

# In Defence of Bolshevism:

## AWL Study Guide

### How to use this guide

This guide is to help comrades discuss the AWL book, *In Defence of Bolshevism* (2018). The book consists of five sections:

- The introduction by Sean Matgamna
- Part 1: *Under the Banner of Marxism* by Max Shachtman
- Part 2: Articles by Max Shachtman
- Part 3: Lenin and Luxemburg by Max Shachtman
- Part 4: Further articles by Max Shachtman, Hal Draper and Leon Trotsky

Sean Matgamna's introduction examines the history of the British labour movement and explains the importance of the Russian revolution for Marxists working in British conditions. It also analyses the state of the British left and its failure to translate the lessons of the Bolshevik experience into working class political activity.

Max Shachtman's *Under the Banner of Marxism* was originally written as an answer to Ernest Erber, a leader of the Workers' Party, an American Trotskyist organisation, who had just deserted. It discusses the arguments Erber used to rationalise dropping out – mostly a critique of the 1917 Russian revolution and its eventual defeat by Stalinism. The book contains an edited version of the original text. The full version was published in the *Bulletin of the Workers Party*, Vol. IV No. 1 (Part II), 14 January 1949, pp. 62–108.

<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/workersparty/wp-ib/2086-v4n01-1949-Part%202-BWP.pdf>  
Erber's document, and a letter he wrote about the same time, are at <http://bit.ly/erber-docs>

The remaining articles by Max Shachtman, Hal Draper, Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky expound further on the themes raised in *Under the Banner of Marxism*. This guide was drafted by Paul Hampton.

### Educationals

Comrades should read and annotate the book, and discuss it in small groups.

The passages in this guide are designed to focus the discussion on key learning points. The best way to use them, we've found, is to ask each person in the study group to take one or a few passages, to read round them, and then explain the passage (and raise any objections, criticisms, doubts, etc. they have) to the group. You may choose to cover only a selection of passages in each session.

The suggested division into five separate sessions is to help organise the reading into more manageable chunks.

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| 1. Introduction by Sean Matgamna pp.3-69  | [67 pages] |
| 2. Part 1: In an age of apostasy and Lenin and the Marxian theory of the state pp.70-129            | [60 pages] |
| 3. Part 1: State and revolution in the light of two experiences + Revolution and violence pp.130-79 | [50 pages] |
| 4. Part 2: The party that led the revolution pp.189-241   | [53 pages] |
| 5. Parts 3 and 4: Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg + Appendices pp.245-308                                  | [64 pages] |

September 2018

Price: £3

## **Introduction: the British labour movement and Bolshevism (Sean Matgamna)**

### **Introduction**

#### **[p.3] None of the Blairite structural changes have been reversed**

In 2018 the Labour Party is still what the Blairite changes in the 1990s and after made it. The structural alterations under Blair radically changed the old Labour Party from a comparatively open and liberal membership organisation to a leadership-heavy, careerist-infested, and seriously depoliticised entity. Political discussion, and any politics other than those of the leadership, played little part. Three years after the Corbyn victory of 2015, none of the Blairite structural changes have so far been reversed. Not one.

#### **[p.4] Corbyn left is politically inchoate**

So far, the Corbyn left is a politically inchoate preliminary ingathering. It is more an embryo than a mature and viable birth.

#### **[p.4] Key questions**

This introduction will try to answer the following questions: what can the Bolsheviks and the revolution they led offer in the way of positive advice and precept to the work of self-renewal the labour movement is now engaged in? What can the experience of the Bennite attempt to renovate the political labour movement in the 1980s tell us not to do again? What might the neo-Bolshevik organisations in Britain contribute to that work? What did they do last time round? How do things stand now after three years of the Corbyn surge?

### **The Russian revolution**

#### **[p.5] Memory of Vladimir Lenin... is still buried**

The memory of Vladimir Lenin... is still buried in one historical sarcophagus with that of Josef Stalin, who led the bureaucratic counter-revolution against the Bolshevik workers.

#### **[p.7] Conditions the Bolsheviks were in**

It is impossible not to regret much that the Bolsheviks did in the Red Terror; and all too easy for people living in the comparatively peaceful and safe foothills of the early 21st century to second-guess the Bolsheviks, who lived on the slopes of an erupting volcano. They had seen the butchery in World War One. The world they lived in, inside Russia and in face of the intervening armies, was brutal, terrible, merciless. The Bolsheviks themselves suffered great casualties. They had to steer, act and fight to prevail in the conditions in which they found themselves and by which they were constrained.

#### **[p.9] Dictatorship of the proletariat**

The "dictatorship of the proletariat" in 1917 and after meant — in terms of what those who set it up wanted to set up — a democratic class dictatorship exercised by the elected workers' councils, the soviets, whose leaders took power out of the hands of the unelected Kerensky government on 25 October 1917.

#### **[p.11] Bolshevism buried**

Most of those who wanted to learn from Lenin and 1917 could see and approach the revolution and the Bolsheviks only through Stalinism, its putative successor. Bolshevism was buried under the foundation stones of Stalinism; it is still half buried under the ruins of Stalinism.

#### **[p.12] Three fronts of the class struggle**

What they [the Bolsheviks] did was rooted in the proposition that the class struggle which the workers have to fight takes place not on one but on three main fronts: the economic, the political, and the battle of ideas. They worked to integrate the three fronts into a coherent strategy of class war and, ultimately, the struggle for working-class state power. The unique and irreplaceable role of the Marxists is in the realm of ideas, for Marxism and against bourgeois ideas.

#### **[p.13] Democratic centralism**

The Bolsheviks had a conception of what they were and how they related to each other that Lenin summed up in 1906 thus: there would be full democracy in the party in reaching decisions. Once a decision was reached and an action was agreed upon, discipline would take over in the action. Even if people in the party disagreed with the decision they would carry out the action. But there was no question of forever curtailing discussion and having just one thinking element in the party. Members were not required to lie in public about what they themselves thought. Discipline was a quality in party action, not the requirement to pretend to think differently from how you really thought.

"Democratic centralism", for the Bolsheviks as for other Marxists of their time, was as Lenin described it in 1906: keen, open debate, linked with prompt collective effort in action.

## The Third International and the Fourth

### [p.18] 'Party' pretensions

Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin* (1928): "A young party representing a political organism in a completely embryonic stage, without any real contact with the masses, without the experience of a revolutionary leadership, and without theoretical schooling, has already been armed from head to foot with all the attributes of a 'revolutionary order', fitted with which it resembles a six-year-old boy wearing his father's accoutrement".

### [p.19] Marxism between 1916 and 1926

At one end of the Bolshevik period, the anti-war Zimmerwald Marxist left of 1915-6, which included the Bolsheviks, went from being, in terms of organisation, very little, to victory in the October 1917 Revolution, and then the creation of mass Communist Parties in a number of countries. At the other end of the period, the forces of revolutionary Marxism went from being a large mass of people all over the world able to shape and aspire to shape events, to being only atolls in a hostile sea, and all of it within a ten or twelve year timespan.

### [p.22] Orthodox Trotskyists

From about 1949, and unrestrainedly from the Korean war that started in mid-1950, the Orthodox Trotskyists were drawn into supporting the expansion of Stalinism. This was a continuation of their politics on Russian expansion in the war and immediately afterwards.

### [p.22-3] Heterodox Trotskyists

The Heterodox at first saw Stalinism as the freakish socio-economic formation it was for Trotsky. Stalinism's survival in World War Two, its wartime expansion and postwar consolidation, and its further advances in China, Vietnam, Cuba, etc., convinced them that Stalinism was advancing barbarism. Their dilemma was that they rightly saw advanced capitalist conditions as better for the working class and for socialist possibilities, and logically, in a world where the Third Camp was minuscule, that put them on the side of advanced capitalism.

### [p.23] The party: Russia and Germany

Russia proved the need for a "Bolshevik-type" party positively; Germany and other countries proved it negatively.

### [p.25] Zinovievism

The delusion — in fact derived from Stalinism — grew that the Bolshevik party was able to do what it did because it was a large, tightly-organised "machine" in the hands of a designated Great Man. It could be replicated by mimicking and parroting what was taken to be Bolshevism. "Bolshevism" came to be reshaped and corrupted, creating a strain of Trotskyist-Zinovievism or Zinovievist-Trotskyism. Each organisation lives in a closed-in world, has shibboleths which are above question, has its own in-house Marxism and is run as more or less a one-faction or — commonly — one-person or few-persons tyranny.

### [p.27] NPA social democratic norms

The Zinovievo-Trotskyist model has hindered progress even where it has been negated. In France, the Mandeliste organisation (LCR, then NPA) was always more open, more alive with debate, than the British groups. Despite that, its trend since 1991 has been to invert the Zinovievo-Trotskyist tradition rather than to rediscover pre-1917 Bolshevik norms — in fact, to drift towards social democratic norms: a party of "adherents" rather than activists, one where the members who hold official union positions are outside party supervision, one where the party's publications are desultorily produced and little circulated. That inversion can bring no progress. And the inversion can itself be inverted, turned back, as in Britain the SWP was after 1968.

## The British and Russian labour movements

### [p.28] Early British labour movement

The British labour movement was much older. It existed before Marxism did... With the defeat of the Chartists in 1848 and after, the labour movement settled into a long existence as craft trade unionism and Liberal politics.

### [p.29] First British Marxists

Attempts to reshape the British workers' movement have been many: that of the first British Marxists, the SDF, under varying names, from 1883; of the socialists of the ILP, from 1893; of the non-Marxist middle-class Fabians (who, as Frederick Engels lampooned them, thought socialism was too good to be left to the working class), from 1884.

The early Communist Party — built initially from the remnants of the SDF, the BSP, and others — set out to reshape British labour movement politics, trying to learn from the Bolshevik experience. The Labour Party, socialists of a looser definition, beat them to it. The Labour Party had at first no direct individual members, only members of the affiliated Trade Unions and socialist organisations, the Independent Labour Party, the Fabian Society and others.

### [p.30] Benn and Corbyn surges

The Benn 'surge' in the early 1980s was an attempt to reshape the labour movement. The people of the Corbyn 'surge' are now trying, once again, to reshape the Labour Party.

### [p.31] Post war labour movement

From the 1945 election on, the labour movement attained a tremendous power in Britain. Even after the Labour party lost its Parliamentary majority in 1951, the labour movement remained tremendously strong, and continued to grow in strength. In the conditions of economic

boom and full employment the working class gained a great power of de facto control in industry — mainly negative control, the ability to veto what the employers and their government wanted. In the factories and in whole industries workers could and did, in practice, challenge the right of the capitalist class to rule as it liked, in its own interests and by its chosen methods.

#### **[p.32] Long boom stalemate**

In the years of the long world capitalist prosperity there was in British capitalist society a stalemate between the ruling class and a labour movement which had grown so very powerful within it, and yet was unable — despite a cloudy mass socialistic sentiment in the trade unions, expressed in union resolutions for the nationalisation of their own and other industries — to overthrow capitalism and replace it. The situation lasted a long time, but it could not last indefinitely. Either the working class and the labour movement would push further, follow through the logic of what the labour movement was doing, and take political control of society. Or the bourgeoisie would eventually regain full control of affairs in “their own” bourgeois society.

### **The first Thatcher**

#### **[p.33] Labour government of 1974-9**

They were right in the sense that the Labour government which came in on a wave of industrial militancy in 1974 could not have subsisted without the active collaboration and support of the trade union bureaucracy. Yet the Labour government of 1974-9 was not the exercise of working-class power, but an exercise in dissipating our strength and effectiveness.

### **The left and the EU**

#### **[p.35] Opposition to the European Union**

Opposition to the European Union and to British membership (Britain joined in January 1973) was an article of faith in the left by the 1970s. It would continue to be so for a very long time after. Echoes of it still resonate on the Labour left. The issue played a central political role in determining the fate of the left in the 1970s.

#### **[p.36] British working class in the 1970s**

In the 1970s a big part of the British working class tried, raggedly, to remake society. It was frustrated in that endeavour, and suffered great defeats. Two of the three preconditions for revolution which Lenin once listed existed then: the rulers could not go on as before, and the people did not want to go on as before. The third condition, the availability of a viable alternative, was painfully absent. Everything that happened came from that.

### **Thatcher's counter-revolution**

#### **[p.37] Thatcher's “coup”**

Thatcher's “coup” after 1979 was brutally real. It was a “very British coup”, as someone said, but a coup is what it was. Thatcher's Tories came to power on a program of breaking the labour movement. In 1984 she would denounce the striking miners as “the enemy within”. That was how she saw the whole labour movement. And the state she ran acted accordingly.

#### **[p.38] The working class part destroyed under Thatcher**

[Under Thatcher] The working class was in part destroyed as a class. Major industries were all but wiped out. Working-class youths, with no jobs and no training for future employment, were deprived of a big part of their lives.

#### **[p.40] Possible alternatives**

The movement should have... set itself the goal of a Workers' Government... Yet there were alternatives to the catastrophe that happened. One of those possible alternatives was that the labour movement would use its expanding base in local government to resist the Tory national government.

### **The Benn movement**

#### **[p.41] Labour Party in 1980s**

The Labour Party then was a living political party with a far more open and democratic structure than it has now. The Annual Conference had a fair measure of democracy, discussed many motions from constituency parties, and took positions. The conference and the affiliated bodies, including the trade unions with their block votes, elected the National Executive, which had real power rather than being subordinate to the “Leader's Office” and the party machine.

#### **[p.41] SCLV initiated the Rank and File Mobilising Committee**

In 1980, the SCLV initiated the Rank and File Mobilising Committee, which - notionally - united the whole Labour left in an active campaign which made important gains. Mandatory reselection of MPs was won and opened the possibility of Labour Party rank and file control of the Parliamentary Labour Party. The election of Party leader by the whole labour and trade-union movement, not as before by the Parliamentary Labour Party alone, opened the possibility, in theory, of the labour movement electing and dismissing the prime minister.

#### **[p.43] WRP and *Labour Herald***

The WRP provided the right wing of the Labour left with strong “Bolshevik” credentials, by association, and from September 1981 with a new weekly paper, *Labour Herald*. Nominally edited by Ken Livingstone, Ted Knight, and another Lambeth councillor, it was printed at rates

which let it survive on a very low paid circulation. It had “big name” contributors like the future Labour minister David Blunkett, then leader of Sheffield City Council. The WRP provided the working editor, a member of its Central Committee, Steven Miller. Among the *Herald's* contributions to the Labour Left were rancid antisemitic cartoons and comments on the Middle East. That is what the WRP was being paid good Arab petro-dollars to provide, among other things, and one motive for them founding *Labour Herald*. Thus Livingstone and Knight were holding hands with WRP leader Gerry Healy, who in turn was holding hands with Gaddafi and the Iraqi regime.

#### [p.43] Labour movement defeated

It was both tragedy and farce, not separate but combined. The tragedy of a labour movement, so strong in 1979-81, which let itself be defeated. And farce, in the behaviour of the local government left, so many of whom were in their own heads Bolsheviks, or at least allied with “Bolsheviks”.

#### [p.45] Foot and Kinnock

Michael Foot, who in the past had had some serious left-wing credentials, had been elected Labour leader (by the Labour MPs) in November 1980. He promised to lead a “crusade” against the Tories and against rising unemployment, which would reach 12% (3.3 million) in February 1984, but he did nothing like that.

He turned on the left, denouncing it as against democracy. The left, bit by bit, lowered its sights and turned to “anti-Tory” electoralism: increasingly, nothing mattered, not even anti-Tory policies, except getting the Tories out. When we finally got the Tories out, we got the Blair neo-Thatcherite, duckegg- blue “Labourites” in.

After the 1983 election, the Labour Party was led by Neil Kinnock, a soft left-talking man who had never, unlike Foot, had serious left-wing credentials. Kinnock was a mere windbag, progressively deflating. He ran helter-skelter down the decade of the 1980s before the Tories. The Labour left revived, and Kinnock was put on the back foot, during the 1984-5 miners' strike, but after the miners' defeat Kinnock proceeded apace.

### The political anatomy of the left in 1979-85

#### [p.47-8] WRP and Arab dictatorships

In 1975-6 Gerry Healy had sold the organisation to the Libyan government and secret service. Over the subsequent years he received an immense amount of money, at least a million pounds, probably more. He also put the organisation to doing money-spinning jobs for the vile tyrants who ran Iraq, and entered into lucrative relations with other Arab states.

In return Healy offered the information-getting capacities of his organisation, and of the reporters and photographers of its paper *Newsline*, to his employers. It provided spy reports on Arab political dissidents in Britain, as well as making propaganda for the Libyan and Iraqi regimes. Some of those spied on no doubt paid dearly for it when they went home. *Newsline* (2 February 1979) publicly justified the killing by the state of 20 Iraqi CPers for organising politically in the army: one of them had five months previously brought greetings to a WRP conference! The WRP's leading committee decided with one dissenting vote to approve the killings.

#### [p.48, p.51] Militant 'perspectives'

By the early 1980s the biggest Trotskyist, would-be Bolshevik, group was *Militant*. They had threaded themselves into the trelliswork of labour movement structures for two decades. They had controlled the Labour youth movement from 1969. They had grown in a strange symbiosis with the official Labour Party bureaucracy. Politically, they were built around what they called their 'perspective'. They had two 'perspectives', one for the rest of the world and one for Britain... [They were] a closed-off sect, devoted to itself and its 'perspectives', capable of... irresponsibility towards the open class struggle during the miners' strike.

#### [p.50] Militant ignored oppression

*Militant* slowly grew to dominance over sections of the Liverpool labour movement. The pre-Windrush-era Liverpool black community had been the subject of institutionalised racism for many decades: *Militant* never concerned itself with such issues: in fact it would come into conflict with the community. Nor with the oppression of women (it campaigned against Mrs Thatcher with a cartoon of a flabby airborne middle-aged female body in a tight Wonder Woman costume, carrying a handbag, and the slogan “Ditch The Bitch”).

#### [p.50-1] Militant in Liverpool

But by 1983, when Labour regained control of the council from the Liberals, *Militant* had a big enough block of councillors to control events, behind a thin screen of “independent left-wingers”, for example, council nominal leader John Hamilton.

#### [p.51] Militant and the miners' strike

In early July 1984, when the miners' strike was still at its strongest, *Militant* chose to do a short-term deal with the Tories. The Tories made some temporary financial concessions that let Liverpool off the hook, and won the Tories time to grind down the miners. *Militant's* leaders on Liverpool City Council, Derek Hatton and his friends — under the daily control of *Militant* national leaders — bought themselves safety from prosecution for exactly a year. Then, the miners beaten, the Tories came back to sort them out. And in the wake of the Tories came Labour leader Neil Kinnock to complete the rout of *Militant*.

#### [p.53] SWP and the Labour Party

The SWP stood aside from the Benn surge and the Labour Party. Cliff, with Paul Foot as amanuensis, reduced the significance of the Labour-left political movement to a silly little joke: “If you want to push a wheelbarrow, you don't sit in it”. Translation: if you want to change the political labour movement, you do not participate in it. In 1979, as the Tories came to power and the Labour left erupted, the SWP put the coping stone on their turn away from the labour movement and towards exclusive focus on building themselves as “the party”, a toy-town pseudo-Bolshevik “party” spinning on its own axis. That was the “theory of the downturn”.

#### [p.54] SWP and the miners' strike

When the miners in the great strike of 1984-5 launched what was the last great battle of the old-pattern labour movement, the SWP was disoriented for the first six months. Join or help the miners' support groups? No! That was just "left-wing Oxfam". Better to concentrate on selling more copies of *Socialist Worker* and try to recruit new members to the "revolutionary party". The SWP made appeals to Labour Party activists to "join the socialists", that is, to abandon the fight in the mass political labour movement and join those who preached that general fightback was impossible or hopeless.

Didn't the miners' strike contradict the idea of an absolute downturn? Not at all! Rubbish! Tony Cliff pronounced: 'The miners' strike is an extreme example of what we in the Socialist Workers Party have called the 'downturn'...

#### [p.54] Socialist Organiser

*Socialist Organiser* — perhaps too ambitiously, but under the compulsion of the situation the labour movement was in — tried to reorganise and unite the left. It raised the alarm against the Thatcher threat. With the 1978 Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory conference it took the initiative in organising the Labour left against the Labour establishment, attempting to combine that with organising to fight the Tories. It also initiated the Rank and File Mobilising Committee that emerged in 1980. The group itself was in a prolonged process of 'reevaluation of values'.

#### [p.56 N47] IMG

There was also the Mandelita organisation, the International Marxist Group (IMG), whose remnants have recently been sojourning, first in George Galloway's Respect, then in the Green Left faction of the Green Party, then in the short-lived Left Unity organisation launched by people quitting Respect, and now in the Labour left. The IMG was not very big, though active enough to be a visible factor on left-wing demonstrations and the like. Politically, it was a wildly unstable organisation, consuming itself in battle between a number of factions, some semi-permanent, kept together by a common adherence to "the International". It zig-zagged between calling on the left to break up Labour Party meetings in June 1970 to joining the Labour Party, then pulling out, then jumping into the Benn current with a sycophantic book, *The Benn Heresy*, then... It lived, bred and bequeaths political confusion.

### Left anti-semitism

#### [p.57] Absolute anti-Zionist anti-semitism

This [the early and mid 80s] was the time when absolute [anti-Zionist anti-semitism] came to be a major aspect of the left.

#### [p.58] *Labour Herald* hysterical "anti-Zionism"

The weekly paper, *Labour Herald*, which the WRP produced for Ken Livingstone and Ted Knight, echoed the WRP's hysterical "anti-Zionism" in articles and cartoons: one, in June 1982, showed Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin in SS uniform and giving a Nazi salute.

#### [p.59] SWP absolute hostility to Israel from 1980s

An anti-Israel tone became dominant after the 1973 war, but the SWP's shift to absolute hostility to Israel becoming a world outlook, with all its ramifications, was as late as 1986-7.

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[p.51 N 44] The group [SWP] then prided itself on understanding that capitalist imperialism had come to an end. They would only attain their present "anti-imperialist" pitch after 1987, when they switched to support Iran in the Iran-Iraq war. They were anti-Israel, but their hostility to Israel had not yet become a world outlook, with all its ramifications. The shift there can be dated to July 1986, when they published a pamphlet, much reprinted since, entitled *Israel, the Hijack State*, whose cover cartoon showed Israel as a mad dog on a leash held by the USA.

### The left today

#### [p.60] *Morning Star* and Corbynites

How does the left look today, measured by what it needs to do? The *Morning Star*, the paper linked to the Communist Party of Britain, circulates among a leading layer of the labour movement. Jeremy Corbyn used to write a column in it until his unexpected election as Labour leader in 2015. If there is a political organ of the Corbynites — Corbyn himself, Seumas Milne, Andrew Murray, and others — it is the *Morning Star*.

#### [p.61] The left and Stalinism

The *Morning Star* is the "left" shorn of positive principles or any coherent notion of what the socialism its publishers think they promote is and must be. A central characteristic of the ostensible left, more widely than just of the *Morning Star*, is that often it does not know, positively, what it is for. A viable new left will never be raised on the mildewed crumbs of old Stalinist politics and animosities.

#### [p.62-3] SWP and Corbyn

The SWP present themselves as enthusiastic supporters of Jeremy Corbyn, criticising him for his voiced objections to Brexit and to left anti-semitism, which they explain as Corbyn conceding to the Labour right. They remain outside the Labour Party on the grounds that "strikes and demonstrations" are necessary for progress as well as parliamentary politics, and who is more expert than the SWP at such activities? They retain a fundamental conception of "the party" (themselves) as an organisational machine rather than an instrument for ideological education and political clarity.

#### [p.64] The No-Party people

Across the valley, so to speak, from the toy-town Bolshevik shell-parties lived, in the 1980s, a lot of people who thought of themselves as Marxists but who had grown indifferent or hostile to any project of building a Marxist organisation.

This tribe, and it was quite an important component of the Labour left, marched or ambled, in so far as it expressed itself explicitly, under the idea: we will develop the influence of Marxism by promoting left-wing ideas in the existing broad labour movement, trade unions and Labour Party. No socialist organisation beyond the Labour Party and its coteries and careerist cliques was needed. The existing structures were sufficient.

#### **[pp.64-65] Develop the 'influence of Marxism'**

You cannot meaningfully develop the 'influence of Marxism' as a revolutionary force without building a revolutionary party... Without revolutionary organisation we can only babble or maintain a preaching sectarian aloofness, muttering whatever self-consoling excuses we can foist on ourselves.

This is the answer to those who conclude from a bad experience with the kitsch-Bolshevik organisations that everything a small Marxist organisation does, beyond routine labour-movement activity, is futile and sectarian.

#### **[p.65] Defeats and regressions**

Unless the Marxists are strong enough to shape events we get fiascos and muddle and confusion as in the Bennite left of the 1980s. And catastrophic defeats and regressions. Marxists know that as well as evolution there is devolution, regression, defeat. That was true around 1980. It is true now. The politics of the Corbynites and their *Morning Star* stink not only of their own wrongheadedness but also, already, of the new defeats they will bring down on the labour movement.

### **Honour the Bolsheviks!**

#### **[p.68] Why study the Bolshevik Revolution**

Uncovering and telling the truth about the great working class revolution of 1917, is one of the irreplaceable things which socialists must do now. Not alone to do justice to the great women and men who made that revolution and to its leaders, in the first place, to Lenin — and to Trotsky, who died defending it against the Stalinist counter-revolution. Because knowing, studying, and understanding the Bolshevik Revolution is a major part of learning how to rebuild a viable working class socialist movement in the 21st century.

## **Part 1: Under the Banner of Marxism (Max Shachtman)**

### **In an age of apostasy**

#### **[p.71] Confusion created by the rise of Stalinism**

The decay of the revolution and the vast confusion created by the rise of Stalinism is therefore a double handicap to us. It requires a thorough political understanding of the problem, and patience and perseverance to overcome the handicap. Our movement is one hundred per cent right in going out of its way, so to speak, to distinguish and dissociate itself from Stalinism, its agencies and policies, in the ranks and the eyes of the working class, even if it entails courting (and — this we will continue to see to — overcoming) the risk of vulgar anti-Stalinism.

#### **[p.73] Pressure on Marxists**

The pressure is enormous; it comes from all sides; it comes in a multiplicity of forms; it is exerted everywhere in different degrees. And here it is more seductive and persuasive. Capitalism here is prosperous (more or less) and democratic (more or less). It has been a success. In a country like ours, a “practical” country which has never had much use for theory or generalisation, above all in social science, success equals good. The Marxian movement has thus far failed to become a serious political force. In a country like ours, failure equals bad — to fail is to show that you didn’t have it in you in the first place, that you have no future.

#### **[p.74] Hooligan ideological pressure against Marxism**

For the moment, it is enough to record that this hooligan ideological pressure against Marxism (the specifically American counterpart of the hooligan police pressure against Marxism in Hitlerite Germany) has yielded valuable results for the bourgeoisie. It has broken from any fidelity to Marxism and the socialist struggle a considerable number of our once prominent or well-known spokesmen and defenders in this country, above all among the intellectuals. And in breaking them from Marxism, with its high standards of intellectual discipline, its unquenchable passion for social justice, its tenets of cool objectivity in political judgement, it has also broken them as rational and distinguished men.

#### **[p.75] Opposing Stalinism**

What is left to fight for, actually, concretely? Some measure of democracy, and that is better than none at all. Who threatens it, actually, concretely? Stalinism. What can resist it? The revolutionary movement? Little or no sign of it. The proletariat? Let us not make an abstraction, a fetish, of the proletariat. It must have a leadership, a real one, not a desirable but mythical one. It will either be led by Stalinists, which is real, or by the bourgeoisie of American democracy, which is also real. We once thought that the socialist revolution would lead to democracy and socialism. Well, all it led to was Stalinism. We know what would happen to us and everyone else if Stalinism triumphed. That, above all and everything else, must be prevented.

We don’t care too much how it is done, either. This is no time for dogmatism or hair-splitting or any scientific refinements. To outstrip Stalinism we must travel fast. Travelling fast means travelling light. Overboard goes all our old baggage. We will concentrate on exposing and opposing Stalinism by speech, article and book, and we’ll show we really mean it by joining with anybody and everybody else who opposes Stalinism.

#### **[p.76] “I-Was-a-Political-Idiot-but-now-I-Am-Smart” School**

Their principal qualification is that, although they teach in different classes, all of them belong to one and the same political school. It should be called by the cumbersome but accurate name of: “I-Was-a-Political-Idiot-but-now-I-Am-Smart” School.

#### **[p.81] What a political party is not**

After all, a political party, good or bad, tight or loose, is not a movie theatre that you stroll out of with a yawn or thrash out of with a snort when the newsreel doesn’t please you.

#### **[pp.81-2] Erber’s impressionism**

The case of Erber is even more lamentable. His abilities and contributions to the party were often valuable and properly recognised for what they were. Also recognised was the fact that he fell deeper and deeper into the habit of undermining his own value, often to the point of negating it entirely: his impressionism. Impressionism in the political movement is not an altogether bad quality, and this was often proved in Erber’s case. It made him sensitive to new situations and new problems, and in itself this sensitivity is certainly a plus. But if it is not balanced by theory (generalisation from significant experience), scientific discipline (the employment of tested methods and standards), and intellectual firmness (resistance to the clamour of the prejudiced, the ignorant, the weak and — in politics — the reactionary, and an understanding contempt for the pressure they seek to exert upon you) — if it is not thus balanced, the plus easily becomes a minus. Events make their impression on you like winds on a loose-legged weathervane. You veer, you reel, in a stiff blow you collapse, and then you are not even any good for telling the direction of the wind, or rather you are carried off by it. If Erber is not evidence of the sure upshot of unbalanced impressionism, then there never was any and there never will be.

#### **[p.82] Marxism is on the defensive**

The forces arrayed against us are multiple and mighty. They are arrogant or persuasive, bestial or subtle, but always persistent and insidious. Small as we are today, they devote no small amount of attention to us, for their good political instincts make up for what they lack in thought-out understanding of what we represent. They pour down upon us a steady trickle of acid. What, after all, is so surprising if this trickle dissolves the elementary lime deposits that make up the mental bones, the political bones of some of us?

### **[p.83] Erber on decay of class feeling**

Erber: "This decay of class feeling and militancy was an inevitable result of the decay that penetrated the entire social organism. No class, above all not one so basically rooted in the productive process as is the proletariat, can base its politics upon the status quo of a rotting society without beginning to rot itself. The proletariat could only save itself in a revolutionary struggle against the status quo.

"But only a tiny segment of the working class understood this and was willing to wage such a fight. More accurately, it was not even a segment of the class but only an ideological grouping that consciously expressed the historic aims of the working class and identified itself with the most advanced program and revolutionary traditions of the working class.

"This core of irreconcilables was all that was salvaged from the revolutionary years. They remained all but immune to the all-pervading decay of the times."

### **[p.84] Marxist evasions**

"Hold on there for a minute!" cry out some of our friendly critics whom we do not need to identify further. "There are at least a couple of things wrong with what you have written thus far. In the first place, you are giving the impression that all is well with your principles, your program, your traditions, your tactics, and that in the face of a fact that not even you deny, namely, the Marxian (or Leninist or Trotskyist) movement has not progressed but, if anything, it has declined, it is weak, it is isolated, it is without serious influence. You are giving the impression that everything in your old, old arsenal must be left intact, nothing added and nothing subtracted, and that in the face of the fact that with these weapons you have not gotten very far. That's the point!

"In the second place, you have been talking about these people pretty much in psychological terms — their lack of character, their lack of firmness and endurance, their lack of understanding, their personal deficiencies and the like. After all, you are not confronted with a psychological but with a political problem. And after all, even if all those who left the movement did suffer from the personal shortcomings you ascribe to them, wouldn't it still be necessary to deal objectively with what they write, with their criticisms, that is, to deal with their ideas independently of the personality of the authors, on the basis of the merit or demerit of the ideas themselves? That's the point!"

### **[p.85] Our ideas**

The instruments are our ideas (principles, program, tactics). The "we" are those who agree on the goal, agree that these are the instruments for attaining it, and seek to keep them clean and sharp and to perfect themselves in their use. The "we" make up the revolutionary party at any given time. To get us to abandon these instruments, it is only necessary to offer us better ones. We will not hold on to what we have simply because the proffered alternative is brand new or very old. We will hold on to them, however, and fanatically, if the alternative is false and inferior. We will certainly hold on to them if *no* alternative is offered.

Our ideas did not come into full and hermetically-sealed roundness overnight. They have developed for a hundred years and more. With our own mortal abilities we have tried to continue that development.

## **Lenin and the Marxian theory of the state**

### **[p.89] Erber vs Lenin on the state**

Erber: "Lenin could conceive of only two states — a bourgeois state and a proletarian state. The former directed the economy in the interests of capitalism, the latter in the interests of socialism.

"Had Lenin not been blinded by the simplistic notion that a state is merely an instrument of one class for the suppression of another, he may have conceived of the possibility that the state apparatus could free itself from class control, wield its power over the economy against both classes, and constitute itself the new ruling class, based upon state ownership of property."

### **[p.90] "Socialists" victory inexorably means triumph of a tyrannical bureaucratic class**

Has he ever heard of any of the rest of the antisocialist schools of thought, down to our Robert Michels and our present day Hayeks, von Mises and the editors, politicians, priests, and turncoats from socialism whom they inspire? The very heart of their teaching is this: A bourgeois state is possible but the "socialist state" never was, never can, and never will be a workers' state because the victory of the "socialists" must inexorably mean the triumph of a tyrannical bureaucratic class which crushes bourgeoisie and proletariat alike; and the existence of the Stalinist state is proof of this and proof of the fundamental invalidity of Marx's theories.

### **[p.91] Erber: Lenin reduced state to a machine**

Erber: "In Lenin's view the bourgeois state was now stripped down to its real function, as nothing else but a machine for the suppression of the working class by the bourgeoisie, of the mass of toilers by a handful of capitalists."

### **[p.93] Engels as machine for controlling the exploited**

Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884): "The aggregation of civilised society is the state, which throughout all typical periods is the state of the ruling class, and in all cases mainly a machine for controlling the oppressed and exploited class."

### **[p.95] Erber: the bourgeois state as a workers' instrument**

Erber: "If it is an instrument for the bourgeois domination of the working class, it is also an instrument for the workers' struggle against that domination. To add to the complexity, the bourgeois state is forced to intervene in the economy against the resistance of the bourgeoisie and develops a momentum of its own which conflicts now with the one and now with the other of the two basic social classes."

### **[p.96] Erber: the bourgeois state as a neutral arena**

Erber is not content with grey theory alone. He piles evidence upon evidence, straight from the rich mine of living history. He shows, by one example after another, that wherever the bourgeois democratic state was based upon an extensive electorate, "it became an arena in which

the other classes fought to bend the powers of government to their own purposes." Every group has a fighting chance — to get its interests taken care of by the bourgeois-democratic state, to "bend" it to its purpose.

**[p.97] Erber: the bourgeois state represents the 'needs of the economy'**

Erber: "The trend toward statification of production, foreseen by Engels and observed by every prominent Marxist theoretician since, is nothing else but the effort of the state to fulfil its social function. It has succeeded in fulfilling it to a remarkable degree despite bourgeois opposition... The state is adapting itself to the needs of the economy."

**[p.97-8] Engels: the state as collective body of all capitalists**

Engels, *Anti-Duhring* (1878): "But the conversion into either joint-stock companies or state property does not deprive the productive forces of their character as capital. In the case of joint-stock companies this is obvious. And the modern state, too, is only the organisation with which bourgeois society provides itself in order to maintain the general external conditions of the capitalist mode of production against encroachments either by the workers or by individual capitalists. The modern state, whatever its form, is an essentially capitalist machine; it is the state of the capitalists, the ideal collective body of all capitalists. The more productive forces it takes over, the more it becomes the real collective body of all the capitalists, the more citizens it exploits. The workers remain wage-earners, proletarians. The capitalist relationship is not abolished; it is, rather, pushed to an extreme."

**[p.98] The class function of the state**

*The class function of the bourgeoisie is precisely its social function.* The function of the bourgeoisie is the organisation, direction, and control of production and exchange, the development of the productive forces, the preservation (and extension) of the national framework ("the fatherland") within which the solid basis of this production and exchange exists. This is its social function. It can fulfil it only as a class function, on the basis of the capitalist exploitation of the proletariat and on no other.

**[p.99] Erber treats state like a vulgar liberal**

When Erber, however, speaks of state intervention in the economy to protect *society as a whole*, he is not just talking like a liberal, at least not like a half-educated liberal, but like the most vulgar and backward of liberals. There is *no such thing* as "society as a whole" and there has not been [for] hundreds and thousands of years. That Erber can even use such language shows he has reached new shores where a different tongue is spoken from that of Marx and the socialist movement. There *is* such a thing as *capitalist society*, divided into classes with conflicting class interests. The modern state can and does intervene to protect capitalist society *as a whole*, nothing else. That is its *social function*. It can fulfil it only on the basis of the *class* society in which and for which it performs this function. Indeed, by performing this social function, the class relationship of capitalism is not abolished, "it is rather pushed to an extreme."

**[p.101] Erber on New Deal**

Erber writes about the New Deal as if it were his most crushing and unassailable argument against Lenin. Actually, it is just about the sorriest section of his sorry document — not *the* sorriest section, for the competition is strong there, but just about. What is the refutation of Lenin's theory that the New Deal represents?

[Erber] "in the midst of capitalism's worst crisis, one that shook it down to its very depths, the bourgeois democratic state in the United States passed as much pro-labour legislation in a few years as took the European workers decades to win."

**[p.103] US state**

Of all the important bourgeois states, the United States is the only important example which Erber can point to as one in which there has been widespread intervention into the economy under an out-and-out bourgeois regime without 'serious curtailments of civil liberties'.

**[p.105] The state both for capitalists against workers and regulates within the capitalist class**

Did that operation bring Roosevelt and the New Deal state into conflict with certain sections of the capitalist class? Of course! Did it even bring them into conflict with big sections of that class? Certainly! Did it force them to seek support in the ranks of the working class? To be sure! But what does that prove about the validity of the Marxist-Leninist theory of the state? Capitalist society could not exist for ten minutes without the capitalist state. That holds true not only because the main contending classes would, in the absence of a state power to regulate their conflict, immediately

tear each other and therefore society as a whole into bleeding shreds, but also because each capitalist and group of capitalists would tear one another to bleeding shreds in the unrestrained and unregulated struggle for the greatest share of the total surplus value, for the greatest power.

The state is necessary not only to regulate the conflict between the classes (in the interests of the economically dominant class — not, as Erber so loosely puts it, the "wishes" of the capitalist class), but also to regulate the conflict within the capitalist class which is united, as a rule, only in opposition to its mortal enemy, the proletariat. This inner-capitalist conflict, the state also regulates (seeks to regulate) in the interests of the economically dominant section of the capitalist class (monopoly capital), coming into conflict with it only when the promotion of the immediate interests of this section would endanger the preservation of the entire class and its social system.

**[p.106] Bourgeois state can conflict with sections of capitalists + make concessions to workers**

Erber has, therefore, discovered, with shattering effect upon himself, that the bourgeois state can come into conflict with the bourgeoisie, and that the working class can extract economic and political concessions from the bourgeois state, especially from the bourgeois-democratic state. It is an important discovery. At any rate, it was important when it was first made, a century or two ago.

**[p.107] Lenin for intervention in bourgeois parliaments**

Every real student, every responsible investigator, can understand Lenin's position on this question without difficulty. We are not speaking of malicious political enemies, superficial journalists, catch-me-on-the-fly impressionists and professional expositors of Bolshevism, but of

real students. The latter know that Lenin not only favoured the most militant struggle for a genuinely representative parliament in Russia, (the struggle under Tsarism for the Constituent Assembly, about which more later), but that he strongly supported participation even in the Tsarist pseudo-parliament, the Duma. They also know that Lenin devoted a classical polemic against the "left sickness" of ultra-radicals in the Comintern who opposed parliamentary activity and participation.

#### **[p.108-9] Limits of Lenin's parliamentarianism**

Lenin's fundamental position on parliamentarianism. First, parliamentary activity that is not subordinated to the daily class struggle of the independently mobilised working class is parliamentary cretinism. Second, parliamentary government is the ideal form of bourgeois rule over the working class and it can and must be utilised to the full with that basic fact in mind. Third, parliamentarism is not and cannot be the governmental form of working-class rule, inasmuch as that requires the Commune-type of state. Fourth, with the sharpening of the class struggle and its development to revolutionary situations and civil war in one country after another the struggle of the working class is necessarily transferred outside of the parliamentary field, and parliaments offer less and less possibility for even minor reforms for the working-class, they become more and more an obstacle in its revolutionary struggle. Finally, the peaceful, organic, parliamentary road to socialism, in the light of all historical experience, is an illusion.

#### **[p.112] Erber on 'roads' to socialism**

Erber: "It is quite true that it has not been proven. However, neither has it been disproven. No one can say over what road, or combination of roads, the struggle for power and socialism will lead. What is necessary for us is to establish that both Scheidemann's road and Lenin's roads are failures".

#### **[p.115] Erber accepted reformist road**

Upon reflection and closer reading, however, it occurs to us that one sector of this division of labour may well be superfluous. Erber's rejection of Lenin's road is clear and categorical. The same cannot be said about his view on Scheidemann's road. His rejection of it is purely verbal and confined to the mere statement in the quoted passage. Read a little further, and you see that Erber has accepted Scheidemann's road, that is, the road of reformism, the road of parliamentarism, the road of class collaboration in industry and in government. His rejection of this road is pure camouflage (conscious? unconscious? That is beside the point). The camouflage consists in falsifying the classical reformist position.

#### **[p.119] Erber is for class collaboration**

Erber is for collaboration between the working class and the bourgeoisie in industry. Erber is for coalition governments between the working class and a bourgeois party in parliament. That all this separates him sharply from Marx and Lenin is self-evident. In what significant way he considers himself separated from Scheidemannism, i.e., from traditional reformism, is a puzzle that is insoluble in political terms.

#### **[p.124] The transition from feudalism to capitalism**

To achieve the transition from feudalism to capitalism, from the feudal states to the capitalist states, it was not necessary to destroy wealth, to expropriate it, to destroy its possessors. It was only necessary to establish the supremacy of capital over landed property, of capitalist economy over feudal stagnation, of the capitalist nation over feudal dispersion and particularism. That revolution could be and in some countries was achieved "organically" (more or less), in others violently. But more important: that revolution could be achieved in some countries by the peasants, artisans, incipient proletarians, and petty-bourgeoisie; in other countries by the bourgeoisie itself; and in still other countries by the feudal caste itself.

*The historically-outlived class was able in many cases to adapt itself without much difficulty to the social transformation, i.e., to the bourgeois revolution.* It could do it by becoming part of the new class which was the principal beneficiary of the new social order. It could adapt itself even without becoming part of the new class, simply by remaining a landlord class, which, while not strictly speaking a capitalist class, shares in the surplus value extracted by the capitalist class.

#### **[p.124] How socialist transformation is different**

How do matters stand with the socialist transformation of society? Here is exactly where the term "peculiar nature" is appropriate. The proletariat is the only class in all history that comes to power not for the purpose of oppressing or ruling over another class but in order to abolish all classes, itself included. It cannot consolidate its power, let alone move on to socialism, without abolishing all privileges and all class wealth, including all private property in the means of production and exchange...

The class which is the bearer of the new economic movement under capitalism is the proletariat. Its "peculiar nature" is that it is a socialist proletariat. It alone can establish a socialist economy. But the socialist state — more accurately, the workers' state — without which all talk of a socialist society remains talk and empty talk, such a state cannot be brought into existence by slave owners, by feudal lords, by capitalists, by Sidney Webb bureaucrats, by trade union bureaucrats, or by Stalinist bureaucrats. The proletariat is the only class in history (see how peculiar it is!) that nobody but the proletariat itself can emancipate...

No political power for the proletariat, no democratic rule by the proletariat, means: no socialism. Only by means of this political power — its own state — can the ruling proletariat carry through its socialist economic transformation. It cannot even begin to carry it out within the womb of capitalist society the way capitalists carried out their economic transformation within the womb of feudal society.

#### **[pp.126-7] What if the workers win a majority in the bourgeois parliament**

Abstractly, we can conceive of a special combination of circumstances under which a genuinely and resolutely socialist proletarian party — not just a party of reformist bureaucrats — can obtain an electoral majority and a majority of seats in a parliament...

If the bourgeoisie turns actively counter-revolutionary, the proletariat is prepared to meet it, blow for blow. But if we find, in the crucial days, that the bourgeoisie has decided to bow to the democratic will of the people, especially when this will is backed up by organised and unflinching power — why, so much the better? It will be an enormous relief to all of us and a happy augur for a fairly painless transition to

socialist brotherhood and peace. Nothing can be lost by instilling the revolutionary concept into the minds of the working class! A lot can be lost, including seas of proletarian blood, by instilling the rosy reformist concept into the minds of the working class. A lot can be lost by forgetting the sanguinary tragedies of the working classes of Europe in the last thirty years of experience with reformism. Those who cannot remember the past, as George Santayana said, are condemned to repeat it.

**[p.127] The working class is for bourgeois democracy**

Bourgeois democracy is an excellent thing for the working class. It is as superior to autocracy as it is inferior to workers' democracy. Universal suffrage is an excellent thing for the working class, which fought to get it and will fight to retain it.

**[p.127] Engels: Universal suffrage is the gauge of the maturity of the working class**

Engels, *Origin of Family, Private Property and State* (1884): "The possessing class rules directly through universal suffrage. For as long as the oppressed class, in this case the proletariat, is not ripe for its economic emancipation, just so long will its majority regard the existing order of society as the only one possible, and form the tail, the extreme left wing of the capitalist class. But the more the proletariat matures toward its self-emancipation, the more does it constitute itself as a separate class and elect its own representatives in place of the capitalists. Universal suffrage is the gauge of the maturity of the working class. It can and will never be anything else but that in the modern state. But that is sufficient. On the day when the thermometer of universal suffrage reaches its boiling point among the labourers, they as well as the capitalists will know what to do."

## State and revolution in the light of two experiences

### [pp.130-1] Erber on the logic of the Bolsheviks taking power

Erber: "Rarely in history has a political leadership appeared that was so thoroughly motivated by a selfless idealism or so completely dedicated to the lofty mission of liberating mankind. But the course they chose had a terrible logic of its own. Once they embarked upon it, they became its prisoners and there was no turning back. This course could not be traversed without the suppression of the socialist opposition, without the Cheka terror, without one-man management of the factories, without compulsory labour. They are all fatal links in a chain that began with Lenin's revision of the traditional Marxist concept of the relationship of democracy to socialism in favour of the anti-democratic view of the party ruling on behalf of the masses, as was expounded by Lenin on the eve of taking power in 'Will the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?'"

### [p.131] Bolshevik course inevitable

Erber: "Once the Bolsheviks had dispersed the Constituent Assembly and decided to rule alone, they had set foot on a course from which there was no turning back. The suppression of the socialist opposition, the terror, the secret police and the long, bloody, destructive Civil War, were now inevitable. As the latter developed, all intermediate solutions became impossible, and all forces that could help bring them about were ground to bits."

### [pp.131-2] The Bolshevik Revolution was the great dividing line

To us, the Bolshevik Revolution was the great dividing line between socialism in theory and socialism in practice — it was not yet socialism, but the end of socialism as mere theory and the beginning of socialism as living social practice. In the Paris Commune, the people ruled their own destinies for the first time in history, but only for ten weeks, without support from France, without support from Europe, without the strength, the time, the possibility of mustering such support; without clear consciousness, without clear leadership. It was the dawn, but a false dawn.

In the Russian Revolution, the people ruled for years, the socialist proletariat ruled with understanding of its status and its role, with a leadership such as no class in history ever equalled. They proved — in a backward, three-quarters ruined country! — and proved it once for all, that the socialist proletariat itself can take power in its own name, hold power, and proceed to put the inherited chaos into socialist order.

### [p.133] 'Don't take state power'

The defence of the Russian Revolution moves along with the attack on it in the same way and with the same aim that the fight for socialism goes on by the side of the fight against socialism... What does it boil down to? We have indicated that before: "You workers, whatever else you do, do not take state power, do not even think in such terms. We have been warning you against it since the days of Marx. In Russia, they didn't listen to us, and look what happened. Lenin carried through a Marxian revolution. We are even ready to admit that Lenin himself was a noble idealist, but that didn't mean very much. Once started on the road, the movement had an iron logic of its own. Its inevitable outcome is the Stalinist state they have today, which even the radical Trotskyists say is an inferno for labour. Once you abolish private property, once you put all economic power into the hands of the state, we are all done for, you as well as we. Socialism is a Utopia. Capitalism is not absolutely perfect, but so long as we have free enterprise and democracy, you can get as much out of it as we can. Go ahead with all the reforms you want to. We will disagree with you here and there. But learn from Russia. Do not think of revolutionary socialism!"

### [pp.134-5] Luxemburg on the Bolshevik Revolution

Read Rosa Luxemburg's criticism of the Bolshevik Revolution which she set down in 1918 in her fragmentary prison notes. She did not draw back from what she felt she had to say about the regime of Lenin and Trotsky. But she was blood-kin of Marx, she was a revolutionist to her finger tips who never for a moment relaxed the struggle against the enemy for socialist freedom. What right — political, moral or any other — do the backsliders and tired and retired radicals have to pull into their camp the revolutionist who ended her critical notes with those clarion words:

"What is in order is to distinguish the essential from the non-essential, the kernel from the accidental excrescences in the policies of the Bolsheviks....It is not a matter of this or that secondary question of tactics, but of the capacity for action of the proletariat, the strength to act, the will to, power of socialism as such. In this, Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the first, those who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world; they are still the only ones up to now who can cry with Hutten: 'I have dared!'"

### [p.137] Erber claimed Engels equated democratic republic with dictatorship of the proletariat

Erber quotes Engels, *Critique of the Erfurt Programme* (1891): "If there is anything that is certain, it is this, that our party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic. This is, what's more, the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the great French revolution [i.e. the Commune] has already shown."

### [p.139] 1871 and 1917 Commune-type of state

Neither in 1871 nor in 1917 did the revolutionary proletariat, in establishing its own democratic republic, set up a parliamentary state — but a Commune-type of state.

#### [p.140] Lenin opposition to parliamentarism

What Erber does not understand (as you see, we are very polite) is that Lenin opposed parliamentarism not because it was democratic and not because he was “for dictatorship,” not in order to replace democratic by anti-democratic institutions, but for contrary reasons. “The way out of parliamentarism,” wrote Lenin, “is to be found, of course, not in the abolition of the representative institutions and the elective principles, but in the conversion of the representative institutions from mere talking shops into working bodies.” On what grounds did Lenin attack parliamentarism? Because of its inferiority to despotism or because of its inferiority — from the working-class point of view, of course — to the Commune-type of state?

#### [p.141] Lenin on parliamentarism

Lenin, *State and Revolution* (1917) noted: “Representative institutions remain, but parliamentarism as a special system, as a division of labour between the legislative and the executive functions, as a privileged position for the deputies, no longer exists. Without representative institutions, we cannot imagine democracy, not even proletarian democracy; but we can and must think of democracy without parliamentarism, if criticism of bourgeois society is not mere empty words for us, if the desire to overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie is our serious and sincere desire, and not a mere election cry for catching workingmen’s votes...”

#### [p.142] Luxemburg on socialism and democracy

Luxemburg is a Marxist. She distinguishes between bourgeois democracy and democracy. She is saying nothing more than this (it is a good deal): The victory of socialism does not depend upon the preservation of bourgeois democracy; genuine democracy depends upon the victory of socialism, upon strengthening the socialist movement, upon the independence and militancy of the proletariat, upon the unrelenting struggle for the socialist goal, on no compromise with bourgeois politics. “He who renounces the struggle for socialism renounces both the labour movement and democracy”.

#### [p.143] Erber: Lenin first revised the Marxian concept on democracy and socialism in early-mid 1917

Lenin, Erber explained to us, first revised the Marxian concept on democracy and socialism in the early and middle parts of 1917. In its place, he adopted the “anti-democratic view of the party ruling on behalf of the masses.” But, continues Erber’s explanation, after adopting the anti-democratic view Lenin still put forward democratic and not anti-democratic slogans. Why? Was there a “cultural lag” in Lenin’s mind? No, democratic slogans were the only ones by which the Bolsheviks could rise to power. A supremely clever trick! For, once in power by exploiting the democratic sentiments of the masses, the Bolsheviks dropped their mask and showed in practice what their revision of Marxism really meant. It meant the destruction of political democracy and the establishment of dictatorship. Democracy was denounced as bourgeois, so were democratic institutions and processes; and “democratic slogans became a weapon of their socialist opponents.”

#### [p.144] Democratic slogans and Mensheviks/SRs

How is it that ‘democratic slogans’ became the weapon of the Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionists only after the Bolshevik Revolution?

#### [p.146] Marx on workers and bourgeois democracy

Marx: *Address to the Communist League* (1850): “During the struggle and after the struggle the workers must at every opportunity put forth their own demands alongside those of the bourgeois democrats.

They must demand guarantees for the workers the moment the democratic citizens set about taking over the government. They must if necessary extort these guarantees, and in general see to it that the new rulers pledge themselves to every conceivable concession and promise — the surest way to compromise them. In general they must restrain in every way to the extent of their power the jubilation and enthusiasm for the new order which follows every victorious street battle, by a calm and coldblooded conception of the situation and by an open distrust of the new government.”

#### [p.150] Constituent Assembly was less representative than the Kerensky government

By its composition, we repeat, the Assembly was less representative than the Kerensky government in its heyday.

#### [p.151] Lenin on the “Commune type of state”.

“The fundamental characteristics of this type are: (1) the source of power is not a law previously discussed and enacted by parliament, but the direct initiative of the masses from below... (2) the direct arming of the whole people in place of the police and the army, which are institutions separated from the people and opposed to the people... (3) officials and bureaucrats... are reduced to the position of simple agents, from a privileged stratum occupying posts remunerated on a high-bourgeois scale, they become workers of a special ‘branch’, remunerated at a salary not exceeding the ordinary pay of a competent worker”.

#### [pp.151-2] Lenin on Soviet government

Lenin, *The Dual Power* (1917): “Humanity has not yet evolved and we do not yet know of a type of government superior to and better than the Soviets of Workers’, Agricultural Labourers’, Peasants’ and Soldiers’ Deputies,” not after the Soviets had rallied to the support of his party, but from the very start — in April, when the Soviets were overwhelmingly under the leadership and control of the Mensheviks and S.R.s, with the Bolsheviks as a small minority among them”.

#### [p.152] What the Constituent Assembly represented

Once the Soviet power had been established with the decisive support of the masses of workers and peasants, the Constituent Assembly could not represent anything more than a throwback to bourgeois democracy, a throwback in the course of which the new Soviet power would have to be crushed, as it was crushed later on in Germany, Bavaria, Austria and Hungary. To have tried to bring into life a “good” bourgeois parliament when life had already made a reality of a far more democratic form of government established by the masses themselves and enjoying their support and confidence, would have meant a victory for reaction.

### **[p.152] Revolutionists may dissolve Soviets**

Similarly, you cannot rule out a decision by the revolutionists themselves, under certain circumstances, to dissolve Soviets that came into existence under different circumstances. The Soviets may be too weak to take supreme power in a country but strong enough to prevent the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeois parties from consolidating their power on a reactionary basis; the bourgeoisie may be too weak to crush the Soviets but strong enough to hold on to its rule. The revolutionists or the Soviets may not enjoy sufficient popular support; the bourgeoisie may hesitate before a civil war in which everything is at stake.

### **[p.153] The Constituent Assembly became the rallying cry**

Which brings us to the third place — the political reality. Once the Soviets took power, the counterrevolution instantly adopted the slogan of the Constituent Assembly even before the Constituent actually convened. The true representatives of the classes regarded neither the Soviets nor the Constituent Assembly as abstractions. For the reaction as well as for the petty-bourgeois democracy (each from its own standpoint), the Constituent Assembly became the rallying cry, the banner, the instrument for the struggle to overthrow the Soviet Power of the workers and peasants, which also meant to overthrow all the achievements obtained by this power and expected from it.

### **[p.155] What the Constituent Assembly offered the bourgeoisie**

A Constituent with only 15 Kadets out of 520 seats and a majority for the S.R.s, even right-wing S.R.s, would give the bourgeoisie very little to cheer about, if this Constituent were proclaiming its sovereignty against the Tsarist Duma. The same Constituent, however, in proclaiming its sovereignty against the revolutionary power of the democratic Soviets of the workers and peasants, would give the bourgeoisie, inside Russia and all over the world, plenty to cheer about.

### **[pp.159-60] Erber for a coalition government based on the Constituent Assembly**

Erber: "Instead of dispersing the Assembly, the Bolshevik course should have been" — press down hard on your sides now — "a government that was responsible to the Constituent Assembly, either an S.R. government or a coalition of the worker and peasant parties (Bolshevik, Menshevik, Left S.R. and Right S.R. parties)..."

### **[p.163] Erber: Stalinism flows from Trotskyism!**

Erber keeps no secrets from you. We have Stalinism today (and Lord alone knows what else) because of the theory of the permanent revolution. All you Social Democrats, liberals, ex-Marxists, ex-Trotskyists and other professional anti-Bolsheviks, take note. Do you still think Stalinism flowed from Leninism? You are wrong. From Leninism, the authentic, the genuine, the unrevised and unretouched, would have flowed milk, honey, democracy and a world of other blessings. The real truth has finally been discovered by the Wise One Who Drips Water after thirty years of world history and thirty weeks of concentrated meditation. It deserves to be set off in a separate paragraph: Stalinism flows from Trotskyism!

### **[p.164] Engels against revolutionists joining bourgeois governments**

And what did Engels mean by how "one should not act in that case?" What was his reference to the February 1848 revolution in Paris? He explained in a letter to the Italian socialist Turati, on January 26 1894:

"After the common victory we might perhaps be offered some seats in the new Government — but always in a minority. Here lies the greatest danger. After the February Revolution in 1848 the French socialistic Democrats (the *Réforme* people, Ledru-Rollin, Louis Blanc, Flocon, etc.) were incautious enough to accept such positions. As a minority in the Government they involuntarily bore the responsibility for all the infamy and treachery which the majority, composed of pure Republicans, committed against the working class, while at the same time their participation in the government completely paralysed the revolutionary action of the working class they were supposed to represent".

### **[p.165] Luxemburg: Bolsheviks 'farsighted, principled and bold'**

Contrast Erber and every word he writes with the critical appraisal of the Bolsheviks written in prison by Rosa Luxemburg, who is invoked against revolutionary socialism nowadays by every turncoat and backslider who wouldn't reach up to her soles if he stood on tiptoes: "That the Bolsheviks have based their policy entirely upon the world proletarian revolution is the clearest proof of their political farsightedness and firmness of principle and of the bold scope of their policies." You will never see that quoted by the turncoats who have drafted Luxemburg into the crusade against Bolshevism against her will.

### **[p.166] Luxemburg: 1917 choice was Kaledin or Lenin**

Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution* (1918): "The real situation in which the Russian Revolution found itself narrowed down in a few months to the alternative: victory of the counter-revolution or dictatorship of the proletariat — Kaledin or Lenin. Such was the objective situation, just as it quickly presents itself in every revolution after the first intoxication is over, and as it presented itself in Russia as a result of the concrete, burning questions of peace and land, for which there was no solution within the framework of bourgeois revolution".

### **[pp.166-7] Luxemburg reassessed during the German revolution**

And in the third place, what she wrote in prison, on the basis of "fragmentary information" (as the editor of the American edition of her prison notes admits), was not her last word on the question. Before her cruel death, she altered her position on the basis of her own experiences, on the basis of the living realities of the German revolution. Lenin's *State and Revolution* was checked twice — first in the Russian Revolution and then in the German revolution! We will give the reader an idea of what she wrote before her death so that he may see why our present "champions" of Luxemburg never find time, space or inclination to quote her to the end.

### **[pp.168-9] Luxemburg reassessed on Constituent Assembly and the Soviets**

It is a pity that there is not space in which to quote far more extensively from the highly remarkable articles she [Luxemburg] wrote in the last few weeks of her life, before she was murdered by those whose "parliamentary cretinism" became the direct betrayal of socialism — by

those for whom Erber has now become a shameful apologist by “showing” that the defeat of the revolution in Germany was as much the responsibility of the masses as it was of the Scheidemanns and Noskes! The articles as a whole show the veritable strides that Luxemburg took away from her prison criticism and toward a policy which was in no important respect different from the one pursued by the Bolsheviks toward the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois democrats, toward the Mensheviks and other “socialist opponents”, toward the Constituent Assembly and the Soviets.

#### **[p.169] Russian Revolution and German Revolution on the state**

The course of the German Revolution, life, the lessons of the struggle — these left us the heritage of a Rosa Luxemburg who was, in every essential, the inseparable comrade-in-arms of the leaders of the Russian Revolution. To claim that this firm solidarity did not exist, is simply an outrage to her memory. What is worse, it shows that nothing has been learned of the lessons of the Russian Revolution and nothing of the lessons of the German Revolution — the two great efforts of the proletariat to test in practice what is, in the long run, the question of life and death for us: the state and revolution. And on this question, with Lenin and with Luxemburg, the real Luxemburg — we remain under the banner of Marxism.

## **Revolution and violence**

#### **[p.170] Erber vs armed insurrection**

Erber: “A Marxist in the United States can commit no greater folly than to view the workers’ road to power as culminating in an armed insurrection against a state that rests on political democracy”.

#### **[p.171] What if the bourgeois state still has the support of the overwhelming majority of working-class people**

Without abandoning our views for a moment, we say to the workers: Unite into your own economic and political organisations, free from the control and influence of your sworn class enemy. You have confidence in bourgeois democracy? Then organise your own political party. Challenge your enemy not only on the economic field but also on the political. Send your own representatives into the legislative bodies to work and fight for your interests. We say, with Engels, that “universal suffrage is the best **lever** for a proletarian movement at the present time”. We say, with Engels, that “universal suffrage is the gauge of the maturity of the working class”. We will therefore do everything we can to raise the red line in that **thermometer** which measures the maturity of the working class. “On the day when the thermometer of universal suffrage reaches its boiling point among the labourers, they as well as the capitalists will know what to do”.

#### **[pp.171-2] When the masses no longer have confidence in the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois state the situation changes**

A “state that rests on political democracy” is a state which, deservedly or not, still enjoys the confidence of the masses. To think of overturning such a state by armed insurrection under such conditions is putschist madness and adventurism, not revolutionary Marxism. When the masses no longer have confidence in the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois state, when they have reached the point where they are ready to take the state into their own hands, ready to undertake a radical solution of the social problem, ready to take control of their own destinies — the situation changes! Once the masses have expressed their decision to take power and expressed it clearly and democratically — be their will expressed in the organs of parliament or in organs of their own which they find at hand or in organs of their own which they create spontaneously in the course of the struggle — the situation changes!... We, followers of Marx and Lenin, want to make sure that on the day the thermometer boils over — not today, not tomorrow, but on that day — “the labourers... as well as the capitalists will know what to do”. We want to make sure that on that day the labourers not only have enough votes in their hands, but enough power to enforce their will.

#### **[p.174] Why defend our tradition**

Why are we so impassioned and tenacious in our defence of Marx, of Lenin, of Luxemburg, of Trotsky, of the Paris Commune, of the Russian Revolution, from all their falsifiers and detractors? Out of academic considerations? Because we are mere historians concerned with an accurate record of our past? Because we are Talmudists with our noses buried in the ancient books of wisdom? We are revolutionary socialists, and the fight to keep our heritage clean is an indispensable part of our fight for socialism.

#### **[p.173] Defeats, on the defensive**

We are fighting for socialist freedom, and in this fight we are now on the defensive. The working class is on the defensive all over the world. It is lacerated by defeats, it is confused and disoriented, it has lost a lot of confidence in its power. It has been backed into a corner like the quarry in a hunt. It is surrounded by baying hounds.

#### **[p.173] The ideological campaign against Marxism**

Social interests shape ideas. Ideas serve social interests. The ideological campaign against Marxism is still what it always was: an integral part of the fight against socialism and the interests of the working class. The campaign against Lenin, the Bolsheviks and the Russian Revolution is still what it always was: an integral part of the fight to turn the working class away from the idea of taking their fate into their own hands.

#### **[p.174] We are not idol-worshippers, not uncritical eulogists**

We are not idol-worshippers. We are not uncritical eulogists of Marx or Lenin or Trotsky or Luxemburg or the Russian Revolution itself. From its grandeur, we have learned what to do. From its decay, what not to do.

#### **[p.175] The Bolsheviks alone kept their heads**

“*Es schwindelt*”, said Lenin to Trotsky when the storm lifted the Bolsheviks to the first socialist power in history — it makes you dizzy. Everybody was made dizzy. The Bolsheviks alone kept their heads. The others lost them completely.

**[p.176] What we have learned from the Russian Revolution**

But it does not follow that no conclusions at all can be drawn from the great revolution. It does not follow that anybody's conclusions, no matter how superficial or trivial or reactionary, are as valid as any others. Our struggle has been hurled back — that is now a commonplace. But it does not follow that we start with tabula rasa — knowing nothing, learning nothing, believing nothing. From the grandeur of the Russian Revolution, we have learned something: the superiority of proletarian democracy to bourgeois democracy. From the decay of the Russian Revolution we have learned something: that proletarian democracy cannot exist for long if it is confined to one faction or one party, even if it be the revolutionary party, that it must be shared equally by all other working-class and even — under favourable circumstances — bourgeois parties and groups, for without it the proletarian party and the proletarian democracy both die and with them die the prospects of socialism.

**[p.177] What the Russian Revolution proved: the working class can take power**

What the Marxists claimed for decades, the Russian Revolution proved. What did it prove? That the rule of the capitalist class is not eternal. That the power of the capitalist class is not invincible. That the working class can overthrow the rule of capital and the bourgeois state, not in the books of Karl Marx, but in the living struggle of organised workers. To this day and hour we say: If the Russian working class could take power, the working class can take power in any other country under similar circumstances. This we consider proved. To disprove it, it is only necessary to show that the Russian proletariat had national or racial characteristics which determined its victory and which are not to be found in any other proletariat. Or, it is only necessary to prove that no other country can ever reproduce a combination of circumstances similar to those which made possible the triumph of the Russian Revolution. Nobody has done this up to now. Until it is done, we regard as proved the ability of the working class to take power in its own name and for its own self. That's a tremendous acquisition for the Marxian and working-class movements. Why should any socialist or even a non-socialist worker be fool enough to bagatellise this acquisition, let alone relinquish it?

**[p.177] Why did the Russian proletariat lose power**

This brings us back to what is, after all, the very essence of the dispute over the Russian Revolution: Why did the proletariat lose power and, therewith, lose the indispensable instrument for constructing socialism?

Exactly ninety-nine per cent of the critics of Bolshevism answer the question in this way, at bottom: The Russian workers lost power because they took power. Stalinism (the destruction of the Russian workers' power) followed ineluctably from the seizure of power by the proletariat and Lenin's refusal to surrender this power to the bourgeois democracy. Exactly ninety-nine per cent of the revolutionary Marxists answer the question in this way, at bottom: The Russian workers lost power because the workers of the other countries failed to take power.

## **Part 2: The party that led the revolution**

### **Shachtman: The party that won the victory (November 1944)**

#### **[p.189] The necessity of a revolutionary party**

The rise and fall of the Russian Revolution are both linked to the Bolshevik Party. Since 1917, revolutionary situations have developed in a dozen countries, with all the elements required for a working-class victory present to at least the same degree as in Kerensky's Russia — all but one: a revolutionary party prepared for just such a situation and capable of utilising it to the utmost. This difference provides the decisive reason why the revolution triumphed in Russia and was defeated everywhere else. It also provides the basis for explaining the subsequent victory of the counter-revolution in Russia itself. The more generally this fact is acknowledged, the less trouble is usually taken to analyse it.

#### **[p.191] Socialist consciousness**

The proletarian revolution, on the contrary, cannot but be a conscious revolution, purposeful, planned, prepared, organised, timed... Consciousness (socialist consciousness, that is) does not, however, come unfaillingly to every worker at a given age, like hair on the head on a growing baby...

The revolutionary proletarian party is the repository of the socialist consciousness of the working class.

#### **[p.192] Lenin's conception of the party**

Lenin's whole conception of the party began and ended with the idea of an organisation composed, trained and activated in such a way that it could be depended upon to lead the working class to power at the right time as the first step in the socialist reorganisation of society. All critics and improvers of Bolshevism, of Lenin's party, who ignore this, are guaranteed to miss the mark.

This conception meant, first of all, a party composed of politically-educated fighters, capable of subordinating all other interests and considerations to the cause of the socialist victory. If the party is to be the repository of the socialist consciousness of the working class, it must be made up of men and women whose action is based upon understanding. They had to understand the nature of the capitalist society whose overthrow they proclaimed; they had to understand the nature of the class that was to overthrow it; they had to understand the means, the strategy and tactics, by which it was to be overthrown.

#### **[p.192] Bolsheviks and theory**

Lenin's party was the best-educated political organisation in the world. The Bolsheviks were intolerant of theoretical sloppiness; toward inattentiveness or neglect of theory, they were absolutely merciless. Lenin's "Without revolutionary theory, no revolutionary practice" was an organic concept with them. The sniggering at "theory" which became current in most other socialist parties of his time was never stylish in Lenin's party.

#### **[p.192] Lenin as polemist**

Lenin was an alert and ubiquitous polemist, and not a mild one. His polemically harsh and even violent language against adversaries used to shock (and still does) the delicate sensibilities of bourgeois and petty bourgeois politicians who considered it perfectly normal, however, to have the ruling class answer their 'critics' with police clubs and prison...

#### **[p.193] Bolsheviks built a revolutionary party of action**

The Bolsheviks built up a revolutionary party of action, not a pleasant company of salon habitues, dilettante socialists, or hair-splitting debaters. Their party was not a debating society, but a fighting army which had bloody battles to engage in and a world-renovating victory to win against the most powerful and deadliest enemy a class ever faced.

#### **[p.194] Bolshevik Party was serious**

Joining the Bolshevik Party meant becoming a soldier in a revolutionary army. It meant discipline and centralisation of efforts. It meant the ability to say: My party has this clear-cut policy, that clear-cut program, this answer to this problem; this is what it proposed to do about this situation; this is what it calls upon the people to do in that situation; if you agree with my party, support it, join it. My party means business; it is serious; it doesn't fool around with the interests and struggles of the working class; it calls upon labour to act as one man and it sets an example of how to act like one man.

#### **[p.195] The rich intellectual life of the Bolshevik party**

The rich, even tumultuous, intellectual life of the Bolshevik party, for which there is no parallel anywhere; the continuous, passionate — and passionately interesting — and fruitful discussions of basic as well as topical questions which characterised it; the wide freedom of viewpoint which always prevailed in it as a matter of course...

#### **[p.194] Caricature of 'Leninism'**

Leninism, it now seems, boils down to this: We are rough and tough. We are hard people. We spit bullets. Shut up. Stop thinking. End debate — don't even start it. We know best. Our program is finished, amendments not admitted.

### **Shachtman: Did Leninism produce Stalinism? (1950)**

#### **[p.197] Lenin's "organisational principles"**

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.

#### **[p.198] Lenin's membership definition**

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 bureaucratised bourgeois political machines that are characterised 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.

#### **[p.199] The Mensheviks adopted Lenin's definition of party membership in 1905**

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.

#### **[p.201] Lenin's "intolerance"**

Lenin's 'intolerance' toward opponents inside the party has been told in a dozen languages... 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.

#### **[p.201] Bolshevik democracy**

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.

#### **[p.202] Bolshevik internal life**

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 Lenin!) with the utmost freedom and impunity.

#### **[p.202] Lenin's open "inner-party" polemics**

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.

#### **[pp.204-5] Lenin's ideas about socialist consciousness from Kautsky**

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.

#### **[p.206] Working class consciousness**

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."

#### **[p.207] "Introduce" socialist consciousness into the working class**

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?...

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.

#### **[p.209] Workers cannot acquire power or wield it unless permeated by socialist consciousness**

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.

#### **[pp.212-3] Bolshevik cadres resisted the rise of the new Stalinist bureaucracy**

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... 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.

### **Shachtman: The working class and socialism (1953)**

#### **[p.216] Heirs of the Trotskyist movement**

We consider ourselves as heirs of the Trotskyist movement when it was a living movement in the full sense of the word, when it represented the imperishable tradition of revolutionary Marxism. And today [1953], 25 years after the founding [in 1928] of that movement, looking backward with a minimum of maudlin sentimentality and a maximum of calm, objective and reasoned analysis — what do we celebrate on this 25th anniversary?

#### **[p.217] What distinguishes Marxian socialism**

Marxism is proletarian socialism... distinguished from them all in this one respect above all others — we believe that task belongs to the proletariat, only the proletariat itself. That is a world-shattering idea. It overshadows all social thought.

#### **[p.218] What we learned then from Trotskyism**

We learned then from Trotskyism what we hold so firmly to now: There can be no socialism without the working class of the world, no socialism without the working class of Russia. Twenty-five years later we see the results of building socialism without the international working class — without the Russian working class and against the Russian working class. No matter how many books you leaf through, no matter how old they are, where will you find the story of such an unendurable tyranny as has been established in the Stalinist countries, where “socialism” has been built without the working class and against the working class?

We are the living carriers and embodiment of the ideas to be learned from these events. We are its living teachers, for those whom we can get to listen in these days of darkness, confusion and cowardice.

#### **[p.219] Our role is to teach Marxism**

We are optimistic because that will remain our hope in the greatest hours of adversity, while everywhere else lies pessimism. Our role is to teach Marxism, that Marxism which is proletarian socialism, Marxist politics, socialist politics.

Our idea of politics boil down to this revolutionary idea — to teach the working class to rely upon itself, upon its own organisation, upon its own programme, upon its own leadership. Upon its own ideas and need for democracy, and not to subordinate itself at any time to the interest, the needs, the leadership, the programme, the movement, the organisation, or the ideas of any other class.

#### **[pp.219-20] There is no socialism without the working class**

What we have learned more sturdily than every before, what is more completely a part of our Marxian idea of proletarian socialism, is that there is no socialism and no progress to socialism without the working class, without the working class revolution, without the working class in power, without the working class having been lifted to “political supremacy” (as Marx called it) to their “victory of democracy” (as Marx also calls it). No socialism and no advance to socialism without it! That is our rock. That is what we build the fight for the socialist future on. That is what we're unshakably committed to.

#### **[p.220] Dogma of opponents: the lower class must always be exploited and oppressed; there is no other way.**

I hold them up as horrible examples — to all and singly who have renounced this struggle after having known its meaning...

They have been corrupted by that most ancient of corrupt ideas: that as for the lower class, there must always be one; that the lower class must always be exploited and oppressed; that there is no other way.

They are the Stalinists in reverse. They have lost their faith in the socialist faith for that reason and for that reason primarily and fundamentally.

They have lost their respect for the working class because for so long a period of time it can, and it has, and it does, lie dormant and stagnant and seems to be absolutely passive, immobilised in permanence. In other words, they have doomed it — this working class which has shown itself so capable of so many miracles in the past hundred and two hundred years of its struggle against the bourgeoisie and against oppression in general — doomed it to eternal servitude. That's why they are not Trotskyists; that's why they're not socialists; that's why they're not democrats...

**[pp.221-2] No matter how dark reaction may be, it regenerates its gravedigger — the proletariat**

We know with scientific sureness that no reaction — not matter how strong at the moment, no matter how prolonged — can destroy that social force whose very conditions of existence force it into a revolutionary struggle against the conditions of its existence, the proletariat. We know with scientific sureness that no matter how dark and powerful reaction may be at any given time, it not only generates but regenerates its gravedigger — that same proletariat, the only social force which class society has endowed with infinite capacity for recuperation from temporary defeat.

**Shachtman: The “mistakes” of the Bolsheviks (1943)**

**[p.224] Political action can only be rationally appraised in terms of the alternative**

Political action can be understood, not in the abstract, but in the concrete conditions in which it occurs. It cannot be rationally appraised by itself, but only in terms of the alternative. The alternative to the “risky” seizure of power by the working class under Bolshevik leadership was not the painless flowering of “democracy” but the triumph of savage counter-revolution and the partitioning and colonialisation of the country.

The “mistake” of the Bolsheviks in taking power when they did and where they did, not only saved the honour of international socialism and gave it a new and powerful lease on life, but it saved Russia.

**[p.226] The Communist International**

The Communist International was organised to restore the class independence of the proletarian movement, of which it had been robbed by the leaders of the Second International. It was organised to unite the proletariat once more around a revolutionary socialist banner, to have it serve itself again, instead of serving the Kaiser, the French Steel Trust or the British Empire.

Above all, however, it was organised as an indispensable weapon of the Russian Revolution itself. The Comintern was the general staff of the world revolution. Its task was the organisation of the victory of the proletariat in the capitalist countries. This was assigned to it by the Bolsheviks, not out of considerations of abstract internationalism, but out of the thousand-times-repeated conviction that without the revolution in the West, the Russian workers' state could not hope to survive, much less solve its fundamental problems.

**[p.227] If the revolution had been victorious in the West**

The victory of the revolution in the West would have meant a vast relaxation of suppressive measures. To this day the best of the Russian Mensheviks (if there are any left who have not gone over to Stalin) do not understand that the primary responsibility for their disfranchisement in Russia (and, more important, the degeneration of the revolution) falls upon the shoulders of their German co-thinkers, who so effectively prevented the German proletariat from coming to power.

**[pp.227-8] the next wave of socialist revolutions will not repeat all the measures of the Russian Revolution**

The proletariat that triumphs in the next wave of socialist revolutions and triumphs in several of the advanced countries will have neither wish nor need to repeat all the measures of the Russian Revolution. It is absurd to think otherwise. It is much more absurd for the revolutionary movement to adopt a program advocating the universal repetition of all the suppressive measures of the Russian Bolsheviks. This injunction applies most particularly against the idea of a single, legal, monopolistic party, or as it is sometimes (and inaccurately) put, a “one-party dictatorship”.

**[p.228] Bolsheviks “mistakes” imposed and not**

There were “mistakes” imposed upon the Bolsheviks by the actions of their opponents and by conditions in general. There were mistakes, without sceptical quotation marks, that cannot be sheltered under that heading.

**[p.228] Mistake: making a virtue and then a principle, out of one party in power**

But after having been compelled to overthrow all the non-Bolshevik parties, the leaders of the party in power made a virtue, and then a principle, out of a temporary necessity. “There is room for all kinds of parties in Russia”, said one of them, Tomsy, if we rightly recall, “but only one of them in power and all the rest in prison”. Tomsy merely expressed what had become the rule and principle for the other leaders.

The idea of one party in power is one thing, and not at all in violation of either bourgeois or workers' democracy. The idea that all other parties must be, not in opposition, with the rights of oppositions, but in prison, violates both bourgeois and workers' democracy, and it is with the latter that we are concerned here.

**[p.229] Miseducation of one party state**

The whole Bolshevik Party was politically miseducated and ideologically intimidated against the very idea of more than one party in the country, and for this miseducation none of its leaders can escape his share of responsibility. It is enough to recall that from the time of

Zinoviev's first capitulation to Stalin in 1927 to the time of the last of the capitulators, every desertion from the Opposition was motivated to a considerable extent by the cry, 'No two parties in the country!'"

### **Shachtman: Bolshevism and gossip (1938)**

#### **[p.232] Political judgments, not personal incidents**

It is such a failure — or inability? — to replace subjective judgments, based on trifling personal incidents, by political judgments, that brought her own political life of the last two decades particularly to such a tragically futile conclusion.

#### **[p.234] Balabanoff devoid of political characterisations**

Balabanoff's book is astoundingly devoid of political characterisations; it is filled with pictures of good men and bad men, honest men and crooks, blunderers and seers; and after the narration of all her experiences in various groups and movements, Balabanoff terminates her book without informing the reader of what are her specific political program and her political associations.

### **Shachtman: October was a true working class revolution (1957)**

#### **[p.239] The Independent Socialist League does not subscribe to any doctrine called Leninism**

The Independent Socialist League does not subscribe to any doctrine called Leninism. It does not have an official position on the subject and I am pretty certain that nobody could get the League to commit itself officially on a term which has been so varyingly and conflictingly defined as to make discussion of it more often semantic than ideological or political.

#### **[p.240] Bolsheviks mistaken to prohibit factions inside the party**

I have in mind, most particularly, the decision of the Tenth Bolshevik Congress to prohibit factions inside the party, which played an enormous role in facilitating the rise of totalitarianism; and the point of view which became a principle defended by the Bolshevik leaders that all parties must be outlawed and kept outlawed. I must say that I unthinkingly accepted this proposition for years in the Communist and Trotskyist movements. But the grim realities of Stalinism forced a reconsideration of many questions. This one was not the least important. Fourteen years ago, I tried to re-examine this vital question...

#### **[p.240] The Stalinist regime is not any kind of socialism**

It is from this socialist standpoint that I want to fight against the Stalinist regime, the Communist movement, their supporters, defenders and apologists. I am completely agreed that the regime is not just a "mistaken form of socialism" or any kind of socialism, but its betrayal and negation.

#### **[p.241] Only a sterile sect demands uniformity of opinion on all questions**

Only a sterile sect demands uniformity of opinion on all questions, historical, theoretical, philosophical, political and tactical. A political movement should and can be built only upon the degree of agreement that is necessary for its to carry out its political tasks effectively. Organisations like the Socialist Labor Party or the Socialist Workers Party are sorry examples of the former. I would like to see the SP-SDF as an encouraging model of the latter.

## **Part 3: Lenin, Bolshevism, and Rosa Luxemburg**

### **Shachtman: Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg (1938)**

#### **[p.245] Stalinist falsification of the relationship between Lenin and Luxemburg**

Two legends have been created about the relationship between the views of Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg. Despite their antagonistic origins and aims, they supplement each other in effect...

One school of thought, if such a term is permissible here, is headed by the faculty of Stalinist falsification. It covers up its reactionary objectives by posing as critics of Luxemburg and proponents of Lenin. A discussion of its arguments is rendered impossible by the very nature of its position, which formally prohibits both argument and discussion.

#### **[p.246] 'Luxemburgism' vs 'Bolshevism'.**

The other school of thought is less authoritarian in tone and form, but just as rigid in unhistorical dogma; and if, unlike the Stalinists, it is not wholly composed of turncoats from revolutionary Marxism, it has a substantial sprinkling of them. Their objectives are covered up by posing as critics of Lenin and defenders of Luxemburg. They include anachronistic philosophers of ultra-leftism and express-train travellers fleeing from the pestilence of Stalinism to the plague of social-democracy [argued that] the horrors of Stalinism are the logical and inevitable outcome of Lenin's 'super-centralism'... Luxemburg, on the other hand, stressed the democratic side of the movement, the struggle, the goal. Hence, 'Luxemburgism' is absolutely irreconcilable with 'Bolshevism'.

#### **[p.246] Luxemburg's early estimate of Kautsky**

Rosa Luxemburg reached a clear estimate of Kautsky and broke with his self-styled 'Marxian centre', long before Lenin did.

#### **[p.247] Lenin's model was German social-democracy**

Lenin's much-disputed *What to Do?* [*What is to be Done?* (1902)] held up, as is known, the German social-democracy and its leader, Bebel, as models for the Russian movement.

#### **[p.248] Lenin vs trade-union consciousness**

Lenin's *What to Do?* was a merciless criticism of "Economism", which he identified with "pure-and-simple trade unionism", with *khvostism* (i.e., the policy of dragging at the tail of events, or of the masses), with opportunism. Social-democracy, he argued, is not a mere outgrowth of the spontaneous economic struggles of the proletariat, nor is it the passive servant of the workers; it is the union of the labour movement with revolutionary socialist theory which must be brought into the working class by the party, for the proletariat, by itself, can only attain a trade-union and not a socialist consciousness.

#### **[p.248] Plekhanov: If you eliminate the bacillus, then there remains only an unconscious mass,**

Plekhanov spoke up in Lenin's defence: "Lenin did not write a treatise on the philosophy of history, but a polemical article against the Economists, who said: We must wait until we see where the working class itself will come, without the help of the revolutionary bacillus." And again: "If you eliminate the bacillus, then there remains only an unconscious mass, into which consciousness must be brought from without. If you had wanted to be right against Lenin and if you had read through his whole book attentively, then you would have seen that this is just what he said."

#### **[p.248] *What is To Be Done?* only disputed after the 1903 split**

It was only after the deepening of the split between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks (Plekhanov included) that the latter launched their sharp attacks" [on *What is To Be Done?*] on Lenin's polemical exaggeration — that is what it was — of the dominant role of the intellectuals as professional revolutionists, organisers and leaders of the party, and of the relationship between spontaneity and the element of socialist consciousness which can only be introduced into the labour movement from without.

#### **[p.250] Lenin on limits of *What is To Be Done?***

The ideas contained in *What to Do?* [*What is To Be Done?*], which should still be read by revolutionists everywhere — and it can be read with the greatest profit — cannot, therefore, be understood without bearing in mind the specific conditions and problems of the Russian movement of the time. That is why Lenin, in answer to a proposal to translate his brochure for the non-Russian parties, told Max Levien in 1921: "That is not desirable; the translation must at least be issued with good commentaries, which would have to be written by a Russian comrade very well acquainted with the history of the Communist Party of Russia, in order to avoid false application."

#### **[p.250] In Germany, the "professionals" were the careerists**

In Germany, the "professionals" were the careerists, the conservative trade union bureaucrats, the lords of the ossifying party machine, the reformist parliamentarians, the whole crew who finally succeeded in disembowelling the movement. An enormous conservative power, they weighed down like a mountain upon the militant-minded rank and file. They were the canal through which the poison of reformism seeped into the masses. They acted as a brake upon the class actions of the workers and not as a spur.

#### **[p.251] Germany tightly organised, conservatively disciplined, routinised, and semi-reformist, centralist leadership**

In Germany, the movement was tightly organised, conservatively disciplined, routinised, and dominated by a semi-reformist, centralist leadership. These concrete circumstances led Luxemburg to the view that only an appeal to the masses, only their elemental militant movement could break through the conservative wall of the party and trade union apparatus. The "centralism" of Lenin forged a party that proved able to lead the Russian masses to a victorious revolution; the "centralism" that Luxemburg saw growing in the German social-democracy became a conservative force and ended in a series of catastrophes for the proletariat. This is what she feared...

#### **[p.251] Luxemburg's Social-Democracy of Poland and Lithuania more highly centralised than the Bolshevik party**

But it is a far cry from the wisdom of these words, uttered in the specific conditions of Luxemburg's struggle in Germany, to the attempts made by syndicalists and ultra-leftists of all kinds to read into her views a universal formula of rejection of the idea of leadership and centralisation. The fact of the matter is that the opportunistic enemies of Luxemburg and her closest collaborator, Leo Jogisches (Tyzsko), especially in the Polish movement in which she actively participated, made virtually the same attacks upon her "organisational principles" and "regime of leadership" as were levelled against Lenin. During the war, for example, the Spartakusbund was highly centralised and held tightly in the hands of that peerless organiser, Jogisches. The Social-Democracy of Poland and Lithuania, which she led, was, if anything, far more highly centralised and far more merciless towards those in its ranks who deviated from the party's line than was the Bolshevik party under Lenin.

#### **[p.252] "Bureaucratic centralism"**

"Bureaucratic centralism", was (and is) the term generally applied by Dan and Mensheviks of all stripes to Lenin and Luxemburg and all others who seriously sought to build up a purposeful party of proletarian revolution, in contrast to that "democratic" looseness prevalent in the Second International which only served as a cover behind which elements alien to the revolution could make their way to the leadership of the party and, at crucial moments, betray it to the class enemy. The irreconcilable antagonism which the reformists felt towards Lenin and Luxemburg is in sharp and significant contrast to the affinity they now feel towards the Stalinist international, in which full-blooded and genuine bureaucratic centralism has attained its most evil form.

### **Part 4: Appendices**

#### **Shachtman confronts Kerensky, from Labor Action (1951)**

##### **[p.256] Democracy**

Democracy does not consist in imposing upon the people what their rulers, by themselves, decide is a good thing for the people. It consists in the free expression of the desires of the people and their ability to realise these desires through institutions manned by their freely-chosen representatives.

##### **[p.258] Autumn 1917: Bolsheviks won uninterrupted victories in the soviets**

After the Kornilov affair, the Bolsheviks won uninterrupted victories in the soviets, while the Mensheviks and SRs split up and declined. Bolshevik influence was won fairly, openly, democratically, in spite of huge handicaps. Their leaders were arrested or driven underground, presses and headquarters smashed, press outlawed, forbidden entry to the garrisons and a lynch spirit aroused against them as German agents.

##### **[p.259] Struggle for democracy and the struggle for socialism**

The road out of the blind alley into which society is being driven more and more, lies in the struggle for democracy. The struggle for democracy receives its clarity, purpose and guarantee in the struggle for socialism; the struggle for socialism lies in the hands of the working class — the beast of burden, the despised of the earth — whose will to victory was forever underlined by their first great revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.

##### **[p.261] Who elected the supposedly "democratic" provisional government**

The ISL chairman demanded to know "who elected" the supposedly "democratic" provisional government — which, of course, had been put into power by no popular vote of any kind. In contrast, he pointed out, the Bolshevik government took power with the support of a free vote of the broadest and most representative body ever assembled in Russia or for that matter in the world — the soviets (councils) of the workers, peasants, and soldiers of the country — in a congress organised and prepared by enemies of the Bolsheviks.

#### **Hal Draper: An anti-Bolshevik eye-witness (1954)**

##### **[p.263] Steinberg, a Left SR presents the 1917 as a real people's revolution.**

[In his book *In the Workshop of the Revolution*, Steinberg, a Left SR leader of 1917-8] presents the 1917 upheaval not as a conspiracy but as a real people's revolution.

##### **[p.264] Steinberg: atmosphere of 1917**

Steinberg: "The October Revolution brought tremendous expectations, there was now a profound sense of relief. It is true that there was also great bitterness about the past, great anxiety for the future; but the deepest sensation which October aroused in the people was joy. In city, village and army, people rejoiced in the fullness of their liberation, in the limitless freedom that now summoned their creative efforts. It was as if the walls of Jericho had crumbled before their eyes. A new life called to them with a thousand voices: from now on 'everything is possible to man'. 'Everything is possible' did not mean licence and wilful destruction, but full freedom to satisfy the constructive urges and the noblest ideals of man.

"All aspects of existence, social economic, political, spiritual, moral, familial, were opened to purposeful fashioning by human hands. Ideas for social betterment and progress that had been gathering for generations in Russia and elsewhere seemed to wait on the threshold of the revolution ready to put forth and permeate the life of the Russian people. The issues were not only social and economic reforms and thoroughgoing political changes; with equal zeal the awakened people turned to the fields of justice and education, to art and literature. Everywhere the driving passion was to create something new, to effect a total difference with 'the old world' and its civilisation. It was one

of those uncommon moments of self perception and self assertion. The storm passed nobody by: neither those who hailed it as a blessing nor those who spurned it as a curse."

#### **[p.267] Left S-Rs in 1918**

Why were the Left S-Rs so frenetically and principledly outraged by this peace signed at the point of Germany's guns? Was it perhaps, the infusion of sheer national chauvinism in their fuzzy ideology which prevented them from accepting the loss of Russian territory, even in order to save the revolution? Yes...

The Left S-R party decided to make up for their defeat in the Soviet Congress by embroiling Russia in war with Germany by their own organised provocation.

#### **[pp.268-9] Bolsheviks offer to Left S-Rs**

Steinberg next presents the text of a document hitherto unknown to me, which is decisive by itself.

It proves to the hilt without any possibility of doubt whatsoever that the Bolshevik government asked only, as the condition for releasing the Left S-Rs that they state publicly that they were against "armed action" to overthrow the government. This the SRs refused to do. Hence there is no possibility of dispute over why they were in prison.

### **Shachtman: What is Trotskyism? (1943)**

#### **[p.271] Criticism of Trotsky's later theory of the "workers' state"**

Our criticism of Trotsky's later theory of the "workers' state" introduces into it an indispensable correction. Far from "demolishing" Trotskyism, it eliminates from it a distorting element of contradiction and restores its essential inner harmony and continuity.

#### **[p.272] Trotskyism: permanent revolution, defence of the Russian Bolshevik revolution and workers' democracy**

The whole of Trotsky, for the new generation of Marxists that must be trained up and organised, does not lie in his contradictory theory of the class character of Russia; it is not even a decisively important part of the whole. Trotskyism is all of Marx, Engels and Lenin that has withstood the test of time and struggle — and that is a good deal! Trotskyism is its leader's magnificent development and amplification of the theory of the permanent revolution. Trotskyism is the defence of the great and fundamental principles of the Russian Bolshevik revolution and the Communist International, which it brought into existence. Trotskyism is the principle of workers' democracy, of the struggle for democracy and socialism.

#### **[p.272] The party was necessary to fight Stalinism**

*The New Course* does more than dismiss this odious ideology that fertilises the mind of the labour bureaucracy. It analyses its source and its nature. It diagnoses the evil to perfection. It indicates the operation needed to remove it, and the tools with which to perform the operation. It is the same tool needed by the proletariat for its emancipation everywhere. Its name is the democratically organised and controlled, self-acting, dynamic, critical, revolutionary political party of the working class.

The counter-revolution in Russia was made possible only because Stalinism blunted, then wore down, then smashed to bits this indispensable tool of the proletariat.

### **Luxemburg: Blanquism and Social Democracy (1906)**

#### **[p.273] The Mensheviks' case: Bolshevik=Blanquist**

Plekhanov... accuses the so-called Bolsheviks of Blanquism.

#### **[p.275] The difference between Blanquism and Bolshevism**

The difference is great, as great as that between a pilot who with great efforts gets his boat to move against the stream, and one who steers a boat carried along by the torrential current.

#### **[p.275] The "autonomy of the masses"**

Comrade Plekhanov should calm down as regards the "revolutionary autonomy of the masses". That autonomy exists, nothing will hold it back, and all the bookish sermons... about its necessity can only bring smiles...

#### **[p.275] Maybe there were traces in the plan of 1902, but now...**

It is possible that there were traces [of Blanquism] in the organisational plan which comrade Lenin drafted in 1902, but that lies in the past...

#### **[p.276] What the Bolsheviks mean by dictatorship of the proletariat**

If the "Bolshevik" comrades today speak of the dictatorship of the proletariat, they have never given it the old Blanquist meaning... On the contrary, they [mean] the proletariat... "taking power for itself".

### **Trotsky: Hands off Rosa Luxemburg! (1932)**

#### **[p.278] Stalin vs Luxemburg**

Stalin's article, "Some Questions Concerning the History of Bolshevism" (1931) reached me after much delay. After receiving it, for a long time I could not force myself to read it, for such literature sticks in one's throat like sawdust or mashed bristles. But still, having finally read it, I came to the conclusion that one cannot ignore this performance, if only because there is included in it a vile and barefaced calumny about Rosa Luxemburg. This great revolutionist is enrolled by Stalin into the camp of centrism!

**[p.278] Bolshevism was only a translation into the language of Russian conditions of the tendency of Bebel-Kautsky**

Lenin considered Kautsky as his teacher and stressed this everywhere he could. In Lenin's work of that period and for a number of years following, one does not find even a trace of criticism in principle directed against the Bebel-Kautsky tendency. Instead one finds a series of declarations to the effect that Bolshevism is not some sort of an independent tendency but is only a translation into the language of Russian conditions of the tendency of Bebel-Kautsky.

**[p.279] Lenin still saw Bolshevism as identical to tendency of Kautsky in Germany in 1906**

According to Stalin, Lenin, even from 1903, had demanded a break in Germany with the opportunists, not only of the right wing (Bernstein) but also of the left (Kautsky). Whereas in December 1906, Lenin as we see was proudly pointing out to Plekhanov and the Mensheviks that the tendency of Kautsky in Germany and the tendency of Bolshevism in Russia were — identical. Such is part one of Stalin's excursion into the ideological history of Bolshevism.

**[p.280] Lenin: Luxemburg was right about Kautsky**

"Rosa Luxemburg was right when she wrote, long ago, that Kautsky has the 'subservience of a theoretician'..." Lenin hastens here to recognise that "verity" which he did not see formerly...

**[p.281] Lenin pro- Kautsky's position and against Luxemburg 1911**

Radek showed Kamenev, Zinoviev, and me — probably also other comrades as well — a letter of Lenin to him (1911?) which consisted of a defence of Kautsky's position against the criticism of the German Lefts.

**[p.283] Luxemburg as inventor of permanent revolution**

In 1931, we are informed by the identical Stalin that it was precisely "Parvus and Rosa Luxemburg... who invented a utopian and semi-Menshevik scheme of permanent revolution."

**[p.285] Luxemburg hailed the Bolshevik-led October 1917 uprising**

Rosa Luxemburg criticised very severely and fundamentally incorrectly the policies of the Bolsheviks in 1918 from her prison cell. But even in this, her most erroneous work, her eagle's wings are to be seen. Here is her general evaluation of the October insurrection: "Everything that a party could offer of courage, revolutionary farsightedness, and consistency in a historic hour, Lenin, Trotsky, and the other comrades have given in good measure. All the revolutionary honour and capacity which the Social Democracy of the West lacked were represented by the Bolsheviks. Their October uprising was not only the actual salvation of the Russian Revolution; it was also the salvation of the honour of international socialism."

**[p.283] Defend Luxemburg's memory**

Stalin has sufficient cause to hate Rosa Luxemburg. But all the more imperious therefore becomes our duty to shield Rosa's memory from Stalin's calumny that has been caught by the hired functionaries of both hemispheres, and pass on this truly beautiful, heroic, and tragic image to the young generations of the proletariat in all its grandeur and inspirational force.

## **Trotsky: Trotskyism and the PSOP (1939)**

**[p.286] Pivert's criticism of "Trotskyism"**

It was with real interest that I turned to Marceau Pivert's article, *The PSOP and Trotskyism*, appearing in the June 9, 1939, issue of the PSOP organ. I had supposed that Pivert would finally submit the differences separating him from the Fourth International to a concrete analysis. Regrettably, from the very first lines I was disappointed. Pivert does not make even an attempt to venture into the field of Marxian theory and class politics. His entire criticism of "Trotskyism" remains on the level of psychology, moralising, and the rules of politeness.

**[p.286] Pivert against Trotskyist faction**

Pivert is ready to collaborate with "Trotskyism," provided only that the latter abandons all claims to "hegemony" and takes the pathway of "trustful collaboration with all elements that have courageously broken with social patriotism and national communism." The very counterposing of collaboration to "claims to hegemony" is enough to arouse suspicion. The participation of different tendencies within a party unquestionably presupposes trust in the possibility of convincing one another, learning from one another. If differences arise, every tendency confident of its views will seek to win a majority. Precisely this constitutes the mechanics of party democracy. What other "hegemony" is possible within a democratic party save that of winning a majority to one's views?

**[p.286] What is a faction?**

It is a temporary non-statutory and voluntary grouping of closest co-thinkers within a party, whose aim is to convince the party of the correctness of their viewpoint in the shortest possible period of time. The appearance of factions is unavoidable even in the most mature and harmonious party, owing to the extension of its influence upon new layers, the cropping up of new problems, sharp turns in the situation, errors of the leadership, and so on.

**[p.287] Banning factions liquidates party democracy**

Whoever prohibits factions thereby liquidates party democracy and takes the first step toward a totalitarian regime.

**[p.288] “An excess of sensitivity is a symptom of inner lack of confidence”**

Experience has demonstrated that the vaguer the views of a politician, and the less he endures criticism, the more readily does a trenchant argument seem to him 'denigration'. An excess of sensitivity is a symptom of inner lack of confidence.

**[p.289] The Fourth International has never prohibited factions**

The Fourth International has never prohibited factions and has no intention of doing so. Factions have existed and do exist among us. Controversy occurs always over the content of the ideas of each faction, but never over its right to existence.

**[p.290] Luxemburg's organisational views were the weakest points in her position**

To prop up his organisational views (more exactly, their absence) Pivert of course cites Luxemburg. But that does not advance us greatly. Much can be learned from Rosa; but her organisational views were the weakest points in her position, for in them was summed up her errors in the sphere of theory and politics. In Germany, Rosa was unable to build a revolutionary party or a faction and this was one of the causes for the foundering of the 1918-1919 Revolution (on this point see the article of Walter Held in *Unser Wort*). As for the Polish party of Rosa Luxemburg under the influence of the events of the revolution it was compelled to reconstruct itself on the Bolshevik model. These historical facts are far more important than quotations!

**[p.293] Ideological bonds firm under the blows of defeats and persecutions**

The Fourth International takes form under the blows of defeats and persecutions. The ideological bond created under such conditions is extraordinarily firm. But the tempo of growth, at all events in the initial period, remains a slow one.

**[p.296] A serious revolutionist**

A serious revolutionist who foresees the grave decisions which the party must make in critical times, feels acutely his responsibility in the preparatory period, painstakingly, meticulously analyses each fact, each concept, each tendency.

**[p.297] Live and let live**

Without plumbing the gist of programmatic differences, he repeats commonplaces on the “impossibility” of any one tendency 'claiming to incorporate in itself all truth.' Ergo? Live and let live. Aphorisms of this type cannot teach an advanced worker anything worthwhile; instead of courage and a sense of responsibility they can only instil indifference and weakness. The Fourth International wages a struggle against quackery for a scientific attitude toward the problems of proletarian politics. Revolutionary ardour in the struggle for socialism is inseparable from intellectual ardour in the struggle for truth.

## **Trotsky: The class, the party and the leadership (1940)**

**[p.298] Extent the working class movement thrown backward gauged by ideological groupings theoretical inquiries**

The extent to which the working class movement has been thrown backward may be gauged not only by the condition of the mass organisations but by ideological groupings and those theoretical inquiries in which so many groups are engaged.

**[p.299] The critics of Bolshevism**

The evasion of any explanation is not accidental. These critics of Bolshevism are all theoretical cowards, for the simple reason that they have nothing solid under their feet. In order not to reveal their own bankruptcy they juggle facts and prowl around the opinions of others. They confine themselves to hints and half-thoughts as if they just haven't the time to delineate their full wisdom. As a matter of fact they possess no wisdom at all. Their haughtiness is lined with intellectual charlatanism.

**[p.300] Evolutionary-liberal epigram: ‘Every people gets the government it deserves’**

There is an ancient, evolutionary-liberal epigram: Every people gets the government it deserves. History, however, shows that one and the same people may in the course of a comparatively brief epoch get very different governments... The very same dialectic approach is necessary in dealing with the question of the leadership of a class. Imitating the liberals our sages tacitly accept the axiom that every class gets the leadership it deserves. In reality leadership is not at all a mere 'reflection' of a class.

**[p.303] The process of educating cadres requires considerable time and the revolution does not afford this time.**

To be sure, during a revolution, i.e., when events move swiftly, a weak party can quickly grow into a mighty one provided it lucidly understands the course of the revolution and possesses staunch cadres that do not become intoxicated with phrases and are not terrorised by persecution. But such a party must be available prior to the revolution inasmuch as the process of educating the cadres requires a considerable period of time and the revolution does not afford this time.

**[p.304] Reducing the party denies the possibility of revolutionary victory**

By reducing to zero the significance of the party and of the leadership these sages deny in general the possibility of revolutionary victory.

## **Trotsky: Tradition and revolutionary policy (1923)**

**[p.306] German social democratic parliamentarism**

Let us take the “classic” party of the Second International, the German social democracy. Its half century of “traditional” policy was based upon an adaptation to parliamentarism and to the unbroken growth of the organisation, the press, and the treasury...

The whole generation following Bebel took shape: a generation of bureaucrats, of philistines, of dullards whose political character was completely revealed in the first hours of the imperialist war. Every congress of the social democracy spoke invariably of the party's old tactics, consecrated by tradition. And the tradition was indeed powerful. It was an automatic tradition, uncritical, conservative, and it ended by stifling the revolutionary will of the party...

**[p.306] Bolshevik Party fundamental tactical quality: to carry out abrupt turns**

If we now take our Bolshevik Party in its revolutionary past and in the period following October, it will be recognised that its most precious fundamental tactical quality is its unequalled ability to orient itself rapidly, to change tactics quickly, to renew its armament and to apply new methods, in a word, to carry out abrupt turns.

**[pp.306-7] Marxism is the self-assured policy of brusque turns according to the peculiarities of the epoch**

Marxism is a method of historical analysis, of political orientation, and not a mass of decisions prepared in advance. Leninism is the application of this method in the conditions of an exceptional historical epoch. It is precisely this union of the peculiarities of the epoch and the method that determines that courageous, self-assured policy of brusque turns of which Lenin gave us the finest models, and which he illuminated theoretically and generalized on more than one occasion.

**[p.307] Lenin: 'start fighting and then see'**

Lenin himself not so long ago expressed this thought in Napoleon's words: "On s'engage et puis on voit" (start fighting and then see). To put it differently, once engaged in the struggle, don't be excessively pre-occupied with canon and precedent, but plunge into reality as it is and seek there the forces necessary for victory and the roads leading to it.

**[p.307] The weapon of Marxist investigation must be constantly sharpened and applied**

The weapon of Marxist investigation must be constantly sharpened and applied. It is precisely in this that tradition consists, and not in the substitution of a formal reference or an accidental quotation. Least of all can Leninism be reconciled with ideological superficiality and theoretical slovenliness.

**[p.308] Leninism: realism, freedom from moralising doctrinairism**

Leninism is, first of all, realism, the highest qualitative and quantitative appreciation of reality, from the standpoint of revolutionary action. Precisely because of this it is irreconcilable with flying from reality behind the screen of hollow agitationalism, with passive loss of time, with haughty justification of yesterday's mistakes on the pretext of saving the tradition of the party.

Leninism is genuine freedom from formalistic prejudices, from moralising doctrinairism, from all forms of intellectual conservatism attempting to stifle the will to revolutionary action. But to believe that Leninism signifies that "anything goes" would be an irremediable mistake. Leninism includes the morality, not formal but genuinely revolutionary, of mass action and the mass party. Nothing is so alien to it as functionary arrogance and bureaucratic cynicism. A mass party has its own morality, which is the bond of fighters in and for action. Demagogy is irreconcilable with the spirit of a revolutionary party because it is deceitful: by presenting one or another simplified solution for the difficulties of the hour, it inevitably undermines the future and weakens the party's self-confidence.

**[p.308] Leninism: No fiction, no bubbleblowing, no pseudo-grandeur**

Leninism is a supreme revolutionary honesty toward the party and the working class. It admits of no fiction, no bubbleblowing, no pseudo-grandeur!