Notes on the Roots of Bolshevism

By John O'Mahony. A series from Solidarity (2004)

## §1. How Russian Marxism began

The October Revolution of 1917 seemed to many observers to be an attempt to stand Marxism on its head.

Those who said that included George Valentinovich Plekhanov and Pavel Borisovich Axelrod, the founders of the Russian Marxist movement, and Karl Kautsky, the most authoritative Marxist of the Second International (1889-1914).

To others, who supported it, it seemed to have succeeded in turning on its head the Marxism long dominant in the labour movement. Antonio Gramsci greeted it as "The Revolution Against Das Kapital" (the title of an article he wrote). Another supporter, the American Max Eastman, told American readers that it was a "syndicalist" revolution, a revolution made by the Russian equivalent of the American anarcho-syndicalist trade union movement, the Industrial Workers of the World.

To some, the young Gramsci for example, what the Bolsheviks and the workers they led had done showed them to be the opposite of the Marxist Social Democratic parties of the West, the German Social Democracy for example.

He did not just mean the opposite of the "Social Democrats" who had betrayed socialism by supporting their own governments in the war that broke out in August 1914. He had in mind the whole history of the West and Central European Social Democratic movement.

Denunciations of the Bolsheviks as not Marxists, not like the "respectable" Marxists of Germany, had long been common in Russia, in the mouths of ex-socialists turned liberal, such as for example Peter Struve, one of the founders of the Russian movement in the 1890s.

Yet the Bolshevik party was dogmatically, if not mechanically, Marxist. It was fiercely determined to vindicate Marxism. It repudiated none of the basic truths of Marxism about a high level of capitalist industrial development being the precondition for working-class socialism.

How did it come to take power in October 1917 in an empire covering one-sixth of the globe, embracing many peoples and nationalities, the most backward of whom were primitive herdsmen and the most advanced, the metal workers in the giant industrial plants in places like St Petersburg?

Russian Marxism began in 1883, when in Geneva G V Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich, Pavel Axelrod, Lev Deutsch and others founded the Group for the Emancipation of Labour.

That organisation arose out of a split in the populist organisation Land and Liberty (Zemlia i Volia).

The populists believed in a socialist revolution in which the peasants would rise up and throw off their rulers, Tsar, landlords and capitalists. As a political movement, the populists tried to rouse and organise the peasantry to do that.

The founders of the Group for the Emancipation of Labour had rejected in 1879 the turn of the Zemlia i Volia majority towards a systematic terrorist war on Tsarism.

Narodnaya Volya, the terrorist group formed by the former Zemlia i Volia majority, killed Tsar Alexander II in 1881. Then their organisation had been shattered by the savage reaction that followed. Five of their leaders were hanged.

The founders of Russian Marxism had been flesh of the populist movement and bone of its bone. The heroic Vera Zasulich had been a pioneer of terrorism - a terrorism, with her as with the other populists, which targeted rulers and high officials, not innocent people.

In July 1877, Boyoliubov, a political prisoner who failed to stand when the Governor of St Petersburg visited the prison - General F F Trepov - was publicly whipped.

Vera Zasulich, daughter of a small landowner, was then aged 25. A revolutionary from the age of 16, she had already spent four years in jail and exile.

When she heard of the ill-treatment of the prisoner Boyoliubov she was outraged and, acting entirely on her own, she shot General Trepov dead. She then surrendered to the authorities.

At her trial she acknowledged that she had shot Trepov. Nonetheless, in a demonstration of political solidarity, the jury found her not guilty, and the crowd in the court prevented her rearrest and allowed her to escape. She went abroad. The government immediately put an end to jury trials for political cases.

G V Plekhanov, born in 1856, a scion of a military family of Tartar descent, had by the age of 19 become a hunted underground organiser of Zemlia i Volia. Pavel Axelrod had joined the populists in the early 1870s.

Even those of the younger generation who would adhere to the Marxism of Plekhanov were not free of ties to populism.

Trotsky, born in 1879, was briefly a populist before, at the age of 18,

becoming a Marxist. Lenin (V I Ulianov), born in 1870, had personal ties of the most tragic sort to the populists.

His brother Alexander in May 1887 was hanged together with others for plotting to kill Tsar Alexander III. The fate of his brother helped to turn Lenin, who was then 17, into a revolutionary, and also convinced him to seek a "better way" than the heroic but inadequate road of throwing bullets and bombs at individual high Tsarist officials.

On trial for his life, Alexander Ulianov explained to the court what drove him and populist intellectuals of his sort.

Such intellectuals saw that their role as that of enlighteners of the people. Their teacher Peter Lavrov had taught them that "critically thinking individuals" owed a debt to society and should discharge it by fighting for a better, socialist, order. But:

"Our intelligentsia is physically so weak and so unorganised that it is incapable of waging an open struggle at present and can only defend its right to think and to participate intelligently in public life through a terrorist form of struggle... Among the Russian people one will always find a dozen persons who are so dedicated in their ideals and take their country's plight so much to heart that they readily sacrifice their lives for the cause..."

Alexander Ulianov was 21 years old when they hanged him.

For 50 years before 1917 the many-sided populist movement to which Alexander Ulianov belonged dominated Russian revolutionary politics. The story of Russian Marxism and of the Russian revolution is incomprehensible without an understand of the great pre-Marxist Russian revolutionary populist movement which was the soil on which it took root and grew.

One of the great advantages of the Russian Marxists when they came to organise was the existence in Russia of a sizeable layer of the who readily accepted that they should devote their lives to the transformation of society. That tradition - expressed in the words of Alexander Ulianov, facing the Tsar's hangman - begins in the populist movement.

Plekhanov's biographer quotes Axelrod, then a follower of Bakunin's strand of populism:

"He who wishes to work for the people must abandon the university, foreswear his previous condition, his family, and turn his back even upon science and art. All connections linking him with the upper classes of society must be severed, all of his bridges burned behind him; in a word, he must voluntarily cut himself off from any possible retreat. The propagandist must, so to speak, transform his whole inner essence, so as to feel at one with the lowest strata of the people, not only ideologically but also in everyday manner of life.

Axelrod, who lived up to this idea, would have a great moral authority among the first Marxists, with Trotsky for example.

When Plekhanov was 20 and an organiser of Zemlia i Volia, he would reply to his mother, who feared for his safety, that his activism came from what she had taught him of truth and justice. She replied: "But you will perish."

Plekhanov responded: but what if everyone should come to think as he did? What if they really did rouse the people?

Populism was, despite its name, a movement of educated young people, typically the sons and daughters of landowners and high state officials. Populism was a response to a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the Russian ruling classes, subject in one degree or another to the intellectual influence of Western Europe.

The Russian state, when Russia began to import ideas and technology and later capital from the West, was an all-powerful autocracy resting on a society where most of the peasants were serfs. Serfs went with an estate and could, like the estate, be sold, or even lost at the gaming table, by the landlord.

Serfdom was not abolished in Russia until 1861 (which, nonetheless, was two years earlier than black slaves in the Southern States at war with the government in Washington were declared free by the US Congress). Amongst the serfs, land was still held in common by village communities, an institution known as the mire.

In the course of freeing the serfs - who would pay money for their freedom for many decades - much land was taken from their village communities and transferred to the landlords in compensation for the freedom of their serfs. Down to the 1917 Revolution this would be a bitter grievance of the recent ex-serf communities.

Agitation about breaking up the lords' estates and dividing it among the peasants would be central to Russian revolutionary politics until it was achieved in 1917 and after.

But Russia was not a deeply archaic state living in isolation. It existed in contact and competition with Western Europe. The state tried to keep abreast of Western military technology. Around 1700 Tsar Peter (The Great) drove Russia to heroic efforts to learn technology and civilisation from the West. He founded St Petersburg as a window looking westwards.

Russia knew enlightened monarchy - Catherine "The Great" was in contact with the most advanced thinkers of Western Europe in the late 18th century - with the French philosopher, Voltaire, one of those who created the Enlightenment and prepared the way for the French Revolution.

War with Napoleon France drew Russian armies into Western Europe. They occupied Paris in 1815. This contact generated in layers of educated

Russians - people whose social position rested on a vast submerged serf population! - the desire for modernisation and for emulation of the West. It created a half-Westernised ruling class - whose ideas and aspirations were starkly at odds with their social base and with the reality of absolute monarchy.

In 1825, a conspiracy of westernising army officers, the "Decembrists", was crushed. Hopes for an enlightened Tsar waxed and waned, and they were always more or less disappointed.

The Crimean war of 1854-5, in which Russia confronted Britain and France, the most advanced countries in Europe, and suffered shattering defeats, made reform urgent for the ruling class, and led to the abolition of serfdom.

But the country still stifled under Tsarist absolutism. The masses of peasants were still crushed by poverty, ignorance and debt. Many thinking Russians of the upper classes felt these contradictions intensely.

Lenin's sister tells of the effect on Lenin of reading a story by Chekhov. An intelligent but indolent doctor who feels he can't change anything starts to have long talks with a mental patient under his care. He is overhead saying to the patient that they are the only two people in the town able to think and speak freely about serious matters. The doctor is himself incarcerated and subjected to the brutalities he had tolerated for others.

Lenin was badly shaken and told his sister that he had the feeling that "I myself was locked up in the madhouse".

The impasse led to layers of the children of the half-westernised ruling classes and others lower down the social scale - or Jews outside it - to create populism. The prestigious intellectual Alexander Herzen, in his magazine The Bell, called in 1861 for the students to "go to the people" to educate and rouse them for the work of creating a better social order.

That "going to the people" would begin to happen in the 1870s.

What better order? Socialism. One of the most important aspects of Russia was that it imported not only technology and technological ideas from the west, but also ideas about society. The enlightened Russians saw the west and disliked much that they saw - especially the urban hell-holes, such as Manchester, in which the industrial wealth of the west was produced.

Honest and sincere people that they were, they saw clearly that the destruction of the old order of kings and noblemen in Europe had given way there not to emancipation but only to a change in the system of oppression. They did not want the old order in Russia to give way to anything like the "new order" of the bourgeoisie that ruled in the West. They wanted socialism, not capitalism, to replace the Russian landlord and Tsar.

Thus they imported socialism into Russia, changing it to fit their conditions. All

the leading intellectuals, though they were not Marxists in our sense, were to some degree influenced by the writings of Marx. Michael Bakunin, the anarchist and Marx's opponent in the First International, translated the Communist Manifesto into Russian in 1869. Russia was one of the first languages into which the first volume of Marx's Capital (1867) was translated, in 1875.

It was socialism that the enlightened intellectual youth went " to the people" to preach.

But it was a special Russian socialism. There were different trends in populism, but they all hoped that the system of village communal land ownership, the mir, could be the basis of a distinctively Russian socialism that could avoid the horrors of capitalism and its industrialisation which in their eyes blighted the peoples of western Europe.

Marx himself especially loathed the Tsarist system and thought of as the pillar of reaction throughout Europe, but did not rule out that this "Russian socialism" was on certain conditions a possibility. He included the idea in the last preface he and Engels penned for the Communist Manifesto, in the 1882 edition.

Russian Marxism would, nevertheless, as we will see, have to fight that idea of a special Russian road to socialism in its first efforts to establish itself.

Populism went through a number of phases, associated with the changing influence of different populist thinkers.

They wanted to stimulate a great peasant self-rousing or awakening that would lead to the overthrow of the social and political order. Intellectuals, students, the enlightened and the critical-minded would initiate that awakening by "going to the people".

This first phase took place under the influence of Peter Lavrov, who believed that before there could be socialist revolution there would have to be a period of preparing the peasants by way of propaganda and educative work. The Lavrovites first recruited and organised students - in foreign countries with Russian students as well as in Russia - to go among the peasants; and then, in 1874-76, they went.

In the summer of 1874 hundreds of upper class youth and students moved out of the urban centres. Abandoning their studies, they dressed as peasants and moved around the countryside preaching revolution to the peasants.

Mainly they met with incomprehension. The socialism they talked of was meaningless to the peasants.

The peasants were still loyal to the idea of the Tsar as the benevolent father of his people. That idea of the Tsar would still, 30 years later, dominate among the workers marching in St Petersburg on Bloody Sunday, 9 January

1905, whose slaughter by the Tsar's soldiers would trigger the 1905 revolution.

Mostly, the peasants beat the students or turned them over to the police.

Here and there some students were allowed to settle and try to live the life of peasants. They would sooner or later come back to where they had started, demoralised and defeated in their endeavours.

In the first two months of "going to the people" in 1874, 770 such young people were arrested, trying to make revolutionary a class that was too backward and too downtrodden for anything like the enlightenment they had in mind.

That first phase, ending in crushing defeat, gave way to the second. Some of the students noticed that the peasants did respond to the idea that the landlords' land should be divided and distributed among the cultivators.

The second wave would have as its guiding spirit not Lavrov but the anarchist Michael Bakunin. Survivors and new recruits, learning from the example of 1874-76, turned to the work of creating a tightly-knit centralised conspiratorial organisation.

Its goal would not be general preparatory propaganda and education as in 1874-6. They would abandon general socialist propaganda and appeal to the peasants' feelings about the land and the landlords. They would concentrate on the demand for the redistribution of the land. This came to be known as "The Black Redistribution".

They would call for and try to stimulate immediate peasant risings.

In this phase the new organisation was called Zemlia i Volia - Land and Freedom. George Plekhanov, who became active in late 1875, joined Zemlia i Volia in 1876.

But Zemlia i Volia failed too in its attempt to rouse the peasants. It failed to stir up the revolutionary disorder that Bakuninism demanded.

But already the industrial proletariat was stirring, and Zemlia i Volia also worked among the proletariat. Plekhanov had to go on the run after speaking at an illegal demonstration over a striking worker jailed in Kazan in December 1876.

The worker had unfurled a red flag with "Zemlia i Volia" written on it. The workers chanted: "Hail to the socialist revolution! Hail to Land and Freedom!"

These workers still had many links with the peasantry. But they were learning to struggle as a working class. For example, two thousand struck at a new textile mill in 1878. Police and Cossack troops attacked them but after two weeks they won some concessions. Zemlia i Volia had some groups in factories.

In late 1878 and early 1879, a wave of working class action broke out in St Petersburg. Some of the workers turned for help to "the students". Plekhanov, in his capacity as a Zemlia i Volia organiser, wrote a manifesto for distribution in St Petersburg's factories calling for solidarity and money for the strikers.

The Zemlia i Volia version of "going to the people" failed just as comprehensively as the first had. There was only one case of them stimulating a response in even a few hundred peasants - and that was the result of an illuminating fraud.

They circulated a manifesto in which the Tsar was made to call on the peasants to come out against the landlords and officials in support of the Tsar! The future Marxist Axelrod was involved in this affair. Plekhanov came out firmly against the use of such methods.

Before the 1870s were out, the truth was unavoidable. Zemlia i Volia was a failure. They had believed that quick success would follow from their agitation. Now they had to face their failure, explain it, and decide what to do next.

Where the first "going to the people" was raw and naive on every level, Zemlia i Volia was a tightly knit, centralised and armed organisation that had risen out of that first failure. Its members defended themselves against the police, guns in hand. Failure made the Zemlia i Volia seek another road.

From general propaganda inspired by Lavrov they had gone to agitation for immediate insurrection inspired by Michael Bakunin. Now they would take the road of terror against the Tsar and his officials.

It made them redefine their aims. In fact they took the first steps towards becoming liberals. The gun and the bomb would be used to force the Tsar to grant a constitution.

From the spring of 1879 Zemlia i Volia began to divide between advocates of terror by an elite minority - who proposed a drive by Zemlia i Volia to kill the Tsar - and advocates of a continued "going to the people".

Plekhanov, a member of the leading committee of Zemlia i Volia, was the leading opponent of the turn to terror. The motives of his opposition were complex.

Zemlia i Volia, following Bakunin, had rejected political action, aiming to rouse up society against the state and the Tsar's governing caste.

Terror was also a turn to a form of political action. Still a Bakuninist, Plekhanov was still against any turn to politics. And he said he could not imagine a revolution that did not involve the masses.

It must be "mass terror" by the people against the rulers, not individual terror, insisted Plekhanov.

At the conference of Zemlia i Volia in the spring of 1878, the majority opposed terror. A year later the advocates of terror would be a majority. In April 1879 an attempt on the Tsar's life produced mass repression by the Tsarist authorities. A dozen prisoners were hanged by the Tsarists.

In June 1879, at a two dozen strong congress of Zemlia i Volia - held in the open, on a wooded island in the centre of a river - the majority voted for a systematic resort to terror. Significantly one of Plekhanov's arguments against drawing such sweeping conclusions - minority not mass action, and for the winning of a political constitution, not a socialist revolution - was that had had some success with factory workers.

Plekhanov, isolated at the congress, walked away. He was not yet a Marxist, but he was close to it.

## §2. Marxism and populism in Russia

In the first instalment of this series I traced in broad outline the populist revolutionary environment in which Russian Marxism emerged.

In the mid 19th century a great wave of radical, leftist, people-oriented - "populist" - rebellion developed among the educated youth of Russia. In 1874-6 the populists "went to the people" in the countryside with revolutionary socialist propaganda and failed.

The populist movement Zemlya i Volya (ZiV) then tried to rouse the peasants to immediate revolution against the Tsar, and failed again.

Next, against the opposition of the future founder of a distinctively Marxist movement, George Valentinovich Plekhanov, the populists made a turn to politics in the form of terrorism against the high officials.

Plekhanov, walking away from the Voronyazh congress of ZiV in June 1879 which sanctioned the new turn, was, I wrote, not yet a Marxist, but close to it.

That was true. Yet Plekhanov walked away from Voronyazh not as someone breaking with his previous ideas, but as their defender against the majority at the ZiV congress who were, in Plekhanov's opinion and in fact, breaking with them.

Plekhanov was still a "conservative" populist, an unreconstructed follower of the ideas of Mikhail Bakunin which had guided the previous phase of populist activity, and not an innovator. He opposed the decision of the ZiV congress to turn towards systematic terrorism, not because it was terrorism but because the projected turn to terrorism to back up the demand for a constitution was a turn towards politics. He was not against the assassination of state officials and members of the ruling class. Indeed, one of his comrades, Vera Zasulich,

had, as we saw, been a pioneer of such terrorism.

It is common for writers on the early Russian Marxists to read back onto the earlier period their attitude 20 years later to the terrorist-populist movement, the "Social Revolutionary Party" (SRs). The Russian Marxists called the SRs the "epigones", the unworthy successors, of the earlier movement created by those from whom Plekhanov had broken in 1879, and denounced their terrorism.

But earlier the Group for the Emancipation of Labour, the Marxist organisation which Plekhanov and others would found in exile in 1883, had explicitly endorsed the terrorism of Narodnaya Volya, the movement founded by Plekhanov's opponents in ZiV.

The dialectical paradox is in the fact that Plekhanov moved towards Marxism by first entrenching himself in the old anti-political populism against those who had drawn political conclusions from both the failure of the movement to "go to the people" with socialist enlightenment in the mid 1870s and ZiV's attempts to rouse the peasants to revolt after 1876.

Insofar as Plekhanov was already a "Marxist" in 1879, he shared that Marxism with his ZiV opponents, who accepted, though not without eclectic admixtures, the basic Marxist outlook on history.

As can be seen in the collected letters of Marx and Engels, Peter Lavrov, the "theorist" of the movement to go to the people to educate them about socialism and politics in the broadest sense, had close and friendly personal relations with Karl Marx in the 1870s. Mikhail Bakunin, the inspirer of the "rebels" of ZiV, who tried to rouse the peasants into immediate revolt, had translated the Communist Manifesto into Russian. In the last phase of a long and politically multi-faceted life, Bakunin rejected what he called Marx's "state socialism". But Bakunin proclaimed himself in agreement with Marx's interpretation of history.

Others of broadly populist persuasion would translate volume one of Capital into Russian, as early as 1872.

Plekhanov was already a "Marxist", but only in the sense that all the leading populists of that time were Marxists. What separated him from the majority of ZiV in June 1879 was his stubborn defence of Bakuninism and the Bakuninist approach to politics.

What then did the conversion of "the father of Russian Marxism" to Marxism entail? A turn to the working class? But in his ZiV days Plekhanov had already turned to the working class, and so to an extent, though not systematically or exclusively, had ZiV.

What Plekhanov's conversation to Marxism would entail was a radical revision of the conception of the Russian revolution common to all the

populists, who believed, in the peasant communes which held land in common, Russia already had the structures of an agrarian socialism.

It was a peculiar variant of utopian socialism. Where the typical West European utopian socialist of the mid 19th century believed in setting up in some wilderness - Etienne Cabet's grouping did it in Texas in the 1840s - small socialist colonies that, in the theory, would grow up side by side with capitalism and demonstrate their superiority over it, the Russian populist socialists believed that the Russian peasant commune and the mir, which involved many millions of peasants, constituted a giant socialist infrastructure that needed only to slough off the ruling class and the autocracy to constitute a fully socialist society.

The political groupings that existed in Russia at various times over the 30 years before the foundation of the first Marxist organisation in 1883 can be labelled in Western terms as anarchist, utopian-socialist, or Jacobin-Blanquist (those who saw the way forward as the seizure of state power). But all of them were distinguished from their equivalents in the West by the belief that in the peasant commune Russian socialism existed already, needing only to be freed from the ruling class.

This gave the socialism of even, for example, Alexander Herzen, who at the time of the emancipation of the serfs (1861) was in practice only a liberal, a solid social reality that distinguished them from both their utopian and reformist socialist equivalents in the West. Where a reformist socialist in the West was typically characterised by a failure to conceive of socialism as something wholly distinct from capitalism, even a mild populist socialist in Russia saw an existing socialism in the mir and counterposed it to the elements of capitalism that were taking root in the country.

Typically the populist socialists saw the emergence of capitalism in Russia as a direct and urgent threat to this, so to speak, "already existing" socialism. They believed, and some of them expressed it in those words, that, if the destruction of the peasant commune by the burgeoning market relations that appeared after the abolition of serfdom in 1861 was not to wipe out the peasant socialist commune, the revolution in Russia had to come "soon or never".

Marx himself was an admirer of Narodnaya Volya. He wrote this about the regicides on trial for killing the Tsar:

"They are sterling people through and through, without a melodramatic pose, simple, businesslike, heroic... They try to teach Europe that their modus operandi is a specifically Russian and historically inevitable matter about which there is no more reason to moralise - for or against - than there is about the earthquake of Chios".

The 1882 preface to the Communist Manifesto, co-signed by Marx and

Engels but probably written by Engels, said:

"Now the question is: can the Russian obshchina, though greatly undermined, yet a form of the primeval common ownership of land, pass directly to the higher form of communist common ownership? Or on the contrary, must it first pass through the same process of dissolution as constitutes the historical evolution of the West?

"The only answer to that possible today is this: If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist development".

The decisive shift by the founders in 1883 of the Group for the Emancipation of Labour - Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zasulich, Deutsch, and Ivanov (who died soon) - towards what we understand as Marxism consisted in their break from all variants of the populist view. On the one hand, they accepted that the triumph of capitalism in Russia was irreversible; on the other, they proclaimed that the socialist future of Russia, which led through a capitalism which was destroying the peasant commune, lay entirely in the hands of Russia's industrial proletariat. In consequence, they posed the practical goal of Russian socialists as the creation in Russia of a labour movement like those of Western Europe.

Many questions arose out of this orientation to the emerging Russian proletariat. For example, how would the working-class movement act during the Russian revolution against the autocracy, which, they believed, would be a bourgeois revolution that would put capital in political power? It would be their different answers to this question that would distinguish the future Mensheviks from the Bolsheviks, and Leon Trotsky from both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

In his first "Marxist" work, Socialism and the Political Struggle (1883), Plekhanov would acknowledge the positive role which the turn of the majority of ZiV towards politics - terrorism to win a constitution - had played in breaking out of the cul de sac in which anti-political populism had, by 1879, trapped itself. While supporting their political - terrorist - struggle, he would now counterpose his "West European" views to their continued peasant populism.

We must look in some detail at the evolution of Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zasulich and the others, between their break with the majority of ZiV in June 1879 and the foundation of the Group for the Emancipation of Labour late in 1883.

The politicising majority of ZiV and the Plekhanovite populist old believers who resisted the turn to politics agreed that neither side would use the name ZiV. The majority thereafter called themselves Narodnaya Volya (the Will of the People), and the minority at the Voronyazh Congress, Cherny Peredel

(literally, Black, that is peasant, Redistribution; more loosely, complete or total redistribution, that is, the division of all the land of Russia, of the landlords and the state, equally between the peasants).

It is one measure of how far Plekhanov had yet to travel that he would come to regard the programme embodied in the very name of Cherny Peredel as socially and economically regressive and reactionary, because it implied levelling down large-scale capitalist farming and replacing it with solely peasant cultivation.

In the still distant future, the Bolshevik government in 1918 would come into bloody conflict - on this question of the division of the land to the working peasants, among other issues - with the heirs of that populist programme, the Left SRs, who for a while after the October Revolution had formed a coalition government with the Bolsheviks, but objected to the retention by the new state of land on which to create state farms worked by wage labour.

One of the leaders of Narodnaya Volya, Morov, summed up the split in ZiV thus: "We divided up the very name of the former organisation. 'Total Redistribution' took over 'Land' while we took over the 'Freedom', and each fraction went its own way".

Very few joined Plekhanov's organisation, which declared itself the continuation of the old populism which had already shown its inadequacy to most of its former adherents. The terrorist turn to politics had come from that failure.

In a country without a parliament, without the right to free speech, free organisation, a free press or the liberty of the person, where official "politics" was never more than intrigues at the Tsarist court, terror was the only form of radical politics available.

Black Redistribution explained itself, and what it thought was wrong with the political turn:

"Political overturns never and nowhere could secure the people's economic and political liberty". They raised the slogan, "let the worker seize the factory and the peasant the land".

In fact Black Redistribution inherited the accumulated dead weight of populist failures to move the peasants. Most importantly for the future, Black Redistribution also "inherited" the lessons of the limited "success" of ZiV, among workers in the big towns. But that would not come into proper focus until after the founders of Black Redistribution had broken with the core beliefs of all the populists.

In 1879 the difference between Narodnya Volya and Black Redistribution was not in fundamental theory. Narodnaya Volya did not repudiate the aim of "rousing the people". The majority at the 1879 conference pledged that it

would "lean on" the people and not the bourgeoisie. They, like the old ZiV and the Plekhanovite minority, were also still for agrarian terrorism, killing landlords and local officials in order to rouse the peasants to revolt, as well as terrorism against the central Tsarist state. It presented its terror as a form of agitation and "propaganda of the deed". As one of Narodnaya Volya's heroic fighters, Vera Figner, who would spend 25 years in a Tsarist jail, put it, terrorism was "an agitational medium of unprecedented strength".

Terror was action that small groups could undertake at will, thus seeming to free the revolutionaries from the dead weight of the "people", the peasants, who had proved to be immovable; and terror was also the line of least resistance in Russian society.

Large swathes of liberal opinion in the upper classes lauded the populists, saw their blows against tyrants as blows for the political demand they had in common with the terrorists - a constitution.

Like all political innovations that prove to be decisive shifts, the Narodnaya Volya seemed to incorporate the older movement and merely to add to it more effective methods of pursuing its old goals. They remained socialists. They were still champions of the socialist village commune against capitalism.

Narodnaya Volya's programme began: "In our basic conceptions we are socialists and populists". The difference was in their adoption of new means. On the other hand, as Vera Figner put it in retrospect: "We were not pursuing the abstract ultimate objectives of socialist doctrine but those demands and needs of the popular mind that in their essence included the socialist principle of liberty".

Though in practice their socialism had meaning only as the private, motivating, "ultimate" aim of Narodnaya Volya militants, they formulated the actual tasks of the political struggle which they concentrated on in terms of the psychology of the old anti-political and socialist movement from which they were breaking.

Narodnaya Volya declared that its terrorist activity had as its goals: "the undermining of the fascination of governmental power, the constant demonstration of the possibilities of struggle against the government, the elevation in this way of the revolutionary spirit of the people and its faith in the success of the cause, and, finally, the formation of forces fit for and accustomed to battle".

"The party", Narodnaya Volya declared, "must pay attention to the people not less seriously". But its "primary task... among the people is to prepare its cooperation [sic] in the overturn".

"In view of the oppression of the people, and since by means of special repression the government will be able to restrain the general revolutionary

movement for a very long time, the party must assume the preparation of the overturn itself and not wait for a time when the people will be able to get along without it".

That was the inversion with a vengeance of the old going-to-the-people with socialist enlightenment or with the call of Zemlya i Volya for immediate mass revolution - the policy which Black Redistribution stuck to. Now small bands of heroes would substitute their actions for those of an unready, unwilling, and repressed people.

Thus do such movements evolve - by way of what they emphasise and concentrate on, and the consequent withering effects for those aspects of themselves that they do not, "for now", emphasise or practise. For practical purposes Narodnaya Volya expressed only the demand for a bourgeois constitution.

It raised the political demand that would serve all the revolutionary tendencies, except the anarchists, until 1917 - the convocation of a Constituent Assembly, elected by universal suffrage.

Vera Figner summed it up in retrospect, in 1925:

"Terror in and for itself was never the aim of the party. It was a means of defence, self-defence, and was considered a powerful medium of agitation... Regicide entered this category as a detail... Organisational and propagandist activity always went hand in hand with the war of destruction". But, she says:

"As the struggle grew more heated, as time passed and one magnificent exploit after another was conceived and executed by us, the former activity among the people grew diminished in their eyes; the countryside receded into the distance, that part of the programme... that spoke of the activity in the countryside gradually took on a purely theoretical, rhetorical character".

Narodnaya Volya's strength was in the fact that, where everything else had failed, the small bands of terrorists could succeed - and, with the killing of the Tsar in March 1881, succeed spectacularly.

Their greatest success, the violent deposition of the Tsar, would also reveal how weak such methods were against the whole system they opposed, how little fundamental could be changed by the changes in leading personnel which were all their infliction of justice on tyrants with guns and bombs could achieve.

But in the immediate competition between Narodnaya Volya and Black Redistribution, the immediate success was all-important. In terms of practical activity, Black Redistribution could do nothing. Its members either fell into inactivity, or defected to Narodnaya Volya. Black Redistribution was stillborn. There was historical justice in that, because, as Plekhanov would later stress, Narodnaya Volya had shot ahead of them in the necessary turn to politics.

The death of the Tsar did not unleash mass revolution as some of them had hoped. Six Narodnaya Volya members were condemned to death for killing the Tsar, two of them women. Five were hanged. The sixth, Gesya Helfman, was held from the gallows so that she could give birth to the baby she was carrying. Immediately afterwards she died in jail.

After the killing of the Tsar, the executive of Narodnaya Volya wrote an open letter to the new Tsar in which they made only two demands on him:

1. A general political amnesty;

2. Convocation of representatives of the people.

Its "moderation" won it the sympathy of "liberal society" in Russia and abroad. It was also a measure of how they had moved from the socialist programme of ZiV - and indeed from their own programme. They now, despite what the 1879 programme had said about leaning on the people, aligned with their natural political allies, bourgeois and liberal aristocrats. In fact, though Narodnaya Volya continued to exist and published a journal in exile, edited by Peter Lavrov, the repression had essentially smashed the group.

In all this Black Redistribution and its leaders had been politically marginalised. They expressed support for Narodnaya Volya and solidarised with its militants. So did Karl Marx.

They moved only slowly on to the new political ground which they had rejected on principle in 1879 - and towards the foundation of the first non-populist Marxist movement in Russia, the Group of the Emancipation of Labour, in September 1883.

Central to the group's theoretical evolution was the existence of a strong working-class movement in Europe and the new and growing working class in Russia. Although politically it was still entwined with the populist movement, including ZiV, the Russian proletariat had already taken action as a distinct class and incipiently as a distinct political force. In the next instalment we will discuss the beginnings of working-class action in Russia.

## §3. Sofia Perovskaya: portrait of a regicide - by Vera Figner

The author of the following memoir of Sofia Perovskaya, one of five populists hanged in 1881 for killing the Tsar, was Vera Figner, who survived 25 years in a Tsarist prison.

It is curious that this ascetic revolutionary was the great-granddaughter of Kyril Grigoryevich Razumovsky, the last hetman of Little Russia; the granddaughter of the governor of the Crimea during the reign of Alexander I, and the daughter of the governor of St Petersburg in the time of Alexander II.

The conditions of her childhood kindled in Sofia Perovskaya a sense of honour, and a radiant love for humanity, which never grew dim.

In the oppressive atmosphere of her family, Sofia Lvovna learned to love mankind, to love those who suffer, as she loved her mother who had suffered so long, and with whom she maintained tender relations up to the last tragic days of her life.

During my own trial, the matrons of the House of Preliminary Detention told me that while Perovskaya's trial was being held, Sofia Lvovna talked very little whenever her mother, who had been summoned from the Crimea, came to see her. Like a sick, tired child, motionless and speechless she would recline with her head on her mother's knee. The two gendarmes, who sat in her cell day and night, remained on duty during these visits.

Upon completing her studies for the position of assistant physician, she came in contact with these people in the village, in her capacity of propagandist from the Populist group.

[Once] both she and I had just left the village [where they had "gone to the people"] and were still bound to it with all our hearts. We were asked to take part in the political struggle, we were called to the city, but we felt that the village needed us, that without us it would be still darker there.

Reason told us that we must follow the course chosen by our comrades, the political terrorists, who were drunk with the spirit of strife and animated by success. But our hearts spoke otherwise, our mood was quite different. It drew us to the world of the dispossessed. After some hesitation we overcame our feeling, our mode, and having renounced that moral satisfaction which life among the people gave to us, we stood firmly side by side with our comrades, whose political sagacity was greater than our own.

From that time on, Perovskaya was first in all the terroristic projects of the Executive Committee of the Will of the People [Narodnaya Volya].

When on the first of March, 1881, the seventh attempt [on the life of the Tsar] was in preparation, Perovskaya, together with Zhelyabov, organised a group of persons who were to observe the Tsar's goings and comings in the capital, and who were to be the signalists at the climax of the drama.

She also directed the bomb-throwers, not only during the preparatory period, but also on 1st March, when she gave orders for a new disposition of forces, thanks to which the Emperor perished from the explosion of two bombs hurled by the terrorists.

It seems only just to state that had it not been for Sofia Perovskaya with her coolheadedness and incomparable good judgment and wise management, the assassination of the Tsar might not have taken place at all on that day.

It was she who saved the day, and paid for the victory with her life.

I became acquainted with Sofia Lvovna in 1877 in St Petersburg, when she was out on bail. Alexandra Kornilova brought her to my attention. In her country smock that served as a nightgown, she looked like a young peasant girl, with her short flaxen braid, her light grey eyes, and her childishly rounded cheeks. Only the high forehead was at variance with the general peasant cast of her features. In all her fair, pleasant little face there was much that was youthful and simple, much that recalled the child.

This childlike element in her face was preserved up to the very end, notwithstanding the tragic moments that she lived through during those March days.

The general expression of her face, with its soft contours, did not speak at all of her strong will and firm character.

Tender, tender as a mother with the working people, she was exacting and severe towards her comrades and fellow-workers, while towards her political enemies, the government she could be merciless.

[Before and after the assassination of the Tsar on 1 March 1881] I came to know all her fine sensitiveness and her disinterested solicitude for her comrades. After Zhelabov's arrest on 27th February 1881, Perovskaya abandoned the apartment that Zhelyabov and she had occupied and removed all illegal property. From that day until 19th March when she was arrested near the Anichkov Palace, she spent the night, now with one friend, now with another.

Perovskaya feared to endanger her comrades.

"Verochka, may I spend the night with you?" asked Perovskaya a day or two before her arrest. I looked at her with astonishment and reproach. "How can you ask that? Indeed, is such a question possible?" "I am asking" said Perovskaya, "because if they come to search the house and find me there, they will hang you." Embracing her, and pointing to the revolver which lay at the head of my bed, I said, "I shall shoot if they come, whether you are here or not."

Such was the soul of Perovskaya, or a part of her soul, because only a small part of it was revealed to me. In those hurried times, we took only a superficial interest in the psychology of one another; we acted, but did not observe.

When they led her out, clad in her black prison dress, to the tumbril waiting in the court of the House of Preliminary Detention, they first seated her with her back to the horse, hung a placard on her bosom with the inscription "The Regicide" and then bound her hands together so tightly that she said, "Loosen the cord a little, it hurts me."

"You'll feel worse than that later on," growled the rough gendarme who was

supervising the train.

In a similar manner they brought to Semenovsky Square our four other comrades who were involved in the affair of 1st March: Zhelyabov, a peasant; Kibalchich, the son of a priest, and the inventor of the bombs; Timofey Mikhaylov, a workman; and Rysakov, a middle class citizen. Together with Perovskaya the noblewoman they represented symbolically all the classes in the Russian Empire.

On the scaffold Perovskaya was firm, with all her steel-like firmness. She embraced Zhelyabov in farewell, she embraced Kibalchich and Mikhaylov; but she did not embrace Rysakov, who in an effort to save himself had betrayed the apartment on Telezhnaya Street and had brought to their ruin Sablin who shot himself, Gesya Helfman who died in the House of Preliminary Detention, and Timofey Mikhaylov who died on the scaffold.

So died Perovskaya, true to herself both in life and in death.

Gesya Helfman was sentenced to death at the same time as Perovskaya and her comrades; pregnant, they waited until her child was born, and soon after that announced that she had died in prison.

## §4. Russia's real exceptionalism

On the eve of the abolition of Russian serfdom, in 1861, many of the jobs which in Western Europe were performed by wage labourers - by legally free women, men and children who sold their labour power for specific periods of time to those who owned the means of production, the mills, mines, quarries, factories, etc. - were in Russia performed by unfree labour. One worker in three was a serf.

Of 565,000 workers in 1860, the year before the emancipation of the serfs, 135,000 were unfree. In some industries, the majority of the workers were serfs. Of 245,000 miners, 70% were serfs.

Overnight, as tens of millions of serfs became legally free peasants, the whole non-agricultural labour force in Russia was turned, at a stroke of Tsar Alexander's pen, from serfs into wage-workers, into proletarians with nothing to live on but the sale of their labour-power.

For those formerly serf workers, freedom meant that they could if they liked go back to their villages and to the land. Many of them did.

The number of workers declined in the first half of the 1860s. Thereafter, the working class grew in a process of recruitment of "voluntary" proletarians.

The proletariat was still a very small, scattered class. Around 1870, there

were 800,000 proletarians; a decade later, about a million, in a population of perhaps 100 million.

Many workers in the less skilled, less specialised trades, in the cotton industry for example, remained half-peasants. In late summer many of them would go "home" for the harvest.

They retained peasant habits of living, dress, and drunkenness. Many of them lived in village-like communities. When the early working-class conflicts with the employers were being fought, the unorganised workers created committees or councils modelled on the rural assemblies of the mir, the people of the obshchina, the peasant commune which held land in common. Those assemblies also pointed to the future - to the soviets of 1905 and 1917.

For their part, the employers too were often slow to begin to behave as West European-style employers of wage labour. Often they would be days, or weeks, or months, late in paying wages. At first some of them did not pay their workers at all, insisting that workers who had possession of strips of land did not need wages!

Early working-class self-awareness was often angry insistence that they were entitled to receive a wage for their labour - that they were wage workers. Early labour conflicts were often about forcing the employers to pay any wage at all.

The Russian working class would remain a minority in the population for a long time, but soon it became very powerful, concentrated in giant factories and industries, built on up-to-date technology which was imported ready-made into backward Russia.

In little more than half a century, 56 years after the abolition of serfdom, the Russian working class would take and hold state power.

Russia would prove, as the populists insisted it was, "exceptional". But in a way starkly opposite to the populists' conception of what would be "exceptional" about Russian development.

The populists of all the different sorts, anarchists, Jacobins, and even pre-Plekhanov Russian Marxists, had thought that Russia's exceptionalism lay in the widespread existence there of the peasant communes, with their collective ownership and periodic redistribution of land.

They saw Russia, in its rural economy, in the peasant communes, as already socialist, needing only a political revolution to destroy or seize the state. In fact, Russia would ripen politically to the extent of workers seizing power in the October Revolution, but it would prove to be a Russia too socially backward for the realisation of socialism.

All the populists saw the development of capitalism, the encroachment of

market relations in the countryside after 1861, which undermined the peasant commune, as a mortal threat to the prospects of rural-based Russian socialism.

In historical fact Russia's real exceptionalism would lie in the consequences of the development of that Russian capitalism which sapped the foundations of the "socialist" peasant commune. Russia's exceptionalism lay in the concentration, social strength, militancy and political acumen of the working class in late 19th and early 20th century Russia.

The Russian workers would be able to seize state power, not in a Russia where socialist relations of production already existed in the peasant commune, but in a Russia where socialism in isolation was - according to the conceptions of "Western" Marxism and of the Bolsheviks, who led the Russian workers - a stark impossibility because of Russia's overall economic and social backwardness.

The first phase in the political history of the Russian working class is the history of its interaction with the populists.

Not the least of the peculiarities of the populist experience was that though the peasant was essentially what they meant when they spoke of "the people", it was elements of the industrial urban working class who responded most readily to their appeals and activities. All the populist movements through the 1870s, culminating in Zemlya i Volya (1876-79) and then the terrorist Narodnaya Volya, found the urban workers far more responsive to their agitation than were the peasants.

The movement in 1874-5 to "go to the people" involved migration of the activists from the urban centres to the countryside, there to try to root themselves in the villages and educate the peasantry. The populist students abandoned their studies and attempted to transplant themselves among the people.

In so far as they concerned themselves with urban workers, they were concerned to recruit individual workers for their missionary work in the countryside. They saw the urban proletariat as a mere subsection of the peasantry - as peasant who had been forced by economic necessity to move to the towns, but who yet maintained links with their peasant roots and rural relatives, and would want to return.

Many of the urban workers did indeed retain connections with the countryside, especially those whose work was in the processing of agricultural products - cotton workers in Moscow, for example - and which required least skill, training and prior socialisation. It was only gradually, in the evolving experience of the generations, that the urban workers began to see themselves as a distinct, permanently urban, social group.

At first it was only the most skilled, the metal workers, for example, whose training, technical education and wages marked them out, who took it that they and their children were permanently rooted in town life.

It was a central idea of all the populists that Russia should avoid the creation of a proletariat like that of the West, an urban proletariat with no property in the means of production, uprooted forever from the land. They believed that once the existing Russian socialism of the obshchina, the mir, was freed from Tsarism and landlordism, then all the population, including peasants who had been forced into the towns, would be attached to a village commune.

Where there was only one case of a sizeable response - involving about a thousand people - to Zemlya i Volya's calls for peasant rebellion, workers' strikes and demonstrations, spontaneous (not rarely in the 1860s) or involving prior agitation by populists, flared up far more readily.

The town workers - or, as Zemlya i Volya saw it at first, the transplanted peasants of the towns - were more aware of the broader world they lived in, more mobile, more willing to act, more mentally attuned to think afresh. Life had already forced them to do that, giving them different worlds to contrast and compare, forcing them to change much in their old thinking.

Life itself was generating in them an irrepressible militancy, as they responded to their experience in the early capitalist hellholes and to populist agitation and propaganda.

It was as if a socialist propagandist had been in the habit of going to a house regularly to "explain" things to the father and the older brothers, "at" whom he talked at length and repeatedly, evoking perplexity, bemusement, and hostility - and then suddenly heard one of the growing children, who had been listening, pipe up: "That makes sense to me. I can see that. I'll help you. I'll do my bit".

## §5. Axelrod the pioneer

What became Bolshevism - that is, the organisation and ideas which led the Russian proletariat to the conquest of state power in 1917 - was the ultimate outcome of a whole series of previous Russian versions of Marxism, of successive self-definitions by groups of revolutionaries against what had existed before.

At the end of the 19th century revolutionary working-class Marxism had to define itself against the "Legal Marxism" of those like Peter Struve who took from Marxism the insistence, against the populists, that capitalism was an unavoidable stage in Russian history - and wound up as liberals, "worshipping" capitalism.

Those who published Iskra (The Spark) after 1900 - Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zasulich, Lenin, Martov, Potresov - defined themselves against the "Economist" tendency which, they argued, wanted to create a loose working-class movement politically subordinate to the liberal bourgeoisie.

The early Bolsheviks defined themselves against those "Mensheviks" who, in the 1905 revolution and, especially, after it, looked to the bourgeoisie for leadership in the struggle against Tsarism.

In early 1917, Lenin rallied those who would lead the October Revolution against those Bolshevik leaders (Stalin, Kamenev) who were imprisoned by the obsolete conceptions which they and Lenin had once shared.

There would be other, later, examples.

The first of those Marxist self-definitions against what had gone before was made by the Group for the Emancipation of Labour, which had to define itself against the populist socialists, many of whom, as we have seen, subscribed to the general Marxist material conception of history.

Against the idea of Russian socialism rooted in the peasant commune with its common ownership of land, the Group for the Emancipation of Labour counterposed the idea that Russian capitalism had developed, would develop, and would destroy the village commune; the way towards socialism in Russia was through a West-European-style proletarian labour movement.

The heavyweight literary work here was done by George Valentinovich Plekhanov. But Plekhanov's comrade Pavel Borisovich Axelrod was arguably the pathfinder, the first of those who would orient to the creation of a distinctively wage-worker political movement in Russia.

Among the leaders of the Russian Marxist movement, Axelrod was singular. Almost all the others came from the upper layers of society, from families of education and culture, riches or comparative riches, and an ordered place in the world.

Axelrod came from the lowest of the low, from a family of illiterate pauper Jews. His mother was intelligent and sensible, but entirely illiterate. His pious father could read the Hebrew prayers he recited, but was illiterate in Russian.

Born in 1849 or 1850, Pavel passed his early childhood in a one-room family hut. His father lacked the internal passport necessary to reside legally in the village where they lived, and went forever afraid of the police.

He borrowed money to start a tavern, and when it failed, was thereafter harassed by the usurers. The family moved around. They spent time in a poorhouse run by their Jewish community.

For the child Pavel there were things more damaging and more permanently scarring than those. In his autobiography, written when he was past 70, he

recalled with horror the ingrained fawning, cringing subservience of people like his family towards anyone with the sartorial or other mark of being socially superior.

Then something more than a little like the plot of one of Charles Dickens' novels occurred. From the 1850s the Russian state provided some state schools for Jews, with the intention of alienating them from Judaism. Intent on saving their own sons from corruption in such places, some pious wealthier people in Axelrod's community provided clothes and food for starveling children to fill the Jewish quota in the unclean Russian school.

If Axelrod's pious father had not been away from home, he would most likely have rejected the offer to pay for Pavel's schooling. But in fact Axelrod's whole life was switched onto a different and unexpected track.

He went to school, and moreover, though Jews could not be headteachers, the head teacher there was not a Christian bigot. He was very helpful and caring towards the boy.

At over 70, Axelrod could still recall the good feeling when he put on the clothes provided by his benefactors, the warm coat and the shoes, enjoying such things for the first time in his life.

After three years, the 12-year-old Axelrod went on his own to a strange town, passed the tests for entry, and enrolled in a higher school. He had neither money nor a place to live, nor, until an enlightened Jewish family of strangers provided it, the necessary student uniform. He slept where he could, and scavenged for food.

Some of his teachers found him after-school work tutoring less clever boys, and the 12-year-old, with those small earnings, became better off than he had ever been before. But he stimulated the pupils to question things their parents believed in, and thereby lost the tutoring work.

Reading a book about astronomy led him to question his own religion. He remembered wrestling with his conscience and fervently praying to god to save him from leaving his faith. By the early 1870s he was a populist, a Bakuninist anarchist.

He spent time in Germany and there marvelled at the dignified, self-respecting workers he saw at meetings organised by the German Social Democracy. By contrast, in Russia, the lower reaches of the working class had only - to use the words with which James Connolly described the condition of the "unskilled" workers of Dublin before Jim Larkin and the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union taught them to organise and fight - the arts of the lickspittle and the toady with which to defend themselves.

Though Axelrod remained an anarchist - and therefore a critic of the German Marxist Social Democratic movement - from that point on his outlook shifted.

He wanted a movement in Russia like the one he saw in Germany. In the still anarchist Black Redistribution group (see last issue of Solidarity) he provoked a crisis by advocating the raising of social democratic "minimum" demands, long before the others were ready to turn to politics.

All through his life Axelrod would remain a herald and an advocate of working-class self-organisation. We will see, as the story is unfolded, what he thought that meant in practice. For in the formation of Menshevism, in contradistinction to what became Bolshevism, Axelrod was Lenin's most consistent opponent.

## §6. The origins of Bolshevism: The first workers' unions

"The question of the city workers is one of those that it may be said will be moved forward automatically by life itself to an appropriate place, in spite of the a priori theoretical decision of the revolutionary leaders".

G V Plekhanov, in the journal of Zemlya i Volya

The history of the beginnings of a labour movement in Russia is a subordinate part of the history of populism. The first Russian labour movement was a populist movement. It was initiated by populists who "went to the people" in the cities. It was made up of workers whose political outlook was populist.

They were socialists, but populist-socialist. They subscribed to the idea that socialism in Russia could be erected on the basis of the village commune, the "obshchina", and the people in it, the "mir". When "native" working-class leaders emerged, the most developed of them journeyed as populists through the different stages of populism, which I have described in earlier articles in this series.

Some of them moved from anarchist rejection of "politics" all the way to Narodnaya Volya's politics of systematic terrorism in support of the "immediate demand" for the granting by the Tsar of a constitution and the convocation of a Constituent Assembly.

Initially the populists sought in the town proletariat, most of whom were still half-rooted in the peasant villages, recruits who could be sent back to the villages as populist missionaries. The idea that a proletariat of the sort that the populists saw in Western Europe - people with no land and nothing but the sale of their labour power to live on - should not be allowed to develop was one of their energising principles.

Over time some of them began to relate to the urban "peasants" as a specific and permanently urban proletarian class. But would take time.

One of the first labour organisations, the Southern Union of Russian Workers, founded and led by populists, was conceived as a workers' movement that would immediately develop its own "fighting organisation" and use terror and the threat of it against employers of labour to force concessions from them and thereby improve the workers' conditions.

Some of the best early working-class leaders were hanged for terrorist activities. So would be some of the upper-class populists who had been heavily involved in work with the factory proletariat, Sofia Perovskaya for example.

Some of the early working-class leaders embodied in their personal history the dilemma that would be posed in various forms to the revolutionary Marxists a quarter of a century late. Which was it to be: build a movement of the workers that would concern itself primarily or exclusively with day to day issues, or develop a working-class movement, and a movement of the socialist intelligentsia based on the working class, which would concern itself primarily with the political struggle to overthrow Tsarism (in the case of the early working-class leaders, by political terrorism)?

The conundrum that would play an enormous part in the development of 20th century socialism, and in 20th century discussions about socialism and Bolshevism - does "socialism" emerge spontaneously in the working class, or it is brought to the working class "from outside", by the "intelligentsia" - was, in the first Russian working-class movement, answered very clearly in terms of fact. Socialism came from outside the working class.

Even when the socialism consisted of a special conception of Russian history and of the potential the populist-socialists thought existed in the village community, it was brought to the Russian proletariat by members of the intelligentsia, those who sometimes referred to themselves as the "proletariat of thought". The idea of a labour movement came from Western Europe.

The "Chaikovists", the most important populist group of the early 1870s in the build-up of forces that would in the "mad summer" of 1874 "go to the people" - to the villages - were the first to "go to the proletariat".

As the historian Franco Venturi puts it in his monumental history of Russian populism, Roots of Revolution, they were "the first to plant the seeds of a genuine working-class organisation".

He goes on: already "the local unorganised and spasmodic fighting spirit of the workers themselves had produced spontaneous revolts", but the Chaikovists "provided the impulse for a working-class movement which, despite its original limitations and the violence of the persecution it had to face, always thereafter maintained some measure of continuity, and which grew in scope and influence as revolutionary populism developed during the [1870s]". They triggered a movement of the working class that was not

primitive and not merely episodic revolt with no continuity between isolated outbreaks of resistance, but continuous.

The Chaikovists included the anarchist propagandist Peter Kropotkin, a full prince no less, from a very ancient family, who would become well-known throughout the socialist and labour world, and whose writings, including his "Appeal to the Young" to devote themselves to the socialist struggle, would influence generations of western socialists. Beginning in the summer of 1872 in the Vyborg district of St Petersburg, they sent people - disguised with false papers and false personal histories - into the factories to work there and to talk to and recruit workers to their study circles.

They who would find it impossible to move or even educate the peasantry, the real "people" of their theories, found the working class responsive. The workers were more mobile. They had a broader view of the world than peasants ignorant of all but their own villages and own concerns. They were concentrated in sizeable groups in their working lives, not only in an occasional gathering in the village.

They lived in a world where things were less fixed and less set in age-old nature-limited routines and the inexorable movement of the seasons than they were in the peasants' world. The will and decisions of the employer were the easily identifiable cause of major events that would affect them - and that will and those decisions could be resisted.

There was often a spontaneous spirit of rebellion among them. Workers responded and fought back where the rustic "people" did not.

What did the Chaikovists and later populists doing the same work - and, after them, the fully-fledged Marxists - say to the workers? They explained to them their own situation, and gave them an overall picture of the society in which they lived.

They taught them to read and write. Even in England in the late 1880s and early 1890s, Eleanor Marx had to teach some of the proletarian leaders of the new mass unions to read and write - famously, Will Thorne, founder of what is now the GMB. In Russia, leaflets and pamphlets usually had to be read out to the mass of workers. Later in the 1870s, the young populist women who "colonised" themselves into the factories won influence and a degree of leadership simply by reading out leaflets, official statements, and employers' regulations, and explaining them to their workmates.

The populists taught workers buried deep in the medieval backwardness of Russia the things that elementary schooling would have taught them - basic geography, for example. They gave them some idea of the history of Europe and the world. They told them about political liberty in other countries, about the Western labour movements, their history, and the socialist society with which they fought to replace capitalism and class society. Thus they gave the

Russian workers an idea of what they themselves could do. They taught political economy, using Karl Marx's work.

They told them about populist struggles in other countries, giving them accounts of the fight by "the Irish populist party" - the Land League - against the landlords in Ireland.

They taught them the history of Russia, giving them an account of how the world they lived in and the institutions and classes that made it up had come into existence. They showed them that things which seemed immutable were themselves the products of change and of struggles in the past, and so could be changed in their turn.

Accounts of history turned easily and naturally into a radical critique of the Russian workers' own world.

Naturally, the populists explained to the workers their own conception of the reality and the possibilities of Russia.

They found that the workers responded especially to history, that they drew out of it a sharpened conception of themselves of their place in the world, and of what they could hope to do in it if they educated and organised themselves.

They told them of the great revolts by Cossacks and Ukrainian peasants in the 17th century, led by Stenka Razin, and in the 18th century, led by Pugachev. Myth-enshrouded, uncritical accounts of those revolts, held up as great ideals of revolutionary action, played a central part in all populist propaganda, perhaps especially in that of the Bakuninists.

The development of critical account of those events in the educational and discussion circles of the working class in the late 1870s - for example, of Pugachev's attempts to make himself "alternative" Tsar, replacing Catherine "The Great" - would mark a sharp shift towards proletarian self-differentiation from peasant myths and hopes.

N Flerovsky, who travelled to observe conditions through the Empire and in 1869 published a study entitled The situation of the working class in Russia (by working class, he meant all the working people, peasants and workers alike) which was greatly praised by Karl Marx, defined what was different about the town working class.

"Whereas the peasant in the north and east of Russia remains apathetic for part of the year, without work or the hope of obtaining it, the worker in industrial Russia is never quiet.

"Here one can hear complaints on all sides that there is now worker, that the rewards are not high enough. Here machinery is hated because it lowers wages and gives profits to the capitalists. Here the capitalists are hated when wages go down.

"Here the mentality and determination of the workers are more highly developed... There are strikes. Methods are found to fight against the capitalists and increase pay.

"But though the workers are bolder in their fight to live, the conditions of their lives are even more oppressive [than those of the peasants]".

In his memoirs Peter Kropotkin described what the Chaikovists did:

"Many of [the workers] lives grouped in small artels of ten or twelve people who lives and ate together. At the end of the month each bore his share of the common expenses. We began to frequent these communities. Very soon the textile workers introduced us to other artels of stone workers, carpenters, etc. In some of these groups our comrades had become part of the family; all night through they discussed Socialism with them. In many districts and suburbs of St Petersburg we had rooms which our comrades had rented for this very purpose. Every evening about a dozen workers came to learn to read and write, and then to chat".

The result was that the populists set in motion a movement that would soon develop its own momentum. The difficulty was that police supervision in the towns was far more intensive than in the countryside. The groups of populists targeting the factory and workshop proletarians for their agitation faced savage repression that would again and again destroy their organisations.

In the first case, that of the Chaikovists in St Petersburg, the result of police action was that the grouping no longer existed by the winter of 1873. Kropotkin escaped to the West. Other populists deserted the cities to go "to the people" in the countryside, abandoning activity among the factory workers which in any case (it will be remembered) had the goal of recruiting workers who would leave the town and go back to the countryside to spread the ideas which the populists had planted in them.

We saw in earlier articles the stages of development which the working class had gone through after the abolition of serfdom in 1861. It took time for a working-class mentality to become distinct. For a long time most workers, especially those engaged in digging, in building, and in less skilled work in the cotton industry, did not see their condition as permanent. A sharp distinction existed within the working class between them and the more skilled permanent proletarians such as the metal workers in the workshops of St Petersburg.

The normal economic strike as we now know it is, despite what bourgeois propaganda maintains, a finely tuned weapon designed to put maximum pressure on the employer without breaking the nexus binding the worker and the employer who hires his or her labour power. It is a rational means to reach a definite objective. Strikers formulate demands.

It took time for that norm to emerge in Russia, and for workers' revolts to become means of exerting pressure for defined goals within the proletarian-capitalist relationship.

At first workers' struggles often took the form of fleeing back to the countryside, or rioting rather than striking.

On the other side, too, it took time for the "normal" attitude to wage labour to emerge. We saw that the early workers sometimes had to fight to receive any wage at all. Employers initially treated workers as serfs. In 1861 fifty free workers digging a canal were flogged by their employer.

The struggle of the workers against the bosses' imposition of fines that ate into their wages went on for decades in Russia as in every capitalist country. In the 1860s there were only 50 recorded strikes in Russia. In the 1870s strikes became much more frequent, reaching a peak at the end of the decade. One account puts the total at 326 strikes.

That was the background against which the populists turned to the working class, though in fact the peak of working-class resistance coincided with the desertion of the towns by the young people going to the peasantry.

The state too needed time to clarify its response to strikes. At first "ringleaders" might be deported home to their villages, or given a few days in jail. Repression quickly became more severe.

By the mid 1870s it had become savage. Sentences of years, sometimes ten or even fifteen years, at hard labour in chains were handed down. "Outside" agitators were treated with special severity.

The arrests of the Chaikovists would eventually lead to a trial of 193 persons, one of a number of such mass trials in the 1870s. For educating workers and "spreading disaffection" among them, sentences of three and even nine years were handed down. Two of those jailed would die in prison, one first driven mad.

In the summer of 1873 another group of populists in St Petersburg found itself able to assemble groups of thirty or forty workers to hear the group's organiser, S Sinegub, expand their ideas. Sofia Perovskaya did work around the Tortini factory. Here too repression in late 1873, with the arrest of the "intellectuals" and some of the workers, smashed the work.

The "seed-sowing" effect of what proved to be short-term populist work within the proletariat took forms other than the implantation of ideas. They gave the workers the tools of knowledge, not only teaching some of them to read and write, but helping them assemble libraries.

For example, the group started in the summer of 1873 set up a library, and workers regularly paid in two per cent of their wages to keep it going. The books would be dispersed among a number of custodians, hidden like

armaments from the state, which rightly regarded books and knowledge as dangerous high explosives.

Trotsky once remarked on the paradox that it was not the terrorists with their bombs and guns who smashed Tsarism, but the Marxists who started out with books, like Marx's Capital. The populists too started out with books, and by imparting simple literacy to the proletarian "people" to which they "went".

The other "institution" which the interaction of the populists with the proletariat would often leave, when arrests or migration had taken the populists away, was the mutual aid bank, a credit union maintained by the workers. The workers would learn to organise such credit unions for themselves. The administration of such institutions helped train leaders of working class political and trade-union organisation.

It took time before the distinction between "temporary" and "permanent" proletarians faded, and time for a distinct proletarian mentality to become dominant, but if the first step in the creation of a working-class consciousness had often been the need after the abolition of serfdom in 1861 to insist that the workers were entitled to wages, the second was the realisation that they were not peasants any more but something distinct.

Inadvertently, and contrary to what at first they intended, the educational work of the populists helped create this proletarian mentality, not least by bringing to the Russian workers knowledge of the working class and labour movements of the West.

The arrests of 1873 and the abandonment of the towns in 1874 by the populists going to the countryside left the seeds they planted to grow. Over time leaders would emerge from within the working class itself.

The political police in Tsarist Russia - as later in Stalinist Russia - were often the best informed commentators on what was happening in the society trapped under the carapace of the authoritarian and totalitarian state. Venturi quotes a police report on the state of things in the St Petersburg working class after the impact of the populists.

"The gross, vulgar methods employed by factory employers are becoming intolerable to the workers. They have obviously realised that a factory is not conceivable without their labour. The employers feed them, but without workers they can do nothing.

"A realisation of this has now given rise to that spirit of solidarity among the workers which has so often been noted these days.

"Two or three years ago the employers' affairs were no better than they are at present. Then, too, it often happened that the workers did not receive their wages on time. Yet then everything went smoothly. The cunning employer flattered his workers and said good-naturedly that he could not pay them at

the right time, and they withdrew in silence, and next day turned up quite normally for work.

"But now as soon as even the most popular employer holds back wages for only three or four days, the crowd begins to murmur and curse, and strikes often break out. Even in the workshops, where money for wages can never been lacking - as this is a State industry - the spirit of opposition to be found among the workmen has appeared on a scale utterly unknown before. There have been cases of work stopping because the men were not satisfied with an insufficient wage or because of oppression exercised by the management of the workshops.

"All this, taken as a whole, clearly betrays the influence of the propagandists, who have been able to sow among the workers hatred for their employers and the belief that the forces of labour are being exploited".

It was not in St Petersburg but in Odessa, in the south, on the Black Sea, that the first distinct working-class organisation in Russia emerged. 30,000 of Odessa's 200,000 population were proletarians. Here too the story began with the work of a populist, E Zaslavsky, which lasted nine months before he was arrested.

He was a noble, but not rich. In 1872-3 he had anticipated the mass movement of 1874 from the towns to the peasants, and gone out to "the people" on his own. He came back disabused and convinced that the "people" to work with were the urban proletariat. He moved in the opposite direction to the majority of the populists at that time.

Zaslavsky was a believer in Lavrov's policy of long-term work through propaganda, and not the Bakuninist one of trying to foment immediate revolt. He circulated Lavrov's émigré paper, Vpered (Forward). In 1873 he became a teacher in an existing small group of populists who worked around the Bellino-Vendrich factory, which had about 500 workers.

He tried to teach political economy and working-class history, but abandoned that for simply reading aloud Chernyshevsky's didactic novel What Is To Be Done? (Lenin would later appropriate the title for his 1902 pamphlet).

The group printed and distributed illegal leaflets, and helped workers form a library and start a communal bath.

350 workers in the factory set up a credit union. The activity of organising the workers in this mutual-aid bank eventually led to the creation of a workers' organisation of 200 members. They had a structured leadership, an entrance fee, a subscription, and regular meetings. This was the nucleus of the Union of Workers of Southern Russia. It spread to other factories across Odessa.

What was the "Union of Workers of Southern Russia"? A trade union? A political party? A mutual aid society? It was all of them!

These were its regulations:

"(1) In view of the fact that the present order does not, as far as the workers are concerned, correspond to the genuine requirements of justice; and that the workers can get their rights recognised only by means of a violent revolution capable of destroying all privilege and inequality by making work the foundation of private and public welfare; and that this revolution can only occur (a) when all workers are aware that there is no escape from their present situation; (b) when they are fully united; we, the workers of Southern Russia, join together in a union which will be called the Union of the Workers of Southern Russia.

And we lay down as our aims: (a) to propagate the idea of the liberation of the workers from the oppression of capital and the privileged classes; (b) the union of the workers in the region of Southern Russia; (c) the coming fight against the existing economic and political regime.

(2) The Union has a bank the funds of which are to be used at first to spread the idea of the liberation of the workers, and later to fight for this idea.

(3) Membership of the Union is open to workers of every kind who have close relations with the working class and not with the privileged classes; who feel and act in accordance with the fundamental desires of the working class, i.e. the struggle against the privileged classes in order to win freedom.

(4) The duties of each single member towards the Union and vice versa are determined on the following basis: All for each and each for all...

(6) Every member must be prepared for any sacrifice, if such sacrifice is needed for the safety of the Union".

It emphasised its distinctive working-class nature. This led to moves to exclude non-workers, and soon there was internal war between Bakuninists and others that led to a split. But the organisation survived."

What did it do? It made propaganda, held classes, fought the working-class struggle. It supported strikes, for example at the Bellino-Vendrich factory and at the Gullier-Blanchard factory. It published a manifesto on those struggles that was distributed in the towns along the Black Sea coast.

Virtually everything the union did was, of course, illegal. In late 1875 it was virtually destroyed by police action. Some of its organisers got ten years hard labour. Zaslavsky got ten years. He went half-mad in jail, and died there of TB in 1878.

From then on the Bakuninists, the "rebels", the Zemlya i Volya organisation of 1867-9, predominated in attempts to revive the Union.

Pavel Axelrod, one of the future consistent Marxists, was still a Zemlya i Volya Bakuninist, but already working-class oriented and heavily influenced by the

workers' movement in the West. He desired, as he put it, to "let the voice of the working classes be heard". He had been working in Kiev since 1872, and there, in 1879, he started the "Workers' Union of South Russia", deliberately reviving the name of the Odessa organisation of 1875.

That union soon disintegrated when Axelrod, who after the June 1879 split in Zemlya i Volya was now with Plekhanov and Zasulich in Cherny Peredel, went to St Petersburg. In terms of the history of the Russian working-class movement, it was however very important, because its programme was an eclectic hybrid of Bakuninist and Western social-democratic approaches.

Axelrod was in transition to West European style social democratic politics in which the proletariat, not, as in populist socialism, the peasantry, was central. The union's goal was to be an anarchist stateless society, but it advocated immediate democratic freedom in Russia. It advocated palliatives and reforms, such as the reduction of hours of work. It had a variant of the minimum-maximum programme, split between short and long-term objectives, typical of the Western Social Democrats, and with an anarchist rather than a Marxian socialist "maximum" programme.

The Workers' Union was restarted in Kiev in 1880 by two young populists of a different political bent, Nikolai Shchedrin and Elizaveta Kovalskaya, who believed in vigorous economic terrorism - the use in the towns of the sort of violence against exploiters and officials which Zemlya i Volya had advocated and used in the countryside.

Shchedrin took work in a railway centre, and soon a dozen railworkers formed the nucleus of the revived organisation. It spread. The Ukrainians in the organisation objected to recruiting Jewish workers - "they killed Christ". The organisers had to fight such attitudes, and they did.

Venturi tells us that the following year an anti-Jewish pogrom was started - Jewish quarters were attacked, people maimed and killed, and women raped, with the police and soldiers looking on or participating. Shchedrin was already in jail, but the workers he had educated, whose anti-semitism he had confronted, put out a leaflet urging the people to fight their exploiters and not the "poor Jews".

The organisation had 600 members and held mass meetings in the open air, outside the town. The methods of the Union were a hybrid of elite combat action for terror against the exploiters, the Bakuninist Zemlya i Volya policy of calls for immediate revolt, and working-class mass action. The workers were still feeling their way, enshrouded still in the integument of populism and populist methods. Many of them still retained the mentality of peasants, looking for help to their "little father", the Tsar.

The organisation was strong in the Kiev Arsenal, but they fought there not by mass working-class action but by publishing a manifesto threatening the

director of the Arsenal with death if he did not give the workers what they wanted. He did as he was told! The working day was reduced by two hours.

The Union saw it as a central task to create for the workers their own "fighting organisation" - that is, an organisation to wage terrorist guerrilla war as a weapon of the working-class struggle against exploitation.

But theirs was a working-class terrorism. Venturi quotes Axelrod's memoirs to the effect that Narodnaya Volya, with its concentration on killing the Tsar and on winning the support of the upper layers of society, objected to this economic terrorism against the capitalists because it would alienate the bourgeoisie when they sought support and money.

By late 1880 the leaders were in jail. Shchedrin paid for his brief activity with a sentence of death, commuted by the Tsar to hard labour for life. He continued to fight in jail, and was again sentenced to death for striking an army officer. Again the sentence was commuted. He went mad and spent the rest of his life in an insane asylum, dying there in 1919. Elizaveta Kovalskaya eventually escaped from jail.

The work of building the Russian labour movement did not come cheap in human cost. Up to the revolution, the typical career of those who built the movement would be to spend a few months or a year at liberty working underground and then to spend years in jail or Siberian exile. The road to the October Revolution would be paved with the bones and skulls of many thousands of such people.

## §7. The origins of Bolshevism: The workers awaken in Petersburg

Populism "denied a future to Russian capitalism. The proletariat was assigned no independent role at all in the revolution. It happened accidentally, however, that propaganda designed in its content for the villages found a sympathetic response only in the cities... assembling only the intelligentsia and some individual industrial workers".

Leon Trotsky, The Young Lenin

The Workers' Union of South Russia (described in my last article) survived the arrest of its leaders for a while, and took on a different political coloration.

Its programme now, though it did not demand a constitution, called for:

Factory legislation which would protected the workers against the capitalists' arbitrary control of their lives;

Freedom of speech, of assembly, and for a working-class press;

Freedom to form unions, credit unions, etc.

Higher wages, and an end to oppressive taxation of the peasants;

Reduction in the hours of work.

By late 1881, the Workers' Union of South Russia had been smashed by the police.

In this article, I will continue to outline the history of the Russian working-class movement, without which the disputes between the Marxists, Bolsheviks against Mensheviks etc., make little sense. I will tell the story of the Union of Workers of North Russia, created in Moscow and St Petersburg around the same period.

In 1875 and early 1876 a group of populists published the first Russian working-class paper, Robotnik (Worker). It explained that the Russian workers must "join together with other workers into a great obshchina, to create a world in which the land belongs to all, everything belongs to all".

Despite its openly populist ideas, Robotnik marked a new stage in the separating-out of a distinct consciousness of the workers. It discussed such things as the British trade unions, critically, but nonetheless in order to see what could be learned from them.

It told of the Babeuf-communist left wing in the French Revolution. It criticised the peasant hero Pugachev, leader of the Rising of 1773-5, for wanting to be Tsar and for not "hanging" merchants and usurers as he hanged landlords.

The base of the group was Moscow, where they had about 20 people working to spread its ideas and win support for them.

Still populists in their goals and conceptions - they raised the slogan, "the cause of the workers and the peasants is one" - they had decided to "go to the people" in the factories. They told the workers: "We need to seize the factories like the peasants need to seize the land".

One of the activists, Vera Figner, explained their ideas in a fine passage:

We read the Organisation du Travail, Cabet's Voyage en Icarie, Proudhon's Plan for a People's Bank, and everything seemed to us to be practical and feasible. The word 'utopia' did not exist for us. We saw only 'plans' to bring about a social revolution, and we were equally enthusiastic when we read the speeches of the genius Lassalle, who summoned the workers to conquer the State, as when we read the anarchist pamphlets of Bakunin, who repudiated the State and appealed for the ruthless and implacable destruction of its whole edifice.

Most of us thought that this last idea was best suited to the conditions of Russian life. For us parliament did not exist. There was no question of even thinking of universal suffrage and elections and workers' delegates.

In Old Russia there had been governments of the people, as Kostomarov had

described; there were artels which we read about in the works of Flerovsky; there was the obshchina... This obshchina was the prototype and at the same time the germ of the just organisation of the future society.

All the new ideas of democracy and economic equality seemed to us quite irrefutable from the point of view of logic. And if anyone made any objections to them, we thought that he could only be inspired by motives of egoism and fear...

In the world as it then was, during the time of propaganda, when all those in power were hostile to Socialism, when the government offered only persecution, anyone who took this road must be prepared for every kind of material and moral privation. To be up to the task that awaited him, he must prepared himself for all the blows of fate.

The asceticism of some who wanted to give up all the goods of the earth achieved the impossible. One day, unawares, the daughter of a landlord from the region of Tambov, called Bardina [of whom we we will learn more later], admitted that she liked strawberries and cream, and was teased by the group to which she belonged. From that day on Vera Lyubatovich, with perfect sincerity, looked upon her as 'bourgeois'.

When... the programme of the new revolutionary organisation came under discussion, the girls proposed that it should include a renunciation of marriage. The men protested, and the clause was not accepted.

Militant Socialism, which promised real liberty, equality and fraternity to the workers and the oppressed; Socialism which refused to recognise the strength and wealth of the powerful, and which was persecuted for the truth which it discovered - this seemed to me a new Gospel... Christian concepts and feelings, the ideas of the sanctity of asceticism and sacrifice, all these led me to the new doctrine... This was the really apostolic mission of our time.

A number of women, disguised with false papers and imaginary life-histories, went to work in the factories in order to merge themselves with the workers. That meant living in the barracks-like dormitories of the women workers. They were soon exposed and sacked. But they had made contact - and some of the contacts were continued and developed. In a short time they had supporters in 20 factories and small workshops, and their connections spread to the region around Moscow.

Venturi quotes these descriptions of what they did.

Beta Kaminskaya took advantage of every possible pretext to start discussions with the workers. If she saw a young man holding the book which his employer had given him and which contained the rules concerning the workers' duties, Kaminskaya read it to him aloud, explaining the meaning of each rule and showing the workers how each one of the articles was harmful

to them and advantageous only to the employer.

She spoke to them of the lives of workers in the West, of their solidarity and their struggle against exploitation by their employers. Gradually as she got deeper into the conversation, she spoke of history, and told them of episodes of the revolution in France and elsewhere.

Naturally the workers were very amazed by these stories. Kaminskaya had said that she was of peasant origins; her seriousness and her culture, which were so unusual in a peasant, made the workers conclude that she belonged to the Raskol [the heretical religious sects]. For the women of the Raskol are indeed the best educated of the inhabitants of Russian villages...

Sofya Bardina took the first opportunity to begin to read a booklet which she had with her, The Story of the Four Brothers. The success was enormous. A large crowd collected round her.

When she stopped reading, the questions were endless: "Where do you come from? Who are you? Who has taught you to read so well?"

Bardina said that she was from the Raskol, that as a girl she had been employed as a maid by the gentry and that she had learned to read. She had gone back to her village, and there had become a devout reader of the [Christian] scriptures, but now necessity had driven her to try and find work in the factories...

From then on Bardina frequently visited the men's dormitories... The workers were proud of her, and on their day of rest, in the inns, they turned to her beseeching her to read them the newspapers.

Eventually the populists were denounced to the police, and the group was smashed. Many workers were arrested, as well as the 'outsider' populist intellectuals. After three years in jail, they were tried - it became known as the 'Trial of the Fifty' - and seized the chance to use the courtroom to explain themselves and their cause.

One of them, Pyotr Alexeyevich Alexeyev, a worker won over by Sofia Perovskaya, came to be the first proletarian in recorded Russian history to speak 'on the record' for himself, for workers like him, and for his persecuted brothers the peasants too, indicting Tsarism.

Born in 1849, the son of serfs, he had become a weaver as a boy. At 17 he taught himself to read. The populist propagandists had given him the beginnings of a working-class world outlook. He declared in court:

I know something about the problems of our Western brothers. Their conditions are in many ways different from those in Russia. Over there they do not persecute, as they do here, those workers who devote all their free time and many sleepless nights to reading. Indeed, there they are proud of them, and speak of us Russians as a people of slaves and semi-barbarians.

And how else can one speak of us? Have we any free time to apply ourselves to anything? Are our poor folk taught anything in their childhood? Are there any useful and accessible books for the workman? Where and from whom can he learn anything?...

The peasant reform of 19th February 1861 - this reform which was a 'gift' - even though it is indispensable, was not provoked by the people itself, and does not guarantee the peasant's most indispensable needs. Just as before, we were left without a piece of bread, and with a completely inadequate strip of land, and so we passed under the control of the capitalists...

If we are unlucky enough to be forced again and again to demand an increase in wages which the capitalists are constantly decreasing, they accuse us of striking and deport us to Siberia. And so this means that we are still serfs!

If we are forced by the capitalist himself to leave the factory, they accuse us of organising a revolt and use a soldier's rifle to force us to continue our work, and some are deported as instigators to distant lands. And so that means that we are still serfs!

From all that I have just been saying it is obvious that the Russian workman can have hope only in himself, and can expect help only from our young intelligentsia which has stretched out a brotherly hand to us.

It has understood in the depth of its soul the meaning and origin of the desperate complaints which come in from all sides. It can no longer look on coldly at the persecuted, oppressed peasant as he weeps under the yoke of despotism. It alone, like a good friend, has held out a brotherly hand, and in all sincerity wants to lift us out of our difficulties and put us on the right road for all the oppressed. It alone is tireless and leads us on...

And it alone, united with us, will accompany us until he time when the muscular arm of millions of workers will arise and the yoke of despotism, defended by the soldier's bayonet, will fall to pieces.

The court's response was to sentence Alexeyev to ten years' hard labour. Sofya Bardina, of whose taste for strawberries and work inside one of the factories we heard above, also got ten years' hard labour. After some years she escaped from Siberia, but she committed suicide in exile.

Many others were given heavy sentences. The organisation was wiped out. No organised working-class movement remained in Moscow.

In St Petersburg working-class organisation in St Petersburg had not been destroyed when its populist organisers, the Chaikovists, were arrested early in 1874. The workers themselves kept the organisation going and spread its ideas. It developed underground.

After 1874, Venturi writes, it was no longer only the revolutionary students

who sought contacts in the factories. The workers themselves, once they had been converted by propaganda, took the initiative in tying together broken threads, and repeatedly asking for support and help. Indeed they themselves were now stretching out a 'brotherly hand' to those intellectuals who could give more significance to their dissatisfaction and revolutionary spirit.

The beginnings of a self-driven working-class movement, capable of sustaining itself, now existed in St Petersburg. When Zemlya i Volya, a tightly organised party of professional revolutionaries whose organisers went armed and were willing to use both terrorisation and terror against oppressors and officials - who would try to kill policemen who attempted to capture them - emerged in the mid 1870s, that is what they found in St Petersburg.

Venturi: By about 1875 there was already a large number of workers in St Petersburg who were not only keen to learn and to read - typical self-educated men from workshops and factories - but who were also well able to hold their own views on the various political ideas about which they had heard the students speak. They were able in fact to contrast populist propaganda with the events of their own lives...

These workers... were at this time acquiring new personalities through their first experience of political activity.

In 1875 and early 1876 the surviving Chaikovists resumed work around the St Petersburg factories. G V Plekhanov was involved.

Plekhanov, who did most of his work for Zemlya i Volya among the town workers, wrote a book, The Russian workers in the revolutionary movement, about these working-class militants and their movements.

He found that the mental transformation of those workers, awakened by politics to a new sharp view of their own lives and of their surroundings, generated in them an enormous drive for knowledge and culture.

Marx had explained the purpose of atheist propaganda against religion in these terms.

Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers on the chain not in order that man shall continue to bear that chain without fantasy or consolation, but so that he shall throw off the chain and pluck the living flower.

And so it was when the populist propagandists stripped away the illusions of the workers in their "Little Father", the Tsar, in the Church, in God, and in the ruling class. They unleashed an energetic need to understand and to know the truth.

This would be a great fermenting power in the Russian labour movement, as it has been in all labour movements - sharper self-awareness and the sense of ignorance generating the drive for knowledge and leavening the economic and political struggles for working-class self-betterment.

Plekhanov commented:

When I asked the workers themselves what exactly they wanted from revolutionary writings, I met with the most varied answers. In most cases each of them wanted a solution to those problems which for some reason were of special interest to my individual hearer at each particular moment.

In the mind of workers such problems were increasingly enormously, and each had his favourite questions according to his own tendencies and character. One was particularly interested in the problem of God and claimed that revolutionary literature ought to use its energies mainly for destroying the religious beliefs of the people.

Others were interested in historical or political problems, or in the natural sciences. Among my acquaintances in the factories, there was also one who was specially interested in the question of women.

Workers who became 'educated' would become political and 'self-motivating' populists. But there were other processes at work too.

In St Petersburg the more educated metalworkers predominated - those workers who were more distant from peasant roots. Elements of the typical town worker's contempt for the ignorant country bumpkin peasants would soon, even among workers who in general accepted the outlook of the populists, help workers define themselves as distinct from the peasants.

The emergence of Zemlya i Volya in the mid 1870s was a product of harsh and sobering experience in the shambolic 'going to the people' in 1874 and after. ZiV's solution was to rouse the peasants to revolt not for socialism, but, immediately, for 'land and freedom'.

From the beginning it also turned to the urban working class, agitating on working-class issues. They hoped to use the workers eventually to reach the peasants, but they got drawn into the working class struggle. They helped organise strikes in St Petersburg in the late 1870s.

They helped organise the first working-class-initiated political demonstration, in St Petersburg, in the square of Our Lady of Kazan, on 6 December 1876, at which the 20 year old Plekhanov was the speaker, risking ten years hard labour if he were taken by the police.

On the morning of 6 December, perhaps 300 workers and a larger number of students and intellectuals gathered in the square, outside the church. Plekhanov shouted, 'Long Live Land and Freedom!'. Workers unfurled a big red banner with 'Land and Freedom' written on it, and Plekhanov started to speak.

The police immediately attacked the demonstration, but the crowd stopped them seizing Plekhanov. A large number of demonstrators and bystanders were attacked and arrested.

In the ensuing trial, the court was savage with the intellectuals, but relatively lenient with the workers. The strange half-medieval character of the society in which the workers were laying the foundations of a great labour movement is shown in the sentences meted out to some of the workers. They were sent to serve period of retreat and prayer in a Russian Orthodox monastery! Others were deported to Siberia.

By contrast, the intellectual Alexei Emelyanov got 15 years in jail, where he was flogged with such violence that he went mad and died in jail. Two other intellectuals got ten years' hard labour, and one six.

The populists could not but be poignantly aware of the sharp contrast between the mobility and combativity of the urban workers and the inertia in the countryside. Venturi quotes a reflective report for the leading layer of Zemlya i Volya written after Kazan Square. Its author might be Plekhanov, but Venturi thinks probably not.

The important result of the entire affair is the union that has now been brought about between the intelligentsia and the people. The author contrasted the workers with the liberals.

The Russian liberals were very learned. They even knew that liberty had been conquered in the West. But obviously one ought not to try to apply this knowledge to Russia.

Russia is led along the road to political freedom not by the liberals but by dreamers who organise ridiculous and childish demonstrations; by men who dare to break the law, by men who are beaten, sentenced and reviled.

The Russian workers had shown themselves more united and compact because of the equality of their conditions; more developed because of the variety of their impressions of town life and because of their frequent and bitter conflicts with the representatives of the government and the ruling classes; and, finally, more open to socialist propaganda...

The worker is always clearly aware of the injustice of the social regime that oppresses him... He can see that the luxury which is the work of his own hands is enjoyed by others. And so his mentality is attuned to demand a fight which will produce immediate results.

He does not want to postpone the battle, but he wants to obtain (if not everything he wants) at least as much as possible as can be obtained at that given time. He wants to make at least a breach in that order of things which has become unbearable for him.

He wants to be a free man with the right to think and speak openly in accordance with his opinions. In fact he sees that to fight against his economic exploiters he must make use of what is called political freedom.

But this freedom he will have to conquer and he will therefore have to enter

into conflict with the very essence of our State system. His activities along the road to freedom inevitably taken on a political character. The events of 6th December are the result of this state of mind among the most conscious of the working classes.

The author concluded that the Kazan Square demonstration showed that in Russia, "the movement would follow the same direction as in the West, i.e. from the town to the country and not vice versa". Therefore the revolutionaries should organise the urban workers and win them over politically.

The ferment in the working class of St Petersburg and the surrounding region helped make this possible. There was a general revival of the working-class movement. It would culminate politically in the public proclamation of the Northern Union of Russian Workers at the end of 1878, at the height of a strike wave.

In December 1877 an explosion occurred at one of the St Petersburg armaments factories. The workers there believed it to be due to the negligence of the management. Six workers were killed.

An organised group of politically conscious workers had existed in the factory for some years. Stepan Khalturin, who would be the main organiser of the Northern Union of Russian Workers and who would be hanged for an attempt to kill the Tsar, had worked there.

The armaments workers decided to turn the funeral of the six workers, where workers could legally assemble, into a political demonstration. They asked ZiV for help and the organisation mobilised its supporters to join the funeral demonstration. A worker whose name is not known spoke at the funeral denouncing the factory management. He said they were burying six victims 'not of the Turks' - Russia was then at war with Turkey in the Balkans - "but of the fatherly administration of the factory". The crowd thwarted an attempt to arrest him.

Plekhanov wrote a manifesto to the armaments workers on the events. It ended as follows:

Workers, now is the time to understand reason. You must not expect help from anyone. And do not expect it from the gentry! The peasants have long been expecting help from the gentry, and all they have got is worse land and heavier taxes, even greater than before... Will you too, the workers in towns, put up with this for ever?

In February 1878, an important strike broke out when two thousand cotton workers, who worked a 13-hour day, struck to stop their wages being reduced. These were the previously most backward workers, half peasant and half worker.

At first they had appealed for 'justice' to the authorities. The chief of police to whom they appealed promised to help them, but did not. Then they struck.

It would take nearly two decades more, and the slaughter of five hundred and wounding of thousands on 9 January 1905, before the Russian labour movement would outgrow the illusion that those 'above' them, and in the first place the Tsar, could be prevailed on to take their side.

An organised group of Northern Union workers was active in the cotton mills, but the group was new and inexperienced, so the Northern Union sent more experienced people in to help. ZiV involved itself.

How precarious the work of these revolutionaries often was is shown by the fate of the ZiVist Aron Gobst, who made the initial contacts there. He was a former junior officer, on the run for making revolutionary propaganda among the troops in Odessa.

Four months after his involvement with the cotton workers, Gobst was caught, taken to Kiev, and there hanged.

Plekhanov, introducing himself to the workers as a lawyer, and other ZiVists, tried to lead and shape the strike. It would be over a decade in the future - in a strike on the other side of Europe, in the most advanced capitalist country in the world, which nevertheless had much in common with the St Petersburg cotton workers' strike - that skilled and politically educated workers like John Burns and Tom Mann would 'intervene' from outside to lead the previously backward London dockers into winning a wages battle and setting up their own union.

Plekhanov wanted to teach the workers by their own experience exactly how things stood between them and the autocracy. He raised the idea of a workers' procession to present a petition to the heir to the throne. They did that peacefully. The petition ended: "If our demands are not satisfied we will know that we have no-one in whom we can hope, that no-one will defend us, and that we must trust in ourselves and in our own arms".

ZiV collected money for the strikes from middle-class sympathisers. They proposed an attempt to spread the strike to other factories, thus helping the workers understand the power their own solidarity could give them.

ZiV arranged for short reports on the strike movement by Plekhanov to be published in a conventional newspaper. When the reports of their deeds were read out to them, the workers felt enhanced by their own reflection in print.

The strike ended when some workers went back to work, believing vague promises, and the remainder were driven back by force.

Some workers learned that the heir to the throne was no friend of theirs. Strikes in cotton broke out at intervals throughout the winter, to be met by extreme political violence and arrests. A large-scale battle in the centre of St

Petersburg was fought between police and workers trying to free arrested comrades.

Workers began to see that politics - the overall power in society - had to be an integral part of their struggle. It was a lesson that would lead them to back the politics-by-terrorism of Narodnaya Volya in the months ahead.

St Petersburg experienced 26 such strikes between 1877 and 1879. Sometimes the workers won, stopping wage cuts for example. They established connections, factory to factory. And they built the Northern Union of Russian Workers.

It was founded by the skilled metalworkers, better paid and better educated than the cotton workers. A nucleus had been formed in 1876 of men who made themselves living links between the different factories by getting jobs in them successively. At the height of the strike wave they founded the Northern Union of Russian Workers.

Their rules and programme were agreed in the course of two meetings at the end of December 1878. ZiV printed their programme.

It began by denouncing "the political and economic yoke which threatens the workers with total material privation and a paralysis of their spiritual forces". Their goal, they wrote, was to create an all-Russian "Union of Workers, which, by grouping together the forces of the workers which are now dispersed in the towns and villages, and by enlightening them as regards their own interests, aims, and aspirations, will be of real help in the struggle against social injustice and will constitute the internal, organic link which is indispensable for the successful prosecution of the struggle".

They declared: "Members of the Union must be chosen exclusively from the workers".

It was to be a select organisation. Each candidate for membership had to be introduced by at least two members. Each member must know the programme of the union and "the essentials of its doctrine". The organisation would establish an illegal library, whose use was not confined to members of the union.

The leader in this enterprise was Stepan Khalturin.

Khalturin, who would end his life on the gallows as a member of Narodnaya Volya, came from a family of prosperous peasants, and had had a good education. He was a blacksmith and mechanic, who become a socialist in his mid teens and almost went to America to found a utopian-socialist colony.

Plekhanov wrote a description of him.

Young, tall and strong, with a fine complexion and expressive eyes, he impressed us as a splendid fellow...But his engaging, and at the same time

rather ordinary, appearance did not reveal the strength of his character and his exceptional intelligence. What mostly struck me in his behaviour was his retiring, almost feminine gentleness...

Not that he himself did not want to speak - and not just with his working class comrades but with the intelligentsia also. When his activities were still on the right side of the law, he willingly met students and tried to make their acquaintance, getting every kind of information from them and borrowing books.

He often stayed with them until midnight, but he very rarely gave his own opinions. His host would grow excited, delighted at the chance to enlighten an ignorant workman, and would speak at great length, theorising in the most 'popular' way possible.

Stepan would stay there listening. Only rarely did he put in a word of his own. And he would gaze carefully, looking up at the speaker. Every now and then his intelligent eyes would reflect an amiable irony. There was always an element of irony in his relations with the students...

With the workers he behaved in a very different way... he looked upon them as more solid and, so to speak, more natural revolutionaries, and he looked after them like a loving nurse. He taught them, he sought books and work for them, he made peace among them when they quarrelled, and he scolded the guilty...

Among the workers of St Petersburg there were people just as educated and competent as he was; there were men who had seen another world, who had lived abroad. The secret of the enormous influence of what can be called Stepan's dictatorship lay in the tireless attention which he devoted to each single thing.

Even before meetings began, he spoke with everyone to find out the general state of mind; he considered all sides of the question; and so naturally he was the most prepared of all. He expressed the general state of mind....

Compared to those of Zemlya i Volya, Khalturin was an extreme Westerner. This Westernism was born and rooted in him thanks to the general situation of working-class life in the capital, which alone interested him; and thanks also to various casual circumstances. Indeed, he had been in contact with the Lavrovists before the Populist 'rebels', and the Lavrovists were able to stimulate among the workers an interest in the German social-democratic movement.

In the paper Zemlya i Volya of February 1879, Plekhanov reported on the state of the working class. "Agitation in the factories increases daily. That is the news of the day".

Venturi: The first months of 1879 constituted the golden age of the Northern

Union. All the working-class districts of St Petersburg had their own organised groups linked to the central body. They could count on about 200 organised men and 200 more in reserve, carefully distributed in the various factories. Their library, one of Khalturin's main concerns, was satisfactorily split up among the various clandestine centres, so as not to risk falling into the hands of the police. It was extensively used even by those not affiliated to the union.

But the workers lived under the guns of the Tsarist state. Everything that the Northern Union of Russian Workers did was illegal. Early in 1879 the work of a spy enabled the state to smash it. Khalturin escaped arrest. He would live to become a Narodnaya Volya fighter who would organise to kill Tsar Alexander II in February 1880.

## §8. The triumph and defeat of Narodnaya Volya

"The Russian proletarian is no novice in the revolutionary movement. You know that it was a worker who blew up the imperial palace in February 1880. The very idea for this action was conceived in a workers' group."

G V Plekhanov and Vera Zasulich, Letter to the International Socialist Congress, 1891

"And our proletariat? Did it pass through the school of the medieval apprentice brotherhood? Has it the ancient tradition of the guilds? Nothing of the kind. It was thrown into the factory cauldron, snatched directly from the plough. Hence the absence of conservative tradition, absence of caste in the proletariat itself, revolutionary freshness: hence - along with other causes - October, the first workers' government in the world. But hence also illiteracy, backwardness, absence of organisational habits, absence of system in labour, of cultural and technical education.

Leon Trotsky, History of the Russian Revolution

The Bolshevik historian Pokrovsky maintained that the Northern Union was the first workers' organisation in Russian history. He dismissed the claims of the Southern Union on the grounds that it was not organised by the workers themselves but by populists of another class, Shchedrin and Kovalskaya, and because of its tactics - the old rural economic terrorism practised by Zemlya i Volya and still advocated by Cherny Peredel, applied to the factories.

"The idea that mass organisations might become the instruments of revolution was entirely new to the men of the 70s; it was unquestionably suggested to them by working with the workers. It originated however in the head of an intellectual, for the statute of the Southern Union was drawn up by Zaslovsky, a member of the gentry".

Such a sharp distinction between the Northern Union and its Southern predecessors begs too many of the questions about the interactions of the workers with the revolutionaries - populists and then Social-Democratic Marxists - of another class that recur, in varying forms, until 1917 and beyond. It is however a matter of fact that the Northern Union was the first working-class organisation initiated and run entirely by the workers themselves.

Plekhanov would later proudly point to the programme of the Northern Union to claim that it was the working-class movement, embryonic though it was, that had first publicly raised the question of a turn to politics which the political terrorists of Narodnaya Volya would soon raise in their own way.

The union's programme was indeed notably political, and its politics were largely social-democratic, that is, in the idiom of the time, Marxist. It declared an affinity with "the Socialist Democratic Party of the West" (see box).

But the development of such working-class politics required political liberties that were unknown in Russia. Even strike action, which was illegal, brought the workers up against the need to win political liberty.

But how? What could they do to win the right to trade-union and political action that would not be crushed by the state?

What politics was possible in Russia, immediately?

Narodnaya Volya had an answer: strike at the Tsar and force his successor to grant constitutional rights. Khalturin's first answer was the Northern Union, the organisation of the working class. When the Northern Union was crushed by the police, Khalturin would see and share the logic of Narodnaya Volya's position: the only feasible politics was political terrorism.

Though he went over to Narodnaya Volya, Khalturin never subscribed to the general populist delusion that an agrarian socialism based on the peasant community was possible for Russia.

Plekhanov records that Khalturin thought the lucubrations of the populist intellectuals about the obshchina futile. "Do you really mean to say that this is important?", he used to tease the populist organiser Plekhanov.

Khalturin had said of the earlier terrorists that the only thing they did was "to shoot their own folk, the officials", and "get in the way of the workers organising".

He said there was "not a chance for us; as soon as we have started something going, bang, the intellectuals have killed somebody, and the police are on to us. Why don't they give us a chance to organise?" He eventually came to the view that only political terrorism could win from the Tsarist state "a chance to organise" for the working class.

Plekhanov reported that Khalturin envisaged the revolution not as a politically

focused outburst such as the populists expected but as a general strike - which, Plekhanov justly noted, was exactly how it did develop in 1905. But that was a generation in the future.

Pavel Axelrod vainly tried to revive the Northern Union. At that stage of the development of the Russian working class, the Tsarist state was strong enough to stifle all attempts to create an organised labour movement.

Should the activists accept that it would take a more or less long time before capitalist development would render the Tsarist state incapable of suppressing the working-class movement, and that therefore all that could be done now was to prepare for that?

In fact it would be the mid 1890s before the Russian working class movement, augmented by the tremendous industrial expansion of the 1880s and 90s, even began to reach such a stage.

None of the revolutionaries consciously chose that perspective. Plekhanov, Axelrod, Deutsch, and Zasulich, the future Marxist social democrats, who would eventually accept that logic, did not. They wanted to continue as ZiV had been, organising, appealing for revolt, using terrorism to "disorganise" its enemies or in the way we saw the organisers of the Southern Union at the end of the 1870s (who were supporters of Plekhanov's Cherny Peredel) use it.

The other logical choice was the one which Narodnaya Volya elaborated - an immediate attempt to blast the Tsarist state out of the power to repress all social movements such as those of the Northern Union.

The second logic proved all-powerful with most of ZiV, including, as we have seen, the working-class leader Khalturin.

Repression became especially fierce after an unsuccessful attempt on the life of Tsar Alexander II in 1879. Russia was divided into six districts, each under the rule of a political-military dictator appointed by the Tsar.

In the spring and early summer of 1879 sizeable numbers of terrorists and Zemlya i Volya people who fired on police to try to avoid arrest were hanged.

Narodnaya Volya was organised in the autumn of 1879. Like ZiV and Cherny Peredel it would attempt to base itself on the urban working class as well as on the urban intelligentsia.

What it offered was the creation of a revolutionary party, made up of militants from different classes and backgrounds but primarily from the intelligentsia, which would capture the imagination of the people and establish itself with them as a sort of collective anti-Tsar.

The historical transmutation envisaged in Antonio Gramsci's conception of the revolutionary Marxist party of the 20th century as "the Modern Prince", the

collective equivalent of the single rulers, the princes, of Renaissance Italy, had already been postulated in those terms by Mikhail Bakunin. It was the clearly expressed design to which the founders of Narodnaya Volya worked.

In April 1879 the leading article in Zemlya i Volya declared:

"More than anything else, it is essential to turn ourselves into the people and live within the people; to become a force not only acting in the people's interests, but with sufficient force to hold firm for itself and the people. We must put the revolutionary party in the place that the mythical Tsar now holds in the eyes of our citizens" (emphasis added).

As to the question, what would this party, the collective anti-Tsar, do, the Narodnaya Volya faction of ZiV had a compelling answer: the collective anti-Tsar would do bloody single combat above society with the Tsar and his lieutenants.

Most of those populists from the intelligentsia who had been involved in the work around the factories, in both Northern and Southern Russia, went over to Narodnaya Volya. The fragments of the suppressed Northern Union supported Narodnaya Volya, not Cherny Peredel.

Khalturin asked Plekhanov to put him in contact with Narodnaya Volya. He made one of the unsuccessful attempts to kill the Tsar, going to work as a carpenter in the Tsar's Winter Palace in September 1879.

He himself had thought it best to kill the Tsar with gun or knife - he had once found himself alone in a room with him! - but the organisation believed a bomb was more sure, and Khalturin accepted that view. He set off a bomb in the Tsar's palace in February 1880 which killed 11 people but failed to kill Tsar Alexander.*

The killing of Tsar Alexander II on 1 March 1881 was followed, not immediately but soon, by the destruction of the Narodnaya Volya military organisation which had killed him. The last members of the "Executive Committee" were rounded up.

Elements of the shattered organisation would survive, as would the mystique of its example and the tradition embodied in that mystique. It would inspire those who planned to kill the Tsar in 1887, for which Lenin's brother Alexander Ulyanov and four others would be hanged.

A newspaper in the name of Narodnaya Volya would continue, edited in exile by no less than Pyotr Lavrov, Karl Marx's friend and the prophet of the earlier "educationalist" populism which had inspired those who "went to the people" in 1874-5. He rallied to support the heroic fighters of NV. So, in his own way, did Karl Marx, who was full of admiration and praise for the simple heroism with which the assassins of Alexander II conducted themselves in court and on the scaffold.

As an organised fighting force Narodnaya Volya was now done for. Not only was its centre shattered, but, most importantly, the ratio between the casualties it endured from the Tsarist police and the new recruits to replace them turned drastically unfavourable for the organisation's survival.

In part that was because of the relentless terror inflicted by the state on anything that moved in Russian society. But that could only have the effect it did because the spectacular achievement of the goal Narodnaya Volya had set itself, the beheading of the autocracy by destroying the reigning autocrat, Alexander, had incontrovertibly shown that political terrorism too could not move Russian forward.

The Tsarist regime automatically extruded another "head" to replace Alexander II - his son Alexander III, who was, even in comparison with his father, a thoroughgoing reactionary.

Narodnaya Volya's spectacular success in their chosen means had produced only pointed failure in achieving the end to which the killing of the Tsar was supposedly the means.

No outbreak of popular revolt followed the assassination of the Tsar. Indeed, the most common peasant and still-peasant-linked working-class explanation for what had happened to the "Tsar Liberator", who had freed the serfs 20 years earlier, was that he had been killed by the landlords in revenge for ending serfdom. The liberal segments of the bourgeoisie recoiled in fear and horror.

Ironically, on the eve of his death the Tsar had, against the opposition of his son and successor, planned to grant limited liberal reforms. The political reaction unleashed by the assassination put an end to all hope for that.

In the next decades much that had been populists would evolve into bourgeois liberalism - indeed, as we saw, the "operational politics" of Narodnaya Volya itself, despite its long-term "socialist goal", had been nothing but the winning of a liberal bourgeois constitution.

With the destruction of Narodnaya Volya, the early labour movement which populism had inspired and influence also went down to destruction.

Stepan Khalturin had been more than a populist, but the heroic end of that working-class leader turned Narodnaya Volya fighter on the gallows nonetheless symbolised the inextricable connections with populism of the first attempts at creating an organised labour movement.

We will find that much of the polemic between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks after 1903 would centre on an alleged analogy or identity between Lenin and the populists and early Russian Jacobins. Following on from those disputes, a veritable academic industry would grow up around the proposition that Lenin's "real" political predecessor and teacher was not Plekhanov but Peter

Tkachev, the Jacobin-populist.**

* The statement in the last Solidarity that Khalturin was captured and hanged for this was mistaken. He was hanged in 1882 for assassinating one of the Tsar's satraps.

** The issue of whether, as ZiV had believed, the revolutionaries should follow the people, or try to lead them, emerged very sharply with the pogroms against Jews in 1881.

NV chose to reflect the popular Christian anti-semitism. It hailed the pogroms as a splendid manifestation of popular revolutionary initiative. Plekhanov and his comrades denounced NV's support of the pogromists and their work.

In practice, generally, NV did not simply reflect the opinions of "the people", but tried to lead them and to shape their consciousness.

The light in the dark 1880s

A year after 1 March 1881 the triumph of social inertia and Tsarism seemed absolute. More than a decade would pass before things began to stir on the surface again. By then Marxism would be a growing force. In the depths of society, Russia would undergo a tremendous economic transformation. The proletarian gravediggers of capitalism would multiply and grow into the mighty force that would bury Tsarism.

Consumer industries, such as cotton and sugar-beet processing, using machinery and hired free labour, existed before 1861. Even so, in 1861 Russia had still had a largely "natural" or subsistence economy. That is, most of the country was still entirely agricultural, and most people consumed only what they could cultivate or make in and around their villages.

Russia was where the advanced countries of Europe had been five or six hundred years earlier, locked in an overpowering medievalism. And if Russia had been left to its own tempo of development, it would probably have taken hundreds of years to reach West European levels.

The key to subsequent Russian history is that it was not isolated, but drawn into a "combined" development, in the course of which the still fundamentally backward Russia would adapt to itself the most advanced technology from countries in the West which were, in terms of linear time, hundreds of years ahead of it.

In 1861, trade beyond the village communities, money, markets, banks, consumer goods from outside beyond a few things like salt, and iron for tools, played little part in the lives of the overwhelming mass of the people. Russia exported a vast amount of grain, but the consumer goods of international trade entered into the needs and lives only of the upper classes.

Apart from industries run by the state to produce the necessities of war, iron

foundries for example, there was very little factory production. Most industry was handicraft production in small workshops.

Russia was almost without railroads. (It had one thousand miles of track in 1861). It had no banking system beyond the financial institutions of the state. There were almost no private trading companies.

The whole society was inimical to the spirit of capitalist free enterprise.

Civil liberties - habeas corpus, free speech, an uncensored press, the right to form voluntary associations, freedom of religion, and much else, did not exist in the Russian Empire. The towns were few and small, and were administrative centres of the state rather than centres of trade. It was not a capitalist, but a pre-capitalist, feudal society, on top of which reared up a gigantic state apparatus crowned by the autocrat Tsar.

That state had much in common with the states of Asiatic despotism in India and China before the forcible intrusion of the capitalist West.

The obshchina, and its people, the mir, which the populists idealised for their common property in land, were in fact immensely conservative and historically inert institutions, which locked the lives of all their people into a rigidly patriarchal society. Individuals did not have the right to leave and, for example, go to the towns to sell their labour power, without formal permission and a passport from the community - whose members were collectively responsible to the state for taxes - and, usually, a commitment to go on paying obshchina taxes.

Karl Marx bracketed the obshchina with the self-sufficient Indian village community. There, unlike in Western Europe, agriculture and handicrafts had never specialised and separated to generate trade. Trade would have broken the barbaric self-sufficiency of the village community, knitted the villages together in a broader economic network, and thus generated urban centres of trade.

Such communities could and did remained unchanged for centuries and even millennia in India and China, no matter what changed in the state above them, until bourgeois Britain disrupted them in the 18th and 19th centuries.

They were locked into a matrix formed by a powerful bureaucratic state which, in Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, China, Inca Peru, etc, though not in Russia, performed certain functions essential to the economy of the village communities - for example, the maintenance of irrigation canals, or the management of regular alluvial floods.

These economically inert but self-sufficient village communities were, in Marx's judgment, the basis on which the states of Oriental Despotism rested. The Russian state and society lay somewhere between the states and societies of Western Europe and of India.

"The West European city was a craft-guild and trade-league city; our cities were above all administrative, military, consequently consuming, and not producing, centres. The craft-guild culture of the West formed itself on a relatively high level of economic development when all the fundamental processes of the manufacturing industries had been distinguished from agriculture, and had been converted into independent crafts, had created their own organisations, their own focuses - the cities - and at first a limited (belonging to local districts), but nevertheless stable, market.

"At the basis of the medieval European city therefore lay a comparatively high differentiation of industry, giving rise to regular interrelations between the city centre and its agricultural periphery.

"Our economic backwardness, on the other hand, found its expression in the fact that craft, not yet separated from agriculture, preserved the form of home industry. Here we were nearer to India than to Europe, just as our medieval cities were nearer to the Asiatic than the European type, and as our autocracy, standing between the European absolutism and the Asiatic despotism, in many features approached the latter".

(Trotsky, History of the Russian Revolution).

The standard and quality of life for most people was wretchedly bad, without hope of improvement and with no consolation but religion and vodka. This was still a largely medieval world untroubled by progress.

The Russian Orthodox church was still medieval, but with the difference from the Church in medieval Western Europe that it was entirely an arm of the state. It had no contradictory outside loyalties to a Roman or other Pope. Russia had had no Reformation. Religious opposition was confined to persecuted peasant sects (the Rashkolniki) of the sort that European had known in pre-Reformation, pre-Renaissance times.

The freeing of the serfs in 1861 struck a fatal blow at that natural economy, but it took a time to give way to a money and market economy. The ancient formula was that the peasants, in their communities, owned the land, and the landlord owned the peasants. As part of the "deal" when the serfs were freed, land (perhaps as much as 50% of all the land: assessments vary) was taken from the communities and given to the landlords. Peasants wound up having to rent land back from the landlord.

Payment was still feudal-style work for the landlord, but a part of it had to be paid in money. And for their redemptions, the ex-serfs were obliged for many years ahead to pay dues, calculated in money. The peasants had to seek cash. That compelled them to sell crops, and, the poorest, to hire out their own labour power for a wage.

As we saw, the first consequence of 1861 was a movement back to the

villages. Serf workers in the factories and mines responded to the fact that they were free by going home. About one in three factory workers had been serf, and of those serfs over half are said to have returned to their villages. It would take time before the flow natural in a developing society, from the villages and the countryside to the towns and industry, set in.

We have seen how workers responded to working in industry, the growth of a permanent working class which defined itself as not peasant, the methods of the early struggles of this still half-peasant working class, the attempts of the populists to rouse and organise the working class, and the weak beginnings of a self-sufficient working-class movement.

All that was still the pre-history, the childhood, of the Russian working class. In 1881, when the populist movement climaxed with the killing of Tsar Alexander II, both the working class and the industry in which it operated were still very small. The population was still only 90 million.

One historian wrote: "The 80s cut across the history of the Russian intelligentsia and of Russian civilisation like a belt of darkness. Something had been broken".

Yet it was in the depths of the repression and reaction after 1881 - a reaction which even saw the reimposition of aspects of serf-like control on the ex-serfs in the countryside - that industry and the working class began to develop. Phenomenally. It was in dark years of repression, in the 1880s and 90s, that the foundations of a mass revolutionary movement were laid down.

Where before revolutionary movements had involved only a thin layer of the intelligentsia, unable to reach or activate their chosen people, the peasants, industrialisation was laying the foundations of a mass working class movement.

Population rose from 74 million in 1861 to 90 million in 1880 and then 174 million in 1917.

Government initiative, government financing, government tariff and fiscal policy, and government guarantees for foreign loans, were central in developing industry.

The central organiser was Sergei Witte, who was Minister of Finance in 1892-1903, though the shaping policies started long before Witte.

As one writer puts it: "At the heart of Witte's system was an attempt to create favourable trade balances by forcing increases in grain exports". By the turn of the 20th century Russia exported 15% of its grain crop, three times the level of 20 years earlier.

That also meant that Russia was vulnerable to fluctuations in the international grain market. Loans also drew it into the world credit system, breaking its isolation.

After its defeat in the Crimean War (1854-5) Russian abandoned protectionism. In the 70s it started to go back to it. From 1877 the tariff on imports had to be paid in gold. Since the paper rouble was one-third below par, this rule in effect raised all tariffs on all imports by 33%.

The aim was to encourage home manufacture in place of imported goods, which were now made artificially dear by government policy, and also to stop the export of gold and encourage foreign investment in Russia.

Specific tariffs were imposed. The tariff on pig iron went up from 5 to 45 kopeks gold. French, Belgian and British capitalists were indeed attracted.

Industry expanded rapidly, starting from the low level of 1861. It grew at an average rate of 5 per cent a year, though some of it was still handicraft and not factory production.

For the most part, mechanical equipment in industry - and agriculture and transportation - had to be imported, right up to World War One.

At the start of World War One, industry employed a little over five per cent of the entire labour force, producing, however, one fifth of Russia's national income. There were all sorts of other proletarians, including those in agriculture. The Bolshevik historian Pokrovsky, writing in the 1920s, argued that there were ten million proletarians in Russia in 1904, meaning those who were 100% dependent on their wages, and twenty million poor peasants who sold their labour power to supplement inadequate income from their farms.

How could such a small working class go on to seize power? Because the bare figures are misleading.

The growing industries of textiles, coal-mining, oil extraction, iron and steel making, etc., employed not only foreign capital but also the most up-to-date techniques imported from Europe and America. Around them grew up gigantic concentrations of workers.

The working class acquired weight and power out of all proportion to its numbers in the population as a whole. And as the bourgeoisie imported Western technology and capital, the working class imported the experience of the West European labour movements and the ideas of consistent Marxism.

Concentration magnified the importance of the working class. Industry was concentrated in distinct regions - in the coal and iron region of the Donets and the Dneiper in the South; in the Moscow region; in the vicinities of Petersburg; and in Russian Poland.

The Russian economy was still, even in 1914, predominantly agricultural and backward. Large numbers of industrial workers still held plots of land in their villages.

Yet, while the proportion of all industrial workers employed in large factories

with more than 500 workers was only 31% in the USA, which in general was far more developed than Russia, in Russia it was 53%.

By the early 20th century the percentage of workers engaged in plants employing from 21 to 100 workers was 10% in Russia and 22% in Germany; between 101 and 500, 17% in Russia and 21% in Germany; between 500 and 1000, 10% in Russia and 6% in Germany; and over 1000 workers, 24% in Russia to only 8% in Germany.

Nine great iron and steel plants accounted for more than 50% of Russia's production of pig-iron. Nine tenths of the enormous production of rails came from seven firms. Six enterprises accounted for two thirds of oil production in the Baku region, in the Caucasus.

There were startling contrasts. In Russia, which was still rooted in backward agriculture, the mechanical horsepower per worker in industry (excluding coal-mining) was about two thirds of the equivalent figure for the UK, and higher than France or Germany.

In the iron industries of the south of the Russian Empire, the blast furnaces in use were larger than in Germany, twice as large as in Britain, and three-fifths as large again as in the USA. [Maurice Dobb, Russian Economic Development Since 1917, 1948].

Those concentrations of advanced industry gave the Russian working class great social weight. The context and background is shown in other figures.

Real income per head in Russia was in 1913 only one third of what it was in the USA and the UK, and one half what it was in Germany.

In 1914 not quite 13% of Russia's total population lived in towns. Less than ten per cent of Russia's population derived its income from industry alone.

The great locomotive, so to speak, of the growth of heavy industry in Russia, and of the knitting-together of agricultural markets, was the state-fostered rail-building programme.

The Russian state needed railways as it needed up-to-date guns - to enable it to assert control. It organised loans from the Bourse, the French money market. Russian railways expanded enormously, from 1000 miles of track in 1861 to more than 40,000 at the beginning of World War One. Even so, Russia still only had one quarter the mileage of the USA.

In 1887 the government decided to build the Trans-Siberian Railway. Constructing that railway absorbed half the iron and steel production of Russia.

Between 1891 and 1904, 5,500 miles of rail lines were built to link Moscow to Vladivostock on the Pacific coast.

The production of rail lines led to the large-scale expansion of iron and steel

production. Between 1887 and 1897 it grew three fold. Before 1887 there had been only two iron foundries in the whole of South Russia - Hughes and Pastukhov's. Very soon the mammoth works arose - Alexandrovsky, Kamenskoy, Gdontsevo, Drughkovka, etc.

By 1899 there was 17 big iron works in the South, with 27 blast furnaces working and twelve under construction. The rail building boom led to a vast expansion of pig-iron production from 507,795 tons in 1885, to 2,227,747 in 1898.

Railway-making involved not only developing the iron and steel industries but also construction. The better and longer-distance transport which railways made possible opened up large markets for sugar and grain crops. It encouraged concentration of people, and urbanisation.

The railways provided jobs. By 1913 there were 800,000 rail workers.

This industrial development did not create the possibility for abundance, and therefore for socialism, in Russia. It did create the proletariat which seized power in 1917.

Driven by need into the factories (while often, even in 1917 and after, retaining plots of land in native villages) the working class that was shaped in the new industries had to fight for everything it needed to make life tolerable, from better wages through stopping ill-treatment by overseers to better housing (many workers lived in barracks).

In those struggles they learned to know their own strength.

The bald figures tell the story. On the eve of World War 1, which would change everything, factories and mines employed three and a half million workers; non-factory manufacturing, three million; construction, one and a half million; transport and communications, not quite one and a half million.

Agricultural labourers, domestic servants and white-collar workers numbered 8.5 million.

Between the end of serfdom and World War One, the number of factory workers quadrupled, and artisans also increased fourfold.

When, at the "Trial of Fifty" in 1877, the worker Peter Alexseyev, one of those tried for the first working-class-initiated political demonstration, in Kazan Square in 1876, told the Tsarist court that "the sinewy arms of millions of workers will be raised and the yoke of despotism, protected by the bayonets of the soldiers, will be smashed to pieces", the proletariat did not yet number millions. His speech was a pledge for the future.

The working class called into existence in the depths of political reaction, after the defeat of NV and of all the populist hopes, would in the mid 1890s rise in mass strikes, in tremendous waves of industrial rebellion, to write what Rosa

Luxemburg would call an entirely new chapter in the history of the international working class.

Programme of the Northern Union of Russian Workers

To the Russian worker:

Recognising the extremely harmful aspect of the political and economic oppression... the whole intolerable burden of our social condition which deprives us of every opportunity and hope for some kind of tolerable existence [and which becomes] more and more impossible to endure... which threatens us with complete material deprivation and the paralysis of our spiritual strength, we, the workers of Petersburg, at a general assembly from 23 to 30 December 1878, have conceived the idea of organising an all-Russian union of workers which, uniting the uncoordinated forces of the urban and rural working population and explaining to it its own interests, aims and aspirations, will serve it as a sufficient bulwark in the struggle with social injustice and will give it the organic internal bond that it needs for the successful conduct of the struggle.

The organisation of the Northern Union of Russian Workers should have a strictly defined character and should pursue precisely those aims which are laid down in its programme.

Workers will only be elected to membership of this Union by at least two people who are more or less well known.

Every worker who wishes to become a member of the Union mist acquaint himself beforehand with the programme which follows and with the essence of its social teaching.

All members of the Union must maintain complete solidarity amongst themselves and whoever breaches this will be immediately excluded. A member who attracts the suspicion that he bas betrayed the Union will submit to a special elected court.

Every member is obliged to contribute to the general fund of the Union a fixed sum determined at the general assembly of members.

The affairs of the Union will be conducted by an elected committee consisting of ten members, in whose charge will also lie the responsibility for the fund and the library. General assemblies of the membership are held once a month, at which the activity of the committee is reviewed and the affairs of the Union are discussed...

The committee [has] the right to establish relations with the representatives of provincial circles and sections of the workers of Russia who have accepted the programme of the Northern Union...

The library is intended to supply free of charge the needs of the workers of

the capital, even of those who do not belong to the Union.

The costs of stocking it and of issuing books is to come from the Union fund and from sums donated by the workers.

The Northern Union of Russian Workers, closely allied in its objectives with the Social Democratic Party of the West, lays down as its programme:

The overthrow of the existing political and economic order of the state as one which is extremely unjust.

The establishment of a free popular federation of communes, founded on complete political equality and with full internal self-government on the principles of Russian common law.

The abolition of private land ownership and its replacement by communal land ownership.

The just associative organisation of labour, placing in the hands of the worker-producers the products and tools of production.

As political freedom assures for each person independence of beliefs and actions, and as it above all assures the resolution of the social question, the following should be the immediate demands of the Union:

Freedom of speech and of the press, the right of assembly and meeting.

The abolition of the criminal investigation department and trial for political crimes.

The abolition of class rights and privileges.

Compulsory and free education in all schools and educational institutions.

A reduction in the size of the standing army or its complete replacement by the arming of the people.

The right of the rural commune to decide matters that concern it, such as: the rate of tax, allotment of land and internal self-government.

Freedom of movement and the abolition of the [internal] passport system.

The abolition of indirect taxes and the institution of direct taxation corresponding to income and inheritance.

The limitation of working hours and the prohibition of child labour.

The institution of production associations, loan funds and free credit for the workers' associations and the peasant communes.

That, in its main features, is the programme that the general assembly of Petersburg workers resolved to be guided by on 23-30 December.

By tireless and active propaganda among its brothers the Northern Union hopes to achieve results that will advance the workers' estate and compel it

to start talking about itself and its rights; and hence it is the sacred duty of every member of this Union to do what lies in his power to carry out agitation among the working mass, oppressed, and sympathetic to demands for justice.

His services will not be forgotten by posterity and his name will be reversed as an apostle of the evangelical truth and will be written in the chronicle of history.

Workers! We summon you now; we appeal to your voice, your conscience and your consciousness!

The great social struggle has already commenced - and we must not wait: our brothers in the West have already raised the banner of the emancipation of the millions - and we have only to join them. Arm in arm with them we shall move forward and in brotherly unity merge into a single fearsome fighting force.

Workers, a great task has fallen to us - the task of our emancipation and the emancipation of our brothers; it is our duty to renew the world, which is wallowing in luxury and draining our strength - and we must carry it out.

Remember who was the first to respond to the great words of Christ, who was the first bearer of his teaching that love and brotherhood would overturn the whole of the old world? - the simple settlers...

We are also called upon to preach, we are also summoned to be the apostles of a new, but in essence only a misunderstood and forgotten, teaching of Christ.

We shall be persecuted as the first Christians were persecuted; we shall be beaten and taunted, but we shall be undaunted and we shall not be ashamed of their desecrations, because this animosity towards us itself demonstrates its weakness in the struggle with the moral greatness of the ideas, in the struggle with the force that we represent.

"You corrupt the world", they say to us, "you destroy the family, you scorn property and profane religion".

Now, we shall reply to them, we are not the ones who are corrupting the world, it is you; we are not the cause of evil - you are. On the contrary, we are going to renew the world, revive the family, establish property as it should be and resurrect the great teaching of Christ on brotherhood and equality...

Workers! Stand bravely beneath our banner of social revolution, join a harmonious, fraternal family and, arming yourselves with the spiritual sword of truth, go and preach your gospel in the towns and villages!

Your future lies in this propaganda of salvation, and your success depends on your moral strength; with it you are mighty, with it you will subdue the world.

Know that in you is contained the entire strength and significance of the country, you are the flesh and blood of the state and without you the other classes which now suck your blood, would not exist....

## §9. The roots of Bolshevism. Plekhanov: father of Russian Marxism

"The task of our revolutionary intelligentsia therefore comes, in the opinion of the Russian Social Democrats, to the following: they must adopt the views of modern scientific socialism, spread them among the workers and, with the help of the workers, storm the stronghold of autocracy. The revolutionary movement in Russia can triumph only as the revolutionary movement of the workers. There is not and cannot be any other way out for us."

George Valentinovich Plekhanov, speaking at the Founding Congress of the Second International in Paris, July 1889

"Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement", so said Lenin. Lenin? In the 20th century many Marxist publications (including more than one I've had a hand in) have carried that quotation "from Lenin" emblazoned on the masthead or editorial page. In fact it originates not with Lenin, but with George Plekhanov, advocating Marxist as against populist ideas. The passage in which it occurs is a great deal richer than the much-cited single sentence can convey; and it speaks directly to today's pixillated left, encouraged by inadequate scraps of "anti-imperialist" theory into reactionary support for such as Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic:

"For without revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary movement in the true sense of the word. Any class which strives for its emancipation, any political party which aims at dominance, is revolutionary only insofar as it represents the most progressive social trends and consequently is a vehicle of the most progressive ideas of its time. An idea which is inherently revolutionary is a kind of dynamite which no other explosive in the world can replace. And as long as our movement is under the banner of backward or erroneous theories it will have revolutionary significance only by some, but by no means all of its aspects. At the same time, without its members knowing it, it will bear in itself the germs of reaction which will deprive it even of that little significance in the more or less near future ."

Plekhanov wrote that in 1883, in the first manifesto of consistent Marxism in Russia, Socialism and the Political Struggle. Lenin was then a 13-year-old schoolboy living quietly in his Tsar-accepting conservative-liberal family.

This common misattribution* is typical of the idea of the relationship between "Lenin" and his Russian Marxist teachers which "Leninist" piety, Stalinist falsification and simple ignorance have combined to create.

The real relationship was greatly different.

Plekhanov was indeed "The father of Russian Marxism", but in a far more substantial sense than "forerunner", distant initiator.

We have seen Plekhanov in his late teens as an underground organiser of workers and as the orator at the first worker-organised illegal political demonstration in Russian history, at the Our Lady of Kazan Square, St Petersburg in 1876.

We saw Plekhanov, the Bakuninist opponent of all "politics", breaking with those populists who turned to the politics of killing the Tsar to force the autocracy to concede a constitution, in the name of continuing to organise the peasants and workers for mass action, and of confining terrorism to a subordinate place in the arsenal of the revolutionaries.

Polemically demolishing populism, Plekhanov put the working class into the leading place in his conception of the Russian revolution, more than a decade before it began to happen in Russian life.

After a gestation of some years duration, during which Plekhanov, Zassulich, Axelrod and Deutsch completed their transformation from populists into Marxist Communists (in the terminology of that time, Social Democrats), the Group for the Emancipation of Labour (GEL) began its work in 1883, the year Karl Marx died.

What was new in the Marxism of the GEL was the group's militant rejection of all variants of the idea that there would be a special Russian road to socialism. They broke entirely with the framework and conclusions of all past Russian socialism.

Still in his 20s, Plekhanov produced the seeding works of Russian Marxism, Socialism and the Political Struggle (1883) and Our Differences (1884)**.

Using the method of Marx to analyse Russian conditions, Plekhanov arrived at conclusions about the road to socialism in Russia which Marx had balked at drawing. It was with some justice that the populist polemicists could accuse Plekhanov of being more "Marxist" than Marx himself.

In their 1882 introduction to a new Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels had left the question of a special Russian road to socialism open. They noted that: "During the Revolution of 1848-49 not only the European princes, but the European bourgeois as well, found their only salvation from the proletariat, just beginning to awaken, in Russian intervention. The Tsar was proclaimed the chief of European reaction. Today he is a prisoner of war of the revolution, [hiding from assassins] in Gatchina, and Russia forms the vanguard of revolutionary action in Europe".

They thought a qualitative difference still existed between Russian society and the capitalist society dealt with in the Communist Manifesto:

"The Communist Manifesto had as its object the proclamation of the inevitably impending dissolution of modern bourgeois property. But in Russia we find, face to face with the rapidly developing capitalist swindle and bourgeois landed property, just beginning to develop, more than half the land owned in common by the peasants. Now the question is: can the Russian obshchina [the village commune], though greatly undermined, yet a form of the primeval common ownership of land, pass directly to the higher form of communist common ownership? Or, on the contrary, must it first pass through the same process of dissolution as constitutes the historical evolution of the West?

"The only answer to that possible today is this: If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist development."

Where Marx and Engels had left the door ajar for Russian populism, Plekhanov in Our Differences closed it with a reverberating slam.

By the early/mid-80s, GEL had already worked through, sketched out, or at least identified and tackled, all of the political questions, and even the key tactical issues, posed by Russia's peculiarities to the Russian Marxists. It elaborated the politics which would animate the Iskra/Zarya group when, at the start of the 20th century, it began to organise the Marxist circles scattered through urban Russia into a coherent Marxist party.

The Iskra project - to use a newspaper as the organising centre from which to politically and organisationally unite the circle-scattered, politically unfocused forces of revolutionary Marxism - was initiated and, mainly, carried out by the younger Marxists. But the political authority of Plekhanov and the GEL were irreplaceable to making Iskra/Zarya the authoritative centre around which to regroup the scattered forces of Russian revolutionary Marxism.

The political ideas elaborated by GEL held as the basis of Russian Social Democracy until the 1905 Revolution. In the revolution differing estimations of the role the bourgeois class would play in what all agreed would be a bourgeois-democratic revolution began to reshape and redefine the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions. (Neither side had seen the dispute on organisation at the 1903 Congress as politically decisive.)

In 1905, Lenin began to insist that workers and peasants would have to make the bourgeois-democratic revolution despite, and in opposition to, the bourgeoisie and their parties. He called for a Democratic Dictatorship of Workers and Peasants; and he began to elaborate the practical implications of that idea for tactics and slogans in the Revolution.

Trotsky went further, arguing that the only possible Russian "bourgeois-democratic revolution" would be led by the working class, at the head of the peasantry (and not, as Lenin believed, in equal partnership with them). In

passing, the working class would carry through the historic tasks of the bourgeoisie - establish a Constituent Assembly, a democratic republic, democratic rights - and then go on, without any period of stable bourgeois power, to create a workers' government. This was Trotsky's theory of "Permanent Revolution".

And that is exactly how it happened in 1917.

Identifiable versions of these guiding ideas of Lenin and Trotsky, or approximations to them, are in the 1880s already to be found, in an underdeveloped and unconcretised form, to be sure, in the writings of Plekhanov and Axelrod. When it came to it, in 1905, the former GEL people became convinced that the revolution could not, after all, do without the bourgeoisie, while Trotsky, Lenin and the Bolsheviks (and initially such Mensheviks as Dan and Martinov) took the opposite fork in the road, facing up to the fact that they would have to.

As well as being the great scholar of Russian Marxism, Plekhanov was in the Iskra years still the embodiment in that movement of the heroic, audacious, stop-at-nothing, militant spirit of the earlier revolutionaries.

It was Plekhanov who proclaimed at the Congress of 1903* that a future Marxist government might well have to violate the rules of formal democracy in the interests of the revolution, insisting against mush hostility that the well-being of the revolution would override all other considerations.

If the RSDLP was the first Marxist Party to write the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" into its programme, and it was, that was the work of Plekhanov.

Yet in the 1880s Plekhanov and GEL seemed to have failed.

Inevitably, GEL too suffered the consequences of the collapse of revolutionary populism after the killing of the Tsar (March 1881) and from the disillusion, inertia and fear of the police that paralysed the opposition-minded intelligentsia for a decade.

GEL had the added disadvantage that immediately it could be only a negative, critical force, directed against both the old and the new populism. What it stood for positively lay still in the future.

Where Chorny Peredel, the populist group which Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zassulich and others had set up in 1879, failed because it had clung to the old populist policy of organising the peasants long after that policy had repeatedly failed in the 1870s - the failure that had generated Narodnaya I Volya's turn to terrorism and politics - GEL failed as an organisation for many years because it oriented to organising the industrial workers as an independent political force when that class was still very weak.

As we have seen in earlier articles, Marxism in Russia remained until the mid 1890s and the onslaught on populism by the "second wave" of Russian

Marxists, the "legal Marxists" - Struve, Tugan-Baranovsky, Bulgakov, etc - only an element in the eclectic education provided in the surviving populist circles.

Both GEL and Chorny Perede were out of their time. But GEL's time was coming.

Personally Plekhanov and the others had a bad time of it. Lev Deutsch, Vera Zassulich's partner, the organiser on whom GEL relied, was arrested in Germany and handed over to the Russian authorities, to be jailed and then exiled to Siberia.

For a long time they had no contact at all with Russia.

They did not recruit amongst Russian exiles, fearing that ill-educated newcomers would dilute the group's politics, or organisationally destabilise it.

And they faced tremendous personal difficulties. Plekhanov, who had a young family, had a hard time reconciling himself to the savage poverty that, circumstances being as they were, was the price of doing the work he had undertaken. Observing the poverty in which the French Marxist Jules Guesde had learned to live, helped reconcile him to it.

Both Plekhanov and Zassulich were consumptives. Plekhanov almost died of it in the 1880s, and did die of it in 1918. Axelrod, the one most concerned with organisational questions, who lived by making and selling a sort of yogurt, suffered from psychological conflicts that often made political and literary work impossible.

Nadezda Krupskaya later recorded the impression Axelrod made on Lenin and herself during the Iskra period:

"Pavel Borisovich had lost three-quarters of his working capacity; he did not sleep for nights at a stretch and wrote with extreme intensity for months on end, without being able to finish the article he had started. Sometimes it was impossible to decipher his handwriting owing to the nervy way in which it was written. Axelrod's handwriting produced a profound impression on Vladimir Illyich. 'It's simply awful', he often used to say, 'if you get into such a state as Axelrod'. He more than once spoke about Axelrod's handwriting to Dr Kramer during his last illness."

Plekhanov sometimes despaired. He responded to a letter in which Axelrod had tried to cheer him up:

"Your expression, 'chosen one of history' makes me laugh. How can anyone be persuaded that he was chosen by history? That is possible only with reference to the past, but with reference to the present, it is senseless and only braggarts and swindlers can look at themselves through such flattering spectacles. And I, I simply am probably a failure, fit now only for the dusthole. I am ill, I know not from what - it must be despair, and it is true that such as I

am now, I am not suited for anything, so what is there to talk about? A squeezed-out lemon should be thrown away into the dusthole and forgotten the sooner, that is all. Your belief in me does honour to your idealism but if it is prolonged it will be funny: who idolises squeezed-out lemons! Now I am sick and in general my condition is wretched, and what is to come - unknown."

When he wrote that, the tide had already began to turn.

In the years after the 1891 famine, Marxist circles, basing themselves on the politics and the work of GEL, multiplied rapidly throughout urban Russia. They remained separate and isolated from each other and mostly had no contact with GEL.

Some impatient younger people out of Russia saw GEL as conservative, inhibitive, over-assertive and out of touch with new conditions in Russia. The combination of GEL and Lenin, Martov, etc, from the St Petersburg League of Struggle, was for the veterans the first long-term such collaboration.

It involved Lenin, Martov and the others siding with the GEL against those with whom the GEL had fallen out. There is even one academic commentator who argues that the campaign against "economism" waged by Iskra was merely a contrivance, a political blunt instrument, with which Plekhanov, using Lenin, etc, clubbed down his critics.We will examine that.

But indisputably GEL did great work of fundamental significance. An examination of the ideas with which they, and the newer generation, set about building a Marxist working class party in Russia is what will concern us here. We will try to follow them step by step.

Footnotes

* A striking example of misattribution is Perry Anderson's account of "Pre-Stalin Marxism" in Western Marxism. "Our Differences", the seminal work of Russian Marxism, is not mentioned at all and the role it played is attributed to Lenin's "Development of Capitalism in Russia", one of a number of offshoots from Plekhanov's work of more than a decade earlier.

** Our Differences is the generative text of the working class political movement that conquered state power in Russia in October 1917. In it Plekhanov expounded his analysis of Russian society in the form of a devastating systematic examination of populism in all its sub-sections - Lavrovist, Bakuninist and Blanquist alike. It is one of the great books of revolutionary Marxism.

*** Two versions of this speech survive. The other ends:

"The industrial proletariat, whose consciousness is being aroused, will strike a mortal blow at the Autocracy For the time being our task is to defend the cause of International Socialism, to spread by all means the teachings of

social democracy amongst the Russian workers and to lead them in storming the stronghold of autocracy.

"In conclusion I repeat - and I insist on this important point: the revolutionary movement in Russia will triumph only as a working-class movement or else it will never triumph!"

## §10. The origins of Bolshevism: Plekhanov's "The Tasks of the Social-Democrats in the Famine"

Introduction, by John O'Mahony: How “many ideas to few people” serves mass agitation.

Earlier articles have recounted the pre-history of the Russian Marxist movement in revolutionary populism. Before we go on to describe the work of the first Russian Marxist groups, the Group for the Emancipation of Labour and later its offshoot, the Iskra/Zarya group, we will first ask, with George Plekhanov: what is the socialist movement, and what do socialists do? Plekhanov, the pioneer of the Russian Marxist movement, answered this fundamental question in his 1892 text The Tasks of the Russian Social Democrats in the Famine. This is one of the basic documents of Russian socialism and we print part of it here.

The turn made to mass agitation among the workers in the mid-1890s was directly inspired by the pamphlet, On Agitation by Kremer and Martov. The whole question had already been brilliantly outlined by Plekhanov here (and also in work by Pavel Axelrod).

Plekhanov’s exposition of what Marxist socialists are and do, and of the relationship of socialist agitation against details of the life imposed on workers by capitalism to our socialist overview and its propagation, is also as relevant to our work at the beginning of the 21st century as to that of the pioneer Russian socialists.

My comments on the excerpts from Plekhanov that follow are in bold type.

SM

If you had put such a question [what is the socialist movement? what do socialists do?] to a socialist in the [18]30s, to one of the followers of the famous Fourier, for instance, he would have replied more or less in the following manner:

Our brilliant teacher discovered and expounded in his works a whole series of truths, whose existence mankind had not previously suspected. On the basis of these discoveries he worked out a detailed plan of the new social order which alone can save man from his countless moral and material misfortunes. The contemporary socialist movement, the true socialist movement and

worthy of the name, is resolved to spread the ideas of our teacher and to realise them in practice.

An answer of this sort would have been quite correct in the [18]30s. At that time the socialist movement was really concerned to spread the ideas of the various schools of socialism and to try to realise them in practice. In these circumstances each school clearly thought that the teaching of its particular founder was the true socialism.

Some of them, the followers of Englishman Robert Owen and Frenchman, Etienne Cabet, for example, formed utopian socialist colonies in some wilderness or other — Cabet in Texas, where the colony survived for some decades after its foundation in the 1840s — intending these to be the beginning of the new society.

But now things are different. To a contemporary socialist the socialist movement does not look anything like it did to a socialist in the [18]30s.

Even shortly before the revolutionary year of 1848 there emerged among the socialists men who looked at socialism in a completely new perspective. Seen in this new perspective the principal error of previous socialists was precisely the fact that [for them] ‘Future history resolves itself, in their eyes, into propaganda and the practical implementation of their social plans.’

The socialists with the new outlook saw in the future history of the civilised world something else, something incomparably more promising.

What precisely did the socialists with the new outlook see in it? Above all class struggle, the struggle of the exploited with the exploiters, the proletariat with the bourgeoisie.

In addition they saw in it the inevitability of the impending triumph of the proletariat, the fall of the present bourgeois social order, the socialist organisation of production and the corresponding alteration in the relationships between people, i.e. even the destruction of classes, among other things.

Although they knew full well (better than their predecessors) that the socialist revolution involves a complete transformation in all social relationships, the Socialists of the new tendency did not concern themselves at all with working out a plan for the future organisation of society.

They thought this a complete waste of time because the details of the future order would be determined in their own time by circumstances that it was impossible to foresee and its general principles would be sufficiently determined by a scientific critique of existing social relationships, i.e. by a critique based not on the sympathies and antipathies of the reformers but on an examination of the historical development of the present social order.

The Socialists with the new outlook broke once and for all with utopias and

took their stand on the basis of science….

If for the followers of [Marxist] scientific socialism the whole future history of bourgeois society resolves itself in the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie, all their practical tasks are prompted by precisely this class struggle.

Standing resolutely on the side of the proletariat, the new Socialists do everything in their power to facilitate and hasten its victory. But what exactly can they do in this case?

A necessary condition for the victory of the proletariat is its recognition of its own position, its relations with its exploiters, its historic role and its socio-political tasks.

For this reason the new Socialists consider it their principal, perhaps even their only, duty to promote the growth of this consciousness among the proletariat, which for short they call its class consciousness.

The whole success of the socialist movement is measured for them in terms of the growth in the class consciousness of the proletariat. Everything that helps this growth they see as useful to their cause: everything that slows it down as harmful.

Anything that has no effect one way or the other is of no consequence for them, it is politically uninteresting…

There is no doubt that the development of capitalism hastens the social revolution.

Consequently, every bourgeois whose activity furthers the development of capitalism hastens the social revolution. But it would be very strange if, because of this, someone were to think of the bourgeois activists as Socialists.

Even people whose activity is directly aimed at fighting socialism can hasten the social revolution.

Some German Social Democrats think that the famous law of exclusion against the Socialists [issued by the “Iron Chancellor”, Otto von Bismarck, in 1878] has to some extent helped their party. If this view is correct then it follows that Bismarck, in introducing the law of exclusion, has by that very fact hastened the social revolution in Germany.

But who would describe as a Socialist the man who was trying to deal the death-blow to the Social Democratic Party?

I reiterate that, however much you have discussed the consequences of your political activity, you will only be recognised as a Socialist if your activity has directly facilitated the growth of the class consciousness of the proletariat. If it does not exert this direct influence then you are not a Socialist at all, even

though the more or less remote consequences of your non-socialist activity may bring some degree of advantage for the cause of socialism.…

In identifying the most important and the most direct sign of socialist activity, I do not wish to say that anyone who does not want to betray the Red Flag should unfailingly engage either in writing socialist books or in distributing them and generally in propaganda among the proletariat and its organisations.

Individuals, belonging to the socialist party, may be involved in other matters without ceasing to be Socialists for a single moment. Let us suppose that the socialist party of a particular country has decided to arrange secret hiding places for its members who are facing government persecution. It entrusts the matter to me and to several other comrades. We willingly and zealously carry out this assignment.

Our individual activity is not directly aimed at the development of the class consciousness of the proletariat. But is it conceivable that, in doing this, we cease to be Socialists? No one could say that.

But why should they not say that?

Because, in engaging in this activity, not only did we remain members of the party that directly promotes the growth of the class consciousness of the proletariat but we also undertook this activity on its instructions.

Another example: the socialist party of a particular country decides that in the near future it will have to come out into open conflict with the government. The success of its struggle depends to a great extent of course on how the army behaves at the decisive moment. And so the party assigns a certain number of its members to engage in revolutionary propaganda in the army.

The soldiers may of course be regarded as proletarians in military uniform. Consequently, as far as the people who explain the ideas of socialism to them are concerned, the question that interests us cannot even arise.

But [that question] is entirely appropriate for the people who deal exclusively with the officers. Do these people cease to be Socialists? Not at all. Why not, then? Once again because their activity is determined by the needs of the party that directly promotes the growth of the class consciousness of the proletariat.

And if they had not belonged to it? In that case they would have ceased to be Socialists because then their work would immediately have lost any connection with the direct and immediate socialist cause.

One could cite very many such examples. But my view, I hope, is sufficiently clear. It is expressed in its entirety in the epigraph to this letter: Without workers who are conscious of their class interests there can be no socialism…

The conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is not the contrivance of the Socialists of a particular school and is by no means a tactical device dreamed up by a fanatical revolutionary, but is that same fateful historical inevitability as was the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the feudal aristocracy in its own time...

But having said that, Plekhanov qualifies it. What follows, about the nature and interconnection of agitation and propaganda, will guide the consistently revolutionary Russian Marxists during the expansion of the labour movement in the 1890s and after. In What Is To Be Done, Lenin will base much of his argument against the so-called “Economists” on this work of Plekhanov’s. See the chapter entitled “How Martynov Rendered Plekhanov More Profound”.

If I assert that the promotion of the growth of the class consciousness of the proletariat is the sole purpose and the direct and sacred duty of the Socialists, then this does not mean that the contemporary Socialists stand for propaganda, for propaganda alone, and for nothing but propaganda.

In the broad sense of the word this is perhaps true, but only in the very broad sense.

When at the International Congress in Paris in 1889 the Socialists resolved to strive for the eight-hour day they obviously had it in mind that workers’ demonstrations in favour of their resolution would be a marvellous method of propagating their ideas. But a demonstration is at the same time a method of agitation.

In general it is not easy to draw the line between agitation and what is usually called propaganda.

Agitation is also propaganda, but propaganda that takes place in particular circumstances, that is in circumstances in which even those who would not normally pay any attention are forced to listen to the propagandist’s words. Propaganda is agitation that is conducted in the normal everyday course of the life of a particular country.

Agitation is propaganda occasioned by events that are not entirely ordinary and that provoke a certain upsurge in the public mood. Socialists would be very bad politicians if they were not to use such notable events for their own ends.

Let us suppose that the agitation in favour of the eight-hour day has been crowned with success. Frightened by constantly growing pressure from the workers’ movement, the bourgeoisie has yielded. In all civilised countries the law has limited the working day to eight hours.

This is a great victory for socialism but the question arises:

There were of course Socialists among them. There were many Socialists

who played a leading role, stepping out in front and sweeping the hesitant and the indecisive along in their wake.

But were there really then people who were hesitant and indecisive? Why did they hesitate, why were they indecisive?...

Probably because they had not fully appreciated the benefits of the eight-hour day and because, on a general level, not having assimilated socialist ideas, they were not yet imbued with the thirst for the battle for a better future that is aroused by a consistent and ordered revolutionary outlook.

In a word, these people were not yet Socialists. But now look at what has happened.

The Socialists have drawn people who were not yet Socialists into the struggle for a cause that will be very useful to socialism. In other words, people who were not yet Socialists have already been working for socialism.

And it is agitation that has done this!

Because of this Socialists can use for the cause not just the forces that belong to them at the present time, but also those that will belong to them only subsequently. What has happened is rather like drawing on the socialist account which history will pay for. And this payment will bring the victory of socialism significantly closer.

Propaganda, in the strict sense of the word, would lose all historical significance if it were not accompanied by agitation.

Propaganda conveys the correct views to dozens, hundreds, thousands of people. But people holding the correct views only become historical activists when they exert a direct influence on public life. And influence on the public life of contemporary civilised countries is unthinkable without influence on the mass, i.e. without agitation. (In barbaric despotisms [such as Tsarist Russia] things are different: there the mass has no importance. But we are not talking about them.)

Consequently agitation is essential for any party that wishes to have historical meaning. A sect may be content with propaganda in the narrow sense of the word, but a political party never.

If I had to clarify further the relationship between agitation and propaganda I should add that the propagandist conveys many ideas to a single person or to a few people, whereas the agitator conveys only one or a few ideas, but he conveys them to a whole mass of people, sometimes to almost the entire population of a particular locality.

But history is made by the mass.

Consequently agitation is the aim of propaganda: I conduct propaganda so that I shall have the opportunity to transfer to agitation.

However, let us return to our example.

We supposed that the Socialists had managed to secure an eight-hour day by law. Such a law brings very great benefit to the working class. Even the least advanced, least comprehending and most backward workers soon become convinced of this once it has become a reality.

And they all know that the eight-hour day was introduced on the initiative of the Socialists.

For this reason all workers, even the most backward, will be thoroughly convinced that the realisation of at least some socialist demands benefits the working class. And this knowledge will in any case bring them incomparably closer to a complete sympathy with socialism than a complete indifference to socialist teaching would have done. But let us go further.

By increasing the worker's leisure time, the eight-hour day gives him the opportunity for greater intellectual development and consequently for the easier assimilation of socialist ideas. That means that in this way too the eight-hour day brings nearer the inevitable reckoning: it 'hastens the social revolution'...

We have seen that [social relations in Russia] are changing very rapidly. The mutual relationship between the social forces does, clearly, change with them. The autocracy weakens as the historical soil that has nurtured it crumbles and decomposes.

At the same time some forces are growing stronger and stronger, and it is the collision with these forces that drives [autocracy] to its ruin.

This means that, while our propaganda is training revolutionaries, history creates the revolutionary milieu essential for their activity; while we are preparing the leaders of the revolutionary mass, the officers and NCOs of the revolutionary army, this very army is being created by the inevitable course of social development.

But [if that is so, must we not] describe our activity as fruitless or unproductive? On the contrary, is it not absolutely necessary and uniquely productive from the revolutionary point of view?

On the other hand it is clear that, as long as the individuals that we have 'propagandised' exert no direct revolutionary influence on the mass, they are only its leaders in theory.

If they are to become its leaders in reality they will have to influence them in the revolutionary sense.

That is where agitation comes into its own. Thanks to it the necessary link between the 'heroes' and the 'crowd', between the mass and its leaders is established and strengthened. The more strained matters become, the more

the old social edifice will rock, and the more rapidly the revolution approaches, the more important agitation will become.

To it belongs the principal role in the drama that we call the social revolution.

From this it follows that, if the Russian Socialists want to play an active role in the coming Russian revolution, they must know how to become agitators.

This is essential. But it is not easy. The task of the agitator involves putting into circulation in each particular case the maximum possible number of revolutionary ideas in a form that is accessible to the mass.

For every mistake he makes one way or another a harsh punishment awaits the agitator.

If he overestimates the revolutionary mood of the mass he will at best remain unintelligible, but he may be ridiculed or even assaulted.

If, on the other hand, because of extreme caution he puts to the mass demands that it has already outgrown in its rapid revolutionary development, he will fall into the awkward position of agitator-brake, an agitator who inspires the crowd with ‘moderation and tender conscience’.

The whole skill of the agitator consists in his ability to avoid such excesses.

But if he has this skill he has no need to fear failure. His task will be carried out of its own accord. You may perhaps say that he is giving the mass nothing: he is only giving fully conscious expression to the attitude that it already holds, which it is not itself aware of. But in this lies the secret of his influence and the guarantee of his future successes.

Seeing in his words merely the expression of its own demands, the mass willingly follows him. And… it may even itself push ahead of the agitator.

Realising that only yesterday it was still frightened by its boldness and novelty it rapidly goes further, inclining to more daring demands.

In this way, learning from its own experience, carried along by its own movement, encouraged by its own success, it gradually, but on the other hand assuredly, becomes more and more revolutionary, until in the end it deals with a single decisive movement the death-blow to the existing order.

But when the edifice of this order, made shaky, weak and decrepit by history, has shattered, new tasks will unfold before it, it will have to build things better in its new home, not falling into the net of the political exploiters, flatterers and tricksters.

Then the services and the directions of its devoted agitator-friends will be just as important for it as they were earlier in the heart of the struggle with the old order.

Orators are born, according to the well-known saying. Agitators are also ‘born’

and no science can replace the inborn agitational gift. Agitation cannot be conducted according to a particular pattern. But this does not prevent us from thinking about its significance and preparing for it with all the means at our disposal at a time when we can foresee that there will soon be a broad scope for agitational activity.

A necessary condition for this activity is a merger of the revolutionary forces that have already been prepared.

Through circle propaganda we can involve people who have no connection with one another and do not even suspect one another's existence. Of course the absence of organisation always affects propaganda, but it does not make it impossible.

In epochs of great social upheaval, when the political atmosphere is charged with electricity and when here and there for the most varied, most unforeseen reasons there are increasingly frequent explosions that testify to the approach of the revolutionary storm, in short when it is necessary either to agitate or to rally to the flag — in these epochs only organised revolutionary forces can exert a serious influence on the course of events.

The individual is then powerless, and only units of a higher order are equal to the revolutionary task: revolutionary organisations.

Organisation is the first, the essential step. However insignificant the prepared revolutionary forces of contemporary Russia, they will be increased tenfold by organisation.

Counting their forces and stationing them where appropriate, the revolutionaries set to work.

By means of spoken and printed propaganda they spread the correct view of the causes of the present famine through all strata of the population.

Wherever the mass is not yet sufficiently advanced to understand their teaching, they give it, as it were, object lessons. They appear wherever it protests, they protest with it, they explain to it the meaning of its own movement and hence they increase its revolutionary preparedness.

In this way the elemental movements of the mass gradually merge with the conscious revolutionary movement, and the idea that the Zemskii sobor [the Constituent Assembly] must be summoned becomes increasingly popular: the Russian people becomes more and more convinced that it must snatch its fate from the hands of tsarist officials.

This is one side of things. On the other side we must ensure that the people, once it has risen against the existing order, should win political rights for itself and not political privileges for its exploiters...

Direct universal suffrage is the first and most important demand of the

Russian Socialists.... Their other demands... are very closely related: freedom of the spoken word, of assembly, of association, freedom to strike, etc., etc. The agitators must win the mass over to every one of these demands.

But from which stratum will the people's representatives in the assembly be elected? Direct universal suffrage certainly does not guarantee that the workers will not elect their bosses, the poor peasants their kulaks or landowners and generally that the exploited will not elect the exploiters.

Direct universal suffrage is a double-edged sword which the government or the bourgeoisie can easily direct against us. How should we fend off their blows?

The worker will only stop voting for his boss when he recognises the irreconcilable contradiction that exists between his own economic interests on the one hand and the interests of the boss on the other.

As soon as he does recognise this, he will no longer want to be the political tool of the exploiter, and he will try to give political expression to his economic needs, he will give his vote to the Socialist.

The poor peasant will only stop voting for the kulak [rich peasant], the landowner, or the government candidate when the socialist workers' party — in putting forward its well-known economic demands like those outlined above, for instance — demonstrates to him that there is a close connection between his interests and the interests of the revolutionary proletariat.

Consequently we come once more to the familiar conclusion that our political agitation will bear fruit for us only if it corresponds to the growth in the class consciousness of the proletariat.

The class consciousness of the proletariat is the protective layer that deflects, like water off a duck's back, all the attacks of the parties opposed to us.

I am coming to the end. I have openly set forth our views on the tasks of the Russian Socialists in the struggle with the causes of the famine in Russia and I hope that now there can be no misunderstandings on that account. I welcome those who agree with them as comrades and I remind those who find them too 'extreme' that we are Socialists and in the eyes of Socialists moderation is by no means something to be proud of.

People will probably tell me that the time is not ripe for an open exposition of our views because this could frighten the liberals. To that I reply: it would be absurd on our part to frighten them deliberately; but if by chance they are frightened of us, against our will, then we can only pity their completely 'inopportune' timidity.

In any case for us the most insidious form of intimidation is the intimidation of Socialists by the spectre of the intimidated liberal. The harm done by this intimidation is infinitely greater than the advantage to be gained by convincing

the liberal gentlemen of our moderation and our tender conscience.

## §11. The background to Lenin's Iskra

The 'Tsar Liberator', Alexander II, was on the eve of his death ready to make some concessions to the reform-minded liberals. The work of the Narodnaya Volya assassins put an end to reform from above for a generation. In the 1880s and 90s, the Tsarist regime was a frozen ice-cap on top of Russian society.

Underneath that inert political regime, Russian capitalism expanded. Market relations became dominant in more and more of Russian life. The working class grew with the growth of industry. Great congregations of proletarians were created around the giant factories that were set up, embodying the most advanced technology of the West, and sometimes on the basis of foreign capital.

A large part of the working class was still half-peasant, retaining links to the countryside and often retaining control of some peasant landholding. Many workers lived in barracks attached to the factories, in the way many Chinese workers do now.

There was often a deep cleavage between the different segments of that working class. The metal workers were usually more fixed than the cotton workers in the proletarian condition of having only the sale of their labour-power to live on. Moreover, theirs was skilled labour. The cotton workers were less skilled and, still half-peasant, often only 'temporary visitors' from the countryside.

Sporadic revolts in the form of strikes and, sometimes, destruction of workplaces and machinery still occasionally broke out. But working-class action was becoming less sporadic, more stable, more rational and more purposeful. A real working class was being created, and slowly a real working-class movement emerged.

Some circles of politically conscious workers existed in a more or less unbroken continuity back to the great days of the populists. The exiled Marxist splinter group from populism, the Group for the Emancipation of Labour - Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zasulich, Deutsch - produced great works of theory and propaganda through the 1880s. Plekhanov settled theoretical accounts with populism in Our Differences (1884).

Inside Russia, Marxism at first existed only in the eclectic, diluted, and adulterated form in which it could be used to sustain the idea of traditional populism, that the village commune holding land in common (the obshchina) could be the basis of a special sort of agrarian socialism in Russia.

The Marxist critique of capitalism was used to bolster this defining idea of the populists. What the consistent Marxists, in the first place Plekhanov, argued was that capitalism had already advanced to dominance in Russian life in the two decades after the end of serfdom in 1861, and therefore the central defining belief of all the populists was now entirely utopian and indeed reactionary.

The village commune was far gone in disintegration. Socialism in Russia could come only through the development of capitalism and as the creation of the Russian working class.

Retaining some of the beliefs that they had held as populists, Plekhanov and Axelrod thought that the bourgeois-democratic revolution - the clearing of the ground for full capitalist development and the creation of a democratic republic - would, because of the weakness of the Russian bourgeoisie, have to be led by the Russian proletariat. Plekhanov told the 1889 founding conference of the Socialist ('Second') International that the Russian revolution would be led by the working class or else it could not happen at all.

But that remained a vague unconcretised general idea. What it meant or might mean would be the substance of much of the pre-1917 discussion among Russian Marxists. Different answers to the dilemmas that it posed would be the primary dividing line between the future Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and Trotsky (who developed a distinct variant of the idea Plekhanov and the Group for the Emancipation of Labour propounded in the 1880s). In due course we will examine these differences.

Populism continued despite savage persecution, but mainly as a tradition and in the fragmented activity of local populist circles, some of which included proletarians.

The works of Marx were circulated - Wage Labour and Capital, and Capital, whose first translated publication was in Russian, in 1872 - and discussed in the circles. The quotient of Marxism in the populist mixture taught in the circles gradually increased.

Those who were more Marxist coexisted peacefully in those circles with those who were "more populist" until the onslaught on populist ideas by such Marxists as Pyotr Struve got under way in 1894 and after. It was only then that a sharp polarisation occurred. There are recorded examples of the working-class 'consumers' in education circles deciding that they wanted 'Marxism' and not populism taught. Some of the populist teachers complied and thereafter taught only Marx!

And the working class continued to grow with the growth of industry.

The political impotence of populism, even at its point of greatest victory when populists killed the Tsar, led after 1881 to a decline and then to a discrediting

of populism. A diluted 'legal populism', evolutionary rather than revolutionary, became a force among the intelligentsia.

The decisive turning point into a new era occurred in 1892, when famine swept across parts of Russia. It was the indirect consequence of the change in the peasant economy which the Tsarist ministers had orchestrated from the pinnacles of the state power when their demands for money-taxes compelled the peasants to sell their grain and rely on buying some of it back later as food.

As starvation stalked parts of the empire, the state was unable to cope. Having stifled civil society for over a decade, the Tsarist autocracy now evoked private activity as a matter of urgency. It appealed to private citizens to help the people of the stricken areas. There was a large response.

In something resembling the intelligentsia's 'going to the people' in the mid 1870s, large numbers of educated men and women from the towns went into the countryside, this time not to educate the muzhiks or call on them to revolt, but to bring them food, money collected in the towns to buy food, and rudimentary medical care.

The newly reawakening intelligentsia's response to the passivity with which the peasantry suffered starvation and disease would have big political consequences, as had their experience with the peasantry in the 1870s. It radically discredited and helped finally bury the whole idea that the peasantry could be any sort of Russia-remaking revolutionary class.

And as that was happening, the industrial working class, augmented enormously, and already possessing a layer of workers educated in the circles - began spectacularly to revolt. The revolutionary peasantry is dead - long live the revolutionary proletariat!

It was the same pattern that in the late 1870s had led populists like Plekhanov to turn to the working class, even when, in their theory, the peasantry was the decisive revolutionary class. But now it was on a far greater scale, and now the fundamentals of populism were widely seen as untenable. And there was now in existence and, so to speak, fully transplanted by Plekhanov into Russia, a Marxist alternative revolutionary theory for them to turn to.

Following on the lessons they drew from the passive suffering of the starving, disease-hit muzhiks, the rise of the working class drove home to the socialistic intelligentsia, in life and no longer in theory, the centrality of the Russian working class in any Russian revolution.

At first it was the workers in Poland and Lithuania, on the western end of the Tsarist empire, who moved in a wave of strikes and created an underground working-class organisation. The Jewish workers, mainly handcrafts workers,

created a fully developed underground labour movement. Then in the mid 1890s the workers' strike movement spread across Russia, despite the fact that police terror there was more severe than in the Western regions.

In 1896/-7 the St Petersburg workers organised a series of mass strikes. From that point onwards, there was a mass underground Russian workers' movement, manifesting itself in tremendous combativity. By 1901 the workers were bursting out into 'spontaneous' political street demonstrations.

The decline in populist credibility, the positive proof given by their revolts that the industrial workers were the revolutionary class in Russia, the reawakening of the intelligentsia after the 1891 famine relief movement, and the intellectual pre-eminence of the Marxism of the Group for the Emancipation of Labour, and of a new generation of Marxists based in Russia, such as Struve, Tugan-Baranovsky and Lenin, now led to a proliferation of Marxist circles across Russia, both worker and intellectual (the workers and intellectuals had their own distinct and separate circles).

Already, in the mid 1890s, the sort of underground Marxist party that only emerged after the turn of the century was objectively possible, had the Marxists been politically experienced enough. The proliferation of Marxist circles across urban Russia already amounted to the rough outline in Russian life of such a party - its prefiguration, so to speak.

Up to the mid-1890s the Marxist circles had engaged in heavy-duty propaganda and education work, giving the small numbers of workers involved in them a pretty thorough education over a long period of time. The Jewish workers in the 'Pale', the area in the West to which Jews were largely confined, pioneered a new method - agitation.

Breaking away from the intensive study work of the old circles, they 'agitated' among the workers on limited issues concerning their immediate interests - wages and conditions in the workshops.

There was in this turn, again, an echo of the past. It was the same pattern as the turn of the intelligentsia of the later 1870s from the broad general educational work associated with the name of the populist writer Peter Lavrov to agitating with the peasants on the question of dividing the landlords' land, calling them to immediate revolt - the period associated with the name of Bakunin.

Whereas the agitation for immediate interests evoked no more response from the peasants than had the general education and propaganda of the first period of the intellectuals 'going to the people', the turn to agitation by the Social Democrats [Marxists] was immediately a stupendous success.

It was what Plekhanov and others had already experienced in the late 1870s when it was workers and not peasants who answered their calls to action -

only now it was on a large and seemingly ever-growing scale.

Aron Kramer, one of the leaders of the turn to agitation in the Jewish Pale, now wrote a pamphlet, On Agitation, and Julius Martov wrote an introduction to it. Both Kramer and, fleetingly, Martov would be founders of the Jewish socialist movement, the Bund.

The pamphlet was circulated to the Marxist circles throughout Russia. Everywhere the Marxists turned to agitation, they found a tremendous response from the working class. In St Petersburg in 1896-7, a city Marxist organisation, the St Petersburg League of Struggle, which included Lenin and the future Menshevik Martov, engaged in agitation directed to factory workers with immense success.

It is important to stress that by now a workers' movement existed - circles in factories - which did not depend on stimulation by circles of the intelligentsia, though the workers' circles usually drew on the intelligentsia for education.

This upsurge of the working class had tremendous power because the workers were concentrated in large-scale and sometimes gigantic factories. The state made concessions to the workers, including, in the mid-90s, passing laws to limit hours of work. The significance of this fact too was not lost on the revolutionary intelligentsia.

But the political system remained savagely authoritarian and brutally repressive. The pattern was, as it would continue to be for most of the time until the February 1917 revolution, that the leaders and organisers of Marxist circles would have a short period of activity and then, inevitably, be arrested, jailed, and deported to forced exile in Siberia.

That was the fate of the leaders of the St Petersburg League of Struggle. Martov, Lenin, and others were arrested in December 1897 and, after imprisonment, exiled (until 1900 - Lenin then went abroad).

Continuity and 'tradition' in the Marxist circles was often rendered impossible. The characteristics of whomever replaced those arrested would come to dominate each circle. That ultimately weakened Marxism as a consistent force, and would have as one of its consequences the revival of a sort of populism.

But there was another, and strange, dimension to the rise of Marxism to hegemony over the intelligentsia and in the revolutionary circles. In parallel to the growth of a legal, non-revolutionary, populism, there grew up, from 1894, a 'legal Marxism'. A number of writers and intellectuals used aspects of Marxism to try finally to bury populism.

Struve, Tugan-Baranovsky and Bulgakov boldly seized those aspects of Marxism which preached that the development of Russian capitalism was not only inevitable and necessary, but progressive - and the only road through

which socialism could, eventually, be reached. They argued that capitalism should, therefore, be championed by those who wanted to promote the welfare of Russia, the Russian people and the Russian industrial proletariat.

They published books and collections of articles - Lenin contributed an essay to one of them - in which they turned Marxism into the champion of Russian capitalism.

The older populists had rejected and resisted that 'objective' side of Marxism, even when the revolutionary side of Marxism was also there full strength. They called the Marxists - or that aspect of Plekhanov's Marxism - apologetics for capitalism and for capitalist exploitation. That had been unjust. With the 'legal Marxists' it was essentially true and, as they evolved to the right, increasingly the dominant side of their work.

The Tsarist authorities looked with limited favour on the work of the legal Marxists with their heavy tomes, seeing them as valuable allies against the populists - who had spawned and would again spawn terrorists against Tsarism - and allowed them to publish some works legally. Thus the name 'legal Marxism', though it came to have other connotations too, those of adulterated, truncated, and part-payment Marxism.

Soon they would subscribe to the 'critical-thinking' revision of Marxism in the West undertaken by some Marxist writers, and in the first place by Eduard Bernstein, breaking with Marxism.

All of these Russian Bernsteinists would become liberals or reactionaries. Bulgakov became a Russian Orthodox priest.

Although initially the 'legal Marxists' did valuable work in spreading a form of Marxism, it would take a political battle between revolutionary Marxists based on the working class - where the labour movements based themselves on elements of the intelligentsia travelling rightwards from populism to liberalism - and the Struves to put Marxism back onto its proper keel.

Decades later, Trotsky would sum up what the legal Marxists did as that they had helped sever the 'umbilical cord' that bound the intelligentsia to populism. He also observed that it was not the revolutionary populists who started with the bomb and bullet for Tsars and Tsarist officials, who destroyed Russian Tsarism, but those who started out with the heavy tomes under their arms and worked to educate and organise the proletariat.

That revolutionary role would be made possible only as a result of a whole series of differentiations among the intelligentsia, in which those who stood with the working class and for working-class revolution separated themselves by way of polemic and dispute from all the others.

In the later 1890s the nebulous state of Russian socialism, consisting as it did of a myriad of separate 'circles', each independent of the others, producing its

own factory leaflets and occasionally more ambitious publications, allowed a certain revival of populism. That would lead to the creation in 1901, by Victor Chernov and others, of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, which would insist that socialism was an immediate possibility in Russia, refuse to draw any basic distinction between peasants and wage-workers (all were 'the people' or 'the working class'), and use terrorism against Tsarist officials.

Against that background the pioneers and veterans of the Group for the Emancipation of Labour, and a group of those who had become Marxists in the 1890s, Lenin, Martov, Potresov, Dan and others, set out to bring political and ideological order and organisation to the large but amorphous Russian Marxist movement and to build a revolutionary working-class party.

At the end of 1900 they published the first numbers of Iskra and Zarya, and began a campaign to win the Russian Marxists to common ideas and a single revolutionary party, organised initially around Iskra.

In 1898 a small and unrepresentative gathering in Minsk had declared the existence of a Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. Peter Struve wrote its manifesto. Most of the delegates were soon arrested.

The RSDLP existed only as a name and an aspiration until its 'second' - effectively its first - congress in mid 1903, prepared for by two and a half years' work by Iskra and Zarya.

Introduction to the version in the printed paper

This and subsequent articles are part of the series on 'The Roots of Bolshevism', but they are out of sequence. The articles printed so far in Solidarity have dealt mainly with the populist pre-history of the Russian revolutionary movement.

We have taken the story as far as the early 1880s and the culmination of the great populist movement in the killing of the Tsar on 1 March 1881.

I now start to deal with some of the key political ideas of Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zasulich and Lenin, that is of the political current grouped from late 1900 around the paper Iskra (Truth) and the magazine Zarya (Dawn).

This is of direct and immediate relevance to the problems which face revolutionary Marxists now. Later articles will deal with the rise of the Russian working-class movement from the mid-1880s to the 1905 revolution. Without that history, a great deal of what Lenin wrote in his polemics is impossible fully to understand. The guiding ideas of Iskra, those that have a direct bearing on our activities now, can however be understood.

To introduce these ideas, in this article I will briefly outline what happened between the killing of the Tsar and the beginning of the 20th century, when the Iskra-ites - Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zasulich, Lenin, Martov, Potresov - started their work.

## §12. The roots of Bolshevism: What is to be done?

Lenin's What Is To Be Done?, written in late 1901 and early 1902, is one of the most important books ever written. Certainly it is one of the most important socialist texts in existence.

Yet it is often seen, even by people who are not antagonistic to Lenin and his work, in the grim retrospective shadow of Stalinism. This, we are told, is the book in which Lenin expounded his notion of a highly centralised party of "professional revolutionaries", and therefore, whatever Lenin's intentions, it was the seed of what, over the next three decades, developed into the totalitarian dictatorship of the state bureaucracy over the working class and all the peoples of the USSR.

The root of Stalinism lay in Leninism, and the root of Lenin's distinctive approach lay in What Is To Be Done?

The most relentless advocates of this idea were the Stalinist ruling class in the USSR and the Communist Parties all over the world, who parroted whatever Moscow said. "Stalin is the Lenin of today", was one of their key slogans. And Lenin was the Stalin of yesterday...

Stalinism and Bolshevism were one. Or at least, Bolshevism was the seed and nutriment of Stalinism. This lie has been lovingly sustained and preserved by the bourgeoisie and its academics. Adapted, preserved, and sustained too by quite a few muddled socialists.

A reading of What Is To Be Done? in its real context demolishes the myths. At the time, a great network of independent Marxist circles, doing valuable work such as the production of factory bulletins and leaflets existed all across Russia. Police repression had smashed the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party set up in 1898. The illegal newspaper Iskra (Spark), published abroad, was trying to reforge the RSDLP, the newspaper acting as both

Marxist propagandist and organisational network.

Lenin wrote What Is To Be Done? as an exposition of what Iskra and the journal Zarya (Dawn) were doing and wished to do, and what was wrong with those Marxists who opposed them.

In the first of two articles, Jack Cleary discusses the real meaning of What Is To Be Done?

Lenin starts by discussing the demand for the "Freedom of criticism of Marxism within the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party":

At first sight, nothing would appear to be more strange than the solemn

appeals to freedom of criticism made by one of the parties to the dispute. Have voices been raised in the advanced parties against the constitutional law of the majority of European countries which guarantees freedom to science and scientific investigation?

In fact, Lenin sees in the claim for “freedom of criticism” the demand for freedom to revise Marxism from a doctrine of revolution into one of piecemeal reform. That is what concerns Lenin:

It is no secret... that two trends have taken form in present-day international Social-Democracy... The essence of the “new” trend, which adopts a “critical” attitude towards “obsolete dogmatic” Marxism, has been clearly enough presented by Bernstein and demonstrated by Millerand.

Eduard Bernstein had proposed to change the German party from a movement preparing to overthrow capitalism into a movement for open-ended reform. He had defined his attitude in this aphorism about the labour movement in history: “The movement is everything, the goal, nothing”. Millerand, in France, had become a minister in a bourgeois government, and moreover, in one which also contained General Gallifet, one of those who had butchered 10,000 workers after the suppression of the Paris Commune, in 1871. Lenin:

Social-Democracy must change from a party of social revolution into a democratic party of social reforms. [Bernstein] denied... the possibility of putting socialism on a scientific basis and of demonstrating its necessity and inevitability from the point of view of the materialist conception of history...

The very concept, “ultimate aim”, was declared to be unsound, and the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat was completely rejected. Denied was the antithesis in principle between liberalism and socialism.

Denied was the theory of the class struggle, on the alleged grounds that it could not be applied to a strictly democratic society governed according to the will of the majority, etc.

Lenin explains the fact that the criticism of Marxism by Bernstein and his friends, had sprung up suddenly ready made:

... This criticism of Marxism has long been directed from the political platform, from university chairs, in numerous pamphlets and in a series of learned treatises.... The entire younger generation of the educated classes has been systematically reared for decades on this criticism, [so] it is not surprising that the “new critical” trend in Social-Democracy should spring up, all complete...

The content of this new trend did not have to grow and take shape: it was transferred bodily from bourgeois to socialist literature.

Lenin explains the relationship which he sees between the theorising of the German, Bernstein and the French “socialist” minister Millerand:

The French socialists have begun, not to theorise, but to act. The democratically more highly developed political conditions in France have permitted them to put “Bernsteinism into practice” immediately, with all its consequences. Millerand has furnished an excellent example of practical Bernsteinism... If democracy, in essence, means the abolition of class domination, then why should not a socialist minister charm the whole bourgeois world by orations on class collaboration? Why should he not remain in the cabinet even after the shooting-down of workers by gendarmes has exposed, for the hundredth and thousandth time, the real nature of the democratic collaboration of classes?...

And what did the French socialists achieve?

The reward for... this corruption of the socialist consciousness of the working masses — the only basis that can guarantee our victory — the reward for this is... miserable reforms, so miserable in fact that much more has been obtained from bourgeois governments!

For Lenin the truth of anything is always concrete — it is discernible only in the whole context and framework which defines and qualifies what any part or aspect of a thing means. That people have the right to scientific investigation, goes he has said almost without saying. But what does the demand for “freedom of criticism” mean here and now, at this stage of the development of the Russian movement?

“Freedom of criticism” means... freedom to convert Social-Democracy into a democratic party of reform, freedom to introduce bourgeois ideas and bourgeois elements into socialism.

“Freedom” is a grand word, but under the banner of freedom for industry the most predatory wars were waged, under the banner of freedom of labour [non-union], the working people were robbed. The modern use of the term “freedom of criticism” contains the same inherent falsehood.

Those who are really convinced that they have made progress in science would not demand freedom for the new views to continue side by side with the old, but the substitution of the new views for the old...

The Marxist movement is a voluntary association of people who need not a “live and let live” indifference to truth and falsehood, but a rigorous attempt to separate truth from falsehood, and a no less rigorous selection of those admitted to their ranks on the basis of adhering to certain ideas and perspectives. He uses a famous image for what a revolutionary organisation is:

We are marching in a compact group along a precipitous and difficult path, firmly holding each other by the hand. We are surrounded on all sides by enemies, and we have to advance almost constantly under their fire. We have

combined, by a freely adopted decision, for the purpose of fighting the enemy, and not of retreating into the neighbouring marsh, the inhabitants of which, from the very outset, have reproached us with having separated ourselves into an exclusive group and with having chosen the path of struggle instead of the path of conciliation.

The “marsh” is the realm of eclecticism, theoretical scepticism and recoil from intellectual and political rigour.

And now some among us begin to cry out: Let us go into the marsh! And when we begin to shame them, they retort: What backward people you are! Are you not ashamed to deny us the liberty to invite you to take a better road! Oh, yes, gentlemen! You are free not only to invite us, but to go yourselves wherever you will, even into the marsh. In fact, we think that the marsh is your proper place, and we are prepared to render you every assistance to get there. Only let go of our hands, don’t clutch at us and don’t besmirch the grand word freedom, for we too are “free” to go where we please, free to fight not only against the marsh, but also against those who are turning towards the marsh!

The Marxists are concerned to hammer out the political basis for a consistently revolutionary Russian working class movement. He recalls that the German Marxist movement, to which he, like all Russian Marxists, looks as the great example to follow, has been built by way of a rigorous attitude to principles, politics and theory...

At the time Engels dealt his blows at [Eugen] Duhring [a university professor who propounded new systems of economics, philosophy, etc], many representatives of German Social-Democracy inclined towards the latter’s views, and accusations of acerbity, intolerance, uncomradely polemics, etc., were hurled at Engels even publicly at a Party Congress. At the Congress of 1877... a resolution [was introduced] to prohibit the publication of Engels’s articles in [the party paper] Vorwarts [Forward] because “they do not interest the overwhelming majority of the readers”, and...their publication had caused great damage to the Party, that Duhring too had rendered services to Social-Democracy.

Lenin now turns to the peculiarities of Russia, where in the mid-1890s the “curious phenomenon” of Legal Marxism had appeared

...In a country ruled by an autocracy, with a completely enslaved press, in a period of desperate political reaction in which even the tiniest outgrowth of political discontent and protest is persecuted, the theory of revolutionary Marxism suddenly forces its way into the censored literature and, though expounded in Aesopian language, is understood by all the “interested”.

The government had regarded only the ideas of the populist terrorists as dangerous and at first welcomed any criticism of them. Then the Government

caught on and set its censors on the legal Marxists.

Meanwhile, Marxist books were published one after another, Marxist journals and newspapers were founded, nearly everyone became a Marxist, Marxists were flattered, Marxists were courted, and the book publishers rejoiced at the extraordinary, ready sale of Marxist literature...It is no secret that the brief period in which Marxism blossomed on the surface of our literature was called forth by an alliance between people of [both] extreme and of very moderate, bourgeois democratic [politics]...

Then was it not an error for revolutionary and consistent Marxists to ally with people who, thinking they were Marxists, were in fact bourgeois democrats? No, says Lenin.

Only those who are not sure of themselves can fear to enter into temporary alliances even with unreliable people ... Thanks to this alliance, an astonishingly rapid victory was obtained over Narodism [the populist agrarian socialist terrorists] and Marxist ideas (even though in a vulgarised form) became very widespread...

But an essential condition for such an alliance must be the full opportunity for the socialists to reveal to the working class that its interests are diametrically opposed to the interests of the bourgeoisie.

However, the Bernsteinian and “critical” trend, to which the majority of the legal Marxists turned, deprived the socialists of this opportunity and demoralised the socialist consciousness by vulgarising Marxism, by advocating the theory of the blunting of social contradictions, by declaring the idea of the social revolution and of the dictatorship of the proletariat to be absurd, by reducing the working-class movement and the class struggle to narrow trade-unionism and to a “realistic” struggle for petty, gradual reforms... [“Economism”] In practice it meant a striving to convert the nascent working-class movement into an appendage of the liberals.

The “ex-Marxists”, who took up the flag of “criticism”... entrenched themselves in this literature. Catchwords like “Against orthodoxy” and “Long live freedom of criticism”... forthwith became the vogue... This trend did not confine itself to the sphere of literature. The turn towards “criticism” was accompanied by an infatuation for Economism among Social-Democratic practical workers.

...Let the workers carry on the economic struggle.. and let the Marxist intelligentsia merge with the liberals for the political “struggle”...

The majority of the Economists look with sincere resentment (as by the very nature of Economism they must) upon all theoretical controversies, factional disagreements, broad political questions, plans for organising revolutionaries, etc. “Leave all that to the people abroad!” said a fairly consistent Economist to me one day, thereby expressing a very widespread (and again purely trade-

unionist) view; our concern is the working-class movement, the workers, organisations here, in our localities; all the rest is merely the invention of doctrinaires, “the overrating of ideology”, as the authors of the letter, published in Iskra, No. 12, expressed it, in unison with Rabocheye Dyelo, No. 10.

...”The Economists want the revolutionaries to recognise the sovereign character of the present movement” ([the Economists’ paper] Rabocheye Dyelo, No. 10, p. 25), i.e., to recognise the “legitimacy” of that which exists; they want the “ideologists” not to try to “divert” the movement from the path that “is determined by the interaction of material. elements and material environment” (“Letter” in Iskra, No. 12); they want to have that struggle recognised as desirable “which it is possible for the workers to wage under the present conditions”, and as the only possible struggle...

“Dogmatism, doctrinairism”, “ossification of the party — the inevitable retribution that follows the violent strait-lacing of thought” — these are the enemies against which the knightly champions of “freedom of criticism” in Rabocheye Dyelo rise up in arms...

Lenin contrasts the neglect of theoretical questions by the champions of freedom of criticism with the attitude and the work of the publishers of Iskra and Zarya (the Group for the Emancipation of Labour) which demands

“vigilant attention to the theoretical aspect of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat”, and calls for “ruthless criticism of the Bernsteinian and other anti-revolutionary tendencies” in our movement. The issues of Zarya to date show how this programme has been carried out.

Thus, we see that high-sounding phrases against the ossification of thought, etc., conceal unconcern and helplessness with regard to the development of theoretical thought. The case of the Russian Social-Democrats manifestly illustrates the general European phenomenon (long ago noted also by the German Marxists) that the much vaunted freedom of criticism does not imply substitution of one theory for another, but freedom from all integral and pondered theory; it implies eclecticism and lack of principle. Those who have the slightest acquaintance with the actual state of our movement cannot but see that the wide spread of Marxism was accompanied by a certain lowering of the theoretical level. Quite a number of people with very little, and even a total lack of theoretical training joined the movement because of its practical significance and its practical successes....

Rabocheye Dyelo had quoted Marx’s statement:

“A single step of the real movement is more important than a dozen programmes.”

Lenin: To repeat these words in a period of theoretical disorder is like wishing

mourners at a funeral many happy returns of the day. Moreover, these words of Marx are taken from his letter on the [German Marxists 1875] Gotha Programme, in which he sharply condemns eclecticism in the formulation of principles. If you must unite, Marx wrote to the party leaders, then enter into agreements to satisfy the practical aims of the movement, but do not allow any bargaining over principles, do not make theoretical “concessions”. This was Marx’s idea, and yet there are people among us who seek in his name to belittle the significance of theory!

Lenin now repeats the words written by George Plekhanov in the early 1880s at the start of the Russian movement:

Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. This idea cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity.

But in Russian conditions, there is more:

Yet, for Russian Social-Democrats the importance of theory is enhanced by three other circumstances, which are often forgotten:

First, by the fact that our Party is only in process of formation, its features are only just becoming defined, and it has as yet far from settled accounts with the other [Populist] trends of revolutionary thought that threaten to divert the movement from the correct path. On the contrary, precisely the very recent past was marked by a revival of non-Social-Democratic revolutionary trends... Under these circumstances, what at first sight appears to be an “unimportant” error may lead to most deplorable consequences, and only short-sighted people can consider factional disputes and a strict differentiation between shades of opinion inopportune or superfluous.

The fate of Russian Social-Democracy for very many years to come may depend on the strengthening of one or the other “shade”.

Secondly, the Social-Democratic movement is in its very essence an international movement. This means, not only that we must combat national chauvinism, but that an incipient movement in a young country can be successful only if it makes use of the experiences of other countries. In order to make use of these experiences it is not enough merely to be acquainted with them, or simply to copy out the latest resolutions. What is required is the ability to treat these experiences critically and to test them independently...

Lenin now situates the tasks of the Russian Marxists in the specific conditions of the Russian state and society. Russia, so Lenin and all Russian Marxists believe, faces a bourgeois-democratic revolution against Tsarism — something like the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century. The question of what role the working class and the Russian Marxist movement

will play in that revolution will dominate Russian Marxism up to 1917. Groupings, factions, and parties will group and regroup around different conceptions of the Russian revolution and the role of Marxists in it. Lenin will argue that the Marxists should put themselves at the head of a great national, workers' and peasant revolution, which will, though led by the workers and peasants not only against the Tsar and the landlords but also in part also against the big bourgeoisie, be only a — profound — bourgeois democratic transformation of Russia.

Thirdly, the national tasks of Russian Social-Democracy are such as have never confronted any other socialist party in the world. We shall have occasion further on to deal with the political and organisational duties which the task of emancipating the whole people from the yoke of [Tsarist] autocracy imposes upon us. At this point, we wish to state only that the role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory...

Lenin will later on in the book discuss the views of those who argue that ideas, "ideology" can not shape and reshape the workers movement, produced by a particular environment. Here, quoting Friedrich Engels, he outlines the key Marxist idea that the class struggle also takes place on the level of ideas.

Let us quote what Engels said in 1874 concerning the significance of theory in the Social-Democratic movement. Engels recognises, not two forms of the great struggle of Social Democracy (political and economic), as is the fashion among us, but three, placing the theoretical struggle on a par with the first two. His recommendations to the German working-class movement, which had become strong, practically and politically, are ...instructive from the standpoint of present-day problems and controversies:

"The German workers have two important advantages over those of the rest of Europe. First, they belong to the most theoretical people of Europe; and they have retained that sense of theory which the so-called 'educated' classes of Germany have almost completely lost. Without German philosophy, which preceded it, particularly that of Hegel, German scientific socialism — the only scientific socialism that has ever existed — would never have come into being.

Without a sense of theory among the workers, this scientific socialism would never have entered their flesh and blood as much as is the case.

What an immeasurable advantage this is may be seen, on the one hand, from the indifference towards all theory, which is one of the main reasons why the English working-class movement crawls along so slowly in spite of the splendid organisation of the individual unions; on the other hand, from the mischief and confusion wrought by Proudhonism, in its original form, among

the French and Belgians, and, in the form further caricatured by Bakunin, among the Spaniards and Italians.

The second advantage is that, chronologically speaking, the Germans were about the last to come into the workers' movement. Just as German theoretical socialism will never forget that it rests on the shoulders of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen -- three men who, in spite of all their fantastic notions and all their utopianism, have their place among the most eminent thinkers of all times, and whose genius anticipated innumerable things, the correctness of which is now being scientifically proved by us -- so the practical workers' movement in Germany ought never to forget that it has developed on the shoulders of the English and French movements, that it was able simply to utilise their dearly bought experience, and could now avoid their mistakes, which in their time were mostly unavoidable.

Without the precedent of the English trade unions and French workers' political struggles, without the gigantic impulse given especially by the Paris Commune, where would we be now?

It must be said to the credit of the German workers that they have exploited the advantages of their situation with rare understanding. For the first time since a workers' movement has existed, the struggle is being conducted pursuant to its three sides -- the theoretical, the political, and the practical-economic (resistance to the capitalists) -- in harmony and in its interconnections, and in a systematic way.

It is precisely in this, as it were, concentric attack, that the strength and invincibility of the German movement lies.

Due to this advantageous situation, on the one hand, and to the insular peculiarities of the English and the forcible suppression of the French movement, on the other, the German workers have for the moment been placed in the vanguard of the proletarian struggle. How long events will allow them to occupy this post of honour cannot be foretold. But let us hope that as long as they occupy it, they will fill it fittingly.

This demands redoubled efforts in every field of struggle and agitation. In particular, it will be the duty of the leaders to gain an ever clearer insight into all theoretical questions, to free themselves more and more from the influence of traditional phrases inherited from the old world outlook, and constantly to keep in mind that socialism, since it has become a science, demands that it be pursued as a science, i.e., that it be studied.

The task will be to spread with increased zeal among the masses of the workers the ever more clarified understanding thus acquired, to knit together ever more firmly the organisation both of the party and of the trade unions....

If the German workers progress in this way, they will not be marching exactly

at the head of the movement -- it is not at all in the interest of this movement that the workers of any particular country should march at its head -- but they will occupy an honourable place in the battle line; and they will stand armed for battle when either unexpectedly grave trials or momentous events demand of them increased courage, increased determination and energy."

Engels's words proved prophetic. Within a few years the German workers were subjected to unexpectedly grave trials in the form of the Exceptional Law Against the Socialists [a law which made their party illegal, from 1878 to 1890]. And they met those trials armed for battle and succeeded in emerging from them victorious.

The Russian proletariat will have to undergo trials immeasurably graver; it will have to fight a monster compared with which an anti-socialist law in a constitutional country seems but a dwarf.

History has now confronted us with an immediate task which is the most revolutionary of all the immediate tasks confronting the proletariat of any country. The fulfilment of this task, the destruction of the most powerful bulwark, not only of European, but (it may now be said) of Asiatic reaction, would make the Russian proletariat the vanguard of the international revolutionary proletariat.

And we have the right to count upon acquiring this honourable title, already earned by our predecessors [the agrarian socialists and political terrorists of the 1860s, 70s and eighties], the revolutionaries of the seventies, if we succeed in inspiring our movement, which is a thousand times broader and deeper, with the same devoted determination and vigour.

## §13. The origins of Bolshevism: Socialism and the workers' struggles

Lenin's 1902 book, What Is To Be Done, is one of the most important of all the great texts of revolutionary Marxism.

Its importance is especially great in the period we are now going through, when as a result of Stalinism and the defeats of the labour movement which it inflicted or precipitated, everywhere Marxism has come to be separated from the working class and its movement. The great task we face is once more to combine Marxism with the working class movements.

What Is To Be Done was a polemical barrage against those who resisted the plan propounded by Lenin, Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zasulich. Martov and others in the fortnightly paper, Iskra [Spark] and the magazine Zarya [Dawn], published abroad and smuggled into Russia. Iskra worked to consolidate the widespread but scattered and uncoordinated elements of the Russian Marxist movement.

After underground work over two decades, operating under ferocious state repression, isolated circles were doing illegal agitational and educational work around factories all over Russia. They had to be welded into an effective Marxist political party.

The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party had been established at a Congress at Minsk in 1898, but had soon fallen into disarray as a results of arrests, the desertion to the bourgeois liberals of leaders like Pyotr Struve, and the fact that a proper basis for a Marxist party had not been laid before 1898.

What Is To Be Done was written to tear down opponents of Iskra's plan for reorganising the party. But it is a great deal more than that. It is a positive exposition of the fundamental ideas of Marxism on all the questions raised in the course of the Russian Marxist's work.

We do not work in conditions like those in Tsarist Russia, but, fundamentally, these ideas are still central to all possible practical situations within which Marxists work to "agitate, educate and organise" workers.

But of all the great texts of revolutionary Marxism, What Is To Be Done, has been the most misrepresented. By unscrupulous or uncomprehending opponents, which is to be expected, but also by ignorant or unscrupulous "Leninists". This article, the second of three, is an attempt to expound Lenin's ideas, mainly in his own words, of the work which a political paper like Solidarity does.

Lenin deals with one of the central questions of Marxist politics — the relationship between Marxism, and Marxists, and the "spontaneous" working class movement.

On one level Marxism is nothing but the theoretical summing up of the experience of the working class. The experience of the first mass working class movement, Chartism in Britain in the 1830s and 40s, played a great part in shaping the Marxism which Marx and Engels created in the 1840s and afterwards. But it was not the only element in it. Marxism also grew out of the highest learning of the bourgeoisie — German philosophy and English political economy. It grew out of the work of "utopian socialists" such as Robert Owen.

The utopian socialists responded to the horrors which industrial capitalism inflicted on the proletariat by creating imaginary alternative social systems and then trying to build them from scratch as socialist colonies in some wilderness or other (in Texas, for example).

Marx and Engels brought all these things together to create the new outlook on the world.

Though this outlook subsumed the social experience of the proletariat and

what could be learned from its attempt to build a labour movement, and though it expressed the historic interests of the working class, the fact that Marxism also embodied the highest learning of bourgeois society necessarily meant that it began divorced from the living working class. For the learning on which Marxism was erected was, in general, not the possession of capitalism's exploited wage-slaves.

Even when they accepted the socialist conclusions that Marx and Engels had established out of that learning, workers could not "spontaneously" arrive at Marxism for themselves. By definition, it had to come to them from "outside", brought by representatives of the educated classes. In the first instance, Marx and Engels.

And if not at Marxism, what exactly does the working class "spontaneously" arrive at when it tries to generalise its experience and elaborate its own distinct outlook? Lenin's answer was that the working class arrives spontaneously only at trade union consciousness. And what of "spontaneous" socialism?

The proletariat also threw up men like Wilhelm Weitling and Pierre Joseph Proudhon, who created their own variants of utopian socialism, or — Proudhon — an outlook that corresponded to the interests of the petit bourgeois, the small producer, rather than those of the proletariat. With both of these famous socialists Marx clashed bitterly, counterposing his own ideas to theirs.

It is true that the German artisan Joseph Dietzgen, also drawing on the pre-existing bourgeois learning, arrived independently at an approximation to the ideas Marx and Engels worked out in the 40s. But Dietzgen was as little typical of his class as Marx and Engels were of theirs.

It is with this complex network of interlinked questions that Lenin deals in the section of What Is To Be Done entitled: "The Spontaneity of the Masses and the Consciousness of the [Marxist] Social-Democrats."

Lenin begins by invoking the spirit of the great revolutionary populist movement of the past, the lone fighters who had killed the Tsar in 1881 and died on the scaffold, in jails and in bleak exile: the new, working class movement must recreate the splendid dedication and ardent revolutionary spirit of the old movement, but on a higher level.

Jack Cleary

By VI Lenin

Our movement, much wider and deeper than the movement of the seventies, must be inspired with the same devoted determination and energy that inspired the movement of that time… No one, we think, has up to now doubted that the strength of the modern movement lies in the awakening of

the masses (principally, the industrial proletariat);… its weakness [in contrast to the seventies] lies in the lack of consciousness and initiative among the revolutionary leaders.

“[The Marxist paper] Rabochye Dyelo… in its polemic with Iskra and Zarya… tried to ascribe [its] ‘general disagreements’ [with Iskra] to a more profound cause — to the ‘different appraisals of the relative importance of the spontaneous and consciously “methodical” element’ [in the development of labour movements]. Rabochye Dyelo’s indictment reads: a ‘belittling of the significance of the objective, or the spontaneous, element of development’… [This thesis] illuminate[s] the quintessence of the present-day theoretical and political differences that exist among Russian Social-Democrats...

“The question of the relation between consciousness and spontaneity is of enormous general interest, and for this reason the question must be dealt with in great detail.

We [have] pointed out how universally absorbed the educated youth of Russia was in the theories of Marxism in the middle of the nineties [When for a while thinly disguised Marxist books were allowed a limited legality]. In the same period the strikes that followed the famous St. Petersburg industrial war of 1896 assumed a similar general character. Their spread over the whole of Russia clearly showed the depth of the newly awakening popular movement, and if we are to speak of the ‘spontaneous element’ then, of course, it is this strike movement which, first and foremost, must be regarded as spontaneous. But there is spontaneity and spontaneity.

Strikes occurred in Russia in the 1860s and 70s (and even in the first half of the nineteenth century), and they were accompanied by the ‘spontaneous’ destruction of machinery, etc. Compared with these ‘revolts’, the strikes of the 90s might even be described as ‘conscious’, to such an extent do they mark the progress which the working-class movement made in that period. This shows that the ‘spontaneous element’, in essence, represents nothing more nor less than consciousness in an embryonic form.

Even the primitive revolts expressed the awakening of consciousness to a certain extent. The workers were losing their age-long faith in the permanence of the system which oppressed them and began... I shall not say to understand, but to sense the necessity for collective resistance, definitely abandoning their slavish submission to the authorities. But this was, nevertheless, more in the nature of outbursts of desperation and vengeance than of struggle.

The strikes of the nineties revealed far greater flashes of consciousness; definite demands were advanced, the strike was carefully timed, known cases and instances in other places were discussed, etc.

The revolts were simply the resistance of the oppressed, whereas the

systematic strikes represented the class struggle in embryo, but only in embryo.

Taken by themselves, these strikes were simply trade union struggles, not yet Social Democratic [class-conscious socialist] struggles. They marked the awakening antagonisms between workers and employers; but the workers, were not, and could not be, conscious of the irreconcilable antagonism of their interests to the whole of the modern political and social system [our emphasis], i.e., theirs was not yet Social-Democratic consciousness.

In this sense, the strikes of the nineties, despite the enormous progress they represented as compared with the ‘revolts’, remained a purely spontaneous movement.

We have said that there could not have been Social-Democratic [Marxist] consciousness among the workers. This consciousness could only be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc.

Trade unionism does not exckude “politics” altogether, as some imagine. Trade unions have always conducted political (but not Social-Democratic) agitation and struggle...

The theory of [Marxist] socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. By their social status the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia.

In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working-class movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia.

In the time of which we are speaking, the middle [eighteen] nineties, [Marxism] not only represented the completely formulated programme of the Emancipation of Labour group [of Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zasulich and others] but had already won over to its side the majority of the revolutionary youth in Russia.

Hence, we had both the spontaneous awakening of the working masses, their awakening to conscious life and conscious struggle, and a revolutionary youth, armed with Social-Democratic theory and straining towards the workers. In this connection it is particularly important to state the oft-forgotten (and comparatively little-known) fact that, although the early Social-

Democrats of that period zealously carried on economic agitation (being guided in this activity by the truly useful indications contained in the pamphlet [of Kramer and Martov] On Agitation, then still in manuscript), they did not regard this as their sole task.

On the contrary, from the very beginning they set for Russian Social-Democracy the most far-reaching historical tasks, in general, and the task of overthrowing the [Tsarist] autocracy, in particular…

[It is important to establish here] the fact that a part (perhaps even a majority) of the Social-Democrats, active in the period of 1895-98, justly considered it possible even then, at the very beginning of the 'spontaneous' movement, to come forward with a most extensive programme and a militant tactical line. Lack of training of the majority of the revolutionaries, an entirely natural phenomenon, could not have roused any particular fears.

Since the tasks were properly defined, since the energy existed for repeated attempts to fulfil them, temporary failures represented only part misfortune. Revolutionary experience and organisational skill are things that can be acquired, provided the desire is there to acquire them, provided the shortcomings are recognised, which in revolutionary activity is more than half-way towards removing them.

But what was only part misfortune became full misfortune when this consciousness began to grow dim… when there appeared people — and even Social-Democratic organs — that were prepared to regard shortcomings as virtues, that even tried to invent a theoretical basis for their slavish cringing before spontaneity. It is time to draw conclusions from this trend, the content of which is incorrectly and too narrowly characterised as Economism.

... [Due to arrests and deportations] the membership of the circles then functioning underwent such constant change that no continuity was established and, consequently, differences in point of view were not recorded in any documents.

The founding of Rabochaya Mysl brought Economism to the light of day... It is well worth dwelling on [the] leading article [of the first issue of Rabochaya Mysl because] it brings out in bold relief the entire spirit of Rabochaya Mysl and Economism generally...

[It says] '…The virility of the working-class movement is due to the fact that the workers themselves are at last taking their fate into their own hands, and out of the hands of the leaders'; this fundamental thesis is then developed in greater detail. Actually, the leaders (i.e. the Social-Democrats, the organisers of the League of Struggle) were, one might say, torn out of the hands of the workers by the police; yet it is made to appear that the workers were fighting against the leaders and liberated themselves from their yoke!

Instead of sounding the call to go forward towards the consolidation of the revolutionary organisation and the expansion of political activity, the call was issued for a retreat to the purely trade union struggle. They announced that ‘the economic basis of the movement is eclipsed by the effort never to forget the political ideal’, and that the watchword for the working-class movement was ‘Struggle for economic conditions’ (!) or, better still, ‘The workers for the workers’.

It was declared that strike funds ‘are more valuable to the movement than a hundred other organisations’... etc. Catchwords like ‘We must concentrate, not on the “cream” of the workers, but on the “average”, mass worker’; ‘Politics always obediently follows economics’, etc., etc., became the fashion, exercising an irresistible influence upon the masses of the youth who were attracted to the movement but who, in the majority of cases, were acquainted only with such fragments of Marxism as were expounded in legally appearing publications.

Political consciousness was completely overwhelmed by spontaneity — the spontaneity of the ‘Social-Democrats’..., the spontaneity of those workers who were carried away by the arguments that a kopek added to a ruble was worth more than any socialism or politics, and that they must ‘fight, knowing that they are fighting, not for the sake of some future generation, but for themselves and their children’ (leader in Rabochaya Mysl, No. 1).

Phrases like these have always been a favourite weapon of the West-European bourgeois, who, in their hatred for socialism, strove… to transplant English trade-unionism to their native soil and to preach to the workers that by engaging in the purely trade union struggle they would be fighting for themselves and for their children, and not for some future generations with some future socialism. And now [some Russian Social-Democrats] have set about repeating these bourgeois phrases.

It is important at this point to note three circumstances that will be useful to our further analysis of contemporary differences.

In the first place, the overwhelming of political consciousness by spontaneity, to which we referred above, also took place spontaneously. This may sound like a pun, but, alas, it is the bitter truth. It did not take place as a result of an open struggle between two diametrically opposed points of view, in which one triumphed over the other; it occurred because of the fact that an increasing number of ‘old’ revolutionaries were ‘torn away’ by the gendarmes and... increasing numbers of ‘young’... Social Democrats appeared on the scene...

Secondly, in the very first literary expression of Economism we observe the exceedingly curious phenomenon — highly characteristic for an understanding of all the differences prevailing among present day Social Democrats — that the adherents of the ‘labour movement pure and simple’,

worshippers of the closest ‘organic’ contacts (Rabochye Dyelo’s term) with the proletarian struggle, opponents of any non-worker intelligentsia (even a socialist intelligentsia), are compelled, in order to defend their positions, to resort to the arguments of the bourgeois ‘pure trade-unionists’.

This shows that... all worship of the spontaneity of the working class movement, all belittling of the role of ‘the conscious element’, of the role of Social-Democracy, means, quite independently of whether he who belittles that role desires it or not, a strengthening of the influence of bourgeois ideology upon the workers. All those who talk about ‘overrating the importance of ideology’, about exaggerating the role of the conscious element, etc., imagine that the labour movement pure and simple can elaborate, and will elaborate, an independent ideology for itself, if only the workers ‘wrest their fate from the hands of the leaders’. But this is a profound mistake.

To supplement what has been said above, we shall quote the following profoundly true and important words of Karl. Kautsky on the new draft programme of the Austrian Social-Democratic Party.

‘Many of our revisionist critics believe that Marx asserted that economic development and the class struggle create, not only the conditions for socialist production, but also, and directly, the consciousness [K K’s italics] of its necessity. And these critics assert that England, the country most highly developed capitalistically, is more remote than any other from this consciousness judging by the draft, one might assume that this allegedly orthodox Marxist view, which is thus refuted, was shared by the committee that drafted the Austrian programme.

In the draft programme it is stated: ‘The more capitalist development increases the numbers of the proletariat, the more the proletariat is compelled and becomes fit to fight against capitalism. The proletariat becomes conscious of the possibility and of the necessity for socialism. In this connection socialist consciousness appears to be a necessary and direct result of the proletarian class struggle.’

But this is absolutely untrue. Of course, socialism, as a doctrine, has its roots in modern economic relationships just as the class struggle of the proletariat has, and, like the latter, emerges from the struggle against the capitalist-created poverty and misery of the masses. But socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises under different conditions.

Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science is as much a condition for socialist production as, say, modern technology, and the proletariat can create neither the one nor the other, no matter how much it

may desire to do so; both arise out of the modern social process. The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia [KK's italics]: it was in the minds of individual members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians who, in their turn, introduce it into the proletarian class struggle where conditions allow that to be done. Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without [von aussen hineingetragenes] and not something that arose within it spontaneously [urwüchsig]. Accordingly, the old Hainfeld programme quite rightly stated that the task of Social-Democracy is to imbue the proletariat (literally: saturate the proletariat) with the consciousness of its position and the consciousness of its task. There would be no need for this if consciousness arose of itself from the class struggle. The new draft copied this proposition from the old programme, and attached it to the proposition mentioned above. But this completely broke the line of thought...'

This does not mean, of course, that the workers have no part in creating such an ideology. They take part, however, not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians, as Proudhons and Weitlings; in other words, they take part only when they are able, and to the extent that they are able, more or less, to acquire the knowledge of their age and develop that knowledge.

But in order that working men may succeed in this more often, every effort must be made to raise the level of the consciousness of the workers in general; it is necessary that the workers do not confine themselves to the artificially restricted limits of 'literature for workers' but that they learn to an increasing degree to master general literature.

It would be even truer to say 'are not confined', instead of 'do not confine themselves', because the workers themselves wish to read and do read all that is written for the intelligentsia, and only a few (bad) intellectuals believe that it is enough 'for workers' to be told a few things about factory conditions and to have repeated to them over and over again what has long been known.

Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement, the only choice is — either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for mankind has not created a 'third' ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or an above-class ideology).

Hence, to belittle the socialist ideology in any way, to turn aside from it in the slightest degree means to strengthen bourgeois ideology.

There is much talk of spontaneity. But the spontaneous development of the working-class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology... for

the spontaneous working-class movement is trade-unionism... and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie.

Hence, our task, the task of Social-Democracy, is to combat spontaneity, to divert the working-class movement from this spontaneous, trade-unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social Democracy. The sentence employed by the authors of the Economist letter published in Iskra, No. 12, that the efforts of the most inspired ideologists fail to divert the working-class movement from the path that is determined by the interaction of the material elements and the material environment is therefore tantamount to renouncing socialism.

If these authors were capable of fearlessly, consistently, and thoroughly considering what they say, as everyone who enters the arena of literary and public activity should be, there would be nothing left for them but to ‘fold their useless arms over their empty breasts’ and surrender the field of action to the [bourgeois liberals, like the] Struves and Prokopoviches, who are dragging the working-class movement ‘along the line of least resistance’, i.e., along the line of bourgeois trade-unionism, or to the [attempt to create police-controlled pseudo trade unions, whose leaders like the Moscow policeman Zubatov]... are dragging it along the line of clerical and gendarme ‘ideology’.

It is often said that the working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism. This is perfectly true in the sense that socialist theory reveals the causes of the misery of the working class more profoundly and more correctly than any other theory, and for that reason the workers are able to assimilate it so easily, provided, however, this theory does not itself yield to spontaneity, provided it subordinates spontaneity to itself. Usually this is taken for granted, but it is precisely this which Rabochye Dyelo forgets or distorts. The working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism; nevertheless, most widespread (and continuously and diversely revived) bourgeois ideology spontaneously imposes itself upon the working class to a still greater degree.

## §14. The origins of Bolshevism: Marxism and the class struggle

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Submitted by AWL on 21 July, 2005 - 12:33 Author: Jack Cleary

Click here for the series on The Roots of Bolshevism of which this article is part

Jack Cleary continues his analysis of and selection from Lenin’s 1902 book What is to be Done?

Arguing that the educational work of Marxists was essential if the “spontaneous” working class trade “unionist” movement were to become

socialist, Marxist movement, Lenin cites the experience of the German labour movement.

“Recall the example of Germany. What was the historic service Lassalle rendered to the German working-class movement? It was that he diverted that movement from the path of progressivist trade-unionism and co-operativism towards which it had been spontaneously

moving...

A fierce struggle against spontaneity was necessary, and only after such a struggle, extending over many years, was it possible, for instance, to convert the working population of Berlin from a bulwark of the [bourgeois] Progressive Party into one of the finest strongholds of Social-Democracy.”

Though he greatly admires German socialism, Lenin knows very well that the struggle he describes is never definitively won by the Marxists, never over and done with. The labour movement lives in a hostile capitalist environment, where bourgeois ideas are, so to speak, in the very air the workers breathe. Lenin knows that the class struggle on the ideological front takes place also within the working class movement, as the controversy between the Marxists and “revisionists” in Germany, to which he has already referred, testifies. He recalls that non-Marxist workers’ organisations still exist, even in Germany.

“... Even now the German working class is, so to speak, split up among a number of ideologies. A section of the workers is organised in Catholic and monarchist trade unions; another section is organised in the Hirsch-Duncker unions, founded by the bourgeois worshippers of English trade-unionism; the third is organised in Social-Democratic trade unions. The last-named group is immeasurably more numerous than the rest, but the Social-Democratic ideology was able to achieve this superiority, and will be able to maintain it, only in an unswerving struggle against all other ideologies.”

Lenin explains why the working class movement, without the work of Marxists, tends to develop ideas that serve not the working class but the bourgeoisie.

“But why, the reader will ask, does the spontaneous movement, the movement along the line of least resistance, lead to the domination of bourgeois ideology? For the simple reason that bourgeois ideology is far older in origin than socialist ideology, that it is more fully developed, and that it has at its disposal immeasurably more means of dissemination.”

In a footnote [the last paragraph in the previous article, in the 23 June Solidarity] aimed to answer some of the critics of What Is To Be Done, Lenin agrees that “the working class gravitates spontaneously towards socialism… in the sense that socialist theory defines the cause of the misery of the working class more profoundly and more correctly than any other theory, and

for that reason the workers are able to appreciate it so easily." But only, Lenin adds, given the activity of the Marxists, "provided that [Marxist] theory does not step aside for spontaneity, and provided it subordinates spontaneity to itself."

Lenin now discusses more concretely on the political characteristics of his opponents.

"Rabochaya Mysl does not altogether repudiate the political struggle; the rules for a workers' mutual benefit fund published in its first issue contain a reference to combating the government.

"Rabochaya Mysl believes, however, that 'politics always obediently follows economics' (Rabocheye Dyelo varies this thesis when it asserts in its programme that 'in Russia more than in any other country, the economic struggle is inseparable from the political struggle').

"If by politics is meant Social-Democratic [Marxist socialist] politics, then the theses of Rabochaya Mysl and Rabocheye Dyelo are utterly incorrect."

Lenin is writing long before such 20th century experiences as a Peronist labour movement in Argentina, Stalinist labour movements in many countries, etc, but he understands how such hybrids could develop. The economic struggle of the workers can be linked to anti-Marxist, anti-socialist, bourgeois politics too.

"The economic struggle of the workers is very often connected (although not inseparably) with bourgeois politics, clerical politics, etc., as we have seen.

"Rabocheye Dyelo's theses are [only] correct, if by politics is meant trade union politics, viz., the common striving of all workers to secure from the government measures for alleviating the distress to which their condition gives rise, but which do not abolish that condition, i.e., which do not remove the subjection of labour to capital.

"That striving indeed is common to the English trade-unionists, who are hostile to socialism, to the Catholic workers, to the [police-run] "Zubatov" workers [organisation in Russia], etc. There is politics and politics.

"Thus, we see that Rabochaya Mysl does not so much deny the political struggle, as it bows to its spontaneity, to its [lack of scientific socialist] consciousness.

While fully recognising the political struggle (better: the political desires and demands of the workers), which arises spontaneously from the working-class movement itself, Rabochaya Nysl absolutely refuses independently to work out a specifically Social-Democratic politics corresponding to the general tasks of socialism and to present-day conditions in Russia…"

A critic had said of a leading article in Rabochaya Mysl that it had been

written in a “sharp and fervent” manner.

“Every man with convictions who thinks he has something new to say writes “fervently” and in such a way as to make his views stand out in bold relief.

“Only those who are accustomed to sitting between two stools lack “fervour”; only such people are able to praise the fervour of Rabochaya Mysl one day and attack the “fervent polemics” of its opponents the next.”

Lenin now discusses the “Appeal of the Self-Emancipation of the Workers Group” (March 1899).

“The authors of the ‘Appeal’ rightly say that ‘the workers of Russia are only just awakening, are just beginning to look about them, and are instinctively clutching at the first available means of struggle’.

“Yet they draw from this the same false conclusion as that drawn by Rabochaya Mysl, forgetting that the instinctive is the unconscious (the spontaneous) to the aid of which socialists must come; that the ‘first available means of struggle’ will always be, in modern society, the trade union means of struggle, and the ‘first available’ ideology the bourgeois ([narrow] trade unionist) ideology…

“The source of [their] confusion is to be found in the ambiguity of the interpretation given to the following thesis of the Rabocheye Dyelo programme:

“We consider that the most important phenomenon of Russian life, the one that will mainly determine the tasks and the character of the publication activity of the union, is the mass working-class movement which has arisen in recent years.”

Lenin now deliniates the Marxist approach to the great spontaneous mass strike movements which the Russian working class had created over the previous decade.

“That the mass movement is a most important phenomenon is a fact not to be disputed. But the crux of the matter is, how is one to understand the statement that the mass working class movement will ‘determine the tasks’? It may be interpreted in one of two ways.

“Either, it means bowing to the spontaneity of this movement, i.e., reducing the role of Social-Democracy to mere subservience to the working-class [trade-unionist] movement as such (the interpretation of Rabochaya Mysl, the Self -Emancipation Group, and other Economists).

“Or, it means that the mass movement places before us new theoretical, political, and organisational tasks, far more complicated than those that might have satisfied us in the period before the rise of the mass movement.

“Rabocheye Dyelo… has argued constantly as though the ‘mass movement’

relieves us of the necessity of clearly understanding and fulfilling the tasks it sets before us.

“We need only point out that Rabocheye Dyelo considered that it was impossible to set the overthrow of the autocracy as the first [prime] task of the mass working-class movement, and that it degraded this task (in the name of the mass movement) to that of a struggle for immediate political demands (Reply, p. 25).”

In a footnote, Lenin says that the article by B Krichevsky in Rabocheye Dyelo, entitled ‘The Economic Struggle in the Russian Movement’, repeats these mistakes.

“On page 4, Krichevsky, protesting against what he regards as the absolutely unfounded charge of Economist heresy, pathetically exclaims: ‘What Social-Democrat does not know that according to the theories of Marx and Engels the economic interests of certain classes play a decisive role in history, and, consequently, that particularly the proletariat’s struggle for its economic interests must be of paramount importance in its class development and struggle for emancipation?’

“The word ‘consequently’ is completely irrelevant. The fact that economic interests play a decisive role does not in the least imply that the economic (i.e., trade union) struggle is of prime importance; for the most essential, the ‘decisive’ interests of classes can be satisfied only by radical political changes in general.

“In particular the fundamental economic interests of the proletariat can be satisfied only by a political revolution that will replace the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie by the dictatorship of the proletariat. Krichevsky repeats the arguments… that politics follows economics, etc... of the Bernsteinians of German Social-Democracy… that the workers must first of all acquire ‘economic power’ before they can think about political revolution?

Lenin turns to the arguments of Rabocheye Dyelo, No. 10.

“…Rabocheye Dyelo saw a ‘diametrical contradiction’ between the proposition:

“‘Social-Democracy does not, tie its hands, it does not restrict its activities to some one preconceived plan or method of political struggle; it recognises all means of struggle as long as they correspond to the forces at the disposal of the Party,’ etc. (Iskra, No. 1.)

“and the proposition:

“‘Without a strong organisation skilled in waging political struggle under all circumstances and at all times, there can be no question of that systematic plan of action, illuminated by firm principles and steadfastly carried out, which alone is worthy of the name of tactics’ (Iskra, No. 4).

“[This] confuses recognition, in principle, of all means of struggle, of all plans and methods, provided they are expedient, with the demand at a given political moment to be guided by a strictly adhered-to plan...

“Rabocheye Dyelo... has made the remarkable discovery that ‘tactics-as-plan contradicts the fundamental spirit of Marxism’ (No. 10, p. 18), that tactics are ‘a process of growth of Party tasks, which grow together with the Party’ (p. 11). This remark has every chance of becoming a celebrated maxim, a permanent monument to the Rabocheye Dyelo ‘trend’.

“To the question, whither?... [it] replies: Movement is a process of changing the distance between the starting-point and subsequent points of the movement.

“This matchless example of profundity is not merely a curiosity (were it that, it would not be worth dealing with at length), but the programme of a whole tendency… expressed in [Rabochaya Mysl’s] words:

“That struggle is desirable which is possible, and the struggle which is possible is that which is going on at the given moment.

“This is precisely the trend of unbounded opportunism, which passively adapts itself to spontaneity.”

Lenin now focuses on the objections raised to the very idea of a worked out plan for developing the movement. Iskra and Zarya have been working to a plan of reorganising the existing Marxist circles around a newspaper published abroad and smuggled into Russia.

“‘A tactics plan contradicts the whole spirit of Marxism!’ But this is a libel on Marxism. It means turning Marxism into the caricature held up by the Narodniks in their struggle against us.

“It means belittling and restraining the initiative and energy of class-conscious fighters, whereas Marxism, on the contrary, gives a gigantic impetus to the initiative and energy of the Social-Democrat, opens up for him the widest perspectives, and (if one may so express it) places at his disposal the mighty force of many millions of workers ‘spontaneously’ rising for the struggle.

The entire history of international Social-Democracy teems with plans advanced now by one, now by another political leader, some confirming the far-sightedness and the correct political and organisational views of their authors and others revealing their short-sightedness and their political errors.

“At the time when Germany was at one of the crucial turning-points in its history — the formation of the Empire [in 1871], the opening of the Reichstag, and the granting of universal suffrage — Liebknecht had one plan for Social-Democratic politics and work in general, and Schweitzer had another.”

[Schweitzer, after the death of Ferdinand Lassalle, was the leader of the sect

of Lassalleans, who would fuse with the Marxists at the 1875 Congress at Gotha.]

“When the anti-socialist law [1879-1990] came down on the heads of the German socialists, Most and Hasselmann had one plan — they were prepared then and there to call for violence and terror; Hochbert, Schramm, and (partly) Bernstein had another — they began to preach to the Social-Democrats that they themselves had provoked the enactment of the law by being unreasonably bitter and revolutionary, and must now earn forgiveness by their exemplary conduct.

“There was yet a third plan, proposed by those who prepared and carried out the publication [abroad] of an illegal organ.

“…At a time of confusion, when [Russian] Social-Democracy [is being reduced ] to the level of trade-unionism, and when the [populist] terrorists are strongly advocating the adoption of ‘tactics-as-plan’, that repeats the old mistakes; at a time… when many Russian Social-Democrats suffer from a lack of initiative and energy, from an inadequate scope of political propaganda, agitation, and organisation, from a lack of ‘plans’ for a broader organisation of revolutionary work — at such a time, to declare that ‘tactics-as-plan’ contradicts the essence of Marxism means not only to vulgarise Marxism in the realm of theory, but to drag the Party backward in practice.

“Rabocheye Dyelo goes on sermonising:

“‘The task of the revolutionary Social-Democrat is only to accelerate objective development by his conscious work, not to obviate it or substitute his own subjective plans for this development. Iskra knows all this in theory; but the enormous importance which Marxism justly attaches to conscious revolutionary work causes it in practice, owing to its doctrinaire view of tactics, to belittle the significance of the objective or the spontaneous element of development’ (p. 18).

“Another example of [Rabocheye Dyelo’s] extraordinary theoretical confusion... We would ask our philosopher: how may a designer of subjective plans ‘belittle’ objective development? Obviously by losing sight of the fact that this objective development creates or strengthens, destroys or weakens certain classes, strata, or groups, certain nations or groups of nations, etc., and in this way serves to determine a given international political alignment of forces, or the position adopted by revolutionary parties, etc.

“If the designer of plans did that, his guilt would not be that he belittled the spontaneous element, but, on the contrary, that he belittled the conscious element, for he would then show that he lacked the ‘consciousness’ properly to understand objective development. Hence, the very talk of ‘estimating the relative significance’ (Rabocheye Dyelo’s italics) of spontaneity and consciousness itself reveals a complete lack of ‘consciousness’.

“If certain ‘spontaneous elements of development’ can be grasped at all by human understanding, then an incorrect estimation of them will be tantamount to ‘belittling the conscious element’. But if they cannot be grasped, then we do not know them, and therefore cannot speak of them.”

Now Lenin focuses on the relationship between the “objective” movement and the conscious Marxists.

“What then is Krichevsky discussing? If he thinks that Iskra’s ‘subjective plans’ are erroneous (as he in fact declares them to be), he should have shown what objective facts they ignore, and only then charged Iskra with lacking political consciousness for ignoring them, with ‘belittling the conscious element’, to use his own words.

“If, however, displeased with subjective plans, he can bring forward no argument other than that of ‘belittling the spontaneous element’ (!), he merely shows: (1) that, theoretically, he [mis]understands Marxism; and (2) that, practically, he is quite satisfied with the ‘spontaneous elements of development’ that have drawn our legal Marxists towards Bernsteinism and our Social-Democrats towards Economism, and that he is ‘full of wrath’ against those who have determined at all costs to divert Russian Social-Democracy from the path of ‘spontaneous’ development.

“Further, there follow things that are positively droll. ‘Just as human beings will reproduce in the old-fashioned way despite all the discoveries of natural science, so the birth of a new social order will come about, in the future too, mainly as a result of elemental outbursts, despite all the discoveries of social science and the increase in the number of conscious fighters’ (p. 19).

“Just as our grandfathers in their old-fashioned wisdom used to say, Anyone can bring children into the world, so today the ‘modern socialists’... say in their wisdom, Anyone can participate in the spontaneous birth of a new social order. We too hold that anyone can. All that is required for participation of that kind is to yield to Economism when Economism reigns and to terrorism when terrorism arises…”

Lenin takes his opponents to task for cutting loose from the experience and tradition of the Russian Marxist movement.

“When Iskra ridiculed Rabocheye Dyelo for declaring the question of terror to be new, the latter angrily accused Iskra of ‘having the incredible effrontery to impose upon the Party organisation solutions of tactical questions proposed by a group of emigrant writers more than fifteen years ago’ (p. 24).

“Effrontery. indeed, and what an overestimation of the conscious element — first to resolve questions theoretically beforehand, and then to try to convince the organisation, the Party, and the masses of the correctness of this solution!

“How much better it would be to repeat the elements and, without ‘imposing’

anything upon anybody, swing with every ‘turn’ — whether in the direction of Economism or in the direction of terrorism.

“Rabocheye Dyelo even generalises this great precept of worldly wisdom and accuses Iskra and Zarya of ‘setting up their programme against the movement, like a spirit hovering over the formless chaos’ (p. 29). But what else is the function of Social-Democracy if not to be a ‘spirit’ that not only hovers over the spontaneous movement, but also raises this movement to the level of ‘its programme’?

“Surely, it is not its function to drag at the tail of the movement. At best, this would be of no service to the movement; at worst, it would be exceedingly harmful.

“Rabocheye Dyelo elevates ‘tactics-as-process’ to a principle, so that it would be more correct to describe its tendency not as opportunism, but as tail-ism (from the word tail).

“And it must be admitted that those who are determined always to follow behind the movement and be its tail are absolutely and forever guaranteed against ‘belittling the spontaneous element of development’.”

Lenin sums it up.

“... The fundamental error committed by the ‘new trend’ in Russian Social-Democracy is its bowing to spontaneity and its failure to understand that the spontaneity of the masses demands a high degree of consciousness from us Social-Democrats.

“The greater the spontaneous upsurge of the masses and the more widespread the movement, the more rapid, incomparably so, the demand for greater consciousness in the theoretical, political and organisational work of Social-Democracy.

“The spontaneous upsurge of the masses in Russia proceeded (and continues) with such rapidity that the young Social Democrats proved unprepared to meet these gigantic tasks. This unpreparedness is our common misfortune, the misfortune of all Russian Social-Democrats.

“The upsurge of the masses [in mass strikes and demonstrations] proceeded and spread with uninterrupted continuity; it not only continued in the places where it began, but spread to new localities and to new strata of the population (under the influence of the working class movement, there was a renewed ferment among the student youth, among the intellectuals generally, and even among the peasantry).

“Revolutionaries, however, lagged behind this upsurge, both in their ‘theories’ and in their activity; they failed to establish a constant and continuous organisation capable of leading the whole movement.”

§14. The origins of Bolshevism: Marxism and the class struggle

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Submitted by AWL on 21 July, 2005 - 12:33 Author: Jack Cleary

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A fierce struggle against spontaneity was necessary, and only after such a struggle, extending over many years, was it possible, for instance, to convert the working population of Berlin from a bulwark of the [bourgeois] Progressive Party into one of the finest strongholds of Social-Democracy."

Though he greatly admires German socialism, Lenin knows very well that the struggle he describes is never definitively won by the Marxists, never over and done with. The labour movement lives in a hostile capitalist environment, where bourgeois ideas are, so to speak, in the very air the workers breathe. Lenin knows that the class struggle on the ideological front takes place also within the working class movement, as the controversy between the Marxists and "revisionists" in Germany, to which he has already referred, testifies. He recalls that non-Marxist workers' organisations still exist, even in Germany.

"... Even now the German working class is, so to speak, split up among a number of ideologies. A section of the workers is organised in Catholic and monarchist trade unions; another section is organised in the Hirsch-Duncker unions, founded by the bourgeois worshippers of English trade-unionism; the third is organised in Social-Democratic trade unions. The last-named group is immeasurably more numerous than the rest, but the Social-Democratic ideology was able to achieve this superiority, and will be able to maintain it, only in an unswerving struggle against all other ideologies."

Lenin explains why the working class movement, without the work of Marxists, tends to develop ideas that serve not the working class but the

bourgeoisie.

“But why, the reader will ask, does the spontaneous movement, the movement along the line of least resistance, lead to the domination of bourgeois ideology? For the simple reason that bourgeois ideology is far older in origin than socialist ideology, that it is more fully developed, and that it has at its disposal immeasurably more means of dissemination.”

In a footnote [the last paragraph in the previous article, in the 23 June Solidarity] aimed to answer some of the critics of What Is To Be Done, Lenin agrees that “the working class gravitates spontaneously towards socialism… in the sense that socialist theory defines the cause of the misery of the working class more profoundly and more correctly than any other theory, and for that reason the workers are able to appreciate it so easily.” But only, Lenin adds, given the activity of the Marxists, “provided that [Marxist] theory does not step aside for spontaneity, and provided it subordinates spontaneity to itself.”

Lenin now discusses more concretely on the political characteristics of his opponents.

“Rabochaya Mysl does not altogether repudiate the political struggle; the rules for a workers’ mutual benefit fund published in its first issue contain a reference to combating the government.

“Rabochaya Mysl believes, however, that ‘politics always obediently follows economics’ (Rabocheye Dyelo varies this thesis when it asserts in its programme that ‘in Russia more than in any other country, the economic struggle is inseparable from the political struggle’).

“If by politics is meant Social-Democratic [Marxist socialist] politics, then the theses of Rabochaya Mysl and Rabocheye Dyelo are utterly incorrect.”

Lenin is writing long before such 20th century experiences as a Peronist labour movement in Argentina, Stalinist labour movements in many countries, etc, but he understands how such hybrids could develop. The economic struggle of the workers can be linked to anti-Marxist, anti-socialist, bourgeois politics too.

“The economic struggle of the workers is very often connected (although not inseparably) with bourgeois politics, clerical politics, etc., as we have seen.

“Rabocheye Dyelo’s theses are [only] correct, if by politics is meant trade union politics, viz., the common striving of all workers to secure from the government measures for alleviating the distress to which their condition gives rise, but which do not abolish that condition, i.e., which do not remove the subjection of labour to capital.

“That striving indeed is common to the English trade-unionists, who are hostile to socialism, to the Catholic workers, to the [police-run] “Zubatov”

workers [organisation in Russia], etc. There is politics and politics.

“Thus, we see that Rabochaya Mysl does not so much deny the political struggle, as it bows to its spontaneity, to its [lack of scientific socialist] consciousness.

While fully recognising the political struggle (better: the political desires and demands of the workers), which arises spontaneously from the working-class movement itself, Rabochaya Nysl absolutely refuses independently to work out a specifically Social-Democratic politics corresponding to the general tasks of socialism and to present-day conditions in Russia…”

A critic had said of a leading article in Rabochaya Mysl that it had been written in a “sharp and fervent” manner.

“Every man with convictions who thinks he has something new to say writes “fervently” and in such a way as to make his views stand out in bold relief.

“Only those who are accustomed to sitting between two stools lack “fervour”; only such people are able to praise the fervour of Rabochaya Mysl one day and attack the “fervent polemics” of its opponents the next.”

Lenin now discusses the “Appeal of the Self-Emancipation of the Workers Group” (March 1899).

“The authors of the ‘Appeal’ rightly say that ‘the workers of Russia are only just awakening, are just beginning to look about them, and are instinctively clutching at the first available means of struggle’.

“Yet they draw from this the same false conclusion as that drawn by Rabochaya Mysl, forgetting that the instinctive is the unconscious (the spontaneous) to the aid of which socialists must come; that the ‘first available means of struggle’ will always be, in modern society, the trade union means of struggle, and the ‘first available’ ideology the bourgeois ([narrow] trade unionist) ideology…

“The source of [their] confusion is to be found in the ambiguity of the interpretation given to the following thesis of the Rabocheye Dyelo programme:

“We consider that the most important phenomenon of Russian life, the one that will mainly determine the tasks and the character of the publication activity of the union, is the mass working-class movement which has arisen in recent years.”

Lenin now deliniates the Marxist approach to the great spontaneous mass strike movements which the Russian working class had created over the previous decade.

“That the mass movement is a most important phenomenon is a fact not to be disputed. But the crux of the matter is, how is one to understand the

statement that the mass working class movement will ‘determine the tasks’? It may be interpreted in one of two ways.

“Either, it means bowing to the spontaneity of this movement, i.e., reducing the role of Social-Democracy to mere subservience to the working-class [trade-unionist] movement as such (the interpretation of Rabochaya Mysl, the Self -Emancipation Group, and other Economists).

“Or, it means that the mass movement places before us new theoretical, political, and organisational tasks, far more complicated than those that might have satisfied us in the period before the rise of the mass movement.

“Rabocheye Dyelo… has argued constantly as though the ‘mass movement’ relieves us of the necessity of clearly understanding and fulfilling the tasks it sets before us.

“We need only point out that Rabocheye Dyelo considered that it was impossible to set the overthrow of the autocracy as the first [prime] task of the mass working-class movement, and that it degraded this task (in the name of the mass movement) to that of a struggle for immediate political demands (Reply, p. 25).”

In a footnote, Lenin says that the article by B Krichevsky in Rabocheye Dyelo, entitled ‘The Economic Struggle in the Russian Movement’, repeats these mistakes.

“On page 4, Krichevsky, protesting against what he regards as the absolutely unfounded charge of Economist heresy, pathetically exclaims: ‘What Social-Democrat does not know that according to the theories of Marx and Engels the economic interests of certain classes play a decisive role in history, and, consequently, that particularly the proletariat’s struggle for its economic interests must be of paramount importance in its class development and struggle for emancipation?’

“The word ‘consequently’ is completely irrelevant. The fact that economic interests play a decisive role does not in the least imply that the economic (i.e., trade union) struggle is of prime importance; for the most essential, the ‘decisive’ interests of classes can be satisfied only by radical political changes in general.

“In particular the fundamental economic interests of the proletariat can be satisfied only by a political revolution that will replace the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie by the dictatorship of the proletariat. Krichevsky repeats the arguments… that politics follows economics, etc... of the Bernsteinians of German Social-Democracy… that the workers must first of all acquire ‘economic power’ before they can think about political revolution?

Lenin turns to the arguments of Rabocheye Dyelo, No. 10.

“…Rabocheye Dyelo saw a ‘diametrical contradiction’ between the

proposition:

"'Social-Democracy does not, tie its hands, it does not restrict its activities to some one preconceived plan or method of political struggle; it recognises all means of struggle as long as they correspond to the forces at the disposal of the Party,' etc. (Iskra, No. 1.)

"and the proposition:

"'Without a strong organisation skilled in waging political struggle under all circumstances and at all times, there can be no question of that systematic plan of action, illuminated by firm principles and steadfastly carried out, which alone is worthy of the name of tactics' (Iskra, No. 4).

"[This] confuses recognition, in principle, of all means of struggle, of all plans and methods, provided they are expedient, with the demand at a given political moment to be guided by a strictly adhered-to plan...

"Rabocheye Dyelo... has made the remarkable discovery that 'tactics-as-plan contradicts the fundamental spirit of Marxism' (No. 10, p. 18), that tactics are 'a process of growth of Party tasks, which grow together with the Party' (p. 11). This remark has every chance of becoming a celebrated maxim, a permanent monument to the Rabocheye Dyelo 'trend'.

"To the question, whither?... [it] replies: Movement is a process of changing the distance between the starting-point and subsequent points of the movement.

"This matchless example of profundity is not merely a curiosity (were it that, it would not be worth dealing with at length), but the programme of a whole tendency… expressed in [Rabochaya Mysl's] words:

"That struggle is desirable which is possible, and the struggle which is possible is that which is going on at the given moment.

"This is precisely the trend of unbounded opportunism, which passively adapts itself to spontaneity."

Lenin now focuses on the objections raised to the very idea of a worked out plan for developing the movement. Iskra and Zarya have been working to a plan of reorganising the existing Marxist circles around a newspaper published abroad and smuggled into Russia.

"'A tactics plan contradicts the whole spirit of Marxism!' But this is a libel on Marxism. It means turning Marxism into the caricature held up by the Narodniks in their struggle against us.

"It means belittling and restraining the initiative and energy of class-conscious fighters, whereas Marxism, on the contrary, gives a gigantic impetus to the initiative and energy of the Social-Democrat, opens up for him the widest perspectives, and (if one may so express it) places at his disposal the mighty

force of many millions of workers ‘spontaneously’ rising for the struggle.

The entire history of international Social-Democracy teems with plans advanced now by one, now by another political leader, some confirming the far-sightedness and the correct political and organisational views of their authors and others revealing their short-sightedness and their political errors.

“At the time when Germany was at one of the crucial turning-points in its history — the formation of the Empire [in 1871], the opening of the Reichstag, and the granting of universal suffrage — Liebknecht had one plan for Social-Democratic politics and work in general, and Schweitzer had another.”

[Schweitzer, after the death of Ferdinand Lassalle, was the leader of the sect of Lassalleans, who would fuse with the Marxists at the 1875 Congress at Gotha.]

“When the anti-socialist law [1879-1990] came down on the heads of the German socialists, Most and Hasselmann had one plan — they were prepared then and there to call for violence and terror; Hochbert, Schramm, and (partly) Bernstein had another — they began to preach to the Social-Democrats that they themselves had provoked the enactment of the law by being unreasonably bitter and revolutionary, and must now earn forgiveness by their exemplary conduct.

“There was yet a third plan, proposed by those who prepared and carried out the publication [abroad] of an illegal organ.

“…At a time of confusion, when [Russian] Social-Democracy [is being reduced ] to the level of trade-unionism, and when the [populist] terrorists are strongly advocating the adoption of ‘tactics-as-plan’, that repeats the old mistakes; at a time… when many Russian Social-Democrats suffer from a lack of initiative and energy, from an inadequate scope of political propaganda, agitation, and organisation, from a lack of ‘plans’ for a broader organisation of revolutionary work — at such a time, to declare that ‘tactics-as-plan’ contradicts the essence of Marxism means not only to vulgarise Marxism in the realm of theory, but to drag the Party backward in practice.

“Rabocheye Dyelo goes on sermonising:

“‘The task of the revolutionary Social-Democrat is only to accelerate objective development by his conscious work, not to obviate it or substitute his own subjective plans for this development. Iskra knows all this in theory; but the enormous importance which Marxism justly attaches to conscious revolutionary work causes it in practice, owing to its doctrinaire view of tactics, to belittle the significance of the objective or the spontaneous element of development’ (p. 18).

“Another example of [Rabocheye Dyelo’s] extraordinary theoretical confusion... We would ask our philosopher: how may a designer of subjective

plans ‘belittle’ objective development? Obviously by losing sight of the fact that this objective development creates or strengthens, destroys or weakens certain classes, strata, or groups, certain nations or groups of nations, etc., and in this way serves to determine a given international political alignment of forces, or the position adopted by revolutionary parties, etc.

“If the designer of plans did that, his guilt would not be that he belittled the spontaneous element, but, on the contrary, that he belittled the conscious element, for he would then show that he lacked the ‘consciousness’ properly to understand objective development. Hence, the very talk of ‘estimating the relative significance’ (Rabocheye Dyelo’s italics) of spontaneity and consciousness itself reveals a complete lack of ‘consciousness’.

“If certain ‘spontaneous elements of development’ can be grasped at all by human understanding, then an incorrect estimation of them will be tantamount to ‘belittling the conscious element’. But if they cannot be grasped, then we do not know them, and therefore cannot speak of them.”

Now Lenin focuses on the relationship between the “objective” movement and the conscious Marxists.

“What then is Krichevsky discussing? If he thinks that Iskra’s ‘subjective plans’ are erroneous (as he in fact declares them to be), he should have shown what objective facts they ignore, and only then charged Iskra with lacking political consciousness for ignoring them, with ‘belittling the conscious element’, to use his own words.

“If, however, displeased with subjective plans, he can bring forward no argument other than that of ‘belittling the spontaneous element’ (!), he merely shows: (1) that, theoretically, he [mis]understands Marxism; and (2) that, practically, he is quite satisfied with the ‘spontaneous elements of development’ that have drawn our legal Marxists towards Bernsteinism and our Social-Democrats towards Economism, and that he is ‘full of wrath’ against those who have determined at all costs to divert Russian Social-Democracy from the path of ‘spontaneous’ development.

“Further, there follow things that are positively droll. ‘Just as human beings will reproduce in the old-fashioned way despite all the discoveries of natural science, so the birth of a new social order will come about, in the future too, mainly as a result of elemental outbursts, despite all the discoveries of social science and the increase in the number of conscious fighters’ (p. 19).

“Just as our grandfathers in their old-fashioned wisdom used to say, Anyone can bring children into the world, so today the ‘modern socialists’... say in their wisdom, Anyone can participate in the spontaneous birth of a new social order. We too hold that anyone can. All that is required for participation of that kind is to yield to Economism when Economism reigns and to terrorism when terrorism arises…”

Lenin takes his opponents to task for cutting loose from the experience and tradition of the Russian Marxist movement.

“When Iskra ridiculed Rabocheye Dyelo for declaring the question of terror to be new, the latter angrily accused Iskra of ‘having the incredible effrontery to impose upon the Party organisation solutions of tactical questions proposed by a group of emigrant writers more than fifteen years ago’ (p. 24).

“Effrontery. indeed, and what an overestimation of the conscious element — first to resolve questions theoretically beforehand, and then to try to convince the organisation, the Party, and the masses of the correctness of this solution!

“How much better it would be to repeat the elements and, without ‘imposing’ anything upon anybody, swing with every ‘turn’ — whether in the direction of Economism or in the direction of terrorism.

“Rabocheye Dyelo even generalises this great precept of worldly wisdom and accuses Iskra and Zarya of ‘setting up their programme against the movement, like a spirit hovering over the formless chaos’ (p. 29). But what else is the function of Social-Democracy if not to be a ‘spirit’ that not only hovers over the spontaneous movement, but also raises this movement to the level of ‘its programme’?

“Surely, it is not its function to drag at the tail of the movement. At best, this would be of no service to the movement; at worst, it would be exceedingly harmful.

“Rabocheye Dyelo elevates ‘tactics-as-process’ to a principle, so that it would be more correct to describe its tendency not as opportunism, but as tail-ism (from the word tail).

“And it must be admitted that those who are determined always to follow behind the movement and be its tail are absolutely and forever guaranteed against ‘belittling the spontaneous element of development’.”

Lenin sums it up.

“... The fundamental error committed by the ‘new trend’ in Russian Social-Democracy is its bowing to spontaneity and its failure to understand that the spontaneity of the masses demands a high degree of consciousness from us Social-Democrats.

“The greater the spontaneous upsurge of the masses and the more widespread the movement, the more rapid, incomparably so, the demand for greater consciousness in the theoretical, political and organisational work of Social-Democracy.

“The spontaneous upsurge of the masses in Russia proceeded (and continues) with such rapidity that the young Social Democrats proved unprepared to meet these gigantic tasks. This unpreparedness is our

common misfortune, the misfortune of all Russian Social-Democrats.

“The upsurge of the masses [in mass strikes and demonstrations] proceeded and spread with uninterrupted continuity; it not only continued in the places where it began, but spread to new localities and to new strata of the population (under the influence of the working class movement, there was a renewed ferment among the student youth, among the intellectuals generally, and even among the peasantry).

“Revolutionaries, however, lagged behind this upsurge, both in their ‘theories’ and in their activity; they failed to establish a constant and continuous organisation capable of leading the whole movement.”

## Appendix 1: Trotsky: The Russian Populists - Advancing Through Heroism and Agony

By Leon Trotsky

In previous issues of Solidarity, we have outlined in some detail the history of revolutionary populism in 19th-century Russia. We will later discuss the development of the early Marxist critique of this populism and examine the process in which Marxism came in the 1880s and 1890s, in part, to displace populism.

This brilliant and concise account by Leon Trotsky, written in the 1930s, of the history we have covered sums up. It has been abridged from Trotsky's account, in The Young Lenin.

The movement of liberation, before becoming a mass movement toward the end of the [19th] century, passed during its earlier decades through a rich experience on a laboratory scale.

In one of the famous political trials of the 1870s, known as "the case of the 193," the principal defendant, Ippolit Myshkin, advanced the thesis that, after the peasant reform, there had arisen, outside the peasantry itself, "a whole faction prepared to respond to the call of the people, and serving as the nucleus of a social revolutionary party. This faction was the intellectual proletariat".

The decomposition of the feudal society proceeded at a faster pace than the formation of the bourgeoisie. The intelligentsia, a product of the decay of the old classes, found neither an adequate demand for its skills nor a sphere for its political influence. It broke with the nobility, the bureaucracy, the clergy, with their stale culture and serf-owning traditions, but it did not effect a rapprochement with the bourgeoisie, which was still too primitive and crude.

It felt itself to be socially independent, yet at the same time it was choking in the clutches of tsarism. Thus, after the fall of serfdom, the intelligentsia formed almost the sole nutritive medium for revolutionary ideas - especially its younger generation, the poorest of the intellectual youth, university students, seminarians, high-school boys, a majority of them not above the proletariat in their standard of living and many below it.

The state, having need of an intelligentsia, reluctantly created one by means of its schools. The intelligentsia, having need of a reformed regime, became an enemy of the state. The political life of the country thus for a long time assumed the form of a duel between the intelligentsia and the police, with the fundamental classes of society almost entirely passive.

Since the struggle was forced upon the "intellectual proletariat" by its whole situation, it had to have some grand illusions.

Having just broken away in the realm of consciousness from medieval customs and relationships, the intelligentsia naturally regarded ideas as its chief power. In the 1860s [the intelligentsia] embraced a theory according to which the progress of humanity is the result of critical thought. And who could serve better as the representatives of critical thought than itself, the intelligentsia? Frightened, however, by its small numbers and isolation, the intelligentsia was compelled to resort to mimicry, that weapon of the weak. It renounced its own being, in order to gain a greater right to speak and act in the name of the people.

"[T]he people" meant the peasants. The tiny industrial proletariat was only an accidental and unhealthy branch of the people. The Populists' worship of the peasant and his commune was but the mirror image of the grandiose pretensions of the "intellectual proletariat" to the role of chief, if not indeed sole, instrument of progress.

The whole history of the Russian intelligentsia develops between these two poles of pride and self-abnegation - which are the short and the long shadows of its social weakness.

The revolutionary elements of the intelligentsia not only identified themselves theoretically with the people, but tried in actual fact to merge with them. They put on peasants' coats, ate watery soup, and learned to work with plough and axe. This was not a political masquerade, but a heroic exploit. Yet it was founded on a gigantic quid pro quo. The intelligentsia created a "people" in its own image, and that biblical act of creation prepared for it a tragic surprise when the time came for action.

The earliest revolutionary groups set themselves the task of preparing a peasant uprising.

[I]n 1860 in Petersburg, a small underground organization known as "Young

Russia" [was organised]. Its immediate aim was: "a bloody and implacable revolution, which shall radically change the whole foundation of contemporary society."

The government answered with repressive measures whose fury gives the measure of its fright. For attempting to issue a proclamation to the peasants, Chernyshevsky, the famous Russian political writer and genuine leader of the younger generation, was pilloried and condemned to hard labour. By this blow the tsar had hoped, with some reason, to behead the revolutionary movement for some time to come.

On April 4, 1866, the twenty-five-year-old Dimitri Karakozov, a former student from the petty nobility, fired the first bullet at Alexander II as the tsar emerged from the Summer Garden. Karakozov missed the tsar, but ended the "liberal" chapter of Alexander's reign. Attacks on the press, and police invasions of peaceful homes, put fear in the hearts of the liberal circles - none too brave to begin with. The independent elements of the bureaucracy began to fall in line.

Six years elapsed between the first proclamation and the first armed attack on the tsar [1866]. The intelligentsia thus completed, in the dawn of its revolutionary activity, its first small cycle: from the hope for an immediate peasant uprising, through the attempt at propaganda and agitation, to individual terror. Many similar mistakes, experiments, and disappointments lay ahead. But, from the abolition of serfdom [in 1861], begins a unique phenomenon in world history: six decades of underground exploits by a body of revolutionary pioneers leading to the explosions of 1905 and 1917.

Two years after the Karakozov affair, an obscure provincial teacher, Nechayev, instructor in theology in a parish school, one of the mightiest figures in the gallery of Russian revolutionaries, attempted to create a conspiratorial society called "The People's Revenge," or "The Axe." Nechayev arranged for a peasant uprising to occur on the anniversary of the reform, February 19, 1870, when the transitional relations in the villages were, according to the law, to be replaced by permanent ones. But again no insurrection followed. The affair ended with the murder of a student suspected of betrayal. Having escaped abroad, Nechayev was turned over to the tsar by the Swiss Government and ended his days in the Peter and Paul Fortress.

In revolutionary circles the word Nechayevism was long to be a term of harsh condemnation, a synonym for risky and reprehensible methods of attaining revolutionary goals. Lenin was to hear himself accused hundreds of times of "Nechayevist" methods by his political opponents.

The 1870s opened a second cycle in the revolutionary movement, considerably wider in scope and intensity but reproducing in its development the sequence o£ stages already familiar to us: from the hope for a popular uprising and the attempt to prepare it, through clashes with the political police

with the people looking on indifferently, to individual terror.

Nechayev's conspiracy, built wholly upon the dictatorship of a single person, evoked in revolutionary circles a sharp reaction against centralism and blind discipline. Reborn in 1873, after a short calm, the movement took on the character of a chaotic mass pilgrimage of the intelligentsia to the people. Young men and women, most of them former students, numbering about a thousand in all, carried socialist propaganda to all corners of the country, especially to the lower reaches of the Volga, where they sought the legacy of Pugachev and Razin.

This movement, remarkable in scope and youthful idealism, the true cradle of the Russian revolution, was distinguished - as is proper to a cradle - by extreme naïveté. The propagandists had neither a guiding organization nor a clear program; they had no conspiratorial experience. And why should they have? These young people, having broken with their families and schools, without profession, personal ties, or obligations, and without fear either of earthly or heavenly powers, seemed to themselves the living crystalization of a popular uprising. A constitution? Parliamentarism? Political liberty? No, they would not be swerved from the path by these Western decoys.

What they wanted was a complete revolution, without abridgements or intermediate stages.

The theoretical sympathies of the youth were divided between Lavrov and Bakunin. Both these captains of thought had come from the nobility, and they had been educated in the same military schools in Petersburg, Mikhail Bakunin ten years earlier than Pyotr Lavrov. Both ended their lives as émigrés - Bakunin in 1876. Lavrov lived till 1900.

The artillery-school teacher, Colonel Lavrov, an eclectic with an encyclopedic education, began to develop in legal journals his theory of "the critically thinking personality".

His doctrine of duty to the people fitted to perfection the Messianism of the intelligentsia, whose theoretical haughtiness was combined with a constant practical readiness for self-sacrifice. The weakness of Lavrovism lay in its failure to indicate any course of action aside from the abstract propaganda of revealed gospel.

[I]t did not satisfy the more resolute and active among the young. Bakunin's doctrine seemed incomparably more clear, and better still, more resolute. It declared the Russian peasants to be "socialist by instinct and revolutionary by nature". It saw the task of the intelligentsia as a summoning of the peasants to an immediate "universal destruction," out of which Russia would emerge a federation of free communes.

Patient propagandism could only fall back under this assault from integral

rebellion.

In the full armor of Bakuninism, which became the ruling doctrine, the intelligentsia of the 1870s considered it self-evident that they need only scatter the sparks of "critical thought," and both steppe and forest would burst into a sheet of flame.

"The movement of the intelligentsia," Myshkin later testified at his trial, "was not artificially created, but was the echo of popular unrest."

Although in a broad historical sense true, this idea could in no way establish a direct political connection between popular discontent and the revolutionary designs of the rebels. By a fatal combination of circumstances, the rural districts, which had been restless throughout almost the whole of Russian history, quieted down just at the moment when the cities became interested in them, and quieted down for a long time.

The intelligentsia's impassioned, impatient, and powerful attraction toward the peasantry clashed with the peasants' embittered distrust for everything that issued from the gentry, from city folk, from educated people, from students. The villages not only did not open their arms to the propagandists, but repelled them with hostility. This fact decided the dramatic course of the revolutionary movement of the 1870s, and its tragic end.

Only a new generation of peasants, growing up after the reform, was to gain an acute new awareness of its land hunger, its burden of taxation, its oppression as a class, and undertake - this time under the guiding influence of the working class - to smoke out the landlords from their settled nests. But it took a quarter of a century to bring this about.

In any case, the movement "to the people" during the 1870s suffered a complete defeat. Neither the Volga nor the Don, nor yet the Dnieper region responded to the call. Moreover, carelessness in the precautions necessary for illegal work soon betrayed the propagandists. An overwhelming majority of them - more than seven hundred persons - had been arrested by 1874. The public prosecutor conducted two great trials, which are remembered in the history of the revolution as "the case of the 50" and "the case of the 193." The challenge thrown in the face of tsarism by the condemned over the heads of the court stirred the hearts of several generations of the young.

In accord with the populist doctrine, which denied a future to Russian capitalism, the proletariat was assigned no independent role at all in the revolution. It happened accidentally, however, that propaganda, designed in its content for the villages, found a sympathetic response only in the cities. The school of history is rich in pedagogical resources. The movement of the 1870s was perhaps most instructive in the fact that a program carefully cut to the pattern of a peasant revolution succeeded in assembling only the intelligentsia and some individual industrial workers. This exposed the

bankruptcy of Populism and prepared the first theoretical elements of its revision.

But before arriving at a realistic doctrine grounded upon the actual trends within society, the revolutionary intelligentsia had to experience the Golgotha of the terrorist struggle.

[T]he fierce governmental assault on the propagandists of the first line - years of pretrial detention, decades at hard labor, physical violence, insanity, and suicide - awakened a burning desire to pass from words to action. But how else could the immediate "work" of small circles express itself than in isolated blows at the most hated representatives of the regime? Terrorist moods began to make their way more and more insistently.

On January 24, 1878, a solitary young girl shot the Petersburg chief of police, Trepov, who had recently ordered a prisoner, Bogolyubov, subjected to corporal punishment. This pistol shot of Vera Zasulich - twenty years later Lenin was to work on the same editorial staff with this remarkable woman - was merely the instinctive expression of a passionate indignation. Yet in this gesture lay the seed of a whole political system.

A half year later on the streets of Petersburg, Kravchinsky, a man equally skilled with pen and dagger, killed the all-powerful chief of gendarmes, Mezentsev. Here, too, it was a matter of avenging slaughtered comrades in arms. But Kravchinsky was no longer a loner; he acted as a member of a revolutionary organization.

The "colonies" scattered among the people had need of leadership. A little experience of the actual struggle overcame their prejudices against centralism and discipline, which had seemed somewhat tinged with "Nechayevism." The provincial groups readily adhered to the newly formed centre, and thus from selected elements was formed the organization called Land and Freedom, a body of revolutionary Populists truly admirable in the composition and solidarity of its cadres.

But alas, the attitude of these Populists toward the people, who were proving so unsympathetic to the bloody sacrifices of the revolutionaries, became more and more touched with skepticism. Zasulich and Kravchinsky seemed by their example to be summoning their followers to seize weapons and, without awaiting the masses, rise immediately in defense of themselves and their own. Half a year later, after the murder of Mezentsev, a young aristocrat, Mirsky - this time on the direct decision of the party - shot at Drenteln, the new chief, but missed!

In the spring of 1879, Alexander Solovyov proposed to kill the tsar.

The leaders of Land and Freedom hesitated. This terrorist leap into the unknown frightened them. The party refused its sanction, but this did not stop

Solovyov. On April 2 [1879], in Winter Palace Square, he fired three shots from a revolver at Alexander II. This attempt was unsuccessful; the tsar escaped unharmed. The government, of course, came down with a new hail of reprisals upon the press and the youth of the country.

The attempt of Solovyov, which Land and Freedom found it impossible to disavow, did not remain, like the shot of Karakozov, an isolated act. Systematic terror became the order of the day.

In June 1879, breaking with the group of orthodox Populists who refused to forsake the villages, Land and Freedom shed its skin and entered the political arena as the People's Will. To be sure, in its manifesto the new party did not renounce propaganda among the masses. On the contrary, it decided to devote two thirds of the party funds to it, and only one third to terror. But this decision remained a symbolic tribute to the past. The revolutionary chemists had no difficulty in explaining in those days that dynamite and nitroglycerine, widely popularized by the Russo-Turkish War, could be easily prepared at home. The die was cast.

At the same moment, propaganda having disappointed all expectations, was once and for all replaced by terror and the revolver, having revealed its inadequacy, was replaced by dynamite. The whole organization was reconstructed to answer the needs of terrorist struggle. All forces and all funds were devoted to the preparation of assassinations. The "villagers" among the revolutionaries felt utterly forgotten in their faraway comers.

[Those who resisted this turn, amongst them Plekhanov] tried in vain to create an independent organization, the Black Redistribution (Cherny Peredel), which was, however, destined to become a bridge to Marxism and had no independent political significance. The turn to terror was irreversible.

The programmatic announcements of the revolutionaries were revised to correspond with the demands of the new method of struggle.

Land and Freedom had spread the doctrine that a constitution was in itself harmful to the people, that political freedom ought to be one of the by-products of a social revolution. The People's Will acknowledged that the achievement of political liberty is a necessary precondition for social revolution. Land and Freedom had tried to see in terror a mere signal for action given to the oppressed masses from above. The People's Will set itself the task of achieving a revolution by terrorist "disorganization" of the government.

What had been at first a semi-instinctive act of revenge for victimized comrades, was converted by the course of events into a self-contained system of political struggle. Thus the intelligentsia, isolated from the people and at the same time pushed forward into the historic vanguard by the whole course of events, tried to offset its social weakness by multiplying it with the

explosive force of dynamite. It converted the chemistry of destruction into a political alchemy.

Together with the change of tasks and methods, the centre of gravity of the work was abruptly shifted from village to city, from the cities to the capital. The headquarters of the revolution must henceforth directly oppose the headquarters of the government. At the same time, the psychological makeup of the revolutionary was altered altered and even his external appearance. With the disappearance of his naïve faith in the people, his carelessness with regard to conspiracy became a thing of the past, too. The revolutionary pulled himself together, became more cautious, more attentive, more resolute. Each day he was faced anew with mortal dangers. For self-defense he carried a dagger in his belt, a revolver in his pocket. People who two or three years before had been learning the shoemaker's or carpenter's trade in order to merge with the people, were now studying the art of assembling and throwing bombs and shooting on the run. The warrior replaced the apostle. While the rural propagandist had dressed almost in rags in order to resemble "the people" more closely, this urban revolutionary tried to be outwardly indistinguishable from the well-to-do, educated city dweller.

Yet striking as was the change that took place in these few short years, it was easy enough, under both disguises, to recognize the same old "nihilist." Dressed in a worn-out coat, he had not been one of the people; in the costume of a gentleman, he was not a bourgeois. A social apostate seeking to explode the old society, he was compelled to adopt the protective coloration now of one and now of the other of its two poles.

The revolutionary path of the intelligentsia thus gradually becomes clear to us. Having begun with a theoretical self-deification under the name of "critical thought", it then renounced itself in the name of a merger with the people, in order, after that failed, once more to arrive at a practical self-deification personified by the terrorist Executive Committee. Critical thought implanted itself in bombs, whose mission was to turn over the destinies of the country to a handful of socialists. So it was written, at least, in the official program of the People's Will.

In fact, the renunciation of the mass struggle converted socialist aims into a subjective illusion. The only reality remaining was the tactic of frightening the monarchy by bombs, with the sole prospect of winning constitutional liberties. In their objective role, yesterday's anarchist rebels, who would not hear of bourgeois democracy, had become today's armed squadron in the service of liberalism. History has ways of putting the obstreperous in their place. Her agenda called not for anarchism, but political liberty.

The police caught them and hanged them unfailingly. From August 1878 to December l879, seventeen revolutionaries were hanged for two governmental

victims. There remained nothing to do but give up striking at individual state dignitaries, and concentrate the entire strength of the party on the tsar.

It is impossible even now, at a half century's distance, not to be struck by the energy, courage, and organizational talent of this handful of fighters. The political leader and orator Zhelyabov, the scientist and inventor Kibalchich, women such as Perovskaya and Figner, peerless in their moral fortitude, were the cream of the intelligentsia, the flower of a generation. They knew how, and taught others how, to subordinate themselves completely to a freely chosen goal. Insurmountable obstacles seemed not to exist for these heroes who had signed a pact with death.

Before destroying them, the terror gave them a superhuman endurance. They would dig tunnels under a railroad track down which the tsar's train was to roll; and then under a street that his carriage was to pass through; they would climb into the tsar's palace with a load of dynamite - as did the worker Khalturin - and set it off.

On March 1, 1881, on a street of the capital, after the young man Rysakov had missed his aim, another young man, Grinevitsky, throwing a second bomb of the Kibalchich make, killed himself and Alexander II simultaneously. This time a blow was struck at the very heart of the regime. But it soon appeared that the People's Will itself was to burn up in the fire of that successful terror.

The strength of the party was concentrated almost entirely in its Executive Committee. The terrorist struggle, at least, including the work of technical preparation, was carried on exclusively by members of the central staff.

How many of these fighters were there? The numbers are now known beyond a doubt. The first Executive Committee consisted of twenty-eight persons. Up to the first of March, 1881, the general membership, never all active at once, comprised thirty-seven persons.

[But i]t seemed as though the mysterious party had legions of fighters at its command. The Executive Committee carefully cultivated this hypnotic belief in its omnipotence. But one cannot hold out long on hypnosis alone. Moreover, the reserves dried up with unexpected swiftness.

Their heroism undoubtedly did evoke emulation. Very likely, there was no shortage of young men and women ready to blow themselves up along with their bombs. But there was now no one to unite and guide them. The party was disintegrating.

By its very nature, the terror expended the forces supplied to it during the propaganda period long before it could create new ones. "We are using up our capital," said the leader of the People's Will, Zhelyabov. To be sure, the trial of the assassins of the tsar evoked a passionate response in the hearts

of individual young people. Although Petersburg was soon swept all too clean by the police, People's Will groups continued to spring up in various provinces until 1885. However, this did not go to the point of a new wave of terror. Having burned their fingers, the great majority of the intelligentsia recoiled from the revolutionary fire.

It was no better with the liberals, to whom the terrorists, after turning from the peasantry, were looking with more and more hope.

[Frightened,] the liberals hastened to discover in the People's Will not an ally, but the chief obstacle on the road to constitutional reforms. In the words of the most leftist of the[m], I I Petrunkevich, the acts of the terrorists only "frightened society and infuriated the government."

Thus, the more deafeningly the dynamite exploded, the more complete became the vacuum that surrounded the Executive Committee, which had once arisen out of a relatively broad movement of the intelligentsia. No guerrilla detachment can long hold out amid a hostile population. No underground group can function without a screen of sympathizers. Political isolation finally exposed the terrorists to the police, who with growing success mopped up both the remnants of the old groups and the germs of the new. The liquidation of People's Will by a series of arrests and trials proceeded rapidly, against the background of the reactionary backlash of the 1880s.

Appendix 2:

What was the Bolsheviks' conception of the 1917 revolution?

[An Introduction to "Trotsky's 3 Conceptions…", published in Socialist Organiser at the time of the collapse of Stalinist Russia.]

The erstwhile rulers of the Stalinist system — which they said was the realisation of socialism — are now working openly for the restoration of capitalism. So are most of those they rule, and in the first place the working class.

The people trapped inside the Stalinist system have been kept for decades in political, economic and intellectual slavery to the bureaucratic state. Now the iron bands have been loosened, and they look to the bourgeois democracies of Western Europe with famished shining eyes, thinking they see here the ideal society of freedom and prosperity.

Not so very long ago, tens of millions of West European workers, like millions of workers throughout the world, looked to Stalin's and Khrushchev's USSR and thought they saw there the model of working-class freedom and prosperity. But it is capitalism which has survived and kept possession of the

world’s advanced economies. Stalinism has withered and is dying.

They tell us it is socialism and Marxism that is dying now, dying discredited, in a storm of curses from its victims, interspersed with which can be heard the gleeful cackling of the triumphant bourgeoisie.

And if what existed in the Stalinist states was socialism — socialism in any shape or degree, socialism in its “first stage” or in any of its stages — then socialism is indeed dead, and it deserves to be dead. It should have died a long time ago!

The question is: was it socialism? Part of the difficulty in answering that question is that the very words are worn away. They have long ago lost their meaning.

What is socialism? Yes, on one level, Stalinism was “socialism”. It has for decades been the “actually existing socialism”. What Stalinism was, that is what “socialism” and “communism” have been. But word-juggling like that does not tell us very much. We need to go behind the words.

Socialism, child of capitalism

Our aim, the aim of authentic socialism, is the emancipation of the proletariat from wage-slavery and state tyranny by the creation of a democratically organised common property in the means of production, and by the destruction of the bureaucratic state which is typical of all modern class societies, including the bourgeois democracies like Britain. Such a society presupposes a high level of economic development; it presupposes there being more than enough for everyone of the basics of life.

According to the reasoning we find in the classics of Marxism such a society can only be brought into existence by a victory of the working class over the bourgeoisie in the class struggle which is a normal and prominent part of capitalist society. (For the last decade in Britain, Margaret Thatcher has waged a bitter and unrelenting class struggle, using the state machine as her stronghold, on behalf of the bosses against the working class).

For Marx and Engels, the founders of modern socialism, and for all their followers, including those of them who led the Russian working class to power in 1917, this meant that socialism was impossible in a country as backward and underdeveloped as Russia was in 1917. Socialism had to be the child of advanced capitalism, or it would never exist.

Socialism could not come before advanced capitalism, or grow up in parallel to it. The idea that socialists leading a tiny working class in a nation of peasants could seize power and then over decades develop a socialist economy in competition with advanced capitalism — that would have been dismissed as lunacy by all the Marxist classics, including Lenin and Trotsky in 1917 and after. They would have pigeon-holed it with utopian-socialist colony

building and with the idea that the working class can displace the bourgeoisie by setting up cooperatives to compete with them.

The working class had to win state power in the most advanced capitalist countries, as well as in the less-developed world with which the advanced countries are economically entwined — that is, make an international revolution — or there would be no socialism.

Yet, you may say, Lenin and Trotsky and their comrades did make a socialist working class revolution in backward Russia! And so they plainly broke with the idea that socialism had to be the offspring of the most advanced capitalism.

No, they didn't! Lenin and Trotsky never believed Russia was ripe for socialism. They knew and repeatedly said the very opposite. They did believe, and prove in practice, that Russia was ripe for a workers' revolution. That is not the same thing.

Because of the collapse in World War I of the rotten old Tsarist order, the workers were able to seize power despite Russia's lack of ripeness for socialism. But Russia did not become ripe for socialism by virtue of the working class seizing power. On the contrary, the civil war and foreign invasions which followed the revolution wrecked the Russian economy and dispersed the working class itself, and thus made Russia less ripe for socialism than when the Bolsheviks seized power.

Russia's isolation

So then, was the Bolshevik revolution a crazy kamikaze adventure by Lenin and Trotsky and their comrades, a foredoomed gesture? No. They believed that the seizure of power by the Russian workers would help trigger workers' revolutions in the West, in the advanced countries such as Britain and Germany and France, which were ripe for socialism. The Russian workers could begin: but the workers of the West would have to "finish". The Russians could only propose, the working class in the West would dispose.

In fact the workers in Germany, Italy, Austria and Hungary did rise, and in Hungary and Bavaria they briefly held power. Either they were defeated, or, as in Germany, their leaders sold out to the bourgeoisie.

Having seized power, the small and depleted Russian working class was isolated in control of a vast country, large swathes of which were economically and socially pre-capitalist. From 1921, they were forced to allow a regrowth of small-scale capitalism, under the control of the workers' state. Having boldly proclaimed the need to destroy the bureaucratic-military state, they were forced in self-defence (14 states, including Britain invaded the workers' republic!) to create a vast bureaucratic-military state. It bulked all the larger in a backward society where the old ruling class had been swept away

and the working class itself had been dispersed and uprooted by civil-war, famine and invasion.

Out of the state bureaucracy soon crystallised a layer, led by Stalin, which secured for itself ever-growing privileges. They allied with the small-capitalist class, newly regrown under the New Economic Policy after 1921, against those, led by Leon Trotsky, who remained loyal to socialism. Because the working class itself had been pulverised, the Stalinists defeated those Bolsheviks who remained Bolsheviks, the Trotskyists.

At an early stage (1923-25) the struggle between Stalinists and Trotskyists had centred around, focused on, political questions. At the heart of the ideological dispute was the question of the nature and perspectives of the Russian Revolution.

The Trotskyists held to the ideas on which the Bolsheviks had made the revolution. Russia was not ripe for socialism, and socialism could not be built in such conditions. The Russian revolution would be destroyed and capitalism restored unless the international working-class revolution, begun in October 1917 in Russia, could be spread to the advanced countries. The fate of the Russian revolution itself would depend on the world revolution.

Those were no more than the elementary ideas of Marxism. But as Stalin gained power, they became the property of a small, persecuted rearguard of those who called themselves Marxists and Leninists.

"Socialism in one country”

From 1924 the Stalinists proclaimed “Socialism in One Country” as the “realistic” approach. Not only could the Russian revolution survive indefinitely in isolation: socialism, they said, could be built there, in parallel to the vastly more advanced capitalist countries, which it would overtake and surpass. Without, of course, acknowledging it, they thus broke with all the basic ideas of Marxian socialism. For world revolution was substituted the task of developing the Soviet economy.

For the Communist Parties outside the USSR this would mean subordinating everything to helping Stalin’s foreign policy secure the conditions for the peaceful development of the one and only socialist country. It led to such horrors as the peaceful surrender of the powerful German Communist Party to Hitler, and the Stalinists’ bloody suppression and destruction of working-class socialism during the Spanish Civil War. But that is a different aspect of the story.

Paradoxically, in the mid ‘20s, while the Stalinists were still allying with the new bourgeoisie against the working class and the Trotskyists, it was Trotsky who made serious proposals for making the best of a temporary peace to build up the economy. The Stalinists, and their allies, Bukharin and his

followers, scoffed.

In 1928-9 the Stalinist state broke with the bourgeoisie and forcibly collectivised the urban and rural economy, with enormous speed and brutality, and at a terrible cost in lost and ruined lives and in economic destruction. Agriculture has never to this day recovered. The bureaucracy was cutting out its bourgeois rival and making itself sole “master of the surplus product” [Trotsky]. For the next sixty years the bureaucracy would lord it over the working class, having crushed the bourgeoisie.

The new Stalinist “model”

In what relationship did Stalin’s social system — which would be replicated in Eastern Europe after the defeat of Hitler in 1945, and then in China, Vietnam, Cuba, etc. — stand to the perspectives and conceptions of Marxian socialism, of Bolshevism?

It was its radical opposite at every important point. The working class was not the ruling class. On the contrary, in the ‘30s and ‘40s it was reduced to something like slavery — and many millions of workers were brought to outright slavery, in the labour camps — by an all-powerful terroristic state.

This was no self-regulating society. It had neither the spontaneous self-regulation of the free market, nor the conscious and deliberate socialist self regulation of free self-determining citizens. The political will of the bureaucracy regulated and ruled, limited only by material constraints and the passive resistance of its victims. The bureaucracy took to itself the privileges of old ruling classes, and administered society by crude planning enforced by indescribably savage police-state terror.

The Stalinist state was markedly autarkic, geared to economic development “in one country” — exceptionally so even in the 1930s’ dislocated world of closed-off empires and economic blocs. At its core was the project of economic self-development from its own resources. The later, smaller, Stalinist states would ludicrously follow the example of would-be autarky set by Stalin in the vastness of Russia.

The development of backward countries by way of an economic forced march organised by an all-powerful terrorist state now became the dominant, the core idea on a world scale of what was “socialism”.

It could neither have sufficient access to the fruits of the most advanced capitalist techniques — that is, build on the achievements of capitalism — nor develop its own advanced technique (except, using German scientists, in freak episodes like its rocketry in the 1950s and 60s). The stifling bureaucratic system on which the ruling class depended worked against science and intellectual freedom.

Despite the economic achievements of Stalinism in crude industrialisation,

the USSR and the rest remained cut off from the dynamic advanced sectors of the world economy which the bourgeoisie had created after World War 2 — those which, according to unfalsified Marxism, had to be the take-off point for building socialism.

The USSR, and its duplicate societies, thus ceased to have anything to do with working-class political power.

But whatever label you gave them — degenerated and deformed workers' states, bureaucratic collectivist, state-capitalist — the Stalinist societies continued to have the essential relationship to the world capitalist economy heralded by Stalin with his notion of building "socialism in one country". They would grow up in parallel to capitalism, competing with it as an alternative system. The totalitarian states were everywhere the creators of great political and economic barrier reefs to wall off their societies from the inevitable consequences of normal market relations between the advanced (capitalist) world and their own world.

Had capitalism continued in its free spiralling decline of the '30s, then the Stalinist systems might have become a stable new form of society. That was what Trotsky feared was happening, and, later, people like Max Shachtman believed had happened. But capitalism, after having reduced large areas of the globe to ruins in World War 2, revived and thrived. The Stalinist states became a backward appendage to the dynamic economies of the world, developing less fast, stifled by bureaucracy, and unable to create their own advanced technology. The ill-formed ruling classes sank into paralysis, without even the control of their societies given to Stalin by his unbridled terror.

The result, too long delayed, is the tremendous collapse we see unfolding now, with all its initial horrors and tragedy for the people of the Stalinist states.

It has nothing to do with socialism. The Stalinist phenomenon was only a social mutation arising out of the defeat of the Russian working class in the 1920s by the Stalinist bureaucracy, allied then to the weak Russian bourgeoisie.

The very model of fully collectivised property came not from socialism but from Stalin's struggle after 1928 on behalf of the bureaucracy to stop the spontaneous growth of petty capitalists as competitors with the bureaucracy for the surplus product. Yet, in so far as the Stalinist states retained their typical peculiar relation to world capitalism, they fell under the self-same laws according to which Trotsky ruled out "socialism in one country".

You cannot overthrow or supersede advanced capitalism by developing a backward country in competition with it. The workers in power could not do that, and the Stalinist rulers who overthrew the workers couldn't do it, even with the most savage super-exploitation of the working class. That is what the

collapse of European Stalinism means.

I repeat: this had nothing to do with socialism. Workers' power was destroyed in the USSR long ago. Immense confusion has been caused by the form of its destruction: not the restoration of the bourgeoisie but the rule of an exploiting class ensconced in the state apparatus and based on collectivised economy. Because they had political power, the bureaucrats warded off the pressures of world capitalism for decades, trying to build "their own" society.

The laws of history

They seemed to defy the Marxist laws of history. They seemed the living and developing refutation of the Marxist view that force, brute force, though force can be the midwife of a society ripe with revolution, could not fundamentally shape the course of history.

Now the laws of history which Stalin denied have caught up with Stalinism.

For socialists that is good. The underlying realities are stripped bare. The counterfeit "socialism" of the bureaucrats ("developmentalism") has truthfully declared itself bankrupt. The bureaucrats are trying to become capitalists.

Nothing socialist is lost, because in the USSR the possibility of socialism without a new workers' revolution was lost sixty years ago. Much is gained — the freeing of socialism from confusion and from horrible associations.

Right now there is a mass stampede away from discredited "socialism": but the ground is being cleared for real socialism and unfalsified Marxism.

This collapse of Stalinism vindicates Marxism — the Marxism proclaimed by the Bolsheviks when they insisted that the Russian revolution would live or die by the world revolution, the Marxism defended by Trotsky against the barbarous nonsense of "socialism in one country". Nothing socialist or Marxist is lost; much is gained.

The collapse of Stalinism vindicates the calculation and perspectives of Lenin and Trotsky and those who led the workers to power in 1917. It has taken a long time — after decades of the Stalinist cul-de-sac social system, walled off from the surrounding world by the Stalinist state power — for the fundamental world realities to make themselves felt. But History does not cheat itself.

Bourgeois triumphalism and the mass renegacy from even nominal socialism of the Stalinists and their fellow-travellers does, of course, exert a great pressure now on all socialists. It presses down even on the Trotskyists, although our version of Marxism is vindicated — the Marxism defending which many thousands of our comrades have died, in a struggle to the death with the murderous Stalinist counterfeit in the Soviet Union, in China, in Spain, and elsewhere.

In the late 1930s C L R James, talking to Trotsky, asked: how is it possible,

comrade Trotsky, that you were right about the German revolution of 1923, the British general strike of 1926, the Chinese revolution in 1927, Hitler's rise to power, and the Spanish Civil War — and yet we are still a tiny, isolated, persecuted little group?

Trotsky replied that to be right is not enough. If your ideas do not prevail, and if as a result the German, Chinese, British, Spanish workers go down to crushing defeat, then being right does not protect you from the general defeat of the class. The defeated movement declines, and we go down: with it. We cannot rise higher than the class whose vigour, elan and combativity are so central and irreplaceable and all-conditioning for our politics. Worse: experience shows that working-class defeat strengthens incumbent bureaucracies and thus further isolates the revolutionaries.

So it is now. The reformists are strengthened, though it was the reformists' treason to the Russian revolutionary workers and to their own working classes in Western Europe which isolated and defeated the heroic Russian working class. The Trotskyists too share the pressure of the general disillusionment and collapse now.

We have the advantage, however, now as in the past, that we can understand what is happening as Marxists; and because of that we can resist the disillusionment. We can prepare the future.

The future, like the past and the present, will be a world of class struggle, and in those struggles socialists will be able to convince the working class to fight for the programme and the perspective of genuine Marxism. Already in the Stalinist states, where the working class has great cause to hate "socialism", and does hate "socialism", the class struggle is rising. The workers will outgrow their confusion. On the ground scorched and polluted by Stalinism, the fresh green shoots of new working class life are already visible.

[1990]

## Appendix 3: Three Conceptions of the Russian Revolution

An article by Trotsky from 1940. (Glossary at the end).

The revolution of 1905 was not only the "dress rehearsal of 1917"; it was also the laboratory from which all the basic groupings of Russian political thought emerged and where all the tendencies and shadings within Russian Marxism took shape or acquired their outlines. The center of the disputes and differences was naturally occupied by the question of the historical character of the Russian revolution and its future paths of development.

In and of itself this war of conceptions and prognoses does not relate directly to the biography of Stalin, who took no independent part in it. Those few propaganda articles which he wrote on the subject are without the slightest theoretical interest. Scores of Bolsheviks, with pens in hand, popularized the very same ideas and did so much more ably.

A critical exposition of the revolutionary conception of Bolshevism should, in the very nature of things, have entered into a biography of Lenin. [However, that did not come about.]

Theories have a fate of their own. In the period of the first revolution and after it, up to 1923, when revolutionary doctrines were being elaborated and put into practice, Stalin generally held no independent position. But beginning in 1924, the situation changed abruptly. An era of bureaucratic reaction opened up, with drastic reevaluations of the past. The film of the revolution began to run backward. Old doctrines were subjected to new appraisals or new interpretations. Quite unexpectedly, at first sight, the center of attention was focused on the conception of “permanent revolution” as the fountainhead of all the alleged blunderings of “Trotskyism.” For a number of years, the criticism of this conception constituted the main content of the theoretical—sit venio verbo (if one may use that term)—work of Stalin and his collaborators. It may be said that the whole of Stalinism, taken on the theoretical plane, grew out of the criticism of the theory of permanent revolution, as it was first formulated in 1905. For this reason, an exposition of the theory of permanent revolution, as distinct from the theories of the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, cannot fail to enter into this book [Stalin: An Appraisal of the Man and His Influence], even if in the form of an appendix.

The development of Russia is characterized first of all by backwardness. Historical backwardness does not, however, mean that a simple reproduction of the development of advanced countries will occur, with merely a delay of one or two centuries. Backwardness engenders an entirely new “combined” social formation, in which the most modern advances of capitalist technology and structure are introduced [vnedryayutsa] in the midst of feudal relations and those of prefeudal barbarism, transforming and subjecting those older social relations and creating a unique new interrelationship of classes. The same thing applies in the realm of ideas. Precisely because of its historical tardiness, Russia turned out to be the only European country where Marxism as a doctrine and the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party attained powerful development even before the bourgeois revolution. It is only natural therefore that it was precisely in Russia that the problem of the correlation between the struggle for democracy and the struggle for socialism was subjected to the most profound theoretical analysis.

The idealist democrats, chiefly the Narodniks, superstitiously refused to acknowledge that the coming revolution would be bourgeois. They labeled it

“democratic,” seeking through this neutral political formula to mask its social content—not only from others but also from themselves. But in the struggle against Narodism, Plekhanov, the founder of Russian Marxism, established as long ago as the early 1880s that Russia had no reason whatever to expect a privileged path of development, that like other “profane” nations, it would have to pass through the purgatory of capitalism and that precisely along this path it would acquire the political freedom indispensable for the further struggle of the proletariat for socialism.

Plekhanov not only separated the bourgeois revolution as a historical task from the socialist revolution—which he postponed to the indefinite future—but he depicted entirely different combinations of forces for each of these “stages” [the “bourgeois stage” and the socialist one]. Political freedom was to be achieved by the proletariat in alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie. Then after many decades, and on a higher level of capitalist development, the proletariat would carry out the socialist revolution in direct struggle against the bourgeoisie.

Lenin, in turn, wrote the following at the end of 1904: “To the Russian intellectual it always seems that to acknowledge our revolution as bourgeois is to deprive it of color, to degrade and debase it... For the proletariat [in contrast to the intelligentsia] the struggle for political freedom and for the democratic republic in bourgeois society is simply a necessary stage in the struggle for the socialist revolution.”

“Marxists are absolutely convinced,” Lenin wrote in 1905, “of the bourgeois character of the Russian revolution. What does this mean? This means that those democratic transformations which have become indispensable for Russia do not, in and of themselves, signify the undermining of capitalism, the undermining of bourgeois rule, but on the contrary they clear the soil, for the first time and in a real way, for a broad and swift, for a European and not an Asiatic development of capitalism. They will make possible for the first time the rule of the bourgeoisie as a class...

“We cannot leap over the bourgeois democratic framework of the Russian revolution,” Lenin insisted. “But we can extend this framework to a colossal degree,” that is, establish much more favorable conditions within bourgeois society for the future struggle of the proletariat. Within these limits Lenin followed Plekhanov. The bourgeois character of the revolution served both factions of the Russian Social Democracy [Bolsheviks and Mensheviks] as their starting point.

It is quite natural that under these conditions, Koba (Stalin), in his propagandistic writings, did not go beyond the popularizing formulas that constituted the common property of Bolsheviks as well as Mensheviks.

“The Constituent Assembly,” he wrote in January 1905, “elected on the basis

of equal, direct, and secret universal suffrage—this is what we must now fight for! Only such an Assembly will give us the democratic republic, so urgently needed by us for our struggle for socialism." The bourgeois republic as an arena for a protracted class struggle for the socialist goal—that is his perspective.

In 1907, i.e., after innumerable discussions in the press both in St. Petersburg and abroad and after a serious testing of theoretical prognoses in the experiences of the first revolution, Stalin wrote:

"That our revolution is bourgeois, that it must conclude by destroying the feudal and not the capitalist order, that it can be crowned only by the democratic republic—on this, it seems, all are agreed in our party."

Stalin spoke not of what the revolution begins with, but of what it ends with, and he limited it in advance and quite categorically to "only the democratic republic." We would seek in vain in his writings for even a hint of any perspective of a socialist revolution in connection with a democratic overturn. This remained his position even at the beginning of the February revolution in 1917, before Lenin's arrival in St. Petersburg [in April 1917].

For Plekhanov, Axelrod, and the leaders of Menshevism in general, the sociological characterization of the revolution as bourgeois was valuable politically above all because it prohibited in advance any danger of provoking the bourgeoisie by the specter of socialism and "repelling" it into the camp of reaction. "The social relations of Russia have ripened only for the bourgeois revolution," said the chief tactician of Menshevism, Axelrod, at the Unity Congress [in Stockholm, Sweden, in April 1906]. "In the face of the universal deprivation of political rights in our country there cannot even be talk of a direct battle between the proletariat and other classes for political power… The proletariat is fighting for conditions of bourgeois development. The objective historical conditions make it the destiny of our proletariat to inescapably collaborate with the bourgeoisie in the struggle against the common enemy." The content of the Russian revolution was thus limited in advance to those transformations which are compatible with the interests and views of the liberal bourgeoisie.

It is precisely at this point that the basic disagreement between the two factions began. Bolshevism absolutely refused to accept the notion that the Russian bourgeoisie was capable of leading its own revolution through to the end. With infinitely greater power and consistency than Plekhanov, Lenin advanced the agrarian question as the central problem of the democratic overturn in Russia. "The crux of the Russian revolution," he repeated, "is the agrarian question, the question of the land. Conclusions concerning the defeat or victory of the revolution must be based…on the calculation of the condition of the masses in the struggle for land." Together with Plekhanov,

Lenin viewed the peasantry as a petty-bourgeois class; the peasant land program as a program of bourgeois progress.

“Nationalization [of the land] is a bourgeois measure,” he insisted at the Unity Congress. “It will give an impulse to the development of capitalism; it will sharpen the class struggle, strengthen the mobilization [intensify the utilization] of the land, cause an influx of capital into agriculture, lower the price of grain.” Notwithstanding the indubitable bourgeois character of the agrarian revolution, however, the Russian bourgeoisie remained hostile to the expropriation of landed estates, and precisely for this reason it strove toward a compromise with the monarchy on the basis of a constitution on the Prussian pattern. To Plekhanov’s idea of an alliance between the proletariat and the liberal bourgeoisie Lenin counterposed the idea of an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry. The task of the revolutionary collaboration of these two classes he proclaimed to be the establishment of a “democratic dictatorship,” as the only means of radically cleansing Russia of feudal rubbish, of creating a free farmers’ system and clearing the road for the development of capitalism along American and not Prussian lines.

The victory of the revolution, he wrote, can be crowned “only by a dictatorship because the accomplishment of transformations immediately and urgently needed by the proletariat and the peasantry will evoke the desperate resistance of the landlords, the big bourgeoisie, and the tsarist regime. Without the dictatorship it will be impossible to break the resistance and repel counterrevolutionary attempts. But this will of course not be a socialist dictatorship, but a democratic dictatorship. It will not be able to touch (without a whole series of transitional stages of revolutionary development) the foundations of capitalism. It will be able, in the best case, to realize a radical redistribution of landed property in favor of the peasantry, introduce a consistent and complete democratic system, going so far as the establishment of a republic, rooting out all Asiatic and feudal features not only from the day-to-day life of the village but also of the factory, beginning to seriously improve workers’ conditions and raise their living standards and, last but not least, carry over the revolutionary conflagration to Europe.”

Lenin’s conception represented an enormous step forward insofar as it proceeded not from constitutional reforms but from the agrarian overturn as the central task of the revolution and singled out the only realistic combination of social forces for its accomplishment. The weak point of Lenin’s conception, however, was the internally contradictory idea of “the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.” Lenin himself underscored the fundamental limitation of this “dictatorship” when he openly called it “bourgeois.” By this he meant to say that for the sake of preserving its alliance with the peasantry the proletariat would in the coming revolution have to forego the direct posing of socialist tasks. But this would signify the renunciation by the proletariat of its

own dictatorship. Consequently, the gist of the matter involved the dictatorship of the peasantry, even if with the participation of the workers. On certain occasions Lenin said just this. For example, at the Stockholm Congress [that is, the same “Unity Congress” of 1906 mentioned above], in refuting Plekhanov, who came out against the “utopia” of seizing power, Lenin said: “What program is under discussion? The agrarian. Who is assumed to seize power under this program? The revolutionary peasantry.” Is Lenin mixing up the power of the proletariat with that of the peasantry? No, he says, referring to himself: Lenin sharply differentiated the socialist power of the proletariat from the bourgeois democratic power of the peasantry. “But how,” he exclaimed again, “is a victorious peasant revolution possible without the seizure of power by the revolutionary peasantry?” In this polemical formula Lenin revealed with special clarity the vulnerability of his position.

The peasantry is dispersed over the surface of an enormous country whose key junctions are the cities. The peasantry itself is incapable of even formulating its own interests inasmuch as in each district these appear differently. The economic link between the provinces is created by the market and the railways, but both the market and the railways are in the hands of the cities. In seeking to tear itself away from the restrictions of the village and to generalize its own interests, the peasantry inescapably falls into political dependence upon the city. Finally, the peasantry is heterogeneous in its social relations as well: the kulak stratum naturally seeks to swing the peasantry toward an alliance with the urban bourgeoisie, while the lower strata in the villages pull toward the side of the urban workers. Under these conditions the peasantry as such is completely incapable of conquering power.

True enough, in ancient China, revolutions placed the peasantry in power or, more precisely, placed the military leaders of peasant uprisings in power. This led each time to a redistribution of the land and the establishment of a new “peasant” dynasty, whereupon the same old history would begin over again, with a new concentration of usury capital, and eventually a new uprising. As long as the revolution preserves its purely peasant character, society is incapable of emerging from these hopeless and vicious cycles. This was the basis of ancient Asiatic history, including ancient Russian history. In Europe beginning with the close of the Middle Ages each victorious peasant uprising placed in power not a peasant government but a left urban party. To put it more precisely, a peasant uprising turned out victorious exactly to the degree to which it succeeded in strengthening the position of the revolutionary section of the urban population. In bourgeois Russia of the twentieth century there could be no question of a seizure of power by the revolutionary peasantry.

The attitude toward the liberal bourgeoisie was, as has been said, the

touchstone of the differentiation between revolutionists and opportunists in the ranks of the Social Democrats. How far could the Russian revolution go? What would be the character of the future revolutionary Provisional Government? What tasks would confront it? And in what order? These questions with all their importance could be correctly posed only on the basis of the fundamental character of the policy of the proletariat, and the character of this policy was in turn determined first of all by the attitude toward the liberal bourgeoisie.

Plekhanov obviously and stubbornly shut his eyes to the fundamental conclusion of the political history of the nineteenth century: Whenever the proletariat comes forward as an independent force the bourgeoisie shifts over to the camp of counterrevolution. The more audacious the mass struggle, all the swifter is the reactionary degeneration of liberalism. No one has yet invented a means for paralyzing the effects of this law of the class struggle.

“We must cherish the support of nonproletarian parties,” repeated Plekhanov during the years of the first revolution [1905–07], “and not repel them from us by tactless actions.” By monotonous preachments of this sort, this philosopher of Marxism indicated that the living dynamics of society were to him a sealed book. “Tactlessness” can repel an individual, especially a sensitive intellectual. Classes and parties are attracted or repelled by social interests. “It can be stated with certainty,” Lenin replied to Plekhanov, “that the liberals and landlords will forgive you millions of ‘tactless acts’ but will not forgive you a summons to take away the land.” And this referred not only to the landlords. The upper echelons of the bourgeoisie are bound up with the landowners by the unity of property interests, and more narrowly by the banking system. The upper elements among the petty bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia are materially and morally dependent upon the big property owners and the owners of medium-sized properties. They are all afraid of an independent mass movement.

And yet, in order to overthrow the tsarist system, it was necessary to rouse tens upon tens of millions of oppressed people to a heroic, wholehearted, self-sacrificing revolutionary assault that would stop at nothing. The masses can rise to the high level of making an insurrection only under the banner of their own interests and consequently in the spirit of irreconcilable hostility toward the exploiting classes, beginning with the landlords. The “repulsion” of the oppositional bourgeoisie from the revolutionary workers and peasants was therefore an inherent law of the revolution itself and could not be avoided by means of diplomacy or “tact.”

[In the 1905 revolution] each passing month confirmed Lenin’s appraisal of liberalism. Contrary to the best hopes of the Mensheviks, the Cadets [i.e., Constitutional Democrats, the main party of Russia’s capitalists] not only did not prepare to take their place at the head of the “bourgeois” revolution, but

on the contrary they found their historical mission more and more in the struggle against it.

After the crushing of the December uprising [i.e., the armed uprising of the workers in Moscow in 1905] the liberals, who occupied the political limelight thanks to the ephemeral First Duma, sought with all their might to justify themselves before the monarchy and explain away their insufficiently active counterrevolutionary conduct in the autumn of 1905, when danger had threatened the most sacred foundations of “culture.” The leader of the liberals, Milyukov, who conducted the behind-the-scenes negotiations with the Winter Palace, quite correctly argued in the press that at the end of 1905 the Cadets could not even show themselves before the masses. “Those who now chide the (Cadet) party,” he wrote, “because it did not protest at the time by arranging meetings against the revolutionary illusions of Trotskyism…simply do not understand or do not remember the moods prevailing at the time among the democratic public gathering at meetings.”

By the “illusions of Trotskyism” the liberal leader understood the independent policy of the proletariat, which attracted to the Soviets the sympathies of the bottommost layers in the cities, and of the soldiers and peasants, and in so doing caused “educated” society to be “repelled.” The evolution of the Mensheviks unfolded along parallel lines. They had to justify themselves more and more frequently to the liberals, because they had ended up in a bloc with Trotsky after October 1905. The explanations of Martov, the talented publicist of the Mensheviks, came down to this: it was necessary to make concessions to the “revolutionary illusions” of the masses.

In Tiflis the political groupings took shape on the same principled basis as in St. Petersburg. “To smash reaction,” wrote Noi Zhordania, leader of the Mensheviks in the Caucaus region, “to conquer and carry through the Constitution — this will depend upon the conscious unification and the striving for a single goal on the part of the forces of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie... It is true that the peasantry will be drawn into the movement, investing it with an elemental character, but the decisive role will nevertheless be played by these two classes, while the peasant movement will add grist to their mill.” Lenin mocked at Zhordania’s fears that an irreconcilable policy toward the bourgeoisie would doom the workers to impotence. Zhordania “discusses the question of the possible isolation of the proletariat in a democratic overturn and forgets ... about the peasantry! Of all the possible allies of the proletariat, he knows [only] of the liberal landowners, and he is enamored of them. But he does not know the peasants. And this in the Caucasus!” [Note: The population in the Causasus was predominantly peasant.]

The refutations of Lenin, while correct in essence, simplify the problem on one point. Zhordania did not “forget” about the peasants and, as may be

gathered from the hint of Lenin himself, could not have possibly forgotten about them in the Caucasus, where turbulent peasant uprisings were taking place at the time under the very banner of the Mensheviks. Zhordania saw in the peasantry, however, not so much a political ally as a historical battering ram which could and should be utilized by the bourgeoisie in alliance with the proletariat. He did not believe that the peasantry was capable of becoming a leading or even an independent force in the revolution, and in this he was not wrong; but he also did not believe that the proletariat was capable of leading the peasant uprising to victory — and in this he was fatally mistaken. The Menshevik idea of the alliance of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie actually signified the subordination of both the workers and the peasants to the liberals. The reactionary utopianism of this program was determined by the fact that the deep separations and divisions [raschlenenie] that had developed between the social classes paralyzed the bourgeoisie in advance as a revolutionary factor. In this fundamental question Bolshevism was entirely correct. To chase after an alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie would inescapably have placed the Social Democratic Labor Party in opposition to the revolutionary movement of the workers and peasants. In 1905 the Mensheviks still lacked the courage to draw all the necessary conclusions from their theory of the “bourgeois” revolution. In 1917 they followed their ideas to the logical conclusion and [as a result] fell flat on their faces.

On the question of the attitude toward the liberals, Stalin stood on Lenin’s side during the years of the first revolution. It must be stated that during this period even the majority of rank-and-file Mensheviks were closer to Lenin than to Plekhanov on issues relating to the “oppositional” bourgeoisie. A contemptuous attitude toward the liberals was the literary tradition of intellectual radicalism. One would, however, seek in vain for an independent contribution from Koba on this question, for an analysis of social relations in the Caucasus, for new arguments, or even for a new formulation of old arguments. The leader of the Mensheviks in the Caucasus, Zhordania, was far more independent in relation to Plekhanov than Stalin was in relation to Lenin. “In vain the Messrs. Liberals seek,” wrote Koba after [the events of Bloody Sunday, on] January 9, 1905, “to save the tottering throne of the tsar. In vain are they extending the hand of assistance to the tsar! The aroused popular masses are preparing for the revolution and not for reconciliation with the tsar... Yes, gentlemen, your efforts are in vain. The Russian revolution is inevitable, and it is as inevitable as the inevitable rising of the sun! Can you stop the rising sun? That is the question!” And so forth and so on.

Higher than this Koba did not rise. Two and a half years later, repeating Lenin almost literally, he wrote: “The Russian liberal bourgeoisie is anti-revolutionary. It cannot be the motive force, nor, all the less so, the leader of the revolution. It is the sworn enemy of the revolution, and a stubborn

struggle must be waged against it." However, it was precisely on this fundamental question that Stalin was to undergo a complete metamorphosis in the next ten years and was to greet the February revolution of 1917 as a partisan of a bloc with the liberal bourgeoisie and, in accordance with that, as a champion of uniting with the Mensheviks into one party. Only when Lenin arrived from abroad [in April 1917] did he put an abrupt end to this "independent" policy of Stalin, which Lenin called a mockery of Marxism.

The Narodniks saw in the workers and peasants simply "toilers" and "the exploited," who are all equally interested in socialism. Marxists regarded the peasant as a petty bourgeois who is capable of becoming a socialist only to the extent to which he ceases materially or spiritually to be a peasant. With the sentimentalism peculiar to them, the Narodniks perceived in this sociological characterization a moral slur against the peasantry. For two generations the main struggle between revolutionary tendencies in Russia took place along this line. To understand the future disputes between Stalinism and Trotskyism, it is necessary once again to emphasize that, in accordance with the entire tradition of Marxism, Lenin never for a moment regarded the peasantry as a socialist ally of the proletariat. On the contrary, the impossibility of the socialist revolution in Russia was deduced by him precisely from the colossal preponderance of the peasantry [in Russia's population]. This idea runs through all his articles which touch directly or indirectly upon the agrarian question.

"We support the peasant movement," wrote Lenin in September 1905, "to the extent that it is a revolutionary democratic movement. We are preparing (right now, and immediately) for a struggle with it to the extent that it will come forward as a reactionary, anti-proletarian movement." The entire gist of Marxism lies in this twofold task. Lenin saw the socialist ally in the Western proletariat and partly in the semi-proletarian elements in the Russian village, but never in the peasantry as a whole. "From the beginning we support to the very end, by means of all measures, up to confiscation [of the land]," he repeated with the insistence peculiar to him, "the peasant in general against the landlord, and later (and not even later but at the very same time) we support the proletariat against the peasant in general."

"The peasantry will conquer in the bourgeois-democratic revolution," he wrote in March 1906, "and with that it will completely exhaust its revolutionary spirit as the peasantry. The proletariat will conquer in the bourgeois-democratic revolution and with that it will only unfold in a real way its genuine socialist revolutionary spirit."

"The movement of the peasantry," Lenin repeated in May of the same year, "is the movement of a different class. This is a struggle not against the foundations of capitalism but for purging all the remnants of feudalism." This viewpoint can be followed in Lenin from one article to the next, year by year,

volume by volume. The language and examples vary; the basic thought remains the same. It could not have been otherwise. Had Lenin seen a socialist ally in the peasantry, he would not have had the slightest ground for insisting upon the “bourgeois” character of the revolution and for limiting “the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” to purely democratic tasks. In those cases where Lenin accused the author of this book of “underestimating” the peasantry he had in mind not at all my nonrecognition of the socialist tendencies of the peasantry but, on the contrary, my inadequate — from Lenin’s viewpoint — recognition of the bourgeois-democratic independence of the peasantry, its ability to create its own power and thereby prevent the establishment of the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat.

The reevaluation of values on this question was opened up only in the years of Thermidorian reaction, the beginning of which coincided approximately with Lenin’s illness and death. Thenceforth the alliance of Russian workers and peasants was proclaimed to be, in and of itself, a sufficient guarantee against the dangers of restoration and an immutable guarantee that socialism could be realized within the borders of the Soviet Union. Replacing the theory of international revolution by the theory of socialism in one country, Stalin began calling the Marxist evaluation of the peasantry nothing other than “Trotskyism.” And this, moreover, was not only in relation to the present but to the entire past.

It is, of course, possible to raise the question whether or not the classic Marxist view of the peasantry has been proven erroneous. This subject would lead us far beyond the limits of the present review. Suffice it to say here that Marxism has never invested its estimation of the peasantry as a non-socialist class with an absolute and static character. Marx himself said that the peasant possesses not only superstitions but the ability to reason. In changing conditions the nature of the peasant himself changes. The regime of the dictatorship of the proletariat opened up very broad possibilities for influencing the peasantry and reeducating it. The limits of these possibilities have not yet been exhausted by history. Nevertheless, it is now already clear that the growing role of state coercion [against the peasantry] in the USSR has not refuted but has confirmed fundamentally the attitude toward the peasantry which distinguished Russian Marxists from the Narodniks. However, whatever may be the situation in this respect today after twenty years of the new regime, it remains undeniable that up to the October revolution, or more correctly up to 1924, no one in the Marxist camp—Lenin, least of all—saw in the peasantry a socialist factor of development. Without the aid of the proletarian revolution in the West, Lenin repeated, restoration in Russia was inevitable. He was not mistaken: the Stalinist bureaucracy is nothing other than the first phase of bourgeois restoration.

We have analyzed above the points of departure of the two main factions in the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. But alongside of them, already at the dawn of the first revolution, a third position was formulated, although it met with almost no recognition during those years. Still, we are obliged to present it here with the necessary completeness, not only because it found its confirmation in the events of 1917 but especially because seven years after the October revolution, this conception, after being turned topsy-turvy, began to play a completely unforeseen role in the political evolution of Stalin and the whole Soviet bureaucracy.

At the beginning of 1905 a pamphlet by Trotsky was issued in Geneva. This pamphlet analyzed the political situation as it had unfolded in the winter of 1904. The author arrived at the conclusion that the independent campaign of petitions and banquets by the liberals had exhausted all its possibilities; that the radical intelligentsia who had pinned their hopes on the liberals had arrived in a blind alley together with the latter; that the peasant movement was creating favorable conditions for victory but was incapable of assuring it; that a solution could be achieved only by the armed uprising of the proletariat; and that the next phase on this path would be the general strike. The pamphlet was entitled Before the Ninth of January (Do devyatogo yanvarya), because it was written before the events of Bloody Sunday in St. Petersburg. The mighty strike wave that came after this date, together with the initial armed clashes which supplemented this strike wave, were an unequivocal confirmation of the strategic prognosis of this pamphlet.

The introduction to my work was written by Parvus, a Russian émigré, who had succeeded by that time in becoming a prominent German writer. Parvus was an exceptionally creative personality capable of becoming infected with the ideas of others as well as of enriching others by his ideas. He lacked internal equilibrium and sufficient love for work to give the labor movement the contribution worthy of his talents as thinker and writer. He undoubtedly influenced my personal development, especially in regard to the revolutionary socialist understanding of our epoch. A few years prior to our first meeting Parvus passionately defended the idea of a general strike in Germany; but the country was then passing through a prolonged industrial boom; German Social Democracy had adapted itself to the regime of the Hohenzollerns; and the revolutionary propaganda of a foreigner met with nothing but ironical indifference.

On the second day after the bloody events in St. Petersburg, on becoming acquainted with my pamphlet, then in manuscript form, Parvus was captured by the idea of the exceptional role which the proletariat of backward Russia was destined to play.

The few days that we then spent together in Munich were filled with conversations which clarified a good deal for both of us and which brought us

personally closer together. The introduction Parvus wrote for the pamphlet at that time has entered firmly into the history of the Russian revolution. In a few pages he illuminated the social peculiarities of Russia's belated development. It is true that these had been known previously, but no one had drawn all the necessary conclusions from them.

Parvus wrote:

"The political radicalism of Western Europe was, as is well known, based primarily on the petty bourgeoisie. These were the handicraft workers and, in general, that section of the bourgeoisie which had been caught up by the industrial development but was at the same time pushed out of the capitalist class... In Russia, during the precapitalist period, the cities developed more along Chinese than European lines. They were administrative centers, purely functionary in character, without the slightest political significance, while in terms of economic relations they served as trading centers, bazaars, for the surrounding landlord and peasant milieu. Their development was still very insignificant when it was halted by the capitalist process, which began to create big cities after its own pattern, i.e., factory cities and centers of world trade…The very same thing that hindered the development of petty-bourgeois democracy served to benefit the class consciousness of the proletariat in Russia, namely, the weak development of the handicraft form of production. The proletariat was immediately concentrated in the factories...

"The peasants will be drawn into the movement in ever larger masses. But they are capable only of increasing the political anarchy in the country and, in this way, of weakening the government; they cannot compose a tightly welded revolutionary army. With the development of the revolution, therefore, an ever greater amount of political work will fall to the share of the proletariat. Along with this, its political self-consciousness will broaden, and its political energy will grow…

"The Social Democratic Party will be confronted with the dilemma: either to assume the responsibility for the Provisional Government or to stand aside from the workers' movement. The workers will consider this government as their own regardless of how the Social Democracy conducts itself…The revolutionary overturn in Russia can be accomplished only by the workers. The revolutionary Provisional Government in Russia will be the government of a workers' democracy. If the Social Democracy heads the revolutionary movement of the Russian proletariat, then this government will be Social Democratic…

"The Social Democratic Provisional Government will not be able to accomplish a socialist overturn in Russia, but the very process of liquidating the autocracy and of establishing the democratic republic will provide it with a rich soil for political work."

In the heat of the revolutionary events in the autumn of 1905, I once again met Parvus, this time in St. Petersburg. While preserving an organizational independence from both factions [Bolsheviks and Mensheviks], we jointly edited a mass workers paper, Russkoye Slovo, and, in a coalition with the Mensheviks, a big political newspaper, Nachalo. The theory of the permanent revolution has usually been linked with the names of Parvus and Trotsky. This was only partially correct. The period of Parvus's revolutionary apogee belongs to the end of the last century, when he marched at the head of the struggle against so-called revisionism, i.e., the opportunist distortion of Marx's theory. The failure of the attempts to push the German Social Democracy onto the path of more resolute policies undermined his optimism. Toward the perspective of the socialist revolution in the West, Parvus began to react with more and more reservations. The view he held at that time was that the "Social Democratic Provisional Government will not be able to accomplish a socialist overturn in Russia." His prognoses indicated, therefore, not the transformation of the democratic revolution into the socialist revolution but only the establishment in Russia of a regime of workers' democracy of the Australian type, where on the basis of a [large-scale] farmers' movement there arose for the first time a labor government, which did not go beyond the framework of a bourgeois regime.

This conclusion was not shared by me. The Australian democracy grew organically from the virgin soil of a new continent and at once assumed a conservative character and subjected to itself a young but quite privileged proletariat. Russian democracy, on the contrary, could arise only as a result of a grandiose revolutionary overturn, the dynamics of which would in no case permit the workers' government to remain within the framework of bourgeois democracy. Our differences, which began shortly after the revolution of 1905, resulted in a complete break between us at the beginning of the world war, when Parvus, in whom the skeptic had completely killed the revolutionist, ended up on the side of German imperialism, and later became counselor and adviser to the first president of the German republic, [the right-wing Social Democrat] Ebert.

Beginning with the pamphlet Before the Ninth of January, I returned more than once to the development and justification of the theory of the permanent revolution. In view of the importance which this theory later acquired in the ideological evolution of [Stalin,] the hero of this biography, it is necessary to present it here in the form of exact quotations from my works in 1905-06:

"The core of the population of a modern city, at least in cities of economic and political significance, is constituted by the sharply differentiated class of wage labor. It is precisely this class, essentially unknown during the Great French Revolution, that is destined to play the decisive role in our revolution... In a country economically more backward, the proletariat may come to power

sooner than in an advanced capitalist country. The assumption of some sort of automatic dependence of proletarian dictatorship upon the technical forces and resources of a country is a prejudice derived from an extremely oversimplified ‘economic determinist’ form of materialism. Such a view has nothing in common with Marxism... Notwithstanding that the productive forces of industry in the United States are ten times higher than ours, the political role of the Russian proletariat, its influence on the politics of our country, and the possibility of its coming influence on world polities is incomparably higher than the role and significance of the American proletariat...

“The Russian revolution, in our view, will create conditions in which the power may (and with the victory of the revolution must) pass into the hands of the proletariat before the politicians of bourgeois liberalism get a chance to develop their ‘statesmanlike genius’ to the full…The Russian bourgeoisie is surrendering all the revolutionary positions to the proletariat. It will have to surrender likewise the revolutionary leadership of the peasantry. The proletariat in power will appear to the peasantry as an emancipator class... The proletariat, basing itself on the peasantry, will bring all its forces into play to raise the cultural level of the village and develop a political consciousness in the peasantry...

“But perhaps the peasantry itself will crowd out the proletariat and occupy its place? This is impossible. All the experience of history protests against this assumption. It shows that the peasantry is completely incapable of playing an independent political role…From what has been said it is clear how we regard the idea of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.’ The gist of the matter is not whether we consider it admissible in principle, whether or not we find this form of political cooperation ‘desirable.’ We consider it unrealizable—at least in the direct and immediate sense…”

The foregoing already demonstrates how erroneous is the assertion, endlessly repeated in later years, that the conception presented here “leaped over the bourgeois revolution.”

“The struggle for the democratic renewal of Russia,” I wrote at that time, “has wholly grown out of capitalism and is being conducted by the forces unfolding on the basis of capitalism and is being aimed directly and first of all against the obstacles deriving from feudalism and serfdom that block the path to the development of capitalist society.”

The question, however, was this: Exactly what forces and methods were capable of removing those obstacles?

“It is possible for all the questions of the revolution to be confined to a limited framework by the assertion that our revolution is bourgeois in its objective aims, and therefore in its inevitable results, and it is possible consequently to shut one’s eyes to the fact that the chief agent of this bourgeois revolution is

the proletariat, and the proletariat will be pushed toward power by the whole course of the revolution…You may lull yourself with the thought that the social conditions of Russia are not yet ripe for a socialist economy—and consequently you may neglect to consider the fact that the proletariat, once in power, will inevitably be pushed by the whole logic of its situation toward management of the economy by the state... Entering the government not as impotent hostages but as a ruling power, the representatives of the proletariat will by this very act destroy the boundary between minimum and maximum program, i.e., will place collective ownership on the order of the day. At what point the proletariat will be stopped in this direction will depend on the relationship of forces, but not at all upon the original intentions of the party of the proletariat...

“But it is not too early now to pose the question: Must this dictatorship of the proletariat inevitably be shattered against the framework of the bourgeois revolution? Or may it not, on the basis of the existing worldwide historical conditions, open before itself the prospect of victory to be achieved by shattering this limited framework?…One thing can be stated with certainty: Without direct state support from the European proletariat the working class of Russia cannot remain in power and cannot convert its temporary rule into a prolonged socialist dictatorship…”

From this, however, a pessimistic prognosis does not follow, not by any means: “The political emancipation led by the working class of Russia raises this leader to unprecedented historical heights, transfers into its hands colossal forces and resources, and makes it the initiator of the worldwide abolition of capitalism, for which history has created all the necessary objective prerequisites…”

In regard to the degree to which international Social Democracy would prove capable of carrying out its revolutionary task, I wrote in 1906:

“The European socialist parties—above all, the mightiest among them, the German party—have developed a conservatism of their own. As greater and greater masses have rallied to socialism and as the discipline and degree of organization of those masses has increased, that conservatism has grown stronger. Because of this, Social Democracy as an organization embodying the political experience of the proletariat may become at a certain moment a direct obstacle for the workers on the road toward open confrontation with bourgeois reaction…”

I concluded my analysis, however, by expressing the assurance that the “Eastern revolution will imbue the Western proletariat with revolutionary idealism and engender in it the desire to ‘start speaking Russian’ to the class enemy.”

Let us summarize.

The Narodniks, following in the wake of the Slavophiles, proceeded from the illusion that Russia's path of development would be absolutely unique, avoiding capitalism and the bourgeois republic.

Plekhanov's Marxism was concentrated on proving that the historical paths of Russia and the West were in principle identical. The program derived from this ignored the wholly real and not at all mystical peculiarities [or unique aspects] of Russia's social structure and of her revolutionary development.

The Menshevik view, stripped of episodic encrustations and individual deviations, can be reduced to the following: The victory of the Russian bourgeois revolution is conceivable only under the leadership of the liberal bourgeoisie and must hand over power to the latter. A democratic system will then make it possible for the Russian proletariat to catch up with its older Western brothers on the road of the struggle for socialism with incomparably greater success than before.

Lenin's perspective may be briefly expressed in the following words: The belated Russian bourgeoisie is incapable of leading its own revolution to the end! The complete victory of the revolution through the medium of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" will purge the country of medievalism, invest the development of Russian capitalism with American tempos, strengthen the proletariat in the city and country, and open up broad possibilities for the struggle for socialism. On the other hand, the victory of the Russian revolution will provide a mighty impulse for the socialist revolution in the West, and the latter will not only shield Russia from the dangers of [feudal-monarchical] restoration but also permit the Russian proletariat to reach the conquest of power in a comparatively short historical interval.

The perspective of the permanent revolution may be summed up this way: The complete victory of the democratic revolution in Russia is inconceivable otherwise than in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat basing itself on the peasantry. The dictatorship of the proletariat, which will inescapably place on the order of the day not only democratic but also socialist tasks, will at the same time provide a mighty impulse to the international socialist revolution. Only, the victory of the proletariat in the West will shield Russia from bourgeois restoration and secure for her the possibility of bringing socialist construction to its conclusion.

These terse formulations reveal with equal clarity both the homogeneity of the last two conceptions, in their irreconcilable contradiction to the liberal-Menshevik perspective, and the very fundamental difference between them on the question of the social character and the tasks of the "dictatorship" that was bound to grow out of the revolution.

The frequently repeated objection of the present Moscow theoreticians to the

effect that the program of the dictatorship of the proletariat was “premature” in 1905 is entirely lacking in content. In the empirical sense the program of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry proved to be equally “premature.” The unfavorable balance of forces in the epoch of the first revolution rendered impossible not the dictatorship of the proletariat as such but the victory of the revolution as a whole. Meanwhile all the revolutionary tendencies proceeded from the hopes for a complete victory; without such a hope an all-out, wholehearted revolutionary struggle would be impossible. The differences involved the general perspectives of the revolution and the strategies flowing from those perspectives. The perspective of Menshevism was false to the core: the road it wanted the proletariat to take was totally wrong. The perspective of Bolshevism was incomplete: it indicated correctly the general direction of the struggle but characterized its stages incorrectly. The inadequacy of the perspective of Bolshevism was not revealed in 1905 only because the revolution itself did not develop fully. But in early 1917 Lenin was compelled, in a direct struggle against the oldest cadres of the party, to change the perspective.

A political prognosis cannot pretend to the same exactness as an astronomical one. It is sufficient if it correctly indicates the general line of development and helps people orient themselves in the actual course of events—events in which the basic line inevitably diverges to the right or to the left. In this sense it is impossible not to recognize that the conception of the permanent revolution has fully passed the test of history. In the first years of the Soviet regime, no one denied this; on the contrary, it was acknowledged as a fact in a number of official publications. But when on the quiescent and ossified summits of Soviet society the bureaucratic reaction against October began, it aimed its fire against this theory from the very start—a theory that more completely than any other reflected the first proletarian revolution in history and at the same time clearly revealed its incomplete, limited, and partial character. Thus, through a process of repulsion [against the theory of permanent revolution], there arose the theory of socialism in one country, the basic dogma of Stalinism.

Glossary

19O5: strikes broke out in December 1904 and January 1905. On 9 January workers marching to the Tsar's palace lo appeal for his help were shot down. The strike wave grew.

Strikes continued through the summer. Peasants withheld taxes. Sailors mutinied on the battleship 'Potemkin'.

In September a new strike wave exploded. A joint council of workers' delegates - a 'soviet' in Russian - was set up in St Petersburg (Leningrad).

In December the Tsar regained the initiative, arresting the Executive of the St

Petersburg soviet. An armed workers' uprising in Moscow was put down.

Bourgeois revolution: by this term Marxists meant a revolution that would break the power of the Tsar (king) and the landed nobility, raising up a new ruling class from the industrialists, merchants and bankers. It would replace hereditary privilege as the keystone of society with profits made in the market place.

Populism, in Russia, meant revolutionary politics which looked to a revolution made by "the people" in general (not the workers particularly). The populists usually argued that Russia need not (or could not) go through capitalist development, but could instead go straight from Tsarism to a sort of peasant-based socialism. Tactically the populists often favoured conspiracies to assassinate leading figures of the Tsarist regime as a way to arouse the people.

Menshevik: the less revolutionary wing in the split in the Russian socialist movement after 1903. Although the split was originally about obscure organisational issues, it quickly gained political substance. The Mensheviks' strategy was to push the bourgeoisie (the industrialists, merchants and bankers) into leading the bourgeois revolution - and this meant the workers must be careful not to frighten the bourgeoisie off.

Bolshevik: the more revolutionary wing in the split the Russian socialist movement after I903. In contrast to the Mensheviks (qv), the Bolsheviks argued for the workers to fight to take the lead and to drive the revolution forward as far as possible Even though (before 1917) they calculated that it would be impossible for the workers to drive the revolution beyond the level of radical democratic measures within a society still based on private profit and private ownership of the means of production, they believed that if the workers did not lead the 'bourgeois revolution', the bourgeoisie would make no revolution at all.

Correspondingly the Bolsheviks argued for a tighter more clearly defined party organisation than the Mensheviks.

Social Democracy was the term used before 1917 to mean 'Marxian Socialist'. The Bolsheviks changed their name from Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) to Communist Party in 1917 to signal their break with the big 'Social Democratic' parties in other countries which had supported their own governments in World War 1. The German Revolution of 1918-19 started with rebellions in late 1918 as the German army went down to defeat in World War 1. The Emperor was quickly kicked out, and a Provisional Government of Social Democrats took over.

But the German Social Democrats were not the revolutionary party they had been. Over the years they had become dominated by party and trade union bureaucrats who looked to piecemeal reform within the capitalist system. Io

World War I they supported the German government. And in 1918-19 they became the last prop of the capitalist order.

Workers' councils were set up all across Germany, but the Social Democrats were able to dominate them, attracting the support of newly-politicised workers for whom the Social Democrats were still the left. The revolutionaries led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were provoked into an ill-timed uprising (against Luxemburg's insistence) in January 1919, and bloodily suppressed. Liebknecht and Luxemburg were murdered by right-wing military detachments acting under the authority of the Social Democratic government.

Germany, however, remained in turmoil until 1923, when the Communist Party, misled by Moscow, botched a new revolutionary opportunity and allowed capitalism to re-establish itself.

Petty bourgeois - in Marxist analysis. means the class who are neither wage-workers nor capitalists exploiting substantial numbers of workers. It is the class of small shopkeepers, small business people employing only one or two workers, 'independent' professional people, doctors, lawyers, dentists, etc.

The 'Prussian Road' meant a transition from feudal or neo-feudal society (based on hereditary privilege) to capitalist society (based on market economics and free wage labour) by way of reform from above rather than revolution from below.

In Prussia (the largest of the cluster of states which were united in 1871 to form Germany), such a policy of reform from above was carried through by Otto von Bismarck. He helped the landlords (junkers) transform themselves into capitalist operators; he used the state to help develop capitalist industry; he introduced limited forms of parliamentary democracy under his own strict control.

Kulak was the term used in Russia for 'rich' peasants. They were rich only very relatively, but in contrast to other peasants they would own enough land to employ a few workers outside their family to work it. They might also own horses or ploughs which they hired out to poorer peasants. The Marxists saw them as the group from which a class of capitalist farmers might grow.

## Appendix 4: How the Bolshevik party was built

By Brian Pearce

Between 17 July and 10 August 1903, in the course of 37 sessions, the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party held its Second Congress in Brussels and London. In reality this was the first, the constituent, congress of

the RSDLP.

The 'First Congress' held in March 1898 in Minsk had lasted one day and all nine delegates were arrested! The 'party' it proclaimed existed only as scattered, uncoordinated local groups and circles.

The 1903 Congress had been prepared by five years of practical work by local circles and three years of literary work by the newspaper Iskra. But this conference was also the beginning of what would become the Bolshevik and Menshevik parties. Thus by the act of constituting itself, the RSDLP splintered.

It would take years for what we know as Bolshevism and Menshevism to be defined and self-defined by events and their responses to events, most importantly to the revolution of 1905. But the separation starts here.

To mark the 100th anniversary of Bolshevism we will publish a number of articles analysing and explaining the origins and history, cutting through the myths and misunderstandings with which both friends and enemies have encrusted it. For socialists who are serious about smashing capitalism, these are enormously important questions.

We begin with this article by Brian Pearce. Originally entitled 'Building the Bolshevik Party: some organisational aspects' it was first published in Labour Review in 1960. Brian Pearce was a historian who left the Communist Party after the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. He joined the British Trotskyist group led by Gerry Healy before its degeneration.

In discussions about the best form of organisation for a Marxist workers' party, reference is often made, in one spirit or another, to the experience of Russia. Sometimes such reference is made confusedly. Three distinct entities are mixed up: the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party of 1903-1911, within which various factions strove for ascendancy, the Bolshevik faction in that "Party", and the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) formed in 1912.

Often misunderstood, also, are the two fundamental presuppositions made by Bolsheviks in their approach to organisational problems.

The first of these was that the working class would have to undertake a struggle for power in which both legal and illegal activity would be involved, a struggle in which all kinds of persecution by the ruling class would have to be faced, a struggle which must culminate in the forcible seizure of power and the forcible defence of the power thus seized against counter-attack. In a word, the Bolsheviks saw before them, and before the workers of every country the prospect of revolution, and therefore the need for a party capable of preparing the carrying through of a revolution. The special features of Tsarist Russia in the early 20th century were not decisive in relation to this

point: in any case, these features fluctuated and changed, and the Bolsheviks' concrete ideas about party organisation in Russia were modified accordingly, but without the fundamental principle being affected.

The second presupposition was that the working class everywhere needs not less but much more 'party organisation' in order to conquer power than was needed by the bourgeoisie in its great revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries. Trotsky (who arrived late at an understanding of this point but thereafter defended the Bolshevik position most staunchly) put it thus in his Lessons of October (1924): "the part played in bourgeois revolutions by the economic power of the bourgeoisie, by its education, by its municipalities and universities, is a part which can be played in a proletarian revolution only by the party of the proletariat". That is to say, the bourgeoisie while still an oppressed class acquires wealth, and important footholds in the institutions of the old regime, but the working class lacks these advantages and has to compensate by intense organisation of those forces which it does possess. In Lenin's words, "in its struggle for power the proletariat has no other weapon but organisation".

When the Russian Marxists were still operating through the rudimentary forms of study circles, living separate lives in the principal cities, and just beginning to apply themselves to study of the detailed problems of their actual setting and to intervention through leaflets in the current struggles of the Russian workers, Lenin raised (in 1894) the question of working towards the formation of a 'socialist workers' party'. The first coming together of representatives of local Leagues of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, at Minsk in 1898, the so-called First Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, achieved nothing in the organisational sphere and was followed by arrests and police repressions of a devastating character. Preparations for another, similar gathering, led to further arrests, and drew from Lenin in 1900 the observation that "congresses inside autocratic Russia are a luxury we can't afford". Instead, he and his associates got down to the publication outside Russia of a newspaper, Iskra, to be smuggled into the country and serve as the means to prepare for another congress. Around the work for this paper, cadres of revolutionaries organized themselves in an all-Russia network, and through this paper a clarifying discussion was carried on for two years about the political tasks and functions of the party to be created.

Already, before the Second Congress met, Lenin had outlined, particularly in A Letter to a Comrade on Our Organisational Tasks (1902), as well as in the more famous What Is To Be Done? his conception of what a revolutionary party must be like. Its dominant characteristic should be centralism, the concentration in the hands of a stable, continuing leadership of all the resources of the Marxist movement, so that the most rational and expedient

use might be made of these resources. Party membership must be strictly defined so that the leadership knew exactly who was who and what forces they possessed at any given moment. In the then existing conditions there could be little democracy in the party, desirable as this was, without over-simplifying the task of the police. The local 'committees' of the party would have to be appointed from above and consist entirely of professional revolutionaries, and each of the party organisations in the factories and elsewhere ("every factory must be our fortress") would operate under the instructions of the local committee, conveyed through one of the committee members who would be the organisation's only contact, for security reasons.

When at last the Second Congress met, in 1903 (at first in Brussels, later moving to London), and got down to settling organisational at well as political problems, the political differences among the Russian Marxists arising from their different estimates of the course of development and relationship of class forces1 at once found reflection in the sphere of organisation, although not in a clear-cut way, there being at this stage much cross-voting. Lenin and Martov confronted each other with their opposing formulation for Rule One, defining what constituted Party membership. Lenin wanted a tight definition obliging members not merely to acceptance of the Party program and the giving of financial support, but also to "personal participation in one of the Party's organisations", whereas the Congress agreed with Martov that "the rendering of personal assistance under the direction of one of the Party's organs" was sufficient. In Lenin's difference with Martov on this point was expressed Lenin's conviction that "the party, as the vanguard of the class, should be as organised as possible, should admit to its ranks only such elements as lend themselves to at least a minimum of organisation", because, "the stronger the party organs consisting of real Social-Democrats are, the less instability there is within the party, the greater will be its influence on the masses around it". Connected with the divergence of views about what should constitute party membership was a more fundamental difference which was to emerge more and more clearly in subsequent years - about the character of the party structure. Lenin's conception was one of "building the party from the top downwards", starting from the party congress and the bodies set up by it, which should be possessed of full powers, with "subordination of lower party bodies to higher party bodies". Martov revealed already at this stage a conception of each party organisation as being 'autonomous'. On the internal political life of the party Lenin's shades is inevitable and essential as long as it does not lead to anarchy and splits, as long as it is confined within bounds approved by the common consent of all party members" (One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, 1904).

In spite of the defeat on Rule One, Lenin and his associates carried the majority with them in the voting on the main political questions (as a result of

which they thereafter enjoyed the advantage in the party of the nickname of Bolshevik or majority), but the deep divergences which had revealed themselves were reflected in the Congress decisions on the central party bodies. A sort of dual power was set up, equal authority being accorded to the editorial board of the party paper, Iskra, residing abroad, and to the Central Committee, operating underground inside Russia. A Party Council, empowered to arbitrate in any disputes that might arise between these two centres of authority, was to consist of two members representing the editorial board, two from the Central Committee, and one elected directly by the party congress. At first the Bolsheviks appeared to dominate both editorial board and Central Committee, but very soon after the Second Congress a shift of allegiance by a few of the leaders of what was then a very small group of people enabled the Mensheviks ('minority') to turn the tables. The Bolsheviks mustered their forces into a faction, set up a 'Bureau of the Committees of the Majority' to lead it, produced a faction paper, Vperyod, and conducted a campaign within the party for the convening of a fresh, Third Congress. By early 1905 they had the majority of the local Committees on record in favour of such a congress, and according to the party rules adopted in 1903 the Party Council should thereupon have convened the congress, but the Mensheviks in control of that body found pretexts not to do so. Accordingly the Bureau of the Committees of the Majority went ahead and convened the Third Congress on its own initiative.

This purely Bolshevik gathering decided to abolish the 'bi-centrism' established in 1903. The editorial board of the party paper had proved to be unstable, while the party organisations inside Russia had grown and become strong. A central committee with full, exclusive powers, including the power to appoint the editorial board, was elected. All party organisations were instructed henceforth to submit fortnightly reports to the central committee: "later on it will be seen how enormously important it is to acquire the habit of regular organisational communication". As regards the Mensheviks, their right and that of all minorities to publish their own literature within the party was recognised, but they must submit to the discipline of the Congress and the Central Committee elected by it. A special resolution charged all party members to "wage an energetic ideological struggle" against Menshevism, while at the same time acknowledging that the latter's adherents could "participate in party organisations provided they recognise party congresses and the party rules and submit to party discipline". Party organisations where Mensheviks were predominant were to be expelled only if they were "unwilling to submit to party discipline".

The Mensheviks refused to recognise the authenticity of the Third Congress and held a parallel congress of their own, which set up a rival leading body called the Organisational Committee. To this they accorded only vague and

limited powers, and they introduced some ultra-democratic provisions into party life, such as that every member of a local organisation was to be asked to express an opinion on every decision of the appropriate local committee before this could be put into force.

With the revolutionary events of 1905, the situation in and around the party changed very rapidly. Great numbers of workers joined its ranks, the opportunities for party work became greater and more diverse and de facto civil liberty expanded, enabling the party to show itself more openly. Lenin led the way in carrying through a reorganisation of the party on more democratic lines, so as to meet and profit by the new situation. Larger and looser party organisations were to be created, and the elective principle was introduced in place of the old tutelage by committees of professionals. Such changes were possible, Lenin stressed, only because of the work done in the preceding phase. "The working class is instinctively, spontaneously, social-democratic2, and the more than 10 years of work put in by the social democrats has done a great deal to transform this spontaneity into class consciousness". (The latter part of this sentence, from Lenin's article on The Reorganisation of The Party, November 1905, is sometimes omitted when it is quoted by unscrupulous anti-Leninists.)

There need be no fear that the mass of new members would dilute the party, because they would find themselves under the influence of the "steadfast solid core" of party members forged in those previous 10 years. At the same time, there could be no question of liquidating the secret apparatus the party prepared for illegality; and in general, Lenin warned, it was necessary to "reckon with the possibility of new attempts on the part of the expiring autocracy to withdraw the promised liberties, to attack the revolutionary workers and especially their leaders". It was to the important but carefully considered changes made at this time that Lenin was mainly referring when he wrote in 1913 (How Vera Zasulich Slays Liquidationism) that, organisationally, the party, "while retaining its fundamental character, has known how to adapt its form to changing conditions, to change this form in accordance with the demands of the moment".

The newly recruited worker-members showed themselves somewhat more resistant to the guiding influence of the old cadres than Lenin had hoped and, unable to grasp what all the 'fuss' was about between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, brought strong pressure to bear for immediate reunification of the party. The very successes achieved by the revolution, with such comparative ease, caused many workers to see the Bolsheviks as gloomy, peculiar folk obsessed with non-existent problems. Zinoviev recalls in his lectures on party history how there was a period in those days when Bolshevik speakers found it hard to get a hearing in the Petersburg factory district called 'the Vyborg side' of the River Neva) which was to become a

Bolshevik stronghold in 1917. It proved impossible not to yield to the pressure from below for 'unity', in spite of prophetic misgivings. A joint central committee was set up, composed of both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks and proceeded to convene a new party congress.

This congress, the Fourth, or 'Unity' congress, held at Stockholm, was elected more democratically than its predecessors, full advantage being taken of the easier conditions for open activity. Thirty-six thousand members took part in the election of the delegates, and one delegate was elected for every 250-300 members - really elected by the rank and file, not, as on previous occasions, chosen by the local committees of professionals. As a result, the Mensheviks found themselves with a majority on the most important political questions - although they were obliged to accept Lenin's formulation of the rule regarding party membership, which they had successfully voted down in 1903! A central committee consisting of six Mensheviks and three Bolsheviks was elected.

Following the Congress, those delegates "who belonged to the 'Bolshevik' faction", issued (May 1906) an appeal to the party membership, in which they declared: "We must and shall fight ideologically against those decisions of the Congress which we regard as erroneous. But at the same time we declare that we are opposed to a split of any kind". To work for another congress with a Bolshevik majority, Lenin and his associates formed a secret factional centre - what Zinoviev called "an organisation which was doubly illegal: in relation to the Tsarist regime and in relation to the Mensheviks". Those local party committees which had Bolshevik majorities sponsored a paper called Proletary, and the editorial board of this paper functioned as the leadership of the Bolshevik "double underground".

This was an extremely difficult period for the Bolsheviks in the party, but they were saved from it by the development of events in Russia in general, and among the Mensheviks in particular, in ways which they had foreseen. Evidence accumulated that political progress was not, after all, going to proceed as smoothly as the Mensheviks had claimed, while at the same time some of the Menshevik leaders came out more and more openly as people who were ready to destroy the independence of the party and even the party itself for the sake of a coalition with bourgeois liberals. Already, before 1906 was out, proposals began to be canvassed in Menshevik circles for dissolving the RSDLP in a "broad Labour congress" modelled on the British Labour Party of that time - a loose, comprehensive body which would embrace the trade unions, the co-operatives, petty-bourgeois radical groups, etc. In Petersburg the local Mensheviks defied the views of their Bolshevik comrades in the 'united' party organisations and linked up electorally with the liberals. Lenin's reply to this was to publish a pamphlet attacking the Mensheviks for treason to the common cause. Summoned before a party

court on a charge of violating discipline, he showed himself quite unrepentant and aggressive. There was no real unity in the party, he said, and a de facto split had taken place. "What is impermissible among members of a united party is permissible and obligatory for the parts of a party that has been split." The Mensheviks of the party court had better think carefully before coming to a decision to expel him: "Your judgement will determine whether the shaken unity of the RSDLP will be weakened or strengthened." Lenin was not expelled.

The balance of support within the party was now moving slowly but steadily towards the Bolsheviks again, as fair-weather members dropped away and the more stable of the new members learned from experience, observed the conduct of the Menshevik leaders and absorbed the influence of the old cadres. The Fifth (London) Congress, held in 1907, and elected no less democratically than the Fourth, proved to have a small pro-Bolshevik majority. It was at this congress that the party adopted as Rule Two of its organisational statute: "All party organisations are built on the principles of democratic centralism." A number of decisions in the direction of further democratisation were taken: a congress was to be held every year, with one delegate for every 1000 members, and an all-Russia conference every three months, with one delegate for every 5000 members.

No congress could in fact be held thereafter until 1917, owing to the onset of reaction. Only two days after the close of the Fifth Congress came the Tsarist coup d'etat of June 3, 1907, and a more severe reign of terror than ever began. The central committee elected by the Congress, although predominantly pro-Bolshevik, was very mixed, and the Bolshevik faction decided to keep its secret, leading centre in being.

In the second half of 1907 Lenin prepared for publication a collection of his writings to be titled Twelve Years. Only one and a half of the three projected volumes were actually published, and these were seized by the police. (A few copies circulated illegally, but not until 1918 did Twelve Years appear again, in full and openly.) The preface which Lenin wrote for this collection, in September 1907, is often referred to by opponents of Leninism as proof that at this time (the opening of the period of blackest reaction!) Lenin repudiated the ideas on party organisation which he had expounded in 1902 in What Is To Be Done? and elsewhere. To show the mendacity of this allegation and to present Lenin's own estimation of the balance sheet of the 'twelve years' from the organisational standpoint, here is a lengthy quotation from the preface in question:

"The basic mistake which is made by people who nowadays polemicise against What Is To Be Done? consists in their completely detaching this work from its connection with a definite historical situation - a definite, and now already long-past period in the development of our party. This mistake was

strikingly committed by Parvus, for example (not to mention innumerable Mensheviks), when he wrote, many years after the appearance of this pamphlet, about its incorrect or exaggerated ideas regarding the organisation of professional revolutionaries.

"At the present time such statements make a frankly comical impression. It is as though people want to brush aside a whole phase in the development of our party, to brush aside those conquests which in their day cost a struggle to achieve but which now have long since become consolidated and done their work. To argue today about Iskra's exaggerations (in 1901 and 1902!) of the idea of an organisation of professional revolutionaries is the same as though after the Russo-Japanese War, one were to reproach the Japanese for having exaggerated the strength of Russia's armed forces, for having been exaggeratedly anxious about the war and the struggle against these forces. The Japanese had to summon up all their strength against the maximum possible power of Russia, so as to ensure victory. Unfortunately, many people judge our party from outside, without knowing what they are talking about, without seeing that now the idea of an organisation of professional revolutionaries has already won complete victory. But this victory would have been impossible unless this idea had been put in the forefront in its day, so as 'exaggeratedly' to make those people grasp this idea who were hindering its realisation.

"What Is To Be Done? is a summary of the Iskra group's tactics and organisational policy in 1901 and 1902. Just a summary, no more and no less. Whoever will take the trouble to familiarise himself with the Iskra of 1901 and 1902 will undoubtedly convince himself of that. And whoever judges this summary without knowledge of Iskra's fight against the then predominant economism3 and without an understanding of this struggle is merely talking through his hat. Iskra fought for the creation of professional revolutionaries, fighting especially energetically in 1901 and 1902; overcame the economism which then predominated; created the organisation at last in 1903; upheld this organisation in spite of the subsequent split in the Iskra group, in spite of all the troubles of this period of storm and stress, upheld it during the whole of the Russian revolution, upheld and preserved it from 1901-02 through to 1907.

"And behold, now, when the fight for this organisation has long since been concluded, when the ground has been sown, when the grain has ripened and the harvest has been reaped, people appear and announce that there has been: "an exaggeration of the idea of an organisation of professional revolutionaries"! Isn't it laughable?

"Take the entire pre-revolutionary period and the first two-and-a-half years of the revolution (1905-1907) as a whole. Compare for this period our Social-Democratic Party with the other parties, from the standpoint of cohesion,

organised character, continuity of purpose. You will have to acknowledge from this standpoint the superiority of our party over all the others - the Cadets, the SRs and the rest - has been indubitable. The Social Democratic Party worked out before the revolution a program which was formally accepted by all members and, while making amendments to it, never broke away from this program. The Social-Democratic Party (in spite of the split from 1903 to 1907 (formally from 1905 to 1906), made public the fullest information about its internal situation, in the minutes of the Second (general) congress, the Third (Bolshevik) congress. and the Fourth or Stockholm (general) congress. The Social Democratic Party, in spite of the split, utilised the momentary gleam of freedom earlier than any of the other parties to introduce an ideal democratic structure for its open organisation, with an elective system and representation at congresses according to the number of organised members of the party. Neither the SRs nor the Cadets have done this yet - these almost-legal, very well organised bourgeois parties which possess incomparably greater financial resources, scope in use of the press and possibility of functioning openly, than ourselves. And did not the elections to the Second Duma, in which all parties took part, show graphically that the organisational cohesion of our party and our Duma group is higher than that of any other?

"The question arises - who achieved, who realised this greater cohesion, stability and staunchness of our party? This was done by the organisation of professional revolutionaries created above all with the participation of Iskra. Whoever knows the history of our party well, whoever has himself lived through the building of our party, needs only to take a simple glance at the composition of the delegation of any faction, let us say, at the London congress, to be convinced, to note at once the old basic nucleus which, more diligently than anybody else, cherished and reared the party. The basic condition for this success was, of course, the fact that the working class, the flower of which created the Social Democratic Party, is distinguished, owing to objective economic causes, from all other classes in capitalist society by its greater capacity for organisation. Without this condition the organisation of professional revolutionaries would have been a toy, an adventure, a meaningless signboard, and the pamphlet What Is To Be Done? stresses repeatedly that only in connexion with a "really revolutionary class which spontaneously rises in struggle" does the organisation which this pamphlet defends make sense. But the objectively very great capacity of the proletariat to be organised is carried out by living people, is carried out not otherwise than in definite forms of organisation. And no other organisation than that put forward by Iskra could, in our historical circumstances, in the Russia of 1900-05, have created such a Social Democratic Workers' Party as has now been created. The professional revolutionary has done his job in the history of Russian proletarian socialism. And no power will now disrupt the work which has long since outgrown the narrow limits of the 'circles'; no belated

complaints about exaggerations of the fighting tasks by those who in their day could only by struggle ensure a correct approach to the fulfilment of these tasks will shake the significance of the conquests which have already been achieved."

With the advance of reaction and dissipation of the rosy illusions of 1905 the Bolshevik proportion in the ranks of the party continued to grow. At the party conference held in November 1907, the Bolsheviks were able to secure the passing of resolutions which subordinated the Social-Democratic group in the Duma to the Central Committee and forbade party members to contribute articles to the bourgeois press on inner-party questions. At the party conference held in December 1908, in view of the now intense police terror in Russia, the elective principle in organisation was sharply modified and the party regime of before 1905 was in the main restored. This conference also passed a resolution condemning 'liquidationism' (advocacy of dissolving the party in a broad Labour Congress), a political disease now spreading very rapidly in the upper circles of the Menshevik faction.

While extreme right-wing tendencies grew among Mensheviks, an ultra-left tendency appeared in the ranks of the Bolsheviks under these conditions of reaction. This took the form of Otzovism (recallism), a system of ideas justifying withdrawal from all attempts to work in the Duma and other legal organisations and concentration of activity exclusively on underground work. At a meeting of the editorial board of Proletary (the secret Bolshevik faction leadership) in the summer of 1909 Otzovism was condemned as having nothing in common with Bolshevism, and members of the faction were called upon to fight against it. So far as the leading Otzovist, Bogdanov, was concerned, it was resolved that the fraction took no further responsibility for his doings (he had set up a 'party school' at which he propounded his doctrines); but it is not correct to say that the Otzovists were expelled from the Bolshevik faction. On the contrary, the factional leadership stated that it aimed at avoiding an organisational split with the Otzovists and would strive to win them back to Bolshevism. (They themselves broke away, trying to form a faction of their own around a paper they called Vperyod, after the Bolshevik factional paper of 1904; but this did not win much influence, and most of the Otzovists found their way back to Bolshevism in due course.)

At this same meeting a decision was taken against agitation for a separate Bolshevik congress to be convened at once, as advocated by some comrades indignant with the degeneration of the Mensheviks into 'liquidationism'. The latter development had aroused misgivings among many of the Menshevik rank and file, who although they disagreed with the Bolsheviks on some important political points, shared with them the conviction that the workers must retain an independent party of their own, organised for illegal as well as legal activity. If the Bolsheviks played their

cards properly they could win over a substantial section of this Menshevik rank and file; at this stage it would be wrong to take the initiative in splitting the party, although a split was inevitable in the not too distant future. A fight must be waged under the slogan of "preservation and consolidation of the RSDLP".

One of the most influential Menshevik leaders, the veteran propagandist of Marxism, Plekhanov, came out against 'liquidationism' and gathered around him these Mensheviks who regarded the continued existence of the party as sine qua non. With these 'pro-party Mensheviks' Lenin formed an alliance for the specific purpose of fighting the 'liquidators'. Plekhanov had played a negative role in 1904-1908 and was to return to that role later, but, in Zinoviev's words, "during the difficult years 1909, 1910 and 1911 Plekhanov rendered invaluable services to the party". Through his alliance with Plekhanov Lenin was able to make contact with wide sections of the Menshevik workers whom otherwise he could not have approached so easily.

The Bolsheviks' striving to isolate and eliminate the liquidators was for a time complicated by the appearance in their own ranks of a 'conciliationist' tendency which, demoralised by the shrinking in the size and influence of the RSDLP under the blows of reaction, and by the sneers of outsiders, including the spokesmen of the Second International, at the 'faction-ridden' state of the Russian workers' movement, wearily urged the dissolution of all factions, 'mutual amnesty' and general brotherhood at the expense of all differences of principle. At a meeting of the Central Committee in January 1910, these 'conciliationists' carried a resolution obliging everybody to dissolve their factions and close down their factional papers. The Bolsheviks fulfilled their obligations under this resolution, but the liquidators failed to do so. This open flouting of the party finally exposed the liquidators in the eyes of numerous Mensheviks, and Lenin and Plekhanov made the most of the situation. At the end of 1910 the Bolsheviks announced that they regarded themselves as released from the undertaking they had given in January, and launched a weekly paper, Zverzda, which was edited jointly with the pro-party Mensheviks.

Zverda functioned in the years 1910-12 as Iskra had functioned in 1900-03, as the organiser of a regrouping of political forces on a basis that it helped to clarify. The task, said Lenin was not to "reconcile certain given persons and groups, irrespective of their work and attitude", but to organise people around a 'definite party line'. "Unity is inseparable from its ideological foundation." The Bolsheviks were aided in their work now by the revival of the working-class movement, which was beginning, favoured by the boom that had started in 1909. With less danger of unemployment - and with the paralysing shock of the reaction of 1907 somewhat worn off - the workers began to recover their militant spirit. Strikes increased, and in 1912 the shooting down

of some strikers in the Lena goldfields was to enable the Bolsheviks to infuse political consciousness into this militancy on a large scale. Pressed between the increasingly restive working class on the one hand and the grim wall of Tsarism on the other, the liquidators were obliged to move ever faster and show their full intentions without dallying any longer. In June 1911, Martov and Dan, leading liquidators, resigned from the editorial board of the official organ of the RSDLP and declared the latter to be no longer existent so far as they were concerned.

The moment had come to carry out the reconstitution of the party on new lines. In December 1911 Lenin was in a position to record that the Bolsheviks and pro-party Mensheviks had formed an Organisation Committee to prepare for a special party conference; that in the course of joint work these two factions had practically fused in such key centres as Baku and Kiev; and that "for the first time after four years of ruin and disintegration", a Social Democratic leading centre had met inside Russia, issued a leaflet to the party, and begun the work of re-establishing the underground organisations that had broken up under the combined action of police terror and liquidationist propaganda.

When the special party conference met in Prague in 1912 it was found to be the most representative party gathering since the Second Congress. Every faction in the RSDLP had been invited, but only the Bolsheviks and pro-party Mensheviks attended; the underground organisations on which the conference was based were now practically entirely in the hands of these two factions. The conference took to itself all the rights and functions of a party congress, and formally expelled the liquidators from the RSDLP. A new central committee was elected to replace the one elected in 1907, which had collapsed after the fiasco of 1910; this central committee was entirely Bolshevik in composition except for one pro-party Menshevik. The faction of pro-party Mensheviks disappeared soon afterwards; while Plekhanov and a few other leaders broke with the Bolsheviks, the bulk of the rank and file came over completely to the Bolshevik position, as Lenin had foreseen. Henceforth, until it changed its name to Communist Party in 1918, the party was the RSDLP (Bolsheviks), with the Petersburg daily Pravda as its central organ. The Bolshevik faction had at last completed its development into the Bolshevik party - the party that, after fusing in 1917 with Trotsky's Mezhrayontsi (inter-ward group), led the great October proletarian revolution.

Notes

1. These political differences, which are largely outside the scope of this article, were largely concerned with relations with the bourgeois liberals.

2. Until 1918 the name social democrats was common to Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

3. The view that the activity of the party would be limited to 'strike making' on immediate economic issues.

## Appendix 5: The history of Bolshevism: did Leninism turn into Stalinism?

By Max Shachtman

The organisation of the party will take the place of the party; the Central Committee will take the place of the organisation; and finally the dictator will take the place of the Central Committee.

Leon Trotsky, 1904

Predictions like this, Trotsky's, in a polemic written in 1904, have often been used to “explain” Stalinism as a logical continuation of Bolshevism. In this polemic against the book “Three Who Made A Revolution”, by Bertram D Wolfe (which has been continuously in print since it was first published in 1948), Max Shachtman dissected such views.

"Under Jacobin-Bolshevik tactics, the whole international proletarian movement would be accused of moderatism before the revolutionary tribunal, and the lion head of Marx would be the first to fall under the knife of the guillotine.. The organisation of the party will take the place of the party; the Central Committee will take the place of the organisation; and finally the dictator will take the place of the Central Committee.

Leon Trotsky, 1904

It is hard to say who has written more absurdities about Lenin's "organisational principles": the Stalinists who seek to prove that their totalitarian party regime conforms identically with the views set forth by Lenin or the modern anti-Bolsheviks who argue that if the two are not quite identical it is nevertheless Lenin's views and practises that led directly to the present Stalinist regime. They represent complementary and mutually parasitic parts of a division of labour which has successfully devastated the thinking of millions of people, with one saying that the totalitarian tyranny leads to (or is!) socialism and the other that socialism can lead to nothing but this totalitarian tyranny.

Either as perpetrators or victims of falsification, both are so thoroughly and extensively wrong that it would require volumes just to exhume and properly correlate the facts. It is not merely a matter of setting the historical record right — that is of secondary importance. It is above all a matter of resuming the lagging fight for socialism, which a Stalin abandoned so completely to pursue one reactionary course and a Wolfe has abandoned just as

completely to pursue a different reactionary course.

In Lenin's conception of the "party machine," of its role in relationship to the working class, Wolfe finds (as what popular writer nowadays does not?) "the germ of a party dictatorship over the proletariat itself, exercised in its name," that is, the germ of Stalinism. It is out of this feature of Bolshevism that Wolfe erects the third pillar of his analysis. He reminds us that at the beginning Trotsky warned against the inevitable outcome of Lenin's conception:

The organisation of the party will take the place of the party; the Central Committee will take the place of the organisation; and finally the dictator will take the place of the Central Committee.

"Was ever prophecy more fatefully fulfilled by history?" exclaims Wolfe. The truth is that if prophets had no better example than this of how they are confirmed by history, the profession would be in sorry shape. With due respect to Trotsky, it can be said that to find in Stalinism a fulfilment of Trotsky's "Cassandra-like prevision" (Wolfe's phrase) of Lenin's conception requires a well-trained capacity for superficiality assisted by an elaborate ignoring — we will not say manipulation — of the historical facts. The "prevision" was not fulfilled at all; and Trotsky himself was not the last to understand this.

But before this is established, let us see what it is that makes Lenin's views so reprehensible in Wolfe's eyes. Rather, let us try to see, for on this score Wolfe is either ambiguous or obscure, or just plain silent. He makes the task of the reviewer almost baffling. Attentive reading of page after page of Wolfe fails to disclose exactly what it was in Lenin's ideas about the "party machine" that led to Stalinism.

Was it Lenin's conception of who is entitled to party membership? Wolfe describes the dispute at the party congress in 1903 on the famous Article I of the party constitution. Lenin's draft defined a party member as one "who recognizes the party's program and supports it by material means and by personal participation in one of the party organisation." Martov, leader of the Mensheviks-to-be, proposed that the phrase in italics be replaced entirely by the following: "and by regular personal assistance under the direction of one of the party organisations." Martov's formula was supported by the majority of the delegates.

Wolfe describes Lenin's view unsympathetically, which is his God-given right. But what was wrong with it? Wolfe's answer is a significant wink and a knowing nod of the head, as if to say, "Now you can see where Lenin was heading from the very start, can't you? Now you know what Bolshevism was at its very origin. If you really want to trace Stalinism to its historical roots, there indeed is one of the sturdiest and most malignant of them."

But wink and nod notwithstanding, all that Lenin proposed was a provision

that had been and was then and has ever since been a commonplace in every socialist party we ever heard of, namely, that to be considered a party member, with the right of determining the policy and leadership that the membership as a whole is to follow, you have to belong to one of the units of the party. That would seem to be, would it not, an eminently democratic procedure, to say nothing of other merits.

By Martov's formulation, the policy and leadership of the party to one of whose branches you belong are determined for you by persons who are given the title of party members in exchange for "assisting" it without the obligation of belonging to any of its established branches. It is the thoroughly bureaucratized bourgeois political machines that are characterized by the kind of party "membership', that Martov's draft proposed, and it is one of the ways in which leadership and party policy are divorced from control by the ranks. But what socialist party, regardless of political tendency, does Wolfe know that has ever adopted a party statute such as Martov defended? The Social Democratic Federation of August Claessens and Algernon Lee is not entirely corroded by Bolshevism, it is said. But suppose someone were to advocate that membership in the SDF be extended to persons who assist the Federation under the direction of one of its branches without actually joining a branch. These nonagenarians would immediately summon every remnant of their remaining muscularity to crush the hardy advocate as a madman who threatens the integrity of the SDF and the "Leninist organisational principle" which they take even more for granted than they do the atrocity stories about the history of Bolshevism.

Or suppose the roles had been reversed, and it was Lenin who had advocated the Martov formulation in 1903. Just imagine the speed with which heads would bob knowingly and eyes blink significantly, and how profound would be the conclusions drawn about the sinister character of Bolshevism as far back as the date of its birth! And the whole joke is that there was a reversal, at least on the part of Martov! Wolfe is oblivious to it; but in his history of the Russian Social Democracy Martov reminds us that under the influence of the 1905 revolution, the Mensheviks, at their Petersburg conference in December of that year, "abandoned Paragraph I of the old party statutes [that is, the Martov formula of 1903] which weakened the strict party-character of the organisation in so far as it did not obligate all the members of the party to join definite party organisations." So, about two years after the London debate, the Mensheviks themselves adopted Lenin's definition of party membership and there is no evidence that they ever altered it subsequently. From then on, at least, Lenin's view was never really in dispute. It is only in our time that it is splattered across the pages of anti-Bolshevik literature, with all sorts of dark but always undefined references to its ominous overtones, undertones and implications.

Was it Lenin's intolerance toward difference of opinion within the party, his conception of a party monolithism that allowed only for obedience to a highly-centralized, self-appointed and self-perpetuating leadership, his autocratic determination to have his own way regardless of the consequences, with a penchant for splitting the movement when he did not get his way? These are familiar charges against Bolshevism, and against Lenin in particular. Wolfe might have made an original contribution to these charges by providing some facts to sustain them. Instead he preferred to repeat them, and more than once.

We feel neither the desire nor the need to canonise Lenin as a saint, or to regard his works as sacred texts. He was the greatest revolutionary leader in history, and that is more than enough to assure his place against both detractors and iconographers. If we knew nothing at all about him, it would be safe to assume that he had his faults, personal and political; learning about him only confirms this innocent and not very instructive assumption. He was devoted to the cause of socialist freedom and his devotion was durable and passionate. As an adversary, Paul Axelrod, said, "there is not another man who for twenty-four hours of the day is taken up with the revolution, who has no other thoughts but thoughts of the revolution, and who, even in his sleep, dreams of nothing but revolution." This made him, in the eyes of dilettantes and philistines, let alone defenders of the old order, a fanatic. It was his strength. He was, in consequence, a passionate partisan of the instrument he regarded as indispensable for the revolution, the party, of the sharpness and clarity of its thought. This necessarily brought him into conflict with others, and not only with dabblers but with revolutionists no less devoted to socialism than he. In polemic and in factional struggle generally (neither of which was really invented by Lenin, and which can be avoided only by eschewing politics altogether), he was resolute, self-confident and uncompromising. It is easy to think of worse qualities. But they were qualities that made him incomprehensible or insufferable in the eyes of tergiversaters and cobwebheads. If, as was often the case, he exaggerated or overreached himself, it was generally because nobody helped him by inventing a method of carrying on polemical and factional struggle without risk of exaggeration. (Reading Wolfe, for example, shows that such a method has still to be invented. Only, for his exaggerations there is not even that excuse.) But all this about Lenin, and a good deal more, does not begin to prove the "standard" charges against him.

Take splits. Wolfe says that "in the matter of splitting, Lenin was invariably the aggressor". It is a categorical statement — one of the few made by Wolfe who generally prefers indirection. To illustrate how much dehydrated bunk there is in the statement, we can take the famous 1903 party congress which split the Russian Social Democratic Party. There was a furious fight over the above-

mentioned Paragraph 1 of the party statutes. Lenin was defeated after a two-day debate. But he did not bolt the congress or the party. Earlier in the sessions, however, the delegates led by Lenin and Martov, Axelrod, Trotsky and Plekhanov, overwhelmingly defeated the position of the Jewish Bund on the question of autonomy. The Bund, refusing to bow to the majority, split from the congress. No sermon from Wolfe on the virtue of unity and the vice of splitting.

Then the congress, Lenin and Martov included, voted against the separate organisation around the "Economist" journal, Rabocheye Dyelo. Whereupon, two Economist delegates split from the congress. Still no sermon from Wolfe. Then the congress, by a slender majority but nonetheless a majority, adopted Lenin's motion for an Iskra editorial board of Plekhanov, Lenin and Martov, as against the outgoing board which had included old-timers like Axelrod and Zasulich. Whereupon Martov announced his refusal to abide by the decision — to serve on the board — and the split between the now-named Mensheviks (Minority) and Bolsheviks (Majority) became a fact. Conclusion? "In the matter of splitting, Lenin was invariably the aggressor."

Of course Lenin was responsible for a split here and a split there! To deny it would be absurd; to feel apologetic about it, likewise. But it is interesting to see how Wolfe applies different standards in different cases — so sternly moralistic toward the Bolsheviks and so maternally tender toward their opponents. He quotes Lenin as writing that he could not understand why the Bund split from the congress since "it showed itself master of the situation and could have put through many things"; and then observes with haughty severity:

Since, all his life, Lenin attached a feeling of moral baseness to "opportunism," he found it hard to understand that these men of the Bund and Rabocheye Dyelo could have firm convictions principles of their own, and, defeated on them, would not content themselves with "putting through" what he regarded as opportunistic measures.

Happy Bundists to have so sympathetic an advocate! Lenin found it hard to understand, but he, Wolfe, he understands. After all, if people have firm convictions and principles, they will not, if defeated in their own organisation, consent to forego them just for the sake of unity. They will not and they should not. Better a split than that! All this applies to Bundists, Economists, Mensheviks and other opponents of the Bolsheviks. But not to the Bolsheviks themselves. Even though their principles and convictions were no less firm, they deserve no such affectionate consideration. Why not? Because... because... well, because in the matter of splitting Lenin was invariably the aggressor.

The tale of Lenin's "intolerance" toward opponents inside the party has been

told in a dozen languages. In the best of cases (they are rare enough), the record is seen through the completely distorting glasses of the present-day Stalinist regime; in the worst of cases (that is, as a rule), the record is falsified in whole or in part. At least nine times out of ten, Lenin's "intolerance" consisted, for the opponents, in the fact that he refused to accept their point of view on a question.

The phenomenon is familiar to anyone who has been active for any length of time in politics, especially in those working-class movements where politics is not an intellectual pastime but is taken most seriously. A man who puts forward a point of view on some question, but adds that his opponent's view is probably just as good if not better — there is a tolerant man for you. If he says that it really doesn't matter much whether the organisation adopts his view or not — there's a tolerant man. If he is not so impolite as to try vigorously to win supporters for his view and to plan, with his initial supporters, on how to win a majority for it — he is tolerant too. Or if his point of view miraculously wins the support of, let us say, the organisation's convention, and he then announces that he is ready to concede the leadership to his opponents who are against his position and who, with the best will in the world, could not carry out the adopted policy with enthusiasm or understanding — there is a most tolerant man. He is not at all like Lenin, granted. He differs from him in that he does not take his views or his organisation — or himself — very seriously. He is in politics for a week-end, warmed by the sunny thought that after he has returned to his normal pursuits he will have left behind a memory unmarred by the tiniest Leninist stain.

The references generally made to Lenin's "intolerance" are actually calculated to convey the impression that he imposed upon the Bolsheviks a uniquely dictatorial regime in which his word, or at best, the word of his Central Committee was law that could be questioned only under penalty of the severest punishment. The unforearmed reader tends to think of Lenin's organisation in terms of Stalin's — not quite the same, to be sure, but as an only slightly modified version.

The comparison is utterly monstrous. Up to 1917, the Russian revolutionary movement was an illegal, underground movement, working under the onerous conditions of czarist autocracy. In spite of that, the Bolshevik movement had, on the whole, more genuine democracy in its organisation, more freedom of opinion and expression, a freer and healthier internal life, than at least nine-tenths of the other socialist or trade-union organisations of Europe, most of which enjoyed legality and other facilities beyond the dreams of the Russians. This was true not only of the relations between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks when they represented only contending factions within a more-or-less united party, but likewise true among the Bolsheviks themselves, first as a faction and, after 1912, as an independent party. The

hideous monolithism of Stalin's regime was entirely unknown — it was not even dreamed of — among the Bolsheviks. Political tendencies were formed without let or hindrance, and if they dissolved it was not under compulsion of any kind. The official leading committee always had its central organ — the spokesman of the faction or the party — but time and again periodicals would be issued on their own responsibility by political groupings or tendencies inside the party and even (or rather particularly!) inside the Bolshevik faction (later inside the Bolshevik Party) itself. Even after the Bolsheviks took power, this tradition was so strong and normal and deeply rooted that, in the most perilous period for the new Soviet regime, it was possible for groups of dissident Bolsheviks not only to publish newspapers and reviews of their own independently of the Central Committee but to attack that committee (and of course Lenin!) with the utmost freedom and... impunity.

These separate organs of tendencies or groups or factions discussed all questions of party theory, party policy, party organisation, and party leadership with a fullness, a freedom and an openness that was known to no other working-class organisation of the time and has certainly had no equal since the rise of Stalinism. The idea of "secret" or "internal" discussion of political or theoretical questions of the movement, introduced by Zinoviev and Stalin in the period of the revolution's decline and now considered perfectly good "Bolshevik" practise, alas, even by self- styled Marxist organisations, was simply not known among the Bolsheviks — mind you, among the Bolsheviks even while they were an illegal, police-hounded and police-infiltrated movement! Lenin's collected works, which are composed largely of open "inner-party" polemics and the files of a dozen different factional papers and pamphlets, provide inundating evidence of this rich, free and open party life. In this respect, no other socialist organisation of those days could even equal the Bolsheviks.

Even in its best days, the German Social Democracy did not have anything like so free and democratic an organisational-political life, while it was an outlawed party or afterward in the period of legality. Why, even Marx and Engels sometimes had to fight to get their views published in the German party press and their fight was not uniformly successful. Among the Bolsheviks, such a thing was unheard of, and not just with respect to a Marx or Engels or Lenin, but also to the spokesman of some unpopular grouping in the party or faction.

Read, or re-read, all the anti-Bolshevik histories or commentaries with the closest care, and see what facts are related about how Lenin's "organisational principles" worked out in party practice. You will find all sorts of hints, suggestions, innuendo, clouded allusions, grunts, grimaces, pursed lips, winks and nods; you will find gossip, chit-chat about factional excesses which are "normal" in heated factional fights, titillating tales about the

"dubious" sources of Bolshevik funds calculated to shock the sensibilities of our pious business and trade-union circles and of course a lot of plain kiln-dried falsification without filler, shellac or varnish. But it would be astounding if you found even one fact about the regime in the Bolshevik party or fraction that contradicts the record cited here about what the regime actually was. And it is this regime, as it really existed, that is supposed to have led to Stalinism! This is the tradition that is said to have helped Stalinism appear and triumph! Stalinism rests upon it exactly the same way a stiletto rests on the heart it has stabbed.

Or just suppose that, in the search for facts about Lenin and the old Bolshevik movement, Wolfe or any other anti-Bolshevik writer had discovered about them the things that are known about other leaders and other political groupings. For example, in the early Iskra days, Plekhanov, in order to assure his domination of the editorial board that was evenly divided between the "old" and the "young," was given two votes as against one for all the other members! If that had happened with Lenin — then or at any other time in his life — can you imagine the pages — no, the chapters — filled with outrage in every line, that would be written to argue that this was the very essence of Bolshevism, the core itself of Leninism, the proof positive and irrefutable of how it was pregnant with Stalinism from the day it was born?

Or take the party of Rosa Luxemburg, who was, writes Wolfe generously and rightly, "the outstanding advocate of revolutionary policy and the outstanding defender of democracy within the labour movement." Yet, she shared the theory of the permanent revolution which, says Wolfe, led to Stalinism; her party was opposed, and not on very democratic grounds, to the Soviets of Workers' Deputies in the revolution of 1905; she and her party were opposed to the democratic slogan of the right of self-determination and on grounds that were, objectively, reactionary; her party (we refer to the Social Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania) was opposed to the idea of mass, formally non-party trade unions and insisted that the unions must declare their allegiance to the revolutionary party; and in spite of her criticisms of Lenin's "organisational principles," the regime in her own party in Poland was exceptionally factional, narrow, super-centralistically disciplined and far more "bureaucratic" than anything the Bolsheviks were ever guilty of.

The anti-Bolsheviks, who have exactly nothing in common with Luxemburg, ghoulishly drag her into court against Lenin, but if that record were to be found in the history of the Bolsheviks, can you imagine the uproar in twelve languages?

Or take the Narodniks (Populists) for whom Wolfe has such an extravagant reverence. In their early days, these spiritual (and political) ancestors or the Social Revolutionists, convinced but primitive revolutionists, exploited — with the best intentions in the world — the anti-Semitic pogrom feelings of the

Russian peasants and even issued leaflets spurring them on. Can you imagine what the anti-Bolshevik professionals would make of such a thing if it could be found in the record of the Bolsheviks or their forebears? Or what they would say if some Bolshevik argued that Kerensky's role in 1917 "flowed from" the anti-Semitic aberrations of the Narodniks four decades earlier?

Such examples could be cited almost indefinitely — but not with reference to Lenin and the Bolsheviks. If they and they alone are the targets today, it is not as a result of objective historical re-examination but because of the frenetic campaign against socialism by a desperate and dying bourgeoisie and by disoriented and disillusioned ex-revolutionists. And by the same token, if we defend the Bolsheviks today it is in the interest of historical objectivity but also because we remain loyal to the emancipating fight for socialism.

WOLFE DOES DEAL WITH TWO ASPECTS of Lenin's "conception of the party machine" that are indeed of decisive importance. He separates them when they should be connected. Properly connected and focussed, they would throw a most revealing light on Bolshevism, the Russian Revolution, its decline and on the rise and meaning of Stalinism. Right here, perhaps, is Wolfe's most glaring failure. He fumbles the problem helplessly and hopelessly, where he is not utterly oblivious to its significance. You cannot help asking yourself what in heaven's name this man learned about Marxism during his long years in the communist movement — or since.

First, Wolfe finds in Lenin's views on the interrelations between the revolutionary movement, socialist consciousness and the spontaneous struggles of the workers, as he expressed them early in the century, the

... dogma, obscure as yet in its implications, [that] was at the very core of "Leninism." From it flowed an attitude toward the working class, toward its ability to think for itself, to learn from experience, toward its capacities and potentialities for self-rule, toward its "spontaneous" movements such as might take place without orders and control from the party of socialist theoreticians and professional revolutionaries. From it would spring a special attitude toward trade unions, toward the impromptu strikers' councils or Soviets, even toward two revolutions — in 1905 and the spring of 1917 — that would come not on order but by surprise.

Elsewhere, Wolfe finds something else that makes up "the real core of 'Leninism,' separating him by an abyss from the Mensheviks, and blurring to the vanishing point the dogmatic line which divided him from Trotsky." The "core" is this:

In short, Lenin's real answer to the question: what happens after we get power? is: Let's take power and then we'll see.

This "core" separated Lenin not only from the Mensheviks but from Marx as well, and Wolfe argues the point with a brevity, if not erudition, which merits

full quotation:

To Marx it might have seemed that "the forms of the state are rooted in the material conditions of life," that "the economic structure of society. .. independent of men's will... determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes," and that "no social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there are room in it have been developed." But to Lenin's political-power-centred mind, for all his Marxist orthodoxy, such formulae were intolerable fetters unless subject to the proper exegesis. And the exegesis literally turned Marx on his head until the Marxist view that "in the last analysis economics determines politics" became the Leninist view that, with enough determination, power itself, naked political power, might succeed wholly in determining economics.

Wolfe has more to say about these two points, but very little more.

Lenin's ideas about socialist consciousness and the struggle of the working class were not invented by him nor were they uniquely his own. They are nothing less than the intellectual underpinnings of any genuinely socialist party, and it is inconceivable without them. In an even deeper sense they underlie the very conception of a rationally-ordered socialist society. No one developed these ideas more sharply and profoundly, even if with polemical vehemence, than Lenin, and that was his special contribution. But the ideas themselves go back to the beginnings of the scientific socialist movement, back to Marx and Engels. A serious examination of Lenin could not have failed to establish this fact and draw conclusions that it indicates Wolfe cannot help but know that Lenin's views were an almost literal copy of those expressed earlier, just as the century turned, by Karl Kautsky. And his present-day venerators would be horrified to hear that, by virtue of what he wrote at that time, he was the fountainhead of what was inevitably to become Stalinism! Kautsky, before Lenin, wrote:

Many of our revisionist critics believe that Marx asserted that economic development and the class struggle create, not only the conditions for socialist production, but also, and directly, the consciousness of its necessity ... In this connection socialist consciousness is presented as a necessary and direct result of the proletarian class struggle. But this is absolutely untrue.

Of course, socialism, as a theory, has its roots in a modern economic relationship in the same way as the class struggle of the proletariat has, and in the same way as the latter emerges from the struggle against the capitalist-created poverty and misery of the masses. But socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises out of different premises.

Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound

scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science is as much a condition for socialist production as, say, modern technology, and the proletariat can create neither the one nor the other, no matter how much it may desire to do so; both arise out of the modern social process. The vehicles of science are not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia: It was out of the heads of members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually-developed proletarians who, in their turn, introduce it into the proletarian class struggle where conditions allow that to be done.

Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without, and not something that arose within it spontaneously. Accordingly, the old [Austrian] Hainfeld program quite rightly stated that the task of Social Democracy is to imbue the proletariat with the consciousness of its position and the consciousness of its tasks. There would be no need for this if consciousness emerged from the class struggle. (Kautsky's emphasis.)

To this should be added: neither would there then be any need for a distinct, separate political movement of socialism — a socialist party — except, perhaps, to fulfil the not very useful function of passive reflector of the welter of ideological and political confusion that, to one extent or another, will always exist in the working class, at least so long as it is a class deprived of social power and therewith of the means of wiping out its own inferior position in society. It is kept in this inferior position under capitalism by force but only in the last analysis, only at times of crisis. As a rule, be it under democratic or even under fascist capitalism, the ruling class maintains or seeks to maintain itself by ideological means.

The whole of capitalism's "headfixing industry", as one Marxist wittily called it, is directed toward keeping the working class in ignorance or confusion about its social position, or rather about the purely capitalist reasons for its position, toward concealing from the working class the emancipating historical mission it has and the road it must travel to perform it.

So long as the workers do not acquire an understanding of their social position and their social task, their battles against the ruling class, be they ever so militant or massive. can only modify the conditions of their economic subjugation but not abolish them. Indispensable to their abolition is the socialist consciousness (an exact mathematical formulation of which is neither possible nor necessary) of the working class, which means nothing more and nothing less than its realisation of its position in society today, of its power, and of its obligation and its ability to reconstruct society socialistically.

Now the dispute over the ideas of Kautsky-Lenin on the subject boils down to this: either the working class, organised in its elementary trade union

organisations or not, acquires this consciousness by spontaneous generation in the course of repeated struggles for the improvement of its conditions — or in its decisive section, it acquires it, in the course of these struggles, to be sure, with the aid of those who already possess this socialist consciousness and who are banded together (in a group, a league, a movement, a party — call it what you will) in order more effectively to transmit it, by word of mouth and by the printed page, to those whose minds are still cluttered up with bourgeois rubbish, that is, the products of the "head-fixing industry."

Between these two, there is not a single person today who calls himself a socialist of any kind who would venture to defend, flatly and frontally, the former conception. All you get from the anti-Bolsheviks is, as in Wolfe's case, murky reference to the "special attitude" that flowed from Lenin's formulation of the position, in which the only thing definite is a sneer at the very conception of a socialist party — the "socialist theoreticians and professional revolutionists." The reformists who distinguish themselves from Lenin by saying that while they too are for a socialist party, they look upon it as a "servant" of the working class and not as its "master" or "dictator"; as a means of the "socialist education" of the working class in whose "ability to think for itself" they devoutly believe and not for the purpose of "ordering and controlling" it from above — are either hypocritical or inane. Their daily practice, inside the labour movement and in politics generally, would indicate that it is less the latter than the former.

The question of socialist consciousness which Lenin developed has wider implications. Wolfe sees in it only the source for establishing a new slavery for the working class, the Stalinist tyranny in the name of the "dictatorship of the proletariat". The truth is not merely different, but in this case it is the exact opposite!

Workers' democracy and, indeed, that complete realisation of democracy which inaugurates the socialist society, are not only inseparable from Lenin's ideas on socialist consciousness but, without them, become empty words, unattainable hopes, illusions at worst.

What was the obvious meaning of Lenin's insistence that the specific role of the socialist movement was to "introduce" a socialist consciousness into the working class? What, for example, was the clear implication of Lenin's "Aside from the influence of the Social Democracy, there is no conscious activity of the workers," which Wolfe quotes as a sample of the "dogma [which] was at the very core of 'Leninism'"... and from which "flowed an attitude toward the working class"? It should be obvious.

The "party of socialist theoreticians and professional revolutionaries" was not assigned thereby to trick the incurably blind and incurably stupid workers into lifting it to power so that it might establish a new kind of dictatorship over

them. That makes no sense whatsoever. It was assigned the job of making the workers aware of the fundamental reasons for their exploited and subjected position under capitalism; of making the workers aware of their own class strength and having them rely only upon their class strength and independence; of assembling them in a revolutionary party of their own; of making them aware of their ability to free themselves from all class rule by setting up their own government as the bridge to socialist freedom.

Without a socialist consciousness, there would be working-class activity but the workers would continue to remain the ruled and never become the free. For the workers to rule themselves required conscious activity toward socialism.

What is Wolfe trying to convey with his suggestive prose? That Lenin dwelled so emphatically upon the need for the party to instil socialist consciousness or stimulate it in the working class because he did not believe in "its ability to think for itself, to learn from experience"? Or because he was sceptical about "its capacities and potentialities for self-rule"'? Did Lenin expect to imbue the unable-to-think-and-lead proletariat with socialist conceptions by intravenous hypodermic injections? Or is Wolfe just a little... careless with his innuendoes?

Let us go further. Lenin knew — he referred to it often enough and nowadays it is especially necessary to emphasise and elaborate it — one of the most basic and decisive differences between the bourgeois revolution and the socialist revolution. One of the outstanding characteristics of the former was that it could be carried through without a clear ideology, without an unequivocally-formulated consciousness on the part of the bourgeoisie whose social system it was to establish. In fact, not only could it be carried out in this way, but generally speaking that is how it was carried out.

The greatest bourgeois revolution the French, was carried out by plebeians, without the bourgeoisie and in part against it; and it was consolidated by Napoleon, in part without the bourgeoisie and in part against it. In Germany it was carried out, that is, the supremacy of capitalism over feudalism was assured, in the Bismarckian or Junker-landlord way — again, in part without the bourgeoisie and in very large part against it. The passage from feudalism to capitalism in Japan is only another example of the same phenomenon. Yet, in all these and other cases, including those where the bourgeoisie was not raised to political power, the bourgeois revolution was nevertheless effected, consolidated, guaranteed. Why? As Lenin once wrote, in 1918:

One of the main differences between the bourgeois and the socialist revolution consists in this, that for the bourgeois revolution which grows up out of feudalism the new economic organisations, which continually transform feudal society on all sides, gradually take form within the womb of the old

society The bourgeois revolution faced only one task: to throw off and destroy all the fetters of the former society. Every bourgeois revolution that fulfils this task, fulfils everything that is demanded of it: it strengthens the growth of capitalism.

But if the bourgeois fetters upon production are thrown off and destroyed, that alone does not and cannot assure the growth of socialist production. Under capitalism, production is assured by the irrepressible tendency toward accumulation of capital which is dictated primarily, not by the will of the capitalist, but by the blindly-operating market as the automatic regulator of capitalist production. Socialist production is incompatible with market relations.

It is production for use and therefore planned production, not automatically regulated by a blind force. Given a certain level of development of the productive force available, everything then depends upon planning, that is, upon the conscious organisation of production and distribution by human beings.

Now, under capitalism, what and how much is produced is determined by the market, and the distribution of what is produced is determined basically by the relations between the class that owns the means of production and exchange and the class that is divorced from them. Overturn capitalism, and it is found that there is no market to determine what is produced and in what quantities, and there is no class that owns private property.

Until the distant day when all classes are completely abolished and socialism fully established, the conditions of production and distribution must necessarily be determined by politically-associated human beings — no longer by the blind market but by the state.

In other words, where the state becomes the repository of all the means of production and is in complete control of them, economy is for the first time subject to planned and conscious control by those who have the state in their hands. In this sense, politics determines economics! This may sound startling to Wolfe, as well as to all sorts of half-baked half Marxists But if this simple and irrefutable fact is not understood, then the whole idea of the working class taking power in order to organise a socialist society becomes absurd and even meaningless. In revolution, but above all and most decisively in the socialist revolution, the relationship between economics and politics is not only reversed, turned upside-down, but it must be reversed!

But if politics now determines economics (again, within the limits of the given productive forces), or to put it differently, if the conditions of production and distribution are now determined by politically conscious individuals or groups, the question of the nature of the determining politics is immediately thrown open. What assurance is there that the politics will be socialist in nature, so

that production relations are socialist or socialistic (by which is meant socialist in tendency or direction) and that distribution corresponds to them, so that what is produced is for the use of the people and not of a small privileged group?

To rely for that on the good will, the honourable intentions or the socialist past or professions of faith of a group of planners who hold the state power to the exclusion of the rest of the people, is naive, where it is not reactionary. In any case, it is not a socialist idea and certainly not Lenin's. A socialist development of the economy can be assured only by those who are to be its principal beneficiaries, the working class, and only if it has the power to make the decisions on production and distribution and to carry them out, hence only if it holds the power of the state. For politics now determines economics! And it cannot acquire this power or wield it unless it is permeated by a socialist consciousness, which means, among other things, an understanding of the decisive role it has to play in the new state, and therefore and only by that means, the role it has to play in assuring a socialist direction to the operation of the economy.

That is why Lenin, in distinguishing between bourgeois and socialist revolutions, underlined the fact that the Bolshevik revolution "found at hand" not socialist economic relations that had developed under capitalism as capitalist economic relations had developed under feudalism, but rather a democratic political factor: "victory depended solely upon whether already finished organisational forms of the movement were at hand that embraced millions. This finished form was the Soviets."

The same thought was in his mind when he urged that every cook should become an administrator, so that with everyone exercising the power of "bureaucrat" no one would be a bureaucrat. And the thought was even more pregnantly expressed in his famous saying that "Soviets plus electrification equal socialism." (It is impossible even to imagine Lenin saying that a totalitarian prison for the workers plus nationalized property equals a degenerated workers' state!)

The Soviets, before the Bolsheviks took power, were acclaimed by every Menshevik and Social Revolutionist as the "revolutionary democracy." That was right. What is more, the Soviets were a magnificent example of a spontaneous movement of the workers and peasants themselves, not set up by order of any party or according to its plan.

Wolfe finds that from Lenin's "dogma" about socialist consciousness "flowed" an attitude toward the working class which was uncommendable because, it would seem, it was most undemocratic and even contemptuous toward the working class, including "its 'spontaneous' movements such as might take place without orders and control from the party..." Like the Soviets of 1917, for

example? Then how explain that every party in Russia, except the Bolsheviks, fought to keep the Soviets (the "revolutionary democracy") from taking over all power, and worked to keep them as a more or less decorative appendage to the never-elected but self-constituted Kerensky regime?

True to Lenin's "dogma", the Bolsheviks alone strove to imbue the Soviets with a genuinely socialist consciousness, which meant concretely that the workers (and even the peasants), more democratically and representatively organised in the Soviets than ever before or ever since in any other movement in any country of the world, should take command of the nation and therewith of their own destiny.

This example of what really was the "attitude" of Lenin and his party toward the "spontaneous" movements of the workers, their ability to think and learn for themselves, and their capacities and potentialities for self rule — not in some thesis or polemical article or speech, but in one of the most crucial periods of history is so outstanding, so overshadowing, so illuminating about Lenin's "conceptions" that Wolfe passes it by. We will not ask what this historian would have said about Lenin's "dogma" if the Bolshevik attitude toward the "revolutionary democracy" in 1917 had been the same as, let us say, that of Kerensky. But we wonder what he will say in succeeding volumes about the Menshevik and SR "attitude" toward the Soviets and the "dogma" from which it "flowed".

The revolution of 1917 was the decisive test for all political parties and groups. In spite of conservative trends in the ranks (all parties tend toward conservatism about some of their "dogmas"), Lenin showed that he had been able to build and hold together a party which proved, in this most critical hour, to be the only consistent champion of revolutionary democracy and revolutionary socialism, and the only "political machine" ready and able to lead both to victory. This is what brought Trotsky to the side of the Bolsheviks and caused him to "forget" his "Cassandra-like prevision" about how "the dictator will take the place of the Central Committee" and the party itself.

If Wolfe finds that Trotsky's prediction was "fatefully fulfilled by history", it is primarily because of his method of separating the history of the conflict of social forces from specific political events, or worse, of simply ignoring the former. The fact is that whatever grounds there may have been or seemed to have been in 1903-04 for Trotsky to utter his warning, the main tendency of the development of Lenin's group or party, particularly from 1905 onwards, was in an entirely opposite one from that feared by Trotsky.

The apparatus did not replace the party, nor the Central Committee the apparatus, nor the dictator (Lenin!) the Central Committee. The inner-party democracy and freedom of opinion and discussion of the Bolsheviks as an illegal movement, it is worth repeating, can be matched, without apology,

against the regime of virtually every other working-class organisation, legal or illegal, that ever existed.

Here, too, the decisive test was 1917 itself. At least, you would think so, on the basis of almost universal experience in such matters. A working-class movement which is suffering from a fatal disease — opportunism, let us say, or bureaucratism — does not usually reveal it, not clearly, at any rate, in normal periods, in periods of social calm or political decay. It shows it, and most disastrously for itself and its followers, in the most critical and troubled periods of society, above all in the crisis of war and the crisis of revolution. But precisely in the critical period of 1917, the Bolshevik party passed the test, and so well that Trotsky found it possible to abandon his early apprehensions about it.

Now, why didn't Lenin's conception of organisation, which was one of the "roots of Stalinism ", manifest itself in 1917 in a way that would cause the Bolshevik party to play a conservative or reactionary role in the revolution, to be a brake upon the workers and peasants? The question is of first-rate interest. Therefore, Wolfe passes it by.

Did the Bolshevik party measure up to its task early in 1917? Of course not! But that was not because Trotsky's prophecy about Lenin's conception of organisation had been fulfilled, fatefully or otherwise. It was an entirely different prophecy of Trotsky's that was fulfilled or almost. Years earlier, Trotsky had written that the Bolshevik formula of "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" had its revolutionary side, as opposed to the Menshevik conception of a revolution in which it would he the role of the proletariat to bring the bourgeoisie to power. But, he added, if the Bolsheviks persisted in this formula, the coming revolution would reveal its reactionary side, that is, that which inhibited the proletariat from carrying the democratic revolution through to proletarian power and the inauguration of socialist measures.

Steeped in Lenin's old formula, most of the party leaders in 1917 adopted a position which paralysed the revolutionary possibilities of the party. It took a further fight by Lenin, after his arrival in Russia in April, to effect that "rearmament" of the party which finally assured the victory in October. But, this "prophecy" of Trotsky's — or rather, Lenin's rearming of the party in the direction of Trotsky's theory — is regarded by Wolfe as one of the sources of Stalinism!

Important is the fact that Lenin did not replace the Central Committee by a dictator in any sense indicated by Trotsky. He enjoyed, justly, immense authority among the Bolsheviks, but he had won it and kept it to the end of his life by his intellectual ability and character as a leader and not by any dirty manipulation or usurpation.

In 1917, most of the party leadership opposed his famous "April Theses." He was not only unable to dictate to the others, but did not dream of it. He won them over, one by one, partly by the pressure of the party ranks whom he convinced and partly by convincing the leaders as well. In 1917, or before, when his point of view won, it was not because the dictator had replaced the Central Committee; and when his point of view lost, as was more than once the case, it was not because the apparatus had replaced the party.

Yet, the Bolshevik party did degenerate; Soviet democracy was replaced by a unique Bonapartist dictatorship. But the process did not conform with Trotsky's prediction, which Wolfe transforms into an abstraction raised to the nth power. Reading Wolfe, you would think that the Bolshevik party was a sort of supra-mundane evolving out of some purely internal mechanism, unaffected by the strains and influences exerted by terrestrial forces.

It is only necessary to read what the Bolsheviks said and wrote in the period of the revolutionary upsurge to see what their real attitude was toward Soviet and socialist democracy, what ideas of working-class self rule they sought with all their strength to instil into the Russian people. The bureaucracy rose not because of these ideas, but in spite of them.

The revolution was soon plunged into a fierce civil war, and if it had not been for the Bolsheviks, including their "machine", the Soviet power would not have lasted 48 hours, to be replaced, in all likelihood, not by bourgeois democrats but by the czarist reaction which Anglo-French imperialism was sponsoring.

Civil war, unfortunately, is not the ideal culture for the growth of the democratic bacillus. The days of War Communism were harsh and stringent. At the front and at home, command inevitably took the place of free discussion and voting. The tendency to bureaucratic command gripped and held not only Bolshevik leaders, but rank-and-file militants, Bolshevik and non-party, as well.

Even so, Soviet democracy could have been restored after the civil war if the accursed backwardness of Russia had been overcome rapidly by the aid which a successful revolution in the advanced West could have contributed on a grand scale. It could have been maintained if, to start with, the Menshevik and SR parties had allied themselves with the "revolutionary democracy" in the civil war and not with the monarchist reaction.

Russian Populists of the old days once exclaimed: "Never will history forgive the autocracy for making terrorists out of us." With far more justice the Bolsheviks might have declared: "Never will history forgive the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionists for joining the war against the Soviets and forcing us to substitute our party for the Soviets."

Soviet democracy might have been restored by another road, the re-democratisation of the Bolshevik Party itself. And here it is interesting to note

that the big fight for party democracy was launched by an outstanding section of the Old Bolsheviks who rallied to Trotsky's position; in fact, by the time Zinoviev broke with Stalin and joined the Trotskyists, it can be said that the bulk of the militants who had been most thoroughly trained in the old school of Bolshevism and in Lenin's "conception of organisation", lined up against the Stalinist bureaucracy, which was represented primarily by comparatively recent members or by obscure personages who had never played an important part in the life of the party.

Well or badly, consistently or not, the old Bolshevik cadres resisted the rise of the new Stalinist bureaucracy. If they failed, it was not due to the overpowering force of Lenin's organisational principles, but to an overpowering force of a radically different kind.

In passing, Wolfe writes:

Nineteen five and nineteen seventeen, the heroic years when the machine was unable to contain the flood of overflowing life, would bring Trotsky to the fore as the flaming tribune of the people, would show Lenin's ability to rise above the confining structure of his dogmas, and would relegate Stalin, the machine-man, to the background. But no people can live forever at fever heat and when that day was over and Lenin was dead the devoted machine-man's day would come. [**]

Just in passing! But these two sentences contain more insight than can be found in any two chapters of Wolfe's book. Revolutions are periods of turbulence precisely because the people are so free to choose their course and their leaders for themselves and so hard to control by a machine. Wolfe merely sets down the two deeply significant sentences and then goes on as though they were no more than a chance collection of words.

He seems to shy away from matters and statements of social importance spontaneously, without special effort, as if by instinct. But the sentences are important regardless of Wolfe. When the masses were free to choose democratically in the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, Trotsky and Lenin were lifted to power. (Their names can be used here as symbolic of Bolshevism as it really was.) And it is only when the masses were exhausted or apathetic or prostrate, that is, when revolution was succeeded by reaction, that the Stalinist counter-revolution could triumph over the masses and over the Bolshevik party.

THERE is the "core of Stalinism" indeed! The Stalinist bureaucracy did not grow out of an organic evolution of the Bolshevik party, as was implied by Trotsky's "prophecy". Its growth paralleled and required the destruction of that party. And its destruction, root and trunk and leaves and branch, until absolutely nothing is left of it today except the plagiarized name. This fact, too, is of such capital importance that the anti Bolshevik writers pass it by.

Destroyed: the principles of Bolshevism, its program, its tradition, its history, its personnel down almost to the last man, including (how significant this is!) even those Bolsheviks who tried to capitulate to Stalinism, and yes, including even the big bulk of the original Stalinist faction of the old party! Preserved: the name of the party and a few renegades from the second and tenth ranks of the old Bolshevik party — that and nothing more.

The destruction of the Bolshevik party meant the destruction of socialist consciousness. The measure of the growth of the Bolshevik party was the growth of this consciousness among the workers it influenced; and in turn it grew among the workers to the extent that the party remained attached to the ideas which Lenin most conspicuously advocated. It is of tremendous interest that for the Stalinist faction to extend its initial victory inside the party apparatus (that's where its first victory occurred) to a victory inside the party generally, it had to flood the party.

The first big public step, so to speak, taken by the Stalinist bureaucracy was the notorious Lenin Levy organised right after Lenin's death. Hundreds of thousands of workers were almost liberally poured into the party. Who were they? Generally speaking, the more conservative workers and employees, people who had not shown any interest in joining the party in the tough days of the revolution and civil war but who could, in 1924-25, be persuaded to join it now that its power seemed consolidated, now that membership seemed to guarantee employment, privileges, a career.

Almost to a man they could be counted on by the bureaucracy in the fight against the Opposition, against the Bolsheviks, their principles, their revolutionary and socialist and democratic traditions. It was Stalin's first and least important step in literally dissolving Lenin's "machine" in order to substitute a despotic police regime that was utterly alien to it. This first step was typical of those that followed.

There is as much justification, then, for the theory that Stalinism was rooted in the Bolshevism which it extirpated, as there is, for example, in the kindred theory that the socialist movement, its methods and its theories in general form the roots of the fascist movement and its methods and theories.

The anti-Bolshevik democrat would feel outraged at seeing the latter argument put forward. He would declare indignantly that to explode such nonsense, nothing more is needed than the fact that Hitlerism crushed the socialist organisations, imprisoned or killed their leaders, outlawed their ideas, and so on and so forth. Yet the argument that Hitlerism had its authentic roots in the German Social Democratic Party is advanced in all coolness by so eminent an anti-socialist as Frederick von Hayek, and with the same reasoning, with the same analogies, with the same cavalier attitude toward decisive facts as is displayed by those who argue that Stalinism is

rooted in Bolshevism.

Hayek is a defender of the capitalist status-quo-ante-state intervention and a sworn foe of socialism, and he has his means of discrediting its good name. The aim of the democratic or reformist anti-Bolsheviks is somewhat loftier, as it were, but the means they employ to discredit Bolshevism are in no essential different from Hayek's.

On the flyleaf of his book, Wolfe quotes, for his motto, the noble words of Albert Mathiez:

The historian has a duty both to himself and to his readers. He has to a certain extent the cure of souls. He is accountable for the reputation of the mighty dead whom he conjures up and portrays. If he makes a mistakes, if he repeats slanders on those who are blameless or holds up profligates or schemers to admiration, he not only commits an evil action; he poisons and misleads the public mind.

Mathiez devoted much of his great work to defending the great French Revolution and its Jacobins from detractors. The socialist today has the duty to defend the great Russian Revolution and its Jacobins in much the same spirit. As to how faithfully Wolfe has heeded the injunction of Mathiez, the reader of his book will judge for himself.

[**] Then why the title "Three. Who Made a Revolution"? Up to now, only Stalinist forgers have presented Stalin as one those who outstandingly led the revolution. The facts presented by Wolfe show this to be a falsification and the above quotation confirms it. The title he gives his book is therefore utterly misleading. It would of course be very awkward to load a book with a title like "Two Who Made a Revolution and One Who Made a Counter-Revolution", but one merit it would have: it would be accurate.

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