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Marx, Lenin and the Problem of Revolution

Vijaya Lakshmi Rajiva

A Thesis

in

The Faculty

of

Arts and Science

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada

October 1987

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ISBN 0-315-41643-2

ABSTRACT

Marx, Lenin and the Problem of Revolution

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Concordia University, 1987

The Marxian theory of revolution is a statement about the relationship between historical understanding and political action by an historical agent. This dissertation will examine the principal ways in which Lenin appropriated this theory and extended it to his own theory and practice of revolution.

Historical understanding in the Marxian world-view signified the following: (a) the historical process is capable of being understood by the human subject; (b) this understanding provides the point of entry for human intervention. Consequently, the proposition that revolutions are changes in the mode of production of given societies and that they represent a transfer of power from one class to another, is simply another way of saying that political change is indissolubly linked to socio-economic change. This statement about the historical process and the possibilities of human intervention in the process was elaborated by Marx chiefly in his materialist interpretation of history, in his analyses of historical events and in his critique of one mode of production, modern capitalism. This classical legacy was taken over by Lenin in his own analyses of the development of capitalism in Russia and later in his studies of the connection between war and imperialism; in both cases, these analyses became the point of departure for a program of political action. This much is not particularly controversial or contentious.

However, when we approach the question of the varieties of human intervention in the historical process, even if we do so from a specifically Marxian vantage point, it becomes problematic as to whether the final insurrectionary assault on the political institutions of Russian capitalism and the importance given to the vanguard Party represent Lenin's extensions of Marxian theory or a wholesale departure from it.

This dissertation will argue for the former case and show that the transition from a theory of revolution to its practice engaged Lenin in some of his most interesting (and controversial) contributions to the Marxian foundation, compelling him to enlarge the question of proletarian class-consciousness to that of political consciousness and to locate this phenomenon in the first instance within the Party (albeit as an historically transitory phase) and thence to the proletariat. The background to the emergence of these views and Lenin's confrontation of the issue of state and revolution will be examined in the latter half of the dissertation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the Ph.D. in Humanities Program of Concordia University for having provided me with an opportunity to pursue an individualised and inter-disciplinary program of study leading to the doctoral degree. In particular I wish to thank the following individuals: Professor James Moore (Department of Political Science, Concordia University), my thesis supervisor, Professor Stanley French (Department of Philosophy, Concordia University) and Professor Irving Smith (Department of History, Concordia University).

I also wish to thank the Graduate Awards Committee of Concordia University for providing funding for the last two years of my study in the Ph.D. in Humanities Program, through a Graduate Fellowship.

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INTRODUCTION

In attempting to understand the exact link between Marx and Lenin, the two most controversial aspects of Lenin's political philosophy are: (1) the question of the seizure of power by the proletariat, and, (2) the role of the Party as the vanguard of the proletarian revolution. The earliest objections to these two aspects of Lenin's theory came from the Mensheviks in Russia and from the Social Democrats in Germany, the basis of their objection being that neither of these two aspects are central to Marxian theory. This point of view is still prevalent among present day scholars and commentators, although it has been modified by the more sophisticated approach that sees Marx as having advocated at various times a proletarian seizure of power and as attempting to establish a Communist Party of sorts.¹ In this study, I shall attempt to explore the nature and significance of the Marx-Lenin connection, vis-a-vis the two themes of the seizure of power by the proletariat and the vanguard role of the Party.

The importance of these two themes is fairly obvious insofar as they explicate some of the events of the October Revolution in 1917; but they gain an even greater significance in view of the fact that Lenin not only claimed that the October Revolution was a Marxian style revolution but

¹ The most recent and distinguished representatives of this new approach are George Lichtheim, Marxism: An Historical And Critical Study Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1961, pp. 325-351.

L. Kolakowski, Main Currents of Marxism, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978, pp. 305-328.

that it was the only possible type of political change that could or should have occurred in the Russia of 1917. This presents us with unravelling the problem of: (a) what political change meant in Marxian theory, and, (b), whether its essential components had been borrowed and modified to suit Russian conditions, or whether they were applicable uniformly to all societies at that particular stage of capitalist development.

The question of political change, in its most extreme form a revolution, was connected in Marxian theory both to the structural elements of a given society (its state institutions and its socio-economic life) and to an overall historical movement (the periodisation of history, its change in time) whose economic base, in some way, had preponderance, both in the historical and in the structural dimension. Marx and Engels called their new theory the materialist interpretation of history (The German Ideology), where among other things, some basic propositions were put forward: (1) the mode of production determines the social and cultural life of a society; (2) this mode of production changes from one epoch to another; (3) the political institutions of a given society reinforce the hegemony of the economically dominant class; and (4), that a class struggle of the proletariat in the epoch of capitalism must end in the overthrow of bourgeois institutions.

Lenin's earliest pronouncements on the subject of the materialist interpretation of history (Who the Friends of the People Are, 1894) show his sensitivity to both aspects of political change, the historical movement or progression as seen in the periodisation of history (Asiatic, communal, feudal, bourgeois, socialist, communist) and the structural

change in the socio-economic sphere. Russian Marxism, on the whole, shared these presuppositions, Plekhanov's writings being the accepted works on the subject both in Russia and abroad.² The difficulty arose only at a somewhat later stage in the history of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, when the question of the structural change in Russian society, especially its political life, was interpreted by Lenin as a dramatic change, an overthrow, signalling the end of the old order and the beginning of the new. The Mensheviks and the German Social Democrats envisaged a slow conquest of political power by the proletariat, achieved mainly through parliamentary methods. Both parties, however, subscribed to one historical factor: the emergence of the modern proletariat in Russian life.

Classical Marxist theory had defined 'revolution' as: (1) a change in the mode of production of a given society (owing to the absence of a proper alignment between the level of development of productive forces and the relations of production, and as (2) the transfer of power from one class to another. The first and clearest statement of this connection between the social and the political revolutions was given in The German Ideology, and the nature of the link is clearly specified there. In this work Marx and Engels spoke of the 'overthrow' of the ruling class (the bourgeoisie) by the propertyless class (the proletariat). This militant call was continued in the Communist

² Georgi Plekhanov, Socialism and the Political Struggle (1883) and The Development of the Marxist View of History (1895), both in Georgi Plekhanov, Selected Philosophical Works, vol. 1, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1974, pp. 48-106, pp. 480-669, respectively.

Manifesto (1848), although the reference there to the proletariat organised as ~~the~~ ruling class could be and was interpreted in non-militant terms by most German Social Democrats in the 1890s.

Indeed, since the 'mode of production' encompassed relations of production which expressed definite class interests and were reinforced by political institutions (as The German Ideology explains it), it stood to reason that a change in the mode of production would bring about change in the political institutions and vice versa, although there is more than a suggestion that a militant overthrow of bourgeois state institutions would speed up the social revolution. This shift to the political revolution became evident in Marx's historical writings, The Class Struggles in France (1848) and The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1850). In these works, as well as in his articles in the Neue Rheinische Zeitung (written during the 1848 revolution in Germany), Marx described the seizure of power by the proletariat (seeking the help of radical democrats and the peasantry) as a bringing to a successful conclusion the revolution that the bourgeoisie itself had started against the autocracy and feudalism, but had been unable and unwilling to continue to the end.³ Here in The Class Struggles in France Marx used, for the first time, the phrase 'the permanence of the revolution,'⁴ the significance of which was not lost on Lenin, who used the phrase 'the

³ A detailed account of this is given in Chapter 1 of the present study.

⁴ K. Marx & F. Engels, Selected Works, vol. 1, p. 282.

uninterrupted revolution.⁵ I shall return to this.

At the time that Marx propounded these views (the 1840s and early 1850s) the revolution could initially be only a bourgeois one against feudalism both in France and in Germany. The proletarian takeover, coming after this initial movement, seemed a logical and desirable possibility (even though this did not occur in 1848 in either Germany or France). Marx discussed the failure of these revolutions in The Class Struggles in France and in his articles in the Neue Rheinische Zeitung, attributing the failure of the revolutions to the betrayal of the bourgeoisie and the unpreparedness of the proletariat. By the time that Marx settled down in England in the mid 1850s, the bourgeois revolution had long since occurred in that country and the proletariat, though better educated than its European counterpart, was led by trade union leaders who were inclined to be reformist, not revolutionary.

Though Marx disapproved of this tendency in the working class movement, he was realistic enough to recognize that the working class in countries such as England (where capitalism had an early start) would be more concerned with practical issues such as higher wages, lower working hours, universal suffrage, etc. This change in strategy was the outcome of Marx's experiences in England rather than any fundamental change in his approach to the study of political economy. As early as 1844, soon after the writing of A Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Marx had started the study of English political economy when he felt that he had

⁵ V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1962.

an insufficient knowledge of that subject.⁶ His readings included the works of Adam Smith, Ricardo, Say, James Mill and others.⁶ At any rate, the year 1859 saw the publication of A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. Between 1857-1858 Marx wrote a short work known as Introduction to a Critique and the Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Oekonomie.⁷ The first volume of Das Kapital appeared in 1857, the year of the founding of the First International. Thus, for nearly a decade, Marx seemed to have withdrawn from political activity (though not completely)⁸ and devoted himself to an understanding of the social revolution through his study of the phenomenon of capitalism.

The First International brought Marx back into the centre of political activity and with the fall of the Paris Commune in 1871, Marx gave up hopes of gradualist change and concentrated attention once more on revolutionary change. After his death in 1883, the German Social Democratic Party (founded in 1891) adopted a gradualist approach to the problem of political power. At approximately the same period, Edouard Bernstein wrote his Evolutionary Socialism in which he called for a revision of Marx's revolutionary theory of political change and advocated a peaceful and parliamentary conquest of power by the proletariat. The

⁶ Karl Marx, A Biography, Progress Publishers, 1973, p. 67.

⁷ For further details on the relationship of the Critique to the other three works, see Maurice Dobb's Introduction to the 1969 edition of the Critique, Progress Publishers, Moscow, pp. 5-16.

⁸ See Karl Marx, A Biography, op.cit., pp. 278-324.

movement which Bernstein began was known as Revisionism.⁹ It gained influence not only in the German Social Democratic Party but also in the Russian Social Democratic Party (founded in 1898, but anticipated by many small splinter groups).¹⁰

The Russian followers of Revisionism were composed both of Legal Marxists (so called because their popularisation of Marxism took place in academic circles and was tolerated by the censorship) and the Economists (a loose conglomerate of Social Democrats and members of the Jewish Bund who favoured a gradualist solution to the problems of political power and stressed the economic struggle of the working class).¹¹ The Russian Marxists who opposed Revisionism called themselves 'orthodox Marxists' and included such figures as Plekhanov, Julius Martov, Pavel Axelrod, Vera Zasulich and Lenin.

At the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (hereafter referred to as the RSDLP) in 1903, a further development took place, the split of the RSDLP into the Menshevik and Bolshevik factions (the former led by Martov supported by Axelrod, the latter led by

⁹ For a good account of Bernstein, see Peter Gay's Dilemmas of Democratic Socialism, Collier Books, New York, 1962.

¹⁰ Richard Pipes, Social Democracy and the St. Petersburg Labour Movement, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1963, pp. 124-125.

¹¹ R. Kindersley's The First Russian Revisionists, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1962, examines the work and careers of the important Legal Marxists, Peter Struve, Tugan-Baranovsky and Berdyaev. An interesting study of the Economists from the viewpoint of an Economist is Jonathan Frankel's edition of Vladimir Akimov on the Dilemmas of Russian Marxism, 1895-1903.

Lenin).¹² While the Mensheviks believed that the coming revolution in Russia would be bourgeois-democratic and that the working class ought not to seize power (but remain represented by the RSDLP as an opposition party in the new government), Lenin argued for the 'uninterrupted revolution', the seizure of power by the proletariat in alliance with the peasantry. This revolution would come hard on the heels of the bourgeois revolution. The Mensheviks saw the liberals as their chief allies and they also advocated a loosely organised Party with a broad based membership, while Lenin insisted on the admission to the Party of professional revolutionaries only, although he actively encouraged a many sided contact with the entire working class and the people as a whole. Both parties to these and other disputes in the RSDLP, however, continued to see the Party as the bona fide leader of the working class.

Opinion was at first divided among the leaders of the Second International (founded in 1891) as to which faction was right in the dispute. In course of time, however, the German Social Democratic Party's leadership sided with the Mensheviks. Rosa Luxemburg criticised Lenin and the Bolsheviks for their views on organisation, even though she supported the call for a revolutionary approach to the conquest of power.¹³ Karl Kautsky, while moderate on the domestic scene in Germany, continued to project an image of radicalism on the international scene, and as late as The Road to Power (1912) was seen by Lenin as a militant

¹² See Chapter 3 of the present study.

¹³ Rosa Luxemburg. The Russian Revolution, Leninism or Marxism, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1961, pp. 81-108.

Marxist. The First World War saw the disintegration of the Second International. With the German Social Democratic Party voting for war credits and with the ignominious spectacle of the leaders of the Second International supporting their own national governments (the lone exceptions being Lenin, Luxemburg and Liebknecht), the myth of internationalist socialist solidarity could no longer prevail.

The First World War, which Lenin described as an imperialist war, only reinforced his conviction that a seizure of power by the proletariat alone could put an end to it. In Russia at any rate, the disenchantment of the soldiers, the peasantry and the masses with the war and the Czar's policies, lent support to Lenin's position (in addition, some leading Mensheviks, notably Martov, also opposed the war effort). Lenin's analysis of imperialism (Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, 1916) gave him further reasons to suppose that the proletarian revolution was at hand.¹⁴

In State and Revolution (1917), written nearly six months after the Czar had been deposed, and approximately two months before the October Revolution, Lenin reiterated the importance of the political revolution in Marxian theory and its link with the social revolution, thus emphasising the need for an immediate seizure of power by the proletariat, should the objective situation be favourable. The October Revolution, led by the Bolsheviks, was hailed by Lenin as a triumph of

¹⁴ Chapter 4 of the present study examines the connection between war, imperialism and revolution in Lenin's thought. See also Neil Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Macmillan & Co., London, 1977-81, vol. 2.

Marxian revolutionary theory.¹⁵ Not all the leaders of international social democracy agreed with Lenin's estimate of the situation (Plekhanov condemned the seizure of power as premature; Kautsky criticised it outright, with Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht alone supporting the revolutionaries). In 1918 Kautsky wrote his pamphlet, 'The Dictatorship of the Proletariat,' and his criticism of the Bolsheviks in that work inaugurated the historic debate between Social Democratic and Communist interpretations of Marx's theory of political revolution.¹⁶

Kautsky's main arguments were: (1) that the proletariat should come to power only through peaceful and parliamentary methods, so that democratic values may be conserved and working class rule would remain stable; and (2), that when Marx spoke of the dictatorship of the proletariat, he did not have a literal dictatorship in mind; he was thinking of a condition of power, not a form of government. Lenin responded almost immediately in his celebrated 'Proletarian Revolution

¹⁵ For a history of the October Revolution, see The Great October Socialist Revolution, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977; N. Sukhanov's The Russian Revolution, Harper & Bros., New York, 1962, is an eyewitness account of the events leading to the revolution and includes the famous description of Lenin's return to Russia in April 1917. Sukhanov, though claiming to be impartial, holds a social democratic position. L. Trotsky's A History of the Russian Revolution, Pluto Press, London, 1977, is a literary masterpiece by an important participant in the revolution.

A work by a contemporary scholar is David Mandel's 2 volume study, The Petrograd Workers & the Fall of the Old Regime, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1983, vol. 1; vol. 2, The Petrograd Workers & the Soviet Seizure of Power, London, Macmillan, 1984.

¹⁶ John Kautsky's Introduction to The Dictatorship of the Proletariat, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1964, p. xi.

and the Renegade Kautsky.¹⁷ This essay, remarkable as much for its bitter invective as for the wealth of its ideas, has not received the attention that it deserves. It is at once a defence of the actual dictatorship of the proletariat (which was established after the October Revolution of 1917) at that given period of Russian history, as well as a theoretical statement of the central importance of this concept to Marxian revolutionary theory. It reiterates with even greater urgency than The State and Revolution (written before the October Revolution) the need to smash the bourgeois state machine and therefore, as a logical corollary to this process, the revolutionary conquest of power by the proletariat, an undertaking, which by its very nature, would be a sudden overthrow of the existing government.

After accusing Kautsky of having turned his back on revolutionary Marxism since the beginning of the First World War, Lenin goes on to observe that "the question of the dictatorship is a question of the relation of the proletarian state to the bourgeois state, of proletarian democracy to bourgeois democracy."¹⁸ And as evidence of the importance of this dictatorship in Marxian theory (an importance which Kautsky had belittled) he quotes from Marx's Critique of the Gotha Programme (1875):

Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a period in which

¹⁷ Lenin, Collected Works; Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1961, vol. 28.

¹⁸ Lenin, op. cit., vol. 28, p. 232.

the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.¹⁹

Lenin goes on to point out, quite accurately, that the formula 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is merely "a more historically concrete and scientific formulation of the proletariat's task of 'smashing' the bourgeois state machine, about which both Marx and Engels, in summing up the experience of the Revolution of 1848, and, still more so, of 1871, spoke for forty years, between 1852 and 1891."²⁰ He then criticizes Kautsky for not offering a definition of the word 'dictatorship' in an adequate manner. Dictatorship, says Lenin, does not simply mean the abolition of democracy, as Kautsky had claimed in his pamphlet. It is natural, according to Lenin, for a liberal to speak of democracy in general, but a Marxist "will never forget to ask for what class."²¹ Rebellions among slaves in ancient times reveal the fact that the state in those times was essentially a dictatorship of the slave owners, although it did not abolish democracy among and for the slaveholders. In forgetting the class struggle, Kautsky had distorted the Marxian meaning of democracy. According to Lenin:

To transform Kautsky's liberal and false assertion into a Marxist and true one, one must say: dictatorship does not necessarily mean the abolition of democracy for the class that exercises the dictatorship over other classes; but it does mean the abolition (or very material restriction,

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 233.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 233.

²¹ Ibid., p. 235.

which is also a form of abolition) of democracy. for the class over which, or against which, the dictatorship is exercised.²²

At this stage of the argument Lenin offers a definition of dictatorship:

Dictatorship is rule based directly upon force and unrestricted by any laws. The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is rule won and maintained by the use of violence by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, rule that is unrestricted by any laws.²³

Further, continued Lenin, to make a distinction between forms of government and conditions of power, is a fraud and "a very crude falsification of Marx, who was very clearly speaking here of this or that form or type of state and not of forms of government."²⁴

There are, for instance, monarchies which are not typical of the bourgeois state, while there are republics that have both a military clique and a bureaucracy. If Marx had advocated (as he did) a peaceful form of political transition for England and America in the 'seventies', it was because in both countries, at the time, there was a minimum of militarism and bureaucracy. This was clearly no longer the case now, and under the conditions of the militarism and bureaucracy of the bourgeois state, "the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is violence against the bourgeoisie; and the necessity of such violence is particularly called for, as Marx and Engels have repeatedly explained in

²² Ibid., p. 235.

²³ Ibid., p. 236.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 236.

detail (especially in The Civil War in France and in the preface to it)...²⁵

Lenin concludes this section of the essay with a reiteration of the theme of his wartime work, Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism (early 1916). In his words:

... pre-monopoly capitalism - which actually reached its zenith in the seventies - was by virtue of its fundamental economic traits, which found most typical expression in Britain and in America, distinguished by a, relatively speaking, maximum fondness for peace and freedom. Imperialism, on the other hand, i.e. monopoly capitalism, which finally matured only in the twentieth century, is by virtue of its fundamental economic traits, distinguished by a minimum fondness for peace and freedom, and by a maximum and universal development of militarism.²⁶

The remainder of the essay is devoted to an explanation of the various measures undertaken by the Bolsheviks, especially their action in dismissing the Constituent Assembly (which Kautsky chose for special criticism). Lenin does not trouble to answer one of Kautsky's most important objections, namely, that the monopolisation of power by the Bolsheviks was an undesirable development. This was probably because since the 1903 break between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks, Lenin had described the former as essentially petty bourgeois democrats and not Marxists. He does make a brief reference to Kautsky's labelling of the Mensheviks as Socialists and the Bolsheviks as dictators, and meets the criticism as follows:

²⁵ Ibid., p. 238.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 239.

Let us point out in passing, that when calling the non-Bolsheviks in Russia, i.e., the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, socialists, Kautsky was guided by their name, that is, by a word, and not by the actual place they occupy in the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.²⁷

Throughout his career Lenin had put forward the claim to be the authentic interpreter of Marxism, calling himself an orthodox Marxist, and by orthodoxy, meaning adherence to the revolutionary dimensions of Marxian theory. He had dismissed his opponents in the international movement as 'revisionists', 'reformists', and 'opportunists'. And indeed he could well point to the Bolsheviks as the only leaders of a successful Marxian revolution, while the others stood by and watched the defeat of the working class and in some cases aiding and abetting this defeat. In his mind, then, the question of the Bolsheviks as the only authentic Marxists of the period, was intimately linked to the exposition of revolutionary Marxism. In essence he saw this as resting on three assumptions of Marx's theory:

1. State power is exercised by the economically dominant class to perpetuate this dominance.
2. Capitalism would be succeeded by socialism; but this process is not purely an objective one, requiring as it does the active intervention of an historical agent, the modern proletariat led by a revolutionary Party.
3. The vanguard of the victorious proletariat would be the Party.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 232.

Lenin's contemporaries in the Social Democratic movement were critical of his interpretation of Marx and this tradition has extended to the present time.

Conflicting Interpretations and Scholarly Debate

Lenin had called the leaders of Social Democracy in Russia, France, Germany and England 'revisionists' for advocating a parliamentary conquest of political power by the working class. Yet, this 'revisionism' had, at least in Germany, antedated Lenin's emergence as a leading Russian Marxist. In 1891, at its congress at Erfurt, the German Social Democratic Party (hereafter referred to as the SPD) adopted the Erfurt Programme, which subsequently became the authoritative source of guidance for German Social Democracy. There is no mention in that programme of the phrase 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and indeed the conquest of power is envisaged here in parliamentary terms. As Robert Tucker has noted in his brief introduction to the 1971 edition of the Erfurt Programme (now entitled The Class Struggle), the SPD while "continuing to profess the classical Marxist belief in the coming revolutionary breakdown of the bourgeois order, was practising the politics of democratic socialism."²⁸

Here, one encounters the first of many difficulties in attempting to evaluate Lenin's Marxist orthodoxy. The historical Marx lived and wrote during an earlier period in the history of capitalism (1818-1883); yet,

²⁸ Robert Tucker, The Class Struggle, pp. 3-4.

on his own estimate, he had evolved a theory of 'scientific socialism' that would, in its general schema, fit both earlier and later periods of history. Lenin accepted this position, as do all contemporary Marxists whether of the West, the East or the Third World. However, shortly after Marx's death, his theories of political change were interpreted in three different ways, that Stanley Moore describes as alternative models: (1) the pattern of permanent revolution, (2) the pattern of increasing misery, and (3) the pattern of competing systems.²⁹

The first model is a minority revolution, so called because the proletariat is in the minority. Lenin, as Stanley Moore sees it, was the chief practitioner of this type of revolution, which Marx had proposed for Germany and France in the 1840s. The second model is a majority style revolution, since the working class are in a majority. Here, of course, one is dealing not so much with 'revolution' as with a 'transition' from capitalism to socialism. The conquest of political power is achieved through parliamentary methods. Kautsky and the German Social Democrats pursued this model. The pattern of competing systems, although it was intended as a revision of Marxian theory (particularly the model of permanent revolution) by Edouard Bernstein, was clearly an abandonment of Marxism.³⁰ This model envisages the gradual control and reform of capitalism by the superior democratic forces of socialism; to the extent that the process is gradual, the two systems would continue to

²⁹ Stanley Moore, Three Tactics, The Background in Marx, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1963, p. 13.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 37-96.

peacefully compete with each other.

The second and third models (that of Kautsky and Bernstein respectively) of revolution are presented as alternatives to the Leninist interpretation of Marx. They are reflected in varying degrees in the works of a number of contemporary scholars: George Lichtheim's Marxism, An Historical & Critical Study, Shlomo Avineri's The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx, L. Kolakowski's Marxism and Peter Gay's The Dilemmas of Democratic Socialism, to name a few of the works which have influenced later generations of Lenin scholars (there are exceptions to this mainstream; I shall return to this question).

All of these works treat the question of the revolutionary conquest of power as a passing phase in Marx's thinking, which can be explained away by the author's youthfulness as well as by the historical fact that this theory was first evolved during the 1840s (a period of turbulence in European history) and while Marx was in residence in Germany and in France. In this interpretation, Marx is seen as having virtually abandoned revolutionary theory by the 1860s, the period of the establishment of the First International and the growth of the labour movement in England where Marx now resided. Lichtheim and Kolakowski agree that Lenin's emphasis on revolutionary methods was dictated by the special circumstances of Russia's economic backwardness (a characteristic shared by Germany in the political sphere).³¹ Both scholars, however, point to the dormant Jacobin tendencies also in Marx, tendencies which

³¹ Lichtheim, op. cit., Kolakowski, op. cit., pp. 325-351, pp. 381-412, respectively.

sometimes surfaced unexpectedly, as hangovers from his youthful past. The conclusion that is then drawn is that the Leninist variant of Marxism is admirably suited to backward countries and can even claim a measure of respectability in the Marxian tradition.

This had already been pointed out by John Kautsky in his introduction to the 1964 edition of Karl Kautsky's The Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Thus, with certain reservations and qualifications and coming through a different route altogether, the Lichtheim thesis (if one may so designate it), quite unintentionally confirms the Stalin thesis that described Leninism as the Marxism of the age of imperialism.³² It must be remarked here that the connection between Russia's economic backwardness and international capitalism had already been present in Lenin's thinking as far back as 1896 in The Development of Capitalism in Russia and was developed to its fullest in Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, though the revolutionary motif in Lenin's thinking attains its clearest expression in the early work in ways which are significant in Lenin's overall approach to revolution, as we shall see. Though neither Lichtheim nor Kolakowski seriously employs the word 'imperialism' their concession to Leninism as an historically necessitated variant of Marxism, was not only motivated by scholarly scrupulosity but also by their desire to salvage for Western society the humanist components of Marxism. Although the conscious intent was to uphold the universal validity of the priority of democracy over socialism, the unwitting

³² Joseph Stalin, Foundations of Leninism, International Publishers, New York, 1939, p. 10.

result was to accentuate the division of the world into haves and have-nots, with the latter understandably opting for revolutionary Marxism.

The dilemma is an 'ancient' one, and was confronted by Karl Kautsky when he castigated the October Revolutions as a departure from Marxism (The Dictatorship of the Proletariat). Kautsky's dilemma was essentially this: writing in 1918, after the fact of the Russian Revolution, and after the failure of German Social Democracy to stop the Kaiser's imperialist designs (indeed with the majority of the SPD voting for war credits) and after the ignominious collapse of the Second International (whose leaders supported the war effort of their respective countries), Kautsky could only feebly make his voice heard in the general adulation that greeted the Bolshevik accession to power. Such was the moral authority and the prestige of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, that not only did the working classes of all countries, but even some German Social Democrats were inclined to support the new regime in Russia (as Kautsky has noted in his The Dictatorship of the Proletariat). It seemed to the tired populations of the belligerent countries that the Bolsheviks alone had pulled their country out of a destructive war and were setting about reconstructing their economy. The enthusiasm for the Russian cause spread also among intellectuals (Harold Laski's The Webbs and Soviet Communism, Sidney and Beatrice Webb's Soviet Communism: A New Civilization), and would only let up in 1956, after Khrushchev's

revelations about the Stalinist period.³³

A number of Western Sovietologists read back from their present perception of Soviet society as a totalitarian regime to the Stalinist era and further back to Soviet rule under Lenin, making no distinction between the three periods. Such scholars, who attribute all the ills of present day Soviet society to the dominance of the Party, naturally tend to interpret Lenin's emphasis on the Party as a departure from Marxism. Robert Daniels, for instance, argues in 'Leninism and the Russian Revolution' (The Nature of Communism),³⁴ that democratic centralism is a deviation from classical Marxism. Kilroy-Silk maintains that Lenin followed the voluntarist, insurrectionist Marx of the early period (Socialism Since Marx).³⁴ Marcel Liebman argues that the disintegration of

³³ A similar situation confronted Rosa Luxemburg whose differences with Lenin on party organization and democratic centralism went as far back as 1903, the year of the first split between the Menshevik and Bolshevik factions of the RSDLP. Luxemburg would soon break with the SPD and along with Karl Liebknecht, form the nucleus of the German Communist Party (KPD), and in 1917, support the October Revolution. But the area of disagreement with Lenin still remained. Luxemburg had all along objected to the emphasis placed on the Party and looked to the spontaneous growth of working class consciousness (The Russian Revolution, 1918). Whatever the merits of her arguments (and these are examined in Chapter 3), the fact remained that Luxemburg had not welded together a strong party such as the Bolshevik Party. Her outstanding moral stature and her great gifts as a Marxist theoretician did not compensate for a fundamental naiveté that distinguished her political career. As political activists both Luxemburg and Liebknecht were capable agitators, not leaders (see Sebastian Haffner's The Failure of a Revolution).

³⁴ Marcel Liebman, 'Lenin in 1905: A Revolution that Shook a Doctrine' in Lenin Today, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1970, pp. 57-75.

Robert Daniels, 'Leninism & the Russian Revolution', The Nature of Communism, pp. 18-29.

the revolutionary movement after 1907 caused Lenin to return to his own earlier authoritarian attitude to the Party, which he had temporarily abandoned during the 1905 revolution and the emergence of the soviets. Richard Pipes dates the emergence of an undemocratic philosophy in Lenin's thought from 1899.³⁵ Bertram Wolfe sees Lenin's concept of the Party as a travesty of Marx's and Engels' views on the subject.³⁶ These are some representative views that may be encountered in contemporary scholarship not an exhaustive summation of the literature on the subject. The point that must be noted, however, is that all these authors share a common aversion to what is perceived as the latent or potential authoritarianism in Lenin's political thought. In The Origins of the Communist Autocracy Leonard Schapiro takes a somewhat more sophisticated stand. He analyses the many factors that led to one Party rule in Russia: the Civil War, foreign intervention, the increasing political opposition to the Bolsheviks and the perceived threat of a repetition of chaos in Soviet Russia.³⁷

A variant of the argument that Lenin's concept of the Party is a departure from Marxian theory is the thesis that his Marxism was overlaid with a strong admixture of the influence of two great populists, Lavrov

³⁵ Richard Pipes, 'The Origins of Bolshevism: The Intellectual Evolution of Young Lenin', in Revolutionary Russia: A symposium, Doubleday Books, Garden City, 1969, pp. 26-52.

³⁶ Bertram Wolfe, 'Dictatorship of Class, Party, or Doctrine?' in Marxism 100 Years in the Life of a Doctrine, Dell Publications, New York, 1967.

³⁷ Leonard Schapiro, The Origin of the Communist Autocracy, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1956.

and Tkachev. Both stressed the need for a secret organization that would seize power and establish itself as the government of the new revolutionary state. This point of view is expressed in some detail in the studies by Darrell P. Hammer and Albert Weeks.³⁸ A. Walicki's The Controversy Over Capitalism: Studies in the Social Philosophy of the Populists is a scholarly refutation of such a connection between Lenin and the Russian Populists, the main point of difference being that the socio-economic base of the Russian populists was the petty bourgeoisie, while the Russian Marxists based themselves on the emerging industrial proletariat.³⁹

Although Lenin had most certainly read Lavrov, Tkachev and other populist writers, and although he deeply admired Chernyshevsky's What is to be Done?, and may even have pondered over the merits of a conspiratorial group of revolutionaries seizing power, the task that he himself set the Bolshevik Party was based on a different set of premises from those assumed by the Russian Populists. As we shall see later in this study, that task set itself the goal of bringing the industrial proletariat, the peasantry and the masses together in a common fight against the autocracy and joining forces with the bourgeois parties. Subsequently, this bourgeois revolution would be completed by the proletariat, in alliance with the peasantry, thus providing for a

³⁸ Darrell P. Hammer, 'The Dictatorship of the Proletariat' and Albert L. Weeks, 'Peter Tkachev: The Forerunner of Lenin', both articles in Lenin and Leninism, D.C. Heath & Co., Lexington, 1971, pp. 3-24.

³⁹ A. Walicki, The Controversy Over Capitalism: Studies in the Social Philosophy of the Populists, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1969, pp. 1-28.

transition to socialism. This two-stage theory of revolution has very little in common with either Russian Populism or French Blanquism.

One of Lenin's main contributions is the concept of the Party as the vanguard of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Its links with the Marxian theory of the Party will be examined later in this study.⁴⁰ It is enough to say here that the notion that the Social Democrats must be the most responsible, most conscious element of the proletariat, disciplined and well organized to lead an armed insurrection, was balanced by the equally weighty consideration that the objective conditions for the seizure of power must exist at any given time. The famous controversy over spontaneity versus consciousness (where he took issue with Rosa Luxemburg and which was first openly expressed in What is to be Done?, 1901, where Lenin emphasised the role of consciousness) was in reality a non-issue as far as Marxian theory is concerned. At no stage in his career did Marx maintain that the Party and the proletariat are identical. Marx distinguished between trade union consciousness and class consciousness, as did Lenin, who of course, would develop this point in greater detail, linking it to the role that the Party would play in relation to the proletariat. This may or may not be an 'elitist' point of view; what is under consideration is whether it can claim to be Marxian in its orientation.

By a process of elimination it becomes clear that what is controversial in the Marx-Lenin connection are: (1) the conquest of political

⁴⁰ See Chapter 3 of the present study.

power by the proletariat using non-parliamentary methods, and (2) the vanguard role of the Party. John Molyneaux's Marxism and the Party is an attempt by a contemporary scholar to elucidate and validate the central role of the Party,⁴¹ while Alan Gilbert's 'Salvaging Marx from Avineri' is a clear statement of the connection between Marxian theory and the seizure of power.⁴² Lucio Colletti's 'The Marxism of the Second International' is the most detailed analysis of the phenomenon of social democracy and its 'distortions' of Marxian revolutionary theory.⁴³ The question of the relationship between backwardness and revolutionary Marxism, has in recent years, occupied the attention of scholars.⁴⁴ In a perceptive study of Trotsky, Baruch Knei-Paz, has examined the way in which Trotsky attempted to understand the relationship of backwardness to a socialist revolution.⁴⁵ Althusser's remarkable analysis of Lenin's theory of the 'weak link' in the imperialist chain, represents the October Revolution as the dialectical outcome of the "accumulation and exacerbation of all the historical contradictions then possible in a

⁴¹ John Molyneaux, Marxism and the Party, Pluto Press, London, 1978.

⁴² Alan Gilbert, 'Salvaging Marx from Avineri', Political Theory, 1976

⁴³ Lucio Colletti, 'Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International' in From Rousseau to Lenin, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1972, pp. 45-108.

⁴⁴ Alexander Gerschenkron, (1) Continuity in History, and other essays, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1968; (2) Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective, a book of essays, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1962.

⁴⁵ Baruch Knei-Paz, The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978.

single State."⁴⁶ Althusser's interpretation takes place within the framework of his exposition of the role of Contradiction in Marx's philosophy. Its startling originality needs to be supplemented by an elucidation of the concept of Transition both in Marx's and in Lenin's thinking. The present study attempts to do just that, situating the dynamics of the Contradiction-Transition process in Lenin's early work The Development of Capitalism in Russia. This great and classic statement of the impact of capitalism on Russia (a country whose backwardness was well known to Lenin), takes place in the context of a dynamic awareness by Lenin of the dialectical movement of history. It is no exaggeration to say that this work can stand as a synthesis of both the Lukacsian and the Althusserian world views, views which have simultaneously enriched and burdened Marxism today. This is a document in the best tradition of Marxian revolutionary theory, encompassing as it does the concepts of Transition and Contradiction and indicating how and why a backward country such as Russia, is the weak and yet necessary link in the chain of world capitalism.

The present study also differs from the interpretation put forward by Neil Harding in his recent two-volume work, Lenin's Political Thought.⁴⁷ Harding introduces a distinction between the Lenin of the bourgeois democratic revolutionary stage and the Lenin of the socialist revolutionary stage (the period of imperialism). The purpose of this distinction is

⁴⁶ Louis Althusser, For Marx, Verso Edition, London, 1979, pp. 95-96. First published in French as Pour Marx, by Francois Maspero, 1965.

⁴⁷ Neil Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, op. cit.

emphasize the fact that prior to his analysis of imperialism in 1916 Lenin did not seriously envisage a seizure of power or endorse anything like a 'permanent revolution'. The distinction that Harding makes, is in my estimation, unnecessary, not only because as this study will make clear, Lenin did think in terms of the conquest of power by the proletariat early on in his career (although this became more pronounced only after the 1905 revolution) but also because a theoretical link can be established between the premises of permanent revolution and those of a theory of imperialism. And indeed, this link is what constitutes the enduring contribution of Marxian theory, and one which Lenin could appropriate as a unified whole. While it is true that Lenin wrote his Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism only in 1916, the situation described in that work had begun to take shape by the turn of the century, precisely at the period, when capitalism had begun to make inroads into the Russian economy and Russian Marxism began its long career. To put it more precisely: (1) there is a continuity of analysis between The Development of Capitalism in Russia (1896-1898) and Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism, and (2) politically, this means that the revolutionary process had tentatively begun by the turn of the century, behooving every serious and dedicated revolutionary to wait and prepare for the eventual overthrow of the ancien régime.

I shall now attempt to spell out the philosophical foundations of Lenin's revolutionary politics. Harding speaks of it as a kind of 'prescience' (the importance of the primacy of theory in Lenin's career

as a revolutionary).⁴⁸ Lukacs refers to 'theory breaking out into practice' and more significantly to the 'actuality of the revolution'.⁴⁹ In both phrases there is a common meaning, the dialectic. Lukacs's observation that the actuality of the revolution is the core of Lenin's thought and his decisive link with Marx is simply another way of saying that the dialectic is the central and decisive link between these two revolutionary thinkers.⁵⁰

What is the place of the revolution in the dialectic? For both Marx and Lenin, the dialectic was the objective movement of history, a process that took place through: (1) a transition from quantity to quality and vice versa, (2) the interpenetration of opposites, (3) and the negation of the negation. This is, of course, the meaning of Marx's observation in Das Kapital that in this work "... the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Harding, op. cit.

⁴⁹ Georg Lukacs, Lenin: A Study in the Unity of His Thought.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Karl Marx, Capital, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, vol. 1, p. 21. The literature on the relationship of the Marxian dialectic to the Hegelian is extensive. In the Marxist camp the two famous critiques of this relationship are offered by Althusser and Colletti in For Marx, op. cit., and From Rousseau to Lenin, op. cit., pp. 111-140, respectively. Both, from different perspectives, question the Hegelian origin of the Marxian dialectic, maintaining that what is new in Marx is not merely the Hegelian dialectic 'inverted' but a new production. I have followed the traditional interpretation: taking Marx at his word, that the Hegelian dialectic was standing on its head and had to be inverted.

The most distinguished recent account of the Hegelian dialectic is Hans-Georg Gadamer's Hegel's Dialectic, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1976. Originally published in German under the title Hegel's Dialectic, 1971 by J.C.B. Mohr.

Engels continued the exposition of the dialectic, both in nature and in human thought in Dialectics of Nature and Lenin took the enquiry further in Conspectus of Hegel's Logic.⁵² In this 'classical' tradition of Marxism, the Hegelian dialectic is seen as a correct account of the twin processes of human history and of nature, especially pertinent as descriptive of human thinking processes. The point that is relevant here is that the dialectic as a 'reflection' of what was going on in the external world, had important consequences for Marx's and Engels' materialist interpretation of history.

Both the periodisation of history (the succession of epochs, the communal, ancient, feudal and modern) and the movement of the period of capitalism (which was the immediate object of Marx's study) were seen as expressing dialectical movement. In evaluating Das Kapital, Lenin makes the interesting observation that although Marx had not left a Logic behind him, he had left the Logic of Capital.⁵³ The significance of this observation is precisely this: in Das Kapital there is simultaneously the use of the dialectic as a method of analysing a given reality, here the capitalist mode of production, as well as the use of the dialectic as a 'reflection' of a changing reality, the phenomenon that Engels referred

The most lucid account of the similarities and the differences between the two dialectics is in Martin Nicolaus' Foreword to his translation of the Grundrisse, Karl Marx, Grundrisse, Vintage Books, New York, 1973, pp. 26-44.

⁵² Frederick Engels, Dialectics of Nature, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1974 and V.I. Lenin, 'Conspectus of Hegel's Logic', Collected Works, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1961, vol. 38.

⁵³ V.I. Lenin, 'Conspectus of Hegel's Logic', op. cit., p. 317.

to as the phenomenon of arising and passing away. The same can be said of Lenin's The Development of Capitalism in Russia. The movement that this work seeks to reflect is the transition from feudalism to capitalism and thence to socialism. The 'actuality' of the revolution, then, is not something conjured up by the feverish imagination of a revolutionary, but the necessity of the historical process, the necessity to be interpreted dialectically and not mechanically. Hence the appearance of the working class in Russia, which will overthrow capitalism, is the major contradiction of capitalism, despite the difference of this capitalist formation from its European counterpart. The concept of 'uneven development' that Lenin formulated to cover all of the determinations of this phenomenon (backwardness, intense concentration of the working class in given centres, etc.) is continuous with the dialectical periodisation of history.

One of the most difficult concepts of Marxian theory (and of Lenin's) is the role of the historical agent of revolution, the proletariat. If the revolution is not only a change in the production, but also the transfer of power from one class to the other, it is still possible for this change to take place in a deterministic inevitable manner; this was precisely how the Marxists of the Second International interpreted revolutionary change. In this study I shall argue that this model of change does not correspond with the concept of the 'actuality' of the revolution either as Marx or Lenin understood it. Only the concept of the 'permanence of the revolution' provides the necessary correspondence. The seizure of power by the historical agent is in a sense both premature and yet necessary. In the 'Conspectus of Hegel's

Logic' Lenin jots down approvingly a passage from Hegel's Encyclopedia:

Whether a thing is possible or impossible depends on the content, i.e., on the sum-total of the moments of Actuality which in its unfolding discloses itself to be Necessity.⁵⁴

In the total context of a world historical process (which Lenin quite obviously thought was a genuine event), in this case, the onset of capitalism in Russia, the historical agent's readiness for the assumption of power, could not be directly correlated to its numerical strength, but to its objective position in the revolutionary scheme.

The specific determinants of a historical process are to be sought out; these, however, cannot be reduced to a single schema of world development. Consequently, neither the existence of a concentrated proletariat or a highly self-conscious Social Democratic Party could overstep the limit of a large rural population in Russia; this was the limit of capitalism's progress in Russia and one which would play an unexpected role in the revolution.

Although a very real limit, it contained its own highly differentiated distinctions: hence it was not just the 'peasantry', but, as Lenin points out consistently throughout his career, it is also the poor peasantry, the middle peasantry and the rich peasantry, which would relate to the revolutionary process in different ways and at different times. The 1905 revolution in Russia, although primarily a movement initiated by the working class in the capitals (through the soviets), had

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 157.

been preceded by a series of peasant disturbances, these events reflecting quite exactly, the contradictory relationship in which the peasantry stood in relation to both feudalism and emergent capitalism and as Marx had indicated in The Class Struggles in France and as Lenin would explicate in his The Development of Capitalism in Russia, this would signal the beginning of an alliance between the peasantry and the proletariat.

The First World War which Lenin saw as directly related to world-imperialism, represented the gathering of forces which had been ripening since the advent of capitalism in Russia. In Russia, the relationship between capitalism and imperialism was expressed by a double process: (1) the inter-imperialist rivalry between Russia and the other imperialist states, (2) the reproduction of backwardness and uneven development within Russia. This process took place in Russia, long before the theoretical studies of imperialism by either Bukharin or Lenin and at that period Lenin could express it (as indeed even Marx could) only within the framework of the permanent revolution; this framework, resting as it did, on the dialectical interpretation of the 'actuality' of the revolution.

I have spent some time on the implications of the dialectic for a reasonable understanding of the disparate elements that went into historical materialism and which provide a unifying perspective to both Marx's and Lenin's political theory. As I have said earlier, the materialist dimension is quite clear in the link-up between the social and the political revolutions. Nevertheless, as has happened in the studies of this subject there is a pronounced tendency to treat the

problem as if it were a question of two revolutions, the social and the political, when in fact it is one revolution, the proletarian revolution (I shall examine this problem in Chapter 1 of this study). This missing connection, therefore, is the dialectic, viewed not as an abstraction, hovering over the historical process, but as immanent in it, and capable of comprehension by the human mind, whenever it is thinking dialectically. The interplay between structures, between the social and the political structures, acquires its urgency and its temporality, in the periodisation of history, thus explaining why it is a proletarian revolution that both Marx and Lenin were speaking of, rather than any other type of revolution.

In Chapter 1, I shall examine the connection between the social and political revolutions in Marx's thought. Chapter 2 will study Lenin's early life as a revolutionary and as member of the RSDLP, paying special attention to The Development of Capitalism in Russia, which I believe adumbrates virtually all of the themes of Lenin's later thought. Chapter 3 deals with a sensitive issue, 'Lenin and the Party'. I have examined here: (1) the historical background of Lenin's association with the RSDLP, (2) Lenin's theory of the significance of revolutionary political consciousness as expressed in What is to be Done?, and, (3) George Lukacs' philosophical explanatory schema for the political practice outlined in What is to be Done?. I have singled out Lukacs as he appears to be the only Marxist thinker who has attempted to meet the problem of the 'revolutionary subject' head on and has produced an interesting synthesis of Hegelian philosophy and Leninist political theory.

In Chapter 4, I examine the significance of Lenin's strategy for a peasant-proletarian alliance for the possibilities of 'uninterrupted revolution'. This chapter will also focus on: (1) the 1905 Revolution, (2) the analysis of imperialism, especially in relation to the First World War and as continuing the essential interpretative schema of the permanent revolution. Chapter 5 will present the central theme of political revolution, now seen by Lenin in The State and Revolution, as the culmination of a long historical process, but also pointing to new tasks.

CHAPTER 1

ONE REVOLUTION, TWO QUESTIONS

The materialist interpretation of history that Marx and Engels offered in The German Ideology effectively explains their view of revolution as a change in the mode of production of a society and the transfer of power from one class to another. In specifying the proletariat as the rising class, who would both be the agent of revolution and its immediate beneficiary, the two authors invoked the principle of the periodisation of history, in the same work, The German Ideology. While the first explanatory principle, the materialist interpretation of history, could be seen as a straightforward 'scientific' explanation (the observation of historical facts and generalisations thereof), the second principle rests on a philosophy of history, that is clearly Hegelian in origin, though not identical with it. The unique synthesis of these two, the materialist interpretation of history and the periodisation of history, is the Marxian dialectic, without which, the link between the social and the political revolutions, as well as the role of the historical agent, remain incomprehensible. One result of this failure to make the Marxian dialectic the nodal point of Marxian theory is that scholars and commentators focus narrowly on either the question of the 'social revolution' or on the 'political revolution', thus generating the impression that we are dealing with two revolutions, when, in fact, it is one revolution, the proletarian

revolution.¹

In attempting to examine the unitary process of the proletarian revolution, as both an historical and a structural change in Marx's presentation of it, I shall begin with an exposition of the materialist interpretation of history and the periodisation of history, and then look for their synthesis in the Marxian dialectic, thus providing the unifying link between the social and the political revolutions. This synthesis, however, remained an abstraction until the experiences of the 1848 revolutions in Germany and France, after which the permanence of the revolution became the concrete mode of expression for a world historical process.

The Materialist Interpretation of History and The Periodisation of It

In The German Ideology Marx and Engels state the first premise of their new materialism as follows:

... men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their material life... This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather, it is a definite form of activity of these

¹ For example, the erudite exposition of William Shaw, in his Marx's Theory of History, Hutchison & Co., London, 1978, presents the 'social revolution' via the change in the mode of production but omits the question of the political conquest of power by the proletariat, although the proletariat is seen as the agent of a slow, evolutionary change. There are some oblique references to the political revolution (see p. 111 of his study).

individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part.²

The significant themes here are: (1) human beings produce their means of subsistence and this act distinguishes them from the other species, and (2) this mode of production is a way of expressing their life. As it stands, however, the passage suggests that the activity of individuals in production is scattered and has no reference points other than isolated individuals. The first premise then has to be supplemented by a second proposition: these individuals can produce only if they enter into definite social relationships or relations of production.³

Human beings cannot produce unless they co-operate with each other; primitive man realized that he had no other alternative and hence entered into a voluntary association with his fellow beings. But, as the means of production developed, and proliferated, there arose a special social

To take a second representative example, G.A. Cohen's Karl - Marx's Theory of History, A Defence, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1978, mentions the class struggle eleven times, but only in the context of the development of productive forces. There is no mention of the political conquest of power by the proletariat.

Notable exceptions are the works by Sherman Chang and M. Bober: The Marxian Theory of the State, Russell & Russell, New York, 1931, and Karl Marx's Interpretation of History, W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., New York, 1948 respectively. More recently, Alan Gilbert's 'Salvaging Marx from Avineri', Political Theory, vol. 4, No. 1, February 1976, pp. 9-34, is a serious discussion of the political revolution. M. Barbalet's Marx's Construction of Social Theory, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Boston, 1983, despite its title, is a conscientious attempt to relate the political revolution to Marxian social theory. Its theoretical presuppositions, though, are somewhat different from those of the present study.

² Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, Collected Works, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, vol. 5, p. 31.

³ Ibid., p. 35.

arrangement, the division of labour: first, the simple division of labour within the family, and then its extension into several families gathered in a tribe. The simple division of labour (that is, of purely physical labour) changed into the division of labour between mental and material work (priests and scholars devoting themselves to mental work in civilised communities). The division of labour introduced the first great change in the economy; products were now exchanged and this in turn gave rise to the practice of confining individuals to the labour involved in producing one or more of the items required by the community.⁴

It is at this stage of the division of labour that relations of production are no longer voluntary association, but a compulsory requirement. Once certain individuals accumulated wealth, first in the form of immovable property (land), then movable property (slaves and the means of production) labour was no longer either a voluntary co-operation or a compulsory requirement (imposed by the community) but 'alienated labour' imposed by the requirements of the exchange economy, a process that reaches its furthest expansion in capitalist production.

Productive forces (Produktivkraefte) include things found in nature, the means of production devised by human beings (implements, tools, etc.) and human labour. In this sense, productive forces represent creativity and activity, rather than 'technology' in its pejorative sense. G.A. Cohen has pointed out that "Once we notice that the development of the forces is centrally an enrichment of human labour, the emphasis on

⁴ Ibid., pp. 46-48.

technology loses its dehumanising appearance."⁵ Richard Miller tends to use the phrase 'productive powers' rather than productive forces, since the former is less technology ridden.⁶ Certainly this would accord with the weight and meaning that Marx and Engels attached to the term 'Produktivkraefte'. They are also careful to point out that the productive forces are also accumulated from the past, both in accumulated goods as well as in accumulated instruments of production.

The ensemble of productive forces and the relations of production is called the 'mode of production'. The revolution or the change in the mode of production has been interpreted to mean that productive forces outstrip relations of production in a purely mechanical fashion, as happened in the evolutionary socialism of Bernstein. This interpretation already rested on a restricted understanding of Produktivkraefte, or to put it more strongly, on "a vulgar and naive conception of the economy."⁷ Lucio Colletti has analysed the problem very accurately:

The so-called 'economic sphere' - which in Marx had embraced both the production of things and the production (objectification) of ideas; production and intersubjective communication; material production and the production of social relations (for Marx, the relation between man and nature was also a relationship between man and man, and

⁵ G.A. Cohen, Karl Marx's Theory of History, A Defence, op. cit.

⁶ See his article 'Producing change: work, technology, and power in Marx's theory of history' in After Marx, ed. Terence Ball & James Farr, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984, pp. 59-86.

⁷ Lucio Colletti, 'Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International' in From Rousseau to Lenin, New Left Books, New York, 1972, p. 63.

vice versa) - was now seen as one isolated factor, separated from the other 'moment' and thereby emptied of any effective socio-historical content, representing on the contrary, an antecedent sphere, prior to any human mediation.⁸

The Marxism of the Second International had resulted in the "divorce of 'production' and 'society', of 'materialism' and history, the separation of man's relation with nature from the simultaneous relations between men."⁹

A given mode of production in society is up to a point determined by the level of productive forces; but it is also artificially given a prolonged lease on life by the existing political institutions. Thus, historically, with the rise of private property, and the division of society into propertied and propertyless classes, political institutions have functioned as coercive agents that compelled the population to consent to the given mode of production. In The German Ideology Marx and Engels also point to the importance of ideology and culture in securing the consent of the ruled, and in generating a false consciousness in the ruling class:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., p. 65.

⁹ Lucio Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin, op. cit., p. 66.

¹⁰ The double role of false consciousness is explored by Georg Lukacs, in his History and Class Consciousness, Collected Works, op.cit., vol. 5, p. 59. Lukacs connects the generation of

The word 'overthrow' is used for the first time in The German Ideology in an overtly political sense when Marx and Engels observe:

... it follows that every class which is aiming at domination, even when its domination, as is the case with the proletariat, leads to the abolition of the old form of society in its entirety and of domination in general, must first conquer political power in order to represent its interest in turn as the general interest, which in the first moment it is forced to do.¹¹

The link between the change in the mode of production and the change in political institutions is the class struggle. The centrality of this concept is to be inferred from the pages of The German Ideology, rather than derived directly from its arguments. The direct statement occurs only a year later in The Class Struggles in France. The periodisation of history, again as a direct statement, obscures the centrality of the class struggle. If the mode of production, the communal, feudal, and bourgeois, are to succeed each other, the question arises as to why the

false consciousness directly to the labour process under private property relations, where owing to the alienation of a worker from the product of his labour, he experiences 'reification', the condition when a relation between subjects takes on a thing-like quality. Louis Althusser goes into the question of ideological control (therefore the subjective factor) in the cultural and political institutions of capitalism (For Karl Marx, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, England, 1969; first published in France, 1966).

Lukacs' arguments, as is well known, take up the theme of the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 (unknown to Lukacs in 1922, when he wrote History and Class Consciousness), although Andrew Feenberg has recently argued in Lukacs, Marx and the Sources of Critical Theory, M. Robertson, Oxford, 1981, pp. 61-62, that the chapter on fetishism in Das Kapital is the closer model for the Lukacsian schema, p.

¹¹ Collected Works, op.cit., vol. 5, p. 47.

succession of stages occurs in this particular sequence. Even were the scheme to be described as evolutionary, the presumption is that if and when the relations of production acted as fetters to the productive forces (themselves described by Marx and Engels as comprising both objective and subjective factors)¹² the movement to the new stage could occur in one of many ways and yet be described as 'higher' or evolutionary.

Of course, one could argue that in an evolutionary scheme, whatever was later, was the higher and the better and this would signify organisms with fewer and fewer physical flaws. Yet, deeply influenced though Marx was by nineteenth century science, the meaning that he attached to 'later' was profoundly Hegelian in its implications. History, for Hegel, was the unfolding of the Absolute Idea, towards making its own potentiality for freedom, an actuality. Freedom, again, was defined as the act of self-consciousness, the process by which Spirit, through a long sojourn in differentiation, returned to its undivided unity.¹³ Marx rejected the theological implications of the Absolute Idea, but retained the goal of history, as being the attainment of freedom for human beings, and the dialectical method of Hegel, the latter also being an ontological statement about reality.

¹² "It follows from this that a certain mode of production, or industrial stage, is always combined with a certain mode of co-operation, or social stage, and this mode of co-operation is itself a "productive force." Ibid., p. 31.

¹³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, The Philosophy of History, Dover Publications, New York, 1956, (republishing of the translation by J. Sibree, 1899, The Colonial Press).

The class struggle, then, is simultaneously a movement towards a specific goal, the attainment of freedom as the untrammelled and creative expression of an individual's powers (The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844) and an expression of the objective movement of socio-economic forces, going through a certain sequence or pattern. (This sequence was clearly derived from Hegel's Science of Logic: the transition from quality to quantity and vice versa, the inter-penetration of opposites, the negation of the negation.) That Marx meant both the attainment of freedom and the objective movement of history as an explanation of the class struggle is evidenced by the innumerable references to the self-activity of individuals in The German Ideology.¹⁴ There is also the brief and tantalising reference to communist consciousness, both in the proletariat as a class and among other classes:

In the development of productive forces there comes a stage when productive forces and means of intercourse are brought into being, which, under the existing relationships, only cause mischief, and are no longer productive but destructive forces (machinery and money); and connected with this a class is called forth, which has to bear all the burdens of society without enjoying its advantages, which, ousted from society, is forced into the most decided antagonism to all other classes; a class which forms the majority of all members of society, and from which emanates the consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution, the communist consciousness, which may, of course, arise among the other classes too through the contemplation of the situation of this

¹⁴ The theme of self-activity is first announced in Marx's doctoral dissertation, 'The Difference Between The Democritian and Epicurean Philosophy'. See Norman Livergood's Activity in Marx's Philosophy, Martin Nijhoff, The Hague, 1967.

class.¹⁵

That a class could come to consciousness, through the contemplation of another class's situation is an unusual statement that would have far reaching consequences (the theme of political consciousness in Lenin's What is to be Done and the distinction between psychological consciousness and imputed consciousness in Lukacs' History and Class Consciousness).¹⁶ More immediately, it would seem to contradict what is commonly interpreted as Marx's materialism and reinforced by many references in The German Ideology to the fact that the material circumstances that human beings find themselves in are beyond their conscious control. There is also the famous statement in the Preface to A Contribution To The Critique of Political Economy: "...in the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations which are independent of their will."¹⁷

In the context of Marx's overall thinking on the subject, the 'independence' in question is quite clearly a relative one. In The German Ideology, the themes of self-activity and the transforming role of labour, lend overwhelming importance to the subjective role of individuals in society. The theory of the permanent revolution adumbrated in The Class Struggles in France is in the tradition of that

¹⁵ Collected Works, op.cit., vol. 5, p. 40.

¹⁶ I have dealt with this question in Chapter 3 of the present study.

¹⁷ Karl Marx, A Contribution To The Critique of Political Economy, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 20.

particular strand in Marx's thinking. The relationship of class to individuals as well as the class struggle is only hinted at, as it were; there is only one direct reference in The German Ideology:

Competition separates individuals from one another, not only the bourgeoisie but still more the workers, in spite of the fact that it brings them together. Hence it is a long time before these individuals can unite, apart from the fact that for the purpose of this union - if it is not to be merely local - the necessary means, the great industrial cities and cheap and quick communications, have first to be produced by big industry.¹⁸

The importance of this passage is that it underlines the positive and negative aspects of bourgeois competition: it both separates and unites. The implication here is that 'class' is both a positive and a negative factor. As an expression of the dialectic this is not surprising. In A Contribution To The Critique of Political Economy Marx had called the bourgeois mode of production the "last antagonistic form of the social process of production."¹⁹ However, it is not 'antagonistic' relations alone that constitute a Contradiction.²⁰

Private property is a Contradiction in the dialectical process of history, reaching its apogee in bourgeois private property, whose most

¹⁸ Collected Works, op.cit., vol. 5, p. 63.

¹⁹ A Contribution, op.cit., p. 21.

²⁰ The most famous analysis of the distinction between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradiction is Mao Tse-Tung's On Contradiction in Four Essays in Philosophy, Peking, Foreign Language Press, 1966, pp. 23-71.

positive feature is the emergence of the proletariat as a class.²¹ Marx has been criticised for not providing an adequate definition of class.²² The criticism, however, is somewhat off the mark, since the concept of class is not only a sociological concept, but a 'moment' of the dialectic. These (moments) may be specified as Transitions and Contradictions²³ and can be better understood within the context of the materialist dialectic if we retrace our steps and see precisely how the historical and the structural interact in a dialectical unity in The German Ideology.

If by Contradiction one means a process in which two opposites interact and through this interaction move to a resolution at a higher

²¹ Marx's interest in property relations began with his journalistic career as editor of the Rheinische Zeitung in 1843. See his articles on the Law of Thefts of Wood and the condition of the vine-growers of Mosel in Collected Works, op.cit., vol. 1, pp. 224-263. In his Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right Marx observes that "the political constitution at its highest point is therefore the constitution of private property." (Collected Works, op.cit., vol. 3, p. 98).

For the early references to the 'proletariat' and their significance see the analysis provided in Joseph O'Malley's introduction to his translation of Marx's first Critique. O'Malley points out that Marx took seriously the Hegelian concept of a universal class, with the difference that while Hegel conferred this status on the bureaucracy, Marx, would, in the next few months, name the universal class, the proletariat. Joseph O'Malley, Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, ed., University Press, Cambridge, 1972, Introduction, p. liv.

²² For an interesting discussion of this question see Stanislaw Ossowski, 'Marx's Concept of Class' in Bottomore and Good, Readings in Marxist Sociology, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1983, pp. 99-102.

²³ The best account of the difference between the Hegelian and the Marxian dialectic is to be found in Martin Nicolaus' Foreword to his translation of the Grundrisse, Karl Marx, Grundrisse, Vintage Books, New York, 1973, pp. 26-44.

level, the first Contradiction that one encounters in The German Ideology is that between the forces of production (specified as instruments of production) and relations of production (specified here as private property relations). In trying to give a specific content to this contradictory relationship the following picture emerges. The instruments of production are part of the productive forces of society. Private ownership of these instruments is a relation of production between individuals in society, a relationship both of interdependence and independence. When in primitive society, man interacted with nature to produce his means of subsistence, he found in nature the instruments of production (field, water, etc.). These are the natural instruments of production, to be distinguished from those created by civilisation. The German Ideology points out that the difference between landed property and capital (crucial to the transition from feudalism to capitalism) originates in the difference between natural and civilised instruments of production.²⁴

While with landed property there is a bond between individuals united in a family tribe etc., with the evolution of instruments of production, the social tie was one of exchange and independence and a material form of community: money. Private property relations, then, are a contradiction brought about by the transition from the natural to the civilised stage of the means of production. The resolution of this contradiction is the abolition of private property. The contradiction

²⁴ Collected Works, op.cit., vol. 5, p. 63.

reaches its highest point (before its transition) only in the period of big industry.²⁵ This dialectical flashpoint would be the guide to Lenin's own interpretation of the revolutionary process in Russia.

The contradiction has a long lease on life as it were, during which it goes through phases of transition and transformation. The division of labour which resulted from the transition from natural to civilised means of production reinforced private property relations and gave rise to the two great classes in history: the propertied and the propertyless.²⁶ The natural division of labour within the family changed to that between mental and material labour, performed by distinct classes of people, then spread out into a further opposition between town and country, then the nation and the world. The account of the rise of bourgeois private property up to the period of manufacture (separation of capital from landed property, the separation of production and commerce, the rise of the merchant class, the linkage between towns, the rise of craft guilds, etc.) has an inexorable and hypnotic quality to it. This has misled readers into interpreting history as a law-governed natural process not subject to active human intervention.

Marx himself intended this account to be read alongside of or in conjunction with the actualities of the class struggle of the proletariat which would result in the overthrow of the political institutions of bourgeois capitalism and the beginning of the socialist transformation of society, an enterprise which was possible with the rise of big industry.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 63-64.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 64.

As yet, in The German Ideology, as well as in the Communist Manifesto, revolution was envisaged only as a possibility. Until the objective circumstances of the 1848 revolutions in France and Germany had made themselves felt, that possibility could not turn into an actuality. Despite the failure of the 1848 revolutions, Marx's analysis of the events is of value, both because it provides us with an example of a contemporary class struggle and because the theory of the permanent revolution was stated first in this period.

Among other things that theory required: (1) that the revolution would be proletarian, supported by the peasantry and the radical elements in society; (2) that it would lead to the abolition of private property; and (3), that it would change the mode of production. Although the revolutions in France and Germany failed, there is no evidence that in subsequent years Marx changed his mind about his own analysis of the events.²⁷ In The Class Struggles in France, written some two years after the events (1850) Marx expressly points out in a brief prefatory note the following:

What succumbed in these defeats was not the revolution. It was the pre-revolutionary traditional appendages, results of social relationships which had not yet come to the point of sharp class antagonisms-persons, illusions, conceptions, projects from which the revolutionary party before the February Revolution was not free, from which it could be freed not by the victory of February, but only by a series of defeats.

²⁷ In his 1895 Introduction to a republication of The Class Struggles in France, Engels takes a more cautious stand. See Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, Selected Works, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, vol. 1, p. 189.

In a word: the revolution made progress, forged ahead, not by its immediate tragicomic achievements, but on the contrary by the creation of a powerful, united counter-revolution, by the creation of an opponent in combat with whom, only, the party of overthrow ripened into a really revolutionary party.

To prove this is the task of the following pages.²⁸

As stated earlier in this chapter the revolution would be a reflection of an objective historical process; it was also guided by the goal or aim of the historical movement, in this case, freedom, whose material basis was spelled out in The German Ideology. That Marx subsequently devoted his attention to the movement of the historical process and to the analysis of the laws of motion of capital, does not mitigate the need to keep the primary goal of revolution in view; that Lenin was able to keep this goal constantly in mind, even while writing a theoretical work such as The Development of Capitalism in Russia was a sign of Lenin's revolutionary genius, as we shall see in the succeeding chapters. The two overarching ideas of the permanent revolution as expressed in The Class Struggles in France are: (1) the ultimate goal of the revolution being achieved through the change in the mode of production (the material basis of freedom), and (2), the class struggle as a reflection of an historical movement.

The 1848 Revolutions in France, Germany, Austria and Italy were unique in that they saw the proletariat as a class using insurrectionary methods to demand a 'social republic'. In France, on February 24, 1848,

²⁸ Ibid., p. 205.

Louis Philippe was overthrown and a republic was established. In Germany, specifically in Prussia, the monarchy was not overthrown but a liberal government came to power briefly, while in Poland and Italy, the proletariat helped to drive out temporarily the despots of Austria and Hungary who ruled these countries. The revolutions were eventually defeated: June 1848 in Paris, October 1848 in Vienna, followed by the defeat in Germany. Marx and Engels were active participants in the German situation, since during the crises there, they founded the journal Neue Rheinische Zeitung which often took the lead in observing and commenting upon the events of the revolution. They were assisted by members of the Communist League which had been formed in 1847 and some of these individuals would subsequently be brought to trial. In 1849 Marx was expelled from Germany and Engels escaped to Switzerland.²⁹

The events in Germany were subsequently analysed by Marx in a series of articles that he wrote for the New York Tribune between September 1851 and December 1852. These articles were edited and printed in one volume by Eleanor Marx as Revolution and Counter-Revolution (1896) and along with the articles of the Neue Rheinische Zeitung constitute the chief

²⁹ That Marx and Engels, along with the Communist League played a not negligible role in Cologne, Germany, is the accepted view of most scholars. See Veit Valentin, 1848, Chapters of German History, tr. by Ethel Talbot Scheffaner, London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1965, Köppel S. Pinson comments thus: "The social protest of a more organised industrial proletariat found its outlet in the Rhineland, especially in Cologne, and in Berlin. Here the direct influence of Marx and Engels was of paramount importance." Modern Germany, Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., New York, 1966, p. 85. For an opposite point of view, see P.H. Noyes, Organisation and Revolution (Working-Class Associations in the German Revolution of 1848-1849), Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1966, p. 64.

source of our information on Marx's views of the German Revolution.³⁰ They are less well known than The Class Struggles in France but are of interest to the present study since the theory of permanent revolution took shape at this period of Marx's reflections on Germany and continued to be developed in his analysis of the French revolution of 1848, even though, the situation in France was signally different than that of Germany. This point has been overlooked even by such astute scholars as George Lichtheim, who merely content themselves with pointing out how the theory of the permanent revolution was eminently suited to the backward conditions obtaining in Germany.³¹

The Revolution in Germany

In 1848, the thirty-eight states that comprised the German Federation are described as standing on the threshold of the Industrial Revolution.³² A predominantly agricultural economy and a guild system made Germany "in many ways and in many places less vigorous than it had been in the days of Durer and Holbein."³³ The transition from the medieval agrarian system (a manorial type) to that of large estates producing corn for export took place in the 16th century and contributed

³⁰ Karl Marx, Revolution and Counter Revolution, ed. Eleanor Marx Aveling Capricorn Books Edition, New York, 1971 and Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, Selected Works, vol. 1, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977.

³¹ George Lichtheim, Marxism, An Historical And Critical Study, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1961, 1964, pp. 122-129.

³² Noyes, op.cit., p. 15.

³³ J.H. Clapham, The Economic Development of France and Germany, 1815-1914, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1921, 1968, pp. 82-103.

to the rise of the powerful landowning class of Junkers.³⁴ The freeing of the serfs, the break up of the guild system, the campaign for internal free trade and the foundations of a Customs Union, the Zollverein, transformed the old system. Industries began to appear slowly, in the Rhineland, in Saxony and in Silesia and around Berlin, by the 1830s. By 1848, there did exist in Germany a "working class".³⁵

The composition of this working class was mainly artisan and cannot be described as an 'industrial proletariat': master craftsmen, journeymen, skilled tradesmen, casual day labourers, and a miniscule number of factory workers (machine builders). Between 1800 and 1850 the population of the 38 states that comprised Germany had grown from 23 million to 35 million (a growth of 50%). However, the mass of the population was still overwhelmingly rural, though as has been pointed out, the rural situation was far from static.³⁶ Improvements in agricultural techniques (deep plowing, the planting of a variety of crops and the use of artificial fertilisers) had raised the productivity of German agriculture. By 1848 labour dues were abolished. A class, which may be called the 'agricultural proletariat', came into being in the countryside. In the villages the decline of home industries such as weaving and spinning and the condition of the landless peasants, created unemployment. Peasants went in search of jobs to the towns. The growth

³⁴ F.L. Carsten, Essays in German History, The Hambledon Press, London, 1985, p. 17. This work contains a scholarly account of the origins of the Junkers, pp. 17-50.

³⁵ Noyes, op.cit., p. 15.

³⁶ ibid., pp. 18-19.

of the towns is an important feature of the period: Berlin, Hamburg, Breslau, Munich, Dresden, Königsberg, and Cologne, are some examples.³⁷

By 1848 there were the beginnings of industry, although such industries as mining, were carried out in rural areas by peasants.³⁸ Manufacturing was carried on by master craftsmen in small workshops. The factory workers comprised only 12% of the working population, while the independent handicraft workers made up 33%.³⁹ The condition of the working class in Germany was unenviable. Long hours, low wages and abject poverty characterised their existence.⁴⁰

The first open revolt of the German working class took place in 1844, when the weavers of Silesia led off a rebellion that was joined by masons, carpenters and other artisans. A series of strikes were set off in Berlin among the workers in calico factories and on the new railroads. These uprisings were suppressed but they signalled the beginning of a new era. There had been some outbreaks in the 1790s as the result of the French Revolution of 1789; but the influence of that event was felt first among the intellectuals of Germany, just as the impact of French

³⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁸ Clapham, op.cit., p. 92.

³⁹ Noyes, op.cit., p. 21.

⁴⁰ C. Edmund Maurice gives a graphic account of the situation in his The Revolutionary Movement of 1848-9 in Italy, Austria-Hungary and Germany, Greenwood Press, New York, 1969. First published in London in 1887. Maurice narrates the story of a working class widow who served up the cooked body of her dead starving child to the remaining children. In the Preface, the author tells us that "for the German part of the Revolution, I have received much help from the kind loan of the Neue Rheinische Zeitung by the late Dr. Karl Marx.", p. vii, Preface.

socialism created a ferment among the intellectuals of Marx's youth.⁴¹ Along with interest in the writings of Proudhon, Considerant, Saint Simon, Owen and Fourier, there was amongst the middle classes in Germany a longing for national unification and political reform. The accession of Frederick William IV to the throne in Prussia in 1840 intensified the aspirations of the liberal bourgeoisie, who hoped that the absolutist monarchy would concede a constitution.

Both the national question and the social question agitated the minds of the middle class. In 1842, a group of liberal businessmen started the publication of the Rheinische Zeitung with Marx as the editor. It was during this period of his editorship that Marx came to an understanding of the social question, especially property relations. His writings in the Rheinische Zeitung comment on the Rhine Province Assembly debates (which he attended) on social and economic questions. On the one

⁴¹ George Peabody Gooch's Germany and the French Revolution, Russell & Russell, Inc., New York, 1966 (2nd edition) contains an interesting chapter on the influence of the French Revolution on Goethe, Schiller, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, pp. 174-207, pp. 208-229, 260-282, 283-302, respectively. R.R. Palmer argues that there was an ambivalence in Germany towards the French Revolution: "The Germans neither rejected revolution in the abstract, nor accepted it in its actual manifestations. nothing was more characteristic, in Germany before 1800, than to continue to hail the principles and goals of the French Revolution with enthusiasm, and to believe that in French hands, thanks to French faults these principles had miscarried." See R.R. Palmer, The Age of the Democratic Revolution. A Political History of Europe and America 1760-1800, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1964, vol. 2, p. 425.

Walter Grab examines the phenomenon of German Jacobinism in his, 'The Revolutionary Propaganda of the German Jacobins, 1792-93' in Karl-Georg Faber, Wolfgang Mommsen, and Walter Grab, Three Lectures in Modern German History, Council on International Studies, State University of New York at Buffalo, Special Studies No. 75, Feb., 1976, pp. 48-76.

hand he encountered the repressive nature of the Prussian state in its censorship laws,⁴² and on the other hand the debates on the Law on the Thefts of Wood convinced him of the discrepancy between the professed social aims of the Legislative Assembly and its actual indifference to the plight of the poor citizens of the province.⁴³ In January 1843 Marx made an explicit connection between the private interests of the legislators, and the repressive legislation that affected the vine growers of Mosel.⁴⁴

In the period between 1843-46 two other influential journals appeared, the Gesellschafts Spiegel, edited by Moses Hess at Elberfeld, and Westfälische Dampfboot, ed. by Otto Luning & Karl Grün at Bielefeld. F. Engels' The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844 was published in Leipzig in 1845. Lorenz von Stein's Socialism and Communism in Contemporary France had already appeared (1842), and was

⁴² Collected Works, op.cit., vol. 1, pp. 109-131.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 224-263.

⁴⁴ It was at this time that Marx felt that a thoroughgoing critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right was an urgent task, since in that work Hegel had apotheosised existing state institutions as the embodiment of the ethical Idea. A year earlier, at the beginning of 1842, Marx had written to Arnold Ruge informing the latter that he intended to undertake a critique of Hegel's legal and political ideas (see Collected Works, vol. 1, p. 382). With the experience of the Rheinische Zeitung period behind him, Marx read Philosophy of Right with the basic aim of demonstrating that the principle of mediation that Hegel put forward as effectively reconciling the public and private spheres of society (state and civil society respectively) was, in fact, a false universality (Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 3-129). The long, complex commentary on Hegel climaxes with the statement that "the political constitution at its highest point is therefore the constitution of private property." (Ibid., vol. 3, p. 98.)

supposed to have been a "spectacular success".⁴⁵ (I shall return to the question of Stein's influence on Marx.) The writings of Saint Simon, Considerant, Proudhon, Leroux, Owen and Fourier (all the Utopian Socialists) were available to the young Hegelians, those whom Marx would shortly deride as True Socialists (in The German Ideology).

The influence of the great Utopian socialists percolated down to self-taught working class individuals such as Wilhelm Weitling, a tailor by profession and Stephan Born, an acquaintance of Marx.⁴⁶ Along with the true socialists whom Marx criticised in The German Ideology and his critique of Proudhon in The Poverty of Philosophy, Marx had to struggle briefly with Weitling (who professed a type of Christian Communism) for leadership of the German workers' groups. In this task the Communist League (founded in 1847, including former members of the League of the Just, an organisation in France composed mainly of German immigrant artisans) supported Marx. Communist study groups were established in Berlin and in other major cities.⁴⁷

The best account of Germany on the eve of the 1848 revolution is given by Marx in his articles written for The New York Tribune. This is worth looking at in some detail:

⁴⁵ Kaethe Mengelberg's Introduction to her translation of Stein's The History of the Social Movement in France, 1789-1850, The Bedminster Press, New Jersey, 1964, p. 4.

⁴⁶ For a good account of Weitling see Carl Wittke, The Utopian Communist. A Biography of Wilhelm Weitling, Nineteenth Century Reformer, Baton Rouge, 1950. Pinson's Modern Germany, op.cit., has a brief but relevant account of Stephan Born, pp. 87-88.

⁴⁷ Karl Marx, A Biography, op.cit., pp. 114-166 has a comprehensive section on the Communist League, its formation and its activities.

And firstly, what was the state of Germany at the outbreak of the Revolution?

The composition of the different classes of the people which form the groundwork of every political organisation was, in Germany, more complicated than in any other country. While in England and France feudalism was entirely destroyed, or, at least reduced, as in the former country, to a few insignificant forms, by a powerful and wealthy middle class, concentrated in large towns, and particularly in the capital, the feudal nobility in Germany had retained a great portion of their ancient privileges. The feudal system of tenure was prevalent almost everywhere. The lords of the land had even retained the jurisdiction over their tenants. Deprived of their political privileges, of the right to control the princes, they had preserved almost all their Medieval supremacy over the peasantry of their demesnes, as well as their exemption from taxes. Feudalism was more flourishing in some localities than in others, but nowhere except on the left bank of the Rhine was it entirely destroyed. This feudal nobility, then extremely numerous and partly very wealthy, was considered, officially, the first 'Order' in the country. It furnished the higher Government officials, it almost exclusively officered the army.

The bourgeoisie of Germany was by far not as wealthy and concentrated as that of France or England. The ancient manufactures of Germany had been destroyed by the introduction of steam, and the rapidly extending supremacy of English manufactures; the more modern manufactures, started under the Napoleonic continental system, established in other parts of the country, did not compensate for the loss of the old ones, nor suffice to create a manufacturing interest strong enough to force its wants upon the notice of Governments jealous of every extension of non-noble wealth and power. If France carried her silk manufactures victorious through fifty years of revolutions and wars, Germany, during the same time, all but lost her ancient linen trade. The manufacturing districts, besides were few and far between; situated far inland, and using, mostly foreign Dutch, or Belgian ports for their imports and exports, they had little or no interest in common with the large seaport towns on the North Sea and the Baltic; they were, above all, unable to create large manufacturing and trading centres, such as Paris and Lyons, London and Manchester. The causes of this backwardness of German manufactures were manifold, but two will suffice to account for it: the unfavourable geographical situation of the country, at a distance from the Atlantic, which had become the great highway for the world's trade, and the continuous wars in

which Germany was involved, and which were fought on her soil, from the sixteenth century to the present day. It was this want of numbers, and particularly of anything like concentrated numbers, which prevented the German middle classes from attaining that political supremacy which the English bourgeoisie has enjoyed ever since 1688, and which the French conquered in 1789. And yet, ever since 1815, the wealth, and with the wealth the political importance of the middle class in Germany, was continually growing. Governments were, although reluctantly, compelled to bow, at least to its more immediate material interests. It may even be truly said that from 1815 to 1830, and from 1832 to 1840, every particle of political influence, which, having been allowed to the middle class in the constitutions of the smaller States, was again wrested from them during the above two periods of political reaction, that every such particle was compensated for by some more practical advantage allowed to them. Every political defeat of the middle class drew after it a victory on the field of commercial legislation. And, certainly, the Prussian Protective Tariff of 1818, and the formation of the Zollverein, were worth a good deal more to the traders and manufacturers of Germany than the equivocal right of expressing in the chambers of some diminutive dukedom their want of confidence in ministers who laughed at their votes. Thus, with growing wealth and extending trade, the bourgeoisie soon arrived at a stage where it found the development of its most important interests checked by the political constitution of the country; by its random division among thirty-six princes with conflicting tendencies and caprices; by the feudal fetters upon agriculture and the trade connected with it; by the prying superintendence to which an ignorant and presumptuous bureaucracy subjected all its transactions. At the same time the extension and consolidation of the Zollverein, the general introduction of steam communication, the growing competition in the home trade, brought the commercial classes of the different States, and Provinces closer together, equalised their interests, centralised their strength. The natural consequence was the passing of the whole mass of them into the camp of the Liberal Opposition, and the gaining of the first serious struggle of the German middle class for political power. This change may be dated from 1840, from the moment when the bourgeoisie of Prussia assumed the lead of the middle-class movement of Germany. 48

48 Karl Marx, Revolution and Counter Revolution, op.cit., pp. 3-5.

Both Marx and Engels were convinced that, though Germany was a latecomer on the European scene, at least as far as the development of capitalism was concerned, the possibilities of revolution there were enhanced by the superiority of the proletariat in Germany, simply by virtue of its being a latecomer. In the Communist Manifesto, written just barely two and a half months before the March events in Germany, they had explained the reasons for their optimism regarding Germany:

The Communists turn their attention chiefly to Germany, because that country is on the eve of a bourgeois revolution that is bound to be carried out under more advanced conditions of European civilisation, and with a much more developed proletariat, than that of England was in the seventeenth, and of France in the eighteenth century, and because the bourgeois revolution in Germany will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution.⁴⁹

Consequently, at the outbreak of the revolution in Germany in March 1848, the 'Demands of the Communist Party of Germany' (written by Marx and Engels and ratified by the Central Authority of the Communist League) contained a strong agrarian programme which the authors presumably saw as being an aid to the bourgeois revolution against feudalism. The programme called for the following changes: (1) abolition of all feudal obligations, dues, tithes etc. without compensation; (2) the taking over by the state of princely and other estates, together with mines and pits, with the estates being cultivated on a large scale on the basis of the most up to date scientific methods; (3) mortgages on lands to be the

⁴⁹ Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, Selected Works, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, vol. 1, p. 137.

property of the state, with interest on such mortgages to be paid by the peasants to the state; and (4), in localities where the tenant system was developed, the land rent or the quit rent to be paid to the state as a tax.

These measures were to be adopted in order "to reduce the communal and other burdens hitherto imposed upon the peasants and small tenant farmers without curtailing the means available for defraying state expenses and without imperilling production."⁵⁰ The legal and fiscal measures to be taken were as follows:

- (1) All legal services were to be free of charge.
- (2) A state bank whose paper issues were legal tender would replace private banks.
- (3) This second measure would make it possible "to regulate the credit system in the interests of the people as a whole, and will thus undermine the dominion of the big financial magnates."⁵¹ This would also set free gold and silver to be used for foreign trade.
- (4) All public services and means of transportation would be taken over by the state. All civil servants would receive the same salary, with some exceptions such as those with families to support. There would be complete separation of Church and State, with the clergy being supported by voluntary contributions from the congregation. The right of inheritance was to be curtailed. Taxes would be

⁵⁰ Collected Works, op.cit., vol. 7, p. 4.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 4.

steeply graduated, and taxes on articles of consumption would be abolished.

With regard to the working class, national workshops, were to be inaugurated, with the state guaranteeing a livelihood to all workers, and providing for those incapacitated. There would be universal and free education. The whole of Germany was to be declared a single and indivisible republic; every German above the age of 21 would have the right to vote and to be elected for office. A specific clause called for the universal arming of the people. Marx and Engels, on arrival in Germany, attended first to the setting up of workers' societies, and where possible arming them. Cologne was an ideal place to operate from as it had a large scale industry and was the centre of the Rhine province, then the most advanced state of Germany. Here too, owing to the Code Napoleon, there was greater freedom of the press, than the Prussian Law permitted. They set up a newspaper, the Neue Rheinische Zeitung, which during the revolutionary period, would act as the focal point of agitation and propaganda.

A comparison with the programme of the liberal and radical intellectuals emphasises the economic programme of the Demands. The liberal and radical demands were mainly political in nature: (1) universal arming of the population; (2) a German parliament based on universal suffrage; (3) freedom of press; (4) freedom of religion, conscience, and teaching; (5) trial by jury; (6) universal German citizenship; (7) taxation according to income; (8) universal education; (9) protection of labour and the right to work (adjustment of relations between labour and capital); (10) popular and economic administration;

(11) responsibility of ministers and officials; and (12), the abolition of all privileges.⁵² The liberal deputies of various states demanded a constitutional monarchy. The news of the overthrow of Louis Philippe in France on February 24, 1848 was the signal for an intensification of the popular clamour in Germany for constitutional reforms.⁵³ Peasant revolts broke out in the agricultural regions of South West Germany. Street demonstrations were common in the big cities of Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Cologne, Mannheim and Offenburg. The two South German radical lawyers went so far as to lead an abortive putsch in Mannheim, to set up a republic. The Vienna insurrection of March 13 broke the power of Prince Metternich and made him flee shamefully out of the country.⁵⁴ On March 18 the people of Berlin took up arms and compelled King Frederick William of Prussia to summon the Rhenish merchant Rudolf Camphausen to form a liberal ministry.

On March 30, a large assembly convened in Frankfurt, composed of liberals and radicals from the various states of Germany. They had not been elected or summoned by a duly constituted authority, as Pinson

⁵² Pinson, op.cit., pp. 81-82.

⁵³ The following non-Marxist accounts of the Revolution may be consulted: L.B. Namier, The Revolution of the Intellectuals, Oxford U.P., London, 1946; Veit Valentin, 1848, Chapters of German History, Tr. by Ethel Talbot Scheffaner, London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1965 (this is an abridged English translation of his classic Geschichte der deutschen Revolution 148-49, Berlin, 1930-1931, 2 vols.; Koppel S. Pinson, Modern Germany, Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc., New York, 1966; P.H. Noyes, Organization and Revolution, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1966.

⁵⁴ Revolution and Counter Revolution, op.cit., p. 30.

points out, but they were "a congress of notables who came together, in revolutionary fashion, and decided to call a general election, based on universal suffrage, to determine the future of Germany."⁵⁵ This Assembly came to be known as the Pre-Parliament and was composed of republicans and monarchists. The most militant of the republicans was the group of South German radicals; the others were moderate constitutionalists. The Pre-Parliament drew up plans for the convocation of the German National Assembly. Although not all states followed the principle of universal suffrage and although there were many voting irregularities, the National Assembly was elected and opened its first sitting on May 18, 1848 at Frankfurt am Main.⁵⁶ The deputies were mainly bankers, industrialists, lawyers, landowners, university professors, doctors, diplomats, and government officials (there were 4 master workers, 11 post-office officials and inspectors). As Pinson has noted: "It was a most unusual galaxy of brilliant personalities who were chosen for their individual qualities rather than as representatives of class group, or political party."⁵⁷

It was this Frankfurt Assembly that Marx assailed in the very first issue of the Neue Rheinische Zeitung:

⁵⁵ Pinson, op.cit., p. 94.

⁵⁶ Pinson, op.cit., p. 95.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 96.

The German people won its sovereign status by fighting in the streets of almost all cities and towns of the country, and especially on the barricades of Vienna and Berlin. It exercised this sovereignty in the elections to the National Assembly.

The first act of the National Assembly should have been to proclaim loudly and publicly this sovereignty of the German people.

Its second act should have been the drafting of a German Constitution based on the sovereignty of the people and the elimination from the regime actually existing in Germany of everything that contradicted the principle of the sovereignty of the people.

During the whole of its session the Assembly ought to have taken all necessary measures to frustrate any reactionary sallies, to maintain the revolutionary basis on which it depends and safeguard the sovereignty of the people, won by the revolution, against all attacks.

Though the German Assembly has met about a dozen times already, it has done none of these things.⁵⁸

Instead, the Frankfurt Assembly preoccupied itself with the technicalities of the Constitution and dissipated its energies wrangling about minutes of meetings, innumerable long-winded digressions and amendments to motions; it displayed a casual indifference to the urgency of the situation and above all failed to safeguard the revolution that had brought the Assembly to power.

By June of 1848 Marx embarked on that specific class analysis of revolutions that he would carry through to the writing of The Class Struggles in France (1850), The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1851-52) and The Civil War in France (1871). The revolution had not

⁵⁸ Collected Works, op.cit., vol. 7, p. 16.

been carried through to the end, because power had passed into the hands of the big bourgeoisie.⁵⁹ The transition from absolutism to the Constitution took the route of repudiating the revolution:

The united reactionary parties began their fight against democracy by calling the revolution in question...and this could be done because it was only a partial revolution, only the beginning of a long revolutionary movement... The Agreement Assembly had now to declare whether it recognised the revolution or not. But to recognise the revolution under these circumstances meant recognising the democratic aspects of the revolution, which the big bourgeoisie wanted to appropriate to itself. Recognising the revolution at this moment meant recognising that Germany was in the grip of a revolutionary movement, and that the Camphausen Ministry, the theory of agreement, indirect elections, the rule of the big capitalists and the decisions of the Assembly itself could be regarded as unavoidable transitional steps, but by no means as final results.⁶⁰

While the Frankfurt Assembly vacillated and prevaricated, the counter-revolution gathered its strength. While it was understandable for the monarchists in the Assembly to behave as they did, supported by the representatives of the big bourgeoisie, it was more difficult to understand the division among the republicans and their inability to unite and press for the strengthening of the Assembly's power:

A. Constituent National Assembly must above all be an active, revolutionarily active assembly. The Assembly at Frankfurt is engaged in parliamentary school exercises and leaves it to the government to act. Assuming that this learned gathering succeeds, after mature consideration, in

⁵⁹ ibid., pp. 73-74.

⁶⁰ ibid., p. 74.

framing the best of agendas and the best of constitutions, of what use is the best agenda and the best Constitution if the governments meanwhile have placed bayonets on the agenda?⁶¹

Marx's second criticism of the Left was its thoughtless advocacy of the principle of federation, rather than a united indivisible Germany:

It is incomprehensible how the so-called radical-democratic party can advocate, as the ultimate constitutional structure of Germany, a federation of constitutional monarchies, small principalities and tiny republics, i.e., a federated state consisting of such heterogenous elements, headed by a republican Government.⁶²

The radical-democrats had patterned their demands on the federal state of North America. Marx pointed out that all the constituent parts of the United States of America have a similar structure; moreover, they cover an area equal to that of Europe. Thus, only a European federation would be analogous to it. Marx went on to comment:

The conflict between centralisation and federalism in Germany is a conflict between modern culture and feudalism. Germany fell into a kind of bourgeoisified feudalism at the very moment the great monarchies arose in the West; she was, moreover, excluded from the world market just when this market was opened up to the countries of Western Europe. Germany became impoverished while the Western countries grew rich; she became countrified while they became urbanised. Even if Russia did not knock at the gate of Germany, the economic conditions alone would compel the latter to introduce rigorous centralisation. Even from a purely bourgeois point of view, the solid unity of Germany is a primary condition for her deliverance from her present

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 74.

⁶² Ibid., p. 50.

wretchedness and for the building up of her national wealth. And how could modern social problems be solved in a territory that is split into 39 small states?⁶³

What the National Assembly needed to do, observed Marx, was "to counter dictatorially the reactionary encroachments by obsolete governments in order to win over public opinion, a power against which all bayonets and rifle-butts would be ineffective."⁶⁴ Within a year the National Assembly was dissolved; Prussia and Austria reasserted their dominant role in German affairs. In 1852, after the writing of both The Class Struggles in France and The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Marx was able to provide a more rigorously worked out class analysis of the German revolution; he expressed these views in Revolution and Counter Revolution. In that work he focussed on the role of the petty bourgeoisie in Germany's revolution; this was the intermediate class that vacillated between liberalism and autocracy, and feared the independent movement of the working class.

In France, too, this class would play a crucial role in the defeat of the revolution, just as the peasantry helped to bring Louis Bonaparte to power. Marx's division of the German peasantry into rich, middle and poor, and his general analysis of the feudal structure of German agriculture as it encountered capitalism, are germane to Lenin's own analysis in The Development of Capitalism in Russia, as we shall see in Chapter 2. Both the German and the French situations resembled the

⁶³ Ibid., p. 51.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 50.

Russian situation at the turn of the century. However, the Russian proletariat and the Russian Social Democratic Party were in a more advanced state of revolutionary preparedness; when the time came in 1917, Lenin was aware that the earliest opportunity to supersede the Provisional Government was to be seized, as part of the revolutionary imperative. It is only at this stage, that the 'political' acquired an unusual preponderance in Lenin's overall scheme.

In examining Marx's account of the 1848 Revolution in France, some scholars have posited a 'break' in the analysis: there is in the earlier section of The Class Struggles in France an impatience in Marx's thinking, a tendency to goad classes and individuals forward on to revolution, while the latter part is a slow, serene invocation of class struggle as it unfolded with historical necessity.⁶⁵ This approach, however, represents a misunderstanding of the dialectics of permanent revolution. Both the tone of Marx's voice, as well as the underlying argumentation of all his work, are simultaneously, exhorting (whether through mockery, outright condemnation or simple moralising) as well as a spelling out of 'objective' factors. Take, for example, Das Kapital (volume 1), which is literally strewn with moralising strictures against the bourgeoisie. This cannot be a mere stylistic eccentricity on Marx's part, but is fundamental to what the 'revolutionary imperative' signified in his thinking, and the implicit relationship between 'class' and 'class consciousness', a relationship which he did not actually offer a

⁶⁵ David Fernbach, The Revolutions of 1848, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1973, pp. 25-38, pp. 52-59.

systematic account of, and which Lenin developed in What is to be Done?⁶⁶

Shorn of these dimensions, the permanent revolution is only a form of Blanquism; likewise, Marx's analysis of Louis Bonaparte and the inevitability of the historical process would also remain a kind of Hegelianism (recall Hegel's eulogising of Caesar as an expression of the historical process). Marx's difference from Hegel was not just 'materialism' at the simplest level, but the importance he assigned to conscious and subjective processes as agents of historical change operating within society (and not as the unfolding of the Absolute Idea, with its own hidden plan or purpose) and therefore capable of being criticised from an ethical point of view.⁶⁷ Consequently, to posit an 'earlier' Marx and a 'later' Marx as not merely a convenient way of exploring the subject (that is, a methodological device) but as having some ontological status based on the arbitrary notion that what is later, must necessarily be authentic, is not only inaccurate, but theoretically unsound. The Class Struggles in France is a powerful analysis precisely because the class struggles are not presented as either social struggles or as political struggles, but as the interaction of the two, with Marx emphasising one or the other at given times.

The 1848 Revolution in France

Marx's distinctive approach to the question of revolution becomes

⁶⁶ See Chapter 2 of the present study.

⁶⁷ Eugene Kamenka, The Ethical Foundations of Marxism, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1972, 2nd ed.

more evident when we compare his work on the 1848 revolutions to other equally well known contemporary accounts. Tocqueville's Recollections has some obvious similarities with Marx's account (the interaction of classes, distaste for greedy politicians) but the overriding difference is that Tocqueville's is a melancholic reminiscence that does not see anything positive coming out of the revolution; while Marx, even at his most pessimistic, invests the revolutionary process with a meaning and purpose.⁶⁸ Louis Blanc's 1848: Historical Revelations is a post festum account of the aims and achievements of the defeated radical democratic party (which he headed unofficially) in the Provisional government.⁶⁹ As an immediate participant in some of the revolutionary events, Blanc's reflections provide an intimate look at the establishment of the National Workshops, by the first influential author of the handbook on state socialism (Organisation du Travail). Blanc, however, does not explain satisfactorily his resignation from the Provisional Government, a move which Marx criticised as being a major blunder to the extent that the

⁶⁸ The Recollections of Alexis De Tocqueville, Translated by Alexander Teixeira De Mattos, Edited and Introduced by J.P. Mayer, Meridian Books, Cleveland and New York, 1959. George Rudé's Introduction to the George Duveau's 1848: The Making of a Revolution, Pantheon Books, New York, 1967, pp. ix-xxi, offers some points of comparison between Tocqueville and Marx, although Rudé is of the opinion that Marx unlike Tocqueville made a precise social analysis of all the parties involved in the struggle, p. XI.

Richard Herr's Tocqueville and the Old Regime, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1962, is an account of the significance of the Recollections in relation to Tocqueville's other major works.

⁶⁹ Louis Blanc, 1848: Historical Revelations, Howard Fertig Inc., New York, 1971 (first published in English in 1858 by Chapman and Hall, London).

radical democratic party lost political clout:

Reluctantly and after long debate, the Provisional Government nominated a permanent special commission charged with finding means of improving the lot of the working classes: This commission consisted of delegates from the corporation of Paris artisans and was presided over by Louis Blanc and Albert. The Luxembourg palace was assigned to it as its meeting place. In this way the representatives of the working class were banished from the seat of the Provisional Government, the bourgeois part of which retained the real state power and the reins of administration exclusively in its hands; and side by side with the Bank and the Bourse, there arose a socialist synagogue whose high priests, Louis Blanc and Albert, had the task of discovering the promised land, of preaching the new gospel and of providing work for the Paris proletariat. Unlike any profane state power, they had no budget, no executive authority, at their disposal. They were supposed to break the pillars of bourgeois society by dashing their heads against them. While the Luxembourg sought the philosopher's stone, in the Hotel de Ville they minted the current coinage.⁷⁰

Blanc does not explain convincingly why he resigned from the Provisional government in order to head the Luxembourg Commission: the reasons cited are fear of a popular uprising should he refuse to take steps to put into practice the principles of his Organisation du travail, the urgent plea of members of the Provisional government whom he respected and his own personal turmoil at the Provisional government's initial refusal to consider establishing a Commission:

... upon which I on the spot tendered my resignation; as, according to my feeling, to assist in working a government on any other principle than one's own, is to stoop to the most degrading of humiliations, and he deserves to be

⁷⁰ Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, Selected Works, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, vol. 1, pp. 212-213.

ranked with the lowest of men who covets power for power's sake.⁷¹

This revealing passage underscores what Marx, throughout his analysis in The Class Struggles in France, would see as petty bourgeois moralism, that ~~he~~ not understand the realities of the class struggle. And indeed, Blanc's account is not much more than a series of personal anecdotes concerning his participation in the Revolution. Marx stops his criticism of the petty bourgeois radical socialists at a certain point in The Class Struggles in France, the reason for this being that they had ceased to play an important role in the following sequence of events. In other words he stops a trenchant critique, not because he had discovered some mythical new principle of history, with his stay in England, but because as he put it, this party made its exit from that point in the counter-revolutionary process.⁷² The impression is inescapable that Marx clearly thought of forms of political action being to able to influence the purely social process and that this does seem to contradict the determinism of passages where he speaks of individuals acting in response to circumstances which are not of their own making. Indeed, the interest of these two great pieces of historical writing, The Class Struggles in France and The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte is that they escape the confines of doctrinaire interpretations, not so much because Marx changed his mind after a certain period of his life, but because the complexity

⁷¹ Louis Blanc, op.cit., p. 90.

⁷² Marx, Selected Works, vol. 1, op.cit., pp. 292-293.

of his analyses required a movement between the inevitable conditioning of objective circumstances and the seemingly 'willed' actions of individuals in society.

The theory of the permanent revolution is part of that dialectic. In March 1850, three months after he had begun the writing of The Class Struggles in France Marx delivered his Address to the Central Committee of the Communist League, where he clarifies his idea of the permanent revolution:

While the democratic petty bourgeois wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible, and with the achievement, of most of the above demands, it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, until the proletariat has conquered state power, and the association of proletarians, not only in one country but in all the dominant countries of the world, has advanced so far that competition among the proletarians of these countries has ceased and that at least the decisive productive forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians. For us the issue cannot be the alteration of private property but only its annihilation, not the smoothing over of class antagonisms but the abolition of classes, not the improvement of existing society but the foundation of a new one.⁷³

What may be termed the 'messianic' quality of this passage, especially the reference to the foundation of a new society, is one of the many meanings that Marx seemed to have attached to political action, presupposing a high degree of consciousness, the type that would make the proletariat not only the most exploited of society (thus struggling for

⁷³ Selected Works, op.cit., vol. 1, pp. 178-179.

its own liberation) or as an agent of unknown forces helping to shatter the integument of capitalism, but also as the class-conscious entity which would, in defeating capitalism, liberate all of society. This appears to have also been Lenin's position.⁷⁴

The second direct reference to the permanent revolution occurs towards the end of The Class Struggles in France:

This Socialism is the declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the abolition of class distinctions generally, to the abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the revolutionising of all the ideas that result from these social relations.⁷⁵

Quite apart from the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat (to which I shall subsequently return) what is of interest is Marx's use of the word 'abolition', very definitely reminiscent of Hegel's aufhebung. The question, quite simply, is how the permanent revolution is part of a mediating process which culminates in abolition (transcendence, synthesis, sublation, etc.). It is at this stage that both types of

⁷⁴ See chapter 2 of the present study. Lorenz von Stein, the author of The Social Movement in France (op.cit.) uses such phrases as 'class consciousness' frequently in his work, but without the revolutionary meaning that Marx attached to that phrase. For a good discussion of Stein's possible influence on Marx see Kaethe Mengelberg's Introduction to The Social Movement in France, pp. 25-33.

Stein, who wrote The Social Movement in France in 1850 as part of a learned attempt to understand the rise of the proletariat in history, clearly sympathised with the Provisional government and was opposed to Communism.

⁷⁵ Selected Works, p. 282.

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explanation; the Althusserian and the evolutionary, fall short of understanding the totality of the historical process, where transitions of various sorts build to a series of contradictions that are annulled only in the political practice of the revolutionary class. (Here one cannot help but draw attention to the importance that all three philosophers, Plato, Hegel and Marx, assigned to the political, the realm of freedom, though each philosopher thought that his age had attained to that state; the point here is that no other thinkers have burdened the word 'political' with so much meaning.)

We know, of course, that Marx based a large part of his critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right on the argument that Hegel had erroneously looked upon the State as the embodiment of the ethical idea, where in fact it was an expression of private interests, a point that would receive final clarification in the concept of the state as the instrument of class rule (The German Ideology). At first glance this seems a revolutionary way of looking at the organisation of state and society; in one sense it is a novel insight, but if it is to receive its fullest stature in revolutionary theory, in other words, if it is to attain a goal, then it must be supplemented by the insight that the universality of participation in the political life of a society, though at present falsely experienced in the bourgeois state, must be experienced as some form of community.

Unlike Rousseau, who posited (if only for methodological convenience) a state of nature, pristine and uncorrupted, Marx is clear that the changes in the mode of production (the primary expression of the historical movement) are higher and better, if only because these are a

shift towards a greater community of existence. Quite apart from the remarkable similarity that this notion has to the Hegelian unfolding of the Idea in history, the important point to take note of is that the shift away from state and state institutions towards community is not a shift away from the public to the private realm, but from a distorted form of public life to an authentic one, authentic, because the experience of universality in community is a dialectical meeting of the particular and the universal.

The class struggle in this context, involves a minimum of development of the forces of production (in this case of capitalism) and the most developed class consciousness possible under the circumstances. Marx very often refers to the awakening of class consciousness among French workers in The Class Struggles in France. He goes on to add that insufficient development of class consciousness goes hand in hand with the insufficient development of capitalism. Nevertheless, implicit throughout this work, is the notion that the working class may push forward, that the petty bourgeoisie ought to have done such and such a thing, that the radical democrats and the bourgeois republicans should have taken possession of power, rather than allow themselves to be duped by Louis Bonaparte etc. As I said earlier this tension is there throughout and is not eliminated at some point in the writing of the texts; this is not accidental, since the theory of the permanent revolution does presuppose such a tension. This is what Lukacs probably meant by his statement: "They knew - to quote the words of Rosa Luxemburg - that the proletarian revolution which, because of its social preconditions, can no longer happen 'too early', must however necessarily

happen 'too early' as far as the maintenance of power... is concerned."⁷⁶

For purposes of convenience we can follow a brief division of the periods of the revolution in France based on Marx's own division, which will enable us to follow his analysis of the transitions and contradictions of this period:

1. The February Revolution of 1848, when Louis Philippe abdicated. February 24. A Provisional Government was established composed of the republican bourgeoisie (Odillon Barrot, Thiers, etc.), the dynastic opposition party (the Legitimists, the supporters of the Bourbons, who had been hostile to the Orleans dynasty of Louis Philippe) and the radical republicans (the party of the petty bourgeoisie) represented by Ledru-Rollin and Flocon. The working class had only two members to represent them, Louis Blanc and Albert.

Louis Philippe had been the 'bankers' king'. The radical republicans on the other hand, represented the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie.⁷⁷ The characteristic of the finance aristocracy headed by Louis Philippe, was that it grew rich not by production, but "by pocketing the already available wealth of others."⁷⁸ The general discontent of the people was further exacerbated by the crop failures of

⁷⁶ Georg Lukács. Lenin, A Study on the Unity of His Thought, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1974, pp. 24-25.

⁷⁷ It is interesting to note that Lorenz von Stein's The Social Movement in France, op.cit., does not make a distinction between the financial bourgeoisie and the industrial bourgeoisie in France.

⁷⁸ K. Marx & F. Engels, Selected Works, op.cit., vol. 1, p. 208.

1845-46. The general commercial and industrial crisis in England affected the Continent, especially France, making the "autocracy of the finance aristocracy still more unbearable."⁷⁹

The transitions and contradictions of the first period, from February to June 1848, could be summed up as follows:

(1) the transition from the monarchy to the bourgeois republic was effected with the help of the proletariat, yet the working class could not as yet win its emancipation. As Marx puts it: "What it won was the terrain for the fight for its revolutionary emancipation, but by no means this emancipation itself."⁸⁰

(2) The February republic needed to complete the rule of the bourgeoisie, but this could not be accomplished because it had already been distorted by the financial aristocracy:

The struggle against capital in its developed, modern form, in its decisive aspect, the struggle of the industrial wage-worker against the industrial bourgeoisie, is in France a partial phenomenon, which after the February days could so much the less supply the national content of the revolution, since the struggle against capital's secondary mode of exploitation, that of the peasant against usury and mortgages or of the petty bourgeois against the wholesale dealer, banker and manufacturer, in a word, against bankruptcy, was still hidden in the general uprising against the finance aristocracy.⁸¹

⁷⁹ ibid., p. 210.

⁸⁰ ibid., p. 212.

⁸¹ ibid., p. 214.

The subsequent measures of the government further illustrate the contradictions of a bourgeois state coming to terms with the monopolistic character of its financial aristocracy:

Directly threatened not only in its rule but in its very existence by the February Revolution, the Bank tried from the outset to discredit the republic by making the lack of credit general. It suddenly stopped the credits of the bankers, the manufacturers and the merchants. As it did not immediately call forth a counter-revolution, this manoeuvre necessarily reacted on the Bank itself. The capitalists drew out the money which they had deposited in the vaults of the Bank. The possessors of bank notes rushed to the pay office in order to exchange them for gold and silver.

The Provisional Government could have forced the Bank into bankruptcy without forcible interference, in a legal manner; it would only have had to remain passive and leave the Bank to its fate. The bankruptcy of the Bank would have been the deluge which in a trice would have swept from French soil the finance aristocracy, the most powerful and dangerous enemy of the republic, the golden pedestal of the July monarchy. And once the Bank was bankrupt, the bourgeoisie itself would have had to regard it as a last desperate attempt at rescue, if the government had formed a national bank and subjected national credit to the control of the nation.

The Provisional Government, on the contrary, fixed a compulsory quotation for the notes of the Bank. It did more. It transformed all provincial banks into branches of the Banque de France and allowed it to cast its net over the whole of France. Later it pledged the state forests to the Bank as a guarantee for a loan that it contracted from it. In this way the February Revolution directly strengthened and enlarged the bankocracy which it should have overthrown.⁸²

To make up for its state deficit the Provisional Government raised the four direct taxes by an additional 45 centimes, a measure that hit

⁸² ibid., pp. 217-218.

the largest majority of the French people, namely the peasants, who, however, owing to their insufficient political maturity laid the blame for their misery on the National Workshops for the working class. Neither the bank oligarchy, nor the industrialists, nor the big landed proprietors were touched by these taxes.

(3) The political device of universal suffrage led to the "unchaining of the class struggle" rather than effect a reconciliation of classes, as was hoped for.⁸³ Marx points out that the various strata of bourgeois society were thrown to the apex of the state, "and thus tearing from them their deceptive mask, whereas the monarchy with its property qualifications only let certain factions of the bourgeoisie compromise themselves, allowing the others to lie hidden behind the scenes and surrounding them with the halo of a common opposition."⁸⁴

(4) The bourgeois republic which came to power with the help of the proletariat in the February Revolution (which Marx calls the 'beautiful revolution') now felt constrained to shake off this ally. As the National Workshops provided no genuine relief for the hardships of the working class, Paris was in ferment. When the insurrection came in June, it was both directly and indirectly provoked by the conduct of the Provisional Government. From that point on the Provisional Government leaned more and more on the monarchical and republican section of itself; the radical democrats lost ground and the socialists led by Louis Blanc vanished from the political scene.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 223.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 283.

II. The Second Period dates from the failure of the June insurrection to December 10, 1848, the election of Louis Bonaparte as the President of the Republic. The main action during this period was the framing of a Constitution, which Marx comments on thus:

The comprehensive contradiction of this constitution, however, consists in the following: The classes whose social slavery the constitution is to perpetuate, proletariat, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie, it puts in possession of political power through universal suffrage. And from the class whose old social power it sanctions, the bourgeoisie, it withdraws the political guarantees of this power. It forces the political rule of the bourgeoisie into democratic conditions, which at every moment help the hostile classes to victory and jeopardise the very foundations of bourgeois society. From the one it demands that they should not go forward from political to social emancipation; from the other that they should not go back from social to political restoration.⁸⁵

After the June defeat of the proletariat, the Constituent Assembly remained the "exclusive representative of bourgeois republicanism".⁸⁶ The form of the Republic was maintained through the support of the democratic republicans (the petty bourgeois party of Ledru Rollin). The content of the Republic was the reproduction of the material conditions of class rule, in this case bourgeois conditions of class rule. Consequently, as Marx points out, even the mode of speech of the republicans resembled that of the royalist factions.⁸⁷

The social enslavement of the masses, the petty bourgeoisie, the

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 235-236.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 229.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

peasantry and the proletariat, continued. The Constituent Assembly rejected a plan to tax capital (the mortgage tax). The law that limited the working day to ten hours was repealed; imprisonment for debt was reintroduced; the majority of the French population that was illiterate was excluded from jury service; journals were once again required to deposit caution-money and the right of association was restricted. Small traders, shopkeepers and restaurateurs found their property alienated to pay off debts. The progressive tax was eliminated. As state revenues sank owing to the bankruptcy of the petty bourgeoisie, the Provisional Government and the National Assembly found itself "still further under the yoke of the finance aristocracy."⁸⁸ By sanctioning the election of a President, the National Assembly set the seal on its own doom.

III. The Third Period dates from January 1849 to May 1850, when the dissolution of the Legislative Assembly, which had convened in May of the previous, was set in motion, by the struggle between the republican bourgeoisie and Louis Bonaparte. A corollary to this struggle was the coming together of the petty bourgeois parties (the democratic republicans, the socialists) and the proletariat. However, as the democratic republicans headed by Ledru Rollin lost ground time and again to the bourgeois republicans (who at these crucial moments sided with Louis Bonaparte) the polarisation of class alignments became sharper, with the proletariat rallying round Communism, which at that period was

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 232.

symbolised by the life and career of Auguste Blanqui.⁸⁹

On November 1, 1849, Louis Bonaparte announced the dismissal of the Barrot Ministry and the appointment of a new one. In the new ministry the chief figure of interest was the Finance Minister Fould:

Fould as Finance Minister signifies the official surrender of France's national wealth to the Bourse, the management of the state's property by the Bourse and in the interests of the Bourse. With the nomination of Fould, the finance aristocracy announced its restoration in the Moniteur. This restoration necessarily supplemented the other restorations, which form just so many links in the chain of the constitutional republic.⁹⁰

Marx appears to have emphasised, quite deliberately, the preponderance of the financial oligarchy in the class configurations of the period. Indeed, at one point in The Class Struggles he expressly says: "Our whole exposition has shown how the republic, from the first day of its existence, did not overthrow but consolidated the finance aristocracy."⁹¹ While it is true that France at that period was primarily agricultural, at least as compared to England, the domination of the finance aristocracy is well documented, and appears to be a characteristic feature of semi-industrialised societies.⁹² Marx himself seemed to think that this was a characteristic feature of bourgeois society in general:

⁸⁹ For a good account of Blanqui, see Alan Spitzer, The Revolutionary Theories of Louis Auguste Blanqui, Columbia University Press, New York, 1957.

⁹⁰ Selected Works, op.cit., p. 269.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 269.

⁹² Carlo Cipolla, The Emergence of Industrial Societies, Collins, 1973.

"In general, the combination of large landed property with high finance is a norman fact. proof: England; proof: even Austria."⁹³

A situation similar to both the French and the German would recur at the turn of the century in Russia; however, the working class of Russia (both the artisan and the industrial) came very quickly under the influence of an advanced political party, the Russian Social Democratic Party, and within a decade or so, had outstripped the German party in militance and political consciousness.

Theorists of the 'break' have argued that Chapter IV of The Class Struggles and The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte represent a change in Marx's outlook on revolution.⁹⁴ The biographical evidence is hardly conclusive enough proof.⁹⁵ We know, certainly, that between the writing of the first three chapters of The Class Struggles in France and the commencement of the fourth chapter, Marx had begun his economic studies at the British Museum. In order to sustain the argument that Marx from that period on, focussed almost exclusively on the 'objective' historical process, the clash and conflict of class struggles (not the subjective wills of individuals in classes), two theses would have to be fully worked out: (1) that in the first three chapters, Marx concerns himself purely with the political, subjective process, (2) that in the fourth chapter of The 'Class Struggles and in The 18th Brumaire of Louis

⁹³ Selected Works, op.cit., vol. 1, p. 270.

⁹⁴ David Fernbach, op.cit.

⁹⁵ Karl Marx, A Biography, op.cit., pp. 236-250.

Bonaparte Marx confines himself to the 'objective' process alone.

My analysis attempts to prove that the opposite is the case, as far as the first thesis is concerned. We shall now see whether the second thesis has any substantial basis to it.

Chapter IV of The Class Struggles begins with an account of the commercial and industrial prosperity that came to France by mid-1850 and ends with the famous passage predicting the impossibility of a revolution until the coming of a new crisis:

With this general prosperity, in which the productive forces of bourgeois society develop as luxuriantly as is at all possible within bourgeois relationships, there can be no talk of a real revolution. Such a revolution is only possible in the periods when both these factors, the modern productive forces and the bourgeois productive forms come in collision with each other. The various quarrels in which the representatives of the individual factions of the Continental party of Order now indulge and mutually compromise themselves, far from providing the occasion for new revolutions are, on the contrary, possible only because the basis of the relationships is momentarily so secure and, what the reaction does not know, so bourgeois. From it all attempts of the reaction to hold up bourgeois development will rebound just as certainly as all moral indignation and all enthusiastic proclamations of the democrats. A new revolution is possible only in consequence of a new crisis. It is, however, just as certain as this crisis.⁹⁶

There is nothing out of character in this passage: from The German Ideology onwards we are accustomed to the notion that revolutions occur when productive forces and relations of production come into conflict with each other. Nor can it be reasonably asserted that from the 1840s

⁹⁶ Selected Works, op.cit., p. 289.

to mid-1850 there were no crises in trade and commerce. Clearly the 1848 revolution took place in a revolutionary period and in advocating the permanent revolution Marx was in no way contradicting his own materialist premises. On the other hand, if he is interpreted as saying that the objectively revolutionary situation alone, from now on, would determine the course of history (as the theorists of the break seem to be arguing) then the internal evidence of the text itself does not support such an interpretation.

Directly after the passage cited above, Marx goes on to speak about the abolition of universal suffrage on May 31, 1850; here he clearly sees the Montagne (the democratic republican party) as having failed in their task as a democratic opposition. At this juncture Marx lists commercial and industrial prosperity as one among the many reasons that the proletariat could not attempt revolution:

An army of 150,000 men in Paris, the long deferment of the decision, the appeasing attitude of the press, the pusillanimity of the Montagne and of the newly elected representatives, the majestic calm of the petty bourgeois, but, above all, the commercial and industrial prosperity, prevented any attempt at revolution on the part of the proletariat.⁹⁷

The remainder of Chapter IV is devoted to the political manoeuvring that went on between the various factions in the Party of Order and the President of the Republic, Louis Bonaparte. The concern with the purely political manoeuvrings is not fortuitous as it is the prelude to the

⁹⁷ ibid., p. 291.

Winning of that unique insight into the nature and forms of the class struggle which makes The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte the extraordinary document that it is.

The reason that Marx saw the second Napoleon as a grotesque parody of the first Napoleon is that the latter represented the rise to power of the bourgeoisie in its uncorrupted ascendancy, while the Second Empire marks the dissolution and decline of the progressive role of the bourgeoisie.

Camille Desmoulins, Danton, Robespierre, Saint-Just, Napoleon, the heroes as well as the parties and the masses of the old French Revolution, performed the task of their time in Roman costume and with Roman phrases, the task of unchaining and setting up modern bourgeois society. The first ones knocked the feudal basis to pieces and mowed off the feudal heads which had grown on it. The other created inside France the conditions under which alone free competition could be developed; and beyond the French borders he everywhere swept the feudal institutions away, so far as was necessary to furnish bourgeois society in France with a suitable up-to-date environment on the European Continent.⁹⁸

The 1848 Revolution also had the possibilities of growing into a vigorous movement towards the future:

The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past. Earlier revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to drug themselves concerning their own content. In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead. There the phrase went beyond the content; here the content goes

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 398-399.

beyond the phrase.⁹⁹

The content was the social republic that the workers of Paris thought they were ushering in, with the fall of Louis Philippe. This is the reason why, from February 24, 1848 to May 4, 1848 (when the Constituent National Assembly was elected), the Provisional Government was perceived by the workers as their government. It was only after the proletariat had "grasped the character of this National Assembly"¹⁰⁰ that disenchantment set in, ending with the June insurrection. The republican party, consisting of royalist factions (both Legitimist and Orleanist), petty bourgeois republicans (Ledru-Rollin) and socialist elements (Louis Blanc) only used the phrases of republican democracy, which in the earlier French revolution, had a definite meaning and content, but were now empty parodies of the old. Had the Republican party been in earnest, it would have moved forward to the social republic. Instead, "Society now seems to have fallen back behind its point of departure."¹⁰¹ As Marx put it:

An entire people, which had imagined that by means of a revolution it had imparted to itself an accelerated power of motion, suddenly finds itself set back into a defunct epoch..."¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 400.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 404.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 401.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 399-400.

The Republican party, instead of augmenting its strength by an active attempt to translate its grandiose phrases into action (thus genuinely supporting the masses), lost ground to Louis Bonaparte, the very day that it defeated its own working class. In The Class Struggles in France Marx had already pointed out that the Provisional Government strengthened the financial oligarchy, instead of weakening it. Its economic measures seemed like so many cynical gestures aimed at placating the proletariat, through useless measures like the National Workshops. The peasantry, alienated by unjust taxes, turned to Bonaparte as their man of the hour. To compound all these mistakes, in their political behaviour the Republicans were guided by a fear of what they saw as the rising power of the proletariat. Consequently, they could not and did not take their position as representatives of the people with any degree of seriousness, thus allowing Napoleon to pose as a champion of the exploited and the oppressed. Having compromised themselves, the Republicans could not defend their legislative rights against the Bonapartists and the Royalists:

Just as brutal as these pure republicans had been in their misuse of physical force against the people, just as cowardly, mealy-mouthed, broken-spirited and incapable of fighting were they now in their retreat, when it was a question of maintaining their republicanism and their legislative rights against the executive power and the royalists. 103

That retreat began effectively, when the Republicans allowed the

103 Ibid., p. 414.

election of the President of the Republic in December 1848, without quite understanding that in this way the Constitution "not only sanctions the division of powers, like the Charter of 1830, it widens it into an intolerable contradiction."¹⁰⁴ Having conferred so much power on the President, the republicans followed him uncomplainingly in his foreign ventures, and began to build a coalition with the royalist factions and with a numerically small group of Bonapartists, to conspire to undermine the power of the democratic republicans in the Legislative Assembly. This bourgeois coalition, Marx calls the Party of Order and it now aimed to rid itself of its petty bourgeois ally:

The bourgeoisie now felt the necessity of making an end of the democratic petty bourgeois, just as a year before it had realised the necessity of settling with the revolutionary proletariat. Only the situation of the adversary was different. The strength of the proletarian party lay in the streets, that of the petty bourgeois in the National Assembly itself. It was therefore a question of decoying them out of the National Assembly into the streets and causing them to smash their parliamentary power themselves, (before time and circumstances could consolidate it. The Montagne rushed headlong into the trap.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ The historian Lewis B. Namier comments: "When the Assembly, enmeshed in constitutional doctrine and democratic dogma, decided to have the President of the Republic elected by popular vote, and not by the Legislature, the door was open for a Bonapartist restoration. To preclude it, an amendment was moved debarring members of former ruling families... The amendment was withdrawn..." Lewis B. Namier, 'The First Mountebank Dictator' from his Vanished Supremacies (London, 1958), reprinted in B.D. Gooch, Napoleon III - Man of Destiny, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1963, p. 20.

¹⁰⁵ Selected Works, op.cit., p. 424.

The President had, along with the support of the Party of Order, ordered the bombardment of Rome by French troops, thus violating Article V of the Constitution which forbade the French Republic from employing its military power against the freedom of another country. Article 54 also prohibited declaration of war without the express consent of the National Assembly. On June 11, 1849, Ledru-Rollin (of the democratic republican faction) brought in a bill of impeachment against Bonaparte and his ministers. On June 12, the National Assembly rejected the bill of impeachment, and the Montagne, which had threatened to defend the Constitution, if necessary, by force of arms, left the parliament. Marx comments:

Seldom had an action been announced with more noise than the impending campaign of the Montagne, seldom had an event been trumpeted with greater certainty or longer in advance than the inevitable victory of the democracy. Most assuredly, the democrats believe in the trumpets before whose blasts the walls of Jericho fell down. And often as they stand before the ramparts of despotism, they seek to imitate the miracle. If the Montagne wished to triumph in parliament, it should not have called to arms. If it called to arms in parliament, it should not have acted in parliamentary fashion in the streets. If the peaceful demonstration was meant seriously, then it was folly not to foresee that it would be given a war-like reception. If a real struggle was intended, then it was a queer idea to lay down the weapons with which it would have to be waged. But the revolutionary threats of the petty bourgeois and their democratic representatives are mere attempts to intimidate the antagonist. 106

The Montagne had tried to force the impeachment of Bonaparte; once it was defeated it was clear that Bonaparte was an uncontested victor.

106 Ibid., pp. 425-426.

In May 1850 the Montagne hoped to gain a victory at the polls; it was forestalled by the passage of the election law on May 31, 1850 abolishing universal suffrage. With the defeat of the Montagne's resources, "instead of the petty skirmishes it had hitherto had with the President, a great and ruthless struggle, a life and death struggle between the two powers, had become inevitable" (Marx is referring to the conflict between the National Assembly and the President).¹⁰⁷

As Bonaparte enlarged his powers one after the other the National Assembly, dominated by the Party of Order, could only thrash about in futile rage: "They only raged because he made an unparliamentary use of his constitutional right. Had they not continually made an unconstitutional use of their parliamentary prerogative, particularly in regard to the abolition of universal suffrage?"¹⁰⁸ (Marx is referring to Bonaparte's dismissal of a General, which the National Assembly objected to).

Despite a belated coalition of the Party of Order with the Montagne, the situation could not be saved. In May 1851 the Constitution was revised; Article 45 which prohibited Bonaparte's re-election was abolished. On December 2, 1851 Bonaparte dissolved the National Assembly. Such were the political events that led to the coup d'état of Louis Bonaparte and the Second Empire. In a Preface to the Second Edition of The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, in June, 1869, Marx wrote:

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 441-442.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 454.

Of the writings dealing with the same subject at the same time as mine, only two deserve notice: Victor Hugo's Napoleon the Little and Proudhon's Coup d'Etat.

Victor Hugo confines himself to bitter and witty invective against the responsible publisher of the coup d'état. The event itself appears in his work like a bolt from the blue. He sees in it only the violent act of a single individual great instead of little by ascribing to him a personal power of initiative such as would be without parallel in world history. Proudhon, for his part, seeks to represent the coup d'état as the result of an antecedent historical development. Unnoticeably, however, his historical construction of the coup d'état becomes a historical apologia for its herd. Thus he falls into the error of our so-called objective historians. I, on the contrary, demonstrate how the class struggle in France created circumstances and relationships that made it possible for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero's part.¹⁰⁹

The class struggle, as Marx presents it in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, provides no real support for an interpretation of that struggle as being determined by purely economic forces or for assuming that he had abandoned the tenets of the theory of permanent revolution. Indeed, the impression one has, throughout the work, is that of the significance of the republican betrayal of the very principles of bourgeois democracy; and if the implication is that this is of the very contradictory nature of bourgeois democracy, the corollary to it is that the contradiction can be transcended only through the completion of the revolutionary process through the active intervention of the proletariat. This idea would acquire greater emphasis in the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which Marx mentions during the period 1848-1852

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 394-395.

and returns to in 1875, with the writing of The Critique of the Gotha Programme. On March 5, 1852, after the writing of The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Marx wrote the famous letter to his friend Weydmeyer:

As to myself, no credit is due to me for discovering either the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes. What I did that was new was to demonstrate: (1) that the existence of classes is merely linked to particular historical phases in the development of production, (2) that class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat, and (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society.¹¹⁰

Social-democratic commentators on Marx such as Lichtheim, Kolakowski, Miliband, Shlomo Avineri and Hal Draper, have sought to prove that with the close of the 1848 period, Marx underwent a radical change towards the question of the political conquest of power by the proletariat.¹¹¹ In this interpretation, Marx for the next 15 years or so, did not use the phrase the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and consequently had no use for it. In that same period his work on political economy, especially Das Kapital, is cited as evidence of a gradualist approach to the political hegemony of the proletariat. This argument is not particularly convincing. If it simply wished to accentuate Marx's wisdom

¹¹⁰ Marx, Engels, Selected Correspondence, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975; p. 64.

¹¹¹ I have examined this question in Chapter V of the present study.

and prudence, these qualities were already evident in the 'revolutionary' period of 1848, when he pleaded with the workers, on several occasions, not to respond to bourgeois provocations, not to give battle when they were not ready for it. Obviously, after the 1848 revolutions, during a period of economic prosperity accompanied by the political repression that followed the failed revolutions, neither Marx nor Engels could see any objective prospects of revolution, although they predicted that with the onset of a new crisis, such a situation was bound to arise. Their active support of the strike movement in the period of the First International (1867-71) was simply a recognition of the strategic value of the strike as a weapon of class struggle, one among many, of the weapons to be used for the overthrow of the bourgeois state.

If anything, Das Kapital, far from recommending the evolutionary nature of capitalism, is in its deepest implications, concerned to show that bourgeois society had become irrevocably counter-revolutionary, not because of any whimsy on the part of individual capitalists, but because 'surplus value' (endemic to the bourgeois mode of production) could no longer be reconciled with 'free competition' and because the increasing centralisation and concentration of capital (leading to a 'monopoly' situation) would require intensified class struggle on the part of the proletariat, and under the right conditions, a seizure of power.¹¹² In the works of his maturity, The Civil War in France (1871) and in The

¹¹² Harry Cleaver, Reading Capital Politically, The Harvester Press, Brighton, 1979, is a detailed examination of the political significance of Marx's economic theory.

Critique of the Gotha Programme (1875) Marx returned to these themes.

The transition from the concept of labour in Marx's early works to 'labour power' represents a greater degree of specificity and refinement in the conceptual tools that Marx employs to analyse the laws of capitalist production. His major works in political economy, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (along with the Introduction and the Preface), the Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Oekonomie, the three volumes of Das Kapital and The Theories of Surplus Value seek to emphasize that 'surplus value' resulting from the sale of labour power is an historical development peculiar to capitalism. Maurice Dobb puts the point succinctly: "Marx's theory of value was something more than a theory of value as generally conceived: it had the function not only of explaining exchange value or prices in a quantitative sense, but of exhibiting the historico-social basis in the labour process of an exchange or commodity-society with labour itself become a commodity."¹¹³

Conclusion

The main focus of this chapter was the dialectical link between the social and political revolutions. The early Marx had to establish firmly the 'materialist' basis of his theory of political revolution, and thus The German Ideology errs on the side of an extremely impersonal account of the clashes, conflicts and collusions of history as they can be seen

¹¹³ Maurice Dobb, Studies in the Development of Capitalism, G. Routledge & Sons Ltd., London, 1959.

in revolutions. The political dimensions of revolution are spelled out briefly in the theory of the state as the instrument of the ruling class. The 1848 Revolutions were an experience in the subjective side of revolutions, as well as an illustration of the dialectical movement of the historical process, passing from transitions and contradictions to a new synthesis. Chapter 2 will pick up this theme as it appears in Lenin's The Development of Capitalism in Russia and the manner in which it influenced Lenin's revolutionary strategy.

The questions of the state and revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat and the relationship of this transitional form to the commune form of state, will be examined in Chapter 5 in the context of Lenin's views on these same questions in his The State and Revolution. Thus a discussion of The Civil War in France and The Critique of the Gotha Programme will be taken up in Chapter 5. Appendix A provides a look at the theme of the Party and Revolution in Marx's thinking.

CHAPTER TWO

THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAPITALISM IN RUSSIA

In the previous chapter we have seen that the permanence of the revolution, as Marx envisaged it, signified that: (1) a bourgeois revolution against feudalism must first be initiated; (b) that the bourgeoisie were both incapable of and unwilling to carry this revolution through to a far-reaching change in the socio-economic ordering of society; and (c), consequently, that this task must be undertaken by the proletariat while securing for itself the alliance of the peasantry and all radical elements of society, where possible. The pre-requisite for this historical innovation was a minimal development of capitalism and the emergence of socialist radical ideas. Marx and Engels had argued that such conditions existed in the Germany of 1848 (a conglomerate of small states). These very same conditions now existed in Russia after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and the industrial development that gathered momentum in the 1880s. As in Germany, so in Russia the break-up in feudal relations had not resulted even in a formal democratic constitution. The autocracy continued to rule as an absolute power and in the economic sphere capitalism and feudal-patriarchal relations continued to exist side by side.

The Marxian programme for a permanent revolution passed over into the traditions of Russian Marxism and became crystallised there in the notion of the hegemony of the proletariat in the coming bourgeois revolution, both in the theoretical work undertaken by Plekhanov and the Emancipation of Labour Group (hereafter referred to as ELG) and

subsequently, in the Leninist theory and practice of revolution. This theoretical presupposition, the hegemony of the proletariat in the bourgeois revolution, was not arrived at fortuitously or by chance, but in constant struggle with rival contenders, particularly the Populists, who interpreted the development of capitalism in Russia in quite a different manner from that of the Russian Marxists, and who arrived at the conclusion that the Russian mir (the village commune) and not the proletariat, was the chief agent of social change in Russia.

In the period under consideration, roughly 1893-1898, Lenin's main achievement was to place the development of capitalism in Russia within the general schema for the periodisation of history outlined by Marx and Engels in The German Ideology and in The Communist Manifesto. Lenin's early polemics against the Populists, What the Friends of the People Are (1897), The Economic Content of Narodism (1894-1895), The Heritage We Renounce (1897) and A Characterisation of Economic Romanticism (1897), varied and complex though they are, constitute footnotes to his elaboration of the theme of the development of capitalism in Russia and the consequences thereof for the political practice of Russian Marxism. The conclusions that Lenin arrived at after his study of the problem were subsequently incorporated into the practical programme of the Russian Marxists. Theoretically, Lenin's The Development of Capitalism in Russia (1898) is not only, as Neil Harding observes, "the fullest, best-documented and best-argued examination of the crucial period of the evolution of capitalism out of feudalism in the literature of Marxism,"¹

¹ Neil Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, vol. 1, 1977, p. 107.

it is also the ~~most~~ authentic mapping out of what Lenin perceived to be the dialectical movement in the historical process, whose general feature is that each stage contains both the old and the new, and proceeds to a third something. Translated into the Russian situation this meant: feudal, precapitalist, patriarchal relations of production, (best exemplified by the economy of the countryside) are already latent with emerging bourgeois relations, which, in turn, are latent with the new socialist relations. This tracing out of a perceived historical process is undertaken with a greater eye for detail and a closer study of relevant statistics than similar work undertaken by Plekhanov, thus completing the latter's critique of Populism and his establishment of the leading role of the proletariat in the coming revolution. The Development also, for the first time in the hitherto brief history of Russian Marxism, introduces the role of the peasantry as allies of the proletariat and lays the basis for that deep understanding of the agrarian problem vis-a-vis the proletarian revolution which was to be unique to Lenin as the leader of the Bolshevik Party.

In this chapter I shall begin with an account of Russian Populism, set against the background of the industrialization of Russia and then proceed to the beginnings of the working class movement in Russia and the rise of Russian Marxism, as seen in the work of Plekhanov and the Emancipation of Labour Group. I shall then examine Lenin's contribution to Russian Marxism in this period.

The Industrialization of Russia and the Rise of Populism

The earlier view that the industrialization of Russia began during the reign of Peter the Great (1682-1725), has now been modified. Both Soviet economic historians such as Peter Lyashchenko, as well as Western scholars such as William Blackwell and Joseph T. Fuhrmann, have pointed out that the early foundations of Russian industry were laid as far back as the sixteenth century.² There was, however, a marked growth in industry during the last quarter of Peter's reign, which can be usefully referred to as Russia's first systematic venture into industrialization. Falkus tells us that:

... the industrial structure that emerged during the first quarter of the eighteenth century was fashioned almost entirely to state requirements. Peter's frequent wars provided the principal driving force, and, especially in the early years, the state itself set up and operated numerous enterprises geared to military needs. Cannon foundries and armament works surveys were initiated to discover mineral resources. Woolen-cloth factories were set up to provide uniforms for the armies, while sail-cloth, rope and other manufactures were developed to provide equipment for the newly formed navy.³

Peter the Great also embarked on public works of various kinds, thus encouraging the building industry. By 1716 Russia was a net exporter of iron, the world's largest iron producer. By 1725, state enterprises were

² William Blackwell, The Beginnings of Russian Industrialization, 1968; Joseph T. Fuhrmann, The Origins of Capitalism in Russia, 1972; Peter I. Lyashchenko, History of the National Economy of Russia to the 1917 Revolution, 1949.

³ Malcolm E. Falkus, The Industrialization of Russia, Macmillan Press, London, 1972, p. 21.

supplemented by private ones. The labour force required by these industries was supplied by the serfs.

In the 1840s, the impact of industrialization on Russian society set off a debate between the Slavophiles among the intelligentsia and the 'Westerners', those moderate Russian intellectuals, who, though they agreed with the Slavophiles that Russia need not follow the path of Western Europe, were united in a firm belief in the Enlightenment ideas of reason and progress. In 'The Problem of Economic Development in Russian Intellectual History of the Nineteenth Century' Alexander Gerschenkron provides a brief but meaningful account of leading intellectuals before Herzen, and their attitudes not only to industrialization, but also to serfdom and the autocracy.⁴ Radischev, Turgenev and Belinsky were influential in their time, but it is with Herzen that one may begin to speak of the beginnings of Russian Populism.

Russian Populism, Narodnichestvo (from the word 'narod' meaning people) was not, as Isaiah Berlin has pointed out "the name of a single political party, nor of a coherent body of doctrine, but of a widespread radical movement in the middle of the nineteenth century."⁵ Nevertheless, it was characterised by certain commonly held beliefs and ideals about Russian society: (1) a passion for social equality and

⁴ Alexander Gerschenkron, 'The Problem of Economic Development in Russian Intellectual History of the Nineteenth Century', in Continuity and Change in Russian and Soviet Thought, ed. E.J. Simmons, 1955, pp. 15-21.

⁵ Isaiah Berlin, 'Introduction', to Franco Venturi's Roots of Revolution, 1960, p. vii.

justice, (2) a deep faith in the 'people' and a related exaltation of the Russian mir as the only possible basis for development, (3) a hatred of capitalism, and following this, skepticism about the beneficial effects of industrialization, and (4) opposition to the State, represented by the Czar and the bureaucracy.

Franco Venturi maintains that the main inspiration for Populist economic doctrine, came from the Utopian socialists of the West, Saint-Simon, Owen, Proudhon, and Fourier.⁶ And indeed, in the case of Herzen, the influence of Saint-Simon's socialism was reinforced by his own observations of the 1848 Revolution in Paris. His disenchantment with the West may be said to have dated from this period, although his support of the Russian mir commenced as early as 1843 when he met in Moscow, Baron Von Haxthausen, author of a set of volumes on life in the Russian mir. Speaking of Haxthausen's impact on Herzen, Venturi notes:

This was a defence of patriarchal life against the interference of the modern State. But the kernel of this particular defence lay not in the nobility, but in the peasant community...

Confronted with the ideas of Haxthausen, Herzen saw that only by the obschina playing its part in the evolution of the Russian State and society would its eventual retention and development be justified. His apologia for patriarchalism was gradually changing into a Populist vision of the future of the Russian countryside.⁷

The defeat of the workers in the 1848 Revolution and the terror

⁶ See Roots of Revolution, Preface, pp. xxxi-xxxii.

⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

perpetrated against them left a deep mark on Herzen and completed his break with the bourgeois West. Europe now seemed more distant than ever from the realisation of socialism, and although Herzen actively continued to support Proudhon, his faith in Western style democracy had been shaken and he now looked to the peasantry of Russia for the development of socialism. In his 1854 letters to the English politician Linton (published in Russia in 1858 as The Old World and Russia), Herzen put forward the argument that was to become the central theme of Populism:

We may have to pass through the difficult and painful trials of the historical development of our predecessors, but in the same way as the embryo passes through all the lower degrees of zoological existence before birth. The finished labour and the result obtained become the general possession of all who understand - such is the mutual guarantee of progress, the birthright of mankind... Every schoolchild must himself find the solution of Euclid's theorems, but what a difference there is between the work of Euclid, who discovered them, and the work of the pupil today! Russia has been through her embryonic genesis in the European class. The nobility and the government in our country represent the European state in the Slav state. We have been through all the phases of political education, from German constitutionalism and English bureaucratic monarchy to the worship of the year 1793. The Russian people need not begin that hard work again. Why should they shed their blood to achieve those semi-solutions that we have already reached and whose only importance was that through them we arrived at other questions, at new strivings? To retain the village commune and give freedom to the individual, to extend the self-government of the village and the volost to the towns and the whole state, maintaining national unity... such is the question of Russia's future, i.e., the question of the very antinomy whose solution occupies and worries minds in the West.⁸

⁸ Quoted in Plekhanov's 'Our Differences', Selected Philosophical Works, vol. 1, pp. 129-130.

The emancipation of the serfs in 1861, so eagerly looked forward to by Russia's liberal and socialist intelligentsia, soon proved itself to be a mixed blessing. Gerschenkron has pointed out that although intended as a measure to provide free labour for nascent capitalism as well as to quieten the peasant unrest that broke out after the Crimean war, the liberation of the serfs was constrained by the onerous terms imposed on them by the emancipation.⁹ The Populists of all shades and opinions, Herzen included, reacted strongly to the encroachment of capitalism in the countryside, especially on the mir.

Nikolai Chernyshevskii (1828-1889), to be classed among the 'Westerners' in the Populist camp, welcomed the introduction of Western technology as a means of raising the productivity of the mir. He rebuked the Slavophiles for their uncritical admiration of all things Russian and supported the mir with a different set of arguments.

In 1859 he wrote The Critique of Philosophical Prejudices Against Communal Ownership in which he placed the question of the mir in historical perspective:

Before the question of the rural commune (obshchina) acquired practical importance, with the beginning of work on the transformation of village relations, the Russian obshchina constituted an object of mystical pride for exclusive worshippers of the Russian national character, who imagined that nothing resembling our communal system existed among other peoples and that it must, therefore, be regarded as an innate peculiarity of the Russian or Slav race, of exactly the same kind as, for instance,

⁹ Alexander Gerschenkron, 'Problems and Patterns of Russian Economic Development', in The Transformation of Russian Society, 1960, pp. 42-46.

cheekbones broader than in other Europeans, or a language which calls men muzh and not mensh, homo or l'homme, and which has seven cases, not six as in Latin, or five as in Greek.¹⁰

The communal land system, wrote Chernyshevskii, had existed among the Germans, the French, and the ancestors of the English and Italians, and indeed, among all European peoples. In the course of historical development it gave way to private ownership of land. Thus, the communal ownership of land is not an innate peculiarity of the Russian national character. It was rather a general human institution belonging to the life of every people at a certain stage of their history. Nevertheless, it could not be argued that private property being a later development, is also a superior one; nor was it necessary for Russia to abandon communal ownership and go forward along the path of capitalist development. "Is the course of development really exhausted by these two?" asked Chernyshevskii rhetorically as it were.¹¹

In the same work, Chernyshevskii presents his critique of the economic viability of private landownership, which may be summarised as follows. Industrial-commercial activity intensifies and produces a colossal growth of speculation, which after enveloping all departments of the national economy, turns to the fundamental and most extensive branch, agriculture. Individual landed property loses its former character. Formerly, the owner of the land was the person who worked it and laid out

¹⁰ Nicolai Chernyshevskii, 'Selected Writings' in Late Marx and the Russian Road, ed. Teodor Shanin, 1983, p. 182.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 186.

his capital to improve it (the system of small proprietors cultivating their plots with their own hands; also the system of tenant and hereditary share-cropping, with or without servile dependence). Now a new system has appeared, contract farming. Under this system, when rents go up as a consequence of the improvements the farmer has introduced, on the land, this same land falls into the hands of another person who has either not participated at all in the improvement or has participated insignificantly, but who, nevertheless profits from the returns the land now yields. At the same time, the cultivation of the land begins to require capital inputs that exceed the means of the vast majority of cultivators, while the farm economy requires a scale of activity which far exceeds the capacities of an individual family and which, in terms of the size of economic plots, also excludes (under private ownership) the vast majority of cultivators from sharing the benefits afforded by that economy, thus turning this majority into hired workers. Chernyshevskii thus concludes:

With these changes, the reasons which existed in former times for the advantage of private property in land over communal ownership are being destroyed. Communal ownership is becoming the sole means to give the vast majority of cultivators a share in the returns which the land comes to yield as a result of improvements effected in it. Thus communal ownership is necessary not only for the well-being of the agricultural class, but also for the progress of agriculture itself. It appears the only full and rational way of combining the farmer's gain with improvements of the land and productive methods with conscientious execution of work. And without this combination, fully successful production is impossible.¹²

¹² ibid., pp. 186-187.

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Chernyshevskii thus introduced a new feature into Populist support of the mir: its economic viability. This would become part of the arsenal of Populist arguments during the period of Legal Populism. I shall return to this question later. Chernyshevskii was arrested in 1862, mainly for his strong criticism of the autocracy, especially the limitations of the emancipation of the serfs, and while he was being incarcerated in the Peter and Paul fortress, wrote his famous novel What is to Be Done?

The emancipation of the serfs in 1861 only placed a double burden on the peasantry (as Plekhanov would note later). Gerschenkron has summarised some of the problems of the emancipation. The emancipation provided that the landowner should give to the peasants a certain amount of land for permanent use. In most of the country, especially the regions of the black-earth belt, the peasants received much less land than that which had been assigned to them prior to the reform. Moreover, they were required to pay quit-rent (obrok) as a compensation for land allotments, and these were set far above the contemporaneous market prices of the land. Although the state had contracted to compensate the landowners over a period of time, in actual fact, the peasants continued to be indebted to the landlord and often paid his share of the dues by various forms of labour-service. Nor could the peasant escape from the obligation of allotments, as the village commune which held the allotment land in common would not release him from his services.

Meanwhile the student agitation of the 60s crystallised into a plot to assassinate the Czar Alexander II, but the plan failed, its leader was executed and mass arrests and deportations of people commenced. Among

those exiled was P. Lavrov, whose Historical Letters was to influence the Narodnaya Volya youth by an idealistic call to serve the people. Lavrov held what came to be called the 'subjectivist' view of history. The foundation of all history, Lavrov argued, is what people think, especially critically thinking individuals, who are able to influence the objective course of history by their living ideals. The masses do not make history; but the critical minority, which owes to these masses its leisure to think, must pay its debt to them. Bakunin, on the other hand, stressed the role of the people in a revolutionary onslaught against the state; the Russian peasantry were not ignorant and doltish but capable both of revolution and socialism.

By the 1870s, under the combined impact of peasant unrest and student agitation, and deeply influenced by the major Populist writers, the Zemlyai Volya (Land and Freedom) movement was founded, which later broke up into the two factions, the Chorny Peredel (to which Plekhanov belonged) and the Narodnaya Volya, the People's Will, which distinguished itself from the parent organization by its programme of individual terrorism. In 1881 Alexander II was assassinated; the main organisers of the conspiracy were hung and the rest were exiled. With this the strength of Narodnaya Volya declined. The Populist philosophy underwent a marked change and emerged by the '90s as Legal Populism, whose leading representatives were Mikhailovsky and Vorontsov. The industrialization of Russia had gained momentum by the 1880s and with the growth of the working class a new development had occurred in Russia's history. As Franco Venturi has noted: "From 1881 onwards the problem of the working classes began to count in Russia not merely as a reflection of what was

happening in Western Europe or as a theoretical demand on the part of the revolutionaries, but as a concrete fact."¹³

The 'sixties saw a number of protests and disorders, but these "disturbances were largely a reflection of the difficulties experienced by workers of peasant origin in adapting themselves to the new condition brought into being by the manifesto of 19th February 1861."¹⁴ The first genuine strike occurred in 1870 at the cotton mills of St. Petersburg; some 800 workers struck and demanded an increase in wages. Between 1870 and 1879, the official documents list some 326 strikes. The new type of militant workers belonged to the metal industries and could be regarded not as peasants who had migrated to the city, but as proletarians proper. The working class movement had its impact on Populism, which now began to turn its attention to the urban working class and not concentrate exclusively on the countryside.¹⁵

The first organization of workers, the South Russian Workers' Union and the Northern Union of Russian Workers, appeared in the '70s. The first working class demonstration against the state occurred in 1876 at St. Petersburg (Plekhanov took part in this). Already in 1869 Flerovski's The Situation of the Working Class in Russia had described the devastating effects of capitalism both on the urban worker and the

¹³ Venturi, op.cit., p. 507.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 507.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 507-552.

rural worker.¹⁶ Flerovski drew the conclusion that the two types of agriculture to be found in the West (large estates and individual farming) were inferior types as compared to the Russian mir, provided the financial burden upon the peasantry was removed. As Solomon M. Schwarz has noted, after the beginning of the 1860s, with the establishment of the railways, a rapid development of commercial agriculture occurred, industry began to grow and change and there was a sudden spurt of foreign and internal trade, and a mushrooming of banks, joint-stock companies, etc.¹⁷ As was to be expected, the peasant bore the brunt of economic progress. The emancipation itself had been burdensome:

Insufficient land, heavy redemption payments (for the land), and high taxes made economic progress impossible for large sections of the peasantry - for the majority of the peasants in some provinces - and led quickly to differentiation within the peasantry: a minority of peasants moved upward on the economic scale, while a very considerable majority moved downward.¹⁸

Now, in addition, the transformation of a natural system of farming into a commercial one, and the destruction of domestic peasant industry (kustar) also changed the face of the village commune. In the '80s, with the decline in the fortunes of the Narodnaya Volya, Legal Populism, which favoured non-revolutionary methods of struggle began to make headway. In

¹⁶ See T. Von Laue 'Russian Labour Between Field and Factory', in California Slavic Studies, vol. III, 1964.

¹⁷ Solomon M. Schwarz, 'Populism and Early Russian Marxism on Ways of Economic Development of Russia, The 1880s and 1890s', in Continuity and Change in Russian and Soviet Thought, ed. E.J. Simmons, 1955, p. 40.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

the '70s, these Populists, Eliseev, Vorontsov, Danielson and Mikhailovsky had helped to disseminate Marxism in Russia. Danielson had made the first Russian translation of Capital, and both Vorontsov and Mikhailovsky had begun their careers with a sympathetic understanding of Marxism; in time they would use this same theory to resuscitate the Russian mir, and as Lenin's Who the Friends of the People Are (1894) makes clear, both men by the '90s, would lead the main attack on Marxism, while accepting the Marxian critique of capitalism. The political strategy of the Legal Populists, varied from support for peasant protests through protests by the intelligentsia, on occasions relying on the autocracy as a level of change, encouraging the survival of the mir and rejecting the working class as the agent of social change. Not all of their support of the peasantry was uncritical:

Mikhailovsky cautioned the intelligent against attempting to submerge himself and his civilized values in the backward ignorant masses of the countryside. He acknowledged the injustices of Western society and held that if Russia followed the right path, it might be able to avoid them and achieve a more rational and human social order. But such prospects, he thought, were only inchoate. Existing conditions in Russia were primitive and the intelligent had to guide their development if they were to conform to the highest values of humanity and civilization.¹⁹

While Mikhailovsky would lead the main philosophical attack on Marxism, both Danielson and Vorontsov became influential in their systematic study of the development of capitalism in Russia, the former

¹⁹ Richard Wortmann, The Crisis of Russian Populism, 1967, pp. 19-20.

questioning the desirability of this development and the latter denying that it could occur in Russia at all. In 1882 in The Destinies of Capitalism in Russia²⁰, Vorontsov put forward the thesis that two reasons militated against the growth of capitalism in Russia: (1) the impoverishment of the peasantry led to the diminution of their purchasing power and hence to the decline of the home market, (2) Russia was not powerful enough to compete with other capitalist nations for the foreign market; without this, capitalism in Russia would decline. Vorontsov, of course, was wrong on both counts, as Lenin would argue in his The Development of Capitalism in Russia (1896), and indeed as the government statisticians themselves would reveal in their documents. The impoverishment of the peasants, in actual fact, extended the home market, because natural economy had changed into a money economy. It was observed by contemporary statistical records that since the emancipation larger quantities of grain were sold to the market; the poorest peasants often sold not only their surplus grain but a large portion of what they needed for their own consumption. The pattern was established for such peasants to sell their grain in the autumn and buy grain in the spring. With regard to industry, the home market grew, not on account of production of means of consumption, but because of the growth of the means of production (the introductory theoretical section of Lenin's The Development of Capitalism in Russia analyses this particular phenomenon). Danielson's arguments, on the other hand, rested on a realistic awareness

²⁰ Lenin singles Vorontsov's arguments out for criticism in The Development of Capitalism in Russia.

of the fact that capitalism had established itself in Russia for the time being and his Essays on Our National Economy after the Emancipation of the Serfs (1893) was intended to reestablish the importance of the commune as the basis of scientific agriculture and large-scale industry.

The question of how all this was to be accomplished in the face of the onset of capitalism in Russia, aided by a powerful autocratic state, was never seriously tackled in Legal Populist literature.²¹ The opposition to Legal Populism came officially from a few scattered sources: outright supporters of capitalism, those who favoured state protectionism and, subsequently, the advocates of economic liberalism (the Legal Marxists). Their combined influence did not seem to have had much impact on public opinion until the rise of Russian Marxism:

Only when the opposition to Populism emerged in the Left camp, not in the name of capitalism and capitalist interest, but in the name of the broad masses of the people and - more remotely - in the name of the abolition of capitalism, did the question of capitalist or non-capitalist ways of development for Russia become (for almost two decades) a central issue.²²

Russian Marxism

In 1883, while in exile abroad, Plekhanov, Axelrod, Vera Zasulich,

²¹ On Danielson's relationship with Marx and Engels and the latter's views on the commune, see Solomon Schwarz, op.cit., pp. 47-44, David McLellan's Karl Marx, His Life and Thought, 1973, pp. 438-442, and T. Shanin, Late Marx and the Russian Road, 1983. For a general history of the Russian commune, see Dorothy Atkinson, The End of the Russian Land Commune, 1865-1930, 1983.

²² Solomon Schwarz, op.cit., p. 54.

Deutsch and Ignatiev, founded in Geneva the first Russian Marxist group, calling it The Emancipation of Labour Group. The ELG's aims were to spread the knowledge of 'scientific socialism' in Russia, chiefly through the translation of the works of Marx and Engels and through a conscientious Marxist analysis of Russian conditions in order to demonstrate that socio-economic change could come about only through the political struggle waged by the emerging Russian proletariat. In their early polemics with the Populists, the Russian Marxists put forward impressive arguments designed to show that capitalism had already come to stay and that a direct political struggle against the autocracy would constitute a double burden for the peasants who were oppressed both by feudalism and by capitalism in the countryside. The focus of the struggle should therefore shift to the working class in Russia, who from now on would be urged to wage both a socialist and a democratic struggle. The strategy of the ELG required that: (1) they demonstrate that capitalism had made inroads into Russia, and that this process could not be halted; (2) that the Russian mir was disintegrating and could not constitute the basis for a new order; (3) that the concept of the 'people' was too diffuse for a clearly thought out political struggle; and (4) that a political party must be organized to lead both the struggles against feudalism and capitalism and end with the seizure of power by the working class (this last being a maximalist position). The struggle would be waged chiefly by the industrial proletariat, with help from the peasantry and all progressive elements of society.

The draft programme of the ELG called for the transfer to social ownership of all the means and objects of production. The market system

would be replaced by a planned economy. The first result of this new economy would be that every citizen would have equal and direct participation in the discussion of and in the decisions on all important matters. These changes would not be brought about by the ruling classes (who as may be expected, would struggle against them) but by the working class. Therefore, the necessary preliminary condition for this reorganization of society is "the seizure of power by the working class in each of the countries concerned."²³

Having stated the basic premises of Russian Social Democracy, the programme of the ELG examines the conditions in Russia that would determine the specific tasks of Social Democracy. Whereas in the West the proletariat had to direct its struggle against bourgeois domination, the working masses of Russia were suffering under a double yoke: an obsolescent patriarchal economy and rising capitalism. Both politically and economically there was an important third factor, the autocracy. Hence: "... on these grounds the Russian Social Democrats consider as their first and principal obligation the formation of a revolutionary workers' party. The growth and development of such a party, however, will find a very powerful obstacle in modern Russian absolutism."²⁴

The ELG's programme did not specify exactly how the overthrow of the autocracy could be accomplished; and the seizure of power was not

²³ G. Plekhanov, 'Our Differences', Selected Philosophical Works, vol. 1, p. 359.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 360.

practicable at that period.²⁵ It was tacitly understood that this could be left to a future date when both the Party and the proletariat had established themselves on the Russian scene. Meanwhile, the democratic struggle for a constitution, for freedom of speech and assembly, etc. would be combined with the economic struggle of the working class for higher wages, shorter working hours, better conditions, etc.

The ELG owed its prestige and influence, undoubtedly, to the vast erudition of its leading member, Plekhanov. His first major work, Socialism and the Political Struggle (1883) was not only a challenge to Populism but was the first detailed application of Marxian theory to an understanding of developments in Russian life. It was followed up by Our Differences (1885), once again a critique of the leading figures of Populism: Herzen, Chernyshevskii, Lavrov, Vorontsov and Mikhailovsky, as well a critique of anarchism in the person of Bakunin. The Development of the Monist View of History, which appeared in 1885, conclusively established Plekhanov's reputation as a Marxist scholar in international circles, chiefly among the German Social Democrats. Its impact on the revolutionary Russian intelligentsia can hardly be overestimated, as it won over large sections of educated youth to the cause of Russian Marxism, while simultaneously administering a defeating blow to the much respected leader of Legal Populism, Mikhailovsky. Of the ELG's work in general and of Plekhanov in particular, it might rightly be said that

²⁵ Axelrod's Present Tasks of Social Democracy took an even more moderate stand, emphasizing day-to-day work rather than the prospect of a seizure of power.

"his principal contribution to the history of political ideas in Russia was to introduce the concept of the Russian proletariat."²⁶

The work of the ELG was soon taken up inside Russia by a number of young Russian Marxists, notably Lenin (at that time still known by the family name of Ulyanov) and by Julius Martov, at a somewhat later date. Both men subscribed to what came to be identified as the 'orthodoxy' of the ELG's Marxism; although their paths would eventually diverge within the space of a decade in what some commentators have called the 'Great Schism.'²⁷ This description, however, does not seem to be an apt one, for it suggests that both parties to the dispute in the famous 1903 split in Russian Marxism (Lenin on the one side, with Martov and the ELG on the other) had both, in their respective fashions, come to interpret their previous orthodoxy in a different manner. Lenin continued to adhere to the 'orthodox' position, while his erstwhile colleagues, turned adversaries, slowly but surely modified their earlier views. I shall return to this question in Chapter III. For the time being, it would be instructive to summarise what 'orthodoxy' signified to all Russian Marxists at that point in time. The basic presuppositions of 'orthodoxy' were: (1) Marxian 'scientific socialism' based on the materialist interpretation of history was the only authentic interpretation of the historical process, and had been validated by the development of various countries; (2) capitalism would succeed feudalism; in Russia this process

²⁶ J.L.H. Keep, The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1963, p. 19.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 107.

was already taking place; (3) the Russian mir was on its way out; (4) the Russian proletariat would lead the revolution against both the autocracy and the bourgeoisie (at the right time), but only in alliance with the peasantry and all radical elements of society; (5) state power must be seized by the victorious proletariat, after the bourgeois revolution against the autocracy; (6) the Russian Social Democratic Party must provide leadership in the coming revolution; (7) the immediate task of the Russian Marxists was to help the proletariat in both its economic and political struggles; and (8) the revolution would be the beginning of far-reaching socialist change.

These presuppositions constituted the general framework within which all Russian Marxists exercised their theoretical and practical activity, and within which they engaged in successive polemics with Populism, their main contender, at that stage, for the leadership of the political life of Russia. Lenin's contribution to this struggle for leadership and, via this, his development and extension of Plekhanov's Marxism have been dealt with recently in Neil Harding's Lenin's Political Thought. Harding's analysis appropriately focuses on the importance of Lenin's economic theory for an understanding of his politics: "The importance of Lenin's economic theory for an understanding of his politics cannot be over estimated; the two elements are inextricably bound together, especially in his early work."²⁷ I shall extend the Harding analysis further to include: (1) Transition and Contradiction in the Historical

²⁷ Neil Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, vol. 1, 1977, p.

Process; (2) the specifically Marxian methodology (borrowed from Capital) that Lenin uses.

A study of Lenin's early work, especially The Development of Capitalism in Russia discloses the specific meaning that Lenin gave to the word 'political.' It would seem to be synonymous with 'historical process.' Since the historical process has been understood quite differently by such thinkers as Hegel (development of the World-Spirit) and Colingwood (the history of men's thoughts and how they shaped human action) it may not be out of place to repeat here that by the historical process Lenin understood it to mean changes in the mode of production. This perception is central to The Development of Capitalism in Russia.

Lenin's Marxism

The cumulative result of Lenin's critique of Populist economic theory (The Economic Content of Narodism), A Characterisation of Economic Romanticism) and Populist 'subjective sociology' (Who the Friends of the People Are), was the writing of The Development of Capitalism in Russia. The key words of this opus are 'transition' and 'contradiction.'

The overall significance that Lenin attached to the word 'transition' was that it was a passing over from older forms to new ones, whether this change was from feudalism to nascent capitalism or from the latter to a still newer form. 'Contradiction' is, as it were, the motor force of this passing over. The entire text of the The Development is strewn with these two words and the title of at least one chapter, specifically uses the word 'transition' (Chapter III, 'The Landowners' Transition from Corvée to Capitalist Economy'). In discussing a stage that has

already come to pass Lenin uses the words 'growth', 'formation', 'stages', 'rise', and 'development.' As noted earlier, the immediate purpose of this work was to refute the Populist argument that the traditional system of the village commune was the proper basis of social development (and was immune to the influences of capitalism) and that capitalism was doomed to extinction in Russia. Lenin would demonstrate that feudalism was interrupted from consolidating as a permanent way of life because of the very contradictions latent within it. In concrete terms this meant that capitalism was not an artificial growth foisted on the economy by the autocracy, but that it was inherent in the developmental process going on in the countryside.

A favourite argument of the Populists had been that with the growing impoverishment of both peasantry and proletariat, their diminishing purchasing capacity would inhibit the growth of capitalism and eventually throttle it. Here again, Lenin points out that one of the 'contradictions' of capitalism was that its main profits were secured from the growth in the means of production, and not purely from the growth of consumer goods. It was a 'contradiction' because while capitalism obtained its profits from the growth of the means of production, it simultaneously enlarged the technological foundations of the economy, stimulated the productive forces and increased the number of the agents of revolution, the proletariat.

A. Transition and Contradiction

The transition from feudalism to capitalism is marked by three moments: (1) labour-service; (2) payment of rent in kind; (3) payment of

rent in cash. Correspondingly, the evolution of capitalism is accompanied by three moments that point to the transition to socialism: (1) small-commodity production; (2) manufacture; (3) factory production. The entire movement of the text of The Development can be described in the six moments cited above, with contradictions appearing just prior to the turning points in the transitions.

(1) Labour-service, referred to in Russian as the barschina system, or the corvée system, prevailed in various forms before the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, and persisted throughout the 1890s as feudal survivals. In briefly describing the epoch of serfdom Lenin notes:

The essence of the economic system in those days was that the entire land of a given unit of agrarian economy, i.e., of a given estate, was divided into the lord's and the peasant's land; the latter was distributed in allotments among the peasants, who (receiving other means of production in addition, as for example, timber, sometimes cattle, etc.) cultivated it with their own labour and their own implements, and obtained their livelihood from it. The product of this peasant labour constituted the necessary product, to employ the terminology of theoretical political economy; necessary for the peasants in providing them with means of subsistence, and for the landlord in providing him with hands - in exactly the same way as the product which replaces the variable part of the value of capital is a necessary product in capitalist society. The peasants' surplus labour, on the other hand, consisted in their cultivation, with the same implements, of the landlord's land; the product of that labour went to the landlord.²⁸

²⁸ V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 3, pp. 191-192. For further accounts of the condition of the peasantry under serfdom, see Geroid Tanquary Robinson, Rural Russia Under the Old Regime, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1972, pp. 36-51; A. Volin, A Century of Russian Agriculture, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1970; Launcelot A. Owen, The Russian Peasant Movement, Russell & Russell, New York, 1963..

The prevalence of such a system required first of all the preponderance of natural economy. Secondly, it required that the direct producer be in possession of the means of production; thirdly, that he be tied to the land. Lenin cites from Engels' The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844:

In opposing the view of Henry George, who said that the expropriation of the mass of the population is the great and universal cause of poverty and oppression, Engels wrote in 1867: "This is not quite correct historically... In the middle ages, it was not the expropriation of the people from, but on the contrary, their appropriation to the land which became the source of feudal oppression. The peasant retained his land, but was attached to it as a serf or a villein, and made liable to tribute to the lord in labour and in produce."²⁹

In such a system the peasant must be in a state of personal dependence on the landlord, since if this were not the case the peasant who owns a plot of land cannot be compelled to work for another man. The peasant's serf status and lack of rights in the social estates formed the basis of this extra economic coercion. The low level of farming technique perpetuated the peasants' dependence on the landlord. In Capital Marx describes labour-service as labour rent.³⁰

The first change in the barschina system appeared when landlords made a breach in the system of natural economy, by producing grain for sale, during the last years of serfdom. Pokrovsky dates the process from

²⁹ V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 3, p. 192.

³⁰ Karl Marx, Capital, vol. 3, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 790.

approximately the period after the Crimean War.³¹ The transition to capitalism in agriculture took place very slowly and was accompanied by a combination of the corvée system with capitalism relations of production. The peasant, after the Emancipation of 1861, had his land clearly separated from the property of the landlord and would become the full owner of it, provided he could buy this land from the landlord, through what came to be known as 'redemption' payment. However, capitalism could only flourish when a class of people appeared who would work for hire and whose implements would be replaced by those of the employer.

The differentiation of the peasantry (a phenomenon noticed by many writers on the subject during Lenin's time) began to appear shortly after the Emancipation. Its significance was best appreciated only by the Russian Marxists, chiefly by Lenin. His classification of the peasantry into the rural bourgeoisie (the rich peasantry, with land, implements and the ability to hire labour), the middle peasantry (who owned some land, and implements, and who partially used wage labour and partly hired themselves out to other rich peasants or to the former landlord) and the rural proletariat (those with little or no land, with no implements and who hired themselves out to the middle and rich peasantry) was to be the basis of the future Bolshevik strategy for a worker-peasant alliance.

The relative concentration of land among smaller sections of the rural population occurred when these sections purchased new land or leased out the allotment land of the poor peasants and those who could

³¹ M.N. Pokrovsky, Brief History of Russia, University Prints & Reprints, Orono, Maine, 1968, p. 201.

not afford to cultivate their land. The concentration of implements among the richer classes of the countryside was facilitated by the introduction of machinery into agriculture. The differentiation of the peasantry cut at the roots of labour-service and introduced payment of rent in kind at first and then money-rent, both in the landlord-economy as well as in the peasant economy. The stage was now set for usury and merchant capital, the precursors of merchant capital. In one of those remarkable asides that punctuate the text of The Development Lenin remarks:

The systems mentioned are actually interwoven in the most varied and fantastic fashion... It is quite natural that the combination of such dissimilar and even opposite systems of economy leads in practice to a whole number of most profound and complicated conflicts and contradictions, and that the pressure of these contradictions results in a number of the farmers going bankrupt, etc. All these are phenomena characteristic of every transitional period.³²

And later, in the same section:

Life creates forms that unite themselves with remarkable gradualness systems of economy whose basic features constitute opposites.³³

The decline of labour-service and the rise of commodity-economy was a slow, complicated process. In his account of labour-service Lenin distinguished between the old form of labour-service (performed by

³² V.I. Lenin, op.cit., p. 195.

³³ Ibid., p. 197.

peasants who owned draught animals and implements) and the new transitional form of labour-service (performed by rural proletarians who had no implements). This latter type "constitutes a direct transition of capitalism, merging with it a number of quite imperceptible transitions."³⁴ The Populists, Lenin noted, did not deny that the labour-service system was simply a survival of the feudal economy; nevertheless they avoided coming to terms with the basic features of the post Emancipation economy and instead engaged in a "monstrous idealization" of the corvée system.³⁵

Danielson (pseudonym Nikolai-on) had claimed that the allotment of land to the peasant under the Emancipation resulted in the intimate linking of the direct producer with his means of production. But, Lenin comments, "he forgot the tiny circumstance that this allotment of land served as a means of guaranteeing a supply of labour for the landlords."³⁶ Elaborating further, Lenin went on to say:

As we have indicated, Marx, in describing pre-capitalist systems of agriculture, analyzed all the forms of economic relations that, in general exist in Russia, and clearly emphasized the necessity of small-scale production and of a tie between the peasant, and the land in the case of both labour-rent, rent in kind and money rent. But could it ever have entered his head to elevate this allotting of land to the dependent peasant into a 'principle' of an eternal tie between the producer and the means of production? Did he forget even for a moment that this tie

³⁴ Ibid., p. 205.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 211.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 211.

between the producer and the means of production was the source of, and condition for medieval exploitation, constituted the basis for technical and social stagnation and necessarily required all sorts of 'other than economic pressure'?³⁷

The transition from labour-service (labour-rent) to that in kind and subsequently to money-rent is documented and analysed in depth and detail in Chapter II of The Development. The use of Zemstvo statistics can overwhelm the unsuspecting reader into thinking that the analysis has a merely illustrative and cumulative value in the text. The fundamental methodological principle that Lenin uses in this chapter is derived from volume 3 of Capital. Its importance can be appreciated best in the light of the current controversy over whether Marx supported the Populists over the question of the obschina. T. Shanin in his Late Marx and the Russian Road argues that Marx, in the last decade of his life, set out to rethink the theoretical suppositions of Capital, in order to account for the uneven development of backward societies such as the Russia of his time.

The basis of Shanin's argument is the letter that Marx wrote to Vera Zasulich in 1881 (of which four drafts were subsequently discovered among his papers). The relevant portions of the letter are cited here:

... The capitalist system is therefore based on the utmost separation of the producer from the means of production... The basis of this whole development is the expropriation of the agricultural producer. This has been accomplished in radical fashion only in England... But all other countries of Western Europe are going through the same process.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 211.

Hence the 'historical inevitability' of this process is expressly limited to the countries of Western Europe. ... In this development in Western Europe it is a question of the transformation of one form of private property into another form of private property. In the case of the Russian peasants one would on the contrary have to transform their common property into private property.

Thus the analysis given in Capital does not provide any arguments for or against the viability of the village community, but the special research into this subject which I have conducted, and for which I obtained the material from original sources, has convinced me that this community is the fulcrum of Russia's social revival, but in order that it might function in this way one would first have to eliminate the destructive influences which assail it from every quarter and then to ensure the conditions normal for spontaneous development...³⁸

However, as Solomon Schwarz has pointed out, the answer to the question of how the commune is to be safeguarded from deleterious influences is of great importance in understanding the Russian Marxist position on the subject. Marx, in a first draft of his letter had said:

A Russian revolution is required, if the Russian commune is to be saved... If the revolution occurs in time to insure the free development of the commune, the latter can become a force for the regeneration of Russian life, an element of advantage compared with the nations enslaved by the capitalist system.³⁹

A year later in the preface to the Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto (1882) both Engels and Marx said:

In Russia, alongside a feverishly rapid development of capitalist knavery, and a just emerging bourgeois agricul-

³⁸ Marx, Engels, Selected Correspondence, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, pp. 319-320.

³⁹ Cited in Solomon Schwarz, op.cit., p. 50.

ture, we find more than half the land owned communally by the peasants. The question arises: can the Russian peasant commune - this, to be sure, is a widely decomposed form of primitive communal ownership of the land - evolve directly to a higher form - to communist common property - or does it have to pass through the process of decomposition through which it passes in the historic development of the West?

The only possible answer to this, at the present time, is the following: If the Russian revolution is a signal for proletarian revolution in the West, so that the two can supplement each other, then modern Russian communal ownership can serve as a point of departure for a communist development.⁴⁰

Marx and Engels seemed to have pinned their hopes for a Russian revolution on the Narodnaya Volya, which as we have seen, declined after the early 1880s. What is of interest for the present analysis is that in the passage cited above both men appear to have been partially aware of the onset of capitalism in Russia. There is nothing contradictory about Marx's initial support of the commune; nor does it require, as Shanin argues, that Marx would need to revise the main propositions of Capital.⁴¹ The theoretical framework for understanding the agrarian situation in Russia in the 1890s is precisely that provided by Capital, vol. 3. In the section on ground rent Marx has this to say:

Whatever the specific form of rent may be, all types have this in common: the appropriation of rent is that economic form in which landed property is realised, and

⁴⁰ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, vol. 1, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, pp. 100-101.

⁴¹ T. Shanin, Late Marx and the Russian Road, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1983, pp. 3-33.

ground-rent, in turn, presupposes the existence of landed property, the ownership of certain portions of our planet by certain individuals. The owner may be an individual representing the community, as in Asia, Egypt, etc.; or this landed property may be merely incidental to the ownership of the immediate producers themselves by some individual as under slavery or serfdom; or it may be a purely private ownership of Nature by non-producers, a mere title to the land; or finally, it may be a relationship to the land which, as in the case of colonists and small peasants owning land, seems to be directly included - in the isolated and not socially developed labour - in the appropriation and production of the products of particular plots of land by the direct producers.⁴²

Developing this further, in the chapter entitled 'Genesis of Capitalist Ground-Rent', Marx examines the stages by which simple ground-rent or labour-rent changes through rent in kind and onto the specifically capitalist form, money-rent. It is this theoretical framework which Lenin uses to analyse the transitional forms from feudalism to nascent capitalism in the Russian countryside. This provides a clearer picture of agricultural capitalism than would have otherwise been possible. He cites the relevant passage from Capital vol. 3 to focus on the basic problem of the feudal forms of ground-rent in Russia:

... the direct producer, using instruments of labour (plough, cattle, etc.) which actually belong to him, cultivates soil actually owned by him during part of the week, and works during the remaining days upon the estate of the feudal lord without any compensation from the feudal lord.⁴³

⁴² Karl Marx, Capital, op.cit., vol. 3, 1977, p. 634.

⁴³ Cited in V.I. Lenin, op.cit., p. 175.

The next form of rent, that in kind, comes into being when the direct producer produces the entire product on his own land and yields the surplus to the landlord. Here, this form of rent

... will rise to greater differences in the economic position of the individual direct producers. At least the possibility for such a differentiation exists and the possibility for the direct producer to have in turn acquired the means to exploit other labourers directly.⁴⁴

The differentiation of the peasantry, thus initiated, develops further at the next stage of money rent, where the direct producer gives up not his product but the price of the produce, although at this stage the peasant is still in possession of his land and implements. Marx had observed that this type of rent "presupposes a considerable development of commerce, or urban industry, of commodity production in general, and thereby of money circulation."⁴⁵ Further, says Lenin:

The transformation of rent in kind into money-rent is furthermore not only inevitably accompanied, but even anticipated, by the formation of a class of propertyless day labourers, who hire themselves out for money. During their genesis, when this new class appears, but sporadically, the custom necessarily develops among the more prosperous peasants subject to rent-payments... of exploiting agricultural wage-labourers for their own account... In this way, the gradually acquire the possibility of accumulating a certain amount of wealth and themselves becoming transformed into future capitalists. The old self-employed possessors of land themselves thus give rise to a nursery school for capitalist tenants, whose development is conditioned beyond the bounds of the

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 175.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 175.

The differentiation of the peasantry, which Lenin broadly defines as "the sum-total of all the economic contradictions among the peasantry is at the same time the process which signifies the utter dissolution of the old, patriarchal peasantry and the creation of new types of rural inhabitants."⁴⁷ The Populists saw in this differentiation just a simple emergence of property inequality, but did not draw the inescapable conclusion:

The old peasantry is not only 'differentiating, it is being completely dissolved, it is ceasing to exist, it is being ousted by absolutely new types of rural inhabitants - types that are the basis of a society in which commodity economy and capitalist production prevail. These types are the rural bourgeoisie (chiefly petty bourgeoisie) and the rural proletariat - a class of commodity producers in agriculture and a class of agricultural wage workers.⁴⁸

Consequently, it was incorrect to speak of the peasantry in general, as the Populists did, and see this peasantry as the "social force that would undermine the onset of capitalism. The peasantry had already taken its definite place in the general system of capitalism.

A great part of the section on the differentiation of the peasantry is devoted to a detailed analysis of Zemstvo statistics on the subject, the material covering the interior purely Russian gubernias. The first

⁴⁶ ibid., p. 176.

⁴⁷ ibid., p. 173.

⁴⁸ ibid., p. 174.

characteristic of the top group was the extensive area of land under cultivation, whether this was rented, purchased or leased land. Correspondingly, the middle group had much less land, and the bottom group, little or none. The equalising principle of land allotment after the Emancipation did not work to the advantage of the poor peasants, who, owing to the lack of sufficient means of production, leased out their allotments to the better off peasantry. The second characteristic of the top group was their possession of superior means of production, both implements (later machinery) and livestock, and draught animals. The relative concentration of land and means of production in the hands of the well to do peasantry was paralleled by the impoverishment and expropriation of the poor peasantry, who then hired themselves out as day labourers for wages or migrated to the cities to become industrial workers or vagrants, and therefore constituted a reserve army of labour. Commenting on the impact of the Emancipation and especially of the problem of the differentiation of the peasantry E.H. Carr notes:

The historical function of the reform, as of the enclosures in English history, was to drive from the land into the towns and factories the labour necessary for the industrialization of the national economy...⁴⁹

... The reform also favoured the rise of a small number of the most efficient peasants who could consolidate and extend their holdings and emerge from the cruc by employing the labour of their less fortunate fellows; but for the mass of peasants it meant a weight of debt, harder conditions, and new forms of exploitation which were

⁴⁹ E.H. Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923, vol. 2, Macmillan, London, 1950-53, p. 10.

resented as keenly as the old. It divided the peasantry into a minority (in some regions perhaps as large as one-fifth) of landowning peasants, some of them employing hired labour to large landowners or well-to-do peasants. The intrusion of capitalism had introduced class distinctions into the countryside.⁵⁰

The theme of the ousting of the middle group of the peasantry by the top group was to have some significance for subsequent Bolshevik strategy, just as much as the existence of the rural proletariat was to be the basis of the future peasant-proletariat alliance in 1905. The middle group would occupy Lenin's attention as a quasi-petty bourgeois element in the coming revolution, who would oscillate from support for the proletariat and yet act as the mainstay of those demanding private property relations in the countryside. In the straitened circumstances in which both the middle and the bottom groups found themselves, it was inevitable that the peasant bourgeoisie (the top group) would engage in usury. With the spread of commercial agriculture "the threads both of merchant's capital (the loaning of money on the security of land, the buying up of various products, etc.) and of industrial capital (commercial agriculture with the aid of the wage-workers) merge in the hands of the peasant bourgeoisie."⁵¹

In Capital Marx had observed that merchant's and usurer's capital on the one hand and industrial capital (both in agriculture and industry) on the other "represent a single type of economic phenomenon, which is

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

⁵¹ V.I. Lenin, op.cit., p. 79.

covered by the general formula: the buying of commodities to sell at profit."⁵² Historically, merchant's and usurer's capital precedes industrial capital and are a necessary, but not sufficient premise for the formation of the latter. In Russia, the question was whether merchant capital and usurer's capital was helping to disintegrate the old mode of production and replace it by the capitalist mode of production. The data on peasant cultivation yielded an affirmative reply to this question. The well to do peasant invested his money in the improvement of his farm, in the purchasing of land and its renting; in the acquisition of implements and the hiring of workers, not merely in trading establishments only or in usury. If capital in the Russian countryside was being used merely for usurious purposes, the data on production would show, not the differentiation of the peasantry into rural bourgeoisie and rural proletariat but "the whole of the peasantry would represent a fairly even type of poverty-stricken cultivators, among whom only usurers would stand out, and they only to the extent of money owned and to the extent and organization of agricultural production."⁵³

This agricultural production had become almost solely commodity production in the shape of commercial agriculture, whose chief characteristic is the specialization of agriculture. The concentration of production and the segregation of areas for specific agricultural activity was a phenomenon new to Russia. The shifting of the principal

⁵² Ibid., p. 183.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 185.

centre of grain production from the central black-earth areas to the steppes and the lower Volga gubernias was explained by the fact that these areas had become colonies of the long-settled parts of European Russia. Dairy farming, the processing of agricultural produce (distilling, beet-sugar production, potato-starch production, vegetable-oil production, tobacco-growing), industrial vegetable and fruit-growing, etc., were concentrated and segregated in various parts of Russia, thus giving rise not only to increased division of labour, but also to exchange between the various agricultural areas. Commercial agriculture, of course, depended on the development of industry: The development of industry in central Russia and the development of commercial farming in the outer regions are inseparably connected, so Lenin pointed out; they create a market for each other.

The transition from feudal relations of production to capitalist ones, was in the main, presented by Lenin as a forward step in the countryside, breaking the isolation of the peasant and the landlord economy:

Capitalism for the first time broke with the system of social estates in land tenure by converting the land into a commodity. The farmer's product was put on sale and began to be subject to social reckoning - first in the local, then in the national, and finally in the international market... The farmer was compelled willy-nilly, on pain of ruin, to take account of the sum-total of social relations both in his own country and in other countries.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 313.

The theme of 'the sum-total of social relations' would gain increasing importance in Lenin's thought, becoming almost the first criterion of what he meant by political consciousness (What is to be Done?). By that time, his attention had moved from the countryside to the working class, and would shift back again only by the 1905 revolution.

The negative side of capitalism was offset by two factors: the immense growth in the productivity of agriculture and the birth of the rural proletariat. This latter circumstance alone truly stamped Russian agriculture as capitalist—and not merely, or only as commodity production. Marx had observed that the production of commodities was the starting point of capitalism, but capitalism proper came into being only when a propertyless class engaged in the sale of labour power and a propertied class purchased it. Consequently, a great part of Lenin's chapter on commercial agriculture is dotted with facts and figures that confirm his thesis of the growth of the rural proletariat. This concern with the growth of the proletariat would become more prominent in the second part of The Development of Capitalism in Russia, where the polemics against Populist arguments acquires a secondary importance.

The transition from artisan production (production of articles to the order of a consumer) to commodity-production takes place gradually, when the artisan comes into contact with the market, and thus becomes a commodity producer, though not yet a petty capitalist. "This transition takes place gradually, at first as an experiment: goods are sold which

are left on his hands by chance, or are produced in his spare time."⁵⁵ As commerce expands, there appear the specialist merchants or buyers-up and the market for wares is no longer the small village fair but the whole region, then the whole country and sometimes other countries: "The production of industrial wares in the shape of commodities is the first step to the separation of industry from agriculture and to mutual exchange between them."⁵⁶

The post Emancipation period saw the (rapid growth of small industries. Lenin's interest in this development was the relation between the growth of small industry and the differentiation of the peasantry. It was the poor peasant mainly, and occasionally the middle peasant who provided the labour required for these industries. His classification of the small peasant industrialists was primarily intended to "ascertain the part wage-labour plays in each group."⁵⁷ Lenin divided the craftsmen in each industry into grades, bottom, middle and top, according to the number of workers (family and hired) per establishment and sometimes according to the volume of output and technical organization. The Table on page 347 of the text of The Development, like many of the others in the sections on agriculture, indicate how closely and carefully Lenin had sifted the mass of available data on the subject. In the 33 industries classified it was found that wage-labour

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 334.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 335.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

predominated over family labour since 51% of the workers were hired:

The role of wage-labour rises parallel to the increase in the size of the establishment.⁵⁸

The tendency of small commodity production was towards the increasing employment of wage-labour, imperceptibly growing into the formation of capitalist workshops characterised by simple co-operation. At this stage, the transition to capitalist manufacture had begun:

Manufacture is highly important in the development of capitalist forms of industry, as the link between handicrafts and small commodity production with primitive forms of capital, and large-scale machine industry.⁵⁹

The division of labour which began with petty commodity production now intensifies and could be seen in Russia in the various industries: weaving, textiles, the making of hemp and rope, wood-working trades, leather and furniture making, the processing of mineral products, the metal trades, jewellery-making, etc. The retention of old methods of hand production in manufacture meant that the process of production was split into several single operations performed by different specialist craftsmen, who, in effect, became apprentices to the trade, without any independence: "It is well known that under the general conditions of commodity-economy and capitalism this gives rise to the worst forms of

⁵⁸ ibid., p. 348.

⁵⁹ ibid., p.

personal dependency and exploitation."⁶⁰ However, the division⁶¹ of labour in manufacture prepared the ground for the reception of large scale machine industry, which could only be introduced "when the production process has been split into a number of the simplest, purely mechanical operations."⁶¹

The much vaunted independence of 'handcraftsmen' which the Narodniks (Populists) extolled was in reality a fiction:

Their work could not be done, and their products would on occasion even have no use-value, if there were no connection with other detailed operations, with other parts of the product. And only big capital, ruling (in one form or another) over a mass of workers performing separate operations was able to and did create the connection. One of the main errors of Narodnik economics is that it ignores or obscures the fact that the 'handcraftsmen' performing a single operation is a constituent part of the capitalist manufactory.⁶²

The negative feature of the division of labour was that it disfigured and crippled the worker, including the handcraftsmen who made single parts: "Division of labour in manufacture produces virtuosi and cripples, the former as rare exceptions, whose skill astonishes, and the latter in the shape of the mass of handcraftsmen, weak chested, with inordinately developed arms and curvature of the spine etc."⁶³ In a footnote Lenin cites the case of the worker, who for six years had been working at the

⁶⁰ ibid., pp. 427-428.

⁶¹ ibid., p. 428.

⁶² ibid., p. 429.

⁶³ ibid.

same vice and had with his bare left foot worn more than halfway through the board on which he stood. The man had remarked with bitter irony that his employer intended to get rid of him when he had worn the board right through.

Manufacture also introduced the territorial division of labour based on the availability of raw materials in a given region. This resulted in a specific form of the separation of agriculture from industry. In most cases, the industries organized on the lines of manufacture had only non-agricultural centres, towns and villages whose inhabitants hardly engaged in agriculture at all. The worker here was tied to his trade, was subordinated to capital, and owned neither raw materials nor finished products.

The Contradictions of Developed Capitalism

Neil Harding has pointed out that Lenin had a minimum definition of capitalism: commodity production.⁶⁴ It may be pointed out that he also had a definition of 'developed' capitalism (not 'advanced' capitalism):

The principal and most important feature of this stage is the employment of a system of machines for production. The transition from the manufactory to the factory signifies a complete technical revolution, which does away with the craftsman's manual skill that has taken centuries to acquire, and this technical revolution is inevitably followed by the most thoroughgoing destruction of social production relations, by a final split among the various groups of participants in production, by a complete break with tradition, by an intensification and extension of all the dark aspects of capitalism, and at the same time by a

⁶⁴ Neil Harding, op.cit., p. 89.

mass socialization of labour by capitalism. Large-scale machine industry is thus the last word in Capitalism, the last in its 'elements of social progress' and regress.⁶⁵

Perhaps what is of most significance in this passage is the reference to the thoroughgoing destruction of ancient social relations. Populists from Chernyshevskii to Danielson had argued that technological innovations could be harnessed meaningfully in the countryside. A contemporary scholar, Theodore Von Laue (who has done extensive work on the condition of both the peasantry and the factory worker in Russia around the turn of the century) describes graphically the plight of the worker-peasant whose way of life had been destroyed by factory capitalism. In 'Russian Labour Between Field and Factory', he divides this labour into 4 stages. Basing himself on accounts by a German economic writing in the 1890s, Schulze-Gavernitz, Von Laue speaks of the 4 stages:

- (1) Labour recruited from peasants who ate and slept at their place of work in the city and returned to the village on the weekend.
- (2) Peasant factory workers who were members of migratory artels, who left family behind in the village.
- (3) Peasant workers who brought their families along, but lived in unsatisfactory quarters, and who returned in their old age to the village.
- (4) Skilled workers, proletarians proper, who lived in Western style with their families in separate quarters, although they might have

⁶⁵ V.I. Lenin, op.cit. p. 454.

communal kitchens.⁶⁶

Lenin saw the 'historical mission of capitalism' as consisting of two main features: (1) the development of the productive forces of social labour, and (2) the socialization of labour. The development of the productive forces of social labour can only be observed in full relief in large-scale machine production. Until then, hand production and primitive techniques prevailed. The lowest and worst forms of capitalism in the handicrafts industries had been superceded and an increase of social wealth in the means of production had been effected: "An equally thorough transformation of technique is seen in every branch of the national economy where capitalist production predominates."⁶⁷ The socialization of labour by capitalism ended feudal isolation and relations of personal dependence. While in natural economy scattered small economic units existed in isolation from each other, in commodity production local markets were drawn together into an enormous national market first and then into the world market. As Lenin expressed it, production for oneself has been transformed into production for the whole of society.

The socialization of labour resulted in the creation of the working class. One of the major Populist arguments had been that the working class in Russia was decreasing in numbers, that the number of factory workers was increasing more slowly than the rest of the population.

⁶⁶ T.H. Von Laue, 'Russian Labour Between Field and Factory,' in California Slavic Studies, vol. III, 1964, p. 70.

⁶⁷ V.I. Lenin, op.cit., p. 596.

Lenin attempts to place the problem in its context:

Let us observe first of all that the question must be whether an increase is taking place in the commercial and industrial population at the expense of the agricultural population... or whether an increase is taking place in the number of workers employed in large-scale machine industry. It cannot be asserted that the number of workers in small industrial establishments or in manufactories must increase in a developing capitalist society, for the factory eliminates the more primitive forms of industry.⁶⁸

Taking a return for all branches of industry and over a period of 25 years (1865-1890), it was clear that there had been an increase of 65% in the workers' population, much greater than the increase in the general population.⁶⁹ For example, in the mining and metallurgical industries there had been an increase of 107%. As it is not within the scope of this chapter to investigate in detail any of the tables provided by Lenin, I have selected one simple table illustrating the growth of the working population in large-scale enterprises:⁷⁰

Number of Workers in Large Capitalist Enterprises (in thousands)

Years	In Factory Industry	In Mining	On Railways	Total
1865	509	165	32	706
1890	840	340	252	1,432

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 496. In section 5 of Chapter VII (The Development of Large-Scale Machine Industry) Lenin clears up a methodological problem relating to the use of official statistics. See The Development, p. 456.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 499.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 499.

Thus, in 25 years, Lenin points out, the number of workers in large capitalist enterprises had doubled, and according to his own analysis of the Zemstvo statistics, had grown faster than the urban population. Lenin was well aware, that both in the industrial and the agricultural sectors, there existed what he called the 'semi-proletarians.' The latter were the allotment-holding wage workers who had not completely severed their ties with the land and who covered their expenses in part by farming tiny plots of land in the village.

Closely related to the growth of the working population was the phenomenon of relative surplus-population, or the reserve army of the unemployed:

... Russian capitalism could never have developed to its present level, could not have survived a single year, had the expropriation of the small producers not created an army of many millions of wage workers ready at the first call to satisfy the maximum demand of the employers in agriculture, lumbering, building, commerce and in the manufacturing, mining, and transport industries, etc. We say the maximum demand, because capitalism can only develop spasmodically, and consequently, the number of producers who need to sell their labour power must always exceed capitalism's average demand for workers. We have now estimated the total numbers of the various categories of wage-workers, but in doing so do not wish to say that capitalism is in a position to give regular employment to them all. There is not, nor can there be, such regularity of employment in capitalist society, whichever category of wage-workers we take. Of the millions of migratory and resident workers a certain section is constantly in the reserve army of unemployed, and this reserve army now swells to enormous dimensions - in years of crisis or if there is a slump in some industry in a particular district, or if there is particularly rapid extension of machine production, which displaces workers - and now shrinks to a minimum, even causing that 'shortage' of labour which is often the subject of complaint by employers in some industries, in some years, in some parts of the country... The increase in the number of peasants thrown into the ranks of the industrial and rural proleta-

riat, and the increase in the demand for wage-labour, are two sides of the same medal.⁷¹

The growth of the proletariat (and its special composition in Russia the semi proletarians and the unemployed) was to have consequences for Bolshevik strategy in the years to come; Lenin's draft programme for the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, and the corrections and additions that he made to Plekhanov's draft programme of the Party for the Second Congress of the RSDLP, reflect the concern with the 'historical agent' of revolution and the manner in which the RSDLP should incorporate it into its political strategy. The fact that in Russia, the proletarian was also a peasant, required an additional emphasis in the Party's agrarian programme and would be reiterated by Lenin, both in the 1905 revolution and after. Apart from the detailed way in which Lenin studied the development of capitalism in Russia, in contrast to Plekhanov, there is an additional element here which is lacking in the latter's work. Neil Harding while comparing and contrasting Plekhanov and Lenin, has observed that the problem of putting a recognisable outline to Plekhanov's skeletal sketch was nowhere more apparent than in the field of economic analysis of Russian society.⁷² One could spell this out further. While Plekhanov did pioneering work to establish the role of the proletariat and thereby point out the transition from feudalism to capitalism, he stopped short at that point, while Lenin went further in delineating the

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 583.

⁷² Neil Harding, op.cit., p. 79.

process of transition from capitalism to socialism, and all the possibilities this held out for revolutionary Marxism. In the Russian context the theme of the 'permanent revolution' required an understanding of the interaction of all three elements: the radical bourgeoisie, proletariat and the peasantry.

In his earlier work What the Friends of the People Are, Lenin had explicitly raised the issues of class struggle in relation to the bourgeois state. In Russia, the class state was complicated by the special combination of an autocratic state and the existence of the two economies, the feudal and the capitalist, both striving for dominance. His Marxian sense of 'historical necessity' could attain concrete expression only by delineating the process at its basic level, the economy. That feudalism would be overtaken by capitalism was taken for granted by the Russian Marxists; it remained to study the historical process as it actually unfolded in Russia.

Above all, the contradictions of developed capitalism, namely, the clash between the collective nature of the labour process and the individual nature of appropriation resulted in the 'exploitation' of the wage workers. This was the objective basis of revolution, to which Lenin added an all important subjective factor. The proletariat represented all the exploited of society. He thus gave meaning to Marx's description of the proletariat as the universal class that in liberating itself, would simultaneously liberate all the exploited of society. To engage in such political action required an authentic knowledge of the historical process, a knowledge which Lenin identified with genuine political consciousness. The Development has been read by contemporary scholars in

various ways: as a treatise on the Russian agrarian problem, as a study in economics, as an essay in sociology; but there can be no doubt that it was intended by its author as a political document intended to further political consciousness, as a precondition for correct political action.⁷³

Conclusion

I began this chapter by pointing out that the Marxian concept of 'permanent revolution' was taken over by Russian Marxism, which, in applying it to the Russian situation, had to contend with the Populist philosophy. With historical hindsight, one may now say that Lenin was its leading exponent. There is no contradiction in this, for although all Russian Marxists were unanimous in thinking of the coming revolution as a bourgeois democratic one, we have seen that Lenin alone (among the leaders) interpreted this as a stage, which would be closely followed by the hegemony of the proletariat in alliance with the peasantry. To arrive at this insight he had to pursue the implications of the transition-and-contradiction terminology of classical Marxism for Russia; as well he was obliged to examine in greater detail the role of the peasantry. His work in this period was to establish the theoretical bases for an understanding of the permanent revolution, or what he also called in 1905, the 'uninterrupted revolution.' Whatever the preoccupations of

⁷³ See Harry Willets, 'Lenin and the Peasant,' in Schapiro & Reddaway, Lenin: The Man, the Theorist, the Leader, 1967, pp. 211-234. Also, in the same volume, Alec Nove, 'Lenin as Economist,' pp. 187-210, and Alan Hunt, 'Lenin and Sociology,' Sociological Review, 24, no. 1, 1976, pp. 5-22.

his colleagues in the RSDLP, Lenin's growing militance and his call for the establishment of a militant revolutionary party followed from the theoretical analysis he had undertaken prior to the founding of Iskra in 1900 and the writing of What is to be Done? in 1901.

CHAPTER III

LENIN AND THE PARTY

The central role that Lenin assigned to the Party in the proletarian revolution has been the source of heated debate among scholars. I have already pointed out in the Introduction that two aspects of Lenin's political theory, the seizure of power by the proletariat and the vanguard role of the Party, are the two most controversial aspects of the Marx-Lenin connection. In Chapters One and Two I attempted to theoretically explore the connection between the theme of the seizure of power and the Marxian theory of revolution in its historical and theoretical setting. In this chapter I shall attempt to relate Lenin's vanguard theory of the Party to two main themes: the seizure of power as an extension of a Marxian theory of revolution and the role of revolutionary political consciousness. The subsidiary themes of Party organization and discipline follow logically from the aims of a revolutionary party, especially under conditions of autocratic rule; consequently, the main focus of the chapter will be on the theory of the vanguard role of the Party, the history and background of its evolution in Lenin's thought, and its rationale.

The Problem

The most common criticism of the vanguard role of the Party is that

it is a Blanquist notion, not a Marxian one.¹ It is generally accepted in liberal scholarship that Marx himself advocated a Blanqui style revolutionary seizure of power, at least until a certain point in his career, approximately, the 1850s.² According to this reading, with the failure of the 1848 revolutions in France and Germany and with the commencement of Marx's study of capitalism, the establishment of the First International (1864) and the growth of the industrial proletariat in England and on the Continent, Marx moved towards the idea of the peaceful and parliamentary conquest of power by the proletariat, thus, in substance adopting a gradualist approach to the conquest of political power. Supposedly, this approach was suspended in the period immediately following the Paris Commune of 1871, when Marx reverted to the Blanquist ideas of his youth; however, this change was short-lived and he proceeded to endorse peaceful and parliamentary methods, a process which was reinforced by Engels after Marx's death and found its culmination in the establishment of the German Social Democratic Party in 1891. I have questioned this reading of Marx and have put forward an alternative approach in Chapter One, arguing mainly that the theory of permanent revolution was integral to Marx's understanding of the nature of state

¹ Louis Auguste Blanqui, who lived during Marx's lifetime and was much admired by him, advocated a seizure of power in France by a small group of dedicated revolutionaries. He was imprisoned for his views and was still in jail during the establishment of the Paris Commune of 1871, when the Versailles government refused to release him to the Communards. For details of Blanqui's views, see Alan Spitzer, The Revolutionary Theory of Louis Auguste Blanqui, Columbia University Press, New York, 1957.

² See the Introduction to the present study, pp. 18-19.

power and the historical mission of the proletariat as both the agent in the defeat of capitalism and in the establishment of a new social order; the question of the role of the Party in the revolutionary process followed logically from these theoretical premises, even though the historical conditions in Marx's time were not yet ready for the full fledged Party.

These scholars (Lichtheim, Kolakowski, Wolfe, Tucker et al.) are not questioning the relevance of a Party to the conditions of modern political life; they merely doubt whether the specific structure that the Bolshevik Party acquired and the specific goals that it worked for, could be described as being inspired by Marx or whether they were the result of the autocratic and oppressive conditions of Russian life. As they have already assumed that the mature Marx favoured a gradualist approach to the conquest of political power by the proletariat, it was natural for them to view the Bolshevik Party as a phenomenon unique to a backward society, with a relatively undeveloped political economy. As indicated earlier, this point of view was an extension of the reformist arguments of German Social Democracy.³ Yet, the elitist component of the vanguard role of the Party (if not the question of the seizure of power) had been a hallowed dogma in international social democracy until the 1903 Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. Not only the veterans of Russian Marxism (Plekhanov, Axelrod, Martov, Zasulich), but also Bebel and Kautsky from the German party had been unanimous in agree-

³ See Introduction, pp. 18-19.

ing that the Party constituted the advance section of the working class, thus implying a qualitative distinction between the vanguard and the totality of the working class.⁴

With regard to Kautsky, who had been a source of inspiration to the Russian Social Democrats, the shift in his political views occurred shortly before the World War. His writings until The Road to Power (1912) continued to hold on to a militant position, this despite the Erfurt Programme of 1891, where the seizure of political power by the proletariat was not mentioned. Kautsky, as Lenin's citations of his work in What Is To Be Done indicate, never relinquished the idea that the Party and the proletariat stood in a special relationship.⁵

The search for peaceful and parliamentary methods of struggle began in the 1890s in Germany, with the spread and consolidation of industrial capitalism there. Edouard Bernstein's Evolutionary Socialism initiated the rise of Revisionism, which spread from Germany to Russia.⁶ A great part of the early history of the RSDLP, can be seen as an attempt to defeat Revisionism in the Russian social democratic movement (I shall return to this).

⁴ This tradition is reflected in Lenin's What is to be Done, Collected Works, op.cit., vol. 5.

⁵ The passage in question runs as follows: "... But socialism and the class struggle, arise side by side and not one out of the other." It is from Kautsky's comments on the draft programme of the Austrian Social Democratic Party and cited by Lenin. See Collected Works, vol. 5, op.cit., p. 383. Had Lenin pondered the significance of the entire passage, he might have been reluctant to quote it.

⁶ For an account of Russian Revisionism, see Richard Kindersley, The Russian Revisionists, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1962.

Briefly, Bernstein's revisionism consisted of an attempt to update and revise Marxian revolutionary strategy on the basis of the new developments in capitalism.⁷ Capitalism, so Bernstein argued, was no longer completely oppressive of the proletariat; it had, in fact, improved the living conditions of the working class (both in Germany and in England) and the Marxian theory of the impoverishment of the proletariat was no longer valid in the existing conditions in Germany and in England, who had been deeply influenced by English parliamentarians, urged German Social Democrats to abandon such concepts as the dictatorship of the proletariat as being no longer necessary for the working class movement and perhaps even being harmful to its prospects. The peaceful parliamentary road to power, first mentioned in the Erfurt Programme of 1891 was now stamped with the authority of Bernstein's analysis. The gradual abandonment of revolutionary aims by German Social Democracy came to a climax with the voting of war credits in 1917 by the SPD; and with Kautsky's final break with revolutionary socialism during the war years. Lenin was not the only Marxist to condemn Kautsky's conduct; Rosa Luxemburg, who knew the Kautsky family intimately, did not hesitate to criticise him:

It is astonishing to observe how this industrious man (Kautsky), by his tireless labour of peaceful and method-

⁷ For Bernstein's views, see Peter Gay's The Dilemmas of Democratic Socialism, op.cit. Lucio Colletti presents a Marxist critique of the political implications of Bernstein's economic theory. See 'Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International' in his From Rousseau to Lenin, op.cit., pp. 45-108.

ical writing during the four years of the World War, has torn one hole after another in the fabric of socialism. It is a labour from which socialism emerged riddled like a sieve, without a whole spot left in it.⁸

I shall return to Luxemburg's own differences with Lenin and the Bolsheviks on the question of the Party, but what is of significance here is that Kautsky's anathematization of the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution (which had a lasting impact on subsequent assessments of Lenin) had already been partially presaged by events connected with his departure from the traditions of Marxian revolutionary strategy.⁹

Writing from a more detached perspective, recent scholars have conceded that: (1) Lenin's views on the Party's importance for the revolution do have a Marxian origin, in that Marx held similar views at various times in his life; (2) Lenin's departure from the 'mature' Marxian theory of gradual development was necessitated by the circumstances of Russia's political life. The implications of this position are that the structure of the vanguard party is not to be uniformly employed in all capitalist societies but only in those where economic oppression is coupled with political repression. Lenin himself, at least during his early years, often spoke favourably of the relatively free conditions that obtained in Germany (after the lifting of the Anti-Socialist Laws), in marked contrast to the Russian situation. On the

⁸ Rosa Luxemburg, The Russian Revolution, op.cit., p. 33.

⁹ For Kautsky's criticism of the Bolshevik seizure of power, see his Demokratie oder Diktatur, Paul Cassiner, Berlin, 1918, and the Introduction to the present study.

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other hand, it is difficult to see him playing the role of a Bernstein or a Kautsky. The relentless determination with which he fought the Russian variant of revisionism would lead one to believe that he envisaged some form of revolutionary militancy as a sine qua non for the existence of a Marxist party in capitalist society.

Among the recent writings of Marxist scholars on the relationship of the Party to the working class, John Molyneaux's Marxism and the Party is perhaps the only work to support openly the need for a vanguard Party in capitalist societies. Molyneaux has pointed out that the growth of reformism in the working class movement makes it mandatory for the revolutionary party to provide organization and leadership.¹⁰

A serious preoccupation among scholars who write in the tradition of 'Soviet Studies' is the supposed link between Lenin's theory of the Party and the revolutionary tradition of Peter Tkachev, Lavrov and even the Narodnaya Volya (People's Will). Darell P. Hammer, Albert L. Weeks and Leonard Schapiro present the case for the Tkachev connection, while Richard Pipes stresses the Narodnaya Volya influence on the grounds that the young Lenin had been a member of the Narodnaya Volya.¹¹ Apart from the fact that virtually all Russian Marxists had been associated with the

¹⁰ John Molyneaux, Marxism and the Party, op.cit., p. 9.

¹¹ Darell P. Hammer, 'The Dictatorship of the Proletariat' and Albert L. Weeks 'Peter Tkachev: The Forerunner of Lenin'; both articles in Lenin and Leninism, op.cit. Leonard Schapiro, The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, op.cit. Adam Ulam, The Bolsheviks, op.cit. Franco Venturi, The Roots of Revolution, op.cit. Richard Pipes, 'The Origins of Bolshevism: The Intellectual Evolution of Young Lenin,' in Revolutionary Russia, op.cit.

Narodnaya Volya at some stage in their early career (Plekhanov and Vera Zasulich being prime examples), the general ethos of the Russian Marxist movement was signally different from that of the Russian Populists.¹² A. Walicki's The Controversy over Capitalism is perhaps the best critique of such views from a somewhat Marxist perspective. Walicki's main argument appears to be that while the socio-economic base of the Russian Populists was the petty bourgeoisie, the Russian Marxists pinned their hopes for the revolution on the emerging industrial proletariat of Russia.

Arising from the initial failure to understand the vanguard theory of the Party in the context of the permanent revolution, most contemporary commentators present the 1903 split in Russian Social Democracy (into Bolshevik and Menshevik factions) as the consequence of Lenin's dogmatic insistence that the Party should admit only professional revolutionaries, without any attempt to go to the foundations of the 'dogma' and the significance that it would subsequently assume for the history of the Bolshevik Party.¹³ At the time of the 1903 split over the question of Party membership Lenin unquestionably had common-sense and realism on his side. Most of the Russian Social Democrats had recently emerged from exile and imprisonment. Police spies and agents provocateurs swarmed everywhere and under the conditions of an autocratic regime, the admission of all and sundry to Party membership was indeed a

¹² On Lenin's relationship to the Populists, see Chapter 2 of this study.

¹³ J.L.H. Keep, The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1963.

suicidal venture (the Mensheviks arguing for the broad membership). Nor was Lenin at any time opposed to the idea of mass organizations affiliated to the Party;¹⁴ in fact, he insistently advocated such an affiliation, a fact glossed over by most commentators. Even his 'democratic centralism', was later admitted as important to the RSDLP, by the Mensheviks at the Unity Congress in 1906.¹⁵

Over and above the need for caution in admitting all and sundry to membership in the RSDLP, there was the question of who the proletariat's allies would be in the coming revolution. The Mensheviks, believing that the coming revolution would be bourgeois-democratic, would increasingly lean for support on the liberals against the autocracy, while Lenin, who also expected a bourgeois-democratic revolution in the near future, would, nevertheless, press for an active alliance with the peasantry. Memories of the role played by the peasantry in bringing Louis Bonaparte to power (as described by Marx in The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte) were still strong in Lenin's mind. It would also seem that in a more positive sense, Lenin was applying to Russian conditions, the analysis of the failure of the 1848 revolutions in France and Germany that Marx had provided in The Class Struggles in France and in his writings in the Neue Rheinische Zeitung.¹⁶

¹⁴ See his What is to Be Done, op.cit., pp. 451-467.

¹⁵ Axelrod was perhaps one of the few Mensheviks who consistently opposed Lenin. See Abraham Ascher's Pavel Axelrod and the Development of Menshevism, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1972.

¹⁶ See Chapter I.

The particular class bias in their respective choice of allies, then, rather than Lenin's 'dogmatism' was perhaps the major factor in the 1903 split between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks.¹⁷ The Menshevik position would not only lead to eclecticism in theory, so Lenin argued, but more seriously, it would throw the Party open to all whose class allegiance was seriously in doubt. The Party, as Lenin would maintain throughout his career, was the peculiar fusion of the socialist movement and the working class in alliance with the peasantry. In theory, the Mensheviks were in agreement with him, but in practice, their slow but inevitable gravitation towards the liberals as their allies, would set them in opposition to Lenin.

In this chapter I shall devote some space to the historical context of the evolution of Lenin's views on the Party, since a failure to pay due attention to this factor has led some scholars to accuse him of dictatorial tendencies, personal vanity, limitless ambition, overweening pride and self-confidence.¹⁸ This 'psychologistic' interpretation is

¹⁷ Léopold Haimson, The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1955, p. 132.

¹⁸ Robert Daniels writes thus in his Red October, Beacon Press, Boston, 1984:

It is impossible to escape the very strong suspicion that Lenin's deepest motive was the drive for personal power, however, he might have rationalised it. Like practically every politician Lenin had a philosophy about the welfare of the people -- in his case it was the entire world proletariat... Lenin had an inordinate dislike of any sort of political co-operation or compromise, not because it might fail, but because it might succeed and leave him with less than the whole loaf of power... (p. 20)

often linked to the early trauma experienced by Lenin at the death of his brother Alexander.¹⁹ Of course, such approaches quite openly abandon any attempt to trace the Marxist connection in Lenin's political thought. What is of greater relevance to the present study is the charge of 'voluntarism' and 'subjectivism' or the approach taken by Alfred Meyer in his Leninism (1962) where Lenin is presented as focussing exclusively on the conscious and rational aspects of political life and as neglecting the spontaneous activity of the proletariat.²⁰ The main document that is cited in support of this interpretation is Lenin's What Is To Be Done. Although this work of Lenin's presents, for the first time, his views on Party organization and discipline, it is also the locus classicus of his statement on the nature and role of revolutionary political consciousness and the Party as a transmitter of these to the working class.

At the outset, it may be pointed out that Lenin's main aim in the creation of the Bolshevik Party can be seen in the work that he intended the Party to undertake: (1) Political work, that is, the dissemination of Marxian theory, alongside of analyses of the concrete problems facing the working class; (2) joining the workers in their economic struggle; (3) making preparations for an armed uprising, should the objective condi-

¹⁹ Harold Shukman in Lenin and the Russian Revolution, Longman, London, 1972, offers a variant of this 'psychologistic' interpretation. He cites Potresov, one of Lenin's early colleagues in the RSDLP, who attributed Lenin's qualities to his deliberate suppression of youthfulness (p. 40). See also David Shub, Lenin, A Biography, The New American Library, New York, p. 27. Alexander Ulyanov was hanged for his attempt to assassinate the Czar in 1887.

²⁰ Alfred Meyer, Leninism, Praeger, New York, 1962.

tions warrant it; and (4) the seizure of power at the right time. Of these four tasks, the first two were being conducted by the German Social Democratic Party in their own country; had Lenin excluded these two vital tasks from the work of the Bolshevik Party, he could indeed be accused of being a 'Blanquist' or Tkachevist or merely a member of the Narodnaya Volya. But, equally, without the addition of the third and fourth tasks Lenin would simply be a social democrat in the reformist tradition of the German party.

The logic of the theory of permanent revolution, which Lenin alternately described in 1905 as the 'uninterrupted revolution' clearly called for the eventual seizure of power by the proletariat. Nor could it be limited to the notion of the hegemony of the proletariat in the bourgeois revolution, as the word 'hegemony' began to lose its revolutionary meaning in the hands of the Mensheviks, and to deteriorate into a vague call for the mustering of the proletariat's strength as only an opposition party. Given the right conditions, that is, the maturing of the revolutionary situation, the proletariat must seize power, so Lenin argued, as we shall see. To seize power meant armed insurrection; this theme becomes important from 1905 onwards.

Task number one had been taken for granted by all social democrats, whether in Germany or in Russia; reiterating it in a special sense became mandatory for the Russian Social Democrats, owing to the rise of Economism. The Economists, both under the influence of Bernsteinian theory and their day-to-day experiences with the working class, called for the postponement (if not the actual abandonment) of the political struggle by the working class, in favour of the economic struggle. It

fell to Lenin to respond directly to this challenge and he did so in What Is To Be Done.

I shall begin with a brief account of the early history of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party and then examine What Is To Be Done, as the apotheosis of the central role of the Party and finally consider the significance of the 1903 split.

The Early History of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party

The wave of industrial strikes which broke out in Russia in 1895 culminated in the great textile workers' strike of 1896 in St. Petersburg. It was in the main organized by the St. Petersburg League of Struggle for Emancipation of the Working Class, which had been organized by Lenin in the autumn of 1895, and was headed by a central group amongst whom were Lenin, Krupskaya, Martov, Krizhizhnovsky and others. In December of the same year the leading members of the League were arrested, but not before it had launched the newspaper Rabocheye Dyelo (The Workers' Cause). The League's influence spread to other parts of Russia where workers' study circles began to organize into similar leagues; in Moscow, Kiev and Ekaterinoslav.

The first Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party was held in March 1898 at Minsk. Only nine delegates were present and these were from four organizations of the League (St. Petersburg, Kiev, Moscow, Ekaterinoslav) with one delegate from the Jewish Bund and one from the editorial group of the Kiev branch of the League, the editorial committee of Rabochaya Gazeta (Workers' Gazette), which was adopted as the official organ of the Party. The Congress also elected a Central

Committee and published a Manifesto which had been partly drafted by Peter Struve, who was himself not present at the Congress. The Congress also declared that the Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad (an amalgam of the Emancipation of Labour Group and younger members) would function as the Party Representative abroad. Shortly after the Congress the Central Committee of the Party was arrested.

During this period Lenin was still in prison eagerly watching the new developments. He had also begun work on The Development of Capitalism in Russia. Meanwhile, the phenomenon known as Economism had reared its head in Russia as the involvement of Social Democrats in the day-to-day struggles of the worker for better conditions increased. Towards the end of 1897 Roabochaia Mysl (Workers' Thought) began clandestine publication, putting forward the Economist argument that the primary task for social democrats was the waging of the economic struggle. This section of the St. Petersburg League had not supported a particular clause of the Minsk Manifesto which had called for the struggle for political liberty. The Economists, both inside Russia and abroad, were no doubt influenced by two developments: the spread of Edouard Bernstein's revision of Marxian theory and the support this venture received from the Legal Marxists whose chief representatives were Struve and Berdyaev.

It was against this background that a small section of the young members of the Union of Social Democrats took it upon themselves to circulate a pamphlet written by Y.D. Kuskova and called the Credo by its opponents. The Credo, which would soon draw fire from both Lenin and the Emancipation of Labour Group, stated the Economist line of reasoning

simply and succinctly. The Constitutions of 1848 in Germany and in France, were won by the bourgeoisie and the small urban artisans. The factory proletariat hardly existed, while the proletariat employed in industries such as weaving "represented a wild mass capable only of rioting, but not of advancing any political demands."²¹ On the other hand, the manufactory skilled workers (printers, weavers, watchmakers, etc.) were accustomed to organization and comprised the core of Social Democratic parties. It was on this basis that theoretical and practical Marxism grew in the West. The starting point was the parliamentary struggle, with the prospect -- only superficially, resembling Blanquism -- of capturing political power. "Marxism was the theoretical expression of the prevailing practice."²² When the political struggle had reached its limit, a change was called for: the vigorous prosecution of the economic struggle and a change towards other democratic parties. The Party's "striving to seize power will be transformed into a striving for change."²³ The oppressive situation in Russia made this course especially urgent. The strike movement had not yet crystallized and the illegal organs of struggle were not even worth consideration. The Credo ended with a sharp thrust at the militants in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party: "The talk about an independent workers' political party merely results from the transplantation of alien aims and

²¹ Cited in V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 4, p. 172.

²² Ibid., p. 172.

²³ Ibid., p. 173.

alien achievements."²⁴

Plekhanov and the veterans of the Emancipation of Labour Group were alarmed and angered, but somewhat slow to respond. Plekhanov's Vandemecum came out only in 1900. Lenin was in exile when he received a copy of the Credo. He immediately set about drafting a reply, 'A Protest By Russian Social Democrats,' which was discussed and approved by seventeen exiled Marxists. The Protest begins with a statement of Lenin's intention to "... warn all comrades against the menacing deflection of Russian Social Democracy from the path it has already marked out -- the formation of an independent political working-class party which is inseparable from the class struggle of the proletariat and which has for its immediate aim the winning of political freedom."²⁵ The authors of the Credo, Lenin continued, have a false conception of the history of the West European working class movement. The working class did take part in political revolution; Chartism and the 1848 revolutions clearly demonstrate this.

Further, Marxism, according to Lenin:

... appeared at a time when non-political socialism prevailed (Owenism, Fourierism, true socialism) and the Communist Manifesto took up the cudgels at once against non-political socialism. Even when Marxism came out fully armed with theory (Capital) and organized the celebrated International Working Men's Association, the political struggle was by no means the prevailing practice (narrow trade unionism in England, anarchism and Proudhonism in

²⁴ Ibid., p. 174.

²⁵ Lenin, Collected Works, op.cit., vol. 4, pp. 167-182.

the Romance countries). In Germany the great historic service performed by Lasalle was the transformation of the working class from an appendage of the liberal bourgeoisie into an independent political party. Marxism linked up the economic and the political struggle of the working class into an inseparable whole; and the efforts of the authors of the Credo to separate these forms of struggle is one of their most clumsy and deplorable departures from Marxism.²⁶

Lenin also pointed out, at that time quite accurately, that the working class in the West as well as German Social Democracy had rejected Bernsteinism. The First International had, long ago, warned against both dangers: underestimating the economic struggle, as well as exaggerating it.

It is especially during a time of political repression that the political struggle must be put in the forefront of activity, "the main aim of which must be the capture of political power by the proletariat for the purpose of organizing socialist society."²⁷ The proletariat must take part in all political and social life, must support progressive classes and parties, support every revolutionary movement against the existing system, champion the interests of every oppressed nationality, race or religion and those disenfranchised on the basis of sex, etc. The Credo was merely obscuring the class struggle of the proletariat. The Russian working class had, since earliest times, put forward political goals. The North Russian Workers' Union (1878) and the South Russian Workers' Union (1875) had put forward the demand for political liberty in

²⁶ Ibid., p. 175.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 177.

their programmes. In spite of the reaction of the '80s the working class repeatedly put forward the same demands in the '90s. Lenin pointed out that in 1897 Axelrod had written in his Present Tasks and Tactics of the Russian Social Democrats that the Social Democrats must work in alliance with revolutionary groups; this was supported by the overwhelming majority of Social Democrats in Russia as well as by the workers and their newspapers: St. Peterbrgsky Rabochy Listok and Rabochaya Gazeta.

While concentrating on activity among factory workers and mine workers, Lenin continued, Social Democrats must not forget that with the expansion of the movement, homeworkers, handicraftsmen, agricultural labourers and the millions of ruined and starving peasants must also be drawn into the ranks of the labouring masses that were being organized. The Social Democrats must also develop techniques for illegal work. Lenin continued to criticise the Economists in such articles as 'A Retrograde Trend in Social Democracy' (written towards the end of 1899) and 'Apropos of the Profession De Foi' written in the same period.²⁸ He was not, of course, the only Russian Marxist to oppose Economism. Plekhanov and Martov would soon enter the lists, but as Leopold Haimson has observed:

... Lenin alone showed himself sufficiently realistic to view Economism as something more than a subsidiary or tendential, if dangerous, phenomenon in the growth of Social Democracy. Plekhanov had been content to regard the new heresy as a mental aberration, as a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of 'objective' factors in

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 255-285, and pp. 286-296, respectively.

history. Axelrod had been quick to diagnose Economism as an effort to free the intelligentsia from its dolg, its duty and debt to the proletariat, and he had considered this effort dangerous only because it might hinder the preparation of the working class for the struggle against absolutism. In this effort of the Economists, Martov, in turn had discerned an elaborate plan of the bourgeoisie to enslave the proletariat.

From the very start, such ready made explanations, seemed unsatisfactory to Lenin. Just as much as any of his colleagues he had been ready to condemn Economism... But unlike Martov, Plekhanov and Axelrod, Lenin saw in the new heresy the expression of a significant and deep-seated internal crisis in the working class movement.²⁹

Lenin would subject this internal crisis in the working class movement to a deep critique in 1901 (What is To Be Done). For the time being, the question of uniting the Social Democrats seemed more urgent than ever, and he would attempt to achieve this, first by drafting a detailed programme for the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party and secondly by establishing the newspaper Iskra.

The Draft Programme of the RSDLP

'A Draft Programme of our Party' was written in 1899, while Lenin was still in exile, and it is essentially a continuation of 'Draft and Explanation of a Programme of the Social-Democratic Party' (1895-96).³⁰ As Lenin explains it, the immediate reason for producing a programme was that certain comrades in Russia had expressed the view that at that particular period the immediate question was not a programme but the

²⁹ Leopold Haimson, op.cit., p. 132.

³⁰ Collected Works, op.cit., vol. 4, pp. 227-254.

developing and strengthening of local organizations, of placing agitation on a sound footing and the delivery of literature on a regular basis. While it was true, said Lenin, that in Critique of the Gotha Programme Marx had said that every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes, neither Marx nor any Social Democrat ever "denied the tremendous importance of a programme for the consolidation of consistent activity of a political party."³⁰ In the Party's career, the period of polemics with rivals was nearly over and the "need for unity, for the establishment of common literature, for the appearance of Russian workers' newspapers arises out of the real situation, and the foundation in the spring of 1898 of the RSDLP, which announced its intention of elaborating a Party programme in the near future, showed clearly that the demand for a programme grew out of the needs of the movement itself."³¹

The RSDLP's task now was not one of further developing scattered and amateurish activities as in the old days but one of organizing its present resources. Its programme must aim to formulate basic views and immediate tasks and strive for unity in agricultural work. It should enlighten the public about its views. As there seemed to be some disagreement within the RSDLP, now was the time to submit a draft programme for a full discussion. The programme of the Emancipation of Labour Group had been drafted some fifteen years ago and some structural changes would have to be introduced into it. The cardinal point of the

³⁰ Cited in Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 4, p. 229.

³¹ Ibid., p. 229.

new programme would be the characterization of the present day economic system in Russia; it would point to the existing social poverty, physical poverty and the splitting up of society into bourgeoisie and proletariat; it would focus on the peasant question. The programme should declare for the political character of the class struggle, setting as its immediate objective the winning of political liberty, while absolutely rejecting terror as a means of struggle.

Lenin's Draft took over from the Emancipation of Labour Group's programme the following features: (1) demands for general democratic reforms; (2) demands for the protection of workers and higher wages and better conditions; (3) demands on behalf of the peasants. On this third point Lenin introduced a controversial programme, which seemed to argue for a more rapid development of capitalism in the countryside. He pointed out that the Emancipation of Labour Group's programme was in principle correct; radical revision of agrarian relations, i.e., a revision of the conditions of land redemption and the allotment of land to the village commune, the granting of the right to the peasant to refuse an allotment and to leave the village commune. He added this comment: "The peasant question in Russia differs substantially from the peasant question in the West, the sole difference being that in the West the question is almost exclusively one of a peasant in a capitalist, bourgeois society, whereas in Russia it is one of a peasant who suffers no less (if not more) from precapitalist institutions and relations, from the survivals of serfdom."

The role of the peasantry as a class that provides fighters against the autocracy and against the survivals of serfdom is by now played out in

the West, but not yet in Russia."³²

The implications of Lenin's proposals were far reaching: Social Democrats must, at the risk of creating a peasant petty bourgeoisie, hasten the demise of feudalism and clear the way for capitalism in the countryside. Anticipating criticism, he goes on to point out that this could be the only way that the countryside would become revolutionary, as the increasing differentiation in the countryside would create a rural proletariat, a question he had amply dealt with in The Development of Capitalism in Russia. The Emancipation of Labour had also dealt with this situation, but the two questions now were: how to determine that support for the peasantry did not degenerate into support for small property owners in a capitalist society; and were the peasants revolutionary? "A working class party cannot, without violating the basic tenets of Marxism and without committing a tremendous political mistake, overlook the revolutionary elements that exist among the peasantry and not afford these elements support."³³ Lenin's argument was that should the peasantry in Russia turn into a revolutionary force, then the working class had found a ready ally.

By the spring of 1900 plans were underway for the publication of an illegal all Russian newspaper, the Iskra. Lenin's term of exile had ended and along with Martov and members of the Emancipation of Labour Group, he drew up a draft declaration of the aims of Iskra and Zarya (the

³² Ibid., pp. 240-242. Lenin's treatment of the peasant question is examined in Chapter IV.

³³ Ibid., p. 244.

latter a journal that, would deal exclusively with general and philosophical questions of Marxism, and whose chief editor would be Plekhanov). In the draft declaration drawn up by Lenin, several questions were raised as to the aims and methods of Iskra: as an organ to promote unity in the RSDLP, to discuss questions of the impending political struggle and not merely narrow economic questions, and to also discuss general democratic questions, "not merely confining ourselves to narrow proletarian questions; in the sense that we would bring forward and discuss all instances and manifestations of political oppression show the connection between the working class movement and the political struggle in all its forms..."³⁴, evolve a common Party literature and help publicise the programme of the RSDLP.

Iskra was launched in December 1900. Its very first issue continued the controversy with the Economists and more importantly, confirmed the leadership of the Emancipation of Labour Group in the Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad. Plekhanov was put forward as the permanent Russian secretary to the International Socialist Congress. Meanwhile, the conflict within the Union of Social Democrats Abroad had resulted in the Emancipation of Labour Group dissociating themselves as a separate organization called Sotsial-Demokrat. In September 1901, a 'Unity Conference' was held in Zurich, to try and bring together the warring factions. The failure of this attempt led to the establishment of the League of Russian Revolutionary Social Democracy Abroad, in October 1901.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 329.

It was henceforth the official organization recognized by Lenin and the Iskra group, and would be the main organizers of the second Congress of the RSDLP in 1903.

In December 1901 the League published a pamphlet which announced that it was "preparing a special pamphlet on the urgent questions of our movement, to be published in the near future."³⁵ This special pamphlet was Lenin's What Is To Be Done and it was published in March 1902.

What Is To Be Done

Although the immediate background for the writing of What Is To Be Done was the RSDLP's struggle with Russian Economism, and the urgency of Lenin's arguments may be so deciphered, it also remains the locus classicus of Lenin's statement on the nature and role of revolutionary political consciousness and of the Party as the transmitter of the same to the working class. As noted earlier, this remains a controversial question. Nowhere in this document does Lenin use the phrase 'class consciousness,' later popularized by Lukacs. Instead, he prefers the terms 'political consciousness':

.... not only must Social Democrats not confine themselves exclusively to the economic struggle, but... they must not allow the organization of economic exposures to become the predominant part of their activities. We must take up actively the political education of the working class and the development of its political consciousness.³⁶

³⁵ V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 5, p. 305.

³⁶ From V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 5, p. 400.

Lenin appears to identify class consciousness with political consciousness; the question is why the proletariat, through its own struggles, cannot arrive at political consciousness. At this stage, Lenin appears to be saying something contradictory to Marxist presuppositions concerning class consciousness: that it can only be brought in from the outside, from the Party, to the working class. It is easy to see why Lenin has been charged with elitism, undue regard for the rational element in political life and for regarding the proletariat as a passive agent, as opposed to the active agency of the vanguard Party. These criticisms represent a vague and scattered awareness of the essential problem: the ascription of a political consciousness to the working class, which does not arise wholly from within itself. In other words, the class makes a transition from in-itself to for-itself using the agency of the Party whose membership need not consist only of proletarians, and which, at any rate, does not confine itself to the purely economic struggle of the working class.

I shall begin with a presentation of Lenin's views in the sequence in which they appear within the text and then move to a consideration of the problem raised above and in doing so, examine the relevance of Lukács' formulation of the problem and its solution.³⁷

Lenin outlines revolutionary political consciousness as being unique to Social Democracy since it "represents the working class, not in its

³⁷ I have singled out Lukács, because he appears to be the only Marxist who seems to have confronted the problem head on and come up with an interesting analysis that owes much to Lenin's initial pronouncements on the subject.

relation to a given group of employers alone, but in its relation to all classes of modern society and to the state as an organized political force."³⁸ This point of view logically entailed that the working class in Russia would initially begin its political career with a struggle against the autocracy and subsequently the bourgeois state, but it does not sufficiently define the 'historic mission' of the working class. Lenin goes on to specify this:

Working class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to all cases of tyranny, oppression, violence and abuse, no matter what class is affected... The consciousness of the working masses cannot be genuine class-consciousness, unless the workers learn, from concrete, and above all, from topical, political facts and events to observe every other social class in all aspects of the life and activity of all classes, strata, and groups of the population. Those who concentrate the attention, observation, and consciousness of the working class exclusively, or even mainly, upon itself alone are not Social-Democrats; for the self-knowledge of the working class is indissolubly bound up, not solely with a fully clear theoretical understanding -- or rather, not so much with the theoretical, as with the practical, understanding -- of the relationship between all the various classes of modern society, acquired through the experience of political life.³⁹

Here in this important passage, Lenin expands the notion of the historic mission of the working class as the vanquisher of capitalism and as fulfilling its role as the universal class that will represent all the exploited of society. Lenin's indictment of Economism, then, was two-

³⁸ Ibid., p. 400.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 412.

fold: (1) it denied the working class the much needed opportunity for political experience, an experience which was vital in its struggle against the repressive Russian state and its subsequent capture of political power; (2) it denied the working class genuine political consciousness and self-knowledge, the pre-requisites for a universal class that claims to represent society.

As noted earlier, Lenin saw Economism as a phase in the internal crisis of the working class movement, natural to a young working class movement. The Economists 'overrated' the spontaneity of the working class movement and the mass movement. Spontaneous strikes were natural to the young Russian working class but even here there were gradations of spontaneity, with the changes occurring towards greater awareness of the political struggle simultaneously with the economic struggle, as a result of socialist ideas emanating from the student and the revolutionary movements. Lenin was simply recording an observed historical fact:

But there is spontaneity and spontaneity. Strikes occurred in Russia in the seventies and sixties (and even in the first half of the nineteenth century), and they were accompanied by the 'spontaneous' destruction of machinery etc. Compared with these 'revolts,' the strikes of the nineties might even be described as 'conscious' to such an extent do they mark the progress which the working class movement made in that period... Taken by themselves, these strikes were simply trade union struggles, not yet Social-Democratic struggles. They marked the awakening antagonism between workers and employers; but the workers were not, and could not be, conscious of the irreconcilable antagonism of their interests to the whole of the modern political and social system, i.e., theirs

was not yet Social-Democratic consciousness.⁴⁰

Perhaps the key words in this passage are "not yet." Both Marcel Liebman and John Molyneux have commented quite accurately on Lenin's appraisal of the development of working class political consciousness after the 1905 Revolution.⁴¹ It is difficult to agree with them that Lenin's position in What Is To Be Done is somewhat 'elitist.' It cannot be over-emphasized that Lenin viewed the emergence of socialist ideas among the bourgeois intelligentsia as an historically transient phenomenon, to be superseded by the maturation of the working class, a process which might begin with bourgeois hegemony, but then pass over into a proletarian one. This is the significance of the entire section on 'The Spontaneity of the Masses and the Consciousness of the Social-Democrats.'⁴² Lenin's insistence on Social-Democratic consciousness stemmed from observations of the labour movement (also noted by both Marx and Engels), chief among which was the fact that left to itself the trade union movement became the instrument of bourgeois domination. The history of the English trade union movement had amply illustrated this.

While it was perfectly natural for the working class to focus only on its economic struggle, for Social-Democrats to limit themselves (and

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 374-375.

⁴¹ Marcel Liebman, 'Lenin in 1905: A Revolution that Shook a Doctrine,' Lenin Today. Eight Essays on the Hundredth Anniversary of Lenin's Birth, Ed. Paul M. Sweezy & H. Magdoff, Monthly Review Press, New York, pp. 57-75. John Molyneux, Marxism and the Party, Pluto Press, London, 1978, pp. 36-55.

⁴² Collected Works, op.cit., vol. 5, pp. 373-387.

the working class) to this perspective was a surrender to opportunism. Opportunism which led to reformism, was, in Lenin's estimation, the abandonment of the historic mission of the working class. In Germany, Bernstein had succumbed to this tendency, one which was endemic to a certain stage in the working class movement. It is significant that at the conclusion of What Is To Be Done Lenin remarks: "We may meet the question, what is to be done? with the brief reply: Put an End to the Third Period."⁴³

The Third Period that Lenin was referring to was the third period of Russian Social Democracy. The first period he dated from 1884-1894, the second from 1894-1898 and the third from 1898-1902. The first period saw the rise of Social Democracy and the consolidation of its programme and theory. The second period marked the founding of the RSDLP as a political party; it was also the period of the upsurge of the mass movement. The task of Social Democracy then was to struggle against the Populists. The third period began the breakaway from Social Democracy of the Legal Marxists: Struve, Berdyaev and others. This was also the period of the full blown emergence of Economism within the RSDLP. The proletarian struggle had spread to new strata of workers and had extended to the whole of Russia, resulting in the revival of the democratic struggle among students and enlightened sections of the population. At this juncture, according to Lenin, Social Democracy was lagging behind the social movement and the rise of Economism reflected this phenomenon.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 520.

Economism had an historical significance for Russian Social Democracy because it represented the "confusion and vacillation which constitute the distinguishing feature of an entire period in the history of Russian Social Democracy."⁴⁴

Lenin goes on to predict the arrival of the Fourth Period:

When the third period will come to an end and the fourth (now heralded by many portents) will begin we do not know. We are passing from the sphere of history to the sphere of the present and, partly, of the future. But we firmly believe that the fourth period will lead to the consolidation of militant Marxism, that Russian Social Democracy will emerge from the crisis in the full flower of manhood, that the opportunist rearguard will be 'replaced' by the genuine vanguard of the most revolutionary state.⁴⁵

Social Democratic political consciousness then is the fullest realization of the historic mission of the working class: (1) the overthrow of capitalism; (2) the socialist transformation of society; and (3) the proletariat acting as the universal class representing all the exploited of society in its struggles. As the working class in Russia had barely begun its realization of its historical mission, the immediate tasks of Social Democracy were such that:

the all-round political agitation will be conducted by a party which unites into one separable whole the assault on the government in the name of the entire people, the revolutionary training of the proletariat, and the safeguarding of its political independence, the guidance of the economic struggle of the working class, and the utiliza-

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 351.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 519-20.

tion of all its spontaneous conflicts with its exploiters which rouse and bring to our camp increasing numbers of the proletariat.⁴⁶

Lenin's concept of the 'organizational' structure of the RSDLP was determined by its dual task: its work among the proletariat and its work with broad sections of the general population. As regards the working class, the RSDLP could and should engage first of all in open trade union activity. Lenin was deeply critical of the attempts of the Economists to set up secret cells within trade union work. This misguided venture, Lenin points out, only made the cells vulnerable to police informers and to governmental confiscation of documents and funds. This was because the Economists confused workers' organizations with the organization of revolutionaries. As Lenin puts it: "The workers' organization must in the first place be a trade-union organization; secondly, it must be as broad as possible; and thirdly, it must be as public as conditions would allow..."⁴⁷ Open participation of the Social Democrats would allow for the proper facilitation of the economic struggle of the workers, the demand for better conditions and higher wages; it would also improve such activity as collection of funds, workers' mutual aid and so on. The legalization of non-socialist and non-political labour unions in Russia had already begun and Social Democrats should actively support this process. As Lenin observed with some acerbity directed towards the Economists: "If we have in mind broad workers' organizations, and not

⁴⁶ ibid., p. 432.

⁴⁷ ibid., p. 452.

widespread arrests, if we do not want to provide satisfaction to the gendarmes, we must see to it that these organizations remain without any rigid formal structure."⁴⁸

The political work of the RSDLP would function simultaneously for both the proletariat and the general public and this Lenin envisaged as public exposure of the autocratic regime and the demand for general democratic reforms. This type of propagandist and agitational work could be carried on by local organizations of the RSDLP, but on a national scale it required a central organ such as Iskra. The RSDLP itself, while surrounding itself with mass organizations would remain a body of professional revolutionaries, a secret and centralised one.

Lenin was criticised for secrecy and centralism by the Economists. His defence was as follows. He did not believe that being accused of following the Narodnaya Volya line was exactly unflattering: "... for what decent Social Democrat has not been accused by the Economists of being a Narodnaya Volya sympathizer?"⁴⁹ The resolute struggle waged against the autocracy by the Narodnaya Volya differed from that of Russian Social Democracy because the former had no substantial theory to back their political action, that they "either did not know, or were unable, to link their movement inseparably with the class struggle in the developing capitalist society."⁵⁰ Other than that, no militant revo-

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 458.

⁴⁹ V.I. Lenin's Collected Works, vol. 5, p. 474.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 474.

lutionary organization, if it is seriously revolutionary, can dispense with organization, especially under an autocratic regime. In form such an organization in an autocratic country must be "conspiratorial." Secrecy must be an essential condition, to which all the other conditions, such as the number and selection of members, functions, etc., must conform.

To invoke the 'democratic principle' under Russian conditions was both illogical and a-historical. The German Socialist Party was called 'democratic' because all its activities were carried out publicly, and its congresses were held in public. Such conditions did not obtain in Russia as every Social Democrat well knew. Similarly, the principle of election which obtained in the German party could not obtain in the Russian one. Lenin asks rhetorically: "Is it possible for all to elect one of these revolutionaries to any particular office when in the very interest of the work, the revolutionary must conceal his identity from nine out of ten of these 'all'?"⁵¹ The Economists' playing at democracy or 'democratism' as Lenin called it, would simply facilitate the work of the police in carrying out raids on a large scale, thus scattering the activities of the organization and preventing revolutionaries from focussing on their tasks. The centralism of the organization flowed logically from the conspiratorial and secret nature of the organization.

As Neil Harding has pointed out, none of Lenin's colleagues in the Emancipation of Labour Group, objected to Lenin's What Is To Be Done, nor

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 478-489.

did they find anything controversial in his programme of organization.⁵² The reasons were quite simple, for the time being, at any rate. The veterans of Russian Marxism had themselves escaped the oppressive conditions that obtained in Russia by living in exile. Their own theoretical and political tracts were essays in transplanting Marxism to Russian soil. Further (and this most certainly contributed to the difference of approach between them and their counterparts in Germany), both the revolutionary intelligentsia and the proletariat in Russia had a much more militant tradition than their counterparts in the Germany of the 1848 Revolution, since by the 1890s Marxism had become a real factor in the thinking of both intelligentsia and proletariat.

The controversy between Lenin and his closest colleagues in the RSDLP emerged only in 1905, when Lenin quite logically, as it seemed to him, continued the line he had advocated all along. In this regard, there is no doubt that both Axelrod and Martov had shifted their positions, soon to be followed by Plekhanov. All three (as well as Potresov) would justify their change of attitude by putting forward the explanation that they had not quite grasped Lenin's dictatorial tendencies at an earlier period. They thus reduced the question to one of personality and temperament.⁵³

A closer examination of the dispute will reveal, however, that the deeper cause of the split lay in the new developments that emerged in

⁵² Neil Harding, op.cit., p. 166.

⁵³ See Keep, The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia, op.cit., p. 111.

Russia by the time of the 1903 split. Until then, the left liberal forces represented by Legal Marxism had not gathered their full strength, nor had the Socialist Revolutionary party been established. Leopold Haimson, perhaps the only non-Leninist commentator to have advanced these two developments as the prime reason for Lenin's intransigence on the leading role of the RSDLP in the coming revolution, has this to say: "The awakening of society that had followed the student strike of 1899-1901 was marked by two major phenomena, a revival of the Narodnichestvo among the members of the intelligentsia and the political organization of the bourgeois liberal movement."⁵⁴ Haimson's account of these two developments deserves a detailed examination.

After the students' agitation of the late 1890s there was a revival of heterogeneous Populist circles. The most important of these groups united at the end of 1901 and organized a new Socialist Revolutionary Party. Although they did not have a definitive and consistently formulated political programme, they had some clear-cut political assumptions. The coming revolution would not be purely bourgeois in character. Both the liberal intelligentsia and the half proletarianised peasantry would join with the proletariat to achieve democratic and social reforms which would form the basis for a socialist construction of society. But in Lenin's estimation, the Socialist Revolutionaries were pushing revolutionary voluntarism too far. Haimson comments:

⁵⁴ Haimson, op.cit., p. 148.

This extreme voluntarism Lenin found abhorrent and dangerous, not only because it was beginning to contaminate many Social Democrats, not only because it seemed to constitute nothing more substantial than the 'revolutionary adventurism' the reckless outbursts of self-affirmation that periodically swept over all 'spontaneous' unconscious movements, but also because it combined with an image of the political map on which all the objective signposts for revolutionary action had been summarily swept away.⁵⁵

Lenin also disagreed strongly with the Socialist Revolutionaries for their advocacy of terrorism. In this "blind and vacillating group"⁵⁶ Lenin saw a serious threat to the future of the revolutionary movement and to the independent identity of Social Democracy, for they were openly advocating political terrorism and other forms of revolutionary pyrotechnics at a moment when revolutionary leaders needed to concentrate every bit of their strength on the massive organization of their followers. The contemporary task facing the revolutionary movement was comparable to that of "burning down a virgin dark forest"⁵⁷; Lenin metaphorically explained. Only a "general and concentrated fire"⁵⁸ could effect a task of such magnitude, and to build such a fire the proper materials had to be systematically accumulated. Instead of working for this careful accumulation of revolutionary energy, the Socialist Revolutionaries were calling on the revolutionists to engage in

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 149.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 151.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 151.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 151.

'excitation,' "send off rockets to knock down the highest tree"⁵⁹ and expend "all available materials, uneconomically and fruitlessly."⁶⁰ Even more than their 'revolutionary adventurism,' Lenin found their failure to understand the revolutionary principles of the class struggle completely unacceptable. Their vague blurring of the distinction between classes, their naive reliance on an alliance between the intelligentsia, the proletariat and the peasantry made them particularly susceptible to the influence of bourgeois propaganda.

To summarize briefly the main points of Lenin's theory: (1) the proletariat's political consciousness must be a consciousness of the proletariat's relations to all classes of society and to the state; (2) it must be a consciousness to end not only the exploitation of the proletariat, but also that of all the oppressed of society; (3) this political consciousness or knowledge is initially brought to the working class by the educated intelligentsia, but with the growth of the social process, the proletariat can accomplish this for itself; and, (4) however, it must still have a Party that will express the rational awareness of the proletariat's historic mission and not be confined to the purely spontaneous struggle concerning economic problems.

By themselves, these propositions would seem to contradict Marx's well known pronouncement that "the emancipation of the working class must

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 151.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 151.

be the work of the working class."⁶¹ But it must be remembered that Marx made this observation during the formation of the First International, when the proletariat was just coming into its own and when all leadership had been effectively in the hands of the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie; apparently, what he had in mind was the likelihood of this leadership taking over the working class movement.

In Chapter One I attempted to show that, while Marx hoped for a wide membership for a working class party, he was not hostile to the notion of a vanguard structure, as indeed his activity both within the Communist League and the First International would indicate. His tolerance of eclecticism in the International had strict limits and his references to 'our Party' throughout his career, would indicate that he certainly did not consider the Party as having played out its role and as having dissolved itself in the labour movement.⁶² However, as John Molyneux has pointed out, Marx, did not, unlike Lenin, pay as close attention to the question of the relationship of the Party to the proletariat; Molyneux attributes this neglect mainly to what he calls Marx's "optimistic evolutionism."⁶³ According to Molyneux, Marx viewed the growth of working class political consciousness as occurring relatively smoothly and evenly, roughly in proportion to the development of capi-

⁶¹ Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, 'General Rules of the International Working Men's Association,' Selected Works, vol. 1, Moscow, p. 386.

⁶² See Appendix A.

⁶³ Molyneux, op.cit., p. 35.

talism.⁶⁴ Again, as Molyneaux points out, the problem of reformism had not surfaced yet in the socialist movement. This problem posed itself with dramatic effect only with the steady growth of a mass working class party in Germany and the publication of Bernstein's Evolutionary Socialism. The threat of an undue preoccupation with the economic struggle, to the exclusion of other aims, had not fully materialised fully in Marx's time, even though both he and Engels were fully aware of the trade unionist mentality of the English membership of the First International.

If the 'historic mission' of the working class was the defeat of capitalism and the fulfillment of the proletariat's universal role (as Lenin maintained, and as was central to the Marxian ethos since the writing of Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right), then the question arises as to why the proletariat could and did succumb to the narrow and particularistic interests of the economic struggle; this also, presumably being the raison d'être for a Party that would provide leadership on a day to day basis, not merely on questions of tactics or organization, but also of theoretical analyses and the aims of the revolutionary movement. Lenin never attempted a philosophical justification of this state of affairs; he merely observed it. The closest that he came to an 'explanation' was to say that in the narrow circumstances of a worker's employment in factory and given the hours, it was not possible for the worker to develop a broader perspective or acquire a more rounded

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

education. It was left to Lukács to provide a 'philosophical' explanatory schema for the 'political practice' expressed in What Is To Be Done.

The Philosophical Debate: Lukács' Solution

George Lukács' career did not begin with his involvement with Marxism or the Party. This involvement came about only with the evolution of his ideas from what he himself has described as 'ethical idealism' to his adoption of the Marxian weltanschauung, and his political involvement with the Party and the short lived Communist regime of 1919.⁶⁵ In a perceptive article, Andrew Arato has pointed out that the central philosophical problem that concerned the young Lukács was the unity of the subject-object, a unity which had been fragmented and expressed itself in 'alienation.'⁶⁶ Lukács' History and Class Consciousness represents an attempt to analyse the alienation and ways of overcoming it. Although Lukács had not yet read Marx's early works (that would come much later, during his sojourn in the Soviet Union, in the 'Thirties') the concept of alienation which Marx had put forth in The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 (and which has subsequently come to influence various writers on what may be loosely termed the New Left) commenced with Marx's analysis of 'alienated

⁶⁵ See Lukács' own 1967 Preface to History & Class Consciousness, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971, p. x.

⁶⁶ Andrew Arato, "George Lukács: The Search for a Revolutionary Subject" in The Unknown Dimension, ed. Dick Howard and Karl E. Klare, Basic Books, New York, 1972.

labour,' a situation in which the worker, estranged from his means of production and from his land, (in the case of the agricultural worker by the process of capitalist expropriation) alienated his creative labour in the production of commodities for the market.⁶⁷ Marx's views of alienation were related strictly to his analysis of private property relationships; and his solution to the problem was the abolition of private property through a communist revolution. Prior to his adoption of Marxism, Lukacs saw in aesthetic and artistic creation the solution to the problem of alienation, but with his adoption of Marxism, he maintained that the proletariat, through revolutionary practice, would overcome alienation (and its specific form 'reification') and become the identical subject-object of history. The revolutionary subject of history (the proletariat), would, however, go through many detours before it arrived at its destination, with the aid of the vanguard Party which Lukacs called "the organizational form of the proletariat."⁶⁸

Although several short writings prior to History and Class Consciousness (1922) sounded out some aspects of this theme, it is only with this work that Lukacs comes to express his fully developed views on the subject. In the first essay, 'Class Consciousness' he addresses himself to a set of problems:

In Marxism the division of society into classes is deter-

⁶⁷ Erich Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man, F. Ungar Pub. Co., New York, 1961; Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, Beacon Press, Boston, 1966; C.W. Mills, The Image of Man, G. Braziller, New York, 1960.

⁶⁸ History & Class Consciousness, p. 75.

mined by position within the process of production. But what, then, is the meaning of class consciousness? The question at once branches out into a series of closely interrelated problems. First of all, how are we to understand class consciousness (in theory)? Second, what is the (practical) function of class consciousness, so understood, in the context of the class struggle? This leads to a further question: is the problem of class consciousness a 'general' sociological problem or does it mean one thing for the proletariat and another for every other class to have emerged hitherto? And lastly; is class consciousness homogenous in nature and function or can we discern different gradations and levels in it? And if so, what are their practical implications for the class struggle of the proletariat?⁶⁹

Lukács stakes his claim on the superiority of collective consciousness or class consciousness, as opposed to the 'individual' consciousness, which he also seems to view as the empirically given consciousness. The former is the 'imputed' consciousness, the authentic and genuine consciousness.⁷⁰

The real motor forces of history are not the psychological, empirically given consciousness of individuals, but the imputed consciousness arising from a class. This is the closest that Lukács comes to reinforcing the material basis of consciousness, whether individual or collective. The question for Lukács is, given that the real motor forces of history are such things as class and class consciousness, why do individuals persist in thinking otherwise? He is not denying that "the conscious reflexes of the different stages of

⁶⁹ ibid., p. 46.

⁷⁰ ibid., p. 51.

economic growth remain historical facts of great importance...⁷¹ He merely views this as false consciousness. Genuine consciousness, on the other hand, sees society as a concrete totality, with this totality being apprehended by a series of mediations.⁷² In contrast, bourgeois thought sees a fragmented reality, an immediate and therefore abstract reality.⁷³ In a passage reminiscent of Lenin's definition of political consciousness as consciousness of all existing relations in society (What Is To Be Done) Lukacs observes:

By relating consciousness to the whole of society it becomes possible to infer the thoughts and feelings which men would have in a particular situation if they were able to assess both it and the interests arising from it in their impact on immediate action on the whole structure of society. That is to say, it would be possible to infer the thoughts and feelings appropriate in their objective situation. The number of such situations is not unlimited in any society.⁷⁴

Consciousness of class relations would form the basis of such knowledge:

Now class consciousness consists in fact of the appropriate and rational reactions 'imputed' (zugerechnet) to a particular typical position in the process of production. This consciousness is, therefore, neither the sum nor the average of what is thought or felt by the single individuals who make up the class. And yet the historically significant actions of the class as a whole are determined in the last resort by this consciousness

⁷¹ ibid., p. 49.

⁷² Totality and mediation, are central to Lukacs' analysis.

⁷³ History & Class Consciousness, p. 50.

⁷⁴ ibid., p. 51.

and not by the thought of the individual -- and these actions can be understood only by reference to this consciousness.⁷⁵

There is then a distinction between class consciousness and psychological consciousness; are the differences so great that there are qualitative distinctions between these two types? And what is the practical and historical significance of "these different possible relations between the objective economic totality, the imputed class consciousness and the real, psychological thoughts of men about their lives."⁷⁶ The question, as Lukács puts it, is how far it is in fact possible to discern the whole of the economy of a society from inside it? After all, the bourgeoisie were unable to do this:

The class consciousness of the bourgeoisie may well be able to reflect all the problems of organization entailed by its hegemony and by the capitalist transformation and penetration of total production. But it becomes obscured as soon as it is called upon to face problems that remain within its jurisdiction but which point beyond the limits of capitalism.⁷⁷

Why then does the proletariat as a class, become fit for class consciousness? Lukács' answer is that whereas in all previous epochs economic interests were masked behind a host of cultural and ideological

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 51. For an excellent discussion on the relationship between the empirical and the imputed consciousness in Marx's own thinking, see, István Mészáros' 'Contingent and Necessary Class Consciousness' in Aspects of History & Class Consciousness, Routledge & K. Paul, London, 1971, pp. 85-127.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 51.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 54.

factors, with capitalism came the creation of a society where a "purely economic articulation"⁷⁸ was made the characteristic feature of that society. And the bourgeoisie's class interests prevent it from attaining to full class consciousness, which is inimical to its limited interests. Whereas, in the case of the proletariat, its class interests and its class consciousness coincide:

As the bourgeoisie has the intellectual, organizational and every other advantage, the superiority of the proletariat must lie exclusively in its ability to see society from the centre, as a coherent whole. This means that it is able to act in such a way as to change reality; in the class consciousness of the proletariat theory and practice coincide and so it can consciously throw the weight of its actions on to the scales of history -- and this is the deciding factor.⁷⁹

Whereas for every other class victory meant a perpetuation of its dominance in society, the proletariat's victory will lead to its self-annihilation as a class. That victory, of course, consists of becoming masters of the productive forces of society. He quotes from the Communist Manifesto:

All the preceding classes that got the upper hand, sought to fortify their already acquired status by subjecting society at large to their conditions of appropriation. The proletariat cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby every other previous mode of appropriation.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 59.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 69.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 71-72.

The ultimate goal, however, can be in dialectical contradiction to the momentary interest of the proletariat. Here, the antagonism between the empirical consciousness of the proletariat and its imputed consciousness plays itself out. The proletariat must go beyond the superficial empiricism of the bourgeoisie, that crude and superficial empiricism with which the bourgeoisie was able to make do:

Whereas even when the development of the proletariat was still at a very primitive stage it discovered that one of the elementary rules of class warfare was to advance beyond what was immediately given. (Marx emphasizes this as early as his observations on the Weavers' Uprising in Silesia).⁸¹

Opportunism in the proletarian movement stays at the level of the empirically given, as in the case of the trade unions. Opportunism always stays at the level of "effects and not causes, parts and not the whole, symptoms and not the thing itself."⁸² Opportunism, then, is the obstacle to the proletariat's development of full class-consciousness:

In contrast with the right instincts of the proletariat it plays the same role as that played hitherto by capitalist theory: it denounces the correct view of the overall economic situation and the correct class consciousness of the proletariat together with its organized form, the Communist Party, as something unreal and inimical to the 'true' interests of the workers (i.e., their immediate, national or professional interests) and as something alien to their 'genuine' class consciousness (i.e., that which is psychologically given).⁸³

⁸¹ ibid., p. 72.

⁸² ibid., p. 74.

⁸³ ibid., p. 75.

There are two extreme attitudes: crude empiricism and abstract utopianism. In the first case, the proletariat remains a passive observer "moving in obedience to laws which it can never control."⁸⁴ In the second case, it regards itself as a power which is "able of its own subjective volition to master the essentially meaningless motion of objects."⁸⁵ Both extremes are ever present dangers to the proletariat precisely because its entrapment in bourgeois society creates the conditions of "reified consciousness."⁸⁶

In Chapter IV Lukács begins his long discourse on 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat.' Of the three long sub-sections, that on the 'Antinomies of Bourgeois Thought' has special interest for those seeking specifically Hegelian connection in Lukács' thought. Its interest is primarily of historical value. The analytical section entitled 'The Phenomenon of Reification' and the concluding section, embodying a solution 'The Standpoint of the Proletariat' will be examined here, briefly, as they connect directly with Lukács' views on the Party in relation to the working class.⁸⁷

Reification describes the situation where what is subjective is seemingly objective; in other words, what is a relation between people is seen as a relation between objects. Reification is expressed in the com-

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 77.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 77.

⁸⁷ For the Hegelian and Kantian background of Lukács, see Victor Zitta's George Lukács' Marxism, M. Nijhoff, The Hague, 1964, pp. 119-128.

modity-structure, which Lukács describes as being "the central, structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects."⁸⁸ He quotes directly from Marx's Capital to illustrate his point:

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses... It is only a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.⁸⁹

Reification affects the working class in distinct ways: (1) work by which an individual should express his creativity and subjectivity seems to be a power alien to the individual controlling his life at every stage; (2) the worker comes to view his labour power as a commodity; hence he stands in a relationship of 'ownership' to this commodity, which he seemingly can sell freely to a purchaser; (3) his work becomes increasingly subject to specialization and loses that organic unity which it would have, if it were not part of the commodity-structure of capitalism; and (4) the worker becomes dehumanised.

So pervasive has capitalism become on a world-wide scale that:

the relations between men that lie hidden in the immediate commodity relation, as well as the relations between men

⁸⁸ History & Class Consciousness, p. 83.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 86.

and the objects that should really gratify their needs, have faded to the point where they can be neither recognized nor even perceived. For that very reason the reified mind has come to regard them as the true representative of his societal existence.⁹⁰

The public institutions of bourgeois society, the political and legal institutions harmonise with the reified structure of society. Reification can be overcome only by "constant and constantly renewed efforts to disrupt the reified structure of existence by concretely relating to the concretely manifested contradictions of the total development, by becoming conscious of the immanent meanings of these contradictions for the total development."⁹¹ The stress here is on making the contradictions conscious:

Only when the consciousness of the proletariat is able to point out the road along which the dialectic of history is objectively impelled, but which it cannot travel unaided, will the consciousness of the proletariat awaken to a consciousness of that process, and only then will the proletariat become the identical subject-object of history whose praxis will change reality.⁹²

Since the historical process has reached a certain stage the proletariat can and must take the next step: "The deed of the proletariat can never be more than to take the next step in the process."⁹³ In an important footnote to this observation Lukács adds:

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

⁹¹ History & Class Consciousness, p. 197.

⁹² Ibid., p. 197.

⁹³ History and Class Consciousness, p. 198.

Lenin's achievement is that he rediscovered this side of Marxism that points the way to an understanding of its practical core. His constantly reiterated warning to seize the 'next link' in the chain with all one's might, that link on which the fate of the totality depends in that one moment, his dismissal of all utopian demands, i.e., his 'relativism' and his 'Realpolitik': all these things are nothing less than the practical realization of the young Marx's Theses on Feuerbach.⁹⁴

The class-consciousness of the proletariat is an "adequate social consciousness which gives the proletariat the opportunity and the necessity to change society."⁹⁶

In the earlier chapters Lukács had mentioned the Party as the organizational form of the proletariat. In the chapter entitled 'Critical Observations' he provides what is perhaps the most cogently argued critique of Rosa Luxemburg's views on the Russian Revolution.⁹⁷ Here Lukács points out that Luxemburg's criticism stemmed from an underestimation of the non-proletarian elements in the Revolution as well as the "power wielded by such ideologies within the proletariat itself."⁹⁸ Correspondingly, there was an "overestimation of its purely proletarian character, and therefore the overestimation both of the external power and of the inner clarity and maturity that the proletariat class can possess and in fact did possess in the first phase of the

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 221, note 60.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 199.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 209.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 272-293.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 275.

revolution. In the earlier chapter, especially the one on Class Consciousness, Lukács had pointed out that the enmeshment of the proletariat in bourgeois production relations posed a danger to the emergence of proletarian class consciousness from its capitalist integument. The growth of opportunism in the working class movement was an observed fact; at the philosophical level Lukács had explained it as a preoccupation with the empirically given, the psychological consciousness of the proletariat as opposed to the imputed consciousness.¹⁰⁰ The transition from empirical consciousness to imputed consciousness could only take place if the proletariat organized itself and this 'organizational' form was the Party. Lukács elaborated on this in the last chapter 'Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organization'.

Lukács believes that the "idea of the Communist Party... has yet often been seen purely in technical terms rather than as one of the most important intellectual questions of the revolution."¹⁰¹ As mentioned above, the central task for Lukács was the "task of anchoring the problem of organization in communist theory."¹⁰² Rosa Luxemburg had seen the importance of mass action and "had located the traditional notion of organization in its false relations to the masses."¹⁰³ In thus sorting

99 Ibid., p. 274.

100 Ibid., p. 74.

101 Ibid., p. 295.

102 Ibid., p. 298.

103 Ibid., p. 298.

out what was wrong with the traditional approach to 'organization' vis-a-vis the untutored masses, Luxemburg "made it possible to define its true function within the revolutionary process. It was necessary, however, to go one step further and to look at the question of political leadership in the context of organization. That is to say, she should have elucidated those organizational factors that render the party of the proletariat capable of assuming political leadership."¹⁰⁴

Lukács points out that it was no accident that the 1903 split in the RSDLP, concerned both questions: on the one hand, the question of who the proletariat's allies would be in the coming revolution, and on the other, the problem of organization:

What turned out to be disastrous for the movement outside Russia was that no one (not even Rosa Luxemburg) realized that the two issues really belonged together and were bound up in an indivisible dialectical unity.¹⁰⁵

This dialectical unity is the unity of theory and practice. Lukács' study of Lenin in 1924 is entitled 'Lenin: A Study in the Unity of Theory and Practice.'¹⁰⁶ Revolutionary theory and practice have to be

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 298.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 298-299.

¹⁰⁶ Commentator after commentator has pointed out, with apparent glee, that Lukács wrote this work on Lenin as a kind of 'peace offering' to the Russian Communist Party, because of the inner Party dispute concerning his History and Class Consciousness. This mendacious view has no foundation in fact, not only because of Lukács' lifelong admiration for Lenin (as seen in the many comments made in the last years of his life) but also because the Lenin study was written in 1924, shortly after Lenin's death, as a commemorative gesture. See Lukács' 1967 Preface to History & Class Consciousness.

'mediated' and "organization is the form of mediation between theory and practice."¹⁰⁷ In the course of a discussion of opposing views, it is possible for a political party to allow even extremely divergent views to be aired and expressed. However, if the party is to have any impact on political life then it must "rise above the level of pure theory or abstract opinion."¹⁰⁸ Opportunism (by which Lukács meant Menshevism) had always been reluctant to give organizational expression to differences of views precisely because doing so would require some form of action in the political arena, some way of selecting out the essential determinants of a situation, that would render theory meaningful, but also relevant:

Just because the Second International studiously avoided all implications for organization it was able to commit itself to many things in theory without feeling in the least compelled to bind itself to any particular line in practice. Thus it was possible to approve the very radical Stuttgart resolution about the war, although it contained no organizational guidelines about what action should be taken and no organizational guarantees about whether the resolution could be implemented in practice.¹⁰⁹

Lukács admits that there is no ready made formula to guarantee that through organization alone, it would be possible to make the transition from theory to practice; consequently, "the essential determinants that

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 299.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 299.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 301. Lukács is referring to the Stuttgart resolution of the Second International.

connect theory and practice"¹¹⁰ must be sought out. Among the important factors "that determine the direction to be taken the proletariat's correct understanding of its own historical position is of the very first importance."¹¹¹ In such a situation the organization of the party of the proletariat spells disorganization and defeat for the whole apparatus of counter-revolution. Lukács cites the course of the Russian Revolution of 1917 as evidence for his argument. At the time the Party's slogans of peace, self-determination and the radical solution to the agrarian problem, were in reality, the articulation at a conscious level, of the spontaneous demands of the masses:

It is not enough to object that the agrarian revolution and the peace movement of the masses would have carried the day without or even against the Communist Party. In the first place, this is absolutely unprovable: as counter-evidence, we may point, e.g., to Hungary where a no less spontaneous agrarian uprising was defeated in October, 1918. And even in Russia it might have been possible to crush the agrarian movement or allow it to dissipate itself, by achieving a 'coalition' (namely a counter-revolutionary coalition) of all the 'influential' workers' parties.¹¹²

Lukács' meaning is quite clear: it was organization that helped the Bolshevik Party to distance itself from opportunism, to seek out the connection between revolutionary theory and practice and to provide

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 300.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 311.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 311.

effective political leadership to the proletariat.¹¹³

The Second Congress of the RSDLP

On no other subject has there been so much misrepresentation and biased recounting of the facts of the case as the Second Congress, both in the response of Lenin's colleagues as well as in subsequent scholarship. According to one interpretation, put forward by J.L.H. Keep (The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia) and Leonard Schapiro, (The Communist Party of the Soviet Union), to mention two leading scholars, Lenin was the evil genius of the Second Congress, who split Russian Marxism in two, against the good intentions of his colleagues. Even so sensible a commentator as Leopold Haimson systematically follows this line of thought.¹¹⁴ In this account I shall attempt to correct the one-sidedness of contemporary scholarly accounts of Lenin's role at the

¹¹³ The best known critique of Lukacs' view of the Party as a series of mediations between the Party and the Proletariat is to be found in Merleau-Ponty's Adventures in the Dialectic, Northwestern University Press, Illinois, 1973. This study, however, merely juxtaposes the author's highly individual vision against Lukacs, but does not attempt a systematic critique. The best study of Lukacs from the standpoint of a phenomenologist is Goldmann's Lukacs and Heidegger, Routledge & K. Paul, London, 1977; Goldmann does not concern himself with the question of the Party. Paul Picone attributes the importance of the Party in Lenin's thought to his failure to analyse the totality of imperialist relations and the importance of the intellectuals in the new period. See 'The Problem of Consciousness' Telos (1970) Andrew Arato's The Young Lukacs and the Origins of Western Marxism, Scarbury Press, New York, 1979, is a general exposition of Lukacs. The best work on Lukacs' theory of praxis is that by one of Herbert Marcuse's pupils, Andrew Feenberg, Lukacs, Marx and the Sources of Critical Theory, op.cit., 1981.

¹¹⁴ Leopold Haimson, The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism, op.cit., pp. 165-181.

Second Congress. In doing so, it is impossible not to see that Julius Martov was not the impeccable saint of social democracy as has been made out by his leading biographer Israel Getzler (Martov: A Political Biography of a Social Democrat) but was, notwithstanding his talents, something of an intriguer and schemer, who, when he suffered defeat at the Congress, violated the very Party rules he had helped to formulate and refused to cooperate in the work of the Party. Lenin, on the contrary, had at least the virtue of consistency: his open and determined advocacy of certain positions had been for three years since the founding of Iskra in 1900 the bedrock of Russian Marxism, and had been upheld by the very same people who now proposed a different route. In historical perspective it is clear that Martov and Axelrod, to be soon followed by Plekhanov, were departing from the orthodoxy of Russian Marxism, which they were entitled to do, but which they did not have the foresight or the courage to substantiate with proper arguments. At the Congress and its immediate aftermath, they indulged in personal abuse of Lenin (Martov being the worst offender in this case), a tradition, which, unfortunately, has persisted in present day scholarship, with a few notable exceptions. Rather than offer a principled defence of their own standpoint, the Minority (Mensheviks) engaged, at the Second Congress, in a boycott of the Party, after the Party had been declared, at the Congress, the sole arbiter; they rejected in a spirit of peevish and childish disgruntlement, the many compromises that Lenin offered them; and worse, made the dispute a matter of personalities, when, in fact, the fate of Social Democracy hung in the balance. Of course, in retrospect, their pathological opposition to Lenin (which they justified with vague

references to 'autocracy, Bonapartism, etc., and which Lenin had no trouble in showing to be unjustified to the majority of Social Democrats) only suffered, in contrast to the consistency of his orthodoxy and his readiness, at this stage, to compromise, should the unity of the Party require it. The famous dispute over Paragraph 1 of the Rules, the question of membership to the Party, was decided by a slim majority in favour of Martov's formulation; nevertheless Lenin bowed to the majority decision, even though he continued to fight openly and legally for his other positions. And with regard to the question of Party organization, even J.L.H. Keep is constrained to say: "An examination of Iskra reveals only the minutest differences of emphasis on such matters between Lenin and his colleagues, who gave him carte blanche to develop his views."¹¹⁵ It is difficult not to draw the conclusion that a purely personal pique induced Martov to descend from the level of principled opposition to gossip and scandalmongering (narrating purely private conversations, without documentation), to detach Plekhanov slowly from the support he gave Lenin, and eventually to destroy the unity of the RSDLP.

As it is impossible to survey all the proceedings of the Second Congress, I shall single out the major sources of controversy, which may be summarized as follows: (1) The Organizing Committee Incident; (2) The Party Programme; (3) The Debate on Paragraph 1 of the Rules; and most significant of all (4) The Election to the Central bodies of the RSDLP.

¹¹⁵J. L.H. Keep, The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia, op.cit., p. 111.

The Organizing Committee Incident

The Organizing Committee, as its name suggests, was set up a year previous to the Congress, to look into such questions as what delegations could be asked to attend the Congress as bona fide components of the RSDLP. This Committee was composed of five Iskra-ists, three members from the Southern Worker (Yuzhny Rabochy) and one from the Jewish Bund. The Committee had decided to turn down the request of the Borba group headed by D.B. Ryazanov to be granted representation at the Congress, a decision upheld subsequently, also by the Credentials Committee, during the opening days of the Congress. For reasons not fully known, the Organizing Committee reversed its own decision and going over the head of the Credentials Committee, decided to issue an invitation to Ryazanov, a move opposed by many Iskra-ists, among whom were Lenin, Plekhanov, Trotsky, and, at this stage, even Martov. It must be pointed out here that the Organizing Committee came to the decision against the strenuous opposition of one of its member, P.A. Krasikov (pseudonym Pavlovich), who was later numbered among the Bolshevik supporters of Lenin. This move by the Organizing Committee was defeated at the Congress and the invitation to Ryazanov withdrawn. However, this incident was an early indication, at least to Lenin, that the Iskra-ists had begun their slow move towards a more eclectic conception of the Party.

The Party Programme

From Lenin's description of the early days of the Congress (written shortly after the Congress) it would seem that the Bund delegates and the Economists, Akimov and Martynov, were engaged in preventing the Congress

from being dominated by the Iskra group.

The debate on the programme dragged out beyond belief. Akimov alone moved several dozen amendments. There were arguments literally over single words, over what conjunction to use. So many amendments had to be discussed that one Bundist, a member of the Programme Committee, asked, and with reason, whose draft we were considering, the one submitted by the editors of Iskra, or the one submitted by Akimov. The amendments were trifling, and the programme was adopted without any changes of importance whatsoever; nevertheless, the debates took up about 20 sittings, so unproductive was the work of the Congress owing to the opposition of various anti-Iskraist and quasi-Iskraist elements.¹¹⁶

The Party Programme, originally drafted by Plekhanov, with several changes suggested by Lenin during the period of drafting, was passed by the Congress. Its theoretical section contains the statement that "to effect this social revolution the proletariat must win political power, which will make it master of the situation and enable it to remove all obstacles along the road to its great goal. In this sense the dictatorship of the proletariat is an essential political condition of the social revolution."¹¹⁷

The immediate political task of the RSDLP was defined as "the overthrow of the Tsarist autocracy and its replacement by a republic based on a democratic constitution"¹¹⁸ that would ensure the people's sovereignty by a legislative assembly consisting of the representatives

¹¹⁶ V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 7, p. 75.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., vol. 6, p. 29.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 30.

of the people, by universal, equal and direct suffrage, freedom of speech and assembly, the right to self-determination of all nations, etc. This part of the 'minimum' programme also demanded the limitation of the working day to eight hours, rest-periods for wage-workers of both sexes, prohibition of overtime and night-work, and the employment of children, as also the prohibition of women in industries injurious to their health, workers' compensation for injuries sustained at work, state pensions for aged workers and the prohibition of payment in kind for work done.

The agrarian programme of the RSDLP aimed at removing all remnants of the serf-owning system: (1) abolition of land redemption and quit-rent payments; (2) annulment of collective liability and of all laws restricting the peasant disposal of land; (3) return to the peasants of sums taken in the shape of redemption money and quit-rent payments, confiscation for this purpose of monasterial property and royal demesnes, imposition of a special land-tax on members of the big landed nobility who received the redemption loans and the money to be paid over to the village communes; (4) the establishment of peasant committees: (a) for the restitution to the village of the land cut off from the peasants when serfdom was abolished and now used by the landlords to keep the peasants in bondage; (b) for the eradication of the remnants of the serf owned system which still existed in certain parts of the country; and (5) the giving of power to the courts to reduce exorbitant rents and declare null and void all contracts entailing bondage.

The delegates from the Bund and the Polish Social-Democrats objected to the clause on self-determination, but were overruled by the Congress. The arguments raised against the agrarian programme by the Economists

were somewhat more persistent. Lenin, whose account of the Congress in One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (1904) was based on a careful study of the minutes of the Congress, tells us that the campaign against the agrarian programme (specifically included at Lenin's insistence, in the Party programme) was launched, as was expected, by the Economist Martynov, and comments thus: "It was the vulgarization of Marxism as applied to so complex and many-sided a phenomenon as the present-day system of Russian peasant economy, and not differences over particulars, that was and is responsible for the failure to understand this programme. And on this vulgar-Marxist standpoint the leaders of the anti-Iskra elements... quickly found themselves in harmony."¹¹⁹ He goes on to speak of "their failure to grasp the importance of the peasant movement, their failure to grasp that it was not over-estimation but, on the contrary, underestimation of its importance (and a lack of forces to utilise it) that was the weak side of our Social Democrats at the time of the first famous peasant revolts."¹²⁰ The Economists had found the agrarian programme Utopian and unrealistic, and had further pointed out that the peasants could not be expected to be a revolutionary force, and that the clause pertaining to cut-off land was impractical as the agricultural labourer could not be expected to side with the rich peasant on this issue since the cut-off land was to a great extent already in the hands of the rich peasant. The cut-off land referred to the pasture and meadow

¹¹⁹ Ibid., vol. 7, p. 234.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 234.

land which the peasants were allowed to use prior to the Emancipation. Lenin reminded his opponents of the Russian peculiarities of capitalist relations between the agricultural labourer and the rich peasant. In his words:

Actually, the cut-off lands today oppress the agricultural labourer as well, and he does not have to be 'induced' to fight for emancipation from his state of servitude. It is certain intellectuals who have to be 'induced' -- induced to take a wider view of their tasks, induced to renounce stereotyped formulas when discussing specific questions, induced to take account of the historical situation, which complicates and modifies our aims. It is only the superstition that the muzhik is stupid -- a superstition which, as Comrade Martov rightly remarked... was to be detected in the speeches of Comrade Makhov and the other opponents of the agrarian programme -- only this superstition explains why these opponents forget our agricultural labourer's actual conditions of life.¹²¹

The question in Russia could not be simplified into a naked contrast of worker and capitalist. The Economists' inability to deal with new issues that did not come within the already established and customary pattern which "called for some independent application of Marx's theory to peculiar and new (new to the Germans) social and economic relations,"¹²² arose from their reduction of the proletarian viewpoint to narrow limits. It is interesting to note that Trotsky, supporting the general Iskra-ist line on the agrarian programme, also remarked that in the approaching period the Social Democrats must link themselves to the

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 236.

¹²² Ibid., p. 237.

peasantry.¹²³ The agrarian programme was passed by the Congress, after a prolonged discussion.

We now approach the two questions that, in retrospect, led to the split in the RSDLP. They were: (1) Paragraph 1 of the Rules defining membership; and (2) the controversy over the elections to the central bodies of the Party.

(1) Paragraph 1 of the Rules

Paragraph 1 of the Rules dealt exclusively with the question of the definition of membership to the Party. The draft submitted by Martov to the Congress ran as follows: "A member of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party is one who accepts its programme, supports the Party financially, and renders it regular personal assistance under the direction of one of its organizations."¹²⁴ Lenin's draft went thus: "A member of the Party is one who accepts its programme and who supports the Party both financially and by personal participation in one of the Party organizations."¹²⁵ Martov's formulation was accepted by the Congress by a narrow majority; it is interesting to note that Martov received the votes of the Jewish Bund and the Southern Worker group and the Economists. Subsequently, the Jewish Bund and Economists would withdraw from the Congress, thus reducing the votes of the Martov faction; hence

¹²³ Ibid., p. 237.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 244.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 244.

the name Mensheviks (the Minority) for the Martov faction and the name Bolshevik (the Majority) for Lenin's group.

As Martov's formulation was accepted by the Congress and as Lenin is on record as saying: "I by no means consider our differences (over Paragraph 1) so vital as to be a matter of life or death to the Party. We shall certainly not perish because of an unfortunate clause in Rules 1¹²⁶ it may be puzzling to understand why this dispute became so central to the RSDLP. The explanation is both simple and complicated. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Lenin's Iskra-ist views on party organization (further clarified in What Is To Be Done) had been the accepted positions of Lenin's colleagues in exile. And indeed, at the Congress, Plekhanov supported the Leninist arguments (although in the coming months, under the influence of Martov's intriguing and personal scandalmongering about Lenin, Plekhanov would shift positions). Martov's methods of fighting Lenin did indeed become personal, and his angry response to the defeat of his candidates for membership to the central institutions of the Party (both verbally and in his refusal to serve on the editorial board of Iskra after being delegated by the Congress to do so) were unquestionably part of the drama but do not constitute a complete explanation of the split in the Party. Martov's biographer Israel Getzler has a more relevant explanation:

... it would be a mistake to regard the membership paragraph as a mere red herring and the debate as nothing

126 ibid., p. 255.

more than a struggle for power taking the form of a tournament of Marxist dialecticians fighting with the weapons of rival formulas, sharpened razor thin. If we grant that Martov in the months before the convocation of the Congress was feeling his way to a wider concept of the Party, while Lenin stood fast for the principles of Iskra militants and of his elitist What Is To Be Done? and wanted them embodied and realized in the new party which was to issue from the Second Congress, then the wrangle over the membership paragraph must be taken seriously as a genuine debate over rival conceptions of the Party. 127

In substance, this appraisal of the dispute is correct, although Getzler's careless use of the word 'elitist' with reference to Lenin is inaccurate and it is questionable whether Martov had, many months before the Congress, arrived at the conclusions he presented to the Congress.

Lenin's defence of his formulation of the membership rule rested on the line of argumentation that he had all along employed, namely, that the Party could be effective only if it were stringently organized. Axelrod began his criticism of this position and his support of Martov's call for a broader party by arguing that Lenin had confused the concepts of party and organization. He went on to point out that the secret and centralised organizations of the Narodnaya Volya had been surrounded by groups of people who helped the Narodnaya Volya, although they did not belong to the organization, and were considered members of that party by the Narodnaya Volya. Axelrod was mistaken on both counts. As Plekhanov pointed out:

127 Israel Getzler, Martov: A Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1967, p. 78.

Axelrod was wrong in citing the seventies. At that time there was a well-organized and splendidly disciplined centre; around it were the organizations, of various categories, which it had created; and what remained outside these organizations was chaos, anarchy. The component elements of this chaos called themselves Party members, but this harmed rather than benefited the cause. We should not imitate the anarchy of the seventies."¹²⁸

The theme of the anarchist nature of Martov's formulation of membership to the party, (by which anyone who cared to do so could call himself or herself a party member and be recognized as such by the party) was to be continually repeated by Lenin in criticism of Martov.

As to Axelrod's first point regarding party and organization Lenin presented his own position clearly both at the Congress and soon after in his One Step Forward, Two Steps Back:

When I say that the Party should be the sum (and not the mere arithmetical sum, but a complex) of organizations, does that mean that I 'confuse' the concepts party and organization? Of course not. I thereby express clearly and precisely my wish, my demand, that the Party, as the vanguard of the class, should be as organized as possible, that the Party should admit to its ranks only such elements as allow of at least a minimum of organization. My opponent on the contrary, lumps together in the Party organized and unorganized elements...¹²⁹

The Russian Social Democrats had long since accepted the principle that the Party should be a disciplined and organized entity; Lenin was well within these limits and subsequent attempts both by his colleagues and by contemporary scholars to attribute his call for discipline and organiza-

¹²⁸ Cited in V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 7, p. 258.

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp. 257-258.

tion to his ambition and need to dominate, are merely off the mark. Lenin's point was simple: to refute his arguments that control, direction and discipline (to which all at the Congress subscribed) were necessary, his opponents would have to show that these qualities could be attained outside an organization.

The idea that the Party would cut itself off from friendly elements, was, Lenin pointed out, a needless fear, since all those who sympathised with the party and wished to help financially or otherwise, were free to do so; should these individuals want to actually join the party they should be prepared to enroll in one of the party organizations. If not, they could not legitimately expect to affect the decisions of the party as and when they arbitrarily chose to attend to its affairs. Anybody could call himself or herself a Social Democrat; this was beyond the party's jurisdiction, but only those individuals who actually enrolled in a party organization could be recognized as party members. As Lenin saw it, the matter "therefore reduces itself to the alternative consistent application of the principle of organization, or the sanctification of disunity and anarchy?"¹³⁰

Lenin's organizational structure had the following categories: (1) organizations of revolutionaries; (2) organizations of workers, as broad and varied as possible. These two categories constitute the Party proper. Supplementary to this were the workers' organizations associated with the Party, workers' organizations not associated with the Party but

¹³⁰ ibid., p. 259.

actually under its direction, and unorganized elements of the working class who were influenced by Social Democracy. Two points are worth noting here: the class composition of the organizational structure and the significance Lenin gave to the word 'organization'.

By 'organization' Lenin meant both an "individual nucleus of a collective of people with at least a minimum degree of coherent form,"¹³¹ and the complex whole of such individual nuclei. The key words here are "a minimum degree of coherent form" which supply the meaning to what Lenin meant by 'democratic centralism.' Any free association of individuals could not be called an organization, until such time that the free association translated itself into a disciplined and necessary action, necessary because it completely expressed the inter relationship between parts and whole as an organic one (that is, not artificial but intrinsic to the structure) and action, because it is a relation between entities and not atomised solitudes. As this notion applied to the RSDLP it signified that individual members of the Party, while free to express their individual positions would require of themselves that they subordinate their wishes to the demands of the whole. In other words, instead of a loose association of conflicting views jumbled aimlessly together, a form would emerge from the rational will to universality of individual members.

Although Lenin's colleagues, as mentioned earlier, were at one with him on the question of centralism, they did not seem to understand all

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 257.

that this word entailed. Temperamentally, both Axelrod and Martov shied away from 'centralism' even they dimly recognized the need for it in the Party. They seemed also to have questioned its usefulness in keeping in touch with the mass movement in Russia. Lenin, on the other hand, saw it not only as virtually necessary for the working of the Party proper, but as actually enriching the Party's role in society as a whole:

Centralization of the most secret functions in an organization of revolutionaries will not diminish, but rather increase the extent and enhance the quality of the activity of a large number of other organizations that are intended for a broad public and are therefore as loose and as non-secret as possible, such as workers' trade unions; workers' self-education circles and circles for reading illegal literature; and socialist, as well as democratic, circles among all other sections of the population.¹³²

From Martov's formulation of Paragraph 1 of the Rules it is clear that he envisaged a period of greater popularity of the RSDLP, amongst sections of the general population and consequently expected that more people would join the party on an informal basis. This may well have been the case; nevertheless, Lenin's criticism of Martov's position retained a certain validity in that the Party needed not more talkers, but individuals whose 'declaration' answered to their actions. The change from accepted orthodoxy on the part of Axelrod and Martov can also be seen as the change in the political climate of Russia. By 1902 Russian liberal democracy under the leadership of Peter Struve was in full swing, gaining its strength from the Zemstvos (local organs of self-

¹³² Ibid., pp. 264-265.

government) and the professional middle class. Both Axelrod and Martov feared that the liberals would usurp the leadership of the coming revolution and their opening up of the Party to radical liberal elements can be seen as a move to pre-empt the liberal leadership. However, what began as a definite move to establish the hegemony of the Social Democrats in the coming revolution, would soon turn to an active collaboration with the liberals, not so much on the part of Axelrod and Martov, but on the part of those Mensheviks who soon came to be described as right Mensheviks. In the 1905 revolution, for example, the Menshevik dominated soviets actively sided with the liberals, and refused to join the insurrectionary soviets. In 1917, they continued to be the conservative force that would hold back the soviets, well until, after July 1917, when the Bolsheviks had won over the metropolitan soviets.¹³³

The class membership of Lenin's views of party organizations (the desirability of having as many workers in the Party as was possible, along with the existing workers' organizations) was Lenin's solution to the possible threat of liberal leadership, and was in keeping with his deeply held Marxian conviction that the working class was the only truly revolutionary class that could bring about the transition from a democratic revolution to a socialist transformation of society. Non-Leninist scholars, too numerous to enumerate (and most works on Lenin, with rare exceptions, belong to this group) profess to see this aspect of

¹³³ See Oskar Anweiler's account in The Soviets: The Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Councils, 1905-1921, Pantheon Books, New York, 1975, pp. 144-207.

political strategy as a drawback which led him to recruit many unsavoury characters into the ranks of the Bolshevik Party. In such accounts, the personal shortcomings of these party members are exaggerated out of proportion; nor do they take into account the many Bolsheviks whose personal integrity was beyond doubt, or whose cultural education was of a high order (Lunacharsky, Bogdanov come to mind). Such critics hypocritically accuse Lenin of 'elitism' and contempt for the working class, while their own 'democratism' is cited as evidence of great love and respect for the working class. The history of the Bolshevik Party, when properly investigated, shows quite clearly that its support came not only from enlightened intellectuals but from the majority of the industrial working class and the poor peasantry. The success of the October revolution depended on this support, especially during the long and difficult years of the civil war and the economic blockade, when the Bolsheviks successfully held the country together against the combined forces of the counter-revolution. Intellectuals, in the hostile accounts of Lenin's regime, are seen as being cowed into submission. No doubt, there were many opportunists among the intelligentsia and many who feared for their future. Here again, the number of intellectuals who came over to the side of the Bolsheviks in genuine appreciation of the vast social changes that were underway in Russia, is indeed impressive.¹³⁴

On balance then, the dispute over the membership rule was quite

¹³⁴ For a complete account of the role of the post-revolutionary intelligentsia see S. Fedyukin, The Great October Revolution And the Intelligentsia, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975.

definitely the statement of the two divergent trends that had developed in Russian Social Democracy. Against this background the struggle for the election to the party's central bodies can also be seen as a continuation of a fundamental divergence and not the conflict of two different personalities. It would appear from the actual events that Martov was less prepared than Lenin for the eventual outcome. Martov was widely respected and had considerable support among the Iskra delegates, although as mentioned earlier, this support was buttressed by the votes of the Economists and the Jewish Bund. His consternation at not being able to outmaneuver Lenin and at not being able to secure the success of his candidates to the Central Committee seems at first glance to be personal; it was not so, but his handling of the entire episode was childish in the extreme and set the final seal on that 'schism' which might have been averted, to the advantage of the entire movement.

The Elections to the Central Bodies of the Party

The Congress had passed a resolution accepting Iskra as the Central Organ of the RSDLP. It remained to decide who would constitute the editorial board of Iskra. Prior to the Congress Lenin had suggested that the old editorial board of five (Plekhanov, Lenin, Martov, Axelrod, Zazulich) was too cumbersome and that a trio would serve the purpose better; both Plekhanov and Martov had gone along with the proposal and the choice of candidates was to be confirmed by the Congress. In the event the three who were elected to do the editorial work were Lenin, Plekhanov and Martov. This took place only after the elections to the Central Committee had confirmed the success of Lenin's list of candidates

and only the partial success of Martov's protégés. (I shall return to this question, later.) There is no doubt that by the time the elections to the editorial board of the Iskra came around Martov felt that the ground was slipping from under his feet. The Bund delegates and the Economists had withdrawn from the Congress and their combined votes of eight could no longer be depended upon. The Iskra-ist majority was behind Lenin and not least in importance the veteran figure of Plekhanov was solidly (at the Congress) behind Lenin. In his mind, and in the minds of his followers, an Iskra board of three, with Lenin and Plekhanov united against himself, would be a further defeat for what he had planned as the future of Russian Social Democracy. Consequently, he refused to serve on the editorial board. Lenin would maintain later that Martov had agreed to the three names prior to the Congress; there seems no reason to doubt this. Martov had calculated on the support of non-Leninist votes and at the time the defeat of his candidates to the Central Committee had not yet occurred.

Martov's biographer Israel Getzler makes the interesting admission that:

... there is no point in supposing that Martov was without sin in these matters; he had gone the whole way with Lenin during the Iskra campaign of conquest, including sharp sharp practice in polemics against the Bund and the Union of Social Democrats Abroad, and subversive tactics in the wrangle over the control of the social democratic committees... He is on record as having urged Lenin to pull off an open coup d'état and have done with it and confront the rest of the social-democratic movement with Iskra-dominated central institutions before calling a Congress. 135

135 Getzler, p. 82.

In the same vein Getzler comments:

Thus in that part of the congress agenda which imposed Iskra's supremacy and mopped up the defeated remnants of opposition, Martov stood with Lenin and stood as a junior partner to a Lenin who had grown to his full stature as leader and political strategist. On these matters they agreed; both wanted a centralized party. But as soon as they turned to consider how completely the party should be centralized, how its centralism should be organized, and above all who should man and control its centre they turned by degrees from partners to opponents.¹³⁶

Getzler goes on to point out that for Martov such measures as would ensure Iskra's supremacy were only temporary maneuvers which would be abandoned after the Second Congress and Russian Social Democracy could look forward to a peaceful respite. Undoubtedly, Martov was temperamentally inclined towards conciliatory policies; but to suppose, as he allegedly did, that Russian Marxism could continue a long a peaceful path of collaboration with rival groups was naive and impolitic; as events would show. It is not, however, certain that Martov's refusal to join the editorial board of Iskra was motivated by sentimental loyalties towards the ousted candidates. Lenin attributed Martov's position to what he called the 'circle mentality,' which was suited to times when the RSDLP was a loose conglomeration of circles of revolutionaries who often knew each other intimately and over a period of time. Now that the RSDLP had grown into a larger organization and would extend its influence further, circle ties, so Lenin argued, would have to be replaced by Party ties, by which he meant placing the interests of the

¹³⁶ ibid., p. 77.

Party above personal loyalties. It seems reasonable to assume that with the defeat of his candidates to the Central Committee, Martov felt acutely the need to diminish Lenin's influence at least in the Central Organ, Iskra, and maneuvered to prevent a Lenin-Plekhanov coalition against himself, by supporting Axelrod and Zazulich, who at any rate were also personal friends.

In this episode as well as on many other occasions Lenin's realism was the key factor, and not malicious intent as Getzler would have us believe. Axelrod had contributed virtually nothing to Iskra over a period of time and Zasulich gave primarily only editorial help. Both these veterans were past their prime, and the entire work of Iskra fell on Lenin, Krupskaya and Martov. The old editorial board had not even met once in its full strength in the year prior to the Congress. To an impartial observer it was evident that the editorial board of Iskra needed sprucing up. Adam Ulam, by no means a sympathetic commentator on Lenin, has this to say:

On the face of it the proposal was quite sensible. The three proposed candidates had carried most of the paper's work anyway. It was desirable to have a smaller number of editors to cut down the endless debates and prolonged correspondence that had hampered the work of the old board... And it was improbable that Lenin's plan was motivated by a conscious desire to seize control of the Party. He would be one of three editors. To be sure, he had, for the moment the support of Plekhanov, but the latter was notoriously changeable, and was as likely to side with Martov, as with him. In brief, the notion of a Machiavellian design behind the plot to drop the revered but incompetent collaborators is hardly tenable.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Adam Ulam, The Bolsheviks, op.cit., p. 192.

As Lenin's proposal for the reconstitution of the editorial board of Iskra also allowed for the co-optation of further candidates, Martov's refusal to join the new board can be seen as a last ditch stand to get the general leadership of the Party under his control, especially since the Central Committee had slipped away from his grasp. It was clearly a splitting and delaying tactic, although his motives were not personal vanity or ambition, but the desire to mould the RSDLP, along new lines. Of course, his refusal to serve on the board, in spite of the Congress elections, actually defeated his own purpose, for now Lenin could and did point out that this was a breach of Party loyalty:

The Organizing Committee drew up very precise (formalistic and bureaucratic, those would say who are now using these words to cover up their political spinelessness) Regulations for the Second Congress, got them passed by all the committees, and finally endorsed them, stipulating among other things, in Point 18 that "all decisions of the Congress and all the elections it carries out are decisions of the Party and binding on all Party organizations. They cannot be challenged by anyone on any pretext whatever and can be rescinded or amended only by the next Party Congress." How innocent in themselves, are they not, these words, accepted at the time without a murmur, as something axiomatic; yet how strange they sound today -- like a verdict against the minority! Why was this point included? Merely as a formality? Of course not. This provision seemed necessary, and was indeed necessary, because the Party consisted of a number of isolated and independent groups, which might refuse to recognize the Congress. This provision in fact expressed the free will of all the revolutionaries (which is now being talked about so much, and so irrelevantly, the term 'free' being euphemistically applied to what really deserves the epithet 'capricious'). It was equivalent to a word of honour mutually pledged by all the Russian Social Democrats. It was intended to guarantee that all the tremendous effort, danger and expense entailed by the Congress should not be in vain, that the Congress should not be turned into a farce. It in advance qualified any

refusal to recognize the decisions and elections at the Congress as a breach of faith.¹³⁸

One of Martov's candidates, among others, was E.M. Alexandrova, somewhat confusingly referred to in the Congress documents as Comrade Stein, Comrade N. and so on (presumably to conceal her identity from the police). She was also a member of the Organizing Committee, that same body which had decided to invite Ryazanov to the Congress, much to the anger and dismay of the majority of Iskra-ists. Prior to the elections to the Central Committee, the 16 united Iskra-ist delegates had met to confer on the list of candidates to be submitted for election. By ten votes to two, with four abstentions, a list of five candidates proposed by Lenin was accepted and was subsequently endorsed at the Congress. Lenin's list included a member of the Bund as well as one from Martov's faction; the other three were hard-line Iskra-ists. It was at this stage, presumably, that Martov decided on a policy of non-cooperation, which lasted many months after the Congress. By the end of 1903, Plekhanov, in order to keep the peace, co-opted the old members of the editorial board of Iskra. Both he and Lenin had earlier invited Martov and the old editorial board to make contributions, but had been refused. Lenin withdrew from the editorial board of Iskra, which from now on would be referred to as the new Iskra. By January 1905 Lenin started the Bolshevik Newspaper Vperyod (Forward). In 1906 both the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks met at a Unity Congress, by which time, the policy

¹³⁸ Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 7, pp. 210-211.

differences between the two factions had only enlarged. (I shall return to this question in the next chapter.)

As mentioned earlier, non-Leninist accounts of the Second Congress, begin with the assumption that it was Lenin who was determined to wreck the Congress in order to achieve domination over the RSDLP. The earliest of such accounts by contemporary scholars is Bertram Wolfe's Three Who Made A Revolution.¹³⁹ It has also been the standard work from which few non-Leninist scholars have departed. Bertram Wolfe's account of the Congress was not only one sided, but he subsequently went on to assemble Rosa Luxemburg's articles on Lenin and the Bolsheviks in a tendentious and arbitrary manner, arranging the articles in such a way that her later positive assessments of the Bolsheviks are presented first and her purely negative critique of the Second Congress is presented last in the collection, thus giving the reader the impression that this was her final and considered judgement on Lenin. As a final coup de grâce he has subtitled the collection Leninism or Marxism? The violation of chronology is particularly obnoxious because Luxemburg's early article on the question of organization and centralism, 'Organizational Questions in Russian Social Democracy' was written in 1904 for the new *Iskra* (at Potresov's request) when her knowledge of both the Mensheviks and the German Social Democrats was rudimentary; more important, when she was little acquainted with the Russian party as a whole. Her subsequent disenchantment with the Mensheviks and the German Social Democrats and

¹³⁹ Bertram D. Wolfe, Three Who Made A Revolution, Dial Press, New York, 1964, pp. 230-248.

her whole-hearted support of the October Revolution of 1917 and her praise of Lenin's leadership, clearly demonstrate a change of opinion.

J.P. Nettl in his Rosa Luxemburg has rightly pointed out that the Luxemburg-Lenin debate of 1904 was not "a collision between two fundamentally irreconcilable concepts of organization, or even revolution."¹⁴⁰ The question was really their differing approaches to class consciousness. Nettl's explanation at this juncture, deserves to be quoted in full:

Lenin believed that without the active tugging of a revolutionary elite, working-class consciousness was doomed to a vicious circle of impotence, that it could not rise above the economic level of trade-union activity. This had been the stuff of his battle with the 'Economists' (who, in fact, would have agreed with many of his propositions; as so often, Lenin's analysis was sharpened by attributing an extreme view to his opponents which bore little relation to reality). But he really did see the growth of class consciousness in terms of a critical minimum effort not unlike that of modern economists with regard to growth 'take off'; a volume of effort injected into the system greater than it would normally be capable of generating itself. Rosa Luxemburg, on the other hand, believed class consciousness to be essentially a problem of friction between Social Democracy and society. Friction was thus the main function of class consciousness. The more closely Social Democracy was engaged with bourgeois society on all fronts -- economic as well as political, industrial as well as social, mental as well as physical -- the greater and more rapid the growth of class consciousness... She proved from her own experience and way of life that elites were necessary; but that they should be allotted a specific function in Marxist theory or strategy was another matter altogether.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ J.P. Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, vol. I, Oxford University Press, London, New York, 1966, p. 290.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Some comments on Nettl's analysis are called for. His fleeting reference to the Economists' readiness to accommodate Lenin's views is not historically accurate, as my account has shown. Every militant member of the RSDLP, from Plekhanov to Martov, had seen Economism as a serious danger. Secondly, Nettl has not sufficiently emphasized the point that for Lenin, the chronological precedence given to 'bourgeois' socialist consciousness was a historically transient phenomenon. The working-class, in good time, would appropriate the insights provided by the intelligentsia and run them in double harness with their own day to day confrontations with capitalism. Thirdly, Luxemburg's neglect of organizational questions (unlike Lenin, she did not attend meetings or acquaint herself with the organizational details of the groups and organizations she was associated with) was one of the reasons for the ineffectualness of the Communist Party of Germany, which she helped to found.

Lenin's response to the Luxemburg critique turned on one simple point which he had set out to explicate in One Step Forward, Two Steps Back:

Comrade Luxemburg, says, for example, that my book is a clear and detailed expressions of the point of view of 'intransigent centralism.' Comrade Luxemburg thus supposes that I defend one system or organization against another. But actually that is not so. From the first to the last page of my book, I defend the elementary principles of any conceivable system of party organization. My book is not concerned with the difference between one system of organization and another, but how any system is to be maintained, criticised, and rectified in a manner consistent with the party idea."¹⁴²

¹⁴² Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 7, p. 474.

Nettl has rightly spoken about the specific Russian context of Lenin's centralism: Lenin's knowledge of centrifugal Russian individualism and indiscipline. It is a well known fact that Martov himself symbolized the somewhat carefree attitude of Russian intellectuals to questions of organization and the specific carrying out of tasks assigned to them. Lenin would characterise this approach of the Russian intellectual as a special type of anarchism. No doubt he had in mind the temperamental characteristics of such individuals; more important, it was at the Second Congress that he came to realize fully that his colleagues in the party had little conception or understanding of the realities of political power, which in the Russian context meant not only a repressive autocracy, but also a weak and hesitant bourgeoisie, and one that would not hesitate to betray the working class. This much he had absorbed from Marx's analysis of the 1848 Revolutions and it seemed inconceivable to him that serious Marxists such as Luxemburg could speak airily of the right of the working class to make its own mistakes and use this argument to justify the lack of organization in the party. Luxemburg argued: "The working class demands the right to make its mistakes and learn in the dialectic of history. Let us speak plainly. Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee."¹⁴³

Lenin began to use the term 'democratic centralism' in 1906 during

¹⁴³ Rosa Luxemburg, The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?, op.cit., p. 108.

the Unity Congress of the RSDLP. As applied to the party it meant that party members had the right and obligation to engage in free discussion and debate of party policy and tactics, but that once a collective decision was taken, it was binding on all members, until the issue was aired once again. The word 'centralism' was applicable in so far as decisions taken by local branches of the party could be investigated and where necessary, could be overturned by the Central Committee of the party. In practice, this centralism did not always obtain and we know that Lenin himself had to contend often with serious opposition from the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party. The two dramatic examples are the occasions when the Party was deeply divided on the question of the seizure of power in October 1917 and during the Brest-Litovsk Treaty with the Germans in 1918. Alfred Meyer in his Leninism, has projected the image of a party of mechanical robot-like individuals who simply and blindly obeyed Lenin's orders.¹⁴⁴ This, of course, is not true. The history of the Bolshevik Party is one of a rich and extraordinary variety of opinions, which were effectively coalesced by the medium of inner party debate into a strong and effective political action. Local branches often acted independently and were allowed to do so, provided they stayed within the general directives of the Central Committee. Were this not the case, the Bolshevik Party's ability to organise as the single most important political entity in Russia would have been historically impossible.

¹⁴⁴ See his Leninism, op.cit.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to place Lenin's views on the role of the Party, in the revolution in their historical context. I have also tried to explicate what 'political consciousness' meant to Lenin and its origin in what he understood to be historical materialism. I have suggested that 'voluntarism' is not a happy term to apply to Lenin's conception of political knowledge, the term being 'archaic' and drawn from earlier pre-Marxian models of political action such as Blanqui and Tkachev. Lenin's delineation of political consciousness as knowledge of the historical process was rooted in Marxian theory and resulted in a richly articulated political practice that has few parallels to date. Consequently, comparisons and contrasts can shed very little light on what is essentially a new practice.

CHAPTER IV

THE 1905 REVOLUTION AND AFTER

The 1905 revolution in Russia has long been considered a watershed in the development of Lenin's political thought. By and large this judgement is an accurate one; in this period, the elements of continuity and change are easier to discern in his theory of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, while his views on the soviets are perhaps more genuinely novel than other aspects of his thinking. The theory of the revolutionary dictatorship had already been partially anticipated in the writings of Plekhanov and had occupied a somewhat shadowy existence in the minds of most Social Democrats in Russia prior to the 1903 split in the RSDLP. It is no exaggeration to say that among the Russian Marxists Lenin showed the most sensitivity to the peasant question and as we shall see, developed a clear cut strategy for the peasantry in the coming bourgeois revolution. On the peasant question he was undoubtedly helped by his previous detailed studies of the problem, notably in his The Development of Capitalism in Russia and in his many polemics with the Populists. The idealisation of the commune as a quasi-socialist entity was effectively countered by the Russian Marxist argument that capitalist relations had already encroached on the commune and severely damaged its potential for socialism; the seemingly quasi-socialist relations of the Russian commune were in reality, as

Lenin argued, residual feudal relations in the countryside.¹

This insight was paralleled by the corresponding notion that the poor peasantry (and on occasion also the middle peasantry) were also semi-proletarians. Hence, the peasant-proletarian alliance was central to Lenin's thinking, as far back as The Development of Capitalism in Russia and antedates the actual tactic that he advocated in 1905. It was, and still remains, a controversial question (I shall return to it later in this chapter), but in Lenin's overall reflections on the subject this alliance, based on the objective realities of the Russian situation, gave substance to what he interpreted as the 'permanent revolution.' If the coming revolution was to be a bourgeois democratic one against the autocracy (as all Russian Social Democrats believed), it stood to reason that the peasantry were involved simultaneously in both the democratic struggle and in the proletarian struggle. To put it alternatively, the peasants, in struggling against feudal survivals, were objectively helping the forces of growing capitalism and in the same process were also acquiring a semi proletarian status. The peasant-proletarian alliance would deepen and extend the bourgeois democratic revolution against the autocracy (and feudalism) into a steady and uninterrupted revolution and to attain this position the revolution would have to establish a democratic republic (not a constitutional monarchy as the Liberals wanted). Participation by the Social Democrats in a provisional

¹ For two recent statements of the Populist case, see Esther Kingston-Mann's Lenin and the Problem of Marxist Peasant Revolution, Oxford University Press, New York, 1983 and Teodor Shanin's Late Marx and the Russian Road, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1983.

government established after armed insurrection would be the only guarantee of the revolution being carried forward. Hence Lenin's use of the words 'revolutionary dictatorship.'

With regard to the soviets (workers councils) Lenin apparently saw no contradiction in their co-existence with the Party (as against the judgement of many other Bolsheviks). In the 1905 revolution Lenin welcomed the soviets as non-partisan organisations expressing the will of the workers, along with trade union organisations. He saw them quite distinctly as being independent bodies, with the proviso that under the conditions of revolutionary struggle, they would accept the leadership of the Social Democratic Party. He even envisaged a situation where, with the presence of Social Democrats in the Provisional Government and with the growing radicalisation of the soviets, the latter would increasingly nominate Social Democrats to the Constituent Assembly that would be convened after the revolution. It was only after the failure of the 1905 revolution that Lenin began to pay closer attention to the partisanship of the soviets either for or against Bolshevik policy, a development that would eventually bear fruit only in 1917. There is no reason to believe (on the basis of available evidence) that Lenin ever thought of the soviets as supplanting the Party either in questions of leadership or of policy. That role he continued to reserve for the Party. On this issue he was not motivated by limitless ambition or autocratic intolerance (as many Western scholars have claimed).² In his own view he was merely

² On the importance of the Party, see Chapter 3 of this study.

adhering to the Marxian precept that the Communists would be the most resolute and most advanced section of the militant proletariat. Marcel Liebman has argued that the 1905 revolution shattered most of Lenin's pre-1905 attitudes to the proletariat's capacity for self-development, unaided by the Party. This is somewhat of an exaggeration. In the first place, as I have pointed out in Chapter Two, Lenin was quite explicit that the intellectual leadership of the Party was a historically transient phenomenon, to be followed up by the leadership of the proletariat as the latter matured and developed its own cadres. The political leadership of the Party was determined by the revolutionary struggle in a given historical period.³ After the 1905 revolution Lenin's attitude to the soviets was a mixture of caution and optimism.

I shall begin with a brief historical survey of the events of the 1905 period and then examine the two questions: (1) revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, (2) the soviets.

Historical Outline

Of this period of the early 1900s, the historian W.H. Chamberlin has remarked: "... until 1905 the struggle against the autocracy was predominantly an affair of individuals and small groups. It was only in that year that the Russian masses, the object of so much revolutionary plotting and theorizing, were stirred into action on a large scale under the triple impact of unsuccessful foreign war, domestic hard times and

³ Ibid.

the ceaseless urging of the revolutionary parties."⁴

In January 1904 Japan and Russia were at war. Although the Japanese began the actual attack on the Russian fleet at its far eastern Port Arthur, it was commonly known that Russia had been following a provocative imperial policy for some time.⁵ The fall of Port Arthur and the tremendous casualties inflicted on the Russian soldiers and sailors led liberal circles to call for a constitutional and representative government that would guarantee civil and political liberties. Writing from Geneva on the fall of Port Arthur Lenin noted that the collapse of Russia's military power signified the beginning of the end for that bulwark of European reaction and the acceleration of the social development of the proletariat.⁶ The military debacle signified the end of Russia's entire political system. The days when wars were fought by mercenaries or by a special caste isolated from the people had passed; now the people had to pay for the autocracy's colonial adventures. Lenin goes on to say: "And the class-conscious proletariat, an implacable enemy of war - this inevitable and inseparable concomitant of all class rule in general - cannot shut its eyes to the revolutionary task which the Japanese bourgeoisie, by its crushing defeat of the Russian autocracy is carrying out."⁷

⁴ W.H. Chamberlin, The Russian Revolution, 1917-1921, Macmillan, New York, 1960, p. 46.

⁵ See Keep, op.cit., p. 149.

⁶ V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 8, pp. 47-55.

⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

Strikes and industrial unrest continued even after peace was declared. In December 1904 the oilfield workers of Baku went on strike until a collective agreement was reached. Revolt in the countryside which had begun in 1902 continued to spread. On January 3, 1905 the St. Petersburg workers at the Putilov works struck and they were soon joined by workers from the mills and factories in St. Petersburg. On January 9 an unarmed contingent of workers led by Father Gapon, who marched with their families to the Czar's palace with a petition were shot at; many died and many more were wounded. The day which came to be known as Bloody Sunday was followed by strikes in all the major cities, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Baku, Riga and others. These strikes were now clearly of a political nature. In the countryside landlords' estates, sugar refineries, distilleries and grain stores were raided, particularly in Central Russia, the Volga region, the Transcaucasus and in Georgia. In June 1905 the sailors of the battleship Potemkin mutinied but were put down. Under pressure from his own circle, the Czar proclaimed the convening of the Bulygin Duma, which did not have legislative powers but was confined solely to deliberation. The Mensheviks participated in the Bulygin Duma while the Bolsheviks boycotted it. In July 1905 Lenin wrote his Two Tactics of Social Democracy, in which he spelled out the difference between the Menshevik and the Bolshevik tactics in the coming revolution.

In May 1905, in a textile district of Moscow, the first Soviet was established and directed by the Social Democrats, began its first strike. As Anweiler has noted:

Around this time the central Russian industrial region, which until then had reacted rather mildly to the events in St. Petersburg, became the arena of violent strikes, the duration and tenacity of which were unprecedented."⁸

Military intervention was employed to put down the strikes. In July, in the neighbouring city of Kostroma, a soviet established itself and then struck. In September of 1905 a printers strike in Moscow was followed by the railway workers strike in St. Petersburg, which then turned into a general strike. It was during this period that the St. Petersburg soviet came into existence. In the next two months soviets sprang up all over Russia in the industrial cities and alongside of this the soviets of soldiers and peasants were established.

In view of the desperate situation, the Czar, on October 17, issued a Manifesto wherein he promised the convening of a legislative Duma, and the extension of the franchise to those who had been previously excluded. He also promised freedom of speech and assembly, etc. In November 1905 Lenin returned to Russia. In December the workers of Moscow, specifically from the soviet, started an uprising which was put down; with this event the 1905 revolution that began in the year came to an end.

In studying the evolution of Social Democracy in this period, especially Lenin's political thought, two factors are of importance: (1) working class militance and peasant unrest; (2) the growth of political parties, especially that of the Socialist Revolutionaries and the liberals (Constitutional Democratic Party).

⁸ Anweiler, op.cit., p. 40.

Lenin, The Social Democrats and the Russian Revolution of 1905

The end of 1901 saw the formation of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (hereafter referred to as SRs). It was a loose amalgam of adherents of the old Zemlya i Volya (Land Freedom) of the 1870s and its offshoot, the Narodnaya Volya (People's Will). Its leader was Victor Chernov. The SRs denied the leading role of the proletariat and concentrated instead on the peasantry, whom they treated as an homogenous group, and whom they considered to be the basis of the coming revolution; they also advocated individual terrorism, such as political assassinations. Their agrarian programme called for the abolition of the private ownership of land and its transfer to the village commune. To that extent they were the enemies of the landlords in the villages, but in so far as they rejected the proletariat as the agent of revolution and since they advocated individual terror, the SRs came into conflict with the Social Democrats, both Menshevik and Bolshevik alike. Lenin, in particular, never ceased his criticism of SR. revolutionary terror, beginning with What Is To Be Done? Shortly after the beginning of industrial strikes in 1902, he returned to the attack on this aspect of SR. policy.

In November 1902 the Rostov workers went on strike and what began as an economic strike soon turned into a political demonstration numbering between 20 and 30 thousand people. In December 1902 Lenin wrote a short but important article for Iskra entitled 'New Events and Old Questions.' In view of his open advocacy of mass insurrection, as opposed to individual terror, it is surprising that the then undivided editorial board of Iskra (Plekhanov, Zasulich, Potresov, Martov and Lenin) should

have allowed this article to pass and permit its publication in Iskra. This article is of such importance in defining Lenin's attitude towards armed insurrection even prior to the 1905 revolution, that it is worth examining in some detail.

Addressing himself to the intelligentsia's lack of faith in the mass working class movement and their simultaneous advocacy of individual political assassinations as a method of political struggle, Lenin pointed to the importance of the Rostov strike and its consequences: "... it is only such mass movements, in which mounting political consciousness and revolutionary activity are openly manifested to all by the working class, that deserve to be called genuinely revolutionary acts and are capable of really encouraging everyone who is fighting for the Russian revolution."⁹ In spite of the lack of organisation and preparation, the masses were waging an actual struggle. In exalting the agitational impact of individual political assassinations, the SRs were staging a "political sensation as a substitute" for the political education of the proletariat.¹⁰ A hundred regicides, so Lenin argued, could not equal the participation of tens of thousands of working people "in meetings where their vital interests are discussed, and participation in a struggle, which really rouses ever new and 'untapped' sections of the proletariat to greater political consciousness, to a broader revolutionary struggle."¹¹

⁹ Lenin, op.cit., p. 279.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 280.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 280.

Anticipating his famous 1917 call to insurrection Lenin observes:

We are told of the disorganisation of the government... but we are convinced that to sacrifice one revolutionary, even in exchange for ten scoundrels means only disorganising our own ranks, which are thin as it is, so thin that they cannot keep up with all that is 'demanded' of them by the workers. We believe that the government is truly disorganised when, and only when, the broad masses, genuinely organised by the struggle itself, plunge the government into a state of confusion; when the legitimacy of the demands of the progressive elements of the working class becomes apparent to the crowd in the street and begins to be clear even to part of the troops called out for the purpose of 'pacification,' when military action against tens of thousands of the people is preceded by wavering among the authorities, who have no way of really knowing what this military action will lead to; when the crowd see and feel that those who fall on the field of civil war are their comrades, a part of themselves, and are filled with new wrath and desire to grapple more decisively with the enemy. Here it is no longer some scoundrel, but the existing system as a whole that comes out as the enemy of the people, against whom are arrayed the local and the St. Petersburg authorities, the police, the Cossacks, and the troops, to say nothing of the gendarmes and the courts, which, as ever, supplement and complete the picture in every popular uprising.

Yes, uprising. However far the beginning of what seemed to be a strike movement in a remote provincial town was 'from a 'genuine' uprising, its continuation and its finale nevertheless evoke involuntary thoughts of an uprising. The prosaic motive for the strike and the minor nature of the demands, presented by the workers, throw into particularly bold relief, not only the mighty power of the solidarity of the proletariat, which at once saw that the railway workers' struggle was the common cause of the proletarians, but also its receptiveness of political ideas and propaganda, and its readiness to defend with might and main, in open battle with the troops, those rights to a free life and free development which all thinking workers have already come to consider common and elementary. And the Don Committee was a thousand times right when it declared in its proclamation, 'To all citizens,' ... that the Rostov strike was one of the steps towards a general upsurge among the Russian workers with the demand for political liberty. In events of this sort we really see with our own eyes how an armed uprising of the whole people against the autocratic government is maturing, not only as an idea in the minds and programmes

of the revolutionaries, but also as the inevitable, natural and practical next step of the movement itself, as the result of the growing indignation, growing experience, and growing boldness of the masses, who are being given such a valuable lesson, such an education by the realities of Russian life.

An inevitable and natural step, I have said - and I hasten to make the reservation: if only we do not permit ourselves to depart by a single step from the impending and pressing task of assisting these masses, who have already begun to rise, to act more boldly and concertedly, of giving them not a couple but a dozen open-air speakers and leaders, of creating a real militant organisation capable of guiding the masses and not a so-called 'combat organisation' that guides elusive individuals (if it does guide them at all). That this is a difficult task goes without saying, but we can quite justifiably adapt Marx's words which have so frequently and so ineptly been quoted of late, and say: 'Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen individual attempts and cases of resistance, more important than a hundred organisations and 'parties' belonging only to the intelligentsia.¹²

As noted earlier, it is indeed surprising that the editorial board of Iskra passed this article. In regard to Martov's general tolerance of Lenin, at least up to the Second Congress of 1903, it has been argued, notably by Israel Getzler, that Martov evidently believed that a Leninist approach was valuable in the early stages of the development of Russian Social Democracy, but that it would be overtaken by a less militant and more peaceful approach within the ranks of Social Democracy.¹³ Plekhanov's attitude is somewhat more puzzling. Until the rise of the liberal movement in Russia at the beginning of the century, he had genuinely believed that an eventual insurrection could not be avoided,

¹² Ibid., pp. 280-282.

¹³ Israel Getzler, Martov: A Political Biography, pp. 63-89.

even though Russia was as yet, economically and socially, ready only for a bourgeois democratic revolution. Axelrod and Potresov, on the hand, were by this time, under the sway of German Social Democracy, could now boast of a broadly organised, peaceful and progressive social democratic party. Although Bernstein had been formally rebuked for his Revisionism, his personal friendship with the leaders of German Social Democracy continued, and even at the ideological level, the Erfurt Programme of the Social Democrats in Germany (drawn up by Kautsky), had quietly omitted any references to revolutionary dictatorship, while stressing the peaceful development of the proletariat within the conditions of legality and order. At the Second Congress Potresov would openly advance a resolution that made it obligatory for Russian Social Democrats to support radical liberals. In doing so, the Mensheviks were attempting to evolve a set of tactics in what they considered to be a bourgeois revolution.

At this stage Lenin was also aware that only a bourgeois democratic revolution was possible in Russia; where he differed with the Mensheviks was in advocating armed struggle on the part of the proletariat in order to push the liberals forward (leftward) and to participate in a provisional government consisting of social democrats and radical liberals. By the time of the Second Congress it was clear that with the exception of Lenin (and his supporters) the Social Democrats were actively casting about for an alliance with the liberals. In this they were aided by the establishment by 1902 of the liberal *Zemstvo* movement, as well as the founding of the liberal magazine Osvobozhdenie edited by Peter Struve the left liberal and one time Marxist. By 1903 Struve's

efforts had borne fruit with the establishment of the League of Emancipation, which along with the Zemstvo constitutionalists, formed the nucleus of the Constitutional Democratic Party (the Cadet Party). The Cadet Party actively canvassed for a Constitutional monarchy. As the Mensheviks were already inclined towards a Western style working class party, the model being Germany, it was not surprising that people like Axelrod pressed for a more liberal membership clause at the Second Congress.

In tones reminiscent of the Economists (who by now had joined forces with the Mensheviks) and whose Credo had been severely criticised by Lenin (see Chapter Three), Axelrod spoke of social democracy in the West as being a movement that included also the intelligentsia, while making allowance for the gradual maturation of the proletariat.¹⁴ Axelrod, of course, could not be blamed for looking towards the West for a model for social democracy. The German Social Democratic Party was at the height of its powers and the betrayal of the working class in the first world war and the subsequent collapse of the Second International were all in the future. It was hard to shed the illusion that the working class under capitalism, could somehow 'spontaneously' develop class consciousness and an "awareness of the world historical importance of its struggle for liberation," to use Axelrod's own words.¹⁵ There was

¹⁴ For Lenin's criticism, see Chapter 3, pp. ; P. Axelrod, 'The Unification of Russian Social Democracy and its Tasks,' in The Mensheviks in the Russian Revolution, ed. Abraham Ascher, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1976, p. 52.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 50.

nothing unsound in casting about for allies, but to depend on an ally who had proven to be as unstable as the liberals, was in effect to doom the proletariat to defeat even before the struggle had started, so Lenin would argue in the coming months.

The Russo-Japanese war and the simultaneous growth of the Zemstvo opposition encouraged the Mensheviks in their tactics of supporting the bourgeois liberal movement, which was now demanding both peace and a constitution. At this juncture Axelrod put forward what came to be known in social democratic circles as the Zemstvo campaign.¹⁶ The Zemstvos were organs of self government established after 1864 in the central provinces of Russia; their powers were strictly limited to local economic and social problems, such as the building and maintenance of hospitals, roads and certain types of social services. Although referred to as self-governing, the Zemstvos' powers were limited by the provincial governors and by the Ministry of the Interior. By the beginning of the century the Zemstvo officials began to assert their independence by calling for a constitution; in this they were supported by the middle class professionals, doctors, lawyers, etc. The 'Zemstvo Campaign' first initiated by Axelrod in 1904 and eventually supported by almost all the Mensheviks, advocated mass demonstrations wherever the liberals congregated, in order to pressure them into more active demands for

¹⁶ Abraham Ascher, Pavel Axelrod, and the Development of Menshevism, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1972. For the origin and significance of the Zemstvo see The Zemstvo in Russia: an experiment in local self-government, ed. by Terence Emmons and Wayne S. Vucinich, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982.

democratic reforms. The Menshevik argument rested on the proposition that it was necessary not to intimidate the liberals in anyway by extreme measures, lest they took fright and sought shelter in reaction. The 'Letter to Party Organizations by Menshevik Leaders, November 1904' specifies this:

As regards the existing zemstvos, our business is to present them those political demands of the revolutionary proletariat that they are bound to support if they are to claim any right to speak for the nation or to possess the firm support of the working masses.¹⁷

The liberal Zemstvos and the dumas (city counterparts of the rural Zemstvos) were described as the "enemies of our enemy," the latter, of course being the autocracy and its reactionary circles.¹⁸ On the question of the armed uprising, a resolution adopted by the Menshevik Conference, April-May 1905, 'Concerning an Armed Uprising' stated among other things: (1) that it is impossible to ensure a simultaneous uprising at a pre-determined date; (2) that favourable conditions for an uprising depends on the ferment among the masses; (3) that the Social Democrats must extend the scope of agitation against the autocracy amongst the people and bring under its influence as many groups and organisations as possible; (4) that the Social Democrats establish the closest links between the fighting proletariat of all localities and between the proletarian movement in the towns and the revolutionary movement in the

¹⁷ ibid., p. 53.

¹⁸ ibid., p. 54.

countryside; (5) that the Social Democrats agitate for a democratic republic and thus secure the maximum support from non-proletarian groups.¹⁹

Commenting on this programme Abraham Ascher remarks:

... the Mensheviks believed that middle class progressives could play a decisive role in the struggle against the autocracy. But the Mensheviks, were nevertheless apprehensive about the intentions of their political allies, and therefore they advocated massive demonstrations by workers wherever liberals assembled, in order to prod them to press for genuinely democratic reforms. The success of the tactic was not outstanding; the working class in Russia was still small and fairly amorphous, the government hampered all political activity by opposition groups and Menshevik organizations were neither numerous nor experienced in mobilizing workers. Still, in a number of cities workers did stage demonstrations outside the building where liberals held meetings and in a few cases led to a slight shift leftward in the resolutions passed by middle class progressives.²⁰

Concerning the Menshevik attempt to reach the masses in the existing situation in Russia, Solomon Schwarz, himself a Menshevik and author of The Russian Revolution of 1905 (written later in emigration) has this to say: "The Mensheviks were trying to solve a problem virtually insoluble in the Russian underground, to link the Party with the masses not only ideologically but also by close organizational bonds and to apply the democratic principle within the Party."²¹ The Mensheviks displayed an

¹⁹ ibid., pp. 56-57.

²⁰ ibid., p. 53.

²¹ Solomon Schwarz, The Russian Revolution of 1905, translated by Gertrude Vakar, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1967, p. 51.

even more puzzling attitude on the question of the seizure of power and participation in the Provisional Government.²² The Social Democrats were not to participate in the provisional government; they were to remain a party of extreme opposition. The 'Letter to Party Organizations by Menshevik Leaders, November 1904,' was explicit on the point:

This tactical line of course does not rule out the desirability of a partial, episodic seizure of power and the formation of revolutionary communes in a particular town or area, purely with the object of extending the scope of the rising and disorganizing the government.

Only in one eventuality should the Social Democratic Party, on its own initiative, endeavour to seize power and hold on to it as long as possible: viz. if the revolution should extend to the advanced countries of Western Europe, where conditions are already in some degree ripe for the establishment of socialism. In that event the restricted historical limitation of the Russian revolution may be significantly enlarged so that it is possible to enter upon the process of socialist transformation.²³

Lenin was quick to seize upon the weaknesses of the new Menshevik tactics and began his critique with the article 'The Zemstvo Campaign and Iskra's Plan' in November 1904, as soon as the Menshevik Letter to Party Organizations appeared in the new Iskra. Lenin's critique begins by recalling the attitudes of the old Iskra towards the liberal movement. There were, Lenin points out, two distinct periods in the social democratic relationships to liberals. In the first period, it was essential to combat Economism, which had denied the existence of a bour-

²² The Mensheviks in the Russian Revolution, op.cit., pp. 57-58.

²³ Ibid., p. 58.

geois-democratic element in Russia and which had ignored the proletariat's task of influencing any opposition strata in Russian society. By narrowing the scope of the political struggle of the proletariat the Economists, consciously or unconsciously, left the role of political leadership to the liberal elements of society, assigning to the workers the economic struggle against the employers and the government.²⁴

The second period began with the establishment of Peter Struve's Osvobozhdenie, in 1902. Of this period Lenin observed:

When the liberals came out with an organ and political programme of their own, the proletariat's task of influencing 'society' naturally underwent a modification: working class democrats could no longer confine themselves to 'shaking up' the liberal democrats and rousing their opposition spirit; they had to put the emphasis on revolutionary criticism of the half-heartedness so clearly exhibited in the political position of liberalism. The influence we brought to bear on the liberal strata now took the form of constantly pointing out the inconsistency and inadequacy of the liberals' political protest (it is sufficient to mention Zarya, which criticised Mr. Struve's preface to the Witte memorandum, also numerous articles in Iskra).²⁵

The article in Zarya (theoretical organ of the RSDLP) that Lenin was referring to was 'The Prosecutors of the Zemstvo and the Hannibals of Liberalism,' written in June 1901 (by Lenin) and published in December of the same year. This article is perhaps one of the best accounts of the development of the Zemstvo opposition in the face of autocracy. In the

²⁴ V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 7, p. 499.

²⁵ V.I. Lenin, Ibid., p. 500.

second half of the article Lenin specifically criticises Peter Struve's Preface to the Witte Memorandum:

As can be seen from numerous passages of his, quoted below, he favours peaceful, gradual, and strictly legal development. On the other hand, he rebels with all his being against the autocracy and yearns for political freedom. But the autocracy is an autocracy precisely because it prohibits and persecutes all development towards freedom.²⁶

This contradiction permeated the whole of Struve's essay and Lenin's conclusion was that there must be another serious force which could deal with the autocracy, the liberals being at best an auxiliary contingent in the main struggle. As Lenin interpreted the situation at the Second Congress in 1903, this had been the position of the RSDLP, with the lone exception of Potresov who tabled a resolution at the Congress which aimed at an agreement with the liberals, while, as Lenin described the situation, the resolution "stipulated for it conditions that were manifestly unreal, being altogether impossible for the liberals to fulfill."²⁷ The liberals, so Lenin argued, would always be half hearted and unstable and the Social Democrats by prodding them on, could and should seek to win over, not these same liberals, but the proletariat and semi-proletarians and part of the petty bourgeoisie. Under the circumstances, there was no serious danger of frightening away the liberals, as the Mensheviks claimed, since the liberals were only

²⁶ Ibid., vol. 5, p. 63. -

²⁷ Ibid., vol. 7, p. 500.

auxiliary forces in the fight against autocracy. Emphasising liberal

fear of an historical movement Lenin commented:

What they are afraid of, it need hardly be said, is not the plan conjured up by the Zemstvo editors, the plan of extorting from the Zemstvo-ists formal promises to the revolutionaries. They are afraid of the revolutionary socialist aims of the 'extreme' parties, they are afraid of leaflets, those first harbingers of independent revolutionary action by the proletariat... This fear is not inspired by ludicrous bogeys, but by the actual nature of the working class movement. While the working class agitated for a democratic republic the liberals wanted a qualified franchise constitution.

We, the party of the proletariat, should of course, 'go to all classes of the population,' openly and vigorously championing our programme and our immediate demands before the people at large; we should seek to present these demands to the Zemstvo gentlemen too; but our focal point and guiding thread must be pressure on the government, not on the Zemstvo-ists.²⁸

The bourgeois opposition, Lenin warned, does not actually fight; it merely stands between the two actual combatants, the government and the revolutionary proletariat, and "hopes to turn the outcome of this struggle to its own advantage."²⁹ Calling for a decisive struggle Lenin said:

Accordingly, the more heated the struggle becomes, the nearer the moment of the decisive battle, the more must we focus our attention and bring our pressure to bear on our actual enemy, and not on a notoriously conditional problematic, unreliable, half-hearted ally... the focal point and guiding thread in our agitation must not be pressure on this ally, but preparation for the decisive battle with the enemy.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid., p. 505.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 505.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 505-506.

The force of mass resistance, capable of "growing into a popular uprising" was the only dependable source of pressure on the enemy.³¹ The political unrest in the country among all sections of the people was an earnest "that the initiative of the proletariat will meet with support."³² Lenin does not here specify who the proletariat's chief ally would be in the coming revolution, nor does he raise as yet the question of a provisional government. He would do so after the events of Bloody Sunday on January 9, 1905. Between April and July of 1905 he wrote 'Social Democracy and the Provisional Revolutionary Government,' 'The Revolutionary Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Peasantry,' and 'Two Tactics of Social Democracy.'

In the first of these three articles (the last being a lengthy pamphlet) he dealt with the question of who exactly would convene the Constituent Assembly and ensure that it was based on the free will of the people and therefore on equal, direct and universal suffrage, after the fall of the monarchy: "... if we are in earnest in putting forward a practical demand for the immediate overthrow of the autocratic government, we must be clear in our minds as to precisely what other government we want to replace the one that is to be overthrown."³³ Lenin was realistic in recognising that the Social Democrats would be a minority in a coalition government; nevertheless he advocated participation

³¹ Ibid., p. 512.

³² Ibid., p. 515.

³³ Ibid., vol. 8, p. 278.

because it seemed to him the only way that pressure could be brought to bear on the new government if the minimum programme of social democracy were to be put into effect. The minimum demands were: the democratic republic, the arming of the people, the separation of Church and State, full democratic liberties and decisive economic reforms. Since the new government would be established only by a victorious popular insurrection, the continuing popular pressure steadily transmitted through the Social Democrats in the coalition would bring about the desired changes.

In the article 'The Revolutionary Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry' Lenin dealt with two of the points raised by the Mensheviks, especially by the Economist Martynov: (1) the Social Democrats should remain as an extreme opposition since in the bourgeois revolution they could not assume responsibility for the obviously non-socialist character of the provisional government; (2) the Social Democrats, by participating in the provisional government would descend to a form of Jaureism; that is, they would end up betraying the proletariat by siding with a bourgeois government. In regard to the first issue, Lenin pointed out that it rested on misconceptions about the limits of the bourgeois revolution. Social Democrats, needless to say, could not and should not overstep the limits of the bourgeois revolution by demanding an immediate implementation of socialist measures; rather they should seek to implement the minimum programme by a steady pressure on the provisional government. Concerning the second of the issues Lenin clarified the different situations that obtained in Russia and in France:

... it shows that those who resort to it have memorised good resolutions without understanding their meaning; they have learned a few anti-Jaureist catchwords by rote, but have not duly weighed them; they have learned the letter but not the spirit of the recent lessons of international revolutionary Social Democracy...

To judge Jaureism from the point of view of dialectical materialism one must draw a clear line between subjective motives and objective historical conditions. Subjectively, Jaures wanted to save the republic by entering into an alliance with the bourgeois democrats. The objective conditions of the 'experiment' were that the republic in France had become an established fact and was in no grave danger; that the working class had every opportunity of developing an independent class political organisation but did not take full advantage of this opportunity, partly because it was influenced by the parliamentary humbug of its leaders; that in actual practice, history was already objectively posing before the working class the tasks of the socialist revolution, from which the Millerands were luring the proletariat with promises of paltry social reforms.³⁴

In Russia, the situation was entirely different; the proletariat was entrusted with the task of bringing about a bourgeois revolution:

... objectively, the historical course of events has now posed before the Russian proletariat precisely the task of carrying through the democratic revolution (the whole content of which, for brevity's sake, we sum up in the word Republic); this task confronts the people as a whole, viz., the entire mass of the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry; without such a revolution the more or less extensive development of an independent class organisation is unthinkable.³⁵

And no serious struggle for the republic is possible without taking into account the petty-bourgeois masses, the intermediate elements and above

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 297-298.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 298.

all the peasantry in Russia. As Lenin pointed out: "A tremendous exertion of revolutionary energy on the part of all progressive classes will be called for to defend this gain."³⁶ The revolution had to be strenuously defended, once the autocracy was overthrown. Only anarchists would refuse participation in the provisional government; the obligations of the Social Democrats were clear. The dangers, too, were obvious, but "there is not, nor can there be, any form of struggle, any political situation that does not involve dangers."³⁷ These arguments Lenin expanded in Two Tactics of Social Democracy. Two outstanding differences existed, then, between Lenin and the Mensheviks: armed insurrection and participation in the provisional government. His critique of the Menshevik support for liberals, though trenchant and to the point, was yet to gain authenticity; this occurred only when Lenin began to spell out his strategy for the proletariat's alliance with the peasantry.

Revolutionary Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasant

In dealing with this subject there is a tendency among scholars to view the peasant-proletarian alliance as something that emerged in Lenin's thinking only after 1901 when the peasant disturbances gained in number and intensity. Harry Villetts comments: "Impressed by the scale of peasant revolutionary activity in the insurgence of 1905, Lenin boldly elaborated on the concepts of a worker-peasant alliance at the Third

³⁶ Ibid., p. 299.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 300.

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Congress (Bolshevik) of the party in April-May 1905.³⁸ While it is true that Lenin proposed the alliance in the dramatic form that he gave it, only in 1905, his very earliest extant work, 'New Economic Developments in Peasant Life' (spring 1893), his writings throughout the period of the 1890s, including The Development of Capitalism in Russia, his consistent critique of Populist agrarian policy and his own Draft Programme of the RSDLP, offer incontrovertible proof that the agrarian problem occupied a central place in his thinking prior to the 1905 revolution. In view of this, it is surprising that a recent scholar should observe that:

... Lenin seldom discussed questions of peasant political strategy during this period. His certainty that peasants were being destroyed by advancing capitalism did not evoke in him any hopes for peasant revolution against their oppressors.³⁹

Esther Kingston-Mann does, however, concede that, given such reservations "it was significant that Lenin nevertheless included an agrarian section in every draft program which he formulated in the period before 1905."⁴⁰ Curiously, she interprets this in the following fashion: "And here as elsewhere one may recognize the tension between his sound

³⁸ Harry Willetts, 'Lenin and the Peasants,' in Lenin: the Man, the Theorist, the Leader, A Reappraisal, Praeger, New York, 1967, p. 220. Willetts writes admiringly of Lenin's agrarian policy; however, he does not pay sufficient attention to Lenin's expectations of the peasantry prior to 1905.

³⁹ Esther Kingston-Mann, Lenin and the Problem of Marxist Peasant Revolution, op.cit., p. 46.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 46.

political instincts and the demands of his Marxist orthodoxy.⁴¹ Kingston-Mann's analysis, throughout her work, is based on the premise that neither Marx nor Engels had a proper place for the peasantry in their scheme. This, of course, is not quite accurate.⁴¹

In 1905 Lenin wrote an important pamphlet entitled 'Revision of The Agrarian Programme of The Workers' Party,' which summarised the previously held views of the Social Democrats, reviewed various draft programmes now proposed by them and then presented the Bolshevik programme:

Ever since they founded their Party, the Russian Social Democrats have maintained the following three propositions. First. The agrarian revolution will necessarily be a part of the democratic revolution in Russia. The content of this revolution will be the liberation of the countryside from the relations of semi-feudal bondage. Second. In its social and economic aspect, the impending agrarian revolution will be a bourgeois-democratic revolution; it will not weaken but stimulate the development of capitalism and capitalist class contradictions. Third. The Social Democrats have every reason to support this revolution most resolutely, setting themselves immediate tasks, but not tying their hands by assuming commitments, and by no means refusing to support even a 'general redistribution.'⁴²

The Programme of the Second Congress of 1903 had advocated the following measures: abolition of the social estate taxation of the peasantry, reduction of rents, freedom to use land at will, refunding of redemption payments, the establishment of peasant committees for the

⁴¹ See E.H. Carr's account in 'Marx, Engels and The Peasant,' in The Bolshevik Revolution, op.cit., pp. 385-393.

⁴² V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 10, p. 170.

restitution of cut-off lands. By 1905, it was clear to Lenin that this agrarian programme was not sufficiently radical, "because the peasant movement was growing in breadth and depth with tremendous speed,"⁴³ Accordingly, by 1905, the Bolsheviks deleted the clause about cut-off lands and substituted "support for the peasant demands up to and including confiscation of all the landed estates."⁴⁴ At their conference the Mensheviks also supported the clause on the confiscation of all the landed estates.

At the time of writing his article (1905), there were, Lenin noted, four approaches to the agrarian problem among the Social-Democrats:

- (1) The agrarian programme of the RSDLP should demand neither the confiscation of landed estates nor nationalisation.
- (2) The programme should demand confiscation of landed estates, but not nationalisation of the land in any form. There should only be municipalization.
- (3) Alienation of the landed estates, together with a restricted nationalisation.
- (4) Confiscation of the landed estates and in definite political conditions, nationalisation of the land.

This last position was that of Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Explaining himself further, Lenin stipulated that nationalisation required the prior condition that the land be seized by the peasantry:

⁴³ ibid., p. 173.

⁴⁴ ibid., p. 174.

Any other advice... is a call to the peasantry to settle the question, not by means of insurrection, but by a deal with the landlords, with the reactionary central authority. It is a call for a settlement of the question, not in a revolutionary but in a bureaucratic way, for even the most democratic regional and Zemstvo organisations are bound to be bureaucratic compared with revolutionary peasant committees, which should settle accounts with the landlords there and then, and take over powers later to be sanctioned by a national constituent assembly.⁴⁵

The emphasis on peasant committees was consistent with Lenin's opposition to the Zemstvo committees, which he regarded as conglomerates of middle class elements, who would side with the bourgeoisie in the revolution and rob the workers and peasants of their gains. It was for this same reason that he opposed municipalization of the land (advocated by the Mensheviks), for the transfer of land to organs of local self-government meant in reality handing over the fruits of revolution to the Zemstvo dominated committees. The transfer of land to the peasantry was also a further entrenchment of private property relations. Lenin recognised that nationalisation was not the equivalent of socialism; but under the given conditions it was a transitional form of state ownership. He defined nationalisation in the following manner: "Nationalisation means transferring to the state the right of ownership of the land, the right to draw rent, but not the land itself."⁴⁶ Lenin's proposal was directed against the landlords, since he was insistent on retaining the small peasant's title to his property.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 190.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 183.

Commenting on Lenin's scheme for nationalisation one contemporary scholar has remarked that "... the mounting cry for nationalization of the land would accelerate the evolution of semiproletarian attitudes among the poorest peasants, in a cause with which the middle peasants would sympathize, and therefore, the majority of the population in the countryside could be counted upon to support a revolution in Russia."⁴⁷ The same author notes that Lenin was aware of the dangers of nationalization, which under Russian conditions was a capitalistic measure. The peasants' demand for nationalization, could, at a later date, change to the demand for division of the land among themselves and an eventual restoration of the old system of landownership:

However, Lenin believed that these risks had to be taken for at least two prime reasons. In the first place, nationalization was much more progressive than the Stolypin attack on the mir, and in the second, since nationalization was wanted by the peasant masses, the Social Democrats must support the demand in order to cement further the rural and urban revolutions.⁴⁸

The Stolypin attack on the mir referred to above, was the Stolypin decree of November 1906, which released peasants from the obligation to stay within the commune and which decreed that the land be distributed among the household forming each commune. The result of this legislation was the introduction of private ownership of land. The question that interested Lenin was whether this private ownership of land would result

⁴⁷ Roy D. Laird, 'Lenin, Peasants, and the Agrarian Reform,' in Lenin and Leninism, D.C. Heath & Company, Lexington, 1971, p. 175.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 176.

in capitalism of the Prussian type (the serf-owning landlord being dominant in the economy) or what he called the evolution of American style capitalism, the abolition of landlord farming, and the growth of the free peasant farmer. He evidently supported the latter type of capitalism.⁴⁹ There is, however, no contradiction between his support of this type of development in the countryside in 1907, after the Stolypin decree of 1906, and his prior call for nationalization, since by this period it was becoming evident that a period of the stabilization of capitalism in the countryside, had set in, a theme to which he returned in The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy In The First Russian Revolution 1905-1907, which he wrote between November and December of 1907.

Here Lenin clarifies the significance of supporting nationalisation of land by pointing to the support it received from the Trudovik party (the peasant party) in both the First and the Second Dumas. The peasant call for nationalisation represented the struggle for land, the need to break up the large landlord latifundia. Hence, "the tactics of Social-Democracy in the Russian bourgeois revolution are determined not by the task of supporting the liberal bourgeoisie, as the opportunists think, but by the task of supporting the fighting peasantry."⁵⁰ Lenin had

⁴⁹ V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 12, p. 356.

⁵⁰ Ibid., vol. 13, p. 244. For an account of the peasant reaction to the government's agrarian programme, see Richard Hennessy, 'The Reaction of the Landowners and the Peasants to the Finance Ministry's Agrarian Programme' in his The Agrarian Question in Russia 1905-1907, W.Schmitz, Giessen, 1977, pp. 39-47.

arrived at this conclusion not only because an objective struggle was going on for the land on the part of the peasantry, but as he put it succinctly, because "our bourgeois revolution in the sphere of agrarian relations must be regarded as a 'peasant' agrarian revolution."⁵¹ Since the second half of the nineteenth century the 'agrarian revolution' in Russia had been for the express purpose of clearing the way for capitalism:

What was our 'great' Peasant Reform, the 'cutting off' of the peasants' lands, the removal of the peasants to the "poor lands," the enforcement of the new land regulations by military force, shootings and floggings? It was the first act of mass violence against the peasantry in the interests of nascent capitalism in agriculture. "It was the clearing of estates" for capitalism by the landlords.⁵²

From the 1905 Revolution to 1917

In Chapter Three it was remarked that the beginning of the century saw the growth of political parties especially that of the liberal Constitutional Democrats (Kadets, for short). Consequently, when in 1906, the Czar, in response to the tumultuous events of 1905, convened the First Duma, the Kadets won a large majority of seats in the Duma and were rivalled only by the Trudoviks (a party representing the peasantry, especially the wealthy ones). Both the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks had boycotted the election, although Axelrod (from the Menshevik camp) pleaded for an alliance of the proletariat with the advanced sections of

⁵¹ ibid., p. 258.

⁵² ibid., pp. 276-277.

the liberals.⁵³ We saw earlier (in Chapter Three) that by the period of the Second Congress of the RSDLP (1903), the Mensheviks had not been wholly unresponsive to the idea of such an alliance, although they still clung to the notion of the hegemony of the proletariat in the bourgeois revolution. Now, one by one, they abandoned what had been a key element in their programme.⁵⁴

The Kadets, who hoped for a parliamentary style of government (with a constitutional monarchy), presented the Czar with a set of moderate reforms. The Czar's reply to these overtures was to dissolve the Duma and call for a Second Duma to be convened in March 1907, by which time the franchise was further narrowed. Nevertheless, when the Second Duma convened in March 1907, the Social Democrats had improved their position taking 54 seats, with the Socialist Revolutionaries receiving 35, the Trudoviks approximately 200. The right wing parties (including the Octobrists) took approximately 80 seats, while the Kadets lost their majority and were down to 123. Lenin undertook a class analysis of the victory of the parties in the Second Duma, in his 'Elections to the Duma and Tactics of the Russian Social Democrats'.⁵⁵ He pointed out the following pertinent facts:

- (1) the right wing parties, the Black Hundreds, the monarchists and the Octobrists represented the big landed proprietors.

⁵³ Abraham Ascher, The Mensheviks in the Russian Revolution, op.cit., p. 60.

⁵⁴ Leonard Schapiro, The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, op.cit., p. 82.

⁵⁵ V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 12, pp. 196-207.

- (2) the urban petty bourgeoisie were represented by the Liberal Kadets and partially by the Trudovik Party.
- (3) the peasant petty bourgeoisie were represented by the Trudoviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries.
- (4) the proletariat and the poor peasantry were represented by the Social Democrats (Lenin and the Bolsheviks continued to call for an alliance of the Social Democrats with the Trudoviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries, a move which would stand them in good stead in 1917).

This clear cut division into party groupings was explained by Lenin as being the direct result of the revolutionary period of 1905:

With an obvious lag in the capitalist development of Russia, this clear-cut division into party groups according to the class structure of society is only to be explained by the stormy revolutionary mood of an epoch in which parties are formed more quickly and class-consciousness grows and takes shape infinitely more quickly than in an epoch of stagnation or of so-called peaceful progress.⁵⁶

In November 1906, the Stolypin Reforms had been put into effect. The peasants now had the right to convert their allotment land into private property and the right to leave the commune with a plot of land or a separate farmstead. The immediate consequence of the Stolypin legislation was to increase the number of rich farmers in the countryside, a move deliberately undertaken in the hope of consolidating support for the monarchy. On June 3, 1907 the Czar issued a manifesto which

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 207.

proclaimed the dissolution of the Second Duma. A number of Social Democrats were arrested and the electoral law was further narrowed, giving greater representation to the big landlords, and the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie. In December 1907 Lenin went into his second period of emigration and settled in Geneva. The Social Democratic movement inside Russia suffered because of frequent arrests. Abroad the situation was hardly more encouraging, as the emigrés engaged in futile bickering. More seriously, a number of talented Bolsheviks such as Bogdanov, Lunacharsky, etc., were preparing to modify the theoretical basis of Marxian materialism under the influence of neo Kantianism and the work of Ernst Mach. Withdrawing from political activity, Lenin in 1908 wrote his Materialism and Empiricocriticism. Within the Bolshevik Party there emerged a group which wanted to do away with the illegal organisations of the Party (these were called the Liquidators).

By 1912 there was a revival of the labour movement inside Russia. Strikes followed in rapid succession, with the massacre of the Lena goldfield workers in 1912. However, the attention of both Russia and the world now focussed on the coming World War.

The Politics of War

When war was declared in August 1914 Lenin was in Geneva. Both he and the Bolsheviks immediately called for non-participation in the war and the active campaigning for an armed struggle by the proletariat and all genuine socialists against their respective governments. The leading figures of the Second International and the German Social Democrats (with the exception of Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Franz Mehring) and Plekhanov, now

residing in France, along with the French members of the Second International, called for support for their respective national governments and the voting of war credits for these same governments. The Social Democrats, especially in Germany, did not arrive at this decision without some conflict and soul searching.⁵⁷ In Russia, all the left parties voted against the war and refused support to the Czarist government that had declared the war. However, Plekhanov and Kautsky, each rather illogically cited Marx and Engels as supporting certain kinds of wars of liberation. Lenin now set himself to unravel this argumentation and to place Marx's views in their proper historical context. Further, as Kautsky based himself on an analysis of what he called the new imperialism, it became obligatory for Lenin to challenge this analysis (which he did in systematic fashion in 1916 with his Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism). The preparatory arguments were already present in Lenin's early pronouncements on the war and the task of the proletariat in this war. Lastly, he had to explain the meaning and significance of civil war in the context of this international crisis.

(1) The Collapse of the Second International

Lenin was on solid ground when he charged the leaders of the Second International for having betrayed their socialist principles by

⁵⁷ For a detailed account of this see Merle Fainsod, International Socialism and the World War, Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1969, pp. 32-61.

supporting their respective governments in their war efforts. The three congresses of the Second International, the Stuttgart Congress (1907), the Copenhagen Congress (1910) and the Basle Congress (1912) had passed resolutions demanding of every Social Democrat that in the event of war being declared, that he or she should actively oppose it. At the Stuttgart Congress, Bebel's resolution, amended by Rosa Luxemburg and the Russian Social Democrats was approved. The amendments read as follows: (1) militarism is the chief weapon of class oppression, (2) the Social Democrats should not only try to prevent war from breaking out or to secure its speediest termination, they should utilise the crisis to hasten the overthrow of the bourgeoisie.

At this same Congress, both Bernstein and David, speaking on behalf of the German delegation, put forward a 'socialist colonial policy,' which, in effect asked only for moderate reforms in the colonies, but not their liberation. Lenin pointed out that this was a justification of a bourgeois world outlook that condones wars and similar atrocities:

Socialism has never refused to advocate reforms in the colonies as well; but this can have nothing in common with weakening our stand in principle against conquest, subjugation of other nations, violence, and plunder, which constitute 'colonial policy.'⁵⁸

He also observed that an extensive colonial policy had helped towards opportunism in the European labour movement. The colonial policy encouraged a new trend in the working class movement:

⁵⁸ Op.cit., vol. 12, p. 87.

... the European proletariat partly finds himself in a position when it is not his labour, but the labour of the practically enslaved natives in the colonies, that maintains the whole of society. The British bourgeoisie, for example, derives more profit from the many millions of the population of India and other colonies than from British workers. In certain countries this provides the material and economic basis for infecting the proletariat with colonial chauvinism. Of course, this may be only a temporary phenomenon, but the evil must nonetheless be clearly realised and its causes understood in order to be able to rally the proletariat of all countries for the struggle against such opportunism.⁵⁹

By the time the Copenhagen Congress was held (August-September, 1910) not only the German Social Democrats but also the Russian Social Democrats had deputies in parliament (Duma) and the 'Congress' main resolution 'The Struggle Against Militarism and War' confirmed the earlier Stuttgart resolution of 1907 on the same topic and listed the demands to be put forward by socialist deputies in parliament: (1) all conflicts between states are to be unfailingly submitted for settlement by international courts of arbitration, (2) general disarmament, (3) abolition of secret diplomacy, (4) autonomy for all nations and their protection against military attacks.

The Basle Congress of the Second International met in November 1912 and passed resolutions which stated that the imperialist states were following a policy of plunder and annexations and emphasising the imperialist nature of the impending war, called upon all socialists to resolutely struggle against this eventuality (The Chemnitz Congress of the German Social Democratic Party, held in September of the same year,

⁵⁹ Ibid., vol. 13, p. 77.

passed a similar resolution).

It was against this background of the Second International's programme and activity that Lenin assessed the volte face made by leaders of such stature as Plekhanov and Kautsky, when war was actually declared in August 1914. In particular Kautsky's betrayal was especially painful (although he himself had voted against war credits, he made no effort to rally the party around him and eventually gave in, to maintain the unity of the party). In 1909 in The Road To Power Kautsky had argued for the conquest of political power by the proletariat and a subsequent dictatorship of the proletariat in no uncertain terms:

In any important movement and uprising we must, of course, reckon with the possibility of defeat. Prior to the struggle, only a fool can consider himself quite certain of victory.⁶⁰

Kautsky had gone on to argue for a militant approach to the conquest of power. To refuse to consider the possibility of victory would be a betrayal of the proletariat. A revolution in connection with a war is possible both during and after a war. The revolutionary elements were now growing in Germany. Out of ten million voters in 1895, there had been six million proletarians. By 1907 that figure had increased by another 1.6 million. 'A world war is ominously imminent and war means revolution,' so Kautsky proclaimed.⁶¹ However, by 1914, Kautsky spoke in a different vein. In 'Social Democracy in Wartime' he observed:

⁶⁰ Quoted in Lenin's Collected Works, vol. 21, p. 94.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 96.

Today the practical question is: victory or defeat of one's own country... Social Democrats of all countries have an equal right or an equal obligation to take part in the defence of the fatherland.⁶²

From Lenin's point of view, an even more dangerous development than the treachery of the German Social Democrats was the line adopted by leading Russian Social Democrats such as Potresov, Maslov and Plekhanov, who while criticising Kautsky for his narrow nationalism, advanced an insidious 'internationalist' view, often citing Marx's texts in support of their position. The question that these individuals raised was: which side's victory is the more desirable one? This question had been considered by Marx in the Italian war of 1859, between Austria and Italy, when one side was a reactionary monarchy and the other was revolutionary (Garibaldi in Italy). Marx had sided with Italy. Lenin pointed out that this was a confusing of two different historical situations:

Potresov has failed to notice that Marx was working on the problem at a time when there existed indubitably progressive bourgeois movements, which, moreover did not merely exist, but were in the forefront of the historical process in the leading states of Europe. Today, it would be ridiculous even to imagine a progressive bourgeois movement, in for instance such key members of the 'Concert' of Europe, as Britain and Germany. The old bourgeois 'democracy' of these two key states has turned reactionary. Potresov has 'forgotten' this, and has substituted the standpoint of old (bourgeois) so-called democracy for that of present day (non-bourgeois) democracy. This shift to the standpoint of another class, and moreover of an old and outmoded class, is sheer opportunism. There cannot be the least doubt that a shift like this cannot be justified by an analysis of the objec-

⁶² Quoted in Lenin's Collected Works, vol. 21, p. 96.

tive content in the old and the new epochs.⁶³

In the present epoch, so Lenin argued, there was neither a bourgeois liberation movement nor a long process of the decay of feudalism. Kautsky and following him, Potresov (and the Second Internationalists in general) evoked a certain periodisation of history: 1789-1871, 1871-1914, 1914-?. Commenting on the first of these periods, Lenin remarked:

The main objective content of the historical wartime phenomena not only of 1865, 1859, 1864, 1866, or 1870, but also of 1877 (the Russo-Turkish war) and 1896-97 (the wars between Turkey and Greece and the Armenian disturbances) were bourgeois national movements or 'convulsions' in a bourgeois society ridding itself of every kind of feudalism.⁶⁴

The second epoch is the full domination and the decline of the bourgeoisie and it was then in transition from its progressive character to its reactionary and even ultra-reactionary period of finance capital. The third epoch, which had just set in, places the bourgeoisie in the same 'position' as that in which the feudal lords found themselves during the first epoch. This third epoch is that of imperialism and imperialist upheavals, as well as of upheavals stemming from the nature of imperialism.⁶⁵ A new class has emerged which is preparing and slowly mustering its forces for the ensuing struggle.

As soon as war was declared Lenin had come out with his 'The Tasks

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 140-141.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 147.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 146.

of Revolutionary Social Democracy,' where he spelled out the themes that would preoccupy him throughout the duration of the war:

- (1) the war was a bourgeois, imperialist and dynastic war, in which none of the belligerent groups were inferior to the other in cruelty and greed.
- (2) The German Social Democrats had betrayed the principles of international socialism; so had many of the other leaders.
- (3) The Second International had collapsed, the Third must now be formed by those who were still revolutionary Marxists and had not succumbed to nationalism.
- (4) Social Democrats should call for the establishment of the United States of Europe.
- (5) Illegal and active propaganda should be carried on in the trenches at all times.
- (6) The crisis of the war should be met with Civil War.

This last theme of the Civil War can best be understood only in the context of Lenin's analysis of imperialism, although its main points may be outlined here.

Civil War and Revolution

Lenin defined civil wars as "wars waged by an oppressed class against the oppressor class, by slaves against slave-holders, by serfs against landowners, and by wage workers against the bourgeoisie..."⁶⁶ He

⁶⁶ ibid., p. 299.

saw these wars as "legitimate, progressive and necessary."⁶⁷ Clearly, in his mind, the civil war that he now envisaged was only an extension of the class struggle, with its final aim; the capture of political power by the proletariat; hence a revolution.

However, there was also the question of how propitious the times were for a revolutionary civil war leading to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and here Lenin's analysis of the current situation, especially in Russia, came up with the following classic definition of a revolutionary situation:

To the Marxist it is indisputable that a revolution is impossible without a revolutionary situation; furthermore, it is not every revolutionary situation that leads to revolution. What, generally speaking, are the symptoms of a revolutionary situation? We shall certainly not be mistaken if we indicate the following three major symptoms: (1) when it is impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule without any change; when there is a crisis, in one form or another, among the 'upper classes,' a crisis in the policy of the ruling class, leading to a fissure through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes burst forth. For a revolution to take place, it is usually insufficient for "the lower classes not to want" to live in the old way; it is also necessary that "the upper classes should be unable" to live in the old way; (2) when the suffering and want of the oppressed classes have grown more acute than usual; (3) when, as a consequence of the above causes, there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses, who uncomplainingly allow themselves to be robbed in "peace time", but, in turbulent times, are drawn both by all the circumstances of the crisis and by the "upper classes" themselves into independent historical action.

Without these objective changes, which are independent of the will, not only of individuals, groups and parties but even of individual classes, a revolution, as a general

⁶⁷ ibid., p. 299.

rule, is impossible. The totality of all these objective changes is called a revolutionary situation.⁶⁸

Having described an objective revolutionary situation, Lenin goes on to account for the importance of the subjective factor, without which revolutions do not occur, the classic instances that he cites being the 1905 situation in Russia, the German situation in the 1860s, the Russian situation in 1859-61 and 1879-80. Why did the revolution not occur in these instances?

It was because it is not every revolutionary situation that gives rise to a revolution; revolution arises only out of a situation in which the above-mentioned objective changes are accompanied by a subjective change, namely, the ability of the revolutionary class to take revolutionary mass action strong enough to break (or dislocate) the old government, which never, not even in a period of crisis, "falls", if it is not toppled over.⁶⁹

The objective factors, of course, were evident, in the suffering and dislocation caused by the war and in the declining power of the old regime. Lenin was mounting his arguments against the leaders of the Second International and the liberal and rightwing Mensheviks in Russia who claimed that the objective situation was not favourable for revolution and that it was mandatory for socialists to either support their governments or to play a wait and see game. The former argument, in Lenin's estimation, was a complete betrayal of international socialism, while the argument concerning the wait and see policy represented a mis-

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 213-214.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 214.

understanding of the subjective factors of revolution. It is especially in time of war, Lenin argued, that governments stand in need of agreement between all the ruling class parties and above all the peaceful submission of the oppressed classes to that rule.

Developing his analysis of the subjective factor in specific terms, especially to the situation in Russia, Lenin emphasised the readiness of the Russian proletariat to engage in a bid for power. In Socialism and War Lenin pointed out that "the only class in Russia that nobody has been able to infect with chauvinism" is the proletariat. The explanation for this lies in the "revolutionary situation in the country and in the Russian proletariat's general conditions of life."⁷⁰ A series of shades of opportunism and reformism have affected the intelligentsia and the petty bourgeoisie, but not the majority of the politically active workers in Russia. This is because the "privileged stratum of factory workers and clerical staff is very thin in our country."⁷¹ In Russia the revolutionary upswing was clearly heralded by the intensification of "a great strike movement, the like of which the world has never known."⁷² At the very lowest estimate, in 1913, one and a half million workers were involved in a mass revolutionary strike. By 1914 the numbers rose to over two million, approaching the 1905 level.

There was a further subjective factor: the existence of a militant

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 319

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 319-320.

⁷² Ibid., p. 319.

revolutionary party, namely, the Bolshevik Party, which was prepared to lead the revolution. Lenin's boast was not an idle one. In the Fourth Duma the Bolshevik group of deputies carried on an intensive battle against the war.⁷³ As Lenin pointed out, it "carried into the midst of the working class a protest against the war, and conducted anti-imperialist propaganda among the masses of the Russian proletarians."⁷⁴ While other Social Democrats merely abstained from voting for war credits, and in some cases (Chkheidze, Vandervelde) pleaded for a temporary truce during the war, only the Bolsheviks carried on their secret and illegal propaganda, in factories, army barracks, workers' meetings and in the underground press (for their legal opposition in the Duma the Bolshevik deputies were arrested and sent to exile in Siberia). Four fifths of the working class population, so Lenin claimed, were now with the Bolsheviks. Correspondingly, the other Social Democrats, both within Russia and abroad, despite every effort had neither been able to cause the dissolution of the Bolshevik Party nor unite themselves into a solid bloc.

Lenin held out to his readers and his audience the model of the Paris Commune which had turned the Franco-Prussian war into a civil war between the working people of Paris and the ruling class. The conclusion was inevitable, there would have to be armed insurrection, hence the active arming of the proletariat. This theme Lenin would persistently

⁷³ See Badayev's The Bolsheviks in the Fourth Duma, International Publishers, New York, 1973 (first published in 1932).

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 321.

hammer away in the coming months right up to the October Revolution. Meanwhile, a more immediate task was the refutation of the Second Internationalist arguments (whose chief spokesman was Kautsky) that if the proletariat could ride the storm of the revolution, the new imperialism promised a period of peaceful development. The alternatives that Lenin presented were: either the working masses and the proletariat would be driven continuously to slaughter or the imperialist war would be turned into civil war, ending with the seizure of power by the proletariat. The relentless logic of his arguments would now be further reinforced by his Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, where the two major themes that are explored are the link between war and finance capital and the consequent violence and militarism that are endemic to imperialism.

Imperialism: The Link Between War and Finance Capital

When Lenin began writing Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916), the major works in this area were Hobson's Imperialism (1902), Rudolph Hilferding's Finance Capital (1910) and N. Bukharin's Imperialism and World Economy (1915, to which Lenin wrote an Introduction). His indebtedness to all three writers for the specific data concerning imperialism has been acknowledged by Lenin himself. The focus of his analysis, however, was to draw out the political implications of imperialism as a world economic system; in this regard it is in a class by itself. It is perhaps the single most important characteristic of Imperialism that distinguishes the work from that of any other author on

the subject.⁷⁵ Consequently, point (4) and point (5) of his definition of imperialism are, I believe, the central concern of Lenin's analysis:

(1) the concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life; (2) the merging of bank capital, and the creation, on the basis of this "finance capital", of a financial oligarchy; (3) the export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance; (4) the formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves, and (5) the territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed.⁷⁶

Points 1, 2, 3, the growth of monopolies, the emergence of finance capital and the export of capital, provide Lenin with a point of departure for the analysis of the question of the division of the world. As Lenin points out, Marx had noticed the phenomenon of cartels and had already emphasised that concentration of production would lead to monopoly.⁷⁷ In the section on the merger of bank capital and industrial capital Lenin's main purpose is to focus on the growth of finance capital

⁷⁵ For an informed analysis of Lenin's economic theory of imperialism see Tom Kemp, Theories of Imperialism, Dobson, London, 1967. This work also compares and contrasts Lenin's theory with that of Marx, Hobson and Rosa Luxemburg. E.L. Varga and L. Mendelsohn's New Data For V.I. Lenin's "Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism", International Publishers, New York, 1938 provides useful data that corroborate Lenin's theory with new empirical data. Michael Barratt-Brown's study The Economics of Imperialism, Penguin Education, Harmondsworth, 1974, is a critical examination of the theory of export capital, which Lenin borrowed from Hilferding.

⁷⁶ Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 22, pp. 266-267.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 196-210. For a recent analysis of the Marxian background of Lenin's views, see Tom Kemp, 'The Marxist Theory of Imperialism,' in Studies in the Theory of Imperialism, op.cit.

and its non-productive role in society (people who are essentially rentiers, clipping coupons).⁷⁸ The export of capital arises because of the lack of adequate (profitable) returns in domestic investment.⁷⁹

Within this Marxian framework Lenin's attention is devoted to two aspects of imperialist oppression: (1) domestic oppression; (2) international exploitation and its attendant violence and militarism. The second aspect concerns the proletariat and the Social Democrats not only because it is a direct affront to their internationalist concern for the oppressed, but because the division of the world and its repartition involved the working masses in imperialist war. The export of capital (an economic contingency directly growing out of monopoly capitalism) need not in itself lead to war, since the colonised peoples have been subjected already, but it does lead to inter-imperialist rivalry. Firstly, because even on the domestic scene the historical accumulation of capital was accomplished by coercive measures (extra-economic measures) and the present process of squeezing out small enterprises is an act of violence. Secondly, the domestic competition has now been transferred to the international scene, among the imperialist powers, and develops into a violent struggle amongst them (in the section of the growth of finance capital Lenin has already spelled out the connection between government and finance capital).

The inter-imperialist rivalry was for the "actual division of the

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 226-240.

⁷⁹ Lenin borrows his arguments from Rudolph Hilferding's Finance Capital, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1981, pp. 311-336.

world,"⁸⁰ a phenomenon whose economic roots lay in the need for expanding capital to invest its surplus in countries where raw materials were abundant, wages low and labour plentiful. In the developed capitalist countries investment was no longer profitable, nor were the capitalists interested in raising agricultural productivity:

It goes without saying that if capitalism could develop agriculture, which today is everywhere lagging terribly behind industry, if it could raise the living standard of the masses, who in spite of the amazing technical progress are everywhere still half-starved and poverty-stricken, there could be no question of a surplus of capital. This "argument" is very often advanced by the petty bourgeois critics of capitalism. But if capitalism did these things it would not be capitalism; for both uneven development and a semi-starvation level of existence of the masses are fundamental and inevitable conditions and constitute premises of this mode of production.⁸¹

The two stages of monopoly capitalism, the formation of trusts within one country (accompanied by economic coercion against the less fortunate ones) and the formation of international cartels, were both sanctioned and upheld by the legal and state systems of the countries concerned.⁸² Kautsky had argued that the formation of international cartels presaged a new era, that of peaceful imperialism:

Certain bourgeois writers (now joined by Karl Kautsky, who has completely abandoned the Marxist position he had held, for example, in 1909) have expressed the opinion that international cartels, being one of the most striking

⁸⁰ Lenin, op.cit., p. 245.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 241.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 246-251.

expressions of the internationalisation of capital, give the hope of peace among nations under capitalism. Theoretically, this opinion is absolutely absurd, while in practice it is sophistry and a dishonest defence of the worst opportunism.⁸³

The division of the world among capitalist associations is a struggle, whose economic underpinnings are of the utmost significance:

The capitalists divide the world, not out of any particular malice, but because the degree of concentrations which has been reached forces them to adopt this method in order to obtain profits.⁸⁴

The division of the world is not carried out on any rationalistic or humanistic principle but in "proportion to capital," "in proportion to strength," "because there cannot be any other method of division under commodity production and capitalism."⁸⁵ The strength of a given capitalist country varies with its economic and political development and is constantly changing, thus also changing the form of the struggle but not its substance:

The epoch of the latest stage of capitalism shows us that certain relations between capitalist associations grow up, based on the economic division of the world; while parallel to and in connection with it, certain relations grow up between political alliances, between states, on the basis of the territorial division of the world, of the struggle for colonies, of the "struggle for spheres of influence."⁸⁶

⁸³ Ibid., p. 252.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 253.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 253.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 253.

Basing himself on the geographer A. Supan's account of the territory belonging to the European colonial powers (Lenin's primary sources are listed in Notebooks on Imperialism, vol. 39 of the Collected Works) Lenin notes that the seizure of unoccupied territories on the globe had been completed. In future only redivision was possible, that is, territories could only pass from one owner to another, not as passing from ownerless to owned. This latter process began with the onset of monopoly capitalism, that is, from the 1860s and 1870s. The period between 1884-1900 (as noted by Hobson) marked the intensified expansion of the chief European states. Of the six Great Powers, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, U.S.A. and Japan, in 1876, Japan, Germany and Russia had no colonies and France hardly any. After 1876 colonial possessions increased by more than 50%, that is, 40,000,000 - 65,000,000 square kilometres. By 1914, the European colonial powers (not including Britain) held colonial possessions whose combined area was held as much as the area of Europe.⁸⁷

The unevenness in the rate of expansion is great. For example, taking France, Germany and Japan (which, as Lenin points out, do not differ much in area and population), France had acquired three times as much area as the other two combined. In regard to finance capital France was also several times richer than Germany and Japan combined:

However strong the process of levelling the world, of levelling the economic and living conditions in different

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 258. Lenin's primary sources are listed in Notebooks on Imperialism, Collected Works, vol. 39.

countries, may have been in the past decades as a result of the pressure of large-scale industry, exchange and finance capital, considerable differences remain; and among the six countries mentioned we see, firstly, young capitalist countries (America, Germany, Japan) whose progress has been extraordinarily rapid; secondly, countries with an old capitalist development (France and Great Britain), whose progress lately has been much slower than that of the previously mentioned countries, and thirdly, a country most backward economically (Russia), where modern capitalist imperialism is enmeshed, so to speak, in a particularly close network or pre-capitalist relations.⁸⁸

What distinguished the present stage of colonial policy and imperialism from that of any other age (e.g. Rome) is the domination of the monopolist associations of big employers:

These monopolies are most firmly established when all the sources of raw materials are captured by one group, and we have seen with what zeal the international capitalist associations exert every effort to deprive their rivals of all opportunity of competing, to buy up, for example, iron-fields, oil-fields, etc. Colonial possession alone gives the monopolies complete guarantee against all contingencies in the struggle against competitors, including the case of the adversary wanting to be protected by a law establishing a state monopoly.⁸⁹

The struggle is not only for control of the colonies but also for the industrialized regions in Europe, e.g. Germany's trying to annex Belgium, France's attempt to get back Lorraine. The redivision, then, is for every kind of territory; sometimes in order to weaken an adversary (Belgium is a base of operations for Germany against Britain; Baghdad for

⁸⁸ ibid., p. 259.

⁸⁹ ibid., p. 260.

Britain's operations against Germany, etc.). The competition between several imperialisms was an observable fact. (In this context it is interesting to note that Barratt Brown is not quite accurate in arguing that Britain's overseas investments in the dependent empire, i.e. the dependent colonies did not rise and thus Lenin had not established the connection between capitalism and imperialism.)⁹⁰

At the time of writing Imperialism (1916) the inter-imperialist struggle was characterised by three features:

- (1) the imperialist struggle and rivalry between Great Britain and Germany (with insignificant colonies)
- (2) the struggle for South America
- (3) the partitioning of China and the struggle between the U.S.A. and Japan.

As Lenin would comment time and again, the rate of growth in the various imperialist countries only intensified the struggle and competition amongst them:

Finance capital and the trusts do not diminish but increase the differences in the rate of growth of the various parts of the world economy. Once the relation of forces is changed, what other solution of the contradictions can be found under capitalism than that of force?⁹¹

The question is: what means other than war could there be under capitalism to overcome the disparity between the development of productive forces and the accumulation of capital on the one side, and the division of colonies and

⁹⁰ See M. Barratt Brown, 'A Critique of Marxist Theories of Imperialism,' in Studies in the Theory of Imperialism, op.cit., p. 39.

⁹¹ Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 22, p. 274.

spheres of influence for finance capital on the other?⁹²

While the same physical extinction of the masses during the period of primitive accumulation is now repeated on a more organised level for the natives in the colonies and the working masses in the metropolitan countries, the question was no longer how much or to what degree of exploitation, oppression or misery the masses would be subjected to; the question simply involved the actual physical survival of the masses who were being driven to slaughter in the inter-imperialist war. In his preface to Bukharin's Imperialism and The World Economy, Lenin raised this fundamental question:

There was an epoch of relatively "peaceful" capitalism when it had completely defeated feudalism in the leading European countries and was free to develop with the utmost - relative - tranquillity and smoothness, expanding "peacefully" over the vast expanses of the as yet unsettled lands and countries not yet irrevocably drawn into the capitalist maelstrom. Of course, even in that period, roughly between 1871 and 1914, "peaceful" capitalism created conditions of life that were a very far cry from actual "peace," both in the military and the class sense. For nine-tenths of the population of the leading countries, for hundreds of millions in the colonies and backward countries, that epoch was not one of "peace" but of oppression, suffering and horror, which was the more terrible, possibly, for appearing to be a "horror without end." This epoch is gone for good, it has given way to an epoch which is relatively much more violent, spasmodic, disastrous and conflicting, an epoch which for the mass of the population is typified not so much by a "horror without end" as by a "horrible end."⁹³

⁹² Ibid., pp. 275-276.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 104.

The opposition to the war was paralleled with a call for civil war. Lenin's was the sole voice even among the extreme left. As Harding has noted:

The great majority of the anti-war left minority groups in 1915 and in 1916 rejected as quite impractical Lenin's call to turn to imperialist war into a civil war. They were equally emphatic that there should be no break with the Second International, though they became increasingly critical and impatient at the failure of the International Socialist Bureau to elaborate a plan for peace without annexations or indemnities and based upon the right of nations to self-determination.⁹⁴

Undaunted, Lenin continued to hammer away his main points: civil war is an extension of the class war; the proletariat must arm itself for the final confrontation, which would be a just war; a general disarmament such as that advocated by the Dutch, Scandinavian and Swiss Social Democrats was tantamount to giving up the struggle even before it had commenced; militarism is part and parcel of the bourgeois state (its standing army and police have always been used to suppress the masses); a war waged by oppressed peoples is acceptable to socialists and so on. In an important article written for the above mentioned Social Democrats Lenin observed:

... the victory of socialism in one country does not at one stroke eliminate all war in general. On the contrary, it presupposes wars. The development of capitalism proceeds extremely unevenly in different countries. It cannot be otherwise under commodity production. From this it follows irrefutably that socialism cannot achieve victory simultaneously in all countries. It will

⁹⁴ Neil Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, op.cit., vol. 2, p. 20.

achieve victory first in one or several countries, while the others will for some time remain bourgeois or pre-bourgeois. This is bound to create not only friction, but a direct attempt on the part of the bourgeoisie of other countries to crush the socialist state's victorious proletariat. In such cases a war on our part would be a legitimate and just war. It would be a war for socialism, for the liberation of other nations from the bourgeoisie.⁹⁵

... Our slogan must be: arming of the proletariat to defeat, expropriate and disarm the bourgeoisie. These are the only tactics possible for a revolutionary class, tactics that follow logically from, and are dictated by, the whole objective development of capitalist militarism. Only after the proletariat has disarmed the bourgeoisie will it be able, without betraying its world-historic mission, to consign all armaments to the scrap-heap. And the proletariat will undoubtedly do this, but only when this condition has been fulfilled, certainly not before.⁹⁶

Events moved fast in favour of a possible seizure of power. After the February Revolution of 1917, when the Czar was deposed and a Provisional Government was established, the Soviets of Workers' Deputies had gained considerable strength both in St. Petersburg and in Moscow. A revolutionary crisis was in the making and Lenin lost no opportunity to prod the Bolsheviks in Russia to make preparations for the eventual seizure of power, this time from the Provisional Government.

Letters from Afar

Lenin's Letters from Afar, the first four of which were written from Switzerland, in the first week of March, begin with an analysis of the

⁹⁵ Ibid., vol. 23, p. 79.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 81.

political forces in Russia during the revolutionary crisis engendered by the war. The class composition of these forces was as follows: (1) the autocracy, which though officially deposed, continued to garner support from feudal elements; (2) the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie represented by the Octobrists, the Kadets and Kerensky and Chkheidze, (3) the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, in alliance with the entire working class and the poorest sections of the peasantry. The monarchy had fallen quickly in the February revolution because of a unique historical situation in which heterogeneous class interests had come together in what appeared to be a harmonious coalition of interests. Nevertheless, this 'harmony' should not mislead the revolutionary proletariat, since the new masters had every intention of continuing the war:

... the conspiracy of the Anglo-French imperialists who impelled Milyukov, Guchkov and Co. to seize power for the purpose of continuing the imperialist war, for the purpose of conducting the war still more ferociously and obstinately, for the purpose of slaughtering fresh millions of Russian workers and peasants in order that the Guchkovs might obtain Constantinople, the French capitalists Syria, the British capitalists Mesopotamia, and so on.⁹⁷

On the other side were the proletarian and mass movements that asked for bread, peace and freedom. The new government was not a fortuitous assembly of persons.⁹⁸ They were representatives of the new class that had arisen to power in Russia, the class of capitalists and landlords and

⁹⁷ ibid., p. 302.

⁹⁸ ibid., p. 303.

the bourgeoisie "which has long been ruling our country economically, and which during the Révolution of 1905-07, the counter-revolutionary period of 1908-14, and finally - and with especial rapidity - the war period of 1914-17, was quick to organise itself politically, taking over control of the local government bodies, public education, congresses of various types, the Duma, the war industries committees, etc..."⁹⁹

In Lenin's mind, there was no doubt that a conflict between the three political forces was imminent and would constitute a transitional period, from the first stage of the revolution to the second. The antagonism between the feudal-monarchical class and the bourgeois, petty bourgeois classes was temporary; it was the result "solely of the present conjunction of circumstances, of the abrupt turn of events in the imperialist war. The whole of the new government is monarchist, for Kerensky's verbal republicanism simply cannot be taken seriously, is not worthy of a statesman and, objectively, is political chicanery."¹⁰⁰ The new government had already begun to strike a bargain with the monarchy. Its call to the workers to support the government in the war was in reality an attempt to disarm the revolutionary proletariat; the members of the new government were traitors to the cause of the proletariat, to peace and freedom:

... precisely this new government is already bound hand and foot by imperialist capital, by the imperialist policy of war and plunder, has already begun to strike a bargain

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 303.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 305.

(without consulting the people!) with the dynasty, is already working to restore the tsarist monarchy, is already soliciting the candidature of Mikhail Romanov as the new kinglet, is already taking measures to prop up the throne, to substitute for the legitimate (lawful, ruling by virtue of the old law) monarchy a Bonapartist, plebiscite monarchy (ruling by virtue of a fraudulent plebiscite).¹⁰¹

The workers must, on no condition, support this new government. Instead, they should take the initiative into their own hands:

For the only guarantee of freedom and of the complete destruction of tsarism lies in arming the proletariat, in strengthening, extending and developing the significance and power of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies.¹⁰²

Lenin, then raises the question of who the proletariat's allies are:

- (1) the mass of the semi-proletarians and the small peasantry. The Soviets must first of all organise the masses, bearing in mind that the poor peasantry must be organised separately from the well to do peasants;
- (2) the proletariat of all the belligerent countries and of all countries in general.

Outlining the future of the revolutionary initiative Lenin observed:

With these two allies, the proletariat, utilising the peculiarities of the present transition situation, can and will proceed, first, to the achievement of a democratic republic and complete victory of the peasantry over the landlords, instead of the Guchkov-Milyukov semi-monarchy, and then to socialism, which alone can give the war-

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 305.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 305.

weary people peace, bread and freedom. 103

It was true that the Soviet of Workers' Deputies had mistakenly called for support to the provisional government: "It shows that the St. Petersburg proletariat, at least at the time the manifesto was issued, was under the predominating influence of petty bourgeois politicians." 104

In his third letter (March 11) Lenin called for insurrection. As early as 1915 he had emphasised that the function of the Soviets during a revolution would be that of organs of insurrection:

This theoretical proposition deduced from the experience of the Commune of 1871 and of the Russian Revolution of 1905, must be explained and concretely developed on the basis of the practical experience of precisely the present stage of the present revolution in Russia. 105

Lenin then goes on to spell out what would become the major theme of his State and Revolution, the need for a transitional state after the revolution. The difference, he pointed out, between Marxists and anarchists was not merely that the former wanted a large-scale, centralised communist production and the latter wanted small-scale decentralised production, but also that Marxists advocated a centralised state-power during the transition from capitalism to communism. This state, however, was to be different from that advocated by Kautsky (complete with parliamentary forms). The bourgeois state machine would

103 ibid., p. 308.

104 ibid., p. 315.

105 ibid., p. 325.

have to be smashed and replaced by proletarian forms of state power. These themes as well as some new ones are stated in the well known April Theses, which Lenin presented on his return to Russia in April 1917.

April Theses

The April Theses, presented on April 4, 1917 to a joint meeting of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks delegates to the All-Russia Conference of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, as 'The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution' begins with a restatement of Lenin's argument that the imperialist war ought not to be supported by the revolutionary proletariat. No concession was to be made to 'revolutionary defencism' (the argument that it was the duty of all revolutionaries to come to the defence of the country):

The class-conscious proletariat can give its consent to a revolutionary war, which would really justify revolutionary defencism, only on one condition: (a) that the power pass to the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants aligned with the proletariat; (b) that all annexations be renounced in deed and not in word; (c) that a complete break be effected in actual fact with all capitalist interests.¹⁰⁶

No support was to be given to the Provisional Government. Instead, all state power must pass to the Soviets of Workers' Deputies. The standing army was to be replaced by the armed people. The police and the bureaucracy were to be abolished. A return to a parliamentary republic would be a retrograde step. From top to bottom power should be exercised

¹⁰⁶ ibid., vol. 24, p. 21.

by a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies. The salaries of all officials (elective and to be recalled at the will of the people) should not exceed the average wage of a competent worker. The agrarian programme, which stressed the organisation of separate Soviets of Deputies of Poor Peasants, called for the nationalisation of all lands in the country and placing the land at the disposal of the Soviets of Peasants' Deputies. (Since the 1905 revolution Lenin had been advocating the nationalisation of land.) Regarding fiscal policy, all banks were to be immediately amalgamated into a single national bank and to be placed under the control of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, the rationale for this being: "It is not our immediate task to "introduce" socialism, but only to bring social production and the distribution of products at once under the control of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies."¹⁰⁷

For the first time, Lenin proposed the changing of the Party's name from Social Democrat to 'Communist.' He repeated his call for the establishment of the Third International.

The impact of the April Theses has been vividly described by Sukhanov in his The Russian Revolution, 1917 and is interesting not only because Sukhanov was an eyewitness to the events of April, but because it expresses what Sukhanov thought was the prevailing view of Lenin as a semi-anarchist among Russian Social Democrats other than the Bolsheviks. Even within the camp of the Bolsheviks there were dissenting voices such

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

as that of Kamenev, who objected to the preparations for the seizure of power.¹⁰⁸ Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution provides an insightful analysis as to the reasons why even some of the Bolsheviks could not at that stage see eye to eye with Lenin on this April Theses.¹⁰⁹ As we have seen the April Theses does not differ in essentials from Letters from Afar; the only difference is that Lenin was no longer addressing emigré groups abroad, but had confronted the entire Social Democratic movement in Russia. What was not clear to this audience up until Lenin's arrival in Russia in April of 1917 was whether he would abandon his earlier position and come over to the side of those who advocated support of the Provisional Government. The April Theses dispelled all such illusions. Events moved rapidly. The Soviets which had hitherto been dominated by the Mensheviks came over to the Bolsheviks. The Kerensky government's vacillation and ineptness, culminating in the revolt in August by Kornilov, convinced the masses that the time was nearing for an armed insurrection. Lenin, who was under orders of arrest, escaped to Finland in July and returned only on the eve of the October Revolution. On his way back he wrote The State and Revolution, summing up his views on the necessity for a conquest of power by the proletariat. I shall examine the controversy surrounding this document of the revolution in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁸ Sukhanov, op.cit., vol. 1, pp. 289-292.

¹⁰⁹ Trotsky, op.cit., pp. 301-313.

Conclusion

Neil Harding has argued in his Lenin's Political Thought that Lenin did not arrive at the notion of the proletarian revolution until the outbreak of the war and his analysis of imperialism and that prior to that he was thinking mainly in terms of a bourgeois democratic revolution. This chapter has tried to show that this division is somewhat artificial and that Lenin's understanding of 'permanent revolution' bridges the two historical phases of competitive capitalism and imperialism. Quite apart from the textual evidence, such as Lenin's pronouncement that he stood for permanent revolution or the uninterrupted revolution, the theoretical presuppositions called for the completion of the bourgeois revolution by the proletariat. There is no evidence for the argument that Marx advocated a 'growing over' of capitalism into socialism, though he did at one stage of his career, speak of the proletariat perhaps being able to come to power by peaceful means in such countries as Holland. The major part of his writings, however, after the 1848 revolutions and increasingly after the Paris Commune, emphasise that the bourgeoisie were unable and unwilling to complete the democratic revolution; this task devolved on the proletariat, which, if the conditions were favourable, ought to seize power and then undertake the socialist transformation of society (the obvious corollary to this was that the bourgeois state must be smashed).

Lenin had high hopes of the 1905 revolution and although, after its failure, he realised that the relative strength of the proletariat was not equal to the seizure of power, he never abandoned the idea that the proletariat or the Party should play an active role in the bourgeois

democratic revolution. The outbreak of the war provided the change in the alignment of forces in the revolution; he was convinced and was proven right, that not only the proletariat of Russia but also the masses had become radicalized by the war. The critique of imperialism was meant to reinforce the necessity for revolution, just as the writing of State and Revolution, was not only his considered statement on the relationship between the bourgeois state and the proletarian revolution, but a definite and militant call for the revolutionary seizure of power by the proletariat.

CHAPTER V.

THE STATE AND REVOLUTION IN THE THOUGHT OF MARX AND LENIN

In Chapter 1 I attempted to show the link between the social and political revolutions in Marxian theory and indicated that the theory of the permanent revolution required that the proletariat, led by a Communist Party, seize power and thereafter undertake the socialist transformation of society. In this chapter I shall examine an alleged contradiction that is seen to permeate Lenin's The State and Revolution, namely, that Marx's analysis of the Paris Commune in his The Civil War in France is at odds with his own theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat (first enunciated in The Class Struggles in France) and that this legacy was passed on to Lenin, who wrestled with the problem but never successfully resolved it.¹ I shall argue that there is no essential contradiction between the two forms as Marx and Engels presented them; nor is it present in The State and Revolution. Why is this question so important? A correct answer would go a long way in changing the image of an inconsistent, and perhaps scheming Lenin, who, after the seizure of power, enforced an energetic dictatorship that violated his own previously held 'Marxist' beliefs about the supremacy of

¹ Neil Harding's statement of the problem, is the most recent one coming from a relatively impartial critic. See his Lenin's Political Thought, Macmillan & Co., London, 1977-81, vol. 2, p. 134.

the working class in the new revolutionary state.² It would also shed light on what Lenin perceived as the goal of revolution and hence clarify the philosophy of State & Revolution.

The Problem Stated: The Harding Thesis

The central significance of Neil Harding's analysis of The State and Revolution is the oscillation that he perceives in Lenin's thinking between the dictatorship form of the state and the commune form, the former a centralised power, the latter a decentralised one:

... there was a large unresolved problem at the very centre of Marx's and Engels' recommendations with regard to the state. Part of Lenin's difficulty in The State and Revolution stemmed from his self-imposed need to distill a single, coherent Marxist account of the state from the very differing characterisations of the commune and the dictatorship of the proletariat.³

Harding's exposition of the problem turns on the semantic confusion created by describing the commune as a 'state.' The dictatorship, he points out, is a state form which can be traced in Marx's thought from the time of the Communist Manifesto, where the forcible overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the seizing of the means of production are clearly spelt out. Following Marx, Lenin, in The State and Revolution, argues that the

2. "If politicians may be criticised for their failures to fulfill the promises they make, there is no more outrageous example of 'bad faith' than the state that Lenin constructed after 1917." This is A.J. Polan's view in his Lenin And The End of Politics, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1984, p. 135.

3 Harding, op.cit., p. 134.

state is a product of class antagonisms, and thus is also a coercive agency with special bodies of armed men (the standing army), the police and the bureaucracy, all designed to hold down the exploited class. Consequently, the victorious proletariat would also employ, albeit transitionally, the repressive state form, in order to hold down the now vanquished bourgeoisie and its allies. So far so good. The problem arises when this state form is sought to be aligned to a commune form, where the standing army, the police and the bureaucracy have been disbanded, and we have in their place the self-acting armed population. Harding believes that Lenin was led to identify the two forms in order to rebut the anarchists who called for the destruction of the state, per se:

If Lenin, in his efforts to square the commune form with that of the dictatorship of the proletariat, is reduced to maintaining that the state is no more than 'the systematic use of arms by one class against another', then the disagreement with the anarchists would appear to be founded on a very exiguous basis, for the majority of anarchists, certainly of those in Russia, would have no qualms about the systematic use of arms by the workers to crush bourgeois resistance.⁴

The semantic confusion that Harding refers to, is however, a misunderstanding of the commune-form (on Harding's part, as well as other commentators, as we shall see later), as Marx spoke of it in The Civil War in France. Though the Paris Commune disbanded the standing army and the bureaucracy, there was in principle, no contradiction in having to

⁴ Harding, op.cit., p. 139.

set up special agencies, whose membership would be drawn from the people and who would not stand above the people (that is, in terms of drawing special salaries or receiving special privileges) and who would be used to fight the counter-revolution in its various forms. This is precisely what happened after the October Revolution, when the Red Army was mobilised to fight the counter-revolution (especially the rebellions led by generals Kolchak, Kaledin, Denikin and Wrangel). Similarly, the Cheka was set up to crush local bourgeois resistance. The crucial point here is that these agencies did not stand apart from or above the people; their existence, or rather the need for them was something that Lenin had envisaged prior to the Revolution, and provides the basis for the phrase used both by Marx and Lenin, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat.' I shall return to the significance of this phrase. When Marx described the Paris Commune, he was careful to point out that certain legitimate functions of the repressive state would continue alongside of the self-government of the commune state.

Nevertheless, the misunderstanding has persisted, that Marx advocated an undiluted commune-form, decentralised, a sort of loose federation. Before proceeding to an examination of what Marx (and Engels) said concerning the state, it might be useful to draw some clear lines of distinction among the several approaches taken by scholars on the question:

(1) The dictatorship of the proletariat was envisaged by Marx to be a condition of power, not a form of government. This argument, clearly

derived from Kautsky's Demokratie oder Diktatur,⁵ sidesteps the issue of the commune-form. Kautsky and the majority of German Social Democrats supported the idea of a centralised state form (albeit a parliamentary one), specifically, the democratic republic. The modern proponents of this point of view are Hal Draper (Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution) and Richard Hunt (The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels).⁶

(2) The dictatorship of the proletariat is both a statement of the class character of the proletariat's political power and a description of the power itself; that it is in fact the nature of the political power which it describes which guarantees its class character. This is Ralph Miliband's position, or at least his early view, as set out in 'Marx and the State' (1965).⁷ Miliband does not then dilate on the need for 'dictatorship' nor does he pay special attention to the repressive aspect of the proletarian state, although he seems to assume that the new state would be some kind of centralised state. He does not go into the question of the relation between this centralised form and the commune-form.

(3) Marx did advocate a dictatorship, regrettable though this was.

⁵ Karl Kautsky, Demokratie oder Diktatur, Paul Cassirer, Berlin, 1918.

⁶ Hal Draper, Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1977; Richard Hunt, The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1974.

⁷ Ralph Miliband, 'Marx and the State,' The Socialist Register, The Merlin Press, London, 1965, pp. 278-296.

Advocates of this position generally make clear their own biases by referring to Marx's authoritarian views, etc. The best expression of this type of approach is to be found in John Plamenatz's German Marxism and Russian Communism.⁸

(4) The theme of dictatorship is not important in Marx's thinking; it occurs only a few times. Marx returned to the organic view of the state and as one expressing the universal interest of society, a position he held in his first major work The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right and continued to adhere to throughout his life. The main exponent of this view is Shlomo Avineri; he focusses only on the young Marx's writings and ignores the later works. Consequently, such themes as the smashing of the bourgeois state machine and the link between class and state power are left out of the evaluation of Marxian theory.⁹

(5) An exclusive focussing on the themes of the smashing of the state machine, Lenin's critique of parliamentarism (as an extension of Marx's own views) and the primacy of the commune-form in Marx's thinking. Lucio Colletti's From Rousseau to Lenin falls in this category; it neglects the repressive aspect of the post-revolutionary state.¹⁰

⁸ John Plamenatz, German Marxism and Russian Communism, Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., 1975.

⁹ Shlomo Avineri, The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1968.

¹⁰ Lucio Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1972.

(6) The dictatorship of the proletariat is central to Marx's revolutionary theory. As the state is an instrument of class rule, there would be a transitional period of proletarian rule organised as a central power, chiefly for the purpose of counteracting opposition from the deposed classes. Some form of decentralised and democratic government would continue for the proletariat and its allies and the general population at large. This approach has been elaborated in some detail by Alan Gilbert.¹¹ A recent work by Barbalet, Marx's Construction of Social Theory (1983), is a sensitive and challenging study in this category. However, Barbalet does not raise the question of the relationship between the dictatorship-form and the Commune-form.¹²

Marx and Engels on the State

Marx's earliest work on the state was a critique of an existing theory of the state as presented by Hegel in Philosophy of Right, a critique which came hard on the heels of Marx's journalistic work for the Rheinische Zeitung.¹³ In the journalistic articles the state is criticised as protector of vested interests, although occasionally there are scattered references to the state as an embodiment of universal interests (although this had Rousseauesque overtones, the General Will

¹¹ Alan Gilbert, 'Salvaging Marx from Avineri,' Political Theory, vol. 4, no. 1, February 1976.

¹² J.M. Barbalet, Marx's Construction of Social Theory, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Boston, 1983.

¹³ Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, ed. Joseph O'Malley, University Press, Cambridge, 1972.

etc., its immediate precursor was undoubtedly the Hegelian philosophy of state). Hegel had argued in Philosophy of Right that the state was the embodiment of the ethical idea and therefore, in the last analysis, it was a reconciling force standing above civil society with its egoistic clash and conflict.

The opening section of Marx's Critique challenges this claim with a closely argued philosophical exegesis of the Hegelian text. The sum and substance of Marx's criticism was that Hegel had mistakenly set up the Absolute Idea as the Subject, while society was made into an object; whereas, the real situation was in reverse. Human beings are the subject of history.¹⁴ Thereafter, Marx examines the various political institutions of German society to unveil their particularism, where Hegel had eulogised them for their universalism. The interesting point, however, is that Marx is still captive to the notion of the state as the universal mediator and reconciler of interests. His Critique hurls bitter invectives at Hegel precisely because the state has not lived up to Marx's high expectations. The new element, as distinct from a semi-Hegelian position, is that of the alienation of the individual in the state. Barbalet has pointed out, and rightly so, that this notion of individual alienation is quite unique to Marx's early work up to The German Ideology: all members of society are alienated by the existence of state power, all participate equally in the alienating condition.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Barbalet, op.cit.

In the formulations of The German Ideology, on the other hand, the state is the political arm of the economically dominant class in society, and thus while it imposes conditions of alienation on the exploited class, the ruling class may enjoy within the state a semblance of freedom. This latter aspect is only hinted at; Marx's attention has shifted to the very real and very material dominance exercised by the economically superior class, through state institutions. This dominance, initially described in The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, as the source of the alienation of labour, would gradually be integrated into a coherent critique of capitalism. The new position, as stated in The German Ideology (the state as the political arm of the economically dominant class) was never abandoned by Marx and Engels, although it continued to be refined in the ensuing years, as they had occasion to study the workings of state power and its institutions.

This theory of the state, commonly known as the instrumentalist theory of the state, has also been described by Ralph Miliband as the primary theory of the state in Marx's political thought.¹⁶ Barbalet calls it Marx's mature state theory, to distinguish it from the early Marxian theory of state as expressed in the first Critique.¹⁷ This mature theory began to take shape only after Marx's discovery of classes:

With a refinement in his works of the notion of class, it became apparent to Marx that the state's role in the preservation of property rights is a class function, and the

¹⁶ Ralph Miliband, 'Marx and the State,' op.cit., p.

¹⁷ Barbalet, op.cit., p. 146.

state, therefore, is a class instrument, an instrument of class domination.¹⁸

At this point, already reached in The German Ideology, the class struggle acquires importance in Marx's thinking. The destruction of the bourgeois state became the preliminary condition for the liberation of the proletariat and via this, to the liberation of society at large; the theme of political revolution is thus first spelled out in The German Ideology.

In Chapter I I outlined the connection between the social and the political revolutions which may be briefly recapitulated here. In The German Ideology, revolutions are defined as: (1) changes in the mode of production; (2) the transfer of power from one class to another. The mode of production is an ensemble of productive forces and the relations of production. The former are mainly (though not wholly) technological in character and are class free, whereas the latter, that is the relations of production, are a social arrangement and therefore class laden. Since the relations of production are a social arrangement (in successive stages, feudal bourgeois, etc.) and since in each arrangement the economically dominant class has so structured production in its favour, it follows that the social arrangement must, of necessity, extend to and include the political order, the institutions and machinery of government, the police, the courts, the standing army, etc.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 164.

The relations of production are not completely autonomous (subject only to the will of the ruling class) or arbitrary; they are also conditioned by the level of development of the productive forces. For instance, it was not possible to impose capitalist relations all at once, before the objective conditions for them were available during the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism; conversely, extra-economic measures were used to hasten the transition from feudalism to capitalism, for instance, the enclosures in 17th century England.¹⁹ The key word here is 'coercion,' and it pertains to the political sphere; extra economic can refer to many things, such as family arrangements and other aspects of social life, cultural, ideological, educational, etc., whereas 'coercion' refers to the direct use of force. The state in The German Ideology is presented as a coercive agent. State power in its historical development was a series of violations against the free association of producers.

The German Ideology is undoubtedly the first and most definitive of Marx's characterisation of state power; with its emphasis on the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeois state it is not surprising that social-democratic commentators on Marx have steadily continued to ignore this document. Ironically, the Communist Manifesto, despite its opening statement regarding the red spectre haunting Europe, is more amenable to

¹⁹ Das Kapital, op.cit.

social democratic interpretations.²⁰ From Karl Kautsky to Shlomo Avineri, the sentence that the proletariat must organise as the ruling class has been taken to mean that Marx favoured a slow gradualist conquest of parliamentary power by the proletariat.²¹

It took the experience of the 1848 revolutions for Marx to develop his theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In Chapter 1 I analysed this experience. Here I shall recapitulate some of its main points and add emphasis on the words 'dictatorship' and 'proletariat.'

We know from an extant letter of Marx to his father Heinrich Marx, that in his nineteenth year, while at the University of Berlin, Marx had studied Roman Law and History and had even attempted to write a book on Public Law.²² This work is not extant. A paper written at the age of 17 while at the Gymnasium 'Does the Reign of Augustus Deserve To Be Counted Among the Happier Periods of the Roman Empire?' has survived. The 'dictator' was a special device of the ancient Roman constitution in the

20 "A spectre is haunting Europe - the spectre of Communism. All the Powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French radicals and German police-spies." Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 108.

21 "The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible." Ibid., p. 126.

22 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Collected Works, International Publishers, New York, 1975, vol. 1, pp. 11-12.

fifth and early fourth century B.C.²³ The ruling class could nominate a 'dictator' who held extraordinary powers for a period of six months. The two elements of extraordinary power and the transitional nature of the dictatorship reappear in Marxian theory, with the important difference that the dictatorship is exercised by the proletariat as a class, along with its vanguard.

The word 'proletariat,' from the Latin word proles, meaning offspring (a reference to the children of the poorer classes who lived by their wages; although the proletariat of ancient Rome resembled the lumpenproletariat of modern times) became popular in the writings of the French socialists, Leroux, Considerant, Proudhon and Fourier (Marx refers to them in his articles of the Rheinische Zeitung, 1842, a year prior to his first Critique).²⁴ Avineri has argued that Marx became familiar with these thinkers through the writings of Lorenz von Stein.²⁵

In his first Critique, Marx, in addition to emphasising the gap between the universality of the state and the egoistic particularism of civil society, also points out that the proletariat is not part of civil society; indeed it is on its shoulders that the civil society rests, quite oppressively too. By the time of The German Ideology, there is a

²³ For further details on the institution of the dictatorship in early Rome, see the works of M.I. Rostovtsev, particularly, his Rome, Oxford University Press, New York, 1960.

²⁴ Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, Collected Works, Progress Publishers, vol. 1, p. 220.

²⁵ Shlomo Avineri, The Social & Political Thought of Karl Marx, op.cit., pp. 52-55.

qualitative change in Marx's handling of the relationship of classes, class struggle, and the political power of the state. The increasing understanding of the class struggle as an historical category, is matched by the refinement of the concept of 'state' and the proletariat's revolutionary overthrow of it. These are reflected in The Class Struggles in France. Barbalet comments on the impact of Marx's primary theory of the state on revolutionary strategy:

Whereas in its first expression in The German Ideology the mature theory tends to assume that the capitalist state is the capitalist class in politics, he argues in later writings that social classes and the political state occupy different fields of operation. The later development of Marx's mature theory also demonstrates that the state, as part of the social formation plays a role in the development of social classes, a factor which escapes his early formulation of the mature political theory.²⁶

While both in The German Ideology and in the Communist Manifesto society is polarised sharply into the ruling class and the ruled, there is a motley crew of classes and subclasses in The Class Struggles: dynastic parties, radical republicans, petty bourgeois democrats, the big bourgeoisie, the peasantry, the lumpen proletariat, the proletariat proper, and above all the finance aristocracy. Taking into account the alignment of class forces, Marx etches out the first sharp outlines of revolutionary strategy through his concept of the 'permanent revolution.' I have dealt with this in Chapter 1. To recapitulate: as the petty democrats and liberals could not be expected to put forward any substan-

²⁶ Barbalet, op.cit., p. 146.

tial revolutionary initiatives, the working class must, in alliance mainly with the peasantry, seize power, in order to effect far reaching social and economic change.

This theme is repeated in 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, where Marx points out that by a special concatenation of forces, Louis Bonaparte was able to have his state seemingly stand above all classes and independent of them. But this is only seeming, for Bonaparte represents, in reality, the alliance of the lumpen proletariat and the conservative peasantry. Here Marx develops his 'parasitical' view of the state (a variant of the primary theory);

... this executive power with its enormous bureaucratic and military organization, with its ingenious state machinery embracing wide strata, with a host of officials numbering half a million, besides an army of another half million, this appalling parasitic body which enmeshes the body of French society like a net and chokes all its pores...²⁷

It is also in this same work, that Marx pointedly observes that the working class cannot lay hold of this parasitic state machine, but must first break it.²⁸ Although Bonaparte's regime is seemingly above classes, such is not the case. As Miliband puts it:

... this does not mean that Bonapartism, for Marx, is in any sense neutral as between contending classes. It may claim to represent all classes and to be the embodiment of the whole of society. But it does in fact exist, and had been called into being, for the purpose of maintaining and

²⁷ Selected Works, op.cit., vol. 1, p. 477.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 477.

strengthening the existing social order and the domination of capital over labour.²⁹

With Marx's arrival in England and his study of the advanced capitalist countries of his day (England and France), Marx's view of the state underwent a further refinement. As Miliband points out, Marx often mentioned the fact that it is not always the ruling class as a whole that controls the state, but a fraction of it, and that those who run the state may well belong to a class which is not the economically dominant class. For instance, Miliband notes that Marx, in his article 'The Elections in Britain' points out that the Whigs made a tacit alliance with the bourgeoisie, to stage manage their political affairs:

The Whigs are the aristocratic representatives of the bourgeoisie, of the industrial and commercial middle class. Under the condition that the bourgeoisie should abandon to them, to an oligarchy of aristocratic families the monopoly of government and the exclusive possession of office, they make to the middle class, and assist it in conquering, all those concessions, which in the course of social and political development, have shown themselves to have become unavoidable and undelayable.³⁰

Miliband goes on to comment:

Marx does not suggest that this fundamentally affects the state's class character and its role of guardian and defender of the interests of property; but it obviously does introduce the element of flexibility in his view of operation of the state's bias, not least because the competition between different factions of the ruling class

²⁹ Miliband, op.cit., p. 285.

³⁰ Quoted in Miliband, op.cit., p. 294.

may well make easier the passage of measures favourable to labour, such as the Ten Hours Bill.³¹

The flexibility that Miliband is referring to, has been interpreted by social democratic commentators to mean that the proletariat could conquer political power through peaceful and parliamentary means. However, Lenin points out, in Marxism and the Renegade Kautsky, that during the '70s, the advanced capitalist countries were characterised by a minimum of bureaucracy and military oppression, while the beginning of the twentieth century saw the intensification of these elements in these same countries; at least this was the case in England.³²

In his 1891 Introduction to The Civil War in France, Engels notes that the public power in America seemed to have become corrupt.³³ Marx does not seem to have entertained for very long the prospects of a peaceful take over of power. Events on the Continent, especially the war between France and Germany in 1870, and the establishment of the Paris Commune and its fall, only reinforced his conviction that an energetic seizure of power and an energetic exercise of dictatorial power by the proletariat and its party were the only means for the destruction of the old state power and the beginnings of the transformation of society. The brief but significant evolution of the Commune-form which he hailed as the political form in which labour would finally emancipate itself, also

³¹ Ibid., p. 283.

³² Lenin, Selected Works, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, vol. 3, p. 25.

³³ Selected Works, vol. 2, pp. 187-188.

raised important questions not only about the desirability of this type of political organisation, but also its practical viability in a hostile environment.³⁴ These issues are examined in The Civil War in France (1871).

The Paris Commune and After

There are three aspects of Marx's analysis of the Paris Commune that deserve special mention in view of the controversy surrounding what he actually thought or said about the event as a revolutionary happening: (1) Marx was at first skeptical of the success of the Communards in seizing power; nevertheless, once they had done so he whole heartedly supported them and continuously sent suggestions through secret emissaries as to how they could retain power; (2) he extolled their economic reforms and their initiative in smashing the bourgeois state machine, but criticised them for their lack of firmness in taking certain essential measures to strengthen their position and especially for not centralising enough what functions were obligatory for a revolutionary government under siege; (3) the fall of the Commune within two months intensified Marx's conviction that only a revolutionary dictatorship could successfully effect a transition from the bourgeois state to the establishment of a communist society; this theme is prominent in his writings immediately after the fall of the Paris Commune and it reaches its apogee in Critique of the Gotha Programme.

³⁴ I have dealt with this question in the following pages.

On July 19, 1870, France under Louis Bonaparte declared war on Germany. In his 1891 Introduction to The Civil War in France Engels remarks:

But the Second Empire was the appeal to French chauvinism, was the demand for the restoration of the frontiers of the First Empire, which had been lost in 1814, or at least those of the First Republic. A French empire within the frontiers of the old monarchy and, in fact, within the even more amputated frontiers of 1815 - such a thing was impossible for any length of time. Hence the necessity for occasional wars and extensions of frontiers. But no extension of frontiers was so dazzling to the imagination of the French chauvinists as the extension to the left bank of the Rhine. One square mile on the Rhine was more to them than ten in the Alps or anywhere else. Given the Second Empire, the demand for the restoration of the left bank of the Rhine, either all at once or piecemeal, was merely a question of time. The time came with the Austro-Prussian War of 1866; cheated of the anticipated 'territorial compensation' by Bismarck and by his own over-cunning, hesitant policy, there was now nothing left for Napoleon but war, which broke out in 1870 and drove him first to Sedan, and thence to Wilhelmshole.³⁵

In the 'First Address of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association on the Franco-Prussian War', Marx observes that the "... war plot of July, 1870, was but an amended edition of the coup d'état of December, 1851."³⁶ He went on to add: "But let us not forget that it is the governments and the ruling classes of Europe who enabled Louis Bonaparte to play during eighteen years the ferocious farce of the Restored Empire."³⁷ On the other hand, the working class and the Paris

³⁵ Selected Works, op.cit., vol. 2, p. 181.

³⁶ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 181.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 192.

members of the International opposed the war. Marx recognised that as far as Germany was concerned, it was initially a war of self-defence. However, he warned that:

If the German working class allow the present war to lose its strictly defensive character and to degenerate into a war against the French people, victory or defeat will prove alike disastrous. All the miseries that befell Germany after her war of independence will revive with accumulated intensity.³⁸

Both at Brunswick and at Chemnitz the workers supported the International's call for peace. The Berlin section of the International did the same, a fact which Marx drew attention to:

The very fact that while official France and Germany are rushing into a fratricidal feud, the workmen of France and Germany send each other messages of peace and goodwill; this great fact, unparalleled in the history of the past, opens the vista of a brighter future. It proves that, in contrast to old society, with its economic miseries and its political delirium, a new society is springing up, whose International rule will be Peace, because its national ruler will be everywhere the same - Labour! The pioneer of that new society is the International Working Men's Association.³⁹

The war ended with Bonaparte's defeat in September 1870 and the proclamation of the French Republic. In the same month Marx gave his 'Second Address of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association on the Franco-Prussian War.' In it he pointedly described

³⁸ Ibid., p. 192.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 193-194.

the stages, by which Bismarck was entering into a policy of conquest. King William had explicitly told the people that he was at war not with the people of France but only with the aggressive emperor of France. Now with the end of the war and Napoleon's capitulation, the stage managers of the ruling class had to depict him as reluctantly giving way to the will of a German nation that asked for French blood, demanded Alsace and Lorraine as 'material guarantees' against further French aggression.⁴⁰ Showing the hypocrisy of this claim Marx went on to say:

History will measure its retribution, not by the extent of the square miles conquered from France, but by the intensity of the crime of reviving, in the second half of the 19th century, the policy of conquest!⁴¹

The German working class which had supported the war of liberation from the Second Empire was now asking for its own guarantees: an honourable peace for France and the recognition of the French Republic. The Central Committee of the German Socialist-Democratic Workmen's Party also made clear that it would not tolerate the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine. Marx commented:

Unfortunately, we cannot feel sanguine of their immediate success. If the French workmen, amidst peace, failed to stop the aggressor, are the German workers more likely to stop the victor amidst the clangour of arms?⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 195-196.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 198.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 199-200.

Marx also had misgivings about the relative strength of the French working class in the new republic:

That Republic has not subverted the throne, but only taken its place become vacant. It has been proclaimed, not as a social conquest, but as a national measure of defence. It is in the hands of a Provisional Government composed partly of notorious Orleanists, partly of middle class Republicans, upon some of whom the insurrection of June, 1848, has left its indelible stigma. The division of labour amongst the members of that government looks awkward. The Orleanists have seized the strongholds of the army and the police, while to the professed Republicans have fallen the talking departments. Some of their first acts go far to show that they have inherited from the empire, not only ruins, but also its dread of the working class. If eventual impossibilities are in wild phraseology demanded from the Republic, is it not with a view to prepare the cry for a "possible" government? Is the Republic, by some of its middle-class managers, not intended to serve as a mere stopgap and bridge over an Orleanist Restoration?⁴³

Marx was aware that the French working class operated in conditions of extreme difficulty. Any attempt at upsetting the new government in the present crisis, when the enemy was almost knocking at the doors of Paris, would be a desperate folly, he warned.⁴⁴ As the majority of the proletariat's leaders were either in jail or had gone abroad and since the middle class seemed inclined to support the Republic, Marx felt that the time had not yet come to give decisive battle. However, on March 18, 1871, the proletariat did take power and proclaimed the Paris Commune; thereafter, Marx spent his entire energies in supporting the Commune in

⁴³ Ibid., p. 200.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 200.

various ways. He sent urgent messages to the Communards in Paris to take strong action against the government at Versailles, by advancing on Versailles first and then seeking support from the province. He wrote to Leibknecht in Germany:

The Committee and later the Commune gave Thiers that mischievous dwarf, time to concentrate the hostile forces, firstly because they rather foolishly did not want to start a civil war as if Thiers had not already started it by his attempts at the forcible disarming of Paris, as if the National Assembly, summoned for the sole purpose of deciding the question of war or peace with the Prussian, had not immediately declared war on the Republic. Secondly, in order that the appearance of having usurped power should not attach to them they lost precious moments (it was imperative to advance on Versailles immediately after the defeat of the reactionaries in Paris) by the election of the Commune, the organisation of which etc. cost yet more time.⁴⁵

Marx had already anticipated that the Versailles government would strike a bargain with Prussia in order to jointly attack the Commune. From the letter written to Edward Spencer Beesley we know that Marx was able to obtain, through an old member of the Communist League, the details of the secret agreement between Bismarck and the Versailles government by which the latter's troops would pass through German lines to attack Paris and by which food supplies could be cut off from Paris, the French troops captured in the war would be returned to the Versailles government and the German High Command would demand of Paris that it dismantle its defences.⁴⁶ In the same letter to Beesley Marx says:

⁴⁵ Selected Correspondence, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, p.246.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 250-251.

If only the Commune had listened to my warnings! I advised its members to fortify the northern side and they still had time to do this; I told them beforehand that they would otherwise be caught in a trap.⁴⁷

Writing some twenty years later Engels remarked that the failure of the Commune to immediately seize the Bank of France had been a serious mistake:

The bank in the hands of the Commune - this would have been worth more than ten thousand hostages. It would have meant the pressure of the whole of the French bourgeoisie on the Versailles government in favour of peace with the Commune.⁴⁸

After the fall of the Commune in May 1871 Marx lost no time in organising support for the Commune's refugees. He also wrote the Third Address of the International Working Men's Association, which is now known as The Civil War in France.

In actual terms, the smashing of the bourgeois state machine meant the dismantling of the bureaucracy, the standing army and the police of the Second Empire. It is in this context one must read Marx's pronouncement: "... the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes."⁴⁹ In the paragraph immediately succeeding these lines, Marx describes the state power that the Commune set out to destroy:

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 251.

⁴⁸ Engels' 1891 Introduction, Selected Works, vol. 2, p. 186.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 217.

the centralized state power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police bureaucracy, clergy, and judiciary organs wrought after the plan of a systematic and absolute monarchy, serving nascent middle-class society as a mighty weapon in its struggle against feudalism. Still, its development remained clogged by all manner of medieval rubbish, seigniorial rights, local privileges, municipal and guild monopolies and provincial constitutions. The gigantic broom of the French Revolution of the eighteenth century swept away all these relics of bygone times, thus clearing simultaneously the social soil of its last hindrances to the superstructure of the modern state edifice raised under the First Empire, itself the offspring of the coalition wars of old semi-feudal Europe against modern France. During the subsequent régimes the Government placed under parliamentary control - that is, under the direct control of the propertied classes - became not only a hotbed of huge national debts and crushing taxes; with its irresistible allurements of place, pelf, and patronage, it became not only the bone of contention between the rival factions and adventures of the ruling classes; but its political character changed simultaneously with the economic changes of society. At the same pace at which the progress of modern industry developed, widened, intensified the class antagonism between capital and labour, the State power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labour, of a public force organised for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism.⁵⁰

There were two aspects of the Second Empire that the Commune had to deal with: (1) centralised State power; (2) the class basis of this State power. The majority of the elected members of the Commune were either working people or acknowledged representatives of the working class. The government of the Commune was made up of municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms. Public service had to be done at workmen's wages. Marx then makes the important observation:

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 217-218.

The few but important functions which still would remain for a central government were not to be suppressed, as has been intentionally mis-stated, but they were to be discharged by Communal and therefore strictly responsible agents... While the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power were to be amputated, its legitimate functions were to be wrested...⁵¹

This passage is of some interest as it is indicative of the fact that even at the height of Marx's enthusiasm for the Commune's political measures he was aware that though it was self-governing, the Commune would also need: (1) some centralisation for the co-ordination of federated communes; (2) energetic action against external threats which would require some retention of the old state power. With regard to point one, Marx explicitly rejects comparison of the Paris Commune with medieval communes:

It is generally the fate of completely new historical creations to be mistaken for the counterpart of older and even defunct forms of social life, to which they may bear a certain likeness. Thus, this new Commune which breaks the modern State Power, has been mistaken for a reproduction of the medieval Communes, which first preceded, and afterwards became the substratum of, that very State power. The Communal Constitution has been mistaken for an attempt to break up into a federation of small states, as dreamed of by Montesquieu and the Girondins, that unity of great nations which, if, originally brought about by political force, has now become a powerful coefficient of social production. The antagonism of the Commune against the State power has been mistaken for an exaggerated form of the ancient struggle against over-centralisation.⁵²

With regard to point (2):

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 221.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 221-222.

While the Versailles Government, as soon as it had recovered some spirit and strength, used the most violent means against the Commune; while it put down the free expression of opinion all over France, even to the forbidding of meetings of delegates from the large towns; while it subjected Versailles and the rest of France to an espionage far surpassing that of the Second Empire; while it burned by its gendarme inquisitor all papers printed at Paris, and sifted all correspondence from and Paris; while in the National Assembly the most timid attempts to put in a word for Paris were howled down in a manner unknown even to the Chambre introuvable of 1861; with the savage warfare of Versailles outside, and its attempts at corruption and conspiracy inside Paris - would the Commune not have shamefully betrayed its trust by affecting to keep up all the decencies and appearances of liberalism as in a time of profound peace?⁵³

Along with the graphic description of the White Terror unleashed on the Communards and the working population of Paris we have here a statement of what would become an important theme in Marx's post-Commune writings: the defence of the Revolution. Neil Harding has rightly remarked that Marx's (and Engels' struggle) against Bakunin and the anarchists in the International is evidence that they supported a centralised state power exercised by the proletariat, immediately after the Revolution.⁵⁴ However, Harding places this before the Paris Commune and neglects its importance after 1871, especially after Bakunin's expulsion from the International in 1872 and then the transfer of the International's headquarters to America. It was during this period also that Marx provided a strong critique of Bakunin's Statehood and Anarchy.

In September of 1871 at the London conference of the International

⁵³ Ibid., p. 228.

⁵⁴ Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, op.cit.

Marx explicitly supported the Blanquist member Edouard Vaillant's draft resolution calling for the workers to engage in a political struggle (the anarchists called for abstention from the struggle), Marx pointed out that the success of the revolution depended on the gaining of political power. At a further discussion Marx said:

But before such a change could be effected a proletarian dictatur would become necessary, and the first condition of that was a proletarian army. The working classes would have to conquer the right to emancipate themselves on the battle field. The task of the International was to organise and combine the forces of labour for the coming struggle.⁵⁵

Consequently, in 1875, when the Social-Democratic Workers' Party and the Lassalleian General Association of German Workers came together for a united programme called the Gotha Programme, Marx had no hesitation in criticising the programme for its advocacy of a reconciliation between the Prussian state and the working class. Among other things, the Programme had talked about the establishment of a free state:

Starting from these basic principles the German Workers' Party strives by all legal means for the free state - and socialist society...⁵⁶

Asking rhetorically what all the talk of a 'free state' meant, Marx went on to criticise the German Workers' Party's tendency to forget the class basis of the state and to treat it as if it were an independent

⁵⁵ Karl Marx, A Biography, op.cit., p. 529.

⁵⁶ Selected Works, op.cit., vol. 3, p. 22.

entity that "possesses its own intellectual, ethical and libertarian bases."⁵⁷ Rather, existing society was the basis of the existing state and thus it followed that:

... the different states of the different civilised countries, in spite of their motley diversity of form, all have this in common, that they are based on modern bourgeois society, only one, more or capitalistically developed. They have, therefore, also certain essential characteristics in common...

... The question then arises: what transformation will the state undergo in communist society? In other words, what social functions will remain in existence there that are analogous to present state functions? This question can only be answered scientifically, and one does not get a flea-hop nearer to the problem by a thousand fold combination of the word 'people' with the word 'state.'⁵⁸

The immediate question was not what transformation the state would undergo in communist society, but what would precede the establishment of a communist society. Here Marx gives the unequivocal answer:

Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.⁵⁹

The lack of equivocation is only softened by the words 'revolutionary' and 'transitional.' Lichtheim has remarked that Marx returned in his

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

later years to the Jacobin ideals of his youth.⁶⁰ This is not an explanation and relies largely on an extrapolation of psychological factors, while also ignoring the steady progression, change and refinement of Marx's understanding of state power and its institutions, which, I believe, was in the direction of a transitional, proletarian, dictatorship-form. This was no arbitrary nor fortuitous progression, but a response to the historical realities and configurations of political power that Marx was able to observe and analyse in his own time.

With regard to the question of the Commune-form, there is no essential incompatibility between it and the dictatorship-form. Among the options available were these:

- (1) parliamentary government which did not preclude violence towards the people;⁶¹
- (2) proletarian dictatorship, which does not necessarily rule out self-government for the proletariat;
- (3) decentralised self-government, which ran the risk of defeat by the counter-revolution.

Lenin opted for the second solution. His advance on Marxian thinking on the subject is simply a reflection of what Lukacs called the 'actuality of the revolution.' Whereas the closing years of Marx's life were characterised by a temporary lull in the revolutionary movement in

⁶⁰ Lichtheim, op.cit.

⁶¹ On the limitations of parliamentary democracy see Lucio Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin, op.cit., pp. 45-108.

all countries, the circumstances of the world war, the traditions of the 1905 revolution (which among other things included the rise of the soviets and the radicalization of the peasantry) and the growth and consolidation of a militant revolutionary party in Russia, all these contributed to the 'inevitability' of the October Revolution, on the eve of which Lenin wrote his State and Revolution.

His immediate circle of readers were the members of the Bolshevik Party, who, as we have seen in the previous chapter were not clear about the prospects of an imminent revolution. Some of them were even considering a deal with the Mensheviks (who opposed the seizure of power). Although State and Revolution was written for a specific time and with a specific audience in mind, it has been hailed as a programmatic statement for Marxist revolutionaries, regardless of time and place. Its central theme appears to be the need for revolution and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. State and Revolution has been the most controversial of all Lenin's writings and I shall now turn to an examination of this opus in the light of recent commentary and criticism.

State and Revolution

The most commonly encountered criticism is that of Utopianism. In this interpretation Lenin's insistence on the smashing of the state machine and the role of the Soviets as organs of working class rule in the new revolutionary state, when measured against the realities of Soviet rule immediately and long after the revolution, smacks of bad faith, recklessness, deliberate propagandising, etc. A related criticism

argues that the ideas of State and Revolution were inconsistent with Lenin's theory before the Revolution and his practice after it. The earliest and most influential advocate of this position is Robert Daniels, whose 'The State and Revolution: A Case Study in the Genesis and Transformation of Communist Ideology' popularised the notion that semianarchist idealistic (Utopian notions) of State and Revolution are inconsistent with Lenin's theory before the revolution and his practice, after it.⁶² He calls the document an "intellectual deviation,"⁶³ presumably because the Utopian elements are foreign to Lenin's general theoretical stance before the Revolution. This means to say that in Daniels' estimation, the Party and the dictatorship of the proletariat, were the central focus of Lenin's thinking before the writing of the State and Revolution, the corollary to this being that these two themes, the Party and the dictatorship are absent in State and Revolution. The Party is only mentioned once and that too, obliquely, in State and Revolution. Why these omissions? Daniels argues that this is because during the year 1917 Lenin came under the influence of the Left wing of the Bolshevik Party, notably, Bukharin, and the left wing of the international social democratic movement, whose chief spokesman was Anton Pannekoek.⁶⁴ The left wing was made up predominantly of intellectuals

⁶² Robert Daniels, 'The State and Revolution: A Case Study in the Genesis and Transformation of Communist Ideology,' Slavic Review, February 1953, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 22-43. Louis Fischer maintains that despite its Marxist terminology, State and Revolution is an aberration because of its Utopianism. See his The Life of Lenin, New York, 1964, p.122.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 22.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 23.

and therefore entertained semi anarchistic and egalitarian social goals (the smashing of the state machine, the Commune-form of government, etc.).

The question that would shed light on the controversy is: does Lenin omit to mention the dictatorship of the proletariat and the need for a repressive dictatorship? The answer clearly is no. It is all too obviously important in State and Revolution, as we shall see later. The second and related question is: Did Lenin ever abandon the notion of the primacy of the Party? Again the answer is no.⁶⁵ Consequently he cannot be accused of inconsistency, and not even of Utopianism. The specific problems that he encountered were endemic to any post revolutionary state; although he had not and could not have anticipated these in any detail, there is no evidence to suggest that Lenin ever thought that making a revolution would be easy. The Commune-form as he interpreted it, could be reconciled and was indeed so reconciled, in the post revolutionary regime, up until the outbreak of the Civil War.⁶⁶

In what follows, an attempt will be made to retrace the background and circumstances of the writing of State and Revolution and to show it

⁶⁵ For a detailed treatment of Lenin's relationship with the Party, see Chapter 3 of the present study.

⁶⁶ For the generous and democratic methods used by Lenin's centralised government to ensure popular participation, and representation by the soviets see T.H. Rigby, Lenin's Government: Sovnarkom 1917-1922, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979. Rigby sees Sovnarkom, the Council of People's Commissars, as an embryonic form of democratic government, which if it had been allowed to develop, would have prevented the rise to power of the Politburo and its monopoly of power. Sovnarkom declined under the exigencies of the civil war.

as consistent with Lenin's earlier thinking on the subject.

State and Revolution was written between August and September 1917 when Lenin had gone into hiding. It was intended to serve propagandistic purposes connected with the immediate question of a Russian revolution, but it was also clearly a continuation of a problem Lenin dealt with earlier in 1916. In December of 1916 he wrote a brief article entitled 'The Youth International,' a review of a German language publication which had started appearing in Switzerland since September 1, 1915. Lenin evidently held the magazine in high esteem, since in that review article Lenin averred that the "... magazine merits our attention and should be strongly recommended to all Party members in a position to contact foreign Social-Democratic parties and youth organisation."⁶⁷

The magazine 'Youth International' carried with it a subtitle 'Militant and Propaganda Organ of the International League of Socialist Youth Organisations.' Lenin evidently saw it as championing the cause of international socialism, at a period when the European Social Democratic parties had fallen prey to what Lenin described as opportunism. As we have seen in the last chapter, these parties had broken the first and fundamental rule of international socialism, by supporting their respective national governments in their war efforts.

Nevertheless, the Youth International endorsed what appeared to Lenin to be two serious errors: (1) the question of disarmament, and (2) the question of the difference between the anarchist and the socialist

⁶⁷ Collected Works, op.cit., vol. 23, pp. 163-166.

approaches to the state. Lenin had already analysed the disarmament slogan in October 1916 in his article 'The Disarmament Slogan.'⁶⁸ The Left, in opposing imperialist militarism, had called for total disarmament. This, in Lenin's view, was a mistake. Disarmament will always be the ideal of socialism, but "whoever expects that socialism will be achieved without a social revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat is not a socialist. Dictatorship is state power based directly on violence. And in the twentieth century - as in the age of civilisation generally - violence means neither a fist nor a club, but troops."⁶⁹

As we have seen in the last chapter, turning the imperialist war into a civil war, had become a central issue for Lenin in his analysis of imperialism. The disarmament platform was shared by the Left of the Youth International, whose chief spokesman was at this time Bukharin, with the German Social Democrats, whom Lenin had called chauvinists and opportunists, and whose chief representative was Kautsky: Lenin's main grievance against these Social Democrats was that they distracted the workers from the revolutionary struggle:

For this advocacy seeks to instil in the workers the idea that the present bourgeois governments of the imperialist powers are not bound to each other by thousands of threads of finance capital and by scores of hundreds of corresponding secret treaties (i.e., predatory, plundering treaties, preparing the way for imperialist war).⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 94-103.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 95.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

The reason that the Bolsheviks tried to combat the slogan then current in Russia, 'the defence of the fatherland' was not because they were pacifists who refused to participate in any kind of war, but because the imperialist war must become the occasion for revolution, for the seizure of power.

The second mistake that the Youth International, particularly Bukharin, was guilty of, was their stand on the question of state power. Bukharin had written that the difference between the anarchists and the Marxists was that the former wanted a decentralised and anarchist method of production while the latter wanted a centralised method of production. Lenin's comment deserves full mention:

This is wrong. The author raises the question of the difference in the socialists' and anarchists' attitude towards the state. However, he answers not this question, but another, namely, the difference in their attitude towards the economic foundation of future society. That, of course, is an important and necessary question. But that is no reason to ignore the main point of difference between socialists and anarchists in their attitude towards the state. Socialists are in favour of utilising the present state and its institutions in the struggle for the emancipation of the working class, maintaining also that the state should be used for a specific form of transition from capitalism to socialism. This transitional form is the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is also a state.⁷¹

Lenin's meaning is quite clear: The Bolsheviks (as Marxists) want some form of state during the transitional period, and they would utilise present state forms for the emancipation of the working class. Bukharin

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 166.

had argued that the "state idea" had penetrated deep into the consciousness of the working masses and this should be fought. Lenin's response was:

The point is not that the "state idea" has clashed with the repudiation of the state, but that opportunist policy (i.e., the opportunist, reformist, bourgeois attitude towards the state) has clashed with revolutionary Social Democratic policy (i.e., the revolutionary Social-Democratic attitude towards the bourgeoisie, to overthrow the bourgeoisie). These are entirely different things. We hope to return to this very important subject in a separate article.⁷²

The separate article turned out to be State and Revolution. Had Lenin's views changed substantially? Marian Sawer has argued that Lenin's views shifted considerably, under the influence of the Zimmerwald Left, which included notable figures such as the Dutch Marxist, Anton Pannekoek.⁷³ According to this line of reasoning, Lenin actively canvassed the 'sprengung' (shattering) of bourgeois state power, under the influence of the Left, and that he seriously canvassed the soviets as organs of working class rule. Sawer speaks of the "disparate elements of Lenin's legacy, from the utopian aspirations of State and Revolution to the organisational imperatives which preoccupied Lenin before and after 1917."⁷⁴ Sawer goes on to stress the "utopian elements stemmed from

⁷² ibid., p. 166.

⁷³ Marian Sawer, 'The Genesis of State and Revolution,' The Socialist Register, The Merlin Press, London, 1977, pp. 209-227.

⁷⁴ ibid., p. 209.

Lenin's rapprochement with Left Marxism in the annus mirabilis of 1917.⁷⁵

The argument of the present study is that Lenin's views did not substantially change from December 1916 to autumn 1917, as Saver maintains.⁷⁶ The charge of utopianism is a failure to understand what Lenin meant by the transitional dictatorship of the proletariat, a view that he began to put forward seriously since 1905. To be more specific, he spoke of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, in alliance with the peasantry. The smashing of the state machine, mentioned in State and Revolution, referred to the doing away with the alienating conditions of bourgeois state power, and not doing away with all of its organisational apparatus. This apparatus would be modified and utilised for the new revolutionary state, in ways that only the revolution would prepare the way for and which included the utilisation of the soviets as some form of self-rule, within the centralised state apparatus (and in fact this is how Sovnarkom functioned in the early days of Lenin's government). So concerned is Lenin to distance himself from the anarchist position of the Left Marxists, that he returns in Chapter 2 of State and Revolution to Marx's controversy with the anarchists.

Marx and Engels, of course, had had a running controversy with the anarchists since the days of the writing of The Poverty of Philosophy and the struggle against Bakunin and his followers in the First International. The specific controversy that Lenin was now referring to

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 209.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 209-227.

was their polemic as expressed in 'Political Indifferentism' by Marx and 'On Political Authority' by Engels. Here the important point that Lenin wished to emphasize was that while Marx believed that the state would disappear with the disappearance of classes, he did not recommend that the working class should dispense with it before its power had been consolidated:

He did not at all oppose the view that the state would disappear when classes disappeared, or that it would be abolished when classes were abolished. What he did oppose was the proposition that the workers should renounce the use of arms, organised violence, that is, the state, which is to serve to "crush the resistance of the bourgeoisie."⁷⁷

Nor would this type of state be opposed to the commune-form, since it incorporates into a higher unity, the centralised republic. We have seen from Chapter 1 of the present study, that from the 1848 revolution in Germany onwards, Marx (and Engels) spoke of the need for a unified, single and indivisible republic for Germany. In State and Revolution Lenin points out that Engels did not mean at all by democratic centralism a bureaucratic notion;

⁷⁷ V. I. Lenin, Selected Works, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1970, vol. 2, p. 330. Even so astute a commentator such as Neil Harding overlooks this aspect of Marx's views on the state: "There can be no doubt that Marx's writings on the commune do represent an abrupt change of stance on the question of the state. The state, Marx argued in his The Civil War in France, was not to be taken over and utilised by the socialists. The instruments of coercion of the old state were not to be used to put down the challenges of hostile classes nor was its machinery to be used to centralise the forces of production in the hands of the proletariat." Lenin's Political Thought, op.cit., vol. 2, p. 87.

His idea of centralism did not in the least preclude such broad local self-government as would combine the voluntary defence of the unity of the state by the "communes" and districts, and the complete elimination of all bureaucratic practices and all "ordering" from above.⁷⁸

From here Lenin goes on to argue that a federal republic does not necessarily mean greater freedom than the centralised republic, for example the centralised French Republic of 1792-98 gave more freedom than the Federal Swiss Republic.⁷⁹

In other words, the greatest amount of local, regional and other freedom known in history was accorded by a centralised and not by a federal republic.⁸⁰

Thus these are the elements that are characteristic of Lenin's thinking on the subject of state and revolution: (1) the dictatorship of the proletariat; by dictatorship he meant rule unrestricted by bourgeois law; (2) a centralised republic; (3) the soviets functioning as links in the system.⁸¹

Why then did: (a) Lenin speak of smashing, shattering the state machine?; (b) why did he omit mention of the Party? We have seen since Chapter 3 that after the 1903 split Lenin saw the Mensheviks as allies of the liberals, compromising revolutionary goals. In the succeeding years, he did not change his position. The War and with it international Social

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 339.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 340.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 340.

⁸¹ See Chapter 1.

Democracy's betrayal of socialism only sealed the rupture between the revolutionary wing and the reformist wing. Although Lenin singles out Kautsky as the leading representative of this trend, that such a development should have taken place, was a foregone conclusion. Kautsky, leading proponent of the parliamentary method of obtaining power for the proletariat, naturally insisted on the retention of parliamentary forms of government. The shattering of state power then referred to these forms and their attendant mechanisms. The destruction by a revolutionary seizure of power, of the state apparatus created by the ruling class, was an historical necessity:

On the other hand, the "Kautskyite" distortion of Marxism is far more subtle. "Theoretically," it is not denied that the state is an organ of class rule, or that class antagonisms are irreconcilable. But what is overlooked or glossed over is this: if the state is the product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms, if it is a power standing above society and "alienating itself more and more from it," it is clear that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution, but also without the destruction of the state apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class and which is the embodiment of this "alienation."⁸²

The Philosophy of State and Revolution

One may approach this great tract from many angles: (1) as revolutionary propaganda designed to goad a tardy Party to action; (2) an attempt to clarify the theoretical bases of Marxian political thought; (3) as a struggle against both the extremes of anarchism and Reformism.

⁸² Lenin, Selected Works, op.cit., vol. 2, p. 291.

Both detractors and admirers alike have focussed on these and similar aspects; but hardly any attempt has been made to see the work as Lenin's definitive statement of what the purpose of proletarian revolution would be. This is to be found in Chapter 5 entitled 'The Economic Basis of the Withering Away of the State' especially the sections: 'The transition From Capitalism To Communism,' 'The First Phase of Communist Society' and 'The Higher Phase of Communist Society.'

In this chapter Lenin gives the most precise and most realistic description of what the proletarian revolution should strive for and can achieve after the seizure of power. This can be summed up in the following statement:

The first phase of communism, therefore, cannot yet provide justice and equality: differences, and unjust differences, in wealth will still persist, but the exploitation of man by man will have become impossible because it will be impossible to seize the means of production - the factories, machines, land, etc. - and make them private property. In smashing Lasalle's petty-bourgeois, vague phrases about 'equality' and 'justice' in general, Marx shows the course of development of communist society, which is compelled to abolish at first only the 'injustice' of the means of production seized by individuals, and which is unable at once to eliminate the other injustice, which consists in the distribution of consumer goods "according to the amount of labour performed" (and not according to needs).⁸³

The striking argument of this passage is that the exploitation of man by man will be eliminated when the means of production become public property. (Note that Lenin does not say that all of the problems of

⁸³ Ibid.; pp. 354-355.

society will have been resolved with the destruction of private property relations, but only that which can be resolved by first changing the mode of production, the first step in this direction being, the public ownership of property. Further improvements will occur, when the new proletarian state whose initial task of defeating the possessing classes, is accompanied by a step by step augmentation of the process that begins with the establishment of public ownership. During the transitional period, then, the state will guarantee to its citizens, what Lenin following Marx, calls 'bourgeois right.'⁸⁴ To trace the meaning of this phrase and its deep involvement with the whole question of the new state's tasks, one must look carefully at the central significance of the use of the word 'exploitation' by Lenin in this chapter of State and Revolution.

There are two interrelated senses in which Lenin uses the word 'exploitation': (1) the horror, savagery and infamies of capitalist exploitation, by which he means a readily identifiable phenomenon such as poverty; (2) the absence of means by which the population may develop all of its resources, both physical and mental (spiritual), what, again following Marx, Lenin calls 'needs.'⁸⁵ The latter is obviously connected with the former and both may be subsumed under the description, the materialist basis of human development.

Poverty is inimical to human development; the 'oppressed classes'

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 356.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 351.

must also contend with the question of simple physical survival. Capitalism has been responsible for both poverty and the servitude of wage labour.

In the phenomenon of exploitation, the central facet is quantification involved in 'equal right,' where a qualitative recognition of the differences of individuals (in birth, hereditary qualities, local development, etc.) would mean the recognition that an equal right approach would be a violation of each individual's ensemble of needs, talents, abilities and the correlative contribution that the individual can make to society. Since people are not alike, an equal measure cannot be applied across the board. Lenin quotes from the Critique of the Gotha Programme:

With an equal performance of labour, and hence an equal share in the social consumption fund, one will in fact receive more than another, one will be richer than another, and so on. To avoid all these defects, right would have to be unequal rather than equal.⁸⁶

This is the possibility and the promise of Communism, one which Lenin frankly admits, is not possible in the first phase. Here there would be, among other things, equal right. One of the 'bourgeois rights' is the right to private property. This will be eliminated under socialism, but the mere conversion of the means of production into the common property of the whole of society (commonly called socialism) does not remove the defects of distribution and the inequality of "bourgeois right," which

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 355.

continues to prevail; so long as products are divided "according to the amount of labour performed".⁸⁷ He then quotes Marx:

But these defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society as it is when it has just emerged, after, prolonged birth pangs, from capitalist society. Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society, and its cultural development conditioned thereby.⁸⁸

The two socialist principles can be realised in the first phase: (1) he who does not work shall not eat; (2) equal amount of products for equal amounts of labour.⁸⁹ And although, the new socialist state was yet to be realised as the time of the writing of State and Revolution Lenin adds that a factory discipline will have to prevail:

But this "factory discipline," which the proletariat, after defeating the capitalists, after overthrowing the exploiters, will extend to the whole of society, is by no means our ideal, or our ultimate goal. It is only a necessary step for thoroughly cleaning society of all the infamies and abominations of capitalist exploitation, and for further progress.⁹⁰

Marx had pointed out that unless Communists were to indulge in Utopian dreams, it was impossible to expect that after the overthrow of capitalism, people would straightaway work without any standard of right.⁹¹ The

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 355.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 355.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 355.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 361.

⁹¹ Cited in State and Revolution, op.cit., p. 356.

abolition of capitalism does not immediately create the "economic prerequisites" for the establishment of a qualitative measure of rights.⁹² Consequently, there is no other standard than that of bourgeois right.⁹³

To this extent, therefore, there still remains the need for a state, which, while safeguarding the common ownership of the means of production, would safeguard equality in labour and in the distribution of products.⁹⁴

Only in "complete communism" will there be a qualitative measure of right, and only under complete communism will there be all round human development:

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour and with it also the antithesis between mental and physical labour has vanished, after labour has become not only a livelihood but life's prime want, after the productive forces have increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly - only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!⁹⁵

The seizure of power, is at this stage of the revolutionary process, the highest form of political action, the only possible practice under the circumstances. If, as Lenin believed, complete development was

⁹² Ibid., p. 356.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 356.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 356.

⁹⁵ From Critique of the Gotha Programme; quoted in Lenin's State and Revolution, op.cit., p. 356.

possible under communism only, the seizure of state power was but a step in the right direction, the preparation for the establishment of the public ownership of resources and production. This political activism was present in Marx's thinking also, as we have seen in Chapter 1, and refutes the traditional interpretation of the determinist Marx, who felt that a proletarian revolution was possible only in an advanced stage of capitalism. It is in State and Revolution that Leninist Practice reaches its apogee. Whereas, in works such as the Philosophical Notebooks, the word Practice is linked primarily to Cognition and therefore our knowledge of the external world (a continuation of the theme of Materialism and Empiricriticism) here it is linked mainly to the 'actuality' of the revolution. If the state hitherto had been the crystallised expression of the power of the ruling classes, the reality of its exploitation, then only a revolution could end this exploitation and lay the ground for the development of man, which Lenin clearly saw as a social phenomenon.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen how the primary theory of the state in Marx's writings acquired an historical confirmation from the 1840s onwards. However, the diverse ramifications of the actual exercise of state power did not and could not obscure Marx's basic insight: the modern state is inextricably linked to the rise and establishment of private property. Hence the destruction of private property relations (in this historical period, the defeat of capitalism) could only be accomplished by the proletariat. Lenin expressed these basic ideas in

State and Revolution.

What is perhaps of central importance is the goal of revolution as both men envisaged it. The presence of exploitation (both oppression and physical destruction) is a direct function of private ownership in the means of production and in natural resources. Clearly, both men thought that the liberation of the productive forces of society from its present constraints (capitalist relations of production) would be the first and major step towards freedom from exploitation.

CONCLUSION

The main premise of this study has been that the problem of revolution was seen by both Marx and Lenin as being intrinsically linked with the defeat of capitalism, and that this required among other things: (1) a theory of historical intelligibility; (2) a strategy for political action; (3) a historical agent. If capitalist development were on the one hand simply a process of the objective development of productive forces then a straightforward strategy of political action (a seizure of power) would suffice; on the other hand if political development were only a matter of the evolution of ideology and consciousness a theory of historical intelligibility alone would suffice. This study sought to show the dialectical link between the theory of historical intelligibility, the strategy for political action and the historical agent.

The inevitability of the final assault through insurrectionary means, came to Marx in three distinct phases:

(1) in the period of his formulation of historical materialism in 1845 and the failure of the 1848 revolutions in France and in Germany. The conquest of political power as a means of effecting socio-economic change is directly linked to the theory of the hegemony of the economically dominant class in society (The German Ideology);

(2) in the middle period of Marx's career, the period of the writing of Das Kapital and the formation of the First International, roughly from the 1850s to the 1870s. The analysis of capitalism, in depth and detail, generates the impression that Marx had forgotten the political struggle. As we have seen in Chapter 1 of this study, this led some Marxists to

interpret the defeat of capitalism as something that would happen spontaneously because of such factors as the increasing poverty and the falling rate of profit. Others hoped for the evolution of capitalism into a more humane system.

The formation and activity of the First International since 1864 (in which trade unionists, at least in the English section, dominated) and the inclusion of a variety of anarchists, Proudhonists, etc. would suggest a type of broad based political activity that was less narrow in scope than the Communist League (as we have seen, Lenin's achievement was a fusion of both types of activity, without the submergence of the narrow Party in the broad based membership). This period, quite mistakenly, has been commonly interpreted as a lull, if not actual decline of interest on the part of Marx in the direct assault on capitalism's nerve centres of political power;

(3) this is the period of the overt resurgence of the themes of the seizure of power and the dictatorship of the proletariat signalled by the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871. The use of the word 'dictatorship' would clearly indicate that the freeing of the productive forces would not take place automatically but would require a direct assault on the relations of production, with the aid of the coercive apparatus of the post revolutionary state. Private property, then, is not 'dissolved' but 'expropriated.'

We see in the continuity of a long evolution of thought Marx's acute prognostication of the revolution that is about to be; his perception that the take off point had been reached when, under the right conditions, capitalism could and should be assaulted frontally and

directly. This relates then to the question of the right tactics and strategy rather than any philosophical support of or opposition to, the use of physical violence. The basic question reasserts itself: whatever the forms of political power and its seizure that appropriation must be effected.

Here, as elsewhere, Lenin was in agreement with Marx. A Communist revolution had two aspects: (1) the destruction of private property relations; (2) the socio-economic transformation of society, beginning with collective or public ownership. As we have seen in Chapter 5 Lenin did permit himself to speak directly about the new social order that would, in providing a material base, allow the flowering of the freedom and dignity of man. There would be no need for 'revolution,' if such were already the case. That was not the case and consequently we see that the greater emphasis in the thinking of both men was on the current 'absence' of freedom and dignity, which they sought to define more clearly as current 'exploitation.' Given their materialist interpretation of history both men could not envisage or endorse a theory of freedom and dignity that did not rest firmly on a material base: (1) in the first instance, the physical survival of human beings, their right to life; (2) the shared abundance of material goods resulting from the liberation of productive forces from their capitalist relations of production.

While both were in agreement on the aims of revolution, it is probably correct to say that Lenin focussed also on the question of strategy and tactics (culminating in the final insurrectionary assault) and the creation of a disciplined vanguard that would lead the

proletariat. Throughout this study I have tried to show that in spite of Lenin's frequent references to and deference towards the Marx-Engels corpus of works, he did not absolve himself of the task of redefining 'historical intelligibility' as an essential pre-requisite for a revolutionary. Specifically, this meant, the detailed understanding of capitalism as it appeared in Russia as successor to feudalism (a process by no means simple nor schematic) and requiring the further delineation of such concepts as 'unequal development' and subsequently, the detailed understanding of the last stage of capitalism, imperialism. The uniquely Russian situation meant that the alliance of the proletariat with the peasantry was a sine qua non of revolutionary success, even more so than in the semi-agrarian conditions of the Germany of 1848, or France under Louis Bonaparte.

Undoubtedly, the onset of the world war (which clearly upset the arguments of the apologists of capitalism in regards to its superiority as a system) also challenged Lenin and other Marxists to provide an explanation for this phenomenon. As we have seen, though Lenin was not the only one to write on the subject of imperialism, he was the only one to explicitly connect the phenomenon with war and to base the seizure of power on the special configurations that presented themselves in Russia.

This study has not attempted to analyse the post revolutionary state in Russia or even to raise the question of the desirability of the transitional dictatorship. Recently, A.J. Polan has attempted to argue that the Commune form of state, the eventual goal of both the Marxian and the Leninist vision, is Utopian and impracticable (Lenin and the End of Politics), given the limiting conditions of human nature and the

complexities of modern living. Although Polan's arguments are persuasive, they rely too heavily on the shortcomings of actually existing socialist states and thus have pre-judged the immense potentialities of the Commune style form. Since such a form has not existed for any length of time (the Paris Commune was allowed to last only for two months) it is premature to draw any final conclusions.

Clearly, capitalism is no longer a viable proposition. Nevertheless, the seizure of power in the exact form in which it occurred in the October Revolution cannot probably be duplicated in the centres of advanced capitalism, not only because of the immense retaliatory powers of the military-industrial complex, but also because of the reluctance of the working class to engage in what it perceives as unproductive strife. The burden of such direct struggle has shifted away from the countries of advanced capitalism to the Third World, in what one might cynically describe as a 'division of labour' in the international revolutionary movement. The Left in the countries of advanced capitalism sees its mission as consisting of the participation in all radical and democratic struggles in their home countries and in aiding the Third World by trying as far as possible to ~~limit the intervention~~ of the capitalist powers in these countries. In the absence of any direct struggle such as advocated both by Marx and Lenin, the Left has increasingly turned to such alternatives as a modified version of the Gramscian concept of hegemony. Here the agent of historical change is no longer only the industrial working class, but progressive (and radical) groups with no special class affiliations: the Women's Movement, the Peace Movement, the environmentalists, etc. Hegemony is understood in this context as "moral

and philosophical leadership, leadership which is attained through the active consent of major groups in a society."¹

These and related issues are beyond the scope of the present work. In demonstrating the intimate links between Marxian theory and the Leninist theory and practice of revolution, my intention was two-fold. In the first instance, it has been necessary (as seen on various occasions in this text) to set the record straight as it were, a record much obscured, unfortunately, by the exigencies of cold war politics. The deeper reason, however, is that Lenin's claims to being an 'orthodox Marxist' are precisely that. At the most basic level both men shared a theory of historical intelligibility, which connected it to political action in a way that earlier theories were not able to and which later ones could not quite approximate.

¹ Robert Bocock, Hegemony, Tavistock Publications, New York, 1986, p. 11.

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APPENDIX A

The Party and Revolution

Among the common misconceptions about Marx's ideas on the role of the Communist Party in furthering the proletarian revolution are those pertaining to the questions of centralism and organisation. It is widely believed that Marx favoured decentralisation and a loose federation of like minded (or dissenting) individuals.

However, the organisation of the Communist League (1847) and its rules, would indicate a certain amount of centralism.¹ Although the highest organ of the Communist League appears to have been the Congress consisting of delegates from local organisations, alongside of it, there was the Central Authority, the executive organ in between the congresses. The primary cell appears to have been members of the community, the cell having an elective chairman and a deputy chairman. The cell decided on the admission of new members. The expulsion of members who had violated the rules of the Communist League seems to have been established practice (Weitling and his followers being the first to have been so expelled). The rules prescribed that members were to observe party secrecy and not to belong to societies hostile to the Communist League. Although a good part of the membership was of proletarian origin, the importance of Marx's and Engels' position in the organisation, would indicate that much of the leadership was provided by these two individuals.

¹ See Karl Marx: A Biography, op.cit., pp. 135-136.

Under the existing conditions, the autocratic regimes on the Continent, it was inevitable that the League remained a secret organisation; however, this was offset by a conscious attempt to stay close to the masses with the aid of open organisations, such as the German Workers' Educational Society. The League also attempted to establish its own such organisations. The procedures in this regard, are remarkably similar to Lenin's strategy of relating to the masses, through their own existing organisations, while keeping intact the independent activity of the Bolshevik Party.

There can be no doubt that Marx fought strenuously and consistently to keep out the Utopian socialists from the League, to the extent that the latter's ideas influenced workers into either premature attacks on the system or unreflecting acquiescence to it. Although he stayed within the Rules of the League, his express purpose was to disseminate what he and Engels believed were the ideas of scientific communism. The tenacity with which they fought disruptive elements would bring charges of 'manipulation' from dissenting members (as happened later in the International, and as would happen to Lenin in his relationship with some sections of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party).

In the Communist Manifesto (January 1848) in the section 'Proletarians and Communists', directly after stating that the Communists "have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole,"² Marx and Engels go on to say:

² Selected Works, op.cit., p. 119.

The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.³

The situation was not very different with the International, established in 1864. The central organ of the International was what came to be known as the General Council, whose express purpose was the co-ordination of international action on behalf of the working class, and of which Marx was a member. Rule seven of the International did stipulate that local societies affiliated to the International would be co-ordinated by the central national organs thus suggesting a measure of local autonomy. However, this was offset by the provision that no independent local society could be prevented from directly corresponding with the General Council based in London. In their study of the International and its relationship to the British Labour movement, Collins and Abramsky note that "this rule, which gave the General Council considerable powers of intervening in the affairs of national sections, was later to prove invaluable to Marx in his life-and-death struggle with Bakunin."⁴

The fact that the officials of the General Council (general secretary, treasurer, corresponding secretaries for different countries) were elected, did not take away from the powers vested in the General Council.

³ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 120.

⁴ H. Collins and C. Abramsky, Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement, 1965, p. 24.

or its importance vis a vis the Congress and the Federal Councils in various countries. The famous first line of the Preamble for the Provisional Rules has often been quoted (by Rosa Luxemburg among others) as evidence of Marx's truly 'democratic' outlook (as opposed to Lenin's centralism): "The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves..."⁵

At the time that Marx spoke in this vein, the European section of the International was dominated by anarchists and petty bourgeois socialists and his comments were intended to mitigate their influence. Marx's writings, as we have seen, based themselves on the premise that it was the proletariat that would overthrow the bourgeoisie, a premise that Lenin whole heartedly agreed with. But both men were also aware that the working class at that juncture in history had neither the unity nor the conscious awareness of their historical mission, and both did not hesitate to offer leadership in that direction. The question of centralism then really boils down to the question of 'leadership' at a given time in the history of the working class movement. Marx drew attention to this in the Inaugural Address (written by him) when he said that in the conquest of political power the workers had one asset, their numbers, but "numbers weigh only in the balance if united by combination and led by knowledge."⁶

In actual fact the working class needed leadership from the Commu-

⁵ The General Council of the First International, 1864-1866, p. 288.

⁶ Ibid., p. 286.

nists; without it, they would come under the influence of trade unionism or petty bourgeois socialism. As Marx saw it these were real threats and he was to spend a considerable amount of his time and energy in combating these influences. He was not without diplomacy or a keen awareness of what could be accomplished at any given time. A study of the Inaugural Address is evidence of his readiness to compromise, should the occasion demand it. As he himself wrote to Engels:

It was very difficult to frame the thing so that our view should appear in a form acceptable from the present standpoint of the workers' movement... It will take time before the reawakened movement allows the old boldness of speech.⁷

He also went on to comment that the Inaugural Address was 'fortiter in re, suaviter in modo' (strong in substance, sweet in form).⁸

Although at Marx's insistence old members of the Communist League were co-opted onto the General Council, it was dominated by the English trade unionists and the Congress by French Proudhonists, Italian Mazzinists and within the next two years of the founding of the International, by Bakunin and his followers. Marx's struggle against these diverse elements, and his subsequent active role in expelling Bakunin from the International in 1873 deserves separate treatment and is beyond the scope of this work. In 1871 Marx would write that the history of the International was "a continual struggle of the General Council against the sects

⁷ Selected Correspondence, op.cit., pp. 139-140.

⁸ Ibid., p. 140.

and amateur experiments, which sought to assert themselves within the International against the real movement of the working class."⁹ If the First International represents the coming together of the English and European labour movement (France, Germany, Italy and Spain, a small section of the Russian movement, Poland, Switzerland) and the assertion of a militant working class programme, it was, in large part, owing to Marx's tireless efforts. Lenin would comment:

In uniting the labour movement of various countries, striving to channel into joint activity the various forms of non-proletarian, pre-Marxian socialism (Mazzini, Proudhon, Bakunin, liberal trade unionism in Britain, Lassalleian vacillations to the right in Germany, etc.), and in combating the theories of all these sects and schools, Marx hammered out a uniform tactic for the proletarian struggle of the working class in the various countries.¹⁰

Marx's writings from the period of the Communist Manifesto (1848) to his death in 1883 are liberally strewn with references to 'our party.' In Critique of the Gotha Programme (1875), years after the fall of the Paris Commune he would still be speaking of 'our Party.' The image of a benevolent, smiling Marx, who took a back seat in the current disputes of his day, or who mechanically responded to the labour movement is historically false. Critics and commentators have sought to maintain otherwise. Tom Bottomore, for instance, argues that Marx's main emphasis is "upon a spontaneous development of working class consciousness."¹¹

⁹ Ibid., p. 253.

¹⁰ V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 21, p. 49.

¹¹ Tom Bottomore, Introduction to Karl Marx, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1973, p. 30.

His argument rests on this premise:

Marx's theory of society, would, of course, influence working-class consciousness and enter in various ways into the political doctrines of the working-class; as a theory, however, its principal object was to reveal the nature of class relations in capitalist society, to analyze the economic and social tendencies in the development of capitalism, and to show the working class as an independent political force engaged in conflict with existing society.¹²

This approach sees Marx primarily as a theorist; it completely ignores Marx as a practising revolutionary. Seen from Marx's own standpoint it would be hard to describe him as anything less than a 'professional revolutionary.' In his personal life, he was refused citizenship in all the European countries, and at first also in England. He often travelled incognito. While the relatively liberal atmosphere of England allowed the meetings of the General Council to take place fairly openly, much of the important business was conducted secretly. This is not to say that Marx wished to develop a Blanquist style conspiratorial party; but neither did Lenin, as we saw in Chapter 3.

Marx made no serious attempts to explain the phenomenon of the necessity for a Communist leadership of the proletarian movement, other than invoking it in general as required by the current immaturity of the working class, and specifically owing to the nature of the repressive regimes that the working class had to live under. Lenin, as we saw in Chapter 3, attempted to give a more theoretical foundation to the

¹² ibid., pp. 31-32.

vanguard role of the Party in its relation to the working class.¹³

¹³ Lenin has been criticised for elitism and voluntarism (see Chapter 3. In Modern Revolutions John Dunn describes Lenin as an elitist and a voluntarist (though not in a pejorative sense). Dunn's position appears to be that revolutionary movements are the work of elitist groups; although this is not the only factor. For instance, he observes that the true meaning of Lenin's Imperialism is his perception that societies can no longer continue to progress economically, because they have been obstructed in the past and continue to be so blocked in the present.

In his analysis of the phenomena of revolution, Dunn is not a systematiser, deliberately so. He takes groups of phenomena, traces some causal connexions and avoids looking for one predominant cause. Dunn argues that although the word 'revolution' is borrowed from the natural sciences we should avoid analogies from the natural sciences and see revolutions as human events brought about by the intentions of human agents operating under certain material conditions, no single one of which is sufficient as a causal explanation and yet without which one cannot have a full explanation of the events. Although Dunn studies eight examples of modern revolutions (Russian, Chinese, Cuban, Yugoslavian, Vietnamese, Algerian, Turkish and Mexican) his account of the Marxian theory of revolution is sporadic. It founders on his inability to make up his mind as to whether Marx is a determinist or a voluntarist or both at the same time. His difficulty, of course, stems from an artificial separating out of the two dimensions of revolution, the social and the political. Consequently, although Dunn observes that Marx does not fit into a positivist interpretation (revolution on a natural science model) he continues to refer to the serenely deterministic quality of the classical Marxian model of revolution.