

International Socialist Forum

No. 4, May/June 1999



In this issue: Kosova, Iran, Paris May/June 68; Socialism, democracy and organisation; Lessons from Japan; The myth of Lenin's "Concept of the Party"; What is this thing ideology?; Marx and Positivism; Debate on the way forward

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Front cover: engraving of Adam and Eve by the 19th century British socialist William Morris

Introduction

The material in this fourth issue of International Socialist Forum needs little introduction – it is strong enough to speak for itself.

In the first section on Events, Bob Myers writes about the war unfolding in Europe – a subject on which we welcome correspondence and debate in future issues. Yassamine Mather explains the fast-changing situation in Iran. Roger Smith reflects on the lessons of Europe's largest-scale revolution.

The second section continues the discussion started by the Minimum Platform document published in ISF No.1.

The third section on theory includes articles by David Hookes and Cyril Smith that began life as contributions at our meetings in London, a review by Jim Smith inspired by recent discussions between ISF and the Alliance for Workers Liberty, and a most welcome contribution sent from Russia by Mikhail Voyekov and from Sweden by Mehdi Keshmiri. The article by Hal Draper is a reprint, justified "by popular demand".

Some final points. The first is that we need your active participation in our discussion. If you are in London, come to our meetings, usually in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square (nearest tube Holborn) on the first Sunday of the month at 2.0 pm, preceded by an organising meeting at 12 midday. Phone Jim Smith on 0181 690 2723 to check details.

If you can not make meetings, please send us material for publication in the journal if you have something to say relevant to discussion. Also please visit our web site (www.isf.org.uk). There is plenty of capacity on the site and we are happy to share it with other organisations whose purposes are similar to our own.

Finally (you have guessed) we need money to keep the journal and the web site going. Donations are welcome. Subscriptions are £12 for four issues and if you can add anything to that it will go to publication and electronic media expenses.

The address for correspondence and donations is ISF, BM Box 2699, London WC1N 3XX.

Nato cannot and never will stop fascism in Kosova or anywhere else: act now to support the appeal from Kosova to break the blockade

by Bob Myers, Workers Aid

I have written this article about the war in Kosova and Serbia at very short notice. A lot of what needs thinking about can only be acknowledged here – above all about the crisis of social control confronting capital with the break-up of the Stalinist empire, as a component part of the structural crisis of the capital system, and the inability of the capitalist class to adequately replace its method of social control with any new, stable form of rule.

The day before I wrote this article we received information from friends in the Kosova mining town of Mitrovica that paramilitaries were rounding up trade union and community activists. Some had been executed. Miners' leaders and their families are missing – gone into hiding or dead? We have a leading member of the Pristina Students union, who has been on a speaking tour round UK universities, now unable to get home. The President of the Education Union who was on a Workers Aid speaking tour in Spain is also unable to return to his wife and children in Pristina, where fascists are going from house to house rounding up people. Here in the UK, Workers Aid members are ringing up asking "What are we going to do? We must do something."

I walked past the SWP paper sellers yesterday. They were shouting out "Welfare not warfare, stop the bombing". But what about the Albanian working class: what about their "welfare"? The question that has to be answered, or begun to be answered, is the question on the lips of the Kosova Albanians and all those people around the world who sympathise with their plight: "how is the nightmare of ethnic persecution going to be stopped?". For most of these people there is no apparent alternative to NATO however much they criticise its delays and prevarication.

Much of the "left" is shouting "No to NATO bombing" but by and large they have said nothing about genocide in Bosnia or the ten year persecution of Albanians in Kosova. "No" to this, "no" to that but not a word about what to do or only a few meaningless abstract phrases like "Albanian and Serb workers unite".

The war refuses to fit into all the dogmatic recipes of the "left" and the implications of this rapidly developing explosion escape all those who try to fit it into the old categories. Who is closer to real concern for the future of humanity – the "Marxist" who shouts "No to NATO bombing" and leaves it at that, or the

person who, with all kinds of doubts, supports bombing because they can see no other way to stop the ethnic cleansing?

What does it say about the "left" when people like Tony Benn and many others present an opposition to NATO actions with exactly the same arguments as Russian ultra-nationalists and fascists? What does it say about their "socialism" when within it there is still a residue of support for the "socialist Yugoslavia" that is organising the massacre of working class activists in Kosova.

The war in Kosova did not start with NATO bombings. It started in 1989 when Yugoslav (effectively Serbian) tanks rolled into Kosova and crushed all democratic institutions and began a policy of ethnic cleansing – at first mainly through economic and cultural pressure with sporadic violence and then from the end of 1997 with the burning and clearing of towns and villages. This was the end of Yugoslavia – a federation of different nationalities.

All of this took place with virtually no response from any of the so called representatives of the working class movement outside of Kosova. This shameful silence was, and remains, total subservience to imperialism and is the main block on any independent working class support for the people of Kosova.

Even today, as the fascists gangs go from house to house, there is hardly a sound from the leaders of working class organisations. In many countries the first demonstrations to be held concerning Kosova will be in opposition to NATO bombing of Serbia, not to the plight of an oppressed people. The Kosova Albanians have the right to call for NATO actions.

As the military onslaught advanced throughout last year who else could they possibly see as a force capable of ending their torment other than NATO/UN? The working class? Ten years ago the Kosova miners staged underground hunger strikes to try to warn the Yugoslav working class and the world that the rise of Serb nationalism would destroy Yugoslavia. Who responded to their actions? They received only one message of support from the entire world – from the Durham miners. For ten years their hell has grown worse. Who came to see them? Union leaders? Socialists? No, only the envoys of imperialism who for their own reasons of intrigue courted the Albanians.

The Albanians ask for NATO action because they see no other force capable of stopping their genocide and they are right. At this moment there is no other force capable of stopping it. There is no working class organisation ready and able to defend them. Albanian cynicism and anger at the UN/NATO has grown over the years. They watched Bosnia, they heard the endless final warnings to Milosevic, they saw the refusal of the "great powers" to support their right of self determination, but in a hope born of desperation they appealed to the western powers to save them. Many of them understand NATO colonial plans but they prefer to deal with that problem in the future rather than be dead now. Where else should they have turned?

So the Kosova Albanians are caught in a terrible dilemma. They need an ally and the only one they can see is NATO while the bitter truth is that NATO not only has no intention of defending them, it is collaborating in the attack on them. So this desperate people, overwhelmingly working class, impoverished and unemployed are left isolated and defenceless as the NATO jets scream overhead, pursuing their own agenda, and on the ground in Kosova the fascists continue their butchery.

Instead of getting so agitated about NATO bombing and condemning it without any alternative to stop genocide, socialists, working class organisers and democrats need to answer the question, in thought and action, "how will we stop the rise of fascism", and only in doing that can it usefully be said to the Albanians and their sympathisers worldwide that "NATO cannot and never will do the job".

What is NATO's policy? Following the collapse of the Soviet empire the capitalists have not been able to establish their "new world order" which was supposed to replace it. Stalinism was a necessary part of the global repression of the working class and cannot easily be replaced. Their great difficulty is capitalism's natural (preferred) form of control over the working class – economic and ideological – is difficult to establish when it simultaneously becomes impossible to stop the collapse of vast areas of human productive activity and millions starve.

The wars in Yugoslavia are not the result of ancient ethnic feuds. The outer form is ethnic in appearance, but the inner content is entirely modern. Social tensions explode along old ethnic fault lines but these are not the cause. The barbarity of Milosevic's ethnic cleansing is not so much a testimony to old hatreds but more a signal of the strength of Yugoslav working class and intellectual opposition to his nationalism however confused and lacking a coherent perspective that opposition is.

The violence in Kosova cannot be understood by tracing old ethnic feuds except in the present context of the restoration of the rule of a capitalist class being pursued equally by the Serbian regime and NATO.

Western powers have tacitly supported Milosevic throughout his recent years. They supported his attempt to illegally seize control of the Federal Parliament of Yugoslavia. They gave the green light for the invasion of Slovenia. They intervened in the Croatia war only when it looked like the Croatian army would destroy the Serbian nationalists. They stood by for three years in Bosnia and again only intervened when resistance to ethnic division proved to strong for both the Croatian and Serbian nationalists and threatened to turn the tables. And throughout the whole period they have refused to condemn the illegal annexation of Kosova.

Tony Blair claims that the NATO bombs are seeking a "just peace". Only a week before, the foreign secretary, Robin Cook, held a gun at the Albanians' heads at the peace talks and let it be understood that if they did not renounce their claim to self determination, the great powers would allow the massacres to continue.

The Western imperialist leaders have backed Milosevic as the strongman they needed to control the territory of former Yugoslavia. They have supported ethnic cleansing as a battering ram against the working class and many of the key players in the diplomatic game have direct financial links to enterprises in former Yugoslavia. The Albanians are paying a heavy price today for the failure of the international working class to come to their side. Forced into reliance on NATO their leaders are now being slaughtered in an entirely predictable manner that suits Milosevic and NATO.

NATO's present actions have nothing to do with "humanitarian or just peace" solutions. From 1989 to 1997 the west gave the Kosova leadership plenty of reasons to believe that they supported their aim of independence. The west urged the Kosova leadership to continue to pursue "passive resistance" as the best way to win. Indeed from 1992 to 1996 the west were particularly keen to maintain a passive Kosova; they knew Milosevic had more than he could deal with in Bosnia. Throughout this period ethnic cleansing continued in Kosova. Tens of thousands of people were driven out through economic pressure and arbitrary violence. There was no UN/NATO action then.

Then in 1997 the patience of the younger generation of Albanians ran out. The students took to the streets again as they had in 1989. At the same time NATO leaders made absolutely clear to Milosevic that they would not tolerate Kosova independence. This was the green light for Milosevic to begin burning town after town and cleansing huge areas of Kosova. NATO's present actions have nothing to do with massacres, humanitarian crisis or democracy. As in Bosnia they have taken the present action because they fear things are getting out of Milosevic's control.

When the Serb army went attacked in 1997 the Albanians dropped their passive resistance and embraced the UCK (KLA) which up till that time had

been a small group of exiles. The Albanian resistance and the orgy of ethnic cleansing is creating a potential explosion amongst Albanians across the Balkans. Imperialism had to rely upon Milosevic and ethnic cleansing to break up a unified pan-Yugoslav mass movement, seeking to take matters into their own hands in the aftermath of the collapse of Stalinism – but the forces behind ethnic cleansing have an uncontrollable logic of their own and cannot simply be switched on or off at NATO's bidding.

The stability of Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Greece and Turkey are now in question. Even more than it did in Bosnia, ethnic cleansing in Kosova threatens to create a general war across the Balkans as more than a million refugees are now certain to be pushed out of Kosova.

To some people this symbiotic relationship between NATO and Milosevic is incomprehensible. To both support and attack? But isn't this the same as in Iraq? So, as in Bosnia, rather than responding to western public outcry over ethnic cleansing, NATO is using it as a cover for advancing its own plans for control over the whole region just as they did in Bosnia. When Milosevic and Tudjman had reduced Bosnia to rubble, but couldn't finish the job, NATO went in.

However, in talking of NATO's "plan", it must be understood that the plan is riddled with unanswered questions and unsolvable problems for capitalism. Do not give them too much credit in the foresight department. They play the game day by day, hour by hour, feeling their way. They need a strong ruler in the Balkans but this produces resistance which cannot be dealt with except by open NATO intervention, but how many countries can NATO end up governing?

Bosnia is now a colony. Three weeks ago the "governor", the contact group high representative Carl Westendorp, sacked the President of the Srpska Republic because he would not comply with NATO wishes. This has attracted little attention, because the President was a "bad" guy. The point is that Bosnia is controlled and run by about 50,000 western administrators – not a very economic solution and not a very stable one. Capitalism needs to create functioning local administrations but cannot do so. The tensions between the aspirations of the Yugoslav people and the needs of capital are on collision course and the greatest fear in the west is the social explosion this is creating across the region and above all inside Serbia itself.

The UN bombing in Bosnia was purely cosmetic. No significant targets were ever hit. It remains to be seen what will happen in Serbia. It is now clear that before the Dayton agreement, secret agreements were made between the US, Tudjman and Milosevic. It may well be that the same has been done now. Milosevic may take half of Kosova – above all the mineral wealth of Trepca – and then a new peace conference will accept this "fait accompli" and the west will oversee an Albanian ghetto in the South. Or there may be some

other scenario. But nothing can alter the fact that NATO and Milosevic have the same military objective in relation to Kosova – to stop the struggle for independence.

There is no doubt that in the future the NATO guns will be turned against the UCK (KLA). This is why the entirely predictable massacre of activists going on a present suits NATO just as NATO and Milosevic's aims converge on silencing and atomising the Serbian working class. While the bombs falling on Belgrade do absolutely nothing to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosova they certainly help the nationalists and fascists in Serbia silence and break up any working class opposition.

In the midst of this carnage, how to find a way to begin to mobilise the working class? In Workers Aid we have been through this situation in Bosnia several times, where utter barbarity produces a desperate situation, in which people want to do something, now, to stop it. For example after Srebrenica. The truth is: we cannot. But what we must do is stick to our guns; we must not abandon our campaign for internationalism and working class solidarity which we have been developing in collaboration with some sections of Kosova society since 1996.

Talks between Kosova representatives and Workers Aid in March resulted in the appeal (see below) for action from Kosova trade unions and student union. This appeal has even more significance now. While the butchery is going on inside Kosova its external borders remain blocked by Serbian troops who sit on one side of the fence while tens of thousands of NATO troops sit on the other. What an image of collaboration, what a powerful confirmation of why Europe can have no confidence in NATO to stop fascism.

The appeal to the working class to open up a corridor into Kosova is an appeal to the working class to act independently of NATO and the imperialists and it is around this appeal and other such initiatives that we must mobilise.

Letter: to the people of Europe, particularly to Trade Unions and Associations, Student Unions, Democratic Rights Organisations and Humanitarian Organisations.

Dear Friends,

The people of Kosova desperately need your help. Ethnic cleansing has driven hundreds of thousands of Albanian Kosova citizens from their homes.

This violence and injustice has been growing since 1989 when Serbian troops occupied Kosova, which had the right of veto at the federal level, illegally crushed its parliament, constitution and all legitimate

institutions, closed its schools, colleges and hospitals to all Albanians and sacked Albanian workers from their jobs.

We appeal to the people of Europe to defend us from this fascist violence. Please, come to Kosova with humanitarian aid, come to show your solidarity, come to see for yourself what is happening. We need you by our side or the Serbian regime's genocide is going to continue until they get their "ethnically pure state".

But if you want to reach us you will have to confront an obstacle – the Serbian regime will not grant visas to anyone who they think will tell the truth of what they have seen in Kosova and campaign for solidarity. There is a blockade around Kosova which isolates the suffering people from the outside world. We need you to break this blockade. We need a humanitarian corridor reaching from the outside world right into Kosova. Let the fleeing victims of ethnic cleansing escape their torturers! Let food, medicine, educational supplies, and everything else needed for a human life, reach the communities who are resisting ethnic cleansing. Let Kosova live!

Therefore if you are to reach us you will need to organise yourselves to be strong enough to demand from the Serbian regime the right to travel to Kosova. We ask everyone who hears this appeal to unite to organise a "convoy of aid and solidarity".

Your action will signal that the people of Europe will not sit back and allow ethnic cleansing and will not allow politicians to make the promise "No more Bosnias" become empty words.

Your action will give hope and strength to all the people in Kosova who want to establish a just and democratic society in which everyone can live and work in peace.

Please contact us today, this minute. Our future is in your hands.

Agim Hyseni, on behalf of SBASHK - The Union of Education, Science and Culture of Kosova.

Ardian Kastrati, Students Independent Union of University of Pristina

Nediha Grapci, Humanitarian Association of Kosova
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Xhafer Nuli, the Independent Union of Miners of Stari Terg - Kosova

25 March 1999

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Political crisis in Iran

by Yassamine Mather

In the last few weeks, demonstrators in Iran have shouted a slogan which is a variation on one used during the demonstrations prior to the February uprising in 1979: The slogan, which rhymes in Farsi, is *Taleban Taleban haya kon, Iran ra raha Kon*, which means *Taleban, Taleban have shame; leave Iran alone*. Taleban is reference to the more conservative faction of the Islamic regime.

Four and a half months after the murder of Dariush and Parvaneh Forouhar by what was clearly an Islamic murder squad, three months after the admission by the ministry of information that officers and employees of the ministry were responsible for these and may be other murders, it is still not clear who has been arrested, who gave the order for these murders, which faction of the regime thought it would benefit from this

...

A catalogue of mishaps

A review of the events of the last few months looks more like a list of unbelievable mishaps for the Iran's Islamic Regime. (This list, except for the last two items, is from information compiled by Iran Human Rights Working Group):

November 22: Dariush Forouhar and Parvaneh Eskandari-Forouhar, the leaders of the nationalist Iran Nation Party, were found stabbed to death in their house in Tehran.

November 25: The body of Majid Sharif, a writer who had been critical of the Islamic Republic, was found after he had been reported missing since November 22. The coroner's office claimed he had died of a heart attack.

December 9: The bodies of two other writers who were actively seeking to revive the Writers Association in Iran, Mohammad Mokhtari and Mohammad Ja'afar Pouyandeh, were found in the streets of Tehran. Mokhtari had been reported missing since December 4. Both bodies bore strangulation marks and in Mokhtari's case the coroners' office announced the official cause of death as strangulation. Mokhtari was among a group of six writers who were questioned by an Islamic revolutionary court in October and warned against reviving the banned Writers Association.

Two other dissidents, Pirouz Davani and Rostam Hamedani have been reported missing. Davani, a writer/activist who led the group United Left, disappeared after publishing a bulletin criticizing the IRI. He has been missing since last August, and is

feared to be dead. Last November, 88 political figures in Iran petitioned President Khatami to order an investigation of Davani's disappearance. Hamedani, a political activist and an ally of Davani, was reported missing by the newspaper Iran in its December 13 issue.

On January 5, under intense pressure from the public and the press, the Information Ministry announced that the murders were carried out by several of its own agents "acting on their own" or as agents of foreign powers. The number of agents arrested was put at ten. On January 20, Mohammad Niazi, a prosecutor of the Tehran military tribunal, announced that the arrested agents would be tried publicly. As of this date, however, IRI officials have neither made public the identities nor the positions of those arrested. On February 14, it was announced that "more" arrests had been made, but no specific details were given. On February 22 Niazi said that four more suspects were arrested, but again no details were provided.

On February 9, Qorbanali Dorri-Najafabadi, the Minister of Intelligence who for weeks had resisted calls for his resignation, finally agreed to step down from his post. He was replaced a few days later by Ali Yunesi, a cleric who was formerly head of the Tehran Revolutionary Court.

January 23: Some of the people who had taken part in a rally commemorating of the 40th day since the deaths of Mohammad Mokhtari and Mohammad Pouyandeh, were beaten up by the police. Among them were the relatives of the writers.

January 24: According to the Staff Secretary of the Restoration of Enjoin the Good and Forbid the Evil, a prison project for Mashhad will eliminate emotional and behavioural problems of the prisoners. In this project "the prisoners will be subject to ideological remedies to cure their psychological and behavioural abnormalities".

January 25: A sound bomb was thrown at the offices of the Khordad daily newspaper, injuring two staff members. One staff member said that an unknown caller had threatened to bomb the daily again with a "real bomb". The newspaper had been launched on December 3 by Abdollah Nouri, the former Minister of the Interior who was impeached by the Majlis.

January 31: Deputy Minister for the Press, Ahmad Borghani, resigned from his post. In his farewell speech he criticised the campaign against the freedom of expression, saying that "young trees have shot up,

but there are apparently people who are determined to cut them off at the roots". During his tenure the number of publications doubled reaching 1,300, and the circulation rate of the country's press increased to 2.3 million copies per day.

February 11: Hadi Khamenei, brother of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, was attacked and beaten up in the Mohammadiéh mosque in Qom as he was preparing to give a speech. It is believed that he was beaten by religious hardliners. Rasul Montajabnia, a close associate of Hadi Khamenei, was also beaten up. A week later, it was announced that 45 people were arrested in connection with the attack.

On February 18, there were reports of unrest in the town of Jajarm, in Northeastern Iran. A number of public buildings and banks were apparently sacked. The unrest followed a decision by the ministry of interior to amalgamate Jajarm with a smaller town, Garmeh, to form a single municipal council for the upcoming local elections.

January 23: the daily newspaper Zan, run by Faezeh Hashemi, the daughter of ex-president Rafsanjani, was ordered closed from January 24 to February 7 by a Tehran court. The charge was defaming the police security chief, General Mohammad Naghdi. The daily had accused him of participating in an attack on former vice president Abdollah Nouri and Minister of Culture Mohajerani. Zan was exonerated of the above charges, but it was found guilty of printing a reader's letter in which she had defamed the investigators into the recent killings by asking "Why has Mr. Khatami sent the wolf after the ewe." The court also sentenced Hashemi to a fine of \$500.

March 10: Mohammad Reza Naqdi and 10 members of his staff are to stand trial this May on charges of torturing Tehran city officials arrested last year on corruption charges. The court will hear charges of mistreatment filed against the suspects by a number of officials who were detained in connection with a corruption scandal in the Tehran city government. The allegations of torture, raised during the trial of the capital's former moderate mayor Gholamhossein Karbaschi, were only shocking in that for the first time a faction of the regime admitted that torture was used by the military police.

April 6: The paper Zan is closed down.

Although it is not unusual for dictatorships to use death squads in order to silence their opponents, the admission of such tactics is surprising, even by the standards of the Islamic regime. However this admission, the arrest of officers, albeit junior ones, from the intelligence police, all point to a crisis at the highest levels of the Islamic regime. The admission regarding what the government called "rogue elements" within the ministry of intelligence was not voluntary; it was made because there were so many leaks from inside the regime both to opponents abroad

and to newspapers in Iran that the story couldn't be kept quiet any more.

What we have seen is a compromise between the two factions of the regime to find the least damaging way of trying to come out of a terrible mess. The dilemma for Khatami and his supporters is that civil society marks the end of political Islam. Whatever happens to the Iranian regime, fundamentalism has come to the end of the road. Maybe Islamic leaders will live to regret slogans promising economic prosperity for the poor and the Iran-Iraq war. Both event mark the disillusionment of the majority of the population with religious government.

Poverty, cynicism about religious state and high birth rates encouraged during the war have all brought major socio-political changes in Iranian society. Irangate tarnished the image of a pure Islamic leadership fighting the "evil US". The rampant corruption of the post-war years, when corruption under president Rafsanjani allowed a few officials to accumulate huge fortunes at the expense of the "dispossessed", left the gap between the rich and poor wider than ever before in Iran.

The problem for the Iranian clergy is that the majority of the population remember the idealist egalitarian slogans of the war years, while the leadership has moved on to become the new elite. Today 75 per cent of the population is below 25, with high rates of literacy, high levels of unemployment, and a worsening economic crisis. This is inevitably challenging the very essence of an Islamic Republic. The election of June 1997 (heralded by some in Iran as the Khordad revolution, Khordad is the name of the month) should be seen primarily as a vote against Nategh Nouri, the candidate of the clergy and the Vali Faghih Khamenei, rather than a vote for Khatami. Of 284 Islamic candidates, 4 were allowed to be nominated; the least fundamentalist of these candidates was Khatami.

Who is Iran's new president?

Khatami's principle advantage compared to previous Islamic leaders is his realisation that old ideas and methods will not work that in order to survive the Islamic regime has to reform itself. Of course he has other advantages, e.g. he can do joined-up writing, unlike previous leaders of the Islamic regime who were notorious for their lack of any form of education apart from memorising the Koran. Khatami is from a clerical family and received traditional clerical training at the seminary in Qom. Just before the Islamic revolution of 1979 he was picked to run the Iranian-sponsored Islamic Center in Hamburg, where he had his first direct contact with the West and learned some German. Until 1992, when he was sent into internal political wilderness, he held ministerial positions in the Islamic Republic for ten years as minister of culture. During most of this period, which coincided with the consolidation of the new regime, Khatami went along

with repressive policies: books were systematically censored and some book publishers had their licenses revoked. Khatami reinstated annual awards for the best books, and established a press arbitration council to deal with complaints against the journals. In 1992, the more fundamentalist faction in the parliament forced Khatami out of the cultural ministry, claiming his policies towards books, film, and the press were too liberal.

Khatami spent the next five years as head of the National Library. During this time he wrote two books in Persian, both collections of essays originally delivered as lectures to university students. The first, *Fear of the Wave*, consists of essays on Shi'ite Islamic reformist thinkers-men whom Khatami admires for attempting to reinterpret Islam in ways that address problems of the modern world. The second, *From the World of the City to the City of the World*, is a long essay on Western political thought from Plato and Aristotle to Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. It concludes with an account of the age of liberalism which, in Khatami's telling, these political philosophers made possible. He is drawn to Western political philosophy, fascinated by St Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, Machiavelli and Hobbes, Voltaire and Locke. These men have provided Western civilization with the kind of political ideas that he believes are lacking in Islamic thought. Khatami finds in Locke the strongest expression of political thought in the West in the modern era – but it isn't clear how Khatami reconciles this with fundamental pillars of the Islamic order in Iran, the notion of Velayat Faghih (Guardian of people) who can over rule every one and remains the sole ultimate power. Locke is the advocate of limited, constitutional government based on the consent of the governed, who must be granted individual rights. Locke is a tolerant religious man but believes in the separation of Church and State, and the primacy of government over religion however Khatami prides himself in supporting an Islamic Republic and has never called for the separation of state and religion. It is said that Khatami is also greatly influenced by Harold Laski's *The Rise of European Liberalism*, and indeed Khatami quotes Laski extensively.

Who are Khatami's constituents? His supporters include (1) the Students of the Imam's Line (the group that organised the siege of the US embassy in Tehran during the 1979 revolution), still for state intervention in economy although Khatami is for privatisations, previously pro-Moscow; (2) the Association of Combatant Clerics, for state intervention in economics; (3) the intellectual Islamic movement – Soroush, Nouri, Mohajerani and Muslim technocrats such as the ex-mayor of Tehran; (4) supporters of Montazeri who is under house arrest, part of the seminary religious school in Ghom; (5) Newspapers, publishers who have benefited from the relative freedoms of the last 2 years; (6) the new student movement – although it, like group (5), covers a rainbow of different opinions and some of them did distance themselves from Khatami in late autumn.

Both factions of the Iranian regime have collaborated in the repressive policies of the last few months, however supporters of both factions have not obeyed their leaders, and it is indeed their arguments that have exposed the truth and cornered leaders of both factions.

What is the logic behind the recent wave of repression?

The severe economic crisis and the sharp drop in the price of oil mean that many workers haven't been paid for more than six months, over 4000 small manufacturing plant are closing down. The government admits to 800,000 unemployed school leavers and it is the fear of these struggles that prompts the regime to suppression.

As early as September 1998, Safavi the head of the Islamic guards warns dissidents: these pens must be broken, tongues must be cut off, some people must be beheaded. On September 15, Ayatollah Khamenei, calls on authorities to punish those publications that "abuse freedom". The next day, the paper *Tous* was closed down the editor, the publishing manager, a leading columnist, and a journalist are arrested as enemies of god. A few days later, the press supervisory board of the newspaper *Tous* is accused of insulting Khomeini. Soon after the repression worsens. Political murders are the regime's answer to political unrest, to create an atmosphere of terror and fear.

The alliance of the Fedayin majority (that section of the Fedayin that swung behind Khomeini in 1980), the Tudeh (former pro-Moscow Communist Party) and the Republicans (an array of groups from ex-constitutional monarchists to supporters of former prime minister Bakhtiar) has found its hero – yet Khatami's promised freedom is always "freedom with limitations." Khatami refers to "legal opposition", those who can be tolerated in the Islamic order. So far the legal opposition is limited to various factions of the Islamic Republic. Workers' protests over closures, redundancy, unpaid salaries are attacked by the military forces. According to one writer: "Even if one assumes that Khatami's faction were not involved in recent killings, all evidence indicate that Iranian dissidents have become the sacrificial lambs of the fights among different factions of the Islamic government, and those clerics who warned earlier to break arms and to behead have done what they wanted to do. As the president of the Islamic Republic, Khatami is implicated in what is going on in Iran, under the aegis of a system he pledges to rescue. I want to underline that the latest killings of opposition intellectuals are not an isolated and aberrant 'incidents.' They are social events that become meaningful in relation with the structure of the Islamic Republic, as such the entire system of the IRI must be put on trial. Khatami's opponents are acting within the confines of the very system that make his socio-political presence legitimate, a system built on repression and terror. Khatami's attempt to bring

'order' to that system is too little, too late." (Hamed Shahidian, December 1998).

The most obvious suspects in these crimes have gone unchecked so far: members of the Special Operations Committee, including Khamenei and former president Hashemi Rafsanjani, Head of the Islamic Judiciary Mohammad Yazdi, Speaker of the Islamic Majlis Nateq Nouri, generals Mohsen Reza'i and Yahya Rahim-Safavi, the former and present commanders of the revolutionary guards. Khatami and Khamenei have this week both complimented the ministry of intelligence for its findings, probably after a compromise at the top – yet there is a great difference in the approach of the two factions: pro-Khatami papers called for, and finally got, the resignation of the minister in charge of intelligence; Khamenei is looking for foreign agents (including foreign radio stations) who have infiltrated the ministry of Intelligence! According to him the "enemies" of Islam kill these people to tarnish the reputation of the Islamic Republic. Who are the "enemies"? The Leader never specifies.

The left

This article will not discuss those sections of the Iranian left known as *estehalegar* (who see Khatami as saviour, want a smooth transfer of power ...). These are the very same groups who defended Khomeini: the Tudeh party, Fedayin majority, etc. As always, they seek minor reforms of the existing system, they have given up socialist aspirations and consider "bourgeois democracy" the ideal system in Iran.

In what is known as the radical left in Iran there is currently a debate on how to deal with recent developments. Some propose that the Left should direct its main attacks on the Khamenei faction, without supporting the so called reformists. Others, wrongly in my opinion, believe that "as reforms delay revolutions" the slogan of the day should be "death to Khatami". The latter position is generally linked to a mistrust of the revolutionary movement in Iran (developing independently of Khatami, such as the movements we see in factories, in universities); a strong prejudice amongst many that if we (i.e. the left in exile) are not the vanguard of the movement, it can't be revolutionary. Sections of the left are looking for "Marxist" slogans while a movement can be revolutionary without reciting Marxist terminology. New terms (jargon) is used daily in Iran – for example "mardom Salari" ("people's power"). For political exiles who have been away for 14-18 years, even the language of some of the contemporary debate in Iran is alien.

Others in the Iranian Left have always denied that workers' struggle are at times started by Islamic councils or what is left of them – while the admission of such facts would not reduce the importance of a workers' strike. It is also true that some on the left are worried by debates on democracy inside Iran as it will show up their own limitations. Those who only support democracy as long as it is within the accepted framework of their ideology get into a tangle when people compare their position with that of Khatami. Some in the Iranian left revel in the idea of "clandestine politics" and actually favour dictatorships as it justifies their internal and external shortcomings regarding political freedoms. After all you can't hold a congress under severe repression; you can use the excuse of repression to stifle debate ...

Others have maintained that the whole debate of the factions is a plot to deceive the people. There are also the workerist arguments, e.g. "why should we support the Writers Association or writers" (!), forgetting that it can act as a catalyst, as indeed it did prior to the uprising in 1979. In addition the Iranian left has little understanding of the use of tactics – and the problem is compounded by a fear that use of tactics is compromise or treachery. A complete distrust and indeed childish behaviour towards alliances has damaged the Iranian left in the last few years, while all sorts of co-operation can and should happen against dictatorships. This is different from supporting Khomeini when he was in power, yet the left in Iran now has a phobia about any co-operation. Many organisations of the left seek 100% agreements before acting together. Others expect loyalty in existing alliances, while parallel alliances and joint actions are in fact healthy and should be encouraged.

What about the future?

The admission by the ministry for interior signalled the compromise of the two factions ... however the protests and strikes continues and neither Khatami nor Khamenei are capable of controlling clerics and civilians in their factions. The fight for democracy, the struggles of workers, state employees who haven't been paid for over 6 months against privatisation ... have only just began. The student movement is openly comparing Islamic dictatorship (*Velayat Faghih*) with the rule of the Shah. The promises of the Iranian president for "civil society" and Islamic tolerance seem already too little too late.

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May-June 68

by Roger Smith

In May 1968 I went to Paris for the Black Dwarf, a new radical paper of the left; its first publication coincided with what were known as "les événements" [the events] in France. It was a polite, fearful name for a revolution in progress. I went there for the Dwarf to report on it first hand.

When I returned to London in June it was clear that the revolution was at an end. A deal had been struck by the Communist Party and De Gaulle and the General Strike was over. The heady euphoria of possibility fizzled out.

The Revolution had been betrayed. The French Communist Party had played a counter revolutionary role.

As a relative novice to this kind of politics I came back determined to find answers to this betrayal. Eventually I joined the Socialist Labour League in November and accepted, among other things, their thesis on France.

Briefly it was that, contrary to revisionist belief, revolution was on the agenda for the metropolitan capitalist countries, that the major obstacle to this was Stalinism and reformism, and that the task in Britain was to build the revolutionary party to lead the working class to power when our turn came.

And that was it really. May June was never really considered outside of that. The fact that the revolution-that-nearly-happened took place in an advanced capitalist country for the first time, and showed features that had never really been seen before, wasn't considered to be of any importance. We went back of course to the old model of Russia 1917, the successful revolution, led by a Bolshevik party.

But the truth is May-June didn't fit that model. Neither did the Transitional Programme written by Trotsky in 1938 have much of an echo in the demands that I saw scrawled on the walls of Paris. Slogans like "Underneath the paving stones, the beach", "Be a realist, demand the impossible", "I take my desires for reality, because I believe in the reality of my desires", "Run forward Comrade, the old world is behind you", or "Ten days of happiness already".

It took me thirty years to think about France again, which says something about the training you got in the Socialist Labour League and its successor, the Workers Revolutionary Party. Mind you, there wasn't much room in my time in the Party for notions like "happiness" and "desire"; we all discovered later that

these were the sole prerogative of the leader, G. Healy. The "impossible", however, we knew only too much about – the vain, back-breaking attempt to maintain the facade of a Daily Paper.

But that wasn't what the young students had in mind when they scrawled their visions for a liberated and human future for mankind. They were reaching out for a vision of communism.

But these demands were ignored, or dismissed as anarchist waffle, or at best romantic illusions. And I think the SLL/WRP wasn't alone in that kind of dismissal. Most of the Trotskyist groups shared the same analysis.

But what were these demands trying to tell us? Where did they come from? Did they express in any way the real contradictions of modern capitalist society? Were they simply an aberration?

I remember my first impressions of Paris then, walking along the Boulevard St Michel, the air heavy with the



"We must prevent the worm of power from devouring the fruit and destroying the garden" (poster, Paris, May 68)

sweet smell of CS gas. It had been used by the police for the very first time. It seemed to hang from the elm trees. Paradoxically it was the very smell of revolution itself.

The streets were crowded, teeming, and there was a wonderful feeling of carnival, of belonging, of the excitement of childhood, of wondering what was going to happen. You felt as if you were entering a whole new era. The future was staring you in the face and it was totally liberating and totally human. You were part of a whole. And it was like poetry.

The early major battles between students and police had been fought out. The Sorbonne was now re-occupied by the students and one by one the mood began to spread throughout the factories.

First Sud Aviation, near Nantes: a few dozen workers left their machines and, within hours, two thousand workers had occupied the plant. The students at the Sorbonne were delirious. Then Renault Flins followed, Renault Billancourt. The movement spread like wild fire – factory occupation after occupation, red flags flying at the gates, “Occupe”. The whole of industry, transport, services.

I remember going to a railway depot that was occupied. I was proudly shown round the works by a representative of the occupation committee. He was a train driver, so eager to talk about his life, his work, his gripes. We climbed up into the drivers’ compartment of one of the enormous SNCF engines and my guide explained how management had done away with co-drivers. “You do the journey on your own. And in case you fall asleep they introduced this automatic brake” – a wachma, he called it. “You have to squeeze it every few seconds, otherwise the train will automatically stop. They figured that would keep you awake. But believe me you learn to sleep and squeeze the brake in your sleep. It’s inhuman, this system. They want you to work twice as hard for the same money.”

And then I saw a man in a suit apparently under escort being led from his office to the lavatory. He was being marched at a fair lick by a couple of young workers in overalls. My driver from the occupation committee explained with a smile. “That’s our depot manager. He was against the occupation so we got him under lock and key. He has his three meals a day but otherwise he’s our prisoner.”

Throughout France workers had their management under factory arrest.

I remember one night at the Sorbonne. Outside, a pitched battle between the CRS and students and now young workers. The students had thrown up huge barricades. Inside, the old Alma Mater of learning had been transformed into an improvised hospital, where

the wounded were patched up by young medical students who had transformed themselves into qualified doctors.

I am delegated to be a guard. “You look tough enough. You can be security.” And a red band is tied round my arm and that’s what I am. CS gas is deadly. You need oxygen to recover and it’s in short supply. At about 1 a.m., to tremendous cheers, a team of firemen drove into the courtyard and dished out their cylinders of oxygen. Vive l’Occupation!

These are just memories that drift back over the years, but I can recall the atmosphere, the daring, the imagination. But above all was the confidence of the shared voices of those who’d had enough, enough of authority, enough of being ripped off, enough of having the living freedom beaten out of you by mob-handed policemen. It was the voice of today, a voice wanting a good time, wanting to break down all the barriers of class and education that divide us, to find a true individuality through the collective struggle. It was a voice looking for a truly human society.

It was a voice, it has to be said, that the Trotskyist groups couldn’t hear. It was a movement that they couldn’t see. They were too busy looking backwards to October 1917. The OCI, the Lambertist group – to their everlasting shame – led a march of 5,000 of their supporters to the Boulevard St Michel where barricades were being built against the gathering riot police. The OCI arrived singing the Internationale and then instead of joining the barricades, they marched away, like the grand old Duke of York, denouncing the students as petit-bourgeois adventurers.

But it is the danger of being behind the times that still confronts us, of trying to make the new fit the old, stale wretched formulae. It bedeviled all these self appointed “Marxist leaderships”. None came as near as the situationists with their demands: “What can the Revolutionary Movement Do Now? Everything. What Will It Become in the Hands of Parties and Unions? Nothing. What does the Movement Want? The Realisation of a Classless Society Through the Power of Workers’ Councils.”

And they were right, the Situationists, in their prediction. The revolution was defeated. And it certainly wasn’t the power of the state that defeated it. The CRS became a demoralised crew, making demands themselves on De Gaulle, bitching about their treatment and their conditions.

It wasn’t the army that defeated it – the troops remained firmly in their barracks. Let’s face it: it’s a daunting task for the forces of the bourgeoisie to take on by force some 12 million working people occupying their work places. People learned very quickly the power of mass action in modern capitalist society.

LA POLICE S'AFFICHE AUX BEAUX ARTS



LES BEAUX ARTS
AFFICHENT dans la RUE

"The police post themselves in the Beaux Arts. The Beaux Arts poster in the streets"

But alas the occupation committees couldn't take that extra step forward, and the Stalinists filled the vacuum with their compromise deal with wage concessions and a few reforms for the students. It was their betrayal.

We do need to examine that defeat. Yes there are important lessons to learn from it. But it's very easy to pursue that to the exclusion of the central question itself – namely what was the thing itself, what was that great historic lurch to liberation?

It has to be said that as far as I can see, the Trotskyist movement has given no thought to these questions. It's no accident, as the Comrades used to say, perhaps still do, that it has taken me thirty years even to dare think about them. I have to say that Cyril Smith's book, *Marx At The Millennium*, was a great liberator, a necessary push to dare to look at the things that you thought you couldn't dare to look at.

But once you begin to think a little about May-June 68, there it is – the great watershed of the second half of the twentieth century, when something happened that had never happened before in an advanced capitalist country. And nearly did it, that's the amazing thing. And it remains there to be explored, to be examined, to discover what it really did mean. That's the work that faces us.

What was this great collective struggle for individual development? Where did it come from this glimpse of a possible future? It was prepared within existing society itself. It's developing all the time. If we don't believe that development is happening within capitalism, then we don't have any future at all.

And here it was in a modern country with millions of people involved, learning it was possible to live humanly.

That was the essence of those demands emblazoned on the walls of the Quartier Latin. They questioned how we lived, denounced the madhouse that we live in.

May 68 took everybody by surprise, but the conditions for the eruption were developing unnoticed. It was the first fearless step to a new world. The first of many to come. We need to know more about it, see it in its multifaceted newness. And dare to do it.

March 1999. This is the summary of a talk given at a meeting of the International Socialist Forum.

Socialism, democracy and organisation

First thoughts on the Platform of the Iranian comrades. By Jean Phillippe Dives

This article has been translated from the French socialist discussion journal Carré Rouge

In No 8 of Carré Rouge we published substantial extracts from the proposed Minimum Platform drawn up by a group of Iranian revolutionary Marxists. This article is the first of our proposed contributions to the discussion.

It concentrates on only a few aspects of the Platform, on matters which are already being discussed in our journal. Articles in earlier issues have dealt with one subject or another; in particular, there were exchanges on "socialism and democracy" at the first Carré Rouge day-schools, held last June.

Once the discussion had begun various contributions expressed different approaches and different points of view. This article, which necessarily takes sides, is a contribution to a discussion which we hope will be continued, with the Iranian comrades as well as within and beyond the pages of Carré Rouge.

Socialism and Stalinism

The Platform opens with a section on The Meaning of Socialism and shows that "the socialist programme is inevitably defined by its socialist goal". On this basis it asserts that "we cannot expect tendencies who disagree on the basic goals of socialism to unite and establish a new alliance of [the] revolutionary left ... Those who called this bloc (the former USSR, and its satellites, China and Albania) 'socialist' and have not yet revised this position, have proved in practice that they have no place inside the revolutionary left". This definition may seem arbitrary, but it is totally justified. A revolutionary Marxist project, if it is a serious one, is obliged to establish itself positively: that is, we must organise ourselves on the basis of what we want and what we are fighting for. In order to do that we must define socialism, and not simply say that it is opposed, however radically, to the capitalist system. That may appear obvious, but what happens in practice is not necessarily what is obvious. For instance there is one method of revolutionary party-building, and it has a number of adherents, which defines itself as "anti-capitalist", but does not put the fight for socialism on the same level, perhaps because they are not brave enough; it is a method that begins not from general objectives and principles but from tactical questions of agenda and circumstance, such as the contents of an emergency programme or a turn to the unions.

There is another reason why the the starting point of the Platform is valid: today, no revolutionary socialist worthy of the name can avoid taking stock of the results of Stalinism and drawing conclusions from it. We have

seen what it achieved, how far its work went to destroy both consciousness and organisation in the workers movement. Unless we make an effort to understand Stalinism and through that effort be able to explain the bureaucratic systems that have existed, and which still survive in some countries and fraudulently claim to be socialism, it will not be possible, in theory or practice, to attempt to reopen the socialist perspective. However, if we do make this effort we shall be able to show how completely distinct we socialists are from the Stalinists.

We should respond to the call of the Iranian comrades for a discussion. It is important to do this as many concepts inspired by Stalinism have found their way into the revolutionary movement, including some organisations which claim to be Trotskyist. One of the most serious problems is the "statist" distortion of the socialist perspective, and it is one which still influences many revolutionary Marxist organisations in different ways: making things state property, or nationalisation, is thought to be the goal, or at least a positive step in itself on the road to emancipating the workers.

Not even the collapse of the USSR was enough to sweep away such a conception. The dramatic results of capitalist restoration that we observe now have even revived the idea that the system of state property that existed before 1991 was, despite all its shortcomings, a "gain" of the workers' movement. We cannot deny that there is common sense behind this understanding: if you ignore the problem of freedom (if it is possible to do that), the Russian working class had a better standard of living before 1991 than they do now.

However, this way of understanding avoids consideration of the problem of the terrible cost, mainly human, but ecological as well, of the "conquests of the working class": terror, massacres, vast quantities of forced labour which amounted to semi-slavery. And it does not take into account the fact that the short time when the material conditions of the Soviet workers really improved corresponded roughly with the post-war economic boom in the world capitalist economy (the "thirty glorious years") during which the situation of the masses improved, relatively, not only in the west as well, but even in some parts of the southern hemisphere.

From this point of view, those revolutionaries who still cultivate nostalgic feelings about the USSR have a position and an attitude parallel to that of the "anti-neo-liberals" who have nostalgic feelings about the welfare state and its role of "regulator" in the developed capitalist countries. Both groups are looking back to an age that is past; the task now is to rebuild a real socialist perspective based on the self-activity and self-

organisation of the masses, and by doing that get rid of the state socialist illusion which has been an obstacle for decades to the emancipation of the workers. It is an illusion that gives free rein to "globalised capital", which continues to act ruthlessly, regardless of whether it is of the liberal or gangster variety.

It is a kind of conception that has all the defects of a static analysis. It is like a still photograph; it does not attempt to look for the origins of the present situation in the previous system and its dynamics. We have to ask ourselves whether the Soviet state and others of the same type represent a kind of barrier to capitalism, or whether the system was capitalism's Trojan horse. The Platform of the Iranian comrades sheds some necessary light on the question: "The Russian revolution was more or less defeated by 1924; however, the victorious counter-revolution could not roll back the events to such a point as to revive capitalism. As a result it continued the collective exploitation of the proletariat under the name of socialism and planned economy. Thus, the period of transition, rather than moving towards socialism, got caught in a backward bureaucratic spiral which was, step by step, returning it to capitalism. Gradually material and financial incentives grew in production and eventually the conditions for the return of capitalism prevailed".

Direct democracy and the transition to socialism

The comrades' description of the statist fetish is clear, and it leads to a very important strategic conclusion for the revolutionary socialist programme: "The only guarantee in achieving this transition and reaching communist society lies in the political nature of the state. Precisely for this reason one cannot talk of a transitional society when this power has been taken away from the proletariat. Such a society can only return to capitalism." And: "What guarantees this transition is not the percentage of state ownership but the rule of the organ for the self-government of the producers, i.e. the soviets."

The Platform defines the conditions which would guarantee the revolutionary socialist nature of the state: in the political sphere forms of the direct democracy of the masses will predominate, and this itself supposes that many parties will exist; in the socio-economic sphere a development of socialisation means that the workers themselves will control the process of production. Nationalisation is only a means to this end, one that is almost certain to be necessary, but it does not guarantee anything. The "semi-state" of the workers will wither away as soon as it is set up: it will be a step towards the extinction of all social classes and the end of oppression – two conditions which are to a large extent interdependent: "During the period of transition, state ownership must gradually and consciously move towards social ownership. The level of this growth is directly related to the level of democracy in the councils. Without the widest democratic rights in the councils state ownership will not only fail to show any signs of

transition to socialism but it will strengthen a collective bureaucracy". If we add a third condition to these two (and one that is not ignored by the Platform), it is the extension of the revolution, an indispensable factor as socialism can only be built internationally.

It is important to stress that these observations are not the result of pure abstract and deduction, but that they are rooted in the experience of the workers' movement, especially the experience of the Russian revolution, the only socialist attempt that was consciously revolutionary. For a short time in the twentieth century it was victorious. The effects of its degeneration still influence the whole world, especially the workers' movement. The causes of its degeneration were both objective and subjective; the result of its degeneration is that things that appeared to be near at hand, as the Platform explains so correctly, disappeared in the end and turned into their opposites.

First came a defeat; then the wave of revolutionary socialism rolled back in Europe; the organs of direct democracy were extinguished, together with the multi-party system; bureaucratic control of the economy grew stronger, to the detriment of direct workers' control; the state apparatus became stronger instead of withering away. [1]

The Iranian comrades insist correctly that "the socialist individuals will not come about by force" and stress the necessity of developing a political democracy in the transitional society, which must be deeper and more extensive than anything that could possibly exist under capitalism.

When they mention the need for "other democratic elected organs representing other sections and layers of the society alongside the workers' soviets" they evoke "one solution [which] might be the creation of an elected parliament". This, as the comrades themselves recognise, is a complex problem which has given rise to a number of arguments in the revolutionary socialist movement, especially about Rosa Luxemburg's line on the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly by the soviet power after the revolution of October 1917. Another contribution to the discussion of the Platform offers a methodological framework for finding an answer: "To propose representative bodies of a parliamentary type suggests prior consideration of the problems of political delegation and of the effective participation of the masses in 'a new form of democracy'. The socialist transition cannot be separated from the widening of democracy at the lowest level; direct democracy; the predominance of social over political issues; and the disappearance or progressive removal of the state." [2]

We can never lose sight of the fact that parliamentarianism constitutes one of the most successful forms of the delegation of power, and that makes it a powerful factor for the existence of a political bureaucracy; in the political sphere it is responsible for the reproduction of relationships of control. If you can imagine that parliamentary forms will still exist in the

transitional society, a problem follows automatically: how are you going to establish mechanisms of control and recall over parliament? Because these are the forms that direct democracy requires within representative democracy.

There is also the matter of central organs of power, whether we call them soviets or councils; such a body has the immense advantage over a parliament of resting upon institutions which at all times involve all producers and consumers in taking decisions. "Democracy of a new type" is not a mere phrase. It expresses very concretely that although socialist democracy, the democracy of the period of transition, contains within itself the gains of bourgeois democracy such as freedom of the press, of organisation, of free speech, and the right to vote, it is radically different from bourgeois democracy: socialist democracy signifies a breach in the pattern of existing democracy.

Democracy, dictatorship and freedom

The Platform indicates the place of democracy in the socialist transition as follows: "Democracy and socialism are not two separate phenomena where the first is merely a means of achieving the second (a means that can sometimes be set aside). For workers and toilers, democracy means securing the right to self-determination in all areas of social life, including the economic arena. Therefore the struggle for this form of democracy cannot be victorious before abolishing classes (in other words, prior to socialism). For Marx, the struggle for socialism without fighting for democracy is meaningless. For us socialism means the democratic organisation of society."

But democracy of a new kind, however much wider and more participatory it may be than the democracy of bourgeois parliamentary regimes, still means the exercise of a "dictatorship", the "revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat", according to Marx. The Platform rightly emphasises that the dictatorship has a content that is essentially social: "This dictatorship does not imply a despotic form of government, but a necessary phase to allow the working class to establish its rule and start the transition period through the abolition of private property".

The very fact that private property will be democratically expropriated and prohibited is itself coercive: it is a "dictatorial" measure against the bourgeoisie! That is what Marx's original concept meant; it had nothing to do with the phrase "dictatorship of the proletariat" as appropriated to itself by the Stalinist bureaucracy in its attempt to legitimise its aims – even though the bureaucrats were careful to stick the word "revolutionary" in front.

It is not just a matter of words which may have been wrongly employed from the very beginning, or which may have been misappropriated. The expression "the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat" may have

become filled with a particular content that makes it difficult to use outside a theoretical debate, but all the great revolutionary socialist leaders used "democracy" and "dictatorship" simultaneously. The general idea contained in the phrase is vital for our understanding of democracy and dictatorship. For Rosa Luxemburg the dictatorship had to be the means of applying democracy, while Lenin never had any hesitation in using the phrase "democratic dictatorship". Although the two words, democracy and dictatorship, are complete opposites in meaning they are far from being, as common sense imagines, incompatible. Democracy is the participation of everybody in collective decisions. By definition that implies a type of constraint: the minority is generally invited to accept the decision of the majority. This problem appears not only in bourgeois society, but in every institution whether it is a party, or the state, or an action by the exploited class. In every strike, for example, there is a problem of democracy: there is a centralising tendency, in the form of the mass meeting, the strike committee, and the necessary unity of the workers; there is an opposite tendency which we might call libertarian. This means, should you allow an individual worker, or a group of workers, the right not to go on strike when the majority, or even the most active and conscious minority, has decided to take strike action?

Obviously, there is no one correct answer that invariably fits all circumstances; only real life, which means your concrete experience in each individual situation, allows you to work out your answer.

Istvan Meszaros, in his book *Beyond Capital*, quotes Marx in *The German Ideology*, emphasising that the class (any class) "in its turn assumes an independent existence as against the individuals", the members of the class, and thus exercises its control over them. "Discussions of Marx's theory as a rule neglect this aspect, and concentrate on what he says about emancipating the proletariat from the bourgeoisie. But what would be the point of this emancipation if the individuals who constitute the proletariat remain dominated by the proletariat as a class?" [3]

This form of "dictatorship" exists in capitalist society; it becomes more acute for individual members of the working class in the society in transition to socialism, precisely because it is their own class which has achieved power. Bringing about socialism implies that all classes will be abolished, including the working class itself; it implies that there will be a conscious fight against control by a class. The history of the Russian revolution from 1917 to 1921 illustrates the contradiction. This period abounds with examples of opposition between the central state and collectives of workers, on a strictly political as well as on a socio-economic level. In December 1917 a discussion began (it was pursued in different ways afterwards) between partisans of workers' management and partisans of forms of centralised control; and those who won the argument were those who recommended concentrating powers of decision making into the hands of the central organs of

the "workers' state". However much you want it to be the main issue, and however consistent you are, democracy is far from being able to resolve the problems relating to methods of organisation and the struggle of the workers, nor, the day after the revolution, to the problems of building socialism.

What can you do with people who do not agree with you, those who by definition are always the minority? Democracy is not the same as freedom. Freedom means that you have full and complete exercise of your individual decisions. Because democracy is not enough, it is necessary to reduce and limit the inevitable elements of authoritarianism which exist at the centre of the various institutions which belong to the workers in the course of their struggle, and to associate elements of freedom both with democracy and with the essential solidarity of the working class. There can only be harmful consequences for both elements if we confuse democracy with freedom. An operation that is collective and "democratic" can perfectly adapt to a form of oppression of minorities, just as the uncontrolled freedom of the individual can repudiate both organisation and democracy.

The Platform suggests that "socialism" and "communism" mean the same: "a democratic organisation of society". This seems to be a source of confusion. In his famous phrase in the Communist Manifesto, Marx defined communism as "an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all". That is, communism is the reign of freedom of the social individual, which from henceforward will be in a position to develop to its fullest extent because there will be no more exploitation and oppression. If Marx had conceived of communism as the reign of democracy and organisation he would have said exactly the opposite of what he did say: the free development of all as a condition of the free development of each.

To some extent it is Stalinist ideology that has reversed the terms of Marx's proposition while it developed its own conception according to which the "socialist order" would guarantee the emancipation of humanity.

Some leaders of Trotskyist organisations have in their turn copied the Stalinists and put forward an ideology of "collectivism" which they counterpose to "individualism". This ideology, above all, has served to justify the internal regimes of these organisations, the characteristic of which is that they exercise tight control over their members. This vision of socialism based on order and discipline, of levelling out all differences other than social ones, is a world away from the concept of Marx and his real partisans.

Our main difference with the anarchists was on the forms and functions of the organisation, in addition to our difference over the conditions under which the state would disappear in the course of the process that led to socialism. There was no difference about the object to be attained. Far from putting some kind of "democratic

state" in place, the transition to socialism implies the complete withering away of the state – which itself, by definition, is the instrument of a class and therefore of oppression. Socialism means the end of democracy in every form that has been understood up to the present day, including political democracy, as that will no longer be a sphere of activity in itself, separate from other human activities.

The revolutionary vanguard party

The "betrayals" of the social democratic and Stalinist parties have their effect today. The evidence is there in people's consciousness; it exists in the form of the phraseology of the Stalinist imposture and its consequences. It does not exist only among the Stalinists: there are revolutionary and Trotskyist organisations that reproduce a whole series of bureaucratic mechanisms. The effect today is that many militant workers and youth, leaders of the class struggle, reject the very idea of a revolutionary vanguard party, and indeed any political party, as the instrument to emancipate those who are exploited. However, building such parties is indispensable, because no other kind of organisation can fulfil their function or even lay claim to carrying it out, especially not trade unions. The purpose of a union is to bring together workers whose class consciousness may be at the most elementary level of realising that it is necessary to defend their immediate interests that arise out of the process of exploitation.

The party is the only form of organisation that is capable of a global response; it embraces all those areas – social, economic, political, ideological, cultural and so on – where the class struggle takes place; it is the only form of organisation that can respond at the level of state power; the only form that can concentrate and synthesise all forms of power. As Pierre Naville said: "The party is the modern form of a voluntary association of people who aim to bring about a regime which they prefer ... it is the triumph of the ideological criterion in the institutional forms of social life". [4]

The Iranian comrades, for their part, have no doubt about this: in their Platform they point out that: "In order to achieve the transition to socialism there is a need for a socialist revolution and in order to lead the working class in this revolution there is a need for a revolutionary party. Therefore, the strategy of revolutionary socialism is the strategy of forming the revolutionary party". But what kind of revolutionary party is it? Who will join together to form it? Will it be a mass party or a "vanguard" party? The Platform replies that "the revolutionary party of the working class is in fact the vanguard workers' party. It is a party combining the revolutionary socialist programme and the vanguard layers of the workers' movement".

Carré Rouge No.7 contains two articles which quite rightly question the concept of the "self- vanguard"; although they begin with an assessment of the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste/Parti



Communiste Internationaliste they consider other Trotskyist organisations as well. [5]

The term "vanguard party" is not simply a phrase you are allowed to use to describe yourselves: it is a title that is won through the ability of a group of revolutionaries to enter deeply into the working class and to fuse with the most advanced sections of the class, in such a way that the party emerges out of the struggle. As the Platform says: "First and foremost it requires a revolutionary programme, a programme not as a souvenir from this or that world experience.... but a programme arisen from inside the specific class struggles... As long as the socialist programme is not closely tied up to the decisive sections of this vanguard, the proletarian party will not be built".

Even if you dismiss the idea of the "self-proclaimed revolutionary vanguard" and call it a caricature, you still have to explain how it is that the revolutionary party which has to be built gathers together a vanguard and not the whole working class. Once again the Iranian comrades provide us with a reply when they indicate: "The dominant ideology is that of the ruling class, therefore up to the period of a revolutionary crisis, ie the eve of the overthrow of the bourgeois state, only a minority of workers will be attracted to a revolutionary socialist programme. ... The necessity for a vanguard party arises from the fact that the process of self-consciousness of the masses is not a linear and steadily ascending process". In other words, there is only one way that the new party can form. It will be a minority party, as a vanguard of the proletariat, because of the very fact that there are extremely different levels of consciousness in the heart of the class, and from the fact that they tend to unite only in a revolutionary period.

Besides, if the level of consciousness was uniform, and if the class tended to unite at other than exceptional moments, the need for a party, or for several parties,

would never appear. The anarcho-syndicalists would have been right. The function of a party would have been fulfilled naturally by the mass organisations, that is, the unions. The very apposite remark by Naville that the party form represents "the triumph of the ideological criterion", emphasises the vanguard character of the revolutionary party.

In practice, and in the conditions of class society, the idea of a party with the authority to unite the whole proletariat actually leads it, more or less inevitably, to reduce the ideological criterion to the level of a decorative extra. The "ideological criterion" is in fact the capability of the members of a party to control the way its perspectives on questions of theory, politics and programme are worked out. If this criterion is not central, the party-form will encourage the emergence of "specialists" who, unlike the mass of the members, "know" things; it will break up or prevent the formation of a "collective intellectual"; and it will favour the process of creating a bureaucracy – which is exactly what we wish to avoid. After all, history has given us enough material to reflect on what is meant by the phrase "serving the cause of Lenin".

The facts show that the problem of building a revolutionary party is extremely complex; all the attempts which have been made up to now, including the one which appeared most conclusive, can only have been approximations. Even the initial success of the Bolshevik party was no guarantee against degeneration. The main contradiction is that although the vanguard party is forced to exist separately from the mass, it must always endeavour to make the separation less and do whatever it can so that the masses themselves may raise their own level of consciousness, become aware of their own self-determination, and abolish the necessity of a party for ever.

Leadership of organisations, or of the party, is similarly complex, and the same arguments apply. That is, comrades truly fulfil their roles as leaders to the extent that they contribute towards the best conditions for abolishing their leadership role. That is, they will bring forward other militants, as many as possible, to take their place. And if the party and its leaders do not have such a perspective there will exist all the inherent dangers of "mini-leaderships", "mini-apparatuses" or "micro-bureaucracies", all more or less self-proclaimed.

Nothing guarantees to protect a party from this kind of deviation. On the other hand means do exist, as the Platform itself mentions, to raise both the theoretical level and the ideological struggle, to create the closest liaison with the proletariat and completely interpenetrate with its real vanguard, those who are actually leading the struggles and mobilisation of the class. There is only one reason why a revolutionary party should exist, and that is the struggle for socialism. Rosa Luxemburg wrote: "The essence of socialist society consists in the great working mass ceasing to be led and on the contrary beginning to live all its active political and economic life for itself, to

determine its own existence, always more conscious and more free". [6]

That explains why in that same document when she emphasised that a vanguard party was necessary, or in what amounts to the same thing, how to avoid a drift to substitutionism, she proposed a synthesis which so far has not been equalled: "The Spartacist League is not a party which aims to establish its domination over the working masses, even if the working masses bring it to power; the only aim of the Spartacist League is to be at every moment that party of the proletariat which is most conscious of the common goal; that party which at each step along the road travelled by the broadest mass of the workers reminds it consciously of its historical tasks; whatever stage of the revolution has been reached, it stands for the final outcome, and in each local or national question, stands for whatever represents the interests of the world revolution of the proletariat". [7]

Experience and consciousness

The Iranian comrades' Platform is written within such a perspective. It defines the real activity and tasks of a party. But then it appears to depart from this perspective when it asserts that "the vanguard party is in fact the accumulated consciousness of the class" and, further on, that "the revolutionary socialist programme is no more than a concentrated generalisation of the experience of the vanguard (on the international scale)". This opens the door to conceptions of spontaneism, possibilism and workerism; in practice, if you disregard the nature of the party as a specific category, not identical to the workers' vanguard (the party is in no sense simply an "outpost" of the vanguard), it can lead you to underestimate a number of tasks which do not reveal themselves automatically or directly out of the experience that has been accumulated in struggle; this argument applies particularly to the development of theory. The assertion that "Marx did not make the workers' movement socialist, it was the working class that converted the liberal Marx to communism" can yield a one-sided interpretation. The connections between experience and consciousness, practice and theory, spontaneity and organisation, are eminently dialectical; these categories are always interconnected and unite in one single revolutionary activity: Marx was nourished by the theoretical and practical experience of the workers' movement (though not that alone) while at the same time he had begun to influence the movement both theoretically and practically. It is of course absolutely true that "Lenin and Trotsky did not put forward the idea of building workers' soviets, but with the establishment of such soviets by the workers themselves they realised the significance of such structures". It is not possible to forget that the actual activity of this workers' movement was determined to a large extent by the intervention of the revolutionary social democrats.

These comments in the document are the prelude to a serious attack on "intellectuals". The Platform asserts that the term "intellectual" itself "has lost the

significance it may have had in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and is today merely an excuse for power-seeking petty bourgeois elements wishing to sound off inside the communist movement". Perhaps this "charge" can be explained by their unfortunate experiences in the Iranian left, but it is not justified at all in the light of the general experience of the workers' movement. It is not true that "from this layer the most important sections of the bureaucracy arise".

In the bureaucratic states the apparatchiks are recruited from various social classes, including the working class (especially, in the early days of the USSR, principally from the working class). They then lifted themselves above the class. And if you had to characterise their intellectual level from the very beginning, you would be forced to point out their absolute mediocrity.

On the contrary it is necessary today to restate the importance of developing theory, bound up of course with a political practice. We are faced with the globalisation of capital, the collapse of the eastern bloc, and the collapse of Stalinism, all at the same time. On a world scale we have entered a new period that poses new and more complex tasks and problems to revolutionary Marxists. From this point of view it is more than ever necessary that "intellectuals", or whatever you want to call them, place their abilities at the service of the proletariat – and the fight to reopen the socialist perspective. Besides, the Iranian comrades themselves, especially in this document, have done intellectual work by posing a series of essential questions and beginning to give answers to them.

About "democratic centralism"

The Platform notes: "Perhaps no issue has been as important a cause of engulfing the Iranian left in the dreadful internal spirals of organisational bureaucracy as the notion of "democratic centralism". It appears to be an experience shared both widely and internationally. Francois Chesnais was completely right when he wrote in Carré Rouge: "For at least forty years democratic centralism has been the instrument that allowed weak or dishonest leaderships to appeal to the principle of authority rather than allowing their members freedom of political thought and action". [8]

This point needs careful critical examination. Weak or dishonest leaderships have the habit of introducing democratic centralism as an inviolable "principle". We are obliged by necessity to question seriously the origins of the concept, and examine in detail how it has been applied in its lifetime.

We can say, first of all, that the idea reflects something real, something necessary. Every revolutionary organisation must be democratic, because it consists of a group of rebels who are fighting the power of the bourgeoisie or the bureaucracy, because democracy is the condition for working out the best political responses, and because the organisation must prefigure

socialist relations to some extent in the way it works. At the same time it must be centralised in action because the bourgeoisie (or the bureaucracy) are always highly centralised.

Democratic centralism is like an algebraic formula that unites two contradictory elements, but it means no more than that the party must be as co-ordinated as possible and at the same time as democratic as possible. "Democratic" means that each member or group of members must have the right to participate in working out decisions and of explaining all their positions and disagreements with the leadership. It even means (and the concrete example of the Bolshevik party demonstrates this point, at the times when it was carried along by the democratic flood of the working class and by society in general) the freedom not to follow its own decisions and even to dissociate themselves publicly from them.

It is necessary to add that the level of democracy, and the degree of centralism, must vary from situation to situation. In a country which suffers from more or less severe police and state repression, democracy and liberty will necessarily be constrained.

For instance, if the party has been forced underground, how can it hold a congress in the best conditions for democracy? What if its members are in jail or have been tortured or assassinated? But in a country like France, where there is almost complete bourgeois democratic freedom for the workers' movement to operate, democracy must be absolute, the freedom of each member or group of members being limited only by the obvious need of making their actions correspond to the common aim of the party. In 1906, that is, at one of the times when the Russian revolutionary Marxists enjoyed democratic freedom and had been able to cease operating clandestinely, Lenin defended "complete freedom of criticism". He meant in public, either in the party press or elsewhere; the only restriction was not to "destroy or hinder the unity of any given action determined by the party". [9]

To put it another way: the only limitation on members' democratic rights, on freedom of expression or on interventions in the class was determined in the last analysis by the programme they had jointly agreed – what Trotsky called a "common understanding of events and tasks". In the conditions we know here, the restrictions on democracy and open expression sometimes imposed in the name of security or even of semi-clandestinity are merely means of coercion. After all, everybody knows who the members of the party are, where they work and where they live (if not, they could not function as party militants); and they know that the state apparatus has ultra-sophisticated means of technological surveillance. No, the purpose of these restrictions on democracy can only be means of coercion, to keep people isolated from each other and to neutralise the members; the leadership, copying the mechanisms of the bureaucracy, use them for their own

benefit, even if it only means that they continue as the leadership.

The Platform of the Iranian comrades puts forward the principle of enlarging to the utmost the rights and guarantees of democracy, especially as it affects the rights of tendencies and factions. It is a positive, and certainly an appropriate, response. However, experience shows that it is not enough to regulate the actual relationships between members within the party. There are numerous aspects of the problem that we still have to study and discuss. There is a particular problem which concerns a kind of federalism, that is, autonomy in making decisions at local level, at least on matters for which local leaders are responsible. Another problem concerns the right of public disagreement and the right to test out perspectives which are different from those of the majority. Yet another concerns the party apparatus, the "full-timers", and how they can be controlled. And the problem of problems is how you can hold fast to what your organisation should really become, which means that as far as possible the party should be the property of the membership.

The specific meaning of this last statement is that information must circulate in all directions; that working out political perspectives is not the monopoly of a few; that the politics of a party that is being formed must allow each member to develop to the greatest extent that they are capable of; and that their leaders should be under the control of the membership.

The reason for making this point is that in most cases what actually happens in parties is the opposite; the leadership controls the members very closely; the only effective rights the members have is to elect a leadership when a congress is held. In short, it means that we must introduce important elements of direct democracy into the revolutionary vanguard organisation.

Notes

1. See articles in *Carré Rouge* Nos. 6 and 7 "Rediscovering the lessons of the October revolution" and "The Black Book of Communism, a prophylactic in the ideological war".
2. "Some notes towards a discussion" by Aldo Andres Romero and Roberto Ramirez, in *Debates*, the discussion journal published by the MAS of Argentina.
3. "Beyond Capital", Merlin Press, London and New York, 1995 pp. 908-909.
4. "The New Leviathan" Vol. 5, p.349, *Anthropos*, 1972.
5. "We need another type of discussion!" by Francois Chesnais, and "Why is it so difficult for us to draw 'some lessons from our history'?" by Benoit Mesly.
6. "What does the Spartacist League want?" in *Spartacus and the Berlin Commune*, Spartacus Publications 1977, p91.
7. *Idem* p 97.
8. *Op cit* *Carre Rouge* No. 7
9. "Freedom of criticism and unity in action", Lenin, *Collected Works* vol. 10 p. 467 (French edition).

A Disappointing Contribution

A response to *The Minimum Platform: Some Comments to Start the Discussion* by Aldo Andres Romero and Roberto Ramirez, which appeared in ISF No.3.

Dear Comrades Romero and Ramirez,

We were very disappointed with your comment on the Minimum Platform. The document, coming out of the rich experience of the defeat of the Iranian workers' movement, explicitly claims to be a minimum set of ideas around which a discussion can begin. Because its limitations are obvious, and in fact deliberate, we hoped you would take them as an opportunity to develop our joint theoretical work. So far, this has not happened, and you merely picked out a few of the points of the Platform, agreeing with some and disagreeing with others.

The significance of the document for ex-"Healyites" like us, and ex-"Morenoites" like you, is that, from the defeat of the Iranian revolution in 1978-80, comes assistance in breaking out of the sterile dogmatism in which the various Fourth Internationals got trapped. For decades, the Trotskyist movement continually shuffled political programmes, sought new alliances and fusions, re-jigged the old phrases – and fragmented more and more. We tried to fit the huge changes taking place in the class struggle into old slogans, instead of analysing them and developing our ideas in line with them. Now, with the eclipse of Stalinism – totally unexpected for all of us – we have an opportunity to return to the most fundamental of Marx's ideas and to re-examine our own history. The vital lessons cannot be drawn for a new generation of revolutionaries, without the most ruthless questioning of our traditional notions. We know from our own experience how hard and painful it is to break away from remnants of those old ideas, but we must not evade this task.

You say that you disagree with "the idea, advanced in the section on the Meaning of Socialism, that the struggles stemming from this awareness will inevitably lead to the establishment of a workers' state and eventually a socialist society". We are unable to see to which passage in the document this refers. But, even if such an idea did appear, this would make it even more important to state what you think is the alternative. You also say the document is "unnecessarily rigid" when it talks about the reduction of the working day. You may be right. But then you should develop your own conceptions on this point.

The main issue is the revolutionary party and its relation to the working class. You say that the document "underestimates [...] the theoretical, programmatic and organisational problems". OK. Please help us to tackle those problems. What exactly do you mean when you write about "a lack of

awareness of the great need to make a specific effort in the elaboration of theory and programme", and "a purely workerist interpretation of the programme question"? You refer to "attacks in the text against 'the intellectuals'." We can only find one place where the word "intellectuals" occurs. Let us recall the paragraphs concerned:

The most ridiculous form of sectarianism is displayed by those intellectuals who, having read a few so-called Marxist books and having gathered a few supporters, call themselves the nucleus of the revolutionary party and then in philistine arrogance start telling the working class how to conduct itself. Tens of cliques and sects have been busy building such "Leninist" parties for decades, whilst the first stage in building this party, ie the process of developing a revolutionary socialist programme and its integration with the real struggles of the working class and its vanguard has not even started. These are the same people who have only learned one slogan from Lenin: consciousness comes from outside the workers' movement. In reality, this has always been a cover for substituting the working class with a clique of a few power-hungry individuals.

Without this or that party, the proletarian vanguard can exist, but without the proletarian the party is irrelevant. Revolutionary socialist programme is no more than a concentrated generalisation of the experiences of the vanguard (on the international scale) and its comprehension. Marx did not make the workers' movement socialist, it was the working class that converted the liberal Marx to communism. Lenin and Trotsky did not put forward the idea of building workers' Soviets, but with the establishment of such Soviets by the workers themselves they realised the significance of such structures. The proletarian vanguard soon grasps the revolutionary programme, often faster and deeper than the "intellectual" from outside the class. If our understanding of the sentence "consciousness comes from outside the class" is that the working class cannot understand theory, we must remind everyone that in the latter part of the twentieth century the vanguard of the proletariat is well educated and can read the Communist Manifesto. Intellectuals are nothing special, they should demand no special privileges from the proletariat. On the contrary, if they have no science or knowledge to contribute, they might as well stay "outside" and not infect the movement with their inevitable prejudices. In fact the term "intellectual"

itself has lost the significance it may have had in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and is today merely an excuse for power-seeking petit-bourgeois elements wishing to sound off inside the communist movement. It is from this layer that the most important sections of the bureaucracy arise.

Although this was written specifically with the Iranian Left in mind, we certainly know several British sects to which it applies. Do you not have such problems in Argentina? Why do you disagree with this "attack" against this particular species of self-styled "intellectual"? In any case, the question of the role of intellectuals in the revolutionary movement is itself

one of great importance. As the document suggests, changes in the working class mean that many of our old ways of regarding this issue must be thought out again, including the very division between the workers and the intellectuals. Our task is to deepen our theoretical understanding of revolution, precisely in order to discover new forms of revolutionary struggle.

Please, comrades, let us try to move this discussion forward as fruitfully as we can.

With best wishes for 1999,

Cyril Smith and John Ballantyne

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Lessons from Japan

by John Robinson

This article essentially consists of a brief review of two books representing the views of the Japan Revolutionary Communist League (JRCL). They have been written by leading JRCL member Kan'ichi Kuroda. Without doubt Kuroda can be regarded as one of the leading Marxists of the twentieth century. The books are: *What is Revolutionary Marxism?* subtitled *On the Principal Problems of Organizing Tactics for Revolutionary Communists in Japan*. The second book is *Praxiology*, subtitled *Philosophy of Inter-Human Subjectivity*.

An essential aspect of both books concerns epistemology. However, a consideration of this key question really needs a separate article and therefore I will not discuss it here.

A brief outline of each book will be given in turn. This will be followed by a short account of Kuroda's approach to revisionism.

(The books cannot really be understood unless the Japanese concepts "topos", *tachiba* and "substance" are understood. A glossary of these terms is appended at the end of this article.)

What is Revolutionary Marxism? deals with the early history of Japanese Trotskyism and the lessons to be learned therefrom. It should be understood that prior to 1956 there was almost no Trotskyism in Japan. There was, however, a large Stalinist party. After Khrushchev's speech on Stalin and the Hungarian revolution, Kuroda and a small handful of other comrades came to understand the significance of Trotskyism and decided to build a Trotskyist organization. The position was complicated by the formation of the Japanese Trotskyist Association (JTA), a Pabloite body following the line of what was then the International Secretariat.

What Kuroda and his comrades proposed was an anti-Stalinist united front, to include not only the JTA but also all those communists opposed to Stalinism, even the supporters of Tony Cliff's "state capitalist" line. An essential feature of the united front tactic was to be fraternal discussion between Kuroda's small group and other tendencies. (This united front tactic is still used by the JRCL today. It is relevant to its relationships with Trotskyist organizations outside Japan.) The united front tactic brought results and enabled the JRCL to be formed in 1957.

Kuroda refers to the Pabloite JTA as "one hundred per cent Trotskyists". This refers to the fact that they tended

to treat Trotsky's writings as dogma, not to be questioned. In contrast to this Kuroda refuses to accept Trotskyism uncritically. For example, while recognizing Trotsky's massive political achievements he is nonetheless critical of certain aspects of his work. Thus he points out that Trotsky never developed organisational skills relating to the development of party organisation. In this Trotsky was far behind Lenin. It was precisely this lack of party organising skills that was at least a contributory factor in the defeat of the left opposition (pp 29-33). Kuroda is also at least mildly critical of Trotsky's formulation of the theory of permanent revolution (pp 41-43). Similarly, without falling into the trap of "state capitalism", he also expresses doubts about Trotsky's characterisation of the USSR in *The Revolution Betrayed* (pp 44-49).

Kuroda is also critical of Lenin, whilst recognizing the latter's organisational genius and his other decisive contributions. He is critical of Lenin's proposed strategy of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry". It was this false strategy that formed the basis for the reactionary "two stage" theory (pp 38-44). It is Kuroda's contention that Lenin's mistake was due to faulty methodology.

It thus becomes clear that Kuroda is prepared to accept all previous contributions to Marxism, but **not uncritically**. This is also shown by his attitude to the Fourth International. He clearly saw that the FI represented the most important aspect of the fight against Stalinism. The attitude of the JRCL is therefore that of striving to form a new world communist organization that would transcend (in a Marxist sense) the FI. This implies absorbing the positive aspects of the FI whilst at the same time going beyond it.

The world-revolution strategy of the JRCL is outlined by Kuroda as "anti-imperialism, anti-Stalinism". This in turn leads to the demand for revolutionary dissolution of both Stalinist and social-democratic parties, as well, of course, of the labour bureaucracy. In the course of this struggle the JRCL would become the leading party of the working class. (Note that today both Stalinism and social-democracy still exercise considerable influence over the Japanese working class.)

One essential theoretical question about which the JRCL is quite clear is that of the relationship between the Marxist party and the working class. The JRCL recognizes that it is the working class itself rather than the Marxist party that has to take power during a

revolution. The task of the JRCL is to prepare the working class for the revolution by providing the leadership the proletariat needs to organize itself as a class.

A significant part of this task is carried out by organising "left" fractions. This implies that JRCL members form fractions of workers inside industry on the basis of a struggle on issues such as speed-up or redundancies, and also against the domination of a section of the union by Stalinists. The leaders of such "left" fractions are JRCL members who, for tactical reasons, may have to conceal this fact even from some of the workers involved in the fraction. In addition to the left fractions, there are revolutionary fractions in which all participants know the fact of JRCL leadership, although the fraction activity itself may have to be conducted in secret. Union rules often ban officials from declaring a hostile political allegiance, and there is also the threat from employers and the secret police.

Both left and revolutionary fractions play a part in helping the workers to organize as a class. They lead workers into collision with the trade union bureaucracy. They also provide recruiting grounds for the JRCL. Such fractions are unique to the JRCL. They are much more than simply a means through which League members decide how to implement JRCL policy and are not a means through which the JRCL manipulates the union for its own ends. It should be noted that such fractions were definitely not thought of either by the Comintern or by the FI.

Of interest is Kuroda's account of the defeat of the so-called Bukuro tendency, which sought to submerge the JRCL into the mass movement (pp 188-205). The Bukuro tendency employed "two-stage tactics". In the first stage this tendency would attempt to build a mass movement without building the revolutionary party. In the second stage, it would attempt to introduce the party and expect workers to follow it. Comrades with experience of British Stalinist and so-called "Trotskyist" organisations will find this a familiar story. Kuroda and his comrades fought for the principle that the building of the mass movement and building the JRCL should go hand in hand. After a bitter struggle Kuroda and his comrades defeated the Bukuro tendency.

Finally, one important point stressed by Kuroda is that if there are factional fights inside the organisation and if those maintaining a principled position win these fights, the revolutionary party becomes immeasurably strengthened. This of course was also true of Lenin's building of the Bolshevik Party.

Praxiology

As its title implies, *Praxiology* develops a basic concept outlined in Marx's first Thesis on Feuerbach: "The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism.....is that the

thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the **object** or of **contemplation**, but not as **human sensuous activity, practice**, not subjectively." This is taken together with the eleventh Thesis: "The philosophers have only **interpreted** the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to **change** it."

The term "praxiology" refers to a study of praxis or practice. Kuroda regards the term "praxiological materialism" as synonymous with "dialectical materialism". The book is subtitled "*Philosophy of Inter-Human Subjectivity*".

There are of course many types of praxis. We engage in praxis every time we consciously do things. But what is clearly important for Marxists is the praxis involved in the labour process – the basis of human existence – together with the praxis involved in proletarian revolution. Kuroda shows that ".....praxiology is the pivot of Marx's philosophy." (p 139)

As all Marxists know, Marx developed both the theory of surplus value, which is fundamental to his critique of political economy, together with historical materialism. However, while these two theoretical gains give us the theoretical tools which enable us to understand a given political situation (i.e., the "topos"), they do not by themselves enable us to understand what we have to do. In order to assist the working class in the class struggle and to lead the proletarian revolution to victory – as Lenin did in 1917 – we have to engage in revolutionary praxis. And it is praxiology that represents our study of what we have to do as revolutionaries. It is one of Kuroda's significant contributions to Marxism that he has both made clearer and developed the basic Marxist ideas outlined in the two Theses on Feuerbach referred to above.

Marx himself, of course, devoted his life to revolutionary praxis. He did so consciously through all his writings, which were intended to give the working class theoretical weapons which would enable it to take the power as a class. Marx was in no sense a contemplator.

The first part of *Praxiology* deals not only with the *Theses on Feuerbach*. It also deals with Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology*. Kuroda writes in some detail about those two works. He gives us insight into them through sharp criticisms of pseudo-Marxist intellectuals who misinterpret or distort what Marx (and Engels) have written. Although those whom Kuroda criticises are Japanese, his criticisms are very relevant to similar writings of pseudo-Marxists in the West. Two examples will suffice.

Firstly, it is often argued that the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (written before *The German Ideology*) have little scientific relevance and represent only philosophical musings by the youthful Marx. It is

further argued that *The German Ideology*, which formed the germ of historical materialism, was Marx's first scientific work.

In opposition to this view, Kuroda shows that *The German Ideology* formed a natural progression from the previous work. This was because, in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx raised the question of alienated labour, i.e., the producers being divorced from and dominated by their products. This led Marx to understand that alienated labour had to be seen in a historical context. In other words, Marx felt that the domination of the producers by their own products had to be shown to be different from, for example, the production relations of feudalism. Although feudal serfs had to surrender part of what they produced to their lords, they were not dominated by what they produced. Thus Marx saw that in order to understand capitalism human history as a whole had to be understood. Hence the outline of historical materialism which is to be found in *The German Ideology*. A further point of relevance is that of the relationship between Marx's political economy and historical materialism. One of the principal themes of historical materialism is the conflict between the productive forces and the relations of production. Marx's political economy confirms this conflict through its analysis of the tendencies in capitalism towards poverty and economic crises.

The second example is that of the "theory" put forward by pseudo-Marxists, that history can be explained by the development of commodity production. Kuroda draws attention to the genuine Marxist view that capitalism could not have developed if it were not for the previous development of slavery and feudalism. Commodity production existed only as a minor feature of these two systems. Further, it was only due to the commoditization of labour power that capitalism as a social system could develop.

Another important aspect of *Praxiology* is that Kuroda shows that Marxism can not be understood by contemplators. Only those who have committed themselves to proletarian revolution can understand Marxism as a scientific world outlook. There is an inescapable link between theoretical ideas and praxis. Here Kuroda develops the ideas of Marx and Engels, starting with the two previously mentioned Theses on Feuerbach.

Praxiology fills an important gap in Marxist theory. The two principal aspects of Marxist theory remain political economy and historical materialism. These two aspects enable us to comprehend various political situations. However, neither of these two aspects tells us how to revolutionise the world and ourselves. The gap is filled by praxiology – the study of praxis. Of special importance is the relationship of praxiology to proletarian revolution. As the subtitle of the book indicates, Kuroda stresses the vital importance of the

subjective factor in revolution. (In this he echoes Trotsky's insistence that the crisis of humanity is reduced to the crisis of leadership.) While it is true that it is history that makes human individuals, it is equally true that only human individuals make human history. There are no impersonal historical forces. Therefore what is decisive in the preparation for and the carrying out of the proletarian revolution is the conscious dedication of individuals to achieve this task. It is worth remarking that without the conscious dedication of the individuals Lenin and Trotsky the Russian revolution would have been defeated.

A vitally important part of *Praxiology* is concerned with Kuroda's theory of "materialist subjectivity". This concerns the need for revolutionaries to understand their own thinking. In other words, they have to understand how they have acquired their own ideas and how to develop their own thinking. Citing the work of another Japanese Marxist, Umemoto Katsumi, Kuroda argues that we need a materialist understanding of the "internal world" in which human thinking, reflecting and cognising the external world, takes place. Such an understanding of this "internal world" is required to conquer the "last citadel of idealism". Needless to say, only those who have consciously dedicated themselves to proletarian revolution can achieve the ability to understand their own thinking. Those who accept the "false consciousness" of capitalist society cannot acquire this ability.

The theory of materialist subjectivity opens then way for the self-regeneration of members of the revolutionary party. If party members are able to think about their own thinking, they can then strive to rid themselves of many of their worst aspects of bourgeois thinking and behaviour. These aspects hinder the building of a vanguard party. Examples are petty-bourgeois arrogance, failure to help others in the party who may have difficulties, subjectivism, hero-worship of the leadership and an inability to be self-critical. It becomes clear that Kuroda's theory of materialist subjectivity not only represents a serious contribution to Marxism. It is also a powerful weapon in the struggle to build the revolutionary party.

Revisionism

One of Kuroda's important contributions is to examine the theoretical roots of revisionism (*What is Revolutionary Marxism?* Chapter 3).

Marxism as a scientific world outlook is contradictory. On the one hand it is constantly being developed by such Marxists as Lenin, Trotsky and Kuroda. On the other hand Marxism has a permanent essential basis. This basis includes the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, the existence of capital as an alien power whose movement dominates our lives, and the irreconcilable nature of the class

struggle, which must end either with the destruction of humanity or with the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is this essential basis, which carries with it the truth that the working class is the only consistently revolutionary class, that revisionists forget.

Kuroda accuses the revisionists of using what he terms the method of "one to one correspondence". This gives rise to the notion that there is one theory for the nineteenth century, when Marx developed his ideas, and another, different, theory for the twentieth century. The two theories exist for the revisionists in parallel as it were, the second not being dependent on the first. I other words revisionists take the view that the view that the twentieth century requires fresh theories of society. In contrast to this, Kuroda argues that to understand the twentieth century we have to start from what he terms "Marxism as essence theory", especially Marx's insistence that the working class is the only revolutionary class, an understanding Marx developed in the last century. Examples are necessary.

During the post-World War Two period sociologists such as the former Marxist Herbert Marcuse put forward the "mass society" theory. This rested on the assumption that the working class in the metropolitan countries had been ideologically corrupted by capitalism and was thus no longer revolutionary. This "theory" gave rise to petty-bourgeois groups like the Baader-Meinhof organisation and the Japanese Red Army Faction. It also had wider implications centred on the belief that revolution would now come from the peasant masses of the so-called "Third World".

The method of "one to one correspondence" also includes the Pablo-Mandel approach, which suggested

that Marx's views might have been applicable in the last century, but that in the twentieth century socialist revolution could be carried out by sections of the Stalinist bureaucracy, together with nationalists like Castro. Similarly, Healy attributed a revolutionary role to nationalist leaders such as Gaddafi and Arafat.

This review fails to describe adequately the full significance of the two works by Kuroda. However, it has become clear that he has emerged as the greatest Marxist of the second half of the twentieth century. Not only has he significantly contributed to the development of Marxist theory. He has also played a leading role in the building of the Japan Revolutionary Communist League, a formidable organisation with deep roots in the working class. It is the JRCL that undoubtedly represents the most advanced communist organisation in the world.

Appendix: meaning of Japanese terms

Topos: A here and now situation in which there is a subject and an object. The two interact with each other. For example, working class and capitalist class, a communist and his or her workmates.

Tachiba: To hold a *tachiba* is to take a definite position involving a conscious decision to revolutionise the topos. In other words, it means more than "having a point of view".

Substance: The substratum or material carrier of which a class or organisation consists, e.g., the substance of a political party is its members, the substance of the working class is proletarians.



Revolutionary Programmes: Necessity or Fantasy

by Roy Ratcliffe

There is a trend of thinking within the ranks of the revolutionary left which seems to start from an assumption that things can or will go wrong with the progress and development of socialism, and have gone wrong in the past, because certain people, key people or even an entire vanguard, had or have inadequate revolutionary ideas. Those who represent this trend and start from such an assumption are at considerable pains to discover the "correct" or "true" ideas and their correct sequence, so that "mistakes" won't happen again.

Reams and reams are produced as a result of a sort of extensive "literary archeology" which attempts to trace the distinct stages of development in the varying species of socialist thought from Marx to present writers in order to demonstrate incorrect programmatic positions which have led or will lead to mistaken or unfortunate actions.

The purpose of such activity is to show where each deviation, variation and possible mutation has occurred in the evolutionary development of socialist thought, in order to discover the "true" message and embody this in the correct practical "order of events" or "sequence of procedures" known as a programme. However, much of this work, unlike real archeology, only manages to invert the real life process. In the end, more often than not, this work only arrives at idealised connections, and proposes correctives in the form of abstract programmes and formulas. Yet such programme-led analyses only serve to perpetuate the problem that has been identified and was the motive or stimulus for such study in the first place. As workers and revolutionary humanists, we should recognise that theories and ideas, whether adequate or not, do not automatically cause people to follow these ideas, although it may often appear that way to other commentators – and even to those who are advocating the ideas themselves. In real life the actual process is that people choose, select, modify, reject and even create ideas and theories that not only embody their experiences but, more importantly, suit their practical needs. Again, this is not always the case. But it happens far more often than is admitted, even when that practical need is simply to be seen as a clever and diligent intellectual.

The Stalins, Healys and others of that ilk, do not or did not act the way they did as a result of mistaken understanding of the theories of Marx. Rather, they acted the way they did for other reasons, and then developed supposedly Marxist theories to vindicate the way they acted. Such people did not and do not study real life in order to justify the relevance of their ideas;

they study ideas to find relevant ways to justify their actions. We should emphatically recognise, for example, that it was not perverted theories or brutal programmes which produced Stalinist sectarian behaviour; it was Stalinist sectarian behaviour that produced perverted theory and brutal programmes. Lenin's actions in consolidating the soviet state against the Russian working class were not the results of following a mistaken theory or even caused by the fact that Marx did not manage to get around to articulating a comprehensive blueprint for transitional forms for him to follow. Instead, the opposite procedure happened. Lenin's real life actions as leader of the Bolsheviks caused a modification in the ideas he had of the state. (See, for example, the ideas in the article *Better Fewer But Better*).

Lenin's own earlier – and more accurate – theoretical contribution in *State and Revolution*, leaning heavily on Marx and Engels and written with full knowledge of the so-called "backwardness" of Russia, called for a smashing of the state. But this was not even attempted. The theoretical positions in *State and Revolution* were ignored by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in practice almost as soon as it was written. So, simply writing into programmes even abstractly "correct" perspectives, like "smashing the state", does not for a moment guarantee that they will be carried out. Trotsky's fetishisation of the Party, his elevation of it over the working class and his concord with Stalin over compulsory labour discipline and the national plan, were not the result of a mistaken understanding of Marx's principle of the self-activity of the working class. Trotsky had a perfectly good theoretical grasp of this principle in 1904. His later theoretical modifications and justifications – see for example his ideas in *Terrorism and Communism* – and his silence over his 1904 theories, were reached as a result of his actions in real life, supporting, and being an active participant in, Bolshevik oppression.

So thinking and writing correct ideas doesn't always mean they will be followed, even by the person who writes them. Gerry Healy and his supporters in the SLL/WRP did not conduct themselves in dehumanised, arrogant and sectarian ways because they were carrying out dehumanised and arrogant theories espoused by Marx and Engels. Quite the reverse. In the process of carrying out the practical struggles to build a "vanguard", they adopted brutal, dehumanised and arrogant methods. Then they sought justification for these methods, not in the writings of Marx, for they could not be found there, but in the writings of Lenin and Trotsky. The reasons they leaned so heavily on some – and actually not all – of the ideas of Lenin and

Trotsky, was because they could find in Lenin and Trotsky ideas which justified their practice. These, and many other sectarian group members, were intelligent and dedicated human beings who studied "theory" and were quite capable of discerning alternative and more humane readings in Marx but they consciously filtered and selected only those ideas which fitted their chosen methods. Incidentally, those who still retain a programmatic allegiance to Lenin and building the "vanguard" need to say whether the following sentiments will appear in their post revolutionary programme as they did in Lenin's writings:

"The dictatorship of the proletariat.....can be exercised only by a vanguard." (Lenin Collected Works, Vol 32, p 21).

"The dictatorship of the proletariat does not fear to resort to compulsion and the most severe, decisive and ruthless forms of coercion by the state." (Lenin, Collected Works, Vol 31 p 497).

"....half a dozen workers who shirk their work (in the manner of rowdies, the manner in which many compositors in Petrograd, particularly the Party print shops, shirk their work) will be put in prison. In another they will be put to cleaning latrines. In a third place they will be provided with yellow tickets after they have served their time ... In a fourth place one out of every ten idlers will be shot on the spot." (Lenin, Collected Works, Vol 26, p 414).

So guess where Stalin got at least some of his inspiration! I suggest also that working people of today and the future would be interested to know whether the present-day followers of Trotsky would include in their post-revolutionary programme ideas such as these:

"The very principle of compulsory labour service is for the communist quite unquestionable." (Terrorism and Communism, p. 146).

"The labour state considers itself empowered to send every worker to the place where his work is necessary. And not one serious socialist will begin to deny to the labour state the right to lay its hand upon the worker who refuses to execute his labour duty." (ibid p. 153).

It is perhaps not too difficult after reading the above to guess why many rank and file workers and party members in Russia could see very little difference between the programmes of Stalin and Trotsky when the arguments developed after the death of Lenin. Those who are still wedded to the ultimate idea of becoming a Leninist or Trotskyist "vanguard", complete with a worked-out revolutionary programme, guided by the writings of Lenin or Trotsky, will have some difficulty convincing working people to accept such possibilities – particularly if they put them up front instead of keeping them hidden. They will also need to convince some of us who still consider Marx as

extremely relevant why such ideas were not considered essential by Marx and yet were carried out in the name of Marx or Marxism as they called it. In fact I suggest that the desperate search in some socialist quarters to discover contradictions between the "young" Marx and "mature" Marx has been more to do with making it easier to justify inhuman or dehumanised practices by consigning or relegating Marx's humanist principles to some immature stage in his development, so they could then be safely ignored.

Uncovering theoretical deviations articulated by the various exponents of "Marxism" may be interesting and occasionally necessary but they are not as important as studying the real-life practice of the actual participants, as they spoke about it or wrote about it in their day to day activity. Perhaps I should supplement the points made above by stating that in my view revolutionary humanists do not study Marx in order to discover or establish the "correct" theory or programme so that we can then follow it or implement it. Revolutionary humanists study Marx to explore and understand how he studied the world so that we can do this ourselves with more accuracy and confidence. So, instead of having to lean on Marx all the time, we learn to stand on our own two feet. Instead of turning to Marx constantly to find a similar or identical situation to the one we are in, we can begin to analyse and respond to the situations ourselves. Accordingly the revolutionary humanist purpose of such study would not be to use Marx's volumes as weapons with which to beat each other around the head. Nor should we be using his words as bullets (or even the softer form of intellectual paint balls) to shoot people down in a ritual macho competition to be "top gun" or top group on the left, whilst hiding behind the camouflage of pursuing and articulating "correct" ideas.

That kind of use for the works of Marx can be expected from sectarians but not genuine revolutionary humanists. Revolutionary humanist theory and practice, of which Marx was and remains the greatest individual exponent, was, I consider, successively distorted and contorted by "Marxists", "Leninists", "Stalinists" and "Trotskyists", until it became transformed into the dogma of a self-satisfied sectarian ruling elite. It mattered little to its "content" whether that sectarian elite controlled the state as in Russia and the eastern bloc or one of the small sects in various countries. Only the scale and extent of the sectarian distortion and brutal arrogance varied between these respective political arenas. Yet, interestingly, they all alleged that they spoke in the name of Karl Marx. Nothing less is required, I suggest, than the return of Marx's works to the revolutionary humanist tradition. The results of his life's activity have been abducted and held hostage by various shades of sectarianism for far too long.

Sadly, much of 20th century philosophical discourse, including a lot of so-called Marxist philosophy, still appears to be little more than terminological abstraction and manipulation. It is not designed to help

make sense of the world, but: (a) to elevate intellectual production into a superior social and economic position to other forms of production; (b) to competitively undermine other rival intellects; and c) to reduce the intellect of the working class to a baffled, subordinated and mute incomprehension. This is perhaps understandable within bourgeois circles, for this class is thoroughly imbued with elitism and tries to justify notions of superiority and inferiority. It has a vested interest in complicating and mystifying life and in making working people feel inadequate. However, this should not be the case for those thinkers ostensibly concerned with developing, and acting upon, the ideas of Marx.

But so-called "Marxist" intellectuals have tended to talk down to working people, assuming they have a superior revolutionary position, because they have the ability and the time to provide complex analysis, detailed programmes and definitive instructions which working people "must" follow. This is despite Marx's argument that it was the unique and key position which working people had in relationship to the means of production which made them the revolutionary class. Incidentally, even if it were true the working class may be proportionately smaller in the advanced countries than in Marx's time, this key position would not be altered. Nor does the fact that some working people in the advanced countries become chauvinistic or racist, or that some in the developing countries become nationalistic change anything – contrary to what some "new left" thinkers considered in the 1960s and 1970s. Such subjective factors may delay the outbreak of revolution, affect its development or even its outcome, but cannot re-fashion the unique revolutionary position and potential of working people.

Positively, this revolutionary potential exists because working people are the "active" element in the production both of the means of production – factories, machines, etc – and of the necessities which the rest of society depend upon today, as will any future society tomorrow. Negatively, this potential exists because of their dehumanised and exploited condition within capitalist society. The life, the very day-to-day existence of the working class is antagonistically opposed to the needs of the ruling capitalist class. Human labour is beyond question the basis of all life and all societies, and the modern working classes are the "specifically created" human agents of all society's essential labour under the domination of capital. And yet it is the capitalist class which have historically appropriated those means of production and the wealth, in the shape of accumulated surplus value.

This polar opposition to the capitalist class makes working people potentially revolutionary against the rule of capital. Their position as the operators of the means of production make them not only able and likely to rebel against capital, but also makes them the only class able to really found society anew. No other class in society can re-engage so completely and directly with the extensive means of production after a

revolutionary overthrow of capital, not simply because of the numbers required but because of their day-to-day familiarity with production under capital and also because of their socialisation in its collective and co-operative patterns of operation. Of course this familiarity, ability and numerical strength can be exploited by other classes as it is under the rule of capital and was under the political rule of Leninist and Stalinist sectarianism, and in particular it can be exploited by some intellectuals who think they know better.

But as Istvan Meszaros comments: "... under the changed circumstances intellectuals (and especially the former bourgeois intellectuals whose conditions of everyday life are quite different from those of the popular masses) know *far less* about "what is to be done" in relation to the specific problems of post-revolutionary societies and their corresponding material mediatory forms of potential solution than the working classes, whose daily bread is directly affected by the success or failure of the measures that need to be adopted." (Beyond Capital p 396).

We can add to this: it is not only bourgeois but revolutionary intellectuals, the producers of ideas, whose conditions of everyday life are quite different from those of the popular masses. And after the experience of revolutionary Russia we can also say that their combined "vanguardist" knowledge of what to do next did not lead to the end of oppression and exploitation for the working class. It led straight to a particular brutality under the rule of a long-term Bolshevik and right hand man of Lenin – Stalin! Not a good track record for the concept of a "vanguard" nor for the leadership efforts of revolutionary intellectuals. Little wonder then that anyone adopting the title of intellectual is viewed with considerable suspicion in some quarters.

However, there is a useful role and there are tasks for revolutionary humanists with intellectual ability. Marx was such a person and one of the highest possible calibre – and, interestingly, he did not produce programmes, try to set up vanguards or tell the working class what they "must" do. Incidentally, he was also quite scathing about some intellectuals himself, calling them "muddleheads from the allegedly 'learned' caste". Nevertheless we should now perhaps add a further essential task of the genuine revolutionary humanist intellectual supporters of working people during and after a revolution: that is, to assist them to overcome all elitist exploitation of their labour and to ensure it does not return under the guise of a different political or intellectual social stratum as it did in Russia. In advance of a revolution, intellectual activity, for example, can also serve to remind working people that the real engine of all necessary social wealth is the activity of the working class. It can also help explain why, in order to realise a future based on socialism, working people will need to keep collective communal control of their productive activity as well as of the means of production.

To return now to the revolutionary position of the working classes. For the material reasons previously noted, Marx concluded that the working class was the only really revolutionary class. It was from a contemplation of the system of capital and the situation of the working class that ideas for the revolutionary overthrow of capital arose. Revolutionary ideas and theories are a creation of thinking, acting human beings, best made after due reflection on areas of experience, particularly the experience of trying to change things. However, these ideas and theories are never concrete or precise but abstract and general. They are more in the nature of guidelines and hypotheses. As such they need to be constantly tested in action by experience, evaluated against that experience and, where necessary, modified, bearing in mind the orientating principles or purposes for which the ideas are intended in practice. For this result, honest description, reflection and evaluation is essential, as well as an honest and clear statement as to the purposes intended.

This level of honesty has become quite rare among the left and entirely absent among the sectarian left. Revolutionary humanist ideas and theories, as creative guidelines for further practice, should encapsulate where possible the experience of past struggles so as to provide improved guidelines. This is why Marx's work is so important. His creative thinking, often after exhaustive study and reflection, provided many such guidelines. However, much of what is published of Marx's work was never intended by him for publication. Many volumes of Marx's writings represent his own notes taken down for his own purposes. As such they are entitled to be obscure and somewhat inaccessible. For this reason special care is needed to understand their terminology and interpret them. Nonetheless for those with the time to read them and resources to obtain them they are the richest known source of creative thinking upon what general directions working people need to take in order to free themselves and the whole of humanity from the restrictive and destructive confines of capitalist economic relations.

Occasionally, we can read sentiments by socialists regretting that Marx never got round to saying more about how life would function under the future socialist society – as if he hadn't done enough for one lifetime. Here we should recognise that Marx didn't theorise much about the future form of society nor comment very much on the precise forms of transition. In his view, it was not the function of intellectual theorising to project a detailed image of an imagined future onto the screen of the present, for the education of revolutionaries and the future education of an (imagined) confused but eagerly waiting working class. For Marx, the creation of the future was to be the practical creative task of the associated workers themselves, once they had liberated themselves from the political, military and economic hold of the ruling class and their state. This was not merely because they were eminently capable of such creative tasks, but also

because this would be necessary for them in order to equip themselves to found society anew. The liberation of the working class from the oppression of capital would be by their own actions and own efforts along with those of their supporters. This liberation would be brought about just as much from the collapse and crisis of capital caused by its own internal contradictions as from the previous and later positive combative actions of the workers themselves. And both of these will be much more useful to the adoption and development of socialist ideas among working people than any intellectually led self-appointed vanguard armed with its latest detailed programme – transitional or not.

It was enough for Marx, and should still be enough for present-day revolutionary humanists, to point out the contradictory and transitional nature of the domination of the capitalist system historically and the socialist transitional forms which had/have already sprung up within the capitalist system – co-operatives, cartels, Paris Commune, pre-Bolshevised soviets – and to point out the many pitfalls waiting for workers in struggle. For the rest, it is sufficient to support and when possible facilitate the coming together of workers and revolutionary humanists in and out of their struggles. The question of the role of revolutionary humanists during the heat of a revolutionary political crisis is a separate question, but even here I suggest their activity should supplement and complement the efforts of revolutionary workers, not frustrate them as in post-1917 Russia. We should acknowledge that no amount of peering at the horizon of the future will produce anything but hazy images, or abstract detail, and even the serious possibility of self-induced mirages. No amount of microscopic analysis of the texts of Marx will produce an exact or foolproof blueprint for the future success of socialism. As noted earlier such study has a different purpose. We should also recognise that sadly the legacy we have actually inherited, after all the volumes of theorising of Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Zinoviev, Lukacs, Marcuse, Gramsci, Gerry Healy, Tony Cliff, Ted Grant, James Cannon, Burnham and the rest, is a chronic, almost fatal dose of dogma and sectarianism. But for the excellent guidelines left by Marx we would have very little else. We also have lots of practical errors and bad practices to seriously evaluate – very little of this has been done to date – so as to avoid them in the future. For this, minimum, maximum or transitional programmes are of absolutely no use. Devising detailed programmes and debating them seems to me to be similar to using a rocking chair: we may be comforted and even fooled by the actual movement, but in reality we are going nowhere except backwards and forwards.

The whole project of socialism is both revolutionary and developmental. It is revolutionary in the comprehensive sense of both the form and content of social and political life; and developmental in the sense of a series of approximations and changes of tack – but not of principle. Revolution involves rapid and sudden changes which are themselves

unpredictable and are the result of unpredictable and often unforeseen causes. The day to day pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary work of working people and revolutionary humanists will be developmental in the sense that much of it hasn't been done before, and many new things will occur which themselves will cause constant reappraisal and modification. So no detailed theory or polished programme – no matter what genius produces it – will guide us much further than next month or at the most next year. By that time many things will have changed. This will be particularly the case when the accelerated tempo of a revolutionary situation begins and throws many, if not all, of the assumptions on which detailed programmes are based out through the window. Trying to follow a previously worked out programme in such dynamic situations is perhaps one of the few instances in which well intentioned revolutionaries can be led into quite reactionary behaviour.

As an instance of sincere revolutionaries following a detailed schematic programme, the line of “defeat social fascism first” in pre-fascist Germany springs to mind here as one of the most catastrophic examples. Sincere rank-and-file Bolsheviks and revolutionary workers forcing through the Bolshevik programme against the Russian working class and peasants is another. Closer to home the thousands of sincere revolutionaries fulfilling the detailed programmes of the sectarian Socialist Labour League/Workers Revolutionary Party, Socialist Workers Party, Communist Party etc – and in doing so boycotting many unity actions – is another. Recognising the extremely limited uses of even well-thought-out programmes does not mean that revolutionary humanists are left to start with a blank sheet, or stumbling about in a darkened room. We have inherited sufficient materialist guidelines to begin to act as revolutionary humanists with a conscious awareness of what is needed in general, even if much of the detail will need to be left closer to the events as they begin to unfold. In some cases, workers and their supporters will be faced with having to think on our feet.

Here are some of the general points that I think we can safely say we know. We know from experience and the guidelines produced by Marx in *Capital* that the capitalist form of production is crisis-ridden and contradictory. We know from the experience of capitalist production and from the *Grundrisse* that the combination of working people and modern industry can produce enough necessary products to assure all the world's citizens of a basic humane standard of economic and social welfare, once production is organised according to socialist methods. We also know from modern society that such is the productivity of the combination of labour and industry that sufficient surplus products can be made available to release sufficient numbers of people (or all people for a time) from direct productive activity to ensure safe, clean, humane and interesting cultural, educational, leisure environments exist.

However, we cannot know in advance exactly what kinds of products and services future associated working people will decide are necessary and how they will create them. We don't know how working people will do this or what they will choose as priorities. Nor should we be crystal gazing and trying to tell them. We know from studying the experience of other revolutions that to get to such a revolutionary situation that the rule of capital will have to undergo sufficient of a crisis (structural or episodic) to shake the existing socio-political set-up to its foundations. But exactly how or when will that happen? Lenin didn't know and nor can we. We know from the experience of Britain, Germany, and Russia, as well as Cuba, Nicaragua and perhaps Chile, that this revolutionary upsurge and even overthrow could be triggered in an isolated advanced country or an isolated outpost of capitalism, but we don't know which or when. We know from the experience of Germany, Britain, Russia, Chile and Nicaragua, that the capitalist class will in such a country fight to the death and will if they need help call upon other capitalist countries to come to its aid. We know this but we don't know how it will unfold. We may prefer revolution to break out simultaneously in many or all countries, since this would weaken the international capitalist class and neutralise any possible military interventions, but real life events may not follow our preferences.

We know from the negative experience of reformism and reformist labour parties that the revolutionary working class and its allies will have to adapt their specific orientation to the circumstances of their own struggle, all the time with the general aim of seizing political and military power and by arming itself resist being crushed. But we cannot know in advance how this will occur, or which troops will defect to the workers' side or what weapons will be secured and used. We know from Marx, and the experience of the Paris Commune, Germany, Britain and Russia that the working class is able to create political forms of its own and if powerful enough, and the ruling class weak enough, can seize and abolish the ruling classes political form, their parties and state. We cannot know in advance, however, who will prove strongest or weakest on the day, or exactly what configuration those working class political forms will take. We know from Marx and now we know from the Russian experience that the state will have to be smashed, not transformed or reformed. And all formal politics will need to be abolished, since politics easily becomes the potential base for a new ruling elite, and the alternative working class social forms of organising – committees, communes or soviets – will need to become not just the means of declaring this abolition, but of carrying it out.

We know from Marx and the experience of Russia that after the abolition of the state that the communal form of working class organisation will need to designate and declare all citizens as “workers” either by hand or brain, recognising no other category of citizen. Even this division has to be overcome as a deliberate process. They will have to assign or re-assign

themselves or confirm their voluntary assignment to some productive activity approved of by the local communal form of organisation. We cannot, however, predict how this will occur or tell them how to do it, nor should we try. They may try different ways simultaneously or sequentially. We know from Marx, and common sense, that these communal forms will have to commence, or continue, the seizure of factories and shops and rebuild any damaged industries and homes caused by the revolutionary upheaval and the collapse of the capitalist system. We know these communal forms of production and distribution will need initially to concentrate on ensuring the production of sufficient necessities for all citizens.

We know from Marx that the communal forms of organisation will need to abolish wage labour and institute a temporary system of payment by voucher. (Modern plastic credit cards may seem to offer a possible socialistic form, once freed of capitalist accounting and profit-making, but they may not be at the cutting edge of technology by then.) We know from decimalisation and the rise of the euro that the name of the unit of payment already changes under capital and causes only temporary problems and uncertainties. Providing the system of economy allows communal production and access by producers to sufficient necessities, and collective decision-making and control over access to any available extras during the first stage of transition, then this won't be a problem. If it is or becomes one then the future groups of associated workers will sort it out themselves using their knowledge of the situation and the available resources and possibilities available at the time.

We know from Marx, from the experience of the Paris Commune and from the Russian soviets, that the communal forms of organisation will need to choose certain people from among themselves to work outside of the full-scale meetings, but as "delegates" rather than permanent representatives. We know from Marx and from the experience of Russia that, for as long as such positions are required, those delegates will need to be elected for their ability and suitability – not party affiliation. They must be subject to instant recall and paid only the communal average. We know from the Paris Commune and the early experience of Soviet Russia that these communal forms of organisation will need and want to negotiate with other such communal forms locally, regionally and nationally. Whether and to what extent they can do so internationally – we know this from the experience of Russia, Cuba and Nicaragua – will depend upon what has happened meanwhile within other capitalist countries. However, the daily experience of shopping will tell us that they will need to begin to develop economically the links we know they will have undoubtedly made politically during the pre-revolutionary situation and during the revolution itself.

We know from the positive experience of the Paris Commune and the negative experience of the Russian Soviets, that working people through these communal

form of organisations will need to ensure that the decision-making processes in the economy and society will stay with them and not be permanently delegated to a class of representatives or permanent group of specialists however much they say they are on the side of working people.

We don't know and can't know precisely how the future associated workers will choose to carry out many of the other things outlined above – but we also don't need to know. There will also be other important general points or orienting principles to add to those above, but we can't be sure they will be of this kind of generality until much closer to their actual unfolding. But such guiding principles cannot simply be cobbled together into a programme. So why do some socialists struggle now, for example, with defining just who will be allowed to vote in the transitional period between capitals collapse and fully achieved socialism? At the same time, others agonise over defining which capitalist or pre-capitalist occupations should be classified as proletarian or not in some future soviet or commune. Why are some calling for "state ownership", "freedom of political parties", "higher levels of productivity than present day capitalism", "a workers' state which must follow a programme", and so on. Why do all this, if it isn't to provide a programme now for the future associated workers to follow, and for present revolutionary humanists and workers to accept or to decline at the price of being excluded (or marginalised) by those who do accept such a programme? And it must be said that some of these demands upon the future are highly debatable now, given the history of the 20th century.

There seems to be a contemporary assumption that revolutionary humanists need a detailed theoretical "programme" around which to unite and that without it a healthy unity cannot be achieved. Not so. We could unite around a number of things, a basic platform or manifesto for example! Many did so around the one produced by Marx which actually also came out of the practical search for unity and did not precede it, and which has yet to be bettered. However, it should be clear that any unity achieved around even an agreed theoretical programme will simply be a theoretical unity! Not only that, it risks leaving out of practical unity all those who for whatever reason can't agree with the ideas of the programme or its suggestions for action. Even for those who are not so excluded I'm afraid a unity on paper remains no more than a paper unity which still needs to be achieved in practice. And, worryingly, unity around a theoretical programme perpetuates and elevates unity around abstract procedural ideas above unity around real practical action.

Besides, "What is to be done?" should not be seen as a general ahistorical question, to be answered by producing a comprehensive programme leading all the way to the conquest of power and beyond. It is a recurrent question. Each time it is considered, the answer will depend upon the specific conditions facing

those who ask the question. In response to a letter regarding a suggestion that a Dutch party congress would discuss "what legislation should be enacted by socialists after they had gained control", Marx criticised the whole idea of such a discussion. Criticising the question itself, he added:

What should be done at any definite moment of the future, and done immediately, depends of course entirely on the given historical conditions in which one has to act.....The doctrinaire and inevitably fantastic anticipation of the programme of action for a revolution of the future only diverts one from the struggle of the present." (Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence, pp 317-8)

Marx's comment draws our attention to the fact that socialists a long time before us have spent time constructing speculative "programmes of action", trying to anticipate the future based upon some "vision" created in the present. In evaluating such "fantastic anticipations" Marx concluded that they diverted attention away from the struggle of the present. Having just "leaned on Marx" to lend support to the essence of my argument I return to standing on my own two feet and suggest that among the many elements of the "current historical conditions" in which revolutionary humanists have to act are the following:

- A) a maturing structural and (likely) episodic economic crisis within the world capitalist production and financial processes;
- B) a complete abandonment of any socialist pretence by "modern" and "modernised" social-democratic (including ex-Stalinist) reformist political parties;
- C) the spectre of Stalinist sectarianism which still haunts, distorts and suppresses the collective, socialist aspirations of working people;
- D) the divisive and debilitating residue of Leninist and Trotskyist sectarianism among those remaining in the revolutionary humanist tradition.

Instead of considering definitive and speculative programmes with which to publicise what must remain for a long time ultimate aspirations, I suggest that what we need to do first of all, and certainly for the next period, is

- a) to follow Marx's long-unheeded 19th century advice and overcome in practice the multi-faceted and ingrained sectarian habits that have developed among us socialists;
- b) thoroughly evaluate the failure of Bolshevik, Leninist, and Trotskyist vanguards;
- c) extend and develop an international network of workers and revolutionary humanists;

d) assist and support workers in struggle when and wherever they are in conflict with capital or the state;

e) share with these workers in struggle and other workers sufficient of the previously noted general understandings derived from Marx to begin to positively re-assert the potential of the socialist perspective for humanity from within the workers movement.

None of these have been yet adequately recognised and analysed from within the revolutionary left. They cannot be carried out comprehensively in a programme, nor without overcoming sectarianism. Without this, I doubt if revolutionary socialists will ever again be trusted, or deserve to be.

I suggest that the above points (a-e) are "what should be done at the moment" and they should form the basis of the present struggle for unity among revolutionary humanists – for they are those elements which can best prepare us for the next shift in the development of the "historical conditions" and they are elements which themselves can, if successfully achieved, create something qualitatively new with which to greet those future historical conditions. Working out detailed programmes for the future can only divert us from these particular struggles for, as Marx noted, debate on such programs will more often than not "end in endlessly repeated general banalities", however learned and practical they may try to sound. Seriously addressing the above points within the ranks of revolutionary humanists and taking the results among working people will also provide a firm practical foundation from which working class socialist self-activity, imagination and creativity can again begin to positively respond to historical conditions and to flourish in new forms.

Of course if readers have not drawn the same or similar conclusions to myself from their experience of sectarianism, their analysis of Bolshevism and Trotskyism, their reading of Marx, and their experience of the creativity of the working class, then nothing will come of the ideas and thoughts in this article. This at least will prove the earlier assertion that ideas and words don't automatically lead to people following them or carrying them out. Unless these particular thoughts and conclusions speak directly to the reader's experience and also unless the reader has the time and inclination to act upon them, then the ideas I present will definitely not be taken up. But then those who produce ideas about a vanguard and a programme have exactly the same problem. They will have to see whether their ideas speak to the experience of those who have read Marx and considered the experience of Russia from the standpoint of the working class and not simply from the standpoint of the vanguard. And later on they will have to see whether those ideas speak to the experience of working people in struggle.

The need to renew our theory

Letter to the editors of ISF

Dear comrades,

Thanks to the help of friends from London, I have received numbers 1 and 3 of ISF, which have been of great interest. I found No. 3 particularly interesting, especially the serious theoretical articles by Cyril Smith, Paresh Chattopadhyay, Istvan Meszaros, as well as the other discussion material. All this is very important, especially for the Russian reader.

Since the collapse of the USSR and the demise of official Soviet "Marxist-Leninist" ideology, Russian socialists have been in an ideological dead-end, or perhaps a vacuum. The new rulers of Russia began to force down people's throats the dogma that socialist ideology and the teachings of Karl Marx had failed. This was based in turn on another, Stalinist, dogma, i.e. that Marxist socialism had been built in the Soviet Union. But the construction of socialism in a single country – an economically and culturally backward country – could not be explained from the point of view of Marxist theory. Theoretically that left a choice of two alternatives: either to accept that Stalinist socialism was right and good, which would mean rejecting the historical materialism of Karl Marx; or to accept the teachings of classical Marxism, accept historical determinism – and reject Stalinism socialism. Stalin made it very simple: all those who thought differently from him, or thought at all, were sent to the Gulag. That's how the development of socialist theory and of socialist ideas in general was killed off for a long time in Russia.

Now, an intensive process of rethinking history is underway. Stalinist dogmas and falsifications are being destroyed. People are seeking answers to many questions about what to do. They are not satisfied with the conceptions of old official Soviet ideology, which took the country into a dead end. Among the majority of working people there is also disillusionment, even irritation, with the new bourgeois ideology, which is being exported here so energetically from the west.

People want a new ideology, a new social theory. In my opinion, this need can only be satisfied by modern-day socialist theory. But the only books and articles printed in large numbers in Russia today are those of liberal, bourgeois ideologues such as Ludwig von Mises and Frederik Hayek, or the historian Richard Pipes. You can find their books everywhere: they are printed in large print runs, sold all over the country and recommended to students at most universities. At the same time, it is almost impossible to find books by socialist thinkers and writers, by western Marxists. In fact the present-day rulers of Russia are terrified to

publish even the works of the European social democrats and "revisionists". World capital is stifling ideas in the new Russia.

Why are questions of theory so important? Because at the moment Russian socialists have only two social theories to choose from: the old Stalinist one and the new bourgeois one. Neither is any use to the genuine left. And the absence of anything else is one of the main reasons for the disorganisation of the socialist and workers' movement in the country. It has no constructive socialist theory, no clear perspective.

In this situation any help that can be given to Russian socialists in terms of theory and research is very important – that is what makes journals like ISF so useful here. Through discussions such as yours we will be able to develop a new socialist theory and an ideological orientation for the socialist movement.

I have a particular request. As I mentioned above, in Russia it is practically impossible to get hold of Marxist books published in the west. It would therefore be extremely useful if your journal could regularly include reviews and surveys of new Marxist and socialist literature – and in this way help Russian readers to overcome intellectual isolation from socialist thought elsewhere.

Another request. In all countries there are many academic conferences and discussions on the development of Marxist and socialist theory. It is very difficult for Russian socialists to take part even in a few of these. For this reason receiving information about such discussions is all the more important. It would be very useful to see reports of such theoretical discussions in the pages of the journal.

Today the most important thing is the development of socialist theory. The break-up of the USSR and the destruction of Stalinism "socialism" has given rise to the most favourable conditions for this development. But for this we need journals, discussion, a constant exchange of information. I hope that ISF will play a significant role in this work.

Yours faithfully,
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The Myth of Lenin's "Concept of The Party" or What They Did to *What Is To Be Done?*

By Hal Draper

This article is reprinted with permission from the Hal Draper Internet Archive. Although it is not new – it was written in 1971 – comrades have asked us to republish it because of its relevance to discussions in the International Socialist Forum. Note that Draper has included Footnotes, referred to as [Footnote 1], etc, and reference notes to give the source of quotations, referred to as [1], etc.

The myth for today is an axiom of what we may call Leninology – a branch of Kremlinology that has rapidly grown in the hands of the various university Russian Institutes, doctoral programs, political journalists, et al. According to this axiom, Lenin's 1902 book *What Is To Be Done?* (for short, *WITBD*) represents the essential content of his "operational code" or "concept of the party"; all of Bolshevism and eventually Stalinism lies in ambush in its pages; it is the canonical work of "Leninism" on party organization, which in turn bears the original sin of totalitarianism. It establishes the "Leninist type of party" as an authoritarian structure controlled from the top by "professional revolutionaries" of upper-class provenance lording it over a proletarian rank and file.

My focus here will be on *WITBD* itself, and on Lenin's views and practices in the period between *WITBD* and the Russian Revolution. Issues ramifying farther into the inevitable multitude of questions will not be treated in the same detail.

The Leninological axiom under discussion is commonly reinforced from two directions. As was pointed out by the prominent Leninologist Utechin (for whom see the appended Special Note), *WITBD* is given a similar exalted position in the party schools of the Stalinist regime. In fact, Utechin's way of demonstrating the basic importance of *WITBD* is to quote the Kremlin's official *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* on this point. The work, says Utechin (much like other Leninologists), "became a guide-book for his followers in matters of organization, strategy and tactics and...has been adhered to by Communists ever since. Lenin himself consistently applied these views... In *WITBD*...his argument has a general validity and has in fact been generally applied by Communists..." [1] In short, both the Western Leninologists and the Stalinists agree that Lenin's book was a totalitarian bible: which is not surprising but does not settle the matter.

"Lenin himself consistently applied these views": we will see how far from the truth this lies. My subject is not my

own interpretation of *WITBD*, but a survey of Lenin's own opinions, recorded many times, on the question raised, viz., the place of *WITBD* in his thought. According to the myth, endlessly repeated from book to book, Lenin's "concept of the party"—

1. saw the party as consisting mainly of "intellectuals," on the basis of a theory according to which workers cannot themselves develop to socialist consciousness; rather, the socialist idea is always and inevitably imported into the movement by bourgeois intellectuals;
2. posited that the party is simply a band of "professional revolutionaries" as distinct from a broad working-class party;
3. repudiated any element of spontaneity or spontaneous movement, in favor of engineered revolution only;
4. required that the party be organized not democratically but as a bureaucratic or semimilitary hierarchy.

In point of fact, we will see that these allegations are contrary to Lenin's views as many times repeated and explained by him, beginning with *WITBD* itself. We will indeed begin with *WITBD*, where we will find something different from the myth. But even more important, it must be understood that *WITBD* was not Lenin's last word – it was closer to being his first word. It is only the Leninologists who write as if *WITBD* were the sum-total of Lenin's writings on the issue.

We will find, for example, that Lenin protested more than once that his initial formulations in *WITBD* were being distorted and misinterpreted by opponents, after which he went on to clarify and modify. If we want to know Lenin's "concept of the party" we must look at the formulations he came to, after there had been discussions and attacks. There is not a single prominent Leninologist who has even mentioned this material in his exposition of *WITBD*'s original sin.

1. Socialist Consciousness and Intellectuals

Let us start with the myth which claims that, according to Lenin's views in 1902 and forever, the workers cannot

come to socialist ideas of themselves, that only bourgeois intellectuals are the carriers of socialist ideas.

We will be eager to see what *WITBD* actually said on this point; but there is an introductory point to be made beforehand.

1. It is a curious fact that no one has ever found this alleged theory anywhere else in Lenin's voluminous writings, not before and not after *WITBD*. It never appeared in Lenin again. No Leninologist has ever quoted such a theory from any other place in Lenin.

This should give pause at least. In ordinary research, a scholar would tend to conclude that, even if Lenin perhaps held this theory in 1902, he soon *abandoned* it. The scholar would at least report this interesting fact, and even perhaps try to explain it. The Leninologists do not behave in this fashion. On the contrary, they endlessly repeat that the virtually nonexistent theory (nonexistent after *WITBD*) is the crux of Leninism forever and onward -- though they never quote anything other than *WITBD*. (The explanation for the curious fact itself will emerge from the points that follow.)

2. Did Lenin put this theory forward even in *WITBD*? Not exactly.

The fact is that Lenin had just read this theory in the most prestigious theoretical organ of Marxism of the whole international socialist movement, the *Neue Zeit*. It had been put forward in an important article by the leading Marxist authority of the International, Karl Kautsky. And this was why and how it got into *WITBD*. In *WITBD* Lenin first paraphrased Kautsky. [2] Then he quoted a long passage from Kautsky's article, almost a page long. Here is Kautsky, whom Lenin then looked up to as the master (some said the "pope") of socialist theory:

Of course, socialism, as a doctrine, has its roots in modern economic relationships... But socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises under different conditions. Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science is as much a condition for socialist production as, say, modern technology, and the proletariat can create neither the one nor the other, no matter how much it may desire to do so; both arise out of the modern social process. The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the *bourgeois intelligentsia* [emphasis by Kautsky]: it was in the minds of individual members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians... Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without and not something that arose within it spontaneously. [3]

There it is -- the whole theory laid out, the devilish crux of "Leninism"; and it turns out to be the product of *Kautsky's* pen! When Lenin paraphrased it a few pages before, he began, "We have said that..." -- that is, he tied it up immediately as the accepted view of the movement (or so he seemed to think). His summary was by no means as brash as Kautsky's formulation. But we will return to Lenin's formulation.

Why did Kautsky emphasize this view of socialist history at this time? The reason is perfectly clear: the new reformist wing of the movement, the Bernsteinian Revisionists, were arguing that all one needed was the ongoing movement of the workers, *not theory*; that the spontaneous class activity of the trade-union movement and other class movements was enough. "The movement is everything, the goal is nothing" was Bernstein's dictum, thereby seeking to shelve theoretical considerations in favor of shortsighted concentration on the day-to-day problems. Reform was the concern of today (the movement); revolution had to do with tomorrow (theory). Kautsky's generalization about the role of the "bourgeois intelligentsia" in importing socialist ideas into the raw class movement was one way, in his eyes, of undercutting the Revisionist approach. And this, of course, gave it equal appeal for other opponents of the new right wing, like Lenin.

It is no part of my subject to explain why Kautsky was misguided in this line of argument, and why his theory was based on a historical half-truth. But it is curious, at any rate, that no one has sought to prove that by launching this theory (which he never repudiated, as far as I know) *Kautsky* was laying the basis for the demon of totalitarianism.

3. So it turns out that the crucial "Leninist" theory was really Kautsky's, as is clear enough to anyone who really reads *WITBD* instead of relying only on the Leninological summaries. Did Lenin, in *WITBD*, adopt Kautsky's theory?

Again, not exactly. Certainly he tried to get maximum mileage out of it against the right wing; this was the point of his quoting it. If it did something for Kautsky's polemic, he no doubt figured that it would do something for his. Certainly this young man Lenin was not (yet) so brash as to attack his "pope" or correct him overtly. But there was obviously a feeling of discomfort. While showing some modesty and attempting to avoid the appearance of a head-on criticism, the fact is that Lenin inserted two longish footnotes *rejecting* (or if you wish, amending) precisely what was worst about the Kautsky theory on the role of the proletariat.

The first footnote was appended right after the Kautsky passage quoted above. It was specifically formulated to undermine and weaken the theoretical content of Kautsky's position. It began: "This does not mean, of course, that the workers have no part in creating such an

ideology." But this was exactly what Kautsky did mean and say. In the guise of offering a caution, Lenin was proposing a modified view. "They [the workers] take part, however," Lenin's footnote continued, "not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians, as Proudhons and Weitlings; in other words, they take part only when they are able..." In short, Lenin was reminding the reader that Kautsky's sweeping statements were not even 100 per cent true historically; he pointed to exceptions. But he went on to a more important point: once you get beyond the *original* initiation of socialist ideas, what is the role of intellectuals and workers? (More on this in the next point.)

Lenin's second footnote was not directly tied to the Kautsky article, but discussed the "spontaneity" of the socialist idea. "It is often said," Lenin began, "that the working class *spontaneously* gravitates towards socialism. This is perfectly true in the sense that socialist theory reveals the causes of the misery of the working class... and for that reason the workers are able to assimilate it so easily," but he reminded that this process itself was not subordinated to mere spontaneity. "The working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism; nevertheless...bourgeois ideology spontaneously imposes itself upon the working class to a still greater degree." [4]

This second footnote was obviously written to modify and recast the Kautsky theory, without coming out and saying that the Master was wrong. There are several things that happen "spontaneously," and what will win out is not decided only by spontaneity! -- so went the modification. It cannot be overemphasized that if one wants to analyze Lenin's developing views about "spontaneity" one cannot stick at this byplay in *WITBD*, but rather one must go on to examine precisely what the developing views were going to be. All that was clear at this point was that Lenin was justifiably *dissatisfied* with the formulation of Kautsky's theory, however conveniently anti-Bernstein it might have been. We will see more about his dissatisfaction.

4. Even Kautsky's theory, as quoted in *WITBD*, was not as crass as the Leninologists make it out to be (while calling it *Lenin's* theory, to be sure). The Leninologists run two different questions together: (a) What was, historically, the *initial* role of intellectuals in the beginnings of the socialist movement, and (b) what *is* -- and above all, what *should be* -- the role of bourgeois intellectuals in a working-class party today.

Kautsky was not so ignorant or dull-witted as to believe (as so many Leninologists apparently do) that *if* it can be shown that intellectuals historically played a certain initiatory role, they *must* and *should* continue to play the same role now and forever. It does not follow; as the working class matured, it tended to throw off leading strings. The Leninologists do not argue this point because they do not see it is there.

As a matter of fact, in the International of 1902 no one really had any doubts about the historical facts concerning

the beginnings of the movement. But what followed from those facts? Marx for one (or Marx and Engels for two) concluded, from the same facts and subsequent experiences, that the movement had to be sternly warned against the influence of bourgeois intellectuals inside the party. [5] "Precisely in Germany these are the most dangerous people," they averred. The historical facts were so many reasons to take the dangers seriously, to *combat* intellectuals' predominance as a social stratum in the movement.

5. No one in the international movement was more forceful or frequent than Lenin in decrying and combating the spread of intellectuals' influence in the movement. This is easy to demonstrate, but I will not take the space to do so here. In any case a mere couple of well-chosen specimens would not be enough. Just to cull the most virulent passages alone would fill a book. As against this indubitable fact, let us ask a question: can anyone cite any passage in which Lenin ever advocated *increased* influence, or *predominant* influence, by intellectuals in the party?

There is no such passage, in point of fact. None is cited by the Leninologists. Their whole case on this point is hung on a deduction (of theirs) from a theory in *WITBD* which is essentially Kautsky's, it turns out. We know indeed that the typical social-democratic reformist party is very much dominated on top by intellectuals derived from the bourgeoisie. We do not typically see the leaders of these parties denouncing this state of affairs. On the other hand, Lenin's collected works are chock-full of denunciations of increased influence by intellectuals. Obviously, this does not settle the matter, but still less is it reasonable to rest virtually the whole case against Lenin, on this point, on what is *not* in Lenin's 1902 book.

In the Russian movement, the Marxist left's denunciations of intellectuals in the movement started with the founding congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party itself (the congress to which *WITBD* was directed). In fact, the Bolshevik-Menshevik split over the notorious membership rule (who could be a party member) was directly connected with the Mensheviks' anxiety to make it easier for nonparty intellectuals to be accounted as members, while Lenin fought to make it harder. (This is hardly disputed.) The Leninological myth that, according to Lenin's "concept of the party," the organization is to consist only or mainly or largely of bourgeois intellectuals -- this is contrary to fact.

6. Lastly, since it is a question of a "party concept" alleged to be peculiar to Lenin and Leninism, we should find that it is *not* true of the other Russian socialist parties -- the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries. But just the reverse is true. The case is most clear-cut with regard to the S-Rs, for while this party aspired to *represent* the peasants' interests and mentality, it was very far from being a party of peasants. Notoriously it was a party composed overwhelmingly of bourgeois intelligentsia.

(You need only read the main scholarly work on the S-Rs, by O. H. Radkey.) The proportion of bourgeois intellectuals in the Mensheviks or supporting the Mensheviks was *greater* than in the case of the Bolsheviks, not less.

2. "Professional Revolutionaries" and Spontaneity

Let us take the second claim, that the Leninist "concept of the party" demanded that the party should consist of so-called professional revolutionaries only. This view was "deduced" from *WITBD* by opponents. As soon as the deduction and the claim appeared, Lenin denied (scores of times) that he wanted a party made up of professional revolutionaries only. The Leninologists endlessly repeat the "deduction", and do not mention that Lenin consistently and firmly repudiated it.

One of the difficulties (not Lenin's) is that there are several questions confused under this head, as usual. In the first place, the most important background fact was the condition of illegality suffered in Russia by any revolutionary party. It was not a question of some general or suprahistorical "concept of the party" offering a formula for any country at any time. *WITBD* asked what was to be done in *this autocratic czarism* in this year of 1902. Whatever views on this question are discerned in *WITBD*, it is false to ascribe them to a generalized program of organization good for any time or place.

In *WITBD* Lenin was discussing the need for a *core* of "professional revolutionaries" in the party for the sake of effective functioning – to make sure that the history of the party was not simply one shipment of revolutionaries after another to Siberia. A good part of the Leninological myth rests on a confused definition of "professional revolutionary." The Leninologists seem to assume that to Lenin a "professional revolutionary" meant a *full-time* party worker or functionary, devoting all his time to party activity. This is absurd from Lenin's viewpoint; it would indeed exclude workers, as the Leninologists deduce.

It can easily be shown, from Lenin's copious discussions of the professional revolutionary for years after *WITBD*, that to Lenin the term meant this: *a party activist who devoted most (preferably all) of his spare time to revolutionary work*. The professional revolutionary considers his revolutionary activity to be the center of his life (or of his life-style, if you will). He must work to earn a living, of course, but this is not his life's center. Such is the professional revolutionary type.

I have come to believe that part of the confusion stems from the important difference in the meaning of *professional* between English and most Continental languages. In French (and I think the German, etc. usage stems directly from the French) the word *professionnel* refers simply to occupation. Whereas in English only

lawyers, doctors and other recognized "professions" can be said to have "professional" activity, in French this can be said of anyone in any occupation; the reference is simply to occupational activity. Under the aegis of the English language, a "professional" revolutionary must be as full-time as a doctor or lawyer. (Of course this does not account for non-English Leninologists, and is only one factor in the confusion.)

It follows from Lenin's view that even the "core" of professional revolutionaries were not necessarily expected to be full-time party activists, which usually means functionaries. (The number of functionaries in a revolutionary group is a question with its own history, but this history is not presently ours.) The point of defining a professional revolutionary as a full-timer, a functionary, is to fake the conclusion, or "deduction": only nonworkers can make up the party elite, hence only intellectuals. This conclusion is an invention of the Leninologists, based on nothing in Lenin.

From Lenin's standpoint, professional-revolutionary workers were important to the movement for two reasons. One is obvious: the greater amount of time and activity that they could devote to the work of the movement. A professional revolutionary regarded even the hours he spent on the job as opportunities for socialist and trade-union propaganda and organization. The second aspect of the professional revolutionary type, much emphasized by Lenin, was that such a worker could be *trained* in revolutionary work, in a more meaningful way; that is, given conscious education and courses in self-development on how to operate as a revolutionary. The professional revolutionary worker was, or could become, a *trained* revolutionary worker.

Lenin had no trouble understanding and acknowledging that only a "core" of the party could consist of such elements. All he argued was that the more such the party had, the more effective its work. This is a far cry from the Leninological myth.

As for the myths about the alleged "theory of spontaneity" versus "conscious organization": much of this is the result simply of failing to understand what the issues were. No one in the movement, certainly not Lenin, had any doubts about the important and positive role played by "spontaneity" -- spontaneous revolts, struggles, etc. (In many cases, when we say a certain revolt was "spontaneous," all we mean is: *we do not know* how it was organized or by whom.)

What Lenin argued against in *WITBD* and elsewhere was the *glorification* of spontaneity for its own sake; for what this glorification meant in actuality was a decrying of conscious organizational activity or party work or leadership. This latter attitude made sense only for anarchists, but it was also likely to be assumed by extreme reformists as a cover for opposing independent working-class organization. For the Russian "Economists" (who

advocated "economic" action only) the line was that no revolutionary party was necessary and the Russian party should be liquidated; and in this context the glorification of "spontaneity" was simply a way of counterposing *something* to the organized political struggle by the working class.

The claim that Lenin was *hostile* to "spontaneous" struggles verges on nonsense. Whenever a Leninologist purports to quote Lenin on this subject, what he really quotes are Lenin's arguments against *relying only on spontaneity* to usher in socialism by some millennial date. Lenin advocated that the spontaneous action of the people must be integrated with the element of political leadership by trained socialist workers, and part of such training was precisely the capacity to take advantage of spontaneous struggles when they turned up. The overwhelming majority of the International would heartily agree. There was nothing specially "Leninist" about this, except Lenin's usual clarity on the point, as compared with the often hazy thinking of reformists.

3. Lenin's Party Concepts

We still have to take up Lenin's later comments on *WITBD*. But something of a historical introduction is necessary here.

The reader of Lenin's *WITBD* must understand that if it embodied some specially Leninist "concept of the party" *Lenin himself was entirely unaware of it* at the time. He thought he was putting forward a view of party and movement that was the same as that of the best parties of the International, particularly the German party under the leadership of August Bebel – only allowing for the big difference that the Russian movement faced the special problems of illegality under an autocracy.

The naive Leninologist seems to assume that when Lenin referred to "centralization" or "centralism," he was necessarily talking about some *supercentralized* organizational form. But in fact the Russians (and others) who used this language often meant the same thing that the Germans had once meant when "Germany" was a geographical expression fragmented into thirty-odd states and statelets. Where there was no center at all, the demand for "centralism" was a call to establish *a* center. In 1902 there was no all-Russian party in existence at all.

A First Congress had taken place in 1898, but had led to nothing. The Russian movement consisted of isolated circles, discrete regional conglomerations, unconnected factory groups, etc. There was no center; in fact there was no "party" except as a future label. The Second Congress scheduled for 1903 was hopefully going to establish an organized all-Russian party for the first time. *This was the situation toward which Lenin directed his little book in 1902.*

The point of holding a congress was to establish a *center* at last. No "central" organization whatever existed as yet. Everyone who looked to the congress was in favor of "centralizing" the work of the now-decentralized circles operating inside Russia. This was what "centralization" meant under the circumstances. But it was ambiguous then as now.

The German party had also gone through a period of illegality, from 1878 to 1890; and during this period its practices had not been ideally democratic at all. One of the main features was the domination of practical party work in Germany, insofar as it was possible, not by the elected National Executive in exile, but by the Reichstag Fraction of deputies, who remained legal. But this Fraction had never been elected by the party; the deputies had been elected by local voters. Marx and Engels looked askance at what they considered to be the "dictatorship" of the Reichstag deputies over the party; but the arrangement was generally accepted for its practical usefulness.

As the Russian situation developed from 1902 to 1914, it turned out – in hindsight – that there *was* something distinctive about Lenin's "concept of the party," even though he was not specifically aware of it. There are two points to be made under this head, the second being more important.

(i) Sectism or Mass Party

Throughout the history of the socialist movement, there has been a tendency for socialist currents that considered themselves to have distinctive ideas to organize *as a sect*. The alternative is to operate as a current in a *class movement*.

One must distinguish clearly between these two organizational forms. The class movement is based on, and cemented by, its role in the class struggle; the sect is based on, and cemented by, its special ideas or program. The history of the socialist movement began mostly with sects (continuing the tradition of religious movements). It was only the continued development of the working class which gave rise to mass parties that sought to represent and reflect the whole class-in-movement.

The outstanding example of the class movement, as counterposed to the sect, was given by the First International, which broke down sect lines (it did not even start with socialism in its program). In the form that Marx brought about, it sought to organize the entire working-class movement in all its forms. This much of its character was continued by the Second International, except that trade unions were not affiliated. In France the fragmentation of the socialist movement into sects continued until 1905, when a united Socialist Party was formed. In Germany the Lassalleian sect had been absorbed fairly quickly, in 1875. Sects still continued to operate in many countries, like the Social Democratic Federation in

Britain, which claimed to represent "revolutionary" socialism.

In 1902 when Lenin wrote *WITBD*, there was a big difference between Germany and Russia (which indeed *WITBD* discussed): in Germany the revolutionary wing (or what Lenin and others considered such) was in control of the party, whereas in Russia the right wing had the dominant influence. Lenin's response to this situation was *not* to organize the revolutionary wing as a left-wing sect outside the general movement. *In fact, if we consider the whole period before 1914, Lenin never organized, or sought to organize, a "Leninist" sect.* (The theory of "revolutionary" sectification arose out of the degeneration of the Comintern to become a "principle of Leninism"; before 1917 it had been kept alive on the fringes of the Second International and in the anarchist movement.)

The course which the young Lenin took was then the normal one in the International: he sought to organize the revolutionary current as a political center of some sort inside the mass party (or what was going to be the mass party if the Second Congress was successful). Most political centers in the socialist movement, leaving aside sects, were currents established around periodical organs; this was the case in the German party, for example. When Lenin went into exile from Russia, he did *not* establish a "Leninist" sect; he went to the *Iskra* editorial board, which was not a membership group. Even after the Bolshevik-Menshevik split, and for the next several years (at least until shortly before World War I), the term "Bolsheviks" and "Mensheviks" meant a political center *inside* the mass party, the RSDLP, not a membership sect.

(ii) Split and Unity

This involved the second distinctive feature of Lenin's party concept. One can distinguish three approaches to this question, as follows.

- a. There were those who believed in *split at any cost*, that is, the revolutionary wing in a reformist party must split away at the most opportune moment, and organize its own sect. This is the characteristic theory of sectism.
- b. There were those, and they were legion, who believed in *unity at any cost*. The unity of the mass social-democratic party must never be breached; a break was the ultimate disaster. This was the mirror image of the first approach: the fetishism of unity.

This approach was the dominant one in the International, including the German party. What it meant in practice was: accommodation with the right wing, even by a *majority* left wing. If the right wing must be persuaded from splitting at any cost, then the majority left had to make concessions to it, sufficient to keep it in the party.

One of the most enlightening examples of this pattern took place in the Russian party soon after the 1903 congress, at

which Lenin's wing won majority control with the support of Plekhanov. The Menshevik minority then split. Thereupon Plekhanov, under pressure, swung around and demanded that the majority of the *Iskra* editorial board be handed back to the Mensheviks, for the sake of "unity." In short: if the Mensheviks had won the majority, there is no doubt that Lenin would have stayed in as a minority; but if the left wins, the right wing picks up its marbles and quits; then for the sake of "unity" the left has to hand control back to the right...

c. Lenin's distinctive approach was this: he simply insisted that where the left won majority control of a party, it had the right and the duty to go ahead with its own policy *just as the right wing was doing everywhere*. The Bolshevik-Menshevik hostilities hardened when Lenin rejected Plekhanov's demand to reverse the outcome of the congress. This distinctive approach was: unity, yes, but not at the cost of foiling the victory of the majority. Unity, yes, but on the same democratic basis as ever: the right wing could work to win out at the next congress if it could, but it would not do to demand political concessions as a reward for *not splitting*.

One of the chapters in Lenin's life most industriously glossed over by the Leninologists is the period that followed the Second Congress and Plekhanov's about-face. One must read Volumes 6 and 7 of Lenin's *Collected Works* to see how heartsick he was in face of the break and what continued efforts he put into healing the split with the Mensheviks on the basis of full democratic rights for all. In test after test, it was the Mensheviks who rejected unity on this basis, or on any basis that failed to give them party control in defiance of the Second Congress outcome. In fact, the first test of course had come at the congress itself, since it was the *Mensheviks* that split away because Lenin had gained a majority in the voting (after extreme right-wing elements had walked out for their own right-wing political reasons). The common claim that it was the Bolsheviks who split is one of the myths of Leninology.

All this was tested again in the period after the upheaval of the 1905 revolution, which opened up Russian political life for a while. Legal organization became possible temporarily, open elections, etc. In this situation, the question of unity of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks was again raised. But we will come back to this in Section 5.

4. Lenin After *WITBD*

In the first two sections we discussed what is in *WITBD* and what isn't; but, as mentioned, this is very far from exhausting the question of Lenin's attitude toward *WITBD*. Part of the Leninological myth is the claim that the "concept of the party" found in *WITBD* (whatever this is) was Lenin's permanent and abiding view, which he "consistently applied" from then on. We must therefore turn to find out what Lenin thought about *WITBD* in the ensuing years.

For one thing we will find this: that, from the time *WITBD* was published until at least the Russian Revolution of 1917, Lenin insisted that this 1902 work of his was *not* a canonical exposition of a model form of party organization, but simply an organizational plan for the given time and place. It was devised for (a) an underground movement functioning in secrecy under conditions of autocracy, and (b) a movement which had not yet succeeded even in forming a national organizing center in its own country, as had most social-democratic parties in Europe. This 1902 plan was therefore not automatically applicable to other situations — to other places in Europe, or to other periods in Russia, where there was more elbow room for political liberty. This plan was time-bound and place-specific.

In his *Letter to a Comrade on Our Organizational Tasks*, September 1902, that is, a few months after the publication of *WITBD*, Lenin explained more than once that the forms of organization needed were determined by the interests of secrecy and circumscribed by the existence of the autocracy. [6] But then, at this time his later opponents, like Martov and Plekhanov, were at one with him in viewing the ideas of *WITBD* as unexceptionable conclusions from the struggle of a serious revolutionary underground movement. It was only after a falling-out on other grounds that these opponents, and their successors, began to read into *WITBD* everything they thought was sinister in Lenin's course, including his inexplicable refusal to yield up the congress majority power to the people who had been the congress minority.

Already at the Second Congress itself, before the final split, Lenin had pleaded with critics not to take *WITBD* passages "wrenched from the context." In doing so, the first point he had made was the one mentioned above, viz., that *WITBD* was not intended to present "principles" of party organization. The discussion on *WITBD*, he said optimistically, had clarified all the questions: "It is obvious that here an episode in the struggle against 'Economism' has been confused with a discussion of the principles of a major theoretical question (the formation of an ideology). Moreover, this episode has been presented in an absolutely false light." [7]

He directly confronted the claim about subordinating the working-class movement to bourgeois intellectuals:

It is claimed that Lenin says nothing about any conflicting trends, but categorically affirms that the working-class movement invariably "tends" to succumb to bourgeois ideology. Is that so? Have I not said that the working-class movement is drawn towards the bourgeois outlook *with the benevolent assistance of the Schulze-Delitzsches and others like them?* And who is meant here by "others like them"? None other than the "Economists"...

This was a further step in adding qualifications to the bare Kautsky theory, without breaking with Kautsky. He added an even more serious qualification:

Lenin [it is claimed, says Lenin] takes no account whatever of the fact that the workers, too, have a share in the formation of an ideology. Is that so? Have I not said time and again that the shortage of fully class-conscious workers, worker-leaders, and worker-revolutionaries is, in fact, the greatest deficiency in our movement? Have I not said there that the training of such worker-revolutionaries must be our immediate task? Is there no mention there of the importance of developing a trade-union movement and creating a special trade-union literature? ... [8]

And to end this same speech, Lenin made the point which is among the most important to keep in mind about *WITBD*:

To conclude. We all know that the "Economists" have gone to one extreme. To straighten matters out somebody had to pull in the other direction, and that is what I have done. [9]

This is the main key to what Lenin was doing in *WITBD*. Throughout his life his constant pattern was to "bend the bow" in an opposite direction in order to push back against some immediate dangerous pressure. His metaphor on these occasions was often to "turn the helm the other way" in order to compensate for the dangerous pressure. Now it happens that personally I do not sympathize with this propensity, though I admit it is natural enough. I think that a bow which is bent in various directions is apt to be bent out of shape. But it is a common enough resort by people of all political complexions, and only asks for understanding. In Lenin's case it is a fact that demands understanding, especially when he specifically explained the pattern in so many words, as he did often enough. And any Leninologist who refuses to understand it is bound to write a great deal of nonsense.

We are still at the Second Congress. On August 15 Lenin's first speech in the Rules discussion was summarized in the minutes in nine lines. Most of it was devoted to saying this:

It should not be imagined that Party organizations must consist solely of professional revolutionaries. We need the most diverse organizations of all types, ranks and shades, beginning with extremely limited and secret [ones] and ending with very broad, free, *lose Organisationem* [loose organizations]. [10]

He could not have been more explicit in correcting any false impression that might have been conveyed by his "bow-bending" in *WITBD*.

Lenin repeated this clarification in his second speech that day:

Comrade Trotsky completely misunderstood the main idea of my book *What Is To Be Done?* when he spoke about the party not being a conspiratorial organization (many others too raised this objection). He forgot that in my book I propose a number of various types of organizations, from the most secret and most exclusive to comparatively broad and "loose" organizations. [11]

If it is charged that this was *not* clear in *WITBD*, well – that is the function of discussion: to clarify and modify. Lenin clarified and modified, not merely later but right in the congress discussion.

It may be said that if *WITBD* was misunderstood by so many, there must have been a reason. This is quite true. There was more than one reason, and the first has been mentioned: Lenin's bow-bending. In addition there was a will to "misunderstand," as there is still today. An objective scholar writing today with the advantage of a longer perspective and fuller documentation should be expected, however, to set forth and weigh Lenin's repeated attempts to clarify and modify (qualify and recast) his views. What is typical about contemporary Leninology is that it ignores Lenin's clarifications in favor of a purely demonological exegesis.

Lenin, we said, was not thinking in terms of a general "concept of party organization." When in a 1904 article in the *Neue Zeit* Rosa Luxemburg attacked his ideas, as set forth in his brochure *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* dealing with the Second Congress, Lenin wrote a reply which rather mildly protested -- what? Not that he was right, but that he did not hold the opinions Luxemburg ascribed to him. [See Footnote 1]. This is what Lenin wrote:

Comrade Luxemburg says, for example, that my book is a clear and detailed expression of the point of view of "intransigent centralism." Comrade Luxemburg thus supposes that I defend one system of 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. [12]

That is, Lenin believed that he was only working out the forms of any party that could conceivably *exist* under the given conditions in Russia:

Rosa Luxemburg further says that "according to his [Lenin's] conception, the Central Committee has the right to organize all the local Party committees." Actually that is not so... Comrade Luxemburg says that in my view "the Central Committee is the only active nucleus of the Party." Actually that is not so. I have never advocated any such view... Comrade Rosa Luxemburg says...that the whole controversy is over

the degree of centralization. Actually that is not so. ...our controversy has principally been over whether the Central Committee and Central Organ should represent the trend of the majority of the Party Congress, or whether they should not. About this "ultra-centralist" and "purely Blanquist" demand the worthy comrade says not a word, she prefers to declaim against mechanical subordination of the part to the whole, against slavish submission, blind obedience, and other such bogeys. ...Comrade Luxemburg fathers on me the idea that all the conditions already exist in Russia for forming a large and extremely centralized workers' party. Again an error of fact. ... [13]

And so on. By the way, anyone who thinks that Rosa Luxemburg was a sainted angel in internal party brawls is naive. In this case, either she was retailing vicious slanders, of the sort she was familiar enough with in the Polish movement, or else someone should demonstrate that Lenin *was* advocating the views with which she charged him. The latter has not been done.

5. Toward Party Democratization

Let us put demonology aside. It must be noted that, in the period inaugurated by the 1905 upheaval, as the situation in Russia changed and the pressure of the autocracy lightened, Lenin's "concept of the party" changed drastically, in accord with the new circumstances -- *just as we would expect if his protestations were taken seriously.*

Already in February 1905, in a draft resolution for the Third Party Congress, Lenin wrote: "Under conditions of political freedom, our Party can and will be built entirely on the elective principle. Under the autocracy this is impracticable for the collective thousands that make up the party." [14] Writing in September 1905, he hailed the German party as "first in respect of organization, integrality and coherence" and pointed to its organizational decisions as "highly instructive to us Russians."

Not so long ago organizational questions occupied a disproportionate place among current problems of Party life, and to some extent this holds true of the present as well. Since the Third Congress two organizational tendencies in the Party have become fully defined. One is toward consistent centralism and consistent extension of the democratic principle in Party organizations, not for the sake of demagoguery or because it sounds good but in order to put this into effect as Social-Democracy's free field of activity extends in Russia. The other tendency is toward diffusiveness of organization, "vagueness of organization" ... [15]

In November 1905 he stressed in an article that the socialist worker "knows there is no other road to socialism save the road through democracy, through political liberty. He therefore strives to achieve democratism completely and consistently in order to attain the ultimate goal --

socialism." [16] The same month he published an important essay, titled "The Reorganization of the Party." In it he called for a new party congress in order to put the whole organization "on a new basis."

This article went to the main point directly: "The conditions in which our Party is functioning are changing radically. Freedom of assembly, of association and the press has been captured." [17] What followed? Lenin answered: "organize in a new way" ... "new methods" ... "a new line."

We, the representatives of revolutionary Social-Democracy, the supporters of the "Majority" [Bolsheviks], have repeatedly said that complete democratization of the Party was impossible in conditions of secret work, and that in such conditions the "elective principle" was a mere phrase. And experience has confirmed our words. ... But we Bolsheviks have always recognized that in new conditions, when political liberties were acquired, it would be essential to adopt the elective principle. [18]

It must be kept in mind that the impracticality of open election of local leading committees under conspiratorial conditions was not a Bolshevik peculiarity; the secret police had made it as difficult for Mensheviks or S-Rs.

Our party [wrote Lenin] has stagnated while working underground. ... The "underground" is breaking up. Forward, then, ... extend your bases, rally all the worker Social-Democrats round yourselves, incorporate them in the ranks of the Party organizations by hundreds and thousands. [19]

These were "new methods" only in Russia, of course; this was what bourgeois democratic regimes had possible in Western Europe before this. Lenin had always viewed the German Social-Democracy as a model of organization; now the Russian Social-Democrats could emulate it.

The decision of the Central Committee...is a decisive step towards the full application of the democratic principle in Party organization. [20]

All comrades, he enjoined, must "devise new forms of organization" to take in an influx of workers, new forms that were "definitely much broader" than the old, "less rigid, more 'free,' more 'loose.'" "With complete freedom of association and civil liberties for the people, we should, of course, have to found Social-Democratic unions..." [21] "Each union, organization or group will immediately elect its bureau, or board, or directing committee..." [22] Furthermore, he recommended, it was now possible to bring about party unity, Bolsheviks with Mensheviks, on the basis of a broad democratic vote of the rank and file, since this could not be organized under the new conditions. [23]

All of this sea-change had to be explained to Russian workers who had never faced such conditions before.

We must not be afraid, Lenin argued, of "a sudden influx of large numbers of non-Social-Democrats into the Party." [24]

Note this remark made almost in passing: "The working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social-Democratic, and more than ten years of work put in by Social-Democracy has done a great deal to transform this spontaneity into consciousness." [25] *It looks as if Lenin had forgotten even the existence of the Kautsky theory he had copied out and quoted in 1902!*

The initiative of the workers themselves will now display itself on a scale that we, the underground and circle workers of yesterday, did not even dare dream of. [26]

He seized on the new conditions especially to advocate that mass recruitment of workers (possible for the first time) should swamp over the influence of intellectuals in the party work:

At the Third Congress of the Party I suggested that there be about eight workers to every two intellectuals in the Party committees. How obsolete that suggestion seems now! Now we must wish for the new Party organizations to have one Social-Democratic intellectual to several hundred Social-Democratic workers. [27]

The article concluded this way, with a typical Lenin reaction:

"We have 'theorized' for so long (sometimes – why not admit it? – to no use) in the unhealthy atmosphere of political exile, that it will really not be amiss if we now 'bend the bow' slightly, a little, just a little, 'the other way' and put practice a little more in the forefront." [28]

So now the bow bent the other way – "slightly."

The situation would now be quite clear even if Lenin never mentioned *WITBD* again. But in fact we can now turn to remarks by Lenin in which he reconsidered *WITBD* specifically, in the light of the new conditions and of these new concepts of party organization (new for Russia).

In November 1907 Lenin published a collection of old articles, called *Twelve Years*. Its aim was to review the movement's thought and action over that period of time, a historical purpose. His preface to this collection was plainly addressed to the new audience generated by the revolutionary upheaval going on since 1905, an audience to whom the old disputes were past history. Here he explained why *WITBD* had been included in the collection. Note in the first place that it required explanation.

WITBD had been included (explains Lenin) because it "is frequently mentioned by the Mensheviks" and bourgeois-

liberal writers; therefore he wanted to "draw the attention of the modern reader" to what was its "essential content." His explanation began with a statement that might just as well be addressed to contemporary Leninologists:

The basic mistake made by those who now criticize *WITBD* is to treat the pamphlet apart from its connection with the concrete historical situation of a definite, and now long past, period in the development of our Party.

This applied, he said, to those "who, many years after the pamphlet appeared, wrote about its incorrect or exaggerated ideas on the subject of an organization of professional revolutionaries." Such criticisms were wrong "to dismiss gains which, in their time, had to be fought for, but which have long ago been consolidated and have served their purpose." [29]

It is obvious that the reference to "exaggerated ideas" is an admission of a degree of incorrectness, even if the confession simultaneously maintains that the incorrectness was pardonable. But that had already been the sense of the "bending the bow" remarks; it was not really even new.

WITBD had done its 1902 job, and should not be treated any more as if it were a current proposal; it had been bypassed. Lenin did not apologize for it or repudiate it; this was something different. He was pigeonholing it as of historical interest only. Socialists would not repudiate the First International either, but no one would dream of bringing it back to life.

It was a far cry from a permanent "concept of the party."

6. Last Words on *WITBD*

Typically Lenin argued that the "exaggeration" in *WITBD* had been necessary at the time in order to make progress in the *direction* desired, even if the exaggerations themselves were not tenable.

To maintain today that *Iskra* exaggerated (in 1901 and 1902!) the idea of an organization of professional revolutionaries is like reproaching the Japanese, after the Russo-Japanese War, for having exaggerated the strength of Russia's armed forces, for having prior to the war exaggerated the need to prepare for fighting these forces. [Footnote 2] To win victory the Japanese had to marshal all their forces against the probable maximum of Russian forces. ... [T]oday the idea of an organization of professional revolutionaries has already scored a complete victory. That victory would have been impossible if this idea had not been pushed to the *forefront* at the time, if we had not "exaggerated" so as to drive it home to people who were trying to prevent it from being realized. [30]

The claim made here that the professional-revolutionary idea had "already scored a complete victory" showed once

more how little the usual Leninological version of this idea jibed with Lenin's. This "victory" included opening the party to an influx of "raw" workers who, hopefully, would swamp not only the party intellectuals but also the old experienced cadre of trained activists (professional revolutionaries). The idea that had shown its power ("scored a complete victory") was the need for a *core* of trained activists in the organization. It had nothing to do with the chimera of a party composed only or mainly of full-time functionaries. This chimera was especially grotesque in the light of Lenin's appeal for mass recruitment.

WITBD, continued Lenin, was merely a summary of the organizational policy of the *Iskra* group of 1901-1902, "no more and no less." [31] That is, it was the joint policy of those (the *Iskra* group) who later divided into Mensheviks and Bolsheviks on *other* grounds. In other words, Lenin was again insisting, in still another way, that at the time he did not regard the ideas of *WITBD* as unique to himself or his tendency. [Footnote 3]

Now, under the new conditions of legality, Lenin boasted as follows:

Despite the split, the Social-Democratic Party earlier than any of the other parties was able to take advantage of the temporary spell of freedom to build a legal organization with an ideal democratic structure, an electoral system, and representation at congresses according to the number of organized members. You will not find this, even today, either in the Socialist-Revolutionary or the Cadet parties... [35]

Here he was talking about the party (the RSDLP) as a whole, not just the Bolshevik wing; there had been a unity congress in May. Who built the party to its present effectiveness as a democratic structure? "It was accomplished by the organization of the professional revolutionaries... glance at the delegate list of any of the groups at, say, the London congress, in order to be convinced of this..." [36] Note that he referred to the "delegate list," or, as he put it in the same sentence, "the central core that had worked hardest of all to build up the Party and make it what it is." It scarcely makes sense to believe that in Lenin's view the party membership (far wider than the "delegate list" or the core) was to consist of professional revolutionaries only -- even if we stick with Lenin's reasonable definition.

The Kautsky theory of 1902 had long disappeared from Lenin's ken by this time; there was no indication that he even remembered its existence. At this point he was busy pointing with pride: the organizational successes of the party were due to the inherent organizational capacities of the working class.

Without this condition an organization of professional revolutionaries would be nothing more than a plaything, an adventure, a mere signboard. *WITBD*

repeatedly emphasizes this, pointing out that the organization it advocates has no meaning apart from its connection with the "genuine revolutionary class that is spontaneously rising to struggle." ... The professional revolutionary has played his part in the history of Russian proletarian socialism. No power on earth can now undo this work... [37]

Throughout these pages, more often than we can reasonably cite, Lenin repeated the theme that the day of *WITBD* was in the past. "In the historical conditions that prevailed in Russia in 1900-1905, no organization other than *Iskra* could have created the Social-Democratic Labor Party we now have." This preceded the statement that "The professional revolutionary has played his part..." The bitter disputes within the émigré circles characterized "a young and immature workers' movement"; "only the broadening of the Party by enlisting proletarian elements can help to eradicate the 'circle spirit.'" "And the transition to a democratically organized workers' party, proclaimed by the Bolsheviks...in November 1905, i.e., as soon as the conditions appeared for legal activity -- this 'e;transition' was a break from the 'old circle ways that had outlived their day.'" [38]

"Yes, 'that had outlived their day,'" Lenin repeated, "for it is not enough to condemn the old circle spirit; its significance in the special circumstances of the past period must be understood..." -- and so on. "The differences among the circles were over the *direction* the work was to take... The circles played their part and are now, of course, obsolete." [39]

Next Lenin commented on Plekhanov's statement that "he differed from me in principle on the question of spontaneity and political consciousness." [40] Once again Lenin insisted that there was no real difference involved at the time. "Plekhanov's criticism," he said, was "based on phrases torn out of context," and, he added, "on particular expressions which I had not quite adroitly or precisely formulated." The particular criticisms by Plekhanov to which Lenin was here referring were to the pamphlet *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, but against them Lenin here appealed to "the general content and the whole spirit of my pamphlet *WITBD*." All of us had agreed (he went on to say) upon the "formulation of the relation between spontaneity and political consciousness" in the draft Party program put forward by the *Iskra* group. And then Lenin made a statement which capped the whole problem:

Nor at the Second Congress did I have any intention of elevating my own formulations, as given in *WITBD*, to "programmatic" level, constituting special principles. On the contrary, the expression I used -- and it has since been frequently quoted -- was that the Economists had gone to one extreme. *WITBD*, I said, straightens out what had been twisted by the Economists... [41]

The meaning of these words is clear enough: *WITBD* is a controversial correction of Economist distortions and it

would be wrong to regard the pamphlet in any other light. It would be hard to imagine any more telling refutation of the *WITBD* myth, unless perhaps Lenin had staged a bonfire of all extant copies of *WITBD*.

There is no record that Lenin ever went back on the above-quoted statements about *WITBD*. In fact, there is no record that he was aware of a problem about it. [Footnote 4]

Now which is "the Leninist concept of party organization" -- Lenin's approach of 1905-1907, just described, or the formulations of 1902 in *WITBD*? The answer that Lenin's ghost would give, obviously, is: neither -- no "concept of the party" taken as a "principle" divorced from time and place. Lenin's ideas on party organization, like those of most others, varied depending on conditions, especially such an immense difference in conditions as that between the underground conditions in an autocracy and the conditions of relative political liberty and open organizational opportunity that characterized Russia in the 1905-1907 period.

At least one Leninologist was able to recognize this elementary idea, and as a result drew the wrathful fires of Leninological authority on his own head. Deviating from the consensus, John Plamenatz wrote this much:

There is nothing specifically undemocratic about the opinions so vigorously expressed in *WITBD*. ... He never, when he wrote *WITBD*, intended that the "party of the proletariat" should drive and bully the workers, or even that it should make their revolution for them, and then govern Russia in their name but without taking the trouble to consult them.

If it were not for what happened after the Bolshevik Revolution, says Plamenatz, "We should not venture to call them [the ideas of *WITBD*] undemocratic, but merely say of them that they were advice perhaps well enough adapted to the needs of a revolutionary party active in Russia in the first decade of the twentieth century." [43]

Lenin's 1902 proposals for the Russian movement of the day may have been good or bad proposals -- this discussion is pre-empted by the Leninological myth. Recognition that *WITBD* was not antidemocratic in its views still leaves open the belief (which Plamenatz for one holds) that "Leninism" took an antidemocratic turn in "what happened after the Bolshevik Revolution." The point about the Leninological myth is that it makes discussion of these developments impossible: political-historical analysis is replaced by demonology.

Special Note - Amazing Story: Utechin's Edition of Lenin's *WITBD*

The preceding essay was in part drafted in 1963 for use in a book review. The year 1963 was a great year for the Leninologists, with the publication of three biographies of

Lenin, plus a relevant volume of memoirs by Angelica Balabanoff. Another event of the year was the publication of a new English translation of *WITBD: What Is To Be Done?* Translated by S. V. and P. Utechin. Edited, with an introduction and notes, by S. V. Utechin. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 213p.

This edition was noteworthy especially because it was, I think, the first example of a major Western publisher's recognition that Lenin's writings were at least as important for the history of sociopolitical thought as, say, those of Lactantius, Leibniz, Lilburne or Luther. It was the first production, from these scholarly precincts, of a critical edition with scholarly appurtenances, annotation, etc.

The milestone was the fact that it was done at all. The nature of the edition issued was of no mean interest. The job was done by S. V. Utechin, author of *Russian Political Thought* and a *Concise Encyclopaedia* covering Russia. The present note will not discuss the views expressed by Utechin's introduction; these views were rather standard specimens of the Leninological consensus on the original sin of *WITBD* as the fountainhead of all Bolshevik devilry. We will be concerned only with what editor Utechin did to the text of Lenin's work.

In the first place, the Utechin edition does not present the complete text. This is doubly puzzling, because (1) Lenin's brochure makes a fairly small booklet to begin with, and (2) the amount cut out by Utechin is not very great in bulk. The reason could hardly have been an overwhelming need for economy by Oxford's Clarendon Press. (The publisher could have saved more space by cutting Utechin's footnotes arguing that conditions under czarism were better than Lenin made out.) There is, of course, reason for condensed versions of notable books, but usually for inclusion in fat collections. This is a small book made smaller.

To justify publishing an incomplete version like this, Utechin refers to the "slightly abridged" version which Lenin himself published in 1907 as part of a collection titled *Twelve Years*. As compared with the original 1902 edition, Lenin here made about a dozen cuts, none of them very important, the largest being the elimination of Chapter 5, Section A. (We should recall that when this 1907 publication took place, Lenin explained to the reader of the collection that *WITBD* was now mainly of historical interest.)

Utechin claims in his preface that "The 1907 version [that is, the abridged one] was used for the only English translation hitherto, that by...J. Fineberg, which has appeared both as a separate pamphlet and in various selections and collections of Lenin's works put out by Communist publishers in Moscow and outside the Soviet Union." This is not true. The Fineberg translation was of the full 1902 text. It appeared in the old (unfinished) *Collected Works*, Volume 4, Book II, published by International Publishers of New York in 1929; and also in the paperbound edition widely read, viz., No. 4 of the

Little Lenin Library. Moreover, another *full* translation of the 1902 edition was subsequently available in English in a paperbound edition put out by the Foreign Languages Publishing House of Moscow. Finally (as Utechin does mention a little later) the new multivolume *Collected Works* in English, published by FLPH, presented still another full translation in its Volume 5. These translations were not the same; and so we had three different English versions of the *unabridged* text before Utechin. The abridged version of 1907 appeared in English only in the various sets titled *Selected Works*.

In any case, the abridgment practices followed by the Communist publishing houses should hardly have been a model for the first Western scholarly edition of a Lenin work.

The second strange thing about Utechin's edition is that *he does not even present the abridged 1907 version*. His surgical operation on the body of *WITBD* only starts with the 1907 abridgment, for he accepts all but a couple of the cuts made there. Then in addition he makes thirty-two further excisions in the text, ranging in length from over a page to a line here and there. Then, from the text which is left, he cuts twenty-four of Lenin's footnotes -- some of them rather long ones and several of them quite important and interesting.

The reader may wonder why Lenin's first Western scholarly editor snips his shears around the work like that; but he may assume that all of the cuts are of unimportant passages. This is true in a few cases, especially where only an odd line has been snipped out here or there. It is odd indeed, but --

Now we come to the fantastic. Many of Utechin's excisions are of passages with considerable interest; some of the excisions are important enough to stay in the most drastically condensed edition; *and a couple of the excisions are among the most important passages in the work*.

We have already seen that one of the most-discussed sections of *WITBD* concerns the role of bourgeois intellectuals in the socialist movement, and the theory that the working class by itself can come only to trade-unionist consciousness. I have pointed out that in reality Lenin presented this theory by quoting it from Kautsky, and that his own paraphrase was based on Kautsky. I have mentioned that Leninologists' discussions of *WITBD* rarely or never mention the inconvenient fact that the demonic theory was really Kautsky's. How does Utechin handle this problem?

Easy: he simply exercises his editorial shears and excises the whole quotation from Kautsky *from the text of the book*. The reader of this sanitized edition will never be confused by finding out that the very crux of Leninist devilry actually started with Kautsky, not Lenin. [Footnote 5]

Fourthly: if the suppression of this crucial passage is bizarre, there are a whole group of cuts that are no less so. Here is an enlightening example.

One of the disputed points in disquisitions on *WITBD* is the question of the origins of Lenin's thought: does it stem mainly from the European Marxist tradition or from the Russian revolutionary past? Utechin is a rather all-out proponent of the latter thesis: his introduction argues that Lenin's spiritual ancestors were Tkachev and Ogarev in particular. The Tkachev bogey is most commonly dangled before readers, for Tkachev was a Blanquist-type nineteenth-century revolutionary of the vulgarest sort.

The text of *WITBD*, writes Utechin in this connection, "is not particularly enlightening on this question." It was not advisable for him to refer to the text. For he has carefully excised from this text every passage in *WITBD* that fails to conform with his thesis, and that he can take out without ruining the continuity.

Take the specific case of the bogeyman Tkachev, Lenin's "real" ancestor according to Utechin and Leninology. It would have been a kindness to Utechin if Lenin had thrown into his writings a few enthusiastic references to Tkachev – say about one percent of the number of references he constantly makes to his European Marxist models. It would have been a boon for Leninologists if he had published just one kind word about his "real ancestor." But in all of the forty-five volumes of Lenin's *Collected Works* there are about five references to Tkachev's name *in toto*, and only one of these is a substantive passage expressing an opinion. This one passage bearing Lenin's view of Tkachev occurs, as it happens, in *WITBD*. And it is distinctly *hostile* to Tkachev as a protagonist of "excitative terror." [44]

Now what does a scholarly editor do when the text fails to conform to the consensus of Leninology? *Utechin strikes out of the text the whole passage on Tkachev.*

This one and only passage in which Lenin actually expressed an attitude toward his "real ancestor" (leaving aside secondhand claims) must not be allowed to confuse the innocent reader. Not only that: in a couple of other places in the text, Utechin cuts out substantial passages in which Lenin attacks terrorism and terrorist views.

This bears only on one side of the question raised about Lenin's ancestors. As mentioned, Utechin wants to play down the extent to which Lenin based himself on the European Marxist tradition. The text of *WITBD* (the text as written by Lenin) abounds in arguments taken from this arsenal. In fact, *WITBD* contains some of the most interesting material in all of Lenin showing his reliance on the European Marxist parties as models of party organization. It is this sort of material that Utechin tends to strike out, though it is too voluminous to excise altogether.

Utechin's preface refers quite consciously to this practice of his: "omitted...are chiefly details of polemics that are of no particular relevance to the main line of argument, and examples given by Lenin from the practice of the German Social-Democracy in order to illustrate points he was making, examples which would now be more likely to obscure than to elucidate his reasoning." These passages not only "obscure" Lenin's "reasoning," they ruin Utechin's case: out they must go – *from the text*.

For example, there is the passage Utechin throws out of Chapter 3, Section F, a eulogy of how the German Social-Democratic Party operates. It is not true that this is only an "illustration," as Utechin claims – though he never explains why enlightening "illustrations" have to be struck out of his text. This passage is an *argument* which Lenin is making in favor of his proposals. Lenin is citing the most admired socialist party as his model. Moreover, in his account of how the admirable Germans work, he is implicitly also giving his own views on how a party *should* work, on the basis of a legality such as did not obtain in Russia. If one wants to find out Lenin's "organizational concepts," it is important (to put it mildly) to find out his views on the organizational concepts and practices of the leading European socialist party.

There are a brace of equally interesting references to the European movement that Utechin throws out. But it is not really necessary to take the space to pile one enormity on another.

Such is this first "scholarly" edition of Lenin from a major publisher, under the auspices of an eminent Western institution of learning, to reveal the lamentable original sins of Bolshevism. If a mangle-job like this had been done on, say, John Stuart Mill by a Moscow publishing agency, we would all know exactly what to think; and Utechin would probably not be behindhand in saying it. It would be called a work of falsification. But we must not be impolite.

After all, there are few Leninologists who are in the fortunate position of being able to "prove" their interpretation of a work by pruning the text to suit the interpretation. This does not necessarily mean that Utechin performed his operation on the body of *WITBD* with conscious dishonesty. It is far more likely that he knows only one way to read Lenin: through his own specially made glasses. The leading authorities of Leninology in the Western scholarly establishment are not different in kind from their blood-brothers in the Stalinist professoriat.

Footnotes

1. Luxemburg's article is commonly reprinted under the bogus title "Leninism or Marxism?" – a title which is not only a Leninological invention but distortive of Luxemburg's view. Those who are sensitive to questions of inner-party democracy, so popular with Leninologists,

should note that although Luxemburg's article was a virulent attack on Lenin, the democratic editors of the *Neue Zeit* refused to print Lenin's mild reply.

2. It should be remembered that Lenin (along with almost the entire International) favored the victory of Japan in that war with Russia.

3. Some previous statements should be mentioned too. In August 1903 Lenin had scribbled a few lines for himself, as a note on "Martov's Contradictions and Zigzags." The second of four points was that "He [Martov] always defended Iskra's ideas of organization (What Is To Be Done?), but secured the incorporation of a Jaurésist [reformist] first clause in the Rules." [32] In January 1904 Lenin published a pamphlet preface in which he challenged the Mensheviks to state their new concepts of organization: they have "announced...the existence of differences over questions of organization. Unfortunately, the editors are in no hurry to specify just what these differences are, confining themselves for the most part to hinting at things unknown." [33] The man who wrote these words was plainly under the impression that up to this point the Mensheviks had no distinctive line on "concept of organization." In March 1905, in a reply to Plekhanov, Lenin insisted that "Plekhanov's assertion that our relations cooled on account of WITBD is absolutely untrue." [34] These are only a few of the many indications of this fact: at least when he published *WITBD*, and until controversy developed subsequently, Lenin thought that the book's views were the common property of the Iskra group.

4. As far as I know, the only claim that Lenin ever came back to the subject appeared in an article which requires notice because it has occasionally been quoted. This article, published in 1938 by Max Shachtman in the theoretical organ of the American Trotskyist group, ascribed *WITBD* to the specific Russian conditions of the time and went on to say: That is why Lenin, in answer to a proposal to translate his brochure for the non-Russian parties, told Max Levien in 1921: "That is not desirable; the translation must at least be issued with good commentaries, which would have to be written by a Russian comrade very well acquainted with the history of the Communist Party of Russia, in order to avoid false application." [42]

Unfortunately the article gave no source for this quotation; and while it gave a list of sources for the article as a whole, I have not been able to find this episode in any of the works listed.

5. The rule that Leninologists do not mention Kautsky in this connection has exceptions that prove the rule. One of the few exceptions is one of the Lenin biographies published in 1963, namely, the one by Possony, who starts off his chapter on *WITBD* with this very quote from Kautsky. The reason is entirely clear and revealing: as a far-out political rightist, Possony is interested in extending

the usual anti-Lenin attitude to the whole socialist movement, right wing included. The other two biographies published in the same year, by Louis Fischer and Robert Payne, do not mention Kautsky in this connection at all. Naturally it is all a question of objective scholarship. ...

Reference Notes

1. For Utechin's book, see the beginning of the Special Note.
2. Lenin: *Collected Works* (Moscow: FLPH, Progress Pub., 1960-70), 5:375. (This work is hereafter abbreviated: *CW*.)
3. *CW* 5:383f.
4. *CW* 5:386.
5. I have dealt with this subject at large in *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution* (New York: Monthly Rev. Press, 1978), Vol. 2, Chaps. 17-18.
6. *CW* 6:235.
7. *CW* 6:490.
8. *CW* 6:490f.
9. *CW* 6:491.
10. *CW* 6:500.
11. *CW* 6:502.
12. *CW* 7:474.
13. *CW* 7:474-76.
14. *CW* 8:196.
15. *CW* 9:291.
16. *CW* 9:442.
17. *CW* 10:29.
18. *CW* 10:30.
19. *CW* 10:32.
20. *CW* 10:33.
21. *CW* 10:34.
22. *CW* 10:35.
23. *CW* 10:37f.
24. *CW* 10:31.
25. *CW* 10:32.
26. *CW* 10:36.
27. *CW* 10:36 f.
28. *CW* 10:38f.
29. *CW* 13:101.
30. *CW* 13:102.
31. *CW* 13:102.
32. *CW* 6:522.
33. *CW* 7:132.
34. *CW* 8:245.
35. *CW* 13:103.
36. *CW* 13:103.
37. *CW* 13:104.
38. *CW* 13:104f.
39. *CW* 13:106.
40. *CW* 13:106.
41. *CW* 13:107f.
42. Shachtman, "Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg," in *The New International* (N.Y.), May 1938, p. 143.
43. John Plamenatz, *German Marxism and Russian Communism* (London: Longmans, Green, 1954), 225f.
44. *CW* 5:510f.

What is this thing called ideology? On Marx's method of thinking

by Mardin Keshmiri

Science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided – Karl Marx (1865)

Introduction

The notion of ideology has enjoyed wide currency in the late 20th century academic literature. Although this notion has increasingly been used in different professional discourses – political debate, social theory, historical studies, cultural analysis, and so forth – there has been no common unitary concept of ideology. It is well known, however, that the expression “ideology” was first invented by Cabanis, Destutt de Tracy and their friends, who assigned to it as an object, the (generic) theory of ideas. But the concept of ideology, as Derek Sayer (1987) mentions, has suffered the fate of many concepts in Marx. Of course, Marx's varied and comprehensive legacy has germinated intellectual authority in many modern contemporary doctrines and conceptual practices. The fate of the term “ideology”, then, could not possibly escape its very “historic” destiny.

It is, perhaps, one of the peculiar ironies of our modern history that there has been no limit to the misinterpretation and distortion of Marx's concepts, even when one has had unlimited access to the original sources of his writings. Misinterpretation of Marx's fundamental concepts in which he frames his distinctive approach to society and history, certainly, is not an enterprise confined exclusively to the adherents of pseudo-Marxism of the former Soviets.

Many Marxists and non-Marxists share this misinterpretation, wholly or in part, across a variety of perspectives and schools of thought. In the fields of social sciences, for instance, the standard interpretation of Marx is persistently ignorant of his substantive historical sociology and his distinctive analytic practice. Sociological reading of Marx is often based on secondary interpretations of his writings dealt with in a framework of the positivistic justificatory strategies. Ideology, then, has become the hard core of Marx's program; like that free-floating thing called culture this notion appears superfluously in the late twentieth century “Science Park”, as the crowning point of many references to Marx's enterprise. Perhaps, from the perspective of social science's self-understanding Marx is (unknowingly) an admirable “theoretician” of ideology. But this, in many ways, is odd. Marx's overriding interest, in his entire intellectual carrier, was not in “theoretical bubble-

blowing”; he was after all engaged in a “critique of the dynamics of bourgeois society.”

Within Marxist tradition, different efforts have been made to formulate both a theory of ideology in general and a theory of particular ideologies. As a direct consequence of these kind of conceptual practices, Marxist parties of varying mode and strength have approved of “Marxist ideology” as “theoretical consciousness of working class”, or even worse as its “scientific world view”. In their struggle against capitalist powers, many parties within mainstream Marxism have indeed paid constant attention to the “qualitative ideological upgrading of their memberships” as an important means of building the revolutionary vanguard of the working class. This glorification of ideology, of course, has gone hand in hand, for several decades, with a ceaseless Soviet distortion and Western ignorance of Marx's basic thinking.

The transformation of what we called “Marxism” into the official ideology of mass parties and latterly of “socialist” states in post-revolutionary societies has had, undoubtedly, much to do with the mutation of this Marxism from method to dogma. Still we can not challenge the very roots of this ideology for, we do not know its real “history”. This problematic, I believe, dates back much deeper to the history of “Marxist tradition”, odd though it may seem, perhaps even to those days when Marx himself felt compelled to comment ironically that he “was not a Marxist”.

In the late nineteenth century, Marx's writings provided the primary impetus for a vital and forceful political movement in both France and Germany. The influence of his social thought was, therefore, far from just being of purely intellectual character; it was meant, on the contrary, to provide a raised platform for the accomplishment of a definite praxis. The “laws of movement” of capitalism, which after the events of 1848 became the focus of Marx's attention, operated differently in France, Germany, and Britain.

From the start Marx remained conscious of those variations in historical development which created social and economic differences between these countries. Thus he never assumed a unitary relationship between level of economic development and the internal character of bourgeois polity. But the law in Capital always stayed the same (his favorite phrase): “De te fabula narratur” (“It is of you that the story is told”). “The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the

image of its own". That is why Capital takes Britain as providing the basic model for the theory of capitalist development.

The professed adherents of Marx, influenced by the late 19th century positivistic and scientific intellectual milieu, failed to accomplish that of their mentor's distinctive praxis. They failed to establish an "organic unity" between the peculiarity of their historical position and the "law" in Capital: the progressive formation of two-class society, the "pauperization" of the vast majority, and the immanent collapse of capitalism in a final catastrophic crisis. For German Marxists, this inadequacy of grasping the full significance of Marx's insights developed into a dramatic tension between the Marxian stress upon the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, and the Lassallean emphasis upon the appropriation of the capitalist state through the achievement of a fully universal franchise. Bernstein's "revisionism", which became the most concrete theoretical expression of Lassallean position, was rejected by German Social Democratic orthodoxy, but at the cost of the strengthening the trend towards a mechanistic-positivistic understanding of history which effectively reverted to that "passive" materialism which Marx tirelessly had criticized and discarded in his early writings.

This inclination to "passive" materialism was given a definite theoretical backing by the fact that "Marxism" came to be identified, for both its adherents and its liberal critics, with the systematic exposition set out by Engels in *Anti-Dühring*. By transferring the dialectic to nature, Engels obscures the most important element in Marx's materialist method of thinking, "the creative dialectical interaction between subject and object in historical process". Engels's theoretical exposition helped to stimulate the notion that ideas simply "reflect" material reality in a passive sense. Marxists, following the simple-minded but vigorous positivism of Engels, could now move in the direction of a philosophical materialism, which treated ideas as epiphenomena, and thereby were able to preserve the Marxist adherence to an immanent conception of ethics. The other path taken mostly by "revisionism" was to reintroduce the possibility of forming an ahistorical traditional philosophy, which stressed upon the "independent" role of ideas in conditioning social change in history.

It was in this context, beginning shortly before Marx's death and the decade following it, that Marxism became a really important movement in Europe, both politically and intellectually. It is worthy of note that many modern sociologists like Max Weber and Emil Durkheim accepted the position of philosophical materialism disseminated by Engels, Kautsky, and Labriola, as the object of their critical evaluation of Marxism. Labriola's work *Socialism and Philosophy*, which leant heavily on *Anti-Dühring*, was treated by Durkheim as the general exposition of Marx's social thought. Marxists, then, including Plekhanov, the

younger Lenin, and many others, did not refuse to wear the straitjacket of philosophical materialism, which the professed followers of Marx sought to impose upon history in the name of "historical materialism".

It is against this backdrop that we should study and explore the real sources of the divergences between Marx's basic thinking, and that bulk of "knowledge" which both his professed adherents and liberal critics have identified as Marxist approach to human society. The rise of a body of ahistorical theory and analytic practice which does serious violence to materialist ontology, by grounding knowledge in "meaning", "interpretation", and the like rather than in the activity of real, living individuals, emerged historically as an antidote to the doctrine of philosophical materialism and its practices.

Nevertheless, grasping the "organic related unity" of historical subject and its materialistic conditions of life enables Marx to ground a science of human society, which could do away with all forms of fetishes that operates as the "religion of everyday life". For him, both Hegel and Feuerbach are ideologists (not only the former). Because ideologist "remains in the realm of theory and does not view men [sic] in their given social connection, not under their existing conditions of life, which have made them what they are, he never arrives at the really existing active men [sic]" (Marx and Engels, 1846/1976:46). Hegel and Feuerbach, thus, never arrived at the existing active men. One ended up in the ideology of Absolute Knowledge and the other in the ideology of Human essence.

Now in what follows I briefly outline and try to defend Marx's critique of ideology, as this is painstakingly integrated in his critical analytic practice. My argument, then, is meant to establish an intimate organic relationship between Marx's critique of ideology, the concept of science, and his materialist method of thinking. I shall thereby suggest that the misunderstanding and distortion of Marx's critique of ideology is not, as it may appear, an intellectual error. This kind of miss or distortion identifies a definite conceptual practice, a real effect due to the peculiarity of the social relations of capitalism. To express the point in terms of Marx's epistemology, I may say that this practice itself is a conceptual practice of ideology; a practice based on capitalism's conceptual fetishism.

Marx versus Althusser

Marx's understanding of the concept of ideology and the way he used it in his substantive inquiry differs radically from that normally ascribed to him. Marx never formulated a theory of ideology. He did not even, I shall hold, provided this concept with a set of systematic propositions or definitions of any kind, positive or negative!

Marx's critique of ideology is, in my view, only an organizing principle in his distinctive approach to

society and history. This simply means that the critique of ideology operates for Marx as an integrated aspect of his method of thinking. It is an aspect of how he looks upon the social reality, how he argues and reasons about society and social process.

Misunderstanding of this vital and dynamic point, I believe, has bowdlerized the kernel of Marx's social thought. For, Marx's critique of ideology is a quality, a permanent characteristic inherent in his methodology. The critique of ideology is indeed the very germ of the philosophical foundation of Marx's materialist method of thinking. The notion of ideology as critique, then, is, in Marx's method of thinking, of epistemological character. Thus, in terms of analytical procedures – or disciplinary definitions if you like – one cannot reconcile the notion of ideology as critique with a theory of ideology, without losing the critical edge of the concept in question. Any attempt, then, to mangle Marx's insights, as a point of departure, with a theory of ideology involves the inability to grasp the essence of his critique of ideology.

In his clarion call for a general theory of ideology, Louis Althusser wrote in 1969 that ideology, for Marx, was the system of the ideas and representations, which dominate the mind of a man or a social group. In the process of elaborating this Marxist definition, Althusser reads in *The German Ideology* that "ideology has no history of its own". Althusser who speaks in a Marxist language, knows well that if "ideology" has no history of its own, then, there is no question of formulating a theory of ideology – at least from the standpoint of Marx's method of thinking.

He, therefore, leaves the terrain of *The German Ideology* but not his dogged determination to arrive at a general theory of ideology. In his essay on *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1969) Althusser finds another theoretical reference point; this time the Freudian terrain of unconscious. He takes Freud's proposition that unconscious is eternal and writes: "If eternal means, not transcendent to all (temporal) history, but omnipresent, transhistorical and therefore immutable in form throughout the extent of history, I shall adopt Freud's expression word for word, and write: Ideology is eternal, exactly like the unconscious" (Althusser, 1969:127). In order to express this Freudian position within a Marxist framework, Althusser goes back to *The German Ideology* and exhibits his own understanding of the thesis that "ideology has no history." He then writes: "The peculiarity of ideology is that it is endowed with a structure and a functioning such as to make it a non-historical reality, an omni-historical reality, in the sense in which that structure and functioning are immutable, present in the same form throughout what we can call history". That is why, he concludes, "I believe, I am justified in proposing a theory of ideology in general, in the sense that Freud presented a theory of unconscious in general" (Althusser, 1969:128).

This, of course, is a scandalous travesty of Marx. The ideology in business, here, is a structure essential to the life of all historical societies as a non-historical reality. The concept of ideology is, for Althusser, a priori, a social universal, which has dominated the mind of humanity throughout the history. Althusser's ideology is then very much like "the spirit of all ages!"

Marx tirelessly fought such profoundly ahistorical use of concepts. In his critique of both Romantic conservatism (in German philosophy) and utilitarianism, as manifest in classical economics, Marx persistently demolishes all kind of conceptualizations, which are not based on "people's materialistic connection." Concepts, categories, and ideas are, for Marx, "the abstract ideal expressions of ... social relations". He says: "indeed, the categories are no more eternal than the relations they express. They are historical and transitory products" (Marx, 1846b:189). In *The Holy Family*, he defines the society not by any supra-historical "philosophical constructions" whose door stands outside history, but in terms of "fundamental social relations". On numerous occasions, as here, Marx criticizes the ideologicity of philosophers' "speculative construction" which is ignorant of society's extended social relations as the basis for a proper and realist critical analysis. As Derek Sayer has stressed the point: "it was at such 'abstractions', rather than the relations of which they were the expression, that the Young Hegelians characteristically tilted. The objective of Marx's critique was to refocus attention on the relations themselves, to locate the secret of the 'holy family' in the 'earthly family' (Sayer, Derek, 1987:93).

Althusser's eternal ideology depends heavily on a conceptual practice, which descends from an abstract discursive mode of thinking. In this mode of thinking, ideology (or any concept) becomes a time-honored, omnipresent "noun", which sails through history innocent of any sociological content and any reference to real individuals and the lives they lead. And indeed, what in many intellectual circles and within mainstream Marxism is addressed as "Marxist theory of ..." descends, in more ways than one, from such abstract mode of thinking.

Marx works differently. For him, concepts and theoretical categories are already expressive of social relations organizing, and co-ordering people's activities. They "arise...from the relations of production themselves. They are categories for the forms of appearance of essential relations" (Marx 1977:677). Political economists are, then, correspondingly and repeatedly criticized for losing sight of the actual social relations in which the categories of political economy arise. They come to treat these categories as permanent features of economic processes (Marx 1977:678). Marx's critique of political economy is, thus, an explication of just those relations that are presupposed when the categories of political economy are treated as given.

Marx's grounding of theoretical categories in the actual social relations of real living individuals is, then, intimately and necessarily bound up with his substantive historical sociology. His definite emphasis on the historical specificity of bourgeois society makes it explicitly clear that in capitalism a system of economic relations emerges as a differentiated and objectified form. Capitalism, thus, abstracts relations of interdependence arising from social division of labour from relationships between particular individuals and land. It creates an independent system of relations mediated by money and commodities. This independent system of relations underlies the category of "economy" as relations that can be seen apart from other dimensions of social existence. Thus, the peculiarity of capitalism's extended social relations distinguishes it from all previous social formations. At the same time, bourgeois society furnishes us with the necessary means to understand and explore those social formations. Bourgeois society, according to Marx, brings the whole of mankind, for the first time in history, within the purview of a single social order, and is genuinely "world historical." It is in this sense that bourgeoisie, for Marx, is the first true ruling class in history. "It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals". This we may call the specificity of bourgeois society. Then, how dare we to treat our very true capitalist concepts as pure ahistorical devices. Do not they "bear the stamp of history" (1867a: 169)?

Marx on ideology

So, what is, then, ideology? Ideology, for Marx, arises only where social relations (or the natural world) manifest themselves to people's experience in misleading forms, and the critique of ideology accordingly involves showing – materially – why this should be the case. The task of the critique, thus, is not to treat its pure concepts in abstracto, but to explicate materially the inhuman character of social relations underlying both our concepts and the "natural. Self-understood forms of social life" or *Erscheinungsformen* in society. For, in capitalist society the essential relations manifest themselves to our experience in a misleading, ideological form. This ideologicality of form, pure appearance of social phenomena, conceals the true substance of its underlying social relations. This reified relation, for Marx, is a real social process of estrangement in a world in which social relations take on the mystifying form of "the violence of things." Accordingly, in the very same world (capitalism) the "abstract ideal expression" of these relations is likely to be a reified one. Therefore, Marx's method instructs us not treat a concept as a theoretical primitive, in the logical sense, nor as interpretable solely in terms of other concepts. Instead, we must explore the ground of a concept in the actual ordering of people's "materialistic connection."

The process of reification in society, as an important feature of the nature of bourgeois reality, comes about in the particular social conditions of capitalist production. Marx's analysis of "the fetishism of commodities" developed in *Capital* reveals how capitalist production transforms the relations of individuals into qualities of things themselves, and this transformation constitutes the nature of the commodity. As it is clearly expressed in the third volume of *Capital*, Marx pays great attention to the "reifying" appearance of the social relations of capitalist production which, according to him, "demonstrate the further development of the form of capital that takes place" in its movement. He thus writes about the relationship between capital, land, and labour: "This economic trinity as the connection between the components of value and wealth in general and its sources, completes the mystification of the capitalist mode of production, the reification of social relations, and the immediate coalescence of the material relations of production with their historical and social specificity: the bewitched, distorted and upside-down world" (Marx 1894: 969).

Given the historical specificity of bourgeois society, it is this "bewitched upside-down" world which appears to the consciousness of people, as the "natural self-understood form of social life." In capitalism, on the surface of society, we have a whole world of phenomenal appearances which operate in accordance with "personification of things" and autonomization of the form of social elements. This fetishism, then, is manifested in capitalism's phenomenal forms, the ways in which the social relations of bourgeois society present themselves to the consciousness of its participants. However, beneath the surface of society, in the depths, entirely different processes go on; for, here lie the essential social relations of capitalist production. Thus, in the realm of the phenomenal world, neither the material groundwork, nor the historicity of capitalist phenomena are immediately evident in their appearance. These forms look, rather, to be natural, universal, and unquestionable, and are therefore understood in ordinary language and political economy in fetishistic ways: precisely as pure ahistoric abstractions. Indeed, in the consciousness of the agents of production, these mystifying forms of appearance present themselves as "overwhelming natural laws, governing them irrespective of their will" in a form in which the fetishistic act of capitalist phenomena "prevails on them as blind necessity" (Marx 1894: 970).

Marx's distinction between the substance of "essential relations" and the misleading "phenomenal forms" in which they manifest themselves to people's experience constitutes the systematic feature of the methodology of *Capital*. He repeatedly, and in various occasions, emphasizes that vulgar economics finds the "natural basis of its fatuous self-importance" in this "false appearance and deception" of phenomena, "in which the entire inner connection is obliterated" (Marx, 1894: 969). Marx actually points out that this position also

corresponds to the self-interest of the dominant classes, since "it preaches the natural necessity and perpetual justification of their sources of income and erects this into a dogma" (Marx, 1894:969). Marx criticizes even the best representatives of classical economics who have fallen far short of grasping the importance of this distinction. They remained, as he remarked, more or less trapped in "the world of illusion" as their criticism dissolved and nothing else was possible from the bourgeois standpoint: "they all fell therefore more or less into inconsistencies, half-truths and unresolved contradictions" (Marx, 1894:969).

Marx's analysis of the discrepancies between essence and appearance, as we have seen, conceives of it to be a necessary result of the very nature of the commodity and capital fetishism. A Marxian social thinker like Sayer, however, has rightly suggested that Marx leans here on Hegel's distinctive logic of essence, which can be typified in the phrase the essence must appear as something other than itself (namely, the phenomena). Hegel, of course, begins with the insight that the appearance and essence do not coincide, and the task of the dialectical thinker is to distinguish the essential from the apparent process of reality and to grasp their relations.

However, it is important to remember that Hegel uses this distinction in the context of a general philosophical thinking. Marx, on the other hand, applies the discrepancies between essence and appearance in a specific historical context, and as the necessary outcome of the fetishistic act of capital and commodity in capitalist production. For him, therefore, "the essence is as much historical as ontological." Marx's critique of appearances, thus, shows explicitly that the rise of ideology as an analytic practice is bound up with the fetishism of capital and commodity in bourgeois society.

So, the task of the critique of ideology is to explicate and demystify the existing discrepancy between the essential relations of society and the misleading forms in which they manifest themselves to our experience. The critique, therefore, must penetrate the alienated social reality, and unmask the "enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world" of capitalism. It must unmask "this religion of everyday life," and thereafter open the possibility of explicating the "entire inner connections" of bourgeois society.

Now, as we have seen, the analytic practice of Capital and the methodology that informs it identifies those conceptual practices which fail to grasp the essential relations of bourgeois society – and remain, therefore, trapped in phenomenal world of appearances – as half-truth, distorted and ideological accounts of bourgeois reality. Marx, for instance, ridicules the conceptual practices of bourgeois economics for its "inability to grasp the necessary difference between the real and the ideal form of bourgeois society", the latter being "only the inverted projection [Lichtbild] of this reality" (Marx 1858:246). The methodology of Capital, thus,

identifies all practices, which uncritically take the bourgeois reality at its face value as distorted, misleading and ideological mode of thinking about capitalist society. This mode of thinking is perverted and ideological because it grounds its analytic categories on the "natural self-understood forms of social life" or *Erscheinungsformen*. It is, however, the sheer massive obviousness of these capitalist *Erscheinungsformen* in bourgeois society that makes the whole phenomenal world of capitalism so deceptive, bewitched, and "natural" in the social consciousness of the agents of production.

Marx's science

Let me now try to put the strands of this argument in a more direct relation to Marx's philosophical thinking. As I mentioned earlier in this paper, Marx's critique of ideology is an organizing principle in his distinctive approach to society and its social processes. This critique, thus, constitutes a quality and a characteristic inherent in Marx's materialist method of thinking. Marx's critique of ideology, in this sense, is a methodological enterprise. It involves a materialist ontology and an epistemology, which makes the social organization of knowledge itself the core of the investigation. Here critique is itself an inquiry, and the method of inquiry is that in which the method itself is explicated as an integral aspect of the inquiry.

Marx's emergent standpoint in his early writings constitutes indeed a decisive epistemological break with idealism, abstract philosophy, and philosophical materialism of his time. The Holy Family, which documents Marx's final break with the young Hegelians, and The German Ideology in which he for the first time outlines a general view of the tenets of materialistic understanding of history, constitute, then, the most significant line of demarcation in Marx's intellectual career. It was from this standpoint that he wrote of the philosophical "nonsense" of German philosophers and the abstract "nonsense" of political economists in the same derisive tone. Both philosophers and political economists constructed accounts of history and society as expressions of concepts. They were, according to Marx's critical analysis of their work, practicing ideology when the abstract categories of their pure knowledge of society superseded the actual social relations of real living individuals as the basis of inquiry. They were confined to the alienated world of abstracted concepts and its "speculative constructions", the philosopher's "fictions" and the economist's "mystical connections."

In The German Ideology, thus, Marx and Engels take on this analysis of the ideological properties of others' work to define and separate from it the methods of a science that grapples with a real world. The German Ideology proposes to ground social science in the activities of actual individuals and the material conditions under which they live. The ontological premises of this science, as The German Ideology

defines it, "are men, not in any fantastic isolation and rigidity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions" (Marx and Engels 1973:57). For Marx, history is a process of the continuous creation, satisfaction, and recreation of human needs. He views history and social relations as processes that exist only in people's activities. The project of a social science, for Marx, insists, therefore, on the discovery of relations and processes that arise only in the actual activities of actual individuals. Marx's critical procedure identifies as ideological, those practices that mask and suppress this grounding of social science. The following passage in *The German Ideology* should make clear how Marx contrasts the ideological practices with a social science that grapples with the real world:

When speculation ends – in real life – there real, positive science begins: the representation of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men. Talk about consciousness ceases, and real knowledge has to take its place. When reality is depicted, philosophy as an independent branch of knowledge loses its medium of existence. At most its place can be taken by a synthesis of the most general results, that may be abstracted from observation of the historical development of men. Separated from actual history, these abstractions have in themselves no value whatsoever. They can only serve to facilitate the ordering of historical materials, to indicate the sequence of its separate layers. But they by no means provide a recipe or scheme, as does philosophy, for neatly trimming the epochs of history. On the contrary, the difficulties only first begin when we set about the observation and the arrangement – the real depiction – of the materials, whether it be of a past epoch or of the present (1846:1973:38-39).

This social science, as Marx puts it, is the science of the actual life-process of society, the representation (study) of the practical activity and the practical process of development of men. As soon as this active life-process is discovered, categories and concepts cease to be a kind of "currency" – a medium of exchange among ideologists and a way of reasoning about the world that stands between the thinkers and the object. They become, instead, a means of facilitating the arrangement of historical material, they become a means of rediscovering the practical activities underlying the apparent social phenomena. Thus, the ontology of *The German Ideology* proposes to ground the social science in the activities of actual individuals and their real relations, and identifies therewith as ideological, those practices of thinking which give primacy to the concepts and their speculations based on abstraction. Ideology, then, in this ontological sense, is a kind of practice in thinking about society, a conceptual practice that masks and suppresses the presence of the actual life-process of individuals as the basis for claiming knowledge of society and history. The ideologist, Marx wrote,

"remains in the realm of theory and does not view men [sic] in their given social connection, not under their existing conditions of life, which have made them what they are, he never arrives at the really existing active men [sic]."

The German Ideology, thus, provides us with a social science that grapples with the real world. We are, therefore, able to make existence claims for its method and theories. The method of this science, as Marx says, "confirms to real life" which is the actual activities of actual individuals under definite material conditions. This, we may call Marx's science, but it can also be, I argue, everybody else's science. It is, for instance, my science too. I think it was indeed Marx's hope that this science would be one day everybody's science, a true all-human science.

Marx's science and everybody's science

Cyril Smith (1997) has introduced a distinction between Marx's science as criticism and the theoretical science, as the established meaning of this concept in contemporary capitalist society. In his article *Marx's Conception of Science*, he writes thus: "there are two kinds of science: 1. Marx's science-as-criticism; 2. everybody else's theoretical science." While I agree with Smith's focus on Marx's science as critique or criticism, I do not share his understanding of the nature of that distinction. Theoretical science, Smith says, constructs theories, and these at best provide us with different explanations of their object of investigation. He criticizes the theoretical science for it can only explain something, and it is, furthermore, dogmatic because its theories are based on presuppositions which take the object of investigation for granted (Smith Cyril, 1997:18).

Although Smith's criticism of this particular explanatory character of "everybody else's science" fairly rings true, the nature of his distinction still gives rise to a methodological confusion. Smith's distinction, in my view, spills bleach on Marx's distinction between science and ideology. If we restrict the meaning of the word a bit – as Smith often does – we can say that his treatment of theoretical science supersedes Marx's concept of ideology.

I think we have no way other than to denounce Cyril Smith's theoretical science as ideological practice. For, if we follow Marx's method of thinking, we see social science as a practice that seeks to discover and unmask the essential relations of bourgeois society. A social science which is capable of grasping radically the "inner connection" of these social relations, and explicating a distinction between the substance of these relations and the misleading "phenomenal forms" in which they represent themselves to people's experience. Marx held, therefore, that "science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided" (1865a: 817). For

Marx, to show materially capitalism's phenomenal forms to be mystifying is implicitly to criticize the immediate "social forms of consciousness" and the theories and ideologies predicated on their plausibility – in which these forms are "spontaneously" grasped.

Marx's whole point in his historical sociology is that the discrepancy between the essence and its appearance, between the reality and its ideal forms is inherent in the nature of the bourgeois reality itself. Failing to see this is a "utopian inability to grasp the necessary difference between the real and the ideal form of bourgeois society" (1858a: 249). Marx's science is, thus, a method to depict and explicate the social reality in its totality. In *The German Ideology*, he wrote:

This conception of history depends on our ability to expound the real process of production, starting out from the material production of life itself, and to comprehend the form of intercourse connected with this and created by this mode of production (i.e., civil society in its various stages), as the basis of all history; and to show it in its action as state, to explain all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc., etc., and trace their origin and growth from that basis; by which means, of course, the whole thing can be depicted in its totality (and therefore, too, the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another). (Marx and Engels, 1965:50).

Ideologies and ideological practices are also "rooted in the material conditions of life", but they are not, and can not be, science as long as their analytic procedure is based on a total reversal of Marx's method of thinking. He criticized bourgeois economists because they failed to see these distinctions of form in their conceptualisation.

Marx says that "in the succession of the economic categories, as in any other historical, social science, it must not be forgotten that their subject – here, modern bourgeois society – is always what is given, in the head as well as in reality, and that these categories express the forms of being, the characteristics of existence" (Marx, 1857:106). What does he mean? I believe he is only emphasizing the historical and sociological anchorage of theoretical categories. He is saying that there is no an Archimedian point enabling the social thinker – including the generators of theoretical science – to stand outside the world they inhabit as actual living individuals, and producing theories which explain that world. This means that those who produce knowledge by making "mystical connections" in the conceptual world and suppress the presence of the actual organization people's "material-istic connection" generate nothing – not even theoretical science – but ideology. Because ideology, as Marx's method shows, separates thought from actualities of society and history, and thus "makes language into an independent realm" (Marx, 1973:107).

The standpoint of our contemporary social sciences, for instance, descends from a method of thinking that locates its problematic in an abstracted conceptual world without subjects. The theories, concepts, and methods of these sciences are generated in an academic discourse, and not by the actual life-process of real living individuals. The relevances, interests, and perspectives of the scientific discourse, then, are incorporated in the relations of ruling of capitalism. As Dorothy E. Smith's studies excellently shows, our modern sociology constitutes a part of the ruling relations of bourgeois society. Its relevances, theories, and subtending organization are given by relation of the ruling apparatus to the social world it governs. The institutional forms of ruling, she points out, "constitutes its major topics- the sociology of organization, of education, of health, of work, of mental illness, of deviance, of law, of knowledge, and the like." The organization of sociological thinking and knowledge is articulated to this institutional structure. It pioneers methods of thinking and the systematics of articulating particular actualities to a generalized conceptual order that serves it. To a significant extent, sociology has been busy clarifying, organizing, mapping, and extending the relations of the institutional forms of ruling to the actualities of their domain" (Smith, Dorothy E., 1987:109). Such are the ideological practices of our modern social "sciences"!

An ideological method of thinking, thus, is a method of superseding, substituting, and suppressing the actual life-process of society, a method of giving primacy to "stupid dogmatic concepts" which confines the practice of thinking in the phenomenal world of pure appearances; "this religion of everyday life" (1894:969). It is a method of practicing the conceptual fetishism in which categories and forms of thought assume an independent existence over and against the actual social relations of society, which underlies them. If science, then, is ever to be judged whatsoever, it must be in the service of humanity. "Science must not be a selfish pleasure," Marx used to say. "Those who have the good fortune to be able to devote themselves to scientific pursuits must be the first to place their knowledge at the service of humanity." Marx's social science is a science of praxis with a profound and clear emancipatory character. For him, therefore, "human emancipation will only be complete when the real, individual man ... has become a species-being."

In all his major writings, Marx draws an analogy between religion and different ideological practices. We must take this analogy very seriously. We have to understand that there is no way "to turn the weapon of ideology against the classes in power." The working class does not need any ideology. The movement of working class, but, tries to create a reality which "is precisely the true basis for rendering it impossible for anything to exist independently of individuals, in so far as reality is only a product of the preceding intercourse of individuals themselves" (1846:71). Marx's critique of ideology, as I have tried to show, is an organizing principle in his substantive inquiry. There is an organic

relationship between his critique of ideology, the concept of science, and his materialist method of thinking. Whenever we read Marx, we come to see these three elements as three inseparable aspect or moment of his analytic practice as critique.

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Marx and the History of Philosophy

by Cyril Smith

This is an outline of a talk given at the International Socialist Forum on 7 March, 1999.

This is yet another instalment of a long-term project: to re-examine what Marx was doing, as far as possible without the prejudices of "Marxism-Leninism". Because of the massive misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Marx's ideas, this is a necessary prelude to going beyond him.

Here I want to look at some of Marx's early writings, in order to clarify the purpose of his work on philosophy, that is, its relation with his idea of communism. I shall try to avoid the language of the "Marxist" tradition, which used philosophical terminology to suggest that Marx was responsible for a kind of philosophy. This was the way that his entire project was mystified.

Marx's early work began within the Hegelian school, like nearly every other thinker in Germany at that time. But as early as 1840 he was clear that that school was in a process of decomposition. That is why his Doctoral Dissertation, on the history of Greek philosophy, already centred upon a disagreement with Hegel, "our great teacher", as Marx calls him. In praising the philosophy of Epicurus, which Hegel had rather disparaged, Marx drew an analogy between the histories of Greek and German philosophy, in which Aristotle took the place of Hegel, and maybe the Epicureans, Stoics and Cynics stood in for the "Young Hegelians".

We have to begin with Hegel, because before him there really was no true history of philosophy. And Hegel's work itself must be taken as a whole: "The True is the Whole". If you abstract one piece of the system – say, the Logic – you falsify both whole and the part. In every one of Hegel's works, he emphasises its relation to the history of philosophy. In the system, all the stages of that history appear as aspects (moments), each bound up with a particular stage of the history of society. Each philosopher's work is "its own time expressed in thought", representing simultaneously a stage of development of society and of society's consciousness of itself. So the history of philosophy is inseparable from the philosophy of history, which traces the unfolding of Spirit, that is, of an entire way of life. For Hegel, each "time" can be "expressed in thought" because thought, Spirit, was the primary determining factor in historical movement.

Of course, each philosophical work has its own logical structure, but it is at the same time an aspect of the organic unfolding of the Idea over time. By the way,

the development of Spirit is the only kind Hegel recognises: Nature "in itself" knows no development, only cyclical movement.

Nature is what it is, and so its alterations are therefore only repetitions, its movement only circular. But the act of Spirit is self-knowledge." (Hegel, Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy, p.24).

[The forward movement of Spirit, both in History and in human consciousness of history, is what Hegel calls dialectic.

"What is shaped is something determinate. It must have a character; determinacy is necessary to its being and existing. But, if so, it is something finite, and the finite is not the truth; it is not what it ought to be. It contradicts its content, i.e. the Idea, and must perish. ... The Idea ... must shatter this form, destroy this one-sided existence in order to give to it the absolute form which is identical with the content." (Hegel, Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy, p.94).

Hegel's logic is not about deriving some true statements from other true statements, so that the presuppositions of the whole structure have to be fed in from outside. He believes that, by looking at the historical unfolding of the true, he can make his system absolute, presuppositionless. This joint movement of history and self-consciousness is the coming-to-be of Freedom. This is Hegel's special meaning of the word Freedom: it is not the "negative freedom" of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which meant only that individuals should not be prevented from doing whatever they happen to feel like. Hegel's freedom centres on the self-creation of Spirit. Thought reconciles itself to the world, by recognising it as the product of its own work. So, according to Hegel, the task of philosophical science is to reflect upon this history and its self-comprehension.

Reflecting on something, "speculative thought", has two implications. The object reflected upon must, first of all, stand opposed to the thinking subject, and secondly, this object must be something that has already happened. Hegel is absolutely opposed to any idea that philosophy can "issue instructions on how the world ought to be", and in this Marx always agreed with him. But in Hegel, this implies an essential pessimism following the French Revolution. Individuals think they can control their own lives, but they cannot succeed. History, the movement of Spirit, has its own agenda. It makes use of individuals, driven

by their own desires, with results which none of them anticipate. Marx accepts this as a description of forms of social life which dominate those who live in them. Communism for Marx is the "actual movement" (wirkliche Bewegung) which will break out of all such forms.

Marx's critique of Hegel's history of philosophy is at the same time the critique of (a) Hegel's entire work; (b) philosophy as such; (c) each of the times which it spoke for; especially (d) bourgeois society. What does Marx mean by "critique"? He does not mean rejection, showing one point of view to be wrong, and replacing it with another, "correct" one. Marx's critique involves finding out what gave rise to an outlook, an entire way of thinking, and thus an entire way of living. So the critique of philosophy is only a preparation for revolutionising that way of living, for "actual life [wirkliche Leben]", truly human life. Such a life would not need philosophy to reconcile thought with its opposite. A human world would not need "explanation" of itself to itself.

Marx's critique of religion, with which he begins, helps to clarify how this works. He does not advocate the simple rejection of religion. For him, religious belief highlights the real distress which gives rise to it. It is "the spirit of a spiritless situation". It is similar with his critique of the State, via Hegel's philosophy of the State. Hegel shows the State as the response to the fragmentation of modern economic life. Marx's critique leads to the need to transcend the State along with that inhuman form of life. Unlike Feuerbach, Marx does not reject Hegel's idealism in favour of a return to the materialism of the eighteenth century, or of any alternative philosophical outlook. Instead, he turns to the critique of political economy, and through it to the transformation of socialism into the practical movement of the working class.

The parallel between God and money, which is found throughout Marx's work, is very important here. Humans create God, and then accept His power over them. In bourgeois society, as he explained in detail in *Capital*, we are governed by the products of our own hands, just as in religion we are governed by the product of our own brains.

Why does Marx's work begin with Greek philosophy? All the great German thinkers at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century looked back on "Hellas" with nostalgia, because here, they thought, had been a people whose life was not fragmented by the relations of the bourgeois world they saw growing in Britain and France. Hegel also looked back to Greece, but he knew there was no return. Instead, he struggled to reconcile the new individualistic world with the unified structure of the State.

In 1843, influenced by Feuerbach's critique of Hegel, Marx studied Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Years later, in the 1859 Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*, Marx looked back at this unpublished work, to explain how he came to study political economy. ("Marxists" quoted the Preface ad nauseam, but never

really explained what this connection was.) Actually, Hegel's last book embodies the entire history of political philosophy since Plato. So Marx says only a little, for example, about the work of Kant, or of Rousseau, because what he has to say is already prepared by Hegel's work, and Marx's critique of Hegel does the job.

The 1844 Paris Manuscripts conclude with a "Critique of Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole". Marx can now understand that the history of philosophy as such expresses alienation, exploitation, fragmentation and oppression. But, instead of seeking answers to these evils, it tries to show their necessity.

The Philosopher – who is himself an abstract form of estranged man – takes himself as the criterion of the estranged world.

Hegel has deep insight into alienation. But, by giving priority to thought, he locks his understanding into a philosophical prison. For Hegel, Marx explains,

it is not the fact that the human being objectifies himself inhumanly, in opposition to himself, but the fact that he objectifies himself in distinction from and in opposition to abstract thinking, that constitutes the posited essence of the estrangement of the thing to be superseded.

Hegel's greatness is that he realises, for example,

that sensuous consciousness is not an abstractly sensuous consciousness, but a humanly sensuous consciousness, that religion, wealth, etc. are but the estranged world of human objectification, of man's essential powers put to work, and that they are therefore but the path to the true human world.

But he only sees all this in philosophical terms. For him,

sense, religion, state power, etc. are spiritual entities; for only mind is the true essence of man, and the true form of mind is thinking mind, the logical, speculative mind. The human character of nature and of the nature created by history – man's products – appears in the form that they are products of abstract mind, and, as such, therefore, phases of mind – thought-entities.

Philosophy is incapable of escaping from the inhuman character of existing social relations: it is itself their highest expression. Above all, Hegel's account of the history of philosophy makes thinking the key to human history. Thus philosophy embodies the division between a ruling class, who does the thinking, and the mass, who do all the actual work. Hegel knows this, but philosophy can only describes it as objectively necessary.

We might say that there are only two tasks for philosophy. It can either "issue instructions" about

changing the world to what philosophy declares it ought to be; or it can explain why things are necessarily just as they are. In this sense, philosophy is always hostile to democracy. "We", the philosophers alone know the answers, while "they", ordinary people, don't. As has often been pointed out, Utopians are always bureaucratic and tyrannical – with the most benevolent intentions, of course. In the course of its work, philosophy can highlight the key problems, but only in thought. These problems, however, are only resolved in the struggle to change the way we live.

Later in 1844, Marx and Engels published *The Holy Family*, a (sometimes rather tedious) "satirical" attack on the Young Hegelians. It takes forward Marx's insights into the nature of philosophy and its history.

Already in Hegel, the Absolute Spirit of history has its material in the Mass and finds its appropriate expression only in philosophy. The philosopher, however, is only the organ through which the maker of history, the Absolute Spirit, arrives at self-consciousness retrospectively, after the movement has ended.

A powerful light is shone on to the Hegelian system. "In Hegel there are three elements, Spinoza's Substance, Fichte's Self-Consciousness and Hegel's necessarily antagonistic unity of the two." Metaphysics is thus used to disguise "nature separated from man; ... spirit separated from nature." Hidden inside their metaphysical unity is "real man, and the real human species".

The 1845 *Theses on Feuerbach* use Hegel's idealism against "all previous materialism – that of Feuerbach included", and at the same time attack idealism from the "standpoint of the new materialism". Thesis 1 backs Hegel against Feuerbach, praising idealism for grasping the importance of practice, but also shows the limitation of idealism. Marx attacks the "theoretical attitude", and condemns Feuerbach for not grasping "'revolutionary', 'practical-critical' activity". Thesis 3 points out the connection between materialism and Utopia, and resolves the problem raised by the Utopians in "revolutionary practice", which shows how "changing of circumstances and human activity" can coincide. In Theses 9 and 10, the "old materialism" is distinguished from the new, whose "standpoint" is "human society and associated humanity". Finally, Thesis 11 embodies the critique of philosophy as such, which, at best, "interprets the world".

Hegel had succeeded in showing history and its comprehension as objective processes, through which humanity, under the name "Spirit", created itself as a self-conscious subject. When, in 1843, Marx turned to the study of political economy, he saw that "Hegel's standpoint is that of modern political economy". (This statement worried the hell out of me when I was a "dialectical materialist".) Hegel had presented an accurate picture of the self-creation of humanity

through social labour, but this could only be an upside-down picture, because, in bourgeois society, humanity was living upside-down.

Now Marx's critique of political economy could begin. Where Hegel's history of philosophy/ philosophy of history made us the prisoners of Spirit, Marx's critique of Hegel showed us how to escape from the prison. In civil society, "the battlefield of private interest", we are "ruled by abstractions". The struggle of the proletariat against its life under the power of capital opened the way for the whole of humanity to free itself. In human society, humans will rule themselves. In place of the "illusory community" called the State will come the "true community's of associated individuals, in which "the free development of each" person will be the condition, and "the free development of all" will be the outcome. But Marx could not come to these notions directly. He had to approach communism through the problems raised by philosophy and its long history. As he put it in his *Notebooks for his Doctoral Thesis*, "the world confronting a philosophy total in itself is ... a world torn apart." The critique of Hegel's "total" summation of the history of philosophy revealed the specific character of this torn-apart world.



[An offering for May-Day 1896 from
Walter Crane]

Marx and Positivism

by David Hookes

This is the summary of a talk given at the International Socialist Forum

Background

It is important to locate any philosophical discussion within a concrete historical context. This is in keeping with Marx's own dictum in the Theses on Feuerbach that "Previously philosophers have only interpreted the world, the task however is to change it". In this spirit, I list some of the relevant issues that confront all those who wish to build an effective movement for socialism:

1. The apparent "triumph" of capital as it appears to establish a global hegemony.
2. The collapse of state bureaucratic regimes in Russia and Eastern Europe into robber-baron, jungle capitalism. The same process is effectively taking place in China but with different dynamics.
3. The revolutionary developments in the productive processes on the planet, centred on the development of the "new technologies" of information processing, communications, and biotechnology, together with associated technologies for automatic control of the productive processes. Generally this can be described as making explicit that which was implicit in the revolutionary developments within physics and molecular biology in the first half of this almost completed century.
4. There is a positive feedback between these new technologies and the development of the understanding of nature. The greater understanding of nature leads to improved technologies, which lead to a better understanding of nature, and so on. This process has continued rapidly to accelerate in last couple of decades. It is commercially driven by the intensification of competition between different sections of capital thus leading to the highly unstable situation of the global capital system at present.
5. The increasing destitution of the majority of humanity of the so-called "Third World" (actually "Two Thirds World", to quote Fr. Sean McDonagh), as these countries seek to pay back massive debts to imperialist finance capital through the "structural adjustment programmes" of the IMF.
6. The increasing threat to the basis of life itself through the pollution and destruction of the biosphere by profit-hungry capital and the former state bureaucratic regimes.
7. The wretched state of social democracy with its open bootlicking of the representatives of capital personified in the antics of certain European leaders, supported enthusiastically by the former "communist" parties.
8. The cacophony of squabbling sects representing the allegedly anti-Stalinist revolutionary socialist movement – each sect existing in its own hermetically sealed universe of discourse, "knowing" that it and it alone has the key to building the "revolutionary party". Out of desperation for new members and influence they attempt to form alliances, with paper-thin protestations of the need for open comradely democratic discussion. Meanwhile, no doubt, they report back to their respective central committees on the possibilities for recruitment of a new layer of paper sellers.
9. The clear need for a mass party of the working class for socialism built *by* the working class not *for* the working class by an elite group of revolutionary know-a-lots. Such a party will be internationalist at its core due to the character of the class whose interests it pursues.
10. There are many rich opportunities for building such a party present today during the intensifying crisis – the crisis of "the social metabolic processes" to quote Istvan Meszaros [1] – of the global capital production system, its manifest inability to create a viable future for the human species.
11. The need to thoroughly grasp the origins of the crisis in the revolutionary movement, particularly its historical and theoretical basis. There can be no no-go

areas, sacred cows to be still worshipped, shibboleths to be recited afresh.

Positivism

I believe a central issue is the concept of the "revolutionary vanguard party" and its malign influence on the development of the socialist movement, particularly the disastrous consequences for the Russian revolution. I also believe that the origin of this tragic mistake lies in the French revolution, which ascribed excessive importance to the role of a revolutionary intellectual elite, those who can apply reason to society as a whole. This was given philosophical form in the philosophy of positivism.

According to The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy and Philosophers [2] "positivism" is the name given (a) to a doctrine and movement founded by the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and (b) to the general philosophical view of which Comte's Positivism is one instance. In this latter sense positivism is the view that all genuine knowledge is based on sense experience and can only be advanced by means of observation and experiment.

Metaphysical or speculative attempts to gain knowledge by reason alone, unchecked by experience should be abandoned ("meaningless" according to Vienna circle Logical positivists) in favour of the special sciences. All positivists hold that the task of philosophy is to understand the methods by which the sciences are advanced but not to seek for any independent knowledge of the world. In short they are empiricists.

Francis Bacon in many ways can be considered the founder of empiricism and therefore positivism, and a key figure (or "organic intellectual") in the rise of the English mercantile bourgeoisie. He held that it was impossible to "deduce" the ultimate facts of nature, philosophers should not wander beyond "the limits of nature". He thinks that there are ultimate facts that should be approached "without any previous conception" – that they should be accepted "on the faith of experience" and uses the word "positive" to denote these "inexplicable" facts. Bacon was much admired by the 18th century empiricist philosophers in England and France and hence his usage of the word "positive" came to be applied to the methods of the natural sciences in their reliance on observation and experiment.

Saint-Simon in his Essay on the Sciences of Man (1813) applies the word "positive" to the sciences which are based on "the facts which have been observed and analyzed"; sciences not so based are called "conjectural". Comte (sometime secretary to Saint-Simon) uses the word in this sense in article entitled Plan of the Scientific Works Necessary for the Reorganisation of Society (1822) and later in his Course of Positive philosophy (1830-42). In the latter he says that the function of theories is to co-ordinate observed facts rather than explain them in terms of causes. Comte is usually credited with being the originator of the famous Law of Three Stages (in fact this is due to Saint-Simon) in which the human mind passes from a *theological* through a *metaphysical* to a final *positive* stage. In the first two stages, attempts are made to penetrate to the inner nature of things by explaining behaviour in terms of supernatural or metaphysical entities. In the final, positive, stage this attempt is abandoned and the positive thinker seeks only to establish by reasoning based on observations the invariable sequences and co-existences of phenomena.

Comte held that the time would come when human society itself would be studied by such positive methods. Such a positive science he called "sociology" or sometimes "social physics". He argues that the development of society corresponds to the three stages. First, a theological social outlook upheld by priestly learning and authority. This is followed by the era of metaphysical criticism of traditional doctrines, when they are replaced by such unverifiable doctrines as belief in natural rights and the sovereignty of the people. In Europe this is the era of the Reformation, Enlightenment, and the French revolution. This era would be replaced by a stable society where agreement is established on the basis of incontrovertible positive social knowledge. A new form of authority would then reside in a new spiritual power consisting of men of science whose knowledge would enable humanity to achieve a peaceful unity of thought and action. In later years Comte developed this authoritarian doctrine into a Religion of Humanity. His prominent English supporters, JS Mill and the novelist George Eliot refused to follow him in this direction. Positivist Societies flourished for many years and one group of Positivist Proletarians was allowed to join the First International.

In positivism there only two types of knowledge: knowledge of matters of fact, how things are through observation and experiment, and then there is knowledge of logic and mathematics which is not

about the world at all. All other books that do not fit into these two categories are "sophistry and illusion". This view was widely held in the 19th century by men of science but not in faculties of philosophy where various forms of Idealist metaphysics prevailed.

Positivism in the form of Logical Positivism revived in the 1920s particularly in the Vienna Circle, and also in Berlin, based on the work of the early Wittgenstein and the developments in Physics (quantum theory and, especially, relativity). This group of thinkers asserted that Kant's category of the Synthetic A Priori must be rejected, and that only verifiable matters of fact or truth of mathematics or logic were meaningful. Everything else was strictly meaningless. Unfortunately, "when it came to explaining what exactly the facts are, which observation and experiment can reveal, positivists give as widely different answers as the metaphysicians" [2, page 256]. Bacon's "simple nature", Hume's "impressions" or the "atomic facts" of the 20th century positivists raise theoretical problems every bit as difficult and elusive as those of the metaphysicians. Two members of the Vienna Circle, Kurt Goedel and Karl Popper, effectively dismantled the whole program of Logical Positivism. The former showed that mathematics itself was incomplete and could not be reduced to "pure" logic, and the latter that the method of science was based on conjectures and refutations not verifications.

At this point I would like to refer the reader to two papers by two American academics: Marxism and Positivism by James Farr, and Marxian Science and Positivist Politics by Terence Ball (see reference [3]). They demonstrate clearly, and with much greater erudition than I could claim, that the ideas of the Positivists were an anathema to Marx himself but NOT to Engels. To give a flavour of these articles I will like to quote the following :

Never one to mince words, he (Marx) condemned the "shit positivism" (Scheisspositivismus) of Comte and vehemently denied ever "writing Comtist recipes for the kitchens of the future"(4). More tellingly, Marx insisted that the much vaunted value neutrality and expertise of Comtean social engineers was a sham, inasmuch as they purport to stand above society, manipulating social variables and changing circumstances of everyone except themselves. "The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and education," wrote Marx, "forgets that the circumstances are changed by men and that the

educator himself must be educated. This doctrine has therefore to divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society"(Marx and Engels [5]). This is, of course, impossible. For the social technician is also human, and is therefore " no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, society"(Marx [6]). Contra Comte, there can be no objective asocial Archimedean point from which expert engineers may move people and manage societies. (Ball, reference [3] page 241).

And also:

Physical reductionists marching under the banner of unified science [a key positivist notion-DH] fail to understand this elementary but quite crucial point. They mistake the "language of commodities" for the language of physical things [Marx(7)]. In so doing they are not only bad scientists but fetishists as well. Physicalism [the reduction of all reality to physics-DH] is in short a version of fetishism. Physical thing terms cannot provide the bedrock of a unified scientific vocabulary because they misdescribe the very reality a social science attempts to capture ... Even Darwin was guilty of this(biological reductionism). After an initial fascination with Darwin, Marx viewed his achievements in a more sceptical light. Indeed, he finally found Darwin's theory downright "amusing" because it smuggled a social interpretation of capitalist society into biological law: "It is remarkable how Darwin recognises among the beasts and plants his English society with its division of labour, competition, opening up of new markets, inventions, and the Malthusian 'struggle for existence'. His is Hobbes' 'bellum omnium contra omnes', and one is reminded of Hegel's Phenomenology where civil society is described as a 'spiritual animal kingdom', while in Darwin the animal kingdom figures as civil society."(Marx Engels [8]). From James Farr [3], pp. 223-4.

[Both these two articles should be read by comrades. I will try to get them made available on the internet-DH]

I would also argue that these ideas were *not* abhorrent to Lenin and Trotsky, despite the former's celebrated attack on the Russian Machist Positivists [9]. Lenin replaced the positivists' sensationalist relativism by an even cruder vulgar materialist empiricism, e.g. the idea that our brains "photograph" reality. Of course as everyone knows Lenin modified these philosophical

views after reading Hegel's Science of Logic, but by then the die was cast and the vanguard party was ready to assume its historical role. Ironically the least knowledgeable of its central committee elite, J Stalin, was waiting in the wings ready to deal with the intellectuals. The appalling debacle of Stalinism and Fascism shaped the rest of the century.

After the revolution, and long before Stalin got control of the bureaucratic apparatus created by Lenin and Trotsky, there were crude examples of positivist methods. For instance workers were put into a special apparatus to attempt to improve their productivity. Then there is Trotsky's talk about remaking humanity "as in a mortar and pestle" – chemical social engineering as it were – and the enthusiasm for Taylorism in the early Soviet Union. There is also Lenin's simplistic mechanistic positivism in his celebrated equation: "Soviets + Electricity = Socialism". Ball's paper clearly shows the connection between the Soviet use of psychiatric methods against dissidents and a positivist philosophical outlook.

It is also important that the reformist branch of social democracy was also heavily influenced by positivist scientific social engineering. The espousal of eugenics by British Fabians and Scandinavian social democrats is but one example. Recent revelations that the latter actually carried out the forced sterilization of biologically "inferior" people is both shocking and instructive.

Of course it is critically important for capital to have its cadres of scientific and technical experts, its social engineers, and administrative bureaucratic elites. It is essential that these social layers are kept loyal and uncritically carry out their allotted tasks of creating the means of engaging in economic and, if necessary, military competition. Such elites are also essential for creating the means of repression and oppression of the vast bulk of humanity, those who earn their living through labour, be they workers or peasants. Such elites are the "organic intelligentsia" of the ruling class described by the Italian Marxist, Gramsci. [10]

I believe a central issue facing the revolutionary socialist movement is the need to win over to the side of labouring humanity elements of the scientific and technical intelligentsia in new non-positivist relationship – a true organic intelligentsia.

My proposal is to fight for the setting up of "Community Development Parks" especially as part of the implementation of a Workers International Plan

for Development [11]. The potential of the new technologies for implementing such a plan is obvious.

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Part of Our History

by Jim Smith

Review article: The Fate of the Russian Revolution: Lost Texts of Critical Marxism Vol. 1. Articles by Max Shachtman, Hal Draper, CLR James, Al Glotzer, Joseph Carter, Leon Trotsky and others. Edited by Sean Matgamna. (London: Phoenix Press, 1998; pp 603, £16.99)

It is a warm Sunday evening in the summer of 1970. The place is The Mound, Edinburgh. The Mound in 1970 is a car park on weekdays, but on Sundays becomes a miniature Speakers Corner.

I have been speaking from a "stump" (or "soapbox") on behalf of the International Socialism Group (IS) – later to become the Socialist Workers Party – whose Edinburgh Branch I founded in 1968. The stump is in fact a herring-box on which is attached a board displaying the initials "IS", the "I" forming a clenched fist.

As usual, I had started off the speaking, leaning on the board in an imitation of the famous photograph of Lenin and attempting to draw an audience by my routine opening line: "Good evening, Friends! And when I say "friends", I mean the working people of Edinburgh! I can say this because I am speaking on behalf of the International Socialism Group...etc, etc..."

I have finished speaking, and my friend and comrade Harry Tait is now on the stump. I am dutifully standing nearby displaying the current issue of *Socialist Worker*. A grey-haired man, shabbily dressed, looking almost like a tramp, is among the handful of listeners.

"Is this group Trotskyist?" asks the man.

I start an explanation of the differences between the IS position and "orthodox" Trotskyism "At the founding conference of the Fourth International was founded in 1938..." The man looks puzzled and interrupts: "1938? I seem to remember sending our delegate Maxy Shachtman to a conference for the Fourth International a few years before that."

The man's name was Jim Charleson. Later that evening he ate with my wife and me and within a few weeks he became a member of the IS. Charleson was a former welder, born and raised in Leith, the port district of Edinburgh and once full of docks, shipyards and engineering works. He travelled widely in the 1920s and 1930s to find work, joined the Communist Party in Edinburgh in the 1920s, but while working in the United States in the early 1930s become increasingly

concerned about the lying, zigzags and betrayals of the Stalinist leadership.

Jim Charleson thus became a supporter of the Left Opposition/Communist League of America. From my meeting with him until his death in 1972 Charleson was as active a member of the IS as his failing health would allow. But not only that. In 1971 he and I were among the delegates from Edinburgh IS to travel to a special IS conference in Birmingham to vote against the expulsion of the "Workers' Fight" faction, which was led by Sean Matgamna, the editor of the work under review and was also known as the "Trotskyist Tendency". At that time Matgamna draped himself in the banner of "orthodox" Trotskyism. Matgamna and his comrades, now formed as the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL), have come a long political journey since then.

The reason Charleson voted against the expulsion of Workers Fight was not because he agreed with their politics, but because he had seen enough in the Stalinist Communist Parties of the hounding out of minorities.

While he was an IS member, Jim Charleson was often asked to describe his activities as a revolutionary, and for his first years as a Trotskyist that meant describing a comradesly relationship with Max Shachtman (or "Maxy" as Jim always referred to him). Charleson had left the USA before 1938, working in – of all places – the Soviet Union before returning to Edinburgh. His reference to an earlier conference arises from the fact that it was Left Opposition policy to call for a Fourth International from 1933, and this position was proposed at the Conference of Left Socialist and Communist Organisations held in Paris on 27-28 of that year.

Jim Charleson had for health reasons been relatively politically inactive in the post-war period. He recorded his memoirs, mainly of the 1930s, on tape, and if any reader wishes to hear them, please send me two blank tapes (c/o ISF).

Shachtman and working class leadership

Almost a quarter of this book is taken up with Matgamna's introduction. More than half of the remainder comprises articles by Shachtman himself from the 1940s and early 1950s. The rest are mainly from Shachtman's supporters in the Workers Party and Independent Socialist League at the

time, with a few articles by Trotsky and a few by adversaries with whom Shachtman and his supporters were in debate.

Matgamna does not support Shachtman's ultimate move to the Right, which became particularly marked following the invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1962. Matgamna states that it was Shachtman's support for US imperialism in Cuba that led such comrades as Hal Draper and Phyllis and Julius Jacobson to break with him. However, there were other issues, in particular Shachtman's perspective on work within the Socialist Party and his attempt to steer the Socialist Party towards the Democratic Party [1]. Shachtman's argument on Cuba was that Stalinist "bureaucratic collectivism" represented a worse form of class rule than liberal capitalism, and he therefore backed the US invasion. Shachtman later supported the US bombing of Vietnam on the same grounds, leading to a further split in what was then the Social Democrats of the USA, with opponents of the bombing led by Michael Harrington forming the Democratic Socialists of America. (Both factions were committed to working inside the Democratic Party).

Matgamna is at pains to refute the argument that Shachtman's later pro-imperialist position flowed directly from his theory of "bureaucratic collectivism" as a system more reactionary than capitalism. This is hardly surprising, as Matgamna also sees Stalinist society as more reactionary than capitalism. Matgamna points out that Shachtman did not argue for support for "democratic capitalism" against the fascist states during World War II, and this is clear from the writings in this book. Another aspect of Shachtman's position, discussed below, is that he originally saw "bureaucratic collectivism" as a more progressive society than capitalism. While the two issues are of course connected, I want at this point to look at Shachtman and his supporters, and the positions adopted in this book, in relation to the issue of building a leadership in the working class before examining the arguments in relation to "the class nature of the Soviet Union".

It will be clear from the above that the sincere working class revolutionary I quote, Jim Charleson, recalled "Maxy" Shachtman as a genuine and even heroic leader of the working class. Even vehement critics of "Shachtmanism", such as Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League/Workers Revolutionary Party, implicitly acknowledged in 1974 the validity of Shachtman's activity up to 1933 by publishing his *The History and Principles of the Left Opposition*. [2]

However, the general tendency to treat Shachtman – from his disputes with Trotsky in 1938/39 – as (in Matgamna's words) "Lucifer, Satan" has been common to both the "orthodox" and "state capitalist" descendants of Trotskyism. (Certainly that was the case with the IS/SWP). The pendulum of left opinion has

now swung in Shachtman's favour[3], while the works of Hal Draper on the nature of revolution and of the revolutionary party are now being read with interest – not least by supporters of the International Socialist Forum.

This means that not only the general theories of Shachtman should be critically evaluated, but also the operation of "Shachtmanite" politics in practice. Unfortunately, the writings in this volume on revolutionary strategy, such as Al Glotzer's "From Anti-Hitlerism to Socialism" and "The 'Democratic Interlude' and Working-Class Leadership" tend to concentrate on Europe rather than where the Shachtmanites actually had a base in the working class, the USA.

This not to say that these writings are not at times illuminative. There is an eerie familiarity about the statement cited by Glotzer (who was arguing against it) from CLR James (using the pen-name JR Johnson) about Europe in 1943: "The most dangerous enemies of the of the militancy of the workers, the flourishing Social-Democratic and Stalinist bureaucracies, no longer exist." How wrong that analysis, made by one of the most talented of revolutionaries, proved to be! James's conclusion, that the opportunity for revolution in France was "a hundred times greater than in 1939" led him to argue it was not necessary to build a vanguard party. Glotzer, for the Workers Party majority, argued against James that a vanguard party was "indispensable" and that James's views were in practice "sectarian".

At any rate, this debate should warn us today not to be too hasty in assuming the demise of those forces who would betray the working class, and of drawing the conclusion (which CLR James continued to maintain) that a revolutionary party is no longer necessary. Glotzer's response is exactly right:

It is important to bear in mind that, however override the objective conditions of European capitalism have been for socialism, they did not automatically mean the *victory* of socialism. For, in the final analysis, the factor which is *all-decisive* is the *subjective* force – the organization. The strength, intelligence and will power of the revolutionary socialist parties, equipped with an unassailably correct programme.

Party democracy, and relationships between comrades, are essential aspects of the issues of party and leadership. Matgamna attempts to be even-handed about the 1940 split when Shachtman's Workers Party separated from the SWP and the Fourth International, and the subsequent bitterness of the exchanges. The SWP leader James P. Cannon says Matgamna, "was no villain" despite the impression given in the writings in this book. The characterisation of Cannon in these texts

is, Matgamna admits, "one-sided and unfair" – but also the mirror image of Cannon's treatment of Shachtman and his supporters. The mutual demonisation between the Cannonites and Shachtmanites – that is, between erstwhile comrades – will be familiar to anyone with experience of the revolutionary left. Matgamna is right to oppose this, but wrong to allow himself to sink to a similar level as he does in the following comment on the 1953 split in the Fourth International:

Like ripples spreading from a stone dropped in still water, the reverberations spread. Groups proliferated, some quite mad. A useful distinction in sorting out these groups is between people honestly trying to understand the world and trying to function politically – and both Cannon and his opponents in 1953 were that – and the charlatans. An increasingly conspicuous section of the neo-Trotskyist movement consisted of charlatans, groups like the French "Lambertists", the later British "Healyites", the Morenists in Latin America"...

This sweeping statement does Matgamna no credit. It is not clear what the term "later" means in regard to the "British Healyites", but Matgamna must be aware that one feature of the Socialist Labour League was its refusal – particularly emphasised in the writings of Tom Kemp [4] – to adopt the position of Pablo and Mandel that revolution could be spread by the Stalinists. The statement also ignores the very real theoretical work done by Geoff Pilling on Marxist political economy and by Cliff Slaughter on dialectics – open to criticism, but hardly works of charlatanism – and the sincerity of the many working class activists who supported the SLL in its early years, many of whom had broken from Stalinism following the Hungarian uprising. It is equally unjust to the thousands of workers who at one time supported the LIT in Latin America.

One infers that Matgamna does not totally accept Shachtman's explanation for his and his allies' "expulsion" from the SWP by the Cannon majority. Shachtman (p 261) calls Cannon's methods used to expel him and his supporters an "infamous improvement on Stalinist procedure". Shachtman claims that his supporters were "kicked out" for not supporting a motion prepared for this purpose, and adds: "Not even Stalin ever equalled this brilliant product of Cannon's brain." Shachtman also claims that Cannon boasted that the expulsion had taken only four and a half minutes, whereas the expulsion of Cannon and Shachtman from the Communist Party had taken the Stalinists a week-long "trial".

In fact, one former Shachtmanite describes the split as "treacherous" – on Shachtman's side. [5] Any split has two sides to it, and resultant recriminations of the kind indulged in by Shachtman in this work benefit no one.

It does seem evident that Trotsky had a low opinion of James Burnham ("the strutting petty-bourgeois pedant") [6] and believed that if the minority faction split away "they can only develop in Burnham's direction". [7] In fact, Burnham left the Workers Party immediately after the split taking no one with him, as Shachtman pointed out.

Shachtman is seen (pp 262-3) in 1943 to claim that the Workers Party "is made up of at least ninety per cent of proletarian men and women" and that more workers read the Workers Party's newspaper, Labor Action, than the all the publications of the SWP combined. An important advantage for the Workers Party was that, at a time when the US and USSR were allies, their rejection of the position of "unconditional defence of the Soviet Union" enabled them to take a more uncompromising stand in opposition to US imperialism. This allowed the Workers Party to lead a major rank and file movement in the United Automobile Workers (UAW) union. The question, which Matgamna and his hero both have difficulty in answering, is why the Workers Party subsequently went into decline, while the SWP grew in the immediate post-war years.

One answer must be the limits of "rank and fileism". Building a revolutionary leadership means not only supporting and even leading militant trade union struggles. It also involves linking this activity to the building of a Marxist vanguard party in the working class. Although through their rank and file militancy Workers Party members were able to win up to one third of the votes for UAW posts, no genuine political leadership was built. As a result, when after the war UAW leader Walter Reuther moved to the left, he was able to undermine the support for the Shachtmanites – simply because he was now adopting a position of left-wing union militancy indistinguishable from theirs.

Shachtman's later perspective was to work within the Socialist Party and then the Democratic Party, and within the union bureaucracies. Matgamna (p 146) seems to be prepared to defend these tactics, stating that what he calls "Shachtman's machinations" were not "necessarily discreditable" and contrasts his activities in the Democratic Party with "sectarian aloofness", which he evidently feels to be the perspective of "orthodox" Trotskyism. What Matgamna does not seem to grasp is that Shachtman's tactics were similar to those of Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, with the difference that they sought to push not only the union bureaucracies and reformist organisations leftwards but also the Stalinist bureaucracies.

Matgamna suggests (p 387) that the "orthodox" Trotskyists "saw the role of the revolutionary party as just being there – with strong organisation and a 'finished' revolutionary program – to meet a

revolutionary movement which would develop almost automatically". He suggests (p 127) that, arising from a perspective based on Cannonite conceptions, arose "an implicit view of revolution as produced by raw rage combined with a sectarian drive to 'build the party'" and sees this outlook in particular in the British SLL/WRP. Matgamna might have been better advised to overcome his past bitterness arising from his own experience in the SLL and look more critically at the development of the "majority" United Secretariat of the Fourth International based initially on the positions of Pablo and led for many years led by Ernest Mandel.

It is also absurd for Matgamna to argue, as he does on p. 387, on the basis of the article criticised by Al Glotzer quoted above, that CLR James adopted the same position as the "orthodox" Trotskyists on the question of the party. It is clear from even the excerpts cited that James was advancing a position he developed more fully in 1958, that the very idea of a vanguard party was no longer relevant to the needs of the working class. [8]

What neither Matgamna nor Shachtman, any more than the Pablo-Mandel or Healyite, Lambertist or Morenist leaderships, developed was a theoretical understanding and consistent method in practice for the work of revolutionaries in the trade unions. The task is neither to develop a sectarian current isolated from the real movements of the working class nor merely to adapt to or tail behind "left" leaders.

This latter approach, in the words of the Japanese Marxist Kan'ichi Kuroda, at best reduces the organisation "to a mere functional group serving the mass movement, that is, to a group of political technicians." [9] Kuroda contrasts this approach and that of "party-building-above-all-ism" to the need to build party organisations mediated by work to advance the mass movement to grasp "the spiralling circular structure of mass movement and League (party) organisation building". The "substance" forming the point of contact between the mass movement building and building of the party – in Kuroda's case of the Japan Revolutionary Communist League (JRCL) – is the "fraction". [10] The JRCL developed their theory of organising tactics in struggle with the Japanese Pabloites [11] and the experience of the JRCL in trade union struggle linked to its Marxist method have allowed it to develop an understanding of the "structure" of revolutionary activity in the unions. [12] Neither Matgamna's introduction nor the writings he has selected begin to approach these issues.

Having said that, there is much that is useful on the issue of revolutionary strategy and party-building in these writings. Trotsky's 1931 article "What is a Revolutionary Situation?", where he argues that "a genuine situation could develop without an adequate revolutionary party" and that this represents a danger

of the revolution being lost, is of present-day relevance. As Trotsky concludes this article: "It is a question of our own activity."

Analysing the Soviet Union

The "guts" of this book may be seen as the writings on the class nature of the Soviet Union and the different programmatic conclusions that flowed from them. In particular, there is the theory of "bureaucratic collectivism" as a description of a new form of class rule in the USSR and, subsequently, the other Stalinist states.

The term "bureaucratic collectivism" originated with the Italian Bruno Rizzi ("Bruno R"). As Matgamna points out, following the point made by James M Fenwick (see pp 315-318 of the book), the term was first introduced into the debate in the SWP and the Fourth International by none other than Trotsky himself. The debate in Europe has tended to be between "state capitalist" and "workers' statist" theories, and as a result there has been little European debate on "bureaucratic collectivism". However, in 1968 the American Independent Socialist Clubs – of which Hal Draper was a leading member – formed a link with the British IS. Draper and other ISC members had broken with Shachtman but retained his theory of "bureaucratic collectivism". This prompted IS leader Tony Cliff, a proponent of the view that the Soviet Union was "state capitalist", to write a critique of the theory. [13] The "Independent Socialist Clubs" in 1969 gave up their independence became the International Socialists (IS-USA).

Bruno Rizzi's theory of bureaucratic collectivism has three features which distinguish it from the "bureaucratic collectivism" later developed by Shachtman. The first, which was also an aspect of Shachtman's original theory, was that "bureaucratic collectivism" was a more progressive form of class rule than capitalism. For Rizzi it also represented a transition towards socialism. The second was that it was not confined to Stalinism, but was also the economic system of Hitler's Germany, with other countries (including the USA under Roosevelt's "New Deal") moving in a similar direction. The third was that as the ruling class was no longer a capitalist class the class it exploited was no longer a proletariat.

As Matgamna points out, Trotsky in "The USSR in War" (September 25 1939) discussed the possibility of such a new class coming into being. In relation to the Soviet Union, Trotsky argued that the dispute could become merely terminological – "sterile toying with words". Trotsky was on strong theoretical basis for saying this. Marx, after all, used the term "class" in different ways, and for example in The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte discussed in what sense the peasantry could be regarded as a class. The

point, according to Trotsky, was that if the Soviet bureaucracy was a class it was nonetheless a "class which does not resemble any of those great propertied classes known to us in the past". He added that: "The Soviet oligarchy possesses all the vices of the old ruling classes but lacks their historical mission". Trotsky argued that by calling the revolution "social" rather than "political" would alter nothing "in essence": he added: "To those tasks of the revolution which we have enumerated it adds nothing whatsoever". Trotsky drew the logical political conclusion: "It would be a piece of monstrous nonsense to split with comrades who on the question of the sociological nature of the USSR have an opinion different from ours, insofar as they solidarize with us in regard to the political tasks."

Matgamna argues that a major error of Trotsky's was to regard the bureaucracy as an unstable, temporary phenomenon. Matgamna argues that the logic of Trotsky's position was that the bureaucracy would become a ruling class if the working class did not overthrow capitalism and the Stalinist bureaucracy. Trotsky's time span, says Matgamna, was "very short", and he cites Trotsky in "The USSR in War": "Might we not place ourselves in a ludicrous position if we affixed to the Bonapartist oligarchy the nomenclature of a new ruling class just a few years or even a few months prior to its inglorious downfall?"

Matgamna could have quoted elsewhere from "The USSR in War" to suggest that Trotsky might have allowed for a longer "time span" for events to unfold. For in this same work Trotsky comments:

]

Twenty-five years in the scales of history, when it is a question of profoundest changes in economic and cultural systems, weigh less than an hour in the life of a man. What good is the individual who, because of empirical failures in the course of an hour or a day, renounces a goal he set for himself on the basis of the experience and analysis of his entire previous lifetime?" [14]

Perhaps more important, it is clear that – while Matgamna says that Trotsky got it wrong because he assumed the overthrow of Stalinism and capitalism were imminent – this book shows that in 1940 Shachtman shared Trotsky's assumption. In his article "Is Russia a Workers' State?" (December 1940), Shachtman asks this question about the Stalinist bureaucratic "class": "Can this new class look forward to a social life-span as long as that enjoyed, for example, by the capitalist class?" He answers: "We see no reason to believe that it can." Shachtman here also rejects the position that the bureaucratising tendency will become a world system – that it "will materialize in the form of a universal 'bureaucratic collectivism'" – this because the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat will, he anticipates, lead to a socialist society. Shachtman here argues that it is important to

indicate the limits of the development of the Stalinist bureaucracy, "precisely in order to distinguish it from the fundamental historical classes". In essence, his position is the same as Trotsky's. If the proletariat is defeated and instead bureaucratisation triumphs worldwide, then, in Trotsky's words, we should have entered a new epoch, "the epoch of the declining society of totalitarian bureaucracy".

"Unconditional defence of the USSR"

Shachtman at this stage in his development is still a committed supporter of the October Revolution. The texts in this book show that. In 1951 Shachtman states in a debate with Kerensky that the achievements of October are "immortal" and serve as "a monument and a guidepost" today. In 1943 he defends the Bolsheviks' actions in "crushing" counterrevolutionary forces, including the banning of all non-Bolshevik parties, as a necessary temporary expedient although, like Rosa Luxemburg, he blames the Bolshevik leaders for making a virtue out of a temporary necessity (Shachtman singles out Tomsy in particular for blame here). However, he sees the Bolshevik party as the main defender of the revolution. Shachtman anticipates that revolution in advanced countries would "assure the widest possible democracy to all working-class parties and organizations". Bourgeois parties could only be permitted, Shachtman argues, when there is no attempt at counterrevolution.

In 1949 Shachtman defends the soviets as a form of class rule and as the "highest form of democratic representative government". He defends soviet power against bourgeois democracy, and therefore defends the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. For the Bolsheviks to have acted otherwise, Shachtman argues, "would have meant a victory for reaction". He rejects the renegade Ernest Erber's argument that Bolshevism or Trotskyism led to Stalinism.

When Shachtman argues that the new bureaucratic collectivist class is "imperialist", he quotes Lenin to justify this term. Shachtman does not regard Stalinist bureaucratic "imperialism" as representing the monopoly or "moribund" phase of capitalism. However, he justifies the term on the grounds that Lenin acknowledged the existence of "imperialist wars" in other circumstances, for example on the basis of slavery between Rome and Carthage. Lenin's statement, "Every war in which both belligerent camps are fighting to oppress foreign countries or peoples and for the division of the booty...must be called imperialistic" is used to justify describing the Stalinist bureaucracy's invasion of Poland and Finland as "imperialist". Shachtman rejects the term "red imperialism" on the grounds that "there is nothing red about it".

Trotsky in "Again and Once More on the Nature of the USSR" rejected this line of argument on the grounds that this was not now the understanding of the term as used by Marxists. [15] The immediate issue was at this stage not a "terminological" one but rather that of "unconditional defence of the USSR". In particular, the question arose as to how to regard the nationalisation of property carried out by the Stalinists in territories which they annexed. The "fetishism" of the nationalised property relations which Matgamna identifies (p 98) as a trend in Trotsky's thought led several trends in "Trotskyism" after Trotsky's death to claim that Stalinism was capable of carrying out revolutions. Matgamna argues powerfully against this position, but fails to see that this does not necessarily imply accepting his position that a counterrevolution in the Soviet Union had brought into being a new ruling class. For example, Kan'ichi Kuroda also argues that Trotsky had a "tendency to make a fetish of the property of the workers' state" [16], while explicitly rejecting Shachtman's formulation. [17]

The book contains useful material showing the cynicism of the SWP's paper *The Militant* in the war years in regard to the Soviet war effort. These include the headline of 15 August 1942, "TROTSKY'S WORKS LIVE ON IN HEROIC RED ARMY" and the dropping of the call to "Defend the Soviet Union against imperialist attack" from the list of key political positions in January 1942 when the USSR seemed close to defeat and reinstating it in December, when the Stalinist army took the offensive. We see Hal Draper in 1941 criticising Cannon's telegram to Stalin asking him to release jailed Trotskyists so that they could defend the Soviet Union. Draper points out that support for the Soviet Union, described as "this one bastion of socialism", remained unconditional.

However, opposition to the call for unconditional defence of the USSR does not depend on the acceptance of the theory that a new class is in power there. Matgamna himself argues that there were inconsistencies in Trotsky's approach. He refers to "two Trotskys" who contradict each other in 1939/40. Trotsky, says Matgamna, "strikes at himself" and "wars on his own politics". Matgamna doesn't seem to notice that at this time both Trotsky and Shachtman share the perspective that the system in the USSR is more progressive than capitalism, so it is difficult to see any necessary connection between the positions of "bureaucratic collectivism" and "workers' state" and "unconditional defence".

Matgamna points out that Trotsky in his article "The Independence of the Ukraine and Sectarian Muddleheads" argued that "the plunder and arbitrary rule of the bureaucracy constitute an important integral part of the current economic plan, and exact heavy toll from the Ukraine". This quotation is certainly a

response to those who argue that the superiority of the Stalinist system lies in its "planning"! Stalinist annexation produces "semi-slavery". In "Again and Once More on the Nature of the USSR" (October 18 1939) Trotsky replies to Albert Goldman, insisting that he stands by the position of "unconditional defence of the USSR" even though that means defending a Ukraine "enslaved by Stalin" – but this is only in the context of an attack by Hitler. The position remains for an independent Soviet Ukraine.

Matgamna argues (p 90) that Trotsky in this article "lays the basis for the position adopted by Shachtman in the Finnish war – 'conjunctural defeatism'". Trotsky was however able to do this without accepting the concept of a new class having taken over in the Soviet Union. Shachtman could also adopt this position without having yet adopted "bureaucratic collectivism". Conversely, the Resolution passed at the 1941 Convention of Shachtman's Workers Party argued that the Soviet Union was a "bureaucratic collectivist state" which was "a reactionary social order" from the standpoint of socialism, but "on an historically more progressive plane" than capitalism. The resolution added that it would in the case of a civil war aimed at restoring capitalism be "possible for the revolutionary vanguard to fight with the army of the Stalinist regime against the army of capitalist restoration". Also, that "in case of a war by which world imperialism seeks to subdue the Soviet Union and acquire a new lease of life by reducing Russia to an imperialist colony, it is possible for the proletariat to take a revolutionary defensist position in Russia." [18]

Hence the fact that Trotsky, in 1940, took a position which both contradicted his own previous writings and conflicted with Shachtman's view was unrelated to the issue of "workers' state" or "bureaucratic collectivist state". Matgamna is essentially correct to state (p 97) that when Trotsky's "Open Letter to James Burnham" (January 7 1940) condemned Shachtman for calling for "a simultaneous insurrection against Hitler and Stalin in occupied Poland" – an insurrection against what Trotsky himself had described as twin tyrannies of slavery and semi-slavery – he was criticising the very position he himself had taken six months previously in regard to the Ukraine.

It is true that the position of "unconditional defence of the USSR" – and by extension, of the Stalinist states – had a damaging effect on the development of Trotskyism. It led to tailing behind Stalinist leaderships and "national liberation" movements. It led to the betrayal by the different tendencies boasting the title "Fourth International" of their own comrades in Vietnam, and to the lauding of those who had murdered them. It led to the support of the Soviet nuclear arsenal and nuclear testing. It was struggle against this position as advanced by the Japanese Pabloites that the JRCL developed its perspective of

"anti-imperialism, anti-Stalinism" and opposition to Stalinist as well as imperialist nuclear testing. [19]

Implications of "bureaucratic collectivism" – was Trotsky too superstitious?

Matgamna gives only a brief review of why Trotsky would not adopt the perspective that a new "bureaucratic collectivist" class had come to power in Russia. He suggests (p 141) that it was no more than "superstition" that prevented Trotsky from saying that the USSR bureaucracy was a ruling class.

In fact, Trotsky's concern was that the whole basis on which the epoch was understood was threatened by such a development. We have noted above that in the years following the split Shachtman still regarded bureaucratic collectivism as a more progressive phase of society than capitalism. He also regarded it as temporary. These positions drove no necessary wedge between his position and Trotsky's.

On the other hand, if the bureaucratic collectivist class was to become a stable class, of a status comparable to that of the bourgeoisie, a number of new perspectives appear. Matgamna states that it became just that. He sees bureaucratic collectivism as being "anti-capitalist" and "counter-revolutionary". Stalinism, he writes, "was a bureaucratic counter-revolution in which the state bureaucracy, led by Stalin, wiped out both the new-born bourgeois classes and the Russian labour movement. It destroyed the defences and the rights of the working class, and turned the peasants into slave-driven, expropriated serfs of the new bureaucratic state."

Matgamna never discusses the subsequent developments in the USSR and the Stalinist states. The changes between 1945 and the system's collapse in the Soviet Union and East Europe were not a continuous history of "slavery" or "serfdom".

We noted above that there were three aspects to Bruno Rizzi's theory. The first was that bureaucratic collectivism was more progressive than capitalism, and a form of transition to socialism. The Stalinist was therefore, in Rizzi's words, "an intermediary regime" despite being "a new social form based on class property and class exploitation". Even though based on slavery, this regime would lead to communist society.

Trotsky could not accept this contradictory position in its entirety even as a hypothetical possibility. He also could not accept Rizzi's second proposition, that bureaucratic collectivism was a world system. Trotsky argued that the fascist states could not expropriate the bourgeoisie. He did, however, acknowledge as a theoretical possibility that if the proletariat proved to

have "the congenital incapacity" to become the ruling class, then it might turn out that "in its fundamental traits the present USSR was the precursor of a new exploiting regime on an international scale". [20] As such a trend would represent "a regime of decline, signaling the eclipse of civilization" Trotsky refused to accept such a development as more than a theoretical possibility. He maintained his confidence in the working class.

Trotsky thus acknowledged the possibility of the USSR and the capitalist countries declining into totalitarianism, into a more backward system than capitalism, but only if the working class failed to take power. As we have seen above, there was no necessary "time span" about this trend. If the bureaucratic collectivist class did come into existence and attain stability, however, there was a new question about the future of the proletariat itself.

Essentially, if a new, stable class, based on a more reactionary system, emerged – as the later Shachtman, not the Shachtman of this book, and Matgamna, came to believe – then the whole revolutionary role of the proletariat was thrown into question. We have noted that Rizzi did not believe the class exploited by the "bureaucratic collectivist" class was a proletariat. If the bureaucratic collectivist class is given "stable" status, then is the class it exploits a revolutionary class? As Tony Cliff puts it: "On the question of whether the workers in Russia are proletarians, the proponents of Bureaucratic Collectivism answer, and must answer, that they not." [21]

Daum [22] makes a similar point, and argues that Shachtman recognised this dilemma in his article "The Program of Stalinist Imperialism" of October 1943 (pp 331-339 of this book) where he writes that "the new ruling class in Russia" has "reduced both worker and peasant to a new kind of state-serf" (p 331).

Cliff and Daum use their arguments to defend different versions of the "state-capitalist" position on the USSR. Paradoxically, although Cliff concludes that the theory of bureaucratic collectivism "is completely arbitrary", "does not give a perspective" and cannot "serve as a basis for a strategy for Socialists" [23], Hal Draper wrote in 1956 that Cliff's "political conclusions" were "very close to, if not identical with" his and Shachtman's, and that the differences between Cliff's "state capitalism" and his own "bureaucratic collectivism" were only "a matter of terminological taste". [24] While Cliff therefore did not return Draper's compliment, Daum argues that since Cliff denies the operation of the law of value within the Soviet Union, he "effectively denies that the system is capitalist in the Marxist sense, so Cliff's too is at bottom a third-system theory" (like bureaucratic collectivism). [25]

I began this review by quoting a revolutionary worker whose memory of Shachtman in the 1930s was of a genuine revolutionary fighter. I think Jim Charleson would have been pleased to see "Maxy" brought back in from the cold. It is unfortunate that, while Matgamna deserves thanks for bringing together these writings, he does not himself grasp many of the issues involved in the debate. Hopefully Volume 2 will bring out the issues more clearly.

Notes

- [1] I am grateful to Sy Landy for information about the Workers Party and Independent Socialist League not found in the book. Landy was a member of the ISL who, like Hal Draper, split from Shachtman in the early 1960s. Hal Draper formed the first "Independent Socialist Club" in Berkeley; Landy and others then formed the second in New York. Sy Landy is now a member of the League for the Revolutionary Party/Communist Organization for the Fourth International (LRP/COFI).
- [2] Max Shachtman, *The History and Principles of the Left Opposition* (London: New Park, 1974).
- [3] An example is the very friendly review of this book by Jack Conrad of the CPGB: "Groping towards a theory", *Weekly Worker* Aug 20 1998.
- [4] I discuss this aspect of Kemp's position in regard to Cuba in my article "The Law of Value in the Transition to Communism", *International Socialist Forum* Vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1998), p 19.
- [5] Walter Daum, *The Life and Death of Stalinism* (New York: Socialist Voice Publishing Co., 1990), p 290.
- [6] Leon Trotsky, "Petty-Bourgeois Moralists and the Myth of the Proletarian Party", in *In Defence of Marxism* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), p 169.
- [7] Letter to Farrell Dobbs March 4, 1940: *In Defence of Marxism*, p 162.
- [8] Grace C Lee, Pierre Chaulieu (Paul Cardan) and JR Johnson (CLR James), *Facing Reality* (Detroit: Correspondence Publishing Company, 1958), pp 86-105.
- [9] Kan'ichi Kuroda, *What Is Revolutionary Marxism?* (Tokyo: Kobushi Shobo, 1991), p 179.
- [10] *Ibid.*, p 192.
- [11] *Ibid.*, pp 166-171.
- [12] Kan'ichi Kuroda, *Praxiology* (Tokyo: Kobushi-Shobo, 1998) pp 195-209.
- [13] Tony Cliff, "The Theory of Bureaucratic Collectivism - a critique" *International Socialism* No. 32 (Spring 1968) pp 13-18.
- [14] *In Defence of Marxism* p 15. For a powerful defence of the view that Trotsky's prognosis was not necessarily short-term but was on the contrary compatible with post-1945 developments see Cliff Slaughter, *The Class Nature of the "International Socialism" group* (London: A Workers Press Pamphlet, 1970).

- [15] *In Defence of Marxism*, p 26.
- [16] Kan'ichi Kuroda, *Stalinist Socialism: A Japanese Marxist's Perspective* (Tokyo: Kobushi Shobo, 1996), p 27.
- [17] *Ibid.*, pp 18-19.
- [18] Cliff, *op. cit.*, p 13.
- [19] See *What Is Revolutionary Marxism?* pp 133-135.
- [20] "The USSR in War": *In Defence of Marxism* pp 9-10.
- [21] Cliff, *op. cit.*, p 17.
- [22] Daum, *op. cit.*, 18.
- [23] Cliff, *op. cit.*, p 18
- [24] Hal Draper, "A matter of terminological taste", *Labor Action* 16 January 1956. Reprinted in *Workers' Liberty* September 1998.
- [25] Daum, *op. cit.*, p 14.



• A GARLAND FOR MAY-DAY 1895 •
• DEDICATED TO THE WORKERS BY WALTER CRANE •

Discussions on the way forward

ISF meets with Movement for Socialism

Participants in the International Socialist Forum and members of the Movement for Socialism met in London on 13 March and agreed to work together on various issues.

It is difficult to report the discussion, which was comradely, even-tempered, serious ... and informal. Comrades who had been involved in the ISF meetings spoke of the progress made at our meetings, particularly in challenging and in some cases destroying old shibboleths in our ideas ("the party", "democratic centralism", etc). MFS members referred to their recent conference at Bradford, at which discussion had centred on finding new forms of work corresponding to the real needs of the working class movement in the present situation.

Some comrades – including MFS members who attend ISF meetings – questioned whether the two organisations needed to work separately at all. Both accept the need for a reworking of the socialist programme; both reject the approach of starting with certain unchallengeable "principles" in favour of reworking past political and theoretical conceptions; both consider that a new working-class party is needed, but reject the idea of building it out of a "group of

groups". A large measure of agreement already, in other words.

It was agreed to pursue the discussion on Sunday 2 May, at the ISF meeting to review the discussion so far on the Minimum Platform document of the Iranian comrades. The question of working together to publish theoretical-political material was mooted – but for the moment the ISF will continue to publish, and the MFS is bringing out a 1999 yearbook compiling some material from its discussions. There is a related discussion, also touched upon, about the need for a wider-circulation newspaper that breaks from the tradition of the old "group" newspapers (e.g. the Socialist, the Socialist Worker) and stimulates discussion amongst a much wider audience.

Other ISF meetings this year have been rich in content and it is hard to do them justice in this short report. Many of the articles in this journal (by Roger Smith, Dave Hookes, Yassamine Mather and Cyril Smith) are based on talks given at the Forum. Impressive talks were also given recently by Anton Mactonian (on Marx's conception of revolution) and Erica Shipley (on China and Maoism).

Simon Pirani

Debate on "left unity" with AWL

About 30 people attended a joint meeting of International Socialist Forum and the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL) in London on 17 March to debate "How can the Left unite?" Clive Bradley spoke for the AWL, and Torab for ISF.

Bradley referred to the launch of the London Socialist Alliance on 9 March as a positive development, putting socialist unity "on the agenda". He emphasised "organisational unity, bringing together socialists from different organisations". The changed situation in Britain was the starting point for the new basis for unity. The consolidation of the Blair faction in the Labour Party meant that socialists must assert that "workers must have their own political voice". This voice would express the idea of a workers' government. "Revolutionary unity" meant agreement that the emancipation of the working class is an act of the workers themselves, that we are fighting for "a democratic workers' republic as the first step towards

socialism", and that this could only be achieved by "a sharp, possibly violent conflict with the capitalist state".

Torab said he did not deny the necessity of orientation to the class struggle and mass organisations of the working class – but the issue was, how do we do this? Torab illustrated the difference between temporary, tactical unity in action and long-term strategy for socialist revolution. For long-term unity we need to agree on a strategic and programmatic basis. Lacking such a basis, splits had occurred in Trotskyist as well as centrist organisations. In Iran, 99 per cent of "Trotskyists" used the "theory of permanent revolution" to justify support for the Khomeini regime.

Torab emphasised the crisis in theory, and the collapse of the mass revolutionary organisations. The traditional Trotskyist position of permanent revolution is out of date, and the Transitional Programme is no longer a

programme that can unite us. There are minimum principles we can agree on, as set out in the Minimum Platform (published in ISF No.1), which can form a basis to go forward.

There were points of agreement between the main speakers. Both opposed the description of the Stalinist states as "degenerated and deformed workers' states" and both opposed the support given by much of the left for Iran against Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war.

The debate from the floor was on the whole constructive. Some of the AWL members took the view that the ISF was emphasising "theory" rather than "practice". This view was put in a more negative way by Bob Pitt, who edits a "Marxist discussion journal" called *What Next?*

In summing up Torab described the posing of the question as "are we for theory or are we for practice?" as ridiculous. Of course we have to practise, and get involved in what struggles we can. However, this will not overcome disunity on the left. The meeting itself showed there was no agreement on basic issues such as how to respond to the Labour Party even among AWL members.

The problem for the British left, said Torab, is not that it is not involved in practical activity. The problem is that we do not understand what we mean by "socialist

revolution", "workers' party", etc, or the relationship between socialism and democracy. One comrade from the floor had talked of "tradition". That tradition is very cosy in a British situation that hasn't changed in a long period. In a revolution, tradition does not tell you how to respond. The Iranian experience showed that those who held to the theory of permanent revolution ended up supporting Khomeini. Thus we need theoretical clarity. We should first identify areas of agreement and develop a journal and flexible organisation for the discussion we need to have a solid basis for socialist unity.

In summing up, Clive Bradley said he agreed with Torab as regards permanent revolution. He went on to emphasise orientation to the working class movement. Bradley said that workers in struggle do not spontaneously know exactly what to do. Socialists therefore need to be organised in ideological-political work. Discussions on unity become more fruitful after and during practical work.

On the whole, those ISF supporters who attended the meeting found it fruitful. There was clearly a lot of sincerity and revolutionary aspiration among the participants, who were also on the whole rather younger than most comrades who participate in ISF.

Jim Smith

Announcement:

An international conference: “The World Crisis of Capitalism and the Post-Soviet States”, Moscow 30 Oct – 1 Nov 1999

c/o M. Voyekov,
Institute of Economics,
Russian Academy of Sciences,
Nakhimovsky Prospekt 32,
Moscow 117218, Russia.
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April 1999

Dear Friend,

“The World Crisis of Capitalism and the Post-Soviet States” – An International Conference
Moscow, Saturday 30 October – Monday 1 November 1999: Call for papers / invitation

We write to invite you to the above international conference, which will be held at the Institute of Comparative Political Sciences at Bolshoi Kolpachny Pereulok in central Moscow. Arrangements for the conference are being made through Professor Mikhail Voyekov at the Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

The conference will provide an opportunity for international scholars from a range of disciplines, journalists and others with a serious interest in the current world crisis, and especially with the place of Russia and the post-Soviet states in it, to meet and exchange views. It is intended that, within this context, there will also be papers dealing with the past, present and future of socialist ideas, and in particular with the history of the Soviet Union and its relationship to Marxism.

The conference will be concerned to encourage fresh thinking about the nature and causes of the crisis of post-Soviet economy and society, and about the responses to that crisis of working-class and left-wing movements, both within the former USSR and outside it. It is hoped to develop continued working relationships among those attending, whether they work in Russia, other post-Soviet states, east or west Europe, North America or elsewhere.

Those who wish to present papers are asked to submit a synopsis of up to 500 words (or a complete text) by 30 June 1999. It is intended to publish conference materials on the internet. A detailed agenda will be available prior to the conference. If you do not intend to submit a paper but wish to receive future mailings, please let us know.

We are convinced that this conference is necessary and timely, but unfortunately we have no substantial financial backing. In addition to asking you, where necessary, to seek your own financial support to attend, we shall therefore also be most grateful for suggestions from any organisations or institutions which may be able to contribute towards our costs. These will include the provision of interpretation between the two conference languages, Russian and English, the translation of conference materials etc. Any such assistance will be fully acknowledged in the conference documentation.

Correspondence may be addressed to Professor Mikhail Voyekov at the Institute of Economics (address above), Suzi Weissman in the US (e-mail sweissman@igc.apc.org, fax +1-818-990-6835), or Simon Pirani in the UK (e-mail smpirani@compuserve.com, fax +44-181-333-2152).

Yours comradely,

Aleksandr Buzgalin (Moscow State University, Alternatives editorial board)

Terry Brotherstone (University of Aberdeen, Scotland)

Alexei Gusev (Moscow State University)

John Holloway (Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla, Mexico)

Hillel Ticktin (Chairman of Centre for Study of Socialist Theory and Movements at University of Glasgow (Scotland), editor Critique)

Istvan Meszaros (Professor Emeritus in Philosophy and Political Theory, University of Sussex (England), and author of Beyond Capital)

Bertell Ollman (New York University)

James Petras (State University of New York)

Hugo Radice (Director, Leeds University Centre for Russian, Eurasian and Central European Studies)

Mikhail Voyekov (Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Alternatives editorial board)

Suzi Weissman (University of St Mary's California)

Notes: travel and accomodation

Visas: Those wishing to travel to Moscow will need an official stamped letter of invitation from the Institute of Economics, which you will need to submit along with your application for a Russian visa. THIS WHOLE PROCESS CAN TAKE UP TO TWO MONTHS although in some countries and in some cases it can be done more quickly. Check with the Russian embassy. Please let us know as soon as possible if you need a letter of invitation. The conference organisers will need your name, address, job title, date of birth and passport number to include in the letter. You should also tell us the earliest possible arrival date and latest possible departure date (i.e. if you wish to spend any extra time in Moscow apart from the days of the conference), as the letter of invitation must stipulate the exact dates of your visit and the visa will only be issued to cover those dates.

Travel: If you book well in advance, there are many cheap return flights to Moscow (e.g. £200-£220 from London Heathrow).

Accomodation: The conference organisers in Moscow will arrange accomodation for all international visitors attending the conference if asked to do so. This may be arranged at roughly \$50 per night (at the university hotel) or at roughly \$25 per night (in a student dormitory or as a guest in a private home).

Arrival at the airport: If you have not visited Russia before and/or you are not sure how to get into central Moscow from the airport, you should give advance notice of your time of arrival to the organisers and we will make the necessary arrangements.

And finally: With proper precautions (such as arranging to be met at the airport) Moscow is an extremely interesting and safe place to visit. As well as its historical associations, it is the home of some of world's major art collections (at the Pushkin museum, Tretyakov gallery etc). It has fine Gothic, Baroque, neo-classical and, perhaps less well-known, Art Nouveau architecture. There are plenty of good restaurants and bars. At very little extra cost, and with some preparation, you may also spend a few days in Leningrad/St Petersburg.

Stop press

Statement by Workers Left Unity of Iran for May Day

Workers of Iran,

For the last few years, you have succeeded in forcing the Iranian government to recognise the First of May as Workers' Day. For over a hundred years, 1st of May has throughout the world been the day when workers, the unemployed, the exploited, men and women together demonstrate to show their solidarity and enormous power and to protest against exploitation.

However in Iran, capitalists and their government have tried to make this into a day of unity between workers and factory owners. You, the most exploited class, who form the largest section of Iran's population have suffered terribly in the last few years. Suffered when you have been forced to take two or three jobs in order to make ends meet; suffered from lack of social security, insurance, poverty wages ... yet you are not even allowed to voice your grievances and protest on workers international day, 1st of May. Your living conditions worsen every day while all the factions of the Iranian regime try to make you suffer for the consequences of their disastrous financial policies. You must defend your basic, essential rights and like fellow workers throughout the world you should be allowed to demonstrate on the first of May.

United and in one voice, we, the organisations of the Iranian Left call on you, Iran's workers, toilers, the exploited, the unemployed to demonstrate this year on the first of May, to establish this right and repeat it every year from now on. We must force the exploiters and their state to recognise this right.

In this year's demonstration, you will inevitably concentrate on your most immediate, pressing demands such as: "pay our wages", "no to forced redundancies", "unemployment benefit for all the unemployed", "wage rises in line with inflation", "equal pay for women and foreign workers for equal work" ...

However let us not forget that in order to defend your wages, you need independent trade unions. To defend all workers, against capitalism and its state you need national workers organisations. The "House of Labour" remains a tool in the hands of the Iranian state, used to control and subjugate the workers. Therefore the establishment of your independent organisations, to advance your demands is needed more than ever before. In the demonstrations of 1st of May and in your daily struggles you must strive for this aim. "The only solution is unity and organisation". We congratulate you on International workers day and we call on all revolutionary workers, all the supporters and activists of our organisations and parties in Iran,

all intellectuals who support the working class to use all their power to make this a successful demonstration in major Iranian cities, especially in Tehran.

Down with the anti working class regime of the Islamic Republic! Long Live international solidarity! long live freedom! long live socialism!

Workers Left Unity- Iran Joint Committee in Defence of Struggles of the Iranian working class

First of May Demonstration in Iran: report

Tens of thousands of workers demonstrated in Tehran on the 1st of May 1999 demanding payment of unpaid wages, an end to mass redundancies, wages in line with the rate of inflation and opposition to an amendment to the "Labour Law" exempting factories with less than three employees from this law. Some radio stations put the number of demonstrators at 100,000. The demonstrators had defied the ban imposed on May Day demonstrations by the ministry of interior on the 26th of April. According to reports received by Workers Left Unity passers by stood and clapped as the workers made their way from Baharestan Square to Hassan Abad. During the demonstration, security forces attacked demonstrators as they were dispersing, injuring some of the workers and arresting others. According to some reports confrontation between the workers and security forces lasted till late afternoon.

Similar demonstrations took place in other Iranian cities including Tabriz and Khoramabad. Last week Workers Left Unity Iran and the Committee to defend the struggles of the Iranian workers made a joint call for May Day demonstrations in Iranian cities. This unprecedented co-operation that united almost all the organisations of the radical Left was well received in Iran where the working class and its supporters have always criticised organisations of the Left for unnecessary splits and sectarian politics. We had no illusion about the significance of our call and we were well aware that in the current political situation the semi official House of Labour is also likely to encourage demonstrations as indeed it did a day before 1st of May. However the crucial issue was that for the first time in 20 years Iranian workers demonstrated for their just demands and against the regime and established their right to do so. Iranian President Mohamad Khatami condemned the protests adding that social unrest was disruptive to the nation's economic security one day after thousands of workers protested in Tehran. Echoing the concerns of Iranian capitalists Khatami said: "Providing a calm and safe atmosphere for investment and production in the country requires a national drive".

From the News Bulletin of Workers Left Unity (email :web@etehadchap.com, fax: 44 141 330 4316 or 46 31 139 897).

Stop press: **From Nigeria: The case of** **Lanre Arogundade**

Introduction/background

Events in Nigeria over the past three weeks show that the imminent May 29 Military handover date to a civilian government, does not in anyway signify an end to heavy handed censorship and other human rights abuses.

This state of affairs is further emphasised by the fact that neither the president elect, his vice president nor any leading figure in the incoming Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) government has commented on various recent attacks on journalists, trade unionists, human rights activists and students.

Most observers generally accept that the flawed electoral process is unlikely to produce a genuinely democratic government.

A most significant case amongst recent abuses, is the arrest, detention, and now trial of the chairman of the Lagos State council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists Mr Lanre Arogundade.

Arogundade who is an Assistant Editor with and member of the Editorial Board of the Lagos based national newspaper "The Vanguard" was arrested on the morning of the 25th of April at his home by men from the Oyo State Police Command. He has for the past six years, been in the fore front of the battle to halt attacks on the media and journalists first as the Chairman of the Press Freedom committee of the NUJ, and for the past four years a chairman of the Lagos NUJ. Arogundade first came to national prominence in 1983 when as president of the National Association of Nigerian Students; his leadership defied a ban by the new military regime and handed the regime their first defeat. He paid for his audacity with a spell in detention.

Arrest and trial

After initially being reluctant to give reasons for arresting him, the Policemen latter said they wanted to "chat" with Arogundade in connection with the death of Ms Bolade Fasasi whom was a one time Treasurer of the Lagos NUJ. He has been in detention since then, and was charged on the 4th of May for murder and conspiracy to commit Murder.

Initially, the police were reluctant to state what the evidence against him was, or to charge him for the said offence. When they finally did, they claimed that they were acting on the basis of a petition by unknown persons. Following criticisms and outcry by Journalists

and human rights organisations, trade unions, lawyers, students and distinguished persons such as the Noble Laureate Prof. Wole Soyinka, the petitioners were revealed, to be a group of four journalists working in Federal government establishments such as the Federal Ministry of Information and the "Daily Times" and "New Nigerian" newspapers.

The revelation of the identities of the petitioners, led to public outrage as the leader of this group had first been suspended, and then expelled from the union last year for undermining the efforts of the union to secure the release of imprisoned journalists, and campaigns against censorship laws and decrees designed to gag the media. They have also on numerous occasions, attempted to disrupt the activities of the NUJ, and are on record as physically attacking Arogundade and other NUJ officials in the presence of witnesses. The late Fasasi had lost her re-election bid in 1997 mostly because she was strongly associated with the petitioners. At the time, the leadership of the Lagos branch of the National Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ) jettisoned their tradition of not openly backing candidates to give her the thumbs down in the elections. In the last two and half years, Fasasi had ceased to work as a journalist as her publication "The Economist" which had published only occasionally for over a year finally folded up in 1996.

Argument against arrest and trial

So far, neither the petitioners nor the police have been able to provide a shred of evidence to link Arogundade to the death of Ms Fasasi.

A three or four man gang of unidentified men suspected to be robbers shot Fasasi in broad daylight at Ibadan (a city almost two hundred miles from Lagos where Arogundade lives and works). The police has been challenged in the media by various sections of society to explain how one person could have been in two places at once, and to provide irrefutable evidence that he conspired with anyone to carry out the killing.

It has further been explained by the Lagos NUJ, that Arogundade was not in any way personally involved with Fasasi nor could he have any political motive to harm Fasasi as she had long ceased to be an official of the union. The fact, that the police choose to charge him at a magistrate court which has no jurisdiction to try murder cases, is seen as sign that the police are buying time while still detaining him. He is now held under an archaic law condemned by lawyers known as "a holden charge" which permits the police to incarcerate persons indefinitely. The last high profile case of persons detained under this provision, were the Ogoni 21 whom spent three and a half years in prison waiting to be tried for the same "murder charges" for which Ken Saro Wiwa was framed. It is in fact the chilling parallels between the case of Ken Saro Wiwa and the present Arogundade case in which criminal charges were used to undermine support for Saro Wiwa that makes this the most significant of recent human

rights abuses. No one had believed at the time, that ken could have been convicted and hung by even a military tribunal on charges of murdering four Ogoni Chiefs killed by unknown persons in the midst of protests in the oil rich Niger - Delta.

Solidarity visits to Arogundade by Noble Laureate Professor Wole Soyinka, human rights leaders, journalists, lawyers, students and trade unionists including President of the Nigerian Labour congress (TUC equivalent) show clearly, that Nigerians have become wise to the tactic of criminalising opponents of the military government in order to provide a "legitimate" basis for eliminating them. The insistence of all the above on physically seeing him has also ensured that he is for now, kept in better conditions than the Nigerian police is reputed for holding political detainees.

That the General Abubakar junta has barely three weeks to hand over does not gladden the hearts of anyone as the incoming president (retired general Obasanjo) is not only seen as a front for the present regime, but is publicly known to have placed a notice on the gate of his residence which read "no journalists and dogs allowed"

It has been suggested by some critics of the regime, that one of the reasons for the persecution of Arogundade, is not just punishment for his role in defending trade unionism and press freedom, but also as a pre-emptive strike against the independent media which has promised to investigate the massive corruption of the past 15 years and the death and disappearances of numerous persons including opposition figures and journalists. It is widely believed, that the new constitution, which has been fashioned and doctored by the regime, and will only be made public on the day of the hand over will contain numerous gag laws aimed at the media. As Chairman of the Lagos Council of the NUJ which is the largest council with over fifty percent of the entire membership, and home to about seventy percent of journalists in the independent media, Arogundade would have been expected to be in the forefront of the struggle to repeal any such laws.

It is also worthy of note, that this is the fourth time since General Abubakar came to power the police will question or arrest Arogundade based on the prompting of the same group of people.

Overall, the political nature of the case is not in doubt, considering the various editorials and programmes in the government owned print and electronic media attacking Arogundade and the Lagos NUJ in the past four years. The fact, that his home has also been searched on allegations of gun running is further evidence of the desperation of the government to smear him and silence him.

The British National Union of Journalists (tel: 0171 278 7916) is supporting the campaign to free Lanre Arogundade and may be contacted for details.