

Chapter 1

What is to be Done? Leninism, anti-Leninist Marxism and the Question of Revolution today

Werner Bonefeld and Sergio Tischler

I

Of one thing we can be certain. The ideologies of the twentieth century will disappear completely. This has been a lousy century. It has been filled with dogmas, dogmas that one after another have cost us time, suffering, and much injustice (Garcia Marquez, 1990).

Amid the resurgence of anti-capitalist movements across the globe, the centenary of Lenin's *What is to be Done?* in 2002 has largely gone unnoticed. Leninism has fallen on hard times – and rightly so. It leaves a bitter taste of a revolution whose heroic struggle turned into a nightmare. The indifference to Leninism is understandable. What, however, is disturbing is the contemporary disinterest in the revolutionary project. What does anti-capitalism in its contemporary form of anti-globalization mean if it is not a practical critique of capitalism and what does it wish to achieve if its anti-capitalism fails to espouse the revolutionary project of human emancipation?

Anti-capitalist indifference to revolution is a contradiction in terms. Rather than freeing the theory and practice of revolution from Leninism, its conception of revolutionary organization in the form of the party, and its idea of the state whose power is to be seized, as an instrument of revolution, remain uncontested. Revolution seems to mean Leninism, now appearing in moderated form as Trotskyism. Orthodox Marxism invests great energy in its attempt to incorporate the

class struggle into preconceived conceptions of organization, seeking to render them manageable under the direction of the party. The management of class struggle belongs traditionally to the bourgeoisie who ‘concentrated in the form of the state’ (see Marx, 1973, p.108), depend on its containment and management in the form of abstract equality. The denial of humanity that is entailed in the subordination of the inequality in property to relations of abstract equality in the form of exchange relations, is mirrored in the Leninist conception of the workers state, where everybody is treated equally as an economic resource.

Hiding behind dogma, contemporary endorsements of the revolutionary party as the organizational form of revolution, focus the ‘distortion’ of socialism on Stalin, cleansing Leninism and maintaining its myth.¹ Was the tragedy of the Russian revolution really just contingent on the question of leadership, a tragedy caused by a bad leader who took over from a good leader, and should Trotsky had succeeded Lenin, would his leadership have been ‘good’, rescuing the revolution from the dungeons of despair – the Gulag? Whatever difference Trotsky might have made, is revolution really just a question of personalities and their leadership qualities? Orthodox accounts do not raise the most basic question of the critical Enlightenment – *cui bono* (who benefits) – and, instead, show great trust in the belief that revolution has to be made on behalf of the dependent masses, so that all goes according to plan, including the planning of the economic resource labour through the workers state. Marx’s insight that communism is a classless society and that ‘to be a productive labourer is...not a piece of luck, but a misfortune’ (Marx, 1983, p.477), is endorsed in perverted form: the party’s directorship over the proletariat is a fortune for the misfortunate. Those who take the project of human emancipation seriously, will find little comfort in the idea that the party knows best. Contemporary anti-capitalism does well to keep well clear of the Leninist conception of revolution. However, its indifference to revolution belies its anti-capitalist stance. This, then, means that the *ratio emancipationis* has to be rediscovered.

¹ See, for example, the contributions to *Historical Materialism*, no. 3.

Contemporaneous critics of Lenin's conception of revolution strongly rejected its authoritarian character, criticized its means, and berated its denial of the purpose of revolution, i.e. human emancipation. Anton Pannekoek concluded that 'the alleged Marxism of Lenin and the Bolshevik party is nothing but a legend' (1948, p.71). Karl Korsch (1970) who, like Pannekoek, argued from a council communist perspective, concurred, arguing that Lenin was the philosopher of an essentially bourgeois revolution. Rosa Luxemburg, aghast at the Leninist conception of revolution, charged that revolution means not the suppression of workers' self-organization but the movement of labour. In her view, missteps that a truly revolutionary workers' movement makes are immeasurably fruitful historically and more valuable than the infallibility of even the best 'central committee' (Luxemburg, 1970, p.88). The theory and practice of revolution has to be emancipated from its Leninist legacy and the question 'what is to be done?' has to mean 'what is to be learned?', 'what is to be avoided?', and 'what has to be done differently?'.

II

The working class has 'no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant' (Marx, 1948, p.58).

Adam Smith was certain in his own mind that capitalism creates the wealth of nations. Hegel concurred but added that the accumulation of wealth renders those who depend on the sale of their labour power for their social reproduction, insecure in deteriorating conditions. He concluded that despite the accumulation of wealth, bourgeois society will find it most difficult to keep the dependent masses pacified, and he saw the form of the state as the means of reconciling the social antagonism, containing the dependent masses. Ricardo formulated the necessity of capitalist social relations to produce 'redundant population'. Marx developed this insight and showed that the idea of 'equal rights' is in principle a bourgeois right. In its content, it is a right of inequality (see

Marx, 1968). Against the bourgeois form of formal equality, he argued that communism rests on the equality of the individual, that is, the equality of individual human needs.

During the last decade we have seen the deep recession of the early 1990s, the European currency crises in 1992 and 1993, the plunge of the Mexican peso in December 1994 which rocked financial markets around the world, the Asian crisis of 1997, the Brazilian crisis of 1999, the Argentinean crisis of 2001. Japan teeters on the edge of depression and then there is the speculative bubble in the New York Stock Exchange and the dramatic global slowdown. As Itoh (2000, p.133) comments, 'the nightmare of a full-scale world economic crisis cannot easily be excluded'; indeed, there is hardly a day without warnings about the immanent burst of the bubble and a world wide depression. And then there is war. How many wars have been fought since the end of the cold war and how many will follow in the years to come? And then there is terrorism. September 11 demonstrated with brutal force the impotence of sense, significance, and thus reason and ultimately truth. The denial of human quality and difference was absolute – not even their corpses survived. And the responds? It confirmed that state terrorism and terrorism are two sides of the same coin. Between them, nothing is allowed to survive.

Against the background of the global crisis during the inter-war period, Paul Mattick suggested in 1934 that capitalism had entered an age of permanent crisis: The periodicity of crisis is in practice nothing other than the recurrent reorganisation of the process of accumulation on a new level of value and price which again secures the accumulation of capital.² If that is not possible, then neither is it possible to confirm accumulation; the same crisis that up to now had presented itself chaotically and could be overcome becomes permanent crisis. In contrast to previous crises of capitalism, which had always led to a restructuring of capital and to a renewed period of accumulation, the crisis of the 1930s appeared to be so profound and prolonged as to be incapable of solution. Crisis, Mattick suggested, had ceased to

² This part draws on Bonefeld and Holloway (1996).

be a periodically recurring phenomenon and had become an endemic feature of capitalism.

Mattick's suggestion, pessimistic though it was, turned out to be far too optimistic. The crisis was resolved, in blood. Capital was restructured and the basis for a new period of accumulation created. Post-war capitalism figures now as a distant 'golden age', and the blood-letting through war and gas is a mere memory. Once again it would seem that we are in a situation of permanent crisis, a crisis that is not caused by globalization but, rather, of which globalization is an expression. It is possible that the crisis will be permanent, with a progressive deterioration of conditions. It is possible too that the crisis will not be permanent, that it will in fact be resolved: what the resolution of 'permanent crisis' can mean stands behind us as a warning of a possibly nightmarish future. 'We know how rapidly an epoch of global prosperity, underpinning prospects of world peace and international harmony, can become an epoch of global confrontation, culminating in war. If such a prospect seems unlikely now, it seemed equally unlikely a century ago' (Clarke, 2001, p.91).

The gloomy prospect that this comparative perspective summons, is not inevitable. The struggles in which capitalist development is 'embedded and the outcomes to which those struggles give rise are not imposed by any economic logic' (ibid.). Contemporary anti-capitalist movements, from Chiapas (Holloway and Peláez, 1998) to the *Piqueteros* of Argentina (Dinerstein, 1999), from Seattle to Genoa (de Angelis, 2001; Federici and Caffentzis, 2001) and beyond, gives ground for optimism (Leeds, 2001). Yet, there should be no complacency. What is meant by anti-globalization? 'The renunciation of internationalism in the name of resurgent nationalism' is the biggest danger (Clarke, 2001, p.91). The critique of globalization fails if it is not a critique of the capitalistically constituted form of social reproduction (see Dinerstein and Neary, 2002). 'Anti-globalization' gives in to the most reactionary forces if its critique of globalization is a critique for the national state. The history of protectionism, national self-sufficiency and 'national money' has always been a world market history (Bonfeld, 2000). Further, the critique of globalization fails if it is merely a critique of speculative capital and that is, a critique for productive accumulation. It

was the crisis of productive accumulation that sustained the divorce of monetary accumulation from productive accumulation (Bonefeld and Holloway, 1996). The critique of speculation has to be a critique of the capitalist form of social reproduction. Without such a critique of capital, the critique of speculation is reactionary. It summons the idea of finance and banks and speculators as merchants of greed. In the past, such views underpinned modern anti-semitism and its idea of a community of blood and soil (Bonefeld, 1997). The fact that Nazism espoused 'industry' and rejected what it saw as vampire like finance, should be sufficient to highlight the rotten character of such a critique of globalization. Lastly, the idea of a Third Way has to be exposed to reveal its meaning and that is, that money must manage and organize the exploitation of labour. The historical comparison with the 1930s shows what this means in practice. The so-called golden age of Keynesianism emerged from a human disaster of incomprehensible dimensions.

III

Adorno's statement that one cannot live honestly in the false totality of bourgeois society is only partially correct – an honest life begins already in the struggle against the falsehood of bourgeois society (Negt, 1984, p.90).

As Johannes Agnoli (2001, p.14) has argued in a different context, history shows that the interests of the ruling class have always entailed violence and destruction. For us that means that those who do not engage in the negation of the capitalist mode of production, should not speak about freedom and peace. Put differently, those who seriously want freedom and equality as social individuals but do not wish to destabilize capitalism, contradict themselves.

Marx was adamant that the emancipation of the working class can only be achieved by the working class itself. Communism, for Marx, stands for a classless society. He

argued that human history begins when Man³ has created social relations in which humanity is no longer an exploitable resource but a purpose. His critique of bourgeois society does not merely wish to expose its true character, that is the accumulation of human machines on the pyramids of accumulation for accumulation's sake. He also, and importantly, showed that the constituted forms of bourgeois social relations are forms of human social practice. This is the material basis for his revolutionary demand that all relations which render Man a forsaken being have to be abolished in favour of the society of the free and equal, a society of human dignity where all is returned to Man who, no longer ruled by self-imposed abstraction, controls his own social affairs and is in possession of himself.

Marx's critique shows that the forms of capitalism obtain as a perverted forms of 'community', a community established by things. He charges that the individuals must emancipate themselves from this abstract community in order ever to be able to interact with one another 'as individuals' (Marx and Engels, 1962, p.70). This central idea is presented most emphatically in *The German Ideology*: 'The reality [*das Bestehende*], that communism creates, is precisely the real [*wirkliche*] basis for rendering it impossible that any reality should exist independently of individuals, in so far as this reality is only a product of the preceding intercourse of the individuals themselves' (ibid., p.70). This, then, is the conception of communism as social autonomy where no-thing exists independently from the social individual. The society of the free and equal, then, can neither be decreed by the revolutionary party nor can it be realized through the good offices of the state. It goes forward through the practical critique of capital and its state. This critique makes itself practical in the self-organization of the dependent masses who anticipate in their struggle against bourgeois society the elements of the new society. The means of revolution have to be adequate to its ends, that is, human emancipation. Anti-globalization has, thus, to mean complete democratization: the

³ 'Man', with a capital 'M', is used here and throughout the text in the sense of *Mensch*.

democratic organization of socially necessary labour by the associated producers themselves.

The struggle for the society of the free and equal is a struggle over the principles of the social organization of labour. Instead of a social reality where the products of social labour appear to have mastery over, instead of being controlled by Man, social reproduction has to be 'controlled by him' (see Marx, 1983, p.85). Marx's critique of political economy does therefore not rest in its macro-economic interpretation by the party leadership ostensibly endowed with scientific insights into economic laws and their application through the good offices of the state. Rather, it is realised in its negation (Marcuse, 1979, p.242). In sum, 'all emancipation is the restoration of the human world and of human relationships to Man himself' (Marx).

The theoretical and practical orientation on the utopia of the society of the free and equal is the only realistic departure from the inhumanity that the world market society of capital posits. What, then, is to be done? The idea of the revolutionary party as the organizational form of revolution has to be abandoned. The form of the party contradicts the content of revolution, and that is, human emancipation – the emancipation of the dependent masses can only be achieved by the dependent masses themselves. The notion of the form of the state as an instrument of revolution has to go. The idea of the seizure of power on behalf of the dependent masses has to be exposed for what it is: the denial of the society of the free and equal. Moaning about the 'excesses' of capital has to stop. A lamenting critique merely seeks to create a fairer capitalism, conferring on capital the capacity to adopt a benevolent developmental logic. Capital is with necessity 'excessive' in its exploitation of labour. To lament this is to misunderstand its social constitution. The attempt to define the revolutionary subject has to be abandoned. This subject can neither be derived analytically from the 'logic' of capital, nor can its existence be decreed by the party, as if it were a mere foot-soldier. The revolutionary subject develops through a constant conflict with capital and its state, and the social composition of this subject will depend on those who stand on the side of human emancipation. In theoretical terms, the revolutionary subject can only be determined as human dignity. The

question of human emancipation is not a theoretical but a practical question. Against the contemporary indifference to the project of human emancipation, the principle of hope in the society of the free and equal has to be rediscovered. 'The more improbable socialism appears, the more desperately one has to stand up for it' (see Horkheimer, 1974, p.253). What, then, is to be done?

IV

This book is in three parts. The contribution to Part One examine the theoretical roots of Leninism, the tradition of anti-Leninist Marxism and discusses the red thread of Marx's conception of labour as the constitutive force of communism. Part One starts with a chapter by Cajo Brendel. His assessment of the elimination of the Kronstadt uprising of 1921 provides the theoretical and historical context of the volume as a whole. Simon Clarke shows that Leninism is rooted in the populist tradition which Marx opposed. Diethard Behrens contextualises Lenin's theory against the background of the debates in the German Social-Democratic Party and reviews the argument of the anti-Leninist tradition, including Rosa Luxemburg and Anton Pannekoek. Mike Rooke's chapter shows that, in contrast to Lenin, Marx saw the society of the free and equal, not as a result of revolution, but as the constitutive force of the class struggle against capital.

Part Two examines the question, what is to be done?, in the contemporary world. Alberto Bonnet offers a critique of Leninist theory of imperialism against the background of globalization and shows, with reference to Latin-America, that it is the insubordination of labour that is key for the understanding of the fragility of global capital. Werner Bonefeld assesses the Leninist conception of revolution, and concludes with an appraisal of contemporary capitalist developments. George Caffentzis argues that contemporary movements can learn from Lenin's conception of the circulation of struggle and assesses Hardt's and Negri's *Empire*, arguing that their conception of revolution fails to convince. Sergio Tischler conceptualizes the dialectics of class struggle and, against the background of the crisis of orthodox

conceptions of revolution, assesses the practical and theoretical implications of the Zapatistas for revolutionary renewal.

The two contributions to Part Three conclude the volume. Johannes Agnoli offers a critique of institutional politics, shows how such politics either affirms or mirrors existing conditions and argues that social autonomy is the productive force of human emancipation. Agnoli's concerns are carried forward by John Holloway who argues that revolution does not mean the seizure of power. Rather, as Holloway argues, it is a struggle against power, not for power, and that is, a struggle for social autonomy.

References

- Agnoli, J. (2001), *Politik und Geschichte, Ça ira*, Freiburg.
- Bonefeld, W. (1997), 'Notes on Anti-Semitism', *Common Sense*, no. 21, pp. 60–76.
- Bonefeld, W. (2000), 'The Spectre of Globalization', in Bonefeld, W. and K. Psychopedis (eds), *The Politics of Change*, Palgrave, London.
- Bonefeld, W. and J. Holloway (1996), 'Conclusion: Money and Class Struggle', in Bonefeld, W. and J. Holloway (eds), *Global Capital, National State and the Politics of Money*, Palgrave, London.
- Clarke, S. (2001), 'Class Struggle and the Global Overaccumulation of Capital', in Albritton, R. *et al.* (eds), *Phases of Capitalist Development*, Palgrave, London.
- de Angelis, M. (2001), 'From Movement to Society', *The Commoner*, August, pp. 1–14, <http://www.commoner.org.uk/>.
- Dinerstein, A. (1999), 'The Violence of Stability: Argentina in the 1990s', in Neary, M. (ed), *Global Humanization*, Mansell, London.
- Dinerstein, A. and M. Neary (eds) (2002), *The Labour Debate*, Ashgate, Aldershot.
- Federici, S. and G. Caffentzis (2001), 'Genova and the Anti-globalization Movement', *The Commoner*, August, pp. 1–12, <http://www.commoner.org.uk/>.
- Garcia Marquez, G. (1990), Newspaper Interview, *El Nuevo Diario*, April 25, Managua.
- Holloway, J. and E. Peláez (eds) (1998), *Zapatista*, Pluto, London.

- Horkheimer, M. (1974), *Notizen 1950 bis 1989 und Dämmerung. Notizen in Deutschland*, Fischer, Frankfurt.
- Itoh, M. (2000), *The Japanese Economy Reconsidered*, Palgrave, London.
- Korsch, K. (1970), *Marxism and Philosophy*, New Left Books, London.
- Leeds (2001), The Leeds May Day Group, 'Anti-Capitalist Movements', *The Commoner*, December, pp. 1–9, <http://www.commoner.org.uk/>.
- Luxemburg, R. (1970), *Schriften zur Theorie der Spontaneität*, Rowohlt, Hamburg.
- Marcuse, H. (1979), *Vernunft und Revolution*, Luchterhand, Darmstadt.
- Marx, K. (1948), *The Civil War in France*, Progress Publishers, Moscow.
- Marx, K. (1968), *Kritik des Gothaer Programms*, MEW 19, Dietz, Berlin.
- Marx, K. (1973), *Grundrisse*, Penguin, London.
- Marx, K. (1983), *Capital*, vol. I, Lawrence & Wishart, London.
- Marx, K. and F. Engels (1962), *The German Ideology*, MEW 3, Dietz, Berlin.
- Negt, O. (1984), *Lebendige Arbeit, enteignete Zeit*, Campus, Frankfurt.
- Pannekoek, A. (1948), *Lenin as Philosopher*, New Essays, New York.

Part I

What is to be Done? in Historical and Critical Perspective

Chapter 2

Kronstadt: Proletarian Spin-Off of the Russian Revolution

Cajo Brendel

I

The interpretation of the historical events that more than fifty years ago entered historical chronologies (and were quickly removed from them) as ‘the Kronstadt Rebellion of 1921’ is inseparably linked to the social position of each interpreter; or, in other words, each interpretation is stamped and conditioned by the author’s position vis-à-vis the class struggles occurring in the society.⁴

Those who interpret the Russian Revolution of 1917 as a socialist upheaval, who consider the Bolshevik rule established during the Civil War years a proletarian power, must necessarily treat that which took place in that island fortress in the Finnish gulf as a counterrevolutionary attempt to overthrow the new ‘workers state’. Those, on the other hand, who regard precisely the action of those in Kronstadt as a revolutionary act will sooner or later arrive at diametrically opposed interpretations of the Russian developments and of the real situation in Russia.

All this appears self-evident. But there is more to it. Bolshevism was not simply a form of economy or state whose existence at that time – not only in Kronstadt, but also in Petrograd, the Ukraine, and in large parts of Southern Russia – was hanging in the balance; Bolshevism was also a form of organization that matured in the Russian revolutionary struggles and that was tailored for the Russian situation. After the Bolshevik victory in the October Revolution this form of organization was, and is still being, forced onto the workers of all countries by representatives of the most varied political positions.

⁴ Editors’ Note: Brendel’s essay was originally given as a speech at the Technical University of Berlin in 1971, on the 50th anniversary of Kronstadt. The original form of his speech has been maintained.

The uprising of the population of Kronstadt against the Bolsheviks was not only a rejection of Bolshevik claims to power, but also a questioning of the traditional Bolshevik conception of Party and of the Party as such. That is why differences of opinion over organizational problems of the working class all too often include a discussion of Kronstadt, and why every discussion of Kronstadt inevitably discloses differences over the tactics and organizational issues of the proletarian class struggle. This means therefore that the Kronstadt Rebellion still remains, after more than a half-century, a burning issue. However colossal its historical importance, that is overshadowed by its practical importance for today's generations of workers.

Leon Trotsky was one of those who did not understand this significance. In his 1938 essay, 'Hue and Cry over Kronstadt', he groaned: 'One would think that the Kronstadt Rebellion occurred not seventeen years ago, but yesterday'.⁵ Trotsky wrote these words at the same time when he worked day in and day out to expose the Stalinist falsification of history and the Stalinist legends. That he, in his critique of Stalinism, never went beyond the boundary of Leninist revolutionary legends – that is a fact that we can here overlook.

II

The Kronstadt Rebellion destroyed a social myth: the myth that in the Bolshevik state, power lay in the hands of the workers. Because this myth was inseparably linked to the entire Bolshevik ideology (and still is today), because in Kronstadt a modest beginning of a true workers' democracy was made, the Kronstadt Rebellion was a deadly danger for the Bolsheviks in their position of power. Not only the military strength of Kronstadt – that at the time of the rebellion was very much impaired by the frozen gulf – but also the demystifying effect of the rebellion threatened Bolshevik rule – a threat that was even stronger than any that could have been posed by the intervention armies of Deniken, Kolchak, Judenitch, or Wrangel.

For this reason the Bolshevik leaders were from their own perspective – or better, as a consequence of their social position (which naturally influenced their perspective) – forced to destroy the Kronstadt Rebellion

⁵ Trotsky's essay appeared in English with the title 'Hue and Cry over Kronstadt. A People's Front of Denouncers', in *The New Internationalist*, April 1938, p.104. I retranslated the title from the Dutch Trotskyist press in which the essay was republished shortly after its initial publication in English.

without hesitation.⁶ While the rebels were – as Trotsky had threatened – being ‘shot like pheasants’, the Bolshevik leadership characterized the Rebellion in their own press as a counterrevolution. Since that time this swindle has been zealously promoted and stubbornly maintained by Trotskyists and Stalinists.

The circumstance that Kronstadt gained open sympathy from both Menshevik and white-guard circles reinforced the Trotskyist and Stalinist versions.⁷ A sorer justification of the official legend is hardly possible. Had Trotsky not himself disdainfully and correctly expressed his views in his *History of the Russian Revolution* about the political positions and social analyses of Professor Miljukow, the reactionary sympathiser with the Kronstadt Rebellion? Just because Miljukow and the entire white-guard press sympathised with Kronstadt – was the Kronstadt Rebellion for this reason counterrevolutionary? How then, according to this notion, should the New Economic Policy, implemented shortly after Kronstadt, be evaluated? The bourgeois Ustrialow openly gave his blessing to the new policy! But that did not at all cause the Bolsheviks to denounce the NEP as ‘counterrevolutionary’. This fact is also symptomatic of the entire demagogic manner of fabricating legends. We will turn our attention away from this last issue. It is naturally of interest, not least because of the social function of legends which, however, can only be understood on the basis of the actual course of events, of the process of social development, and of the social character of the Russian upheaval.

⁶ Trotsky also speaks of this need in his biography of Stalin. There he says ‘[t]hat which the Soviet government did against its will in Kronstadt was a tragic necessity’. Nevertheless, already in the next sentence, and in keeping with the legend, he speaks again of ‘a handful of reactionary peasants and rebellious soldiers’. (English edition: *Stalin: An Appraisal of the Man and His Influence*, edited and annotated from the Russian by Charles Malamuth, London, 1947, p.337).

⁷ In certain Menshevik and white-guard circles, that is, not in all of them. It has been suggested that these were primarily those who found themselves outside of Russia at the time. In a contemporary document it is mentioned how the defeated remnants of the white guard who found themselves still in Russia recognized with such an unerring instinct the proletarian threat emerging in Kronstadt that they unconditionally volunteered their services to the Bolshevik leaders to help quell the rebellion. ‘Die Wahrheit über Kronstadt’, 1921. Complete reprinting of this work in German translation in *Dokumente der Weltrevolution*, vol. 2, *Arbeiterdemokratie oder Parteidiktatur*, Ötten, 1967, p.297ff.

III

The Kronstadt Rebellion of 1921 was the dramatic high-point of a revolution whose social content must in shorthand be defined as *bourgeois*. The Rebellion was the *proletarian spin-off* of this *bourgeois* revolution, just as, in almost identical circumstances, the May events in Catalonia in 1937 represented the proletarian spin-off of the Spanish Revolution, or Babeuf's conspiracy of 1796 was the proletarian tendency in the great French Revolution.⁸ The same causes are responsible for the fact that all three ended in defeat. In each case the conditions and prerequisites for a proletarian victory were lacking. Czarist Russia participated in the first world war as an underdeveloped country. Out of military and political need it had begun to industrialize and it took therewith the first step on the capitalist path; but the proletariat that emerged in this context was numerically too small in relation to the huge mass of Russian peasants. Certainly the political climate of czarist absolutism had resulted in an extraordinary increase in the militant spirit of the Russian workers. That enabled them to put a certain imprint on the developing revolution, but not enough decisively to influence its course. Despite the existence of the Putilov Works, the oil facilities in the Caucasus, the coal mines in the Donetz region, and the textile factories in Moscow, agriculture was the essential economic base of Russian society. Though a kind of emancipation of the peasantry occurred in 1861, the remnants of serfdom had by no means disappeared. The relations of production were feudal and the political superstructure corresponded: nobles and clergy were the ruling classes that – with the help of the army, the police, and the bureaucracy – exercised their power in the gigantic empire of large landholdings.

Consequently, the Russian Revolution of the twentieth century confronted the economic task of abolishing feudalism and all of its components – serfdom, for example. It needed to industrialize agriculture and subject it to the conditions of modern commodity production; and it had to break all feudal chains on existing industry.

Politically, this revolution had the task of destroying absolutism, abolishing the privileges accorded the feudal nobles, and developing a form of government and the state machinery that could politically guarantee the solution of the revolution's economic goals. It is clear that these economic and political tasks corresponded to those which in the West had to be fulfilled by the revolutions of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth

⁸ These examples could be endlessly multiplied. One might compare this with the movement of the Levellers in the English Revolution of the seventeenth century.

centuries.⁹ However, the Russian Revolution – similar to the later Chinese Revolution – had a peculiar characteristic. In Western Europe, above all in France, the bourgeoisie was the bearer of social progress, the preliminary proponent of the upheaval. In the East, and for the above-mentioned reason, the bourgeoisie was weak. And for this reason its interests were closely connected to those of czarism. That is, the *bourgeois* revolution in Russia had to be accomplished without, and moreover, against, the bourgeoisie.

IV

Lenin recognized exactly this peculiarity of the Russian Revolution. ‘The Marxists’, he wrote, ‘are thoroughly convinced about the bourgeois character of the Russian Revolution. What does that mean? That means that those democratic transformations of the political order and those socio-economic transformations, that are necessary for Russia alone, do not amount to the burial of capitalism, nor the burial of the rule of the bourgeoisie; rather they for the first time prepare the ground for a broad and rapid development of capitalism...’¹⁰ In another passage he wrote: ‘The victory of the bourgeois revolution in Russia is impossible [as] a bourgeois victory. That seems paradoxical. But so it is. The majority peasant population, the strength and consciousness of the proletariat that is already organized in the Socialist Party – all these circumstances lend a unique character to our bourgeois revolution. This uniqueness however does not eliminate the bourgeois character of the revolution’.¹¹

One comment however must be added here: the party of which Lenin speaks was neither socialist, nor could one claim that the proletariat was organized in it. It is of course true that it should be differentiated in several ways from the social-democratic parties of the West which played the role of the loyal opposition on the bourgeois parliamentary playing field, and which tried with all possible means to prevent the

⁹ Compare the social character of the Russian Revolution in 1917 in ‘Thesen über den Bolschewismus’, first published in *Rätekorrespondenz*, no. 3, August 1934; Reprint in Kollektiv-Verlag, Berlin, n.d.

¹⁰ W.I. Lenin, ‘Zwei Taktiken der Sozialdemokratie in der demokratischen Revolution’, in *Ausgewählte Werke*, vol. 1, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1964, p.558.

¹¹ This is an indirect citation of Lenin from the essay by N. Insarow, that was published in September 1926 in the journal *Proletarian*. Insarow used the Russian edition of Lenin’s Complete Works that was published by the Russian State Publishing House. The passage is to be found there in vol. 11, Part I, p.28.

transformation of the capitalist into a socialist society. But Lenin's party did not differ from its Western counterparts in a socialist sense.

Lenin's party in Russia strove for the revolutionary transformation of social relations; but as Lenin himself admitted, it was a matter of a revolution that in a different form had long since been accomplished in the West. This fact did not remain without consequences for Russian Social Democracy in general and the Bolshevik Party in particular.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks were of the opinion that because of the class relations in Russia, their own party would inherit the role of Jacobins. Not without reason did Lenin define the social-democrat as 'a Jacobin in alliance with the masses'; not without reason did he create his party as a committee of professional revolutionaries; not without reason did he argue in *What is to be Done?* that their main task was the struggle against spontaneity.

When Rosa Luxemburg criticized this conception at the beginning of the twentieth century, she was correct, but also incorrect. She was correct in that Lenin's conspiratorial organization had nothing to do with the natural organizational forms of the militant workers, that is, those that are predicated on capitalist relations and that grow out of class antagonism. What she overlooked, however, is that in Russia such a proletarian struggle was present in a very small measure, if at all.

In Russia where the abolition of capitalist production relations and wage labour was not even on the horizon, it was a matter of a different struggle. For this struggle the Bolshevik party was perfectly suited. It completely fulfilled the needs of the imminent revolution. That the organizational form of this party – the so-called democratic centralism – would end with the dictatorship of the central committee over the mass of the members (as Rosa Luxemburg had predicted) proved to be completely correct; and precisely that was required for that 'bourgeois revolution with its *unique* character'.

V

The Bolshevik Party derived its intellectual weapons from Marxism which at that time was the only radical theory that it could latch onto. Marxism, however, was the theoretical expression of a highly developed class struggle of a kind that was foreign to Russia; and it was a theory whose proper understanding was lacking in Russia. Thus it happened that the development of 'Marxism' in Russia had only the name in common with

Marxism, and was actually much closer to the Jacobin radicalism of, for example, Auguste Blanqui than to the ideas of Marx and Engels.

Lenin, and Plekhanov too, shared with Blanqui a *naturalistic* conception of materialism [*naturwissenschaftlicher* Materialismus] that on the eve of the revolution in France was the main weapon in the struggle against the nobility and religion, and that was very distant from dialectical materialism. In Russia the situation was similar to that of pre-revolutionary France.

Marxism, as Lenin understood it – and as he had to understand it – made it possible for him to gain deep insight into the essential problems of the Russian Revolution. That same Marxism provided the Bolshevik Party with a conceptual apparatus that stood in the most blatant contradiction to its own tasks and also to its practice. This meant, as Preobraschenski publicly acknowledged during a regional conference in 1925, that Marxism in Russia had become a mere *ideology*.

Naturally the revolutionary praxis of the Russian working class – to the extent that there was one – was not in harmony with the praxis of the Bolshevik Party that represented the interests of the bourgeois revolution in Russia as a whole. When the Russian workers rose up in 1917, they went, in accordance with their class nature, far beyond the limits of bourgeois upheaval. They attempted to determine their own lot and, with the help of the workers' councils, to realize their own self-determined forms of organization as producers.

The Party that was 'always right' and that was supposed to show the working class the proper path – since as the leaders insisted, the proletariat could not find it on its own – limped behind. The Party was forced to recognize the fact of the workers' councils just as it was forced to acknowledge the existence of a massive peasantry. Neither the worker councils nor the large peasantry fitted in with its doctrine which reflected all previous experiences of revolution where conditions had been underdeveloped. In Russia the revolutionary praxis on the part of either the workers or the peasants could not be sustained for long. The material conditions for such sustained revolutionary praxis did not exist.

VI

What happened was the following: capitalism (hardly developed) was not toppled. Wage labour remained, which Marx, as it is well known, insisted is predicated on capital, as conversely capital is predicated on wage labour.

The Russian workers did not obtain control over the means of production; that control fell rather to the Party (or the state). The Russian

workers accordingly remained producers of surplus value. Neither the fact that the surplus value was not expropriated by a class of private capitalists, but by the state, or by the Party elements in control of the state, nor the fact that economic development in Russia – because of the absence of a bourgeois class – took another course than that of the West, changed anything for the position of the Russian worker as object of exploitation or wage slave. One cannot speak of the exercise of power by the working class. The czarist state was indeed broken, but the power of the workers' councils did not take its place. The councils that were spontaneously formed by Russian workers were stripped of their power as quickly as possible by the Bolshevik government, that is, already in the early summer of 1918, and they were condemned to complete insignificance. In place of the previous serfdom or quasi-feudal servitude, the economic basis of the country now assumed the form of economic slavery of the kind about which Trotsky wrote in 1917 that it was 'incompatible with the political sovereignty of the proletariat'. This thesis was correct; the Bolsheviks, however, – after they had wrongly proclaimed that *their* rule was that of the working class – helped themselves to political power, ostensibly in order to overcome the oppression of the Russian proletariat. But because of the lack of real worker power, Bolshevik political rule developed not into an instrument of emancipation, but into an instrument of suppression. In Bolshevik Russia, between the outbreak of the February Revolution and the forceful elimination of Kronstadt and the introduction of the new economic policy, the situation was similar to that of the February Revolution of 1848 in France. Marx commented on this revolution as follows: 'In France the petit bourgeois does what normally would have to be done by the industrial bourgeoisie, the worker does, what normally would be the duty of the petit bourgeois. And the task of the worker, who resolves that? This obligation is not discharged in France; it is merely proclaimed in France'. In Russia, this obligation continued to be proclaimed. However, with the Kronstadt uprising, the revolutionary process – of which October was only a staging ground – had come to an end. Kronstadt was the revolutionary moment where the pendulum swings of the revolution swung the furthest to the left.

In the previous four fateful years a profound schism had been revealed between, on the one hand, the Bolshevik party and the Bolshevik government, and, on the other, the Russian working class. This became ever more apparent the more the opposition between this government and the peasants revealed itself. In addition there was the contradiction between workers and peasants, which was hushed up under the cover of the so-called *Smytschka*, that is, the class alliance between the two. From our perspective the contradiction between peasants and the Bolshevik

government can be left aside. We only mention it in passing because the manifold contradictions between workers, Bolshevik government, and peasants, explains the necessity of party dictatorship.

VII

In the time-span, then, between the eruption of the revolution and the events of 1921, the Russian working class was engaged in a constant struggle. In the course of 1917, this struggle progressed much further than the Bolsheviks intended. In 1917, between March and the end of September, there had been 365 strikes, 38 factory occupations and 111 dismissals of company managers.¹² The Bolshevik motto 'control of production by the workers' was, in these conditions, condemned to fail. The workers expropriated the means of production on their own initiative, until, that is, the decree of workers' control that was issued on the 14th of November 1917, only one week after the Bolshevik seizure of power (!), put the brakes on these activities. After May 1918, 'nationalizations' could only be undertaken by the central economic council. Shortly before, in April 1918, the individual responsibility of company managers had been re-introduced; they no longer had to justify their decisions to 'their' workers.

The factory councils had been liquidated in January 1918. Soon afterwards, once the so-called war-communism had been surmounted, the economic laws of a commodity producing society made themselves felt. Lenin lamented: 'The steering wheel slips out of the hands...the wagon does not drive properly, and frequently not at all in the way that the one who sits at the wheel imagines'. A Russian union newspaper reported that there were 477 strikes in 1921 with a total of 184,000 participants. Some other numbers: 505 strikes with 154,000 participants in 1922; 267 strikes in 1924, 151 of which were in state-run factories; 199 strikes in 1925, 99 of which were in state factories.¹³

¹² These figures were taken from F. Pollock (*Die planwirtschaftlichen Versuche in der Sowjetunion 1917-1927*, Leipzig, 1929, p.25) and from the work of Y.G. Kotelnikow and V.L. Melier, *Die Bauernbewegung 1917* (which also contains facts concerning strikes and workers' political actions).

¹³ The statistics about the strikes and strikers are provided by the Russian union newspaper *Voprocy Truda*, 1924, no. 7/8. The editors note that the numbers are not at all complete. We cite once again Pollock, op.cit. In the (historical) first part of her book, *Labour Disputes in Soviet Russia, 1957-1965* (Oxford, 1969, p.15), Mary McAuley also provides information about the number of strikes in Russia in the

The numbers show a slow decline in workers' protests. The movement reached its high-point in 1921 with the Kronstadt Rebellion. On 24 February 1921 the Petrograd workers went out on strike. They demanded: freedom for all workers; abolition of the special decrees; free elections for the councils. These were the same demands that were raised a few days later in Kronstadt. A general discontent gripped the country. At the turn of the year 1920-21, Bolshevik Russia was the stage of a deep antagonism. This immediately gave rise to the 'worker opposition' that was led by two former metal workers. This opposition demanded the exclusion of the Bolshevik Party, abolition of the Party dictatorship, and its replacement by the self-government of the producing masses. In a word, the opposition demanded council democracy and communism!

Shortly thereafter, the above-mentioned Kronstadt document characterized the general situation in Russia just as briefly as it did accurately: 'Through cunning propaganda the sons of working people were pulled into the party and subjected to a rigid discipline. When the communists felt that they were strong enough, they excluded step by step socialists of other stripes, and finally they shoved the workers and peasants themselves away from the rudder of the ship of state, yet they continued to rule the country in their names'.¹⁴ Strong protests broke out in Petrograd in 1921. Proletarian demonstrators marched through the outlying areas of the city. The Red Army received the command to break up these demonstrations. The soldiers refused to shoot at the workers. The word was: general strike! On February 27, the general strike was a fact. On the 28th reliable troops devoted to the government were mobilized in Petrograd. The strike leaders were arrested; the workers were driven into factories. The resistance was broken. Nevertheless, on the same day the sailors of the battleship *Petropawlowsk*, riding at anchor near Kronstadt, demanded free elections for the workers' councils and freedom of press and association – for the workers. The crew of the battleship *Sewastopol* joined in those demands. On the next day 16,000 people gathered in the Kronstadt harbor to declare their solidarity with the Petrograd strikers.

first years after the revolution. She bases her information on Revzin in *Vestnik Truda*, 1924, no. 5-6, pp.154-160. These numbers are in agreement with Pollock's.

¹⁴ 'Die Wahrheit über Kronstadt 1921', *Dokumente der Weltrevolution*, op.cit., vol. 2, p.288.

VIII

The significance of the Kronstadt Rebellion can hardly be overestimated. It is like a beacon light. The rebels wrote in their newspaper: 'What are we fighting for? The working class had hoped to win its freedom in the October Revolution. But the result is a still greater oppression. The Bolshevik government has exchanged the famous symbol of the workers' state – the hammer and sickle – for the bayonet and prison bars in order to protect a comfortable life for the commissars and bureaucrats'. This all means that in Kronstadt the moment of truth had arrived for Bolshevik rule, just as in 1848 the June Days of the French proletariat was the moment of truth for the radical French republic. Here as there the burial site of the proletariat was made into the birthplace of capitalism. In France the proletariat had forced the bourgeois republic to show its true colors as the state whose acknowledged purpose was the perpetuation of the rule of capital. Likewise in Kronstadt the sailors and workers forced the Bolshevik Party to show its true colors as an institution that was openly hostile to workers and whose single purpose was the establishment of state capitalism. With the defeat of the rebellion, the path to that purpose had been cleared.

In the streets of Paris General Cavaignac drowned proletarian hopes in blood. The Kronstadt Rebellion was beaten down by Leon Trotsky. In March 1921 Trotsky became the Cavaignac, the Gustav Noske of the Russian Revolution. As befitting the irony of history, Trotsky, the most famous and most respected representative of the theory of permanent revolution, prevented the most serious attempt since October 1917 to make the revolution permanent.

This course, however, was unavoidable. The material prerequisites for proletarian victory in Kronstadt were lacking. The only thing that could have helped them was precisely that permanence of the revolution that we have mentioned. The Kronstadt workers themselves knew and understood this. For that reason they continually sent telegrams to their comrades on the Russian mainland asking for active support.

The Kronstadt workers pinned their hopes on 'the third revolution', just as thousands of Russian proletarians hoped for that third revolution in Kronstadt. But that which was called 'the third revolution' was in the agrarian Russia of that time, with its relatively small working class and its primitive economy, nothing but an illusion. 'In Kronstadt', Lenin said at a time when the construction of the Kronstadt legend had hardly begun, 'they

don't want the power of the white guards, they don't want our power. But there is no other power'.¹⁵

Lenin was right to the degree that at that moment there was no other choice, at least not in Russia. But the Kronstadt workers, like the German workers, had shown the *possibility* of another form of power. With their commune and with their freely elected councils, *the workers*, not the Bolsheviks, provided the prototype of a proletarian revolution and workers' power.

One should not be disturbed by the battle cry 'councils without communists'. 'Communists' is what those usurpers, those Bolshevik champions of state capitalism who suppressed the strike of the Petrograd workers, called themselves and what they still – and incorrectly – call themselves. The name 'communist' was hated by the Kronstadt workers in 1921, by the East German workers in 1953 and the Hungarian workers in 1956. The Kronstadt workers, however, just like those others, took their class interests to heart. Accordingly, their proletarian methods of struggle are still today of utmost importance for all of the class comrades who – wherever they may be – carry on their own struggle and have learned from experience that their emancipation must be their own work.

Note

Translated from German by Joseph Fracchia.

¹⁵ *Dokumente der Weltrevolution*, op.cit., vol. 2, p.288.

Chapter 3

**Perspectives on Left Politics:
On the Development of anti-Leninist Conceptions of Socialist Politics**

Diethard Behrens

Introductory Comments

The history of the failure of the Soviet Union is today interpreted as that of ‘socialism’. The crimes of Stalinism throw their shadows backward over Lenin, Trotsky, and even Marx. This is however only an inversion of that interpretation that had previously viewed the history of the Soviet Union since the Russian Revolution¹⁶ as a history of success¹⁷ connected with the name of Lenin. In both cases socialism is identified with the events of the Russian Revolution and with Lenin’s political-theoretical conceptions. Lenin’s theoretical reflections are advanced as the legitimation of socialist politics. But – it was quickly asked – what kind of revolution was this? What kind of politics was this? From what perspective was left politics from then on to be thematized?

Since the 1920s there has been a broad discussion about the character of this revolution and about the significance and efficacy of Lenin’s politics. This discussion was not without influence on

¹⁶ Thus Kolakowski, for example, also reads the writings of the social democrats through Leninist lenses which drives him toward an apology for Stalinism. Characteristic of Lenin, he insists, is the instrumental evaluation of theories, the inquiry into their *cui bono* for the revolution. Like many others, he remains caught in Leninist apology. See esp. Leszek Kolakowski, *Die Hauptströmungen des Marxismus*, vol. 2, Munich-Zurich, 1978, p.429ff.

¹⁷ For a critique of Leninist notions of economy and politics after 1917, cf. Diethard Behrens and Kornelia Hafner, ‘Auf der Suche nach dem “wahren Sozialismus”’: Von der Kritik des Proudhonismus über die Modernisierungsdiktatur zum realsozialistischen Etikettenschwindel’, in Anton Pannekoek, Paul Mattick et al., *Marxistischer Anti-Leninismus* with an introduction by Diethard Behrens, Freiburg, 1991, p.205ff.

the perspective from which left politics were henceforth thematized.

Historical Considerations

Until the beginning of the war in 1914, Lenin espoused German Social Democracy, with Kautsky as theoretical authority, just as Plekhanov was the theoretical-political point of reference for the young Lenin up until the founding of 'Iskra'.¹⁸ Conceptually Lenin felt closest to the middle faction, the Marxist center, of Social Democracy,¹⁹ which led him also to a mechanistic understanding of capitalism and revolution,²⁰ aimed only at the abolition of the relations of production extrinsic to society. As late as 1905, in 'Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution',²¹ he still insisted on the identity of his politics with that of Bebel and Kautsky.

This has several implications. In *What is to be Done?* (1902), an essay that was conceived for the second party conference of the SDAPR (Social Democratic Labour Party of Russia) in London in 1903, Lenin, leaning on Kautsky, emphasised the claim of the social democratic party to develop socialist insights. These had to be brought to the workers from the outside.²² The party was endorsed as the 'vanguard and organizer, leader and ideologue of the workers'.²³ For Kolakowski, as well as for historians of the worker movement who use a similar interpretive schema, what fails to be acknowledged is first of all that Lenin's proximity to Kautsky also included

¹⁸ 'Lenin on the other hand is more closely bound to the theoretical tenets of those against whom he struggled politically. In [his]...analysis, his theory is built on the economic foundations of the theoreticians of the Second International'. See Ulysses Santamaria and Alain Manville, 'Lenin, und das Problem der Übergangsgesellschaft', in Claudio Pozzoli (ed), *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung*, vol. 5, Frankfurt, p.54f.

¹⁹ This ordering of the factions still holds even if one pushes the 'Marxist center' out of the middle and characterizes it as the moderate left of Social Democracy.

²⁰ See Santamaria and Manville, 'Lenin...', loc cit pp.57, 65f. For Lenin, the main economic goal remained the increase of the forces of production and of worker productivity (see Lenin, LW 27, p.247); and his political goal was a better administration (see LW 27, p.232f). His notion of state capitalism included the maintenance of capitalist forms. On this see Santamaria and Manville, 'Lenin...', loc cit p.75.

²¹ See Lenin, *Werke* 9, p.54; Kolakowski, *Hauptströmungen...*, vol. 2, p.428.

²² See Annette Jost, 'Rosa Luxemburgs Lenin-Kritik', in Claudio Pozzoli (ed), *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung*, vol. 5: *Kritik des Leninismus*, p.79.

²³ Kolakowski, loc cit p.433.

the latter's evolutionism,²⁴ just as his proximity to Plekhanov included the latter's mechanical materialism.²⁵ Secondly, Kautsky's high esteem for scientific socialism vis-à-vis the workers brings to the fore not only a simple vanguardist conception, but therewith also a privileging of the 'socialist' intellectuals – only a short distance from Lassalle's notion of 'social caesarism', which provides the intellectuals with dictatorial powers. The function accorded to intellectuals should thus be taken over by the party. Organizationally, this presumption became the foundation for the model of 'democratic centralism'. Not the least consequence of this was the division of Russian Social Democracy into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

Kolakowski emphasizes that three of Lenin's innovations vis-à-vis the traditional conception of Marxism of the Second International were decisive for the successful 'Bolshevik Revolution':²⁶

1. The alliance of the proletariat and the peasantry;
2. The recognition of the national question; and
3. The special role of the 'party as opposed to the spontaneous worker movement'²⁷ – that is, as Lenin would say, against the workers' 'trade-union consciousness'.

The first point, according to all accounts in the more recent literature, proves to be an adaptation of the 'Narodnik Program' – one that was taken up only very late by the Bolsheviks, and remains determined by power politics. The second point, the question of national self-determination, did indeed play a role in the alliances made during the Russian Revolution; it emerges, however, that what really mattered was the development of the conditions of national sovereignty, the constitution of bourgeois society, the establishment of a domestic market, and participation in the world market. All this contains within itself a force that 'in the long run' serves to jettison socialist ideology. Thus only the third point remains as a matter of debate: Lenin's conception of the party, that is criticized by both anti-socialist and socialist opponents of Lenin as the essential feature of 'socialism' in its Soviet form.

Early Critique of Lenin

²⁴ Engels had of course already prepared the way for the narrowing of the dialectic. On this, see Diethard Behrens, *Zur Kritik der marxistisch-leninistischen Naturtheorie* (Ph.D. thesis), Frankfurt, 1984.

²⁵ In Plekhanov's works, the most varied interpretations of materialism are slipped in so that mechanical materialism and dialectical method coincide.

²⁶ Kolakowski, loc cit p.431.

²⁷ *ibid.*

The earliest and most advanced critique of Lenin's position, dating from the period before the first world war, comes from Rosa Luxemburg. She repeatedly criticized his political insistence on Bolshevik autonomy vis-à-vis the other factions of Russian and Polish Social Democracy.²⁸

In her contribution, 'Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy',²⁹ her answer to Lenin's 'One Step Forwards, Two Steps Back',³⁰ Luxemburg develops a critique of 'ultracentralism',³¹ which she considered to be the legacy of the 'Jacobin-Blanquist' party type.³² Here she criticized the position, held not only by Lenin, that Social Democracy was the heir to the Jacobins.³³ Her concern was to emphasise the difference between

²⁸ In one of her motions to the International Bureau of the Second International, Rosa Luxemburg demanded the reunification of the Russian Social Democratic Party and criticized Lenin's divisive tactics. She was referring to the exclusion of the Mensheviks at the Party Conference of 1912, and thus to the constitution of the Bolshevik Party. See *Vorwärts*, no. 306, 21 Nov. 1913; from Rosa Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Werke* vol. 3, Berlin 1978, p.356f.

²⁹ Rosa Luxemburg, 'Organisationsfragen der russischen Sozialdemokratie', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1/2, Berlin, 1979, p.422ff.

³⁰ Lenin, 'Ein Schritt vorwärts, zwei Schritte zurück', in Lenin, *Werke*, vol. 7, Berlin, 1963, pp.199–430.

³¹ Rosa Luxemburg, 'Organisationsfragen...'. loc cit, p.425. The central committee is in this formulation, 'the real active core of the party'. All other organizations are only instruments. While Luxemburg's notions aimed at a 'self-centralism' of the masses (Jost, 'Rosa Luxemburgs...'. loc cit, p.80), Lenin's is rather bureaucratic and hierarchical. See esp. Lenin, 'Ein Schritt...', loc cit, p.418. The critique that Rosa Luxemburg raised in her article on the Russian Revolution is that this centralism would lead to the rule of a group over the population, to the rule of a 'new' elite, to a bourgeois dictatorship. See Jost, 'Rosa Luxemburg...', loc cit., p.95.

³² As an example of this, cf. Maurice Dommanget, 'Blanqui – ein Vorläufer der Bolschewiki', in *Arbeiter-Literature*, Sonderheft 1, Vienna, 1924, pp.71-87; Hugues Portelli, 'Jacobinisme et antijacobinisme de Gramsci', in *Dialectiques*, no. 4/5, mars 1974, pp.28-43; Bernd Rabehl, Wilfried Spohn, Ulf Wolter, 'Der Einfluss der jacobinischen und sozialdemokratischen Tradition auf das leninistische Organisationskonzept', in *Probleme des Klassenkampfes*, no. 17/18, pp.99–142.

³³ Lenin had written: 'The Jacobin who is inseparable from the organization of the proletariat, who has become conscious of his class interests – that is precisely the revolutionary social democrat.' Lenin, 'Ein Schritt...', loc cit, p.386. In his 'Antikritik' Lenin said that not he, but Axelrod had declared this. He himself had mentioned that the comparison is only admissible in terms of the difference between the revolutionary and opportunistic wings, between the Jacobins and the Girondins (See loc cit, p.483). See also Diethard Behrens, *Zur Kritik der marxistisch-leninistischen Naturtheorie* (Ph.D. thesis), Frankfurt, 1984.

social-democratic and Blanquist centralism.³⁴ Social Democracy has no group of the population opposite to itself that could be directed. Accordingly, she criticized as an illusion Lenin's formulation of the fundamental problem as the struggle against a virulent opportunism, which he intended to defeat by means of organizational statutes.³⁵ The proletariat and the intelligentsia cannot be assigned to the opposite poles of class-consciousness and opportunism.³⁶ Whether the intelligentsia acts opportunistically – that depends on the historical circumstances. In Russia, the situation is not unambiguous. The theory of 'going to the people', as well as that of the 'pure' proletariat, are first of all ideological moments; the one developing through agrarian romanticism just as the other espouses industrial romanticism.³⁷ The questions of organization and of the struggle against opportunism cannot be linked in such an immediate and direct manner. She argued on the one hand that opportunism is indeed flexible, but on the other hand that it is better served in centralized and socially oriented organizations.³⁸ For this reason opportunism cannot be held at arm's length by means of organizational statutes and 'ultracentralism'.³⁹ Even if 'opportunism [appears] to be a product of the workers' movement itself', as 'an unavoidable moment of its historical development' and immaturity, this needs to be understood quite differently from, and in distinction to Lenin's conception.⁴⁰

³⁴ Marx also expresses himself against centralism. See Karl Marx, 'Letter to Baptist von Schweitzer', 13.10.1868, MEW 32, p.570.

³⁵ See Lenin, 'Ein Schritt...', loc cit, p.271 and p.400f.

³⁶ 'Above all it must be said that in the strong development of the inborn capacities of the proletariat toward social-democratic organization and in the suspicion of the "academic" elements of the social-democratic movement, there is not yet anything that can be called "marxist-revolutionary"; rather such notions can easily be shown to be related to opportunistic positions' (Luxemburg, 'Organisationsfragen...', loc cit, p.436).

³⁷ For Rosa Luxemburg, Russia stood before 'not a proletarian, but a bourgeois revolution' (loc cit, p.440).

³⁸ 'To attribute to opportunism, as Lenin does, an enthusiasm for some specific form of organization – let us say decentralization – is to mistake its nature... But if we understand opportunism, as did Lenin, as the attempt to tame the independent revolutionary class movement of the proletariat in order to make it serviceable to the bourgeois intelligentsia's desire for power, then this purpose cannot best be reached in the beginning stages of the workers' movement through decentralism, but precisely through rigid centralization that delivers the still immature proletarian movement, head and tail, to a handful of leaders' (loc cit, p.439).

³⁹ See loc cit, p.441.

⁴⁰ It 'seems to be an all the more curious idea, right at the beginnings of the workers' movement, to be able to forbid the emergence of opportunistic tendencies

The question of organization, then, came to the fore as one of the central problems in the discussions of the old Social Democracy and in the ‘new’ organizational formations that emerged in the labour movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. For this movement too, the organization, its genesis and its form, became the focus. If working people were to be organized through a central committee, then the structure and relations of dependence, as well as ingrained conceptions of authority, remain in place. How, then, under these conditions, could a socialist consciousness emerge, that is, a consciousness capable of understanding and transforming social relations? How should a consciousness of socialism as a vision of the abolition of all enslaving and alienating relations assume its place? Organization, as Rosa Luxemburg rightly emphasized, cannot be presupposed in *a priori* fashion; it cannot be conceived in abstraction from existing social relations. In short, organization cannot be presupposed to existing social relations, but is always a form of political-social co-operation. The peculiar form of Social Democracy developed from the results of the 1848 Revolution; it emerged from a historical context in which social relations had not fully developed in capitalist terms. For Luxemburg, this should give us pause for thought and cause us to think through the organizational question anew and better.

The worry that a political stance adapts itself to the currently most favorable relations, and is always ready as it were to sacrifice fundamental principles to a favorable opportunity, mostly an opportunity for individual advance, is not rendered obsolete in centralist models of organization. In these models there is even more room for such opportunistic behavior. And opportunism is not limited to the intellectuals either. Lenin acknowledged this with his thesis on the labour aristocracy. Nevertheless, the differentiation between unskilled and skilled labour is also quite inadequate as a conceptual means of explaining opportunism. Class membership says nothing about the

through this or that formulation of organizational statutes. The attempt to defend against opportunism with such paper means will actually cut in the flesh, not of opportunism, but of social democracy itself...such an attempt weakens the ability to resist not only opportunistic tendencies, but also...the existing social order. The means turns against its own end’ (loc cit, p.443). Against the ‘elevated majesty of a central committee’ other means must be emphasized: ‘In this way the audacious acrobat overlooks the fact that the only subject to whom this roll as pilot falls is to the mass-I [*Massen-Ich*] of the working class, that always insists on making its own mistakes in order that it may itself learn the historical dialectic. Finally, we must say openly, among ourselves: Missteps that a truly revolutionary workers’ movement make are immeasurably fruitful historically and more valuable than the infallibility of the very best “central committee”’ (loc cit, p.444).

content. Certainly, opportunistic elements can also be found among different leadership groups. Centralism⁴¹ appears as the simple flipside of opportunism. Talk of opportunism rather obscures the problem that people [*Menschen*] in their existing social context are not only antagonists, but also contemporaries, that they are not only workers, but also participants in the sphere of circulation. If simple models of organization are abandoned, then we open the way to focusing on the forms of conflict in which working people are involved and on the experience that workers make in the course of their struggle. This is where the consciousness of the possibility of socialism is formed. From a socialist perspective, the characteristics of Soviet power, summed up in the formula of state capitalism and electricity, do not provide alternatives to bourgeois society. Lenin formulated his politics on the basis of the autonomously conceived social relations of production and the forces of production, where the former stands for capitalism, the latter for socialism. This formulation alone indicates that capitalism was not understood. The unfettering of productivity, already recognized by Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*, is a progressive moment of the capitalistic dynamic. Notwithstanding the few indications provided by Rosa Luxemburg, the debate about what this ‘unfettering’ could mean from a socialist perspective has hardly begun.

Workers’ Movement and Emancipation

This section summarizes briefly the history of the left opposition within, and on the edge of Social Democracy and thus provides the prehistory of the opposition to Leninism.

Before 1914 German Social Democracy was the strongest party within the European workers’ movement. Its beginnings lay in the results of the 1848 Revolution: concentration and organization of the growing ‘worker population’ and opposition against the emerging ‘Wilhelminian’ society and state. Its main strength lay in the organization of the ‘journeymen’⁴² among the artisanry and industry.⁴³ This had a formative side – social formation of the skilled workers – and a status or guild-like side – warding off the lower

⁴¹ Russian social-democratic centralism is also the legacy of the structure of their respective societies, Wilhelminism and czarism.

⁴² See Thomas Welskopp, *‘Das Banner der Brüderlichkeit’. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vom Vormärz bis zum Sozialistengesetz*, Bonn, 2000.

⁴³ The Party focused on skilled workers as its industrial basis, and this continued to be the case well beyond the first World War.

social layers, denounced as ‘lumpenproletariat’.⁴⁴ Politically, social democracy also functioned as a focal point for a part of the bourgeois opposition: social democracy inherited the main legacy of ‘democratic Germany’, even if the understanding of democracy became increasingly disputed.

The ‘Socialist Laws’ led both the Party and its followers to a certain radicalization, that, after the repeal of those laws, both the Party and the unions were relieved to abandon. This was also the moment of the emergence and formation of the left opposition, that formulated its demands as ‘social emancipation’, self-determination and democracy.

Five factions of this left opposition can be differentiated, which appear partially in historical sequence and partially contemporaneously:

1. The so-called ‘Young Ones’, German anarchism of the *fin de siècle*, Anarcho-syndicalism;
2. The syndicalists;
3. The ‘Rosa Luxemburg’ faction;
4. Radical intellectuals: Julian Borchardt, Heinrich Laufenberg, Karl Liebknecht, Franz Pfempfert, Fritz Wolffheim; and
5. The ‘Bremen Radicals’: Pannekoek, Knief, Gorter.

The Opposition of the ‘Young Ones’

After the repeal of the ‘Socialist Laws’ and the beginning of the ‘new politics’, left Social Democrats⁴⁵ – partly those who led the opposition to the ‘Socialist Laws’ – began to resist politics of the Party and the unions. The social democratic opposition can be differentiated from that with an anarchistic profile.

In the context of these conflicts with the leadership of the Party and the Unions, the ‘faction’ of ‘the Young Ones’ was formed.⁴⁶ They too were anti-parliamentary, anti-centralist and opted for a federalist union movement. A further target of their criticism was the increasing bureaucratization in the Party and union movement. They also criticized the

⁴⁴ This estate [*ständische*] terminology was taken over by the Leninist tradition.

⁴⁵ See Manfred Bock, *Syndikalismus und Linkskommunismus von 1918-1923*. On the history and sociology of the *Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands* (syndicalists), the *Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands*, and the *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands*, Meisenheim, 1969, p.2ff. See *ibid.*, *Geschichte des ‘linken Radikalismus’ in Deutschland. Ein Versuch*, Frankfurt, 1976.

⁴⁶ See Jacques Droz, ‘Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie (1875-1914)’, in *ibid.* (ed), *Geschichte des Sozialismus*, vol. 4 (1974), Frankfurt-Berlin-Wien 1975, p.39.

‘reform course’ of the Party as mere adaptation, the politics of balancing between the bourgeoisie and proletariat in the unions, and the adoption of the leadership principle in place of the democracy principle in the party organization.⁴⁷ As a consequence a large number of the ‘Young Ones’ were forced out of the Party and the Unions.⁴⁸

The Syndicalist Opposition

After the abolition of the ‘Socialist Laws’ in 1890, Legien instituted a General Commission for union activities. Previously, the activities of the half-legal unions were carried out by a network of shop stewards. After the Union Congress of 1892 in Halberstadt, large central organizations⁴⁹ were created whose existence, however, was dependent on the renunciation of political activity.

Already at this Congress a minority voted for locally rooted organizations and for the right to engage in political activity. This minority was dubbed the ‘localists’.⁵⁰ They were led by the ‘Regierungsbaumeister a.D.’, Gustav Kessler. From 1897 on, their publicity organ was the ‘Unity’.⁵¹ Their demands aimed at the elimination of the separation of social-democratic politics and union activities. The existence of tariff treaties and funds for

⁴⁷ See Bock, *Syndikalismus...*, loc cit, p.10f. These ‘revolts’ were also supported by Domela F. Nieuwenhuis. As is shown by Nieuwenhuis’s politics, there was quite an opportunity for integration. The lack of a capacity for integration can often be seen in the history of the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany). Engels on the other hand denounced the movement as a rebellion of literati and students which ignores the fact that they were anchored among the workers in the large cities.

⁴⁸ As a reaction to the exclusion of parts of the opposition, the *Vereinigung unabhängiger Sozialisten* was founded with the journal *Sozialist* as its publicity organ. This group swung back and forth between anarchistic ideas, an individual-ethical socialism, and left social-democratic positions. The reception of early socialist ideas is unmistakable: justice, ethical education for work, social ethic, comradeship and socialist living communities. Revolution, so they generally argued, was possible at all times, if the people only wanted it. Landauer was later active in this circle. On the history of German anarchism, see Ulrich Linse, *Organisierter Anarchismus im deutschen Kaiserreich von 1871*, Berlin, 1969.

⁴⁹ The central unions had approximately 340,000 members in 1891; approximately 2.5 million in 1914. See Bock, *Syndikalismus...*, loc cit, p.24.

⁵⁰ The ‘localists’ initially had approximately 10,000 members; then the number declined slightly and toward the end they again had approximately 17,000. They were made up in large part of the urban working class. They were strongest among construction workers, especially in Berlin.

⁵¹ This newspaper was forbidden in 1914.

economic support of workers were criticized as a means of ‘moderating the willingness to fight’ [*kampfmindernde Elemente*]. In 1901 they renamed themselves the ‘Free Alliance of German Unions’ (*Freie Vereinigung deutscher Gewerkschaften*).

At the beginning of this conflict, the SPD remained neutral, trying to reunite both wings of the union movement. This changed, however, in the phase characterized by the ‘Mass Strike Debate’. While the unions rejected the mass strike, the ‘localists’ supported it. Formally, the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany), influenced by Bebel, also supported it. But the secret agreement between the Union- and Party-leadership to prevent all mass strikes was publicised by the ‘localists’. This was, however, for the ‘localists’ only a Pyrrhic victory.

In its wake the ‘localists’ divided into anarchistic and social-democratic factions. After Kessler’s death, the anarcho-syndicalists under Friedeberg managed to gain the leadership.⁵² The division came over the question of syndicalism.⁵³ Focal points of their political activity up to 1914 were: anti-religious propaganda, enlightenment about pregnancy reduction from the perspective of a proletarian Malthusianism, and anti-militarism.

Operating in political proximity with them for a while during his time in the workers’ movement, but increasingly critical, was also Robert Michels.⁵⁴ He too criticized the ‘petite bourgeois’ character of the SPD and considered it a result of bureaucratization.⁵⁵

Discomfort about the ‘bourgeois’ leaders became increasingly general, especially as the socialist ‘tribunes’, Bebel and Liebknecht moved into the background. In this period the tendencies that develop in modern large organizations as moments of cooperation and hierarchy – that is, the same tendencies that critics viewed as subordination and accommodation to bourgeois stereotypes – became increasingly apparent.

The ‘Rosa Luxemburg Faction’

⁵² Under Friedeberg’s leadership they fell back to a position of strict anti-parliamentarism and propagated the general strike as the starting point of the uprising – this in contrast to the social-democratic understanding of the mass strike as an instrument of class struggle. See Bock, *Syndikalismus...*, loc cit, pp.28-30. The revolutionary syndicalist orientation was only found in the CGT.

⁵³ The result of the argument between Kater and Friedeberg was that of the approximately 17,000 members, about 8,000 returned to the central unions. A remainder of about 6,000 (1914) voted for Kater’s syndicalism.

⁵⁴ See Bock, *Syndikalismus...*, loc cit, p.35.

⁵⁵ His law of oligarchy focused on the SPD.

Rosa Luxemburg is one of the most important figures of revolutionary Social Democracy. In the struggle over the direction Social Democracy should take, she chose – at that time still with Kautsky’s support – to combat Bernstein’s revisionism. Her essay, ‘Social Reform or Revolution’, is devoted to this battle.⁵⁶

Rosa Luxemburg’s critique focuses on the notion that a new form of sociability, socialism, could be reached step by step through reforms and that therefore Marx’s theory was now of only historical interest. She railed against Bernstein’s⁵⁷ concept that continuous growth of the unions and the Social Democratic Party would lead more or less automatically to Socialism. She considered this idea to imply a mongrel hybrid between socialism and capitalism.⁵⁸ In terms of the economic theory, she accused Bernstein of accepting only the guarantees of bourgeois economists.⁵⁹ In short: Bernstein’s undertaking was that of classical social-democratic opportunism. In equal measure she criticized the renunciation of reflection about the relation between theory and praxis. This critique was shared by most of the leftists. Thus in her attack on Bernstein, Rosa Luxemburg found a range of support from the Marxist center all the way through to the ‘Bremen Faction’.

In the mass-strike debate, provoked by the strike movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, above all, by the Russian Revolution of 1905, the question of a revolutionary proletarian strategy was raised again; and Rosa Luxemburg took a middling position. On the one hand, she criticized the anarchistic identification of mass strike and general strike, while holding on to the form of this struggle because of the many contemporary occurrences of mass strikes; and thus, on the other hand, she criticized the leadership of the unions and the Party to whom the independently active masses were an outrage. Against the background of the course of the Russian strike movement and of the political movement accompanying it, Rosa Luxemburg – as explicated in her essay on the mass strike⁶⁰ – developed her specific understanding of theory and praxis.

She differentiated the forms of the strike into demonstration strikes, combat strikes [*Kampfstreik*], and mass strikes. For her, the mass strike was

⁵⁶ Rosa Luxemburg, ‘Sozialreform oder Revolution?’ in *ibid.*, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/1, Berlin, 1979, pp.367–466.

⁵⁷ Oskar Negt, ‘Rosa Luxemburg: Zur materialistischen Dialektik von Spontaneität und Organisation’, in Claudio Pozzoli (ed), *Rosa Luxemburg oder Die Bestimmung des Sozialismus* (Frankfurt: 1974), p.191.

⁵⁸ See Rosa Luxemburg, ‘Sozialreform...’, p.420.

⁵⁹ See *loc cit*, p.438.

⁶⁰ Rosa Luxemburg, ‘Massenstreik, Partei und Gewerkschaften’, in *ibid.*, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, 1974, pp.91–170 (Hamburg, 1906).

not only an economically motivated strike; it was above all a political weapon.⁶¹ Mass strikes, she replied to the anarcho-syndicalists, do not happen for no reason.⁶² With this she touched on the classical union position.⁶³ Mass strikes have a different course, they are stormier and more intensive.⁶⁴ The mass strike documents the ‘creative form of expression of the experiences and needs of workers.’⁶⁵ The driving force here is the spontaneous.⁶⁶

Oskar Negt argues that Luxemburg’s understanding of dialectics can be found in her conception of the mass movement⁶⁷ which is also the place of the proletarian public sphere.⁶⁸ In contrast to the architects of the theory of spontaneity,⁶⁹ of course, Luxemburg points toward the ambivalent role of spontaneity, that may in one case be a driving force, in another a retarding force.⁷⁰ Just as the focal point of the struggle can constantly change from an economic to a political one, so too is the character of spontaneity to be viewed in relation to the process of becoming conscious of social relations. If in quiet times the division of labour between party and unions is sensible,⁷¹ it becomes in revolutionary periods an ideology; for in such times the unity of the economic and the political struggle is formed in real terms.⁷² In such periods the separation of the economic and the political is transcended⁷³, and they are fused.⁷⁴ This emerging unity has as its

⁶¹ See Peter Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg* (Köln-Berlin, 1969), p.183.

⁶² See Rosa Luxemburg, ‘Massenstreik,...’, loc cit, p.130f.

⁶³ See loc cit, p.166.

⁶⁴ See Peter Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, loc cit, p.185.

⁶⁵ Oskar Negt, ‘Rosa Luxemburg...’, loc cit, p.160.

⁶⁶ See Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, loc cit, p.188.

⁶⁷ See Negt, ‘Rosa Luxemburg...’, loc cit, p.160: For her, ‘[d]ialectics was the method, the form, the consciousness of the self-movement of its content’. loc cit, p.161 – What is dialectical in the figure of a content that gives itself a form?

⁶⁸ See loc cit, pp.171, 193. On the question of the bourgeois public sphere, see Jürgen Habermas, *Der Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Neuwied-Berlin, 1969).

⁶⁹ This is mostly a creation of her opponents: Social-democracy, Leninism, and Stalinism are in agreement here.

⁷⁰ See Rosa Luxemburg, ‘Massenstreik,...’, loc cit, p.132.

⁷¹ This division of labor, Luxemburg emphasized, has its historical justification, especially in the quiet phases of bourgeois society. See loc cit, p.156.

⁷² See loc cit, p.162.

⁷³ See loc cit, p.155. The division between economic struggle and indirect forms of political struggle fall away in this period.

⁷⁴ The economic and the political are no longer to be separated. See loc cit, pp.127, 128, 154. Marx too had also pointed out the close relation between the economic and political struggles with the example of the struggle over the reduction of the

consequence a different form of organization. And this form cannot be decreed, nor be determined in a technical-voluntaristic manner.⁷⁵ At a certain point the mass strike becomes a people's movement [*Volksbewegung*]. For this reason, it is injurious to the analysis of this movement to underestimate the potential of the unorganized workers – although Social Democracy is naturally the organized centre of the working class.⁷⁶ As Social Democracy is itself part of the movement, it must of course intervene and back the movement up tactically and supportively so that the movement is able to unfurl its full force.⁷⁷ But it can only do this insofar as it spreads enlightenment about what it is that the masses are striving for.⁷⁸ In this situation, the organization then appears as the quintessence, the product of such mass activities.⁷⁹

The attempt to think the relation between organization and spontaneity as a 'dialectical-democratic process'⁸⁰ also implies a different understanding of the idea of participating in traditional parliamentarism in order to have at least a controlling influence on the process of political power.⁸¹ This attempt is immediately embedded at the very root of the democratic process itself. The 'process of spontaneity and organization' should be understood as a 'process of learning and experience'. In her view this process of experience in practical democracy generates not only a proletarian public sphere. It also generates organization. It is, then, the process that generates consciousness, and it does so in and through the practical and theoretical assertion of a class perspective that is conscious of its own transcendence as

length of the workday. See Karl Marx, 'Letter to Friedrich Bolte', 23.11.1871, in MEW 33, p.332f.

⁷⁵ See Rosa Luxemburg, Speech against a unified economic and political organization of the workers' movement, presented at the founding conference of the KPD (30.12.1918-1.1.1919), in *ibid.*, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 4 (Berlin, 1979), pp.483–485. See also Bock, *Syndikalismus...*, loc cit, p.44.

⁷⁶ See Rosa Luxemburg, 'Massenstreik, ...', loc cit, pp.143, 144.

⁷⁷ See loc cit, p.133.

⁷⁸ About the leadership, she wrote: '[t]he Social Democratic Party is the most enlightened, most class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat...It must, as always, be out in front of events, trying to accelerate them. Social Democracy can do this by making the broadest layers of the proletariat understand the inevitability of entering into a revolutionary period and the most important social moments and political consequences of that period' (loc cit, p.145f).

⁷⁹ Nettl especially points this out. See *ibid.*, *Rosa Luxemburg*, loc cit, p.188.

⁸⁰ See for a detailed discussion: Diethard Behrens, *Elemente einer Demokratietheorie*, loc cit, p.53ff.

⁸¹ A weakness of these early discussions, and this is true for almost all of the participants, is the ignorance concerning the problem posed by the state and the law.

a class. The ‘self-knowledge of the proletariat’, mediated through specific actions, contains political and economic experiences and, as Luxemburg sees it, these should lead to self-organization as well as to new organizational forms. In order to mediate theory and praxis with one another, there needed to be the possibility of ‘proletarian’ communication (*‘proletarischen’ Verständigungsmöglichkeit*). It is this critical understanding that transports and mediates experience. It is also a process of self-communication and self-understanding. The initially separated dimensions of social reality – the economic struggle for distributional justice and the state-oriented perspective of politics – are only apparently independent, and their seeming separation will be recognized as illusion and mere appearance; and this is a practical as well as a theoretical process, about which *a priori* nothing can be said. As these experiences appear however briefly in historical moments, they need analysis and further development, and that is, in turn, a theoretical *and* a practical process.

Social democrats of various positions belonged to the circle around Rosa Luxemburg. Although these persons worked in different departments of the workers’ movement – like Zetkin in women’s issues, Mehring in cultural matters, and Liebknecht in the youth and peace movements – they were able to come together to form a ‘left’. Thus the ‘alliance’ included people like Franz Mehring, Clara Zetkin, Karl Liebknecht, but also Radek and Karski. In 1910 at the latest, the break between the ‘left’ and the Social Democratic Party was complete, when the party leadership refused an article by Rosa Luxemburg on the movement for the right to vote in Prussia.⁸² In their opposition to the war the different factions came together one more time.

Radical Intellectuals: Julian Borchardt, Heinrich Laufenberg, Karl Liebknecht, Franz Pfempfert, Fritz Wolffheim

In February 1911 Franz Pfempfert became the editor of *Die Aktion*⁸³ in Berlin, in which many authors to the left of center published their work. They had a diverse [*weitverzweigte*] readership.⁸⁴ The declared aim was to build the ‘greater German Left’.⁸⁵ Pfempfert’s initiative was aimed above all at the organization of the ‘intelligentsia’. *Die Aktion* stood in solidarity with Rosa Luxemburg, but already very early on preferred organizational

⁸² See Bock, *Syndikalismus...*, loc cit, p.46f.

⁸³ Rosa Luxemburg also published her most important later articles in *Die Aktion*.

⁸⁴ The young Horkheimer was also among its readership.

⁸⁵ See *Die Aktion*, 1911, No. 2.

independence vis-à-vis the SPD. Along with Otto Rühle, Pfempfert opted for a new 'syndicalist Workers' Party'.⁸⁶

In September 1913 Julian Borchardt became editor of the *Lichtstrahlen*. He too voted after 1914 for an 'independent oppositional workers' party'⁸⁷ and worked within the context of the *Internationalen Sozialisten Deutschlands* (ISD).

Heinrich Laufenberg who came to the SPD from the Catholic Center Party and Mehring suggested that he go to Hamburg to write a history of the workers' movement. He was excluded from the Party in 1912 because of his leftist demands. He played a large role in the leftist factions in Hamburg during the war. Theoretically, he was more critical of the notion of spontaneity than other contemporaries. Together with Fritz Wolffheim, he became one of the representatives of the left wing of the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) after the war. Later he briefly played a role in the KAPD (Communist Workers Party of Germany) until he and Wolffheim were both excluded as representatives of German National Bolshevism.

Karl Liebknecht, a well-known lawyer, tried before the war to organize the youth movement of the SPD as well as the anti-militarist movement. He advocated an ethical-socialist position that, after the outbreak of the war, quickly led him – and Pfempfert – to a rejection of the war credits. His work in the USPD (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany) and *Spartakusbund* made him – next to Rosa Luxemburg – one of the leaders of the young communist movement.

The 'Bremen Radicals': Pannekoek, Knief, Gorter

After Rosa Luxemburg, the most significant theoretician of left social democracy before 1914 was doubtless the astronomer Anton Pannekoek. Recommended by Mehring for the Party School of the SPD, he taught there from 1905 onwards. With Herman Gorter and Henriette Roland-Holst theoretical elements of the radical opposition of the Dutch democratic party were enunciated. Beginning in 1907 he published the socialist opposition paper, *De Tribune*. With the founding of the SDP⁸⁸ in 1909, he distanced himself from social democracy.

The political and theoretical influence of Pannekoek's writings reached the *Bremer Bürgerzeitung* under the editorship of Johannes Knief and the

⁸⁶ See Bock, *Syndikalismus...*, loc cit, p.47.

⁸⁷ See loc cit, p.48.

⁸⁸ Several hundred of the approximately 30,000 members of the Social Democratic Party of the Netherlands made this same switch. See Bock, *Syndikalismus...*, loc cit, p.49. The KPN emerged from the SDP in 1918.

Bremen *Arbeiterpolitik*, and also the Bremen and Hamburg left. The focal point of his writings was the mass strike.

His opposition to traditional versions became clear in the polemic between him and Kautsky.⁸⁹ Kautsky insisted that the interests of the organized and unorganized masses were not the same, and he accused the leftists of political encroachment. Pannekoek in contrast emphasized that decisive power lay beyond parliament; and he accused Kautsky of having a 'too mechanistic conception of the organization',⁹⁰ of identifying organization with institutions, and of being afraid of revolution. The basis of organization is rather a different, more voluntary one; and thus the party must be understood as only one part of the 'power of the masses for action'.⁹¹ Summarizing Pannekoek's position on the question of organization, Bock writes: 'The basis of understanding organization is the voluntary discipline of the masses in action and with unlimited freedom of discussion.'⁹² Nevertheless, the party should assume leadership. The mass strike toward which this movement is heading will only occur on the basis of proletarian power. Organization, as Bock makes clear, was for Pannekoek determined by the 'spirit of belonging'.⁹³ Marxist theory must be made complete by inclusion of the subjective factor.⁹⁴ Despite the differences, Pannekoek's similarities with the syndicalist position are obvious. Subjective morality reappears here as the mere will toward revolution.

⁸⁹ See *Die Neue Zeit*, 1912, vols. I and II.

⁹⁰ Bock, *Syndikalismus...*, loc cit, p.52.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Loc cit, p.53. This thesis rests on the notion that the economy has direct causal efficacy and causes the masses to react.

⁹³ Loc cit, p.54. The KAPD later based itself systematically on Dietzgen's writings that were popularised by Roland-Holst. See Henriette Roland-Holst, *Joseph Dietzgens Philosophie gemeinverständlich erläutert in ihrer Bedeutung für das Proletariat* (Munich, 1910). As Bock shows, Pannekoek, who followed her efforts, remarked to Dietzgen (see *Neue Zeit*, 1913, vol. II, pp.37-47): 'Marx showed the efficacy of the world, society, and the economy by showing how they affect people and offer them a certain content. Dietzgen showed the efficacy of mind itself by giving this content a particular form'. Bock, *Syndikalismus...*, loc cit, p.55. Pure neo-idealism!

⁹⁴ Bock interprets this, in agreement with Lenk, as an anticipation of the position that Lukács and Korsch later adopted. See Kurt Lenk, *Ideologie, Kritik und Wissenssoziologie* (Neuwied, 1961), p.37.

First World War

Not immediately, though in due course, the first World War and the politics of civil peace [*Burgfriedenspolitik*] brought the various factions of the opposition together. This began with the refusal of Karl Liebknecht (December 1914) and Otto Rühle (March 1915) to vote for the war credits. By the end of 1915 there were already 15 Reichstag representatives who voted against the credits. The group organized itself first as the *Sozialdemokratischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft* and then as the USPD. In 1916 the founding of the *Spartakusbund* followed in order to provide opposition to the power politics of the majority SPD.⁹⁵ The *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* included the leftists, the earlier Marxist center, the Haase faction, Ledebour and some of the reformists. This group was unified by opposition to the war. There were various notions of organization from the USPD, the *Spartakusbund*, and the ‘Bremen’ leftists. The USPD organized itself according to the adoption of moderately decentralizing elements. The *Spartakusbund* represented a moderate centralism in the context of a revolutionary International, but rejected conspiratorial activities. The decentralizing tendencies were rejected. The Bremen and Hamburg left⁹⁶ cooperated early on with the Zimmerwald movement, and then opted against the ‘social democraticism’ of the USPD and the *Spartakusbund*. Increasingly they understood themselves as a part of the Zimmerwald left with Lenin as their spokesman.

The Revolutionary Period

The revolutions of 1917 strengthened the revolutionary tendencies in Europe.⁹⁷ In this context the economic caesura seemed to be a break with

⁹⁵ The SPD majority allowed the offices of the centrist newspaper *Vorwärts* to be occupied and the editorial board dispersed by the military authorities. See Bock, *Syndikalismus...*, loc cit, p.59. On the general history of the first World War and the Weimar Republic, see Karl Dietrich Bracher, Manfred Funke, Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (eds), *Die Weimarer Republik 1918-1933* (Bonn, 1987); Arthur Rosenberg, *Entstehung der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt, 1961). On the social history of this period, cf. Jürgen Kocka, *Klassengesellschaft im Krieg* (Göttingen, 1978); Hans-Joachim Bieber, *Gewerkschaften in Krieg und Revolution*, 2 vols. (Hamburg, 1981).

⁹⁶ This also included those associated with the newspaper *Lichtstrahlen* (Berlin).

⁹⁷ A study that proves to be an implicitly apologetic interpretation of the developments in Russia is that by Rainer Rotermundt, Ursula Schmiederer, and Helmut Becker-Panitz, “‘Realer Sozialismus’ und realer Sozialismus: Bedingungen und Chancen einer sozialistischen Entwicklung in Gesellschaften

the past,⁹⁸ a new time. The period before the war had already been perceived by many contemporaries to be a period of crisis. Contributing to this perception were not only the political-militaristic chest-beating of the European leaders, but also the signs of a serious economic crisis. The World War accelerated the decline of the economy. The Russian revolutions signaled not only the end of the first World War, but also the end of traditional power. Revolution, economic crisis, and political crisis were thus interpreted as a unity and perceived as a historical break. Because the protagonists of this study saw in socialism an alternative, the year 1917 seemed to be an epochal break – the beginning of a new era, of socialism.

After the strikes at the end of the war, the foundation of the Communist Party was accomplished. This encompassed three factions: one that aimed at a unification with the USPD; one that followed a strategy oriented toward the masses, including Luxemburg; and the Bremen, Hamburg, and Berlin leftists who pushed the strongest for a republic of workers' councils or soviets. The leftists were accused of 'syndicalism' and were forced out of the KPD by Levi. They then organized themselves into the new KAPD.⁹⁹ This new party proved to be divided into three wings: the national-bolshevist, a syndicalist wing renouncing politics, and an authentic left-communist wing. The highpoint of the KAPD was the period from 1918-1924. It then collapsed, having splintered several times. Part of its membership returned to the SPD, while others worked on in small groups.

The Critique of Bolshevism

sowjetischen Typs', in Claudio Pozzoli (ed), *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung*, vol. 5, loc cit, pp.9-37. This work repeats the thesis of the belated development of Russia and the need for the Soviet Union to catch up with the West as well as the thesis of the Soviet Union as 'really existing substitute of socialism'. See esp. pp.19f,21,22.

⁹⁸ A new epoch appeared to have begun. That which Marx had written about the industrial pirates proved itself to be the stronger law. Concerning the general concentration of capital, Santamaria and Manville maintain: 'The result of the abolition of capital within the boundaries of the capitalist mode of production is itself only a formal abolition. Marx...shows...that this abolition is an imposed force...A historical form of the manifestation of capital, the form based on private property, is abolished, but not the relation itself...' (Santamaria and Manville, 'Lenin...', loc cit, p.61).

⁹⁹ Though the federalist principle could not be established in the KPD, especially after Liebknecht's death, it remained the programmatic centerpoint of left communism.

Early on, a clear profile of anti-Leninist notions of organization had developed. The critique of Lenin was then extended to his philosophy.¹⁰⁰ The focal point of left political thinking remained the ‘soviet’ or ‘council’ movement. Similar notions can also be found in Italy during this period. The critique of Bolshevism became general.¹⁰¹

The ‘Theses on Bolshevism’ by the Group of International Communists of Holland begin with praise of Lenin for his struggle against the war and for having decisively led the Russian Revolution. Concerning the discussion of the prerequisites of the Russian Revolution, the ‘Theses’ based its interpretation on the following: Russian history had been determined by two opposing forces: lying geographically between Europe and Asia, and with a political economy caught between feudalism¹⁰² and capitalism.¹⁰³ The uniqueness of the Russian conditions, of course, remains uncomprehended in this mechanistic interpretation, which transposed in schematic fashion western structures onto Russia.

For that reason, the following theses are also problematic, although their details are partially based on correct facts. Russia of the late nineteenth century was seen to have been based on an equilibrium between the propertied classes and faced the task of industrialization. For this reason, a certain form of bourgeois revolution was due. The ‘Theses’ argued that this situation could to a certain degree be compared with that of pre-revolutionary France. The decisive difference is seen by the ‘Theses’ especially in the fact that the classes were ambivalent in their interests. On the one hand, they should feel as opponents of czarism with which, however, they co-operated on the other hand. However, while the Russian nobility attempted before 1917 to extend its influence over the absolutist state, the bourgeoisie was weak and dependent on czarism, and ultimately signed on to the program of ‘reforming czarism’. The Russian peasantry

¹⁰⁰ Anton Pannekoek, ‘Lenin als Philosoph’, in *Rätekorrespondenz*, vol. 1, 1938 (and New York, 1948); reprinted in Anton Pannekoek et al., *Marxistischer Antileninismus* with an introduction by Diethard Behrens (Freiburg, 1991).

¹⁰¹ Gruppe Internationaler Kommunisten Hollands, ‘Thesen über den Bolschewismus’ (August 1934), in *Rätekorrespondenz*, no. 3. See Gottfried Mergner (ed), *Gruppe Internationaler Kommunisten* (Reinbek, 1971) and in Anton Pannekoek, Paul Mattick et al., *Marxistischer Anti-Leninismus*, loc cit, p.19ff.

¹⁰² Russian feudalism is generally considered a form of rule analogous to that of feudalism in the West. This analogy, however, ignores the particular structure of the Russian bureaucratic nobility after the Petrine reforms.

¹⁰³ There were only a few initiatives to develop capitalist agriculture; these resulted, however, only in the destruction of the Russia village communes, which brought great immiseration in its wake. See loc cit, p.20f.

was petite bourgeois and dependent on alliances with other social groups. Later, in the phase of struggles in 1917, it is alleged that the peasantry became counter-revolutionary. Nevertheless, the peasantry is seen to have helped secure the victory of the revolution by having represented their own interests against the large landholders. The Russian proletariat, on the other hand, even though numerically small, is said to have developed a huge readiness to fight. Finally, the petite-bourgeois intelligentsia, the Jacobins, had put its 'stamp' on the Revolution.¹⁰⁴ The Russian Revolution supposedly occurred within this class-triangle – czarism, feudalism, bourgeoisie against peasants and proletariat; and because the peasants were too dependent and the workers too few, Bolshevism is seen to have entered the picture as a substitute.¹⁰⁵

Bolshevism is seen to bear all 'the essential tendencies of revolutionary bourgeois politics', plus the Marxist 'insight into the laws of the movement of classes'. Bolshevism is deemed to be the revolutionary social democrat, 'the Jacobin in alliance with the masses' (Lenin). In short, it is to be compared with the revolutionary petite bourgeoisie of the French Revolution. This is seen to be most apparent in its politics and organization: mobilization and seizure of power by means of a centralized organization. Theoretically Lenin's theory was seen to have been hitched onto bourgeois materialism which did not prevent a 'sliding back into philosophical idealism'. Insofar as Bolshevik politics were aimed against Russian absolutism, it was seen to be justified. In terms of the groups who were bearing the alliance against czarism, Bolshevik politics were instrumental. This instrumentalism, it was emphasized, also has a theoretical side concerning its relation to Marxism.¹⁰⁶ At this point it becomes clear that the critique delivered in the 'Theses' is developed from the perspective of the critique of Stalinism. The emphasis on the 'people's revolution' is seen to reveal that the Russian Revolution was a bourgeois revolution: the masses under bourgeois leadership.

Against this background, the slogans about the workers' councils are seen to be merely tactical. The council model¹⁰⁷ was in fact abandoned as the Bolsheviks found other means to carry out their struggle against the Social Revolutionaries.¹⁰⁸ The end of the council model was at Kronstadt.

¹⁰⁴ See loc cit, p.24.

¹⁰⁵ See loc cit, p.25.

¹⁰⁶ See loc cit, p.29f.

¹⁰⁷ On the Russian council movement, see Oskar Anweiler, *Rätebewegung in Russland* (Leiden, 1958).

¹⁰⁸ See loc cit, p.31.

From then on, the idea of a democracy of workers' councils was only represented by the worker opposition which brought about only its own persecution.

In contrast to the usual division of the events of 1917 into first a bourgeois, then a proletarian revolution, the 'Theses' argue that the whole period should be considered a fundamental and unitary process of social restructuring – a process that began with the collapse of czarism and that can be characterized as a bourgeois revolutionary process. The old power triangle 'czarism-feudal nobility-bourgeoisie' was dissolved by the new one: Bolshevism-peasantry-working class.¹⁰⁹

The revolution was considered a Blanquist one and transposed elements of a 'politics of Jacobin conspiracy', of a bourgeois revolution against the bourgeoisie. After the revolution the bourgeois element clearly focused on industrial politics, but at issue was not socialization, but 'control of capitalist production by the workers'¹¹⁰ – not socialism, but state economy.

Thus, Bolshevism was considered to be above all a 'dictatorial leadership of the Jacobin intelligentsia' and as such the modern form of bourgeois revolution. In this respect, it was also considered to be the largest obstacle to proletarian struggle.

Analytical moments similar to those of the council communists are to be found in Lukács and especially Korsch. While Lukács¹¹¹ begins *History and Class Consciousness*¹¹² with subjectively oriented elements and ends up in accommodation with Leninism,¹¹³ Korsch's critique of Lenin after his break with the KPD was more fundamental.¹¹⁴ The focal point of Korsch's critique consists of questions of epistemology and notions of praxis. In this regard it is clear that he is much closer to the left communists.

¹⁰⁹ Thesis 44: '...Just as the czarist state apparatus ruled autonomously over both property owning classes, so too did the new Bolshevik state apparatus begin to gain autonomy from the two classes on which it was based' (loc cit, p 33).

¹¹⁰ Loc cit, p.34.

¹¹¹ The Lukács in question here is the political Lukács. His significance as a social theorist and philosopher is disproportionately greater. His theoretical work concentrated on society, reification, fetishism, and knowledge. These issues must be treated elsewhere.

¹¹² Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (Berlin, 1923).

¹¹³ Lukács's was concerned here with the limits on what could still be said in the KP. This forced him to make many changes of direction, self-criticisms, and recantations.

¹¹⁴ Karl Korsch, 'Lenin's Philosophy', in *Living Marxism*, Nov. 1938, p. 138–144. Karl Korsch, *Die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung und andere Schriften*, edited by Erich Gerlach (Frankfurt, 1971). Korsch's critique speaks of Kautsky, but it is aimed at Lenin.

Dilemmas of Left Politics

The dilemma of left politics in the 1920s can be described as follows:

1. The general politics of the KPD is characterised by its accommodations with Russian relations and politics. Because several different factions were involved, these politics were, at times, not successful. Eventually the Bolshevization of the Party was accomplished, even if it remained an open question as to what that meant in specific historical situations. An opposition movement in the style of a left opposition to Lenin, like that of Fischer and Maslow (who later formed the *Lenin-Bund*) did not go beyond this framework.
2. In view of the rise of fascist movements and parties, the politics of the Communist Party-Opposition aimed at closer cooperation with the SPD and the unions. Thalheimer's analysis, known as the 'Bonapartism Thesis',¹¹⁵ studied the social situation against the background of fascist movements. These attempts were mostly torpedoed by the central organizations of the party. The shortcoming of this politics was obvious: it was oriented toward short-term cooperation and information, but largely had to accept the undertakings of social-democratic politics in the Party and unions; and it had a close pragmatic relationship to social conflicts.
3. The syndicalist orientation had some influence in, and outside of, the unions. Its federalist program was partially accepted in many parties to the left of the Communist Party. Similarly, the politics of left communism had some influence periodically. As a democratic and federalist group that was oriented towards workers' councils and that concentrated on the working class, it formulated – partially through its critique of Lenin – various perspectives beyond day-to-day politics. The demand for a 'pure proletariat', though itself not without prognostic value, contradicted, however, not only the premises of spontaneity theory but also the insight, adopted from syndicalism and social anarchism, that the revolution is possible at all times, that is: it depends solely on the will of the actors. As clear as its perspective on revolution was, its concept of revolution was equally unclear. From a theoretical perspective, however, questions were raised that led to attempts to

¹¹⁵ See Nils Kadritzke, *Faschismus und Krise. Zum Verhältnis von Politik und Ökonomie im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt/New York, 1976).

connect to a new conceptualization of experience, which posited a different conception of revolution.

After the War

After the war – as a consequence of national-socialist and Stalinist politics – all communist groups found themselves marginalized once again. This remains true even though several groups were able to carve out positions of local significance.¹¹⁶ German left communism seems to have emigrated to the United States.¹¹⁷

Several earlier followers, however, hibernated in various university cities and exercised some influence on the SDS (Socialist German Student Union) that formed an independent organization in 1959-60 – namely in Berlin, Frankfurt, Giessen, Göttingen, and Stuttgart. It was therefore not surprising that in the wake of the struggle associated with 1968, and in the wake of the Maoist and Soviet re-dogmatizing of political discussion, the idea of the council movement emerged once again, though articulated somewhat naïvely as opposition. In the course of these re-emerging discussions, classical anarchism became marginalized because its bourgeois-individualistic forms were again revealed and it was therefore conceptualized as a faction of liberalism. The ‘own history’ of council communism, however, the tradition of council communism was wholly inadequately studied. This was reserved for only a very few.¹¹⁸

The collapse of the Soviet Union had to some degree opened the possibility for a new debate and new politics. The aura that had surrounded Lenin’s politics has dissipated. The fragile foundation of Soviet politics has become obvious. Even if one follows the findings that Lenin’s politics follow a bourgeois notion of revolution, the memory remains of constellations that opened possibilities, even though many, for a number of internal and external reasons, were not realized. Two moments immediately spring to mind: internationalism and the conception of the economic.

A specific international constellation made the Russian Revolution possible. But it was only possible because it conceived of itself both as a movement against the war and as an international movement. The demand of a proletarian internationalism became universal – a demand that,

¹¹⁶ The KPO in Bremen among others.

¹¹⁷ See the writings by and about Paul Mattick.

¹¹⁸ Bordiga’s influence was first recognized in the German discussion, although generally without any critical evaluation.

cautiously formulated, is already found in the writings of the First International. But in post-1917 politics, internationalism was not pursued in real terms. For this reason, internationalizing the workers' movement is still a fundamental task.

Lenin's understanding of the economy has been widely discussed. Yet, a fundamental understanding and critique of the capitalist economy cannot be found in Lenin.

If an understanding of economic forms cannot be offered in dogmatic terms, then one must confront the question of what indeed is meant by a capitalist economy. What makes the economy 'capitalistic'? This leads to further questions as to how to overcome it. In this regard it is necessary to problematize the relation between the political and the social, and to explain how they are bound together in the economic sphere. This conceptualization cannot be made from the outside – one has to stand in the things in order to understand and, through their understanding, to criticize them. It would therefore be of great value to remind ourselves again of Rosa Luxemburg's concept of experience and its further elaborations, and to reapply and renew it as a topic for critical thought and reflection.

Note

Translated from German by Joseph Fracchia.

Chapter 4

Was Lenin a Marxist? The Populist Roots of Marxism-Leninism

Simon Clarke

Populism and the Origins of Russian Marxism

Lenin's name has been coupled with that of Marx as the co-founder of the theory of 'Marxism-Leninism'. However, despite his emphasis on the role of revolutionary theory, Lenin's original theoretical contributions to the development of Marxism were very limited. His talents were those of a determined revolutionary, in the populist tradition of Chernyshevsky, and a brilliantly effective propagandist and political organizer. His contribution to 'Marxism-Leninism' was to modify Marxist orthodoxy in such a way as to integrate the political and organizational principles of revolutionary populism into Marxism, on the basis of Plekhanov's 'dialectical materialism', whose distinctive interpretation of Marxism was Lenin's constant guide and inspiration. In this paper I want to argue that Lenin never broke from the theoretical and political traditions of Russian populism, but completed Plekhanov's project by assimilating Marxism to the very different theoretical framework of populism.

According to Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, populism and Marxism-Leninism constitute two radically opposed political and theoretical traditions. However this is a completely misleading characterization, for Russian Marxism emerged directly out of populism, and the distinctiveness of Marxism-Leninism can be traced directly back to the theoretical traditions of Russian populism.

The development of Marxism in Russia took place not against but within the populist movement. The early populists were romantic critics of capitalism, who drew heavily on the Hegelian philosophy of history, and particularly on the Young Hegelians' revolutionary interpretation of Hegel's historical dialectic as a process of negation and transcendence. Although they were romantic critics of capitalism, however, the early populists were fierce opponents of idealism, which was associated with the tyranny of religion and the autocracy, and so developed a materialist interpretation of the Hegelian dialectic, according to which the values of

freedom, equality and community were not derived from any spiritual world, but were inherent in the existing institutions of peasant life, and above all in the peasant commune, a materialist interpretation of history which was supplemented in the 1860s by Darwin's evolutionism. The most influential philosopher was Ludwig Feuerbach, whose naturalistic materialism was the direct inspiration for both Belinsky and Chernyshevsky, who nevertheless, like all the populists, combined their materialism with a romantic utopianism.

The theoretical problem which the populists faced was that of relating their own utopian vision to the more mundane aspirations of the peasantry, whose conditions of life were supposed to provide the material base for the realization of that vision, but whose ignorance and limited cultural horizons prevented them from making the socialist vision their own. Thus, while the material base might be the aspirations of the peasantry, the values and ideals of the new society were those of the intelligentsia. This problem provided the basis for the principal division within the populist movement, which was between those who believed that socialist values were immanent in the conditions of life of the mass of the population, and so put primary emphasis on agitation, and those who believed that the realm of values was the specialist realm of the intellectual, and so put primary emphasis on education.

It is important to emphasize that the division within populism expressed different solutions to a single ideological and political problem, that of legitimating and realizing socialist values which are held by only a small minority of the population, the intelligentsia. In this sense they were both variants of what Marx characterized as 'utopian socialism'. Populism looked to the material needs of the peasantry to provide the popular base for a political movement which could realize these values, and in this sense it was committed to a 'materialist' philosophy, but these 'material needs' were themselves defined ideologically by the intelligentsia, for what the populists sought to realize was not the aspirations of the peasantry, but the intellectuals' own values, and in this sense populism was committed to a philosophy which was just as idealist as that which it opposed.

In the 1870s this division separated the anarchists, inspired particularly by Bakunin, from the 'subjective sociologists', inspired particularly by Lavrov and Mikhailovsky, but this was primarily a tactical and even rhetorical division within the populist movement, as both factions moved into the villages to propagandize amongst the peasantry. It was only with the collapse of the populist faith in the peasantry, following the famine of 1890-91, that this division came to assume much greater significance,

coming to separate the Social Democrats from the 'legal Marxists', on the one hand, and the anarchists and 'economists', on the other.

Marxism had been influential in Russia from an early stage in the development of populism, for Marx provided the most powerful critique of modern capitalism, and the strongest of arguments for resisting its advance. But the greatest importance of Marxism was that it provided the ideological bridge from romantic populism to modern socialism, providing a scientific theory which could both explain the failures of populism, and point a new way forward. Marx's 'political economy' established the possibility of the advance of capitalism, against the populist belief that the lack of markets made capitalist development impossible in Russia, while also showing the limitations of capitalism, and identifying in the proletariat the social force which would overthrow it. However, the Marxists of the 1890s were ultimately as little concerned with the conditions of the proletariat as had the populists of the 1870s been concerned with the conditions of the peasants. The turn from the peasantry to the proletariat did not come about because the suffering of the proletariat was greater than that of the peasantry, and still less because the proletariat constituted a majority of the population, but because the proletariat was identified as the new vehicle for the old populist hopes, the 'material base' for the realization of socialist values. In this sense Russian Marxism developed directly out of Russian populism, in response to changing economic, social and political circumstances.

Plekhanov's Marxism developed in the context of the debates within Russian populism in the 1880s, as Plekhanov turned from the peasantry to the proletariat as the basis of his revolutionary hopes. The laws of historical materialism guaranteed that the development of capitalism, which was destroying the immediate hopes of the populists, would give rise to their ultimate realization, so that the revolutionary movement could embrace the development of capitalism as a necessary stage on the road to socialism. However this did not mean that revolutionaries had to sit back and wait for the inevitable revolution. Plekhanov's Marxism stressed the active role of ideas and of political organization in determining the pace of historical development. On the other hand, it was not possible to achieve socialism until the historical process had matured. Thus Plekhanov vehemently opposed the voluntarism of the 'subjective sociologists'. The freedom of action open to the revolutionary movement was not defined by the ability of the subject to transcend its determination by historical laws, but was rather defined by the ability of the revolutionary movement to come to know those laws, and so to accelerate (or retard) the pace of historical development – this was the difference between scientific and utopian

socialism. Following Engels's interpretation of Hegel, Plekhanov defined freedom as the knowledge of necessity, and so the ability to control the laws of nature and of history, which had hitherto operated as blind forces. This idea lay at the heart of Plekhanov's reconciliation of a rigidly deterministic materialism with a vigorous political activism. Plekhanov called the philosophy which he developed to express this idea 'dialectical materialism', which opposed both the fatalism implied by a 'mechanical materialism' and the voluntarism implied by 'subjective sociology'.

Plekhanov's Philosophy of History: the Populist Foundations of Dialectical Materialism

Although Plekhanov invented the term, the exposition of the philosophy of 'dialectical materialism' is often attributed to Engels.¹¹⁹ However Plekhanov's characterization of 'dialectical materialism' is significantly different from Engels's characterization of the 'materialist dialectic', and from Marx's own critique of bourgeois philosophy. The difference is quite fundamental, for Plekhanov's 'dialectical materialism' is nothing less than the philosophical materialism of the populist followers of Feuerbach, which was precisely the philosophy against which Marx and Engels directed their most devastating criticism.¹²⁰

Plekhanov criticized eighteenth century materialism for its inconsistent adherence to materialist principles, exemplified by the contradiction between the view that '*the opinions of men are determined by their environment*' and the view that '*the environment is determined by opinions*'

¹¹⁹ Plekhanov used the term 'dialectical materialism' in an 1891 article in *Neue Zeit*. Lenin adopted the term in his 1894 'What the Friends of the People Are'. The phrase 'the materialist conception of history' dates from Engels's 1859 review of Marx's *Critique of Political Economy*, but the term 'historical materialism' was only introduced in his 1892 Special Introduction to the English edition of *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*.

¹²⁰ There is a link between Engels and the populist roots of Plekhanov's philosophy, for Engels in his adolescence was a member of the group of Young Hegelians and followers of Feuerbach who provided the philosophical inspiration for the first generation of Russian populists. Indeed, one of Engels' own youthful articles, developing a Feuerbachian critique of Hegel, had a significant impact in Russia in the 1840s.

(Plekhanov, 1956, p.21). It therefore fell back into a view of opinions and the environment, manners and the constitution, as mutually interacting forces, without any understanding of the 'historical factor which produced both the manners of the given people and its constitution, and thereby *created the very possibility of their interaction*' (ibid., p.24).

The French historians of the Restoration period advanced beyond this dualism, to locate both manners and the constitution in the *civil condition* of men, in which particular property relations determined particular class interests. However, this did not resolve the contradiction, since property relations were seen as essentially legal and political relations, the historical development of property relations being explained in terms of the spiritual development of humanity, from the infantile age of feelings, through the adolescent age of passions to the mature age of reason.

The utopian socialists, and above all Saint-Simon, had an inkling of the solution to the puzzle, in relating the development of property to the development of production. However the development of production was ultimately seen as a further expression of human intellectual development, expressing the development of scientific and technical knowledge, repeating the Restoration historians' identification of the historical development of human nature with the development of the individual from infancy through adolescence to maturity.

All of these different formulations of a materialist conception of history fell at the last hurdle, reducing historical development to the moral and intellectual development inscribed in human nature. The result was a profound ambivalence as to the role of human agency in the making of history, as they oscillated between an extreme fatalism and an extreme subjectivism. The belief that moral and intellectual development was subject to determination by natural laws led to fatalism. On the other hand, knowledge of those laws provided the basis for utopian schemes to reform human institutions in accordance with human nature, without any regard for historical laws or institutional constraints. The utopian preoccupation with 'what ought to be' was accordingly associated with a profound disregard for what is. In particular, existing political institutions and political conflicts were seen as merely an expression of an outmoded stage of moral and intellectual development, irrelevant to and inappropriate for the realization of the utopian schemes, which depended not on the mobilization of material and political interests, but on the realization of an *idea*. Thus in the last resort materialism, rather than submit to a paralyzing fatalism, reverts to idealism.

The importance of Hegel for Plekhanov was that it was Hegel who broke through the contradiction at the heart of 'metaphysical' materialism

in adopting the point of view of dialectics, ‘which studies phenomena precisely in their development and, consequently, in their interconnection’ (ibid., p.92). The dialectical study of an historical process ‘presupposes an attentive attitude to its *real* course in *actual fact*’ so that dialecticians ‘do not content themselves with *abstract conclusions from abstract principles*’ (ibid., p.101, cf. pp.108–9). The importance of Hegel’s dialectic is that, in showing that everything is useful in its right place and at the right time, but then becomes harmful, Hegel dispels all Utopias, which claim to provide an ideal valid for all places and all times. Similarly Hegel destroyed the foundations of Utopianism in destroying the idea of an invariant human nature. Hegel certainly retained a universal historical principle, the principle of reason, but this was not at all the human reason of the *philosophes*, but rather an objective reason, of which the philosopher can only become aware *ex post*, through the scientific study of its manifestations. For Hegel ‘reason governs history...in the sense of *conformity to law*’ (ibid., p.126). This leads to a fundamentally different conception of intellectual development from that of the metaphysicians, who each believed that they had achieved the truth against which all other systems of thought were simply false. Intellectual development is no less subject to historical laws than is any other human institution, adapting to changing historical needs. Thus ‘[p]hilosophy is the intellectual expression of its own age...every philosophy is true for its own age, and mistaken for any other’ (ibid., p.127).

The Hegelian dialectic is undoubtedly idealist. But more importantly it is *monistic*, avoiding the dualism into which previous forms of materialism had always degenerated in trying to recover a role for consciousness and subjectivity. For consistent idealists, including Leibniz and Spinoza as well as Hegel, the human and natural world is universally governed by determinate laws which operate independently of human consciousness and human will. However, the fact that historical development is governed by such laws in no way undermines human freedom. ‘The laws of material necessity themselves are nothing else than the laws of action of the spirit. *Freedom presupposes necessity, necessity passes entirely into freedom*’ (ibid., p.130). Thus Hegel’s rigorous commitment to determinism simultaneously provides a far wider scope for freedom than do the dualists who, ‘when trying to delimit *free* activity and *necessary* activity, they thereby tear away from the *realm of freedom* all that region...which they set apart for *necessity*’ (ibid., pp.130–31).

This apparent paradox is resolved when it is appreciated that the possibility of any effective exercise of my freedom depends on an understanding of the *necessity* which governs the consequences of my

action. The exercise of freedom is only possible on the basis of an understanding of necessity. '*The possibility of the free (conscious) historical activity of any particular person is reduced to zero, if at the very foundation of free human actions there does not lie necessity which is accessible to the understanding of the doer*' (ibid., p.132). While I am not conscious of the necessity which governs the consequences of my actions, those consequences will turn out to be other than those I intended, and so will be determined not by my free will, but by necessity. The necessary outcome of such acts will in turn modify the situation of the individual actors, determining new aims which they will freely pursue. Thus freedom and necessity are not the mutually exclusive categories posited by the dualists, but are inter-penetrating opposites. The consequences of the free acts of individuals are determined according to necessary laws, the outcome of which provides the grounds for new forms of free conscious activity. This interpenetration of freedom and necessity '*also takes place according to definite laws, which can and must be discovered by theoretical philosophy*' (ibid., p.134). However, once theoretical philosophy has discovered 'the laws of social and historical progress, I can influence the latter according to my aims' (ibid., p.135) – freedom can only grow out of knowledge of necessity.

Hegel's monism provides the only firm foundation for a science of history. However, Hegel reduced the history of social relations to the history of the Idea, which cannot be the determining cause of historical development, since it is no more than the 'personification of our own logical process' (ibid., p.137), the outcome of our reflection on history. All that remains is to set Hegel's philosophy on materialist foundations. The way forward was shown by Feuerbach, who replaced Hegel's Idea by the category of Matter, inverting the Hegelian relationship between thinking and being, a point of view which 'was also accepted by Marx and Engels. It became the basis of their philosophy' (Plekhanov, 1929, p.7). However Feuerbach's materialism was incomplete, and still suffered from the defects of those which had preceded it. For Feuerbach the relation between being and thought was a purely contemplative relationship, thought being a passive reflection of matter, so that the laws of history were once again reduced to the laws of nature. Marx finally solves this problem in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, where he 'completes and deepens Feuerbach's ideas' (ibid., pp.11–2) in insisting that the relationship between man and nature is not a *contemplative* but a *practical* relationship, practice providing the key to historical development. Human nature is not an unchanging phenomenon since, as Marx noted in *Capital*, 'whilst man works upon outside nature and changes it, he changes at the same time his

own nature' (quoted in *ibid.*, p.13). The laws which govern historical development cannot be found in the unchanging human nature of the bourgeois materialists, nor in the disembodied Spirit of Hegel, but must be located in the concrete material interaction between humanity and nature, in the development of *production*. It fell to Marx to provide a materialism which was both monistic and historical in locating the common foundation of social and political institutions, of manners, morals and constitutions, which determined their substantive content and the forms of their interaction, in the development of the *means of production* which mediate the relation of humanity to nature, and provide a materialist explanation for the development of human society by determining the social relations within which production must take place.

Plekhanov is unequivocal in seeing the progressive and autonomous development of the productive forces as playing the determining role in historical development.¹²¹ The foundation of Plekhanov's historical materialism is not the 'economic' relations of society, since:

*the economy of society and its psychology represent two sides of one and the same phenomenon of the 'production of life' of men, their struggle for existence, in which they are grouped in a particular way thanks to the particular state of the productive forces. The struggle for existence creates their economy, and on the same basis arises their psychology as well. Economy itself is something derivative, just like psychology...[O]nly in a popular speech could one talk about economy as the prime cause of all social phenomena. Far from being a prime cause, it is itself a consequence, a 'function' of the productive forces (Plekhanov, 1956, p.207).*¹²²

For Plekhanov the inadequacy of Feuerbach's materialism lay in its failure to find any principle of historical change in the material world. Marx's great advance was to introduce an historical principle into nature, locating that principle in the development of the forces of production. Thus Marx's materialism was not qualitatively distinct from that of Feuerbach, or from previously existing forms of bourgeois materialism, it merely completed and perfected the philosophy of materialism.

Plekhanov claims that his critique of bourgeois philosophy is that of Marx and Engels. However he does not develop his critique by reference to the works of Marx and Engels. In part he can be excused such a neglect, since of course many of the early works of Marx, in which he developed that critique, were not available to Plekhanov. Nevertheless, although Marx's critique of bourgeois philosophy is largely contained in those

¹²¹ See Plekhanov, 1956, pp.156–57, 187, 188, 197, 198, 229.

¹²² Plekhanov also falls back into a geographical determinism, for which his Soviet editors administer a stern rebuke (Plekhanov, 1956, pp.161–63, 270–71).

unpublished early works, he devoted his life's work to developing the critique of the most developed and sophisticated exposition of bourgeois materialism, classical political economy, and Plekhanov almost completely ignores the significance of this critique for his characterization of Marxist philosophy. Had he done so he could not have avoided recognizing that his critique of Hegelian idealism and of French materialism is not that of Marx, but that of the classical political economy of Smith and Ricardo and the philosophy of Feuerbach. Plekhanov remained clear throughout his life that Marx merely developed Feuerbach's materialism to his conclusions. In *In Defence of Materialism* Plekhanov (1956, pp.21–2) argued clearly that:

none of the fundamental ideas of Feuerbach's philosophy are refuted. Marx is content to amend them, and to demand that these ideas should be applied more consistently than they were applied by Feuerbach...[T]he materialist views of Marx and Engels have been elaborated in the direction indicated by the inner logic of Feuerbach's philosophy.

In *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* Lenin went even further than Plekhanov in reducing Marxism to a vulgar materialism, a literal inversion of Hegelian idealism, and a simplistic identification with Feuerbachian materialism. Lenin condemned Plekhanov as an inconsistent materialist, because Plekhanov believed that ideas were symbols or 'hieroglyphs' of reality, rather than literal 'copies of real things' (Lenin, n.d.a, p.238). Thus Lenin notes, following Plekhanov, that Engels criticized hitherto existing materialism for its mechanical that is, its attempted reduction of chemistry and organic nature to the principles of mechanics and undialectical character, that is, its failure to grasp the relation between absolute and relative truth: the Machians believe that because truths are relative there can be no absolute truth independent of mankind. They do not understand that 'absolute truth results from the sum-total of relative truths in the course of their development; that relative truths represent relatively faithful reflections of an object existing independently of man; that these reflections become more and more faithful; that every truth, notwithstanding its relative nature, contains an element of absolute truth' (ibid., p.321) – a purely Hegelian and idealist conception of science. Lenin is emphatic: '*Exclusively* for these three things and *exclusively* within these limits, does Engels refute both the materialism of the eighteenth century and the doctrines of Büchner and Co! On all other, more elementary, questions of materialism...*there is and can be no difference* between Marx

and Engels on the one hand and all these old materialists on the other' (ibid., p.247).

That Plekhanov's misinterpretation cannot be attributed to his ignorance of much of Marx's early work is shown clearly by the critique of David Ryazanov, who was clear of the limitations of Feuerbach's argument in his Preface to *In Defence of Materialism*, where he denies Plekhanov's assertion that Feuerbach provides the philosophical basis of Marxism. Plekhanov claims that Feuerbach's thesis that 'thought is conditioned by being, not being by thought. Being is conditioned by itself, has its basis in itself' is the 'view of the relations between being and thought which was adopted by Marx and Engels and was by them made the foundation of their materialist conception of history. It was the most important outcome of the criticism of Hegelian idealism which, in its broad lines, had been made by Feuerbach himself' (Plekhanov, 1956, p.7). However, Ryazanov qualifies this assertion, noting that 'Marx radically modified and supplemented Feuerbach's thesis, which is as abstract, as little historical, as the "Man" Feuerbach put in the place of "God" or of "Reason"' and then, quoting Marx's sixth thesis on Feuerbach, concludes that 'the basic error of all philosophical systems endeavoring to explain the relations between thought and being, is that, like Feuerbach, they have ignored the fact that "the abstract individual analysed by them really belongs to a specific form of society"' (Ryazanov, in Plekhanov, 1956, p.xiii). It is not surprising that Ryazanov was disposed of by Stalin.

Against the common interpretation of Marx as a 'materialist', it is essential to be clear that Marx did not oppose materialism to idealism. In the *German Ideology*, and elsewhere, Marx characterized his starting point as 'materialist', but the term referred not to a philosophical materialism, but to the premise of 'real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live' which can 'be verified in a purely empirical way' (Marx and Engels, 1964, p.31), a perspective which Marx identified as that of the 'practical materialist, i.e., the communist' (ibid., p.56). Engels typically characterized Marx's work as 'materialist', but in the sense of assimilating it to the movement of modern science, which 'no longer needs any philosophy standing above the other sciences' (Engels, 1962a, pp.39–40), the task of philosophy being only to formalize the 'materialist dialectic', which Engels saw as the characteristic method of modern science. Marx believed that the opposition between materialism and idealism was a false one, since 'matter' is no less idealist a concept than is the 'idea', so that 'abstract materialism is the abstract spiritualism of matter' (Marx, 1975c, p.88).

Marx sought to overcome this false opposition by focusing on *society* as the mediating term between the 'material' and the 'ideal', but society understood not as yet another abstraction, but as the everyday practical activity of real human beings. It is the divorce of individual from society which underlies the false antitheses of the Enlightenment, in eliminating the mediating term between humanity and nature, between the ideal and the material, between subject and object. Thus, in his early works Marx criticized materialism and idealism alike from the standpoint of '*human sensuous activity, practice...practical-critical activity...human society or socialized humanity*' (Marx, 1975b, pp.421-22), characterizing his own position not as a materialism but variously as a humanistic naturalism, or a naturalistic or real humanism: 'Consistent naturalism or humanism is distinct from both idealism and materialism, and constitutes at the same time the unifying truth of both' (Marx, 1975a, p.336). Similarly Marx rejected the equally false antithesis between humanity and nature: '*Society is the complete unity of man with nature...the accomplished naturalism of man and the accomplished humanism of nature*' (ibid., p.298), a formulation which should not be interpreted as proposing a 'sociologistic' solution to a philosophical problem, but of transforming the problem from a philosophical to a socio-historical one. Marx declared not the triumph of materialism over idealism, but the triumph of social science over philosophy.

Marx's early critique was directed at both Adam Smith and Hegel, but he certainly did not support the 'materialist' Smith against the 'idealist' Hegel. Marx's position was that the two theories were equally idealist in resting on the categorical oppositions of matter and idea, individual and society, humanity and nature, oppositions which Marx argued were empty abstractions, empty because they are concepts which do not correspond to any determinate existence, and so can have no determinate effects. However, this is not only a critique of Smith and of Hegel, for these conceptual oppositions are constitutive of bourgeois thought in general, as that has come down from the Enlightenment.

For Marx the weakness of bourgeois materialism was that it sought to explain social relations by referring them back to a material foundation, which was seen naturalistically, defined by the physical conditions of production. This led it to naturalize what were in reality historically specific social relations, constituted on a particular *social* foundation. Thus Marx, and later Engels, criticized the earlier materialism for its lack of a systematic and historical perspective, in having a naturalistic view of the world which could not embrace history. To this extent Plekhanov's characterization of Marx's critique of Feuerbach's materialism is correct.

But Marx attributed Feuerbach's errors not to his being insufficiently materialist, in locating history outside nature, but for being *too* materialist, in reducing history to the history of nature. Certainly Marx criticized Feuerbach's static view of nature, but Feuerbach's was not the last word in bourgeois materialism. While Feuerbach's materialism was restricted in having an unchanging view of human nature, that of classical political economy was not so limited.

It is very significant that in Plekhanov's extensive discussions of the history of materialism he completely ignores the role of classical political economy, and the historical materialism of the Scottish Enlightenment, for the latter proposed a philosophy of history which corresponds exactly to Plekhanov's characterization of Marx's philosophical revolution. Against the various forms of racial, demographic and climactic determinism proposed by Continental materialism the Scottish Enlightenment offered a philosophy of history which explained the development of manners, morals and constitutions precisely in terms of the stages of development of the 'mode of subsistence', although the latter was not so crudely reduced to the means of production, nor to geographical conditions, as it was by Plekhanov, offering precisely the 'historical' materialism which Plekhanov characterizes as that of Marx. Marx, in his tenth thesis on Feuerbach, addressed the limits of this form of materialism in noting that 'the standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society, or social humanity'. The error of hitherto existing materialism for Marx was *not* identified with its adoption of the standpoint of human nature, but of the abstraction of the human individual from 'the ensemble of social relations' (sixth thesis), which is the historical characteristic of bourgeois society. Marx's standpoint is not that of the act of material production, it is that of 'human society, or social humanity'. Thus Marx did not defend the materialism of political economy against the idealism of Hegel, but criticized both as equally idealist theories of history.

Similarly the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment had precisely the Hegelian view of the relation between freedom and necessity which Plekhanov characterizes as that of Marx, which is why they turned to the study of political economy, as the science which could reveal the laws of development of society. Against the romantic idealism of the French *philosophers*, the political economists believed that the only basis of social reform was the knowledge of the material foundations of history provided by their new science. However, 'science' for Marx provides no solution to the dualisms of bourgeois materialism for, as he remarked in his third thesis on Feuerbach:

[t]he materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and it is essential to educate the educator himself. This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society (Marx, 1975b, p.422).

For Marx knowledge is undoubtedly a weapon in the revolution, but it is not knowledge which makes the revolution, but the proletariat, and knowledge only constitutes a revolutionary weapon when it is embodied in the proletarian movement. The philosophical roots of Bolshevik politics can be traced directly back to Plekhanov's fundamental misunderstanding of the significance of Marx's critique of political economy.

In Hegel's work bourgeois reason finds its summation and its most systematic expression. The great merit of Hegel, according to Marx, was that he pushed bourgeois reason to its limits, so that its speculative foundations stand out starkly in the contradiction between the universal and the particular, which Hegel could only resolve speculatively in the dialectical development of Reason. In exactly the same way Smith, and later Ricardo, recognized the real contradictions between universal human needs and aspirations and the particular social relations of the capitalist system of production, but again resolved these contradictions speculatively, in the dialectical development of Nature. Whether the supra-human force which makes history is called Reason or Nature is neither here nor there. Thus Marx's critique of Hegelian idealism can be translated immediately into a critique of the idealism of political economy, however 'materialist' political economy might appear at first sight, because it is a critique of their common ideological foundations. Marx no more 'continued the work' of political economy, than he completed that of Feuerbach (see, Lenin, n.d.b). The ideological foundations of Hegelian philosophy and political economy lie in their attempt to present bourgeois social relations as the culmination of the history of the synthesis of Reason and Nature, and it is precisely this that characterizes them as bourgeois. Consequently Marx's critique of Hegel is a critique of the ideological foundations of all forms of bourgeois social thought, both idealist and materialist.

Marx could apply the method developed in the critique of Hegel's abstract spiritualism to the critique of political economy because the theories were two sides of the same coin. Like Hegel, political economy is content to describe the alienated forms of social existence, attributing their social character not to their human origins but to an alien power: on the one hand, the Idea, on the other, Nature.

Excursus: Marx, Engels and the Inversion of Hegel

The principal authority for Lenin and Plekhanov's characterization of Marxism as a philosophical materialism is the famous passage in the Afterword to the Second German Edition of *Kapital*, in which Marx wrote: 'My dialectical method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite...With me...the ideal is but the material transposed and translated in man's head'. With Hegel the dialectic 'is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell' (Marx, 1976, p.103).

The orthodox interpretation of this passage regards the inversion as *philosophical*, Marx setting the dialectical method on a rational foundation by replacing Hegel's idealist monism with a symmetrical materialist monism. Thus Plekhanov argued that:

Materialism is the direct opposite of *idealism*. Idealism strives to explain all the phenomena of Nature, all the qualities of matter, by these or those qualities of the *spirit*. Materialism acts in the exactly opposite way. It tries to explain psychic phenomena by these or those qualities of *matter*, by this or that organization of the human, or, in more general terms, of the animal *body* (Plekhanov, 1956, pp.13–4).

Thus Hegel's dialectical method is valid, once it is appreciated that the dialectical laws are not laws of thought but laws of matter. For Lenin, Hegel's 'transition of the logical idea to *nature*' at the end of the *Logic* 'brings one within a hand's grasp of materialism'. Indeed:

the whole chapter on the 'Absolute Idea'...contains almost nothing that is specifically *idealism*, but has for its main subject the *dialectical method*. The sum-total, the last word and essence of Hegel's logic is the *dialectical method* – this is extremely noteworthy. And one thing more: in this *most idealistic* of Hegel's works there is the *least idealism* and the *most materialism* (Lenin, 1961, p.234).

Against this interpretation it should be noted that Marx defined his inversion not as an inversion of Hegel's *ontology*, but precisely of his *method*, which the orthodox interpretation regards as being untouched by Marx's critique. As noted above, Marx did not characterize his philosophy as a 'materialism', but as a 'humanistic naturalism' or a 'naturalistic humanism'. When he used the term 'materialism' positively he used it as a synonym for 'science'. Marx's extensive discussion of his method, in contrast to that of Hegel, in the 1857 Introduction to the *Grundrisse*

contrasts the laborious development of scientific knowledge with the representation of such knowledge by speculative philosophy. Thus Marx's dialectical method is the method of scientific labour, while that of Hegel is the method of speculative philosophy. Marx's inversion of the Hegelian dialectic is not a matter of a *philosophical* inversion which replaces a monistic idealism with a monistic materialism, but of inverting the idealist relation between science and philosophy.

Where does Engels stand between Marx and Plekhanov? The answer, appropriately enough, is somewhere in the middle. In *Ludwig Feuerbach* Engels referred to the Hegelian system as 'a materialism idealistically turned upside down in *method and content*' (Engels, 1962b, p.372, my emphasis).

Engels espoused, as Marx arguably did not, a philosophical materialism. Thus he argues that 'it is self-evident that the products of the human brain, being in the last analysis also products of nature, do not contradict the rest of nature's interconnections but are in correspondence with them' (Engels, 1962a, p.55), and he characterizes dialectics, 'the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought' (ibid., p.194), as 'nothing more than the mere reflection' of the flux of reality 'in the thinking brain' (Engels, 1962b, p.363).¹²³ These arguments come directly from Feuerbach, who believed that he had overcome the dichotomy of thought and matter, not by reducing thought to matter, but by integrating the two, thought being not an effect of matter but one of its properties. As a natural being I am not a subject contemplating an object, but apart of the object reflecting on itself, so there can be no contradiction between thought and being. However, Engels was dismissive of Feuerbach's materialism, which he regarded as being as metaphysical as Hegel's idealism in resting on abstract concepts of 'Man' and 'Nature', rather than on the real historical relations between men and nature. For Engels the 'nature' on which his materialism rests is not a philosophical category but a scientific one, different forms of materialism corresponding to different conceptions of nature emerging from science. Historical materialism is made possible by the development of a new conception of nature, which sees the world as constructed not of things mechanically related to one another, but as processes in change. Thus his Feuerbachian argument is not used as a metaphysical prop, but turns into his pragmatic epistemology for which the relation between thought and being is an historical and practical relationship of

¹²³ And many more such formulae are to be found, particularly in *The Dialectics of Nature*.

‘experiment and industry’. However this argument is not used by Engels, as it came to be used by ‘dialectical materialism’, as an ontological guarantee of the truth of the laws of the materialist dialectic.

Engels’s use of the word ‘reflection’ does not imply either the reflectionist theory of knowledge or the correspondence theory of truth which Lenin attributed to him. Engels repeatedly stresses that ‘human history...cannot find its intellectual final term in the discovery of any so-called absolute truth’ (Engels, 1962a, p.38), and insists on the hypothetical and limited character of all knowledge, a principle which he applies to his and Marx’s work (cf. Engels, 1962a, pp.57, 83, 92, 125, 129, 207–9, and Engels, 1962b, pp.362–63, 377–78). In contrast to Lenin’s argument against the neo-Kantians that such relative truths constitute successive approximations to an absolute truth, marked by the correspondence of the connections established in ‘thought’ with those existing in ‘matter’, Engels has a pragmatic view of truth, dismissing the scepticism of Hume and Kant as a product of the chimerical pursuit of ‘absolute truth’, which has no significance once it is recognized that one can only pursue ‘attainable relative truths along the path of the positive sciences’, whose methods of ‘experiment and industry’ make the ‘thing-in-itself’ into a ‘thing-for-us’ (Engels, 1962b, pp.363, 371). Engels’s dismissal of Kant may be naïve, but far from serving as an irrationalist critique of science, his materialism serves as a defence of science against philosophy, to support his pragmatism against a Kantian epistemological dualism which sees ‘consciousness’ as ‘something given, something opposed from the outset to being, to nature’ (Engels, 1962a, p.55), establishing a gap between thought and reality which can only be bridged by metaphysics, whether metaphysical materialism or speculative idealism.¹²⁴

Although Engels regards Marx’s inversion of Hegel as both philosophical and methodological, it is the latter aspect which he constantly stresses, and to which he subordinates Marx’s supposed philosophical revolution. He describes Marx’s theoretical innovation as a scientific revolution, in contrast to that of Feuerbach, which remained firmly within the antinomies of philosophy. In Marx’s case:

the separation from Hegelian philosophy was here also the result of a return to the materialist standpoint. That means it was resolved to comprehend the real world –

¹²⁴ Engels’s *Dialectics of Nature* may be equally naïve but it does not set out to revolutionise the natural sciences by applying the laws of the dialectic, but rather to assimilate Marxism to modern science by demonstrating the universality of those laws through a comprehensive survey of the achieved results of the modern natural sciences. Engels claims no scientific advances, but merely wraps scientific findings in the bizarre rhetoric of the dialectic.

nature and history – just as it presents itself to everyone who approaches it free from preconceived idealist crochets. It was decided mercilessly to sacrifice every idealist crochet which could not be brought into harmony with the facts conceived in their own and not in a fantastic interconnection. And materialism means nothing more than this (Engels, 1962b, p.608).

Thus Engels follows Marx in seeing the inversion of the Hegelian dialectic as an inversion of the relation between science and philosophy, which becomes possible when science incorporates the principle of the dialectic as its own method. Modern materialism is essentially dialectic, and no longer needs any philosophy standing above the other sciences. As soon as each special science is bound to make clear its position in the great totality of things and of our knowledge of things, a special science dealing with this totality is superfluous. That which still survives, independently, of all earlier philosophy is the science of thought and its laws – formal logic and dialectics. Everything else is subsumed in the positive science of nature and history.

Consequently the materialist dialectic does not *invert* the idealist relationship between reason and nature, it overcomes that opposition as science becomes aware in its own practice of the dialectical principles of flux and interconnectedness. The dialectical method does not define an irrationalist critique of science, but confirms a scientific positivism.

A Materialist Conception of History?

Plekhanov's resurrection of bourgeois materialism as the principle of Marxism faces the same dilemma that he identified at the heart of hitherto existing materialism. If the development of the manners, morals and constitution of society are determined by the development of the forces of production, how are we to explain the active role of human agency in historical development? It would seem that a monistic materialism has once again condemned us to the populist oscillation between fatalism and voluntarism.

Plekhanov sought to overcome this dilemma by drawing, as we have seen, on the Hegelian analysis of the relation between freedom and necessity to argue that *knowledge* gives us the freedom to overcome necessity. However this does not offer a solution. If knowledge is a mere knowledge of necessity it remains purely contemplative and retrospective. But if knowledge is to be the means of changing the direction of history, then we have returned to the dualism with which Plekhanov charges bourgeois materialism, and the question arises once more of the demarcation of the realms of freedom and necessity. Plekhanov answers this question by distinguishing between the *direction* and the *pace* of historical development, and between the *content* and the *form* of legal,

political and ideological superstructures. The direction of historical development is determined by necessity, but its pace is subject to human intervention. The content of superstructures is ultimately determined by the needs of production, mediated by class interests, but the same content may be expressed in a variety of forms.

While the development of the forces of production unequivocally determines the *direction* of historical development, the *pace* of development of the productive forces is by no means independent of the form of the social relations of production. Thus, for example, ‘slave labour is not very favorable to the development of the productive forces; in conditions of slavery it advances extremely slowly, but still it does advance’ (Plekhanov, 1956, pp.165–66), while under capitalism the forces of production develop at an historically unprecedented rate.

The legal and political superstructure can also play a part in determining the pace, but not the direction, of historical development. The law and the constitution are determined functionally by the needs of society, which are in turn determined by the ‘*modes of production and on those mutual relations between people which are created by those modes*’ (1956, p.187). Particular legal and constitutional systems express particular ideas, but ideas emerge on the basis of needs, and those ideas which prevail are those which meet society’s needs. ‘In reality, only that is “ideal” which is useful to men, and every society in working out its *ideals* is guided only by its needs. The seeming exceptions to this incontestably general rule are explained by the fact that, *in consequence of the development of society*, its *ideals* frequently lag behind its *new needs*’ (ibid., p.188).¹²⁵ It is this lag which enables the law and politics to have an impact on the pace of social development, if not on its direction:

Political institutions influence economic life. They *either facilitate* its development *or impede* it. The first case is in no way surprising from the point of view of Marx, because the given political system has been created for the very purpose of *promoting the further development of the productive forces* (whether it is consciously or unconsciously created is in this case all one to us). The second case does not in any way contradict Marx’s point of view, because historical experience shows that once a given political system ceases to correspond to the state of the productive forces, once it is transformed into an obstacle to their further development, it begins to decline and finally is eliminated (Plekhanov, 1956, p.203, cf., p.272).

¹²⁵ In the same way ‘*the psychology of society is always expedient in relation to its economy, always corresponds to it, is always determined by it*’ (Plekhanov, 1956, p.206).

The social needs which give rise to particular legal, political and ideological superstructures are expressed in particular, and conflicting, class interests. The productive forces determine the economic relations of society. 'These relations naturally give rise to definite interests, which are expressed in *law*', and which give rise to '*state* organization, the purpose of which is to protect the dominant interests' (Plekhanov, 1940, p.23). The pace of historical development is therefore determined by the outcome of the class struggle which expresses the balance of class forces: 'the further development of every given society always depends on the relationships of social forces within it' (Plekhanov, 1956, p.298). It is therefore only the concrete study of the relations of social forces which 'can show what is "inevitable" and what is not "inevitable" for the given society' (ibid.). Thus, for example, the inevitability of capitalism in Russia was dictated 'not because there exists some external force, some mysterious law pushing it along that path, but because there is no effective internal force capable of pushing it from that path' (ibid., p.302).¹²⁶

The struggle over the forms of law and the constitution does not appear immediately as a struggle between conflicting class forces, but as a struggle between different ideas, which express conflicting class interests. The *content* of these interests is determined by economic relations, but the economic relations do not determine the ideological *forms* in which those interests are expressed. Thus 'the state of social consciousness...does determine *the form which the reflection of the given interest takes in the mind of man*' (Plekhanov, 1940, p.40). The relation of ideas to social needs and to class interests is not a simple one. The world of ideas is an autonomous world, subject to its own laws, so that ideas are not the direct expression of class interests. Intellectuals cannot be reduced to the sycophantic spokespeople of particular interests, but their ideas are nevertheless circumscribed by their historical environment, including their particular intellectual milieu, which in turn is related to those of previous epochs, of other countries and of other classes with which they interact. Through these complex interdependencies 'ideas, feelings and beliefs are co-ordinated according to their own particular laws' corresponding to the intellectual forms in which they appear. But at the same time 'these laws

¹²⁶ This account of history is, once again, indistinguishable from that of Adam Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment, whose development of a theory of class, on the basis of the new science of political economy, was designed precisely to identify the contending class interests which determined the course of history.

are brought into play by external circumstances which have nothing in common with these laws' (Plekhanov, 1956, p.236).

The relationship between interests and ideas is not, therefore, a genetic relationship, but is rather one of a Spinozist correspondence between the material world of interests and the intellectual world of ideas. This conception obviously corresponds very closely to the reality of Russian political and ideological conflicts, which were fought out amongst intellectuals who had very limited contact with any organized class forces, so that the dividing lines of political conflict were drawn not so much in terms of the social forces in struggle, as in terms of the interests which particular ideas supposedly *represented*.¹²⁷

It should not be surprising to find that Plekhanov ultimately overcomes this Spinozist dualism in classically Hegelian terms. Ideas obey their own laws, but at the same time are subject to the laws of material necessity, but the laws of material necessity determine that humanity will transcend the rule of necessity to realise its freedom. '*[W]ith the development of the productive forces the mutual relations of men in the social process of production become more complex, the course of that process completely slips from under their control, the producer proves to be the slave of his own creation (as an example, the capitalist anarchy of production)*'. But:

the relations of production, social relations, by the very logic of their development bring man to realization of the causes of his enslavement by *economic* necessity. This provides the opportunity for a new and final triumph of *consciousness* over *necessity*, of *reason* over blind *law*.

Further:

Having realized that the cause of his enslavement by his own creation lies in the anarchy of production, the producer ('social man') organizes that production and thereby subjects it to his will. Then terminates the kingdom of

¹²⁷ This dislocation appeared most starkly in Lenin's critique of economism in *What is to be Done?*, which reached the bizarre conclusion that proletarian consciousness is bourgeois, while that of the radical bourgeois intelligentsia is proletarian. Plekhanov, retaining some link between interests, ideas, and the social forces they represent, looked to an *alliance* between the radical bourgeoisie and the proletariat, which was the point at which Lenin broke with him politically. There can be no doubt that in this division it was Plekhanov who remained closer to Marxism, while Lenin reverted to populism, as indicated by the very title of his text, assimilating Marx to Chernyshevsky.

necessity and there begins the reign of *freedom*, which itself proves to be *necessity* (Plekhanov, 1956, pp.273–74).

The coming revolution is a matter not so much of the realization of the material interests of the working class or the liberation of the working class from capitalist exploitation, as of the realization of human reason. The working class appears as the agent of this realization:

Modern dialectical materialism strives for the elimination of classes. It appeared, in fact, when that elimination became an historical necessity. Therefore it turns to the producers, who are to become the heroes of the historical period lying immediately ahead. Therefore, for the first time since our world has existed and the earth has been revolving around the sun, there is taking place the coming together of science and workers: science hastens to the aid of the toiling mass, and the toiling mass relies on the conclusions of science in its conscious movement (ibid., p.279).

Plekhanov offers an extremely powerful critique of voluntarism, but he certainly does not offer a Marxist critique. His standpoint is not the ‘*sensuous human activity, practice...practical-critical activity...human society or social humanity*’ (Theses on Feuerbach; Marx, 1975b, pp.421–23) which Marx took as his starting point, but an anonymous ‘*dialectic*’ which is no less idealist for being attributed to natural geographical, technological, biological and psychological processes.

Plekhanov’s philosophy makes no sense at all as an interpretation of Marx. But it makes a great deal of sense as a critique of the first generation of populists, who proved unable to connect their revolutionary ambitions to the material base of the aspirations of the peasantry, and so tempered their philosophical materialism with a voluntaristic romanticism, and it is from this that Plekhanov’s work derived its power and its influence in Russia. But it is a critique from within populism, the contrast between materialism and idealism corresponding to the emerging division within the populist movement, and not a critique from the position of Marxism, which would have led Plekhanov to oppose both the ‘*materialist*’ and the ‘*idealist*’ wings of the populist movement, on the basis of the aspirations of the emerging working class movement. However, such a critique was obviously impossible in Russia in the late nineteenth century, just as it had been impossible in Germany in the early nineteenth century, for such a movement did not yet exist. In Russia socialism remained the preserve of the intelligentsia, and so remained in the realm of ideas. Whereas German Social Democrats could look for the necessity of the revolution to the

concrete historical development of the working class movement, as anticipated by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*, in Russia the necessity of revolution could only be defined philosophically, through the principles of 'dialectical materialism' and the mystical laws of 'the transformation of quantity into quality' and the 'negation of the negation'.

Lenin's Populist Interpretation of Marxism

The dilemma faced by Russian Marxists was that their revolutionary ideas ran far ahead of the degree of development of the workers' movement. This inevitably gave the intelligentsia a leading role in the revolutionary movement, a role which Plekhanov's 'dialectical materialism' served to justify philosophically. It was the intellectuals who could transmit the lessons learnt in the more advanced countries, and embodied in the scientific laws of historical materialism, to the Russian proletariat. These laws enabled revolutionary intellectuals to grasp scientifically the connection between the interests of the working class and the ideals of socialism, even where this connection was not yet apparent to the workers themselves. However, this brings us back to the political dilemma of populism. What is the political imperative of a revolutionary movement in which the mass of the population has not yet become aware of the ideas which express their objective interests? Will revolutionary ideas inevitably emerge from the agitation of the working class as the workers come to self-consciousness through struggle, as Bakunin had believed, and as was argued by the 'economists' and 'ultra-leftists' against whom Lenin fought so vigorously? Or should revolutionary ideas be disseminated by a patient process of propaganda, education and evangelizing, as the 'subjective sociologists' had believed, and as the 'Legal Marxists' came to argue? Or should the revolution be taken in hand by a small group of dedicated revolutionaries, armed with a vision of a just society, as Chernyshevsky had argued, and as the terroristic wing of populism, from which Lenin emerged, believed?

The orthodox Marxist answer to this question was a combination of the first and second answers: Social Democracy developed the class-conscious workers' movement through agitation, organization and education. In the case of Russia this would necessarily be a long-drawn out historical process, for the working-class remained a small minority of the population. The latter also implied that the working class would have to look elsewhere for allies in its struggle, for without allies it would be crushed by the autocratic state. The peasantry could not provide such an ally, for it was a doomed class which sought to resist the development of capitalism. Instead the social democratic movement had to look abroad, to the international workers' movement and the prospect of a world revolution, and had to forge a tactical alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie, with which it shared an interest in democratic reform against the tyrannical rule of the autocracy. Although Plekhanov legitimated the role of the intelligentsia in the revolutionary movement in terms of a

philosophy of history which had nothing in common with Marxism, politically he remained attached to Marxist orthodoxy in assigning the leading role in the revolution to the organized working class movement.

Nevertheless, Plekhanov's philosophy of history could be given an altogether different interpretation. If the intelligentsia has a privileged access to the scientific understanding of reality, and if the role of ideas in history is to accelerate the necessary development of the historical process, why should the intelligentsia wait on the historical development of the working class movement? Should not the revolutionary intelligentsia itself play the leading role in history, seizing power by whatever means might be necessary, looking to whatever social classes and strata might be mobilized in its support, and taking whatever measures might be necessary to pursue its historic role? This was precisely the logic which drove the first generation of radical populists into terrorism, and it was the logic which led Lenin to transform Plekhanov's 'dialectical and historical materialism' into the ideology of Bolshevism. The privileged status of the intelligentsia, which was established by Plekhanov's philosophy, is realized in the Leninist conception of the Party, which represents the working class not because it is the political form through which the mass of the working class represents its interests, but because it is the institutional form in which the revolutionary ideology is mobilized as an historical force. Lenin could justly criticize Plekhanov for not following the logic of his own philosophy through to its political conclusions. This was why Lenin could vigorously criticize Plekhanov politically, while remaining slavishly faithful to Plekhanov's philosophy. But Lenin's transformation of Plekhanov's political theory was not in the direction of Marxism, but rather assimilated Plekhanov's Marxism back into the populist traditions from which Lenin had emerged. While Plekhanov used the populist philosophy to bridge the gap from populist to Marxist politics, Lenin used it to reverse the movement, and to put the revolution back on the Russian agenda.

The populist roots of Lenin's political thought are obvious and well-known. Revolutionary populism had four distinctive features which Lenin brought into the centre of his Marxism and which formed the core of 'Marxism-Leninism'.

First, it stressed the active role of revolutionary ideas in determining the course of history, and so gave the intellectuals a prominent political role. This was the element which was developed by Plekhanov and adopted from him by Lenin. The orthodox Marxism of the Second International certainly did not underestimate the role of ideas in historical development, but revolutionary ideas emerged out of the revolutionary

movement, however much intellectuals might play a role in their formulation. Although Kautsky's theory gave the intellectuals a special position in the struggle for socialism, it did not give them any special authority. For Lenin the spontaneous struggle of the working class is inevitably a sectional struggle for economic aims. It is only the scientific theory of Marxism which can reveal the wider class perspective which is necessary to advance beyond trades union demands to a political struggle. This perspective is provided by the intellectuals, and institutionalized in the Party, which expresses the political interests of the class as a whole against the sectional interests of its component parts. For Kautsky, by contrast, there is no such divorce of economic from political struggles and the revolution depends not on the leading role of the vanguard Party, representing the class as a whole, but on the *fusion* of socialist ideas with working class struggle. 'The socialist movement is nothing more than the part of this militant proletariat which has become conscious of its goal' (Kautsky, 1920, p.183). With the integration of socialism and the labour movement the socialist party is able to transcend the limits of any sectional representation, and to express the aspirations of all the non-capitalist classes and strata, so that the 'ways of feeling' of the proletariat 'are becoming standard for the whole mass of non-capitalists, no matter what their status may be' (*ibid.*, p.210).

Second, populism stressed the power of the revolutionary will, expressed through a disciplined organization of dedicated revolutionaries, in realizing the revolutionary ideal. This was the idea which Lenin took from his revolutionary mentor, Chernyshevsky, but one which had been rejected by orthodox Marxists, who stressed the mass democratic character of the proletarian movement.

Third, it was marked by a radical rejection of the state, and opposition to any involvement in constitutional politics, on the grounds that the state was essentially the agent of capitalist development, while the basis of the new society lay outside the state, in the commune and in co-operative production. It accordingly had an insurrectionary view of the revolution, the task of which was to destroy the economic and political forces of capitalism to set free the elements of socialism. This idea was also rejected by orthodox Marxists, who certainly did not believe that socialism could be achieved by electoral means, but who regarded the democratization of the state and the achievement of civil liberties as a primary condition for the development of the workers' movement, and political agitation as a primary form of propaganda. Orthodox Marxists also rejected the populist belief that the material base of socialism lay in the commune and co-operative production, believing instead that it was

necessary to take control of the state in order to nationalize the means of production, to provide the material base of socialism. Lenin's revolutionary Party, by contrast, provided a means of organizing which did not require democracy or civil liberties, while his conception of the leading role of the Party dispensed with the need to develop the self-consciousness of the working class. On the question of the material base of socialism Lenin was more ambivalent. He rejected the populist faith in the commune, and the revisionist faith in co-operative production, but before the revolution he wavered between a commitment to the soviet as providing the material and political base of the new society, with the state serving only a transitional role as the instrument of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', and an orthodox belief in the state as providing a more permanent basis of the new society. In the event, he combined the worst of both viewpoints, soon institutionalizing a dictatorial state as the permanent basis of the new society.

Fourth, populism was most fundamentally characterized by its faith in the revolutionary role of the peasantry. This was the point at which orthodox Marxism broke most decisively with populism, on the grounds that the peasantry was a doomed class, which could therefore play only a reactionary role, and that its conditions of life were such that it could never unite as a self-conscious class force. For this reason Plekhanov and the Mensheviks looked to the liberal bourgeoisie for a political alliance against the autocratic state. On the other hand, in the most advanced capitalist countries, like Germany, the proletarianization of the rural population meant that the latter could play a positive role in the revolutionary movement not as peasants, but as workers. Lenin, in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, proposed a critique of populism which paradoxically maintained the role attributed by the populists to the peasantry, in arguing that the extent of the capitalist development of Russian agriculture was such that the Russian peasantry was already well on the way to destruction. While this meant that it was no longer possible to look to the rural commune as the basis of socialism, it also meant that the rural population could still play a revolutionary role. Lenin's conception of revolutionary politics meant that it did not matter that the rural population was not organized as a part of the proletariat, and did not express proletarian or socialist aspirations, for the operative interests and aspirations of the peasantry were not those expressed by the peasants themselves, but those expressed on their behalf by the revolutionary party. Unfortunately for the peasantry, Lenin's characterization of their condition was quite wrong. The mass of the Russian peasantry had not been proletarianized by 1917, any more than they had been in 1899, as Lenin had to recognize when he

introduced the NEP, or than they were in 1929, when Stalin decided to take matters into his own hands, and accelerate the necessary course of history by proletarianizing the peasantry by force.

References

- Engels, F. (1962a), *Anti-Dühring*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow.
- Engels, F. (1962b), *Dialectics of Nature*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow.
- Kautsky, K. (1910), *The Class Struggle*, Charles H. Kerr and Company, Chicago.
- Lenin, V.I. (n.d.a), *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Progress Publishers, Moscow.
- Lenin, V.I. (n.d.b), *The Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism*, in *Selected Works*, vol. 1, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow.
- Lenin, V.I. (1961), *Philosophical Notebooks*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 38, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow.
- Marx, K. (1975a), 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, Progress Publishers, Moscow.
- Marx, K. (1975b), 'Theses on Feuerbach', in *Marx and Engels: Early Writings*, edited by L. Colletti, Pelican, London.
- Marx, K. (1975c), 'Contribution to Hegel's Philosophy of Law', in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 2, Progress Publishers, Moscow.
- Marx, K. (1976), 'Afterword to the Second German Edition of *Capital*', in *Capital*, vol. 1, Penguin, London.
- Marx, K and F. Engels (1964), *The German Ideology*, Progress Publishers, Moscow.
- Plekhanov, G. (1929), *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, Lawrence and Wishart, London.
- Plekhanov, G. (1940), *The Materialist Conception of History*, International Publishers, New York.
- Plekhanov, G. (1956), *The Development of the Monist View of History*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow.

Note

This paper was originally written in 1991 for Russian publication, as ‘Byl li Lenin Marksistom?’, in *Rubezh*, no. 3, 1992. It was reprinted in English in *Historical Materialism*, no. 3, 1999, pp. 3–27.

Chapter 5

The Dialectic of Labour and Human Emancipation

Mike Rooke

Introduction

The significance of Marx lies in his attempt to realise the promise of modern European philosophy by non-philosophical means. In modern philosophy (German idealism in particular) he finds that the great question of human freedom (thrown up by a period of social and political revolution) remains an abstraction because of the separation of theory and practice on which this philosophy rests. This idealism, in contrast to empiricism, conceived human Reason (in its highest expression as philosophy) as the active creator of the truth of the world, and thus the seat of human freedom.

The young Marx initially identified with the left Hegelians in seeking to combine the philosophic promise of German idealism with the radical ideals of the French revolution. But in seeking to change the world, he came up against the natural limits, not only of German idealism, but of philosophy as such. Marx's critical turn consisted in declaring that in starting from the real premises of the material world this separation of theory and practice could be transcended. What pushes him decisively beyond the standpoint of philosophy is his discovery of the proletariat. Furthermore, interpreting Hegel's dialectic as an abstraction from a very real historical dialectic, Marx finds in the dialectic of labour the means and meaning of this struggle to realise human freedom. He sees communism as the earthly form of this philosophical longing, embodied in a proletariat whose existence is at once the expression and negation of private property.

The importance therefore, of Marx's claim to the transcending of philosophy lay precisely in overcoming its separation of theory and practice. Conceiving the dialectical unity of these moments is from the start integral to his conception of communism as the living struggle of alienated labour against its conditions of existence. Freedom is consequently to be understood as the emancipation of labour. Not only is labour the

fundamental ontological category, but it is also the substance of history as development. When theory is regarded as an expression of the class struggle of labour against capital, we can appreciate the importance of Marx's claim in the early writings that communism is the true solution of the struggle between existence and essence, objectification and self-affirmation, freedom and necessity, individual and species (see Marx, 1971, p.148).

In this article I will argue that contrary to the majority of interpretations, which identify it as a radical philosophy or political economy, Marx's work must be understood as a theory of revolution rooted in the class struggle between labour and capital. Communism for Marx was not an ideal or a utopia, but a practical movement whose aim is the regaining of control by the direct producers of their labour and its product – a society based on free labour. In this respect the core of Marx's work from the very beginning was a post-philosophical dialectics of labour.

There are two principal aspects to Marx's critique of philosophy. Out of his critique of materialism (in the person of Feuerbach), Marx fashioned a concept of revolutionary practice which allowed him to transcend the epistemological dualism of modern philosophy (which German idealism had struggled to resolve). Out of his critique of Hegel's idealism he extracted the dialectic of labour and its estrangement, which for Marx constitutes the self movement of human history. This gave Marx a vantage point from which to grasp the place of labour in constituting the human world, and by that token, a recognition that philosophy was irrelevant to his enquiry. The ground was thus prepared for his engagement with and critique of political economy as the only valid route for scientific investigation. In this engagement Marx begins by concretising Hegel's concept of estrangement as the alienation of labour (in the *Paris Manuscripts* of 1844), and goes on to analyse (in the later works) the commodity and the value form of labour under the capitalist mode of production. The entire trajectory (from the *Manuscripts* to *Kapital*) is a unified working out of Marx's search for the grounds of human freedom in the radically new form of society then emerging. In the work of Marx therefore we find a unique cross fertilization of the 'promise' of philosophy, with the yearnings of the class of wage workers for the de-commodification of their labour.

Marx's Revolution Against Philosophy

The importance of Hegel in modern European philosophy lay in his attempt to transcend its subject-object dualism – a view of reality as a division between the knowing subject and the objective world. While Kant's

epistemology ultimately failed to achieve this, Hegel reunited the categories of thinking (subject) and being (object) in an idealist ontology. He did this by constructing a dialectic of subject and object which represented a radical break with the epistemological framework of existing metaphysics. Although this ontology grounded freedom in the creation by humanity of its own objective world (hence the importance which Hegel accorded labour), it remained idealist insofar as self-consciousness was for Hegel the essence of man, and the objective world was ultimately a derivation of 'mind' or 'spirit'.

While recognising this, Marx also crucially recognised that Hegel had grasped the active, transforming role of human activity in producing the world. He further understood the centrality of Hegel's concept of 'estrangement' in the dialectic of man's objective activity. But whereas in Hegel human 'estrangement' is grounded in the inadequacy of the object in relation to the 'concept', in other words, a dialectic which takes place entirely in thought, Marx understands estrangement (re-termed 'alienation') as a feature of man's productive activity. He therefore recasts the dialectic materialistically.

For Marx the fact that the world exists in alienated (ie., estranged) form is not the inevitable condition of objectification itself (and therefore an eternal condition), but the result of historically specific social relations which man has created for himself. It follows therefore that it is within man's powers to dis-alienate his existence. It is not objectivity as such which must be superseded (Hegel), but objectivity in its alienated form. Alienation must be overcome in practice, and not, as Hegel believes, in consciousness.

Here we can see how the concept of estrangement which Marx takes from Hegel is part of a dialectical process. While this process is, in Hegel, abstract and speculative, Marx argues that it is only the idealist expression of a real, historical movement, and it is this real movement which Marx seeks to apprehend. Marx's radical inversion of the speculative philosophical method amounts to its dissolution by making the starting point for analysis, real, objective, human beings. For as Marx says, all the theoretical antitheses which have preoccupied philosophy – subjectivism and objectivism, spiritualism and materialism – only lose their character as (irreconcilable) antitheses through being resolved in a practical way, in real life. This was something 'that philosophy could not solve just because it conceived of it as a purely theoretical task' (Marx, 1971, p.153).

Marx's critique of Hegel proceeded by way of Feuerbach's materialism. Feuerbach's criticism of speculative thought (the theology-metaphysics of German idealism), was that it inverted subject and predicate. Predicates – the

attributes of things (in effect abstractions) – were taken by the speculative method as independently existing (self-subsistent) subjects. In religion (the fundamental expression of human self-alienation), the attributes of real man (human nature) are abstracted (divested of any determinateness) and projected back to man as the attributes of God. In Hegel's speculative philosophy these (human) attributes become transposed into the self-moving categories of the Spirit or Absolute Idea. Real, living men therefore make their appearance only as moments of this Spirit. Feuerbach therefore reversed Hegel's speculative method in order to restore living man as the starting point for a humanist analysis. His philosophy begins with human sensory experience (determinate human beings) rather than Hegel's abstract, because indeterminate, 'pure being'. And it is man's 'species being', rather than Hegel's Spirit, that is objectified in the world as history. For Feuerbach, man not Spirit is made the true subject of history, and philosophy is thereby returned to the real world!

In the *Manuscripts*, Marx accepts Feuerbach's inversion of the Hegelian dialectic to the effect that man, not Spirit, is the true subject. But he departs from Feuerbach in rejecting his 'materialism' as contemplative. So while in accepting the reality of the objective world, Feuerbach departs from idealism, he does not see the object as the product of man's 'real sensuous activity'. He remains within an epistemological frame which sees subject and object in ultimately separate realms: subject confronting object in a knowledge relation. This is what Marx means when he says that Feuerbach 'regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude', and 'does not conceive human activity itself as objective activity' (Marx, 1992, p.421). For Marx, overcoming alienation is therefore not a matter of theoretical enlightenment (true consciousness displacing religious consciousness), but of 'practical-critical' activity (Marx, 1992, p.422). Feuerbach's contemplative (ie., philosophical) materialism remains metaphysical in its acceptance of the separation of subject and object, a dualism which finds its expression in the separation of individual from society, theory from practice. In contrast to Feuerbach's intended return of philosophy to the real world (as a naturalism or humanism), Marx's 1844 critique of Hegel constitutes the first step in his transcendence of philosophy.

Marx transcends the dualism of both materialism and idealism through the 'negative' dialectic of labour. This is the 'connecting' category that effects the humanization of nature (nature as a social creation), and the naturalization of man (man as an objective being). And since this dialectic is only the logic of man's struggle to control his conditions of existence, apprehending it is a 'practical-critical', not a philosophical task.

Having defined alienated labour as the absence of control by the worker over both his/her labour and the product of that labour, and having thus

identified wages and private property (capital) with alienation, Marx posits communism as the ‘annulment’ of this alienation. Still couched in the terminology of Hegel’s dialectic, Marx describes the transcendence of this alienation as the point when the object for man becomes a human object, the reality of man’s essential powers. And true to the principle of that dialectic, but shorn of its idealist trappings, the possibility of this transcendence arises, results, from the contradictions inherent in ‘the movement of private property’, the resolution of which poses communism, not as a theoretical contrivance, but as a form of social existence which ‘finds to hand all the material for this development’ in existing conditions (Marx 1969, p.101).

In the *Manuscripts* Marx presents a sustained account of the reification of social life, an analysis we see elaborated in Marx’s later writings in the concept of commodity fetishism. The fact of society’s productive powers, Marx observes, has hitherto been conceived not as an expression of human powers, but rather as an autonomous force existing over and against man – because ‘moving in the realm of estrangement’, and ‘since all human activity hitherto has been labour – that is, industry – activity estranged from itself’ (Marx, 1969, p.102). Communism is no distant goal, but is understood as ‘the necessary pattern and the dynamic principle of the immediate future’, and as ‘the negation of the negation’ it is ‘the actual phase necessary for the next stage of development in the process of human emancipation’ (Marx, 1969, p.106). There is no place for a philosophy of human liberation standing outside the class struggle, for liberation is precisely the transcendence of the separation of theory and practice, of the alienated labour which produces a reified world. Faithful in this respect to the Hegelian dialectic, Marx’s understanding of liberation requires no external, hypothetical determination. Where in Hegel the dialectic is the self-development of the concept (as a contradictory unity of opposites), the materialistic content of Marx’s dialectic is provided by the contradictory unity of the capital-labour relationship; class struggle is the expression, and communism the resolution, of this internal negativity.

In *Kapital*, as is well known, Marx begins with what he calls the basic cell of capitalism – the commodity. The dual nature of the commodity lies in its possession of both use value and exchange value, which in turn reflects the dual nature of the labour which produces it – concrete labour and abstract social labour. The many types of concrete labour are translated into abstract social labour through the exchange of the products of labour (and labour itself) in the market. It is through the exchange of commodities in the market that the labour time socially necessary to produce a commodity (thus determining its value) is established. This is what Marx

meant by the Law of Value as a regulator of society's productive labour time.

Marx points out that while Classical Political Economy, in the persons of Smith and Ricardo, was preoccupied with what determines the magnitude of value, they had never asked the all important question: what form of labour is it that produces value ('the form of value which makes it exchange value' (Marx, 1957, p.55))? The reason, he argues, is that the value form of the product derives from 'its peculiar stamp' as a special, historical form of production, a specific way of organizing labour. Moreover the existence of the commodity, money and capital are simply different (because at different stages of development) expressions of this value. But understanding that labour time is thus the measure of the magnitude of value, as did Smith, Ricardo and the Ricardian socialists, did not enable them to grasp value as the expression of a historically specific social relation. Value is thus the expression of an antagonistic social relation – in the form of capital. Capital, as we find it presented in *Kapital*, is premised on the separation of labour from both the means of production, and the product of that labour, and therefore the denial of labour's control over the labour process. It represents the negation of the free, cooperative and creative powers of human labour, which for Marx constitutes the immanence of communism. Capital is therefore a (necessary) moment in the historical dialectic of labour, whose telos is communism. Knowledge of the 'secrets' of value therefore presupposes the analysis of capital as a social relation (as alienated labour), which is why bourgeois political economy never advances beyond the superficial, quantitative aspects of value.

It is in Marx's concept of commodity fetishism (formulated in its clearest form in *Kapital*) that we find the key to understanding the social content (as opposed to the quantitative aspects) of value, and by the same token, all the misconceptions of bourgeois economics concerning the capitalist mode of production. But more than that, it is central to understanding what Marx meant by the abolition of capital.

For Marx there is 'an enigma' attached to commodities that arises out of their value form: that the products of labour appears to possess natural properties independent of the labour which produced them. It means that:

the social relations connecting the labour of one private individual (or group) with the labour of another, seem to the producers, not direct social relations between individuals at work, but what they really are: material relations between persons and social relations between things (Marx, 1957, p.46).

The fetishistic world of commodities, based on their existence as exchange values, arises from 'the peculiar social quality of labour'. This is 'a type of social organization in which the process of production is the master of mankind, and in which mankind has not yet mastered the process of production' (Marx, 1957, p.56). From this fetishism arises the view that value is a natural property of things (commodities, money and capital), that labour depends on capital for its existence and realization, and that wages, profit and interest are the necessary (and eternal) forms which productive activity must take. Bourgeois political economy and its related forms of socialism is premised on this failure to see labour in any other form than the alienated form it takes in the capital relation.

The analysis of commodity fetishism (ie., of the value form) thus further develops the analysis of alienated labour begun in the Manuscripts. Rubin points out that: 'the theory of fetishism is, per se, the basis of Marx's entire economic system and in particular his theory of value' (Rubin, 1972, p.31). Regarding commodity fetishism and the value form as simply two aspects of the same phenomenon has, as we shall see, important implications for the liberation of labour, for the revolution against capital.

Vulgar economy (ie., political economy after Ricardo) and the forms of socialism which rest upon it (seeking to regulate and modify, as opposed to abolishing, capitalist markets) remains imprisoned within the reified conceptual limits of the capital relation. Insofar as it only considers the quantitative relations between fetishized categories, it can neither arrive at an understanding of the production of value, or grasp the historically limited nature of the capitalist mode of production. This explains why it is limited to theorizing the realm of market appearances, and can only grasp labour as it grasps the other factors of production – as a thing.

Lukács, in his *History and Class Consciousness*, similarly emphasizes the importance of Marx's presentation of commodity fetishism. The effects of commodity fetishism are not, he argues, confined to the sphere of production, but permeate the whole of social life. Lukács reminds us that commodity exchange is the universal structuring principle of capitalist society, and by virtue of this fact social reality presents itself in reified form:

Just as the capitalist system continuously produces and reproduces itself economically on higher levels, the structure of reification progressively sinks more deeply, more fatefully and more definitely into the consciousness of man (Lukács, 1971, p.93).

This 'veil' of reification generates an experience and perception of reality as separate from and autonomous of the social activity that produces it.

Reification is not a question of perception alone, for it reflects the lived experience of those in a commodity producing society that have no control over the means of existence. It therefore corresponds to the reality of alienated labour.

However, to see the value form of labour as unbreakable, to see fetishism as absolute, is to regard it undialectically, to overlook the fact that it is in the first place the result of man's *own* creative activity – the self-imposed objectification of human subjectivity. Yet even under the capital form labour is still by its very nature reflexive (coming to know its powers and possibilities). Since the composition of the 'collective labourer' is constantly changing, labour is incorporated within capital (as labour power), but at the same time is forced to assert its independence from capital (as class struggle); labour is therefore (and must always be) the contradictory unity of these contending polarities.

The importance of the concept of commodity-fetishism/reification lies in the character of the revolution required to overcome its effects. This revolution cannot be limited to a change in political relations, nor can it be a revolution carried out on behalf of the producers, for this would leave the source of reification intact. The communist revolution must be a revolution that abolishes the value form, the world of commodities, the buying and selling of labour power, the society based on the accumulation of capital. It is therefore not just a question of constructing a society where free time (from labour) is maximised, but one where the very nature of productive activity is the result of the freely associated producers, and the existing form of the distinction between work and free time is abolished. Communism is the free association of the direct producers.

In the *Grundrisse* (written between 1857 and 1858) we see a rehearsal of *Kapital*. In the former the language of the *Manuscripts* surfaces repeatedly, but alongside the more developed categories that will structure the analysis of *Kapital*. In the latter, the vocabulary of alienation is largely absent, but the dialectic of alienated labour remains integral to the whole structure of the work. In the analysis of the commodity it is therefore easy to overlook the unity of the theory of the value form and alienated labour (fetishism). When Marx considered the originality of his work to lie in the analysis of concrete and abstract labour 'the pivot on which a clear comprehension of political economy turns' (Marx, 1957, p.48), he indicated that it is the opposition of alienated (exploited) to free labour which provides the very moving principle of capital. Capital is not therefore a self-contained force, standing in an external relation to labour, and unfolding according to its own essential logic (in other words it is not a 'thing'). It is the impulse of producing individuals to free association that is

the real driving force behind capital's continuous revolutionizing of the conditions of production, a revolutionizing whose principal aim is to prevent working class control over the labour process. The itinerary of capital is thus nothing other than the continuing story of the antagonism inherent in the capital relation, the root of its very forms of development.

In *Kapital*, Marx outlines a dialectical derivation of the forms of value – commodity, money, capital. The development of the money form originates in the simple contrast between use value and exchange value, providing the means whereby the different products of labour are equated (ie., converted into commodities). In other words the most fundamental contradiction of the value form of production lies in its basic cell - the commodity. And this contradiction is nothing else but an expression of the condition of alienated labour - labour which produces value. This is the contradiction that is the moving force of the genesis-development of capital: that between concrete labour (producing use values) and abstract labour (producing exchange values). Through abstract labour/exchange value the universality and productivity of human labour is developed, but this form of labour is at the same time the denial of production for use (concrete labour). The logic of the struggle for freely determined labour (for the production of use values) against alienated labour (for the production of value) leads to the necessity of overcoming the value form. This historical dialectic results in the reuniting of the conscious control of labour by the workers themselves with the universal character of labour (developed by the capitalist market), ie., social production regulated not by the law of value (the market) but by conscious, collective planning. This higher stage of social production is one in which, having abolished capital, the proletariat abolishes itself as wage labour.

A society of freely associated social labour is thus a decommodified society based on the negation of 'work' (as alienated labour), and therefore capital. Human labour power no longer takes the form of wage labour producing exchange values. It implies a completely different form of the regulation of the labour time of society – conscious direction of the production of use values by the direct producers themselves. It is thus the first truly human form of social organization, because for the first time in history humankind places itself in conscious control of the means of its existence. This was the kind of society presupposed by Marx's dialectic of labour. This is why for Marx the theoretical stance of Communists is not an abstract ideal, but rather the expression of the 'practical-critical' activity of the proletariat. The two aspects stand in a unity, and can have no historical significance considered separately.

Marx's work must be grasped in its unity. The analysis of alienated labour (first presented in the 1844 *Manuscripts*) is continued and developed – through the notion of commodity fetishism (reification) and the value forms of labour, commodity, money, capital – in *Kapital*. Despite the problems posed by the incomplete state of *Kapital*,¹²⁸ the inner connection of this presentation is implicitly provided by the dialectic of labour. The mode of production, the life of capital which we find analyzed in *Kapital*, is premised on the fact of alienated labour. Attempts to identify in *Kapital* a self-contained and detached exposition of 'Marxist' scientific method invariably divorce Marx from his earlier writings and end up defining Marx the 'scientist' (theory) from Marx the communist (practice). Marx's analysis in *Kapital* is inseparable from the dialectic of labour of the early writings, and only on this basis was it possible for Marx to penetrate the logic of capital in the way that he did.¹²⁹

The mode of existence of capital, although the product of human labour, dominates the producers and reifies the whole of social life. But the value form which depends on alienated labour, is also the form which socializes labour on a global scale, and does so under the negative dialectic of the class struggle for free labour, for communism. True to Hegel's notion of contradiction, for Marx, capital is the one-sided universalization of labour, one-sided because as abstract (value producing) labour, it is an alienated universality. Truly universal labour is free labour (free because consciously determined) as communism, and is the sublation of the contradictory unity of opposites that constitutes capital. That communism should negate capital, is the potential dialectical transformation of one social form into another, the possibility of the former contained entirely within the existence of the latter. The significance of communism lies only in this.

¹²⁸ Lebowitz (1992) has argued that Marx's analysis in *Kapital* remained incomplete due to the absence of the book he intended to write on 'wage-labour'. So while *Kapital* provided a (necessarily) one-sided 'study of the logic of capital', encouraging a 'determinist' interpretation of Marxism, the missing work would have developed a 'political economy of the working class' which focussed more centrally on the struggle of labour against and beyond capital. Lebowitz makes a convincing case that the concepts necessary for this project 'are only latent in *Kapital*'.

¹²⁹ Oishi (2001), in a close textual analysis of Marx's writings, argues that the method employed in Marx's later works (*The Grundrisse* and *Das Kapital*) is the developed form of the 'seed' established in the 'early' works (the 1844 *Manuscripts* and *The Poverty of Philosophy*), what Marx referred to as the 'general result' deriving from his critique of Hegel's dialectic and Classical value theory.

Theory and Practice

We have seen how Marx resolved the subject-object dualism which he found in Hegel and Feuerbach. The problem of the relationship of consciousness to being (mind to matter) was but an expression of the stance philosophical consciousness adopted towards its object (the world) – a contemplative one (in essence the separation of theory and practice). Marx saw in Hegel a dialectical ontology which transcended this epistemological dualism, but which nevertheless remained on the ground of philosophy. Feuerbach similarly fails to break free from the philosophical bonds of a contemplative materialism. Marx's decisive break consisted in reuniting subject and object (consciousness and being) by transcending philosophy as such. Discarding the contemplative stance meant the uniting of theory and practice, a reunification made possible by his discovery of the struggle of the proletariat.

The Marxism of the 2nd International, associated principally with Engels, Kautsky and Plekhanov, was the first 'orthodoxy' after Marx. Spanning the years between 1890 and the First World War, in its ranks could be counted such diverse figures as Bernstein, Lenin, Luxemburg and Pannekoek. From the left-wing which split away from it in 1915 at Kienthal, came the forces which cohered to form the Communist 3rd International, founded in 1919. This orthodoxy was a Marxism without a dialectics of labour. The absence was a consequence of several factors: the influence of Engels' positivist conception of Marx's method, the unfinished nature of *Kapital* which encouraged a 'scientist' reading of 'Marxism', and the character of the period in which this orthodoxy emerged.

The consequence of a Marxism without a dialectics of labour meant that the unity of subject and object (which for Marx were distinct but also in unity), of consciousness and being, and therefore of theory and practice, was sundered, allowing the dualism to re-emerge. Once consciousness was separated from being, the notion of a dialectic of change could be restricted to any one side of the dualism. In the new 'Dialectical Materialism',¹³⁰ it became a mechanical scheme of development, a general law of change associated in the first instance with the object side, with nature, and

¹³⁰ In the Soviet dominated (orthodox) interpretation of Marxism, Dialectical Materialism ('Diamat') provided a philosophic-scientific interpretation of reality, and on the basis of the dialectical laws revealed by it, Marx's science of history (historical materialism) was formulated ('Histomat').

therewith a history without a subject (and here Engels' conception of a dialectic of nature was critical). The effect of this was to reintroduce the philosophical stance of eighteenth century materialism (of Feuerbach): mind is opposed to matter in a contemplative relationship. While Marx's unity of consciousness and being was based on his view that social consciousness is nothing but conscious being, the life process of living individuals, 'Diamat' reintroduced the idea of theory as something separate from its object. The task of scientific (Marxist) theory was therefore conceived as the acquisition of a knowledge of the object, in a natural-scientific, positivist sense. History becomes reified as a process of natural evolution, knowable from the outside through a body of theory that stands independently of the subject. Thus Marxism as a dualist epistemology was reinstated.

Several well known and recognizable features of 2nd International Marxism (and as we shall see in an even more exaggerated form in 3rd International Marxism) spring from this reified philosophical dualism. Marxism becomes a scientific theory of inevitable social evolution, which can exist quite independently of the proletariat and its struggle. Theory is applied to the proletariat, rather than deriving from its struggle. We see this taken to its logical conclusion in Hilferding's distinction between fact (objectivity) and value (subjectivity), and his claim that Marxism can be construed as a value-free science of social phenomena independent of the class struggle. This opens the road to a division of labour within Marxist theory parallel to that of the social sciences, and Marxist philosophy, economics, and sociology become legitimate spheres of autonomous intellectual research.

If Marxism as a whole is thus reified, the conception of the dialectic is also reified. Social evolution is regarded as a process of natural history operating independently of human will and consciousness (Marxism is the social equivalent of Darwinism). The categories of the 'economy' (productive forces) and 'politics' are treated as self-constituting, with the 'economic' determining the political in a mechanical fashion. Laws of capital and capitalism are erected independently of class struggle. Labour (human practical-critical activity) as the site and source of the dialectic disappears, and the proletariat becomes again the object of theory, rather than its source. If this is the relation of class to theory, the same relation holds between class and party and class and state. In each it is substitutionist.

A bureaucratic and instrumental relation between the party and class is established. The party as the possessor of scientific consciousness is contrasted to a proletariat limited by false consciousness. The goal is a

rationally planned society (socialism) that will be achieved on behalf of the proletariat by the party. Once theory is separated from practice this is inevitable to some degree. It results in a conception of socialism as a rationalistic alternative that emanates from scientific theory (and the guardians of it) rather than the expression of the practical-critical activity of the proletariat.

The influence of social democratic Marxism on the major theoreticians of the 3rd International was substantial and direct. Lenin for example, considered Plekhanov the ‘father’ of an orthodox Marxism which formed the basis for his own thinking. In Plekhanov we find all the features of the Marxism described above: a reversion to a pre-Marx philosophical materialism, with its dualism of subject (consciousness) and object (being), and the absence of a dialectic of labour. Korsch (1970) and Pannekoek (1975) identified exactly the same mode of thought in Lenin. They argued that Lenin’s materialism (expounded in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, which appeared in 1908) was dualist, resting on the acceptance of objective being (matter) as independent of consciousness (mind). In this reflectionist materialism matter was given epistemological primacy over consciousness, directly contradicting Marx’s view (so crucial to his dialectic) of the dialectical unity of consciousness and being (that consciousness *is* conscious being). Lenin’s theory of knowledge therefore militates against the unity of theory and practice we find in Marx. His conception of theory is one in which it stands in a contemplative relation to the object, to which it is applied from the outside, practice being the result of this application. This is illustrated in Lenin’s 1902 work *What is to be Done?* The thesis of that book is an elaboration of Plekhanov’s view that theory (‘social democratic consciousness’) is brought to the workers from the ‘outside’ by Marxist intellectuals. Workers are only capable by themselves of generating ‘trade union consciousness’. The implication of this view is that Marxism as theory is no longer the conscious expression of the ‘practical-critical activity’ of the proletariat, having been separated from the reality that it seeks to change. Here is the germ of the later substitutionism of the Bolshevik party in power!¹³¹

Pannekoek described the philosophical basis of Lenin’s Marxism as a ‘middle class materialism’, a mixture of the contemplative materialism of the eighteenth century and a substitutionist political method. This, he argued, flowed from Lenin’s apprehension of Marxism in the context of

¹³¹ For a critique of Lenin’s *What is to be Done?*, and a more general analysis of the relationship between consciousness, class and party, see International Communist Current pamphlet No. 3.

'backward', semi-feudal, Russian conditions. For Pannekoek, Bolshevism was never a Marxism in the 'western' sense of expressing the communist impulse of the proletariat to directly overthrow capital.

If the foundation of Marxism is the unity of theory and practice, its relationship to the class struggle at any point in time is critical. The essentials of Marx's materialist method (historical materialism) were worked out in the 1840's, during which period the emerging struggles of English and French workers led Marx and Engels to anticipate the proletarian revolution. This real movement enabled them to express in theory the independence of the proletarian class from the peasantry and bourgeoisie. The clearest programmatic expression of this is the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848. The second half of the century in Western Europe witnessed the organic growth of proletarian organizations (trades unions, workers parties), expressing above all the desire for the improvement and inclusion of the proletariat in bourgeois society (democracy). This was the seedbed for the emergence of electorally based reformist workers parties (of which German Social Democracy became the archetype). But the intensification of class struggle in the late years of the century, and up to 1914 (mass strikes, the growth of syndicalism, soviets), led to a growing contradiction between 2nd international Marxism and workers militancy. This found theoretical expression in the emergence of communist 'lefts' (Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Pannekoek, Gorter), prefiguring a radical readjustment of theory to the needs of the revolutionary period opening up.

In Russia the contradiction between theory and the class struggle was arguably even sharper. Russian 'backwardness' (the absence of a bourgeoisie and associated democratic political forms) pushed bourgeois-democratic tasks to the fore (for Mensheviks and Bolsheviks alike), while at the same time forcing Russian workers to adopt the most advanced organizational forms: workers councils (soviets) as the embryonic form of workers self-government. This resulted in Lenin's strategic conception of a bourgeois-democratic revolution led by the proletariat (but not necessarily leading to socialism), which he adhered to until 1917. In his 1917 pamphlet *The State and Revolution*, Lenin signaled the de facto abandonment of the old Bolshevik strategy by posing directly and immediately the socialist tasks of a workers state. This in fact only brought him into line with Trotsky's long standing strategy of a proletarian led socialist revolution (the theory of permanent revolution).

Bolshevism was therefore ultimately a contradictory phenomenon. Under Lenin it was responsive to and expressive of the most advanced forms of workers struggle and organization while retaining the belief that the Russian revolution would necessarily be a bourgeois one. Lenin's

greatness (despite his theoretical limitations) lay in his ability to programmatically adapt to the actuality of the revolution (particularly during 1917). But Bolshevism also contained the theoretical baggage of Kautskyism, and the substitutionism inherent in its state socialist methodology came to the fore following the seizure of power. In the circumstances of the defeat of the German (European) revolution and the ensuing isolation of the USSR, the expressions of independent workers power in Russia (in the factory committees, soviets and trade unions) were subordinated to the Bolshevik state-party apparatus. Dismantling workers control of industry and introducing state command was justified by the Bolsheviks by the need to stem the decline of productivity. While it is true that war had taken the most class conscious workers to the front and left industry close to collapse (the contradiction of a revolution in an isolated country) Bolshevik thinking remained firmly within a state socialist mindset. The Bolshevik leadership announced in 1919:

Economics remains economics and it has its own inexorable logic. It is quite immaterial who manages the economy; the only thing that matters is whether the management is in capable and diligent hands (Bunyan, 1967, p.69).¹³²

The years between 1917-23 were a high point of proletarian struggle characterized by the ubiquity of the soviet form of struggle and self-government. Theory most closely expressed the new levels of struggle in the left communist and council communist currents that cohered on the left of the newly formed Communist International.¹³³ Not only in Russia, but in Germany in 1917-18, and Italy between 1918 and 1920, factory councils and committees sprang up as organs of workers power that directly challenged the bourgeois state, and in some cases temporarily seized power. Associated with such figures as Pannekoek, Gorter, Rühle, Korsch and Gramsci, the experience of the councils represented not just a prefiguration, but the actuality of workers self rule. In by-passing the intermediation of party and even trade union, the council form expressed the communist impulse to directly control the labour process in the interests

¹³² For a critique of Bolshevik practice during the revolution from a left/council communist perspective see, Brinton (1970), Mattick (1978), Council Communist Pamphlet No. 2 (1984), 'Escape' document (n.d.). For a detailed study, see Sirianni (1982). See also Aufheben (1999) for an examination of the extent to which the substitutionism of the Bolsheviks was due to their political method, as opposed to the isolation of the revolution in a 'backward' country.

¹³³ See Aufheben (1999) for a detailed examination of the German, Dutch and Italian Left Communist currents.

of the producers themselves. As the German Communist Workers Party (KAPD) programme of 1920 put it:

The factory committee is the economic precondition for the construction of a communist community. The political form of organization for a communist community is the Council system. The Factory Committees defend the idea that all political power must be exercised by the Executive Committee of the Councils (Schechter, 1994, p.81).

A self-managing system of workers councils of course would not, of itself, guarantee the abolition of wage labour, and therefore the rule of capital, but given the Marxist view that this can only ever be accomplished by the producers themselves, Council Communism avoided the separation of revolutionary change (as political practice at the level of the state) from the class which alone could achieve it. In contrast to state socialism, it disintermediated the party, and therefore the 'socialist' state, as the basis of socialist transition, and posed communism as the immediate task of the revolution. In other words it re-established the unity of theory and practice so central to Marx's thought.¹³⁴

By the mid-1920s, the ascendancy of Stalinism in Russia reduced the 3rd International to being the foreign policy arm of the Russian state. In theory its 'official' Marxism consolidated the determinism and objectivism of 2nd International Marxism, while in practice it rested on the atomization of the Russian working class, and the subordination of the national Communist Parties to Moscow. The Left Opposition around Trotsky eventually advocated (when their reform strategy foundered) a political revolution to remove the bureaucratic caste while at the same time defending the socialist property relations established by the October revolution. For Trotsky, the ruling caste presided over by Stalin remained in essence a proletarian phenomenon (because based on nationalized property relations), and he dubbed the Russian political economy a degenerated workers state. In the absence of the law of value, the self-interest of this caste lay in preventing any restoration of capitalism while at the same time depriving the working class of any political power. The great contradiction at the heart of Trotsky's Marxism was the belief that he held to the end of his life, that the rule of the proletariat could express itself through the rule of a bureaucracy, while not completely abnegating the class character of the state (ie., a workers state). What Trotsky could not fully accept was what the left and council communists were pointing out by

¹³⁴ For the experience of the workers councils, see *Workers Voice* (1968), Rubel and Crump (1987), and Horvat, Markovic, et al. (1975).

the early 1920s – that since nothing remained of the working class revolution of 1917, Russia could in no sense be described a workers state in any form.

While the strength of the Trotskyist programme was its rejection of Stalin's 'socialism-in-one-country' (in favour of a strategy of international revolution), its weakness lay in its reification of the category of the 'economic'. The economy, conceptualized as property relations, could be designated as basically 'socialist' even if the direct producers were deprived of any power (a lack which Trotsky argued could be rectified by a political revolution to oust the bureaucracy).¹³⁵ Despite the vehement critique which Trotskyism levelled at the political reformism of Kautskyism, in its fetishism of nationalized property, Trotskyism never departed fundamentally from the 2nd International's conception of socialist economy. The view that socialism could be represented by social forces or property relations in the absence of workers power was only an expression of the separation of theory and practice (ie., substitutionism) at the heart of its methodology. In this respect, Trotskyism helped consolidate the myth that the Russian working class had actually held economic and political power before the Stalinist thermidor. But as the council communists and anarcho-communists pointed out, a workers state – in the form of workers management of the means of production through a system of workers councils – in other words a Commune state – never at any point existed in Russia. For the Trotskyists, defence of the gains of October therefore came to mean – state planning plus democratically functioning soviets. While Trotsky in the late 1920s opposed democratic planning to Stalin's forced industrialization and collectivization, workers management never had a central place in the Trotskyist platform (Trotsky's responsibility for the militarization of labour in 1920, and his general indifference to the question of workers management has never been fully acknowledged by his

¹³⁵ Sean Matgamna (1998), in his introduction to *The Fate of the Russian Revolution*, criticises Trotsky for constructing a 'metaphysics of the nationalised economy', based on the idea that the statified property of the USSR was sufficient to define it as a workers state. Matgamna argues that there is in Trotsky's thinking a logic to the forward march of the productive forces under state property which leads to socialism even if the working class does not hold power, a logic which was bequeathed to the post-Trotsky Fourth International. The significance of Matgamna's introduction is that he takes the critique of Trotsky and mainstream Trotskyism as far as it is possible to go while indentifying with and remaining part of that tradition.

followers). In the sphere of dialectics, Trotsky was an objectivist, in no significant respect different from the orthodoxy of Plekhanov and Lenin.¹³⁶

Despite the heroic anti-Stalinism of Trotsky's 4th International, it never broke decisively with the statist, substitutionist methodology of the 2nd and 3rd Internationals. In the post 1945 period, this resulted in a persistent tendency to seek revolutionary advance through non-proletarian forces (leftward leaning Stalinists, social democrats and nationalists), and the identification of a family of deformed workers states in Eastern Europe, China, etc., after the Second World War. It therefore never consistently championed the political autonomy of the proletariat, and remained in the last analysis a left variant of the state socialism that so dominated the twentieth century.

Conclusion

While Hegel understood the significance of labour in the making of history, his dialectic ultimately resided in a supra-human Spirit. In Marx this dialectic is demystified and identified with the class struggle over the control of social labour. What became the 'Marxist' orthodoxy of the 2nd and 3rd Internationals was premised on what Jakubowski (1976) has called an abandonment of the dialectic. Diamat-Histomat represented a regression to a point antedating Marx's revolution against philosophy. It was nothing less than the reintroduction into Marxism of the philosophical dualism between subject and object (and Marxism became, among other things, a philosophy!).¹³⁷ In separating the human subject from the objective world (Nature), consciousness from being, Marx's conception of revolutionary practice as the coincidence of the changing of circumstances with self-transformation, was erased. This paved the way for a dialectic which resided in either a reified subject or a reified object. Whether this expressed itself in an objectivist-determinist or a subjectivist-voluntarist brand of Marxism, the programmatic result was the same – the separation of theory and practice, the substituting of the party for the self-activity of the

¹³⁶ See Pomper (1986) and Trotsky (1970) for Trotsky's conception of and application of dialectics respectively.

¹³⁷ See McInnes (1972) for a convincing account of Marx the 'anti-philosopher'. McInnes shows how the majority of post-Marx (Marxist) theoreticians remystified Marx by refashioning his work as philosophy. In particular, Lukács, Gramsci and Marcuse attempt to reinstate the very metaphysics that Marx sought to debunk. McInnes points out that their endeavours were a revival of the Young Hegelian project of 'realising' philosophy.

proletariat, the experience of which has constituted the history of ‘state socialism’ in the twentieth century.

Without a dialectic of labour the categories of labour and capital in Marxist theory were reified. They represented entities in discrete separation. As things, as externally constituted opposites, their relation was one of contingent rather than necessary antagonism. Such fixity crystallized their permanence: the natural requirement for capital and the necessity of wage labour, a naturalness sanctified by bourgeois economics and mimicked in turn by ‘Marxist’ economics. This left the only possibility for change in the terms of the opposition between them. If Marxism as epistemology was the logical (philosophic) corollary of this reified world view, Marxism as reformism was its political result.

In the aftermath of the Russian revolution, Marxism came to be defined by, and identified with, the twin strands of state socialism: Stalinism and social democracy. Left/council communism cohered at the high point of proletarian struggle (principally in Russia, Germany and Italy), between 1917 and 1923. The Left/council communists espoused a Marxism that saw in the experience of the workers councils a vindication of Marx’s original conception of the unity of theory and practice. The stage reached by the class struggle during and immediately after the Russian revolution, a struggle that implicitly constituted the struggle for communism, posed a historically specific resolution of the institutionalized divide between theory and practice, programme and consciousness, party and class. The workers struggle therefore came into conflict with a Marxist orthodoxy that remained rooted in these divisions.

With the defeat and retreat of this revolutionary wave, Left/council communism became isolated from the working class. Its isolation persisted to the extent that the working class struggle remained confined to the limits set by the ‘official’ labour (Stalinist or social democratic) organizations. State socialist hegemony over the labour movement constituted ‘the prevention of communism’.¹³⁸ the proletariat east and west was subordinated to workers parties, workers states and the regime of work.¹³⁹ The separation of theory and practice was institutionalized in the form of the official labour movement, and orthodox Marxism became a reified

¹³⁸ A phrase used by the journal *Radical Chains* to denote the service provided to capital by both social democracy and Stalinism.

¹³⁹ See Harry Cleaver’s definition of ‘socialism’ (in his Introduction to Negri 1991, p. xxvi) as ‘an advanced form of capitalism’ which retains the planned imposition of work (ie., the ‘extraction of surplus work and the subordination of needs to accumulation’).

ideology in the service of the preservation of reified social relations. Despite this, the living force of Marx's dialectic was confirmed again and again in the 80 years following the Russian revolution: In Spain in the 1930s, Hungary and Poland in 1956, France in 1968, Italy in 1969, Portugal in 1975, workers spontaneously created their own 'councils' to express their immediate needs in opposition to, and therefore by-passing, the official labour organizations.

The rapid disintegration of Stalinism after 1989 signified not the death of Marxism but rather the 'rejection of work' under barracks-style 'communism'. Likewise the parallel exhaustion of social democratic reformism signifies the end of the delusion of democratising capital. State socialism has therefore in the course of the century eroded in both its forms. The standpoint of left/council communism (embodied in its German, Dutch and Italian groupings) offered the possibility of regenerating the liberatory core of Marx; for the truth of this tradition of Marxism is that the dialectic does not have to be reinvented, but only has to be recognised as the irrepressible future in the present, and given theoretical and programmatic form. This current produced many contradictory and incomplete theoretical positions – on the nature of the Russian revolution, the analysis of its degeneration, the nature of Stalinism, and the relationship between the organization of revolutionaries and the proletariat. But its historical significance lay in its rejection of the reified relationship that was then crystallising between institutionalised Marxism and the working class.¹⁴⁰

Contemporary Marxists must not 'fetishize' the experience of the councils into a timeless template for revolutionary change, or accept uncritically the anti-partyist bias of ultra-councilist positions (eg. Rühle), which can relegate revolutionaries to a position of intellectual voyeurism. The composition of the working class changes and develops, as does its organizations and the class struggle. The point is rather to apprehend in what way the council experience pointed beyond the substitutionist mainstream of Marxist orthodoxy for a whole historical period, how it posed the possibility of uniting theory and practice at a higher level than hitherto. Aspects of the theory and sentiment of the Left/council communist position was reproduced in the 1960s and 1970s by a current of class

¹⁴⁰ See the journals *Aufheben* and *Radical Chains* for critiques of the left/council communist tradition. For the distinction between Left-communism and Council Communism, see International Communist Current (2001). This distinction, although important, cannot be explored within the space of this article.

struggle/Autonomist Marxism.¹⁴¹ Central to this outlook has been the search for those class forces and actions which promote the breaking down of the reified practices and perceptions which govern social existence under the rule of capital, in particular the separation of work and non-work on which bourgeois political economy depends. Workers councils (autonomous of party and trades unions) are in this view only a stage, a bridge, to the revolutionizing of the whole of life. Focusing exclusively on the point of production would on this view lead to a narrow ‘productivism’, which would, in the last analysis, constitute a barrier to the final overthrow of the power of capital. In contrast to Bordigism, which ‘always regarded communism as a programme to be put into practice after the seizure of power’ (Dauvé, 2000, p.47),¹⁴² hence its party-ist emphasis, autonomist Marxism has stressed that the revolution must be conceived as the immediate communization of the whole social life, the breaking down of all the separations which flow from the basic division between work (as economy) and non-work: production and consumption, economics and politics, the realm of ‘necessity’ and the realm of ‘freedom’. The point about this ‘red thread of Marxism’ is not that, in any of its manifestations (over the last century), a definitive and finished alternative to the objectivist orthodoxy is to be found,¹⁴³ but rather that in its interventions the principle that communism must be the act of the working class was the starting point of its theory and practice.

¹⁴¹ An important expression of which was the Italian ‘Autonomia’ of the late 1960s/early 1970s, a movement of workers, women and students that was autonomous of the mainstream workers parties and trades unions. The struggle (in particular its ‘refusal of work’) was read by Negri and others as expressing ‘immanent communism’ (‘class valorization’). For an account of this see, the Editor’s Introduction to Negri (1991). See also Dyer-Witheford (1999), who includes the autonomist perspective as part of a ‘red thread’ of Marxism that has variously been called ‘class struggle’, ‘subjectivist’, or ‘open’ Marxism. For the latter, see Bonefeld et al. (1992 and 1995).

¹⁴² See also International Communist Current Pamphlet No. 3 for a critique of Bordigism.

¹⁴³ Antonio Negri’s brand of autonomist Marxism may be criticised for its simplistic identification of spontaneous class struggle with communism.

References

- Aufheben* (1999), 'What was the USSR? Part 3: Left Communism and the Russian Revolution', no. 8, pp.24–44.
- Beyond Kronstadt (The Bolsheviks in Power), (n.d.), published by *Escape*, London.
- Bonfeld, W., Gunn. R. and K. Psychopedis (1992-1995), *Open Marxism*, 3 volumes, Pluto, London.
- Brinton, M. (1970), *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control 1917-1921*, Solidarity, London.
- Bunyan, J. (1967), *The Origin of Forced Labour in the Soviet State 1917-1921*, The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore.
- Council Communist Pamphlet No. 2 (1984), *The Experience of the Factory Committees in the Russian Revolution*.
- Dyer-Witheford, N. (1999), *Cyber Marx*, University of Illinois Press, Chicago.
- Dauve, G. (2000), 'Back to the Situationist International', in *Aufheben* no. 9, p. 47.
- Horvat, B., Markovic, M. and R. Supek (eds) (1975), *Self-Governing Socialism (A Reader)*, vol 1, International Arts and Sciences Press, New York.
- International Communist Current (n.d.), 'Communist Organizations and Class Consciousness', Pamphlet no 3.
- International Communist Current (2001), *The Dutch and German Communist Left*, Porcupine Press, London.
- Jakubowski, F. (1976), *Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism*, Allison and Busby, London.
- Korsch, K. (1970), *Marxism and Philosophy*, New Left Books, London.
- Lebowitz, M. (1992), *Beyond Capital*, MacMillan, London.
- Lukács, G. (1971), *History and Class Consciousness*, Merlin, London.
- McInnes, N. (1972), *The Western Marxists*, Alcove, London.
- Marx, K. (1992), *Early Writings*, Penguin, London
- Marx, K. (1971), *Early Texts*, translated and edited by David McLellan, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Marx, K. (1969), *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Progress Publishers, Moscow.
- Marx, K. (1957), *Capital*, vol 1, translated from the 4th Edition by Eden and Cedar Paul, Lawrence and Wishart, London.
- Matgamna, S. (ed.) (1998), *The Fate of the Russian Revolution*, Phoenix, London.
- Mattick, P. (1978), *Anti-Bolshevik Communism*, Merlin, London.
- Negri, A. (1991), *Marx Beyond Marx*, Autonomedia/Pluto, New York and London.
- Oishi, T. (2001), *The Unknown Marx*, Pluto, London.
- Pannekoek, A. (1975), *Lenin as Philosopher*, Merlin, London.
- Pomper, P. (1986), *Trotsky's Notebooks 1933-35*, Columbia University Press, New York.
- Rubel, M. and J. Crump (eds.) *Non-Market Socialism in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, MacMillan, London.
- Rubin, I.I. (1972), *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, Black Rose Press, Detroit.

- Schechter, D. (1994), *Radical Theories Paths Beyond Marxism and Social Democracy*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.
- Sirianni, C. (1982), *Workers Control and Socialist Democracy. The Soviet Experience*, Verso, London.
- Trotsky, L. (1970), *In Defence of Marxism*, Pathfinder, London.
- Workers Voice (1968), *The Origins of the Movement for Workers Councils in Germany 1918-29*.

Part II

**What is to be Learned? Contemporary
Capitalism and the Politics of Negation**

Chapter 6

The Command of Money-Capital and the Latin American Crises

Alberto R. Bonnet

Introduction

At the current time, more than three decades since the eruption of crisis put an end to the post-war capitalist order, the start-point for anti-capitalist critique is that we live (or, more to the point, *survive*) in a new and distinct period of capitalist development.¹⁴⁴

Lenin was certainly one of the first theorists who dared to argue that capitalism went through distinct periods in its development (cf. McDonough, 1995; 1998). In effect, the phases that Marx had identified in *Capital* (manufacturing, large-scale industry) can, as such, be better understood as formative moments of original European capitalism rather than periods of global capitalist development. Lenin's idea that, towards the end of the nineteenth century or the beginning of the twentieth century, capitalism had entered into an 'imperialist' period (Lenin, 1977) inaugurated a long tradition of attempts to periodize capitalist development. Great crises and wars, profound changes in the correlation of social forces between classes, moments of accelerated technological innovation or radical restructuring of the world market, would from then on be associated with the emergence of a new period of capitalist development.

Numerous Marxists in this way identified a new period of capitalism in the period following the Second World War. From Mandel's 'late capitalism', through Boccará's 'state monopoly capitalism' and Aglietta's notion of 'Fordism', to Sweezy's renovated 'monopoly capitalism'; all the above highlight in their own way the specificities of post-war capitalism. However, whilst in some cases (re-vindicating their 'Leninist orthodoxies') they emphasised continuities with respect to the 'imperialist' capitalism

¹⁴⁴ Editors' Note: This chapter was completed in summer 2001, before the Argentinean 'crisis of command'.

studied by Lenin, these post-war Marxists nonetheless dared to argue that the novelties of post-war capitalism were of at least a similar magnitude to the continuities, and thereby worthy of sustained critical analysis.

Naturally, this does not imply that contemporary analysts should be content with one of these aforementioned interpretations of post-war capitalism or with the Leninist interpretation of 'imperialist' capitalism. This contribution does not intend to review any of these interpretations. But, to take an example, Lenin's theory of imperialism is profoundly questionable with respect to two of its fundamental pillars: first, his conception of monopoly (which supposes the abolition of the law of value on a world market scale) and, second, his conception of the imperialist state (which presupposes an instrumentalist vision of the state). It is necessary for us, then, to develop a critical analysis of contemporary capitalism.

In effect, we live in a period of capitalist development distinct from that associated with the transition between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and that of the second half of the twentieth century. Its origin is to be found precisely in the crisis that brought post-war capitalism to an end, that is to say, in the rainbow of social struggles that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s that included the rejection of work in the large automated factories of advanced capitalism, the rebellions against the Stalinist bureaucracies of Eastern Europe, and the national liberation struggles of the colonial South: struggles that were expressed in the form of a crisis that negated any possibility of a return to the capitalism of the post-war period. Thirty years later, however, this contemporaneous capitalism in which we survive is already as old as the 'thirty glorious years' of post-war capitalism, which, to tell the truth, were neither 'thirty' nor 'glorious'.

Various economic phenomena can be invoked to support the distinction between the capitalism of our days and post-war capitalism. A slowdown in the average growth rates of production, investment, employment, productivity and wages, for example, which contrasts notably with the accelerated expansion of trade and capital flows on a global level. Moreover, there has been a greater extension and integration of the world market, facilitated by the collapse of the bureaucratic regimes of the East, alongside a persistent polarization of this world market centred on the regions associated with the United States, Europe and Japan. Indeed, contemporary capitalism is characterised by marked differentiation between the long-term economic performances of these poles and, concurrently, periodic episodes of deep recession with a more or less generalized scope.

However, the phenomenon that is most significant for making the distinction between contemporary capitalism and post-war capitalism is the

expansion and socialization of debt. There can be little doubt about the extreme importance of this factor. To appreciate this point it is enough to cast a glance at the sheer magnitude of the sums involved, at the nature of financial instruments, at the behaviour of the actors involved, and at the functioning of the respective markets. Nevertheless, interpreting this phenomenon and understanding the role that it plays within contemporary capitalism is a source of much disagreement. These problems are the theme of this article.

To explore the nature and role played by this expansion and socialization of debt means to explore the specific manner in which class struggle is developing today. In effect, it is necessary to dialectically interpret the process of debt expansion and socialization as an expression of the antagonism between capital and labour. In other words, it must be seen as a result of the wave of class struggle that led to the crisis of post-war capitalism and, at the same time, as a capitalist response to that wave. As a capitalist response, this process instigated a new mode of the command of money-capital over capitalist accumulation. As a result of class struggle – and a class struggle that always returns to express itself as crisis – this command is necessarily a command-in-crisis. In this sense the article stresses the *command-in-crisis of money capital*, and shall concentrate particularly on the manner in which the latter operates in the Latin America.

Contemporary capitalism – a new period of capitalist development – is associated in this manner with a new mode of command-in-crisis.¹⁴⁵ However, it is possible to go further and that is, to associate the capitalism of the imperialist period analysed by Lenin as a determined mode of command – the command that Lenin linked to the large monopoly companies and the integration between the imperialist state and financial capital – just as it is possible to associate a new mode of command – the command-in-crisis of money-capital – to today's capitalism. However, in Lenin's work there existed a close relation between this mode of command and the composition, modes of organization and action, and programme of the working class. This bond is implicit in each one of the pages of *What is to be Done?*¹⁴⁶ Clearly there also exists a relation between the current

¹⁴⁵ I employ here the notion of 'command' in a similar manner to that of Antonio Negri. He also associated distinct modes of capitalist command with distinct periods of capitalist development, in particular cf. Negri (1992).

¹⁴⁶ In effect, the pamphlet can be defined as a response to the question of how to reconcile the spontaneous 'economic-trade unionist' struggle of the workers with the conscious 'political social-democratic' struggle. Moreover, leaving to one side the specificities of Russia at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, the very parameters of the question alongside those of Lenin's

command-in-crisis of money-capital and the new global movements of anti-capitalist resistance, as shall be developed in the conclusion.

In the Beginning was the Crisis

In the beginning was the crisis: that is, the insubordination of labour that signified the disintegration of post-war capitalism. A falling rate of profit began to undermine the conditions for accumulation in the advanced Keynesian economies and these began – one after the other starting with the US – to plunge into stagflation. The central reformist states that had played a key role in creating the conditions for expanded accumulation during the post-war period in turn entered into a profound fiscal and political crisis. The existing structure of the world market, in particular the monetary and financial order created at Bretton Woods, disintegrated under the strains of international disequilibria that had no precedent. The configuration of the international state system that emerged during the Second World War and was consolidated during the Cold War, predicated as it was on a reactionary ordering of inter-state relations around the Soviet and North American blocks, was similarly challenged through class struggle.

The immediate reaction of capital before the unprecedented magnitude of the crisis unleashed through the wave of class struggle was, like in other revolutionary conjunctures, a flight from the deteriorating conditions of accumulation. In fact, it was a double flight.

In the first place, there occurred a spatial flight through a process of relocation of production to territories where the conditions for accumulation were more favourable (see Harvey, 1990; 1992). Certain countries that were economically more backward and subject to dictatorial political regimes were prime candidates for the reception of uprooted productive processes. These specifically included the anti-communist bulwarks in East and Southeast Asia installed by the US in the Cold War and, to a lesser degree, particular Latin American dictatorships.

response refer to this issue, i.e. of the limits of the ‘professional worker’, their organization and action, their programme; of the necessity of ‘professional revolutionaries’, of consciousness from outside, of a vanguard party, of an organizer-propagandist (Lenin, 1976). Once again, this does not imply that we should uncritically accept the manner in which Lenin posed the question – although the problem certainly still exists – nor the answer he gave.

A brief illustration helps make the point. The wave of workers struggles in northern Italy that extended between the ‘hot autumn’ of 1969 until the ‘spring rebellion’ of 1977 had its epicentre in the strikes, occupations, confrontations and sabotage at the Fiat plant of Turin. The Fiat management reacted, not just by replacing living labour with dead labour through the forced automation of the production process – an action which leads to a rise in the organic composition of capital and, ultimately, a fall in the rate of profit – but also by relocating productive processes to the periphery. In the words of one of their workers: ‘they have not used these profits in terms of investment in Italy – no, they have carried their cash abroad, and have set up factories in other countries. In Brazil, for example, or Argentina...in all those countries with regimes that are fascist’ (CSE/Red Notes, 1979, p.195).

In effect, the workers’ struggles forced Fiat to relocate a portion of its productive activities, including the production of complete models as well as specific auto parts, to plants in Latin American countries whose working class was then subject to the open repression of military dictatorships. The corporation developed an investment plan and a process of vertical and horizontal integration in Argentina (Córdoba) between 1977 and 1982, finally selling its assets and concentrating its regional activities in Brazil (Belo Horizonte, Río de Janeiro).

Nonetheless, this relocation of production to territories where the conditions for accumulation appear more favourable has strict limits, which are far more complex than a simple cost-analysis of the relocation process. Fiat had already established itself in Argentina during the 1950s and since the 1960s was producing cars for the local market. The ‘hot autumn’ in Italy had been preceded by the Argentinean *cordobazo* with its own strikes, occupations, confrontations and sabotage, and the Fiat plant in Cordoba had been one of the epicentres (Brennan, 1996, James, 1990). It was only with the fierce military dictatorship that took power in 1976 that relations of force favourable to capital were established – by means of the persecution and assassination of union leaders, the prohibition of unions and strikes and other repressive measures taken by the state – and this enabled Fiat to carry out its restructuring plans – massive sackings and wage cuts – and provided the basis for its subsequent expansion.

Hence, it is important to keep in mind that this same flight of capital from the insubordination of labour through relocation reproduces this same insubordination of labour in the periphery. As such, the insubordination of labour trails capital like its own shadow. The flight of capital from the insubordination of labour in the capitalist centres meets up with the insubordination of labour in the periphery. The recent Korean auto-workers

strikes are illustrative of this point: the relocation of productive processes to the relatively backward countries of Southeast Asia ruled by anti-communist dictatorships, and with South Korea at the forefront, ongoing since the 1970s, found itself confronted by massive social struggles and crisis during the 1990s.¹⁴⁷

In the second place, the reaction of capital consisted in a flight in time – that is a massive process of the expansion of credit that postponed the unleashing of the crisis (see Holloway, 1994). The inflationary expansion of credit, still accompanied at this point by Keynesian economic policies, was the immediate reaction of capital to the crisis for much of the 1970s.

Another case in point helps illustrate the issue. In response to the ‘French May’ movement and the Grenelle accords in May and June of 1968, capital reacted by an inflationary expansion of credit that definitively put an end to one of the key pieces of the post-war Gaullist political programme – the metal fetish of the Finance Minister, Rueff. Note the exultant declarations of De Gaulle in the middle of the 1960s:

We consider that international exchanges must be founded, as occurred before the great world disasters, in an unquestionable monetary base that does not bear the stamp of any particular country. On what base? In reality, it is difficult to conceive in this respect of any other criteria, any other standard, other than gold. Yes, gold, whose nature does not change, that can be converted into bars, ingots or coins, that has no nationality, that is considered in every place and in every time as immutable value and fiduciary *par excellence*... With no room for doubt, no-one would think of imposing on a country the form of administering its internal affairs. Nonetheless, the rule of gold (and certainly it is pertinent to say so) must be applied and followed anew in international economic relations. The supreme law is the need to balance, through the income and expenditure of gold, the balance of payments that result from exchanges between two monetary areas.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ To confront the dynamics of capitalist accumulation and world market insertion of Latin America and Southeast Asia, although not possible in this article, is important because this confrontation is the key to much of Latin American ‘neo-development’. In effect, the collapse of import substitution models in the 1960s and 1970s prompted a recycling – and a shifting to the right – of the development discourse. The latter has been noticeable since Fajnzylber (1983) postulated on the disjuncture between the ‘virtues’ of the Asian model and the ‘vices’ of the Latin American models (for a more recent version refer to Ferrer, 1998). The Korean auto-workers, however, seem to hold a different opinion in this respect.

¹⁴⁸ Press conference, 4 February 1965, cited in Cohen (1984).

This reactionary dream of returning to the imposition of the deflationary discipline of gold on the working class succumbed a few years later to the Parisian barricades. In effect, the deterioration of the French balance of payments – a product of the concessions won by the unions during the 1968 movement – prompted an anticipatory flight of capital that decimated the reserves and unleashed a devaluation of the franc (Mandel, 1976). Capital found itself forced to renounce the discipline of gold. Pompidou undertook a devaluation of 12.5 percent towards the middle of 1969 and, towards the end of the year at the meeting of the European Economic Community in The Hague, he agreed to the incorporation of the franc into the European monetary snake, implemented in April 1972. The new strategy, which succumbed in turn a couple of years later in the midst of new devaluations of the pound, lira, and the franc itself, would no longer hang its hopes on the old metallic fetish but would attempt to pin them squarely on the disciplinary capacity of the *Bundesbank*.

Now let us look at this double flight of capital analytically. It is clear that both reactions, both modes of capital flight, suppose the metamorphosis of productive capital immobilised in production into mobile money-capital form. And, at the same time, both modes of flight imply an always uncertain gamble for capital – that of finding improved conditions for accumulation in new locations or at a future moment: a gamble which presupposes a future inversion of the metamorphosis, a return from the money-capital form to the productive-capital form which alone is capable of exploiting living labour. However, whilst in the first case the two metamorphoses occur in a short time frame, in the second case they can remain separated on a more long-term basis. The insubordination of labour, for its part, can always refute capital's gamble. But this refutation expresses itself in a different manner in both cases: in the first instance it is expressed as a crisis of profitability of relocated productive capital; in the second as the long-term impossibility of re-converting money-capital into productive capital.

Both modes of capital flight are related to each other, and both are characteristics of contemporary capitalism, as displayed by the expansion of foreign direct investment, of intra-firm trade, and of international financial flows. Nevertheless, we shall concentrate here on the second mode of capital flight, that is to say, the conversion of ever-greater masses of productive capital into money-capital, because we consider this process of expansion and socialization of debt (which we call the command-in-crisis of money capital) to be the mode *par excellence* in which the antagonism between capital and labour is manifested in contemporary

capitalism. This means understanding this process as a result of the struggle of the working class and, in turn, as a capitalist response to the same.

The Expansion and Socialization of Debt

It could be said that the first of the two aforementioned moments is the dominant one in the development of the crisis of post-war capitalism during much of the 1970s, while the second is the decisive moment during the second half of the 1980s and 1990s. It could be said too that the capitalist offensive associated with the neo-conservatism arising in the later 1970s and extending during the first half of the 1980s operated as a sort of hinge between the two periods. However, as we shall see, this process of expansion and socialization of debt is always both a result of and a response to class struggle, it is permanently both capitalist command *and* crisis.

The previous periodization can be clearly illustrated through the perspective of Latin America and its foreign debt. The crisis of profitability that, since the end of the 1960s, undermined the conditions for accumulation in the stagflation-stricken advanced Keynesian capitalisms, gave dynamism in the 1970s to a sustained increase in international liquidity, that is to a sustained increase in the offer of money-capital on international financial markets. In this sense, the financial recycling of the petrodollars accumulated by the OPEC countries as a result of the oil price hikes in 1974-75 and again in 1979-80, must be understood as a chapter in this wider process. The expansion of international credit, which during the 1970s was expressed primarily through the credit expansion of international commercial banks and only secondarily through the international emission of bonds, developed at a rate of some USD 50,000 million annually between 1973 and 1975, some USD 100,000 million annually between 1976 and 1978, and more than USD 150,000 Million annually between 1979 and 1981, before slowing abruptly because of the rise in interest rates.¹⁴⁹ This expansion of international money-capital flows was not a response, therefore, to the conjunctural effects of the rise in oil prices driven by the OPEC countries but, more profoundly, it was a

¹⁴⁹ At its greatest moment, the bank deposits of the oil-exporting countries accounted for a third to a quarter of this expansion (USD 37,000/125,000 millions in 1979 and 41,000/160,000 millions in 1980). IMF figures in IMF/World Bank: *Finance and Development* 19 (4), Washington, December 1982.

response to the deteriorating conditions of profitability of the advanced capitalisms that were mired deep in crisis.

The counterpoint to this expansion of international flows of money-capital was, quite naturally, the process of external indebtedness of the peripheral capitalist countries and, in particular, those of Latin America. The annual net capital flows to Latin American countries climbed gradually at an average rate of USD 814 million between 1950 and 1965 (equivalent to 1.2 percent of regional GDP) to some USD 4,042 million between 1966 and 1973 (2.8 percent of GDP). From then, the increase accelerated, reaching averages of USD 14,956 million between 1974 and 1976 (4.2 percent of GDP) and USD 28,861 million between 1977 and 1981 (4.5 percent of GDP).¹⁵⁰ In consequence, the total stock of Latin American external debt had already ascended to USD 258,665 million in 1980, a sum of which the major part was long-term public debt (USD 146,198 million) and an important portion was short-term (USD 68,597 million, against USD 42,458 million of long-term private debt and USD 1,413 million owed to the IMF).¹⁵¹

The immediate result of this process of Latin American indebtedness was the postponement during the 1970s of the regional unleashing of the global crisis of post-war development (Ominami, 1987). The expansion of credit operated once more as a 'flight forward'. However, starting from the debt crisis, which reached its apex with the cessation of payments by Mexico in 1982, this same foreign indebtedness turned out in the medium term to be the primary mode of expression of this very crisis and a crucial instrument for the restructuring processes that constituted the response of capital. In other words, this foreign debt became the foremost regional expression of the command-in-crisis of money-capital.

The deflationary policies of disciplining labour – imposed by the neo-conservative offensive in the advanced capitalisms from the end of the 1970s (see Bonefeld, 1995a; Clarke, 1988; Marazzi, 1995, amongst others) – operated as a hinge between one period and the next. In effect, the monetarist turn that Volcker – then a functionary of the Carter administration – imposed on the Federal Reserve from October 1979, replace the policy of interest rate control with a policy that tried to control the monetary base itself as the lynchpin of the deflationary strategy. In a technical sense, this policy of control was already doomed to failure given that inflation originates in the internal contradictions of capitalist

¹⁵⁰ Figures from CEPAL: *Políticas para mejorar la inserción en la economía mundial*, Santiago de Chile, 1995.

¹⁵¹ Figures from the World Bank: *World Debt Tables*, 1995.

accumulation and cannot be fully manipulated in an exogenous manner by state monetary policy. It merely induced the deflation that propelled the North American economy to its most severe recession in the post-war period (North American production, like its British counterpart, fell in 1980-2). Monetary emission accelerated once again towards the middle of 1981 and the original monetarist policy, facing the threat of a generalised bankruptcy of major banks, was definitively abandoned. This threat originated in the bankruptcy of over-indebted North American companies and the cessation of payments by foreign debtors that, started by Mexico, threatened to extend themselves on a regional scale. Thus, the initial monetarism was replaced gradually by a policy centred on the independence of the central banks: a policy less mechanical in its quantitative objectives and more orientated towards the discretionary management of interest rates. It was modelled on the European monetary policy of the *Bundesbank* (see Kirshner, 1998).¹⁵² The monetarist restriction of credit returned in boomerang fashion against capital itself. Nonetheless, in the more political sense of an attempt at 'monetary imposition of class relations through the subordination of the working class to the abstract equality of money' (Bonefeld, 1995b, p.81), this monetarist policy of disciplining labour attained certain important successes in the advanced capitalist centres. The upward movement of the average rate of profit during the 1980s is the most succinct indicator of this success.¹⁵³ Moreover, it is in this sense that the capitalist offensive associated with neo-conservatism operated as a sort of hinge between the two periods.

A more detailed analysis of this process is beyond the scope of this paper. It is important, however, to note that the rise in real interest rates prompted by monetarist policies also signified a key turning point in the aforementioned process of Latin American external indebtedness. The reference interest rate for the region (i.e. the yield from US ten-year benchmark bonds) passed 15 percent during 1981 and the start of 1982

¹⁵² This benefited exclusively the capitalist centres. It is important to note that, in Latin America, the implementation of such monetarist policies to discipline labour were introduced prior to in the north. The first instance of monetarist imposition was under the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile from 1975, and such policies continued to be implemented long after their abandonment in the advanced capitalisms. In effect, the policies of fixed exchange rates (note the current extreme case of the Argentinean currency board regime) and the more recent policies of dollarization (most importantly undertaken in Ecuador) should be considered to be variants of these former policies.

¹⁵³ Diverse estimations of the evolution of the profit rate all indicated this upward movement; e.g. A. Glyn, G Duménil and D. Lévy, A Shaikh, M. Husson, etc.

whilst annual dollar inflation fell from 12 to 2.5 percent. Capital flows towards Latin American countries, which had reached a peak of USD 39,804 million in 1981 (4.6 percent of regional GDP) consequently contracted to 20,133 million by 1982 and to an average of only 8,154 million annually between 1983 and 1989 (1.2 percent of a severely diminished regional GDP).¹⁵⁴

In this manner the global crisis of post-war capitalism – which up to this point had been postponed – unleashed itself upon the region, and with an unprecedented depth: between 1970 and 1980 the GDP of the region expanded by almost a factor of four (396 percent) whereas between 1980 and 1990 it scarcely increased by one fourth (27 percent). In a number of years there was actually an absolute fall in production. The stock of foreign debt and its impact, despite the massive outflow of money-capital during the decade, could not but increase in the wake of this poor performance. By the end of the 1980s, the total stock of Latin American foreign debt had risen to USD 476,739 million: of this a larger part than in 1980 was long-term public debt (USD 355,893 million against USD 77,487 million short-term) and a much smaller part (USD 25,061 million) was long-term private debt, owing to various policies of state assumption of private debt, and a significant part (USD 18,298 million) was owed to the IMF for restructuring programmes. All the debt indicators had worsened: the stock of debt represented 33 percent of the annual product of the region compared to 26.5 percent in 1980, and 162 percent of exports in 1990 as against 88 percent in 1980.¹⁵⁵

After the abandonment of monetarist policies, North American interest rates in the second half of the 1980s – notwithstanding some severe fluctuations – tended to decrease until they reached a band between 7 and 9 percent, while dollar inflation slowly recovered, reaching a peak of 6 percent at the end of the 1980s. However, during the entire decade the advanced capitalist centres – and particularly the US – operated as a giant suction pump for international money-capital flows. The extraordinary expansion registered by the market for titles in North American public debt gives a clear indication of this trend. Their volume registered a more than four-fold increase during the 1980s, whilst their nominal underlying value rose from USD 973 thousand million in 1980 to USD 4,144 thousand million in 1990.¹⁵⁶ The expansion of debt, now as public debt emitted in

¹⁵⁴ Figures from CEPAL, op. cit.

¹⁵⁵ Figures from World Bank, op. cit.

¹⁵⁶ Figures from Merrill Lynch: *Size and structure of the world bond market*, various numbers.

order to finance fiscal deficits derived from the military-Keynesianism of *Reaganomics*, once again constituted the clearest expression of the crisis.

International flows of money-capital to Latin American countries, nonetheless, recovered in the 1990s. In effect, these flows had by 1990 already equalled the amounts reached prior to the debt crisis (USD 37,211 million as compared to 39,804 million in 1981). Moreover, they would amply surpass them during the following years (USD 61,682 and 65,088 in 1992 and 1993; representing 5.2 percent of regional GDP as compared to the peak of 4.6 percent in 1981). The fall in North American interest rates during the 1990-91 recession – holding to about 6 or 7 percent during the first half of the decade – alongside stabilised dollar inflation of 2 to 3 percent annually prompted a new cycle of Latin American indebtedness. However, this new cycle adopted various distinctive features as compared to its predecessor. Firstly, it was much more selective in its chosen debtors. A small group of Latin American countries (Brazil, Mexico and Argentina in that order) along with another small group of Asian countries (China, Thailand, Indonesia, Korea and Malaysia) absorbed 70 percent of all lent money-capital.¹⁵⁷ Secondly, it is enough merely to invoke the names of these particular countries to draw attention to the fact that this new cycle of lending would turn to massive capital outflows and consequent financial crises that have characterised the 1990s (discussed further below).¹⁵⁸ Thirdly, it is, however, important to note that this cycle would be characterised by the process of disintermediation of the banks and the conversion of debt into property titles. These latter two factors created a process of indebtedness through investment in bonds and titles and, secondarily, from portfolio capital investment.

This disintermediation and conversion of debt into titles, which had already started in the 1980s, was consolidated in the 1990s particularly through the mediation of the Brady Plan to restructure private debt. The process was a reaction by the large international banks to the cessation of payments and the danger of chain bankruptcies that characterized the 1980s. This is a significant point because it implies, alongside a new step in

¹⁵⁷ From 1990 to 1997, the year that interrupted the process because of the crisis initiated in Southeast Asia, the previously noted receivers of money-capital flows accounted for a respective USD 150,000 million (China), 130,000 million (Brazil), 120,000 million (Mexico – some 40 percent of the total shared between the three Latin American countries), 70,000 million (Thailand), 65,000 (Indonesia), 60,000 million (Korea and Argentina) and 50,000 million (Malaysia).

¹⁵⁸ According to the IMF, these net out-flows of money-capital in the crises reached some USD 57,000 million in the case of Mexico in 1995, and 43,000 and 24,000 million in the cases of Korea and Thailand in 1997.

the process of debt *expansion*, a great advance towards the *socialization* of debt. Gradually, the large international commercial banks stopped being creditors, and were replaced by institutional investors such as pension funds, mutual funds and, to the degree that the quality of debtors decreases, speculative hedge funds. Debt was socialized through this displacement of creditors. It was socialized in a perverse manner, of course: on the one hand, as the loss of a whole life's savings by retired workers whose pension funds included titles in their portfolios; and on the other, through the bountiful short-term gains of speculators in hedge funds registered in exotic fiscal paradises yet, often enough, controlled by members of the very same Latin American bourgeoisie.

This disintermediation and underwriting of debt implied, moreover, that the debt came to be evaluated on a daily basis by international financial markets. The spreads that resulted from this process of continuous market evaluation, accompanied by the country-risk evaluations released by credit-rating agencies, are *prima facie* instruments of the command of money-capital, as discussed further in the following section.

The Argentinean case serves to clearly highlight all of the new features of this present cycle of Latin American foreign indebtedness. The total Argentinean external debt grew from USD 61,300 million in 1991, after it overcame the moratorium incurred between 1988 and 1990, to USD 124,300 millions in 1997, just before contagion from the Southeast Asian crisis rocked the region. Private debt operated as the motor of this expansion, as occurred in the rest of the region and, to a much greater extent, amongst the Asian debtors. As such, between 1991 and 1997 private debt moved from 14 percent of total debt to 39.8 percent and at the same time it is estimated that local capital flows to the exterior, and invested in part in titles in this same foreign debt, grew from USD 60,400 million to 96,400 million. This debt was progressively disintermediated and converted into property titles during these years as the converging result of the restructuring of public debt foreseen in the Brady Plan, the emission of new public debt and the tendency of the local big bourgeoisie to directly finance itself through the emission of titles in international markets. These bonds, which represented scarcely 10.3 percent of total debt in 1991, grew to 54.1 percent in 1997. Meanwhile, debt owed to commercial banks fell from 53.9 percent to 16.3 percent.¹⁵⁹ It is unnecessary to dwell upon the pressure

¹⁵⁹ Figures come from the database of the National Ministry of Economics and Public Works and Services, in Basualdo (2000a and 2000b). Following the implementation of the Brady Plan, interest paid on public debt titles grew from 2.9 percent in 1993 to an estimated 9.5 percent in 2000. Concurrently, the weight of

exercised upon the direction of internal policies by such debt evaluations, carried out on behalf of investors represented by international financial organisations and risk-analysis agencies. It suffices to note that in applying policies of ‘debt capitalization’ lauded by the IMF in its annual meeting in Seoul, 1985, Argentina is the country in Latin America that has gone furthest with debt-for-equity swaps, i.e. the privatization of public companies in exchange for debt titles.

The Command-in-Crisis of Money-Capital

We have associated this process of expansion and socialization of debt described in the previous section with a command-in-crisis of money-capital. The latter is the primary modality through which the antagonism between capital and labour expresses itself in contemporary capitalism. Now it is necessary to give a fuller analysis of the operation of this domination.

The starting point that many diverse analyses assume when explaining this process of expansion and socialization of debt, whether coming from a Marxist, Keynesian or monetarist theoretical framework, is the relation between the sphere of finance capital and the sphere of productive capital. In the most apologetic versions, the free establishment of prices for diverse activities in conveniently deregulated and liberalised financial markets assures the optimal assignment of savings to investment. In this way, the expansion and socialization of debt would be the result of the beneficial abandonment of the repressive financial policies of post-war capitalism. Furthermore, the plethora of financial crises are seen as unfortunate events originating from exogenous causes, whether economic in nature (‘sun spots’) or political (‘normative surprises’). It is not necessary to conduct here a detailed critique of this platonic sky of Walrasian mainstream theorizing, especially given that its own advocates have chosen to exile themselves from their own clouds in the wake of emerging financial crises in the second half of the 1990s (refer to the discussions around the ‘Post-Washington Consensus’ in Stiglitz (1998) and elsewhere).

In the more critical versions, moreover, the very functionality of this expansion and socialization process is questioned. The rise in financial profitability, understood as a result of neo-conservative policies, is seen to brake productive investment and employment. Contemporary capitalism is thereby converted into a financially dominated global regime of accumulation (Chesnais, 1997) and, concurrently, into a large casino marked by the rent-seeking and parasitic nature of financial capital

these interests on current state income rose from 6 percent to 16.5 percent in the same period.

(Sweezy, 1994). Owing to this speculative dynamic, the establishment of equity prices in financial markets cannot be characterized as a form of optimising rationality (Kregel, 1999) and, moreover, finance converts itself into the source of ‘systemic crises’ that threaten capitalism in its contemporary conjuncture (Aglietta, 1995).

Once again, it is not possible to provide here a detailed critique of these accounts (see Bonnet, 2001). It is enough to remember that the idea of a purely rent-seeking and parasitic functioning of capitalism in the medium-term is unsustainable because finance can only absorb and redistribute the mass of surplus value generated in production (see Husson, 1999 and Chesnais, 1999). Moreover, as highlighted in the introduction of this paper, the period of capitalist development under consideration has already extended for a period equal to that of post-war capitalism. As such, we are faced with the reappearance – shrouded in the esoteric mists of finance – of the constitutive dependence of capital upon labour.

It is, however, extremely important to indicate the political implications of this idea of the ‘financialization’ of capitalism. In the capitalist centre this idea runs through a system of binary oppositions between a ‘good’ productive capitalism and a ‘bad’ speculative capitalism, each one respectively associated with its particular fraction of the bourgeoisie; between a ‘good’ Rhineland model and a ‘bad’ Anglo-Saxon model despite the imposition of the latter on a global scale thanks to complicit European politicians; between ‘good’ European capital and ‘bad’ US capital, and so on.¹⁶⁰ In many cases there is barely an inch between the formulation of these oppositions and the derivation of political implications whose reactionary profile is reminiscent of the old discourse of social-imperialism.

Nonetheless, this warning is particularly important in the case of Latin America. In effect, the idea of a financialization of global capitalism politically imposed by the rent-seeking and parasitic dominant interests of the US is assimilated and remoulded in Latin America. In this region – with half a century’s experience of nationalist and populist development and continually marked by its precarious manner of insertion into the world market – such discourses assume ostensibly progressive contents. However,

¹⁶⁰ The pioneer of this discourse is Albert (1991), but it constitutes the essence of the campaigns started by Fitoussi in defence of the Euro; by Ramonet in denunciation of the *pensée unique*, etc. Their principal theoretical prop can be found, naturally enough, in the regulation school in which various models of capitalism give rise to distinct modes of regulation. The relations between production and finance are thereby conceived as articulated through one or another version of the structuralist notion of relative autonomy or determination in the ultimate instance, etc.

behind this idea of the financialization of capitalism there often hides a resurrection of the old ideologies of dependency-in-crisis and, in this manner, it is imbued with a tendency to recycle nationalist-populist development programmes headed by the presuppositions of a productive national bourgeoisie threatened by global financial capitalism.¹⁶¹

The point of departure for a critical analysis of the operation of the command-in-crisis of money-capital does not arise from the relations between the sphere of financial capital and the sphere of productive capital. Much less still does it arise from the relations between financial and productive capitalism, fractions of the bourgeoisie, models of capitalism or national capitalisms. The point of departure is the unique process of global social capital accumulation, which encompasses the moments of production and circulation and which must be analysed starting from the antagonism between capital and labour:

The movement of capital is the dialectic unity of the flight from insubordination and of insubordination and the imposition of subordination. It is more common to express this as the dialectic unity of circulation and production but these terms do not emphasise that both circulation and production are class struggle, differentiated in time and in space (Holloway, 1995, p.26).

The previously noted interpretations, thereby, lose sight of this central antagonism between capital and labour, and fall into a fetishization of finance. The question that orientates a critical analysis of the operations of the command-in-crisis of money-capital must emphasize, therefore, the relation between this new configuration of global social capital – productive and financial – marked by the expansion and socialization of debt and the antagonism between capital and labour inherent to capitalism. Some of the most pertinent aspects of this are expanded below.

The key to this command-in-crisis of money-capital resides in the mobility of global capital and, above all, in the privileged mobility of capital in its money-capital form. Its spearhead is precisely the massive moment of money-capital on a global scale. To understand its mode of being presupposes an understanding of these movements of money-capital as the result of the antagonism between capital and labour and, thereby, as the response of capital to this antagonism. In other words, it is a case of

¹⁶¹ This discourse characterises the major part of Latin American anti-neoliberalism and its most important sources are the old dependency-school intellectuals who did not convert to the neoliberal doctrine. This is particularly the case in Brazil (see, for example, Furtado, 1998 and Dos Santos, 2000).

understanding the movements of money-capital as determined by – and in turn determining – the balance of class power.

In effect, the so-called ‘fundamentals’ that determine the movements of capital on a global scale relate to the conditions of exploitation and domination of labour present in distinct spaces of accumulation and are nothing less than synthetic expressions of these class relations. Any variable or set of variables that refers to the levels of labour exploitation – some combination of productivity, salary and exchange rate, for example, that can indicate the rate of surplus value extraction – can be adopted as an ‘economic’ determinant of productive capital flows.¹⁶² The dynamic of integration of Mexico in NAFTA helps to illustrate this point. Valle Baeza (1998) argues that, leaving aside exchange rate effects, the difference in wages between Mexico and the United States are of a magnitude similar to the productivity differential between the two. Foreign investment flows are therefore orientated towards the *maquila* Mexican export industry which concentrates the segments of the production process that require the employment of a large workforce with low productivity and low wages.¹⁶³ The variables that refer to the capacity of debtors to pay – i.e. the ratios between debt/product, debt/exports, public expenditure/income, etc. – and that are often considered as *fundamentals* in the movement of money-capital themselves also relate, although more indirectly, to these levels of labour exploitation.

However, it is also necessary to include in these *fundamentals* certain variables of a political nature – such as the indicators of ‘governability’, a euphemism invented by international organisations to refer to the internal conditions of the domination of labour – given that the political domination of workers remains a necessary condition for their economic exploitation.¹⁶⁴ The devaluation of the real in Brazil at the start of 1999 is a

¹⁶² Various contemporary Marxists – such as Carchedi, Shaikh, Husson and others – made important contributions to the comprehension of contemporary capitalism through explanations of the mobility of capital and the levelling out of profit rates on a world scale based on these *fundamentals* of accumulation. However, these *fundamentals* depend primarily on the very antagonism between capital and labour and not, as suggested by these explanatory schema, by inter-capitalist competition.

¹⁶³ This, despite the bloody ultra-taylorisation of work processes within the *maquila*, reduces these productivity differentials (cf. Husson, 1994 and 1995).

¹⁶⁴ These conditions of political domination of course continue to be mediated by states that continue to enclose labour inside national frontiers. The idea of a metamorphosis of the post-war reformist state into ‘competition states’ or ‘Schumpeterian states’, i.e. states that are pawns in the capturing of the largest possible portions of global money-capital flows, as proposed by Hirsch (1995) and

case in point. From the middle of 1998 the foreign reserves of the central bank were strongly depleted by the operations of futures and options that provided capital flows into the Brazilian stock exchange. These foreign reserves fell from USD 75,000 to 27,000 million between July of 1998 and January of 1999, a sum that equates to 6 percent of Brazilian GDP. Consequently, the recently re-elected Cardoso administration devalued the currency and left it at the mercy of the foreign exchange markets, thereby ending the fixed rate plan for the real. Up to that time, the devaluation of the real had been deferred owing to the credit package negotiated with the IMF in October/November 1998. The IMF, at the head of a series of states and international financial institutions, has put together a rescue package of USD 41,500 million to be disbursed over three years with 37,000 being disbursed during the first year.¹⁶⁵ In terms of its *size*, the package is comparable only to the bailouts of Mexico in 1995 and of Korea in 1997. However, its *nature* is not comparable to the latter two as it primarily revolved around 'preventive programmes' agreed a year previously by the IMF and G7 during the fallout from the Southeast Asian crisis. As such, it was the first rescue undertaken before the fact, that is, before capital flight devastated the financial markets in question. Hence, on closer inspection, it can be seen that the IMF, as on previous occasions, guaranteed the gains of the speculators who had been involved in the capital flight, and who it represents. More importantly still, both the flight of capital and the IMF intervention responded to the specific internal political conjuncture. The possibility of a PT (Brazilian Worker's Party) triumph in the elections, understood by the speculators and the functionaries of the international financial institutions as a threat to their interests, determined the behaviour of both. The IMF, therefore, came out to guarantee the internal governability of Brazil through, in the short-term, assuring the re-election of Cardoso and, in the medium term, disciplining the sectors of the PT left that demanded a change in the direction of economic policy. This story is repeating itself today with a new line of external credit in the face of fresh Brazilian elections, with the PT ever more disciplined.

It is important to note, however, that this is not a 'politicist' interpretation of the operation of the command of money-capital.¹⁶⁶ The 'political' and

Jessop (1999), is interesting in this sense. However, their arguments rest on questionable structural-functionalist foundations – see the critique by Bonefeld (1997) and a more critical analysis of the relation between nation-states and global capital in Holloway (1993).

¹⁶⁵ See IMF, *IMF Survey*, 1998 and 1999 issues.

¹⁶⁶ One of the most curious discursive strategies of the neo-developmentalists in Latin America is to emphasize – thereby synthesising the 'second generation'

‘economic’ variables that govern the movements of money-capital are both determined by the same antagonism between capital and labour, just as the political and the economic as a unity-in-separation, are only the forms assumed by the very same antagonistic social relations of capitalism (see Holloway, 1994).

A glance at the variables considered in the evaluation of country-risk by credit rating agencies can provide a more or less complete panorama governing the determinations of the movements of money-capital on a global scale. In effect, these credit-risk evaluations by the main protagonists such as Moody’s or Standard and Poors, are the most synthetic and disturbing expression of capitalist forecasting about the conditions for exploitation and domination of labour in distinct accumulation spaces in the world market. They are, in other words, the authoritative directives of the command of money-capital. They can be appreciated in this way as the variables tied to the ‘economic risks’ of payment cessation, ranging from the past records of successful payment to indicators such as the weight of debt service on GDP and exportations, and the status of the commercial balance alongside the immediate conditions of the debtors’ access to bond markets. All the former are put alongside variables linked to perceived ‘political risks’.¹⁶⁷

Naturally, this does not mean that such credit-rating agencies govern by themselves the international movement of money-capital. Their ratings are simply an institutionalized reflection of the variables that concretely determine these money-capital movements. The only respect in which they are a determining influence by themselves is for those institutional investors whose portfolios are legally restricted (investment grade is normally demanded of pension funds). The spreads themselves, submitted to the volatile daily arbitrage of speculators in international financial

reforms of the World Bank – the political variables that determine capital movements (i.e. ‘the quality and efficiency of institutions’) in a manner feebly delinked from the domination of labour. The economic variables are in turn, also delinked from the exploitation of labour (for example, abstractly counter-posing the ‘cost of the work force’ with the ‘skills and flexibility of the work force’; these expressions come from de Bouzas and French Davis, 1998).

¹⁶⁷ From a study of credit ratings compiled by *Institutional Investor* and *Euromoney* and by the editorial of the *Economist Intelligence Unit* it follows that these ‘political risks’ explain between 15 and 40 percent of the considered variables. ‘Economic risks’ count for between 30 and 45 percent, and access to short-term markets makes up the rest (N. U. Haque, D Mathieson and N. Mark: ‘Evaluación de las instituciones que clasifican a los países según el grado de solvencia’, in IMF: *Finanzas y desarrollo* 34 (1), Washington, March 1997).

markets, operate as the true yet anonymous directives of the command of money-capital. The recent financial turbulence in Argentina is a dramatic illustration of this arbitrage. Over the course of several weeks headlines were filled and conversations dominated by the mysterious notion of ‘country risk’. The latter was itself associated with the equally cryptic numbers of spreads that often surpassed 1700 base points. A wave of speculation around public debt titles conducted in international financial markets seemed to lie at the heart of these mysteries. However, what really transpired was that this spread was rising and falling on a daily basis in line with the changing balance of class relations. It went down when the government advanced its policy of fiscal equilibrium based on the reduction of the wages of public workers, unemployment benefits and pensions; and it went up when the resistance of employed and unemployed workers threatened to overturn that policy and send the debt spinning into default.

This is a decisive point for understanding the command of money-capital – namely, that it is in essence a blind domination. Neither private institutions such as credit risk agencies, nor public institutions such as the US Federal Reserve, nor international institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, Bank for International Settlements, the Basil Committee, govern the movement of money-capital. In other words, the command-in-crisis of money-capital does not concisely correspond to any particular political form.¹⁶⁸

The decisive role played by money-capital movements in contemporary capitalism should not be interpreted in terms of the relative autonomy of its dynamics within a supposedly financialized accumulation regime. The valorization of global social capital remains dependent on the effective exploitation of labour and it is in respect to the conditions underpinning this valorization – i.e. the conditions arising from the antagonism between capital and labour – that the movement of money-capital must be understood. The specificity of this role of money-capital, however, must be situated within the specific contemporary configuration of global social capital: it is rooted in its special part in imposing the conditions of exploitation and domination of labour on behalf of a globalized productive capital. It is in this precise sense that we speak here of the command of money-capital.

¹⁶⁸ Although there is no room to embellish this point here, the absence of an adequate political form is a key feature of contemporary capitalism. In this sense, the argument concerning the necessity of a ‘global quasi-state of the disciplinary regime’ made by Hardt and Negri (2000) seems forced.

Nonetheless, these conditions are constantly traversed by the antagonism between capital and labour inherent in exploitation. The antagonism between capital and labour, more precisely, undermines through uncertainty the nexus between present and future conditions of exploitation and domination, the precise nexus on which money-capital operates. The movements of money-capital are in this sense gambles, perpetually vulnerable, on the future exploitation of labour. The insubordination of labour can negate the expectations of capital for the future conditions of exploitation and domination and result in massive outflows of money-capital. In turn, the disciplinary character of capital-flows is a decisive reply on the part of capital in order to re-subordinate labour to its expectations for future exploitation. In either case, to assimilate analytically the future conditions for the exploitation and domination of labour to the present is equivalent to papering-over the uncertainty that the antagonism between capital and labour bestows on both. In other words it is to deny the very existence of class struggle.¹⁶⁹ This uncertainty is decisive, in effect, because it entails that financial markets can only effectively sanction *post hoc* (instead of *ex ante*) the conditions for the exploitation of labour. It is for this reason that it is not adequate to talk simply of domination but rather always of the command-in-crisis of money-capital.

Here another decisive aspect of this command is realised. Namely, its *post hoc* sanctions develop directly within the context of massive flows of money-capital, resulting in huge financial crises that threaten the system as a whole. Class struggle, in other words, expresses itself directly in financial crisis. The case of the Mexican financial crisis of 1994-95 is illustrative in this respect. It made it apparent how this *post hoc* sanctioning operates upon prior expectations of continued political domination that were consequently shattered by class struggle (see Holloway, 1997).

The manner of Mexican integration into the world market, initiated in the middle of the 1980s, generated considerable macroeconomic disequilibria. Commercial imbalances, derived from its integration with the US economy (USD 30,149 million, equivalent to 8.3 percent of 1994 GDP), caused growing current account deficits (USD 28,785 million, 7.9

¹⁶⁹ Antoni Negri has put forward, in his excellent critique of Keynes' thought, this relation between uncertainty and capital/labour antagonism without, however, subjecting it to a detailed examination. The notion of uncertainty in the formation of financial market expectations, as understood by post-Keynesian economists, can and must be systematically critiqued in this way in order to rescue its kernel of truth, which currently remains mystified.

percent of GDP).¹⁷⁰ These commercial deficits were meanwhile compensated for by capital inflows: net private capital flows reached USD 21,900 million by 1993, although they already began to decline in 1994 to 17,400 million. Exchange rate overvaluation (which, starting in 1988, reached 30 percent in 1993) had reduced inflation and the weight of external debt repayments but also had created new pressures in the trade balance.¹⁷¹

All these macroeconomic disequilibria clearly undermined the Mexican economy before the 1994-95 crisis. Nonetheless, it is also clear that the crisis cannot simply be understood as a traditional balance of payments crisis. A comparison between the Mexican and Argentinean situations can clarify this point. The commercial and current Mexican deficits were more than double the Argentinean ones (the latter represented 3.7 and 3.6 percent of Argentine GDP respectively in 1994), whilst the overvaluation of the Argentine peso was more than double that of the Mexican peso (estimated to be 77.7 percent between 1988 and 1993). However, it is necessary to note that these Mexican deficits went together with a greater insertion into the world market. In 1994 the Mexican sum of exports and imports accounted for 39.1 percent of its GDP as compared to 18.8 percent for Argentina. Moving to the effect these variables would have in the respective capacity to pay external debt it is notable that the total stock of Mexican debt was equivalent to 228 percent of exports whereas in the Argentine case it amounted to 368 percent,¹⁷² while the service payments on the debt were equivalent to a similar portion in both cases (34 percent and 32 percent respectively).¹⁷³ All this raises certain critical questions: What made the Mexican situation particularly explosive? Why did devaluation and subsequent financial crisis explode in Mexico and not in Argentina? And why, even more surprisingly, did peso convertibility and the Argentine financial system in general resist devaluation and crisis at

¹⁷⁰ From the World Bank database – World Bank: *World debt tables* 1996, Washington. Commercial debt was USD 9,449 million (4 percent of GDP) in 1990. It had grown by 219 percent. Concurrently, current account deficit was USD 7,451 million (3.1 percent of GDP) and had grown by 286 percent.

¹⁷¹ Real exchange rate evaluations come from CEPAL op. cit.

¹⁷² Or, if one considers only public debt, the respective figures are 165 and 265 percent.

¹⁷³ The respective structure of each debt was clearly divergent. Some 24.5 percent of the Mexican debt was short term (average maturity of 7.5 years), whereas only 9.3 percent of Argentine debt was in that category (9.3 years) following the Brady Plan restructuring. Average interest rates on the emission of new debt, however, were similar in both cases, hovering around 6 to 7 points.

that particular historical juncture when the shock-waves from the Mexican crisis were buffeting the region?¹⁷⁴

The answer is simple. The Mexican political situation was very different from its Argentine counterpart. The Bank of Mexico reserves, that supported the bands within which the peso fluctuated, started to dwindle after the beginning of 1994, i.e. after the start of the Zapatista insurrection. The PRI state-party regime, for its part, suffered a political crisis that became terminal several years later. The official PRI candidate, Colosio, was assassinated in March of that year and some USD 10,000 million evaporated from the national reserves in an attempt to save the peso. The general secretary of the PRI, Massieu, was assassinated in September and the bleeding of reserves continued. In December the Zapatistas broke the military cordon that encircled them and spread from the Lacandon jungle. The following day President Ernesto Zedillo was obliged to devalue the peso by 15.3 percent whilst another USD 10 to 12,000 continued to bleed from the reserves. Zedillo was confronted with the spectre of a peso in freefall that depreciated by 50 percent of its value. Massive flows of money-capital constituted the *post hoc* reaction to the negation through class struggle of the expected conditions of political domination.

The Argentine political situation was quite different. The banking system suffered a currency run that depleted nearly 20 percent of deposits, especially in pesos, and internal and external interest rates doubled between November 1994 and April 1995.¹⁷⁵ Central Bank reserves that supported peso convertibility dropped 20 percent. Nevertheless, the government of Carlos Menem enjoyed a wide political consensus, sustained through the blackmail of a prospective return to hyperinflation, which was expressed in his re-election in May, in the middle of the crisis (see Bonnet, 1995). Hence, he was in a position to unleash the brutal mechanisms of adjustment inherent in the convertibility regime: deflation, decrease in nominal wages, and increased unemployment, in order to save the peso.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ The ideologues of convertibility, such as Cavallo and Hanke, did not miss the opportunity to promote the miraculous virtues of the currency board regime and its capacity to resist exchange rate volatility. Moreover, they were right – the convertible peso could resist exchange volatility and devaluation but only at the cost of its own death through dollarization (see Carchedi, 2000).

¹⁷⁵ Figures compiled by CEPAL, in Kosakoff and Heymann (2000).

¹⁷⁶ During the crisis, which extended between the fourth quarter of 1994 and the third of 1995, Argentine GDP fell by 10 percent, consumption by 9.4 percent and investment by 30 percent. Mexican GDP, in comparison, fell 6.2 percent, consumption 9.5 percent, and investment 29 percent during the crisis. In other words, the depth of the recession imposed in order to sustain Argentine peso

Clearly, the antagonism between capital and labour develops differently in distinct accumulation spaces within the world market. In this sense, the movements of money-capital are determined by, and at the same time determine, differences in expectations concerning the future conditions of exploitation and domination associated with these distinct accumulation spaces. As a consequence, in order to explain the precise movements of money-capital it is necessary to consider simultaneously the expectations associated with the prospective accumulation space alongside those of the accumulation space from which capital is fleeing. Hence the analysis must immediately assume a global perspective. In concrete terms, money-capital fled the crisis and lack of profitable investment in the advanced capitalist centres in the mid-1970s towards the backward and dictatorial capitalism of Latin America. Nevertheless, the debt crisis at the start of the 1980s revealed that these Latin American countries, far from being safe-havens, were actually dangerous refuges and, once again, money-capital fled, this time towards the expansion associated with *Reaganomics*. Thus, the massive flows of money-capital that unleashed the financial crises of the mid-1990s are inexplicable without taking into account the previous flows of money-capital towards the 'emerging markets' following the recession of the early 1990s in the advanced capitalist centres. Once again, this highlights a decisive aspect of the dominance of money-capital: it is precisely a mode of capitalist command that operates immediately at a global level. In this way each and every corner of the planet becomes a stage in the game of global capital flows whilst each and every point of class struggle – including that of the Lacandon jungle – are at the same time barriers against global money-capital.

By Way of Conclusion and Hope

To recap, capitalist domination is exercised in contemporary capitalism as the command of money-capital that, through its movement, sanctions the conditions of exploitation and domination of labour. However, it is command-in-crisis because, at root, it expresses through crisis the insubordination of labour that negates these expectations of exploitation and domination. This specific form of expression of the insubordination of labour has important implications for the development of class struggle. Firstly, the insubordination of labour tends to adopt an immediately anti-

convertibility was comparable to that caused by the devaluation and crisis in Mexico.

capitalist character because the command of money-capital is essentially the anonymous and immediate domination of capital. Secondly, this insubordination becomes expressed directly in the form of financial crisis because capitalist domination is exercised directly as the command of capital in the form of money-capital. Thirdly, the insubordination of labour is immediately directed against capital on a global scale, precisely because the command of money-capital is immediately global in scope. In other words, every social struggle – from the indigenous Zapatista uprising, the unemployed *piqueteros* in Argentina, the land-seizures of the *sem terra* in Brazil, to the huge *cocalera* demonstrations in Bolivia, become expressed without mediation as a crisis of the global command of money capital.

However, the insubordination of labour is expressed as the crisis of the command of money-capital, that is to say, in the form of its own negation. That is, it expresses itself in a fetishized form through speculative flight in the international financial markets. More importantly still, it expresses itself in a perverse manner – resulting in financial crises that impose dramatic social consequences on workers. This is not a new phenomenon: under capitalism the creativity of living labour – be it productive or political – is normally expressed through its very self-negation.

Nonetheless, there is no reason to believe that we are trapped in this situation. The new global anti-capitalist movement, which we see spreading like wildfire from Seattle to Geneva via Porto Alegre, is inaugurating a novel perspective in this respect. Global labour, through the dynamic of insubordination, is starting to recognise itself as the antagonist of global capital. The old question *What is to be Done?* is beginning to find new answers.

References

- Aglietta, M. (1995), *Macroéconomie financière*, La Découverte, Paris.
- Albert, M. (1991), *Capitalisme contre capitalisme*, Editions du Seuil, Paris.
- Basualdo, E. M. (2000a), *Acerca de la naturaleza de la deuda externa y la definición de una estrategia política*, UNQ-Flacso, Buenos Aires.
- Basualdo, E. M. (2000b), *Concentración y centralización del capital en la Argentina durante la década del 90*, UNQ-Flacso, Buenos Aires.
- Bonefeld, W. (1995a), ‘Monetarism and crisis’, in Bonefeld, W. and J. Holloway (eds) 1995.
- Bonefeld, W. (1995b), ‘Dinero y libertad. El poder del trabajo y la reproducción capitalista’, in AAVV: *Globalización y estados-nación. El monetarismo en la crisis actual*, Tierra del Fuego-Homo Sapiens, Buenos Aires-Rosario.

- Bonefeld, W. (1997), 'Globalisation and democracy: an assessment of Joachim Hirsch's *Competition State*', in *Common Sense* 22, pp.61–82.
- Bonefeld, W. and J. Holloway (eds) (1995), *Global capital, national state and the politics of money*, Macmillan, London.
- Bonnet, A. (1995), 'Argentina 1995: ¿una nueva hegemonía?', in *Cuadernos del Sur* 19, pp. 94–123.
- Bonnet, A. (2001), 'El fetichismo del capital dinero. Un comentario sobre el debate Chesnais-Husson', unpublished paper.
- Bouzas, R. and R. Ffrench Davis (1998), 'La globalización y la gobernabilidad de los países en desarrollo' *Revista de la CEPAL*, número extraordinario 50 años, pp.13–35.
- Brennan, J.P. (1996), *l cordobazo. Las guerras obreras en Córdoba 1955-1976*, udamericana, Buenos Aires.
- Carchedi, G. (2000), 'La dolarización, el señoreaje y el euro', *Cuadernos del Sur* 30, pp.112–138.
- Chesnais, F. (eds) (1996), *La mondialization financière. Genèse, coût et enjeux*, Syros, Paris.
- Chesnais, F. (1997), *La mondialisation du capital*, París, Syros, Paris.
- Chesnais, F. (1999), 'Los peligrosos espejismos de la "relativa funcionalidad de las finanzas". Respuesta a Michel Husson', in *Razón y revolución*, no. 5, pp.50–63.
- Clarke, S. (1988), *Keynesianism, monetarism and the crisis of the state*, Edward Elgar, Aldershot.
- Cohen, B. (1984), *La organización del dinero en el mundo*, FCE, México.
- CSE/Red Notes (1979), *Working class autonomy and the crisis. Italian Marxist texts of the theory and practice of class movement: 1964-1979*, CSE/Red Notes, London.
- Dos Santos, T. (2000), *A teoria da dependência: balanço e perspectivas, Civilização Brasileira, Rio de Janeiro.***
- Fajnzylber, F. (1983), *La industrialización trunca de América Latina, Nueva Imagen, México.***
- Ferrer, A. (1998), 'América Latina y la globalización', *Revista de la CEPAL*, número extraordinario 50 años, pp.48–57.
- Furtado, C. (1998), *O capitalismo global, Paz e Terra, San Pablo.***
- Hardt, M. and A. Negri (2000), *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachutes.
- Harvey, D. (1990), *Los límites del capitalismo y la teoría marxista*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México.
- Harvey, D. (1992), *A condição pós-moderna. Uma pesquisa sobre as origens da mudança cultural*, Loyola, San Pablo.
- Hirsch, J. (1995), *Der nationale Wettbewerbsstaat. Staat, Demokratie und Politik im globalen Kapitalismus*, ID-Archiv, Berlin.
- Holloway, J. (1993), 'Reforma del estado: capital global y estado nacional', *Cuadernos del Sur*, no. 16, .pp.75–98.
- Holloway, J. (1994), *Marxismo, estado y capital*, Tierra del Fuego, Buenos Aires.

- Holloway, J. (1995), 'El capital se mueve', in M. E. Ceceña (eds), *La internacionalización del capital y sus fronteras tecnológicas*, El Caballito, México.
- Holloway, J. (1997), 'Los zapatistas y el derrumbe del capitalismo mundial', *Economía Internacional*, no. 55/56, pp. 19–26.
- Husson, M. (1994), 'Les fausses évidences du marché. Le cas de l'Accord de libre-échange nord-américain', *Cahiers de Sciences Humaines* vol. 30, no. 1–2, pp. 91–109.
- Husson, M. (1995), 'Mexique: la dévaluation du modèle néolibéral', *Critique Communiste*, no. 140, pp.67-75.
- Husson, M. (1999), 'Contra el fetichismo financiero', *Razón y revolución*, no. 5, pp.41–49.
- James, D. (1990), *Resistencia e integración. El peronismo y la clase trabajadora argentina, 1946-1976*, Sudamericana, Buenos Aires.
- Jessop, B. (1999), *Crisis del estado de bienestar. hacia una nueva teoría del estado y sus consecuencias sociales*, Siglo del Hombre Editores, Bogotá.
- Kirshner, J. (1998), 'Disinflation, structural change and distribution', *Review of Radical Political Economics* vol. 30, no. 1, pp.59–89.
- Kosakoff, B and Heymann, D. (eds) (2000), *La Argentina de los noventa*, Eudeba-CEPAL, Buenos Aires.
- Kregel, J. (1999), 'Flujos de capital, banca mundial y crisis financiera después de Bretton Woods', *Comercio Exterior*, vol. 48, no. 1, pp.7–15.
- Lenin, V. I. (1976), *¿Qué hacer? Problemas candentes de nuestro movimiento*, in *Obras Completas*, vol. V, Akal, Madrid.
- Lenin, V. I. (1977), *El imperialismo, etapa superior del capitalismo*, in *Obras Completas*, vol. XXIII, Akal, Madrid.
- Mandel, E. (1976), 'La crisis del franco francés' and 'La devaluación del franco francés', in *El dólar y la crisis del imperialismo*, Era, México.
- Marazzi, C. (1995), 'Money in the world crisis: the new basis of capitalist power', in Bonefeld, W. and J. Holloway (eds) 1995.
- McDonough, T. (1995), 'Lenin, el imperialismo y las etapas del capitalismo', *Cuadernos del Sur*, no. 24, pp.44–72.
- McDonough, T. (1998), 'Waves, structures and regimes: the economics of marxian stage theory', en *Actes du Congrès Marx International II*, París, mimeo.
- Negri, A. (1992): 'Interpretation of the class situation today: methodological aspects', in Bonefeld, W., Gunn, R. and K. Psychopedis (eds), *Open Marxism*, vol. II, Pluto Press, London.
- Negri, A. (1996), 'Keynes and the capitalist theory of the state', in Negri, A and M. Hardt: *Labor of Dyonisus. A critique of the state-form*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Ominami, C. (1987), *El tercer mundo en la crisis*, GEL, Buenos Aires.
- Palazollos, E. (1998), *La globalización financiera. La internacionalización del capital financiero a finales del siglo XX*, Síntesis, Madrid.

- Stiglitz, J. E. (1998), 'Más instrumentos y metas más amplias para el desarrollo. Hacia el consenso post-Washington', *Desarrollo Económico*, vol. 38, no. 151, pp.691–722.
- Sweezy, P. M. (1994), 'The triumph of financial capital', *Monthly Review*, vol. 46, no. 2, pp.1–19.
- Valle Baeza, A. (1998), 'La productividad del trabajo al encuentro de la teorema marxista', *Revista da Sociedade Brasileira de Economia Politica*, no. 2, pp.25–45.

Note

Translated from Spanish by Marcus Taylor.

Chapter 7

State, Revolution, and Self-Determination

Werner Bonefeld¹⁷⁷

I

All emancipation is the restoration of the human world and of human relationships to Man himself (Marx).

Communism is the theoretical and practical anticipation of the society of the free and equal – the complete emancipation of Man, of human emancipation.¹⁷⁸ It is a society worthy of Man, a society where Man is no longer a dominated, exploited and debased being that is condemned to function as a mere human resource in the accumulation of abstract wealth for accumulation's sake. It is a society where Man exists as a purpose and not as an exploitable resource. Communism does not denote abstract equality before the law, before money, before the state. Communism is, rather, the emancipation of Man from abstract equality and as such an emancipation it declares that the social individual receives according to her needs and that each social individual contributes according to her ability. Communism, then, is the practical critique of the domination of Man over Man.

The society of the free and equal summons the idea of the 'community of free individuals, carrying out their work with the means of production in common' (Marx, 1983, pp.82–3). Communism is not the transformation of society into a single office and a single factory where everybody becomes a labourer, as Lenin proposed in his *State and Revolution*. Does the proletariat need what Lenin extolled: factory discipline? Would this really be what the community of freely associated Man would decide for themselves in freedom from coercion? Communism and factory discipline are mutually exclusive and their proposed extension in the name of the proletariat is shameful. As Marx (1983, p.477) saw it, 'to be a productive labourer is...not a piece of luck, but a misfortune'. The idea that communism entails the generalization of this misfortune in the form of the

¹⁷⁷ I want to thank Mike Rooke for his most helpful comments. The usual disclaimers apply.

¹⁷⁸ 'Man', with a capital 'M', is used here and throughout, to mean *Mensch*.

workers' state, is grotesque: it projects the capitalist subsumption of all and everything to the dictate of economic rationality as communism and adds that communism is different from capitalism because it replaces the market by a centrally planned regulation of the political economy of labour. Communism is not social reproduction through humans; it is social reproduction for humans, for and by themselves according to their needs. Communism, then, does not stand for the nationalization of industry. It stands for the socialization of the means of production, that is, their transformation into means of emancipation, means which are controlled and applied by Man himself in full possession of his own existence as the subject.

The free association of individuals and the form of the state are mutually exclusive. Communism entails the abolition of all forms of power over and above the human individual. Communism, in short, stands for human emancipation and because of this, it is a critique of political emancipation, of the state. As Marx argued,

all emancipation is a return of the human world and human relationships to humans themselves. Political emancipation is the reduction of man, on the one hand, to a member of bourgeois society, an egoistic and independent individual, on the other hand, to a citizen of the state, a moral person. Not until the real individual man has taken the abstract citizen back into himself and, as an individual man, has become a species-being in his empirical life, in his individual work and individual relationships, not until man recognises and organises his 'forces propres' as social forces and thus no longer separates social forces from himself in the form of political forces, not until then will human emancipation be completed (Marx, 1964, p.370).

The society of the free and equal does, in short, not entail the liberation of Man through the state but the emancipation of Man from the state, its abolition by the freely associated producers organizing their own human world.

Political emancipation denotes the existence of the social individual as an individualized individual endowed with abstract rights. These rights are those of atomized market individuals who are all equal before the law despite their inequality in property. The divorce, then, of labour from the means of production entails the emancipation of the political from society. The form of the state, thus, is the 'concentration of bourgeois society' (see Marx, 1973, p.108): its purpose is to guarantee and secure the inequality in property through the subsumption of the individualized individual under the law of abstract equality. This, then, is the subordination of social relations to the law of private property, that is equality, freedom and Bentham (see Marx, 1983, p.172). The treatment of all as equals before the

law characterizes the form of the state as an ‘illusory community’ (see Marx and Engels, 1962). It treats the real existing individual as constituted ‘character-masks’ or ‘personifications’ of capital and espouses the interest that is common to all character-masks: their universal existence for each other as a resource, as a utility – the so-called republic of the market. The form of the state, then, is adequate to its content: to guarantee and protect the enslavement of labour as a mere human factor of production that is sold and exchanged on the market and, once contracted, made to work ‘under the command of capital’ (see Marx, 1973, p.508). The capitalist freedom of labour from the means of production entails that the products of labour appear to have mastery over, instead of being controlled by Man (cf. Marx, 1983, p.85). The freedom of labour from the means of production entails the freedom of the products of labour from the social individual and that is, the subordination of social labour to the world of things it itself creates. The political emancipation of the political in the form of the state, its abstraction from society, entails its content of upholding the rights of contract – the form of bourgeois freedom. The freedom of capitalist exchange relations presupposes the exploitation of labour and this exploitation presupposes the divorce of labour from the means of production, rendering social labour power a mere commodity that is bought and put to use. The form of the state thus indicates formal freedom and formal equality, the content of which is the ‘perpetuation of the labourer’ – the ‘sine qua non of the existence of capital’ (Marx, 1983, p.536). In short, the exploitation of Man by Man and the domination of Man over Man are inseparable as each is the condition of the other.

Communism means the return to Man of all that which appears to exist separate from Man. It demands, then, social autonomy and that is social self-determination:

the reality [*das Bestehende*], that communism creates, is precisely the real [*wirkliche*] basis for rendering it impossible that any reality should exist independently of individuals, in so far as this reality is only a product of the preceding intercourse of the individuals themselves (Marx and Engels, 1962, p.70).

In short, ‘revolutions are not made by laws’ (Marx, 1983, p.703), nor are they made by or through the state. The Leninist espousal of the state as the vehicle of social revolution confuses social autonomy with the autonomy of the state and, by doing so, it affirms the essence of the state, that is, the emancipation of the political from society the content of which is the subsumption of human purposeful activity to relations of abstract

equality, an equality that denies human dignity: it treats everybody, regardless of need, as abstract individuals endowed with formally equal rights.

II

‘Communism is the real movement of the working class’ (Marx)

Lenin’s statement, in *State and Revolution*, that the proletarian state is a bourgeois state without bourgeoisie, was apt. The bourgeoisie was abolished, the relations of private property were changed, but the mode of production remained in the form of state-capitalism. Insofar as revolutions leave the material basis of society untouched – and indeed aim to bring forth ‘industrialization’ and that is, ‘capitalization’ by means of state-led expropriation and economic planning – revolutionary change amounts merely to a political revolution, a change of political class. Capital, as Marx argued, is ‘the separation of the conditions of production from the labourer’ (Marx, 1972, p.422). The nationalization of the means of production does not provide an alternative to capitalism because it does not overcome the divorce of social labour from the means of production; it merely focuses this divorce in the form of the state.

Marx’s conception of communism as a classless society is turned upside down in Leninism: society consists of only one class: the working class. As Lenin (1917, p.91) put it, ‘the whole of society will have to become a single office and a single factory with equality of labour and equality of pay’. The factory discipline of the capitalist enterprise is to be ‘extended to the whole of society’ (ibid.). The workers state has to control ‘corrupted workers’ (ibid.) and has to assert ‘control over idlers’ (p.92) and ‘serious punishment’ has to be imposed to secure compliance. However, as Lenin argued, ‘the necessity to observe the uncomplicated basic rules of all human intercourse will soon become a habit. And then the door will be opened wide’ for the transition from communism’s first stage to its second where the state withers away (ibid.). The internalization, in other words, of the capitalist factory discipline as a social habit is endorsed as the prerequisite for the withering away of the state. The idea of society as a centrally planned factory and of humans as socialized factors of production whose ability to think and dream is expropriated and replaced by the internalization of command, mirrors and reinforces the capitalist existence of human social practice as a mere personification of exchange relations. The idea that social emancipation can be effected through the workers state,

and the understanding of communism as the emancipation of Man as the subject, are mutually exclusive. The former is based on the economy of labour and the latter on the freedom of society to control its own affairs.

Marx saw the society of the free and equal anticipated in the:

community of revolutionary proletarians, who extend their own control over the conditions of their own existence and those of all members of society. It is as individuals that the individuals participate in it. It is exactly this combination of individuals (assuming the advanced stage of modern productive forces, of course) which puts the conditions of the free development and movement of individuals under their control – conditions which were previously abandoned to chance and had assumed an independent existence over and against the separate individuals precisely because of their separation as individuals (Marx and Engels, 1962, p.74).

In other words, Marx saw communism as the real movement of human self-determination. For humans to enter into relationships with one another, not as separated individuals whose social existence is made manifest behind their backs through the value form, but as social individuals, as human dignities, who are in control of their social conditions, the economic ‘mastery of capital over man’ has to be abolished so that man’s social reproduction is ‘controlled by him’ (see Marx, 1983, p.85). What needs to be overcome, then, is the alienation of human social practice from her conditions. It is this alienation that constitutes the relationship between wage labour and capital. What functions are left for the state in a society that is in possession of itself and organizes its social reproduction on the basis of the equality of needs? What social basis does it have in a society where the realm of necessity is cooperatively organized by the associated producers themselves through the realm of freedom?¹⁷⁹

The revolutionizing of the relations of oppression fails if the means of revolution do not anticipate the purpose of social revolution: human

¹⁷⁹ ‘In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production...Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised Man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by the blind forces of Nature...But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis’ (Marx, 1966, p.820). See the useful exchange between Wildcat and Holloway for an assessment (Wildcat, 1999).

emancipation. The ends have to be anticipated in the means – without this, the means merely accommodate to those same conditions which, ostensibly, social revolution sets out to abolish. Social revolutions that accommodate their organizational means and methods to existing relations of oppression and divorce the goal of revolution from the organizational means rendering them an end in themselves, merely perfect the machinery of the state *in the name* of the proletariat: Lenin proclaimed that the workers would be participating in equal measure in the administration of industry and state and demanded their subordination to the communist party because it was the party which gives expression to their most urgent and sovereign will. In short, he argued that each individual is able to perform both advanced and mundane functions in recognition of and subordinated to a most superior authority: the party. The proletariat, then, functions as a party worker in all aspects of its life-practice. It does not figure as the essence of revolution and that is, it is not endorsed as a revolutionary subject that is seized by the recognition of its own social power to leave behind all relations of oppression.

Communism cannot be decreed, nor is it government on behalf of the people. Communism is not an ‘advanced system’ of the political economy of labour. It is the self-activity of the social individuals who determine their affairs themselves as autonomous social subjects. Slaves, as Marcuse (1967, p.61) put it, ‘have to be free for their liberation so that they are able to become free’. In other words, the society of the free and equal has already to be present in the consciousness and practice of the dependent masses and has to achieve material existence in the revolutionary movement itself. In short, the purpose of social revolution, i.e. human emancipation, has to be effective in the revolutionary means themselves and that is, the content of revolution has to be reflected in – better: has to be constitutive of the organizational means.

The means of emancipation are most crucial. Lenin’s (1902) notion that revolutionary consciousness has to be brought to the masses from without because the working class, by its own efforts, is able only to develop trade union, i.e. economic, consciousness, justifies the idea of the revolutionary party as the tribune of the people. As such a tribune, the party is conceived as a committee of professional revolutionaries that direct the masses. Democracy and revolutionary organization are thus with necessity seen to be mutually exclusive: since the masses are presumed to be unable to determine themselves, democracy would merely undermine the revolutionary efforts of the party, subjecting it to ‘economist’ demands that emasculate the leadership role of the revolutionary party. Since the workers are deemed incapable of revolutionary consciousness, the party, through its

directorship over the working class, is charged with educating the masses in revolutionary discipline and spirit so that it transforms into a class for-itself. Who, however, educates the revolutionaries? For what purpose do workers have to be educated? Lenin's answer is communism: Our task, he argues, 'is to combat spontaneity, to divert the working class movement from its spontaneous, trade unionist striving...and to bring it under the wing of the revolutionary social-democrats' (ibid., p.41). There is no need here to rehash Luxemburg's critique of Lenin. Suffice to say that she saw spontaneity not as an 'instinctive' action in contrast to conscious direction. She saw spontaneity as the driving force not only of the revolution but of the vanguard leadership itself, keeping it left. Her assessment of Lenin as a Blanquist who, operating conspirationally, has no need for mass action except on the day of the revolution itself, is apt. In Leninism, the means are turned against the ends.

The critique of spontaneity is, for the Leninists and any other self-declared revolutionary vanguard, self-serving. It mirrors the bourgeois prejudice of the dependent masses as an ill-educated crowd that has to be led by 'responsible' leaders so that it fulfils its historical function to achieve communism. However, communism is not the creator of class consciousness; rather communism grows out of it. In short, the idea of the party as the vanguard that directs and educates the masses for communism denies that communism is the movement of the working class. The Leninist supposition of the immaturity of the working class, rather than justifying the idea of the 'revolutionary' party, justifies instead the existence of the party as an end in itself. Would this not imply that the party is the most powerful check on the real movement of communism, the working class?

The idea of the 'revolutionary party' is a contradiction in terms. The basic idea of the revolutionary party is that the working class is incapable of emancipating itself, of making revolution, and that it therefore can not do without a party of professional revolutionaries. How might the revolutionary party be able to seize power? The answer is: through a mass uprising. Will the revolutionary party get anywhere without the masses? The answer is self-evident: for the revolutionary party to succeed, it depends on the masses, their ingenuity and purpose of action. What role, however, is left for the revolutionary party once the masses have taken charge of themselves? Will it become part of the masses and so abandon its 'leadership' or will it proclaim its leadership over the revolutionary masses? How can this be done when the masses persist in their effort to achieve self-determination? The conflict, then, between the revolution and the old 'regime' transforms into a conflict between the masses and the party. Although its own 'revolutionary success' depended on the

revolutionary activity of the masses, this activity threatens the leadership role of the party and is thus deemed a factor of disorder and anarchy (see Lenin, 1968). The party, in sum, has to catch-up with the revolutionary masses, haul them in and, once power has been seized, re-educate and discipline them to 'create' socialism on their behalf.

According to this view, the working class has to be taught to be emancipated. Education implies the supervision of the working class so as to secure its compliance with the laws of emancipation as conceived by the revolutionary party. In other words, the masses are allowed to be as free as the party decrees and not as the masses determine. Any attempt at freedom of self-determination on the part of the dependent masses is seen, with necessity, as a counter-revolutionary threat. The party leads because the dependent masses are immature and infected by bourgeois prejudices. Any assertion of independence of action on the part of the masses is thus judged, with necessity, as a threat to the leadership of the party and thus the revolution itself. The equation of revolution with the leadership of the party then means that, in the name of revolution, the party has to use all available methods and means to maintain strictest control over the masses whose consciousness is deemed either petty or bourgeois (i.e. economic), and, once power has been seized, subversive and potentially counter-revolutionary.

Socialism, Marx once argued, is the 'revolution in permanence, the dictatorship of the proletariat a necessary transitional period toward the abolition of all classes' (1969, p.89). Can this permanent revolution be announced by the party and its state? If it were, how can the permanent revolution progress without calling into question the party and its state? Or is it directed by the party and its state? If it is, whom does it revolutionize? Marx conceived of permanent revolution in terms of the dictatorship of the proletariat. What is meant by the class dictatorship of the proletariat? Trotsky, who is famously credited with the idea of permanent revolution, provided one answer: the revolutionary soviet of Kronstadt 1921 did not manifest permanent revolution but, instead, a counterrevolution that had to be annihilated and its participants to be 'shot like pheasants' (Trotsky), as indeed they were. As Brendel (in this volume) shows, Kronstadt 1921 entered the mythology of the Bolshevik state: the so-called counterrevolution was defeated allowing the consolidation of the Bolsheviks and their republic of commandeered labour. On the day that the central committee announced the NEP and commemorated the Paris Commune of 1871, Kronstadt fell. From the perspective of the party's seizure of power, this murderous elimination of the permanent revolution in action makes sense – it freed the so-called workers state from the self-

organization of the proletariat, securing its existence over and above the social individual.

Historically, political revolutions have never transformed the mode of production. They changed the form of the state, perfected its machinery, and replaced one political class by another. As Marx argued in the *18th Brumaire*, all political upheavals have perfected the state instead of smashing it. There is no doubt that 'political upheavals' are quite incapable of realizing 'the society of the free and equal' (see Agnoli, 2000). The fall of Kronstadt eliminated the organizational forms of social self-determination, i.e. the soviets, and incorporated them as administrative organs into the structure of power, strengthening the conception of socialism as 'socialist organization plus electrification'. This conception emulated in practice the Taylorist division of labour and affirmed that the so-called workers state entailed the standardization of social life based on a centrally planned economy of labour. The idea of society as a huge centrally directed factory entailed the 'introjection of capitalist norms of efficiency, labour discipline, industry and accumulation' (Dyer-Witheford, 1999, pp.6-7). The conception of socialism as a centrally planned economy of labour characterized the idea and practice of the 'revolutionary party' from its inception: the division between the (directing) party and the (directed) masses. The smashing of Kronstadt 1921 suppressed the revolution for social self-organization and that is social autonomy, in favour of a conception of socialism not as an alternative to but as a competitor with capitalism (see *ibid.*).

III

'In a fearsome world it is a question of learning hope' (Bloch)

Marx talked about the dictatorship of the proletariat on only a few occasions. Yet, it was this term upon which the Marxist-Leninist tradition built a whole legitimating edifice. Dictatorship is usually, and correctly so, used to describe a state in the state of siege. In Leninism, the term stands for the 'socialist' organization of society by the party and its state. Marx's few references to the dictatorship of the proletariat refer to it as the dictatorship of the proletariat as a class, the mass of society. Millions of people cannot all be dictators concentrated in the form of the state. Such a dictatorship, by its very nature, is limited to a small number of people. Is this Leninist conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat what Marx had in mind? If he had, that would be bad for Marx.

Godelier (2000, p.163) reports that there is nothing in Marx that would suggest that he advocated 'state or bureaucratic power against the working masses'. Marx did not argue that the proletariat had to be educated by its 'own' dictatorship to acquire factory discipline. Indeed, as Godelier continues, 'dictatorship of the people was not to be turned against the people, but against the enemies of the people, against the representatives of the old exploiting classes who were opposing revolutionary transformations of the society with arms and other means'. It was, then, not to be a party dictatorship on behalf of and that is, over the working class. It was conceived as a dictatorship of the majority of the people against the minority, that is, those who own the means of production and whose interests, the interests of bourgeois society, are concentrated in the form of the state. The dictatorship of the proletariat, then, relates to the revolutionary struggle for the democracy of the freely associated cooperative producers. Whether this phase will succeed depends on whether the means of production are socialized leading to their control by associated labour or whether the counterrevolution triumphs. The dictatorship of the proletariat appears, then, to refer to the struggle for social autonomy against existing relations of constituted power – '[a]bove all we must avoid postulating "society" again as an abstraction vis-à-vis the individual. The individual *is social being*' (Marx, 1975, p.299). Simply put, capitalism cannot be overcome by a change in command but only by the abolition of the commanding. Instead of the seizure of power, it means the abolition of power, not after, but during the revolution itself. The first step in this abolition, as Marx and Engels argued in the *Communist Manifesto*, is the struggle for democracy by the working class. How can the equation of the dictatorship of the proletariat with democracy be understood?

The espousal of the state as the vehicle for the society of the free and equal confuses human emancipation with the emancipation of the state from society. The idea of the 'social' republic means the social subordination of society to the state. The idea of the state as the agent of the dictatorship of the proletariat means the forceful subordination of society to the authority of the state. The idea that society is to be set free through the state, as Leninism and with it all vanguard notions of liberation teach, accepts the state as if it were an 'independent being which possesses its own *intellectual, ethical and libertarian bases*' (Marx, 1973b, p.28). Lenin's rejection of the capitalist state and his affirmation of the proletarian dictatorship through the state seems to imply that the state is a capitalist state only because it is run by the bourgeoisie and that, once state power has been seized by the vanguard, the state becomes an instrument of emancipation. Marx's notion of the state as the 'organized violence of the

enslavement of labour' (1979, p.541) is thus not denied by Lenin: organized violence is to be perpetuated by the 'workers state' to realize the proletarianization of society, extending the factory discipline to the whole of society.

The project of human emancipation and the seizure of political power are mutually exclusive: the state cannot be used for the purpose of human emancipation (Marx, 1979, p.336). The project of human emancipation has to be reflected in and must inform the means of revolutionary transformation itself. In terms of the dictatorship of the proletariat, this would mean the extension of democracy to the whole of society. In short, the dictatorship of the proletariat stands for the democratic self-organization of society in and through the negation of the state. The dictatorship of the proletariat, in this view, does not only *not* assume the form of the state. It is, in fact, the negation of the state. Marx's assessment of the Paris Commune is explicit on this: the Commune was 'the negation of all state power' (ibid., p.542) and amounted to a revolution against the state (ibid., p.541). It was the organizational form through which society restores to itself its own social life (see ibid.). The Commune did not entail a revolutionary transformation of the state, transferring power from one political class to another. Rather it was a revolution which smashed the political form of class domination, i.e. the state (see ibid.). It replaced, in other words, the organized power of subordination by its own power, creating its own self-determined forms of social organization. The Commune, then, was the organized social counterpower and as such the political form of social emancipation (ibid., p.545). Instead of seeking 'salvation' through the state, the Commune stands for the autonomy of society, its self-determination and self-organization, in opposition to the state during the revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie whose concentrated force is the state. The state, then, is neither the agent nor the instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Rather, as Marx argued (1973b, pp.28, 31), it is the state that requires to be educated by the masses. What function is left to the state once this education has run its course?

Marx (1979, p.546) saw the Commune as the 'most human means' of revolutionary struggle for social self-determination and this at a point of transition, that is, during the intense battle between the forces of revolution and violent counterrevolution. The Commune anticipated, in its revolutionary means and methods, the purpose of human emancipation. It began the '*emancipation of labour*' (ibid., p.546). However, it was not the society of the free and equal. It was the organizational means of social self-determination during the revolutionary uprising itself. The Commune, in short, set the elements of a new society into freedom during the

revolutionary struggle. Marx called this phase of the revolutionary process the dictatorship of the proletariat and he argued that, in relation to the Commune, this dictatorship reflected in its means the purpose of social revolution. In short, Marx's assessment of the Commune shows the dictatorship of the proletariat in a different light: the practical negation of the state in and through the democratic self-organization of society, a democracy of the social majority and, as such, a democracy that begins, in opposition to existing relations of oppression, the emancipation of labour.

Every revolution can only develop and mature the germs which already exist and have made their way into the consciousness of Man. Revolutions cannot themselves create these germs or generate new worlds out of nothing. The society of the associated producers is not something that communism invents or creates. If communism is indeed seen as something that invents itself, then Engels' notion of communism as 'humanity's leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom' (Engels, 1973, p.226) is apt. Leninism rests on this conception of communism as a 'leap': it is created by the party as the theoretical guardian and organizational expression of working class consciousness. Lenin's idea that the masses are by themselves incapable of revolutionary consciousness denies the possibility of revolution as social self-determination and, instead, confirms that revolutionary change can only be brought about from above, *forcing*, as it were, the working class to 'leap' into communism. The means of emancipation have to be adequate to their purpose. If the means merely mirror existing relations of power, then nothing new is born: rather than Man creating his own social organizations and forms of social reproduction, power is seized but not abolished, and the capitalist means of production are nationalized and the economy of labour is imposed on society to create the new socialist Man – a Man of standardized issue.

Marx did not conceive of the 'realm of freedom' as the result of an historical leap. Rather, communism was seen as the movement of the working class within and against the capitalist social relations themselves. In short, communism grows out of class struggle. Human emancipation cannot be imposed. It develops through conflict, and this conflict organizes, based on a history of experience of struggle, its own organizational forms of self-determination in opposition to existing relations of exploitation and domination. The constituted relations of power are the foundation upon and against which the struggle for human emancipation rests (Marx, 1979, p.362). The organizational forms of human emancipation, then, develop within the womb of existing society (*ibid.*, p.343) and are shaped by it. Marx's insistence that the dictatorship of the proletariat is a period of transition, that is, a period of struggle between the new and the old,

between social self-determination and the relations of constituted power, recognizes that the new society grows out of the old society on the basis of a permanent class struggle that counterposes, in its organizational means, the revolutionary ends of human emancipation to the existing relations of human indignity.

In sum, revolutions can not be made by decrees. They can neither be announced by a central committee nor can they be directed by it. The project of human emancipation grows up within existing relations of power, develops through conflict against them and either goes beyond them or is cut back only to start anew: 'Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with the new one' (Marx, 1966, p.703). Marx adds: 'It is itself an economic power' (ibid.). Class struggle is the 'logical and historical presupposition for the existence of individual capitalists and workers' and 'the basis on which exploitation' rests (Clarke, 1982, p.80). Capitalist social relations rest on and develop through class struggle: Capital has to exploit labour in order to reproduce itself: 'fanatically bent on making value expand itself, [the personified capitalist] ruthlessly forces the human race to produce for production's sake', increasing 'the mass of human beings exploited by him' (Marx, 1983, p.555). Class struggle is constitutive of capital's expanded reproduction and it is the force through which the new is born. The Leninist idea of the party as the director of class struggle casts the party in the role of the midwife. However, the midwife is herself not struggling to be born. This is not the role of the midwife. Once that which has been born 'screams' (see Holloway, 2002a), the midwife is redundant, unless the midwife is adamant that that which is born is not to be allowed to be set free. Human emancipation has to do without an external – Leninist – midwife; its realization depends on the self-determining power (in the sense of *potentia* or *Vermögen*) of the dependent masses, that it, it depends on their power of self-determination through organizational means that posit the emancipatory goal of the classless society as the organizational principle of the means themselves. As Mattick (1991, p.198) reports, 'the workers who committed themselves to the revolutionary councils, argued for dictatorship because for them the revolutionary councils amounted to the dictatorship of the proletariat. They opposed Lenin, not because he demanded dictatorship but because he demanded the dictatorship of the party'. In Leninism, the means are turned against the end. Instead of social self-determination, the education of the proletariat by the dictatorship of the 'revolutionary party' led, not as a distortion but as a confirmation of the idea of socialism as an advanced system of the economy of labour, to the forced industrialization that under

Stalin constituted nothing less than a version of ‘primitive accumulation’ (see Dyer-Witheford, 1999).

IV

‘Thinking means venturing beyond’ (Bloch)

Communism means the emancipation of labour from all abstractions that rule over the social individual. It does not mean the emancipation from labour nor does it mean the liberation of labour from the anarchy of the market through means of central economic planning. In every society, all production is appropriation of nature and appropriation means exchange with nature through labour. Labour is necessary. The question is not the necessity of labour. The question is, rather, the form of the social organization of this necessity:

Really free labour, e.g. composing, is at the same time the most damned seriousness, the most intense exertion. The work of material production can achieve this character only (1) when its social character is posited, (2) when it is of a scientific and at the same time general character, not merely human exertion as a specifically harnessed natural force, but exertion as subject, which appears in the production process not in a merely natural, spontaneous form, but as an activity regulating all forces of nature (Marx, 1973, pp.611–12).¹⁸⁰

In short, the emancipation of labour amounts to the social autonomy of labour organizing its own affairs, its social character as self-determined practice, its existence as a subject. The social appropriation of Man’s life-forces means that these are returned to Man, bringing them under the control of the freely associated cooperative producers.

In Marxism-Leninism this appropriation is understood in merely judicial terms. It does not advocate the transformation of the means of production into means of emancipation but, rather, their expropriation by the state. It projects the transfer of the property rights from capitalist ownership to state ownership. It is, then, not the social individual who is in control of the means of production but the party bureaucracy and its state. The separation of the original producers from the means of production is not abolished – it is merely focused: state socialism amounts to a rebellion against the anarchy of the market whose unpredictable development is to be overcome through the state organized extension of the capitalist factory discipline to

¹⁸⁰ Adapted from the German original (Marx, 1974, p.505).

society at large. Socialism, then, as Lenin argued, ‘is nothing else than state-capitalist monopoly which is applied for the benefit of the whole people and which therefore ceases to be capitalist monopoly’ (quoted in IFS, 1990, p.77). The destructive character of capital is thus only one of degree and therefore correctable through the combination of capitalist work discipline with ‘socialist’ organization. The problem, then, with capitalism is not the exploitation of labour founded on labour’s divorce from the means of production. The problem is, rather, the lack of effective and efficient organization, which is seen to derive from the competitive, that is, self-destructive market relations based on private property. The socialist transformation of capitalist monopoly into state-capitalist monopoly is seen to replace capital’s destructive market forces by the rational administration of economic relations.¹⁸¹ This organization of social reproduction requires central leadership and bureaucratization. It can not do without. Leadership is thus not only a question of the conquest of power. It is the presupposition of Leninism in its entirety.

Trotsky’s statement that the ‘crisis of the world is a crisis of leadership’ (quoted in Dunayevskaya, 1986, p.xxxi) is, therefore, apt. Regardless of whether Trotsky would have been a better leader than Stalin, the focus on leadership mirrors the idea of the business leader of laissez-fair capitalism, adopts it as the organizational means of revolution, and transposes it to so-called workers state. Revolutionary leadership was required because, as Lenin argued, class consciousness ‘can be brought to the workers *only from without*, that is, from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers’ (1902, p.79). The idea then, of subordinating the workers to themselves in the form of the workers’ state rests on distrust of the workers who on their own are merely able to develop, at best, economic consciousness. Hence, his claim that the party had to ‘bring political knowledge to the workers’ (ibid.). Trotsky’s idea of crisis as a crisis of leadership merely echoes Lenin’s concerns: the masses must be made free by force and their education, an education for liberty (!), must not hesitate to use compulsion and violence against those on whose behalf the party leads.

¹⁸¹ The idea of the state as economic planner does not derive from Marx but from Hegel. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel argued that in the progress of reason all is ultimately subsumed into the state. Although Hegel did not argue that private property was to be subsumed into the state, the socialist idea of the state as the organizer and planner of society poses Hegel’s idea of the progress of reason with more logical force than Hegel himself. On Lenin’s misconception of economic relations, see Behrens in this volume.

The argument of the historical backwardness of the proletariat does not wash. It presupposes that against the background of existing conditions of misery, the project of emancipation has with necessity to be one of party leadership, a leadership which assumes the directorship of the class struggle both against existing powers and against backward workers, educating them in political consciousness and directing their efforts. The conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a form of educational dictatorship rests theoretically on a tradition which spans from Plato to Rousseau. It is, as Marcuse (1967, p.60) argued, easy to ridicule this position but much more difficult to contradict it. This is so because, without hypocrisy, it acknowledges those same conditions which prevent human self-determination. The argument, then, rests on the so-called objective character of existing conditions and, by accepting the objectivity of capitalist conditions, reinforces their objective force. Marx's idea that the dictatorship of the proletariat teaches the state a lesson, replacing the artificial but none the less powerful sovereignty of the state by the true sovereignty of the social individuals organizing their own social reproduction, is thus turned on its head. The idea of the 'education of the masses in socialism' not only acknowledges the conditions which prevent social self-determination. It also mirrors these conditions in the revolutionary means and projects them on to the 'new' society, perverting the revolutionary ends.

Against the background of existing conditions of human indignity, the Leninist idea of leadership appears persuasive: the demand for human self-determination appears to summon romantic illusions, rendering Leninism credible by default. What, however, is to be understood by 'objective' conditions? Orthodox Marxism argues that because of its position in the production process, the working class is the only revolutionary class. However, this position is itself an 'objective' condition: the working class exists in-itself and, in order to realize its potential as a revolutionary class, has to be transformed into a class for-itself. This transformation requires 'leadership'. The notion 'in-itself' refers to capitalist social relations as constituted relations and that is, as relations where human social practice subsists as if it were a mere personification of the things themselves. Thus, 'in-itself' refers to the established existence of capital, its constituted *Dasein*. Orthodox accounts, then, employ the notions 'in-itself' and 'for-itself' to indicate the 'objective' position of the working class and its potential as a revolutionary class ('class for-itself'). Leaving aside the Leninist instrumentalization of this dualism in the form of the leadership role of the revolutionary party, Marx's answer to the classical question of epistemology is unambiguous: 'the separation between in-itself and for

itself, the substance of the subject, is abstract mysticism' (Marx, 1981, p.265).¹⁸²

Furthermore, the dualism between objectivity and subjectivity does not make sense when looked at through the lenses of Marx's critique of fetishism. His critique shows that human practice exists for itself as a perverted practice in the form of capitalist social relations and he argued that all social relations are essentially practical. His critique reveals that the constituted forms of capital are, in fact, forms in and through which human practice 'exists': 'in-itself' as relations between things whose constituted form is the separation of social practice from its conditions, and 'for-itself' because human social relations subsist in and through the relations between things – better: these relations acquire a livelihood as perverted forms of existence of capitalistically constituted human social relations – a world of things that is reproduced by 'active humanity' in and through her class-divided social practice. It follows that human social practice subsists also 'against-itself' as, on the one hand, a perverted social category and, on the other, as a power that makes history and is thus capable of leaving behind her own perverted existence. Human practice, then, exists in-itself, for-itself and against-itself in the form of capital. The dualist conception of objectivity (in-itself) and subjectivity (for-itself) belongs firmly to a tradition of thought that resists an understanding of our social world as a world made by Man and a world dependent upon Man's transformative power. The treatment of class as existing 'in-itself' leads to an accommodation to 'objective conditions', that is, it leads to affirmative accounts of a 'perverted' world (see Horkheimer, 1992, p.246). In short, as Horkheimer (1985, p.84) reports, the separation of 'genesis' from 'existence' constitutes the blind spot of dogmatic thought.

The presupposition of this separation merely leads to the critical acceptance of 'objective conditions' from which human social practice is derived and upon which strategic calculations for the conduct of class struggle are based. In contrast, Marx's critique of fetishism does not affirm objective conditions – it dissolves them as conditions that subsist in and through human social practice however perverted this practice might be in the form of capital (see Bonefeld, 1995). In other words, the Leninist idea of 'leadership' mirrors the perverted world that it, ostensibly, sets out to dissolve. Mirrors provide reflections which however fractured do not provide projections of the 'not-yet' (Bloch, 1973) that exists in perverted

¹⁸² On Leninism's roots in pre-Marxian methodology, see the contributions by Behrens, Clarke, and Rooke in this volume. The quotation from Marx (1981) has been translated by the author.

form within the constituted relations of capital as its constitutive power: human cooperation in and through and against the perverted form of value.¹⁸³ *Pace* the orthodox affirmation of objective conditions, the critique of political economy is charged with providing enlightenment as to the true constitution of the world of things (see Bonefeld, 2001). Enlightenment is a thoroughly subversive business. It doubts that things are as what they appear to be and it thinks the world up-side down in order to reveal its essence: the human being that exists against itself as the producer of its own forsaken conditions and for-itself as the not-yet existing subject that relates to herself in dignity and that is, exists for-itself as a purpose and not as a resource.

The presupposition of capitalist social reproduction is the freedom of labour from her condition; this presupposition informs and in-forms the real movement of capitalist social relations. Capital, ‘fanatically bent on making value expand itself’ (Marx, 1983, p.555) can do no other than to intensify the division of labour so as to increase its productive power. There is no doubt that ‘the subdivision of labour is the assassination of a people’ (Urquhart, quoted in Marx, 1983, p.343); yet it merely consolidates the ‘original’ separation of labour from its conditions through further and further fragmentations of the social labour process, dismembering Man (see Marx, 1977, p.155). Still, however much social labour is fragmented, divided and subdivided, human cooperation remains ‘the fundamental form of the capitalist mode of production’ (Marx, 1983, p.317). This cooperation exists against itself in the value form that integrates the ‘assassination of a people’ with the respectful forms of equal and free exchange relations. Human cooperation, then, has to be liberated from its antagonistic link with the capitalist organization of social reproduction.

Labour ‘is and remains the presupposition’ of capital (Marx, 1973, p.399). Capital cannot liberate itself from labour; it depends on the imposition of necessary labour, the constituent side of surplus labour, upon the world’s working classes. It has to posit necessary labour at the same time as which it has to reduce necessary labour to the utmost in order to increase surplus value. This reduction develops labour’s productive power and, at the same time, the real possibility of the realm of freedom. The circumstance that less and less socially necessary labour time is required to produce, for want of a better expression, the necessities of life, limits the realm of necessity and so allows the blossoming of what Marx characterized as the realm of freedom. Within capitalist society, this contradiction can be contained only through force (*Gewalt*), including not

¹⁸³ On these issues, see Bonefeld (2002).

only the destruction of productive capacities, unemployment, worsening conditions, and widespread poverty, but also the destruction of human life through war, ecological disaster, famine, the burning of land, poisoning of water, devastation of communities, and the creation of new profitable opportunities such as the production of babies for profit, the usage of the human body as a commodity to be exchanged or operated on, the industrialization of human production through cloning, etc. The existence of Man as a degraded, exploited, debased, forsaken and enslaved being, shows that capitalist production is not production for humans – it is production through humans. In other words, the value form represents not just an abstraction from the real social individual. It is an abstraction that is ‘true in practice’ (see Marx, 1973, p.105): it abstracts from the human being and reduces her to a mere personification of her own life-practice. The universal reduction of all specific human social practice to the one, some abstract form of labour, from the battlefield to the cloning laboratory, indicates that the separation which began with primitive accumulation appears now in the biotechnical determination to expropriate human beings. This misery is unworthy of Man. It demands revolutionary transformation. Paraphrasing Marcuse (1998), the human being is a thinking being and if thought is the site of truth, then the human being has to possess the freedom, to be led by thought in order to realize what is recognized as truth, namely that the human social practice itself is constitutive of a world which enslaves it.

Marx saw the appearance of workers’ cooperatives and worker owned factories as both direct and indirect signs that the transition to communism had already begun. He saw in the struggle for a shorter working week, however contradictory the results for wage-labour (Marx, 1983), as ‘the basic prerequisite’ for human emancipation (Marx, 1966, p.820). Further, he showed the contradictory force of cooperation. ‘Not only have we here an increase in the productive power of the individual, by means of cooperation, but the creation of a new power, namely, the collective power of the masses’ (Marx, 1983, p.309). He argued that the capitalist struggle to contain labour as a resource for the accumulation of abstract wealth contains the tendency toward a:

monstrous disproportion between the labour time applied, and its product... Labour no longer appears so much to be included within the production process, rather, the human being comes to relate more as watchman and regulator to the production process itself...[The labourer] steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor (Marx, 1973, p.705).

Further,

nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules, etc. These are the products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of the human will over nature, or of participating in nature. They are *organs of the human brain, created by the human hand*, the power of knowledge, objectified. The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a *direct force of production*, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it. To what degree the powers of social production have been produced, not only in the form of knowledge, but also as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process (Marx, 1973, p.706).

In other words, although condemned as a mere factor of production, living labour organizes production and it does so by transforming its life-practice into a watchman and regulator invested with general intellectual human knowledge and intellectual power. This transformation, concerning contemporary relations, entails a crisis-ridden reduction of necessary labour in and through unemployed workers and unemployed capital (see Marx, 1966, p.251). Capital, in the form of money, is unemployed because it exists in excess to the reproductive requirements of expanded accumulation. There develops, then, a 'credit-superstructure' in abstraction from surplus value production where money is made out of money – M...M' – at the same time as money's quest for self-expansion depends on the exploitation of labour: M...P...M'. This divorce between productive accumulation and monetary accumulation is, with necessity, intensely crisis-ridden and violent in its command – it entails a mortgage on the future exploitation of labour, a mortgage which, as every crash or financial crisis indicates, is destructive of human life. The limit of capital is capital itself: in order to posit itself through expanded accumulation, it has to contain human productive power through the destruction of the means of production on the altar of money, sacrificing workers on the pyramids of accumulation. Monetary panic and industrial crash are two sides of the same coin (see Bonefeld, 1996). Any debtor crisis shows how this works in practice.

Nevertheless, this misery is made by Man in and through their capitalistically organized relations of social reproduction. Marx's statement that the working class can only liberate itself poses the real problem of revolution. The problem is that of the self-organization of labour, a self-organization that poses a real alternative to capitalism and thus reflects the ends of the revolutionary struggle in its organizational means. In short, the great problem of revolutionary organization is that of

finding a means or method of struggle that is worthy of Man and which, at the same time, is able to withstand not just the most heavily armed reaction but, importantly, the mimicry of power in everyday life practice. The first principle of revolutionary transformation is the democratization of society, that is, human self-determination against all forms of power which condemn Man as a mere resource, restoring the human world to Man himself. The democratization of society means essentially the democratic organization of socially necessary labour, that is, the organization of the realm of necessity by the associated producers themselves. The democratization of society and the democratic organization of necessary labour belong together as each other's presupposition. The democratization of necessary labour in freedom from coercion entails the demand for social autonomy in all areas of human life. Autonomy means human sovereignty and thus human dignity as a subject. It means the abolition of all relations which render Man a debased being ruled by abstractions. Social autonomy, in short, means social self-determination in and through organizational forms of resistance which anticipate in their method of organization the purpose of revolution: human emancipation. 'The society of the free and equal' (see Agnoli, 2000) entails the end of class, a classless society where Man recognizes and organizes his 'forces propres' as his own social forces (see Marx, 1964, p.370). The issue, then, that we confront is that of achieving power without taking power (Holloway, 2002b). Its resolution is not a theoretical question; it is a practical question.

References

- Agnoli, J. (2000), 'The Market, the State and the End of History', in Bonefeld, W. and K. Psychopedis (eds) *The Politics of Change*, Palgrave, London.
- Bloch, E. (1973), *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt.
- Bonefeld, W. (1995), 'Capital as Subject and the Existence of Labour', in Bonefeld, W., et al. (eds) *Open Marxism*, vol. III, Pluto, London.
- Bonefeld, W. (1996), 'Money, Equality and Exploitation', in Bonefeld, W. and J. Holloway (eds) *Global Capital, National State and the Politics of Money*, Plagrave, London.
- Bonefeld, W. (2001), 'Social Form, Critique and Human Dignity', *Zeitschrift für kritische Theorie*, no. 13, pp. 97–113.
- Bonefeld, W. (2002), 'Capital, Labour and Primitive Accumulation. On Class and Constitution', in Dinerstein, A.C. and M. Neary (eds), *The Labour Debate*, Ashgate, Aldershot.
- Clarke, S. (1982), *Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology*, Palgrave, London.
- Dunayevskaya, R. (1986), *Rosa Luxemburg*, University of Illinois Press, Chicago.
- Dyer-Witthford, N. (1999), *Cyber-Marx*, University of Illinois Press, Chicago.

- Engels, F. (1973), *Die Entwicklung des Sozialismus von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft*, in MEW 19, Dietz, Berlin.
- Godelier, M. (2000), 'The Disappearance of the "Socialist System": Failure or Confirmation of Marx's Views on the Transition from One Form of Production and Society to Another?', in Bonefeld, W. and K. Psychopedis (eds) *The Politics of Change*, Palgrave, London.
- Holloway, J. (2002a), 'In the Beginning was the Scream', in Bonefeld, W. (ed) *Revolutionary Writing. Common Sense Essays in Post-Political Politics*, Autonomedia, New York, also available in *Common Sense*, no. 11, pp. 66–78.
- Holloway, J. (2002b), *Change the World Without Taking Power*, Pluto, London.
- Horkheimer, M. (1985), *Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft*, Fischer, Frankfurt.
- Horkheimer, M. (1992), 'Traditionelle and kritische Theory', in *ibid.*, *Traditionelle und kritische Theorie*, Fischer, Frankfurt.
- IFS (1990), Institute für Sozialistische Forschung, *Das Ende des Sozialismus, die Zukunft der Revolution*, Ça Ira, Freiburg.
- Lenin, W. (1902), *What is to be Done?*, Progress Publishers, Moscow.
- Lenin, W. (1917), *State and Revolution*, Progress Publishers, Moscow.
- Lenin, W. (1968), '*Left-Wing Communism*': *An infantile Disorder*, Progress Publishers, Moscow.
- Marcuse, H. (1967), *Der eindimensionale Mensch*, Luchterhand, Darmstadt.
- Marcuse, H. (1998), *Feindanalyse*, von Klampen, Lüneburg.
- Marx, K. (1964) *Zur Judenfrage*, in MEW 1, Dietz, Berlin.
- Marx, K. (1966), *Capital* vol. III, Lawrence & Wishart, London.
- Marx, K. (1969), *Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich, 1848 bis 1850*, in MEW 7, Dietz, Berlin.
- Marx, K. (1972), *Theories of Surplus Value Part III*, Lawrence & Wishart, London.
- Marx, K. (1973), *Grundrisse*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- Marx, K. (1973b), *Kritik des Gothaer Programms*, in MEW 19, Dietz, Berlin.
- Marx, K. (1974), *Grundrisse*, Dietz, Berlin.
- Marx, K. (1975), *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, 1844*, in *Collected Works*, Lawrence and Wishart, London.
- Marx, K. (1977), *Das Elend der Philosophie*, in MEW 4, Dietz, Berlin.
- Marx, K. (1979), *Der Bürgerkrieg in Frankreich*, in MEW 17, Dietz, Berlin.
- Marx, K. (1981), *Kritik des Hegelschen Staatsrechts*, in MEW 1, Dietz, Berlin.
- Marx, K. (1983), *Capital* vol. I, Lawrence & Wishart, London.
- Marx, K and F. Engels (1962), *Die deutsche Ideologie*, in MEW 3, Dietz, Berlin.
- Mattick, P. (1991), 'Der Leninismus und die Arbeiterbewegung des Westens', in D. Behrens (ed) *Marxistischer Antileninismus*, Ça ira, Freiburg.
- Wildcat and J. Holloway (1999), 'Wildcat (Germany) reads John Holloway - A Debate on Marxism and the Politics of Dignity', *Common Sense*, no. 24, pp. 58–75.

Chapter 8

Lenin on the Production of Revolution

George Caffentzis

When this book [Restructuring and Resistance] was about to be finished, the editor proposed a title which included the word 'Revolution' to the authors involved in anti-capitalist movements in Western Europe. Some expressed very serious reservations about it and the hope that it would not be used, arguing that this word is too deeply associated with the disgraceful atrocities and despotism of communist dictatorships, or that the idea of revolutions on this continent is nothing but wishful thinking (Abramsky, 2001, p.546).

It is necessary to dream (Lenin, 1988, p.229).

Introduction

It is now almost a century since Lenin published *What is to be Done?*, his first major formulation of a theory and practice of revolutionary organization. In this article I show that Lenin, in *What is to be Done?* achieved an important methodological breakthrough in Marxism: the application of Marxism to itself. For up until then the categories of Marxism were applied externally to the political superstructures of the bourgeoisie but not to Marxist political organizations.

I will then examine Lenin's conception of the 'network of revolution' in the early twentieth century, examine its problematics, and compare it with the crisis of the very concept of revolution in the contemporary anti-globalization movement (as expressed by this article's first epigraph). Lenin's conception of revolutionary organization has been savagely criticized for decades and the institutional results of the revolutions launched by Leninists seem to condemn it outright. On the basis of this experience, we now have a better understanding of what is not to be done. Could the anti-globalization movement in the early twenty-first century (the closest heir to the anti-capitalist movements of a century ago) have

anything to learn from *What is to be Done?* My answer is a very qualified, 'Yes'.

Secrecy and Communication

It is often pointed out that the title of Lenin's *What is to be Done?* self-consciously echoes the title of Nikolai Chernyshevski's novel. But its grammar might be more important than its genealogy. For 'Chto delat' (the Russian phrase) is literally to be translated 'What to do?' (Service, 1988, p.27). The emphasis is on doing, not on the goal, or, in another reading, on production, and not the product.

Lenin was concerned with the question of how one can produce a revolution in way that Marx was not. Just as there is very little reference in Marx's work on the features of post-capitalist world, there is even less on the principles of producing revolutions.¹⁸⁴ Marx definitely was involved in a number of important organizational efforts, but the most important one – the International Working Men's Association – was not revolutionary (Cole, 1969, p.88). In fact, he was positively hostile to the self-identified revolutionary forces in the First International (represented by Bakunin) and was brought with some hesitancy to support the Paris Commune. Could revolutions be made like other historical products? Marx was not convinced of this, and that was one of the major reasons for his infinite contempt for the revolutionary busy bodies that so filled the workers' movement of his time.

Lenin, for all his reverence of Marx, lived and breathed The Revolution and posed the question – how to do a revolution – throughout his work,

¹⁸⁴ As Elster conventionally points out: '[Marx's] theory of revolution must be reconstructed from scattered passages, most of which were written with an immediately political purpose' (Elster, 1985, p.428). Of course, we can see all of Marx's work, from his theory of value to the general law of accumulation, as a study of revolutionary class struggle (Cleaver, 2000). G. D. H. Cole assessed Marx's stance to revolution in the following words: 'After 1850 Marx had ceased to belong to the extreme left of mere émeutisme, which he saw as presenting unnecessary opportunities to the enemy to destroy the workers' organizations and deprive them of their leaders by imprisonment or exile. What he wanted to do in founding the International was to take the workers' movement as it was and to build up its strength in the day-to-day struggle, in the belief that it could thus be led into the right courses and develop, under ideological leadership, a revolutionary outlook arising out the experience of the struggle for partial reforms, economic and political' (Cole, 1969, p.92).

especially in *What is to be Done?* Consequently, the production of revolutions for him was a matter of political work. Revolutions were not just happenings. The chief categorical distinction of work for Marxists in his period was between unskilled and skilled work and he applied it quite self-consciously.¹⁸⁵ Lenin argued that one of the most important conditions for revolution-production was professionalism in revolutionary producers. He had nothing but disdain for the amateurish efforts of many Russian revolutionaries. A professional is a highly skilled worker while an amateur is one who practices skilled work on some level but does not have the full-time absorption and training of the professional. Why did one need a professional revolutionary in order to produce a revolution? Why were both amateurs and the unskilled not enough? Why could the workers in carrying on their everyday struggles not eventually wear away the gains of capital and expropriate the expropriators, as Marx seems to suggest in the stirring finale of *Kapital* (Marx, 1967, p.763)?

The answer lies in the working conditions of revolutionaries. Lenin introduces the issue of professionalism in his critique of a comrade Martynov's 'lofty contempt for the struggle against the police' (p.171).¹⁸⁶ For Lenin, the entrance of the political police into the struggle is the necessary condition for the professional revolutionary: 'Average people [of the masses] are capable of displaying enormous energy and self-sacrifice in strikes and street battles with the police and the troops, and are capable (in fact, are alone capable) of determining the outcome of our entire movement – but the struggle against the political police requires special qualities; it requires professional revolutionaries' (p.172). What is the work that the political police do? They keep the struggle secret and the strugglers confused. Here is Lenin's argument:

It is impossible for a strike to remain a secret to those participating in it and to those immediately associated with it. But it may (and in the majority of cases does) remain a 'secret' to the masses of the Russian workers, because the government takes care to cut all communication with the strikers, to prevent all news of strikes from spreading. Here indeed is where a special 'struggle against

¹⁸⁵ Remarkably, Marx give very little theoretical consideration in *Kapital* to the role of chattel slavery and all its close relations in the development of capitalism. He was much more concerned about the internal differentiations within the waged working class, as were most other male European Marxists since 1867. For a discussion of skilled labour, artisanal labour, 'aristocracy of labour', and similar terms, see Hobsbawn (1984, pp.252-72).

¹⁸⁶ All page references to *What is to be Done?* are from Lenin (1988). All of the italics in the quotations are Lenin's.

the political police' is required, a struggle that can never be conducted actively by such large masses as take part in strikes. This struggle must be organized according to 'all the rules of the art' by people who are professionally engaged in revolutionary activity (p.173).

The political police aim to have 'the masses' not know themselves and their actions. The police have a perverse epistemological function: they are professional scientists of ignorance and disrupters of communication. Only equally professional revolutionaries could counter them by generating intra-class knowledge and communication, according to Lenin.

The inverse relationship between professional revolutionaries and political policemen in Russia (deployed by the infamous Okhranas) was recognized by police executives. General Trepov, head of the national police and target of Vera Zasulich's bullet, concluded in 1898 that 'the police are obliged to be interested in the same thing as the revolutionary', viz., revolution (Kochan, 1966, p.34). The history of political policing in Russia is a complex story, but just a little sketch might be of use to make it clear what Lenin's professional revolutionaries were up against. The original version of the formalized political police, 'the Third Department' was formed in response to the Decemberist Revolt (1825), but by the last quarter of the nineteenth century it had changed its name to 'The Okhrana' and was turning its attention to the explosion of terrorist assassinations and working class trade union organizing (Squire, 1968). It was a secret detachment of the Department of Police which used the Corps of Gendarmes as its strong arm. It was not a small operation. The gendarmes numbered 13,000 in the 1870s but in the first decade of the twentieth century had increased to 50,000 and, at its peak, the Okhrana had twenty-six branches in various Russian cities and abroad (Rogger, 1983, pp.54-6). At first these branches were controlled by local officials, after 1898, however, they were coordinated through the 'Special Section' of the Department of Police, giving rise to the specter of an 'all-Russian Okhrana' (Judge, 1983, p.130).

The long story of arrest, torture and exile of radicals and revolutionaries followed in the wake of the Okhranas which, however, learned much from their continual inverse interaction with revolutionaries and often put this knowledge into practice, as General Trepov observed. In fact, at the very moment Lenin was composing *What is to be Done?* the Okhrana was running its most sophisticated experiment in class warfare, simulation and confusion: it was creating its own trade union movement! This bold plan was the product of a revolutionary who flipped to become the head of the Moscow Okhrana, Sergei Zubatov. In March 1901 he initiated a self-help

society among the city's mechanical workers. The effort was so successful that soon textile workers, confectioners, tobacco workers, perfumers, and button-workers joined the society that was equipped and funded by the Okhrana. In April 1902 (a month after the publication of *What is to be Done?*) the Police Director Zvolianskii wrote to the Minister of Interior Plehve: 'In spite of the seeming spontaneity of this development, the organization of a trade union workers' movement in Moscow...was conducted all along in accordance with a well thought-out plan. It was necessary to foresee every detail, and to direct every step of the workers who initiated it' (Judge, 1983, p.32). The Okhrana's involvement was quite well known and soon it began to be called the 'Zubatov movement' or Zubatovshchina.¹⁸⁷ Thus along with disruption of the communication of struggles, the political police added simulation of the movement.

The production of revolution, according to Lenin, is necessarily rooted in a complementary relation between communication and secrecy. If one communicates knowledge of the actions of the masses to the masses in a channel controlled by a state determined to destroy, distort and simulate the information transmitted through deploying political police, then the professional revolutionary must be a master of secrecy as well as communication. Indeed, the professionalism of the revolutionary is precisely defined by his/her capacity for secrecy. The organization of revolutionaries must be as private as possible in order to make the activities of the masses as public as possible.

The existence of the political police deployed by an autocratic state having experienced a generation of terrorist activity provides the operational test for any revolutionary strategy in turn-of-the-century Russia, according to Lenin. Unless a proposed organizational strategy can respond to this hostile permeating presence – which operates not only through creating noise in the lateral communication channels of the

¹⁸⁷ The dénouement of Zubatovshchina is a cautionary tale to those postmodernists who believe that the state (or the media or capital or the ruling class) is capable of supporting infinite degrees of manipulative Maya. The leaders of the Zubatov-movement, in order to satisfy the most basic demands of the workers, organized a number of illegal but successful strikes in Moscow and, especially, in Odessa. They were aided by the secret police who actually freed worker-agitators after they had been arrested by the gendarmes! In both places industrialists were incensed, but in Odessa the Zubatovite workers' strike helped to instigate a very destabilizing general strike in July of 1903. The Minister of the Interior, Plehve, who had previously backed Zubatov, sacked him and pulled all government support from the Zubatovshchina unions. A full telling of the story can be found in (Judge, 1983, pp.122–49).

working class but also by continually breaking up bodily concentrations of revolutionary workers – its adherents are inevitably doomed, however laudatory its democratic and egalitarian aims. One should not confuse ‘the “depth” of the “roots” of the movement with the technical and organizational question of the best method in combating the gendarmes’ (p.183). Lenin argues that the revolutionary movement’s roots in Russia are deep enough and even when they are unearthed they quickly grow back, the problem is with revolutionary organizations. Once they are unearthed, they do not grow back quickly. Consequently, the key is prevention of detection which is the job of professional revolutionaries. For ‘in an autocratic state, the more we confine membership in such an organization to people who are professionally engaged in revolutionary activity and who have been professionally trained in the art of combating the political police the more difficult will it be to unearth the organization’ (p.186).

In sum then, Lenin presented a communication theory of revolutionary organization built to evade a detection state. It is no accident that the project he was defending as the indispensable condition for the production of revolution was ‘an all-Russian newspaper!’ No conspiratorial scheme to storm the Winter Palace was on Lenin’s agenda in 1902. He was searching for an essential precondition for a revolutionary uprising then. With an all-Russian newspaper, Lenin argues (rather awkwardly for ‘post-fordist’ sensibilities):

A study circle which has not yet begun to work but which only just seeking activity could then start, not like a craftsman in an isolated little workshop unaware of the earlier development of ‘industry’ or of the general level of production methods prevailing in industry but as a participant in an extensive enterprise that reflects the whole general revolutionary attack on the autocracy. And the more perfect the finish of each little cog-wheel and the larger the number of detail workers engaged in the common cause, the denser will our network become and the less will be the disorder in the ranks caused by the inevitable police break-ups (p.227).

The point of such a newspaper is to broaden the communication channels between revolutionary centres: ‘At the present time, communication between towns on revolutionary business is an extreme rarity and, at all events, a rarity’ (p.227). This communication would create many opportunities for discussion and debate throughout the revolutionary network. This has been termed the circulation of struggles in later studies of class dynamics which would make some kind of socialist emulation or ‘competition’ possible – as he adds, ‘we socialists do not by any means flatly reject all emulation or all “competition”’ (p.228). Even more crucial

is that intensive intra-class communication creates a simultaneity of action, which is a necessary condition for a successful uprising: 'Precisely such activity [i.e., producing and distributing an all-Russian newspaper] would train all local organizations to respond simultaneously to the same political questions, incidents, and events that agitate the whole of Russia and to react to such "incidents" in the most vigorous, most uniform and most expedient "answer" of the entire people to the government' (p.236). The revolutionary universal is created out of the network of communicating particulars.

Of course, the communication model of revolutionary production is not the only one to be found in *What is to be Done?* There are at least four others he develops metaphorically in varying degrees: the military, the manufacturing, the agricultural and the construction models of production. But that Lenin's conception of revolutionary work is centered on the communicative model is indicated by the origin of, as well as the means and end of the revolutionary work he calls for. I have dealt with the means (an all-Russian newspaper) and the end (a working class in full communicative awareness of its actions), but I have kept for last the most notorious of his positions in *What is to be Done?*: '...there could not have been social-democratic consciousness among workers. It could only have been brought to them from without' (p.98). It is an uncomfortable Platonic theme that he deliberately returns to a number of times almost enjoying the *épâté le proletariat* sensation he provokes. He writes:

Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere between workers and employers...We deliberately select this blunt formula, we deliberately express ourselves in this sharply simplified manner not because we desire to indulge in paradoxes but in order to 'impel' the 'Economists' to undertake the tasks which they unpardonably ignore... (p.144).

The revolutionary message must originate outside of the intra-working class communication network created by the professional revolutionary through the all-Russian newspaper. This is indicated both historically, according to Lenin, since the very notion of socialism 'grew out of' the theories of the intelligentsia, and logically, since the knowledge constituting class political consciousness must be obtained in a conceptual level beyond the particularistic experience of typical workers: 'the sphere of relationships of all classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of the interrelations among all classes' (p.144). This vital universal knowledge (or theory) is essential to the production of revolution, for 'without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement'

(p.91). Hence the professional revolutionary must be detached from the 'sphere between workers and employers' in order to have something to communicate to the network in the first place. Otherwise they would be simply communicating what the workers already knew more deeply and intimately than any revolutionary. The very asymmetry of the information exchange between workers and professional revolutionaries made the exchanges valuable for both sides.

Lenin's model of the production of revolution was an attempt at the self-reflexive application of Marxist theory onto Marxist organizations. For it took the work of revolution-making and applied to it the productive communicative models in his period when the newest organizational structures (railroad coordination, electricity production and distribution, telephone exchanges, monetary transfers, etc.) required centralization and professionalization in order for there to be massification. It also recognized that, like any other productive organization, one producing revolutions needed to have a division of labour appropriate to its ends and its environment of struggle.¹⁸⁸

What is to be Learned?

The critique of *What is to be Done?* began even before its publication in the debate that Lenin's article, 'Where to begin,' provoked within the Russian revolutionary movement (Lenin, 1961). 'Where to begin?' was a sketch of the chief arguments Lenin presented a year later in his book. Lenin in 1901 was immediately accused of being undemocratic, detached from the realities of working class struggle, elitist, bookish and even a 'power

¹⁸⁸ The self-reflexive application of Marxist class analysis to working class organizations that is so important in *What is to be Done?* became a standard feature in many branches of Marxism in the twentieth century. Lenin himself applies this method in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* to explain the 'reformism' of working class parties of Germany, France and Great Britain and their complicity in their respective ruling classes' colonial adventures (Lenin, 1968, pp.147–48). After Lenin, there have been a wide variety of individuals and 'schools' that have attempted to apply Marxism to Marxism from the Warwick school, the students of class composition, the theorists of wages for housework, the 'autonomous marxist' school, etc. For a short introduction to this method see the 'Introduction to Zerowork I' (Midnight Notes, 1992, pp.108–14) and for a bibliography that includes many of the key works in this methodological tradition until 1989 see (Clever, Fleming and Herold, 1991) and the bibliography in (Clever, 2000).

seeking impostor.’ The debate continued up until the October revolution in Russia.¹⁸⁹ But with the triumph of the Bolshevik revolution *What is to be Done?* became a quasi-sacred scripture. The Third International projected its conception of revolutionary organization as the model for communist party organization throughout the world. Finally, Stalin used the book to justify the post-revolutionary lineaments of the Soviet Communist Party.

The Stalinist appropriation of *What is to be Done?* inevitably led to its association with some of the darkest acts of the twentieth century. Many asked: Did the initial critiques of ‘Where to begin’ presciently pin-point errors that would end in the Gulags? These are the kinds of questions that drove the book from its sacred heights into the pit of diabolical texts, especially after 1956. It is only with the end of the Cold War and its detachment from the ugly aura of state power that a new set of non-teleological readings and questions could emerge like: Does *What is to be Done?* merely prefigure the ‘disgraceful atrocities and despotism of communist dictatorships’ or can its study be useful in avoiding the very calamities it historically became associated with? Does *What is to be Done?* provide a good model for the production of revolutions in all environments or is it just a historically limited discussion of the organizational difficulties faced by a Russian revolutionary party in the early twentieth century?

In this essay I will deal with a variant of the latter question: Has the change in the nature of capitalism (roughly from the ‘imperialism’ of the early twentieth century to the ‘globalization’ of today) made the communicative model of revolution production presented in *What is to be Done?* practically useless and simply a matter of historical interest? In order to answer it I will deal with the question in two parts: (a) is the concept of revolution-production at all relevant when confronting globalizing capital? (b) if it is, then is the communicative model of revolution-production useful in the struggle?

If Lenin had read the contemporary epigraph of this article concerning the very word ‘revolution,’ he might have instinctually responded with his own tag, ‘It is necessary to dream,’ and dismissed the revolution-phobes as Bernsteinians bereft of even the Kantian Ideal of Socialism.¹⁹⁰ But the

¹⁸⁹ For two generations of Kautskyite criticism of Lenin’s theory of organization, see Kautsky (1964) and Kautsky (1994). For a view of *What is to be Done?* from the trenches, so to speak, see Akimov’s scathing appraisal in *A Short History of the Party* (1904-5), translated and reprinted in (Frankel, 1969).

¹⁹⁰ The sentence introduces one of the few comic interludes in all of Lenin’s writing.

mood that the epigraph describes is quite real. For the period since the dissolution of the Soviet Union has been a paradoxical one. On the one side, the process of globalization that has intensified since 1989 has brought about a recomposition and homogenization of the working class internationally that was envisioned by Marx as the precondition for anti-capitalist revolution in the *Communist Manifesto* (Marx, 1977, p.235); on the other side, the sense of revolutionary possibilities has been dramatically depressed. Workers of the world are uniting (physically, organizationally and conceptually) in many new ways with the post-Cold War collapse of the various ideological and national restrictions on motion and communication. Objectively then, this would appear to be a revolutionary period, but subjectively it appears to be one of deep skepticism about revolution even among the most committed anti-capitalist activists. Why?

In the epigraph we are given two alternative explanations: either (a) 'revolution' is too deeply associated with the disgraceful atrocities and despotism of communist dictatorships, or (b) that the idea of revolutions in Western Europe is nothing but wishful thinking. I question alternative (a), for, after all, the word 'revolution' refers to many experiences beside the Stalinist outcome of the October Revolution (there has been the American Revolution, the Mexican Revolution, the Boxer Revolution, the Velvet Revolution, etc.). Certainly, the publicists of capital have no fear in using the word, from 'computer revolution' to 'a revolutionary new tea kettle.' Moreover, the use/neglect of a word is not merely determined by its pleasant/unpleasant associations, otherwise 'death' and 'misery' would be banished from the English language.

This leaves us with (b), the wishful thinking alternative, i.e. the word 'revolution' does not refer to any feature of social reality, consequently, it is pointless to use it in the title of a book describing the anti-capitalist movements in Western Europe at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Anti-capitalism without revolution is apparently de rigour; it clearly has won the day. Where does this 'postmodern' conviction come from? It is hard to be certain, of course, but there is a good explanation in the very situation created by globalization.

Revolution in the Marxist tradition has always had an ambiguous status. On the one side, it standardly referred to political revolutions in nation states (with the classic examples being the English Revolution of 1640, the French Revolution of 1789, or the Russian Revolution of 1917) or in colonies that later become independent nation states (e.g., the American Revolution of 1776 or the Cuban Revolution of 1898), on the other, it referred to social revolutions involving transitions from one mode of production to another (e.g., feudalism to capitalism, capitalism to

communism). The first reading of the term has precise spatio-temporal contours, the second clearly does not. 'When does feudalism end and capitalism begin?', 'where does this transition happen?' are difficult questions to answer. For example, if capitalism requires the world market to operate, then the correct answer to the 'where' question is 'everywhere'. There is a categorical gap between the two kinds of revolutions that makes them uneasy logical partners.

Consequently, given the importance of the issue, the relation between political revolution and social revolution has been a bitterly contested one. Shamelessly and schematically one might put the issue in the following formulae: Stalinists argued for the identity of political and social revolution in the unique case of the Soviet Union; Trotskyites argued for the total difference of political and social revolutions and the need for 'permanent [political] revolution[s]' until the attainment of social revolution throughout the planet; Maoists argued for the political revolutions in the Third World that would initiate a social revolution in the nations of the First; some have argued that Marx's notion of the relation was that political revolutions in the First World would initiate a social revolution in the nations of the Third.

This discourse on revolution, determined by the poles of the nation state and the world, has been undercut by the process of globalization. For the most palpable sense of revolution is one involving political transformations of power in nation states or colonies, but since the sovereign status of the nation states (with the US perhaps being the exception) is put into question by the process of globalization, the very notion of revolution in a nation state that can put into effect or even initiate a social revolution is moot. The very idea that a political revolution led by workers in Italy alone, for example, would be able to impose even a modest program of legal reform, e.g., a succession from NATO, the expulsion of the US military presence, the cutting of ties to the EU and the shifting of trade to be predominantly with, say, North Africa or even ending of participation in the world market tout court, the redistribution of land, the imposition of strict ecological controls on industries, etc. is definitely 'wishful thinking'. Thus, globalization not only affects the capacity of nation states to be controlled by their own constituents, it also affects the imposition of new political agendas that might even initiate a social revolution. One might even say that this is the hidden function of globalization in the first place: to make national revolutions politically impossible or socially fruitless.

This is not to say, however, the long identified causes of social revolution have been eliminated. On the contrary, the more political revolution is emptied of reality by the process of globalization, the more

pressing are the motives for a social revolution, defined as a transition to another mode of production. For capitalist development increasingly endangers the reproduction of the human race, and in this period of globalization the pace of endangerment has intensified.

In the last hundred and fifty years the causes of this danger have been identified by at least five different movements:

1. Marx and the Marxist movement identified the necessity of alienation, exploitation and economic crises in all capitalist societies and showed that these miseries will increase with capitalist development to sap human vitality and eventually threaten our species being.
2. Lenin, Luxemburg and the Anti-imperialist movement identified the necessity of increasingly violent wars over control of territory, resources and labour power in capitalist development until the dimensions of this violence will threaten the existence of the human race.
3. The Feminist Movement has pointed out the contradiction between the social reproduction needs of humanity and the operations of the capitalist market that becomes ever sharper with the 'progress' of capitalist development (Dalla Costa and Dalla Costa, 1999).
4. The Anti-racist Movement has demonstrated that capitalist development requires 'on the immense scale of humanity...racial hatreds, slavery, exploitation, and above all the bloodless genocide which consisted in the setting aside of fifteen thousand millions of men [and women]' (Fanon, 1963, p.315).
5. The Ecology Movement has demonstrated that the climax (equilibrium) state of climate, flora and fauna as determined by the continuation of capitalist development will be incompatible with the existence of the human race as well as most other co-evolved species.

Ulrich Beck made this last point well: capitalist development (in the forms of bio-engineering, nuclear power generation, species annihilation, resource depletion, and climate change) is the true revolutionary process for it is forcing the whole biological world (with the human race included) to enter into a total experiment with unknown results that puts the survival of the human race at risk. He writes: '[c]onsider as an example the tinkering advances in knowledge in genetic technology and human genetics and their impending large-scale utilization: there is no site and no subject for decision making in this area of progress, an area that will touch, change, and quite possibly endanger the human substance of our social life (Beck, 1995, p.101). Needless to say, it will require a social revolution to halt this apocalyptic 'tinkering' (Sarkar, 1999).

These are far from original points. Indeed, their recognition has laid the foundation for a contemporary conception of anti-capitalism that synthesizes Marxism, Anti-Imperialism, Feminism, Anti-Racism and Ecology which is undoubtedly well known to all the contributors to *Restructuring and Resistance*, the book mentioned in the epigraph. Then why the revolution-phobia among anti-capitalists of Western Europe and of Latin America? Perhaps it lay in the ever increasing gap between the despair with revolutions in the nation-state level and the ever growing recognition of the danger of continued global capitalist development. For an anti-capitalist social revolution on a global scale is realistically inarticulatable in the terms of the revolution discourse of the twentieth century. We are poised between impossibilities and ineffabilities – a good prescription for silence and the lack of ‘Revolution’ in a title!

But, as the old Russians would say, ‘there is revolution and revolution’. Since the need for social transformation is so widely acknowledged, the despair over political revolution is so universal while the objective preconditions for unifying the working class laterally are being put in place by the very process of globalization, the situation calls for a new conception of revolutionary organization. This conception, however, would violate the very heart of Lenin’s project. For he modeled and conditioned his notion of social revolution on a political one rooted in a nation state. Without the latter there is no apparent point to Lenin insights. For if one were to apply Lenin’s methods in *What is to be Done?* today, what would be the result? Would it not be the Sisyphean vision of a centralized organization of professional revolutionaries agitating an ocean of turbulent workers in order to seize power in their nation state?

That would be the conventional default answer. But there is another face to *What is to be Done?*: the communicative model of revolutionary organization. Lenin in 1902 rejected all the old methods of revolutionaries in the Russian past from insurrectional conspiracy to terrorism to put squarely at the forefront what appeared to be an unspectacular goal: circulating the news of struggles. Whether rightly or wrongly, he was quite confident that the antagonistic social relation that is capital will provide a continual crop of struggles. He was also confident that contradictory forces motivating capitalist development will eventually explode into social revolution. Neither struggle nor revolution were problematic for him. The problem was the Okhrana which was continually repressing, distorting and simulating the good news of the struggles in order to widen the temporal gap between the field of social antagonism and its eventual collapse into a revolutionary singularity. The immediate task of revolutionary organization is to undo this repression, distortion and simulation.

Today, the scene of this activity cannot usefully be directed to the nation state. Hence, if *What is to be Done?* is to be at all relevant, its communicative model must be directed to the planetary proletariat. For the key to understanding class struggle now is not rooted in the nation state; organizations that can circulate and communicate struggles world-wide are crucial for anti-capitalist politics of social transformation. As if to confirm Marx's dubious adage about humanity's propensity to ask the questions that it is ready to answer, there has arisen a world-wide set of organizations devoted to circulating and coordinating struggles against capital on a planetary basis (including 50 Years is Enough, Peoples' Global Action, Indy Media, etc.). Many of the activists and organizations of what is called the anti-globalization movement have devoted themselves to this task using the information technology now available and having to increasingly confront an international police force protecting the intellectual property regime being mandated by the World Trade Organization, the IMF and World Bank. None of these activist coordinating organizations would consider themselves Leninist in the traditional sense, of course, but they are applying a communicatory model of revolutionary organization initially hypothesized by Lenin.¹⁹¹

Such a project has been, however, rejected by two influential commentators on contemporary revolutionary politics: Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their recent book, *Empire*. They argue that:

...the figure of an international cycle of struggles based on the communication and translation of common desires of labour in revolt seems no longer to exist...This is certainly one of the central and most urgent political paradoxes of our time: in our much celebrated age of communication, struggles have become all incommunicable (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.54).

¹⁹¹ For a discussion of the organizational structure of the anti-globalization movement and the importance of the Zapatista uprising for its development see (Midnight Notes, 2001). Hardt and Negri seem to be systematically determined to ignore the lateral planetary dimensions of the Zapatistas. They claim that 'the insurrection focused primarily on local concerns: problems of exclusion and lack of representation specific to Mexican society and the Mexican state, which have long been common to the racial hierarchies throughout much of Latin America' (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.55). But almost every commentator has noted the remarkable capacity of the Zapatistas to continually connect local and global struggles. Thus in Negri's own country, Italy, one of the most important political organizations of the 1990s, Ya Basta!, got both its name and its political inspiration from the Zapatistas (Abramsky, 2001, pp.187-88).

The reasons for this incommunicability, according to these students of *Empire*, are that they have no common enemy and ‘no common language of struggles that could “translate” the particular language of each into a cosmopolitan language’ (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.57). They pick out six powerful recent struggles – the first Intifada, the Tiananmen Square uprising in 1989, the Los Angeles revolt of 1992, the Zapatista uprising in 1994, the December 1995 French strikes, and the 1996 general strikes in South Korea – to illustrate their claim. They claim that ‘these struggles not only fail to communicate to other contexts but also lack even a local communication, and thus often have a brief duration where they are born, burning out in a flash’ (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.54) But though they burn out they have a tremendous intensity and ‘leap vertically, directly to the virtual center of Empire’ (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.58).

Empirically, their critique of the model of the circulation of struggles is questionable on many counts. For example, one could hardly call the first Intifada which began in 1987 as burning out in a flash. It went on for nearly seven years and it reignited on September 28, 2000 and is burning still (Elia, 2001). Moreover, three of the six moments of struggle they mentioned (in Chiapas, France and South Korea) were already identifying the neo-liberal capitalist counter-revolution as their common enemy with similar words and banners. These large-scale struggles were being tied together by the literally hundreds of general strikes, urban riots and rural insurrections across Africa, South America and Asia beginning in the mid-1980s against structural adjustment programs and the institutions that were supervising them, the IMF and the World Bank (Federici and Caffentzis, 2001). A huge literature on the consequences of structural adjustment and neoliberalism had already been written and disseminated by the mid-1990s and an internationally-oriented personnel of organizers and activists could be found throughout the planet by that time as well.

It would be hard to refute the evidence showing that there has been a world-wide circulation of struggles against neoliberalism, especially when the largely Third World struggles led by indigenous people demanding the return of their expropriated land and the end of debt slavery appeared on the streets of the First. For during the writing of *Empire* in the late 1990s, Hardt and Negri must have seen images of the great anti-globalization demonstrations in Birmingham, Geneva, Köln, and Seattle. They would probably have been solicited to be involved with Jubilee 2000, Peoples’ Global Action, or 50 Years is Enough. These anti-globalization demonstrations and organizations spoke with a common language and struggled against the same institutions of globalization – the World Bank,

the IMF, WTO, the G8 – but somehow Hardt and Negri missed them or did not think they expressed struggles worthy of note.

This picture of isolated, incommunicable struggles that Hardt and Negri paint obviously misrepresents (and even trivializes) the efforts of millions of people around the planet who struggle against structural adjustment programs often at the cost of their lives or liberty. Consequently, the conclusion they derive from such a picture concerning the nature of contemporary revolutionary politics is unsupported. They argue that since the laterality of struggles – their ability to reflect and energize each other – does not exist, then ‘the only strategy available to the struggles is that of a constituent counterpower that emerges from within Empire’ (Hardt and Negri, 2000 p.59). But what is this constituent counterpower and can the Kerala farmer, the Chiapan Zapatista, the Zimbabwean war veteran, the Indonesian Nike worker and the Nigerian prostitute in Italy take part in it? According to our pair, none of these people will do. The appropriate figure is the ‘social worker [in whom] the various threads of immaterial labour-power are being woven together. A constituent power that connects mass intellectuality and self-valorization in all the arenas of the flexible and nomadic productive social cooperation is the order of the day’ (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.410).¹⁹² This description, of course, is a bit abstract so our pair end their book with a prose poem on the militant social worker that identifies him/her with...St. Francis of Assisi! ‘Consider his work. To denounce the poverty of the multitude he adopted that common condition and discovered the ontological power of a new society...Once again in postmodernity we find ourselves in Francis’s situation, posing against the misery of power the joy of being’ (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.413).

Hardt and Negri may have provided poetry, but not a refutation of the communication model of revolution production. It still is a valid in the contemporary period, for it is only with the increasing simultaneity and homogenization of struggles that the divide, defer and rule strategy of the globalizing institutions will be put into a crisis that could be followed by a social transformation. This simultaneity and homogenization is not a result of a ‘pre-established harmony’. It can only be brought about by an organizational effort that will be facing increasing efforts by the Okhranas of global capital in the twenty-first century to repress, disrupt and simulate the messages of the struggles.

Lenin’s *What is to be Done?* is hardly a good model for anti-globalization organization in general. It is too riddled with the elitism and suspicion of democratic procedures that have been pointed out ad nauseam

¹⁹² Negri introduced such terms like ‘social worker’ and ‘self-valorization’ in Negri (1991). For a critique of their use, see Caffentzis (1987).

during the Cold War. But Lenin's insistence on the need for putting the proletarian body in touch with all its members, actions and powers, and his sober assessment of the need to have activists capable of outwitting a concerted police strategy of illusion- and ignorance-creation has even greater resonance today when revolution must be planetary or nothing. In these respects St. Lenin the Evangelist might be a more useful, if less heart-warming, ancestor for the anti-globalization movement than St. Francis the Militant.

References

- Abramsky, K. (ed) (2000), *Restructuring and Resistance: Diverse Voices of Struggle in Western Europe*, resresrev@yahoo.com/.
- Beck, U. (1995), *Ecological Enlightenment: Essays on the Politics of the Risk Society*, Humanities Press, New York.
- Caffentzis, G. (1987), 'A review of Negri's *Marx Beyond Marx*', *New German Critique*, no. 41, pp. 186–92.
- Cleaver, H. (2000), *Reading Capital Politically*, 2nd Edition, Anti/Theses, Leeds.
- Cleaver, H., Fleming, J. and C. Herold (1991). Bibliography, in Negri, A. (1991).
- Cole, G.D.H. (1969), *A History of Socialist Thought. Volume II: Marxism and Anarchism 1850-1890*, Macmillan, London.
- Dalla Costa, M. and Dalla Costa, G. (1999), *Women, Development and the Labour of Reproduction*, Africa World Press, Lawrenceville, NJ.
- Danaher, K. (ed) (2001), *Democratizing the Global Economy: The Battle Against the World Bank and the IMF*, Monroe, Common Courage Press, Maine.
- Elia, N. (ed) (2001), *Special Issue: The Second Intifada. Radical Philosophy Review*, vol. 3, no. 2.
- Elster, J. (1985), *Making Sense of Marx*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Fanon, F. (1963), *The Wretched of the Earth*, Weidenfeld, New York.
- Federici, S. and Caffentzis, G. (2001), 'A Brief History of Resistance to Structural Adjustment', in Danahar, K. (ed) (2001).
- Frankel, J. (ed) (1969), *Vladimir Akimov on the Dilemmas of Russian Marxism 1895-1903*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2000), *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachutes.
- Hobsbawm, E. (1984), *Workers: Worlds of Labour*, Pantheon Books, New York.
- Judge, E.H. (1983), *Plehve: Repression and Reform in Imperial Russia 1902-1904*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse.
- Kautsky, J. H. (1994), *Marxism and Leninism, Not Marxism-Leninism: An Essay in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Greenwood Press, Westport.
- Kautsky, K. (1964), *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.

- Kochan, L. (1966), *Russia in Revolution 1890-1918*, The New American Library, New York.
- Lenin, V.I. (1961a), 'Where to Begin', in *Collected Works*, vol. 5, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow.
- Lenin, V.I. (1968), *On Politics and Revolution: Selected Writing*, edited by James E. Connor, Pegasus, New York.
- Lenin, V.I. (1988) *What is to be Done?*, intro. by Robert Service, Penguin, London.
- Marx, K. (1967), *Capital*, vol. 1, International Publishers, New York.
- Marx, K. (1977), *Selected Writings*, edited by David McLellan, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Midnight Notes (1992), *Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War 1973-1992*, Autonomedia, New York.
- Midnight Notes (2001), *Auroras of the Zapatistas: Local and Global Struggles in the Fourth World War*, Autonomedia, New York.
- Negri, A. (1991), *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, Autonomedia, New York.
- Rogger, H. (1983), *Russia in the Age of Modernisation and Revolution 1881-1917*, Longman, London.
- Sarkar, S. (1999), *Eco-Socialism or Eco-Capitalism? A Critical Analysis of Humanity's Fundamental Choices*, Zed Books, London.
- Service, R. (1988), 'Introduction', in Lenin, V.I. (1988).
- Squire, P.S. (1968), *The Third Department: The Establishment and Practices of the Political Police in the Russia of Nicolas I*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Chapter 9

The Crisis of the Leninist Subject and the Zapatista Circumstance

To René Zavaleta Mercado

In memoriam

Sergio Tischler

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism. One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm. The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are ‘still’ possible in the twentieth century is not philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge – unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.

Walter Benjamin

Introduction

Many things have occurred in Mexico since the uprising of the Zapatistas on January 1 1994. No one can deny that the indigenous men and women of the state of Chiapas that form it – as well as their principal spokesman, Marcos – have turned into central figures, if not icons, of all the struggles and social movements of resistance around the world that stand against the dominant system. Nevertheless, there has not as yet been a sustainable effort, much less a thorough systematic debate, surrounding the theoretical issues of revolutionary action in the actual circumstance, probably as a result of the irregular development of the Zapatista movement. We are, of course, talking about an open, public debate on problems that the Zapatista movement itself raises.

Although there has been great theoretical activity on the issue of indigenous autonomy and ethnic matters, there has not been a parallel activity in formulating the general problems of revolutionary action. The ideological mood and sensitivity that became dominant (the 'culture of defeat') after the failure of Soviet communism and the idea of revolution that became attached to it naturally favour such a phenomenon. One should better be careful with the word revolution; since that experience it sounds ironical, if not a bad joke.

In this sense, the theoretical works of John Holloway¹⁹³ have been of great importance. Holloway finds inspiration in the Zapatista experience to call for the urgency of revolution, but more importantly for the need to reinvent it breaking the classic canon in which it was thought and imagined. One of the great contributions of these works is that they stress the need to broaden categories, namely that of revolutionary subject, an idea that the Zapatista movement expresses, at least potentially.

Atilio Borón (2001) recently wrote the essay 'The jungle and the city. Questions on the political theory of the Zapatista movement', in which he argues with Holloway in particular, and questions some of the basic postulates of 'zapatismo'. The essay is well written, has a precise line of argumentation and density of thought, as do most of the works of Borón. One of its main contributions is that it initiates an open and serious theoretical debate on revolutionary action and the Zapatista movement; it invites a critical reflection on these issues.

The brief considerations developed here in fragmentary form are to be understood in this context. They do not directly refer to the texts of the authors mentioned, but to certain issues involved in a direct or indirect way. Therefore, if it were necessary to choose a name to include this set of ideas (at times intuitions), it would be *the crisis of the Leninist subject as the classic revolutionary subject and the Zapatista circumstance*.

The crisis of the Leninist subject is a theoretical as well as historical issue. It is a historical issue because one of the events that characterize the situation today and the present 'balance of forces' is the failure of the Leninist-inspired revolution. It is a theoretical issue because the concepts of subject and class struggle associated with Leninism are part of this failure. That is to say that the construction of an alternative subject has to include the critical assimilation of this political form; without this, it is difficult to think of a true negation as part of a social criticism of the dominant system.

¹⁹³ We are specifically referring to 'Dignity's revolt', 'The Zapatista movement and social sciences in Latin America', 'The asymmetry of class struggle'. See Holloway in bibliography.

The following are general provisional considerations on issues related to this crisis, inspired in Marxism as a negative theory and *zapatismo* as a movement and a discourse: considerations focused on the impact of Leninism in the reification of class struggle, an issue we consider essential in the debate on *zapatismo* and social theory.

Reification

One of the problems that have always marked revolutionary action and theory is *reification* (see Tischler, 2001). Maybe because revolutionary thought has almost always been part of a ‘cultural correlation of forces’ (Anderson, 1998) dominated by capital. Or maybe because the *habitus*, as part of this relation of forces, always impregnates our sensitivity and ways of thought no matter how much we try to overcome our daily reality through the force of struggle. For some reason a tendency has always existed amongst the modern revolutionary movement to render Marx’s theory positive, in keeping with what could be called – perhaps in a somewhat arbitrary use of Foucault’s term – the *episteme* of the system.

This theoretical movement begins early with Engels, whose doctrine on ‘objective independent laws’ (see Holloway, 2001b) paved the way for Kautsky’s economicist reductionism. The theoretical core of this process was the transformation of Marx’s theories into a theory of capital as an object. The dialectical concept of social relation (capital as a social relation, as class struggle) turns into a positivist concept of law that imposes itself on the subject. In other words, we witness what Martinez (2001) calls the ‘naturalization’ of Marxism, an issue that implies the imprisonment of the idea of class struggle within the concept of reproduction of the system.

Reification in the opposite direction is what we get from the theorization of Lenin, who in *What is to be Done?* advances a theory of politics directly related to the issue of revolutionary organization. The most important passages of this essential work of modern revolutionary thought are well known. For this reason, it is not our interest to offer an extensive discussion. We are more interested in stressing the Leninist division between economic and political struggle, as well as the importance given to class consciousness and the revolutionary party in class struggle. It is our opinion that not only do these issues express a theory of the revolutionary subject and organization, but also that Lenin’s arguments embody a theoretical structure which is less explicit on these problems and is related to the issue of reification.

In general terms, Lenin's argument is: in its struggle against capital, labour can develop an economic consciousness (trade-unionist). This activity represents a 'spontaneous' tendency in the labour movement, a tendency derived from class struggle itself and expressed in a certain type of organization, the trade union. The latter, as a form of organization and struggle, exists in the field of economic relations, in the sphere of negotiation of the price of labour power; in other words, it does not imply a struggle that goes beyond capital. For a 'true class struggle' to exist there must be an organization of professionals (the party) to create class consciousness amongst the working classes, who could not otherwise produce conscious revolutionary action, since class consciousness can only be brought to them 'from the outside' (the party). Although certain shades of meaning are omitted, the considerations included in *What is to be Done?* can be resumed in these central points.¹⁹⁴

How to interpret the issue of subject and revolutionary action starting from this approach? One possibility is the following: Leninist concepts of organization, class consciousness and party embody the basic idea that class consciousness cannot be created inside capital. Within this relationship, the subjects are immersed in the conceptual horizon of 'false consciousness'. In other words, revolutionary consciousness (class consciousness) is produced *outside capital* (let us say in some zone of the superstructure, using the classic but questionable nomenclature). Therefore, it is up to the intellectuals to comprehend the true meaning of class struggle (the theoretical core of this struggle), because their social condition allows them access to science (the science of *Kapital* in this case); and also because they are submerged in class conflict, in a context of relations of force. In the same way, the revolutionary party expresses the organized consciousness of the class because it moves on the terrain of relations between 'all classes', that is in the *specific field of politics*, which amounts to stating that it acquires its theoretical horizon precisely because it exists outside the direct capital/labour relation.

We know that Lenin's idea of class consciousness as a specialization of politics ('from the outside') was taken from Kautsky. What we are interested in pointing out is the theoretical link between the two authors: both consider capital as economics or as an object rather than a social relation; as an area separated and completely differentiated from politics. Seen in this way, capital is opposed to the political which is conceived as the scene for the totalization of social relations, a place to overcome the immediacy of economic relations. In other words, Leninist theorization

¹⁹⁴ See Lenin *What is to be Done?*, especially chapters I-II.

reproduces the reified theoretical basis of its time (Kautsky was considered the principal theorist of social democracy).

The idea that 'true' class struggle is centred in the party, as well as the opinion that class consciousness comes to the labour movement 'from the outside', belong to a theorization that separates the subject from the object and, because of this, produces a reified notion of class struggle that amounts to the conceptualization of capital as a *thing*.

It seems that both Kautsky and Lenin lack an idea of *mediation* to try and solve this problem from a dialectical perspective. This dimension is incorporated by Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* when he argues that organization is the mediation between theory and practice; but here we are approaching different theoretical grounds.

Party and State

As De Giovanni (1981) observes, Lenin's theory is a *modern theorization* of politics insofar as it is based on the classic themes of 'separation' and 'specialization', so central, for example, in Max Weber. In this sense, one could say that such a theorization is the production of knowledge starting from a *dominant cultural form*.

In this line of thought we may ask ourselves if it is possible for socially significant knowledge to exist outside some kind of dominant form. The answer would be that the dominant is not total, and that the social *fissure* implies heterogeneity and conflict, essential conditions for the production of knowledge; in this case knowledge of resistance and knowledge against the dominant. A knowledge that goes through and beyond form. But the central problem here is not this possibility, it is rather the possibility that the emerging knowledge becomes, if it is constructed on the basis of the hegemonic form parameters, reproductive of these same forms. In this case, the form is not deeply altered, much less negated.

The fact that Lenin's political theories form part of a dominant cultural form, as we already set out, does not mean that it does not call for the transformation of bourgeois society and the construction of another alternative, it does not mean that its core was not revolution. We refer to another issue, namely the parameters or theoretical framework not explicit in this theory, a framework through which this theory's basic concepts are expressed. This is where Lenin and Max Weber converge in a common theoretical field. On this, De Giovanni argues:

In Lenin we find a first notion of the form of politics specifically related to the Russian reality in the XIX and XX centuries, autocracy, where the field of politics is basically restricted to the repressive organization of the state *aparatus*. But this is not the essential point. Lenin's thesis is not conditioned by what was perhaps the most backward political reality in Europe at the beginning of the XX century. In that case we would not be able to explain the disruptive effect it had on the theory and practice of the history of the labour movement, and its capacity to provide a political and organizational horizon to two whole historical periods of the life of the communist International. The true connection, the true relation is to be found elsewhere. Imagination leads us directly to one of the highest points of bourgeois political theory, one that widely depicts the historical feeling of a transformation of politics in the western capitalist countries. 1918: *Politics as a vocation* by Max Weber shows a very precise moment in this theoretical process. The complexity of the relation between the state and capitalist development is defined in the progressive increase of political autonomy, in the concentration of political power where the unity of the power of the state dictates (De Giovanni, 1981, pp.183–84).

This meeting point is the modern state and its proletarian theoretical equivalent. What identifies Lenin with the Weberian theory of power is the concept of revolution based on a centre, symmetrical to the capitalist state. Thus concentration of the exercise of power is posed as the key issue in both bourgeois and proletarian politics. In both theorists we find different considerations on class with one enduring common problematic: politics as separation and concentration. They both theorize, in this sense, the modernization of the state or what De Giovanni calls the 'autonomous productivity of politics'. Because, as Weber points out well, the modernization of the state is a process similar to capital's primitive accumulation. In the case of primitive accumulation, the issue is the expropriation of the direct producers. In the case of the state, it is the expropriation of sovereignty from private hands and its concentration in a sphere radically different from society. Hence the idea of the state as a 'monopoly of legitimate violence'. For Lenin, the locus for the legitimate concentration of power is the party, equivalent to the Weberian state. Once again quoting De Giovanni:

Lenin's criticism of economicism should always be considered in the historical framework that is determined by a class antagonism and an organization of class relations that is based on the supremacy of the form of politics of a specific state. The supremacy of the political form that serves the dominant classes calls for a high concentration of the political productivity of the labour movement. That is where we find the modern meaning of *What is to be Done?* And that is where we also find the meaning of consciousness that comes from the outside (De Giovanni, 1981, p.185).

Rosa Luxemburg criticized *What is to be Done?* precisely because of the state spirit that defines its principal theories: '[t]he ultra-centrism defended by Lenin seems to us to be impregnated not by a positive, creative spirit, but by the spirit of the night-watchman' (Luxemburg, 1980, p.41). The problem, according to her argument, is that the concept of class struggle itself is deeply altered if it is seen as culminating in the state, being reduced to a productivity only to be found in the separate sphere of politics that the party embodies. In other words, it produces a vertical notion of politics that also categorizes class struggle in similar terms. We shall come back to this later on.

What we wish to point out now is that this blessed 'autonomous productivity of politics' not only introduces the issue of the political as the domain of the elites in the revolutionary field, but it also impregnates class struggle with a reified concept: the party. The fetishism of the 'independent objective laws' turns into the party/state fetishism that builds 'from the outside' – starting from its own logic – the logic that corresponds to the modern Leviathan. This takes place within the above-mentioned theoretical framework. Only when one considers capital as an object and the masses as the bearers of politics, can one imagine an autonomous existence of the party as a total subject.

Criticism of economism produced the fetishism of politics in the form of the party: a theoretical construction that is based on the preoccupations of the bourgeois form, the *value form*. What Weber and Lenin theorize from politics is the value form displayed as the consecration of instrumental reason; truly a homogenizing, vertical and repressive form of the social inscribed in the horizon of the accumulation of power.

On this issue, Holloway's (2001) thesis on the *asymmetry of class struggle* seems to hit the nail on the head. If our interpretation is correct, Holloway wishes, using this term, to transmit the idea that the concept of revolution today cannot reproduce the bourgeois canon of class struggle that culminates in the state. In other words, in the present circumstances one cannot think of radical social change in terms of an organization theory equivalent to a theory of state. The Zapatista 'ruling by obeying' moves towards that direction.

This is a matter of great importance, for it involves breaking away from the core of Leninist political theory and it points towards a criticism of all political theories. The future of the revolution would then be the abolition of politics as an eminent crystallization of the separation and fragmentation typical of capital (see Bonefeld, 2001a); in other words as a reified and reifying form of power.

We could also argue that Lenin broke with Marx in constructing a positive political theory, symmetric – as we have observed – to bourgeois theory in a line that goes as far back as Machiavelli. A similar legacy can also be found in Gramsci, confirming the existence of a line of force in revolutionary theory: being thinkers of subalternity, revolutionary intellectuals have tended to produce a legitimate theory of power. Legitimate in the sense that it has a scientific content that competes in equal conditions with the dominant theory. Hence, partly, the emphasis on ‘Marxist political theory’ as a response to the ‘absence’ of which liberal theory accuses Marxism.

Opposed to this approach, we find in Marx something radically different: the critique of political theory as part of the critique of capital and the state (see Bonefeld, 2001b). Such criticism is not found in specific systematic works (a theory of subjectivity, a theory of the state, a theory of the subject, etc.), precisely because he considers those as forms of the capital relation. We cannot offer an extensive analysis of this complex issue, but we can affirm that in *Kapital* we find no theory of state because *Capital* is precisely a critique of the theory of state. In the same sense, following Adorno (1990), one could state that what we find in *Kapital* is a negative theory of politics.

Revolution and the Nation State

As Lenin’s name is indissolubly connected to the Russian revolution, Leninism cannot be interpreted other than as a constitutive part of this great historical rupture, and the construction of the Soviet state as one of its principal consequences, so that it is almost impossible to differentiate the concept of revolution derived from this experience from that of a form of state. In the same way, one may argue that it is not revolution that goes beyond the form of the nation state, but the category of the nation state that subsumes revolution. Part of this tension was expressed in the famous debate on the construction of ‘socialism in one country’. The dilemma was not so much to save the revolution in an isolated march towards socialism as Stalin argued, as to save it from its antithesis: the stratification and nationalization of the process. For the idea of a revolution that turns into a state reproduces bourgeois power categories, since the horizon of action is given by the nation state, with all that this historically embodies.

As we have argued, the Leninist idea of politics brings forward the idea of state as the core of revolutionary action. This, together with the soviet process of stratification allowed Lenin’s theory to become the paradigm of revolutionary organization and action. By extension, the Russian revolution

itself was codified as the model of revolution. All as part of an ideological process linked to the construction of the Soviet state, whose legitimacy basically lay in presenting itself in those historical circumstances as the only alternative power to capitalist barbarism.

Nevertheless, no matter how contradictory it may seem from a positivist point of view, the phenomenon of Leninism resulted, to some extent, from failure rather than victory: the failure of the European revolution.

With this we wish to argue that the Bolshevik seizure of power was not enough to turn Leninism into the ideological model of the revolution. The deeper 'conditions of possibility' should be sought in a more complex phenomenon, the failure of the European socialist revolution and the transformation of the Russian revolution into a particular form of state (defensive towards the outside and repressive towards the inside), partly as a response to this defeat. One could argue, in the same way, that *What is to be Done?* managed to irradiate the power of appeal and seduction because the world-wide wave of revolutionary activity failed to turn into a triumphant revolution and, therefore, an example to be followed, for failure was also stabilized and crystallized as a theoretical failure of great cultural consequences. Much of the theoretical relevance of this issue is to be found precisely in this limit and failure, and not in the triumph (positivity) of the revolution, in the 'weakest link'. And we cannot blame Lenin for this, for he was conscious of the undeveloped character of the Russian experience as opposed to the more developed West countries.

To think revolution from the perspective of its failure is to adopt the hidden, negated and repressed side of history in order to think 'against the tide' (Benjamin). In this sense only the negated that is revealed illuminates the existing, since the existing in the form of positive assertion is constructed through the annihilation of the consciousness of the repressed. History as an objectivist account of the existing annihilates the force of the repressed in forming 'objectivity', and therefore annihilates the sense of multiplicity and diversity. History, viewed as linear time, always hides rupture, division, plurality of senses, or better, the subject. That is why objectivist history is always repressive. Objectivity as the construction of an identity with what exists always hides a repressed history (see Adorno, 1990).

That is why the most important question from a theoretical-critical ('against the tide') point of view is to ask ourselves about the history that is repressed in the affirmation of a political and historical phenomenon, in this case Leninism. One could argue, in this sense, that the assertion of Leninism was a process of repressively negating other forms of considering revolution.

Without the helping hand of this 'dark side', we would have great difficulties escaping from the vicious circle of the positivization of revolutionary thinking. A crucial issue would then be to rescue the multiple meaning of class struggle and revolution; to extract it from its centralizing and homogenizing conceptual framework. Or, as Jameson puts it (1998, p.17), break loose from the 'destructive past' of a utopia associated with Bolshevism and Stalinism.

There is, nevertheless, a crucial issue in Leninism which should be carefully studied, though here we shall simply mention it: the construction of modern sovereignty and a national-popular dimension of power in the conditions of dependency peculiar to the peculiar to the peripheral countries.

An important part of Lenin's theorization refers to democratic revolution in conditions of general decadence of the bourgeoisie as a democratic subject. A significant factor in Russia, given the country's characteristics, namely economic backwardness and the lack of a 'state hungry' bourgeoisie. Hence the permanent theme of revolution as the locomotive of modernization or as a line of force that depicts revolution in the horizon of the consolidation of the nation state, rather than a radical negation of capitalist society, so that the bourgeois form is seen as part of the revolutionary process.

The theory of imperialism and the national form of revolution forms part of this conceptual framework. The most eminent works of Latin American critical thought have been developed from this point of view and they should be discussed in more detail to grant new meaning, in the light of the actual circumstances, to those theoretical premises that are undergoing deep crisis.¹⁹⁵

Dialectics and Class Struggle

The Leninist idea of subject embodies an instrumentalist conception of class and class struggle. It projects, at a theoretical level, the rupture between subject and object. In this game, the subject is finally reduced to the party or the state, while the 'empirical' class plays a supporting role, in the best of cases, or is presented as a reconstruction from a centre that gives it 'real' political consistency.

¹⁹⁵ The works of René Zavaleta Mercado are especially relevant due to their extensive analysis of this issue. See *El poder dual. Problemas de la teoría del Estado en América Latina*, Siglo XXI, México, various editions; *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, Siglo XXI, México, 1986.

If class is viewed as an object, then revolutionary dialectics as negative dialectics cannot exist. Dialectics as a ‘method’ that allows us to ‘understand better’ reality and operate on it simply confirms the rupture, the ‘external’ character of dialectics regarding class. Only the idea of *class as struggle* can go beyond the objectivist point of view and rescue dialectics from instrumental closure. That means that, in the theory of the (revolutionary) subject, we find an implicit conception of class and class struggle that can be either dialectical or instrumental.

More recently E.P. Thompson elaborated one of the basic criticisms of the instrumental notion of class. Thompson basically argues that class consciousness is the result of the class’s own experience (mediated by struggle) and not of something outside the labour movement. It is through class experience that men adopt a class position.¹⁹⁶

The idea of this author that a class ‘is defined by its own men, depending on how they live their own history’ has been criticized by many, sometimes with very solid arguments (see Anderson, 1985). Nevertheless, besides criticizing the instrumental approach which prevails in the left, he posits a crucial question: a democratic socialism can never be constructed on the basis of an authoritarian notion of class.

Now, Thompson allows us to leap back to the issue of dialectics, leading us to Rosa Luxemburg, who offers one of the most brilliant interpretations of class and class struggle.

According to Rosa Luxemburg, dialectics is not an abstract method, but a consciousness (part) of class struggle, of its necessary and contradictory role in capitalist society. When taken away from this field, dialectics turns into philosophy, science or method. From her point of view, class cannot be fixed in relation to an organizational form or a ‘structural placing’, it is a contradictory process that moves in the temporality of struggle, not in the linear temporality of instrumental logic (the planning of a party or the

¹⁹⁶ Opposed to the concept of class as an object, he argues: ‘There is today an ever-present temptation to suppose that class is a thing. This was not Marx’s meaning, in his own historical writing, yet the error vitiates much latter-day “Marxist” writing. “It”, the working class, is assumed to have a real existence, which can be defined almost mathematically – so many men who stand in a certain relation to the means of production. Once this is assumed it becomes possible to deduce the class-consciousness which “it” ought to have (but seldom does have) if “it” was properly aware of its own position and real interests. There is a cultural superstructure, though which this recognition dawns in inefficient ways. These cultural “lags” and distortions are a nuisance, so that it is easy to pass from this to some theory of substitution: the party, sect, or theorist, who disclose class-consciousness, not as it is, but as it ought to be’ (Thompson, 1991, p.9).

temporality of capital defined by turnover and profit). For this reason, 'organization' does not substitute class and class struggle, but it is rather part of the same process in which struggle takes up various forms, since there is no permanent 'solid centre' to organize them into a hierarchy, or freeze them in a canon to be followed. Referring to social democracy and organization in general, she argues:

It – social democracy – arises historically from the elemental class struggle, and it moves in this dialectical contradiction. Only in the course of the struggle is the proletarian army recruited and only then does it acquire consciousness of the aims of the struggle. The organization, the advances in consciousness and the struggle are not particular phases, mechanically separated in time, as in the Blanquist movement, but on the contrary, they are distinct aspects of the same single process. On the one hand, beyond the general principles of struggle, there does not exist a tactic elaborated in all its details which a Central Committee could teach its troops like in a barracks; on the other hand, the vicissitudes of struggle, in the course of which the organisation is created, determine incessant fluctuations in the sphere of influence of the socialist party (Luxemburg, 1980, p.46).

Organization and consciousness cannot be external to class, since they are both part of this contradictory movement that is class struggle. She says:

In reality, social democracy is not tied to the organization of the working class, it is the movement itself of the working class. It is necessary, therefore, that the centralism of social democracy should be fundamentally distinct from the Blanquist centralism...It is, so to speak, an auto-centralism of the leading stratum of the proletariat, it is the reign of the majority in the inside of the party itself (Luxemburg, 1980, p.47).

Precisely because class struggle is contradictory, there is no 'pure subject', only dominant and emerging forms of struggle, forms that are also part of the struggle of capital against the autonomous organization of labour.¹⁹⁷ For Rosa Luxemburg, forms are constituted by struggle, by conflict, that make

¹⁹⁷ This way we could conceive parliamentarianism as part of class struggle, as a mediation that arises in that field; also the revisionist (opportunist) tendency, present in the organization when rendering absolute this field of action, as well as the radical contrary ideological response, tending to create a kind of 'uncontaminated subject', as in Leninism, from the contradiction of struggle. See Rosa Luxemburg (1980).

them unstable and perishable.¹⁹⁸ Socialism is conceived as an ongoing process, as a struggle destined to abolish capitalist society starting from the self-organization of the workers. It is not a concentrated blow that transfers political power from one elite to another. Revolutionary dialectics embodies this act of negation starting from self-organization. Unlike the idea of a separate party that perpetuates or consolidates class, self-organization is a process of class negation as a result of struggle. It consolidates the world of labour against capital, use value against value; in other words, in this movement the class affirms itself by negating itself. Without this ‘not yet’ of negation, the concept of class is naturalized. This seems to be the meaning of the Luxemburgian notion that social democracy is the movement of the working class.

Perhaps this is why one could argue that struggle leads us to no safe harbour. For revolutionary dialectics is a form of uncertainty of the modern world; it does not fit properly in the model of instrumental reason and its power principle. It is the *fissure* or *tearing apart* of the modern subject and her world that the apparent dimension of ideology tries to enclose in the famous principle of identity (see Adorno, 1990). Seen from the perspective of this uncertainty, class is a sort of ‘illumination’: the material force of imagination that goes beyond what exists, starting from the ‘redemption of the past’, the uncertainty created by the multiple meanings of struggle.¹⁹⁹ When seen this way, class does not move towards totality, towards the system, but towards its rupture as opposed to the idea of a class-object-system that derives from the totalitarian aspect that Horkheimer and Adorno (1987) found in the Age of Enlightenment. In this sense, class is a negative concept.²⁰⁰

The idea of class as ‘illumination’ may seem absurd, but perhaps that is precisely where its importance lies; in any case, it leads us to Walter Benjamin. In his works we can find one of the best examples of Marxist theory on class and class struggle, directed against positivism and the bourgeois form of considering revolution. From his point of view, revolution is not ‘progress’, but rather a filling of the present moment with

¹⁹⁸ Here we observe a different approach from that of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, where social forms are closed because they are constituted by power.

¹⁹⁹ Certainties as reifications and repressive forms of culture are analysed by Erich Fromm in *El miedo a la libertad*, Paidós, Buenos Aires

²⁰⁰ For a critical and not analytical concept of class, see Werner Bonefeld’s excellent essay ‘Class and Constitution’ (...). A critical approach to the objectivist concept of class as part of the theory of Smith and Ricardo can be found in Andrés Bilbao, *Obreros y ciudadanos. La desestructuración de la clase obrera*, Editorial Trotta, Madrid, 1993.

'now-time', exploding the *continuum* of history; it is the creation of another time starting from 'emergency'. Therefore, class is the critical principle that succeeds in going beyond modern time as (homogenous and abstract) time of capital and its domain; it liberates time, redeeming the past, filling it with meaning. The struggle of the oppressed, in this sense, is a struggle against progress, the possibility to 'suspend' time, because progress is conceived as barbarity, and its horizon an abyss.²⁰¹ In other words, we cannot continue to think of revolution from the point of view of progress, with positive categories; it must be thought of 'against the tide'.²⁰² The consideration of class in positive terms is an assertion of what exists that does not configure a revolutionary subject:

Not man or men but the struggling, oppressed class itself is the depository of historical knowledge. In Marx it appears as the last enslaved class, as the avenger that completes the task of liberation in the name of generations of the downtrodden. This conviction, which had a brief resurgence in the Spartacist group, has always been objectionable to Social Democrats. Within three decades they managed virtually to erase the name of Blanqui, though it had been the rallying sound that reverberated through the preceding century. Social Democracy thought fit to assign to the working class the role of the redeemer of future generations, in this way cutting the sinews of its greatest strength. This training made the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren (Benjamin, 1969, p.260)

The apocalyptic view of revolution presented by Benjamin has little to do with religious theory. His language is clearly anti-positivist. A violent

²⁰¹ On this, see Benjamin: 'A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage, and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress' (Benjamin, 1969, pp.257-58).

²⁰² 'The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are "still" possible in the twentieth century is "not" philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge – unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable' (Benjamin, 1969, p.257).

language that condemns the conceptual reification of the idea of history within the labour movement. And this is possible in an emergency situation, a situation of danger, as he points out. Rather than certainty, revolution is a theory of emergency. *Kapital* is still the principal theoretical expression of this condition.

Marx, in his essential work, analyses capital as alienated labour, in other words, as a social relation based on the *divorce* of the producer from labour's objective conditions. The issue of *divorce*, taken to other levels, allows us to conceive dominant (bourgeois) social forms in terms of particularizations of this constitutive rupture and of the conflict it implies (the issue of 'politics' is part of this relation – see Bonefeld, 2001b). In the same line of thought, we can argue that the central issue of *class* is not the 'placing' in a system of relations, but the rupture, the divorce. That is probably why Benjamin rejects all objectivist knowledge in the definition of class, since to him the subject is always the class which struggles. In the act of struggle class is produced as a movement of negativity of labour against capital (it cannot be reduced to a group, for it includes all those exploited by capital). In this movement, class tends to go beyond the constitutive separation of capitalism and beyond itself as a class. So to Benjamin, class is a sort of negation of 'modernity' and 'progress' and their categories, including the state.

The Zapatista Circumstance

Parts of the Zapatista discourse, such as 'to command obeying', 'keep walking until we find our own backs', or those that adopt the idea of struggling until 'we are no longer needed', imply a concept of struggle that does not conclude in taking over power or the state. They are images of a theory of 'emergency' against power, rather than a systematic theoretical elaboration on power: images that express a 'structure of sentiment' (Williams, 1980), whose core is the rejection of all elitist and instrumentalist idea of revolution. Far from rejecting the concept of class struggle, they bring forward the consciousness of the need to re-elaborate it, to give it new meaning.

Although not explicitly mentioned, who knows why, this emerging theory contains a criticism of Leninism and an affiliation to Benjamin, in the sense that it represents struggle against reification, it implies the urgency to liberate the concept of class struggle from its instrumental closure. In this sense, for example, the Zapatista concept of 'civil society' is not unrelated to class struggle, it includes it as its line of force. It calls for the need to give new meaning to the liberal concept of civil society through

the development of the class contradictions that this concept embodies, though acknowledging its importance in the contemporary 'cultural correlation of forces' (see Tischler, 2001).

On a theoretical level, the concepts 'anti-power' and 'asymmetry of class struggle' proposed by Holloway form part of the elaboration of a deified concept of class struggle. Based on these concepts we can begin to develop a notion of theory of struggle whose centre will not be certainty; for certainty, as we have tried to show, is part of the texture of power. Or, as Holloway says:

Orthodox-Marxist theories sought to win certainty over to the side of revolution, arguing that historical development led inevitably to the creation of a communist society. This is fundamentally misconceived, because there can be nothing certain about the creation of a self-determining society. Certainty can only be on the side of domination (Holloway, 2001a, p.104).

In any case, the theoretical assimilation of the crisis of a particular form of understanding class struggle is a crucial part of the process of creating a new subject. In this sense, rather than defending the supposed fortress of a (Marxist) political theory, one should rather confront its constitutive prisons.

References

- Adorno, T. (1990), *Negative Dialectics*, Routledge, London.
- Anderson, P. (1985), *Teoría, política e historia. Un debate con E.P. Thompson*, Editorial Siglo XXI, Madrid.
- Anderson, P. (1998), 'Marshall Berman: modernidad y revolución', in *ibid.*, *Campos de Batalla*, Editorial Anagrama, Barcelona.
- Benjamin, W. (1969), *Illuminations*, Schocken Books, New York.
- Bonefeld, W. (2001a), 'Clase y constitución', *Bajo el volcán*, no. 2, Posgrado de Sociología del Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, pp.139–166.
- Bonefeld, W. (2001b), 'The State and Capital: On the Critique of the Political', unpublished paper.
- Boron, A. (2001), 'La selva y la polis. Interrogantes en torno a la teoría política del zapatismo', *Chiapas*, no. 10, Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas de la UNAM, Editorial Era, pp. 89–114.
- de Giovanni, B. (1981), 'Lenin, Gramsci y la base teórica del pluralismo', in *Teoría marxista de la política*, Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente, Editorial Siglo XXI, México.

- Fromm, E. (1977), *El miedo a la libertad*, Editorial Paidós, Buenos Aires.
- Holloway, J. (1998), 'Dignity's Revolt', in Holloway, J. and E. Peláez (eds), *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico*, Pluto, London.
- Holloway, J. (2000), 'El zapatismo y las ciencias sociales en América Latina', *Chiapas*, no. 10, Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas de la UNAM, Editorial Era, pp.41–50.
- Holloway, J. (2001a), 'Cambiar el mundo: once tesis', in Sergio Tischler, et. al., *Conflicto, violencia y teoría social*, Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades de la Universidad Autónoma de Puebla y Departamento de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades de la Universidad Iberoamericana Golfo-Centro, México.
- Holloway, J. (2001b), 'Viva la línea correcta!', *Bajo el Volcán*, no. 3, Posgrado de Sociología del Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, pp.235–244.
- Holloway, J. (2001c), 'La asimetría de la lucha de clases', *Chiapas*, no. 10, Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas de la UNAM, Editorial Era, pp. 115–120.
- Horkheimer, M. and T. Adorno (1987), *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Herder and Herder, New York.
- Jamson, F. (1998), 'El marxismo realmente existente', *Casa de las Américas*, no. 211, pp.3–33.
- Lenin, V.I. (1902), *What is to be Done?*, various editions.
- Luxemburg, R. (1980), 'Problemas de la organización de la sociodemocracia rusa', in *Teoría marxista del partido político*, Cuadernos de pasado y presente, no. 12, Editorial Siglo XXI, México.
- Martínez, J. M. (2001), 'Naturalizaciones del marxismo. Regulacionismo, análisis sistémico y autonomismo', *Bajo el Volcán*, no. 3, Posgrado de Sociología del Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, pp. 201–214.
- Thompson, E. P. (1991), *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, London.
- Tischler, S. (2001), 'La 'sociedad civil': ¿fetiche?, ¿sujeto?', *Bajo el Volcán*, no. 3, Posgrado de Sociología del Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, pp.169–182.
- Williams, R. (1997), *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, London and New York.

Note

Translated from Spanish by Anna-Maeve Holloway

Part III

What about Revolution? Ends and Means

Chapter 10

Emancipation: Paths and Goals

Johannes Agnoli

Prologue

The liberation of individuals from objectively coercive conditions (*objective Sachzwänge*) was already in antiquity an issue for some sophists, for the stoics and Epicureans. After Christendom was transformed from the *ecclesia militans* (with several emancipatory tendencies) into *ecclesia triumphans*, emancipation was continued by heretics and dissidents. In its contemporary form, where the essential issue is liberation from coercive conditions, emancipation is indebted to the French Revolution, itself the culmination of comprehensive social processes. These processes were economic – the freeing of production from the chains of the guilds and the corporate system of the estates – and, linked to that, political – the rise of the bourgeoisie and its emancipation from the bonds of feudalism and absolute monarchy. From this perspective, the beginnings of the capitalist mode of production and of the bourgeois state contained thoroughly emancipatory contents. It quickly became clear, however, that these emancipatory contents were contained in the course of their development, and above all that capitalism did lead to the liberation of production, but not, however, to the emancipation of individuals. The same is true of the form in which socio-economic structures of domination were translated into politics, that is, the form of the state. This is true in the first half of the nineteenth century with its whole series of revolutions and revolts. And this is especially true of the movement in the second half of the nineteenth century that powerfully posed the problem of social emancipation: the labour movement, that not only strove for the so-called emancipation of labour, but actually for general social emancipation. Much later, the same striving was reiterated in the women's movement, even if it envisaged not so much general emancipation, but rather the emancipation of women from patriarchy. Meanwhile, there are a multitude of single-issue movements [*Einzelbewegungen*], all of which are oriented toward emancipation.

The matter, then, is to find the appropriate paths toward the goal of emancipation. And this is where the problem begins. All these movements of emancipation see themselves confronted with the question of what means and paths they should choose to reach this goal. Especially the particular political forms of the bourgeois constitutional state seem available as emancipatory means. This focus on the form of the state as a means of emancipatory transformation is not completely misguided, since precisely this form of the state is characterized by its open character that apparently makes it available as a vehicle for all possible social contents. However, the question that is not at all asked is whether this view corresponds to reality and whether therefore the bourgeois constitutional state can function as a means of emancipation. The relation of the paths to the goal, in other words, the means-end relationship, is removed from critical reflection. If the goal truly is social emancipation and the emancipation of individuals in society, then it is necessary to reflect in precise terms whether the means are really suitable to this end, the end of human emancipation.

The importance of determining in precise terms what kind of organizational means may truly serve emancipatory ends also holds true of other levels of social reality and attempts at human realization (*Verwirklichung*). Without question the negation of existing coercive conditions has to be organized. Yet here, too, the dilemma lies in the *form* of organization. Today, moreover, the question of organization is frequently discussed merely within associational parameters, rather than in terms of the goals. The tendency toward what Max Weber analysed as ‘autonomous organizational interests’ (*autonomen Verbandsinteresse*) is very strong. This leads to a focus on organizational continuity, numerical strength, and the so-called capacity to influence developments as something that is of more decisive importance than the orientation toward the desired end. More recently a new dimension has been added that was not an issue in either in the old workers’ movement – not even in Lenin’s perspective – or, at least not initially, in the women’s movement: the efficacy of the media. The predominance of the media confuses traditional notions of organization. The attempt to adapt to the media and become effective as a media-suited organization increases the danger of the autonomization of organizational self-interests as ends in themselves: the organization’s media image becomes most

important. This is most obvious during elections when – leaving aside the associated personalization of the campaigns – the homogeneity and strength of the individual parties are more likely to have a greater effect than party political programmes and other declarations. In the German context, one casualty of these can be seen in the peculiar development of the ‘Greens’. They began as an ‘anti-party party’ and as a radical alternative to the political system. They integrated themselves into the system and in a very short time they themselves became ‘systematized’, that is, rather than changing the system from within, they became institutionalized and thus part of the earlier rejected system. But insofar as they continued to include a multiplicity of positions, they presented themselves to the voting population as a fractured party and were rewarded commensurately during the elections.

The lack of reflection on the means-end relationship can also be seen in the development of the labour movement and in the intricacies and entanglements of the women’s movement. The labour movement long ago abandoned the perspective of emancipation and concerned itself – commendably – with the improvement of the quality of life for workers. In the women’s movement developments have been more problematic. Women’s emancipation became increasingly understood as access to hitherto patriarchially wielded power. Success has been neither thorough nor complete. But in the meantime women’s politics has come to consist of an alleged liberation by way of access to managerial positions in the economy, to parliamentary and executive positions in politics, and, paradoxically, in the gendering of job titles.

The problematic character in the relation of emancipatory movements to the state is not limited to the Western political arena. Even in the former states that called themselves really existing socialist states, the same problematic relation developed. Thus it was claimed in the former German Democratic Republic: the emancipation of women is not a problem, since the state had freed women from patriarchy. How a coercive organization – and the state is such – could accomplish emancipation is a secret of the politics of that time – a secret that certainly was not based on Marx, but rather that recalls Fichte’s absurdity that people (*Menschen*) must be forced to be free.

In any case, in the questions of the relation to the bourgeois state and of the proper conduct in the corridors of power, as well as in

the question of how this relation and conduct could be organized, the relation between ends and means remains unsolved.

Main Part

At the highpoint of the 1968 movement in Germany, there was a search for a strategic solution for future political work. There were many suggestions, several of an adventurous kind, aimed at the revolutionary creation of a communist council system in West Berlin and West Germany, and other more reasonable suggestions for the sustained development of mass demonstrations and social struggles. A different motto predominated, however, that seemed to unite both possibilities. In a rather daring analogy to the long march of the Chinese communists, there was talk of the long march through the institutions. This also included not only political institutions, but also social institutions: entry into the school system in order – so it was claimed – to socialize children for communism; entry into the unions in order to strengthen their left potential; entry into the factories in order to establish direct contact to the workers. Primarily, however, the emphasis was on state institutions: the building of appropriate organizations to participate in elections and gain entry into parliament, in order to force a breakdown of the political system from within. Little heed was paid to the warnings against that approach – warnings that pointed out the unique characteristics of state institutions. I can still recall my futile attempts to make this clear. In order to go through the institutions, one must first give oneself over to them. Or, as the ancient Egyptians put it, one must enter the ‘palace’ where power resides. The ‘palace’ certainly has many rooms and several stories: from the ground floor where the people and their representatives bustle about up to the top floor where the executive resides. However: the ‘palace’ has no back door. Marching through the institutions means, if anything, to ascend from the ground floor to the top floor. In Germany, the Greens succumbed to this logic: once they entered the ‘palace’, they by no means forced it to break down; rather they adapted to it and therewith opened the door for themselves to enter into government. While marching through the institutions, they simply forgot that these institutions have their own dynamic, that, as Marx had already insisted, is stronger than the will of the individual. State institutions do not allow themselves to be used in any manner whatsoever, for their logic is not their own, but is determined by the reality whose functioning they serve. State institutions are not there to realize either freedom or human rights, not to mention social emancipation; rather they have solely the responsibility of

organizing and securing the social reproduction of a capitalist society. Their orientation is unquestionably that of the *bonum comune* in the Aristotelian tradition. It is precisely the orientation toward the *bonum comune* that appears to lend them the possibility of an alternative use. The *bonum*, however, that they serve, is *comune* only in the sense that everything really is in common: the *bonum* of the accumulation of capital under which everything – be it humans or spheres of life – is subsumed. In this regard they are in no way available for any purpose whatsoever, and certainly not for the otherwise always acclaimed alternative use. It is not that nothing could be accomplished through state institutions. On the contrary, through patient reform work, through the activity of social democratic politicians much has been achieved: improvement of the quality of life, better guarantees of particular freedoms, the establishing of so-called democratic principles. There definitely were many successes on the long road of state politics. Emancipation, however, fell by the wayside.

There is a similar dilemma in the question of organization with regard to possible emancipatory contents. In this context Lenin's *What is to be Done?* is exemplary, for liberation was the goal among the Russian Social-Democratic successors of German Social Democracy. Its initial concern was the liberation of the proletariat, and its ultimate concern was universal human freedom in a society of the free and equal, that is: communism.

Lenin was centrally concerned with an immediate task: the prerequisite for the success of the social-democratic movement was the overthrow of czarism. That the task of overthrowing the liberal regime was added later rendered the set task of emancipation more problematic. Lenin focused not on the goal of the movement, but on the immediate means. And this means consisted solely of the seizure of power by the vanguard of the proletariat. In her critique of Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg had already insisted that his emphasis on the central committee as the locus of power was not only aimed at the overthrow of czarism, but was intended as *the* principle of organization. The continuity of Lenin's thinking about power was also evident later, after the October Revolution. In the attempt to insure production and reproduction, Lenin pointed to the alleged necessity of maintaining the principle of rigid leadership in the economy and politics: the will of hundreds and thousands was to be subordinated to the will of a single person. Later the well-known General Secretary of the Party began relentlessly to inject this principle into all aspects of social life. As soon as the critique of Stalin's politics began, his critics in all communist movements gladly disremembered Lenin's directives on the locus and exercise of power and spoke in an obscurantist manner about the cult of personality.

Lenin's notion of organization was thoroughly successful, even if – as was later shown – not eternally. The Party vanguard seized power and the system was consolidated. Emancipation failed to materialize.

Regardless of how historically and practically different they are, both approaches – the long march through the institutions by an initially oppositional force in a constitutional state and Lenin's notion of organization – have one thing in common: they both rigorously separate the form (of organization) from every content; in so doing they do not pay attention to the fact that no political or organizational form is autonomous, but is rather the form of a specific content. Lenin's conception led to a political form of the mode of production (though one does not exactly know how to specify it) that was based first and foremost on structures of command. The constitutional state is first and foremost the political form in which a capitalistically producing bourgeois society that reproduces itself by means of coercive structures is organized.

In both cases, the form is simply hypostatized and made into a kind of value in itself. The content may even be arbitrary. But the form is firmly held onto. Thus, on the one hand the party is beyond all social content and is in itself the decisive power. As was repeatedly stated in the former German Democratic Republic, 'The Party is always right'. On the other hand – and here too without consideration of the contents and without any indication of emancipation – the constitutional state is valued as the best of all political worlds. The social opposition gives itself over to the state institutions and feels itself at home in them. For this reason alone, the opposition seeks to defend and maintain the institutions.

One objection can be raised against this analysis, namely that the political system of capitalist society is full of contradictions and that these mirror the contradictory character of the society itself. This thesis is well known and has always been adduced to justify the entry into the system in order to rupture it from the inside out. Whether these contradictions actually permit an alternative use of state power has not yet been proven. The notion of the contradictory character of the system often serves as a pretext to justify one's adaptation to it. It is certain that bourgeois society is characterized by contradictions. It is just as certain that these contradictions are always absorbed by or, indeed, belong immanently to the system itself. One might think for example of the contradiction of capitalist society, that is, not of the so-called contradiction of capital and labour, but of the contradictory relations between individual capitalists, of the principle of competition. Competition, as is well known, in no way leads to the abolition of the capitalist mode of production, but belongs rather to its inner dynamic. One even hears that competition provides for the democratic

character of the market. In this context, the freedom of the consumer is happily pointed out, but here too as a mere form without any elaboration of the content. This argument acts as if the freedom of choice among consumer products had something in common with social freedom, as if the possibility to choose between a Ford and a Volvo had an emancipatory character.

There is, however, one institution that initially pointed toward emancipation: universal suffrage. We are dealing here with a genuine historical accomplishment that it would be foolish to relinquish. Universal suffrage appeared world-historically not only in the form of a possible alternative use, but as an alternative in itself. Beginning with Marsilius of Padua and the *Monarchomachen*²⁰³ the idea of popular sovereignty, that the ruled are to determine their rulers, entered into history. The successors of the *Monarchomachen*, the Levellers and Diggers in Cromwell's revolutionary army concretized this demand. In their negotiations with the officers they demanded an equal vote for all. Later, impressed by the electoral success of Social Democracy, the elderly Engels aligned himself to the alternative use of the suffrage as a means of social transformation. He became effusive, writing that the bourgeoisie had more fear of the ballot than of weapons. Engels, however, interpreted the general male suffrage introduced by Bismarck differently than did the bourgeoisie itself. The bourgeoisie relatively quickly realized that in contrast to weapons, that at that time were still a possible means of emancipation, the ballot was an effective instrument of integration. This was, of course, not the initial reaction of the bourgeoisie to the suffrage before it was universal; existing restrictions of the suffrage meant that, in the hands of the bourgeoisie, it allowed for the identity between rulers and ruled, that is, the bourgeoisie ruled itself by itself. The recognition of its integrative capacity developed gradually, and was coupled with the increasing presence of the dependent masses in the political arena. Today the integrative and non-emancipatory character of universal suffrage is increasingly obvious. However

²⁰³ Editors' Note: The *Monarchomachen* stood for the right of popular resistance against rulers who misuse their power, including the killing of the ruler. During the sixteenth Century, the doctrine of tyrannicide was extended from its earlier Greek reference to the usurper to so-called legitimate rulers. The doctrine developed in connection with natural law theory and formed part of the doctrine of popular sovereignty and the right of popular resistance against unjust rulers. According to this theory, the power of the people can not be given away: the ruler is merely the deputy of the people and should delegated power be misused, the people have the right to dismiss him and, if need be, to kill him. See Agnoli's *Subversive Theorie* (Ca ira, Freiburg, 1996) for an introduction into the history of subversive thought.

indispensable it might be for emancipation, the general and free election is in the bourgeoisie constitutional state nothing more than a mechanism for consensus building.

This, then, poses for an emancipatory movement a unique problem. However much it may criticize the increasingly instrumental character of political elections, an emancipatory movement must confront the problem of what stance to take toward them. An abstract renunciation is insufficient. It is worth recalling that even Bakunin, a resolute opponent of all state forms, announced his preference during American presidential elections. What stance, then, should an emancipatory movement take: make electoral recommendations? Though surely not itself offering candidates for election, should it support one party or the other? To call for a boycott of elections seems in fact more appropriate, but that is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, a mass boycott might bring about ruptures. This is how it appears when one considers the concerns that the major parties feign in the face of the decline of the number of voters. On the other hand, refusing to participate in elections does not necessarily amount to a social renunciation of the political system: silence equals consent. With this problem or dilemma of elections, I arrive at an:

Epilogue

There is one thing of lasting importance in Lenin's text: the title. Still one hundred years later, any movement that considers itself emancipatory must confront the question of what is to be done. This question is significant in terms of both the relationship of the movement to the state and the organizational problem. There are only a few basic rules that have been established as indubitable and that one should unconditionally follow. Emancipation as a social movement can only develop outside of state institutions. This is of course no simple matter, for the state more or less affects all aspects of life. Extra-institutional opposition is however simply necessary in order to avoid integrative consequences. Outside of state institutions does not mean, of course, outside of society. The risk of, and even the descent into, insignificance lie in the temptation of accomplishing emancipation through the idyllic retreat into private life. The formation of small, autonomous, mostly agricultural units of production leads nowhere, nor does an orientation toward so-called non-profit undertakings. As soon as the latter become large enough to be of economic significance in the marketplace, they become in the short or long run subject to the laws of the competitive market economy and become negotiable on the stock exchange; in this way they simply participate in the globalization of capital. To act extra-institutionally within society assures the possibility of

influence. In this regard, the experience of the 1968 movement is very instructive. It was able to exert political influence only for as long as it did not participate in a direct and immediate sense in state politics (*Staatspolitik*). Its *ratio emancipationis* (*Vernunft*) came into play as long as it assembled in the streets; its *Vernunft* went astray as soon as the movement began the long institutional march.

The question of organization is more complex, because the organization is supposed to unite in itself two seemingly contradictory elements: organization of the social negation and of emancipation. This, too, is a rather simple matter that is, however, so difficult to achieve. For one thing is certain: against a powerful opponent that is thoroughly and strongly organized, the organization of emancipatory negation must function without any form of central committee, oligarchy or hierarchy. *Hic rhodus, hic saltus*: the organization must anticipate the goal of emancipation and determine its character on the basis of this goal. How this is possible cannot be determined theoretically. It is a practical question. Both individually as well as collectively, and also in daily life, this notion can only be realized in and through practical activity. For that, a theoretically developed and clever plan of organization is useless. What is to be done must be tried out in practice. For: 'Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice...All social life is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice' (Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, author's emphasis).

Note

Translated from German by Joseph Fracchia

Revolt and Revolution

Or

Get out of the Way, Capital!

John Holloway

How do we tell capital ‘Get out, clear off! This relationship has lasted far too long already. Now get out, go away!’?

The issue is posed with brilliant simplicity by recent events in Argentina. ‘¡Que se vayan todos!’ – ‘Let them all go away!’ is the cry of a people who have lost all respect for their politicians, who just want them to go away, all of them, irrespective of party. And for many the ‘them’ refers not just to the politicians but to their capitalist friends, their accomplices in the rampant corruption and exploitation of recent years. But for many the cry refers to all those who exploit and all those who live as parasites of exploitation. The anger against capitalism, against that system which is such an obvious disaster, takes on a personal colour, turns not just against capitalism but against capitalists, against all those who live by exploiting the misery of others. Get out, all of you! ¡Que se vayan todos!

And of course it is not just Argentina. Everywhere there is a widening gap not just between rich and poor but between governments and governed. Everywhere it is becoming clearer that those who claim social authority are nothing but the corrupt, sick instruments of a social system that attacks humanity more and more violently. We have lived in this stupid, oppressive relationship for about three hundred years, exploited and ruled by people for whom we have no respect, and now it is time to say ‘Enough, get out, go!’

But is it really possible?

The question would be an empty abstraction if it were not for the fact that nearly everybody says ‘go away!’ to capital nearly all the time: perhaps not with the same clarity, but with similar intent. There must be very few people in the world who actively support capitalism, who actually think it is a good way of organizing society, rather than simply taking it for granted or thinking that there is no alternative. There can be very few people who

think that a society is good in which 35,000 children die needlessly each day, as a result of the way in which production and distribution are organized.

The vast majority of us try to escape from capital all the time. We do it in different ways. We flee. We flee by throwing the alarm clock against the wall when it rings in the morning and tells us to go to work. We flee when we phone up and say we are unable to go to work today. We flee when we watch a Hollywood movie and reassure ourselves that the world is not so bad really, that it will all turn out all right in the end. We flee by leaving our job and trying to survive on the dole. We flee when we open up a small shop or set up a small business – anything to avoid the direct command of capital. We flee when we migrate, hoping that conditions will somehow be better on the other side of the fence. For some of us flight is more complicated, more contradictory. In some ways we like what we do. We like to be teachers, doctors, nurses, joiners. We think that what we do makes sense in some ways and like the personal relations involved. The problem is the restrictions and the direction that capital imposes on us: we want to teach well, to treat our patients well, to do whatever it is we are doing well, but not to worry about profit, nor about imposing discipline, nor about closing our eyes to the horrors we see around us. We flee from capital by fighting for what we are doing against the limits and blinkers imposed on us by the capitalist form of organization.

Capitalism is repulsive, deeply repulsive. All forms of domination are repulsive, but in capitalism this repulsion is a basic principle of social organization. The repulsive character of capitalism is what liberal theory calls freedom.

Slavery and feudalism are repulsive too, of course. Slaves hate their masters and would like to be free of them, but they are tied by the bond of ownership; slave-owners too despise their slaves and consider them lazy and stupid, but it may not be so easy to sell them and buy other, better ones. In feudalism, the situation is even worse, for the bond is for life. The serfs cannot walk away from their lord, no matter how cruel or demanding he is; but neither can the lords walk away from their serfs, no matter how stupid or disobedient they are. The mutual repulsion of lord and serf is contained.

This changes with the transition to capitalism. The serfs win their freedom: if they do not like their lord-turned-capitalist, they can leave him. If the lord-turned-capitalist does not like his workers, he can sack them. The pent-up hatred of centuries, the repulsion each side feels for the other, finds expression in the new freedom of capitalist society.

This is a real freedom. The former serfs are at last able to say to their masters ‘Go away! Leave us in peace, leave us to get on with our own lives

the way we want to!’ The masters are at last able to say to the former serfs ‘You’re fired! We don’t want you’.

This is an illusory freedom, of course. The former serfs have to produce or to do something in order to survive, but the only way in which they can do that is by having access to that which they (or their forbears) have done in the past, or to land. But when they try to do this, they find that what they have done in the past and the land too is private property, all enclosed and marked with signs saying ‘This is mine!’ They must go then, cap in hand, to the capitalist (the property-owner, the person who has marked everything with ‘this is mine!’) and ask for access to the means of survival. The capitalist (the former lord and slave-owner) finds too that, once the serfs are gone, he has no source of wealth unless he employs the now-free workers. And so a new relation is born. The former serfs sell their labour power (their capacity to work) to the former lords and become workers, working again for the people that they had fled from. The former lords too are forced into a new relation of dependence: they depend now not on the serfs but on the workers they have contracted.

The relationship is not the same as before, however, because mutual repugnance, flight, freedom in other words, is now built into the core of the relationship. Capital is structured around mutual repulsion: capital is repulsive. This repulsion finds expression in the ability of capitalists to flee from their workers whenever they want. Flight and the threat of flight is the principal way in which capital imposes its discipline (quite unlike the lords of feudal times). But workers too are free to flee, by working slowly, by not turning up for work, by putting the desire to do things well before the interests of their employer, by dropping out.

The flight from capital is central to our lives. That is surely the starting point for thinking about revolutionary change.

Fleeing from capital is easy. The problem is to maintain that flight, to avoid being recaptured. Maybe the same could be said for slaves and serfs. They too could run away, their problem was to avoid being recaptured. But when they ran away, they were already in breach of the law and in danger of direct physical punishment. When we run away, there is no breach of the law, no threat of punishment. Our master’s leash is much longer. We run away and everyone says ‘Fine, you’re free to do what you like’. The problem comes when our lack of access to the means of doing means that we starve.

There are two elements, then, in thinking about the possibility of revolutionary change. The first is telling capital (and capitalists and their politicians) to go away. ¡Que se vayan todos! Most of us do it in some form or another much of the time. The problem is to do it effectively and

collectively. The second element is to think how to survive once the relationship is broken, how to avoid being recaptured, forced back into submission by our lack of access to the means of doing. The distinction can be expressed in terms of revolt and revolution. Revolt is inherent in our existence in an oppressive society, revolution refers to the question of how we maintain the impetus of revolt.

These elements are interwoven, interdependent and yet distinct. The first element (*¡que se vayan todos!*, revolt) expresses a deep and urgent anger. Capitalism is so terribly, terribly destructive that we cannot wait until we have a plan for survival before we say ‘enough!’ To a woman who is being beaten by her husband you cannot say ‘but how will you survive without him?’ No, there is only one thing to be said now: ‘get out, husband, go!’ Of course the demand will gain force if the woman already has a plan for survival, but to regard such a plan as a precondition for saying ‘get out!’ would be insulting. If necessary, finding the means to survive is something that has to be developed in the process of breaking the relationship.

We cannot tell capital to go away by trying to take state power, either by parliamentary or by violent means. Going to the state (by whatever means) is like going to a marriage counsellor. Its *raison d'être* is to preserve the relationship that we are determined to break. The time for trying to reform the relationship, to make capital more human, is long past. This lesson has been hammered home daily since September 11 as we see bodies pulled from the rubble in Afghanistan, Palestine, and where next, and all pretence of giving capitalism a human face has been abandoned. Now it is more urgent than ever to break the capital relation.

The second element (how can we survive?, revolution), unless it is grounded in the anger of the first (*¡que se vayan todos!*) becomes an abstraction. But the first element, unless it leads on to alternative forms of survival, is unable to maintain itself. To speak of revolution makes sense only if it is grounded in revolt; and revolt can maintain itself only if it tends towards revolution. The initial ‘Get out! *¡que se vayan todos!*’, has to lead on to the construction of alternative forms of sociality. It cannot be a question of replacing one set of rulers with another, but of building a different sort of social relationship. The initial anger inevitably takes a personal form, but thoughts about how to survive push us beyond the understanding of capital in personal terms to seeing capital as a social relation, so that throwing capital out can only mean developing alternative forms of social relations, alternative forms of sociality.

The sociality of doing is the central issue. To live, to survive, to be human, we do. Doing, in the sense of projecting, changing and changing ourselves, is central to human existence – ‘for what is life but

activity?’ (Marx, 1975, p.275). But doing is always social doing, always part of a social flow of doing. In order to do, we connect in some way, consciously or unconsciously, with the doing of others, we integrate our doing with the doing of others. I cannot imagine a doing that is purely individual. I may think of writing this chapter as an individual action, but obviously it is not: it is a blending of my doing with the doing of others who have written or talked about the issue, with the doing of the people who made the computer I am using, with that of the people who put electricity in the house and so on and so on. My doing is not necessarily co-ordinated with the doing of others, but it is none the less a social doing. My doing blends with that which others are doing or have done in a flow of doing through time and space.

Then comes capital, that horrible, horrible relationship that we want to break. Capital is the fracturing of the sociality of doing. Capital is the separation of that which has been done from the flow of doing. Capitalists appropriate that which has been done, they take it and say ‘this is mine! This is my property!’ The seizure of the done is of course the seizure of the means of doing (since our doing depends on that which has been done), so that our access to doing (that is, to the social flow of doing) now has to pass through the capitalist. In order to integrate our doing into the social flow of doing (in order to be able to do at all), we must sell our capacity to do (our labour power) to the capitalist and do what he tells us to do. We are torn from any direct determination of the social flow of doing, we are torn from that conscious projection of our own doing which distinguishes us from animals, we are torn from the direct participation in the sociality of doing which gives social validity to what we do and mutual recognition to each of us as participants in the flow of human doing.

Capital stands as the gatekeeper to the sociality of doing. Unless we go through capital, unless we sell our labour power to the capitalist or participate in some way in capitalist social relations, we are isolated, impoverished (or indeed annihilated) both materially and socially. Capital stands as gatekeeper, supported of course by all the politicians, soldiers, police, professors and the like who make it unthinkable for us to question the ‘this is mine!’ upon which capital stands. When we say ‘Go! Get thee gone!’ to capital and its henchmen, we are saying ‘Get out of the way, we want direct access to the sociality of doing’. We no longer accept that the relation between our particular doing and the social flow of doing should pass through capital. We ourselves want to determine how our doing should be integrated into the flow of doing of all. It is only by integrating our doing into the sociality of doing that we can maintain our flight from capital.

How can we tell the gatekeeper to clear off and what does it mean? It cannot be a question of appointing a new gatekeeper, the party or the state. That does not make sense, we want no gatekeeper at all. It cannot be a question of converting private property into public property: any form of property is a breaking of the social flow of doing. It is the abolition of property that is required, the dissolution of this dam that breaks the flow of human doing.

If we were to think of replacing one gatekeeper by another, as in the old concept of social transformation, that would already suggest a model of revolution and of organization. To replace one gatekeeper with another, there must be direct confrontation. Direct confrontation was understood as taking place at the level of the state, as though the state marked the limits of society – now obviously (but always) a remarkably silly idea. It is probably not helpful to think of revolution now in terms of direct confrontation: not only because it has not worked in the past, not only because we would almost certainly lose, given the means of violence which the states have at their disposal, but also because direct confrontation means adopting the forms of social relations inherent in capital. Direct confrontation implies adopting a mirror image of the enemy. One army looks very much like another, and it never really matters which wins.

This suggests that we should think of revolution not (or not just?) as punching the gatekeeper on the nose, but rather in terms of flowing around him, establishing alternative forms of sociality, making him an irrelevant and despicable laughing-stock.

In some ways, Lenin's great question 'what is to be done?' is much more urgent now than it was a hundred years ago. But the question was perhaps not an innocent one. The formulation ('what is to be done?' rather than 'what do we do?') already suggests an instrumental approach. It carries with it the idea of 'what is to be done to get from point A to point B?' or 'what is the best way of reaching point B?' It separates the end from the means, and subordinates the means to the end. Any means are justified to reach the goal of communism. However, by detaching the means from the end, this conception deprives the means of their emancipatory content (emancipation is seen as coming after the revolution). Thereby, the relationship is reversed: since the end can be nothing other than the product of the means, the end produced (the communism of the Soviet Union) was necessarily non-emancipatory. The apparent subordination of means to end necessarily means in reality the subordination of end to means. It is important, then, in distinguishing between the two elements of our problem (*¡que se vayan todos!* or revolt, and how to survive? or revolution), that we see the relation between the two as internal, not external. The development

of an alternative sociality is not to be seen as something that comes after the revolution: it is rather the movement from revolt to revolution.

The idea of flowing around the capital-gatekeeper makes it clear that there is no one correct way, that rather the strength of the flowing around lies in the fact that the movement is made up of a million different initiatives, a million different experiments going beyond the limited but very adaptable confines of the capital-gatekeeper's imagination, a million different explorations of different ways of establishing social validation and mutual recognition. Of course there is confrontation as capital tries to stop us and impose its stupid, violent 'This is mine!', but the response cannot be to adopt the logic of capital but to laugh and overflow, to expose its violent stupidity. Our strength lies not in working through capitalist structures but in developing forms of action and forms of relations that do not dovetail with the capitalist forms, that do not correspond to the logic of capital.

We can make the same argument in terms of power. Our power is fundamentally different in quality from the power of capital. This difference in quality is hidden if we speak of 'counter-power', as do traditional discussions of revolution. The problem with the term 'counter-power' is that it leaves open the question of whether our power is symmetrical to the power of capital or in some way fundamentally non-symmetrical. In other words, the term 'counter-power' conflates two quite different meanings of the word 'power'.

Our power is the power of the social flow of doing. It is the blending of our doing with the doing of others that gives us the possibility of satisfying our material wants and living in a world based on dignity, on the mutual recognition of one another as doers, as active subjects. Our power is the social capacity to do, to realise our projects.

The power of capital is the fracturing of social doing. The power of capital is its capacity to appropriate the done and say 'this is mine'. The power of capital is the power to deny us access to the sociality of doing. Capital separates: capital separates us from that which we have done, from the means of doing, from the possibility of determining our own doing, from one another, from the sociality without which our individual existence becomes meaningless.

The power of capital (power-over) separates. Our power, anti-power, power-to-do, brings together. The logic of the two powers, their grammar, their syntax, is fundamentally different. They are two totally antithetical movements (for more on this see Holloway, 2002). If we (whatever we call ourselves, be it working class, trade union, revolutionary party) adopt the logic and grammar of separation, then we are struggling on behalf of

capital, whatever our intentions. There is no symmetry between the two sides of the class struggle.

Revolution, then, is not the struggle to take power from *them*, but rather the movement of our own power, the movement of power-to. But what does that mean? Our power, the power to do, is the social flow of doing, but it exists in a society in which that social flow is fractured. Consequently, it can only be understood as a movement against that fracturing, the struggle to recompose and assert our own power. Our movement is negative, a movement-against, but it is not an empty negativity, rather a negativity filled with the assertion of our power-to against that which negates and fractures it.

Revolution is the movement of power-to. This is still very abstract, and in some ways it is more a question than a statement, but a number of points are clear.

Firstly, it is possible to refer to power-to as the ‘forces of production’, since human doing is the only creative force, the only force of production. However, the way in which the phrase ‘forces of production’ has been understood in the (post-Marx) Marxist tradition, as referring to technology, conceals the basic point: it is the developing power of human creativity (of the social flow of doing) which comes into constant conflict with the existing relations of production, based as they are on the fracturing of social creativity. The idea of a clash between ‘the forces of production’ and the ‘relations of production’ has been associated with a deterministic view of social development as an objective process of which we are the ‘bearers’, but no more. If, however, we think of a conflict between our power-to and the fracturing of that power-to by capital, it is clear that we, as subject, are in the centre of the process, that we are the movement of history.

Secondly, it is clear that the movement of power-to against its own fracturing cannot take place through the state, since the state itself is part of that fracturing. The state is a process of fracturing in various senses: it divides the political from the economic, the public from the private, the national from the foreign. The sociality of doing is not a national sociality. It does not stop at the frontiers of the state. To think of the explicit socialization of doing in terms of the state is nonsensical. It is clear from the history of the so-called ‘socialist states’ that the result of identifying sociality with the state was to cut the doers in those countries off from the global sociality of doing, with disastrous consequences in terms of intellectual and material impoverishment. The movement of power-to cannot be a national movement.

Thirdly, and following from that, we cannot think of the movement of power-to as being a 'political' process of collective deliberation separated from the economic. 'Neighbourhood assemblies' and other forms of communal deliberation are certainly of crucial importance, but we must not forget that capital-as-gatekeeper separates us not just from collective deliberation but also from the material richness produced by social doing. Overcoming the capital-gatekeeper must involve the development of forms of doing that participate in all the richness of social doing.

In other words (and fourthly), the movement of power-to cannot be conceived in terms of a retreat from sociality. Saying 'go away, capital' can easily lead us to turn inwards, to turn our back on capital and try to develop our own little projects for survival. This is very understandable and probably necessary in many cases. How else do we try to develop alternative ways of doing, other forms of sociality, if not by creating our own spaces? We establish our own seminars or discussion groups away from the usual academic pressures, we set up or participate in community projects of one sort or another, social centres, unemployed workers' centres, co-operatives for the production of organic vegetables and so on. There is a temptation to turn inwards, to defend and consolidate 'our own space'. But probably the notion of 'our own space' is illusory – and perhaps we should think in terms of time and not of space. In such projects, the issue always arises of how we connect to the global flow of doing – what do we do with the organic vegetables, how do we avoid the social centre becoming isolated and inward-looking, the discussion group becoming arid and sectarian? The strength of such projects ultimately depends on the degree to which they find ways of integrating their doing into the social flow, without going through the fracturing forms of capitalist social relations. Their strength depends not on turning away from the capital-gatekeeper-to-sociality but on flowing around it. The movement of power-to cannot be understood as a movement towards poverty, austerity and isolation. The richness of the Zapatista movement, for example, derives not from their defence of indigenous traditions but from their openness to a world of struggle.

Fifthly, it used to be said that there was a difference between the transition from feudalism to capitalism and the transition from capitalism to communism in that the former was interstitial, a gradual building up of bourgeois power in the interstices of feudalism, whereas the latter could only be achieved at one blow, through a climactic Revolution-Event. This argument leads almost inevitably to a vanguardist conception of revolution as the seizure of power and the identification of the state with the whole of society. However much one may want capital to drop dead tomorrow, the

idea of revolution as the movement of power-to probably means that revolution can only be conceived of as interstitial – or rather (perhaps a better image) as a progressive flowing around capital, a progressive overflowing, outsmarting, ridiculing, jumping to a different plane. This does not mean a gradualist approach to revolution, a conception which depends on the linearity of time, but rather the progressive destruction of the linearity of time, a moving beyond all the linearities and definitions of capitalism.

Sixthly, if the movement from revolt to revolution is the development of an alternative sociality, then it is important to see that this movement is just as much rooted in everyday practice as is the movement of revolt. We develop social relations all the time that are not commodified and that are in implicit or explicit tension with capitalist social relations: relations of love, of solidarity, of co-operation, of dignity. Obviously these relations do not exist in a social vacuum, they are in no sense pure prefigurations of a non-capitalist society, but their existence nevertheless points against and beyond capitalist social relations. The development of an alternative sociality is not something that has to be created from nothing, it already exists, albeit embryonically, in the daily practice of people against and beyond capital.

Lastly (and perhaps most important), understanding revolution as the movement of power-to means not following the agenda of capital. There is a tendency in left thought to focus on what capital (through its mouthpieces) is saying and doing, and to criticise that. That is no doubt important, and yet it is wrong, it is completely upside down. Capital cannot be the starting-point of revolutionary thought. We are the doers, the only creators. Capital runs after us, trying to contain what we are doing, to define it, to appropriate it, to convince us that *it* is the only subject and that we are nothing. Our doing constantly overflows the bounds of capital: capital is a movement of containment, absorption, integration. To follow the agenda of capital is to accept that it is the Subject, to lose sight of our own power-to-do (and capital's absolute dependence on that power). Revolutionary theory can only be the recuperation of our own exclusive subjectivity, our power-to-do: not that theory can recover our subjectivity on its own, but that it makes sense only as part of the struggle to do so.

We are the only subject, the only creators, the only gods. Capital runs around us proclaiming 'this is mine, I am the only subject, you cannot have access to the social flow of doing unless you go through me'. The power of social creativity moves ahead and capital runs about developing new concepts of property in the effort to contain it – as witness the enormous expansion of the concept of 'intellectual property' in recent years as capital

seeks to enclose new forms of activity. Time and again it leaps in front of us as gatekeeper and says 'you cannot have access to music on the internet unless you pay your toll to me, you cannot have access to software, you cannot have access to medicines for the treatments of AIDS unless you pay me what I demand, you cannot plant this type of maize because now I have patented it'.

How do we develop forms of doing that flow around the gatekeeper-capital and feed directly into a global sociality? We do it all the time. What is to be done, yes, but it must be grounded in what is being done already, and what is being done already is rich and wonderful. There are millions of different projects already in existence: small-scale projects in cities and in indigenous rural communities, projects to develop the creativity of the millions and millions (billions) of people that capital has simply spat out as irrelevant to its own expansion, large movements like the Zapatistas in Mexico or the landless peasants in Brazil, global projects constructed through the networks facilitated by the internet. A surge of movements, of people trying to develop their power against and beyond capital, a surge of which the iceberg-tip can be seen in Seattle, Genoa, Barcelona, Porto Alegre. A host of people trying to find a way of surviving without entering into the oppression of capital. A contradictory, often chaotic movement – but then that is the only way we can think of getting around capital, the gatekeeper to sociality.

The future is frightening and uncertain, for capital fights back, like any gatekeeper. It represses violently and viciously, it tries to absorb and contain. It defends its property and develops new forms of property, new ways of saying 'this is mine', trying to appropriate all that is produced by human creativity. The more absurd its existence becomes, the more violent it becomes. But we do not need you, capital, get out! Get out of our way and let us develop our own power to create a world based on the mutual recognition of human dignity.

References

- Holloway, J. (2002), *Change the World without Taking Power*, Pluto, London.
Marx, K. (1975), *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, in Marx, K. and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, Lawrence and Wishart, London.

Index

- Abramsky, K., 150, 163
 Adorno, T.W., 5, 175, 176, 180
 Aglietta, M., 101, 114
 Agnoli, J., 5, 8, 136, 148, 193
 Akimov, V., 158
 Albert, M., 115
 alienation, 61, 77–80, 82, 84, 85, 132, 161, 182; see also reification
 Anderson, P., 170, 178
 anti-capitalism, 1, 2, 4, 101, 104, 124, 125, 150, 158, 159, 162, 163, 206;
 anti-globalization, 1, 4, 5, 6, 151, 163, 164, 165, 166;
 revolution, 1, 150, 159, 197–206
 anti-racism, 161
 anti-semitism, 5
 Anweiler, O., 45
 Argentina, 101, 105, 112, 119, 122, 196; see also debt and Argentina
 Asian crisis, 112, 118
 Autonomist Marxism, 95, 96, 157
 Axelrod, P., 28
- Bakunin, M., 50, 70, 151, 194
 Basualdo, E.M., 113
 Bebel, A., 26, 34, 35
 Beck, U., 161
 Becker-Panitz, H., 42
 Behrens, D., 8, 25, 27, 29, 37, 43, 142, 144
 Belinsky, V.G., 50
 Benjamin, W., 168, 176, 180–182
 Bernstein, E., 35, 86, 158
 Bieber, H.J., 41
 Bilbao, A., 180
 Bismarck, O. von, 193
 Blanqui, J-A., 19, 28, 29, 45, 134, 179, 181
 Bloch, E., 136, 141, 145
 Brazil, 105, 112, 118; see also debt
 Boccará, P., 101
 Bock, M., 32–34, 37–41
 Bochard, J., 32, 39
 Bolshevism, 13, 39, 43, 44, 45, 71, 89, 90, 177; claim to power, 14, 20, 21;
 form of economy, 13, 19, 21, 31, 42, 90–95, 128, 129, 131, 142, 192;
 militarization of labour, 92;
 and state, 14, 20, 45, 135–137, 142, 174, 175; and workers state, 13, 21, 89, 92,
 129–131, 136; see also Leninism
 Bonefeld, W., 4, 5, 8, 96, 109, 110, 117, 144, 145, 147, 174, 175, 180, 182

- Bonnet, A., 8, 114, 123
Bordiga, A., 47
Bordigism, 96
Borón, A., 169
Bouzas, R., 119
Bracher, K.D., 41
Brady Plan, 112–13
Brendel, C., 7, 24, 135
Brennan, J.P., 105
Bretton Woods, 104
Brinton, M., 90
Bunyon, J., 90
- Caffentzis, G., 4, 8, 164, 165
capital, 3, 6–8, 48, 83–85, 115, 116, 131, 140, 145, 146, 188, 191, 199, 200–202, 204, 205–206;
 and crisis of accumulation, 3, 4, 102, 105, 106, 111, 115; flight, 104–109, 166, 124, 200
Carchedi, G., 117, 122
Carter, J., 109
Cavaignac, L.E., 23
Cavallo, D., 122
Chernyshevsky, N., 49, 50, 68, 70, 72, 151
Chesnais, F., 114, 115
Clarke, S., 4, 5, 8, 109, 140, 144
 Cleaver, H., 95, 151, 157
Chiapas, see Zapatistas
Chinese Revolution, 17
class, 69, 87, 94, 134, 143, 144, 178, 180–182;
class struggle, 4, 8, 67, 70, 77, 87, 110, 119, 120, 121, 147, 164, 172, 179, 180, 181, 183;
 asymmetry, 174, 183, 203
 communism, 8, 24, 80, 135, 139, 140; contemporary crisis, 101, 103, 104–108, 110, 114, 115, 147;
 circulation of struggle, 102, 105, 164; dialectic of class struggle, 8, 28–30, 36–38, 77, 83, 95, 177–181
- Cocalera, 124
Cohen, B., 106
Cole, G. D.H.G., 151
commodity, 77, 80–85, 130, 146
communication, 38, 150, 153–158, 162–165; see also experience and proletarian public sphere
communism, 2, 3, 5, 6–8, 14, 31, 58, 83, 84, 85, 96, 128–133, 138, 139, 141, 148, 194, 195, 201

- consciousness, 54, 64, 68, 78, 79, 86–88, 93, 94, 142; and class, 30, 70, 90, 142, 156, 171, 173, 178, 179; see also Experience
- council communism 14, 19, 20, 22, 24, 43, 45, 46, 47, 89, 90–92, 95, 96, 140
- credit, see debt
- Crump, J., 91
- Dalla Costa, G.F., 161
- Dalla Costa, M.R., 161
- Darwin, Ch., 50
- Darwinism, 87
- Dauvé, G., 96
- De Angelis, M., 4
- debt, 109–114, 164; crisis, 109, 111, 112, 118, 120–122, 147; expansion, 110, 111–113; socialization, 102, 103, 107–109, 112–114, 116; and Argentina, 122, 123; and Mexico, 121–123
- De Gaulle, Ch., 106
- De Giovanni, B., 172, 173
- democracy, see revolution
- dialectics, 37, 49, 50, 54, 62, 63, 65, 76–81, 84, 85, 87, 88, 92, 93, 94, 178; of labour, 76, 77, 81, 84, 86, 94, 178
- dictatorship, 136
- dictatorship of the proletariat, 73, 135–140, 143
- Dietzgens, J., 40, 41
- Diggers, 193
- Dinerstein, A., 4, 5
- Dommanget, M., 28
- Dos Santos, T., 115
- Droz, J., 32
- Duménil, D., 110
- Dunayevskaya, R., 142
- Dyer-Withford, N., 96, 136, 141
- ecology movement, 161
- Education, 30, 60, 61, 143; and coercion, 88, 135, 142, 143, 190
- Elia, N., 164
- Elster, J., 151
- emancipation and contradiction, 146, 192
- Engels, F., 6, 19, 27, 33, 52, 55, 56–58, 59, 62, 63–65, 70, 86, 87, 89, 130, 132, 137, 139, 170, 193
- Enlightenment, 59, 180; Scottish Enlightenment, 60, 67
- equality, 1–3, 5–7, 50, 84, 110, 128–132, 136, 148, 145
- experience, 30, 38, 47, 48, 95, 139, 178; see also consciousness and proletarian public

- Faknzylber, F., 106
Fanon, F., 161
Fascism, 168
Federici, S., 4, 164
feminism, 161
Ferrer, A., 106
fetishism, 45, 80–85, 92, 95, 110, 125, 144, 174
Feuerbach, L., 50, 52, 55, 56, 57, 58–61, 63, 64, 69, 77, 78, 79, 86, 87
Ffrench-Davis, R., 119
Fichte, G., 189
Fischer, R., 46
Fleming, J., 157
forces of production, 26, 56, 66–68, 205; and superstructure, 66, 67
Foucault, M., 170, 180
France 1968, 106
Frankel, J., 158
freedom and necessity, 54, 55, 65, 132, 141, 145, 146, 148
Friedeberg, R., 34
Fromm, E., 180
Funke, M., 41
Furtado, C., 116
- Garcia Marques, G., 1
German Democratic Republic, 189, 192
Germany 1968, 47, 48, 189, 190, 194
globalization, 8, 158, 160; see also anti-capitalism
Glyn, A., 110
Godelier, M., 137
Gorter, H., 32, 39, 89, 90
Gramsci, A., 90, 93, 175
Green Party (Germany), 189, 190
- Haase, H., 41
Habermas, J., 36
Hafner, K., 25
Haque, N.U., 119
Hardt, M., 8, 120, 163–165
Harvey, D., 104
Hegel, G.W.F., 3, 49, 52–57, 59–63, 64, 65, 68, 76–80, 85, 86, 93, 142
Herold, C., 123
Heymann, D., 123
Hilferding, R., 87
Hirsch, J., 117
Hobsbawn, E., 152

- Holloway, J., 4, 5, 8, 106, 116, 117, 119, 121, 133, 140, 148, 169, 170, 174, 183, 202
- Horkheimer, M., 7, 39, 144, 180
- Horvat, B., 91
- human cooperation, 145
- human dignity, 6, 7, 131, 140, 145, 148, 202, 205, 206
- human emancipation, 1, 2, 6–8, 14, 40, 80, 128, 129, 138, 141, 187, 188, 190, 191, 195, 195; and universal suffrage, 139, 192–195
- Hot Autumn 1969, 104, 105
- Hume, D., 64
- Husson, M., 110, 115, 117
- imperialism, 8, 101–103, 158, 179;
and anti-imperialism, 161
- Insarow, N., 17
- institutional politics, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194; and Extra-Institutional
Opposition, 194
- Itoh, M., 3
- Jacobson, H.A., 41
- Jakubowski, f., 93
- James, D., 105
- Jameson, F., 177
- Jessop, B., 117
- Jost, A., 26, 28
- Judge, E.H., 153, 154
- Kadritzke, N., 46
- Kant, I., 64, 78, 158
- KAPD, 39, 40, 43, 91
- Karski, W., 38
- Kater, F., 34
- Kautsky, J.H., 157
- Kautsky, K., 26, 27, 35, 40, 46, 72, 86, 90, 92, 92, 157, 170–172
- Kessler, G., 34
- Keynes, J.M., 121, Keynesianism, 4, 5, 108; military Keynesianism, 111
- Kirshner, J., 110
- Knief, J., 32, 39, 40
- Knowledge, 45, 53, 61, 64, 65, 81, 153, 156, 168, 172, 181
- Kocha, J., 153
- Kochan, L., 153
- Kolakowski, L., 25–27
- Korsch, K., 2, 41, 45, 46, 88, 90
- Kosakoff, B., 123
- Kotelnikow, Y.G., 21

- KPD, 39,42, 43, 46
Kregel, S., 114
Kronstadt (1921), 7, 13–24, 45, 135, 136
- Labour, as constitutive, 7, 77, 93, 115, 144–146; commodity, 78, 130; exploitation, 5, 117, 120, 121, 124, 131, 140, 148, 161; insubordination, 8, 104, 105, 107, 124, 125; living labour, 120, 125, 147; see also dialectics of labour
- Landauer, G., 33
Lasalle, F., 27
Laufenberg, H., 32, 39
Lavrov, P., 50
Lebowitz, M., 85
Ledebour, G., 41
Left Communism, 43, 46, 47, 90, 94
Left Opposition, 31–33, 39, 91
Legien, C., 33
Leipnitz, G.W., 54
Lenin, W.I., 1, 2, 7, 8, 14, 17, 18, 21, 23–31, 42, 44, 46–49, 52, 57, 61, 62, 68, 70–74, 86, 88–90, 93, 101–104, 128, 131, 133–135, 138, 139, 142, 143, 150–158, 161–163, 165, 170–173, 175, 177, 189, 192, 193, 194, 201
Leninism, 1, 2, 26, 31, 36, 46, 49, 134, 136, 137, 140, 141, 143, 169, 170, 171, 176, 179, 182; Jacobin radicalism, 19, 28, 29, 44, 45, 134; party, 1, 2, 17, 18, 27, 71–73, 89, 133, 134, 140, 141, 171, 173, 174, 191, 192; populism, 7, 49–51, 52, 68–72; state, 1, 2, 73, 90, 130, 131, 172–175, 191; theoretical roots, 2, 7, 18, 19, 48, 49–75, 86–90, 170, 172, 174
Lenin-Bund, 46
Lenk, K., 41
Levellers, 16, 193
Levi, P., 43
Lévy, D., 110
Liebknecht, K., 32, 35, 38–41, 43, 89
Linse, U., 33
Lukács, G., 41, 45, 46, 82, 93, 172
Luxemburg, R., 2, 3, 7, 8, 15, 28–32, 35–40, 42, 48, 86, 89, 134, 161, 174, 178–180, 191
- Machiavelli, N., 175
Mandel, E., 101, 107
Manville, A., 26, 42
Maoism, 160
Maquila, 117
Marcos, 168
Marazzi, Ch., 109

- Marcuse, H., 7, 93, 133, 143, 146
 Mark, N., 119
 Markovic, M., 91
 Marsilius of Padua, 193
 Martinez, J.M., 170
 Martynow, Y., 152
 Marx, K., 1–3, 5–8, 19, 20, 25, 29, 31, 35, 37, 40, 42, 50, 51, 55–66, 68, 69, 70, 76–89, 91, 92–95, 101, 128, 129–132, 135–148, 151, 152, 158, 160, 161, 163, 170, 175, 181, 190, 191, 195, 200
 Marxism-Leninism, 18, 19, 44, 49, 51, 61, 68, 71, 87, 88, 93–95, 141
 Maslow, P., 46
 mass strike, 34–36, 40, 89
 Matgamna, S., 92
 Mathieson, D., 119
 materialism, 49–74, 64, 79, 80, 85, 87, 88; and idealism, 49–74, 76–78, 80; dialectical materialism, 49, 52–54, 58, 63, 70, 86, 93; historical materialism, 51, 52, 56, 57, 60, 63, 89; metaphysical materialism, 53, 63; naturalistic materialism, 19, 50, 52, 55, 57, 63, 64
 Mattick, P., 4, 25, 43, 47, 90, 140
 McAuley, M., 22
 McDonough, T., 101
 McInnes, N., 93
 Melier, V.L., 21
 Mehring, F., 38–40
 Menem, C., 123
 Menshivism, 15, 27, 28, 73, 89
 Mercado, R.Z., 177
 Mergner, G., 43
 Mexico, 110, 112, 117, 118, 121; see also debt, and Zapatistas
 Michels, R., 34
 Mikhailovsky, N., 50
 Miljukow, P., 15
 Monarchomachen, 193
 mutual recognition, 200, 203, 206
 mutual repulsion, 197–198
- Nazism, 5
 Neary, M., 4, 5
 Negri, A., 8, 94, 96, 103, 120, 121, 163–165
 Negt, O., 5, 35, 36
 Nettl, P., 36, 37
 New Economic Policy (NEP), 15, 20, 74, 136
 Nieuwenhuis, D.F., 33
 Noske, G., 23

- Oishi, T., 85
Okhranas, 153, 154, 162, 165
Ominami, C., 109
opportunism, 28–30, 35, 179
organization, 2, 6, 16, 89, 134–139, 147, 162, 179, 180, 201; and media, 189, 191, 192; question of, 14, 26–48, 51, 89, 155, 194–195; self-interest, 189; see communism, human emancipation, and revolution
- Pannekoek, A., 2, 8, 25, 32, 39, 40, 41, 43, 86, 88, 89, 90
parliamentarism, 38, 72, 73; and anti-parliamentarism, 33; see also institutional politics
patriarchy, 189, 190
Peláez, E., 4
permanent revolution, 23, 89, 135, 136, 140
Pfempfert, F., 32, 39
Pinoche, A., 110
Piqueteros, 4, 124
Plato, 143, 156
Plehve, V.K., 154
Plekhanov, G.V., 19, 26, 27, 49, 51–53, 55–63, 65–73, 86, 88, 93
Pollock, F., 21, 22
Pomper, P., 93
Pompidou, G., 107
Portelli, H., 28
power, 24, 40, 89, 137, 140, 148, 174, 202–204, 205
Pozzoli, A., 26, 35, 42
Preobrashonski, Y., 19
primitive accumulation, 141, 146, 173
property relations, 3, 53, 198, 200, 201, 202, 206
proletarian public sphere, 36
- Rabel, B., 28
Radek, K., 38
Reaganomics, 111, 124
reason, 2, 54, 61, 76, 194; instrumental reason, 180
reification, 45, 82, 83, 87, 92, 95, 170–174, 181, 182
revolution, 2, 6, 8, 18, 28, 40, 70, 71, 82, 83, 151, 152, 159, 160–162, 169, 175, 176, 179, 182, 187, 199, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205; and democracy, 6, 93, 133, 134, 137, 138, 139, 148, 177, 178; means and ends, 6, 30, 33, 133, 138, 139, 143, 188, 189, 191, 192, 195, 201; theory and practice, 3, 72, 89, 94; see also see also human emancipation; state and revolution
revolution and revolt, 188, 198–206

- revolutionary party, 1, 6, 7, 8, 18, 19, 26, 27, 71, 72, 133–136, 156, 171, 172, 174, 191; democratic centralism, 18, 27, 29–31, 191; workers, 2, 30, 43, 44, 70–72, 134
- revolutionary subject, 7, 169; Leninist subject, 104, 169
- Ricardo, D., 3, 57, 61, 81, 82, 180
- Rogger, H., 153
- Roland-Holst, H., 40
- Rooke, M., 8, 128, 144
- Rosenberg, A., 41
- Rousseau, J., 143
- Rotermundt, R., 42
- Rubel, M., 91
- Rubin, I., 82
- Rueff, J., 106
- Rühle, O., 39, 41, 90, 95
- Russian Revolution 2, 13–24, 25, 16, 17, 19, 25, 27, 42, 48, 90, 95; and bourgeois revolution, 2, 16, 17, 28, 29, 42, 44, 45, 89; strikes and workers, 19–24
- Ryazanov, D., 58

- Saint-Simon, C.H., 53
- Santamaria, U., 26, 42
- Sakar, S., 161
- Schechter, D., 91
- Schmiederer, U., 42
- scientific socialism, 27, 52, 86
- Sem Terra, 124
- Service, R., 151
- Shaikh, A., 110, 117
- Smith, A., 3, 57, 59, 61, 67, 81, 180
- social autonomy, 6, 8, 93, 97, 130, 136–139, 141, 148
- social democracy, 26, 29–32, 37, 51, 69, 70, 72, 73, 89, 94, 179, 180, 181; SDARP, 26; SDP of the Netherlands, 40; SPD, 7, 26, 34, 35, 40, 41, 43; and left opposition, 31–42; and legal Marxists, 51, 70; and workers, 70, 72
- South Korea, 105, 106, 112
- Spartakusbund, 39, 41
- Spinoza, B., 54, 68
- Spohn, W., 28
- spontaneity, 18, 36–38, 72, 134, 171
- Squire, P.S., 153
- Stalin, J., 2, 14, 15, 74, 91, 94, 141, 142, 158, 175, 191
- Stalinism, 25, 36, 45, 47, 93, 94, 160, 179
- state, 1–8, 38, 129, 130, 137, 138, 143, 182, 187, 189, 190, 192, 193, 194; and revolution, 1, 7, 8, 129, 132, 137, 138, 173–177, 182, 187, 188, 190, 192,

- 193, 194, 199, 201; of emergency, 168; withering away, 131; workers state, 2, 13, 92, 129, 131
- Stiglitz, J.E., 114
- Syndicalism, 33–35, 41, 46, 89
- Thalheimer, A., 46
- Thesis on Bolshevism, 17, 43–45
- Third Way, 5
- Thompson, E.P., 178
- Tischler, S., 8, 170, 183
- Trepov, D.F., 153
- Trotsky, L., 2, 14, 15, 20, 23, 25, 89, 91–93, 135, 142
- Trotskyism, 1, 92, 160
- uncertainty, 180, 183, 206
- Urquhart, D., 145
- USPD, 39, 41, 42
- Ustrialow, P., 15
- utopian socialism, 52, 53, 54
- Valle Baeza, A., 117
- value form, 77, 80–85, 91, 102, 115, 117, 132, 145, 146, 174, 180; abolition, 83
- Volcker, P., 109
- Walter, U., 28
- war, 3, 4, 38, 40–42, 101, 146
- Weber, M., 172, 173, 174, 188
- Weisskopf, T., 31

- Wildcat (Germany), 133
Williams, R., 182
Wolffheim, F., 32, 39
Women's movement, 187, 188, 189; see also feminism
- Zapatistas, 4, 8, 123–125, 163, 165, 168, 169, 174, 182, 204, 206
Zasulich, V., 153
Zetkin, C., 38
Zedillo, E., 123
Zubatov, S., 153
Zubatov movement, 154

List of Contributors

Johannes Agnoli is Emeritus Professor at the Free University of Berlin.

Diethard Behrens teaches at the Johann Wolfgang University of Frankfurt.

Werner Bonefeld teaches at the Department of Politics, University of York.

Alberto Bonnet teaches at the University of Buenos Aires and at the National University of Quilmes.

Cajo Brendel is a writer and a council communist activist since the early 1930s.

George Caffentzis teaches at the Department of Philosophy, University of Southern Main.

Simon Clarke teaches at the Department of Sociology, University of Warwick.

John Holloway teaches Sociology in the Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades of the Autonomous University of Puebla.

Mike Rooke teaches Economics at Ruskin College, Oxford.

Sergio Tischler teaches Sociology in the Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades of the Autónoma University of Puebla.

Contents

List of Contributors vii

1	What is to be Done? Leninism, anti-Leninist Marxism and the Question of Revolution Today <i>Werner Bonefeld and Sergio Tischler</i>	1
Part I: What is to be Done? in Historical and Critical Perspective		
2	Kronstadt: Proletarian Spin-Off of the Russian Revolution <i>Cajo Brendel</i>	13
3	Perspectives on Left Politics: On the Development of anti-Leninist Conceptions of Socialist Politics <i>Diethard Behrens</i>	25
4	<i>Was Lenin a Marxist? The Populist Roots of Marxism-Leninism</i> Simon Clarke	49
5	<i>The Dialectic of Labour and Human Emancipation</i> Mike Rooke	76
Part II: What is to be Learned? Contemporary Capitalism and the Politics of Negation 99		
6	The Command of Money-Capital and the Latin American Crises <i>Alberto Bonnet</i>	101
7	<i>State, Revolution and Self-Determination</i> <i>Werner Bonefeld</i>	128
8	<i>Lenin on the Production of Revolution</i> <i>George Caffentzis</i>	150

<i>What is to be Done?</i>	221
9 <i>The Crisis of the Leninist Subject and the Zapatista Circumstance</i> Sergio Tischler	168
Part III: What about Revolution? Ends and Means	185
10 <i>Emancipation: Paths and Goals</i> <i>Johannes Agnoli</i>	187
11 <i>Revolt and Revolution Or Get out of the Way, Capital!</i> <i>John Holloway</i>	196
<i>Index</i>	208