

CR

The Overthrow of Tsardom

Part 2 The March Revolution

Andrew Rothstein

Reform and Revolution

Matthew Widdowson

Marx's Capital and capitalism today

Robert Griffiths

Vietnamese CP Contribution to the 2016 International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties

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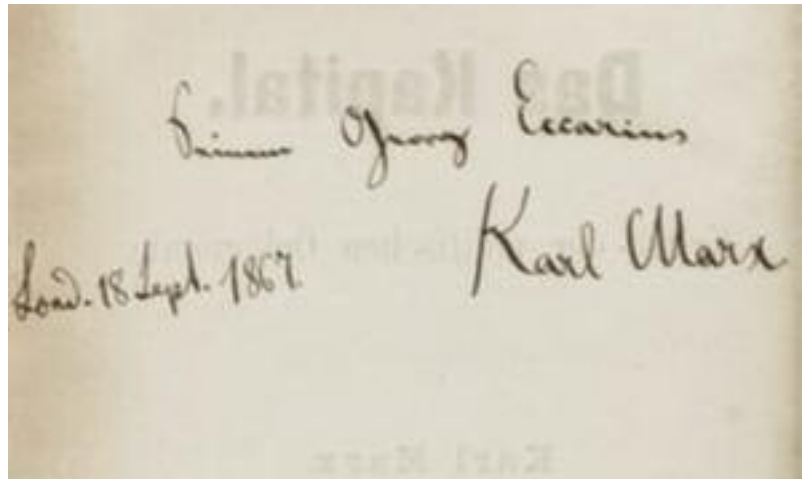
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Cover image: detail of Lawrence Bradshaw's
bust of Karl Marx in Highgate Cemetery.
Top right: Karl Marx's signature on
a first edition of *Das Kapital*



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editorial by Martin Levy

In *CR77* (Autumn 2015), writing about Jeremy Corbyn's successful campaign for the Labour leadership, I recalled the statement by former Labour prime minister Harold Wilson that "A week is a long time in politics." Fewer than 80 weeks on, we have seen further dramatic transformations, including the ruling class defeat in the EU referendum, Corbyn's second victory over the right wing in the parliamentary Labour Party, and the stunning advances made by Labour in the 2017 general election.

"Universal suffrage", wrote Frederick Engels back in 1884, "is the gauge of the maturity of the working class." In a capitalist parliamentary democracy such as ours, "wealth exercises its power indirectly, but all the more surely" than under a dictatorship.¹

The election result therefore represents a significant growing maturity in our working class. After over 30 years of retreats, when "class" almost became a dirty word, and despite the ruling class pulling out all the stops, millions of working people voted to support a programme which puts class back at the centre of the agenda – *For the many, not the few*.

How did this happen? Corbyn's campaign broke new ground in several respects – a rock concert appearance, 6 simultaneous mass rallies and the mobilisation of tens of thousands of door-step campaigners, phone bankers and social media activists. Corbyn's own drive, integrity and approachability was also a major factor. But it was above all the policies: Labour's manifesto offered a vision of community, public service and collectivism – a message of hope in response to austerity, privatisation, and 'same old, same old'.

Of course, the manifesto was not a socialist programme, and it did reflect major weaknesses over the nature of the European Union and the state, nuclear weapons and the role of imperialism and NATO. Nonetheless it was a big step forward, opening up the possibilities for major left advance should Labour ultimately be elected to government. But such a victory would inevitably be countered by the most ruthless opposition from the monopoly capitalist ruling class. The labour movement needs to be prepared for that, and there is still a big gap between the vague understanding of class, as expressed in voting, and political class consciousness.

Two of the contributions in this edition of *CR* relate to that distinction. In part 2 of his article *The Overthrow of Tsardom*, originally published in *Marxism Today* 50 years ago, Andrew Rothstein explains why the February 1917 Revolution in Russia did not dispense with the capitalists and landlords along with the monarchy. Brought suddenly into mass activity, the soldiers – largely recruited from the peasantry – and the inexperienced majority of the working class fell prey to petty-bourgeois ideology. But the working class was, for the first time in its history, playing an independent part, and was therefore in a position to learn from its experiences and as a result carry through the October Revolution under Bolshevik leadership.

In his article, *Reform and Revolution: VI Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg*, Matthew Widdowson addresses the question of spontaneity in developing class consciousness. While making clear that Luxemburg and Lenin were actually a lot closer in theoretical terms than commonly presented, he argues that for

Luxemburg it is the experience of class struggle which enables the working class to raise its class consciousness and hence fulfil its historic role. For Lenin, on the other hand, such struggle only leads to trade union consciousness, which is at the mercy of bourgeois ideology and populism – unless there is leadership by a revolutionary vanguard based on the principles of scientific socialism (*ie* a Communist Party). As Matthew notes, "different members and sections of [the working class] will come to class consciousness at different times due to their specific concrete conditions."

That last point was also made over 20 years ago by Hans Heinz Holz, in chapter 4 of his book *Kommunisten Heute (Communists Today)*.² Class itself, he says, is a theoretical generalisation, and so is class consciousness, which may be considered as the 'self-confidence' of a generalised person at a particular historical period. No concept of the class situation develops 'by itself' from individual experiences; and every individual person will remain *behind* the general class consciousness, since each represents only one of the particularities of this general consciousness. The task is to turn that general consciousness into *educated class consciousness*, which understands that individual and trade union experiences are inherently linked to the existing social system. Key elements in helping workers to gain that consciousness are the development of practical solidarity, and the educative and leadership role of the Communist Party.

Workers should therefore not only learn about the history of struggle of their class, but also develop their understanding of how capitalist society works, and why it needs to be replaced by socialism. On 18 September this year, exactly 150 years will have passed since the first publication of *Das Kapital*, which Marx himself described as the "the most terrible MISSILE that has yet been hurled at the heads of the bourgeoisie (landowners included)." That quotation also appears in our feature article, the first installment of a two-parter from Rob Griffiths, celebrating the 150th anniversary. Of course, as Rob makes clear, capitalism has developed since Marx's day into imperialism and state monopoly capitalism, but the basic contradiction between capital and labour remains. For anyone who has not read *Capital* – and even for those who have – Rob's is a very stimulating introduction.

In our previous issue, we printed the speech by the Chinese Communist Party representative at last November's International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties. This time, we print the Vietnamese contribution, which again highlights the market methods being used to expand production from a very low level. *Soul Food* profiles the really deep and intense poetry of political activist Fran Lock. And Lars Ulrik Thomsen gives us another of his interesting book reviews relating to Russia in that decisive year of 1917.

Notes and References

- 1 F Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, in K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol 26, pp 271-2.
- 2 H H Holz, *Kommunisten Heute*, Neue Impulse Verlag, Essen, 1995; translation of Chapter 4 online at <http://www.northerncommunists.org.uk/political-education/class-struggle>.



Martin Levy

FROM THE ARCHIVES

1917: The Overthrow of Tsardom

by Andrew Rothstein

Part 2. The March Revolution

Article originally published in *Marxism Today*, June 1967, pp 207-216



But the special feature of the situation was that the Provisional Government acquired its position, and could retain it, only by grace and favour of the majority in the Soviet – representing hundreds of thousands of those same workmen and soldiers.

It was this situation which Lenin described as “dual power”.

Attacking the Tzar's police during the first days of the March Revolution *Wikimedia Commons*



5 TSARDOM AND BOURGEOISIE, 1914-1917

AFTER THE first few months of the war, there were indeed ‘collisions’ between the Tsar and his officials on the one hand, and the majority of the bourgeois parties represented in the Duma, on the other. But they were collisions about how best to organise the war – which for the bourgeoisie meant the conquest of vast markets in Asia and elsewhere – and how best to avoid revolution. In other words, they were collisions between the two factions of the ruling classes.

The memoirs of the politicians and the Tsarist officials are full of charges of incompetence, intrigue and reactionary blindness levelled against Tsar Nicholas II and his Court – more particularly against the Empress (Tsaritsa) Alexandra Feodorovna and her cronies, the cunning impostor Rasputin and her go-between with him, Vyubova – with many hints of pro-German intrigue. The latter were based on the perfectly understandable feeling that the supporters of autocracy in the long run had much in common with the autocratic tendencies of the German Kaiser (although he had far fewer opportunities to indulge them than the Tsar) and little in common with the ‘dangerous’ parliamentary regimes of Britain and France. In fact, there were a number of soundings carried out by emissaries of the Tsardom, secretly from its allies, as to the possibility of some accommodation with Germany.

Thus, Alexandra’s lady-in-waiting Mariya Vasilchikova, caught in Vienna when war broke out, wrote to the Tsar on 10 March 1915,¹⁷ transmitting an offer from three “prominent” enemy representatives to discuss peace. She subsequently had talks in Berlin with the German Foreign Minister and with the Duke of Hesse, Alexandra’s brother, from whom she received further offers: she wrote to the Tsar about these on May 27, and the letter was delivered. Finally she was allowed in December to go back to Russia, and was received by the Tsar. But she had written about her “mission” already to Rodzyanko¹⁸ and to Foreign Minister Sazonov, and the thing was being talked about widely. The Tsar therefore agreed to her being exiled and deprived of her Court post: which produced an irritated comment from the Tsaritsa, in a letter to the Tsar on 3 January 1916, that “others who say the same thing might very well have their gold-braided uniform taken away as well.” Again, in the summer of 1916 a well known right-wing member of the Duma, Protopopov, met a German industrialist Warburg in Stockholm to discuss peace terms. The meeting had been arranged by the Russian Minister¹⁹ – who could hardly have acted without instructions – and on his return Protopopov was appointed Minister of the Interior (16 September 1916), on the insistent recommendation of the Tsaritsa, backed by Rasputin.

Pro-German intrigue

It was not surprising that the British and French Embassies, in particular, regarded the pro-German inclinations of the Empress and her entourage as unquestionable, and the Tsar as her weak-willed instrument. The memoirs of the British Ambassador, Sir George Buchanan, abound in references to this feeling, as do those of his French colleague²⁰; moreover, they understood very well that pro-Germanism in the particular context of Russian politics was the equivalent of the most pig-headed reaction. When a Baltic German landowner, Stürmer, was appointed prime minister (in February 1916), both of them noted that he was a friend of Rasputin and “backed by the Empress’s camarilla.”²¹ Buchanan wrote to the Foreign Office

on 18 August that year that Stürmer was “according to all accounts, a Germanophile at heart”, and at one with the Empress in trying to maintain the autocracy intact; if the Tsar continued this course, “a revolution is, I fear, inevitable.”²²

Indeed, the secret police of Petrograd reported in October 1916 that the Right parties now considered the war, in alliance with republican France and constitutional Britain against Germany whose mode of Government was akin to Russia’s, a mistake. “If the Government wants order and quiet to be restored in Russia, it should first of all disperse the ‘Jewish conclave’” (*ie* the Duma), “sign an honourable peace with Germany and break off all treaties with England.” A cable from Sir Edward Grey, then Foreign Secretary to Sir George Buchanan on 2 November 1916, advised the Ambassador, in fact, that, according to a reliable source, conversations between a German statesman and “a Russian returning from London” had lately begun in Sweden.²³ Neither the police nor the Foreign Secretary, probably, knew of Alexandra’s remarks in her letter to Nicholas II on 5 June 1916, after Lord Kitchener had gone down with *HMS Hampshire*, torpedoed in Arctic waters:

“In the opinion of our Friend” (Rasputin), “it is a good thing for us that Kitchener has perished, as later he might have caused harm to Russia: and it is no loss that his papers perished with him. You see he is always frightened of England, what she will be like at the end of the war, when peace negotiations begin.”²⁴

The bourgeois dilemma

However, at a time when the disasters described earlier, both military and economic, were overtaking Russia, it was the political significance of blind reaction at the top that caused deepest alarm and dissension in the ranks of the bourgeoisie above all, and ultimately among the aristocracy themselves. The bourgeois parties – Octobrists and Cadets – saw the danger of revolution very early on, and wanted to use it as a lever for extorting reforms out of the Tsar which would give them more control over the machinery of state. But they were unwilling to put the Tsar in a position of having really to give up his autocratic powers to the Duma, for fear this would encourage the masses to demand for themselves what the bourgeois parties regarded as their own special prerogative – political power. This dilemma emerges from all their political statements in wartime, both private and public. One need only quote a characteristic few.

In the summer of 1915, when the military position was desperate, the monarchist deputy Shulgin discussed with his political opponent, the Cadet leader Milyukov, what ought to be done. Milyukov told him that the persons responsible for the catastrophe ought to be replaced by “worthy and capable men who enjoy public confidence.” Shulgin asked, did that mean a Ministry responsible to the Duma? Milyukov said no, “perhaps we are not ready for that. But something like it.”²⁵

That July, too, Milyukov addressed a conference of his party in Petrograd. He said:

“Not to support the Government now means playing with fire ... a match carelessly thrown away would be enough for a terrible conflagration; and God preserve us from seeing it. ... All that one can do at the present time is to try and open the eyes of the Government, by the language of irrefutable facts, to fight that ministerial rottenness which is leading our army to defeat.”

In August 1915 six bourgeois parties in the Duma, grouping two thirds of its members, formed a “Progressive Bloc” which was announced as an historic event. But although its programme – apart from minor reforms – included the very moderate demand for “formation of a government by agreement with the Duma”, the Bloc did nothing to bring it about beyond pleading with the Tsar, directly or indirectly. And the formula “by agreement with the Duma” was itself an India rubber one. Shulgin describes in the same memoirs just quoted a heated discussion on 1 November 1916, between the leaders of the Progressive Bloc and their former colleague Protopopov, lately appointed Minister of the Interior. When he taunted them with wanting a “responsible ministry”, and said they would never get it, several angry voices retorted: “A ministry of confidence, a ministry of confidence!” – implying that they could let the ministers remain responsible to the Tsar, providing they had the confidence of the Duma.

As late as 11 November 1916, after the great Petrograd strikes, Milyukov told the French Ambassador that the forthcoming Duma session would not bring about anything “grave” – but that it was necessary for “certain things” to be said,

“Otherwise we should lose all authority over our electors, and they would go to the extreme parties.”

The Cadet leaders were saying (Paléologue noted in his diary) on November 26:

“The time has perhaps come, not to overthrow the Imperial regime, of course, but to organise some striking demonstration which would frighten the Tsar and force him to give up his autocratic privileges.”

But the “certain things” turned out to be a speech in the Duma, on November 14, in which Milyukov put a number of searching questions to the Government about its actions, finishing each one with the rhetorical demand, “And what is that – stupidity or treachery?” And the “striking demonstration”? – only another speech by Milyukov in the Duma on December 17, in which he said:

“We are now going through a terrible moment. Before our eyes the social struggle is leaving the framework of strict legality, and the de facto forms of 1905 are being reborn.”

If the Tsar could have been “frightened” for a moment by such a picture, he would doubtless have recovered his balance at the absurd suggestion that the social struggle in Tsarist Russia had ever been conducted in the framework of “strict legality” – words which in reality betrayed that the speaker was as frightened as he hoped the Tsar would be. In fact the secret police reported early in January 1917, on a meeting of the Cadet deputies, that both they and the Octobrists “recognised that, in the times we are going through, the only possible struggle is by lawful parliamentary means.”²⁶

Signs of despair

But the trouble – so far as the Progressive Bloc was concerned – was just that Nicholas II refused to be frightened. All the memoirs of those days record the constant appeals to the Tsar by officials, politicians, generals, even Grand Dukes, to accept some relaxation of the autocracy and admit a more bourgeois government. Even the British and French Ambassadors felt

themselves driven to do so, in defiance of diplomatic etiquette; but the Tsar was immovable.

Then – towards the end of 1916 – there began talk of a palace revolution, which would replace Nicholas II by his young son, with a senior Grand Duke as Regent. There is no need to discuss the various schemes in detail, since none of them came to anything beyond a great deal of gossip. What is worth noting is, first, one of their by-products, the assassination of Rasputin by a group of reactionary aristocrats, hoping in that way to ‘redeem’ the monarchy. Secondly, the British and French Ambassadors gave full moral support to the would-be conspirators.²⁷ Their own memoirs leave no doubt about that. Buchanan recorded how, at the beginning of January 1917, a palace revolution was freely discussed at an Embassy dinner, particularly whether only the Empress should be killed, or Nicholas as well, without any hindrance, one must conclude, from him.²⁸ Paléologue describes how in 1916, he told Russians, who were discussing assassination of the Tsar with him, that “regicide is the necessary corrective for autocracy”; and how the matter was discussed at a dinner which he attended together with a group of officers and important industrial magnates.²⁹

But all these signs of desperation were only evidence that the upper classes, whatever their differences, were united in their fear that the people themselves were about to step in. Nor were these fears groundless.

6 THE MARCH REVOLUTION

The approach of the Revolution was heralded by a series of struggles in January and February 1917, which outwardly were but a further development of those of 1916, a quantitative change, so to speak.

In January (according to official data) there were 454 strikes with 355,000 participants; of these, 258 strikes with 218,000 participants were political; in Petrograd nearly 90% of the strikes were political – chiefly on the anniversary of Bloody Sunday³⁰. Denunciation of Tsardom and the war was general.

In February, up to the 20th, there are records so far of 158 strikes with 203,000 participants – 70% of them political. In particular, there were 89,000 strikes in Petrograd on February 14, when a session of the Duma was to begin. The Menshevik delegates in the War Industry Committee had organised legal meetings in the factories calling on the workers to march to the Duma on that day as a sign of their support. The Bolsheviks called for a strike, first on February 10 – which turned out to be unsuitable, because large numbers of factories were on Shrovetide holiday – then on February 14. The strike that day took place in spite of dire threats placarded by General Habalov, commandant of Petrograd, and an appeal from Milyukov.

Thus the atmosphere in the capital was once more tense, and very little was needed to bring down a storm.³¹

The beginning

It began with a strike in one department of the Putilov works on March 2, continued next day. The same evening the Party Committee in the Narva quarter decided to call for solidarity action in other factories of the district. On the 4th a number of other plants struck, while the Putilov strikers elected a delegation to interview the management. The latter however threatened to dismiss the delegates. Protest meetings began in all departments of the vast plant (in which there were

approximately 150 members of the Bolshevik Party), and on March 6 the whole place was stopped. The following day the management closed down the works indefinitely. A strike committee of one per department was elected by the workers who had gathered at the gates that morning; and it held a joint meeting with the Narva Party Committee, at which it was decided to send delegates to all the factories in that and the neighbouring Vyborg quarter, asking for solidarity strikes. The news spread like lightning throughout the capital.

March 8 was International Women's Day. The Bolshevik leaders had decided to call for stop-work and factory meetings, the subject to be "The War, the High Cost of Living and the Position of Working Women". They did not manage to get out a leaflet, and a small mixed group of former Bolsheviks and anti-war Mensheviks issued one which denounced the war and Tsardom, but did not call for strikes or a demonstration. But meetings were held in many of the factories in the Vyborg quarter, where Bolsheviks were particularly strong. While a giant procession of the Putilov workers was marching through the Narva ward towards the centre of the city, drawing thousands of people from the food queues into its ranks and being joined by workers from factories on the route, the Vyborg workers, enterprise after enterprise, starting with the textile factories where masses of women were employed, were going on strike, and sending representatives to factories still working – and then marching towards the city centre, the Nevsky Prospekt. There they met a large section of the Narva workers, who had evaded police barriers by also crossing the icebound river. The resultant demonstration freely displayed red flags, sang revolutionary songs, and had fierce fights with the police. In all, including the Putilov workers already on strike, at least 120,000 were out.

Large numbers of troops were called out, according to a plan carefully worked out in January 1916, which provided for over 20 battalions of infantry and cavalry, distributed over 16 sections into which the city was divided, to reinforce the police. In most places the workers surrounded the soldiers, arguing with them and explaining their aims. The battle for the armed forces had begun.

That evening there was a meeting of the Vyborg Bolshevik Committee with representatives of the Petrograd Committee and the Russian Bureau. They decided to call for an extension of the strike, to hold an anti-war meeting on the Nevsky Prospekt, and to intensify agitation among the soldiers.

On March 9 the day began with over 200,000 workers on strike. This time tens of thousands of workers broke through several police barriers at the bridges and burst into the centre, singing, shouting "Down with the Tsar!" and carrying red flags. A feature of the demonstrations was the stubbornness with which, dispersed by police, Cossacks and infantry in one place, they would gather immediately not far off. Dozens of factories, large and small, joined in the strike during the day. On the other hand, many more units of the Petrograd garrison were called out to support the police. Among these there were many mobilised workers, and they together with Bolshevik workers who talked with soldiers in the streets began energetic agitation among the troops. The first results were seen at three demonstrations on the vast Nevsky Prospekt, where Cossacks refused to join the police fighting the workers and rode away, amid cheers from the crowd. By the evening some 240,000 were on strike – about 60% of the city's working class. There was a second joint Party meeting that evening, this time with representatives of Party organisations from other quarters of Petrograd. It was decided to call for a general political strike

against Tsardom next day, to get Party spokesmen into the barracks, and to send a messenger to Moscow urging the Party committee there to organise solidarity action.

General political strike

Petrograd resembled an occupied city next morning, March 10. There were infantry, police and Cossack posts everywhere, and mounted patrols in the streets from early morning. The aim was to keep the workers back in the factory quarters. On their side, just over 300,000 came on strike. The workers gathered at their factory gates and marched off in columns, growing rapidly into huge demonstrations towards the river. The police report for the day noted that almost the only slogan on the banners was "Down with Tsardom". There were no police to be seen in the industrial districts, and the Putilov works passed into the hands of a Provisional Revolutionary Committee, which began organising an armed workers' guard, and later in the day a revolutionary staff was set up. There was a series of fights with the police at the bridges and on the Nevsky, but thousands broke through across the ice; several demonstrators were killed by revolver shots.

On several occasions however, Cossacks refused to attack the workers, and at about 2 pm, in the presence of a 5,000-strong demonstration at the Kazan bridge, they helped in the freeing of 25 who had been arrested earlier, striking the police with the flats of their sabres. At Znamensky Square a girl student was shot dead by an officer, but a Cossack NCO cut down a police chief. Individual policemen were disarmed, and in the Vyborg and Narva wards the workers occupied police stations and took away the rifles, revolvers and ammunition. While a printed leaflet in the name of the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks circulated, calling for an all-Russian strike and for all to come out into the streets and fight for freedom, a meeting of the Petrograd Committee in the afternoon decided (i) to issue an appeal to the soldiers, (ii) to organise an information bureau of elected delegates from factory committees, and (iii) to proceed to an insurrection, erecting barricades. Reports from the Ministers and General Habalov to the Tsar (who was at GHQ), a letter to him from his wife, discussions of the politicians in the Duma building and at the City Council, all treated the events as "food disturbances". While the Tsar at 9 pm sent a telegram to Habalov ordering him to "stop the disorders tomorrow", the Bloc leaders (including the Socialist-Revolutionary Kerensky) called for the formation of a "responsible Ministry" (under the Tsar) and urged the workers not to "repeat the sad events of 1905" by street fighting. The police arrested about 100 more active Bolsheviks during the night including three members of the Petrograd Committee – they had an agent in the Committee.

March 11 was a Sunday; the strike was reinforced by the printers, and no newspapers appeared. Habalov ordered all regimental commanders and police chiefs to fire after three warnings. About 400 machine guns were installed by the police on roofs and belfries. Workers began to gather at midday in the factory quarters and move off towards the centre, this time in columns of 5,000 or more. Once again they were breaking through into the centre with almost continuous 'meetings' at the lines of soldiers; but this time there was continual shooting on the Nevsky itself. Police reports as well as memoirs speak of the astonishing insistence with which meetings went on there even after shootings, gathering immediately from the doorways and alleys in which the workers had taken refuge.

Armed groups of workers and students exchanged fire with

the police: dozens were killed on both sides. Girl students, organised by the Bolshevik Student Committee, put on white aprons and Red Cross armbands and forced their way into police stations to tend the wounded under arrest, “behaving in the highest degree insolently”, the last report of the secret police noted that evening. The Party leaflet to the soldiers reached them; it was distributed in the streets, thrown over the railings of barrack yards, given in packets at barrack gates to soldiers returning from duty, by pickets and at short meetings.

Individual soldiers began joining the demonstrators with their arms, and a company of the Pavlovsky Guards mutinied; they were however disarmed by soldiers called in from the Preobrazhensky Guards close by. On orders from the Tsar, Chief of General Staff Alexeyev that night instructed the Northern and Western Fronts (those nearest to the capital) each to despatch a brigade of infantry, with artillery, and a cavalry brigade to reinforce the Petrograd garrison, under an “energetic general”. The same evening Rodzyanko, president of the Duma, bombarded the Tsar with telegrams imploring him to appoint a new premier, “enjoying the confidence of the country”, and adding that “delay meant death”; he sent copies to the Front commanders, and two of them in the morning supported him in cables to Alexeyev. Menshevik speakers this day called on the workers to break off the general strike, saying that a revolution was “madness”. Anarchists called for terror against the Government. Late at night delegates of the Bolshevik Russian Bureau, the Petrograd Committee, the Vyborg Committee and of a number of large factory groups resolved that next day must be one of armed insurrection: steps were discussed to seize arms depots and prisons and for more fraternisation with the soldiers, and to issue leaflets calling for insurrection. A girl student working for the Bureau was sent to Moscow. During the night the local Bolshevik committees received these directions, studied maps and prepared action.

Armed insurrection

Early on March 12 more threats by Habalov were placarded everywhere; but brief workers’ meetings at factory gates rapidly adopted resolutions endorsing the Party’s appeal, and moved off to the centre. At one bridge a training company of the Moscow Guards was disarmed, after a brief struggle in which the commander was killed. In ward after ward ammunition factories and gun shops were occupied. Police stations everywhere were attacked and sacked, and after a fight with the gendarmes the Petrograd Secret Police office was seized and set on fire. Most of the soldiers this time were kept in barracks, but all accounts show that discussions among them raged all night. After preliminary discussions among NCOs, the Volhynian Guards were roused one hour earlier and urged not to obey orders to fire; when the first officers appeared, a general revolt took place. The regiment formed up and sent delegates to the neighbouring Litovsky and Preobrazhensky Guards. These too rose, and all three regiments, without officers, marched off to the Vyborg quarter, where they joined the huge workers’ demonstration, handing over part of their arms. Occupation of the points decided on during the night began, including all bridges, railway termini, the Arsenal with 40,000 rifles and 30,000 revolvers. Large quantities of arms in regimental stores were seized; the main prisons were occupied during the morning and political prisoners released, and regiment after regiment revolted, sometimes killing their most recalcitrant officers.

By the evening nearly 67,000 soldiers had gone over to the Revolution. About 160 private cafes and municipal

canteens were taken over, as temporary canteens for the troops. In the evening the Peter and Paul Fortress, with more arms in its arsenal, fell. In the morning the Vyborg Committee issued a leaflet calling on the workers to elect delegates to a Council of Deputies as a “Provisional Revolutionary Government” (elections of delegates had already begun, mainly in the engineering factories in different quarters, on March 9 and 10). During the day the Russian Bureau adopted and issued as a printed leaflet in the name of the Central Committee a manifesto “To all Citizens of Russia”, announcing the fall of Tsardom, proclaiming the programme of basic measures which the Bolsheviks had long adopted (a democratic republic, the 8-hour day and confiscation of landowners’ estates) and calling on the workers and soldiers to elect their delegates to a Provisional Revolutionary Government. By the evening the last 2,000 troops at Habalov’s disposal, a mere handful, had been driven back to the Winter Palace; but there was still intensive firing from the police machine-gun nests on roofs and belfries.³² About 2 pm the Menshevik leaders of the ‘Workers’ Group’ on the Central War Industry Committee met with their deputies at the Duma building, proclaimed themselves the Provisional Executive Committee of the Council of Workers’ Deputies (Soviet) and issued a call to the workers to send one deputy per 1,000, and to the soldiers to send one per *company*, to a first meeting at 7 pm. Actually it met at about 9 pm, with some 50 present; the main life of the capital was still in the streets.

It elected an Executive Committee, appointed food, defence and literature committees, decided to publish a daily paper (*Izvestia*), and called on the workers to form a militia in each factory, 100 per 1,000 workers. At about 4 pm, in another wing of the Duma building, after many hours of discussion, whether they should take any action or not – since it was not clear what the Tsar would do – the leaders of the Progressive Bloc decided to form a “Provisional Committee of the State Duma to restore order in the capital and enter into relations with institutions and persons”. Under cover of this cautious formula, they began pressing for the Tsar’s brother, the Grand Duke Michael, to become dictator, and for the Tsar to “grant a responsible ministry”. The one thing that united all concerned was fear of the revolted workers and soldiers. Rodzyanko, Milyukov and Kerensky, in speech after speech to military units which marched to the Duma building that afternoon, urged them to obey their officers and go back to their barracks. Meanwhile the reserves summoned from the various fronts began moving towards the capital, and the Tsar appointed an “energetic general” Ivanov, to take charge of them and of the Petrograd Military District with dictatorial powers: he also decided to go to Petrograd himself next day, and summoned yet more artillery batteries from the fronts. In fact, however, most of the ministers had already been arrested and the whole city was in the hands of the revolutionaries. Habalov informed Ivanov himself by telegraph in the early hours of March 13. And (anticipating a little) early on March 14 the whole punitive expedition was stopped in its tracks by the 25,000-strong garrison of one railway junction on its way (Luga) going over to the Revolution, railwaymen and other workers blocking the way on another line, and finally troops of the Ivanov expedition themselves beginning to melt away, persuaded by revolutionary soldiers at Tsarskoye Selo.

In Moscow

Meanwhile in Moscow, despite the fact that the press was forbidden to publish any details of what was going on, the City

Committee of the Bolsheviks on March 12 decided to issue a printed leaflet. It reported the revolution in Petrograd – particularly the soldiers joining the people – and called on the workers to strike and the soldiers to come out on the streets, and thus transform the revolution into an all-Russian one. It also called for elections to a Council of Workers' Deputies. The same evening, trying to outwit the Bolsheviks, the Menshevik leaders met at the City Hall and proclaimed themselves a provisional revolutionary committee. Next morning, however, many Bolshevik delegates came in from the factories. The enlarged committee likewise called for a general strike, and for the soldiers to come over to the workers' side. Strikes in fact broke out all over Moscow that morning and workers marched from all quarters to the centre, breaking down all police resistance on the way. Nowhere did soldiers, lined up to bar the way, attempt to stop the workers, much less shoot; and in the course of the day many units joined the revolution. Numbers of gendarmes and police were disarmed. Political meetings went on all day outside the City Hall (now [1967 –*Ed*] the Lenin Museum). Next day (March 14), as a particularly stirring appeal to soldiers from the Bolshevik Committee was being distributed in the barracks, an entire artillery brigade, upwards of 15,000 soldiers, went over to the Revolution; in the course of the day so many troops did the same that in the evening the staff of the Moscow Military District ordered all shooting to cease. By then all public buildings were in the hands of the workers, as well as all the prisons; political prisoners, some of them after ten years at hard labour, were released. Similar events took place in many other towns.

By midday on March 13, all resistance had been overcome in Petrograd, and officers – among them the Grand Duke Cyril – themselves began to come to the Duma to proclaim their adhesion to the Revolution. Simultaneously elections to the Soviet took place in most factories and military units; when the Soviet held its second meeting in the afternoon, hundreds of delegates attended. All day ministers, high Tsarist officials, police chiefs and generals (including Habalov) were being arrested.

7 DUAL POWER

It was not by chance that officers began to come to the Duma proclaiming their support of the Revolution. Word of the Duma leaders' appeals to the soldiers to disarm, the day before, had got round. Now Rodzyanko signed an order, on behalf of the Duma's Provisional Committee, instructing the soldiers to return to their barracks and hand in their arms. The same afternoon, two members of the Duma were sent with a military unit to the Peter and Paul Fortress and stopped any further distribution of arms to the workers. These circumstances should be seen in connection with the fact that the Duma Committee knew that General Ivanov with his punitive expedition at that moment was moving on the capital (but concealed it from the Soviet). It is obvious that the Provisional Committee was still hoping to get the revolution under control: this became clear on March 14, when it sent out a telegram to all towns in Russia, signed by Rodzyanko, announcing that Government power in Petrograd had passed to the Provisional Committee. What this meant was well understood. General Orlov, deputy to the Viceroy of the Caucasus (the Grand Duke Nicholas), sent a secret circular to all the local (Tsarist) authorities, instructing them to maintain order by force of arms if necessary, and explaining that the Provisional Committee

formed by the Duma “has set itself the patriotic public task of quelling the revolutionary movement”. Obviously only the arrival of Ivanov's forces and the voluntary surrender of their arms by the soldiers, could make such a “task” practicable, and give the bourgeois parties the real power they still lacked.

The soldiers' demands

While all these details were not yet public, Rodzyanko's order on March 13 was sufficient to alarm the now alert soldiers. All over the Petrograd garrison they were roused to fury when the officers who had fled the previous day began reappearing: great numbers of them were disarmed and arrested, and delegates from the soldiers began arriving at the Soviet session in the evening to demand withdrawal of Rodzyanko's order. Late that night the Executive Committee (EC) of the Soviet decided that the matter must be discussed at the Soviet meeting next day.¹⁷

The Soviet session opened at midday on March 14 and a little later a number of soldiers' delegates arrived. In the course of a deeply heated discussion, at least 20 soldiers took part. They bluntly stated that Rodzyanko represented the “party of order”, who wanted “the workers and peasants to be like a herd of cattle, while they do the ruling”; that until the revolution was successful, the Duma leaders had supported the Tsar, but now they were trying to get back under the plea for ‘order’; once they had disarmed the soldiers, they would throttle the revolution; the soldiers should be organised in the Soviet of Soldiers' and Workers' Deputies, who should be the only authority for them; the only weapons left to the “gentlemen officers” should be their swords, while all other arms should be under the control of elected soldiers' committees; the returning officers had only put on red armbands to deceive the soldiers, but in reality they were monarchists, and among themselves called the soldiers “a flock of sheep”; they should be allowed back only as instructors, forbidden to use bad language, and addressed as “Mr Captain”, etc. The Soviet, deciding to accept these points in general, instructed its EC to draw up an appropriate order to the troops. It included in the EC for this purpose 10 representatives of the soldiers. Those chosen included two Bolsheviks, two left Mensheviks, a right-wing Menshevik, a Socialist-Revolutionary, and four without particular affiliations. These, together with representatives of the EC, drew up “Order No 1” in about half an hour, embodying the essential demands of the soldiers. It was endorsed first by the EC and then by the full Soviet: and sent to the printers immediately, to appear in the form of leaflets which were issued to all units in the morning, and later in *Izvestia*.

This act, which aroused the unspeakable fury of the old generals, the Provisional Committee of the Duma, the foreign ambassadors etc, broke the back of the old army, and paralysed beforehand any attempt of the Duma parties to “quell the revolutionary movement”. It showed, moreover, where real power lay on March 14.

On the same day, the EC of the Soviet decided all the same that it should not enter the Government but should confine itself to critical support. The Government should be formed by the Provisional Committee of the Duma, *ie* by the bourgeois parties, on condition that they accepted a programme of democratic reforms (but not including any reference to peace or the land). The EC late that night met the Provisional Committee, which accepted the conditions. At midday on March 15 the EC reported to the full Soviet, where a discussion lasting seven hours ensued. The Bolsheviks fought for the creation of a Provisional Revolutionary

Government based on the political parties represented in the Soviet alone, but were defeated. The Mensheviks argued that the working class was not organised enough and could not consolidate the revolution without the help of the bourgeoisie – whom they promised to keep under “supervision”. As though to round off the yielding of political power to the bourgeois parties, Kerensky (who was a vice-chairman of the Soviet) came into the meeting and announced that, contrary to the decision not to enter the government when it was formed, he had agreed to join it as Minister of Justice in order to secure the liberation of all political prisoners. His action was approved by an immense majority.

Provisional Government formed

Later that day (March 15) the Duma Committee announced the formation of a Provisional Government of 12 members – six of them Cadets, five Octobrists or members of minor bourgeois parties, one Socialist-Revolutionary. Thus the Progressive Bloc had achieved its aim, and the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries had carried out their programme: the bourgeoisie had replaced the great landowners as the ruling class. The parties which had kept well out of the picture, intriguing with Tsardom to the end, until the workers and soldiers had by their sacrifices made the revolution (869 soldiers, 237 workmen and 276 others had been killed and wounded in the struggle) were enabled to step into the seats of power.³⁴ But the special feature of the situation was that the Provisional Government acquired its position, and could retain it, only by grace and favour of the majority in the Soviet – representing hundreds of thousands of those same workmen and soldiers.

It was this situation which Lenin described as “dual power”.

How fragile was the situation of the Provisional Government was displayed that very day, March 15, on which it was formed. So fixed in the minds of its members was the idea that Russia could not get on without a monarchy, and the Romanov dynasty particularly, that it despatched two of the leading members of the bourgeois parties, Guchkov and Shulgin, to the Tsar at Pskov to persuade him to abdicate in favour of his son, with the Grand Duke Michael as Regent. In fact, when they got there, they found that Nicholas was abdicating on behalf of his son as well, and was calling on Michael to succeed him as Tsar – a questionable honour, which Michael next day wisely refused with the utmost energy. But so sure of himself was Milyukov, the new Foreign Minister, that after the negotiations with the Soviet leaders about the Government were over, he announced to a large gathering of workers and soldiers in the Duma building the Provisional Government’s decision about Michael Romanov’s regency.

This caused an immediate uproar, and when the news spread through the city, stormy meetings of workers and soldiers began. Officers began to arrive in groups at the Duma building, saying that they dared not return to their units unless Milyukov’s announcement were repudiated. He had to do this himself in the next morning’s press, explaining that he had “only expressed his own personal opinion”. Guchkov did not know of this, and immediately on his return to Petrograd (March 16) announced the “glad news” about the Grand Duke Michael taking over to a meeting of 2,000 railway shopmen – who immediately arrested him and sent him under armed guard to the North Western Railway Commissary office, whence he only got away after the workmen had “calmed down”.³⁵

Thus for all their investment with power by the Soviet, the Provisional Government in the person of its leading spokesmen – Guchkov was Minister of War and Marine – found itself powerless directly a question was raised which the workers and soldiers regarded as vital for themselves.

8 CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

But how was such a situation possible?

Primarily because Russia was a petty-bourgeois country still, *ie* one in which the vast majority of the people were peasants, while capitalism was still inadequately developed – so that large sections of the workers too were recent recruits from the peasantry (and, owing to wartime conditions, from the town small shopkeepers and other petty bourgeois strata as well). Brought suddenly into mass activity, the peasants in uniform and the greatly diluted working class in its majority, even while carrying out a giant revolution, were politically inexperienced and simple-minded. They easily fell a prey to the skilled eloquence, concealing pro-capitalist aims, in socialist-sounding phrases of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries. As Lenin wrote:

“A gigantic petty-bourgeois wave has swept over everything and overwhelmed the class-conscious proletariat, not only by force of numbers but also ideologically; that is, it has infected and imbued very wide circles of workers with the petty-bourgeois political outlook.”³⁶

Furthermore, this was made particularly easy for the ‘Socialist’ opportunist parties because, supporting the war as they had from the outset, they had been treated with great leniency by the authorities from 1914 onwards, and allowed to retain all kinds of ‘legal’ posts—particularly in the cooperative societies, sick benefit clubs and, as has been shown, the War Industry Committee – as well as holding their prominent positions in the Duma and publishing their paper. The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, had been continually harried, on a far bigger scale than before 1914, losing their five deputies as well as their paper. Concentrating on the largest factories and the biggest industrial towns in their deeply ‘underground’ organisation, they were unable to maintain permanent contact with the great mass; and when revolution began, literally hundreds of their best speakers, organisers and writers had to be brought back from exile, or out of prison, before they could begin to function.

This situation found its dramatic reflection in the fact that, during the dramatic events before and after 12 March, the Mensheviks were able to avoid publicly associating themselves with revolution until the cat had jumped, whereas all the Bolsheviks available were involved day and night in getting it to jump: one group of released prisoners went to the Duma building while the other went to the factories, streets and barracks.

In this situation, in turn, the system of election to the Soviet, though natural enough from the standpoint of drawing the widest mass of the working people into activity, ensured a big preponderance of the “petty-bourgeois political outlook”. With the workers electing on the basis of one deputy per 1,000 – and smaller factories under that figure nevertheless having one deputy as well – the Petrograd Soviet had 800 worker deputies, but the larger works were definitely outnumbered

among them. When it came to the soldiers, however, one per company or its equivalent was the rule, ie one per 200 or 300; many smaller units had deputies as well. As a result, there were 2,000 soldier deputies – although the total garrison (170,000) was no more than half the size of the Petrograd working class.

Thus the character of the broad democratic upheaval of the people in Russia, the particular circumstances of the political parties seeking the ear of the working people, the form of mass organisation which this situation brought into existence, were all closely interconnected – and they made it certain that the very thoroughness of that great event would put the Menshevik leaders in a majority position, when they were able to try out to the full their theory that this was a bourgeois revolution, therefore the bourgeoisie must rule.

Role of the Bolsheviks

Does this mean that it was they who made the revolution, or that it happened spontaneously, as the British newspapers immediately tried to make out; or that the Bolsheviks, not having been able to ‘plan’ the revolution in its technical details, dates etc, therefore had no part in making it, as subsequent popular historians have asserted; or that they (and Lenin) were taken by surprise?³⁷

All these suggestions, put forward at various times in the last fifty years [*ie* to 1967 – *Ed*], in order somehow or other to present a picture of the March Revolution without the Bolsheviks, are belied by the facts of history – when these are studied objectively, on the basis of contemporary documents and properly checked memoirs.³⁸ It is these facts which have been summarised in the preceding pages, and which are constantly ignored by those who seek to present the kind of distorted picture which will at least partially whitewash the bourgeois parties and the Mensheviks (most commonly), or even the Tsardom (more rarely).

Of course a revolution in which millions of workers and soldiers took part could not be *planned* in the sense that an advertising campaign, or even a single demonstration can be planned, with all the technical details of an organisation, supervising and directing the whole operation. The suggestion that it can, only reflects the degree to which the historian, who makes it, has absorbed the *police* conception of a revolution, “the police-tinged bourgeois mind” which Marx long ago ridiculed in his *Civil War in France* – “explosions” ordered from time to time by some central conspiratorial body.³⁹

That kind of ‘revolution’ is indeed known to history – but it is the kind in which armed coups have been carried out against the people, and often with foreign encouragement and aid compensating the conspirators for their lack of thinking support among the masses. Such was the Franco rebellion against the Spanish Republic in 1936, and the military coup of the fascist General Metaxas in Greece, the same year.

But a revolution in which the masses play a decisive part, again and again taking the initiative because they understand in essence what it is all about, cannot be an ‘operation’ of that kind. Millions and tens of millions of workers, peasants and soldiers cannot be encompassed by an all-seeing and all-directing organisation for *revolutionary* action.⁴⁰ What a revolutionary organisation can do is to show that it understands the basic requirements of the people, and lead them towards the fulfilment of those requirements wherever and whenever it can. This the Bolsheviks did over many years, and particularly in the years of revival of the working class movement before and during the war (1912-14, 1915-17).

They could not know precisely the week and day when a strike of one section of the workers might lead to a general strike, still less when a general strike might develop into a revolution (just as a party elsewhere cannot tell when a campaign of political demonstrations may turn into a political storm which may sweep away a Minister, as happened with Sir Samuel Hoare over the betrayal of Ethiopia in 1935, or completely frustrate the policy of a recently elected Government, as happened with Anthony Eden’s Government over Suez). What the Bolsheviks could do, and alone did, was to be present and active as part of the working class, wherever the most influential sections of that class were prompted by general conditions into action – and, once that action was launched, to act in the spirit of Marx and Engels’ advice in the *Communist Manifesto*:

“The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement.”⁴¹

Tsardom overthrown

At a moment when the incapacity of the ruling class of Russia (all their conflicting groups) was at its height, when the masses of the workers, soldiers and peasants were feeling that the miseries of the war were an intolerable burden, and displaying their feeling in many spontaneous ways: the determined action of the Bolsheviks led by Lenin, and only the Bolsheviks, and particularly of their Petrograd organisation, raised the struggle which had been going on, in wartime conditions, since 1915 to a higher level – and at that higher level it broke through all obstacles, and launched the revolutionary fight which, in five swift days, overthrew Tsardom. Thereby the Bolsheviks were put publicly in the position of a minority – but a minority in a working class which was, for the first time in its history, playing an independent part, potentially holding political power though not wielding it, a working class, therefore, which was in a position to learn from its experiences, as it had never learned in the half century since the emancipation of the serfs in 1861.

It did learn from its experience between March and November, and the lesson it drew was that the Bolsheviks were right.

That was the greatness of the March Revolution, and that was what made it the first historic stride towards the Socialist Revolution in November.

■ Part 1 of this article was published in *CR*83, Spring 2017, pp 2-10. In both cases additional endnotes have been supplied, for clarity, by the *CR* editor.

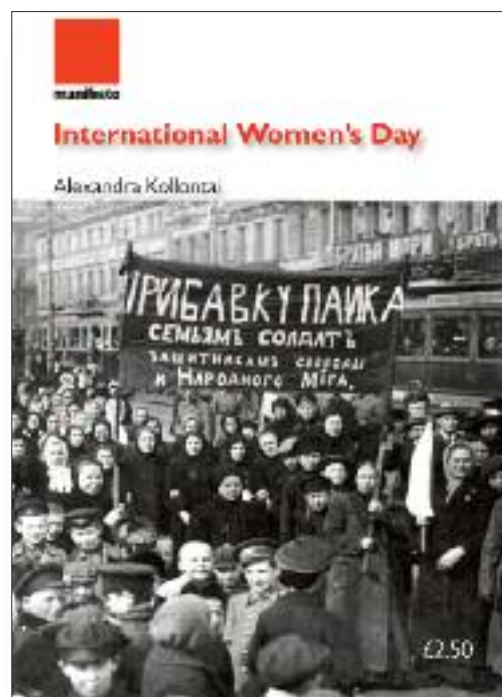
Notes and references

- 17 Rothstein is somewhat inconsistent in whether the dates are on the current Gregorian calendar or the Julian calendar in force in pre-revolutionary Russia. Several, but not all, of the dates in section 5 are from the latter; but then, in line with the former he writes of the “March Revolution” which is still referred to in Russia as the “February Revolution”. – *Ed*.
- 18 The president of the Duma (see part 1) – *Ed*.
- 19 Rothstein does not give the name of “the Minister” who arranged the visit, but Protopopov was certainly sent to Stockholm by the Russian authorities as head of a parliamentary delegation for negotiations with the allied countries; see V Kazan, “... We Must Save Our People”, in *Jewishness in Russian Culture*, L F Katsis and H Tolstoy, eds,

- Brill, Leiden, 2014, p 156 – *Ed.*
- 20 Maurice Paléologue; see Part 1 –*Ed.*
- 21 G Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia*, Vol 2, Cassell & Co, London, 1923, p 4 –*Ed.* A camarilla is a group of courtiers or favourites who surround a ruler and influence him/her behind the scenes.
- 22 *Ibid.* pp 18-19.
- 23 *Constantinople and the Straits* (in Russian), Vol II, No 340; quoted by Ignatiev, *Russo-British Relations on the Eve of the October Revolution* (in Russian), 1966, p 48.
- 24 *Correspondence of Nicholas and Alexandra Romanov* (in Russian), Vol IV, 1926, p 289.
- 25 Quoted by V V Shulgin in his book, *Years*, in the Soviet journal *History of the USSR* (in Russian), 1967, No 1.
- 26 Quoted in A Aluf, *Some Questions of the February Revolution* (in Russian), in *Problems of History of the CPSU*, 1967, No 1.
- 27 There have been more recent claims that British agents were actively involved in the assassination; see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grigori_Rasputin for a discussion of this –*Ed.*
- 28 Buchanan, *op cit*, p 41.
- 29 M Paléologue, *La Russie des Tsars pendant la Grande Guerre*, Plon-Nourrit et cie, Paris, 1922: Vol 2, p 332; Vol 3, p 137.
- 30 See Note 15 in Part 1 –*Ed.*
- 31 The following account is based on the highly documented section on the Revolution (Ch 6) in the work of Academician I I Mintz, *History of the Great October* (in Russian).
- 32 A ridiculous attempt has been made by G Katkov, in his *Russia 1917: The February Revolution*, the most recent [Longmans, 1967 – *Ed*] historical whitewashing of the Tsar, to pretend that the police firing from the rooftops is a “legend”. Unfortunately for him, cables from *The Times* correspondent in Petrograd, sent on 12, 13, 14 and 17 March 1917, all provide explicit evidence that it was not.
- 33 For the proceedings which ended in the issuing of “Order No 1” to the troops, I follow the detailed accounts, based on the minutes lately found in the archives of the Petrograd Soviet, in Miller, *The Beginning of Democratization of the Old Army*, in the Soviet journal *History of the USSR* (in Russian), 1966, No 6.
- 34 *Pravda*, 23 March (5 April, new style) 1917.
- 35 One consequence of this incident, described by Shulgin in his 1925 memoirs, *Days*, and by Professor Lomonosov in his *Recollections of the March 1917 Revolution*, Berlin 1921, was that the act of abdication was handed over by Shulgin to Bublikov, a Duma member, who hid it in a pile of old journals at the Railway Ministry – where it was lost, and only rediscovered at the Academy of Sciences in 1929!
- 36 V I Lenin, *The Tasks of the Proletariat in our Revolution*, ‘The Peculiar Nature of the Dual Power and its Class Significance’, in *Collected Works (LCW)*, Vol 24, p 62.
- 37 B Pares, *A History of Russia*, Cape, 1947: “As yet (March 12th) there was no direction of the movement which, in the words of one of the leading revolutionaries, went of itself.” H Seton Watson, *The Decline of Imperial Russia 1855-1914*, Methuen, 1952: “The Progressive Bloc appointed a permanent committee. ... On the morning of March 12th the troops in the capital began to come over to its side. The revolution had come.” R D Charques, *A Short History of Russia*, Phoenix House, London, 1956: “Planless, aimless, chaotic, the March revolution of 1917 had been achieved. ... The Bolsheviks had next to nothing to do with the fall of Tsarism.” J Lawrence, *Russia in the Making*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1957: “Riots broke out in the capital; the Tsar dissolved the Duma, the Duma refused to be dissolved, mutinous troops refused to fire on the people; and suddenly no one obeyed the Government.” R D Charques, *The Twilight of Imperial Russia*, Oxford University Press, 1958: “The Bolsheviks contributed little or nothing to the revolution. The first disturbances were wholly unorganised. The mass moved of itself. ... The Petrograd Soviet came into existence out of the chaos of revolution.” L Kochan, *The Making of Modern Russia*, Cape, 1962: “It began in a small way, spontaneously almost, one might say, unpolitically. ... The movement took the revolutionaries by surprise as much as anyone else.” G Katkov, *op cit*: “All the evidence goes to show that the Bolsheviks had not set up an organisation capable of provoking mass action. ... In the spring of 1917 in particular they did not believe mass action at all

desirable (The Petrograd Bolsheviks) played an insignificant part.”

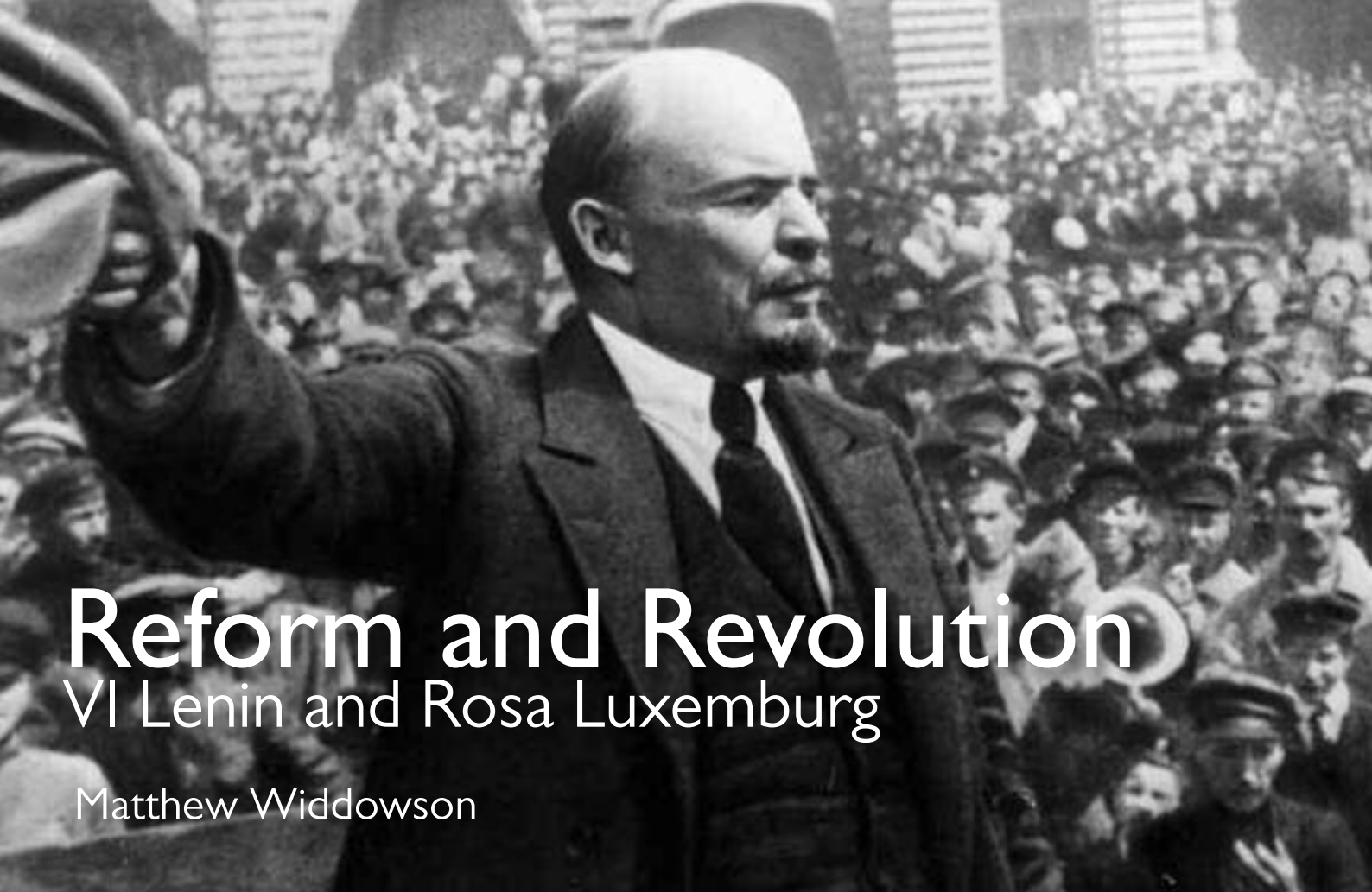
- 38 It should be mentioned that one myth put about in recent years [ie to 1967 – *Ed*] is that Lenin himself was not only taken by surprise, but did not believe the revolution would happen in his lifetime: as proof of this, his address on the anniversary of 1905 to Swiss Youth at Zurich (22 January 1917) is regularly quoted. But the text is available now in many cheap editions. Anyone can see for himself that, when Lenin spoke of the Russian revolution, he was referring to what had happened in 1905; when he said that “we of the older generation may not live to see the decisive battles of this coming revolution”, he was referring throughout (6 times!) to a European revolution. [Rothstein’s point appears to be slightly misplaced; in the address, *Lecture on the 1905 Revolution*, in *LCW*, Vol 23, pp 236-253, Lenin states that “Europe is pregnant with revolution”, but when he speaks of the “decisive battles” he refers clearly to the socialist revolution –*Ed.*]
- 39 K Marx, *The Civil War in France*, Part IV, in K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol 22, p 354.
- 40 The logical absurdity to which the contrary idea of what makes a revolution is pushed is well illustrated by Mr Katkov when he writes, *op cit*, pp 260-1, that the proletarian masses in 1917 were not interested in the slogans for which they were demonstrating, so long as they got their strike pay – forgetting only to produce one solitary piece of evidence amid that vast series of struggles that anyone, anywhere, got any “strike pay”.
- 41 K Marx and F Engels, in *MECW*, Vol 6, p 518.



Following the Russian Revolution, International Women’s Day was established as a national holiday and Alexandra Kollontai became head of the Women’s Department and People’s Commissar for welfare and led the campaign to improve women’s living conditions, eradicate illiteracy and establish a new legal and social framework for women’s liberation. International Women’s Day is now celebrated throughout the world and its close links to the revolutionary struggles of the 20th century become more relevant as systemic crisis grips the capitalist world.

Manifesto Press published this reprint of Alexandra Kollontai’s writing on International Women’s Day as part of its programme to mark the centenary of the October Socialist Revolution.

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Reform and Revolution

VI Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg

Matthew Widdowson

ROSA LUXEMBURG often finds herself among the pantheon of ‘left communist’ theoreticians alongside the likes of Herman Gorter, Anton Pannekoek, Paul Mattick *et al.* However, a closer reading of Luxemburg reveals her thinking to be much more aligned with Lenin than the ‘left communists’ would like to admit, and the areas of overlap between these two outstanding Marxists outnumber the areas of dispute.

Leninism is the most plausible means for Marxism to succeed politically, but it has often been accused of ignoring the role of spontaneity due to what its ‘left’ opponents perceive to be overly authoritarian ‘command and control’ centralism. The role that Luxemburg gave to spontaneity is often presented as an alternative to the democratic centralism of Leninism; however this ignores her recognition of the role of leadership and the fact that the centralising tendency of what was then called Social Democracy stems from the centralising tendencies of the capitalist society in which they exist.

The ‘left communist’ *error* also arises from misunderstanding the pragmatism and realism of Leninism: the revolutionary party ought to be organised in line with the prevailing objective conditions – not pre-existing organisational principles. Therefore, the Marxist-Leninist party is realistic and able to adapt itself to the varying degrees of political liberty it finds itself in.

Luxemburg was generally supportive of the Bolshevik programme and I will argue that her criticisms can be taken as highly useful comradeship advice to Leninists and not as an outright dismissal as some ‘left communists’ will argue. There exist major areas of agreement between Lenin and Luxemburg and I will begin with their shared opposition to reformism: Luxemburg¹ identifying the shared roots of the

error of both reformism and extremism at the time of the ‘Bernstein debates’²; and Lenin elsewhere³ questioning the reformist understanding of the capitalist state; both arguments being mutually supportive of each other.

It is important to begin with the shared opposition to reformism as this is a good starting point for a discussion on the limitations and dangers of a purely trade union consciousness and how this would develop into a revolutionary class consciousness. For both theorists, the subjective development of the working class into a fully conscious proletariat is essential for the achievement of socialism; however, it is the means by which class consciousness is developed that is a point of contention. I will argue that there are, in fact, still many points of agreement during the subsequent debates over the nature of the revolutionary organisation and that these disputes can be seen as a matter of degree rather than a fundamental difference.

Reform and revolution

Both Lenin⁴ and Luxemburg⁵ agree that the reformist Bernstein had abandoned revolutionary socialism in favour of bourgeois social reformism. Luxemburg argues that, by rejecting the dialectical method, reformism had lost the capacity to comprehend the totality of capitalism, thus being reduced to perceiving the social world as a series of isolated factors to be tackled one by one. This abandonment of Marxist theory leaves the labour movement without its chief source of strength.⁶ Luxemburg condemns reformism as being a mechanistic (as opposed to dialectical) understanding of history: drifting through a series of events from which it tried to grasp at some sort of causality; attempting to correct the causes of what were arbitrarily

While not dismissing spontaneity altogether, Lenin sees limitations in Luxemburg's theory of the development of class consciousness and claims that "instinctiveness is an unconsciousness (a spontaneity) to the aid of which socialists must come."



Matthew Widdowson

deemed as being socially undesirable; and ignorant of how these factors were dialectically related within a totality. This reduces the reformists, in the words of Lelio Basso, to "vulgar empiricists"⁷ unable to expose the contradictions within capitalism and equally unable to make the vital link between the daily struggle for reforms and the necessity of revolution.

This inability to grasp the whole leads reformism towards making terrible *errors* as, like bourgeois liberalism, it places artificial boundaries between the spheres of the political and the economic, leading reformism into inadvertently strengthening the ruling class and actively supporting imperialism by misrecognising how the political and economic are intertwined within the whole.⁸

The reformist position also errs in the unfounded belief in gradual evolution; that incremental change will bring about genuine social transformation.⁹ Lenin argues that this belief arose from a misreading of Marx and Engels, leading to a flawed conception of the state. In *The State and Revolution*, he argues that this *error* centres around Engels' conception of the "withering away of the state", which gradualists had erroneously understood to mean the gradual dissolution of the bourgeois state.¹⁰ Lenin counters this by presenting a more sophisticated analysis of the capitalist state as an entity created by class antagonisms and the ruling class's need to justify oppression (particularly through its legal framework).¹¹ While acknowledging that the bourgeois republic was the best possible form of state for the worker within a capitalist society, it does not equate to the reformist belief that it is the best possible means through which the worker can achieve emancipation.^{12,13} The petty-bourgeois democrat is mistaken in believing that the state transcends class conflict, and is equally misguided in believing that the capitalist class will simply submit to the will of the majority and give up its dominant position within the state.³ For Lenin, the only course by which the proletariat can realise its historic role is through the revolutionary capture of the state.^{9,14}

Therefore, contrary to the reformist argument, it is not the bourgeois state but the subsequent proletarian state which must "wither away":

"...the proletariat cannot overthrow the bourgeoisie without first conquering political power, without attaining political dominance, without transforming the state into the 'proletariat organised as the ruling class'; and this proletarian state will begin to wither away immediately after its victory because the state is unnecessary and

impossible in a society without class contradictions."⁹

Luxemburg articulates a similar criticism of the reformist belief in the capacity of the bourgeois state to bring about genuine social transformation.¹⁵ As with Lenin, Luxemburg viewed the state (while being capable of offering minor concessions to the working class) as acting, in the final instance, always in the favour of the ruling class:

"It [the bourgeois state] assumes functions favouring social development specifically because, and in the measure that, these interests and social development coincide, in a general fashion, with the interests of the dominant class. Labour legislation is enacted as much in the immediate interest of the capitalist class as in the interests of society in general. But this harmony endures only up to a certain point of capitalist development. When capitalist development has reached a certain level, the interests of the bourgeoisie, as a class, and the needs of economic progress begin to clash even in the capitalist sense."¹⁶

Although both Lenin and Luxemburg agree on the limitations of the bourgeois state, neither abandons the defensive struggle for reforms within capitalism. Nor does Lenin advocate the abandonment of participation in bourgeois democratic institutions on principle: after all, parliamentarianism provides the revolutionary party with an excellent means of addressing a working class who still have faith in the bourgeois state.¹⁷

The extremists who reject participation in bourgeois democracy on a point of principle are guilty of making the same *error* as the reformists.^{18,19} For Luxemburg, reformism and extremism have common origins and are polar extremes of the same phenomenon: while opportunism abandons revolution for reform, the extremist abandons reform for revolution. Extremism abandons the day-to-day struggle and is therefore cut loose from the realities of the labour movement and the masses, becoming an 'all or nothing' dogma that inevitably leads to sectarianism or, in worse cases, acts of *terrorism* (although it should be noted that, for Lenin, his opposition to individual acts of *terrorism* came not from principle but as a matter of political expediency²⁰). The *errors* of both reformism and extremism stem from the failure to understand that the economic struggle for reforms aimed at defending workers within capitalism and the preparation for revolution are the same struggle; there is no artificial division between the economic and political.



Rosa Luxemburg speaking at a rally

Trade union consciousness and class consciousness

This failure to recognise the ‘unity of action’ between reform and revolution that is found within Social-Democratic parties is also present in the trade union movement. Trade unions, for Luxemburg, contain all of the contradictions of the capitalist society in which they are situated and are just as susceptible to the reformist tendencies within the Social-Democratic Party.²¹ Unions are trapped in the logic of the sale of labour power and are therefore performing the “labour of Sisyphus”;²² the changing objective conditions of capitalism mean that the battle to defend workers is always having to be constantly refought.

Even though reformism condemns trade unions to this labour of Sisyphus, both Lenin and Luxemburg understand the vital importance of organised labour. Through trade unionism the working class is prepared for revolution through creating “the subjective factor of the socialist transformation, for the task of realising socialism.”²³ It is also through trade union struggle that workers will see the limitations of reformist institutions within a capitalist society and, for Luxemburg at least, begin to develop a class consciousness.²⁴

The exact level of consciousness that the worker can achieve through the economic struggle alone is the point at which Lenin and Luxemburg begin to diverge. While Luxemburg sees the working class as revolutionary though tempered by the outside forces of reformism, Lenin acknowledged that a labour aristocracy within a stratified class meant that reformism was, in fact, embedded within the working class. While Luxemburg sees the struggle as the means through which the worker can begin to develop a class consciousness, Lenin maintains that, due to the interests of the labour aristocracy, it is only a trade union consciousness that can be achieved through the economic struggle alone; as Alan Shandro²⁵ has discussed, the development of class consciousness must come “from without.”²⁶ The workers, raised only to the level of trade union consciousness, are still open to bourgeois manipulation and remain unable to see beyond their immediate interests to perceive the wider historical role of the proletariat.²⁷ Therefore, while Luxemburg sees the beginnings of class consciousness forming through

participation in trade union struggles,²⁸ Lenin argues that this, “spontaneous element, in essence, represents nothing more nor less than consciousness in an embryonic form”,²⁷ which requires the leadership and theoretical knowledge of the revolutionary. This question of the degree to which the working class can self-develop a proletarian class consciousness is at the heart of the subsequent debate between Lenin and Luxemburg.

Class consciousness and spontaneity

Both Lenin and Luxemburg reject fatalistic economism in favour of the dialectical understanding of historical processes.^{29,30} The Marxist method acknowledges a complex interplay of factors within the totality leading to the development of tendencies and counter-tendencies which may or may not come to fruition. Armed with this dialectical method, the proletariat has the ability to develop, as Basso notes, a “historical sense of the present”³¹ enabling it to perceive daily struggles within the wider whole and identify these tendencies. It is the role of the proletariat to act to promote the progressive tendencies and to defend them against the counter-tendencies.

This thinking echoes that of Karl Marx:

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”³²

History is not mechanistically predetermined; there exist junctures at which conscious agents are able to take action appropriate to the prevailing objective conditions. It is a great mistake to believe that bourgeois society will give way to socialism without a struggle. There is a degree of choice for the proletariat. For Luxemburg, socialism is not necessarily a given. This raises the prospect that, without the conscious action of a revolutionary proletariat, capitalism may continue, with ever increasing waves of conflict and oppression, towards an eventual collapse into chaos.³³ It is therefore necessary for the proletariat to save, not only itself, but humanity from this disastrous fate.

Lenin also rejects a mechanistic reading of Marx as undialectical, especially – as Lukács observes³⁰ – when confronted with the Menshevik argument that Russia needed to pass through an era of bourgeois democracy before progressing to socialism. However, it is the ability of the working class to achieve the necessary level of class consciousness through the process of struggle alone on which Lenin and Luxemburg differ.

For Luxemburg, the struggle is a process. It is through the class struggle that the working class raises itself to a level of class consciousness and is able to fulfil its historic role. As Basso notes, class consciousness is achieved through the dialectical transcendence of spontaneous action by means of the continuous process of critical reflection: a higher consciousness is achieved through the dialectical interaction of spontaneity and subjectivity.³⁴ This means that class consciousness cannot be bestowed by an external intellectual elite, as it is the result of the lived struggle. This is class consciousness from within.

While not dismissing spontaneity altogether, Lenin sees limitations in Luxemburg's theory of the development of class consciousness and claims that "instinctiveness is an unconsciousness (a spontaneity) to the aid of which socialists must come."³⁵ He justifies what, prima facie, amounts to the leadership of the proletariat by intellectuals originating from the bourgeoisie, as a continuation of the development of scientific socialism:

"The teachings of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by the intelligentsia. By their social status, the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia."²⁷

This is a convincing argument since rejecting the contributions of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois intellectuals would mean rejecting Marx and Engels, and even Lenin and Luxemburg themselves. In fact – as Shandro observes – Lenin argues that it is essential to dissolve within the revolutionary organisation the distinction between intellectual and worker, and that the rejection of intellectualism leads the working class towards the rabble-rousing of demagogues and the danger of atheoretical populism.³⁶ Without the leadership of the revolutionary vanguard, the trade union consciousness gained through spontaneous action is left to the mercy of bourgeois ideology and the rhetoric of the populist.

'Left communists' often criticise Leninism as being authoritarian and elitist, which Shandro argues comes from a misunderstanding of Lenin. It is perhaps necessary to summarise briefly the reasoning behind Shandro's claim

"that Lenin's appraisal of spontaneity and consciousness does not, contrary to conventional wisdom violate the Marxist conception of proletarian self-emancipation".³⁷

The argument against Leninism derives from the view that Lenin apparently advocated the separation of a class-conscious vanguard from the workers, creating a "schizophrenia [that] translates into an authoritarian division of society into enlightened reformers and an unenlightened mass to be moulded".³⁸ Shandro argues that the 'left' criticism of Leninism derives from a false dichotomy between autonomism and heteronomy and he asks the question:

"... in the act of self-emancipation do all workers come to consciousness at once or are some of them, the leaders, in advance of others?"³⁹

Shandro reveals pragmatic realism on Lenin's part: his analysis rejects the notion of mass awakening of the working class and accepts that different members and sections of it will come to class consciousness at different times due to their specific concrete conditions. Thus Shandro provides a summary of Lenin's view of spontaneity and consciousness:

"... although the spontaneous working class movement could not generate Marxist theory itself, once it exists and is made available to them, they grasp it easily; they can do so because, in a sense, the theory is not alien to them, because it constitutes a mirror in which that can see their reality and their aspirations more clearly."⁴⁰

Vanguardism is therefore only elitist in the sense that class consciousness is required of the revolutionary. Both the class conscious worker-intellectual and the previously bourgeois and petty-bourgeois intellectual are dissolved within this vanguard. Vanguardism is not elitist in the sense that its 'left communist' critics seek to portray it: any workers that grasp that their class interests are in conflict with the bourgeois class in general can make the leap from a narrow trade union consciousness to a full class consciousness. It is the role of the vanguard to work within working class organisations to guide this embryonic consciousness away from opportunism and bourgeois ideology and towards revolutionary Social Democracy.

Luxemburg also recognised the need for revolutionary leadership. The masses are like Thalatta – the eternal sea – within which there is every possibility; but to navigate the sea, the working class must be guided by the truth.⁴¹ Basso notes that, while the working class is best instructed by its own experience and self-reflection on its errors, this does not mean that Luxemburg, in overestimating the capacity for spontaneity, believed in the possibility of revolution without any form of organisation.⁴² He argues that Luxemburg opposed organisation for organisation's sake and that the party should not hinder the creative capacity of the masses, but this is not the same as disposing of the party. It instead leads to a conception of the party that is, so far at least, not completely incompatible with that of the Leninist party. It is more a matter of the correct method of organisation suitable for the prevailing objective conditions; a pragmatic approach at the core of Leninism.

Again, drawing on the Marxist method, Luxemburg understands the masses and the Social-Democratic leadership to be dialectically related: both elements exist within one struggle and each develops alongside the other. This leads Luxemburg to envision a rather pedagogical role for the party: the leadership's role is to assist the working class in understanding the wider contexts of the struggle and how this relates to its historic role; and, when spontaneous action leads to defeat, to aid the workers in their critical self-reflection. Thus, breaking from Lenin, there is no place for the issuance of instructions for action from the party centre as the masses can only develop subjectively through the process of spontaneous struggle.

In her most forceful argument against Leninist organisation, Luxemburg states that the masses are not to be viewed as troops to be ordered around by a central committee, but instead are to be taught and guided by a party which is responsive to objective conditions of the struggle.⁴³ In her 1904

article, *Organisational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy* (republished in Britain in 1935 under the provocative title *Leninism or Marxism?* by the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation – an organisation whose name implies it had abandoned the link between reform and revolution), Luxemburg sets out to criticise the “ultra-centralist” and “pitiless” methods of Leninist organisation⁴⁴ and accuses Lenin of displaying Jacobin and Blanquist tendencies in his thought (although without going as far as to accuse Lenin of outright Blanquism). The Leninist party, as portrayed in *Organisational Questions*, is reduced to an all-powerful central committee issuing edicts to subordinate party elements:

“The Central Committee would be the only thinking element in the party. All other groupings would be its executive limbs.”⁴⁵

After this forceful attack on Leninist organisational principles, Luxemburg then proceeds to acknowledge that the tendency towards centralisation in then Social-Democratic parties reflects the centralising tendency of the capitalist society in which they exist: like trade unions, parties do not exist outside of capitalism.⁴⁶ Utilising her ability to assess the struggle within the context of objective conditions, Luxemburg (while continuing to place an emphasis on spontaneity), notes that the conditions in which the party can organise on a federal or local basis are the exception.⁴⁶ Again, it seems that it is the objective conditions which should determine the organisation of the Social-Democratic Party and, as she acknowledges, it is only in exceptional circumstances that the party can operate on a truly federal basis.

We can either understand *Organisational Questions* as the total rejection of centralism or as a statement intended to remind her Russian comrades of the necessity of applying the correct organisational principles to the prevailing objective conditions while ensuring the greatest degree of local initiative possible. It is my conclusion that it is the latter understanding which is the most consistent with the dialectical method and should be understood as comradesly advice as opposed to an attack on the Bolsheviks.

It is also noteworthy, that *Organisational Questions* states that the conditions for Social Democracy were not yet met in Russia and that the working class could only develop class consciousness in an atmosphere of “political liberty”.⁴⁶ It is not clear whether this “political liberty” would entail a period of bourgeois liberalism during which the Social-Democratic Party would be able to operate openly and legally. A reading such as this would contrast with Luxemburg’s support for the 1917 Russian Revolution and lend support to the Mensheviks’ argument that conditions in Russia had to be given time to mature (possibly one of the reasons behind Stalin’s, not unreasonable, condemnation of Luxemburg’s supporters as “semi-Mensheviks”⁴⁷). Indeed, as Basso notes, Luxemburg had recognised that a socialist revolution was possible in Russia: an immature bourgeois class, the emergence of a proletariat and existing Social-Democratic organisations leading to what she identified as “overlapping circumstances”⁴⁸. To have argued in *Organisational Questions* that Social Democracy required the conditions of political liberty as provided for by a bourgeois republic would have been at odds with Luxemburg’s opposition elsewhere to the undialectical analysis of concrete conditions.

Luxemburg’s article, published in 1904, in both *Iskra* and

Neue Zeit, seems strangely at odds with her work elsewhere, although Ottokar Luban makes the argument that her position is consistent (albeit more moderate elsewhere) within her wider work, particularly that of a 1911 article intended to appeal for unity between the factions of the Russian Social-Democratic Party.⁴⁹ Luxemburg’s opposition to centralism may have stemmed, not so much from her opposition to the organisational principles of the Bolsheviks, but from the centralism practiced within the German Social-Democratic Party which was leading the party towards support for the war.

It is also important to remember that both Lenin and Luxemburg agree on the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the “temporary occupation of the centralised state apparatus”⁵⁰; and that the party, according to Paul Frölich’s account of Luxemburg’s view, “had to be centralistically organised, and that the will of its majority could be carried out by means of strict discipline in its activities.”⁵¹ Therefore, it would be reasonable to conclude that, on organisational principles, the differences between Lenin and Luxemburg are matters of degree, not fundamental disagreements. The exact nature of Social-Democratic organisation – the degree of centralism, the scope for internal dissent, the independence of its parts, and the degree of secrecy – is dependent on objective conditions, and is not a matter of abiding by *a priori* principles.

Conclusion

Leninism is certainly the most plausible way in which Marxism can succeed politically. By showing the limitations of spontaneity, Lenin articulates a more realistic and pragmatic political programme, one which was adaptable to the prevailing objective conditions and was realistic about the subjectivity of the working class within capitalism. However, Luxemburg continues to offer Leninism her comradesly advice that organisation for organisation’s sake is counter-productive and that objective conditions (particularly the amount of political freedom within society) must always guide the revolutionary leadership when deciding upon the appropriate degree of internal dissent and spontaneous action. Leninism is sufficiently realistic and sophisticated to recognise that an assessment of the concrete conditions must be the basis for organisational method.

Notes and references

- 1 R Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution (ROR)*, in *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg*, H Scott, ed, Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2008, p 103. She identifies the extremes of anarchism and opportunism in Social Democracy and argues that Marxist theory provides a guide for overcoming these tendencies.
- 2 The ‘Bernstein debates’ were debates in the German Social-Democratic Party, starting in 1896, due to a series of revisionist articles published by Eduard Bernstein. Defending the Marxist position were August Bebel, Karl Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg.
- 3 V I Lenin, *The State and Revolution (SAR)*, R Service trans, Penguin Books, 1992, p 24.
- 4 V I Lenin, *What is to be Done? (WITBD)*, J Fineberg, G Hanna and R Service, trans, Penguin Books, 1989, p 75.
- 5 Luxemburg, *ROR*, pp 100-104. She writes: “Bernstein’s system, opportunism, has gone – negatively through its renunciation of scientific socialism, positively through its marshalling of every bit of theoretical confusion possible – as far as it can.”
- 6 *Ibid*, p 43.
- 7 L Basso, *Rosa Luxemburg: A Reappraisal*, D Parmée, trans, Deutsch, London, 1975, p 18.
- 8 R Luxemburg, *The Junius Pamphlet (TJP)*, D Hollis trans, Ch 7; online at <http://tinyurl.com/y8a7b2ru>. For example, Luxemburg argues that Social Democrats in the Reichstag should have been working to expose the “real background of

- this imperialist war” instead of supporting the “civil peace”.
- 9 Lenin, *SAR*, p 21.
 - 10 *Ibid.*, p 17.
 - 11 *Ibid.*, pp 8-9.
 - 12 V I Lenin, *‘Left-Wing’ Communism, An Infantile Disorder (LWC)*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1970, p 15.
 - 13 Lenin, *SAR*, p 19.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, p 27.
 - 15 Luxemburg, *ROR*, pp 61-6.
 - 16 *Ibid.*, pp 61-2.
 - 17 Lenin, *LWC*, p 40.
 - 18 Basso, *op cit*, pp 22-23.
 - 19 Lenin, *SAR*, p 140.
 - 20 Lenin, *LWC*, p 17.
 - 21 Basso, *op cit*, p 25.
 - 22 Luxemburg, *ROR*, p 83.
 - 23 *Ibid.*, p 66.
 - 24 Basso, *op cit*, p 62.
 - 25 A Shandro, “Consciousness from Without”: *Marxism, Lenin and the Proletariat*, in *Science & Society*, Vol 59, No 3, Fall 1995, pp 268-297.
 - 26 V I Lenin, *The Struggle of the Proletariat*, in *Collected Works*, Vol 9, p 388.
 - 27 Lenin, *WITBD*, pp 97-8.
 - 28 Basso, *op cit*, p 62.
 - 29 *Ibid.*, p 30.
 - 30 G Lukács, *Lenin: A Study in The Unity of His Thought*, N Jacobs, trans, New Left Books, 1977, p 17.
 - 31 Basso, *op cit*, p 28.
 - 32 K Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, S.K. Padover, trans, Ch 1; online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>.
 - 33 Luxemburg, *TJP*, Ch 1; online at <http://tinyurl.com/lmq8fq>
Luxemburg writes: “Friedrich Engels once said: ‘Bourgeois society stands at the crossroads, either transition to socialism or regression into barbarism.’ ... Today, we face the choice exactly as Friedrich Engels foresaw it a generation ago: either the triumph of imperialism and the collapse of all civilisation as in ancient Rome, depopulation, desolation, degeneration – a great cemetery. Or the victory of socialism, that means the conscious active struggle of the international proletariat against imperialism and its method of war.”
 - 34 Basso, *op cit*, p 100.
 - 35 Lenin, *WITBD*, p 111.
 - 36 *Ibid.*, pp 174, 183.
 - 37 Shandro, *op cit*, p 269.
 - 38 *Ibid.*, p 270.
 - 39 *Ibid.*, p 271.
 - 40 *Ibid.*, p 276.
 - 41 Luxemburg’s letter to Mathilde Wurm, 16 February 1917, reproduced in P Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, J Hoornweg, trans, Pluto Press, 1972, pp 143-4.
 - 42 Basso, *op cit*, pp 102, 105.
 - 43 R Luxemburg, *Organisational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy*, online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1904/questions-rsd/>; see also *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?*, Ann Arbor Paperback/University of Michigan Press/Ambassador Books, 1961, p 88.
 - 44 *Ibid.*, p 84.
 - 45 *Ibid.*, p 85.
 - 46 *Ibid.*, p 89.
 - 47 J. Stalin, *Some Questions Concerning the History of Bolshevism*, online at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1931/x01/x01.htm>.
 - 48 Basso, *op cit*, pp 75-80.
 - 49 O Luban, Rosa Luxemburg’s *Critique of Lenin’s Ultra Centralistic Party Concept and of the Bolshevik Revolution*, in *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, Vol 40, No 3, August 2012, pp 357-365.
 - 50 H Gautney, *Political Organisation on the Global Left*, in *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Vol 51, ‘Globalisation and Social Change’, 2007, p 156.
 - 50 H Gautney, *Political Organisation on the Global Left*, in *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Vol 51, ‘Globalisation and Social Change’, 2007, p 156.
 - 51 Frölich, *op cit*, p 84.



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Communist Party of Vietnam

Introductory Speech at the 18th International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties

Hanoi, 28 October 2016



Dear Comrades

On behalf of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, I warmly welcome all of you to the 18th International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties, hosted for the first time by the Communist Party of Vietnam in Hanoi, the capital of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Our 18th Meeting has a very topical theme: "Capitalist crisis and imperialist offensive – strategy and tactics of the communist and workers' parties in the struggle for peace, workers' and peoples' rights, socialism". I believe that the discussions at this meeting and its outcomes will contribute significantly to our common struggle.

On this occasion, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to communist and workers' parties in the world for their fervent and wholehearted support for Vietnam during the preparation for this important meeting.

Comrades,
25 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern European socialist countries, humankind today is facing numerous daunting challenges.

It is apparent to us that international capitalism has been exposing more clearly its inhumanity and opposition to social progress, by accelerating and imposing neoliberalism through

the process of globalisation, directly causing ongoing serious economic-financial, socio-ethical and environmental crises, which are exerting negative impacts on the lives of billions of people around the world. Advances in the scientific-technological revolution have been controlled and manipulated to intensify the exploitation of working people for the profit of a few multinational capitalist corporations. Impoverishment and the division between rich and poor have been continuously widened. Depleted natural resources, environmental pollution, pandemic diseases and climate change are posing historically unprecedented challenges to humankind. In contrast to the 1929-1933 crisis, global capitalism today is not attempting to adjust its policies in order to soften social conflicts. In fact, it has been stepping up exploitation and cutting back welfare, thus further impoverishing working people and infringing upon their rights.

Although the Cold War belongs to the past, the world today is becoming increasingly unstable, and indeed vulnerable to unprecedented dangers. The strategy of military intervention and propagation of 'colour revolutions', practised by the US and its allies, has caused disastrous plights for people in the Middle East and other regions, has triggered terrorism, and has directly led to the biggest refugee crisis since World War 2. Strategic rivalry among

'The application of the socialist-oriented market economy aimed to unleash productivity, in order to develop the socialist technical infrastructure in the transitional period.'

the major powers is getting increasingly drastic. Military expenditure and arms build-up are on the rise. Tension over territorial and sovereignty disputes is escalating, threatening peace and stability in various regions. Neofascism, religious and nationalist extremism, xenophobia, racism etc are rising in many countries. In the face of discontent and widespread protests by people in many countries, the bourgeoisie and reactionary forces have stepped up their anti-communist activities, launched offensive operations against the left and progressive forces, strengthened their manipulation and control of the mass media, and divided up and depoliticised people's movements. Populism is tending to find more ground for growth in many places.

Under such circumstances, the struggle for peace and socialism, for the independence and sovereignty of nations and for the interests of the working people is tasked with new demands and more urgent requirements than ever before.

Looking back 99 years from now, the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia ushered in a new era of the history of humankind. The first ever worker-peasant state not only emancipated the Russian working people, but also quickly transformed Russia from a backward country into a world power which played a decisive role in saving humankind from the holocaust of fascism. The Soviet Union, and the socialist system which came into existence after World War 2, not only marked great achievements in the construction of real socialism, but also helped to sustain and advance the cause of national liberation around the world, and served as an important factor in maintaining and protecting world peace in the 20th century. It was its very existence, and its outstanding feature of ensuring equality and social progress in the real socialist system, that inspired the struggle of the working people in the capitalist countries, forcing the bourgeoisie to adjust and compromise in favour of the working class in these countries.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist countries was a great loss for progressive humankind. However, though a setback, it does not mean 'the end of history' and of socialism. Contrary to the projections of many bourgeois politicians and scholars, Vietnam, China and Laos did not fall, but in fact advanced, marking great achievements in their renewal processes, opening doors towards socialism. Despite embargoes, Cuba and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are still consistently following the path of socialism. Against all odds and current difficulties, the left movement, '21st Century Socialism', in Latin America has been steadfast in realising the aspiration and the willpower of the working people in these countries to strive for a more equitable and better society.

Observing the contemporary world from our perspective and with the practical outcomes of 30 years of renewal in Vietnam, we believe that only socialism can provide a comprehensive solution to the current economic, social and ecological crises, offering the only effective alternative to the brutal exploitative capitalism, ensuring sustainable development, equality and social progress. We also believe that strict observation of the fundamental principles of the UN Charter and international laws, especially respect for independence, sovereignty, non-interference in other countries' internal affairs, non-use of force or threat of the use of force and settlement of disputes by peaceful means, make the foundation for peace and stability of countries in the current world.

Dear comrades,

Let me now share with you some thoughts about our country and Party:

After defeating the US war of aggression, reunifying our country in 1975, Vietnam faced tremendous difficulties due to the socioeconomic and environmental damage caused by the war. The US and the West then imposed sanctions and carried out activities to sabotage and isolate Vietnam. In the meantime, wars at southwestern and northern borders occurred. The stagnation, crisis and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern European socialist countries also had certain negative impacts on Vietnam.

The country fell into dire socioeconomic crises in the mid-1980s, with economic downturn, food and commodity shortages, and an inflation rate of over 700%. People lived in extreme difficulty, with up to 75% of the population under the poverty line. Apart from the aforementioned objective causes, the subjective reason was that we were too hasty and voluntaristic in adopting mechanisms and models of socioeconomic development not suited to the specific conditions of Vietnam, including the imposition of production relations incompatible with the actual development of the productive forces.

The 6th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam in 1986 adopted a renewal policy to fix such mistakes and to open up a new path for the country to develop towards socialism in line with Vietnam-specific conditions in the new context. The application of the socialist-oriented market economy aimed to unleash productivity, in order to develop the socialist technical infrastructure in the transitional period. Vietnam's socialist-oriented market economy has the following key characteristics:

- first, management and regulation by the socialist government under the leadership of the Communist Party, in order to bring positive features into full play while minimising negative effects of the market economy, and in order to orientate development according to the goals of each stage in the construction of socialism;
- second, the application of market rules combined with macro-planning, in which resources are allocated according to the market and to national programmes to implement the set development targets;
- third, a dominant role for the state economic sector in the multi-sector economy; and
- fourth, the active and gradual promotion of social progress and equality through each economic step and development policy.

In the realm of foreign policy, we have exercised independence, self-reliance, peaceful cooperation and development, multilateralisation and diversification of external relations and active international integration with step-by-step removal of blockades and embargoes. As a result, we have normalised and improved relations with other countries, joined the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other regional and international organisations, built an environment of peace and stability, and created favourable international conditions for national development and defence in the new situation.

The implementation of the renewal policy over the past 30 years has brought about great achievements, and has been of historic significance to our people and country. Vietnam has rapidly recovered from the socioeconomic crisis, and from 2010 has overcome its underdeveloped status, becoming an average-income developing country. The people's livelihoods

have improved significantly. From 1990 to 2015, the poverty rate fell from 58% to just over 4%, and average life expectancy increased from 62 to 73.5 years. Vietnam's foreign relations with other countries have been expanded, strengthening the synergy of the country.

Having said that, our country has also encountered a number of difficulties and limitations, and is now facing emerging challenges, both internal and external. The level of development, and the efficiency and sustainability of the economy, by and large remain low; various social and environmental issues have to be further addressed; corruption and ethical degradation among a number of cadres has been getting complicated; and the impact of climate change is becoming ever more acute. At the same time, there are new challenges to the environment of peace and stability, as well as national sovereignty and integrity; adversary and reactionary forces are intensifying their interfering and undermining activities, stepping up the idea of 'peaceful evolution'; and strategic rivalries among powers, together with volatilities in the global economy and international security, are having complex impacts on Vietnam.

The 12th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, organised early this year:

- took stock of the achievements and lessons learned in the past 30 years of implementing the renewal policy;
- affirmed the consistent pursuit of the goal of national independence and socialism, Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's thoughts; and
- determinedly advanced our all-round and whole-system reforms.

The Congress put forward the overall objectives in the coming period as follows:

- To enhance the Party's leadership capacity and combativeness, and build a strong political system.
- To promote the entire nation's strength and socialist democracy.
- To push forward the renewal process in a comprehensive and synchronous manner; to develop the economy rapidly and sustainably, and to strive for Vietnam soon to become basically an industrialised country moving towards modernity.
- To improve the people's material and spiritual living standards.
- To struggle resolutely and persistently for the firm defence of our homeland's independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity as well as safeguarding the Party, State, people and socialist system.
- To preserve peace and stability, and proactively and actively integrate into the international community, for national development.

On this auspicious occasion, we would like to express the heartfelt gratitude of the Party, State and people of Vietnam to communist and workers' parties and to progressive, peace-loving people in the world, for your strong solidarity and support given to us so far, in our struggle for national liberation and for the defence and construction of Socialist Vietnam. We look forward to having your continued support and solidarity in the time to come. We take this opportunity to offer our faithful solidarity to the struggle led by the communist and workers' parties around the world for peace, independence, democracy, social progress and socialism.

Comrades,
While realising our guidelines of multilateralisation and

diversification of external relations, the Communist Party of Vietnam always attaches great importance to consolidating and enhancing the relationship with socialist nations, our traditional friends, with communist and workers' parties in the world. We note with delight the robust friendship and cooperation between the Communist Party of Vietnam and your respective parties over the years. We highly value the initiative and your efforts invested in formulating and sustaining the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties, considering it as an important forum for exchanging information and experience, and for promoting cooperation and collaboration in our common struggle. As such, the Communist Party of Vietnam has over the years been actively participating in the International Meeting, contributing responsibly.

In light of the complexities in the international context and the challenges facing us, our Party would like to join you in the expectation of continued reforms and higher efficiency for the mechanism of this International Meeting, so that the unity and solidarity of the international communist and workers' movement will be further promoted.

As a matter of fact, we are witnessing a new face of the world – where the correlation of forces is becoming so different from the past – characterised by changes in socioeconomic structures and working conditions, a new environment of communications and political awareness, as well as new methods for mass mobilisation and operation. While we adhere steadfastly to the bedrock of Marxism-Leninism and the goal of socialism, the new situation requires us to have innovative strategies and methods for our struggle, suited to the specific time-period and conditions of each country. Such an approach is the essence of communist dialectics.

We should therefore put more effort into exchanging theoretical issues and practical experience, on socialism, on our political-ideological work, on party-building and on mass mobilisation for our own struggles, in the spirit of respect for the creativeness and choice forged and determined by each and every party.

We also need to share further with each other our experience in combatting political, ideological and socioeconomic attacks launched globally against us by capitalism.

It is also necessary for us to push forward our fight against all forms of aggression, invasion, expansionism, occupation, military intervention and interference in domestic affairs, and attempts to export 'colour revolutions', thus safeguarding peace, independence, sovereignty and the territorial integrity of nation states.

To commemorate the Centenary of the Great October Revolution in Russia, we seek to hail our unity and solidarity in the common struggle for peace and the legitimate rights of workers and working people, striving for the goal of socialism.

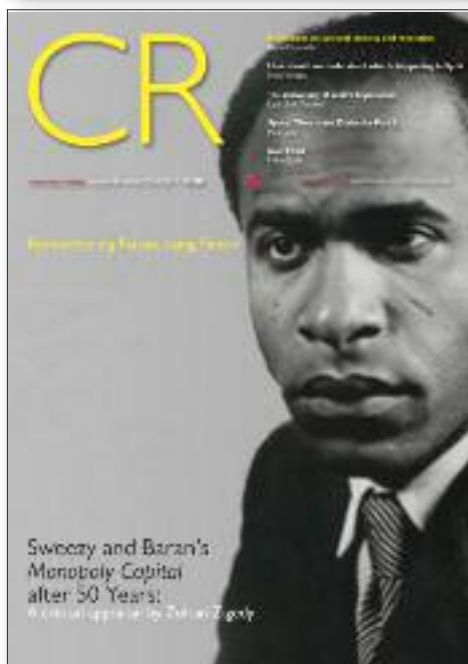
I do hope that this meeting will serve as an opportunity for us to advance the aforementioned goals.

In such an endeavouring spirit, I have the honour to declare open the 18th International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties.

Good health to all comrades, great success to the 18th International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties.

I thank you all.

■ *First published online at www.solidnet.org, initially as plain text and then in Information Bulletin, No 26, 2017, pp 1-5, and edited here for style and grammar.*



CR

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150th anniversary of the publication of Marx's *Das Kapital*

Marx's *Capital* and Capitalism Today: Part I

Rob Griffiths



In reality, according to Marx, the capitalist mode of production transforms the mass of the population into wage labourers and their means of production into capital which comes into the world “dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt.”



Rob Griffiths

THE FIRST volume of *Capital* by Karl Marx was published in 1867, in German as *Das Kapital*. It was the fruit of ten years’ study, analysis and composition in the wake of the first real international crisis of capitalism.

This work began in earnest with his *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-58*¹. In essence, these represent the first draft of Volume I of *Capital*.

Portions of the *Economic Manuscripts* relating to the dual character and values of commodities, labour and money were then restructured and published in 1859 as ‘part I’ of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (ACCPE)*. The title was to become the sub-title of *Capital* proper. In a famous preface to the 1859 text, Marx summarised his theory of historical materialism, with its revolutionary conclusion that within each mode of production (slavery, feudalism, capitalism),

society’s productive forces develop to the point where the existing relations between the exploiting and exploited classes act as an absolute barrier to their further development and so have to be ruptured: “Then begins an era of social revolution.”³

Although *ACCPE* launched a fierce assault on classical bourgeois political economy’s understanding of value, labour and money, it met initially with silence in Germany. But German-speaking workers there and in emigré communities in France, England and the USA awoke to the significance of its contents, not least its exposition of the Theory of Labour Exploitation.

Family illness, an upsurge in working class and national-democratic movements in Germany, Italy and Poland, and the American Civil War, interrupted Marx’s efforts to complete the second part of *ACCPE*. What he produced in the end was the *Economic Manuscript of 1861-63*,⁴ in effect a second draft of Volume I of *Capital*. Additional notebooks and the *Economic Manuscript of 1863-65* followed, on which Marx worked intermittently until his death in 1883. Other commitments – not least his leading role in the International Workingmen’s Association (the ‘First International’, the IWA) from 1864 until 1873 – meant that it was only in 1885 and 1894 that much of this material was published, as Volumes II and III respectively of *Capital*, prepared and edited by Engels. A hitherto unpublished section of the *1861-63 Manuscript*, ‘Theories of Surplus Value’, was later produced by Karl Kautsky, although a complete and accurate translation into English did not follow until 1963-71.

Marx in 1867
Left

Das Kapital
Title page
right



The first draft of *Capital*

In August 1857, US investors had begun to lose confidence in insurance companies, banks and railroad stocks after an economic boom based on the expansion of international trade, gold discoveries and credit-fuelled investment and speculation. The panic provoked a financial crash with banking and insurance failures and cutbacks in production. Extensive US commercial and financial links spread the impact to parts of western Europe, the Far East, Australia and Latin America. In Britain, financial institutions involved in the extensive trade with the US collapsed, contributing to an economic stagnation that lasted until late in 1858.⁵

While politicians, economists and commentators in Britain pinned blame for this first major international crisis on over-speculation, unsound credit, inadequate gold supply, the Crimean War or on some permutation of them, Marx located its root in capitalism’s cyclical character. In a series of articles

for the *New York Daily Tribune*,⁶ he argued that, as the economy grows and accelerates, investment and production increase along with profit, credit and speculation. Inevitably, a point is reached where there is an ‘overproduction’ of commodities, not all of which can then be sold at a profit. It is in these conditions that investors, speculators and stock markets become nervous and more sensitive to signs of slowdown and failure. Production declines, investment is cut back, workers are laid off, prices and profits fall, stocks and shares go down, companies fail and the economy as a whole spirals into recession. Recovery will then occur as it becomes profitable once more to produce commodities with lower-cost premises, plant, machinery, supplies, labour and credit. The pace quickens, breaks into a boom and so the cycle proceeds.

While other factors – economic, political, legal – can hasten, postpone, aggravate or prolong capitalism’s periodic crises, Marx suggested that their underlying and primary cause is to be found in the sphere of production. This remained the case, even though dramatic commercial and financial events had occupied the newspaper headlines, parliamentary speeches and the official reports in 1857-58.⁷ Varying the amount of money in circulation beforehand, or curbing speculation on the stock exchange, might have affected the contours of the crisis in some way, but they would not have prevented it from breaking out sooner or later.

Marx’s intention with his *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-58* was to help workers understand the laws and tendencies of the economic and political system in which they worked and lived, so that they would see why it would have to be overthrown and replaced by communism. Six of the seven notebooks comprise a chapter on ‘Capital’, where he traced the development of trade, money and commodities. Capitalism is defined as a mode of production in which, firstly, the production of commodities – of goods and services for sale in a market – has become predominant. Indeed, as he was to put later in Volume I proper of *Capital*, in terms of its material wealth capitalist society presents itself as “an immense accumulation of commodities”.⁸

Secondly, the means of production (land, premises, plant and machinery, raw materials and other inputs, etc) are largely in private ownership. Thirdly, labour power – the worker’s capacity to work – has also become a universal commodity. In fact, without the purchase and application of labour power, the means of production could not be set in motion and applied.

Commodities, value and exploitation

In the *1857-58 Manuscripts*, Marx transformed the Labour Theory of Value advanced by Adam Smith and David Ricardo – with all their confusions around wealth and value – into his own Theory of Labour Exploitation (or Theory of Surplus Value). In particular, he explained how workers are robbed of much of the value they produce, amending and refining the main propositions in a series of newspaper articles that had been published together in 1849 under the title *Wage Labour and Capital*.

Every commodity must have a “use value”, so that a consumer wishes to buy it. But that cannot determine its price, nor does it explain why very different types of commodity in size, weight, composition etc, can be measured against one another through their price (or “exchange value”) on the market. The one characteristic all commodities have in common, to which they can all be reduced and by which, therefore, their value can be measured, is the labour time that goes into every aspect of their production. The past labour time

embodied in the means of production used up in producing the commodity, together with the present or living labour time turning those means into the finished product, is the starting point for determining a commodity’s exchange value. It is why there is almost always a proportionality within limits between the prices of vastly different commodities. Obviously, market prices can be driven above or below a commodity’s exchange value due to factors of supply and demand, monopoly power, state regulation etc, but these are fluctuations around that value and are rarely completely divorced from it.

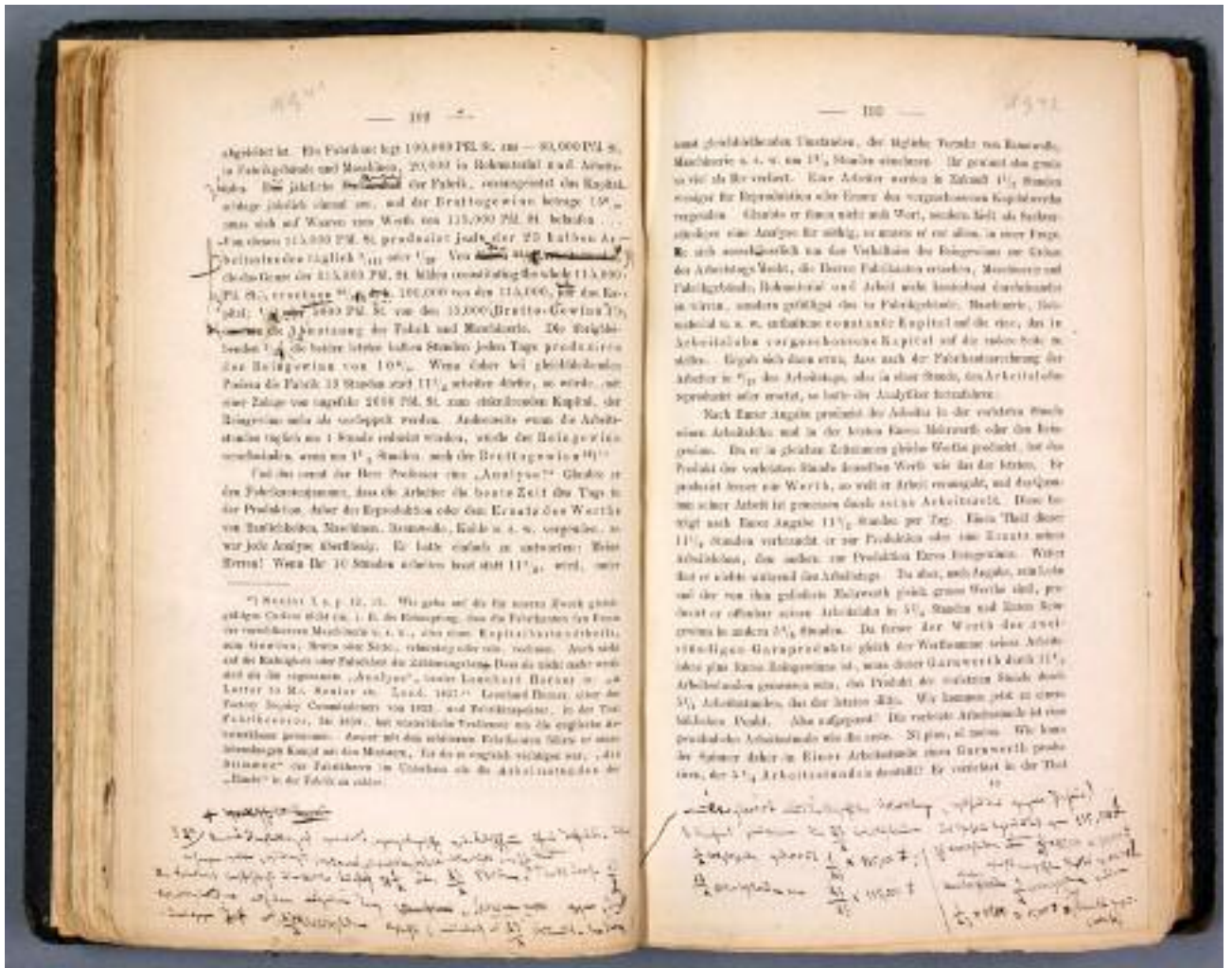
When the average worker sells her or his labour time to the capitalist employer, what is its exchange value? Like any other commodity, it is the average amount of society’s labour time necessary to produce that commodity, to produce the means of consumption (accommodation, food, clothing, leisure etc) that enable the worker and any dependants to live, work and rear the next generation of workers. Therefore, the worker’s wage broadly reflects the value of her or his labour power.

But labour power has the capacity to produce more value in a day or a week than it needs to consume. As well as producing value equivalent to the value of the wage used to buy one day’s worth of means of consumption, which might take five hours of labour time, the worker then goes on working for another, say, three hours. This produces three hours of ‘surplus value’ in labour time for the capitalist employer, for which the worker is unpaid. But like the value of the five hours’ paid labour time and of the past labour time embodied in the means of production used up in producing the commodity, the value of this surplus labour time will be transferred into the total value of the end commodity and reflected in its selling price. The employer has not paid the worker in full for his or her eight hours of labour, with a wage worth eight hours of means of consumption. Instead, the employer has paid the worker in full for her or his capacity to work, *ie* her or his labour power, which can be set to work on the means of production for eight hours a day. Of course, the wage is presented as full payment for the hours worked (or commodities produced in the case of piece-work), thereby concealing the unpaid surplus labour performed and the surplus value it has created.

Here is the great secret discovered by Marx and which had escaped earlier political economists, whose labour theories of value held that workers were fairly rewarded for the wealth they create while also producing the compensation that was fairly due to the owners of the two other factors of production, namely, land (in the form of rent) and capital (in the form of profit).

When the commodity is sold, the capitalist gets back the money laid out on the means of production, including depreciation (*c* for constant capital whose value is transferred unchanged into the final product) and on living labour power in the form of wages (denoted as *v* for variable capital because this is the money which makes possible the variation – the increase – in value and thus money returned in revenue). When it is realised in money terms, the surplus value (*s*) in the commodity created by unpaid, surplus labour time constitutes the gross operating profit and includes the amount necessary for the capitalists to purchase their own means of consumption.

Here is the “use value” of labour power as far as the capitalist is concerned: it produces surplus value, which from the standpoint of the capitalist is the only reason for producing anything. Under capitalism, commodities are not produced in order to make people happy, or to meet some pressing social need. As Marx put it in his *Economic Manuscript of 1861-63*: “The direct purpose of capitalist production is not the production of commodities, but of surplus value or profit.”⁹ Left



to its own devices, capitalism would not produce anything that does not do so.

Recent calculations indicate that the rate of exploitation or of surplus value (the proportion s/v) in Britain has ranged from 42% to 63% between 1986 and 2009.¹⁰ In other words, the average production worker performs somewhere between three and a half to five hours unpaid labour in an 8-hour day, not counting breaks. Michael Roberts estimates that exploitation rates varied from 42% to 68% in the US economy between 1945 and 2014.¹¹

Because a commodity's surplus value does not manifest itself as extra money until the point of sale, the illusion is created that profit originates in the sphere of circulation – and then only in its final stage – rather than production.

Out of the surplus value, or gross operating profit, and other sections of the capitalist class may draw rent for land and interest on loan capital from the commodity-producing capitalist, both of which are also forms of the surplus value extracted from workers. Rent and interest are also collected directly from workers by other capitalists, of course, and after the deduction of costs are also classed as 'profit' in the everyday use of the term. Nonetheless, Marx made the important point that, however defined, the source of capitalist profit in general is not to be found in the spheres of circulation and finance as such, but in the sphere of the commodity production by living labour power.

Furthermore, while constant capital c replenishes the means of production at their previous level, a portion of the surplus value s is used to expand investment, production and therefore profit in a process of expanded reproduction. In this way, capital accumulates to exercise what Marx called its "great civilising influence" by developing society's productive forces

on a colossal scale.¹²

In presenting this theory of labour exploitation, Marx also laid bare the motivation for employers to maintain or even extend the working day or week. It would enable them to increase the absolute amount of unpaid labour time (*ie* surplus value) extracted from the workers' labour power. Hence the capitalist resistance to trade union demands for the 8-hour day, the 5-day week and more holidays.

Guided and enthused by Marx, the IWA in 1866 took up the demand for the 8-hour day; and in 1889 the Second International made it the first theme for International Workers' Day demonstrations on May 1. Enacted first in Soviet Russia four days after the Great October Socialist Revolution in 1917, the 8-hour day was soon won by workers in France and Portugal, and by railway workers in Britain, after a nine-day strike in 1919.

Nevertheless, the struggle over the duration of working time has continued ever since. In 1989-90, the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions in Britain launched a rolling programme of subsidised, selective strikes to compel employers to reduce the standard working week from 39 hours to 35; many opted to settle at 36-38 hours. In France, the Socialist-Communist coalition government legislated in 2000 for a universal 35-hour week. Today, most countries have national laws limiting the obligatory working week to 40-48 hours, but some have higher limits (Kenya) or none at all (eg Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Jamaica, Grenada) although in some of the latter category there are limits agreed through collective bargaining with trade unions (Germany, Australia, Denmark) or within an international legislative framework such as the EU Working Time Directive. But weak enforcement, exempted occupations and 'voluntary' overtime mean that the struggle

proposed by Marx and the IWA continues and, as in France currently, employers and their hired politicians still strive to change the law to allow longer working time.

There are other ways in which employers seek to maximise surplus value. For example, working-class consumption can be cut in real terms, hence in part the struggle over wages and payment systems. But this can only be taken so far before it adversely affects the worker's capacity to work, produce value and rear the next generation of labour power.

Surplus value can also be increased relatively, by reducing the value of labour power (v), so that less of the worker's labour time is required to earn the wage needed to purchase life's necessities. This is made possible by increasing productivity, especially in those branches producing consumer goods most required by the working class. Hence the struggle over the intensity of work and control of the work process. But higher productivity will only lower the average labour time necessary to produce the essentials of life for the average worker if it can be achieved in all the relevant branches of production.

Another possibility is to import cheaper consumer goods or their raw materials from outside. This option is, of course, limited by problems of availability and the willingness of importers to sell their commodities at significantly below the prevailing market price.

More recently, we have seen the spread of various forms of contracted labour in the guise of 'self-employment' in some of the developed capitalist economies, not least in Britain. The genuinely self-employed worker sells his or her commodity to the customer at more or less its value, in other words at a price that very roughly reflects the past and living labour time that has gone into its production (although the means of production have usually been secured at 'trade' discount below their value). There is no unpaid surplus labour time as such, because the self-employed worker is being paid for every hour worked. But the contractor of so-called 'self-employed' labour pays only for the hire of the labour power, often maximising the surplus value from it by not paying for holiday time, sickness, maternity or paternity leave etc.

Such social and welfare benefits are part of what today – together with public services such as health, education etc – is regarded as the 'social wage'. Workers and capitalists fund it through taxation and state insurance rather than by payment at the point of delivery. It is in the interests of the working class to maximise the funding contribution from the capitalist class and enhance the 'social wage' in both quality and quantity; the capitalists seek to minimise their financial contribution while ensuring that those services essential to the functioning of capitalism and its workforce are maintained, preferably on a basis that also allows profits to be made. This struggle over the formation and composition of the social wage is today a prominent feature of the economic and political class struggle in capitalist society.

“Estrangement” or alienation

In Volume I of *Capital*, Marx provided a detailed historical and contemporary account of the class struggle in England, Scotland and Wales over surplus value. Battles were fought over the length of the working day, night work, work systems and female and child labour throughout the period from England's 14th century Labour Statutes to Britain's 19th century Factory Acts. In particular, his accounts of the rise and impact of machinery and the factory system draw from a host of sources relating to England, Scotland, Wales and continental Europe. Referring to the machine as the “material

embodiment of capital”, he returned to an earlier theme about the dehumanising effect (“estrangement”) of mechanisation and automation on the labour process, on the machine operative and on those handicraft workers who lose their livelihoods as their skills are rendered redundant.¹³

In the *1857-58 Economic Manuscripts*, he had argued that the development of society's productive forces had enshrined (“reified”) past labour in the huge machinery that dominates living labour – indeed, to the point that it appears (at least to the capitalist) that the machine is independent of the worker. Society's labour has set up an “enormous objectified power” which it sees as an alienated force over and against itself, and which belongs to capital.¹⁴ That machinery should appear so to the capitalist and the worker is an historical necessity as part of capitalist development. Yet this is merely one aspect of capitalism's appropriation of living labour, in effect “alienating” it from itself, objectifying it whether in the form of machinery or as the commodities produced by living labour and then removed from it.

Technology and the division (specialisation) of labour have further transformed the labour process and workplaces in the course of the 20th century, particularly in the advanced capitalist economies. Many workers still feel alienated from their work, the workplace and its modern machinery. Numerous studies published by bodies ranging from the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in Britain to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Geneva describe and explain how the introduction of the most modern technology – computerisation, automation etc – and the pressures of globalised competition have greatly increased workplace stress.¹⁵

As Marx had put it in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*:

“Labour is external to the worker ... in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labour. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague.”¹⁶

Cyclical crises

The *1857-58 Manuscripts* elaborate Marx's theory of economic crisis. A portion of surplus value is reinvested as wage-capital (approximating to v), exploits labour and emerges afresh as expanded value (s) seeking further profitable investment. This process of expanded reproduction accelerates into a boom.

But capitalism's recurring problem is that, while the capitalist class constantly seeks to maximise profit, not least by exerting downward pressure on wages, this accumulation of capital outstrips the capacity of the working class to buy all that its labour power produces at a profitable price for the capitalists. Capital is accumulating which cannot find a profitable outlet and so engages in ever more speculative ventures. More is being produced than can be sold at a profit. The result is that products go unsold or have to be offloaded at a loss. Companies cut back their production and investment plans. Some go out of business. Workers are laid off, reducing

purchasing power in the economy still further. Production and investment go into a downward spiral. Economic slow-down turns into recession and, in the most severe cases, slump. Only when labour power and the means of production are cheap enough to return a profit does production and then investment begin to recover as the cycle begins once more.

As Marx summarised this cycle in Volume I of *Capital* itself:

“The enormous power, inherent in the factory system, of expanding by jumps, and the dependence of that system on the markets of the world, necessarily beget feverish production, followed by overfilling of the markets, whereupon contraction of the markets brings on crippling of production. The life of modern industry becomes a series of periods of moderate activity, prosperity, overproduction, crisis and stagnation.”¹⁷

This is the cyclical character of capitalism’s crises of generalised overproduction, which the orthodox economists in Marx’s day made “childish” attempts to deny.¹⁸ Since then, cyclical crises have been a recurring feature of established, developed capitalist economies. Britain, for instance, has experienced the depressions of 1919-21 and 1930-31 and the recessions of 1952, 1958, 1974-75, 1980-81, 1991 and 2008-09, when aggregate GDP still fell, though not as severely. In the US, by far the world’s biggest economy throughout the post-war period, GDP dropped in 1954, 1958, 1974-5, 1982, 1991 and 2008-09. Most Western European economies, including Germany and France, shared the recessions of the mid-1970s, early 1990s and 2008-09, less so in the early 1980s, and the growing international synchronisation of the most advanced capitalist economies is clear.¹⁹

While these crises all had their own particular characteristics, they also exhibited the common features of overaccumulation and overproduction to a greater or lesser degree. In addition, especially during the post-war expansion between 1945 and 1973, there were cyclical slowdowns in economic growth that did not dip into recession and an absolute decline in national economic output.

Of course, capitalism’s tame economists deny that these crises arise as the result of contradictions within the capitalist mode of production related to overaccumulation and overproduction. They prefer to identify ‘business cycles’ that merely describe a crisis. Explanations are rare and very unconvincing, usually attributing turbulence to insufficient demand or, for various reasons, insufficient supply. Capitalism’s apologists also tend to exaggerate the uncommon features of each crisis (such as world oil price rises in 1973-74) in order to separate them from one another and from capitalism’s own contradictions.

Within the Marxist tradition in the 20th century, Dutch economists Jacob van Gelderen and Salomon de Wolff and, later, Soviet economist Nikolai Kondratiev claimed to detect long waves of economic growth and slowdown in the course of capitalist development internationally. These cover periods of 45-60 years at a time, encompass overproduction cycles and are linked by most Marxist proponents of the theory to technological innovations such as the steam engine, iron smelting and the railways, engineering, motor vehicles and oil and, most recently, information technology. Non-Marxist ‘long wave’ theories emphasise the role of demographic change, land speculation or levels of credit and debt.

Capital accumulation and the “reserve army”

Part VII of *Capital* Volume I contained much new and groundbreaking material on “The Accumulation of Capital”. A portion of surplus value is converted into capital for expansion, divided between extra investment in both labour power (v) and in means of production (c). But the onward march of technology, mechanisation and labour productivity means that the amount of c in the economy as a whole grows faster than the amount of v . Even though extra labour will be employed actually producing the means of production (machines, tools, energy etc), this will be counteracted by the spread of labour-saving technology. Furthermore and in any event, there will usually be limits on the speed and extent to which the labour force can expand through procreation or immigration.

One effect of the accumulation of capital, Marx noted, is that the amount of capital owned by the individual capitalist or association of capitalists grows in a process he calls concentration. But the intensified competition for surplus value also gives rise to a process of centralisation: the “expropriation of capitalist by capitalist” and the “transformation of many small into few large capitals”.²⁰

Volume II of *Capital* highlighted the importance of the timescale in which a given portion of capital circulates and expands. The faster the turnover, the quicker the accumulation and the bigger the mass of profit over a particular period of time. The credit system, which develops along with capitalism generally, accelerates both production and consumption as well as facilitating the concentration of capital.

The increased demand for labour power that accompanies capital accumulation, as both c and v grow in absolute terms, compounds the displacement of labour in particular industries (employment in agriculture and textiles were early casualties of technological advance). As a consequence, where sections of a multiplying population are relatively surplus to requirements, a more or less permanent “disposable industrial reserve army”²¹ of labour is formed, which can be recruited for work during a boom and quickly expelled during recession and slump. Moreover, its very existence is essential to capital accumulation, because it exerts pressure on employed workers to submit to greater exploitation – through productivity measures or wage restraint – for fear of losing their job to reservists waiting in the wings.

During the long economic expansion from the end of the Second World War until 1970, Britain’s unemployment rate did not fall below the ‘full employment’ rate of 3% as defined by William Beveridge. Post-war Labour and Tory governments pursued the objective of “full and stable employment” first set out in the Economic Policy White Paper published in May 1944. Governments in the USA, Australia and elsewhere quickly followed suit. Since 1980, the unemployment rate in the G7 group of leading capitalist countries has not fallen more than fractionally below 5%. In fact, it has undergone four dramatic cycles over that time, reaching peaks of 8.5%. Historically, after the freak period brought on by world war and the destruction of value on an epic scale, capitalism has returned to normal – complete with its reserve army of labour, its migrant worker battalions and its temporary, casual, flexible and zero-hours contracts.

“Primitive Accumulation”

The final Part VIII of *Capital* Volume I constitutes the most searing indictment of the methods by which capitalism established itself. Outlining the “So-Called Primitive Accumulation” of capital, Marx recounted in fine detail the

deprivations inflicted on the agricultural populations of England, Wales and Scotland from the late 15th century onwards, ruthlessly sweeping away small peasant producers and culminating in the Highland Clearances (the later depopulation of Ireland is covered at the end of Part VII). They were separated from the means of production (land, small-scale machinery and tools) and turned into urban or rural labourers now 'free' to sell their labour power, as some landowners and emergent capitalist farmers stole common land and turned to large-scale mechanised commodity production. Conversely, the primitive accumulation of capital also produced and necessitated a primitive accumulation of labour power.

Several chapters detail the harsh and cruel legislation enacted against those who had been expropriated – liberated from their previous livelihoods – whipping and mutilating them for vagrancy and vagabondage, press-ganging the unemployed and destitute into military service, extending the working day, limiting wages, outlawing strikes and workers' combinations. Marx drew parallels with similar measures in France and Germany.

In Chapter XXX on the 'Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist', he laid bare the brutal means by which money was accumulated for use as industrial capital (as *c* and *v*). The dissolution of feudalism, with its expropriation and clearance of the rural population, made possible the transformation of money made from trade and credit. Marx summarised the other main sources thus:

"The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of blackskins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief momenta of primitive accumulation. On their heels treads the commercial war of the European nations, with the globe for a theatre. It begins with the revolt of the Netherlands from Spain, assumes giant dimension in England's Anti-Jacobin War²², and is still going on in the opium wars against China &c."²³

Chapter XXX of Volume I goes on to highlight the role of state power in organising colonial trade monopolies, the National Debt, taxation and trade protectionism to accelerate the transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode in Spain, Portugal, Holland, France and – from the late 17th century – England. He reserved special scorn for the way in which Christian colonists, with the backing of governments and parliaments in the 'mother country', enslaved or massacred native peoples from Indonesia and Africa to the West Indies, Mexico and the United States. Due prominence is given to the role of the nexus linking the slave trade, shipping, colonial plantation, the cotton industry and child labour in the take-off of British capitalism: "the veiled slavery of the wage workers in Europe needed, for its pedestal, slavery pure and simple in the new world."²⁴

While primitive accumulation had been more or less completed in western Europe, capitalism still had to expropriate the many independent producers in Europe's colonial settlements. Otherwise, there could be no supply of labour for commodity production there, no development of labour's enormous productive power on the basis of large-scale machinery, cooperation and division of tasks. In the USA and Canada, for instance, this failure to divorce colonists from the

means of production – especially the land – had retarded the development of industry and its necessary separation from agriculture. In the American case, mass immigration, civil war and with it the raising of a National Debt and taxes, together with the huge allocation of public land to mining, railway construction etc, spurred the rapid development of capitalist production. A similar path had also been taken in Australia.

Unsurprisingly, much of this account of primitive accumulation differs radically from those in numerous history and economics text books over the past 150 years and even today. Many pro-capitalist historians and economists simply equate the onset of capitalism with the expansion of domestic and international trade and then industrialisation. The initial finance is attributed to thrift, royal patronage, family collectivism, merchant profit, commercial credit and overseas discoveries, allowing barely a minor role to the slave trade and slavery.

In reality, according to Marx, the capitalist mode of production transforms the mass of the population into wage labourers and their means of production into capital which comes into the world "dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt."²⁵

Historical parallels can be misleading, if not wholly misconceived and erroneous. Yet they can be detected in the huge shifts in population from the countryside to industrial areas, towns and cities that have taken place in many parts of the Third World, as part of a process of primitive accumulation. In some countries, notably India, this has been driven by landowning and industrial capitalist interests and facilitated by legislation. But in the biggest example of all, China, parallels have been contradicted because the process has been centrally planned by a socialist state in order to develop what the Chinese Communist Party calls the "primary stage" of socialism. Unlike early industrial capitalism in Britain and elsewhere, China is implementing policies to provide social protection for urban workers and to stimulate economic development in rural areas.

Concentration, centralisation, globalisation

In Chapter XXXII of Volume I, Marx indicated how capitalism's primitive accumulation necessarily dissolves private, self-earned property in the means of production based on the labour of its owner. This is the case whether that property is the land of the peasant or the tool of the artisan. Such a pattern of small-scale production, which had survived ancient slave-society and feudalism, was incompatible with capitalism's concentration of the means of production to create a vast socially integrated mode of production based on cooperation, a division of labour and control and application of the forces of nature.

In "annihilating" – Marx's term – the old order, capitalism transformed the scattered and individualised means of production of the many into the huge property of the few. As the smallholders and artisans are expropriated and turned into propertyless labourers ("proletarians") to be employed and exploited, so in turn are many small capitalists driven out by bigger ones: "one capitalist kills many."²⁶ This centralisation is an essential feature of a system that expands to create a world market which entangles all peoples in its net.

The 20th century witnessed an enormous acceleration in these processes of concentration and centralisation and the extension of a capitalist world market.

Marx laid bare the forces and tendencies that shaped modern capitalism. But he could not have anticipated the precise forms, relations and mechanisms that would characterise such development. Only after his death did Karl

Kautsky and V I Lenin propose the theory that capitalism had entered a qualitatively new stage, namely “imperialism”. Economically, in the biggest and most advanced capitalist societies (Britain, France, the USA and Germany), free competition had turned into its opposite, namely monopoly. Through growth, merger and takeover, accelerated by periodic crises, a small number of companies had come to monopolise most sectors of the economy.

In his classic work, *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), Lenin identified the other defining economic features of capitalism in its imperialist stage:²⁷ banking capital fusing with industrial capital to create finance capital controlled by a financial oligarchy; the export of capital – as distinct from goods – assuming exceptional significance; the formation of “international monopolist capitalist associations” sharing the world between them; and the biggest capitalist powers dividing up the world between each other. In these conditions, monopolies in the imperialist heartlands could export surplus capital to reap super-profits from the super-exploitation of non-unionised, cheap and ‘flexible’ labour to obtain raw materials in the colonies and semi-colonies.

This last feature would not have been unknown to Marx, even though it did not achieve such prominence until after his death. In Volume III of *Capital*, he noted that “if capital is sent abroad, this is not done because it absolutely could not be applied at home, but because it can be employed at a higher rate of profit in a foreign country.”²⁸

By 2011, of the world’s biggest 175 economic entities by Gross Domestic Product (in the case of countries) or revenue (for companies), the top 25 are countries led by the US, China, Germany, Japan, France, Italy and Britain; but monopoly corporations make up most of the others and almost two-thirds of the total.²⁹ Most of the names will be familiar: Walmart, Royal Dutch Shell, Exxon Mobil, BP, General Electric, Volkswagen, Glencore, Total, Apple, Samsung, Berkshire Hathaway Each of the first three has a turnover bigger than the GDP of 110 of the world’s countries – more than half. The scale of Royal Dutch Shell’s operations is twice that of Portugal’s entire economy. Oil and other energy corporations comprise the biggest group, with vehicles, electronics and IT, banking and retail corporations following closely behind. Thanks to China (Sinopec, PetroChina), a growing number of the top corporations are state-owned, notably in energy, banking and construction.

These transnational corporations (TNCs) straddle the international economy, carrying out their operations in more than one country. They have helped to form and intensify a world market in which the processes of production, trade and commerce are increasingly integrated internationally. At the same time, it should be emphasised that all but a handful of TNCs have a home country whose national state power is usually exercised in their interests. In 2016, most of the biggest 100 were based in the USA (55), with others in China (11), Britain (7), Germany (5), France (4) and Japan (4). In terms of market capitalisation (*ie* aggregate share value), several of them are bigger now than the biggest of them seven years previously, having recovered from the general collapse in capital values in 2008-09. Sectors with the most companies in the top 100 are consumer goods (19), finance (18), health and pharmaceuticals (17), technology (12) and consumer and retail services (11), followed by oil and gas, telecommunications and industrial production.³⁰

In the domestic economies of the main capitalist countries, monopoly domination is almost total. In Britain, for example,

the biggest five companies in each industry in 2004 accounted for more than 50% of the output in coal, oil and gas extraction, sugar, confectionery, drinks, tobacco, oil refining, nuclear power, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, cement, iron and steel, armaments, energy production and distribution, postal services, telecommunications, banking and most other financial services.³¹ As for concentration, in terms of market capitalisation at constant prices, the top 15 companies in 2006 were more than three times bigger than those in 1992. The same trends of centralisation and concentration occur in the USA, largely unhindered by the existence – as in Britain – of anti-monopoly legislation.³²

In Britain as elsewhere, these capitalist monopolies set the norms as far as prices, pay and technological development are concerned. In turn, they are now integrated into a financial oligarchy centred upon the City of London’s financial institutions and markets. This finance capital exerts a decisive influence over the economy as a whole through interlocking shares and directorships and through its role in determining interest and currency rates, commodity prices and the availability of credit and investment. Of the top 15 FTSE companies in 1992, none was a bank, ten were manufacturers and three were oil and gas producers; in 2006, the respective figures were six, five and three.³³

Lenin also set out how, politically, imperialism meant a growth in the political power of the state in the core metropolitan countries and its merger with the economic power of the giant corporations, syndicates, trusts and cartels to constitute “state-monopoly capitalism”. The role of the capitalist class as a progressive, democratising force in history had come to an end, as Marx had recognised in his own lifetime. It also meant the domination of other, less developed countries and their human and natural resources by the imperialist countries, whether through direct colonial rule or indirect, semi-colonial pressure. Either way, it was domination based ultimately on the threat or use of military force. For Lenin, the struggle between the imperialist powers to redivide the world in favour of their own monopolies had culminated in the 1914-18 Great War. Marx might not have predicted this imperialist world war – although Engels did with astonishing prescience in 1887,³⁴ as he was editing Volume III of *Capital* – but Marx would not have been too surprised by its occurrence.

Expropriating the expropriators?

Above all, Marx was sure that capitalism with its innate tendencies of concentration and centralisation cannot expand indefinitely while escaping its own growing contradictions. Towards the end of Volume I, he concluded:

“Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolise all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.”²⁶

This is a highly significant passage, because it demonstrates beyond doubt that it is not the injustices of exploitation, nor the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, nor cyclical crises, that create the conditions for the overthrow of capitalism by the working class. These all contribute to that outcome, because they strengthen the case for its replacement and create the force that will make it happen. But it is the barrier imposed by monopoly ownership of capital and the means of production on further development of society's productive forces to meet humanity's needs and desires that will compel the working class to break with capitalist exploitation.

Marx's immiseration thesis⁷ has been challenged by capitalism's proponents and disowned by some of capitalism's opponents. They have argued as a matter of fact that "the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation" has not grown with the development of capitalism, but has actually decreased in the course of the 20th and 21st centuries.

In purely numerical terms, there are certainly more people exploited and oppressed today than in Marx's time, if only because the world's population is now six times bigger (7.5bn) than it was in 1850 (1.2bn). In a world that produces enough food for everyone, 795m people suffer chronic under-nourishment, although the number has fallen rapidly over recent decades.³⁵ Furthermore, there are still 705m people living in extreme poverty (with incomes below \$1.9 per day), although this is fewer than when *Capital* was first published (about 1.2bn) and again the figure has declined significantly since 1990.³⁶ In terms of health and life expectancy, global inequality grew substantially between 1800 and 1950 but has reduced since then at higher levels in all countries. Even so, child mortality rates in low-income countries are ten times higher than in high income ones.³⁷ Enormous inequalities in healthcare and education provision between countries and between classes persists. In Britain, income inequality by any measure fell gradually from the late 1860s until the late 1970s, since when it has been climbing back towards pre-World War One levels.³⁸

In fact, Utsa Patnaik has argued that Marx was correct if we look at capitalist accumulation on a global scale. Western capitalism arose on the basis of modern slavery and reduced its own reserve army of labour by outmigration to lands seized from indigenous peoples, and by creating a bloated reserve army in subjugated colonies. Third World countries seeking to industrialise today do not have these options; and there is clear evidence of growing undernutrition and poverty in the Global South.³⁹

On the negative side of capitalism's balance sheet must also be entered its responsibility for two world wars and countless colonial and other conflicts, together with imperialist exploitation and debt bondage in the Third World, widescale environmental despoliation, global warming and extreme weather conditions and the forced migrations of many millions of people fleeing the consequences of capitalism's impact on their societies of origin.

It should also be taken into account that many of the improvements secured in people's living standards, nutrition, health, education and life chances have come about through action and policies that have challenged capitalist interests. This was true in the case of welfare and other reforms in developed countries and in the transformation of society in the Soviet Union, eastern Europe, and in China where Communist Party rule has lifted more than 600m people out of extreme poverty in just 20 years: a feat "unequaled in history", according to the World Bank.⁴⁰

What of "the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself"? The world's labour force numbers 3.4bn today, compared with no more than 300m in the mid-19th century. Of these, more than 400m are organised in trade unions affiliated to the International Federation of Trade Unions, the World Federation of Trade Unions or the All-China Federation of Trade Unions. Despite ebbs and flows in militancy, they display no significant loss of capacity and willingness to revolt against essential aspects of capitalism.

Then there is the question of whether capitalism's relations of production, notably monopoly capitalist ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, are substantially holding back the further development of society's productive forces. This point has not been reached, however enthusiastically some anti-capitalists proclaim otherwise. Yet it cannot be denied, even by pro-capitalists, that we are approaching the point at which capitalism's increasingly parasitic, anarchic, authoritarian, militaristic, anti-social, anti-environmental character means that it is incapable of solving humanity's most acute problems.

Reactions to *Capital Volume I*

In his introduction to the *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-58*, Marx set out his view of what should constitute "political economy" as a field of study, research and analysis. It should encompass all the relations in society between the different classes of people engaged in economic activity, including how and why those relations change in the transition from one mode of production to another. Because each mode of production and its class relations provide the basis for a social, political, legal and cultural superstructure of relations, ideas and institutions, these also comprise political economy. However much they concentrated their work on some of these elements rather than on others, this approach had been broadly accepted by Marx's predecessors, from the French physiocrats to such classical capitalist economists as Smith and Ricardo, as well as by contemporaries such as John Stuart Mill.

In respect of Marx, this approach explains why *Capital*, like his earlier economic work, featured scathing and relentless attacks on every aspect of a system which condemned men, women and children to industrial slavery, debilitating poverty, virulent disease and – in most cases – an early death. Putting false modesty aside, he himself declared that *Capital* would be "without question the most terrible MISSILE that has yet been hurled at the heads of the bourgeoisie (landowners included)."⁴¹

Whether the content or its complexity was responsible, publication of *Das Kapital* in September 1867 met initially with a wall of silence. Frederick Engels wrote reviews to break through it. Friends secured the appearance of translated extracts in English and French journals. Then a Russian translation was produced before a second German edition came out in 1871, after all one thousand copies of the first edition had been sold. Marx edited a French translation and significantly altered the contents. Further editions would appear in English and other languages. The counter-attacks from bourgeois economists eventually arrived, too.

It may also be significant that, after the publication of *Capital*, the case was argued by William Stanley Jevons, Alfred Marshall and other neoclassicists for replacing the term, concept and practice of 'political economy' with that of 'economics'. The latter would deal with the economy as a mathematically informed and logical science, analysing

production in terms of laws of supply, demand and utility. In other words, the economy should be studied with the politics of class relations (not least political power) left out.

The battle of ideas

The ideological struggle over political economy has, of course, continued since Marx's day. However, in recent decades the perceived failure of socialism and Marxism in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, together with the triumph of neoliberalism, has had a profound impact in one arena where the battle has often been fiercest, namely, in the universities, not least in Britain. Economics departments have been turned into 'business schools' and, in many of them, curriculae have narrowed to the point where the only theory being studied is neoliberalism and its classical antecedents. Marxist and Keynesian political economy – previously taught alongside classical and neoclassical theories – has been ruthlessly excluded.

Yet the neoliberal orthodoxy was tarnished by the 2007-08 financial crash and subsequent economic recession. The high priests of monetarism, free markets, deregulation and privatisation neither foresaw the calamity whose size was precipitated, at least to some degree, by their creed. Nor could they propose any remedy, other than a retreat into an even more fundamentalist *laissez-faire* cul-de-sac that would have consigned whole economies to ruin. Economics students wondered why their studies were largely restricted to such dogma.

Notably, some of those at the University of Manchester formed a Post-Crash Economics Society in 2010, which is now part of a Rethinking Economics movement with groups in the USA, Germany, France, Brazil, India, Italy, Turkey and China.⁴²

After I had taken part in a debate at the Manchester Union in October 2013, on the motion 'Has Capitalism Failed?', students informed me that little had changed in their courses. Following a debate on the same motion at the University of Bath in March 2015, one of the organisers wrote to tell me: "A lot of the economists in the audience felt that you transcended their previous knowledge on economics (it is a very narrowly taught subject at university). I think they really valued seeing economics from a fresh perspective."

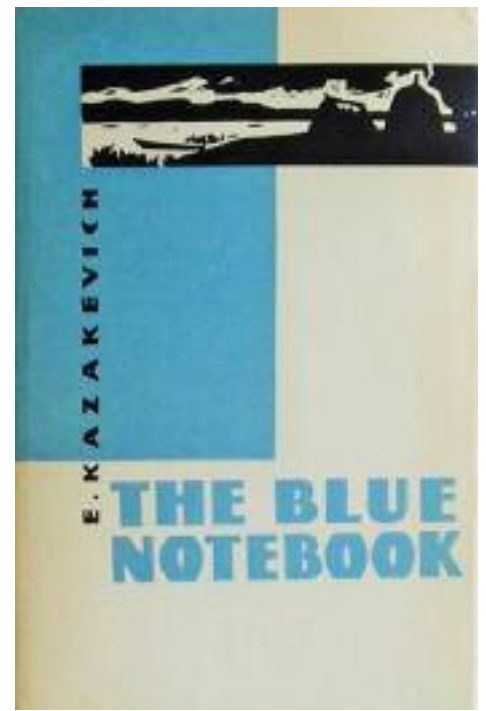
When I studied Economics and Administration at the same institution in 1970-74, the curriculum featured Marxist political economy and Soviet economic policy as well as the full range of pro-capitalist theories from Smith and Ricardo to Alfred Marshall, Keynes and Joan Robinson. Now, for the time being, it seems that neoliberalism exercises its intellectual dictatorship there as elsewhere.

This is all the more reason for communists, socialists, the left and the labour movement to mount a fight-back in the battle of ideas in political economy. But this should not be confined to universities. In the trade unions and political parties of the left, inspired by *Capital*, Marxist political economy at both the theoretical and policy levels now needs to be studied and formulated on a higher level than it is today.

● *Part Two of this article will deal with the following topics: 'unproductive' labour; crises of disproportion; the 'price of production'; the tendency of the rate of profit to fall; 'fictitious' capital; theoretical controversies; 'underconsumption' and Keynesianism; monetarism and neoliberalism; 'financialisation' and the 2007-08 crash; the communist mode of production.*

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Illegal in the summer of 1917

Review by Lars Ulrik Thomsen

The Blue Notebook

by Emanuil Kazakevich
translated from the Russian by Ralph Parker
and Valentina Scott
[Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1962, hbk,
105 pp; only available used]

Lenin's time in Razliv near Petrograd, in the summer of 1917, has inspired at least two works of art – a novel and a symphonic movement.

With the counter-revolution starting in July 1917, the situation changed completely for the Bolsheviks, as they were now illegal.¹

Lenin had to go underground and the Central Committee organised his exile. He lived for a while with the Russian worker and farmer Yemelyanov and his family, in the district of Razliv outside Petrograd. At first he stayed in their barn but after a few days moved to a hay meadow on the Eastern shore of Sestroretskiy Lake. All this is portrayed in an excellent way by Emmanuil Kazakevich² in *The Blue Notebook*. As a gifted writer, Kazakevich really understood how to describe the events of Razliv in the summer of 1917, even if the book is fiction:

“The moon shed a dim light in the pale northern sky. Two boats glided across the lake. Lenin was seated in the stern of the first boat. He kept his eyes strained at the milky twilight of the distant shore. He was thinking that if it should turn out to be quiet and safe over there in the

meadows across the lake he would be able to send for his blue notebook and complete an exceptionally important pamphlet that had long lain in his mind.”(p 3)

On the surface this was a quiet life in a thatched hut, of the type used by the Russian farmers when they could not get home at night. But there followed some months of hectic and intense work, in what Lenin called his “green office”. It consisted of a chopping block as a desk, and a stump of tree as a chair. The time in Razliv became a maturation process for Lenin as a human and politician. In addition to numerous articles, he wrote his pamphlet *The State and Revolution*, which was intended to clarify the Marxist understanding of the state in preparation for the “world proletarian revolution”³ – although it was not actually published until after the October Revolution.

As well as describing this, Kazakevich depicts the significance Lenin had for Yemelyanov's family, especially for his wife Nadezdha:

“It was clear that whenever he obtained a piece of observation, however petty, about the lives and needs of the people, he weighed it on some special scales, that he thought of applying what he had found out, what he had heard, to a much greater scale. He was wholly with them, with the people he was living amidst, and at the same time he was not there at all, but among a vast number of other people whom he did not know personally. He was like the artist who admires a landscape or who looks at

people just as another man does but who at the same time is using his imagination in a way that others don't, thinking, ‘I'm going to paint that’, ‘I could draw that’, or ‘That might be useful for my idea’.” (p 47)

The care and interest that Lenin showed to Nadezdha's family made an indelible impression on her. She realised that when the Bolsheviks came to power, that would mean a fundamental change in the position of women in society.

Every morning, she sent the eldest boys to town to buy newspapers for Lenin, which were indispensable for his correspondence with the Party and its newspapers.

“Having grown accustomed to Lenin, Nadezdha found it hard to believe (for he was so cheerful, lively and kind) that he was on the run, that thousands of people were hunting him and that he was protected from them by nothing more than the thin wall of the shed. And, as she read a newspaper which ran some rabid campaign against him, or overheard talk about Lenin in the shop, she grew terrified by her carelessness. After that she would take the children into a corner and remind them for the hundredth time of their duty to keep their mouths shut and not betray the presence of a stranger in their midst by a word or a glance; they were to forget about the man in the garret.” (p 49)

Lenin was not alone in hiding at Razliv; Zinoviev accompanied him. In view of Zinoviev's later vacillation, Kazakevich imagines a very sharp dialogue between the two men, in which the ‘core issues’ of the

revolution are depicted. Against Lenin's argument that they should move on from the bourgeois democratic revolution in February to the socialist revolution, Kazakevich depicts Zinoviev as having got cold feet, trying to reconcile Lenin with the provisional government. Here Lenin answers Zinoviev as follows:

"I'm not juggling with slogans, I'm telling the masses the truth at each new turn of revolution, however sharp it may be. And you, I have the feeling, are afraid to tell the people the truth. You want to conduct proletarian politics with bourgeois methods. Leaders who know the truth 'in their circle', among themselves, and don't tell that truth to the masses because the masses, as they say, are ignorant and slow-witted, are not proletarian leaders. Speak the truth. If you suffer a defeat don't try to pass it off as a victory; if you strike a compromise, tell the people that it is a compromise; if you had an easy victory over the enemy, don't insist that it was difficult, and if it was difficult, don't boast that it was easy; if you make a mistake, admit your mistake without fear for your own prestige because what undermines your prestige is keeping silent about mistakes; if circumstances oblige you to change course, don't try to present things as

though there had been no change; be truthful to the working class if you believe in its class feeling and revolutionary common sense – and for a Marxist not to believe in that spells shame and ruin. Besides, even to deceive the enemy is extremely complicated, double-edged and permissible only in the most concrete cases of direct military tactics, for our enemies are far from being shut off by an iron wall from our friends, they still have an influence on the people and, with their skill in making fools of the masses, they will try – with success, too – to show up our clever-clever manoeuvres as attempts to deceive the masses. To be insincere with the masses for the sake of 'deceiving the enemy' is a stupid and ill-calculated policy. The proletariat needs the truth and there is nothing more damaging to its cause than a genteel petty-bourgeois lie." (pp 87f)

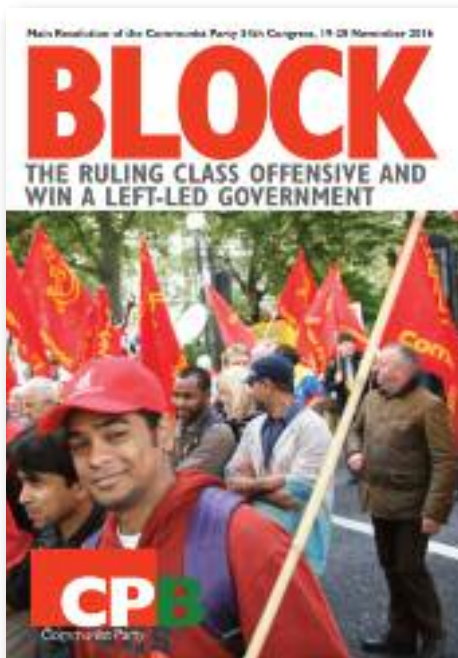
Zinoviev staggers and is lost, he fails the revolutionary ideals to Lenin's great disappointment. This upsets him because Zinoviev had belonged to the Zimmerwald Left, and was one of his closest colleagues in their long-term exile. Again it is important to stress that the dialogue is fiction, but the later events in preparing for the October Revolution confirmed the treason of Zinoviev.

With his personalisation and dialogues, Kazakevich is able to provide a whole new dimension to the events in the summer of 1917. Now we can understand the costs to the Bolsheviks, in psychological and physical exertions, in preparing for the October Revolution.

As an additional dimension, we can complement *The Blue Notebook* with Dmitri Shostakovich's 12th Symphony, *The Year 1917*. In this very exceptional composition, Shostakovich first depicts the February Revolution in Petrograd, then the time in Razliv, thirdly the shot from the cruiser Aurora, and finally "the dawn of humanity" – the very revolution itself. The movement that concerns Razliv alternates between contemplative, and hectic and short, sections, showing how it felt to be on the run and in hiding. It is a beautiful and gripping piece – an indelible memory of the time, preparing for the formation of the first working-class state.

Notes and references

- 1 V I Lenin, *Lessons of the Revolution, in Collected Works, Vol 25, pp 227-243.*
- 2 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emmanuil_Kazakevich.
- 3 V I Lenin, *Preface to the First Edition of The State and Revolution, in Collected Works, Vol 25, p 387.*



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SOURWOOD

by Mike Quille

On fighting on: Fran Lock

Fran Lock is a political activist, writer and illustrator, and one of the finest political poets around. Her poetry expresses and vindicates the feminist belief that the personal is the political. It weaves psychological insight and social awareness into themes of poverty, mental health problems, sexual abuse, domestic violence and political struggle. It is vivid and punchy, combining a deep sense of anger and injustice with a kind of vulnerable empathy and compassion.

Fran's writing is reminiscent of John Clare, the 19th century poet who also combined the political with the personal and psychological, and who also expressed the disruptions and depredations of capitalist encroachment on the cultural commons of both land and mind, material and mental space.

Like Clare, Lock evokes the troubling, often agonising effects of capitalist culture and society on personal and social identity, on the mind, body and world, using a diction that keeps telling you something is wrong, and vivid, densely textured phrases and sentences, packed with assonance and internal rhyme.

That's enough criticism, here's the real thing, some of the most powerful poetry and prose poetry you'll read this year.



A backward dark

*"Disability benefits should go to 'really disabled people', not 'anxiety sufferers', says Theresa May's adviser" – headline from **The Independent**, 26 February 2017*

I grew like a twisted tooth, and every day was a backward dark, and delving awkward into morning, met by soft syndromal light let into rooms through cracks in glass and gaps in brick. How should I spend my precious time? These hours of stricken and hiccuping mien, and *what did you think would happen?* Left alone to my own gaunt indifference, with nothing to get up for. They said they could not help me, professional obsessives in glum and underfunded rooms I crawled to and then back, by ugly alleyways and flats, breathing in an air of eager menace; psychotic riposte, urine and homicidal shoplift. Inside, a dead, dry plant with crispy bacon leaves, expired medication. They said they could not help me. I am less than nothing, an excrescence in the eye of an overworked GP. What should I do? Slump my misshapen shoulders at the desk, survive on sheepish chivalries, the profligate affinities of friends who say they *love* me and then don't call for days? Or drag my debt to be the subject of slack whispers in the local bar, to hide from crowds of people with my old cowering proficiency. An online forum told me *you are not your worst day*, but this disease puts out more roots than branches, and anyway, there's nowhere left to go but down. They said they could not help me.

Grey-brown fish food flakes of snow. My mirror is a study in malnourishment. I drop my untidy shadow by the bed like crumpled clothes. I *try* to work, at anything at all. I do not want to live like this, prostrate before the bailiffs yet again. I do not want to live. A book is better eaten than drowned. Evicted, unemployable, people like me *shouldn't aim too high*. It's Friday and the blackly estimated self is slipping. I wish this pain electric, to exit via the fingertips in sparks. But it does not, it is a dull and stumbling blow, the cold slap of another wave. This pain makes nothing. It's all I'm good for, born for, groomed to droop, to wheedle in a stuttering rank to clinics and to agencies, and *what is wrong with you?* Burning up with shame, it's red-faced sensibility. In university I learnt to tell *suffering* from *punishment*, and much good has this done me. I grew like a twisted tooth, with dirt at the crown and rot at the root.

I've been away

“... *exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted*” – Edward Said

How had I forgotten this? Low sun spreading reddish light on everything; the windows of abandoned cars all burning with a foiled or fevered grace. I wake to this, wake from a thin, insoluble sleep, to the colic hospitality of uncles, cousins, thin familial strangers. None of them can look me in the eye, and so I ask myself: *should I walk*, befriend the fearless streets our fathers thundered down like bulls? And is there still a place for me, among the dingy churches, ugly work that made our mothers ugly? Our battlefields are landfills now, and somebody in London said *you can't go back*. The chimneys stand, aggrieved and moot, and on the air the slight, rank breath of catatonic industry. The house is silent. I count to ten. I close the primrose curtains, then intuit the darkened room. Here, you held my hand. I want to scream my head off. I want to write a poem; a poem distorts the space around it like a recent grief. I want to climb inside of that distortion, lie down, bury my aching face and sleep for years. Outside is sweat, the brittle predilections of the men, old men, *auld boys*; the city's dirt verbatim slurs. I am afraid, but still I come, into the steep, beset and ransacked North. I want to run between premeditated terraces, catch your after-image: *lover*, who answers to no compass but an erring star, your eyes the rudest blue I ever saw. For you, I come. Last night my dreams were made of knives, moving in shoals through the city like fish; their impudent caresses, secret gardens opened in your skin. I am afraid, but still I come, seized by a backward, sighing power, and talking to myself again. I need it yet, this *home*, these streets, that real long-distance dark, as it goes winding through the hills, so supple and devoid, a place to burrow down; a choice and beetle-black, unwholesome country night we raked our skinny fingers through like soil. Ours. And so I walk the heart's stunted geographies. Saint Martin's in the dark, cramped salvationeering for the famished or the lost. I need the sound of bells, although you'd say: *our priests travel in packs like wolves*, and *fuck all that*, faith is a false economy, or anything you're bullied into. Descend these narrow, breakneck stairs, I dare not breathe, I cannot see to kneel. This creosote perspective: grief or loss or that which means you're gone and I am not absolved. How could I have forgotten that? I wake, and my insufficiently singing soul is barking at starlings, perverse and haunted. The estate lies sticky, sallow in caramelised tristesse; the eyes of plaster saints all chronic and beseeching. Ours. Sectarian Camelot, flags hanging from lampposts, guttering coming away. I need it yet, this decomposing ozone I am one with; a city morbid with doorways, inclined to ghosts, and stammering. On the grass verge a mastiff bitch could suckle human twins for years. I picture love this way: a Rome where all roads lead. Emaciated aunties *tsk*; their gaze is more corrective than affectionate. I am *wrong*; there is no English word that means the strong magnetic pull of certain pains. I walk, the shops are two for one in a floundering light that flatters no one: skinny kids as pink as carvery beef, fidgeting and scolded; nasty men in Harrington jackets, adulterous proficiencies, cuffs they fasten with safety pins. They scratch themselves, allergic with lust. *Desire's a form of contempt round here*, you said. They spit. *Tourist bitch! Fuck off home!* I duck my head, my vision blurs, the eye a hobbled place where light crawls in. And you, my love, a slim green dread to grasp at like the first nettle of spring. I walk, the market opens early with its tatty penchant, paper bags of oranges; a man embellishing a bargain with a silver tooth. A woman sells a hundred brassy rosaries. Jesus, a militant wishbone, sharpened to a point you rip your finger on. Mary as a dark hag with a pointed chin, like me. I have never forgotten, the border towns, their seismic folklore; our heads bent in the bookshop, rotten coffee, second-hand Fiacc. What did I come here for? Saint Martin's, unlit candles like apple cores. I make my midget cones of fire. It's always you, the sleeping face I want to study like a forger. I long to drink, to greet forgetfulness half way. Or else to merge my meagre loss with history. I cannot. I will not give you up that way. And not our home. The place they built their walls around, their war around, but glowing, with a sweet, defeatist beauty all our own.

On fighting on

I cannot kiss this better; retrieve a token bliss from broken teeth, on Friday night or otherwise. I know that now. They make incessant fetish from the vegetative English dead; you don't belong. *Fuck off!* they said. I cannot kiss this better; the old accused and clouded heart. *You're fit enough.* They sent a letter, spread a sad, mutating shame; your hijacked mind was reeling and your pockets full of stones. I cannot make this better. The children stew in uniforms, and take instruction in a sneer. The ethic of their ignorance, a stifled pride they daub on walls or break a window with. There's nothing better left round here. I cannot make this better. The paper sprouts opinions, promiscuous as weeds. We are the *undeserving poor*, so televise our erring faces, slurring in a sound bite. A viral slight they slip between the ribs; a smile that serves to show the teeth, distorts the jaw. I cannot kiss this better, the rifle butt to your mother's chin; the door the bawling troops kicked in, the hank of hair they tore out at the roots; a conscience polished for parades, the armour of their accolades, our blood and muck still clinging to their boots. And all throughout the politicians smirk, upholstered in their pedigree. And people, drunk on lapis sap, applaud the spoilt heredity of Windsors; their balconies are panting with long tongues of ugly bunting. I cannot kiss this better. Nobody can fight alone nostalgia's analgesic trap. But we can work together. We are still here, we can, we must, rebuild again in faith and trust. This land is ours, we want it back.

Notes to On fighting on:

"I don't like the word 'utopian'. *Utopia* is a literal no-place, its use echoes to the strains of a slightly cranky and unachievable idealism. I'm not an idealist. I live in the world, and I think I have a pretty comprehensive grasp of human fallibility. I do, however, believe that a better world is possible. Not a perfect world. Socialism is not some quack cure-all for everything that ails us, but it is, it has to be, a far more solid and more humane foundation than a system that enshrines personal enrichment, competition and acquisitiveness as its central tenets.

Living round here exhausts me, and some of my neighbours are tough to love; people are tough to love in general: they can be ignorant, bigoted, violent and cruel. To think in terms of class solidarity is hard when the people you're supposed to feel solidarity with don't want you living next door to them; when those people intimidate women, harass people of colour on public transport, and consistently vote for those who would dismantle their communities, destroy their livelihoods and remove their access to essential services. The media wrings its hands about the racism in particular of the white working classes, talking it up as a consequence of poverty, of feeling ignored, and of forming a misguided idea about who is to blame. These discussions miss the point. This poverty is not a natural disaster, it is the material consequence of political decision making. This

ignorance is not an act of God, it's engineered. And the blame and scapegoating of immigrant communities is not spontaneous or accidental either. It comes from somewhere. It's part of an agenda.

One of the most maddening things for me in recent years has been the steady destruction of the opportunity for people in poverty to educate themselves. Rises in fees, cuts to basic maintenance and support, the closure of libraries, all this acts in concert to prevent people in poverty from accessing knowledge, inside the system or out of it. Our ability to opt out of the current educational establishment has also been severely curtailed, in tandem with changes to the National Curriculum that minimise the development of critical thinking skills. In this climate it becomes increasingly difficult to evolve or maintain any kind of meaningful analytical faculty, and it requires an insane amount of unequal effort to participate in education or academia at all.

Who does this benefit? Certainly not the working classes. A populace with insufficient ability to deconstruct the lies they're fed, to even recognise them as lies, that's a populace easy to manipulate. Further, it's a populace you can discount and sneer at, having first created the conditions from which that populace is shaped. *Look at the chavs, they're so socially unaware.* Yeah, amazing, I wonder how that happened.

But a better world is possible; and people are capable of better effort. What Corbyn's Socialism argues for, and what the Socialism in which I passionately believe is dedicated to, is allowing people the possibility for personal growth, the potential for change. We deserve better. We can be better. Just watch us."

Biographical details

Fran Lock is a sometime itinerant dog whisperer and the author of three poetry collections, *Flatrock* (Little Episodes, 2011), *The Mystic and the Pig Thief* (Salt, 2014), and *Dogtooth* (Out-Spoken Press, 2017). She is currently undertaking a practice-based PhD at Birkbeck University on the relationship between the epistolary form in contemporary poetry and the use of letters in therapeutic contexts.

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