

**Charles
Bettelheim**

**Class
Struggles
in the
USSR**



First Period: 1917-1923

[Section 2 -- Part 2]

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Key to abbreviations, initials, and Russian words used in the text

Artel	A particular form of producers' cooperative
Cadet party	The Constitutional Democratic Party
CLD	See STO
Cheka	Extraordinary Commission (political police)
Glavk	One of the chief directorates in the Supreme Council of the National Economy or in a people's commissariat
Gosplan	State Planning Commission
GPU	State Political Administration (political police)
Kulak	A rich peasant, often involved in capitalist activities of one kind or another, such as hiring out agricultural machinery, trade, moneylending, etc.
Mir	The village community
Narkomtrud	People's Commissariat of Labor
NEP	New Economic Policy
NKhSSSRv	National Economy of the USSR in (a certain year or period)
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
OGPU	Unified State Political Administration (political police)
Orgburo	Organization Bureau of the Bolshevik Party
Politburo	Political Bureau of the Bolshevik Party
Rabfak	Workers' Faculty
Rabkrin	See RKI
RCP(B)	Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik): official

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	name of the Bolshevik Party, adopted by the Seventh Party Congress in March 1918
RKI	Workers' and Peasants' Inspection
RSDLP	Russian Social Democratic Labor Party
RSDLP(B)	Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Bolshevik)
RSFSR	Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic
Skhod	General assembly of a village
Sovkhoz	State farm
Sovnarkhoz	Regional Economic Council
Sovnarkom	Council of People's Commissars
SR	Socialist Revolutionary
STO	Council of Labor and Defense
Uchraspred	Department in the Bolshevik Party responsible for registering the members and assigning them to different tasks

Uyezd	County
Volost	Rural district
VSNKh	Supreme Economic Council
VTsIK	All-Russia Central Executive Committee (organ derived from the Congress of soviets)
Zemstvo	Administrative body in country areas before the Revolution

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Part 2

Soviet power and the transformation of class relations between 1917 and 1921

After October 1917 a process of extremely complex revolutionary changes began as a result of the proletariat having become the ruling class and of the struggle being waged by the masses under the leadership, or with the aid, of the proletariat and its party. As has been shown, the changes that then took place were twofold in character: democratic in the countryside, where the peasant masses were on the move, and socialist in the towns, where the working class was attacking domination of the means of production by their capitalist owners. These changes proceeded by stages and affected to varying degrees the different social relations and their component elements. They caused class relations to alter.

Before taking a general view of the principal changes undergone by economic and legal relations during the first years of the Russian Revolution, we must examine how relations altered between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie as a result of the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

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1. The transformation of relations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat under the dictatorship of the proletariat

The establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat not only represented a profound upheaval in relations between classes, but changed the classes themselves. As Lenin wrote in *Economics and Politics in the Era of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* :

Classes cannot be abolished at one stroke. And classes still *remain* and *will remain* in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The dictatorship will become unnecessary when classes disappear. Without the dictatorship of the proletariat they will not disappear. Classes have remained, but in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat *every* class has undergone a change, and the relations between the classes have also changed. The class struggle does not disappear under the dictatorship of the proletariat; it merely assumes different forms.[1]

If classes remained, even though changed and with changed interrelations, this was because the former social relations and, in particular, capitalist production relations were not "abolished" but only changed by the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In the same article, Lenin said that during the period of transition between capitalism and communism a struggle would be fought out between the former, "which has been defeated but not destroyed," and the latter, "which has been born but is still very feeble." [2]

The existence of "defeated" capitalism obviously implies also that the bourgeoisie and the proletariat still exist: these two classes continue to confront each other, even though their social conditions of existence have been greatly altered.

The primary and basic change in the conditions of existence

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of these classes is bound up with the fact that the bourgeoisie has lost power. This means, concretely, that the bourgeoisie no longer dominates the old machinery of politics and administration, which has been smashed, broken up, and more or less completely replaced by apparatuses and organizations linked with the revolutionary masses and led by the proletariat and its vanguard, the proletarian party, a class apparatus which thereafter plays the dominant role. Concretely, this means also that the capitalists and landlords have, in the main, lost their power to "dispose freely" of the means of production. In industry, the activity of factory committees, workers' control, expropriations, etc., profoundly upset the conditions governing use of the chief means of production, which are no longer directly subject to the requirements of the process of valorization of capital. However, these requirements are not "abolished" but only transformed by the exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

If the bourgeoisie and the proletariat continue their struggle under new conditions, this is precisely because the bourgeois social relations which underlie the existence and practices of these classes have not been "abolished" but only transformed. Although the social reproduction process is no longer dominated by the bourgeoisie, the capitalist character of this process is at first only partially modified by the dictatorship of the proletariat: the basic structure of this process has not yet really been broken. In each unit of production the producers continue to be involved in the same type of division of labor, which implies the separation of mental from manual work and that of administrative tasks from performance tasks. What is new is that those who direct the immediate process of production must carry out their role under control by the proletariat, the workers' mass organizations, and the new machinery of the proletarian state and of the proletarian party.

Nationalization of the means of production by a proletarian state results first and foremost in the creation of *politico-juridical conditions favorable to the socialist transformation of production relations* and, to the *socialization* of the means of production but *it is not to be identified with this transformation*.

We know that production relations are determined relations into which "men inevitably enter" and which are "independent of their will." People form these relations among themselves in the course of what Marx calls "the social production of their existence."^[3] These relations are imposed upon the agents of production by the structure of the processes of production and circulation, that is, by the real process of social production. This structure is itself embodied in the division of labor and in the instruments of labor (which Marx calls the "indicators of social conditions"). Of course, the specific forms assumed by the division of labor and the instruments of labor do not drop from heaven, but are the effect of previous class struggles and of the character that these struggles have imposed upon the development of the productive forces. In every age, these class struggles (which always take place on determined *material foundations*) make the domination of the production process and the distribution of the labor force among different tasks "the basis of special social functions performed within the production relations by certain of their agents, as opposed to the direct producers."^[4]

The embodiment of the production relations in the division of labor and in the instruments of labor signifies that it is not enough for a new class to acquire political domination over the other classes for it to transform the existing production relations straight away. It can do this only by breaking up and restructuring, that is, by "revolutionizing," the real production process.

The capitalist character of the production relations that exist on the morrow of the establishment of proletarian power is obviously also embedded in the very structure of the production process.

Thus, when it establishes its rule and nationalizes some factories, the proletariat acquires the possibility -- but only the possibility -- of revolutionizing the real process of production and of causing new production relations to appear, with a new social division of labor and new productive forces. Insofar as this task has not yet been accomplished, the former capitalist production relations continue, together with the forms of representation and the ideological forms in which these relations

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appear. Insofar as this task is in course of being accomplished, the former relations are partly transformed, the socialist transition is under way, and it is possible to speak of a "socialist society."

Socialism thus does not mean -- it is particularly necessary to stress this in view of the confusion caused by ideological discourses about the "socialist mode of production" -- the "abolition" of capitalist production relations. It means -- given certain definite ideological and political conditions that hardly existed in the Russia of 1918-1922 -- the transformation of these relations, their destruction and reconstruction of *transitional* relations which can be analyzed as a combination of capitalist elements and socialist or communist elements. The advance toward socialism means the growing domination of the latter over the former, the "dying out" of the capitalist elements and the consolidation of the increasingly dominant socialist elements.

This advance requires a long historical period: it corresponds to a revolutionization of the conditions of production which is itself the result of a protracted class struggle, guided by a correct political line, that is, a line that determines, at each stage, objectives which make possible an actual socialist transformation of the production relations. The elaboration of such a line presupposes the existence of a proletarian party armed with revolutionary theory and, competent to play its leading role. This role is vital, for it is not the party or the state of the dictatorship of the proletariat that can "directly bring about" a socialist transformation of the production relations, but only the struggle waged by the classes that were formerly dominated

and exploited. Such a struggle alone, by revolutionizing the processes of production and social relations as a whole, can put an end to what were formerly the "special functions" fulfilled by the dominant classes.

As long as capitalist relations have been transformed only partially, the *forms* in which these relations manifest themselves continue to be reproduced, so that money, prices, wages, profit, etc., continue to exist and cannot be "abolished" by mere decrees. Only the socialist transformation of the rela-

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tions of production can bring about the withering away of these forms -- a transformation which implies that the socialization of production results increasingly from the coordinated action of the workers, who become a "collective laborer" on the social scale. The process of constituting this "collective laborer" is a long-term one, passing through *stages* and calling for the revolutionization of social relations as a whole -- economic, ideological, and political -- for the different aspects of this revolutionization are mutually dependent in a complex way.

As long as bourgeois elements persist in the various social relations, then, until the coming of communism, there is room for the existence of a proletariat and a bourgeoisie, and it remains possible for the latter -- if the proletarian class struggle fails to follow a correct line -- to develop the bourgeois elements in social relations, consolidate the bourgeois aspects of the ideological and political machinery, and ultimately restore capitalism (in the specific forms dictated by those of the previously transformed social relations which the bourgeoisie cannot destroy).

It is in particular because the development of state ownership, even under the dictatorship of the proletariat, leaves in being elements of capitalist relations which are only partly modified, that *the expropriation of the bourgeoisie is not equivalent to its disappearance*. As long as capitalist elements persist in the production relations, there also persists the possibility of *capitalist functions*, and the bourgeoisie can continue to exist in a modified form through the state apparatus and assume the form of a *state bourgeoisie*.

This becomes clearer in the light of Lenin's definition of social classes in his pamphlet [A Great Beginning](#): "Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated by law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it."^[5]

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This passage brings out some vital points: (1) Relations of distribution are only a *consequence* of relations of production (of the place occupied in production and in relation to the means of production.) Therefore, analysis of relations of distribution (of the "mode of acquiring" a certain share of social wealth, and of the dimensions of this share) can help reveal the nature of the production relations and the class relations that these determine, but cannot, by itself, give knowledge of either.

(2) The "fixing" by law of certain relations to the means of production may "formulate" these relations, but the latter exist independently of the "law." Indeed, the law may serve to disguise real relations that differ from those which it "formulates." Thus, in capitalist society, the means of production which are "state owned" belong in reality to the capitalist class: they are a part of the latter's "collective" capital.

(3) Classes are distinguished both by the relations of their members to the means of production (and so by the place occupied by these members) and by the "role" which they play in the "social organization of labor."

The distinction between the "place occupied" by the agents of production and their "role" -- and consequently also the *class practices* in which they engage -- assumes very special importance when we come to analyze a social formation in which the proletariat is in power. The existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat modifies differentially the place and role of both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and the exercise of this dictatorship makes it possible to modify further this place, this role, and the system of dominant social practices. Thus, the initial change which establishes the proletarian power but leaves in being various forms of separation between the proletariat and the means of production, can be followed by other changes. If the class struggle is waged correctly, the proletariat, by revolutionizing social relations, gradually takes over the management of the economy and of the units of production, guidance of transformations in the system of productive forces, the direction of the educational apparatus, and so on.

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These changes result from revolutionary struggles which enable the proletariat to become less and less a proletariat -- to abolish itself as a proletariat by appropriating all the social forces from which the capitalist mode of production had separated it. During this process of revolutionary transformation, all the "places" and roles that corresponded to those of the bourgeoisie are transformed, and the agents of production and reproduction occupying those places and playing these roles also become less and less a bourgeoisie -- although constantly liable to develop, in these places and roles, bourgeois social practices which may cause the proletariat to lose the positions it has already won.

All those who, in the system of social production and reproduction, occupy a place corresponding to that of the bourgeoisie, and who in that system develop *bourgeois social practices* despite the existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat, constitute a bourgeoisie.

After the October Revolution and in the early 1920s in Russia the bourgeoisie was widely represented in the state's economic apparatus; it occupied leading positions in the units of production and in the management of the economy as a whole, and also in the administrative and educational machinery. Historically, this situation was due to the class origin of the majority of those who staffed these organizations, but, over-and above this origin, what was decisive was the bourgeois practices of those who occupied the leading positions, and the actual structure of the state machine. These practices and this structure tended to consolidate capitalist relations, and therefore also the existence of a bourgeoisie which took the form of a state bourgeoisie.

This situation was obviously bound up with the stage the Russian Revolution had reached at that time. The revolution was only beginning to carry out some of its socialist tasks. For these tasks to go on being carried out, it was necessary that there should be revolutionary action by the proletariat organized as the dominant class. This required the elaboration and application of a revolutionary political line, and, therefore, the presence of a leading proletarian party.

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In order to analyze the transformations that occurred in the place and role of the different classes in the period immediately after October 1917, we must distinguish between the effects of the revolutionary process in the towns and in the countryside.

Notes

1. *CW*, vol. 30, pp. 114-115.
2. *Ibid.*, p.107.
3. *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 20.
4. *Capital*, vol. III, p. 857.
5. *CW*, vol. 29, p. 421.

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2. The transformation of class relations in the towns

The transformation of class relations in the towns resulted first from the leadership of the workers' class struggles by the Bolshevik Party, and then, when the new state machine had been set up, from the operation of this machine as well.

Fundamentally, the changes carried through between October 1917 and the beginning of 1923 resulted in eliminating the bourgeoisie (and the landlords) *from the dominant positions they had previously occupied*, but this elimination as we have seen, was not, and could not be, total and immediate. Although the *private* bourgeoisie was largely eliminated, this period also saw the formation of a state bourgeoisie which was mainly determined by the small extent to which the social process of production and reproduction had been transformed, this being due to the actual conditions of the class struggle, the degree of urgency of the different tasks which the proletariat had to carry out, and the way in which the Bolshevik Party analyzed and handled the contradictions.

The changes affecting the various social classes during this period were numerous, and only the main ones can be examined here. I shall first examine the changes which occurred immediately after the establishment of the proletarian power, and then those which took place in subsequent years.

I. The immediate measures affecting industry and trade

In the period immediately following the establishment of Soviet power there was no question, either for the working-

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class masses or for the Bolshevik Party, of "introducing socialism." Their chief preoccupation was the consolidation of proletarian power by effecting such changes as would make it possible to "gain time," by developing a "state capitalism" that would permit certain steps to be taken toward socialism, although these transformations were not as yet socialist in character.

Changes of this sort took concrete form in certain decisive measures concerning industry and trade. Of these, the most important were the decree on workers' control, published on November 19, 1917, the decree on the formation of the Supreme Council of National Economy (VSNKh), the decrees on the nationalization of the banks (December 28), the decree on consumers' organizations, placing consumers' cooperatives under the control of the soviets (April 16), and the decree on the monopoly of foreign trade (April 23).

(a) Expropriations

While taking these measures, the Soviet government also decided to expropriate a certain number of enterprises, mainly industrial or commercial. However, these expropriations in no way constituted the principal aspect of the policy then being followed, which was characterized by Lenin as "state capitalism."

Between October 1917 and May 1918, the Bolshevik Party's policy was not at all aimed at extending nationalizations and expropriations. In contrast to the illusions and demands of the "left Communists," among whom Bukharin was prominent, the majority of the party leaders understood very well that multiplying nationalizations and expropriations does not bring one closer to socialism in the absence of the political and ideological conditions which can enable these nationalizations to bring about effective socialization. Lenin explained this when he wrote: "One may or may not be determined on the question of nationalisation or confiscation, but the whole point is that even the greatest possible 'determination' in the world is not enough to pass *from* nationalisation and confisca-

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tion to socialisation."^[1] A few lines farther on, he pointed out that "the difference between socialisation and simple confiscation is that confiscation can be carried out by 'determination' alone, without the ability to calculate and distribute properly, *whereas socialisation cannot be brought about without this ability.*"^[2]

This "ability" -- a necessary condition for the socialization of the means of production -- was one that the proletariat and its party had to acquire in order to utilize the means of production in a coordinated way on the social scale. The expropriations were aimed, above all, at weakening the bourgeoisie economically and politically and smashing its attempts at sabotage. They were measures of class struggle.

From the spring of 1918 onward, the Soviet power was increasingly compelled, as a result both of pressure from the workers and of the hostility of the industrial capitalists, to employ this weapon on a scale that did not correspond to existing capacity to organize production on new foundations. This entailed a growing degree of disorganization in industry. The establishment, side by side, of workers' control and the VSNKh seemed at the time to provide the two means by which the Soviet power could acquire the "ability" that was indispensable for the coordinated social utilization of the means of production.

(b) Workers' control

Workers' control was effected by a set of measures aimed at enabling the working class to

supervise the way in which the means of production were being employed, through organs emanating from the working class and intended to function both in the factories still belonging to private capital and in those which had been expropriated.

The role which Lenin in 1918 attributed to workers' control was essentially that of a preliminary measure aimed at preparing the working class to advance toward socialism. In [*The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*](#) he wrote: "Until workers' control has become a fact . . . it will be impossible to

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pass . . . to the second step towards socialism, i.e., to pass on to workers' regulation of production."^[3]

The actual development of the class struggle during 1917 had led to the problem of workers' control arising in the form of a development of the factory committee movement. This movement had boomed between February and October, and the Bolshevik Party had given it resolute support.

In the weeks following the October insurrection, the Bolshevik Party strove to transform the dispersed and anarchical activity of hundreds and thousands of factory committees into a coordinated system of workers' control, in conformity with the needs of a proletarian policy. This was no easy task, for as the number of factory committees grew, each tended to multiply the prerogatives it claimed and to treat each factory as an independent unit of production, the collective property of its own workers, deciding for itself what should be produced, and to whom it should be sold and at what price -- all this when the social domination of the working class over the means of production required that the atomized and contradictory powers of the factory committees be subordinated to a common political end.

Social coordination of production was particularly essential in industry, where each unit of production carried out only a limited number of transformation processes, constituting merely one link in a total production process that was highly socialized. The survival of Soviet industry, and the struggle against market forces and against the predominance of the separate interests of the different factories, therefore called for a certain minimum of prior coordination of the activities of the various production units. In the absence of such a priori intervention, coordination takes place a posteriori, somehow or other, through the market, or else results from the relation of forces between different branches of industry or different factories. In practice, it is possible that it may not even take place at all, in which case production becomes increasingly paralyzed. And this is what actually happened during the winter of 1917-1918.

The Bolshevik Party consequently sought to solve the problem of coordinating the activities of the factory committees by

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introducing "workers' control." This was to function on a wider scale than that of the individual factory committee, substituting, for the divided and fragmentary (and therefore illusory) "authority" exercised by the collectives of the separate factories, a coordinated and unified class control.

The conditions existing immediately after October did not make it easy to go over to a unified form of control. The workers were not spontaneously convinced of the need for the powers of their factory committees to be limited by subordination to an outside authority. In the eyes of many of them, the establishment of more or less centralized control looked like a "confiscation" of the power which they had just succeeded in wresting from the bourgeoisie and

which they wished to retain at the level of their own factory. This way of looking at the matter was encouraged by the opponents of the dictatorship of the proletariat, especially by the Mensheviks, who incited the trade-union organizations in which they had influence to defend the independence of the factory committees and even of the railroad "station committees."

Before the October Revolution Lenin had already foreseen the need for workers' control on a national scale, and the difficulty there would be in implementing it. For example, in [Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?](#) he had written: "The chief difficulty facing the proletarian revolution is the establishment on a countrywide scale of the most precise and most conscientious accounting and control, of *workers' control* of the production and distribution of goods."^[4]

Transition to workers' control in this sense, and abandonment of the type of "decentralized" and anarchical control favored by the factory committees, came up against especially strong resistance from the bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideology, still deeply rooted in the masses, of "everyone for himself," of "individual enterprise egoism," and of an abstract notion of "freedom." In this connection Lenin wrote: "The petty-bourgeoisie oppose every kind of state interference, accounting and control, whether it be state capitalist or state socialist."^[5]

Despite the political influence exercised by the Bolshevik Party over the most militant sections of the workers, its

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ideological influence and its foothold in the units of production were still very slight in relation to the task of persuasion that was required in order to transform the factory committees into organs of workers' control. In the period immediately after October this transformation faced great difficulties which were aggravated by the reluctance shown even by some Bolsheviks regarding the restrictions imposed by "countrywide" workers' control on the powers of the factory committees. However, the most serious resistance encountered was due to the influence of the Mensheviks and of some anarchist tendencies among a section of the masses, which they used to obstruct Bolshevik policy as much as possible.

This resistance and reluctance account for the delay that occurred in adopting decisions concerning workers' control, and also for the magnitude of the controversy aroused by these decisions. Here are some facts by way of illustration.

Originally it had been expected that the Second Congress of Soviets would proclaim the establishment of workers' control at its session held on the very day following the insurrection. The decrees on workers' control and on land were to have been promulgated simultaneously. However, this did not happen, and the congress broke up without adopting any measure concerned with workers' control. Again, though *Pravda* of November 3 published a draft decree on the subject, which Lenin had prepared, the decree itself was not immediately submitted to the organs of government (nor was it ever submitted to them in its original form). Finally, it was only on November 14 that a revised version of Lenin's draft was considered by the VTsIK and adopted with a few amendments.

The decree contained the principal provisions of Lenin's draft,^[6] in particular as regards the binding character of the decisions taken by the workers' representatives and the responsibility toward the state of these representatives and of the factory owners. Workers' control was made part of the soviet system, factory committees and councils were placed under the supervision of higher bodies which functioned at the level of the locality, province, or region, and an *All-Russia*

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Council of Workers' Control, was to head this entire apparatus.

One of the problems the decree had to solve was that of the respective places to be occupied, in the organization of workers' control, by the factory committees and by the trade-union apparatus. This problem was not unimportant, for the factory committees emanated directly from the workers in each enterprise, whereas the trade unions (which were far from embracing all the workers) had a centralized structure which made them especially well-adapted for helping in the establishment of a centralized form of control, but which also meant that they were not under direct influence from the rank and file. The decree dealt with the problem by giving an important place to the trade unions in the organization of workers' control, but this solution caused discontent among some workers who saw it as a kind of tutelage established over them. On the other hand, some of the Bolsheviks in the trade union movement thought that the decree did not go far enough. They considered that the problem had not been settled with sufficient sharpness in favor of the trade unions, and that the decree tended to perpetuate the division of the enterprises into independent units. Thus, for example, Lozovsky, the trade unions' spokesman in the VTsIK, said: "It is necessary to make an absolutely clear and categorical reservation that the workers in each enterprise should not get the impression that the enterprise belongs to them."^[7]

At the beginning of 1918 the wording of the November 1917 decree was more or less repeated in the "Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People." This declaration was drafted by Lenin and adopted on January 3 by the VTsIK. It stated that workers' control was confirmed "as a first step towards the complete conversion of the factories, mines, railways and other means of production and transport into the property of the workers' and peasants' state."^[8]

This document shows that the Bolshevik Party then accepted that state ownership of the means of production cannot be social ownership until control by the workers themselves of the factories, mines, railways, etc., has been realized.

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Shortly before drafting it, Lenin had pointed out that "the accounting and control essential for the transition to socialism can be exercised only by the people."^[9]

In March-April 1918 Lenin was to stress again, and more than once (especially in *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*), that the control by the masses which he had in mind was something different from what the factory committees tended toward in seeking to run their enterprises "each for itself." Workers' control, he said, meant control by the Soviet state, not a multitude of scattered controls. A form of control which would take care of the interests of all would be possible, Lenin added, "only if the proletariat and the poor peasants display sufficient class-consciousness, devotion to principle, self-sacrifice and perseverance"; only then would "the victory of the socialist revolution be assured."^[10]

As a result of the various decisions, the uncontrolled initiatives that might be taken at the level of each separate unit of production were, in principle, considerably reduced. To the extent that these decisions were actually applied, the factory committees practically lost their independence: ceasing to possess real powers of their own, they were integrated into the system of central workers' control.

In all the enterprises of a certain size (described as those "of national importance"), the factory committees were made responsible to the state for "the maintenance of the strictest order and discipline and for the protection of property."^[11] This responsibility was laid upon the elected representatives of the workers and staff appointed to exercise workers' control.

These measures aroused the discontent of the anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists, who wanted to turn the factory committees into independent committees of management, perhaps organized in a federation, but without any responsibility to the state. Those opposed to the measures said, in particular, that the workers' control regulations extended so far the concept of an enterprise "of national importance" that application of the official rules for workers' control meant the complete subjection of the factory committees to an authority external to themselves.

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This authority was made up of the various organs to which the basic organizations of workers' control (principally the former factory committees) were subordinated, namely, the regional councils and the All-Russia Council of Workers' Control. The representatives of the basic organizations of workers' control were in a minority in these bodies. Thus, in the All-Russia Council of Workers' Control there were only five representatives appointed by the All-Russia Council of Factory Committees, whereas there were five representatives of the VTsIK, five from the Central Trade-Union Council, five from the Association of Engineers and Technicians, two from the Association of Agronomists, two from the Petrograd Trade-Union Council, one representative of each trade union with fewer than 100,000 members, and two representatives of each union with more than that number.^[12] In the higher organs of workers' control, the representatives of the basic organizations were thus outnumbered by the representatives of the trade unions.

Even transformed in this way, the structure of workers' control proved incapable of ensuring the coordination required by large-scale industrial production. And Russia was in a situation where supplies for the towns and the villages (and soon, for the front as well) made it indispensable that production should be regular and, above all, as closely as possible in accordance with needs which could only be estimated on the basis of an overall view of the situation.

The Bolshevik Party decided to "reinforce" the system of workers' control by establishing other forms of coordination and direction of production as well. The most important of these was the VSNKh.

In fact, in the conditions that developed when the civil war began and when the slogan "Everything for the Front!" prevailed, it was these forms of coordination and direction that took precedence over workers' control.^[13] The latter ended by disintegrating, along with the old factory committees.

This breakup seems to have been connected with the shortage in the factories of working-class organizers capable of tackling factory problems. In turn, the lack of working-class

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organizations at the base is to be seen in relation to the relative numerical weakness of the Bolshevik Party and the absorption (which was doubtless unavoidable) of a growing proportion of the most active workers in organizational tasks in the party, the state machine, and, especially, the army. The lack of any systematic impulsion from the party, and the increasing indifference shown by the workers to the factory committees, also played their part. Eventually, workers' control, as conceived in the first months of the Soviet regime, fell asleep, never to awake. It was on other foundations that the direction and coordination of industrial production came to be ensured.

(c) The VSNKh and the coordination of the production processes

The first mention of the forthcoming establishment of a Supreme Economic Council was made on November 17 -- three days after the publication of the decree on workers' control. This mention appeared in the decree dissolving the Economic Council, and the Chief Economic Committee which had been set up by the Provisional Government: these bodies were to be replaced by a new Economic Council. Bukharin was given the task of preparing the necessary documents, and the decree he drafted was published on December 5.^[14]

The task assigned to the "Supreme Economic Council" (or VSNKh, using the Russian initials of the title) was to "organize the economic activity of the nation and the financial resources of the Government," and to "direct to a uniform end the activities of all the existing economic authorities, central and local," including those of the All-Russia Council of Workers' Control. It actually duplicated the functions of the latter, which also included ensuring "the planned regulation of the national economy." Furthermore, the decree integrated workers' control into the VSNKh, for it stipulated that the latter should include the members of the All-Russia Council of

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Workers' Control, and this body was subordinated to the VSNKh.

The subordination of workers' control to the system of economic councils prepared the way for its disappearance. Lenin himself, reviewing the decisions taken during the first months of Soviet power, noted that, after beginning with workers' control, they had advanced to the creation of the Supreme Economic Council.^[15]

Some of the concrete arrangements concerning the organization of the VSNKh and the relations it was to maintain with the units of production were strongly marked by the specific conditions of the period in which the VSNKh was set up. These conditions favored administrative centralization rather than democratic centralism. However, the arrangements made under those conditions were, in the main, retained in the subsequent period, and were found in the organization of the *State Planning Commission*, or *Gosplan*, formed on February 22, 1921 (as a development of the All-Russia Electrification Commission, or *Goelro*, established on February 21, 1920). The Gosplan was at first only a minor "technical organ," with the task of carrying out studies with a view to preparing a plan of economic development. Only much later, in February 1925, did the Gosplan, having been equipped with "decentralized" organs, replace to some extent the VSNKh.^[16]

During the years 1918-1923, the system of economic councils, of which the VSNKh was the supreme body, became the instrument for the centralization and centralized management of industry. The powers conferred on the VSNKh were considerable: it could confiscate, acquire, or sequester any enterprise or any branch of production or business, and was responsible for directing the work of all the economic organs and for preparing laws and decrees concerning the economy, preparatory to submitting these to the Council of People's Commissars. It was placed directly under the latter.

The VSNKh was made up chiefly of representatives of the various people's commissariats, assisted by experts who were appointed for their technical ability. The VSNKh had a

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twofold structure, consisting of central organs, the *glavki* (directing the various branches of industry) and regional organs, the local economic councils (*sovnarkhozy*).

Technically, the decree setting up the VSNKh and the other measures subsequently introduced were to ensure, in principle, the coordination by the state of the work of the various

factories. At the same time, these measures conferred a great deal of authority on the stratum of engineers, specialists, and technicians, who occupied dominant positions in the VSNKh and the organs attached to it. By the decree, this "bourgeois section of the population"^[17] was restored to positions of leadership, though it held them by virtue of decisions taken by the Soviet power which could, in principle, take away its authority at any moment.

The role played by this "bourgeois section" was enhanced by the economic disorganization against which the Soviet power had to fight in order to prevent the collapse of the proletarian dictatorship. The situation was described in a resolution of the Fourth All-Russia Congress of Soviets (March 1918), which placed on the agenda "a relentless struggle with the chaos, disorganisation and disintegration which are historically inevitable as the consequence of a devastating war, but are at the same time the primary obstacle to the final victory of socialism and the reinforcement of the foundations of socialist society." A congress resolution called for "the creation everywhere and in all directions of strong, solid organisations covering as far as possible all production and all distribution of goods."^[18]

In keeping with this resolution, the leadership of VSNKh was recast and Bukharin and some other "left Communists" were removed. Among the new heads of the council were Milyutin, an old Bolshevik, and Larin, a former Menshevik who favored centralized state control of industry and planning.

A system of economic and political relations thus came into being which formed one aspect of what Lenin called "state capitalism," a system which, he said, was not feared by the workers because they knew that it was "the organisers . . . of

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really large-scale and giant enterprises, trusts," men belonging to the capitalist class, who had to be hired, "as technicians," and whose services could be obtained only in return "for higher salaries."^[19]

Lenin defended this view in a particularly clear-cut way in *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*, in which he explained that the Soviet state's recruitment of "bourgeois specialists" was a "compromise" with the bourgeoisie, and one the magnitude of which went beyond what had originally been foreseen, but which had been made necessary by the fact that the workers' councils, the soviets, and the factory committees had not proved able to organize production on a national scale: "Had the proletariat acting through the Soviet government *managed* [my emphasis -- C. B.] to organise accounting and control on a national scale, or at least laid the foundation for such control, it would not have been necessary to make such compromises."^[20]

(d) The appointment of heads of units of production and the question of one-man management

One of the first decisions taken by the VSNKh related to the conditions governing the management of the units of production and the procedure for appointing heads of enterprises which had been expropriated. A decree dated March 3, 1918 provided that each "chief directorate" (*glavk*) was responsible for appointing, in the enterprises within its field, a commissar representing the government, and two managers (one technical, the other administrative). Only decisions taken by the administrative manager could be challenged by the factory committees or whatever bodies took their place: the technical manager was accountable solely to the chief directorate of the industry to which the enterprise belonged. In nationalized enterprises the decisions of the factory or workshop committees must be submitted for approval to an administrative economic council in which the workers (including office workers) were not

to have a majority.[21] The managers appointed by the

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glavki were usually engineers and former managers, and among them were former capitalists.

Without anticipating my account of the ideological conflicts which arose within the Bolshevik Party, some brief pointers must be given at this stage as to the attitudes of certain of the Bolshevik leaders to the appointment of factory managers by a central administrative authority. Such appointments were sharply criticized not only by some of the Bolshevik trade union leaders but also by those who were known as "left Communists." The latter, who included Bukharin, were very active in the spring of 1918 (their group broke up later). They opposed the appointment of factory managers, the power given to these managers, and the relatively high salaries paid to them. For the "left Communists" all this was a violation of the principle proclaimed in the "[April Theses](#)," according to which officials ought not to receive a salary higher than the average worker's wage, and were to be both elected and subject to recall by their electors.

Lenin did not, of course, deny that the decree on factory management contradicted some of the principles set forth in his "April Theses," but he stressed that it was a matter of *provisional measures* imposed by the necessity of getting the enterprises to work and not letting this task be hindered by "the practice of a lily-livered proletarian government." [22]

For Lenin these measures were "a step backward," tempo rary but unavoidable in the existing circumstances, which, he said did not yet allow socialism to advance "in its own way . . . by *Soviet* methods." [23] The "step backward" of which Lenin spoke was defined by him as a strengthening of *capital* (even though there was no reestablishment of legal ownership of the nationalized enterprises by the capitalists), "*for capital is not a sum of money but a definite social relation.*" [24] Lenin's principled attitude was thus clear, and so it is all the more important to note that the "step backward" and the strengthening of capitalist relations were not put right later on by the adoption of measures conforming with "Soviet methods" [25] and the "April Theses."

In his article, already quoted, on "'Left-Wing' Childish-

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ness," published in May 1918, Lenin returned to the question of the appointment of factory managers and to the fact that sometimes former capitalists were given these posts:

"Management" is entrusted by the Soviet power to capitalists not as capitalists but as technicians or organisers, for higher salaries. And the workers know very well that ninety-nine per cent of the organisers and first-class technicians of really large-scale and giant enterprises, trusts or other establishments belong to the capitalist class. But it is precisely these people whom we, the proletarian party, must appoint to "manage" the labour process and the organisation of production for there are *no* other people who have practical experience in this matter . . . The workers . . . are not afraid of large-scale "state capitalism," they prize it as their *proletarian* weapon which *their Soviet* power will use against small-proprietary disintegration and disorganisation. [26]

This quotation shows that Lenin viewed the appointment of "specialist technicians" to manage state enterprises, where they enjoyed considerable power and received high salaries, as an aspect of what he called "state capitalism."

Subsequently, between 1918 and 1920, the conditions of civil war and foreign intervention caused the Soviet power to enlarge the scope allowed to experienced administrators and, correspondingly, to restrict the functions of the factory committees. The resolutions of the

Ninth Congress of the Bolshevik Party confirmed this tendency. Speaking at the congress, Lenin emphasised that "for the work of administration, of organising the state, we need people who are versed in the art of administration, who have state and business experience," and added that "there is nowhere we can turn to for such people except the old class."^[27]

The congress also made it clear that the factory committees were to devote themselves mainly to questions of labor discipline, propaganda, and workers' education.^[28]

Trotsky and Bukharin (the latter breaking with the line he had taken in 1918) were among those who tried to "give theoretical significance" to organizational forms that were established in this period. They strove to ascribe a general

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"socialist" implication to measures which, in fact, were above all the result of a very special situation.

Bukharin saw in these measures a direct transition to communism. In an endeavor to reconcile the attitude he had taken as a "left Communist" (in March-April 1918) with his present attitude in favor of extreme centralism and one-man management, he wrote that, in a period when "the emphasis of proletarian tasks is transferred to the area of economic construction," it was necessary to effect a restructuring of the economic apparatus that resulted from the first phase of the workers' struggle -- "a restructuring which moves in the direction of the decrease of comaraderie, and in some cases (in individual factories, etc.) to the introduction of the individual administration [i.e., one-man management -- *Translator*]. The latter signifies neither a curtailment of the rights of the class nor a diminishing of the role of its organisation. This is the form of proletarian administration of industry, compressed and consolidated . . ."^[29]

Bukharin went on to say that, since "one no longer needs to concentrate . . . on the problem of stabilisation of the class position of the proletariat -- this question is essentially solved" -- at present

the emphasis does not rest on the principal change of relations of production but in the discovery of such a form of administration which guarantees maximal efficiency. The principle of far-reaching eligibility from below upward (usually even by the workers within the factories) is replaced by the principle of painstaking selection in dependence on technological and administrative personnel, on the competence and the reliability of the candidates. At the top of the factory administrations appear responsible persons -- workers or specialists . . . Within this system no engineer may fulfil a different function from that required of him by the proletariat.^[30]

The problem of transforming production relations, and the problem of the possibility that managers alien to proletarian ideology might not be subject to direct control by the basic organizations of the party and the workers, were thus "settled" as if by the waving of a magic wand.

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The evolution of Bukharin's ideas should not surprise us. It testifies to the profound unity between rightist and leftist attitudes, which is such that one is justified in calling them "rightist-leftist."^[31] Lenin severely condemned the "rightist-leftist" extremism of Trotsky and Bukharin, especially in his speech of December 30, 1920, which was published as *The Trade Unions, The Present Situation and Trotsky's Mistakes*.^[32] He mentioned that contradictions might develop between workers and managers, and subsequently indicated that in certain circumstances resort to the strike weapon might be justified, even under the dictatorship of the proletariat.^[33]

The same "rightist-leftist" mistakes that were committed by Trotsky and Bukharin

reappeared during the five year plans in certain statements by Stalin,^[34] even though the latter had, in the controversy of the winter of 1920-1921, supported Lenin against Trotsky and Bukharin. Conceptions were thus emerging which were in conflict with revolutionary Marxism. These conceptions found one of their completest expressions in the textbook of political economy issued by the USSR Academy of Sciences.^[35] Only one more step needed to be taken in order to arrive at revisionism.

II. The situation of the urban bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie at the end of "war communism"

The changes in the situation of the bourgeoisie which had been initiated in the first months of Soviet power went ahead at a faster rate as soon as the White revolt and foreign intervention began. The gradual prohibition of almost all private economic activity, which was a feature of the new period, also affected the urban petty bourgeoisie, especially the small traders. Actually, what was going on was a dual process: the elimination of the activities of the private bourgeoisie, and the development of a state bourgeoisie.

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(a) Elimination of the activities of the private bourgeoisie

After the establishment of the VSNKh and its subsequent reorganization, the increasing sabotage of production by the bourgeoisie led, between April and June 1918, to a certain increase in the rate at which factories, mines, etc., were expropriated, and soon after the civil war began, expropriations became general. A decree of June 28, 1918, provided for the rapid nationalization of all large enterprises, i.e., those with a capital of one million roubles or more.^[36]

The decree laid down the principle of nationalization, but the actual application of this principle had to be decided from one case to the next. In practice, the expropriation of large-scale enterprises took place quickly, so that the number of state-owned industrial enterprises increased from fewer than 1,000 in May 1918 to between 3,000 and 4,000 in the autumn of that year.^[37]

The implementation of these measures and the decision to prohibit practically all activity by private factories and commercial firms had the result that by the end of the civil war period, at the beginning of 1921, the Russian bourgeoisie had lost most of the positions in industry and trade it had still held in the spring of 1918. Henceforth, it no longer possessed the material and social base which made it a part of the imperialist world bourgeoisie: its powerful links with international banking and financial capital had been broken, just as the old state whose economic and military policy corresponded to its interests had departed from the scene.

Many members of the former bourgeoisie, like many former landlords, had emigrated: this was the case especially with those who had formerly been the richest among them.

Nevertheless, despite these upheavals, the prerevolutionary bourgeoisie had not purely and simply "disappeared." A part of the rural bourgeoisie, the kulaks and other rich peasants, had managed more or less to get by, as we shall see in the next chapter. A fairly large proportion of the bourgeois intelligentsia (doctors, academicians, lawyers, engineers, technical

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specialists, teachers, etc.) had remained in Russia. To be sure, they mostly lived very modestly, having lost almost everything except their "professional income" (and even some of that too), but they tended to fit themselves into the new Soviet society, carrying on the same sort of activity as before. Their influence was not negligible, as may be seen, for instance, from the discussions on the school system and from the nature of the changes made in this system. Some of the members of this intelligentsia obtained posts in the state administration, especially in the economic apparatus, in the new judiciary that was being formed, in the political police, and in the *Prokuratura*.^[38]

At the economic level the activity of the bourgeoisie was carried on both "legally" and "illegally." Illegally, first of all, for the bourgeoisie possessed, in Lenin's words, "the 'art' of administration,"^[39] and it continued to maintain close relations with the state machine. Even during "war communism" a part of the bourgeoisie continued to participate actively in profitable economic operations through illegal trade involving amounts that were certainly substantial, even though impossible to estimate. These operations enabled the bourgeoisie to retain a degree of economic power that was by no means trivial; this explains why after the end of "war communism," when the NEP period began, a private urban bourgeoisie, the "Nepmen," proved able to "rise from the dead" with comparative ease. However, this element was never to constitute a social force that directly threatened the dictatorship of the proletariat, though its existence and its connections with the state machinery certainly contributed to the subsequent reinforcement of the state bourgeoisie.

(a) The weakening of the private petty bourgeoisie and the position of the administrative petty bourgeoisie

The largest element in Russia's petty bourgeoisie was the middle peasantry, whose problems will be examined later.

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Here I shall confine myself to a few remarks concerning the other petty bourgeois elements.

Their numerical importance is very hard to estimate, but it may be assumed that before the revolution they made up about 15 percent of the population, one-fifth of them being office workers.^[40] By early 1920 a large proportion of this petty bourgeoisie, especially the small traders, had been declassed: some went in for illegal trade during "war communism," others found more or less secure jobs in the administration and in the cooperative societies, while yet others went to work in the factories.

The situation of the craftsmen also worsened greatly during "war communism": the control of transport and the rationing of raw materials compelled most of them to suspend their activities. A few managed to get work in industry, and some formed producers' cooperatives (*artels*) in order to secure at least a minimum of raw material.

The political attitude of these two sections of the petty bourgeoisie was far from friendly to the Soviet power. The NEP caused them gradually to go over to an attitude of (non-benevolent) "neutrality."

The position of the administrative petty bourgeoisie (small and medium officials, office workers in industry, commerce, banking, etc.), was not very different. At the outset, their enmity toward the Soviet power was even manifested in an "administrative strike." When the people's commissars took over the ministries, they found the offices empty of officials and clerks, and sometimes the files in disorder. Gradually, however, since they needed their

salaries, these officials and clerks went back to work. At the start of the NEP their number seems to have been no smaller than before the revolution. Deeply influenced by bourgeois ideology, these petty bourgeois elements continued hostile for a long time. They appear to have often practised a sort of "bureaucratic sabotage" by aggravating administrative delay and routine. Everything suggests that these practices, to some extent inherited from the past, continued to be characteristic of the administrative petty bourgeoisie even after (having been partly reno-

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vated by recruitment) it had at last "accepted" the Soviet power.

The technicians, specialists, and engineers of middle rank also belonged to the petty bourgeoisie, and at first their enmity toward the Soviet power (apart from individual exceptions, here as elsewhere) was no less marked than that of the other petty bourgeois groups. Their "neutrality" seems, however, to have been won sooner than that of the others, through the material advantages granted to them, as a result of which their incomes were considerably greater than those of the administrative petty bourgeoisie whose lower stratum received very poor pay, sometimes less than the wages of manual workers.

(c) The development of a state bourgeoisie

The process by which a part of the former bourgeoisie penetrated into the administrative and economic state machinery continued during the period of "war communism." At the same time, the operation of this machinery ensured the reproduction of bourgeois practices and bourgeois relations of distribution. The latter are, as Marx put it, the "reverse side" of capitalist production relations, which also continued to be reproduced,^[41] though in a form that was partly transformed by the dictatorship of the proletariat. As we know, these practices and relations create the conditions for the development of a state bourgeoisie.

The development of the state bourgeoisie was thus the counterpart of objective social relations which could not be "abolished" or "destroyed" in a short period, all the less so because the class struggle and the nature of the contradictions needing to be dealt with (the chief of which confronted the Soviet power with the landlords and capitalists of Russia and world imperialism, a contradiction that took the form of armed struggle) did not allow priority to be accorded to the tackling of these relations.

At the same time as a state bourgeoisie began to emerge (still only at the embryonic stage), relations of distribution

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developed which were favorable to the factory managers, organizers of branches of industry, and highly qualified engineers and technicians. A part of the surplus value produced in industry was thus appropriated by this new bourgeoisie.

A decree of February 21, 1919, consolidated a general scale of wages and salaries with a "spread" which was much wider (that is, which implied much greater inequality) than had been considered acceptable in the period immediately after October, although narrower than the pre-1914 differentials. The decree fixed the minimum wage at 600 roubles and the maximum salary for "highly-qualified administrative personnel" at 3,000 roubles. This applied to Moscow and environs; elsewhere the same coefficients of inequality were to apply, but the basic wage would vary in accordance with local conditions. In fact, salaries exceeding 3,000 roubles could be approved for "very highly qualified" administrative and technical staff.

The payment of such salaries aroused a certain amount of discontent in the working class and disagreement within the party.^[42] Consequently, Lenin returned more than once to the problem of the "specialists" and their salaries. He said that it was not possible to get industry to function without them, and also impossible simply to force these men to work for the Soviet power. "To compel a whole section of the population to work under coercion is impossible . . ." ^[43]

The high salaries paid to the specialists were thus clearly recognized as a *compromise dictated by circumstances of the class struggle* and not, as in the current formulations of the Soviet revisionists, as an application of the principle "to each according to his work."

In his report on the CC, presented to the party congress on March 18, 1919, Lenin stressed that many of the decisions taken by the Soviet government had been forced upon it by the pressure of facts, and he recalled that "Marx once said that it is to the credit of the Paris Communards that they carried into effect decisions which were not borrowed from some pre-conceived theories, but were dictated by actual necessity." ^[44]

In practice, the measures taken with regard to the salaries of

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"bourgeois specialists" were fairly soon extended to other "responsible workers," and gave rise to inequalities that were not confined to differences in money received. In April 1919 a decree fixed the salaries of "responsible political workers," providing that the people's commissars, the members of the VTsIK, and certain high officials were to be paid 2,000 roubles per month -- which meant partially abandoning the *partmax*, that is, the rule by which no party member must be paid at a rate exceeding a worker's wage.

As a result of the increase in prices in 1919 and 1920, wages and salaries were increased several times. These increases were accompanied by a slight tendency to narrow the "spread," but to a growing extent during these years, money wages lost their significance owing to the general shortage of goods, rationing, and the sharp rise in prices, especially on the black market.^[45]

The depreciation of money wages was accompanied by the development of inequality in other forms. The bourgeois engineers, specialists, and administrators were granted various material advantages, and a similar process took place in the Red Army, in which the officers (many of whom came from the old tsarist army) received a number of privileges, not only in respect of payment but also in the form of special quarters, meals differing from those served to the soldiers, and so on.

In 1920 it was practically impossible to evaluate the "average" differences between the wages and salaries of different categories. Individual variations were becoming very important, and there were also "bonuses in kind" which could not be translated into a unified price system, for prices themselves varied a great deal and very quickly. These "bonuses in kind" were paid either in foodstuffs (though this type of payment was not used much, owing to the inadequacy of the supply of provisions at the state's disposal) or in the actual products of particular factories (including such products as transmission belts for machinery, pieces of metal, small tools, etc.). Such products were not, of course, directly consumed by those who received them in this way, but went into the black market, where they were exchanged for other goods.^[46]

A part of the workers' wages was also paid in the same

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manner, but it was the "bourgeois specialists" who were the chief beneficiaries of the system.

For the period in which these wages in kind bulked large, it is impossible to measure the size of the gap between the payment of the producers and that of the specialists, engineers, etc. Nevertheless, there are many indications that the administrators and technicians gave themselves the lion's share of the "deductions in kind" which were made from the factories' production, and that they participated extensively in illegal trade.

Later on, the NEP was to consolidate these distribution relations by confirming the wage spread laid down by the decree of February 21, 1919, together with the many bonuses which were now paid in money to the managers, chief engineers, etc.

The state bourgeoisie being formed during these years was as yet small in numbers. Its size cannot be estimated with any exactness, for there are no relevant statistics, but it cannot have exceeded a few thousand. In fact, it was only gradually that the system of the single manager appointed by the VSNKh came into force and that engineers and technicians also came to be appointed in the factories, trusts, and *glavki*. Thus, at the end of 1920, out of the 2,051 important enterprises for which we have statistics, 1,783 were operating on the basis of one-man management.^[47]

In some parts of the state economic machinery especially in certain organs of the VSNKh, penetration by the bourgeoisie was considerable. It was described by a "White" university professor who arrived in Omsk during this period: "At the head of many of the centres and *glavki* sit former employers and responsible officials and managers of business. The unprepared visitor to the centres who is personally acquainted with the former commercial and industrial world would be surprised to see the former owners of big leather factories sitting in Glavokozh, big manufacturers in the central textile organizations, etc."^[48]

In this way a state bourgeoisie was formed which was at that stage mainly composed of members of the old bourgeoisie.^[49]

This embryonic state bourgeoisie took shape in the first

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place in the town's and constituted the mainspring of the organs of state capitalism. It was emerging also in the countryside, where the managers of the *sovkhozy* (state farms) usually ensured a privileged situation for themselves. At the Seventh Congress of Soviets, in December 1919, the *Sovkhozy* were accused of attracting specialists to their service by paying them high salaries, and some of their managers were denounced for living luxuriously in the former homes of the landlords; it even happened quite often that it was the latter who contrived to reestablish themselves in the guise of "managers of state farms." A delegate at the congress went so far as to claim that state farms "have been turned into instruments of counter-revolutionary agitation against the Soviet power."^[50]

The merely embryonic condition of the state bourgeoisie during "war communism" and at the beginning of the NEP was due to several circumstances. The class had been formed only recently; some of the same kind of posts that were occupied by "bourgeois specialists" were held by Bolshevik Party members who, inspired by the ideas of revolutionary Marxism, were models of proletarian practice who put first the common interests of the revolution and worked closely with the workers and the organizations of the working class, the party, and the trade unions; finally, the very acuteness of the class struggle to some extent restricted the possibilities for action by members of the former bourgeoisie within the state's economic machinery. They were far from being able to cause the bourgeois practices of which they were the carriers to prevail generally, owing to the suspicion in which they were held by the workers and to the resistance of the latter to the consolidation of certain relations of hierarchy and authority.

The workers' resistance was one of the obstacles limiting the possibilities for the consolidation of a state bourgeoisie. Proofs of such resistance are plentiful. The exasperation felt by the workers led them quite often to refuse to "cooperate" with the bourgeois elements managing the factories, to carry out searches in their homes, and seize their stocks of provisions. These events found an echo in the Soviet press and in Lenin's writings -- for example, in his "[Reply to an open letter](#)

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[by a bourgeois specialist](#)," published in *Pravda* of March 28, 1919.^[51] These forms of workers' resistance to the policy of integrating bourgeois specialists and technicians into the state economic apparatus were never to cease; they continued including during the NEP period, in more or less acute forms.^[52]

However, this was an elementary form of class struggle which could not by itself modify the production relations or really prevent those who held posts of leadership in the economic machinery from developing bourgeois practices and becoming a state bourgeoisie.

In any case, it would be quite wrong to assume that all who at that time held leading positions in industry or in the economic and administrative machinery formed part of the state bourgeoisie. Actually, some of these positions were held by Communists who developed proletarian practices to the greatest possible extent, doing all they could to help the workers free themselves from bourgeois relations and find scope for their initiative. These leaders, whose principal function was revolutionary-proletarian in character (and who usually refused, in accordance with the rules of the Bolshevik Party at this time, to draw a salary higher than a worker's wage), did not belong to the state bourgeoisie but to the proletariat, in which they were ideologically and materially integrated and from which in very many cases they themselves stemmed.

(d) The educational system and the subsequent consolidation of the bourgeoisie

A far from negligible role (even though secondary in importance to the reproduction of the hardly transformed capitalist production relations) in the subsequent consolidation of the bourgeoisie was played by the old educational system, which underwent practically no revolutionary transformation. This system remained a bastion of the bourgeois intelligentsia and bourgeois ideology, and increasingly imposed this ideology on the children of workers and peasants who passed through

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the Soviet schools and in growing numbers filled leading positions.

The old educational system inherited from tsardom and the Provisional Government had strongly subjected its own agents to bourgeois ideology: for several years after October 1917, the teachers and the educational bureaucracy in the main refused to "recognize" Soviet power. As Daniel Lindenberg writes, "the Narkompros (People's Commissariat of Education), established on 22 November 1917, with Lunacharsky as commissar, took over no files or statistics, and the former educational bureaucracy . . . practised sabotage by desertion; as for the great majority of the teachers, they remained deaf to the Bolsheviks' appeals, refusing for years on end to apply the party's recommendations -- a form of sabotage by passivity."^[53]

After October, the state of affairs in the educational system was as follows: primary

education was dominated by the union of primary school teachers, which was led by the Mensheviks and SRs, while the secondary schools were dominated by an association of secondary school teachers which was closely linked with the Cadet party, the situation in higher education being similar.^[54]

After the civil war, a *modus vivendi* was arrived at between the Soviet power and the ideological and political forces that actually dominated the educational system, but it was realized on the basis of bourgeois educational ideology, not on that of proletarian ideology.

In 1917, moreover, the Bolshevik Party did not have a unified conception of what its line in the field of education should be: on this point, as on others, several conceptions clashed. The most influential were those of Krupskaya and Lunacharsky.

On the question of the relations between the educational system and the state administration, Nadezhda Krupskaya's ideas were faithful to those of Marx, being opposed to any direct interference by the state administration in educational matters. She saw it as the task of specific soviets, the "school councils," to take charge of basic education: these councils were to elect the teachers and run the schools, with participa-

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tion by the schoolchildren themselves.^[55] In principle, the content of teaching was to be profoundly altered by the establishment of the "single labor school," the basis of which "must be productive labor, conceived not as being devoted to the material conservation of the school or merely as a method of teaching, but as a productive and socially necessary activity."^[56]

As a result of noncooperation by the teachers, the economic and financial chaos resulting from the imperialist war, the civil war, and foreign intervention, and the Bolshevik Party's concentration on other problems, the practical effect of these ideas remained extremely limited; when the schools really got going again at the beginning of the NEP, it was in concrete conditions very different from those which had been envisaged by Krupskaya. Her revolutionary notions had, besides, constantly conflicted with the centralizing and statist notions of an important section of the Bolshevik Party, represented by Lunacharsky, who upheld the conceptions of bourgeois humanism. These conservative ideas made themselves clearly felt after 1917 where secondary and higher educational institutions were concerned.

In fact, at the level of secondary and higher education, nothing changed after October. The system of *gymnasia* remained practically intact until 1928, and the same was true as regards access to the universities, which in practice remained more or less closed to the workers and peasants.

During the summer of 1918 (August 6), at a moment when the civil war had in fact already begun, an attempt was made to modify this state of affairs by opening "workers faculties" (*rabfak*), in which the period of study was relatively short and teaching related mainly to industrial techniques and political work. These *rabfaks* had great success, but after the end of 1918 their role was modified so as to increase the production of specialists. For the same reason the universities reintroduced the old rules for selection: although, in principle, those candidates who held *rabfak* diplomas were exempt from the entrance examination, the content of the final examination

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was such that university graduates of working-class origin were few and far between, and these rare birds were usually persons who had assimilated the bourgeois ideology reproduced by the university system.

Thus, on the morrow of October, the Soviet power had in practice *not* revolutionized the educational system, and had changed it only to a very limited extent. Fundamentally, the system remained bourgeois, by virtue of what it taught, how this was taught, and the type of relation between theory and practice which it fostered. Apart from a few abortive attempts, this situation was to persist. The functioning of the educational apparatus and its reproduction of bourgeois relations and ideological practices thus played a considerable role in the steady rise of bourgeois forces in the USSR.

III. The situation of the proletariat at the end of "war communism"

The situation of the Soviet proletariat at the end of "war communism" was profoundly contradictory. On the one hand, it wielded state power and, along with the peasantry, it had won victories that were remarkable, given the difference in the material forces involved, over capitalism, the landlords, and foreign imperialism. Furthermore, its material situation, though miserable because of the general shortage of goods was relatively "privileged."^[57] On the other hand, its numbers had been reduced and it had been penetrated by alien elements of bourgeois and petty bourgeois origin. A part of the old working class was deeply demoralized and was often kept at work only by a system of rigorous discipline.

This contradictory situation, together with some of the stages that had led to it, needs to be examined fairly closely if we are to understand the specific place of the proletariat in the system of class relations at the end of "war communism."

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(a) The "physical" weakening of the Soviet proletariat and its partial "disintegration"

By the beginning of the 1920s the Russian proletariat had suffered a terrible bloodletting. It had literally melted away during the civil war, and this process was continuing at the outset of the NEP. Thus, in 1922, the number of employed workers was less than half the prewar figure - 4.6 million instead of 11 million in 1913, within the same frontiers, and of these 4.6 million, only 2 million were employed in industry, 1.2 million being agricultural laborers.^[58]

The active working class was not only reduced numerically but also greatly altered in its composition. Many of the most militant workers had fallen at the front. Others had been absorbed into the machinery of the party, the trade unions, and the state. Others, especially in the big industrial centers, had left the ranks of the working class, owing to unemployment or the food shortage, and gone back to their native villages. At the same time, men and women of bourgeois and petty bourgeois origin, who were usually hostile to the dictatorship of the proletariat, had made their way into the ranks of the working class so as to take advantage of the higher rations available to manual workers, or to conceal their class origin.

Amidst a population of 136 million, of whom about half were of working age, the number of those who made up the active nucleus of the new ruling class were thus small; and this was so even if one adds to the workers actually employed in 1922 the former workers who were ready to go back to their old places in production. The solidity of the proletarian dictatorship was not mainly determined by the relative weight of the working class, but, above all, by its class organization and by its ability to exercise ideological and political leadership of the masses.

(b) The standard of living of the working class and the problem of wages

Immediately after October the conditions of the working class improved greatly. The principal changes concerned the

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abolition of the fines which the capitalists deducted arbitrarily from the workers' wages on all sorts of pretexts, and the maintenance of the same wage level for a shorter working day, this being reduced to eight hours instead of the ten or twelve hours that had previously been worked in many cases. These changes were in line with those which the workers' economic struggle since February 1917 had been able to wrest from the employers before October.

However, the economic disorganization caused by the war and the civil war soon reduced the workers' level of consumption. True, wages were frequently readjusted so as to take account of official price increases, especially where rationed goods were concerned, but rations became increasingly scanty and unavailable. In 1919 consumption was covered only to the extent of 50 percent by purchases made at official prices, the rest being accounted for by the black market, where prices were high and fluctuating.

The problem of wages -- the way to determine them and the differentials to be maintained -- was the subject, all through "war communism" and at the beginning of the NEP, of many discussions in the trade unions and in the Bolshevik Party. The decisions taken were largely determined by a situation marked by the departure from the active working class of its best elements and the influx of many petty bourgeois and bourgeois. This situation, together with the general economic conditions, led to a catastrophic fall in productivity and in industrial production, a great deal of absenteeism, and the disorganization of industry.

The Labor Code of the RSFSR, adopted on October 10, 1918, confirmed the regulations for the protection of labor adopted after the October Revolution, and charged the trade unions with responsibility for fixing wages in consultation with the managers of enterprises and subject to rectification by the Commissariat of Labor.^[59]

In April 1918 the Central Trade-Union Council had declared itself for the extension of piece rates. The labor code provided that wages might be "differentiated" in such a way as to take account not only of the arduousness of the work performed but also of the "degree of responsibility" and the

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"skill" involved. Piece rates and bonuses were treated as the "normal" form of wages.

The payment of wages on a piece work basis was in fact widespread in Russian industry, and its retention was relatively advantageous to long-established workers, as compared with newcomers to the working class. The majority of the Bolshevik leaders favored this way of calculating wages, seeing in it, in the conditions then prevailing, one of the ways of reestablishing production and the productivity of industrial labor. On this point Lenin wrote: "We must raise the question of piece-work and apply and test it in practice; we must raise the question of applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system; we must make wages correspond to the total amount of goods turned out or the amount of work done by the railways, the water-transport system, etc., etc."^[60]

This declaration gave rise to a wide discussion in the Bolshevik Party, in which a section of the party, the "left Communists," including leading figures such as Bukharin, Radek, and

Osinsky, denounced what they saw as a move in the direction of restoring "capitalist management of the enterprises."

In "'Left-Wing' Childishness"^[61] Lenin sharply attacked the position of the "left Communists," which, he said, coincided with that of the Mensheviks, who also protested against the introduction of piece wages and of arrangements borrowed from the Taylor system, and against the reorganization of the management of the enterprises and branches of industry under the direction of "industrial trusts." For Lenin, these measures were dictated by the conditions, objective and subjective, of the moment: they were part of the system of "state capitalism" under the dictatorship of the proletariat, the only form of production that could be developed immediately and rapidly.

The orientation advocated by Lenin prevailed. It was maintained throughout "war communism" and during the NEP, though with a tendency, in 1918 and at the beginning of 1919, to narrow the spread of wages as compared with the pre-1914 situation.^[62]

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The February 21, 1919, decree on wages, already mentioned, divided wages into a large number of groups, each of which was subdivided into twelve categories. Within each group, the ratio of the highest wage to the lowest corresponded to a coefficient of 1.75. Piece wages and bonuses were made general. Only where piece rates were impossible to apply was payment on a time basis treated as admissible, but in such cases "production norms" had to be fixed.

In April 1920, at the Third All-Russia Trade-Union Congress, it was decided to widen the spread of wages somewhat. Within each group the coefficient of differentiation was increased from 1.75 to 2. Actually, since money wages were at that time losing much of their practical significance (owing to the shortage of products purchasable at official prices), it was decided to vary the rations distributed by the state in accordance with workers' levels of skill and output. In practice, this system was fairly widely replaced by payment of wages in kind, with levels also fixed in relation to "output" and "skill."

Eventually, then, along with the growing difficulty in obtaining supplies and the depreciation of the currency (which steadily reduced the significance of wages paid in money), an orientation was established which favored wage differentials, piece rates, and bonuses. With the development of the NEP, the differentiation in money wages and bonuses was to assume its full importance.

In order to appreciate the meaning of the measures described, and those about to be mentioned, it must not be forgotten that when they were adopted most of them were, in principle, transient in character: they were intended to cope with what appeared as an immediate and crying need, in view of the demands of the front, to maintain and increase the quantity of industrial products available, at a time when labor discipline was so gravely compromised that interruptions in production were frequent. Study of the problems presented by labor discipline cannot be separated from consideration of a number of facts relevant to the ideological class struggle.

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(c) The ideological class struggle and labor discipline

Industrial production, as highly socialized production, calls for strict coordination of the elementary labor processes and the carrying out of these processes in accordance with strict qualitative norms. Genuine labor discipline is necessary for the fulfillment of these

requirements, but this discipline always possesses a class character. It may be imposed from above upon workers who try to "dodge" exploitation or administratively fixed rules by reducing their productive effort: this is bourgeois discipline. It may be freely agreed upon by workers who get together and themselves coordinate their efforts: labor discipline is then proletarian in character. The first kind of discipline is despotic and ensures the reproduction of capitalist social relations, of *capital* and *labor*. The second is inherent in socialist cooperation, which does not mean that the task of coordination is not assumed by one particular worker who plays the part of the conductor of the orchestra: "An orchestra conductor need not own the instruments of the orchestra,"^[63] he is only the executant of the collective will of the workers.

The transition from one type of discipline to the other, however, even when most of the means of production belong to the state of proletarian dictatorship, cannot be "instantaneous." It forms part of the process of transition from capitalism to communism, and passes through stages in which factory discipline offers contradictory features which express the birth of communist relations and the withering away of capitalist relations. Like the transition process as a whole, this transition is no spontaneous affair, but depends on ideological and political class struggle. It is a revolutionary process with objective and subjective aspects and, like every such revolutionary process, it has to be guided by a revolutionary theory by means of which the lessons of experience and of mass initiative can be drawn.

The subjective side of this revolutionary process is essential, for the agents of production need to free themselves from the ideological relations to which capitalist exploitation has

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forced them to submit, and from the social practices corresponding to this exploitation. As Marx noted: "This revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the *ruling* class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew."^[64]

The revolution through which the former exploited class "rids itself of all the muck of ages" is obviously more than a political revolution: it is an ideological revolution such as, we know now, can be accomplished only through several "cultural revolutions." Insofar as the proletariat is not free from bourgeois ideology, it develops practices which contradict its own class interests and tend to consolidate the capitalist elements in the production relations.

At the time of the October Revolution and in the following years, the ideological foundations of the bourgeoisie's political dominance had been sufficiently shaken for that class to lose power and fail to reconquer it, for the Russian workers were ready to fight against it, arms in hand, and make the greatest sacrifices in order to ensure military victory over the class enemy. However, the ideological revolutionization of the Russian proletariat (then extensively penetrated by petty bourgeois and bourgeois elements) and the Bolshevik Party's ability to advance this process (in the extremely complex conditions of the time) were insufficient for mainly proletarian forms of discipline to become predominant in industry.

Immediately after October, the Bolshevik Party made a certain number of attempts to move in the direction of proletarian discipline, drawing upon "practical organizers among the workers and peasants," whom the party tried to get to play a leading role by leaving them the widest scope for initiative. Lenin stressed the decisive importance of the workers' own spontaneous initiative. In his essay "[How to Organise Competition](#)" he wrote:

There are a great many talented organisers among the peasants and the working class, and they are only just beginning to be come aware of themselves, to awaken, to stretch out towards

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great, vital, creative work, to tackle with their own forces the task of building socialist society. One of the most important tasks of today, if not the most important, is to develop this independent initiative of the workers, and of all the working and exploited people generally, develop it as widely as possible in creative *organisational* work. At all costs, we must break the old, *absurd*, savage, despicable and disgusting prejudice that only the so called "upper classes", only the rich, and those who have gone through the school of the rich, are capable of administering the state and directing the organisational development of socialist society.^[65]

He added that the generalized, universal accounting and control needed for socialism could be carried out only by the masses, and that, in endeavoring to bring it about, "every attempt to establish stereotyped forms and to impose uniformity from above, as intellectuals are so inclined to do, must be combated. Stereotyped forms and uniformity imposed from above have nothing in common with democratic and socialist centralism . . . The Paris Commune gave a great example of how to combine initiative, independence, freedom of action and vigour from below with voluntary centralism free from stereotyped forms."^[66]

However, as we have seen, at the very moment Lenin was writing these lines, measures were being taken which cut down the powers of the factory committees and subjected workers' control to central administrative organs. In Lenin's eyes, these measures were justified by the urgent need to establish centralization in the form of state capitalism, and also by the "timidity" with which the working-class masses were approaching the problem of control.^[67]

Lenin also justified these measures by reference to the influence of bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideas, together with the fact that "poverty and want forced thousands and thousands on to the path of rowdiness, corruption and roguery, and caused them to lose all human semblance,"^[68] which made it necessary to establish strict discipline and strictly centralized control.

In December 1917 Lenin seemed to think that the principal aspect of the situation was the enormous drive of the masses to

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free themselves from bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideas, to overcome their "timidity" and so to develop their self-confidence and self-discipline. He considered that what would best help the masses to advance in that direction was the class struggle:

As their enemies, the exploiters, step up their resistance, the exploited mature and gain in strength; they grow and learn and they cast out the "old Adam" of wage-slavery. Victory will be on the side of the exploited, for on their side is life, numerical strength, the strength of the mass, the strength of the inexhaustible sources of all that is selfless, dedicated and honest, all that is surging forward and awakening to the building of the new, all the vast reserves of energy and talent latent in the so-called "common people" the workers and peasants. Victory will be theirs.^[69]

A few months later, in March-April 1918, faced with the increasing disorganization of Russia's economy, and with the development of anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist tendencies, which constitute one of the most dangerous forms of penetration by petty bourgeois ideology, Lenin considered that the Soviet proletariat had not succeeded, owing to lack of initiative, resolution, and unity, in developing the capacity to organize accounting and control of production on a countrywide scale, or in establishing its own factory discipline; from this followed the need to give more scope to capitalists and bourgeois specialists in the central organs directing the economy and in the administration and management of the enterprises.

In his speech of April 29, 1918, to the VTsIK, Lenin connected the inadequate level of discipline with the petty bourgeois ideas of those workers who had not been through the school

of trade unionism, and denounced the illusions of the "left Communists" who thought it possible to get rid of the capitalists without replacing bourgeois discipline by proletarian discipline. It was in this connection that he observed that the most difficult task was not overthrowing the bourgeoisie but maintaining the dictatorship of the proletariat, and ensuring thereby "the establishment of order, discipline,

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labour productivity, accounting and control by the proletarian Soviet power."[\[70\]](#)

At that time Lenin thought that the principal danger threatening the Soviet power was not open counter-revolution (as became the case a few weeks later), but the bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideas present among the masses. He developed this theme in his April 23, 1918, speech to the Moscow Soviet: "We have one extremely dangerous secret enemy, more dangerous than many open counter-revolutionaries; this enemy is the deadly enemy of the socialist revolution and the Soviet power . . . The enemy of whom I have spoken is the anarchy of the petty proprietors, whose life is guided by one thought: 'I grab all I can -- the rest can go hang.' This enemy is more powerful than all the Kornilovs, Dutovs and Kaledins put together."[\[71\]](#)

He took up the idea again in *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government* :

Yesterday we were menaced by the restoration of bourgeois exploitation, personified by the Kornilovs, Gotzes, Dutovs, Gegechkoris and Bogayevskys. We conquered them. This restoration, this very same restoration menaces us today in another form, in the form of the element of petty bourgeois laxity and anarchism, or small-proprietor "it's-not-my-business" psychology, in the form of the daily, petty, but numerous sorties and attacks of this element against proletarian discipline. We must, and we shall vanquish this element of petty bourgeois anarchy.[\[72\]](#)

It was thus a whole complex set of reasons that led Lenin and the Bolshevik Party to introduce a series of measures aimed at imposing "from above" as strict a system of labor discipline as possible.

Clearly, it is possible to wonder whether these measures may not have contributed to restrict still further the initiative of the working-class rank and file, to reduce what confidence it may have had in its own powers, and to cause it to resume a passive attitude hard to reconcile with the exercise of its role as the ruling class. Such questions can indeed be asked, but there is, of course, no possibility of answering them. We do know, however, that given the disorganized state of the

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economy and the disintegration of the working class, and in the absence of a sufficient degree of discipline in the enterprises and coordination of their activities, Soviet industry would have been unable to go on functioning.

We know, too, that the policy of "state capitalism" did make possible a partial reactivation of industry so that the latter was able to sustain the war effort which was forced upon the Soviet power from May 1918 onward.

(d) Labor discipline and the role of the trade unions

The appointment of former capitalists and bourgeois specialists to managerial posts in the factories, the Soviet trusts, the *glavki*, and the VSNKh, which led to the reestablishment of

capitalist discipline and methods of management in industry, often gave rise to serious discontent among the workers. From the second half of 1918 onward, this discontent frequently expressed itself in acts of violence, and even of revolt, which were echoed in the Soviet press and trade-union congresses of the period. At the same time, as a result of the shortage of foodstuffs in the towns, there was growing absenteeism and migration to the countryside. The factories and mines were thus deprived of workers whose regular presence was essential if production was to be maintained at a level adequate to servicing the hard struggle being waged on many fronts by the workers and peasants who were defending Soviet power.

In the face of this situation the Bolshevik Party was led to take measures resulting in a thorough transformation of trade-union functions. This began during the second half of 1918, when military operations were becoming widespread and the nationalization of enterprises was developing. The trade unions were increasingly called upon to cooperate administratively with the People's Commissariat of Labor (Narkomtrud) and with the managers of nationalized enterprises, especially in fixing labor conditions and disciplinary rules binding on the workers.

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The Second All-Russia Congress of Trade Unions (January 1919) ratified the principle of what was then officially called the "governmentalization" of the trade unions, that is, their de facto subordination to the central state administration through the Narkomtrud.

The principle of subordination of the administrative apparatus, a principle not to be identified with the leading ideological and political role of the party, was formulated by the Bolshevik Party^[73] itself and submitted by the Bolshevik fraction in the congress for ratification by the Second All-Russia Congress of Trade Unions.

The effects of this subordination might seem limited, seeing that the central collegium at the head of the Narkomtrud was itself made up of trade-union representatives. The task of these representatives in the Narkomtrud was twofold -- deciding on rules for labor discipline, and checking that the bourgeois managers, engineers, specialists, etc., did not misuse their power. In principle, therefore, it was a question of endowing the trade unions, as a mass organization of the wage workers, with the formal right to supervise the activities of the "bourgeois specialists" and administer labor discipline themselves.

Actually, in the concrete conditions existing, the presence of trade-union representatives in the central collegium of the Narkomtrud did not mean much, as effective local control of bourgeois factory managers, specialists, etc., was in practice entrusted to the local organs of the Narkomtrud, that is, to a body of officials inherited from the previous regime and organized in the same administrative structures as of old: moreover, the local organs of the Narkomtrud were not subordinated to the local trade-union organizations so that it was an apparatus free from effective control by the workers that increasingly tended to decide questions of working conditions and labor discipline.

The "governmentalization" of the trade unions resulted in their de facto fusion with the state administrative apparatus and the transfer to this apparatus of a part of the tasks which were supposed to be delegated to the trade unions. This was

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the case with the mobilization of labor that took place throughout 1919.

The development of this mobilization led the Ninth Party Congress (March 1920) to adopt several resolutions, one of which concerned the trade unions. This resolution^[74] laid down a number of important principles, some of which were of a general character while others

corresponded to concerns of the moment. One of the statements of principle dealt with the tasks of the trade unions. It was said that under the dictatorship of the proletariat the trade unions did not have as their principal task to act as organs of workers' struggle, but rather to contribute to "economic organisation and education." The same resolution said that the trade unions were to carry out their functions "not self-sufficiently and in isolation, but as one of the essential instruments of the Soviet state, led by the Communist Party." The resolution defined the trade unions as "schools of communism" and as "the link binding the most backward masses of the proletariat . . . to the proletarian vanguard, the Communist Party." It added that, to this end, they "must educate and organise the masses culturally, politically and administratively."

Furthermore, the resolution stated that the trade unions must carry out their administrative functions as subordinate parts of the state machine as a whole, and must not intervene directly in the management of enterprises. They might put forward candidates for the management of the enterprises, but the principle of election was set aside in favor of that of "selection on the basis of a practical probationary period enabling estimation to be made of the candidate's technical competence, firmness, organisational ability and efficiency."

The principal functions of the trade unions were set forth as follows: "Improvement of labour discipline by all methods, up to and including comradely disciplinary tribunals [elected by a general meeting of workers in the enterprise -- C.B.], propaganda for productive labour . . . ; educating the workers and arousing their interest in understanding the role of their factory . . ."

In describing "the current tasks of the trade unions," the

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resolution stressed that they must participate in the organization of "work conducted on a war basis."

Those trade-union leaders who refused to follow the path laid down by the resolution could be relieved of their functions and replaced by a directly appointed (and no longer elected) "political leadership." This was in fact done in certain sectors, such as the railroads, where far-reaching disorganization had to be remedied. The old leadership of the railroad workers' union, which was hostile to the Bolshevik Party, was replaced, on Trotsky's initiative, by a "political leadership of transport" which was regarded as a temporary organ of the party and of the Soviet power.

Another resolution, also adopted by the Ninth Party Congress, on "The Immediate Tasks of Economic Construction," stipulated (Article 12) that decisions of this kind *were "exceptional, emergency measures."*^[75]

The resistance of the old trade-union leaders to the line laid down by this resolution was clearly inspired by a variety of motives. For some (in particular, the Mensheviks) it was a question of sabotaging the war effort; for others, what mattered was to resist measures that developed in a one-sided way the administrative and disciplinary role of the trade-union organizations. This resistance was all the greater because parts of the congress resolution on "The Immediate Tasks of Economic Construction"^[76] were not easily acceptable to a large section of the workers.

These resolutions (which the trade unions had the task of implementing) aimed at introducing a series of measures of a coercive character: compulsory labor, militarization of the economy, obligation of party and trade-union organizations to register all skilled workers (so as to assign them to production with the same strictness "as was and is being shown towards officers in relation to the army's needs"), mobilization of the workers as a whole, including the unskilled, in labor units, with a staff of "technically competent instructors," and establishment of a system

of "scientific organization of production."

The role to be assigned to the bourgeois specialists and the

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administrative and technical personnel, and the basis for their remuneration were provided for as follows:

Individual calculation of labour productivity and the system of individual bonuses are to be applied, in appropriate forms, to the administrative and technical staff. The best administrators, engineers and technicians must be placed in the most favourable conditions for the full deployment of their capacities in the interest of the socialist economy . . . The prejudice against admission of the higher technical personnel of the enterprises and institutions to membership of the trade unions must be finally uprooted. By welcoming the engineers, doctors, agronomists and other such workers, the trade unions will help them, through fraternal collaboration with the organised proletariat, to participate actively in Soviet construction and will acquire workers with specialised scientific knowledge and experience such as the trade unions have very great need of.^[77]

These resolutions testify to the great difficulties then being experienced by Soviet industry, and also reflect the existence of contradictory tendencies within the Bolshevik Party. These contradictions, which burst forth at the end of 1920 in the "trade union discussion" in which Lenin opposed Trotsky and Bukharin, related to the significance -- were they to be seen as mere conjunctural decisions or as matters of principle? -- of some of the resolutions of the Ninth Party Congress, and also to the role to be played by coercion where the workers were concerned. Such coercion was in fact applied until the end of 1920 as a result of economic disorganization and the need to furnish supplies to the armed forces of the revolution.

(e) Resort to measures of coercion against the workers

From the second half of 1918 onward, there developed a growing contradiction between what the war effort demanded from the various industries and the actual amount of work that many workers were disposed to put in "spontaneously." Given the Bolshevik Party's lack of sufficient capacity to

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undertake the task of persuasion of the masses, coercive measures were adopted.

In the first place, employment was subjected to regulation, so as to prevent workers from moving too often from one enterprise to another, and oblige them to accept whatever jobs were offered to them. This was, for example, the purpose of a decree of September 1918, forbidding unemployed workers to reject the jobs offered them on penalty of losing their right to unemployment pay. At the end of October 1918 the "employment services" were transformed into local organs of the Narkomtrud: thereafter, the conclusion of any contract of employment ^[78] had to be authorized by these organs, which thus became an obligatory intermediary for workers and employers alike.

In March 1919 the Eighth Congress of the Bolshevik Party took an important step in the same direction. The program it then adopted stated:

For the purposive development of economic life it is essential to utilise to the utmost all the labour power at the disposal of the state. Its correct assignment and reassignment as between the various territorial areas and as between the various branches of economic life is the main task of the economic policy of the Soviet power. It can be fulfilled in no other way than by an intimate

association between the Soviet power and the trade unions. The general mobilisation by the Soviet power of all members of the population who are physically and mentally fit for work (a mobilisation to be effected through the instrumentality of the trade unions), for the discharge of definite social duties must be achieved far more widely and systematically than has hitherto been the case.

By virtue of these decisions of the Eighth Party Congress, the role of *planned direction of labor, attributed to the trade unions, was exercised in practice by the state administrative system* into which the trade unions were integrated, but because of the place formally assigned to the trade unions, the direction of labor planned in this way was identified with the introduction of "a new socialist discipline."^[79]

A month after the Eighth Congress, the Sovnarkom adopted

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a "general mobilization order" and gave the trade unions the task of selecting those workers who were to be sent to the front. In practice, this selection was made by the managers of enterprises, who chose the men they considered they could best do without. At the same time, the STO (Council of Labor and Defense), which was headed by Trotsky, published a decree mobilizing at their workplaces those miners who had not been sent to the front.

Other measures were gradually added so as to ensure better control over the way the country's labor force was being used. In June 1919 the workers of Moscow and Petrograd were made to carry *workbooks* containing full details of their work record. It was hoped by this means more effectively to prevent unauthorized moves by workers from job to job: this shifting about, usually inspired by a desire to find more attractive conditions, was indeed occurring on a scale that endangered the functioning of industry and the war effort. This measure was gradually extended to other towns. As the trade unions proved unable to control the workers, this task was taken out of their hands in November 1919. Thereafter, the power to mobilize the workers and direct them to particular factories or tasks was wholly transferred to the Narkomtrud and its local organs. This power to mobilize the labor force was also made applicable to the peasants.

In January 1920 the Sovnarkom proclaimed that it was necessary to "supply industry, agriculture, transport and other branches of the national economy with labour power on the basis of a general economic plan."^[80] A system of general labor service was organized, dependent no longer on the Narkomtrud but on the STO. The latter set up its own local organs for the purpose of conscripting workers for urgent tasks. Workers who tried to dodge assignments they did not like by going back to their native villages could be sought out, arrested, and treated as deserters.^[81] In April 1920 a report to the Third Congress of Trade Unions went so far as to regret the destruction by the revolution of "the old police apparatus which had known how to register citizens not only in the towns but in the country."^[82] In fact, the Narkomtrud and the STO proved able

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to cope with the needs of the situation: in the forestry industry alone, they mobilized nearly six million persons through the labor service in the first half of 1920.^[33]

In the spring of 1920, when the army's need for manpower was slackening off, Trotsky decided not to demobilize that part of the army which was no longer required at the front, but instead to transform it into a "labor army" to be employed in particularly arduous tasks.

The Ninth Congress, in its resolution on "The Present Tasks of Economic Construction," systematized and developed a number of measures which had been adopted during the

preceding months, dealing with the formation of "labor armies" and with the introduction of the crime of "labor-desertion," which was to be severely punished. Point 15 of this resolution declared, among other things, that

given that a considerable number of workers, in search of better food supplies, and often desiring to engage in speculation, are voluntarily leaving the enterprises and moving about from place to place . . . the Congress considers it to be one of the urgent tasks of the Soviet power and the trade unions to struggle in a planned systematic way, persistently and with strictness, against labour-desertion, in particular by the publication of black lists of deserters, the formation of penal labour-detachments made up of deserters and, finally, the internment of deserters in concentration camps.

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(f) *The principal aspect of the proletariat's situation: its constitution as the dominant class*

The necessity under which the Soviet power found itself to resort -- in a situation of extreme want and general physical misery, when it had to face an international coalition of counter-revolutionary forces -- to severe coercion not only against the enemy classes but also against the vacillating elements in the working class and the peasantry, must be put in its right context. This resort to coercion was only the secondary aspect of a situation whose principal aspect was the

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constitution of the proletariat as the dominant class. If this is not appreciated, one slips into the empty phrasemongering of the Mensheviks, SRs, and anarchists who, like other ideologists of the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie, assert that what then existed in Russia was not the dictatorship of the proletariat but a dictatorship over the proletariat. Being incapable of making an overall analysis of class relations, the ideological opponents of the Soviet power are obviously likewise incapable of explaining what class, according to them, was then exercising its dictatorship over the proletariat.

Whoever fails to undertake an overall analysis of class relations and merely isolates certain aspects of reality -- like the use of coercion against some sections of the working class and the peasantry -- remains unable to explain the actual course of history. The latter is indeed incomprehensible to whoever tries to ignore the fact that the strength of the Soviet power -- its capacity to resist and overcome foes who possessed material force that was infinitely greater than its own -- was based on its class character, on the fact that it was the power of the broad masses of the toilers. It was because it was *their power*, that the workers and peasants fought for it with a fury and heroism unequalled in previous history.

One must be standing outside the real movement of history to allege that the Soviet power, issued from the *struggle of the masses* against the social and political forces of the bourgeoisie, the landlords, and imperialism, and continuing to wage a fight to the death against those forces (which at that time were leagued against it on a world scale), *had suddenly changed its character*, so that, while still fighting against its former enemies, it became transformed into an organ of oppression of the masses. It is not possible to argue that, because coercion was used against certain elements of the working class and the peasantry, the power using this coercion was not the power of the workers and peasants, when the activity of this power as a whole and its very capacity for action testify to its being thoroughly rooted in the masses, and to the leading role being played by the proletariat, organized as the dominant class, in alliance with the peasantry.

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The victories won by the Soviet power over the bourgeoisie, the landlords, and world imperialism were possible only because it was then a proletarian power concentrating the will of the masses. If this is not seen, it is impossible to understand the outcome of the battles waged by the Soviet army, badly equipped and supplied, against the White armies backed by the imperialist great powers, to understand how and why Soviet Russia got the better of its powerful enemies although it was gripped by famine and disease. Apart from any abstract considerations, the actual course of events showed in practice the existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the realization of the fundamental unity of the masses, guided by the Bolshevik Party and revolutionary Marxism.

This proletarian dictatorship, like every historical reality, was complex and contradictory. Through the work of the Bolshevik Party, through the fact that this party was deeply rooted in the working class and that it applied Marxism, which enabled it to carry out at every stage essential revolutionary tasks, the proletarian dictatorship realized the fighting, unity of the proletariat and the peasantry. At the same time, for lack of a long ideological and political struggle waged on a large scale before the establishment of the proletarian power, and for lack of previous experience, the unity of the masses thus realized was not completely adequate to the tasks that had to be accomplished. A part of the peasantry and even of the working class continued to be strongly influenced by bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideas and practices, and so gave precedence to personal interests over the interests of the revolution and allowed itself temporarily to be influenced by ideological tendencies that weakened the revolutionary unity of the masses -- the SRs, the Mensheviks, and various forms of anarchism. This was only a secondary aspect of the situation, for these trends never succeeded in wielding more than a limited and unstable influence, and as a rule they did not even operate openly. This secondary aspect of the situation explains some particular features of the dictatorship of the proletariat during these years -- the low level of activity of some of the mass organizations (the local soviets and, up to a point, the

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trade unions) and the relatively large proportion of acts of indiscipline which -- in a situation of extreme tension -- compelled the Soviet power to use coercion against unstable elements.

In these circumstances, the proletarian character of the ruling power was essentially determined by the bonds uniting the Bolshevik Party with the revolutionary masses, by its practice of a mass line of revolutionary Marxism, and by the merging of this party, the vanguard of the proletariat, with the most militant section of the working class.

Whatever may have been the role played by coercion of part of the workers -- a coercion that was often exercised, moreover, by workers' detachments and not by a specialized body -- power was wielded at that time above all by virtue of the confidence placed in the Bolshevik Party by the broadest masses. The latter saw in the party the victorious leader of the October Revolution, the party that had identified itself with their own desire to get out of the imperialist war, with the peasants' desire to become masters of their own land, and that had shown itself able to unite them to fight the enemies of the revolution. Furthermore, this confidence was based not only on the party's capacity to respond to fundamental popular aspirations and adopt the appropriate decisions, but also on the carrying out of the mass line, for this is essential for consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat.

(g) The dictatorship of the proletariat and the mass line

Lenin frequently expounded some of the conditions needed for the practice of a mass line and emphasized that this practice distinguished a revolutionary proletarian party from the

Social Democratic parties of the Second International. Thus, in [One of the Fundamental Questions of the Revolution](#), he wrote:

Don't be afraid of the people's initiative and independence. Put your faith in their revolutionary organisations, and you will see *in all* realms of state affairs the same strength, majesty and in-

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vincibility of the workers and peasants as were displayed in their unity and their fury against Kornilov. Lack of faith in the people, fear of their initiative and independence, trepidation before their revolutionary energy instead of all-round and unqualified support for it -- this is where the S.R and Menshevik leaders have sinned most of all. This is where we find one of the deepest roots of their indecision, their vacillation, their infinite and infinitely fruitless attempts to pour new wine into the old bottles of the old, bureaucratic state apparatus.^[85]

Lenin came back to the same principles and ideas on the most varied occasions. For instance, in [Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder](#),^[86] he brought out with particular vigor the significance of the principle of keeping contact with the masses, and dwelled on the conditions for doing this. He also showed that proletarian discipline, in contrast to bureaucratic discipline, a discipline imposed from above, can only be based on "ability to link up, maintain the closest contact, and -- if you wish -- merge, in certain measure, with the broadest masses of the working people -- primarily with the proletariat, but also with the non-proletarian masses of working people."^[87]

In the same work Lenin writes about another, closely related principle, namely, that the party's role is not to force a political line on the masses, but to convince them of the correctness of this line by reference to "their own experience."^[88] Given these conditions, Lenin adds, proletarian discipline can be achieved, but "without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end up in phrasemongering and clowning."^[89]

As for the conditions that enable the party to convince the masses, Lenin stresses that they cannot be improvised, that they "cannot emerge at once. They are created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience. Their creation is facilitated by a correct revolutionary theory which, in its turn, is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connexion with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement."^[90]

This last remark obviously has important implications. It

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means that the existence of a revolutionary party linked with the masses can only be the historical product of correct theory and practice. It means, too, that if the product of such theory and practice, that is, a party which has confidence in the masses and in which the masses have confidence, is destroyed because it has committed a certain number of mistakes, only very protracted work can bring about the rebirth of such a party, and without this work all appeals to discipline, confidence, etc., amount merely to "phrasemongering."

Inherent in respect for this principle of maintaining a close link between the party and the masses, their relative "merging," or internal relations to each other, is the party's capacity for "watching the mood of the masses"^[91] and learning from experience.^[92]

One of the conditions of existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat was respect by the Bolshevik Party for the fundamental requirements of the mass line. This does not mean, of course, as has already been shown, that at every moment and in all circumstances, the Bolshevik Party was able to respect these requirements. The rapidity with which it came to power, its composition, its lack of experience, and the features of the ideological struggle that

developed within it meant that a mass line could be followed only to a partial extent: hence the real tensions that developed at certain moments between the Soviet power and some sections of the masses, especially in the countryside. But, however much the Bolshevik Party's practice may at times have departed from the requirements of a mass line, the *dominant aspect* of this practice was respect for these requirements. Had it been otherwise, the Bolshevik Party would not have been able to remain at the head of the Soviet power and ensure its triumph.

(h) The dictatorship of the proletariat and the "merging" of the Bolshevik Party with the advanced elements of the working class

The Bolshevik Party was able to play the role of instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat by rapidly increasing its

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membership and merging with the advanced elements of the working class.

Until the end of 1920, the evolution of the party's numbers largely reflected its increasing implantation among the masses, which entailed a profound change in its composition. From 24,000 in January 1917,^[93] membership increased to 612,000 in March 1920 and 732,000 in March 1921. From 1921 onward, the numbers were greatly reduced by purges. In 1923 they amounted to 499,000.

Of these members, the number of workers^[94] increased from 14,000 in 1917 to about 270,000 in 1920, and 300,000 in 1921. Between 1917 and 1920, the number of peasant members rose from 1,800 to over 200,000 (on January 1, 1921).^[95] While the party's peasant membership (or, more precisely, it would seem, its membership of peasant, or even only rural, origin) was slight in a country that was more than 70 percent peasant, the worker members represented in 1921 a considerable percentage of the active working class. From the standpoint of the role of the working class in the state machine, the size of the Bolshevik Party's proletarian membership is all the more significant in that in this period (1919), 60 percent of the members were working in the administrative services of the state and the party, and a quarter in the Red Army, very often in posts of political or military responsibility.^[96] Thus, the presence of Communist workers in the principal organs of the state was considerable.

During the years 1919 and 1920, joining the Bolshevik Party was, generally speaking, an act of undoubted political significance. True, the party was in power, and that attracted careerists, but purges were frequent and, above all, the power wielded by the party often seemed gravely threatened by the military offensives of the White armies, who massacred party members in the areas they occupied. Besides, members had to fulfill heavy obligations.

The merging of the party with the advanced workers was at that time real and deep. It was one aspect of the proletarian character of the ruling power. In the long run, however, the incorporation of a large number of workers in administrative

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functions, in a period when the proletariat was not very numerous and, especially, when its ranks were being thinned and were even being penetrated by bourgeois and petty bourgeois elements, had a negative side to it. After a few years, there was danger of these workers becoming transformed into officials, and their proletarian origin gradually ceasing to mean anything. In 1919, apparently, only 11 per cent of the party members were working in factories.^[97] At that time, however, the party members in official positions who came from the working

class had left its ranks too recently for their class origin to have ceased to be significant. The danger of "deproletarianization" was nevertheless felt to be a real one. Three years later, Lenin was to draw the party's attention sharply to its existence. In 1919 the Eighth Party Congress stipulated that worker-members engaged in full-time administrative work must go back to their factories for at least one month in four.^[98]

In the conditions of civil war this obligation does not appear to have been fulfilled, and later it appears to have been "forgotten." The negative consequences of this "forgetting" may subsequently have been all the greater because about 30 per cent of the party members were neither workers nor peasants and, in the administration, Communist workers worked alongside many officials taken over from the old regime, to whose ideological influence they gradually succumbed, a process referred to as "bureaucratization," though it would be more correct to call it "bourgeoisification." During the civil war and immediately after, however, the class struggle was too intense for the Communist workers holding responsible posts to be "bourgeoisified" on any large scale by the functions they were carrying out. By their numbers, energy, and devotion they constituted one of the safeguards of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

It is just this merging of the party with the advanced elements of the working class, together with the acuteness of the class struggle, that explains why, as a result of the initiative of the masses during the civil war, entirely new (even though, of course, as yet embryonic) production relations began to arise.

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IV. The emergence of new socialist and communist production relations

The Communist Saturdays (*subbotniki*) are an especially significant aspect of the proletarian character of the Soviet revolution, as they show the close attachment of the most militant workers to the tasks of the dictatorship of the proletariat. During 1918-1921 the ideological revolutionization of these workers gave rise, locally and transiently, to production relations of a new type, Communist relations. This resulted from the ideological intervention of the Bolshevik Party, and in particular of some of its rank and file, in an acute process of class struggle.

(a) "Communist Saturdays"

One of the first writings in which Lenin dealt explicitly with the concrete appearance of new production relations, Communist relations, was his pamphlet *A Great Beginning*.^[99] It is important because in it he shows in a striking way the historic significance of the "Communist Saturdays." It illustrates also Lenin's ability to grasp whatever was really new and revolutionary, and which remains incomprehensible to the bourgeois and petty bourgeois philistines for whom there exists a "human nature" of which the "perfected" manifestation is the egoistic and calculating petty bourgeois.

The "Communist Saturdays" were a form of voluntary mass labor. They were usually aimed at the rapid completion of certain productive tasks, especially, though not exclusively, in the domain of repairing or constructing communications (mainly railroad lines). This is how Lenin evaluates the significance of this initiative taken by the workers themselves:

The *communist subbotniks* organised by the workers on their own initiative are really of enormous significance. Evidently, this is only a beginning, but it is a beginning of exceptionally great importance. It is the beginning of a revolution that is more difficult, more tangible, more radical and more decisive than the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, for it is a victory over our own conservatism, indiscipline, petty-bourgeois egoism, a victory

over the habits left as a heritage to the worker and peasant by accursed capitalism. Only when *this* victory is consolidated will the new social discipline, socialist discipline, be created; then and only then will a reversion to capitalism become impossible, will communism become really invincible.

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A few pages later, Lenin further explains the importance of the Communist Saturdays as he sees it:

The first communist *subbotnik* . . . was of greater historical significance than any of the victories of Hindenburg, or of Foch and the British in the 1914-1918 imperialist war. The victories of the imperialists mean the slaughter of millions of workers for the sake of the profits of the Anglo-American and French multimillionaires, they are the atrocities of doomed capitalism, bloated with over-eating and rotting alive. The communist *subbotnik* organised by the workers of the Moscow-Kazan railway is one of the cells of the new, socialist society, which brings to all the peoples of the earth emancipation from the yoke of capital and from wars.[101]

Lenin is not unaware of the fragility of the social relations which are beginning to emerge in this way, but he knows that the main thing is not this fragility, that it is the novelty of these relations that deserves attention: "Jeering at the feebleness of the young shoots of the new order, cheap scepticism of the intellectuals and the like -- these are, essentially, methods of bourgeois class struggle against the proletariat, a defence of capitalism against socialism. We must carefully study the new shoots, we must devote the greatest attention to them, do everything to promote their growth and 'nurse' them." [102]

Nor does Lenin fail to realize that some of these "shoots" are doomed to perish and that this will perhaps be the fate of the "Communist Saturdays," since, in the prevailing circumstances, it is not certain that they will play an especially important role, but, as he says, "that is not the point. The point is to foster each and every shoot of the new; and life will select the most viable." [103] In order to overcome capitalism, Lenin repeats, one needs to have the perseverance to "try hundreds and thousands of new methods, means and weapons of struggle in order to elaborate the most suitable of them." [104]

This is the very language of *antidogmatism*, the language of

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confidence in the revolutionary initiative of the masses, the language of a proletarian political leader who knows that, as Mao Tse-tung was to say later, "correct ideas do not fall from heaven," but emerge from social practice. It is also the language of a Marxist theoretician who realizes that the building of a new world proceeds necessarily by way of hundreds of attempts, only some of which are destined to bear the fruits that they seem to promise.

For Lenin, the historic significance of the "Communist Saturdays" lies in the fact that they originated from genuine mass initiative, in particular from the initiative of workers, and workers whose own situation was among the *most difficult*. It lies also in the fact that when the workers agree, as they did in the case of the "Communist Saturdays," to work "without remuneration," the transition to communism *has already begun*. This is why Lenin says:

Communist *subbotniks* are extraordinarily valuable as the actual beginning of *communism*; and this is a very rare thing, because we are in a stage when "only the *first steps* in the transition from capitalism to communism are being taken" (as our Party Programme quite rightly says).

Communism begins when the *rank and-file workers* display an enthusiastic concern that is undaunted by arduous toil to increase the productivity of labour, husband every *pood of grain, coal, iron* and other products, which do not accrue to the workers personally or to their "close" kith and kin, but to their "distant" kith and kin, i.e., to society as a whole . . . [105]

In this essay so rich in ideas, Lenin also tackles the problem of the liberation of women and the emergence, in this sphere too, of "exemplary Communist work," freed from "profit-making enterprises."^[106]

(b) *Communist work and socialist discipline*

One of the essential concepts in this essay is that of "Communist work," by which Lenin means work performed "with out remuneration in the interests of society, in the interests of all the working people,"^[107] work into which it is possible to

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lead "the whole mass of the working and exploited people, as well as all the petty-bourgeois groups, on the road to new economic development, towards the creation of a new social bond, a new labour discipline, a new organisation of labour."^[108]

The new forms of discipline and organization of labor of which Lenin speaks are the basis of communist production relations, beginning a process of revolutionization of the labor process itself, in which the separation between executive tasks and performance tasks tends to disappear, *particular work becomes transformed into general work*, and there is a withering-away of wage labor, "the *essential* form of mediation [of capitalist production], continually reproduced by the capitalist production-relation."^[109]

About eight months after the publication of his pamphlet *A Great Beginning*, Lenin returned to the theme of Communist labor in his article [*From the Destruction of the Old Social System to the Creation of the New*](#), in which he expressed the following ideas:

We can, and should, get right down to the problem of communist labour, or rather, it would be more correct to say, not communist, but socialist labour; for we are dealing not with the higher but the lower, the primary stage of the new social system that is growing out of capitalism.

Communist labour in the narrower and stricter sense of the term is labour performed gratis for the benefit of society, labour performed not as a definite duty, not for the purpose of obtaining a right to certain products, not according to previously established and legally fixed quotas, but voluntary labour, irrespective of quotas; it is labour performed without expectation of reward, without reward as a condition, labour performed because it has become a habit to work for the common good, and because of a conscious realisation (that has become a habit) of the necessity of working for the common good . . .^[110]

Here, too, Lenin returns to the close link between the flowering of Communist work and the development of new social relations. He stresses that this flowering is a long-term process which will be spread over decades, for it is a process bound up

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with a mass ideological revolution, leading to work performed without expectation of any particular payment.

A few days after the publication of this article, on the occasion of May 1, 1920, Lenin declared that, with the victory over the White insurrection and foreign intervention, "the ground is being cleared for the actual building of socialism, for the development of new social links, a new discipline of work in common and a new national (and later an international) system of economy of world-historic importance."^[111] He added that, to win this ground, it was necessary to overthrow "the old economic relationship," which also implied "the transformation of all labour habits" and being ready to "make every sacrifice" and "do away with . . . the habit of looking upon work merely as a duty, and of considering rightful only that work which is paid

for at certain rates."^[112]

(b) *"War communism" and Communist work*

Lenin's writings on the subject of Communist work are not numerous, but most of them have great theoretical significance. This is true of what he says about the connection between the *transformation of habits* and *the building of new economic relationships*. We are here a long way from the view that it is necessary to wait for a change in economic relationships to take place through pressure from the development of the productive forces.

This is also true of the observations he makes when he shows that the real "constructive task," following the revolutionary overthrow of the exploiters, is that of "establishing new economic relations."^[113]

Among his few writings that deal with this question must also be mentioned the [Report on the Tax in Kind](#), delivered at a meeting of secretaries and responsible representatives of the RCP (B) cells of Moscow city and Moscow Gubernia on April 9, 1921. This is especially significant because it is subsequent to the "war communism" period. Here Lenin offers a more general definition of socialist economic relations: "In no circumstances must we forget what we have occasion to see very

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often, namely, the socialist attitude of workers at state factories, who collect fuel, raw materials and food, or try to arrange a proper distribution of manufactured goods among the peasants and to deliver them with their own transport facilities. That is socialism."^[114]

However, the new relations which arose between 1918 and 1921 on the initiative of the masses gradually faded away, for a variety of reasons. Among these was the development of administrative centralism, the multiplication of rules and constraints imposed by the state (not propitious for initiatives from below), and the penetration of "bourgeois specialists" into the state machine, with the resulting "bureaucratization." One of the effects of the last-mentioned development was the appearance of "Communist Saturdays" which were no longer "Communist" except in name, as they were made obligatory. This practice (which even received indirect encouragement from certain formulations in the resolution of the Ninth Congress on "The Present Tasks of Economic Construction")^[115] tended to destroy the "germs of the new" that were contained in the "Communist Saturdays." It expressed the contradiction between two types of discipline -- collective self-discipline, inherent in the genuine "Communist Saturdays," and imposed discipline, inherent in the establishment and development of a centralized machine using coercion in dealing with the masses.

Nevertheless, the "excesses" of centralization and regulation cannot by themselves account for the withering away, after 1920-1921, of Communist work.^[116] Actually, once the extremely acute civil war period of class struggle came to an end, Communist work faded away because of the very limited character of the transformation effected in overall social relations. This limitation was dictated by *the phase in which the Russian revolution then found itself*.

In industry, the capitalist division of labor had not been shaken (and, in the transitional stage of the proletarian dictatorship as it then was, matters could not have been otherwise), so that Communist work was only "marginal," appearing in the main outside the process of industrial production.

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Correlatively with this, the system of bourgeois ideological relations was also only very partially shaken: in the countryside, the stage of the democratic revolution had not been surpassed, and this situation did not constitute favorable ground for the development of socialist relations or Communist work.

There were therefore objective reasons for the narrow limits within which at that time a few fragile "islets" of Communist work could develop. The expansion and even the consolidation of these "islets" would have required a broad transformation of social relations as a whole, in both town and country -- and at the opening of the NEP period no such transformation was on the agenda.

Notes

1. "['Left-Wing' Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality](#)," in Lenin, *CW*, vol. 27, pp. 323-354; the passage quoted is on p. 333. [p. [145](#)]
2. *Ibid.*, p. 334. [p. [145](#)]
3. *CW*, vol. 27, pp. 254-255. [p. [146](#)]
4. *Ibid.*, vol. 26, pp. 104-105. [p. [147](#)]
5. "'Left-wing' Childishness," in *CW*, vol. 27, p. 336. It will be observed that in this passage Lenin employs, unusually for him, the expression "state socialist," which is a contradiction in terms. He does this for the sake of contrast with "state capitalist" in the sense which was previously current, that is, referring to state capitalism under the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. In alluding to what here appears as "state socialism" Lenin usually employs the expression "state capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat." We shall see later on the significance of this expression and some of the ways in which Lenin uses it. [p. [147](#)]
6. On this point, see *CW*, vol. 26, pp. 264-265. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Draft Regulations on Workers' Control](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. [148](#)]
7. Lozovsky, *Rabochy Kontrol'*, p. 21: quoted in E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*, vol. 2, p. 74. [p. [149](#)]
8. *CW*, vol. 26, pp. 423-424. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. [149](#)]
9. "[How to Organise Competition](#)," in *ibid.*, p. 410. [p. [150](#)]

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10. *CW*, vol. 27, p. 241. [p. [150](#)]
11. *CW*, vol. 26, pp. 264-265. [p. [150](#)]
12. See Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control*, p. 18. [p. [151](#)]
13. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 78. [p. [151](#)]
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 79 ff. [p. [152](#)]
15. See Lenin's speech at the Third Congress of Soviets in *CW*, vol. 26, pp. 453 ff., especially p. 468. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Third All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. [153](#)]
16. *Malaya Sovyetskaya Entsiklopediya*, vol. 2, article on "Gosplan," p. 599. [p. [153](#)]
17. Lenin had no doubt whatever that, on the whole, the engineers, technicians, administrators, and other "specialists" inherited from the old regime constituted a "bourgeois section of the population," as he said, for example, in "[All Out for the Fight Against Denikin!](#)", *CW*, vol. 29, p. 448. [p. [154](#)]

18. Quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 90. [p. [154](#)]
19. "'Left-Wing' Childishness," in *CW*, vol. 27, p. 349. [p. [155](#)]
20. *CW*, vol. 27, p. 256. [p. [155](#)]
21. Information about the measures mentioned, and some others, will be found in the appendices to volume 22 of the 3rd edition of Lenin's works, published in Russian in 1935 (pp. 549-572); in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, pp. 73ff.; in the minutes of the sessions of the VTsIK in the collection (*Sobranie*) of decrees and decisions concerning the economy published in Moscow (in Russia) in 1918, and covering the period between October 25, 1917, and October 25, 1918 (see especially, pp. 171-172 and 311-315); and in an article by D. L. Limon, "Lénine et le contrôle ouvrier." The measures taken by the Soviet government in the spheres of workers' control and economic management in 1917-1921 are summarized in M. Brinton. See also Raoul Labry, *Une Législation communiste*, especially pp. 131-136. [p. [155](#)]
22. "[The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government](#)," in *CW*, vol. 27, p. 259. [p. [156](#)]
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 248-249. [p. [156](#)]
24. *Ibid.*, p. 249 (my emphasis -- C. B.). [p. [156](#)]
25. Some aspects of this problem are discussed (in connection with the changes brought about in China during the Cultural Revolution) in Bettelheim, [Cultural Revolution and Industrial Organisation in China](#), pp. 91-103. [p. [156](#)]
26. *CW*, vol. 27, p. 349. [p. [157](#)]

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27. *CW*, vol. 30, p. 458. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's [Ninth Congress of the R.C.P.\(B.\)](#). -- DJR] [p. [157](#)]
28. *K.P.S.S. v rezolyutsiyakh*, vol. I, pp. 476 ff. [p. [157](#)]
29. Bukharin, *Economics of the Transformation Period*, p. 129. [p. [158](#)]
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130. [p. [158](#)]
31. Bukharin's change of line between 1918 and 1920 reveals, throughout, a "mechanistic," undialectical conception of Marxism. According to this conception, the economic basis and the superstructure do not possess relative independence, do not form a contradictory whole, but are a totality each part of which expresses the structure of the whole. In 1918 this conception caused Bukharin to claim that the existence of capitalist discipline in the factories was equivalent to a negation of the proletarian dictatorship. In 1920 the same conception made him claim that the existence of the proletarian dictatorship guaranteed the socialist character of the management of the factories. Similarly, his lack of a dialectical conception of what is meant by a contradictory unity prevented Bukharin from grasping, in his discussion with Lenin at the end of 1920, that the Soviet state of that time was "a workers' and peasants' state": for him it had to be *either* a workers' state *or* a peasants' state. [p. [159](#)]
32. *CW*, vol. 32, pp. 19 ff. [p. [159](#)]
33. *CW*, vol. 33, p. 187. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[The Role and Functions of the Trade Unions Under the New Economic Policy](#)". -- DJR] [p. [159](#)]
34. In 1936, in his report on the new Soviet constitution, Stalin claimed that exploiting classes no longer existed in the USSR, and in 1935, in his address to graduates from Red Army academies, he proclaimed, as a principle, that "cadres decide everything" (Stalin, *Leninism*, pp. 565, 543). [*Transcriber's Note*: See Stalin's "[On the Draft Constitution of the U.S.S.R.](#)" and his "[Address Delivered in the Kremlin Palace to the Graduates from the Red Army Academies](#)". -- DJR] [p. [159](#)]
35. See *Political Economy: A Textbook*. [p. [159](#)]
36. Dobb, *Soviet Economic Development*, p. 95. According to Dobb, this decree was especially aimed at effecting immediate nationalization of large-scale enterprises in the Ukraine, so as to ensure that in regions

- occupied by the German army it would not be possible for German capital to "purchase" these enterprises from the Russian or Ukrainian capitalists.
[p. [160](#)]
37. Ibid., p. 96. [p. [160](#)]
38. This was, among other things, the public prosecutor's office which supervised the working of the courts. Quite a number of Menshevik former lawyers (such as Vyshinsky, the future public prosecutor in the trials of the 1930s) entered it. In the political police it was more a question of former SRs. [p. [161](#)]
39. *CW*, vol. 30, pp. 107 ff., especially p. 115. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Economics and Politics in the Era of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat](#)". - *DJR*] [p. [161](#)]
40. *Narodnoye Kh.SSSR v 1970 g.*, p. 22. [p. [162](#)]

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41. This was what Lenin pointed out when he reminded his listeners that capital is not a sum of money but "a definite social relation." In this case, it was a question of the social relations implicit in the division of labor.
[p. [163](#)]
42. See Lenin's report to the Eighth Party Congress, in *CW*, vol. 29, especially pp. 178-179. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Eighth Congress of the R.C.P. \(B.\)](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. [164](#)]
43. Ibid., p. 180. [p. [164](#)]
44. Ibid., p. 152. [p. [164](#)]
45. For more details on this point, see Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, pp. 205-206. [p. [165](#)]
46. In 1919 and 1920 Lenin denounced this situation several times. It was in May 1918 that distribution in kind of part of factory production began to be practised. See *ibid.*, pp. 243-245. [p. [165](#)]
47. See *ibid.*, p. 194, n.5. During the 1920s, an attempt was made to limit the authority of the manager by requiring him to consult the secretary of the party committee in the factory and the secretary of the trade union on all important questions. This was called the "triangle system." It did not work satisfactorily, and at the beginning of the period of the five year plans, the authority of the manager (now increasingly a party member of working-class origin) was again predominant, although in many cases the secretary of the party committee in the factory might possess at least equivalent authority. [p. [166](#)]
48. Gins, *Sibir', soyuzniki i Kolchak*, vol. 2, p. 429. [p. [166](#)]
49. While the class origin of the members of this state bourgeoisie played at first an important role in the formation of the class, this was not so later on. When the state bourgeoisie became consolidated, the class origin of its members ceased to be significant: thereafter, what was decisive was the place occupied by this new class in relation to the means of production, its role in the social division of labor, the share of the wealth produced that it took, and the class practices that it developed. [p. [166](#)]
50. Quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 170, n. 1. [p. [167](#)]
51. *CW*, vol. 29, pp. 228 ff. [p. [168](#)]
52. *CW*, vol. 33, pp. 194-195. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[The Role and Functions of the Trade Unions Under the New Economic Policy](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. [168](#)]
53. Lindenberg, *L'Internationale Communiste*, p. 289. [p. [169](#)]
54. On the Soviet educational system immediately after October, see also Lindenberg's article, "Sur la préhistoire de l'école soviétique," pp. 57 ff. On the place of "the school" in the reproduction of bourgeois relations and ideological practices, see Baudelot and Establet, *L'Ecole capitaliste en France*. [p. [169](#)]
55. See Lindenberg, *L'Internationale Communiste*, pp. 306-307. [p. [170](#)]

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56. Ibid., p. 304. [p. [170](#)]
57. Thus, from August 1918 on, a differential rationing system applied in Moscow and Petrograd. The population was divided into three categories: manual workers doing heavy work; other workers, and the families of all workers; and members of the former bourgeoisie. The rations allowed to the first category were four times larger, and those of the second category three times larger, than those allowed to the third category. A system that was similar, but often more complex, was gradually extended to all the urban centers. Actually, the rations allowed soon became inadequate for all categories: on the eve of the introduction of the NEP the workers in receipt of the largest rations were getting only 1,200-1,900 calories per day, when their minimum allowance should have been 3,000. See Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, pp. 233 and 243. [p. [171](#)]
58. *Narodnoye Khozyaistvo SSSR 1922-72* gg, pp. 345 and 346. [p. [172](#)]
59. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 201. [p. [173](#)]
60. "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government," in *CW*, vol. 27, p. 258. [p. [174](#)]
61. *CW*, vol. 27, pp. 323 ff. [p. [174](#)]
62. See Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 205. [p. [174](#)]
63. Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, p. 379. [p. [176](#)]
64. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 86. [p. [177](#)]
65. *CW*, vol. 26, p. 409. [p. [178](#)]
66. Ibid., p. 413. [p. [178](#)]
67. He wrote, for example, that "the workers and peasants are still 'timid'; they must get rid of this timidity, and they certainly will get rid of it" (ibid., p. 412). [p. [178](#)]
68. Ibid., p. 411. [p. [178](#)]
69. Ibid., p. 403. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Fear of the Collapse of the Old and the Fight for the New](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. [179](#)]
70. *CW*, vol. 27, p. 300. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Session of the All-Russia C.E.C.](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. [180](#)]
71. Ibid., p.232. Kornilov, Dutov, and Kaledin were commanders of counter-revolutionary forces. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Speech in the Moscow Soviet of Workers', Peasants' and Red Army Deputies](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. [180](#)]
72. Ibid., pp. 271-272. Kornilov, Dutov, and Bogayevsky were White generals: Gotz and Gegechkori -- the former an SR, the latter a Menshevik -- were politicians who engaged in counter-revolutionary activities. [p. [180](#)]
73. See Lenin's report to the Second All-Russia Congress of Trade Unions, in *CW*, vol. 28, pp. 412 ff., especially p. 419. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Report at the Second All-Russia Trade Union Congress](#)". -- *DJR*] It will be observed that Lenin uses the expression "governmentalizing," whereas the passing of industrial enterprises into state owner-

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ship is called "nationalization." The original Russian terms are, respectively, *ogosudarstvlenie* [better rendered as "statization" than, as in the official translation, "governmentalizing" -- Trans.] and *natsionalizatsiya*. [p. [182](#)]

74. *K.P.S.S. v rezolyutsiyakh*, vol. I, pp. 490-494. [p. [183](#)]
75. Ibid., p. 486. [p. [184](#)]
76. Ibid., pp. 477-490. [p. [184](#)]
77. Ibid., pp. 485-486. [p. [185](#)]
- Sobranie uzakononii, 1917-1918*, no. 64, art. 704, and no. 80, art. 838,
78. quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 202, n. 1 and 2. [p.

- [186](#)
79. See *K.P.S.S. v. rezolyutsiyakh*, vol. I, p. 422 (Eng. trans. from appendix to *The ABC of Communism*, ed. E. H. Carr, p. 448). [p. [186](#)]
80. Quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 211, note 4. [p. [187](#)]
81. Ibid. In April 1919 forced labor camps were set up. In principle, these camps, which were at first administered by the Cheka and later by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), were intended for counter-revolutionary elements who had been sentenced by a tribunal. See Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, pp. 212-213. [p. [187](#)]
82. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 212, n. 2. [p. [187](#)]
83. Kritsman, *Geroichesky period*, p. 106. [p. [188](#)]
84. See appendices to volume 25 of the 3rd edition of Lenin's works (in Russian), p. 556. It was at this time that, alongside the labor camps already mentioned, concentration camps were established. As Carr points out, the concentration camps of 1920 did not have the importance or the economic role they acquired later on in the period of the five year plans and after. [p. [188](#)]
85. *CW*, vol. 25, pp. 366-373; quotation from p. 370. [p. [192](#)]
86. *CW*, vol. 31, pp. 17 ff. [p. [192](#)]
87. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25. [p. [192](#)]
88. *Ibid.*, pp. 25. [p. [192](#)]
89. *Ibid.* [p. [192](#)]
90. *Ibid.* [p. [192](#)]
91. *Ibid.*, p. 44. [p. [193](#)]
92. *CW*, vol. 31, pp. 408 ff., particularly pp. 425-426. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Our Foreign and Domestic Position and the Tasks of the Party](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. [193](#)]
93. Except where otherwise stated, the figures are those for January 1 of each year. They are quoted by Rigby, *Communist Party Membership*, pp. 52-53. From 1919 onward, there was a category of "candidate members" undergoing probation, who do not appear as such in the statistics until after 1922. In principle

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- they are not included in earlier figures, but this seems contrary to what is said in other estimates, such as those given in the first edition of the *Bolshaya Sovyetskaya Entsiklopediya*. [p. [194](#)]
94. The question of the social composition of the Bolshevik Party and of the significance of the statistics available on this subject is considered later. [p. [194](#)]
95. See Rigby, *Communist Party Membership*, p. 85, for the class composition of the party. The percentages are calculated in accordance with various Soviet sources. [p. [194](#)]
96. *Ibid.*, p. 81. [p. [194](#)]
97. *Ibid.* [p. [195](#)]
98. In *ibid.*, p. 82. [p. [195](#)]
99. *CW*, vol. 29, pp. 409 ff. The pamphlet was first published in Moscow in July 1919. [p. [196](#)]
100. *Ibid.*, pp. 411-412. [p. [197](#)]
101. *Ibid.*, p. 424. [p. [197](#)]
102. *Ibid.*, p. 425. [p. [197](#)]
103. *Ibid.*, pp. 425-426. [p. [197](#)]
104. *Ibid.*, p. 426. [p. [197](#)]
105. *Ibid.*, p. 427. [p. [198](#)]
106. *Ibid.*, pp. 429-430. [p. [198](#)]

107. Ibid., p. 431. [p. [198](#)]

108. Ibid., p. 423. [p. [199](#)]

Marx, *Un Chapitre inédit du "Capital,"* p. 263. In the *Grundrisse* (pp. 158-

109. 159), Marx points out that "the very necessity of first transforming individual products or activities into exchange value . . . proves two things: (1) that individuals now produce only for society and in society; (2) that production is not directly social, is not 'the offspring of association,' which distributes labour internally. Individuals are subsumed under social production; social production exists outside them, as their fate; but social production is not subsumed under individuals, manageable by them as their common wealth." This leads him to observe that "there can therefore be nothing more erroneous and absurd than to postulate the control by the united individuals of their total production, on the basis of exchange value, of money, as was done . . . in the case of the time-chit bank" (and, we may add today, as is done in present Soviet economic practice). A few pages further on, Marx notes that it is only with collective production, when production has a "communal character," that labor is not "particular" but "general," so that

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what the individual "has bought with his labour is not a specific and particular product, but rather a specific share of the communal production" (ibid., pp. 171-172). It was to this type of relation that the "Communist Saturdays" gave birth. [p. [199](#)]

110. *CW*, vol. 30, pp. 516 ff. [p. [199](#)]

CW, vol. 31, pp. 123 ff. [*Transcriber's Note:* See Lenin's "[From the First](#)

111. [Subbotnik on the Moscow-Kazan Railway to the All-Russia May Day Subbotnik](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. [200](#)]

112. Ibid., p. 124. [p. [200](#)]

113. "[Our Foreign and Domestic Position](#)," in *CW*, vol. 31, pp. 408 ff., especially p. 417. [p. [200](#)]

114. *CW*, vol. 32, p. 296. [p. [201](#)]

115. See appendices to volume 25 of the 3rd edition of Lenin's works, pp. 548-558. [p. [201](#)]

116. Even today "Communist Saturdays" are still held in the Soviet Union, but they have nothing in common with the Communist Saturdays that sprang from the initiative of the masses. They are an imposed ritual which serves as a means of getting extra work out of the workers. [p. [201](#)]

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3. The transformation of class relations in the countryside

The transformation of class relations in the Soviet countryside between 1917 and 1923 was also the outcome of a revolutionary process, but *this* process was basically democratic, resulting from the alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry. It took place through the activity of

the peasant masses, protected and consolidated by the dictatorship of the proletariat, which gave support to the democratic revolution in the countryside.

One of the first and most important steps taken by the Soviet power on the very morrow of its establishment was the "decree on land" (ratified on October 26, 1917, by the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets). This decree annulled all private ownership of land: the estates of the landlords, of the state, and of the church were placed at the disposal of the district committees and peasants' soviets. By this decree the Soviet government proved concretely that it was a workers' and peasants' government. The Soviet state thus showed clearly that, unlike the previous state, it did not protect the interests of the landlords and bourgeois, but, on the contrary, deprived them of their lands. Furthermore, the Soviet power told the peasants that it was encouraging them to take the land *themselves* and to *organize themselves* in order to regulate the use they made of it.

The implications of the October decree were enormous. By confirming in practice that the new ruling power was not that of the exploiting classes, it helped to tip the balance in favor of the Soviet revolution among the still hesitant sections of the peasantry for whom the question of the land (like that of peace, which the Soviet power announced its willingness to conclude immediately) was absolutely vital. The proletarian

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revolution in the towns thus ensured that the revolutionary movement of the peasants would develop in a new way.

The actual content of the "decree on land," and of the documents accompanying and following it which dealt with its practical application, did not correspond to the Bolshevik Party's previous program, but coincided almost exactly with the first draft of a decree drawn up in August 1917 by the All-Russia Peasants' Congress, which was largely dominated by the Socialist-Revolutionary Party. To those Bolsheviks who protested against their party's approval of arrangements which it had previously stigmatized as being bourgeois-democratic, not socialist -- in that, instead of abolishing private exploitation of the land and favoring the development of large, socialist units of production, it favored the multiplication of small-scale units -- Lenin replied that these arrangements gave expression to "the absolute will of the vast majority of the class-conscious peasants of Russia."^[1]

One of the most remarkable aspects of the October decree -- and, to a hardly lesser extent, of the law promulgated on February 19, 1918, which was called the law on "socialization of the land"^[2] -- was that it did not seek to impose upon the peasants from above any strict rules about what was to be done with the land. The Bolshevik Party was, of course, in favor of collective forms of exploitation of the land, but it wished the peasants to adopt such forms on the basis of their own experience. In this sphere, too, Lenin called on the Bolsheviks to *have confidence in the peasants*. In his address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets, for example, he said:

In the fire of experience, applying the decree in practice and carrying it out locally, the peasants will themselves realise where the truth lies . . . Experience is the best teacher, and it will show who is right. Let the peasants solve this problem from one end and we shall solve it from the other. Experience will oblige us to draw together in the general stream of revolutionary creative work, in the elaboration of new state forms. We must be guided by experience; we must allow complete freedom to the creative faculties of the masses.^[3]

The decisions taken at the end of 1917 and the beginning

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1918 by the Soviet power were thus far from being mere "legislative documents." They were

appeals to the masses. They showed confidence in the experience and patient work of the Bolsheviks who would help the peasants to understand what form of social organization would be best for them. They opened the way to something more than a mere legal transfer of ownership -- to an upheaval in production relations. It was the mass movement that, given the prevailing objective and subjective conditions, would determine the new production relations emerging from the class struggle that developed in the countryside. Since these new relations emerged from the destruction of the old ones, it is impossible to understand the nature of the revolutionary process then under way in rural Russia unless account is taken of the concrete conditions of the struggles and the specific character of the social relations which were formerly dominant there, and which, moreover, were only partly destroyed during the period 1917-1922.

I. The specific character of the former social relations in the countryside

The social relations and class relations in Russia's rural areas on the eve of the revolution were highly complex and are not well-known. The bulk of the "documentation" about rural realities in prerevolutionary Russia comes from bourgeois specialists -- the *zemstvo* [4] statisticians and the rural economists: both described that fraction of the countryside with which they were concerned from the standpoint of their class practice and in terms of their own ideology. Hence the great difficulty experienced by the Bolsheviks in "translating" the "information" provided by these specialists into the terms of production relations.

Lenin was undoubtedly the Bolshevik leader who had most systematically worked over the available documentation. He had brought out in a striking way the importance of the tendencies to capitalist development that existed in the coun-

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tryside of tsarist Russia. His very earliest writings were devoted to analyzing this problem: [New Economic Developments in Peasant Life](#), [On the So-Called Market Question](#), etc. [5] One of his principal economic works, [The Development of Capitalism in Russia](#), dealt with it, and he wrote about it in his many polemics with the Narodniks and SRs.

Lenin showed that the complexity of the social relations in the Russian countryside, and the plurality of forms assumed by capitalist development there at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, were due to the existence of a dynamic stratum of capitalist peasants who had left the old village communities, and to the transformation of some big landlords into capitalist agriculturists. He showed, too, how capitalism was emerging within the peasant communities themselves.

The peasant community, the *mir*, is one of the specific features of Russian rural life which has given rise to many illusions and much discussion. The *mir* was a community that functioned at village level. It controlled the peasants' land, [6] and shared it out among its members in accordance with various criteria which were supposed to maintain a certain "equality" among the various peasant households. After the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the law forbade shareouts at intervals of less than twelve years.

The unit for allotment of a share of the land was the household, and the area of land received by each household was, in principle, a definite proportion of the land of the village to which this household belonged (leaving aside the forests and pastures which made up the common land not subject to distribution). This proportion was decided by taking account of the "number" of members in each household: but, depending on the particular village, this

"number" might correspond to the number of "mouths" that the household had to feed or the number of persons in it who were capable of work, and it could also be decided in accordance with the means of production at the household's disposal, in particular the number of draft animals in its possession. Inquiries carried out at that time showed that rich households (which were usually the

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most numerous, as they frequently practiced adoption) were often the ones most favored when the land was redivided. Moreover, the poor households (those which were inadequately provided with instruments of production) were often obliged to lease out the land assigned to them, and their able-bodied members had to take jobs as wage laborers. Thus, a small group of rich families might dominate a village.

The inequalities which developed in this way were due to the fact that, behind the "communal" facade of the *mir*, the basic reality was fragmented labor, individual cultivation and stockbreeding, and private ownership of the instruments of production, especially draft animals. As Marx had observed as far back as 1881, the *mir* was breaking up from within because "labour on one's own lot" was "a source of private appropriation," making possible "the accumulation of movable goods,"^[7] in other words, a social differentiation. This inevitably affected the functioning of the peasant assembly which regulated "common concerns" and the redistribution of the land. From having been "egalitarian," the *mir* gradually became a means of consolidating and reproducing economic and social inequalities. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, this development was fostered by the landlords, to whom the *mir* was in practice subordinate, and by the general progress of capitalism.

The Narodniks and SRs sought to deny that this evolution was taking place, and interpreted in a one-sided way the 1882 preface to the Russian translation of the [Communist Manifesto](#), in which Marx and Engels wrote: "If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist development."^[8]

Here we find what Marx had written a year earlier in a letter to Vera Zasulich. In that letter, however, Marx emphasized the forces disintegrating the *mir* from within and also those which were attacking it from without. In 1881 Marx already noted that "the 'village community' is reduced almost to its last gasp."^[9]

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Thirteen years later, in 1894, Engels remarked that, in the period that had elapsed, "the development of capitalism and the dissolution of the village community in Russia have both taken enormous strides forward."^[10]

Lenin, in showing the effects of the development of capitalism in Russia, carried forward in the form of a concrete analysis the comments made by Marx and Engels. At the same time, he warned (for example, in his article of 1905, "[From Narodism to Marxism](#)") against the illusions of the Narodniks who thought that the old peasant communities could be revived by means of various "reforms." On this point he wrote: "The 'bourgeois-proprietary' (and at the same time labouring) peasantry has already made good use of the socialist phrases of the Narodnik, democratic intelligentsia which harboured illusions of sustaining 'the toiler traditions and modes of life' by means of its *artels*, co-operatives, fodder-grass cultivation, ploughs, Zemstvo warehouses and banks, but which actually promoted the development of capitalism within the commune."^[11]

To the many figures quoted by Lenin which show the development of capitalism in the

countryside, it is perhaps worth adding others taken from writers who would like to "prove" that the *mir* did really operate as a leveling device, and yet, in fact, prove the contrary. This is the case with T. Shanin, who shows that in the province of Kaluga in 1897 the area of land *per head* varied in the proportion of 1 to 26 (or of 1 to 3 if the category of landless peasants is excluded), and that it was the most numerous households -- those of the rich peasants (enlarged, as we know, through the practice of adoption) -- that held *the largest amount of land per head*.

[12]

Statistics regarding the history of households, though usually also compiled with a view to proving that the latter passed through a "cycle of successive dimensions" (as a consequence of redistributions of land among households), show that in fact this did not happen. Thus, one such set of figures reveals that after thirty years (between 1882 and 1911), 75 percent of the households that originally possessed less than six desyatins were still in the same category and that this was likewise true

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of about two-fifths of the households possessing more than nine desyatins.[13]

Analysis of social differentiation in the Russian village shows that the *mir* presented no real obstacle to the development of capitalism, but that its existence did give rise to a certain number of problems, as it *ensured the reproduction of specific social relations* which need to be taken into account if one is to appreciate the forms that the class struggle could assume in the countryside of Russia before and after the revolution. Although seriously undermined by inner contradictions, the *mir* still existed in February 1917, and it affected to a considerable extent the way in which the revolution developed in the countryside and also, subsequently, the functioning of the NEP.

The *mir* furnished a political and ideological apparatus that enabled the peasants to act in a relatively "independent" fashion. After October 1917, owing to the absence of a strong representation of the Bolshevik Party in the rural areas, this relative "independence" enabled the village rich to dominate the poor and middle peasants more easily. It must not be forgotten that at the end of 1917, the Bolshevik Party had only 203 peasant branches with 4,122 members, and in 1918 only 2,304 branches with 14,792 members.

Even at that time the "peasant" branches were thus very few in number, and their members (who were largely rural civil servants, such as primary school teachers) made up hardly 5 percent of the party's total membership.

The effects of the *mir*'s existence and of the specific social relations corresponding to it are all the more worthy of attention because the illusion that the *mir* constituted a distinctive "mode of production" and an instrument of social "leveling" continues to be fairly widespread. Briefly, these are the main points to be noted:

(1) The *mir* was not a mode of production (a definite way of producing) but a political apparatus for carrying out redistribution of the land, which ensured not collective but individual cultivation. Consequently, producers "did as they

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liked" with what they produced, being free to sell it and to accumulate "freely." The *mir* did indeed impose certain rules on its members, but these were intended to facilitate individual cultivation of the separate holdings and had nothing to do with collective cultivation. The sole "residue" of a former communal mode of production was limited to a few practices of mutual aid between neighbors, and even these amounted to little, being often transformed by the

development of exchange, which led to *payment* being required for the services rendered.

(2) The *mir*, being a political apparatus, was of course, not "neutral." It was the battlefield of a class struggle that was fought out within it, and it felt the effects of the class struggle taking place on the scale of society as a whole. Generally speaking, the *mir* was dominated by the better-off peasants, who were often elected village heads or members of the permanent organs of administration, and they profited by their position of advantage to perpetuate their privileged situation. Their advantageous position also made itself felt in the redistribution of the land, despite the "egalitarian principles" which were supposed to govern its procedure. The relatively limited effects of the division of the land carried out between 1917 and 1922, seem to confirm that the domination of the *mir* by the well-to-do peasants was maintained even during those years of acute class struggle.

(3) The *mir* and the *skhod* (the general assembly of peasants) nevertheless took the form of a village community, tending to make of every village a little world of its own, cut off from the rest, with its own local authorities. Historical experience shows that this form fosters a "village patriotism," a local egoism, which has as its counterpart a profound indifference to whatever is happening outside. Historically, the *mir* was the foundation on which the tsarist autocracy developed. Tsardom was the instrument "unifying," in a largely formal way, all the village communities. By ensuring their "military defense," tsardom established an external link between them which enabled it to enslave them. It is significant that most

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peasant revolts in Russia were directed against the landlords, not against the tsar. Until the imperialist epoch, the tsar seemed to the peasants to be someone to whom they could "appeal" against the landlords. When the peasants were drafted, they thought of themselves as going to fight not "for Russia" but "for the tsar." The *mir*, based as it was on the household as unit of production, strengthened petty bourgeois individualism. This individualism, combined with the local egoism engendered by the workings of the *mir*, accounts for the relative indifference shown by the peasants, during the period of "war communism," toward the hardships then being suffered by the towns, which were without food.

(4) While substantial inequalities were reproduced on an expanded scale under the prevailing egalitarian forms (which, moreover, were concerned in practice only with land), these forms did nevertheless help, at the ideological level, to reinforce petty bourgeois egalitarianism and individualism. Both of these obtained on a very large scale, to the detriment of the peasants' own interests, leading as they did to "miniparcellization" of the land, in order that each peasant might have a piece of each quality of land -- an arrangement which meant that some peasants had to travel huge distances, and also that considerable tracts of land were lost to cultivation. It also contributed to "freezing" for centuries (and even after the revolution) the methods of cultivation, and was thus one of the factors in the low yields and famines that afflicted the peasantry.

It is not wholly out of the question that if the Bolshevik Party had been more effectively present in the countryside, and had been able to make use of what survived of communal traditions in the *mir*, the latter might have been made the point of departure for collective farming. However, if Marx and Engels felt doubtful on the point at the end of the nineteenth century, there is even more reason to doubt whether such a possibility existed at the time of the October Revolution. The *mir*, having undergone still further decomposition, had become a form concealing a reality quite different from what appeared on the surface.

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II. The democratic agrarian revolution and

the hope of a socialist agrarian revolution

The "decree on land" and the subsequent documents issued by the Soviet power gave an extra stimulus to the movement that the peasants had themselves undertaken, from 1917 onward, to seize the estates of the landlords.

(a) The democratic agrarian revolution of the winter of 1917-1918

During the winter of 1917-1918 and the succeeding months, the peasants -- now backed by the Soviet power -- took over (mainly acting through the *mir*) most of the land^[14] belonging to the landlords, the state, and the church. The land thus acquired constituted a substantial area, for in 1916 the big landlords held 40 percent of all the cultivable land in Russia.^[15]

At the same time, the peasants also took over (again, usually through the *mir*) a part, which has not been estimated, of the land of the rich peasants who had broken away from the *mir* after the reforms of 1861 and 1906. We have inadequate information regarding the land held by these peasants on the eve of October,^[16] and we know still less about how much of it was taken from them after October.^[17] In any case, these "recoveries" considerably improved the situation of part of the peasantry.^[18]

Each *mir* distributed the lands it recovered among the peasant households of the village, for them to cultivate individually. Individual cultivation was thus preserved, for the encouragement being given to joint cultivation by the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet government had little effect at that time.

A quantitative estimate of the results of this process of revolutionary transformation launched by the mass movement of the peasants backed by the Soviet power, becomes possible only in 1919. At that time, according to Soviet statistics (which were doubtless highly approximate), 96.8 percent of the land under cultivation was held by peasants who worked it indi-

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vidually (either within or outside the framework of the *mir*) 0.5 percent was held by agricultural cooperatives, and 2.7 percent was held by state farms.^[19] The agrarian revolution had thus indeed been a *democratic, not a socialist transformation*.

This agrarian revolution did not change very deeply the way the *mir* functioned. The sharing-out of land continued to be effected on the basis of the "household" (the peasant "hearth"), and according to the same criteria as before. The scanty information available suggests that, when the land was being divided, the "authority" of the rich peasants (who owned animals and equipment) continued to make itself felt. On the whole, however, because of the acuteness of the class struggle and the reappropriation of the bulk of the land that had been taken out of the *mir*, the proportion of poor peasants was reduced, together with social inequality. Nevertheless, a considerable body of poor peasants continued to exist, and it was on them that the Bolshevik Party sought to rely, in the period from June 1918 onward, in stimulating the class struggle in the countryside, fighting against the rich peasants (kulaks) and their influence, both economic and political.

(b) The attempt to develop an independent movement of poor peasants in the summer of 1918

The Bolshevik Party's desire to base itself, in the countryside, first and foremost upon the agricultural laborers and poor peasants (the rural semiproletariat) was expressed in its program, and was recalled in Lenin's "April Theses." In June 1918 the party thought that the time had come to help these two groups fight directly for socialism. It thought indeed that the democratic agrarian revolution was essentially completed, so that preparation of the socialist stage was now on the agenda. At the same time, the party sought to mobilize in the villages those specific social forces on which it considered the proletarian power must rely in order to cope with economic disorganization: above all, the poor peasants, who were most directly interested in socialism.

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During the summer of 1918 the decline in agricultural production assumed very serious proportions, just at the time when the White forces and the interventionist armies were beginning to go into action. The feeding of the towns was gravely jeopardized, for the peasants no longer had any but small quantities of produce available for exchange and were unwilling to sell what they had: the inflation that had developed meant that they could easily pay their taxes (as the phrase then went, "the villages were awash with money") and they had practically nothing to buy in the towns in any case.

In these circumstances the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet government endeavored to break with the policy followed up to that time with regard to the peasantry, a policy which treated the peasantry "as a whole," as an "undifferentiated" ally of the proletariat, an ally within which class differences were as yet of secondary importance and which was fighting to carry through its own task -- the democratic agrarian revolution.

A decree of June 11, 1918, gave concrete form to this move. It provided for the setting up of organs of power distinct from the peasant soviets and made up exclusively of poor peasants. This decree officially committed the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet government to systematic *differential treatment* of the different classes of the peasantry. A document of July 11, 1918, stipulated that only peasants who did not employ wage workers and who had no surpluses of grain available for collection could belong to the poor peasants' committees. On July 15 it was decided that the poor peasants' committees were to be one of the instruments of Soviet policy in the countryside, in particular, by helping in the seizure of grain from the kulaks: the poor peasants would be allowed to keep for themselves a proportion of the grain thus confiscated.^[20]

For Lenin, at least in 1918, the formation of the poor peasants' committees signified the development of the class struggle in the countryside, the split at last effected between the agricultural laborers and poor peasants on the one hand, and the well-to-do strata of the peasantry on the other. It seemed to him that now an alliance between the town proletariat and the poor peasants had become possible, with the former helping

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the latter to organize themselves and according them a specific leading role in the villages.

In his address of November 8, 1918, to the delegates of the poor peasants' committees of the central gubernias, Lenin said: "We decided to split (the peasants) . . . The workers have been helping the poor peasants in their struggle against the kulaks. In the civil war that has flared up in the countryside the workers are on the side of the poor peasants, as they were when they passed the S.R.-sponsored law on the socialisation of the land."^[21]

He added that Russia must be covered with poor peasants' committees which would become transformed into soviets, that is, into fully recognized organs of the Soviet power. At the same time he stressed the transition to collective work, to communes, that is, to the socialist

transformation of production relations in the countryside. In the same period, in October-November 1918, in his pamphlet on [The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky](#), Lenin declared that with the formation of the poor peasants' committees, the revolution could at last transcend in the countryside the bourgeois limits beyond which it had not hitherto been able to advance. In the same pamphlet he described the situation until June 1918 as having been one of "proletarian revolution in the capitals" and "bourgeois democratic revolution" in the countryside.^[22]

At that time most of the Bolshevik leaders thought that the class struggle among the peasants themselves had reached a level such that abandonment of individual cultivation and going over to "the real work of building socialism" had now become possible and necessary.^[23] As Lenin saw it, "the ruination left by the war simply does not allow us to restore the old small-scale peasant forms." Furthermore, this same war had given the masses the idea that the wonders of technique which had served for destruction could be put at the service of production, on the basis of collective labor. From this Lenin concluded that "the majority of the working peasants are striving toward collective farming," and that it was therefore now possible to develop collective forms of cultivation, agricultural communes, and state farms.^[24]

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Lenin emphasized in all his speeches that the socialist transformation of production relations must be the work of the peasants themselves. It was not enough, he said, for the revolutionary leaders to be convinced of the necessity for such a change for the latter to become possible, nor was propaganda alone sufficient to win over millions of peasants: the latter could become convinced only through practical experience.^[25]

In very explicit terms, Lenin thus connected the socialist transformation of economic relations in the countryside not only with the abolition of private property in land (which, he said, inevitably remained "a paper revolution" as long as "the poor peasants, the working peasants" did not themselves take up the struggle against capitalism,^[26] but also with the transformation of political relations within the rural community itself (by the formation of poor peasants' committees) and with the transformation of ideological relations which would enable the mass of the peasants to go over to collective farming.

Lenin's and the Bolshevik Party's hopes for a rapid transition to a socialist agrarian revolution were not borne out by the facts. The majority of the working peasants were not really ready to take that path, and the poor peasants' committees were found to be lacking in vitality. They were not established everywhere, and those that did come into being often represented only a minority of the poor peasants, which, moreover, was not always made up of the most militant elements of that class. The committees sometimes included declassed elements who were attracted by the idea of grabbing some of the produce seized from the rich peasants, and who were not at all interested in setting up collective farms.

The ideological and political differentiation in the peasantry was thus not so advanced as had been supposed in the middle of 1918. The division of the estates had somewhat reduced the proportion of poor peasants and increased that of the middle peasants. Above all, because of the lack of an adequate presence of the Bolshevik Party in the rural areas, it had led to a relative revitalization of the *mir*, owing to the role the latter played in the sharing-out of the land, for which it was the instrument, and this meant the consolidation of a certain "unity" of the village in relation to the town, a "unity" which

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benefited the well-to-do and middle elements among the peasantry.

The Bolshevik Party's move to form poor peasants' committees was thus followed by an unrepresentative minority of that class. Recognizing this, the party concluded that it would be dangerous to persist in pursuing this line, especially at a time when the offensive of the White Guards and interventionists was being intensified and it was essential to strengthen the alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry as a whole.

Toward the end of 1918, the abortive attempt to generalize the formation of poor peasants' committees was dropped (though not systematically). By the beginning of 1919 these committees had mostly merged with the peasant soviets. Thus there opened a new phase in the Bolshevik Party's peasant policy: henceforth, the emphasis was placed much more on the middle peasants, whose numbers had, moreover, increased as a result of the democratic revolution in the countryside.

III. The years 1919-1920 and the orientation on the middle peasantry for the building of socialism

At the Eighth Congress of the Bolshevik Party (March 18-23, 1919), Lenin directed the party's attention particularly to "the problem of our attitude towards the middle peasants." This problem, he said, could not be brought to the forefront "until we had made secure the basis for the existence of the Soviet Republic," but it must now be tackled directly, in order to "lay the sound foundations of communist society."^[27] Explaining the attitude to be adopted, Lenin declared:

This attitude cannot be defined simply by the answer -- struggle or support. As regards the bourgeoisie our task is defined by the words "struggle," "suppression," and as regards the rural proletariat and semi-proletariat our task is defined by the words "our support," but this problem is undoubtedly more complicated. On this point, the socialists, the best representatives of socialism in

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the old days, when they still believed in the revolution and faithfully adhered to its theory and ideals, talked about *neutralising the peasantry*, i.e., making the middle peasants a social stratum which, if it did not actively help the proletarian revolution, at least would not hinder it, that would remain neutral and not go over to the side of our enemies. This abstract, theoretical formulation of the problem is quite clear but is inadequate. We have reached the stage of socialist development when we must draw up definite and detailed rules and regulations *which have been tested by practical experience in the rural districts* [my emphasis -- C. B.] to guide us in our efforts to place our relations with the middle peasants *on the basis of a firm alliance* and so preclude the possibility of a repetition of those mistakes and blunders we have repeatedly made in the past. These blunders estranged the middle peasants from us. . .^[28]

These few sentences are of fundamental importance. They pose the question of what was later called "the integration of the middle peasant into socialism." They reject the previously held belief that the middle peasants could not be an ally in the building of socialism, so that the proletariat could only aim to "neutralize" them. They declare that in the building of Communist society, the middle peasant can and must be a "firm" ally. They condemn the "mistakes and blunders" of the past, consisting in the belief that the only possible allies in the countryside, for the building of socialism, were the rural proletarians and semiproletarians. They raise the problem of what the concrete conditions are for establishing this "firm alliance" which has not yet been realized.

Lenin does not claim to be in a position to answer this question there and then. He considers it necessary to study the experience of work in the countryside. However, he warns expressly against continuing a situation in which "the blows which were intended for the kulaks very

frequently fell on the middle peasants. In this respect we have sinned a great deal."^[29]

The context shows that this mistake was not unconnected with the way in which the poor peasants' committees were formed and with the role that these committees played in the sphere of requisitioning and food supply.

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The mistakes of orientation made in the second half of 1918 are certainly to be explained in part by the place previously given to the idea of mere "neutralization" of the middle peasant, but above all by the lack of any practical experience before that time, and by the presence in the party of a "rightist-leftist" tendency. The latter was disposed to consider any change in labor relations that gave rise to collective forms of production as a step toward socialism, even if it was imposed from above by coercion, provided that the state of the dictatorship of the proletariat was the agent of this change.

On March 13, 1919, at the First Congress of Farm Laborers of Petrograd Gubernia, Lenin spoke very firmly against the tendency of certain party officials to "compel" peasants to join collective farms. He reminded his hearers that "the Soviet government must not under any circumstances resort to coercion . . . Agricultural communes are established on a voluntary basis; the adoption of collective tillage must be voluntary; the workers' and peasants' government must refrain from exercising the slightest compulsion, and the law prohibits this."^[30]

Clearly, when he recalled these principles, Lenin was not concerned with the formal aspect of legality: what mattered to him was to stress that the founding of agricultural communes by force could not give rise to communist forms of labor.

At this same congress Lenin also spoke against the compromise of forming "state farms" in which the participants retained individual holdings. He considered that if such holdings existed they would be a germ of decomposition in the state farms. Thus, for instance: "If private vegetable plots, animals, poultry and so forth were permitted again, we should revert to the small farming that had existed hitherto. If that were the case, would it be worth while to have all this bother? Would it be worth while establishing state farms?"^[31]

In his report of March 23, to the Eighth Congress of the Bolshevik Party, Lenin again discussed the policy of allying with the middle peasant in order to build socialism. He emphasized once more that it was necessary to refrain from resorting to coercion, that the peasants must not be dragged by

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force onto a path they were not ready to follow. He dwelt at length on this idea, because it was not easily accepted by certain party members. He said: "If we were to act in the same way towards the middle peasant (as we acted to crush the bourgeoisie) it would be such idiocy, such stupidity, it would be so ruinous to our cause, that only provocateurs could deliberately act in such a way . . . You cannot create anything here by coercion. Coercion applied to the middle peasants would cause untold harm."^[32] And again:

We must particularly stress the truth that here by the very nature of the case coercive methods can accomplish nothing . . . *Here coercion would ruin the whole cause.* Prolonged educational work is required . . . On this question we must say that we do encourage communes, but they must be so organised *as to gain the confidence of the peasants* . . . *Nothing is more stupid than the very idea of applying coercion in economic relations with the middle peasant.* The aim is not to expropriate the middle peasant but to . . . learn from him methods of transition to a better system, and *not to dare to give orders!* ^[33]

The principles are clear -- no violence in dealing with the middle peasants; work must be carried on among them to convince them, to win their confidence, so that they themselves will change the economic relations; learn from the peasants, do not dare to give them orders.

The Bolshevik Party formally accepted these principles, but the administrative organs showed only partial respect for them during 1919 and 1920, and even violated them where requisitioning was concerned. Only after the introduction of the NEP were these principles really respected -- and then they were jettisoned again when the collectivization campaign was launched at the end of the 1920s.

The party's rallying to the point of view voiced by Lenin was expressed in the adoption of a resolution "On the Attitude to the Middle Peasants."^[34] It condemned "arbitrary action on the part of the local authorities" in dealing with the middle peasants, who "are not exploiters since they do not profit by the labour of others," and it encouraged the formation of agricultural communes on an exclusively voluntary basis. It

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condemned the way requisitioning had been carried out among the middle peasants and declared that such requisitioning must be exercised with moderation. Finally, it dwelt at length on the help and support that the Soviet power must render to the middle peasants so that they might improve their individual holdings, through being backed up by cooperatives providing services and financing. This resolution is of all the greater importance from the standpoint of principle in that it was adopted at a time when the illusions of "war communism" about "direct" transition to communism were at their height.

In practice, the resolution was applied very unevenly. The objective process of the class struggle proceeding in Russian society as a whole, the party's weak roots in the countryside, and the acute crisis in the supply of food to the towns meant that the Bolshevik Party could only partially honor the decisions of the Eighth Congress regarding the middle peasants.

(a) The emergence of socialist relations in the countryside

It was in the matter of the transition to collective cultivation and the need for no coercion to be used in this field that the decisions of the Eighth Party Congress had most effect.

In October 1919, in *Economics and Politics in the Era of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*,^[35] Lenin observed that in the transition to collectivism in agriculture Russia had as yet taken only the "first steps."^[36] Indeed, in 1919 there were only 2,100 agricultural communes with some 350,000 members, and these figures later diminished: there were only 1,520 communes in March 1920. Some of them had had to dissolve in the face of the hostility shown by other peasants: this hostility, stirred up by the kulaks, sometimes led to the murder of commune members by peasants from neighboring villages.

The agricultural communes were formed mainly by the poor and landless, not by middle peasants. Some of them were first established by workers from the industrial centers, as happened in 1918, for example, on the outskirts of Petrograd --

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which shows the close connection the industrial workers still retained with agriculture.^[37]

Another form of socialist production was constituted in this period by the "Soviet farms," or

"state farms" (*sovkhozy*). These were formed by the Soviet state and not directly by the toilers themselves, and those who worked in them were paid wages. Their socialist character depended on the extent to which they were actually subordinate to the state of the proletarian dictatorship.

In 1919, the number of state farms was a little larger than the number of agricultural communes -- 3,500 -- and this figure even rose to 4,400 in 1920. They were still relatively small affairs, most covering less than 200 hectares, usually poor land of which not even half was under cultivation.

Finally, alongside these two forms there were *artels*, that is, producers' cooperatives of a lower type which carried on collective cultivation of fields that remained privately owned. These *artels* were a little more numerous than the communes: 1,900 in 1919 and 3,800 in 1920.

[38]

Altogether, these forms of production represented almost nothing in the immense ocean of individual production. Nevertheless, their *importance from the standpoint of principle* was considerable.

The poor development of collective production in its various forms showed that socialist ideas had barely penetrated the countryside, and was also due to the fact that the Bolshevik Party thereafter refrained from imposing these forms, especially as it did not view this as the main task at a time when the principal contradiction was still that which confronted the workers and peasants with the White Guards who were defending the landlords and capitalists, and with imperialism.

(b) *Helping the middle peasant*

The help for the middle peasant provided for in the Eighth Congress resolution did not materialize. In view of the condi-

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tion of Russia's economy at the time, it was not possible to supply the peasants with improved seeds, artificial fertilizers, or pedigree stock, or to set up centers for repairing machinery or clearing land for tillage. All these intentions remained at that time so many aspirations.

The chief form of help rendered to the middle peasant was political. The local authorities ceased (more or less) to treat him as a kulak as far as his holdings were concerned. He was promised, in a decree adopted in the summer of 1920, that his land would not be taken from him -- this was current practice in a number of *mirs* -- as long as he cultivated it with his own hands, even if its area was larger than allowed by the regional norms of distribution.[39] This decree was aimed at supporting the middle peasant even against the demands of the poor peasants. The official commentary noted that the decree "creates stability in rural farming. It is necessary that every peasant should be convinced that his share will remain his own, that it will not be taken away from him because the majority wish to make another redistribution." [40]

To sum up, the middle peasant, one of the chief beneficiaries of the agrarian revolution, did not receive, between 1919 and 1921, any material aid from the Soviet power, but the attitude officially adopted offered him reassurance as to his future, whereas previously he had felt threatened by the one-sided emphasis laid on alliance with the poor peasants and by the activities of the committees formed by a section of the latter.

(c) *The problem of requisitioning*

The decisions of the Eighth Congress on requisitioning were not respected. The middle peasants -- who were defending the Soviet power by force of arms: without them victory over the White Guards and the imperialist forces could not have been won -- handed over to the Soviet state hardly any of that part of their produce which they did not consume themselves. They sold a big proportion of it on the black market, thus giving priority to their own immediate material interests

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over the needs of the front and of the workers and peasants who were fighting there.

In his speech of November 19, 1919, to the First All-Russia Conference on Party Work in the Countryside, Lenin pointed out the dual character of the middle peasant. On the one hand, he said, the peasant is a toiler, a man who lives by the sweat of his brow, and who therefore sides with the worker, but on the other hand "the peasant as a proprietor with a surplus of grain is accustomed to regarding it as his property which he can sell freely" -- and, Lenin added, "anyone who sells grain surpluses in a hunger-ridden country becomes a profiteer, an exploiter, because the starving man will give everything he has for bread."[\[41\]](#)

Basing himself on this formulation, Lenin said that the middle peasant must be given dual treatment, depending on whether he was acting as a toiler or as an exploiter. He reminded his hearers that renunciation of coercion in dealings with the middle peasant referred not to freedom for him to exploit the proletariat, but to the principle that "there can be no question of forcibly imposing socialism on anyone."[\[42\]](#)

In December 1919 the Seventh Congress of Soviets adopted a resolution which called explicitly for a strengthening of measures of requisitioning and their extension to all agricultural products. In practice, these measures affected almost all holdings capable of producing a "surplus" over subsistence needs.

Such measures were essential in order to ensure the survival of the soldiers at the front and the workers in the factories (whose rations were already minimal). At that moment and in this field, recourse to coercion was dictated by the economic and military situation and by the nature of the relations between the mass of the peasants and the Soviet power, which were not such as to cause the majority of the peasants to hand over their produce of their own free will to organs of the state with nothing to give them "in exchange."

The general requisitioning measures adopted at the end of 1919 nevertheless helped to worsen the political relations between the peasantry and the Soviet power, that is, the al-

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liance of the working class with the middle peasants, most of whom found themselves being treated as speculators and "exploiters." Moreover, on the economic plane, these requisitioning measures discouraged agricultural production, which declined considerably.

The Soviet power tried to resist this decline by imposing sowing plans upon the peasants, that is, by resorting, in this sphere as well, to coercion.[\[43\]](#) Actually, it was almost impossible to ensure the carrying out of these plans on the basis of individual production. The situation therefore worsened, since, by affecting an ever-larger number of peasants, the requisitioning measures provoked increasing discontent on the part of the peasantry toward the Soviet power.

At a conference of chairmen of *uyezd* (district), *volost* (county), and village executive committees of Moscow gubernia, on October 15, 1920, Lenin took note of this discontent. It had been manifested during the conference in such a way that the spokesmen of the government

had often found difficulty in expounding their opinions. In one of his speeches Lenin said: "If extreme dissatisfaction and impatience have been expressed here so often, we all know that freedom of speech is the primary rule of procedure at meetings. At this meeting you have broken this rule -- it is because the majority of the peasants are experiencing all too severely the effects of the very grave situation that has arisen in the localities. Most of the peasants are feeling all too severely the effects of famine, cold and excessive taxation."^[44]

Thus, contrary to what the Bolshevik Party had wished, the year 1920 was a year in which the great majority of the peasants were subjected to severe requisitioning in order to provide for the needs of the front and of the towns. This entailed serious political consequences. At the end of the autumn of 1920 and during the winter of 1920-1921, when the White and interventionist armies had practically been defeated, peasant revolts broke out in various regions, particularly in the south and southeast of Russia, and compelled the Ministry of Food Supplies to suspend all collecting and requisitioning of grain in thirteen provinces.^[45]

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The crisis in the grain collections at the end of 1920 was obviously not merely due to the peasants' refusal to sell part of their produce. It was connected also with the failure of the harvest, which was due to the war, to economic disorganization, and to the discontent felt by the peasants, many of whom restricted production to what was needed for their own consumption. Consequently, according to generally accepted estimates, annual grain production fell from 72.5 million metric tons in the period 1909-1913 to under 35 million in 1920, and the peasants' own consumption was less than 17 million metric tons, a catastrophic reduction of about 40 percent as compared with prewar figures.^[46]

The grave situation in agriculture, the discontent of the peasantry, which was in rebellion in some provinces, and, finally, the victory over the Whites and the imperialist armies, led the Bolshevik Party to make a rectification in its peasant policy, as it was now actually in a position to do. This rectification took place as part of a new conception of economic policy in general -- what was called the New Economic Policy. The latter will be discussed in the last part of this book. Here I shall examine only some of the decisions and measures which relate more particularly to the Bolshevik Party's peasant policy and its immediate effects on the class struggle in the countryside.

IV. The rectification of the Bolshevik Party's peasant policy and class relations in the countryside at the end of "war communism" and the beginning of the NEP

At the end of 1920 and at the beginning of 1921, Lenin emphasized the need for a thorough rectification of the party's peasant policy. This did not take effect in practice, however, until March 1921, after the peasant discontent fanned by the SRs and Mensheviks had given rise to rural insurrections and contributed to the Kronstadt rising.

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In his report to the Tenth Party Congress, on March 8, 1921, Lenin mentioned, as he had already done before, that the policy of requisitioning carried on without adequate knowledge of the possibilities and needs of the peasantry in the different regions had helped "to intensify the crisis in the peasant economy considerably,"^[47] so that the peasants' "dissatisfaction with the proletarian dictatorship is mounting,"^[48] and this made it necessary to rectify relations between the working class and the peasantry.

(a) *The peasants' demands and the reestablishment of "freedom of exchange"*

On March 15, 1921, in his report on the substitution of a tax in kind for requisitioning, Lenin spoke at length and explicitly about the rectification that had become necessary in the party's policy toward the peasantry:

Under no circumstances must we try to hide anything; we must plainly state that the peasantry is dissatisfied with the form of our relations, that it does not want relations of this type, and will not continue to live as it has hitherto. This is unquestionable. The peasantry has expressed its will in this respect definitely enough. It is the will of the vast masses of the working population. We must reckon with this, and we are sober enough politicians to say frankly: let us re-examine our policy in regard to the peasantry. The state of affairs that has prevailed so far cannot be continued any longer. We must try to satisfy the demands of the peasants who are dissatisfied and disgruntled, and legitimately so, and who cannot be otherwise. We must say to them: "Yes, this cannot go on any longer." How is the peasant to be satisfied, and what does satisfying him mean? Where is the answer? Naturally, it lies in the demands of the peasantry.^[49]

These last formulations again show that, in Lenin's case, besides the theory that serves as guide to revolutionary action, there was another essential factor in the working out of a correct political line: the lessons of experience and the demands of the masses themselves.

In order to meet the peasants' demands, Lenin and the Bolshevik Party acknowledged that, in the situation of the

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moment, the peasants must be given freedom to dispose of their produce once they had paid their taxes, and a certain degree of freedom must be allowed to small-scale trade and small-scale industry. At the same time, "concessions"^[50] of a limited kind were offered to foreign capital. Under the conditions then existing, it seemed to the Bolshevik Party that it was only by taking this path that the country could be saved from famine and economic breakdown, and the dictatorship of the proletariat consolidated, for the latter was seriously threatened by the discontent of the peasantry, with the prospect it opened up of an end to the alliance between workers and peasants.

The concrete forms that were subsequently to be assured by the reestablished "freedom of exchange" varied from time to time. The initial formula of still "regulated" exchange gave way to "free" commercial exchange and to the restoration of commodity circulation on a substantial scale. These variations were extensions of the original rectification, of the abandonment of "war communism," and of the adoption of the NEP.

The principal decrees inaugurating the NEP were published in the days immediately following the Tenth Congress. On March 21 came the decree putting an end to the requisitioning of foodstuffs, and on March 28 Lenin signed the decree "freeing" trade, the buying and selling of foodstuffs, and abolishing restrictions on the transport of these goods.

(b) *The agrarian legislation of 1922*

We shall see later how, on the basis of practical experience, the original conception of the NEP became transformed. Here, in discussing class relations in the countryside, it is essential to say a few words about the decree of May 22, 1922, on land associations, or land societies.

This decree gave practical recognition to the *mir*, while trying to transform it so as to make

its functions more compatible with those of the various organs of the Soviet power. This attempt did not enjoy much success: under the new name of "land association" (*zemelnoye obshchestvo*), it was more or

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less the same old *mir* that continued to exist. Like the *mir*, the "land association" functioned at village level.

The land code of November 15, 1922, embodied the provisions of the decree of May 22. It sought to provide satisfactory conditions for the development of individual cultivation, since this was what, to an overwhelming extent, prevailed within the transformed *mir*. At the same time, the land code of 1922 established more precise foundations for the constitution of agricultural communes, which could be formed either within a given land association or by several villages acting together.

The land association -- that is, the transformed *mir* -- was administered by a general assembly (*skhod*) of all who had the right to vote and by elected organs. In principle, this change was important since participation in the *skhod* was previously confined to peasants who were heads of households, whereas henceforth, in theory, all who were aged 18 or over and possessed some land were to participate and to join in electing the governing bodies. The *skhod* decided who had the right to belong to the *mir* and who was allowed to leave it, and it could decide on the type of cultivation and on the mode of distributing the land. The renovated *mir* was juridically a person, with power to buy and sell.

The reality of the new *mir* was considerably different from this, however. After the promulgation of the land code, just as before, actual political power in the localities was usually wielded by the rich and well-to-do peasants through the *skhod* and its elected head, or "plenipotentiary," who was, as a rule, himself a rich peasant.

The *skhod*, largely dominated by the rich and well-to-do peasants, took precedence over the rural soviets. It was in practice the sole judge of how the land was to be shared out. Sometimes it went so far as to deprive the poorest peasants of the little land they had,^[51] on the grounds that they were not able to cope with a holding. This situation continued until collectivization, as was acknowledged, for example, in an analysis of the situation in the countryside made at the end of 1928: "The village Skhod continues to occupy the predominant position in the life of the village."^[52]

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Some Soviet writers^[53] consequently consider that the consolidation of the *mir* favored the rich peasants, and that they were even its chief advocates since, given the lack of a real presence of Bolshevik Party members in the villages, they were able to profit by their dominant position in the *skhod*. This claim is probably correct. The rich peasants were not, generally speaking, the best cultivators, but they skillfully combined farming with commercial activities and even with usury, and they also rented out draft animals and agricultural tools or machines.

The 1922 code sought to combat the tendency to "miniparcelization," and to promote the concentration of land within each holding, so as to remedy a situation that involved considerable loss of cultivable land used as paths and as balks separating plots, and obliged the peasants to travel great distances (sometimes the different plots making up a single holding were located fifteen or twenty kilometers from the farm house,^[54] which meant increased transportation costs). These efforts conflicted, however, with the redistributions of land carried out from time to time by the *mir*, and which the law also strove to restrict -- with only relative success.

Finally, the code authorized the leasing of land for a period not exceeding three years, on condition that it be cultivated without the employment of wage labor. At the beginning of 1923 the employment of wage labor was permitted, subject to certain limitations.

In this way some of "the peasants' demands" were satisfied. Given the relation of forces in the countryside, however, these demands broadly corresponded to the demands of the rich peasants who were able to influence the mass of the countryfolk.

(c) The economic position of the peasantry immediately following the civil war, and class differentiation in the countryside at the beginning of the NEP

The peasantry was the social group whose economic position underwent the greatest fundamental improvement as a

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result of the revolution. The land at its disposal was increased by 50 percent. The dues it formerly had to pay to the state were abolished, and it was no longer obliged to pay rent for land leased from the landlords, since the latter had been expropriated. Accordingly, the peasantry actively supported the revolution and enabled the Red Army to beat the White and imperialist forces. Without the support of a mass which constituted more than two-thirds of the population, victory would have been impossible. The victory of the Red Army, which was extremely poorly equipped and supplied, was and could only be a *political* victory -- that of the worker-peasant alliance.

The enlargement of the area of land available to the peasants and the elimination of the landlords basically improved the position of the peasantry, but its immediate economic situation nevertheless suffered substantial deterioration. This happened, first, because the prices of industrial goods (which could practically be found only on the black market) rose much more quickly than those of agricultural products, and, secondly, because agricultural production itself collapsed,^[55] and the requisitions carried out until the end of 1920 took such quantities of produce from the peasants that they were reduced to hunger.

The strengthening of the economic position of the poor and middle peasants. The revolution changed a section of the former poor peasants into middle peasants and improved their relative position.

It is extremely difficult to arrive at a numerical estimate of the changes that occurred inside the peasantry between 1917 and 1922. To be serious, it would need to be based on detailed studies which have not been undertaken. It is necessary therefore to confine oneself to broad figures whose significance must not be overestimated, especially as they relate essentially to the division of land among "peasant holdings," and not to the division of the peasants into *classes*.

Among the various estimates that have been made, the one that gives the most likely seeming figures is due to N. D. Kondrat'ev and N. P. Oganovsky.^[56]

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<i>Cultivable area per holding</i>	<i>Percent</i>	
	<i>1905</i>	<i>1922</i>
Between 0 and 2.7 desyatins	15.8	15.1

Between 2.7 and 5.4 desyatins	34.7	35.2
Between 5.4 and 13.1 desyatins	40.4	45.8
Over 13.1 desyatins	10.5	3.9

The classification of holdings in terms of size cannot, of course, be interpreted as the direct equivalent of a division of the peasantry into poor, middle, well-to-do, and rich peasants. Actually, peasants owning the same area of land might belong to different categories, depending on the quality of their respective pieces of land, the means of production other than land at their disposal, etc. From the standpoint of the changes which took place among the peasantry, the conclusions to be drawn from the above table, as from other sources, must therefore be formulated with great caution.

Allowing for this reservation, it will be seen that the group of peasants who were poorest in terms of land diminished slightly. The middle peasants who were poorer than others in terms of land saw their proportion increase slightly, while that of the rest of the middle peasants increased markedly, and the proportion of peasants rich in terms of land fell by two-thirds.

One must, however, be careful not to draw hasty conclusions from the above table, as the totality of concrete conditions in which many poor and middle peasants found themselves in 1920-1922 meant that they did not cultivate all the land at their disposal. One reason for this was that it was mainly the land that was shared out, and only rarely the other means of production. This was indeed the traditional practice in the *mir*, and it was usually maintained by the better-off peasants who dominated the *mir* and accepted by the poorest peasants. The latter, as a rule, considered the principal reason for their poverty to be lack of land, and that it was this deficiency that had to be put right. In the period when the poor peasants' committees flourished, they showed little interest in agricultural equipment.^[57]

As a result of the lack of correspondence between the divi-

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sion of land and the division of other means of production (but also for other reasons connected with the marketability of part of agricultural production), uncultivated land in 1922-1923 amounted to about 30 percent of the area under cultivation in 1913. Therefore, if what is taken into account is actually cultivated land, we see that the proportion of smaller holdings (those roughly corresponding to the poor and middle peasants) increased from 43.8 percent to 49.6 percent between 1917 and 1922, whereas the proportion represented by the in-between group diminished (from 42.7 percent to 39.2 percent), as did that representing the well-to-do and rich peasants^[58] (from 13.5 percent to 11.2 percent).

In short, the Russian Revolution enabled the poor peasants and the less well-off middle peasants -- categorized in terms of land -- to improve their economic position (increasing by 30 percent and more the average amount of land in their possession). Nevertheless, by 1922 it had not improved the immediate economic situation of these peasants. Such an improvement was not to be experienced until the NEP got under way (between 1923 and 1926).

All the same, since possession of land seemed the most important thing in the eyes of most peasants, the increase in the amount held by the poor and middle peasants constituted a decisive victory for them. Hence, the undoubted political support given to the Soviet power by the peasant masses during the civil war. As we know, this did not prevent a section of the peasantry from starting to revolt, when the civil war was nearing its end, against this same power, which had gone too far with its requisitioning and its banning of free trade. The peasantry then formulated the demands to which the NEP gave satisfaction, thus consolidating afresh the bonds between the broad masses of the peasantry and the Soviet power.

The Russian peasantry and the village petty bourgeoisie. In the main -- that is, with the obvious exceptions of the rural proletariat and poor peasants at one extreme, and the rich peasants at the other -- the Russian peasantry of this period belonged to the petty bourgeoisie. It was involved in com-

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modity relations, and occupied in the Russian social formation (in which capitalist relations, scarcely transformed, continued to be dominant) the intermediate position characteristic of the petty bourgeoisie.

True, part of what was produced by the middle section of the peasantry was intended for its own consumption, but another part was intended for sale in order to obtain in exchange the sums of money which the peasants needed for their consumption, both productive and unproductive. The peasants' production was therefore dominated by the requirements of the reproduction of conditions of production that were realized through circulation.

As far as that part of the peasantry was concerned which formed the village petty bourgeoisie, and also as regards the rural bourgeoisie, the domination of production by market conditions was very thorough. Thus, the decline in production that took place in 1917-1922 was partly due to the depreciation of the rouble and to the lack of industrial goods obtainable in exchange for agricultural produce: this situation blocked the social conditions for agricultural production and contributed to its decline. The first years of the NEP showed to what an extent Russian agriculture could be affected by price and market conditions.

That the middle section of the peasantry belonged to the petty bourgeoisie was due to its place in the relations of production. In the absence of ideological and political activity by the Bolshevik Party which could have made it possible to transform the social practices of this part of the petty bourgeoisie, its practices also remained petty bourgeois, at both the economic and the political levels.

Thus, at the economic level, the sharp fall in the amount of produce provided by agriculture was due only in part to a worsening of the material conditions of production. In fact, the material means for maintaining a relatively high level of production existed almost everywhere. If the amount produced fell dramatically between 1917 and 1921, this was because the mass of the peasants who could have been producing to supply the towns, the factories, and the front had reduced their

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production to more or less the level required for their own subsistence, and had done this because they could get nothing, or almost nothing, in exchange for what they might have supplied. In this matter, what was decisive was the petty bourgeois practice of "giving nothing for nothing." For the moment, the towns could give nothing, and so they were (voluntarily) given nothing, or almost nothing. The petty bourgeois practice of exchange thus took precedence over solidarity with the soldiers (the workers and peasants at the front), with the town workers (the brothers and cousins of the peasants in the villages), or even with the peasants in those regions where the harvest had failed.

In noting this fact, we are not, of course, drawing up some sort of "indictment" of the Russian peasants of that time, but noting a class practice, and the Bolshevik Party's inability at that time to transform it (whereas the subsequent experience of the Chinese Revolution has shown that it can be done).

At the political level, the peasant revolts of the winter of 1920-1921, and the Kronstadt rising

which was a continuation of this movement, testify to the petty bourgeois class nature of the support given by the peasantry to the state of the proletarian dictatorship. This support was unstable insofar as it emanated from the middle peasants, who formed the bulk of the peasantry and influenced a section of the poor peasants. The middle peasants supported the Soviet power as long as it was helping them get rid of the landlords and seize a certain amount of land, but their support faltered once the war was over and the Soviet power did not allow them then to develop their commercial activities as they wished. This was the vacillating support of a petty bourgeoisie that wanted to dispose "freely" of "its own" products and carry on trade in them -- a type of support symbolized in the formula used by the Russian peasants: "Up with the Bolsheviks (who helped to overthrow tsardom and get rid of the landlords); down with the Communists." In order to understand what the NEP meant for the Russian peasantry at the beginning of the 1920s, one needs to recognize the class character of the peasantry's practice, both

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economic and political, and to appreciate that the Bolshevik Party was not in a position to transform this practice.

This incapacity of the party was due to many reasons. Some were connected with its own history: its weak roots in the countryside, its too rigid conception of the relations between class situation and class practice (as a result of which the leading role of the Bolshevik Party was predominantly political rather than ideological), etc. The other reasons were connected with the actual situation in Russia -- the types of social differentiation existing in the Russian countryside, the influence of the petty bourgeois ideas of the SR party, and the effects of the functioning of the *mir*, even in its renovated form.

The *rural bourgeoisie*. If we confine our attention to changes in the division of cultivable land, we arrive at false conclusions regarding the changes undergone by class relations in the countryside. These conclusions would be especially misleading as regards the rich peasants, whose share of the cultivable land was reduced between 1917 and 1922. To form a judgment of the economic position of the rural bourgeoisie, we need above all to take into account the division of the means of production other than land. Unfortunately, overall figures on this subject are not available. The fragmentary information we have suggests that the inequality in the division of these means of production was reduced a little, but that it persisted and continued to be one of the vital material foundations for the relations of exploitation that were reproduced at village level, that is, for the differentiation of the peasantry into poor, middle, and rich peasants, with the rich peasants constituting the nucleus of a rural bourgeoisie.

It is first of all necessary to dispose of the idea that only the division of the land mattered, as the peasants "could produce for themselves" the other means of production, since these were "so simple." That is a plainly unrealistic notion. While a swing-plow could sometimes be made by an individual for personal use, this was not the case with a wheeled plow or a scythe, and even less so with a cart; as for draft animals, these

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had to be bought, since they were not redistributed, and that called for large sums of money -- for most poor and middle peasant households, the death of their one draft animal was an economic catastrophe which plunged them into the lowest social category.

The means of production owned by the poor peasants were, in fact, very inadequate. Thus, in Northwest Russia, a region for which some usable figures exist, 29 percent of the holdings belonging to the *mir* had no tools at all, and there were only 35 draft animals for 100 holdings. For the RSFSR as a whole, the number of swing-plows per 100 desyatins sown was only 9.6 in

1920, and the number of wheeled plows only 11.2 (it was no more than 9.6 in 1923).

The unequal availability of equipment had, moreover, a decisive influence on yield per desyatin. In one and the same region, the yield from well-equipped holdings was often more than 60 percent greater than that from holdings with average equipment.^[59]

However, the problem of the differentiation among the peasantry is not to be reduced to a problem of "inequality": it was a problem of class differentiation. At one of the poles of village society were the agricultural semiproletariat and the poor peasants exploited by the rich peasants (and sometimes by the better-off middle peasants) from whom they had to hire horses, plows, and other instruments of agricultural production. At the opposite pole was the rural bourgeoisie, the kulaks, who exploited the semiproletarians, the poor peasants, and some of the middle peasants.

There are no figures for this exploitation, but it is known to have been severe (thus, it was said that a poor peasant had to hand over one-third of his crop to the owner of the horse he had borrowed in order to till his land). We know, too, that under Soviet rule this exploitation often assumed concealed forms so as to avoid state intervention: but, in any case, it was real and heavy exploitation.

What was present here was capitalist parasitism combined with a slow development of capitalism in agriculture. The kulak got more income from hiring out his tools of labor and

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speculating in grain than he got from improving his own farming. The observations that Marx and Engels had already made in the second half of the nineteenth century were basically still valid in 1920-1922^[60]

The rural bourgeoisie had a considerable economic and political impact. Through the *mir*, it tended to dominate the village and manipulate the mass of the peasants who were, in part, economically dependent upon it. This was all the more the case in that the Soviet administration was far away, located in the chief town of the district, and was even itself, in some places, much under the influence of the kulaks.

The resulting polarization of the village turned the middle peasants a petty bourgeoisie striving to become rich and struggling to save itself from falling into the ranks of the semiproletariat and the poor peasants. This petty bourgeoisie was thus also driven to exploit, so far as it could, the poorer strata of the peasantry.

It was on the basis of these social relations, these class relations and these class practices, that the state apparatus underwent transformations which we must now examine.

Notes

1. *CW*, vol. 26, p. 260. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's [Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies](#). -- DJR] [p. 211]
2. The SRs were also in favor of nationalization of the land, which Lenin considered, before the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, as being merely the "last word" of the bourgeois revolution. [p. 211]
3. *CW*, vol. 26, pp. 260-261. [p. 211]
4. The zemstvo was a local or provincial system of administration in the old

Russia. Each *zemstvo* was headed by an assembly elected by the nobility and property-owning classes. The agricultural and agrarian statistics of the old Russia were compiled by the *zemstvo* officials. [p. 212]

5. *CW*, vol. 1, pp. 11-125. [p. 213]
6. It is usually estimated that at the beginning of the century the land controlled by these village communities amounted to about half of all the land under cultivation, the rest consisting of the

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estates of the landlords, the land held by peasants who had left the *mir*, "settlement" lands (mainly in the regions which had been conquered by tsarist Russia in the previous hundred years), and estates belonging to the state, the crown, and religious institutions. [p. 213]

7. See Marx and Engels, *The Russian Menace to Europe*, p. 221. [p. 214]
8. Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, pp. 100-101. The principal writings of Marx and Engels on Russia consist, first, of two articles by Engels in the *Volksstaat* of April 16 and 21, 1875, the content of which Marx had approved, and which, with some others, were published as a pamphlet under the title *Soziales in Russland*, preceded by a long foreword. This collection was reissued in Russian in Geneva in 1894, under the title *Friedrich Engels o Rossii*, with an afterword by Engels and a preface by Plekhanov. Then, secondly, there is Marx's correspondence with Vera Zasulich, in which the chief item is a letter of March 1881 of which three drafts have survived, the last of these being practically identical with the letter that was eventually dispatched. Not long afterward, Marx wrote some unpublished notes which are known as his "Notes on the reform of 1861 and the development connected with this in Russia."

Engels's writings of 1875 are in Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol. 18, pp. 556-567 and 584-586, and vol. 22, pp. 421-435. Marx's writings mentioned are in *ibid.*, vol. 19, pp. 384-406 and 407-424. (For English versions of some of these, see Marx and Engels, *The Russian Menace to Europe*, Chapters 17-21.) [p. 214]
9. Marx and Engels, *The Russian Menace to Europe*, p. 226. [p. 214]
10. Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 2, p. 407. [p. 215]
11. *CW*, vol. 8, p. 86. [p. 215]
12. Shanin, *The Awkward Class*, p. 64. [p. 215]
13. Chayanov, *The Theory of Peasant Economy*, p. 67. These figures were compiled for one *uyezd* (county). A *desyatina* is 2.7 acres. [p. 216]
14. Another part of the land was kept back as a "state land fund," to serve as the basis for "Soviet" or "state" farms. [p. 219]
15. Anfimov, *Rossiiskaya derevnya*, p. 91. [p. 219]
16. It has been estimated that, on the eve of October, in 47 provinces of European Russia, 10 percent of peasant households had left the *mir*, though in some regions this percentage was as much as 20-30 percent. See Narkiewicz, *The Making of the Soviet State Apparatus*, p. 118. [p. 219]
17. Averages mean little in this context, as the amount of land recov-

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ered varied enormously from one region to another. These variations were due to the relative size of the holdings that were detached from the *mir* before the revolution, and also -- though to a rather slight degree, since the party's influence in the rural areas was itself slight -- to the role that the Bolshevik Party was able to play. It seems that in the regions where "separated" holdings (*otruby* or *khutora*) were comparatively numerous they were less affected than elsewhere, since the section of the peasantry which had broken away from the *mir* constituted a real social force in those regions. Thus, in Petrograd province, where such holdings, a good many of which were actual capitalist farms, made up 28.7 percent of all holdings in 1916, they were still 22.7 percent in 1922. See Sharapov, *Razreshenie*. [p.

- [219](#)]
18. For European Russia as a whole, the land at the disposal of the peasants increased by about 50 percent. See Volin, *A Century of Russian Agriculture*, p. 133. [p. [219](#)]
 19. See Narkiewicz, *The Making of the Soviet State Apparatus*, p. 27. [p. [220](#)]
 20. On this point see Dobb, *Soviet Economic Development*, pp. 104-105, and Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, pp. 59-60. [p. [221](#)]
 21. CW, vol. 28, pp. 174-175. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Speech at a Meeting of Delegates from the Poor Peasants' Committees of the Central Gubernias](#)". -- DJR] [p. [222](#)]
 22. Ibid., pp. 227 ff.; quotation on pp. 303-304. [p. [222](#)]
 23. Ibid., pp. 338 ff.; quotation on p. 341. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Speech to the First All-Russia Congress of Land Departments, Poor Peasants' Committees and Communes](#)". -- DJR] [p. [222](#)]
 24. Ibid., pp. 343, 344. [p. [222](#)]
 25. He touches on this subject in his speech to the Sixth Congress of Soviets (ibid., p. 142 [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's [Extraordinary Sixth All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers', Peasants' Cossacks' and Red Army Deputies](#). -- DJR]), and in his speech to the poor peasants' committee delegates (see ibid., p. 175). [p. [223](#)]
 26. See his speech to the First Congress of Land Departments, in CW, vol. 28, p. 340. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Speech to the First All-Russia Congress of Land Departments, Poor Peasants' Committees and Communes](#)". -- DJR] [p. [223](#)]
 27. Opening speech at the Eighth Congress, in CW, vol. 29, pp. 143-145. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's [Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.\(B.\)](#). -- DJR] [p. [224](#)]
 28. Ibid., pp. 144-145. [p. [225](#)]
 29. Ibid., p. 159. [p. [225](#)]
 30. Ibid., p. 44. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Session of the First Congress of Farm Laborers of Petrograd Gubernia](#)". -- DJR] [p. [226](#)]
 31. Ibid., pp. 43-44. [p. [226](#)]
 32. Ibid., p. 210. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's [Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.\(B.\)](#). -- DJR] [p. [227](#)]
 33. Ibid., pp. 210-211. The "communes" mentioned here were not the traditional village community (*mir*) but agricultural communes in which the peasants came together to carry out *collective labor*. [p. [227](#)]
 34. Ibid., pp. 217-220. [p. [227](#)]
 35. CW, vol. 30, pp. 107 ff. [p. [228](#)]
 36. Ibid., p. 108. [p. [228](#)]
 37. On these agricultural communes formed by town workers, see Sharapov. [p. [229](#)]
 38. The figures given here are taken from Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 160, and Narkiewicz, *The Making of the Soviet State Apparatus*, pp. 42-43. [p. [229](#)]
 39. *Izvestiya*, June 10, 1920. [p. [230](#)]
 40. Quoted in Narkiewicz, *The Making of the Soviet State Apparatus*, p. 43. [p. [230](#)]
 41. CW, vol. 30, pp. 143 ff.; quotation on p. 146. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Speech Delivered at the First All-Russia Conference on Party Work in the Countryside](#)". -- DJR] [p. [231](#)]
 42. Ibid., p. 146. [p. [231](#)]
 43. I shall show later on how, during the summer of 1920, the illusion arose that it would be possible to increase agricultural production by forcible means and that such means would even enable socialism to be built. [p. [232](#)]
 44. vol. 31, p. 335. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Concluding Remarks at a Conference of Chairmen of Uyezd, Volost, and Village Executive](#)

- [Committees of Moscow Gubernia](#)". -- DJR] [p. 232]
45. Statement made to the Tenth Party Congress, quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 173, n. 2. [p. 232]
 46. The figure for grain production in the period 1909-1913 is taken from *Narodnoye Kh.SSSR v 1958*, p. 70, and that for 1920 is calculated from Krzhizhanovsky, *Desyat'*, pp. 124-125. The total for prewar consumption by the peasants is given according to current estimates, while that of 1920-1921 is quoted in Grosskopf, *Le Problème des Céréales*, p. 122. Though not strictly comparable, being based on unreliable statistical foundations and tending to overestimate the decline in production and consumption, these figures give some idea of the magnitude of the fall in both. [p. 233]
 47. CW, vol. 32, p. 175. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's [Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.\(B.\)](#). -- DJR] [p. 234]
 48. Ibid., p. 178. [p. 234]
 49. Ibid., pp. 215 and 217. [p. 234]
 50. By "concessions" was meant opportunities accorded to foreign capital, under very strict controls, to invest in certain industries especially factory production, to bring into Russia the equipment the country lacked, and to transfer abroad the profits made. [p. 235]
 51. Carr and Davies, *Foundations of a Planned Economy*, vol. 1, p. 121, n. 2. [p. 236]
 52. Quoted in Carr, *Foundations of a Planned Economy*, vol. 2, p. 248, n. 7. [p. 236]

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53. See Ustinov, "K voprosu o formakh zemlepolzovaniya," pp. 143-149. [p. 237]
54. Figure given by Grosskopf, *Le Problème des céréales*, p. 55. [p. 237]
55. The decline in overall agricultural production has been officially estimated at 40 percent, as compared with the figure for 1913 (see *Narodnoye Kh.SSSR v 1958*, p. 52) and even more so far as grain was concerned. The view is often expressed that a quarter of what was actually produced was concealed, so that the real decline in production was only 20 percent; but this seems an optimistic estimate. [p. 238]
56. Quoted in Grosskopf, "Appropriation," p. 515. (Percentages given to the nearest decimal.) [p. 238]
57. See Grosskopf, *Le Problème des céréales*, p. 87. [p. 239]
58. Cf. the estimates of Kondrat'ev and Oganovsky, quoted in Grosskopf, *Cahiers*, p. 516. [p. 240]
59. On these points, see Kondrat'ev and Oganovsky, especially pp. 60-61 and 123. [p. 244]
60. It was with reference to Russia's rich peasants, the kulaks, that Engels used the expression "capitalist parasitism" in his 1875 article on social conditions in Russia (Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 2, p. 390). [p. 245]

From Marx to Mao	Other Documents	Reading Guide	On to Section 3, Bettelheim's Text
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