

**Charles
Bettelheim**

**Class
Struggles
in the
USSR**



First Period: 1917-1923

[Section 3 -- Part 3]

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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 3

The transformation of the principal instruments of the proletarian dictatorship

Analysis of the transformations undergone between 1917 and 1922 in the principal instruments of power enables us to grasp some of the political changes that began at that time (changes which were often emphasized by Lenin), and which later on gave rise to increasingly negative consequences for the proletariat. It also enables us to see that these transformations were the result of an objective social process, the outcome of a class struggle, and not the "product" of the theoretical or organizational conceptions of the Bolshevik Party. Although some of these conceptions, through their partial "inadequacy," did fail to enable the effects of the transformations that were going on to be foreseen, or their consequences to be prevented, one should not confuse a partial failure to control an objective social process with its driving force.

To get to the root of the matter, let it be recalled that political relations are never "decreed": in the last analysis they are always the form assumed by fundamental social relations at the level of production. As Marx wrote in the introduction to his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, "each mode of production produces its specific legal relations, political forms, etc."^[1] This determination of political forms by modes of production enables us to understand how it was that the limited extent to which changes were effected at the level of production relations (particularly in the division of labor in the factories, the division of labor between town and country, and class divisions in the rural areas), tended *in the final analysis* to offset the achievements of the October Revolution. Viewed over a period of several decades, this determining relation also explains why, in the absence of a renewed revo-

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lutionary offensive attacking production relations in depth, and of a political line permitting such an offensive to develop successfully, the dictatorship of the proletariat itself has ended by

being annihilated, and why we are seeing in the Russia of today, under new conditions, a resurgence of internal political relations and of political relations with the rest of the world which look like a "reproduction" of bourgeois political relations, and even of those of the tsarist period.

The determination of the political level by the economic level -- the relation which Lenin summed up admirably in his well-known formula: "Politics is concentrated economics" -- is obviously a relation of determination in the final analysis, and not a "relation of expression," such as would make political relations a mere "expression," "another face" of economic relations. The political level is *relatively independent* of the economic level.

This relative independence explains how the revolutionary struggle could bring down the political power of the bourgeoisie and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, as happened in October 1917, without production relations and property relations having been previously or simultaneously revolutionized -- this revolutionization becoming possible only after the bourgeoisie had been deprived of power and the proletariat had become the ruling class.

The need for "uninterrupted revolution" for the revolutionary struggle to be continued under the dictatorship of the proletariat, is due precisely to the fact that without such a struggle the fundamental economic relations cannot be transformed in depth. And as long as they have not been radically transformed -- destroyed and rebuilt -- and insofar as they contain elements of capitalist relations, the prevailing social relations provide an objective basis for bourgeois social practices which tend to ensure the reproduction of the former political relations, to weaken the dictatorship of the proletariat and, eventually, by consolidating the positions from which the bourgeoisie can carry on its class struggle, to reestablish all the conditions for the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, as well as this dictatorship itself.

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One of the issues in the class struggle under the dictatorship of the proletariat is the development of proletarian social practices. It is this development alone that makes it possible to transform social relations as a whole in a revolutionary way. Without it, bourgeois social practices are reproduced, and ensure, at every level of the social formation, conditions favorable to the bourgeois class struggle, to the consolidation and reestablishment of bourgeois social relations.

Historical experience shows that one of the vital and irreplaceable tasks of a revolutionary party is to assist the advance of proletarian practices. To this end the party must constantly pay attention to the ripening of class contradictions, taking account of all aspects of these contradictions. The Bolshevik Party coped very unevenly with this task, and thereby allowed bourgeois social practices to be reproduced, and consolidation to proceed in the capitalist social relations to which the October Revolution had administered no more than an initial shakeup, mainly at the political and juridical levels. The process of consolidation of these relations showed itself first in a process of transformation of the principal instruments of the proletarian dictatorship. I shall now analyze the main aspects of this process, the significance and effects of which were, and could not but be, appreciated only partially by the Bolshevik Party, the first revolutionary party to have to cope with the unprecedented historical task of guiding the construction of socialist social relations.

Note

1. Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 193. Marx expresses the same idea in *Capital*, vol. III, p. 772.

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1. The transformation of the central organs of power and the administrative machinery of state

The Soviet power evolved very quickly toward a system of political relations profoundly different from that which Lenin had outlined in [*The State and Revolution*](#). According to Engels's expression, taken over by Lenin, the characteristics of this system should have made the Soviet power something that was "no longer a state in the proper sense of the word."^[1] This power should have been based fundamentally upon the local soviets, with the central organs of state serving mainly the purpose of centralization. In practice, relations of this sort, partly "non-state" in nature, which did appear in embryonic form in the Soviet system, failed to become consolidated. Concentration of power in the central organs of state occurred instead of mere centralization. The role of the local soviets either failed to materialize or else tended to diminish, as did that of the congress of soviets. This tendency continued and was accelerated under "war communism." It gave rise to an ever more pronounced trend toward the administrative machinery of state acquiring independence. This machinery was not really subjected to control by the masses and it even tended to escape from the effective authority of the Bolshevik Party.

I. The transformation of relations between the central governmental organs

According to the Bolshevik Party's original plans, central state power was to be held by a congress of soviets, which

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would meet every three months. In the intervals, central state power was to be exercised by the All-Russia Executive Committee of the Soviets, or CEC (VTsIK, in the Russian abbreviation), elected by the congress. Actually, after 1918, although no formal change was at first made in the rules, the congress of soviets met only once a year. In 1921 the Ninth Congress of Soviets formally resolved that subsequent congresses should be annual only, and this not merely in the case of the All-Russia Congress but also where the district congresses of soviets were concerned.

Not only did the congresses of soviets meet less frequently, but their authority was reduced. After July 1918 the chairmen of the VTsIK and the Sovnarkom no longer presented reports to

the congress on the activities of the organs over which they presided: previously, these reports had to be discussed and ratified by the congress.

The VTsIK itself, derived directly from the All-Russia Congress of Soviets, became less active, even while the number of its members increased, reaching 300 in 1920.^[2] Originally the VTsIK was to have remained in permanent session, but in practice its meetings were held at long intervals and became more and more infrequent. In 1921 it met only three times.

In December 1919 such power as the VTsIK retained was virtually transferred to its chairman, whose role was soon reduced to that of a formal and honorific "head of state."^[3]

During "war communism," the state organ which actually played the dominant role was not the one that emanated from the All-Russia Congress of Soviets, but the Council of People's Commissars, which Lenin headed until his death. From the formal standpoint, important decisions were taken, indifferently, in the name of the Sovnarkom, of the Central Committee of the party, or jointly by one of these organs and the VTsIK. As will be seen, there was also a considerable gap between the formal concentration of power in certain central organs and the actual exercise of this power, which tended to shift toward the administrative organs, though these were in theory subordinate. On more than one occasion Lenin noted that this was the real state of affairs, which he tried to alter.

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II. The process of eliminating the bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties and their press

The Bolshevik Party had no preconceived "program" regarding the place to be occupied in the system of the proletarian dictatorship by the democratic and bourgeois parties and press. Before the October Revolution, however, a clear distinction was made between the parties and publications which directly expressed the interests of the bourgeoisie (such as the Constitutional Democratic Party, or Cadets), against which repressive measures would have to be taken, and the democratic parties and press which voiced the aspirations of the petty bourgeoisie. With regard to the latter, the Bolshevik Party considered that the principal aspect of the struggle to wrest the masses from their influence was constituted by ideological class struggle, which implied confronting these parties in the soviets and allowing them to have their own newspapers. This attitude, of course, did not mean that these parties or publications would be allowed to carry on counter-revolutionary activity with impunity.

In fact, in the period immediately following October, the Bolshevik Party in power allowed the democratic parties to pursue their activities: the party even negotiated with a view to their possible participation in the government, and it exercised only limited repression against the bourgeois press and parties.

(a) The Cadet party and its press

The Cadet party was not at once suppressed after the October Revolution. Only at the end of November 1917, when this party was openly supporting Kaledin's preparations for a counter-revolutionary revolt, was it declared a "party of enemies of the people" and banned by a decree of the Sovnarkom.^[4] Cadet deputies, together with deputies belonging to other bourgeois parties, were nevertheless elected to the Constituent Assembly and took part in its brief meeting.

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As regards the bourgeois press, the Soviet government showed itself at first more tolerant in its practice than in its declarations. In principle, the bourgeois press was to have been closed down. As Lenin recalled in his speech on the press on November 4, 1917: "Earlier on we said that if we took power, we intended to close down the bourgeois newspapers. To tolerate the existence of these papers is to cease being a socialist . . . We cannot provide the bourgeoisie with an opportunity for slandering us." However, he went on, "we are not bureaucrats and do not want to insist on the letter of the law everywhere . . ." [5] Its application would depend on local conditions, which meant that the Soviet power was not at that stage disposed to follow a policy of crude suppression.

In practice, during the winter of 1917-1918 and the spring of 1918, the Soviet power refrained from banning all the bourgeois papers. Thus, when the Cadet party had been dissolved, its newspaper, *Svoboda Rossii*, continued to appear, and was circulating even during the summer of 1918, in the midst of the civil war. [6] It disappeared only later, when the military conflict became so acute that publication of a paper which represented the views of the enemy could no longer be tolerated.

The Cadets were to reappear officially for the last time when an All-Russia Committee for Aid to Famine Victims was set up by a decree of July 21, 1921; this committee was to take part in obtaining international relief for the famine-stricken regions of Russia. The Soviet government then nominated several well-known Cadets to serve on this committee, where they sat alongside Mensheviks, SRs, and, of course, Bolsheviks (one of whom acted as chairman). It soon became obvious that the bourgeois members of this organization were trying to negotiate directly with foreign representatives, in an endeavor to establish themselves as a "countergovernment." The committee was thereupon dissolved by a decree of August 27, 1921, and its principal bourgeois members were arrested. [7] The Cadets then vanished from the political scene. In 1922, that is, early in the NEP period, the last bourgeois publications, including the "liberal" economic periodical, *Ekonomist*, ceased to appear. [8] These facts show that it was

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essentially in response to changing political situations, to the critical conjuncture of the war years and the grave difficulties that followed them, that the Bolshevik Party in power gradually suppressed all the activities of the bourgeois organizations and publications, since these activities were not confined to ideological struggle but constantly tended toward open counter-revolution. A parallel process went on with regard to the "democratic" parties and press, but this process was more complex and developed more slowly.

(b) *The initial negotiations with the "democratic" parties*

Although the October insurrection was directed not only against the bourgeoisie but also against the policy of support to Kerensky's Provisional Government, which was being followed by the "democratic" parties, the Bolshevik Party did not at first treat the latter as counter-revolutionary parties. Not only did it not ban them; but it tried to get them to participate in the new government. When the Mensheviks and SRs decided to leave the Congress of Soviets, Lenin said on October 29, 1917, at a meeting of regimental delegates of the Petrograd garrison: "It is not our fault that the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks have gone. They were invited to share political power, but they want to sit on the fence until the fight against Kerensky is over." And he added: "Here everyone knows that the

S.R.s and the Mensheviks went because they were left in a minority. The men of the Petrograd garrison are aware of this. They know that we wanted a coalition Soviet government."^[9]

In fact, during the night of October 25-26, the Mensheviks and SRs had refused to recognize that power was now held by the soviets and had decided to leave the congress thus siding with the counter-revolution. Nevertheless, on October 29 the central committee, in the absence of Lenin, Stalin, and Trotsky, agreed to discuss with these parties^[10] the forming of a coalition government.^[11] But the "democratic" parties showed open hostility to the Soviet power. They demanded that the VTsIK include a large number of bourgeois representatives

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(members of the municipal councils of Petrograd and Moscow), and that Lenin and Trotsky be excluded from any coalition government. On November 1 Lenin, while agreeing that these negotiations could "serve as diplomatic cover for military preparations," said that the time had now come to break them off: it was henceforth a question of standing "either with the agents of Kaledin or with the rank-and-file."^[12] He moved a resolution to this effect, but the Central Committee rejected it by ten to four.^[13] The next day Lenin declared that those in favor of continued negotiation with parties refusing to recognize the power that had emerged from the October Revolution and the congress of soviets had "departed completely from all the fundamental positions of Bolshevism and of the proletarian class struggle in general."

The resolution he put before the Central Committee declared: "To yield to the ultimatums and threats of the minority of the Soviets would be tantamount to complete renunciation not only of Soviet power but of democracy, for such yielding would be tantamount to the majority's fear to make use of its majority, it would be tantamount to submitting to anarchy and inviting the repetition of ultimatums on the part of any minority."^[14]

This resolution was adopted by only eight to seven, after three votes had been taken. As a result of the final vote, the minority withdrew from the Central Committee^[15] and several people's commissars resigned from the government. But the minority's attempt to continue talks with the Mensheviks and SRs came to grief on the anti-Sovietism of these parties, which, after having demanded that the Bolshevik Party practically renounce leadership of the government, ended by deciding to put an end to the negotiations.^[16] The breakaway minority then returned to the Central Committee.

It must be emphasized that in its resolution of November 2, the Central Committee did not rule that the parties which had withdrawn from the congress of soviets must be excluded from it. Indeed, the resolution, moved by Lenin, said: "The Central Committee affirms that, not having excluded anybody from the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets, it is even now fully prepared to permit the return of those who walked out and to

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agree to a coalition within the Soviets with those who walked out, and that, consequently, all talk about the Bolsheviks refusing to share power with anybody else is absolutely false."^[17]

After the breakdown of the talks with the Menshevik and SR parties, the Bolsheviks, Lenin included, still continued to try and negotiate with the Left SRs, who had not walked out of the congress. When the Soviet government was formed they had been asked to participate, but had refused.^[18] After the resignation of the people's commissars who supported the line of the minority in the CC, fresh approaches were made to the Left SRs. Following protracted negotiations, agreement was reached on December 12, 1917 and a coalition government formed, made up of eleven Bolsheviks and seven Left SRs. A Left SR became deputy-

chairman of the Cheka. This coalition government lasted until the end of February 1918, when the agreement between the two parties failed owing to the opposition of the Left SRs to the peace negotiations with Germany. Nevertheless, for a time even after the resignation of the Left SR people's commissars, relations continued to be quite good with this party, which was still represented in the commissions of the VTsIK, in some departments of the people's commissariats, and even in the Cheka. When the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk was actually signed, however, and the civil war began, relations with the Left SRs definitely deteriorated.

The Bolshevik Party thus decided how to act toward the "democratic" parties in response to the policy actually being followed by the latter -- their hostility to, or acceptance of, the Soviet power. Provided the activity of these parties was not dangerously counter-revolutionary, it was not hindered. Depending on the intensity of the contradictions, and in particular on the military situation during the civil war, broader or narrower opportunities for activity were allowed to these parties: they were not treated in a uniform way, since what mattered was their actual attitude to the Soviet power.

(c) The policy of the Socialist Revolutionary Party

The "democratic" party most immediately and openly hostile to the Soviet power was the Socialist Revolutionary Party

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(from which the Left SRs had broken away, as will be seen). At the time of the October Revolution, the social base of this party was constituted by the rural intelligentsia -- the staffs of the *zemstvos* and cooperative societies, the schoolteachers, and the officials of the villages and country districts. Between February and October 1917, this party drew closer and closer to the Cadets, and it opposed the Soviet power and the dividing up of the land by the peasants. Before they were nationalized, the Russian banks helped the party financially, and it also received funds from American businessmen. As early as October 26, 1917, it decided to launch armed action against the Soviet power, and for this purpose entered into negotiation with Cossack regiments and army cadets. After the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, it resorted to individual terror and committed several assassinations. During the civil war, the SR party openly supported the counter-revolution, participating in several anti-Bolshevik "governments."^[19]

Despite these counter-revolutionary activities, the SR party was not dissolved by the Soviet government. Until the civil war began, it took part in the work of the soviets (for it had withdrawn only from the congress of soviets) and its papers continued to appear, although these were increasingly subjected to censorship (which had been established in March 1918). When the civil war got under way, however, the SRs were expelled from the soviets on grounds of their "association with notorious counter-revolutionaries,"^[20] but their party was not formally dissolved, and at certain periods its activity was more or less tolerated.

This tolerance was not fruitless. Thus, in February 1919 the SRs of Petrograd denounced the counter-revolutionary movement and foreign intervention. By a decision of the VTsIK dated February 25, 1919,^[21] SRs who took this position were readmitted to the Soviet organs. Thereafter, it was possible for some SR meetings to be held, and at the end of 1920 SR delegates even participated, though without the right to vote, in the Thirteenth Congress of Soviets.

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(d) The Left SRs

The Left SRs were during a certain period dealt with rather differently. They had broken away from the SR party during the war, and had a different social base, with considerable influence among the middle peasants. In October 1917 they continued to take part in the congress of soviets, and soon afterward formed a distinct party, their constituent congress being held in November.^[22] Although this party then entered the Soviet government and the VTsIK, a break between it and the Bolsheviks became inevitable early in 1918, first of all because of the signing of the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk, to which the Left SRs were totally opposed. In the summer of 1918 they denounced the decision to set up the poor peasants' committees and send workers' detachments into the countryside, and in July they broke with the Soviet power in startling fashion.

This open break took place at the Fifth Congress of Soviets, where the 1,132 delegates included 754 Bolsheviks and 352 Left SRs. The Left SR representatives used the congress platform to call for revolt. One of them congratulated some military units which had mutinied. A Left SR leader, Maria Spiridonova, declared: "Some of the differences between us are only accidental, but on the peasant question we are ready for battle." She announced that the Left SRs would go over to terrorist action and that she herself would confront the Bolsheviks with revolver or bomb in hand. The chairman then stopped her from continuing her speech. The next day, men inspired by the Left SR movement murdered the German ambassador, hoping to cause a resumption of hostilities, and the party launched an armed insurrection in Moscow. There after, the Left SRs were regarded as being in the camp of counter-revolution. Actually, their party split. Those who associated themselves with counter-revolutionary activities were expelled from the soviets and arrested when they took part in uprisings. The activity of those Left SRs who held aloof from terrorism was not prohibited, and repression was di-

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rected against them only in a limited way. If they decided to continue working in the soviets, they were not expelled from them.^[23] Clearly, the Bolshevik Party was taking account of the Left SRs' social base, and wished to avoid a definitive break with them. This hope was not realized, though, for an increasing number of Left SRs engaged in counter-revolutionary activity, while others fell victim to the sectarianism of some of the Bolsheviks.

(e) The anarchists

The relations of the Soviet power and the Bolshevik Party with the anarchists also testified to the former's willingness to cooperate with those who were not engaged in counter-revolutionary activity. These relations were, however, rendered confused by the extreme variety of tendencies that existed among the anarchists, some of whom gave occasional support to the Soviet regime while others were violently hostile to it. Cooperation with the anarchists was also made difficult by the presence among them of declassed and adventuristic elements. In any case, until April 1918 the anarchists functioned without restraint, especially in the two capitals. In that month, a police operation was carried out against one of the anarchist offices in Moscow, as counter-revolutionary officers had infiltrated among them. In July 1918 some anarchists took part in the attempted revolt by the Left SRs, and in September 1919 an anarchist group attacked the Bolshevik Party offices in Moscow, killing twelve people and wounding more than fifty.^[24]

Between 1918 and 1920 Lenin strove to maintain good relations, in spite of everything, with the anarchist tendencies which were linked with certain sections of the proletariat. In August

1919, in a letter to Sylvia Pankhurst, he stated that "very many anarchist workers are now becoming sincere supporters of Soviet power," adding that these were "our best comrades and friends, the best of revolutionaries, who have been enemies of Marxism only through misunderstanding, or, more correctly . . . because the official socialism prevailing in

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the epoch of the Second International (1889-1914) betrayed Marxism . . ."[25] In July 1920, in his theses on the tasks of the Second Congress of the Communist International, Lenin wrote that it was "the duty of all Communists to do everything to help all proletarian mass elements to abandon anarchism and come over to the side of the Third International." [26] The policy followed by the Bolshevik Party toward the anarchist elements in the proletariat was aimed at making it possible to carry out ideological struggle against anarchism in good conditions, avoiding measures of repression and helping the workers who were under the influence of anarchist theories to realize that these theories were mistaken and could not lead to the victory of the revolution.[27]

One of the "peasant" tendencies in the anarchist movement, headed by Nestor Makhno, was particularly strong in the Ukraine. For a time Makhno led an army of peasants, and the Bolshevik Party negotiated with him in order to organize joint action against the White armies. This cooperation could not last very long, though, for the Makhnovists were violently anti-Bolshevik: they did not tolerate Communist propaganda in the villages under their control, and exterminated party members who showed up there.[28] In November 1920 the agreements between the Soviet power and Makhno's forces broke down, and the latter were quickly defeated and scattered by the Red Army.

After the end of the civil war the Kronstadt rising caused new clashes with the anarchists, but later they recovered a certain amount of freedom of expression: their organization had an office in Moscow and printed various publications. It was toward the end of the NEP that the last remaining anarchist organizations were broken up.

(f) The Mensheviks

Relations with the Mensheviks were also largely governed by their attitude to the Soviet power. Immediately after the October Revolution, the Mensheviks walked out of the congress of soviets, along with the SRs. However, their party was

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not dissolved, either, and they took part in the work of the soviets until July 1918. After the attempted revolt of the Left SRs, the Mensheviks, too, were excluded from the Soviet organizations on grounds of counter-revolutionary activity. Those Mensheviks who engaged in specific anti-Soviet operations were arrested during the summer of 1918. The functioning of the Menshevik organizations which confined themselves to ideological struggle was not systematically hindered, however, for the Soviet power wished to confine the battle against petty bourgeois ideology to the plane of persuasion and argument and not of repression.

At the end of October 1918, the Mensheviks' central committee met for five days in Moscow and adopted a resolution of support for the Soviet government in defense of the conquests of the revolution. Although the wording of this resolution was confused and contradictory, the Bolshevik Party saw it as a sign that the Menshevik leaders were turning away from their counter-revolutionary attitude; on November 30, 1918, a decree of the VTsIK canceled the earlier decision excluding the Mensheviks from the Soviet organs. This did not

apply, of course to "those groups of Mensheviks who continue to be allied with the Russian and foreign bourgeoisie against the Soviet power."^[29]

Even though relations with the Mensheviks continued to be strained throughout 1919, owing to the ambiguity of their attitude, the Menshevik leaders were invited in December 1919 to attend the Seventh Congress of Soviets. Several of them, such as Dan and Martov, addressed the congress. The former called for "the single revolutionary front," while the latter demanded "a restoration of the working of the constitution, . . . freedom of the press, of association and of assembly."^[30] Lenin, referring to the life-and-death struggle going on between the Soviet power and the world bourgeoisie, replied that Martov's slogan was, in fact "back to bourgeois democracy," and he added that "when we hear such declarations from people who announce their sympathy with us, we say to ourselves: 'No, both terror and the Cheka are absolutely indispensable.'"^[31]

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During 1920 the Menshevik Party carried on its activities in Moscow and in the provinces. It possessed offices, printed several papers and, although all its doings were closely watched, took part in elections to local soviets, winning some hundreds of seats. The Mensheviks held meetings, convened their central committee, organized in August 1920 a conference of their party (which was reported in the Soviet press), and were also very active in the trade unions, in which they worked as an organized group. When the Eighth Congress of Soviets met, Menshevik delegates were invited. These invitations enabled the ideological struggle to be carried on before a huge audience, and also helped to counteract the attitude of the lower organs of the Bolshevik Party and the soviets, which saw fit to prevent the election of Menshevik delegates to any bodies higher than the local soviets.

The Eighth Congress of Soviets was the last in which Menshevik or SR delegates took part. During the winter of 1920-1921, the anti-Bolshevik activity of both parties was an important factor in fostering the conditions for the Kronstadt rising: the Mensheviks used their position in the trade unions to promote extension of the strikes that broke out in Petrograd, while the SRs encouraged the development in certain regions of active peasant resistance to the Soviet power.

*(g) The development of repression of the
"democratic" parties and press*

Just as their counter-revolutionary activity in the second half of 1918 had resulted in the jailing of some Mensheviks and SRs, so their subversive conduct in the winter of 1920-1921 brought repression down upon them and caused the Soviet power to place increasing restrictions on their organizations and press.

In this connection there was a considerable difference between the Bolshevik Party's practice from 1921 onward and the line Lenin had taken even during the civil war. Thus, in November 1918, speaking about the Mensheviks who had shown that they repudiated an anti-Soviet attitude, Lenin

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said: "We must not now turn them away, on the contrary, we must meet them halfway and give them a chance to work with us."^[32] In the same period Lenin warned that "it would be . . . foolish and ridiculous . . . to insist only on tactics of suppression and terror in relation to the petty-bourgeois democrats when the course of events is compelling them to turn in our

direction."^[33]

He also expressed himself in favor, at one and the same time, of banning the bourgeois press (meaning the press that was bourgeois either in its source of funds or in its openly counter-revolutionary character) and of allowing freedom to the "democratic" press, that is, the publications of mass organizations or of parties willing to carry on a political struggle within the Soviet system.

Thus, soon after the October Revolution, a draft resolution composed by Lenin declared that the press which was not dependent on capital would be left free. Dated November 4, 1917, it stated that "for the workers' and peasants' government, freedom of the press means liberation of the press from capitalist oppression, and public ownership of paper mills and printing presses; equal right for public groups of a certain size (say, numbering 10,000) to a fair share of newsprint stocks and a corresponding quantity of printers' labour."^[34]

The project was never put into practice, first, owing to a grave shortage of paper, and then, from 1918 onward, owing to increasingly tense political circumstances, especially as a result of the development of the civil war. In March 1918 censorship was introduced (though it did not at first apply to duplicated sheets and leaflets, as would be the case later on), and starting in July of that year, numerous Menshevik, SR, and anarchist publications were banned. Until 1921, however, it was usually enough for these publications to assume a different title for them to be able to reappear, even when their contents were violently critical of the Bolshevik Party.

It was, in fact, from 1921 on, in the disastrous situation that prevailed in that year, and after the attempt of the committee set up in July 1921 to enter into direct negotiations with the imperialist governments, that repression hardened against the "democratic" parties and press, and became more and more

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systematic. It does not appear, though, that Lenin at that time envisaged the banning of the "democratic" parties, which, in his view, were "inevitably engendered by petty-bourgeois economic relations,"^[35] and it has even been claimed that in 1922 he was contemplating "the revival of some degree of press freedom."^[36]

The actual practice of the Bolshevik Party took a different direction, partly owing to the counter-revolutionary activity of many SRs and Mensheviks. In February 1922 forty-seven SR leaders were charged with anti-Soviet conspiracy, and in June their trial began. It ended with a number of convictions,^[37] and both the SR and Menshevik parties now found their activities increasingly obstructed. Nevertheless, they were not banned. The VTsIK decree of August 8, 1922, which confirmed the sentences passed on the convicted SRs (but suspended execution of these sentences), even gave implicit recognition to the legal existence of their party, since it declared: "If the party of the S.R.s in deed and in practice discontinues its underground conspiratorial terrorist and military espionage activity leading to insurrection against the power of the workers and peasants, it will by doing so release from paying the supreme penalty those of its leading members who in the past led this work . . ."^[38]

All the same, the legal existence of these "democratic" parties was thereafter increasingly a fiction: though not formally dissolved, their activity became practically impossible. Their leaders were often arrested and most of them eventually emigrated. Their press could no longer be produced in Russia, though for some years it continued to be circulated there. Gradually, a certain number of Mensheviks and SRs who did not emigrate joined the Bolshevik Party. In this way Russia soon became, during the first years of the NEP, a "one-

party state."

The original attempt to grant the "democratic" parties a place in the political relations that were being formed under the proletarian dictatorship had thus failed. This failure was due mainly to the illusions entertained by these parties, which thought they could overthrow the proletarian power by means of subversive agitation, and so refused, on their own initiative,

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to fit into the new political relations. This attitude was certainly fostered by the mistakes of the Bolshevik Party, which often preferred to apply methods of repression instead of relying mainly on ideological struggle.

The very great difficulties encountered by the Soviet power at the beginning of the 1920s -- difficulties which created a situation that seemed hopeless -- played a vital role in this connection. They gave rise to the illusion in the petty bourgeois organizations that the dictatorship of the proletariat could be overthrown, an illusion which led them to choose the path of subversion in preference to that of finding a place for themselves in the system of the proletarian dictatorship. These parties were the first to suffer the consequences of their mistake, for they disappeared altogether as a result of the repression that descended upon them: but their disappearance did not have a good influence on the development of the Soviet system, or on the Bolshevik Party. The party did not have to wage the same ideological struggle it would have faced had these parties remained in existence: it was not obliged to reply to their criticisms,^[39] in a way that could only have proved helpful to the development of revolutionary Marxism.

III. The transformation of the role of the soviet organs

A process parallel to that which led to the transformation of the relations between the central organs of government, reducing to a formality the role of the elected assemblies -- that is, the central soviet bodies -- went forward at the level of the soviets of the provinces, districts, and towns, and in the local soviets.

Here, too, effective power shifted from the congresses to the executive committees, and, in fact within the latter, on the one hand, to the Bolshevik Party (in this case, as we shall see, often only formally), and, on the other, to a permanent administrative machine.

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It is important to emphasize how objective this process was, bringing transformations that were not "wished for," but happened of themselves. This process, moreover, had begun before the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus, already in April 1917 it was possible to observe that the Petrograd soviet "had been transformed into a well-organised administrative machine. Several hundred office-workers, mostly secretaries, were actively engaged in its service . . . The executive of the Soviet was obviously escaping from the supervision that the deputies were supposed to exercise over it."^[40]

After the October Revolution this process continued, transforming at all levels, local and provincial, the relations between the administrative machinery and the deputies to the soviets, and consequently, the interest that the masses took in the activities of their representatives. This process led to the inflation of an administrative apparatus which was increasingly in the

hands of the former bourgeoisie (mainly members of the old corps of officials), and which tended to become independent of the proletarian ruling authority.

In 1920 Lenin noted that this was the situation: "Any person in authority who goes to the rural districts, as delegate or representative of the Central Committee, must remember that we have a tremendous machinery of state which is still functioning poorly because we do not know how to run it properly . . . The Soviet government employs hundreds of thousands of office workers who are either bourgeois or semi-bourgeois, or else have been so downtrodden that they have absolutely no confidence in our Soviet government."^[41]

The authority of the local soviets was affected even more profoundly by another development, namely, the increasing concentration of power in the hands of the various central organs of government. This concentration, due at first to the demands of the military struggle and then, more lastingly, to the weakness of the local political cadres, aroused from time to time protests by the "lower" soviet organs, which did not always readily agree to accept subordination to the central authorities.

The process whereby the effective authority of the local

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soviets passed to the central organs of government and, still more, to the central administrative machine, affected adversely the working people's interest in the functioning of the basic soviet organs. As a result, the soviets were not a system of government by the masses, as Lenin recorded when he wrote, in March 1919: "The Soviets, which by virtue of their programme are organs of government by the working people are in fact organs of government for the working people by the advanced section of the proletariat, but not by the working people as a whole."^[42]

A decree of the Sovnarkom in April 1921 sought to increase participation by women workers and peasant women in the executive committees of the soviets. They were to be employed in administrative capacities, either on a temporary basis or permanently. This decree had no effect on the indifference of the masses toward the soviet organs, which no longer played more than a very much reduced role, with effective administration concentrated in the hands of a permanent bureaucratic apparatus over which the soviets exercised, in fact, no real control.

Thus, between 1918 and 1921 a process of withering of the soviet organs went forward. These organs offered less and less opportunity for the working people to express their criticism or to control the corps of officials. The state's administrative machine became more and more independent, more and more separate from the masses and the role played by this machine also made it hard for the Bolshevik Party to control and give political guidance to the state machine.

IV. The state administrative machine becomes independent of the party and the government

At the center, the leading role of the party in relation to the government was shown as early as October 16, 1917, by the conditions in which the Sovnarkom, headed by Lenin, was

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formed, and by the role assumed on that occasion by the Central Committee of the RSDLP (B). This leading role was a matter of principle, but it was not enough for the Bolshevik Party to proclaim it for the party to exercise in reality concrete leadership of the country's affairs. Actually, during the first period of Soviet power a considerable part of the administrative machine was not guided by the party and the government. This was so not only in remote country areas but even in the towns, including the capitals, Petrograd and Moscow.

Jacques Sadoul notes that in early 1918 the Bolshevik cadres, themselves dedicated militants, were surrounded by administrators of bourgeois origin, "careerists and corruptionists who seem to have no other defined ideal than to fill their pockets fast." He added that these people had "developed with brilliance the regime of bribe-taking which was already notorious in tsarist Russia," and that, as a result, corruption was tending to infect certain party circles. Sadoul mentions, in particular, commissions of between 10 and 15 percent, payment of which enabled members of the former bourgeoisie, whose funds were theoretically frozen, to draw from their safe deposits all the valuables or money they wanted.^[43]

Relations between the central organs of government and the state administrative machine changed during "war communism," but remained nevertheless such that a divergence was often to be observed between the orders issuing from the highest level and the actual doings of the administration.

As early as March 1918 an attempt was made to increase the central government's control over the administrative machine. It took the form of establishing the People's Commissariat for Control of the State. This measure had no serious results, and so the Eighth Party Congress decided in March 1919 that "control in the Soviet republic should be radically reorganised in order to create a genuine, practical control of a socialist character." The leading role in exercising this control should be entrusted to party organizations and trade unions.^[44]

As a consequence of this decision a new People's Commis-

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sariat for Control of the State was formed on April 9, 1919, with Stalin as commissar: he held at the same time leading positions in two other organs that had been recently formed -- the Politburo and the Orgburo.

In fact, however, the People's Commissariat for Control of the State did not succeed in changing the situation very much. A decree of February 7, 1920, aimed afresh at improving the control exercised over the administration by transforming the commissariat into a "Workers' and Peasants' Inspection" (RKI, or Rabkrin), also headed by Stalin. This organ was intended to develop a new type of relationship with the masses. The decree provided that "the fight against bureaucratism and corruption in soviet institutions" must henceforth be carried on by workers and peasants elected by the same assemblies which elected deputies to the soviets. The idea was thus, in principle, one of organizing mass control over the state administrative machine. In April 1920 the trade unions were also associated with the work of Rabkrin. Under conditions in which the soviet organs were declining in activity, however, Rabkrin was doomed to remain a bureaucratic organ of which Lenin would say, a few years after its creation: "The People's Commissariat of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection does not at present enjoy the slightest authority. Everybody knows that no other institutions are worse organised than those of our Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, and that under present conditions nothing can be expected from this People's Commissariat."^[45]

V. The development of the Red Army

The October Revolution was accompanied by the collapse of the old feudal-bourgeois military machine of tsardom, which literally disintegrated. The order for demobilizing the entire old army, which was officially promulgated on March 2, 1918, ratified a de facto situation, a tremendous victory of the masses: the breakup of one of the instruments of repression used by the exploiting classes.

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However, largely for the same reasons that governed the general process already analyzed (but also for other reasons to be examined later), the October Revolution did not succeed in building an army that was definitely proletarian in character, characterized by new ideological and political relations which could have been an instrument in the struggle for socialist transformation of social relations and against the subsequent rise of bourgeois forces.

(a) The creation of the Red Army

The Red Army did not result from the merging of squads or detachments of workers and peasants. Armed forces of that character did exist, having emerged directly from the struggles preceding October, and their nucleus was the Red Guards. These forces were too meager, however, for the Soviet power to be able to rely on them alone in facing up to the enormous military effort it had to undertake. The Red Guards and other revolutionary detachments formed only a minority element in the Soviet army. The latter had to be built up quickly, "from above."

The old machinery of the Ministry of War, transformed into the People's Commissariat for War and the Red Army, played a substantial part in this process. Purged of its overtly counter-revolutionary elements and brought under control by the Bolshevik Party, it was entrusted with the task, as Trotsky put it, of "unifying and organising the huge military apparatus inherited from the past, which though disorganised and disordered, is mighty owing to the quantity of values it includes, and adapting this to the army that we now wish to form."^[46]

This quotation shows clearly that the Red Army was largely continuous with "the military apparatus inherited from the past. The "values" that the Red Army conserved were thus, in part, *the rules of discipline, the hierarchical relations*, etc., of the old tsarist army.

The commanders of this army were to some extent revolutionary officers risen from the ranks, but there were also many former tsarist officers. Some of these had "rallied" to the

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Soviet power, for a variety of reasons, while others were incorporated by order of the Soviet state:^[47] all of them were appointed, not elected. The role accorded to the former tsarist officers was due in part to "technical requirements" and, still more, to the decisive importance accorded to the "military skills" which were supposed to be mainly concentrated in the old officer corps. The idea of the "neutrality" of technique was at work here -- an idea frequently expounded by Trotsky.

For example, in his report of March 28, 1918, to the conference of the Bolshevik Party of the City of Moscow, Trotsky said that the "technicians, engineers, doctors, teachers, ex-officers constitute, just like the inanimate machines, national capital^[48] belonging to the people which it is our duty to take stock of, organise and adopt if we are to solve the vital problems

facing us."[\[49\]](#)

This conception was bound up with the idea that there is no strictly proletarian way of fighting and making war. In Trotsky's view, military tactics are determined not by the class nature of the power organizing the military operations, but by the level of development of the productive forces. He therefore declared that it was wrong to suppose "that now, on the basis of our low technical and cultural level, we are already able to create tactics, new in principle and more perfected, than those which the most civilised beasts of prey of the West have attained."[\[50\]](#)

At the same time, Trotsky had a mechanistic notion of the relations between the nature of the ruling class and the army placed under the domination of that class, a notion expressed in the same article: "The composition of the army and the personnel of its command is conditioned by the social structure of society. The administrative supply apparatus depends on the general apparatus [i.e., the machinery of state -- Trans.], which is determined by the nature of the ruling class."[\[51\]](#)

This undialectical way of presenting the problem rules out a priori the possibility of any contradiction developing between the class in power and its own machinery of state -- administrative, military, etc.

The new military apparatus was markedly affected by the

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place given in it to the former tsarist officers, and more especially to the younger generation of the old officer corps, by the role of the old military academies in the training of the new cadres, and by the retention of many principles characteristic of the army that had just been dissolved. Here we see at work a "technicist" conception according to which there is an "institutional form" for an army, dictated by the prevailing techniques. Trotsky gave clear expression to this notion when he said: "We must have an effective armed force, constructed on the basis of military science. The active and systematic participation of military specialists in all our work is, therefore, a vital necessity. We must ensure that the military specialists are able conscientiously and honestly to make their contribution to the work of building the army."[\[52\]](#)

In the absence of real practical military experience before the establishment of the Soviet power, the "technicist" conception of the army and of military tactics, which prevailed widely in the Bolshevik Party, stood in the way of the building of an army of a new type. It favored, on the contrary, the formation and consolidation in the Red Army of hierarchical relations of the feudal-bourgeois type, and this all the more rapidly because, from the spring of 1918 onward, a general process began whereby the machinery of state became increasingly independent.

In Trotsky's case this conception was combined with great distrust of the masses. Speaking of their recent past, he said, for instance, that they were "merely a compact mass that lived and died just as a cloud of grasshoppers lives and dies,"[\[53\]](#) and, speaking of their present, he said that they were possessed by "the most elementary instincts," so that "the mass-man . . . tries to grab for himself all that he can, he thinks only of himself and is not disposed to consider the people's class point of view."[\[54\]](#)

The old hierarchical relations retained by the Red Army (in a more or less modified form) were imposed upon the revolutionary cadres in the army and upon the newly qualified officers emerging from the Soviet military academies. As soon as they were promoted, the young

officers found themselves

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placed at a certain level in these hierarchical relations, they enjoyed material privileges, and they learnt to trust their technical knowledge more than the working masses in arms.

Control of this army by a proletarian state dictatorship obviously presented grave problems. Control of the officers by the soldiers was ruled out by the facts of the situation, especially since recruitment was based on conscription, which resulted in the mass-scale incorporation of peasants who were as yet little influenced by the Bolshevik Party. In these circumstances, the tasks of political control were entrusted to political commissars appointed by the Soviet power. While these commissars were chosen on the basis of their proven devotion to the dictatorship of the proletariat, the officers were appointed above all on the basis of their "technical ability." One of the principal tasks of the political commissars was thus to check that the army was not used by the officers for counter-revolutionary operations: on the other hand, in principle, they refrained from interfering in the way military operations were conceived. The latter -- except on the highest plane of strategy -- were regarded as being essentially "technical." It was for the officers to conduct them as they saw fit. Trotsky said on this point: "Where purely military, operational questions are concerned, and even more so as regards questions relating to the battle itself, the military specialists in all branches of the administration have the last word."^[55]

(b) The problem of the local militias

During the summer of 1918 the Soviet power decided to form a "militia of the rear" (decree of July 20, 1918). Actually, the conceptions that prevailed in the formation of the Red Army, together with concern not to risk putting military means in the hands of the SR and Menshevik enemies of the Soviet power who were still active, got in the way of any serious development of these militias. The price paid for this failure was a heavy one. In 1919 the rear was not prepared to withstand the enemy's increasingly numerous cavalry raids, and a system of local militias had to be improvised. These were set

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up, in certain regions at any rate, with a success that tended to prove that it was possible to develop forms of armed struggle other than those that the Red Army could conduct, and that such a development might have been of great service to the defense of the Soviet power. Trotsky was obliged to recognize this: "The deep breakthrough by Mamontov's cavalry made it urgent to create local forces from scratch. We can say that, this time, our Soviet apparatus showed sufficient flexibility and aptitude in concentrating all its efforts upon an unexpected task: in many places . . . groups and detachments, not only of infantry but of cavalry as well, were created literally 'out of nothing.'"^[56]

On this occasion were displayed the remarkable qualities, the capacity for initiative, and the "military skills" of the worker and peasant masses solving for themselves, "out of nothing," by their own powers, the problems involved in an "unexpected task."

However, the ruling notions regarding "military science" and the structure to be given to the armed forces, together with the resistance opposed by the new officer corps to military initiatives that were not under their control, meant that the system of local militias was not developed extensively. It was, instead, looked upon with suspicion. The same happened with the partisan detachments the necessity of which, in view of enemy incursions, Trotsky had also to recognize, while endeavoring to restrict their role in conformity with the demands voiced by

the "military authorities."[\[57\]](#)

*(c) The Red Army's victories and its nature
as a people's army*

The Red Army, formed in the conditions just recalled, won victories the historical significance of which was immense. Backed by absurdly inadequate material resources, with industry disorganized and operating in slow motion, and with very little to eat, it defeated the White Guards who were backed by the interventionist forces of the imperialist powers. The Russian soldiers who, not long before, had revolted

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against continuance of the imperialist war waged by the Provisional Government, displayed extraordinary heroism, an indomitable will to defend the Soviet power. Without that will victory would not have been possible.

The victories which the Red Army wrested from armies that were infinitely better equipped testify to the profoundly popular character of the October Revolution. They show, too, that, owing to its dual character, at once proletarian and democratic, the revolution could be defended by an army that was not constructed on proletarian principles, provided that this army was actually subject to political guidance by the proletariat and that the general political line followed by the leading party was basically correct. The mistakes of "war communism," since they did not deeply shake the will of the Red Army's soldiers to struggle and conquer, must be regarded as being of secondary importance.

As Lenin said in his speech of May 13, 1920, at an enlarged conference of workers and Red Army men:

In the final analysis, victory in any war depends on the spirit animating the masses that spill their own blood on the field of battle. The conviction that the war is in a just cause and the realisation that their lives must be laid down for the welfare of their brothers strengthen the morale of the fighting men and enable them to endure incredible hardships. Tsarist generals say that our Red Army men are capable of enduring hardships that the Tsar's army could never have stood up to. The reason is that every mobilised worker or peasant knows what he is fighting for, and is ready to shed his own blood for the triumph of justice and socialism.[\[58\]](#)

Although, in the conjuncture of the civil war and the fight against imperialist intervention, the revolutionary will of the soldiers and the masses was the deciding factor in the victories of the Red Army, it is nevertheless true that this army, as an instrument of state, did not possess the fundamental features of a proletarian army.

Indeed, the internal political relations of the Red Army corresponded at bottom to the demands of a democratic revolution (a revolution made by the peasants fighting for the land

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and against the landlords) led by the proletariat. These relations enabled the Russian revolution to cope with the principal tasks facing it at the stage at which it then stood. However, constituted as the Red Army was, this army could not be an instrument suitable for making the transition to the next stage of the revolution. It was not a proletarian army but a people's army subordinated to the dictatorship of the proletariat. It was thus very different from what the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in China was to be from the outset. This army was formed directly by the Chinese Communist Party, from the ground up, by merging into army corps the

most combative elements of the proletariat and the peasantry who had already committed themselves to struggle under the leadership of the party. Accordingly, from the beginning, the PLA was under the ideological and political guidance of the Chinese Communist Party, with its officers under the control of the soldiers helped by political commissars.

As regards the Soviet Red Army, the following two points need especially to be stressed.

(1) It was a centralized army (as is the PLA) and not a collection of people's militias. An army of this type seems necessary if military forces are to be formed that possess the mobility and unity over a vast area which are required for fighting the armies of centralized, imperialist states. These were the exigencies that dictated, in Russia as in China, the formation of a real army.^[59]

(2) The Red Army's subordination to the dictatorship of the proletariat was at the outset (for a number of reasons, and particularly owing to the conditions under which the officer corps was recruited), more a matter of political than ideological leadership by the Bolshevik Party. The political leadership was ensured, in the main, by the presence of political commissars alongside the officers of the Soviet army.

The weakness of the ideological leadership exercised by the proletariat over the Soviet Red Army resulted from an historical process, from the concrete conditions in which this army had had to be built. This weakness had as its counterpart the still mainly bourgeois character of the dominant ideological

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and political relations within the Red Army -- whence the importance of "external signs of respect," the markedly different living conditions (quarters, food, etc.) of officers and soldiers, etc.

Since the internal political relations of the Red Army were not predominantly proletarian, the same was true of its relations with the masses. One of the most significant indications that this was the case was Trotsky's move to form "labor armies," made up principally of soldiers who, though demobilized, could be recalled to the colors at any moment. This move shows that participation in productive labor was not one of the normal tasks of the Soviet Red Army. It shows also the fear that existed of allowing the former soldiers to "disperse," of letting them "wander off" and of not being able to reincorporate them easily in the event that they should be needed again for military tasks -- which confirms that the Red Army's discipline was founded more on bourgeois forms of maintaining discipline than on the predominance of proletarian ideology.

While its formation took place in basically the same way as that of the state's civil administrative system, the Red Army nevertheless had some distinctive features that made it an instrument much more closely subject to the political ruling power. The institution of political commissars was one of the means of ensuring a political subordination which was absolutely necessary in view of the vital importance of the Red Army's task of waging armed struggle against the bourgeoisie and imperialism in order to ensure the very survival of the Soviet power. This task obliged the Bolshevik Party to focus upon the Red Army attention and efforts that were beyond all comparison with those that were devoted, in the same period, to the civil administration.

During the "war communism" period, and even long afterward, the Bolshevik Party watched with quite special vigilance over everything that went on in the army. It sent into the army a large proportion of its best political forces. However, this exceptional vigilance and attention

could not by themselves alter the political relations, in particular the rela-

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tions between soldiers and officers, prevailing in the Soviet army. This army did not become a proletarian army; on the contrary, getting caught up in a general process, the army's bourgeois features were gradually reinforced.

On the morrow of "war communism," one of the principal contributions made by the Red Army was to release for service in the civil administration and the state's economic apparatus a number of energetic and experienced administrators. They strengthened in their new settings those forms of "efficiency" that could be achieved by means of strict discipline of the traditional type, which is quite different from proletarian discipline.

VI. The establishment and development of the Cheka

The proletarian character of the October revolution was shown in its ability to smash the apparatus of repression of the tsarist and bourgeois rulers. Like the old army, the old police apparatus was shattered during the October days. The same thing happened with the old judicial system (which was formally abolished by a decree of November 24, 1918);^[60] the functions of that organization were taken over by revolutionary tribunals directly representing the masses.

In the concrete circumstances in which the revolutionary process developed, the Soviet power quickly equipped itself with an apparatus for security and for the repression of counter-revolution. This apparatus grew out of the Military Revolutionary Committee, of which it was a commission, the "extraordinary commission," or Cheka (from the initials of the Russian name). When a decree of the Sovnarkom, dated December 7, 1917, dissolved the Military Revolutionary Committee, the Cheka was kept in being, and when the seat of government was moved in March 1918 from Petrograd to Moscow, the Cheka went with it and took up residence in Lubyanka Square. Its importance grew as the civil war progressed.

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The dictatorship of the proletariat was then fighting for its life, and the Cheka was one of the instruments that it employed in its fight against the bourgeoisie and imperialism. During the second half of 1918, when the activities of the SRs and Mensheviks were increasingly serving the interests of the counter-revolution, it was decided to use the Cheka to keep an eye on their organizations.

In the extremely tense situation of autumn 1918, an official decision, dated September 19, authorized the Cheka to make arrests and carry out executions without reference to the revolutionary tribunals, thus giving official approval to a practice which had already become established. As Peters, one of the heads of the Cheka wrote: "In its activity the Cheka is completely independent, carrying out searches, arrests, shootings, afterwards making a report to the Council of People's Commissars and the Soviet Central Executive Committee."^[61]

At the end of 1918 and during 1919 the struggle for survival waged by the dictatorship of the proletariat consciously assumed the form of "revolutionary terror," in imitation of the "Terror" imposed in 1793 by France's Committee of Public Safety.^[62] The Cheka was the agency charged with implementing this revolutionary terror. Its power to destroy its

opponents, and the secrecy surrounding it made the Cheka especially susceptible to playing a relatively independent role. Already in 1919, indeed, it sometimes went beyond the limits that were in principle laid down for its activity, and struck not only at counter-revolutionary acts but also at mere expressions of discontent -- as when repression was extended to middle peasants protesting against excessive requisitioning. Some of the actions of the Cheka -- whose powers of intervention increased with the passage of time, especially when it acquired its own armed forces -- thus conflicted with the Political line laid down by the top leadership of the Bolshevik Party.

At the Eighth Party Congress, in March 1919, Lenin warned the party and the repressive organs against coercion of the middle peasants. The resolution adopted on this question stated:

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To confuse the middle peasants with the kulaks and to extend to them in one or another degree measures directed against the kulaks is to violate most flagrantly not only all the decrees of the Soviet government and its entire policy, but also all the basic principles of communism, according to which agreement between the proletariat and the middle peasants is one of the conditions for a painless transition to the abolition of all exploitation in the period of decisive struggle waged by the proletariat to overthrow the bourgeoisie.^[63]

However, this resolution did not succeed, any more than did the earlier decisions of the Sixth Congress of Soviets (late 1918) or the subsequent resolutions of the Ninth Party Congress, in keeping the Cheka's activity within the limits that the Soviet power wished to lay down for it.

The Cheka thus very soon acquired a relative degree of independence, as was shown by the fact that it was necessary to repeat the resolution of the Sixth Congress of Soviets ordering the release, within a fortnight of their arrest, of all persons detained by the Cheka, unless definite charges of counter-revolutionary activity could be brought against them.^[64] Similarly, it seems that not much respect was shown in practice to the resolution of the Sixth Congress of Soviets, according to which the VTsIK and the local soviets' executive committees had the right to supervise the Cheka's activities: this resolution included also a reminder that "all functionaries of the Soviet power" were obliged to observe strict obedience to the law, and it gave citizens the right to appeal against violation of their rights by these functionaries.

The year 1919 was marked, however, by large-scale counter-revolutionary offensives, and in this situation the Bolshevik Party granted new powers to the Cheka, cutting across previous decisions to subject its work to closer control.

On April 15, 1919, the powers of the Cheka were strengthened in order to deal with acts of banditry and breaches of Soviet discipline. For this purpose "corrective labor camps" were established, to which could be sent those persons who were convicted by the revolutionary tribunals,

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the local soviets, or the Cheka. The provincial departments of the Cheka were given the responsibility of setting up these camps, where detainees were to be employed on work of benefit to Soviet institutions. Separate camps were set up for children and minors.^[65]

On October 21, 1919, another decree established a "special revolutionary tribunal" under the immediate authority of the Cheka, with the task of "waging merciless struggle" against thieves and speculators. At that time the crime of speculation included the unauthorized conveyance of any quantity of foodstuffs, however small, from country to town.

At the beginning of 1920 this "special tribunal" was abolished, but in November of that year the local organs of the Cheka were endowed with the same powers as those possessed by the military revolutionary tribunals, including the right to carry out sentences on the spot, merely reporting the executions to the People's Commissariat of Justice.^[66]

Generally speaking, the work of the Cheka between 1917 and 1921 came gradually to have two aspects. On the one hand, it was an instrument for "maintaining law and order," intervening in certain cases to prevent theft and speculation, enforce various requisitioning measures in the countryside, or ensure respect for labor discipline. On the other, it was an instrument of political struggle, both against open agents of counter-revolution and against members of those parties which were associated with counter-revolutionary activities.

During those years, cases of interference by the Cheka in the internal life of the Bolshevik Party were exceptional. In some cases, though (in particular toward the end of this period, and especially during the preparations for the Tenth Party Congress and immediately after it), this interference was sufficiently serious to provoke reactions from party members, causing a Bolshevik speaker at the Ninth Congress of Soviets (December 23-28, 1921) to call for a complete reorganization of the Cheka organs with the aim "of restricting their competence and of strengthening the principles of revolutionary legality." A resolution including this phrase was passed by the congress.^[67]

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Subsequently, on February 8, 1922, the VTsIK issued a decree abolishing the Cheka and its local commissions. This decree transferred the responsibilities of the Cheka to the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, creating within the latter a "state political administration (GPU) entrusted with fulfillment of the functions of the former Cheka, under the supervision of the people's commissariat in question. In principle, the political sections of the GPU in the provinces, autonomous republics, and autonomous regions were to be responsible to the executive committees of the local soviets. This measure was intended to ensure better control by the Soviet authorities over the activities of the security organs. At the same time, the GPU was allotted "special army detachments," one of the functions of which was to "combat crime in the Army and on the railways."

In theory the GPU enjoyed much more limited freedom of action than the Cheka had enjoyed de facto. In particular, preventive detention was to last no more than two months, after which any person arrested by the GPU must either be released or handed over to the judicial authorities, unless the VTsIK should decide otherwise. These restrictions were ignored, however, and "political offenses" continued to be dealt with quite outside the judicial system, with the GPU, in this connection, even assuming powers that were still more extensive and arbitrary than those wielded by the former Cheka -- though the subordination of the GPU to the Commissariat of Internal Affairs had been decided with a view to limiting its powers. In 1923, after the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the GPU shook off even formal control the Commissariat of Internal Affairs.^[68]

One other point that needs to be mentioned is that, after the Tenth Party Congress (1921), first the Cheka and then the GPU participated directly and officially in the work of the party's Control Commission. This meant increasing interference in the life of the Bolshevik Party by a repressive organ which had its own apparatus and its own files and card indexes (based on sources of information that could not be checked). Increasingly, one of the activities of the GPU was to

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consist in probing within the Bolshevik Party in order to identify and track down "dissident" members.^[69]

The widening of the GPU's activities and the arbitrary character of its decisions contributed to creating an atmosphere unfavorable to free expression of opinion and free development of initiative. At the Eleventh Party Congress (March 27-April 2, 1922), the last he was able to attend, Lenin himself denounced the irregular extension of the GPU's scope, but this did not prevent the process from continuing whereby that institution was strengthened, and its activities merged more and more closely with those of the party's Central Control Commission and of the People's Commissariat of Workers' and Peasants' Inspection -- of which commissariat Lenin was to say, not long before his death, that it "does not at present enjoy the slightest authority."

Finally, in 1921, and even more markedly in the years that followed, the position acquired by the organs of repression and the scope of their activities created a situation utterly different from what Lenin had envisaged in 1917 and at the beginning of 1918.

Notes

1. Engels to Bebel, March 18-28, 1875, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 357, and Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 3, p. 34. Lenin discusses this passage in chapter IV, section 2, of *The State and Revolution* (*CW*, vol. 25, pp. 439 ff.). [p. 255]
2. The Fifth Congress of Soviets (1918) had fixed the membership of the VTsIK at 200. [p. 256]
3. See Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, pp. 220-230. [p. 256]
4. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 122. [p. 257]
5. *CW*, vol. 26, p. 285. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Meeting of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee](#)". -- DJR] [p. 258]
6. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 177. [p. 258]
7. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 186. [p. 258]
8. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, vol. 1, p. 65. [p. 258]
9. *CW*, vol. 26, pp. 269-270. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Conference of Regimental Delegates of the Petrograd Garrison](#)". -- DJR] [p. 259]
10. Broué, *Le Parti bolchévique*, p. 99. [p. 259]

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11. As we have just seen on that same day Lenin, addressing the regimental delegates of the Petrograd garrison, said that "we *wanted* [my emphasis -- C.B.] a coalition Soviet government," implying that he no longer wanted this. [p. 259]
12. Lenin's remarks at the CC meeting of November 1, 1917, in *CW*, vol. 26, pp. 275-276. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Speeches at a Meeting of the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P., November 1 \(14\), 1917](#)". -- DJR] [p. 260]
13. Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin*, p. 240. [p. 260]
14. *CW*, vol. 26, pp. 277-278. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Resolution of the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P. on the Opposition within the Central Committee, November 2 \(15\), 1917](#)". -- DJR] [p. 260]
15. Among the members of this minority were Kamenev, Zinoviev, Rykov, Nogin, and Milyutin (*CW*, vol. 26, pp. 557-558). [Transcriber's Note: See the endnote to Lenin's [Speeches at a Meeting of the Central Committee of the](#)

- [R.S.D.L.P., November 1 \(14\), 1917"](#). -- DJR] [p. [260](#)]
16. Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin*, p. 242. [p. [260](#)]
 17. *CW*, vol. 26, p. 278. [p. [261](#)]
 18. Ibid. [p. [261](#)]
 19. Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin*, pp. 243-246. [p. [262](#)]
 20. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, pp. 170-171. [p. [262](#)]
 21. Ibid., p. 180. [p. [262](#)]
 22. *CW*, vol. 26, p. 555. [Transcriber's Note: See the endnote (no. 109) to Lenin's "[Conference of Regimental Delegates of the Petrograd Garrison](#)". -- DJR] [p. [263](#)]
 23. Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin*, pp. 256-257 and 313. [p. [264](#)]
 24. Ibid., pp. 252-253. [p. [264](#)]
 25. *CW*, vol. 29, pp. 561-562. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Letter to Sylvia Pankhurst](#)". -- DJR] [p. [265](#)]
 26. *CW*, vol. 31, p. 201. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Theses on the Fundamental Tasks of the Second Communist International](#)". -- DJR] [p. [265](#)]
 27. Ibid., pp. 32-33. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder](#)". -- DJR] [p. [265](#)]
 28. Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin*, p. 253. [p. [265](#)]
 29. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 180. [p. [266](#)]
 30. Report of the Seventh Congress (in Russian), pp. 60-63, quoted in Carr, *ibid.*, p. 182. [p. [266](#)]
 31. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 182. [p. [266](#)]
 32. *CW*, vol. 28, p. 198. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Speech Delivered to a Meeting of Delegates from the Moscow Central Workers' Co-operative](#)". -- DJR] [p. [268](#)]
 33. Ibid., p. 191. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Valuable Admissions of Pitirim Sorokin](#)". -- DJR] [p. [268](#)]
 34. *CW*, vol. 26, p. 283. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Draft Resolution on Freedom of the Press](#)". -- DJR] [p. [268](#)]
 35. *CW*, vol. 32, p. 230. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's [Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.\(B.\)](#). -- DJR] [p. [269](#)]
 36. Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, p. 163. [p. [269](#)]
 37. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 189. [p. [269](#)]
 38. Trial proceedings, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 190. [p. [269](#)]
 39. It is pertinent here to quote Mao Tse-tung's remarks in an article of April 25, 1956, reissued on December 27, 1965, by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. In this article, entitled [On the Ten Great Relationships](#), Mao Tse-tung discussed the Chinese CP's relations with the democratic parties and the non-party democrats. After asking: "Is it really better to have one party or several parties?" he replied: "As things are

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now, it would seem to be better to have several parties. Not only was this so in the past, it may very well be so in the future too, right up to the time when all parties wither away. Long-term co-existence and mutual supervision between the Communist Party and the various democratic parties has advantages" (Schram, *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed*, pp. 74-75). [p. [270](#)]

40. Anweiler, *Die Rätebewegung*, p. 133. [p. [271](#)]
41. Lenin's speech of June 12, 1920, to the Second All-Russia Conference of Organizers Responsible for Rural Work, in *CW*, vol. 31, pp. 168 ff.; quotation on pp. 177-178. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Speech Delivered at the Second All-Russia Conference of Organizers Responsible for Rural Work](#)". -- DJR] [p. [271](#)]

42. Lenin, report to the Eighth Party Congress, March 19, 1919, in *CW*, vol. 29, p. 183. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's [Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.\(B.\)](#). -- DJR] [p. [272](#)]
43. Sadoul, *Notes sur la révolution bolchévique*, p. 217. [p. [273](#)]
44. Quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 231; *K.P.S.S. v Rezolyutsiyakh*, p. 445. [p. [273](#)]
45. Lenin, "[Better Fewer but Better](#)" (1922), in *CW*, vol. 33, p. 490. [p. [274](#)]
46. Trotsky, *Kak vooruzhalas' revolyutsiya*, p. 101. [p. [275](#)]
47. *Ibid.*, p. 145. [p. [276](#)]
48. Note the use of the term "capital," used in the empirical sense of an accumulation (in this case, an accumulation of knowledge), which conceals the fundamental reality: the social relations (and the social practices) of which all these "specialists" were the carriers and agents. [p. [276](#)]
49. Trotsky, *Kak vooruzhalas' revolyutsiya*, p. 37. [p. [276](#)]
50. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, p. 145. [p. [276](#)]
51. *Ibid.*, p. 136. [p. [276](#)]
52. Trotsky, *Kak vooruzhalas' revolyutsiya*, p. 135. [p. [277](#)]
53. *Ibid.*, p. 38. [p. [277](#)]
54. *Ibid.*, p. 39. [p. [277](#)]
55. *Ibid.*, p. 102. [p. [278](#)]
56. *Ibid.*, p. 289. [p. [279](#)]
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 283-284. [p. [279](#)]
58. *CW*, vol. 31, p. 137. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Speech at an Enlarged Conference of Workers and Red Army Men in Rogozhsko-Simonovsky District of Moscow](#)". -- DJR] [p. [280](#)]
59. In China, the need to form an army was recognized as soon as the question of Red political power arose. Thus, Mao Tse-tung wrote in "[Why is it that Red political power can exist in China?](#)" (October 5, 1928): "The existence of a regular Red Army of adequate strength is a necessary condition for the existence of Red political power. If we have local Red Guards only [these were armed units whose members carried on with their ordinary productive work -- C.B.], but no regular Red Army, then we can

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- not cope with the regular White forces, but only with the landlords' levies" (Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, p. 66). [p. [281](#)]
60. For details, see Begaux-Francotte, "La *prokuratura* soviétique," pp. 52-53. [p. [283](#)]
 61. Quoted in Fainsod, *How Russia Is Ruled*, p. 360. [p. [284](#)]
 62. The Soviet power's resort to terror is often "explained" by the constant reference by the Bolshevik leaders to the experience of the French Revolution of 1789-1793. But this reference was relevant only because of the actual nature of the Russian Revolution, the particular form in which the proletarian revolutionary process and that of the democratic revolution were combined, and the considerable place occupied by the latter as compared with the former, owing to the weakness of the Bolshevik Party's ideological role in relation to the democratic revolutionary process. The place assumed in the Russian Revolution by state centralization and by coercion exercised by specialized organs is to be explained in the same way. This particular form of combination of the two revolutionary processes was not present in the Chinese Revolution, in which the proletarian ideology guiding the Chinese Communist Party played a leading role in the rural areas as well. [p. [284](#)]
 63. *CW*, vol. 29, p. 217. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's [Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.\(B.\)](#). -- DJR] [p. [285](#)]
 64. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 178. [p. [285](#)]
 65. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 212-213. [p. [286](#)]

66. See *Sobranie*, 1919, p. 504; 1920, pp. 22-23, 115, and 454. [p. [286](#)]
 67. Quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, pp. 187-188. [p. [286](#)]
 68. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 189. [p. [287](#)]
 69. *Ibid.*, p. 218. [p. [288](#)]

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2. The changes in the Bolshevik Party, the guiding instrument of the proletarian dictatorship

Before October 1917 the Bolshevik Party was essentially a party of revolutionary activists who took upon themselves political and ideological tasks among the masses. They propagated the revolutionary ideas of Marxism, organized the workers, analyzed the political situation, the class contradictions, and guided the class struggle along the path of revolution, taking account of the state of mind of the masses and drawing lessons from their experience. It was a small party mainly composed of tried and tested militants who were ready for the greatest sacrifices.

After October the party still had to carry out these same tasks, but it had also to cope with new ones. As the principal instrument of the proletarian dictatorship, it had to take part in the management of public affairs, be present in the organs of power at all levels, both the elected organs and the administrative ones, determine the economic, military, and administrative aims to be attained, and contribute to their attainment. The party's new functions and the place it held in the power structures called for an increase in membership.

The Bolshevik Party underwent a massive influx of new members. (As we have seen, in March 1920 it had nearly 612,000 members, compared with 24,000 in 1917.) Some of the newcomers were undoubtedly motivated by a desire to serve the revolution, but others looked on a party card as an aid to the furtherance of their ambitions. The danger of such members flooding in became very real by the end of 1920. In 1922, despite the purges, the party's numbers were regarded by Lenin as too big, and its recruitment insufficiently selective. He considered that, in the then existing conditions, with the

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Soviet proletariat decimated by the imperialist and civil wars and undermined by unemployment, a party membership of between 300,000 and 400,000 was still "excessive."^[1] However, the transformations undergone by the Bolshevik Party during those years were not merely quantitative, nor mainly determined by the influx of careerist and ambitious elements. They were connected with the ever-closer relations being formed between the party apparatus and a state administrative machine whose proletarian character proved especially weak. The types of practice that developed in the machinery of state, including the Red Army and the Cheka, thus produced effects on the functioning of the party, on the relations between its

different levels, and on its relations with the masses.

I. The Bolshevik Party's relations with the state machine

The party's role as "the ruling party," the party in power, meant, as Lenin rightly observed, that "we had inevitably to merge the party and Government leadership."^[2] However, the forms assumed by such a merger may vary. The merging of the "leaderships" can be the result of mass work carried out by the party, which brings forward activists capable of shouldering responsibilities in the various branches of government and strengthening the party's leading ideological and political role. But this "merging" can also result from the appointment to posts of responsibility of militants who, though active, are not closely linked with the masses locally. After October the conditions were such, in many areas, that it was often the second type of "merging" that took place.

The Bolshevik Party had hardly any footholds in the rural districts, in the small and middle-sized towns, and in vast regions of Russia. In countless localities it possessed no basic organization, nor even activists who were already connected with the masses in these localities and capable of playing a leading role among them. The party had to send all across the

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country organizers and cadres drawn from the big industrial centers. Lacking a sufficient number of members, it had to entrust the activists it dispatched hither and thither with a great number of functions, to be performed simultaneously, including administrative responsibilities. Soviet organs often did not exist at all in a certain place, or else were so composed that it was impossible to find among their members reliable persons who could be entrusted with the indispensable tasks of administration.

A report by Podbelsky, a people's commissar who was sent to make a tour of the countryside, describes the situation he found in July 1919 in Tambov province: "Strictly speaking, there is no Soviet government in the majority of the *uyezdy*. At present the soviets exist in most places only on paper; in reality, representatives of kulaks and speculators, or self-interested people, or cowards, who carry out the work without any definite direction, work under the name of Soviets."^[3]

These pseudosoviets -- like, for that matter, most of the normally elected soviets -- were "served" by a bureaucratic apparatus made up of officials inherited from the old regime, persons who were corrupt, formalistic, or indifferent to their work. It was under such conditions that the few party activists who could be spared from the central organs and the army had to assume a multitude of responsibilities. They had to do this without being able to rely locally on a collective of communists linked with the masses, for in many places such a collective was either nonexistent or only embryonic. Given the urgency of their tasks, they had to get on with them before the embryonic party organizations had been transformed into proper ones, and before genuine soviets had been created.

A situation like this inevitably entailed a series of effects on the way the party itself operated. It led locally, in a great number of towns and districts, to activists taking on a plurality of functions, to a lack of control by basic party organs (since these hardly existed) over activists who were loaded with many responsibilities, and, often, to the absorption of these activists in tasks that were essentially administrative in

character, to the detriment of political and ideological tasks, that is, of work among the masses.

Some of the delegates to the Eighth Party Congress (1919) described in detail the sort of thing that was happening at that time. They mentioned, for instance, that very often, in the provinces, the chairman of the party committee was also the chairman of the soviet, of the Cheka, of the revolutionary tribunal, and of yet other institutions. They showed that this confusion of functions strengthened the tendency for the executive committees to take over the role of the soviets (where these existed), and for the party committees to substitute themselves for the party organizations.^[4]

In other words, the party apparatus tended to merge with the administrative apparatus (the characteristics of which we have already seen) and at the same time tended to substitute itself for the party organizations, that is, to act in their place and not to submit to control by the rank and file of the party -- the basic organizations of the party being, in many places, barely existent.

Under these conditions, the party came to be dominated by an increasingly weighty administrative machine, instead of really running its own affairs. This was the situation that Lenin described in his report of March 27, 1922, to the Eleventh Party Congress, when he used the metaphor of "the man at the steering wheel," meaning the ruling party in charge of the state. The state machine, he said, "did not operate in the way we wanted. How did it operate? The machine refused to obey the hand that guided it. It was like a car that was going not in the direction the driver desired, but in the direction someone else desired . . ."^[5]

As Lenin made clear, this "someone else" was the capitalists, the speculators, and the administrative apparatus which was under the influence of the bourgeoisie and tending to become "independent" of the proletarian dictatorship.

The continuation of this passage shows that Lenin clearly recognized the possible outcome of the evolution that had begun in the preceding years. Shortly after evoking this image

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of "the man at the steering wheel," Lenin raised the question of the direction that the Soviet power might take, and, analyzing the new tactic of certain Russian emigres grouped around Ustryalov,^[6] did not hesitate to declare that one of the dangers to which the Soviet power was exposed was indeed that of eventually evolving into "the ordinary bourgeois state."^[7]

Lenin then described the type of relationship which had become established (this was in 1922) between the party and the state machine: "If we take Moscow with its 4,700 Communists in responsible positions, and if we take that huge bureaucratic machine, that gigantic heap, we must ask: who is directing whom? I doubt very much whether it can truthfully be said that the Communists are directing that heap. To tell the truth, they are not directing, they are being directed."^[8] He went on: "Communists who are put at the head of departments -- and sometimes artful saboteurs deliberately put them in these positions in order to use them as a shield -- are often fooled . . . Will the responsible Communists of the R.S.F.S.R. and of the Russian Communist Party realise that they cannot administer: that they only imagine they are directing, but are, actually, being directed?"^[9]

Lenin then sketched an analogy between the situation of the Bolshevik Party, which occupied the leading positions in the state but could not really govern, and that of a conquering

people which had apparently subjugated another people but, in the long run, though still occupying the latter's territory, became subject to it, because "the vanquished nation," being "more civilised," "imposes its culture upon the conqueror."^[10]

The "subjection" of which Lenin spoke here meant the domination of the party by the bourgeoisie, especially the bourgeois elements present in the state machine with which the party was tending to "merge" under the conditions already outlined. This subjection could be nothing but the transformation of the Bolshevik Party into its opposite, from a proletarian party into a bourgeois party.

In 1922 this was still a distant danger, but it is not without importance that Lenin was able to recognize it, just as it is of interest to note that, about a year after the Eleventh Congress,

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Lenin's point was repeated and developed by Bukharin in terms that deserve attention, since they describe in a striking way what actually came about later on.

The work in which Bukharin gave this description was entitled *The Proletarian Revolution and Culture*.^[11] He started from Lenin's comment that "the real and main danger"^[12] was not a direct attack, but the overthrow of proletarian class domination within the machinery of the state and the party, which would lead to full restoration of bourgeois power. Like Lenin, Bukharin referred to Ustryalov and his supporters, the *Smenovekhovtsy*.^[13] Their advice to the bourgeois intelligentsia to rally to the Russian Revolution was one of the leading themes of the journal they were then publishing in Paris (under the title *Smena Vekh*). They hoped that the revolution had taken "the road to Thermidor," and their journal praised those intellectuals who had remained in Soviet Russia and joined the party or entered government service.

Bukharin outlined with remarkable precision the possibility of a restoration bourgeois power in Soviet Russia under cover of the "monopoly of knowledge" that the bourgeoisie and its intelligentsia were supposed to possess. He showed that the *Smenovekhovtsy* were "friends" of a very special kind, who considered that the October Revolution had carried through an indispensable historical task from which a new bourgeoisie would be able to profit to the full. For the *Smenovekhovtsy* the October Revolution possessed the immense merit of having roused and mobilized "the bravest and most ruthless enemies of the rotten old regime of tsardom": it had "utterly smashed the corrupt intellectual strata who could only talk of God and the Devil," and had "set the masses in motion," thereby "opening the way to the creation of a new bourgeoisie" -- a bourgeoisie which, having passed through many trials, "has fortified its will and character and is now entering history's scene . . . fresher, younger, more vigorous, more 'American.'"

This "freshness," this "vigor" of the new bourgeoisie existed, of course, only in the imagination of the *Smenovekhovtsy*. But the vision they had of the possibility

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that the new bourgeoisie might subvert the Soviet power and the Bolshevik Party from within corresponded to what we know today is indeed one aspect of the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, of the struggle between two lines and two paths of development.

Denouncing the path indicated by the *Smenovekhovtsy*, Bukharin showed how the bourgeoisie was "supporting" the Soviet power in a quite special way, "gradually penetrating into the pores of the apparatus," introducing its own people, slowly but persistently changing

the characteristics of the Soviet power. After thus describing the process that was going on -- the very process which had worried Lenin a year earlier, when he showed that it was often not the Communists but the bourgeoisie who were really determining direction, Bukharin said that, if this process was not halted,

we shall arrive at a situation in which all our declarations, our flags, the "Internationale," the Soviet form of government would remain outwardly in being, while their inner content would already have been transformed: this content . . . would correspond to the expectations, wishes, hopes, and interests of the new bourgeois stratum which is constantly growing, constantly getting stronger, and which, through slow, organic changes, could succeed in transforming all the features of the Soviet state, setting it gradually on the rails of a purely capitalist policy . . . The old, rotten bourgeoisie, which lived on alms from the tsarist Government . . . would then have been replaced, thanks to the Russian Revolution, by a new bourgeoisie . . . which would stop at nothing, making its way forward in the spirit of nationalism but hiding itself behind the phraseology and the banners of internationalism, so as to advance toward a new capitalist and bourgeois Russia, great and powerful.[14]

Bukharin drew from his analysis this general conclusion: "Every workers' revolution, in whatever country it takes place, inevitably runs, in the course of its development, very great dangers of the internal degeneration of the revolution, the proletarian state, and the party." [15] He said that one of the vital tasks of the period of the proletarian dictatorship was to

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initiate a "cultural revolution." [16] In this connection he took up the example given by Lenin of the conquest of a "civilized" people by a "barbarian" one. Lenin gave this example in order to show how the working class risked losing power by gradually adopting the forms of social organization of the class it had overthrown. Bukharin added:

The working class can mechanically subjugate its opponent . . . it can take physical possession of all that exists, and yet it can at the same time be absorbed by the enemy's cultural forces . . . This danger inevitably threatens every working class which seizes state power. If it were to happen, we should be transformed into a new class made up of the new technical intelligentsia, a part of the new bourgeoisie . . . because we should have become cut off, without noticing it but absolutely, from our general proletarian base, and in this way we should be transformed into a new social formation.[17]

Bukharin rejected the illusion that the proletarian class origin of the cadres would constitute an adequate safeguard against their transformation into a new bourgeois class, for, he said, it was perfectly possible to imagine a situation in which a part of the working class became separated from the working masses, acquiring a monopolistic position and transforming itself into a new class.[18]

This observation regarding the general character of the process of recovery of power by the bourgeoisie that is, the universal character of the struggle between two roads -- is particularly interesting, as is the idea developed by Bukharin (following up earlier suggestions by N. Krupskaya) that only a "cultural revolution" can halt the trend toward capitalism, even though he puts forward only very vague formulations as to the conditions and forms of such a cultural revolution.

While the process of internal bourgeois subversion of the Soviet power, begun during the civil war and continuing after it, bears a universal character and therefore provides general lessons, it is nevertheless true that the specific form assumed by this process at the beginning of the NEP was destined -- contrary to Bukharin's forecast -- to be completely overturned

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a few years later, when the NEP was abandoned and the Bolshevik Party took the path of collectivization and the five year plans.

II. The transformation of internal relations in the Bolshevik Party

During the civil war, internal relations in the Bolshevik Party gradually changed. This change was bound up, to some extent at least, with the new and urgent tasks which had to be fulfilled by the ruling party. But it was also due, and to a greater extent, to the specific conditions under which the Bolshevik Party was obliged to fulfill its tasks: it had suddenly to cope with extensive and complex economic and military problems at a time when the administrative state apparatus through which it operated was essentially nonproletarian and when its relations with the peasant masses were far from being close and trusting.

In order to appreciate the scale of the changes that took place after the October Revolution, one must remember that the Bolshevik faction, and then the Bolshevik Party, had experienced for many years an intense political life which included ample discussion even at the most difficult moments. When faced with complex or new problems, the party leadership did not, as a rule, take decisions until after holding discussions that were thorough, detailed, and as open as possible, given the nature of the problem at issue.^[19] Not only were these discussions largely open in character, but members who held a point of view differing from that of the majority of the Central Committee could address themselves directly to the party as a whole. They could do this either through the party's official organs or through publications of their own, periodical or otherwise.^[20]

As for the principles governing the discussions and the ideological and political disputes, these were, in practice, the same that the Chinese Communist Party was later to proclaim

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explicitly: unity -- struggle -- unity. By virtue of these principles, party members who came to conclusions differing from those of the majority of the Central Committee were not made objects of a "ruthless struggle" or of "merciless blows."^[21] The party expected participants in discussions to put forward concrete analyses and undertake theoretical investigations that would help real progress to be made toward a serious solution of the problems at issue.

Even when, on certain questions, the number of active participants in a discussion was limited, this limitation was in no way imposed by administrative methods or regulations, and the rank and file were frequently called upon to give their views, which meant that the discussion affected the mass of the membership. After the middle of 1918, however, a gradual change set in.

(a) Modifications in relations between the rank and file of the party and the higher party bodies

The first changes appeared during the struggle against the White insurrection and imperialist intervention. These changes were favored by the dispersal of a great many of the leading figures, whose time was increasingly taken up with tasks that were precise, urgent, and of absolutely decisive immediate importance, especially on the civil war front.

In the last few months of 1918 the party leadership was obliged to take, on its own, a number of highly important decisions, often without consulting the basic organizations. The party's capacity to function as a body was all the more limited at that time because the political leadership possessed practically no central apparatus by means of which it could maintain regular contact with the basic organizations. At the beginning of 1919, the Central Committee staff consisted of fifteen people, grouped around Sverdlov, the secretary of the CC.

Between June 1918 and the beginning of 1919 the leading bodies met only rarely. Nearly all decisions were taken by

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direct contact between Lenin, chairman of the Sovnarkom, Sverdlov, and the party members in charge of the various sectors.

In this period, the tendency for the party to merge with the state machine was such that Preobrazhensky went so far as to suggest -- without provoking a storm of protest -- that the party should be dissolved, on the grounds that it had become completely merged with the state machine. Osinsky put forward some practical proposals tending in the same direction -- e.g., that the Central Committee, the VTsIK, and the Sovnarkom be merged. These suggestions were not followed.^[22]

The Eighth Party Congress (March 1919) marked an important turning point. It began to reconstruct the party, to give it a structure more suitable for enabling it to carry out its task as a ruling party. Henceforth, the CC was to meet at least twice a month, and in the intervals between its meetings, decisions would be taken by a new organ, the Political Bureau, or Politburo. A similar organ had existed previously on a quite temporary basis, in connection with the preparation of the October insurrection.

The first nontemporary Politburo was formed in March 1919, at the Eighth Congress. It was made up of five permanent members (Lenin, Kamenev, Trotsky, Stalin, Krestinsky) and three "substitute" members (Zinoviev, Bukharin, Kalinin). This Politburo soon became the real leadership of the party, taking all the important decisions, which became operative at once.

The Eighth Congress also declared in favor of the forming of a People's Commissariat for Control of the State, which was placed under Stalin's direction. As mentioned earlier, this became in 1920, still under Stalin, the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection -- the Rabkrin, or RKI.

Another decision of importance for the subsequent life of the party was taken by the Eighth Congress, namely, the establishment of the Orgburo, the Organization Bureau. It had also five members, including Stalin. It was to meet three times a week and "direct all the party's organizational work." In addition a Secretariat of the Central Committee was

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formed, responsible, in principle, for executive tasks. Stalin was present here, too, having been appointed secretary of the Central Committee after Sverdlov's death on the eve of the Eighth Congress.

In 1919 the secretariat of the CC was, in theory, a "mere technical organ." Gradually, however, the secretariat and the Orgburo were to become a sort of administrative leadership, paralleling the party's political leadership, an evolution confirmed three years later when, on April 4, 1922, the post of General Secretary was created. Stalin became General Secretary by

decision of the Central Committee elected by the Eleventh Party Congress.

The Eighth Congress was thus the starting point in a rapid change in the conditions in which the Bolshevik Party functioned, and in its internal relations. Increasingly, the party became a structured body, subject to a discipline of a type quite different from what it had previously known -- a discipline in which there was a certain element of administrative centralism, though this was as yet only nascent.

In the circumstances that prevailed in 1919, with acute class struggle and difficulty in controlling a state machine in which bourgeois practices were predominant, the effects of the tendency to administrative centralism began to make themselves strongly felt. A process can be seen to have started by which the party's administrative organs became independent of its leading political organs -- a process closely linked with that in which the state machine was becoming independent of the proletarian dictatorship. This process grew more pronounced as the years went by. To the increasing role played by the party's central administrative organs corresponded an inflation of the administrative staff attached to the Central Committee. This staff increased from 15 members at the beginning of 1919 to 150 in March 1920, and 602 a year later.^[23] Highly structured departments were formed. The two departments of the party administration that played the most important roles were the Orgotdel (in charge of organization and regulation) and the Uchraspred (in charge of keeping records of proceedings, maintaining registers and card-indexes, and assigning

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party members to particular tasks). There were also other departments, groups, and bureaus which gradually came to supervise, ever more closely, the activities of the party cadres.

In practice, the party secretariat and the Uchraspred made most assignments, with only some of these coming before the Orgburo, the elected body. Thus, between April and November 1919, the Uchraspred made 2,182 assignments, as against 544 made by the Orgburo.^[24] Between April 1920 and mid-February 1921 the Uchraspred made 40,000 assignments.

For some time these assignments were made without much of a selection procedure, but increasingly they came to be decided on the basis of central card-indexes that were maintained with ever-greater efficiency. In November 1921 the Uchraspred possessed reports on about 23,500 party cadres, who were divided into groups in accordance with their specialty. A few months later, the Uchraspred had an index covering about 26,000 cadres. These records enabled it to follow a party member's "career" -- and, to a large extent, to determine its course. In June 1922, through a merger with the Orgotdel, the Uchraspred became even more powerful. It was then put under the direction of L. M. Kaganovich. The Orgotdel now had its own staff of "instructors," charged with inspecting the party's local organizations and having access to all documents and all meetings, including secret ones. These instructors could make any recommendations they liked with a view to amending the decisions of provincial party committees, though the latter retained the right of appeal to the Central Committee.

In this way a process developed which increasingly stripped political power from the party conferences that were held at province, town, and district level. The gradually diminishing role of provincial party conferences was reflected in the lengthening intervals between their meetings; and also, especially, in the fact that, although these conferences still elected their committees, the latter were dominated by the holders of a few key posts whose appointment had been decided on by the central administrative organs. Fairly soon, the committee elected by the conference played only a consultative role,

whereas the real decisions were taken by the "bureau" (at first called the "presidium") of this committee.

Gradually, then, a structure was formed in which rank-and-file decisions assumed secondary significance, the vital ones being taken at the top, by an administrative apparatus. In this way it came about that the secretaries of provincial party committees were more and more frequently appointed from the center, and the powers of these political officials increased rapidly. The provincial party secretary ceased to be dependent on the party conference and the party committee. On the contrary, it was the members of these bodies who increasingly became dependent on the provincial party secretary and, through him, on the central administrative apparatus. This apparatus was structured in the image of the state machine: its members were divided into five categories corresponding to the five salary grades of government officials.^[25]

In principle, the increasing role accorded to the central administrative apparatus was intended to ensure "better management" of the party cadres and a rational selection of leading personnel. In practice, it led quickly to an increasing degree of political control by the party's internal administration (itself controlled only with difficulty by the elected leading bodies) over the organization as a whole, and especially over its cadres. This control was exercised especially through the system of "assignments" and "transfers," which made it possible to alter the balance of political forces in a particular party organization. By means of "transfers," party members whose notions differed from those of the party's administrative heads could be isolated. These transfers corresponded at first to the requirements of a good system of assignment, or to justifiable administrative sanctions. In 1921, however, at the time of the struggle against the Workers' Opposition, such measures began to be used as a means of uprooting oppositionists from local party organizations in which they had a certain influence, and of reducing the freedom of expression enjoyed by the party cadres.

The provincial, municipal and district party organizations protested many times against this development. It was in

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response to these protests that in September 1920 a Central Control Commission was set up, with a pyramid of local control commissions to which party members could appeal against arbitrary decisions by the party's administrative apparatus. This method of recourse to an organ independent of the party's administrative apparatus functioned, more or less, until 1922, when a change was made. In order to avoid conflicts between the control commissions and the party's administrative apparatus, a resolution of the Eleventh Congress^[26] decided to "unify" the work of the local control commissions. These became practically a new branch of the central administrative apparatus: instead of helping to supervise it, they became an additional instrument at its disposal.

The transformation of relations between the administrative directorate of the party and the rank and file also altered the relations between the political leadership (CC and Politburo) and the party as a whole. The administrative apparatus (especially its central nucleus) became a second center of party leadership: a center which, though formally only "administrative," was in reality, of course, also a political center that could exercise an influence over the party's political leadership, even determining the line its decisions would take, and the way these decisions would be applied.

In 1921, at the Tenth Party Congress, Lenin explicitly warned against the growth of the "bureaucratic"-apparatus, which was tending to raise a screen between the party leadership and

what was really going on in the country. Later, Lenin was to emphasize -- but without his idea being followed up in practice -- the need to cut down the bureaucratic apparatus and to ensure that the party was supervised not only by its rank and file but even by non-party people. Thus, in his article "[Purging the Party](#)"^[27] Lenin said that the party should rid itself of bureaucratized elements and that, in order to do this, the suggestions of the masses should be sought:

In appraising persons, in the negative attitude to those who have "attached" themselves to us for selfish motives, to those who have become "puffed-up commissars" and "bureaucrats," the

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suggestions of the non-Party proletarian masses and, in many cases, of the non-Party peasant masses, are extremely valuable. The working masses have a fine intuition, which enables them to distinguish honest and devoted Communists from those who arouse the disgust of people earning their bread by the sweat of their brow, enjoying no privileges and having no "pull."^[28]

(b) The conception of the party becoming "overgrown" by its administrative apparatus

Until the Tenth Congress the changes in internal relationships within the Bolshevik Party seemed to many of its members to be a consequence of the exceptional circumstances connected with the civil war and the imperialist intervention, and this was why the manifestations of these changes provoked only a few protests (mainly from old party members).

The resolution of the Tenth Congress (1921) still reflected the idea that these changes in the party's internal life were only transitory and conjunctural. This congress adopted, at one and the same time, resolutions intended to promote more democratic relations, enabling the rank and file to express themselves better, and resolutions restricting opportunities for criticism, largely under the influence of the fears aroused by a political situation marked by the peasants' growing discontent and culminating in the Kronstadt rising.

Actually, the Tenth Congress resolutions calling for the development of more democratic relations within the party remained inoperative, so that in 1922, at the Eleventh Congress, fresh protests arose against the predominance of administrative and hierarchical relations. A resolution passed by this congress declared: "The Party organizations have begun to be systematically overgrown by a large apparatus which serves these organizations. This apparatus which is gradually spreading, has itself begun to acquire a bureaucratic coating and to absorb an excessive share of the Party's forces."^[29]

The Eleventh Congress's protest against the "overgrowing" of the party by a "large apparatus" had no effect. The party's

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administrative apparatus -- that is, the secretariat of the Central Committee, and the central departments and bureaus -- were to take practically no notice of this resolution: the administrative apparatus only broadened and expanded the sphere of its interventions.

The conception of the party being "overgrown" by its apparatus defined in an ambiguous way the result of a twofold process: a process which led to the one-sided domination of the party's rank and file by the party's central organs, and a gradual process of shifting of authority within the central organs themselves, that strengthened the position of the administrative

organs in relation to the political leadership elected by the congresses. Later, the effects of this second process would seem to disappear -- when the very composition of the congresses, and of the political leadership elected by them, would be very largely determined by the central administrative organs! In 1922-1923, things had not gone that far, and the distinction between the authority of the administrative apparatus and that of the party's political leadership was still real.

The first aspect of the process of "overgrowing" against which the Eleventh Congress protested, corresponded to a large extent to the desire to preserve the proletarian character of party policy. It was a matter of concentrating vital decisions in the hands of an experienced revolutionary "old guard," since this was a period when the party was receiving a massive influx of new members, some of whom, though devoted to the revolution, were as yet inexperienced, while others were joining the party in order to get important positions or to facilitate their career in state service.

At the beginning of 1922 Lenin drew attention to the changes that had taken place in the composition of the Bolshevik Party, when he said that "taken as a whole (if we take the level of the overwhelming majority of Party members), our Party is less politically trained than is necessary for real proletarian leadership in the present difficult situation."^[30] Lenin considered that this state of affairs was bound to get worse in

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the absence of rigorous measures, which were not taken, and in that event he expected to see "a big increase in the efforts of petty-bourgeois elements, and of elements positively hostile to all that is proletarian, to penetrate into the Party."^[31]

In the historical conditions of 1918-1923, preserving the proletarian character of party policy meant concentrating authority in the hands of those who embodied the historical experience and theory of the revolutionary movement, Russian and international -- in other words, in practice, at the start of this period, in the hands of the Political Bureau and the Central Committee.

The other aspect of this process of "overgrowing" -- and the more dangerous aspect as regards preservation of the proletarian character of the Bolshevik Party -- was the concentration of an increasing number of decisions (those that shaped the internal life of the party and its very composition) in the hands not merely of the heads of the central administrative bodies but in those of a corps of party officials. This concentration of power had the result of removing many vital decisions both from control by the rank and file and from control by the Central Committee and the Political Bureau. By its growth in numbers, its complex structure, the conditions under which it was recruited (increasingly similar to those applying to an unrevolutionized state administrative service), the corps of party officials and the administrative organization came to acquire a larger and larger measure of independence.

The transformation of the Bolshevik Party between 1918 and 1923 thus presented a twofold aspect: on the one hand, it tended to bestow independence upon the Party's administrative apparatus and thereby increase the freedom of action of a body of officials who, in the conditions then existing, were increasingly bourgeois and petty bourgeois.

This second aspect became increasingly important in the period following the Tenth Congress. There developed within the Bolshevik Party political relationships of a bourgeois kind, marked by increasing independence of the

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party officialdom in relation to the rank and file and to the masses, and gradually ousting the former proletarian political relationships.

On the eve of Lenin's death, the concentration of power in the hands of the party's administrative apparatus and its corps of officials had already gone far. At the time of the Twelfth Congress, held during April 17-25, 1923, when Lenin was very seriously ill and unable to attend, many old Bolsheviks called for a change in internal relations, and for a return to relations such as would enable the party as a whole to lead a more active and genuine political life. At this congress, the old Bolshevik V. Kosior condemned the way the General Secretary was influencing the party's orientation by making changes in members' assignments so as to get out of the way those who dared to voice criticism, and by giving preference to docility over ability and a firm proletarian attitude. Others, such as Bukharin and Rakovsky, used Lenin's own words,^[32] in denouncing Great-Russian chauvinism and the policy of Russifying the minorities being carried out by the party's General Secretariat. But these protests were ineffectual.

In the months that followed, when Lenin was no longer able to direct public affairs, arrests of party members who expressed critical views became frequent. In September 1923 Dzerzhinsky, an old Bolshevik and first head of the Cheka, told a subcommission of the Central Committee: "The decline of our Party, the extinguishing of our internal life, the replacement of election by appointment are becoming a political danger."^[33] This did not prevent Dzerzhinsky himself, shortly afterward, from intensifying repression of groups of oppositionists among the workers and demanding of the Political Bureau that every party member be called upon to denounce to the GPU anything that might be considered "oppositional activity."^[34]

In practice, the change in internal relationships within the party had already reached such a point that a genuine reactivation of its internal political life would have required open intervention by the rank and file and also, doubtless, large-scale intervention by all those workers who were inspired by a

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proletarian conception of how the party should function and relate to the state machine and the masses. The conditions for a development of this sort were not present; and so the crisis of leadership that opened after Lenin's death led to a new concentration of power in the hands of the party's administrative apparatus, thus confirming the forecast made by Lenin in his letter to Molotov of March 26, 1922.^[35]

Thereafter, the political power wielded by the party's administrative apparatus was to increase rapidly. This did not mean, however, that the political leadership of the party passed completely into the hands of its administrative apparatus, slipping away from the influence of the Central Committee and the Political Bureau, but that the influence of these bodies tended to diminish, while there was an increase in that of the administrative apparatus which, through the very circumstance of its growing independence from the rank and file and the masses, was open to influence and penetration by the bourgeoisie.

III. The effects of the changes in the Bolshevik Party on the way the party functioned

The tendency for the party to become merged with a state administrative machine which

was itself becoming independent of the masses, and to be "overgrown" by its own administrative apparatus, were not without consequences where the class character of the political practices in the party was concerned. These consequences made themselves felt first and foremost in the "everyday life" of the party, that is, in its style of leadership and in its underlying ideology.

(a) *The style of leadership*

The strengthening of the two tendencies mentioned above created favorable conditions for the development of bourgeois

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political practices. Thus, instead of a democratic and proletarian leadership such as Lenin endeavored to maintain, emphasizing the centralization of correct ideas, persuasion, and broad discussion, there was gradually substituted a style of leadership of quite a different order, in which the giving of orders and insistence on unquestioning discipline were the main features.

This different style of leadership, and the ideological relations underlying it (such as "respect" by the "lower" bodies for the will of the "higher" ones), tended to transform a section of the party membership -- in the first place, the political cadres -- from militants into officeholders who were principally concerned to know what their superiors expected of them, rather than to analyze a situation and point out to the party leadership the mistakes that had been made, so as to help in rectifying them, to assess for themselves the state of mind of the masses so as to warn the leadership in good time against ill-considered measures, and so on. In this way a set of new political practices appeared which the Bolshevik Party had in previous times hardly known.

These practices were those of party members who were turning into "functionaries," "members of the apparatus," or, as they were already starting to be called, *apparatchiki*. At the time, Sosnovsky, an old Bolshevik, described in these terms the way such *apparatchiki* behaved:

They are neither hot nor cold. They take note, "for information and execution," of all the circulars they receive from the CC or the Guberniya committees. Unhurriedly, they do their duty in carrying out "campaigns": they keep precise statistical accounts of these campaigns, set down on square-ruled forms all the party's revolutionary activity, and are pleased with themselves when all the squares have been filled and they can report to the center the "thorough" fulfillment of all directives received. From party workers of this sort, plans, programs, instructions, theses, questionnaires, and reports pour out as though from a cornucopia . . . They are happy when outward calm prevails in their organization, when there are no "squabbles" and nobody is fighting anybody else.^[36]

Early in 1921 the Tenth Congress had sought to put an end

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to this style of leadership and to the lack of workers' democracy which characterized it -- a style which was thought to be connected with the "militarization" of the party, itself a consequence of the civil war. Thus, Bukharin, speaking on behalf of the Central Committee, said:

We must strive towards workers' democracy, and put this into effect with the same vigour we showed in the previous period in militarising the Party . . . By workers' democracy within the Party must be understood a form of organisation which ensures that all members can participate actively

in Party life, in discussion of all questions that arise and in deciding how to answer them, and also in the building of the Party . . . Workers' democracy makes impossible the system of appointment, and is characterised by the election of all organs, from top to bottom, by the responsibility of these organs, and by their subjection to control.

The report stressed the need for "broad discussion of all important questions, absolute freedom of criticism within the Party and collective working out of Party decisions."^[37]

It is well-known that the resolutions adopted by the congress, following the line proposed by Bukharin in the name of the Central Committee, did nothing to alter the existing style of leadership, which instead became more prominent in the years that followed.

In September 1921, in a letter to Stalin, Lenin vigorously denounced another aspect of the repressive style of leadership which was tending to become established in the party. He stigmatized one of the practices of the administrative apparatus, which consisted in "exposing" rather than "improving." In a later piece of writing he also denounced the toadyism of the members of the apparatus and what he ironically called "Communist conceit."^[38] In one of his last works, *Better Fewer but Better*,^[39] he did not hesitate to write: "We have bureaucrats in our Party institutions as well as in the Soviet institutions."

In denouncing "bureaucracy" in the party and the state, Lenin was continuing a campaign he had been waging for several years.

The term "bureaucracy," in itself purely descriptive, has had a remarkable history. At first it was used to reprove the

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behavior of certain cadres -- their authoritarianism, their "personal" style of leadership, their careerism, and so on, which seemed to be due to "features of character" rather than to a particular form of organization. Very soon, however, it acquired a second meaning, describing both a form of organization (which obstructed proletarian democracy) and the resulting style of work. Subsequently the term "bureaucracy" was used to describe a social stratum: it was in this sense that Trotsky used it, in accordance with a well-established tradition.^[40] Finally, some have even seen in the bureaucracy a new social class and the basis of a new mode of production.^[41]

Since this is not the place to discuss these various conceptions, I will confine myself to noting that what is usually referred to, when the descriptive term "bureaucracy" is used, is the situation conferred on the agents of certain social apparatuses by a set of relationships which make of these agents a group placed in a position of relative independence both in relation to the dominant class (some of whose powers the group concentrates in its hands) and to the dominated classes. When, from 1921 onward, Lenin and other Bolsheviks denounced the rise of "bureaucracy," they were referring to a set of practices and relationships which put the leading officials of the state and the party in a position of relative independence. That time saw only the beginning of practices that were later to become consolidated and deprive the proletariat of power, placing it instead in the hands of this leading group, which then became a state bourgeoisie insofar as it had at its disposal all or most of the means of production and activated them on the basis of *capitalist production relations* (in particular, the capitalist division of labor). While in 1921 that situation was still a long way off, what was truly and ultimately at stake in the struggle against "bureaucracy" was the position of the proletariat as the dominant class, with "the bureaucracy" representing the embryo of a new bourgeoisie in the apparatus of the state and of the ruling party.

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*(b) The membership and social composition
of the Bolshevik Party*

I have already mentioned that the speed with which party membership increased, and the extent of the changes undergone by its social composition between 1917 and 1923, contributed to the transformation of internal relationships in the party. The process actually worked both ways: while the sudden and poorly supervised increase in the number of members and the alteration in their social make-up had the effects mentioned, it was also true that the transformation of the party's style of work and leadership, and the close ties binding it to a state administrative machine which was not really proletarian, helped to attract bourgeois or petty bourgeois elements, and even to bourgeoisify the world view of party members who were of proletarian origin.

The changes affecting the party had two main aspects. First, there was the influx into the party of bourgeois and petty bourgeois elements, which had been denounced by Lenin in 1919, at the Eighth Congress, when he mentioned that "old bureaucrats" who had been driven out of the administration had had to be recalled, and that some of them, disguising themselves as Communists, had slipped into the party.^[42]

Between 1921 and 1923, Lenin frequently returned to this problem. He referred to the ever-growing danger of "a big increase in the efforts of petty-bourgeois elements, and of elements positively hostile to all that is proletarian, to penetrate into the Party."^[43] He emphasized the need to turn to the non-party masses in order to get rid of the "lordly ones" and the "bureaucratized" elements in the party, and he urged that the only persons to be regarded as workers, and so to be entitled to the short probationary period of six months before being admitted to party membership, should be those "who have actually been employed in large industrial enterprises for not less than ten years."^[44]

The other aspect of the changes affecting the party was perhaps even more serious because it was less directly con-

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trollable, namely, the changes in the world view of many party members and in particular of the cadres.

These changes were closely bound up with changes in the party's role and place in political relationships as a whole and, more especially, with the intimacy of its ties with the state administrative machine, and with the growth of its own administrative functions.

These changes helped attract bourgeois and petty bourgeois elements, and even, to a certain extent, to make their entry "necessary." At the same time, these changes, and their effects as a whole, helped to alienate from the party those revolutionary militants who refused to bow to the demands of strict administrative rules and to the routine and type of discipline required in a centralized administrative organization tending to cut itself off from the masses. Rejection of this form of organization, of its rules and methods of discipline, contributed to some of the struggles that went on in the party between 1918 and 1923. This rejection was also expressed in the sporadic attempts by some rank-and-file members to oppose the party's "bureaucratization." The defeat of these attempts led to disappointed militants leaving the party, or even being expelled from it for having criticized the administrative apparatus. Such expulsions took place especially during the party purges about which something will be said later. The multiplication of administrative tasks of a certain type helped also to change profoundly the conditions of existence of the party cadres responsible for these tasks, and so to

transform their world outlook, since, in the last analysis, it is conditions of existence that determine consciousness.

What was involved here was, in the first place, "specialization" of administrative functions. As a result of this "specialization," those who held such responsibilities were increasingly absorbed into activities which severed them from production and from the conditions in which the great majority of the population lived and worked. They thus tended to become separated from the masses and to look down on them "from the height of their responsibilities."

This tendency was accentuated by the fact that most admin-

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istrative tasks were carried on outside the organs of self administration by the masses and without any supervision by the latter, through an administrative apparatus that was centralized, hierarchical, and becoming more and more formalistic. At the beginning of 1923 Lenin criticized this development, saying: "As regards precedence, the observation of the forms and rites of office management, our 'revolutionariness' often gives way to the mustiest routine."^[45]

It is in the light of these considerations that the figures regarding the increase in party membership, its social make up, and the assignment of party members to different types of activity assume their true significance.

As regards the increase in membership, we have already seen that this rose from 24,000 in 1917 to 612,000 in March 1920. It reached 732,000 in March 1921 and exceeded 860,000 three years later.^[46]

This rapid growth in party membership might be seen as a symptom of "health," if one were to ignore the concrete conditions in which it took place, and the effects it had. As regards the circumstances of this growth, there are several points that deserve attention.

In the period closed by the Eighth Congress (March 1919), the Bolshevik Party followed, more or less, an "open-door" policy, which led to a rapid increase in membership, which reached the figure of 350,000, or thereabouts, at the time of the congress. The congress decided to undertake a registration of the membership with a view to expelling any who were found unworthy. So began a period in which a mass purge was carried out. By autumn 1919, the party had no more than about 150,000 members. In October-December 1919, a particularly difficult moment in the civil war, when the risk of careerist elements trying to get into the party seemed diminished, a third period opened. Recruitment was again carried out on a mass scale, so that party membership rose to nearly 612,000 by the time of the Ninth Congress. This policy continued until the eve of the Tenth Congress.

The Tenth Congress (1921) was the starting point for a fresh purge. The aim of the decisions adopted by the congress was

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to "proletarianize" the party to a greater extent by expelling "non-Communist elements," reducing the number of party members occupying administrative posts, and increasing the recruitment of workers. All the tendencies in the party agreed on the need to realize this aim.^[47]

Application of the decisions of the Tenth Congress contributed to reducing party membership to less than 500,000 in January 1923. After Lenin's death -- and against his wish

that party membership be reduced to under 400,000 -- a new recruitment campaign was launched, which sharply increased the number of party members by about 70 percent in a little over a year.

However, the change effected in the proportion of workers in total party membership was not very great. But the abrupt reversals in recruitment policy and the conditions in which the purges took place entailed a certain number of negative consequences.

An important aspect of the purge campaigns, which partly accounts for their negative effects, was their essentially "administrative" character. In practice the purges were not carried through with the help of the masses, and especially with the help of the non-party masses. In 1921 the purge was effected by a central control commission with subordinate local commissions. In the prevailing circumstances, this procedure considerably strengthened the powers of the party's administrative apparatus. The latter succeeded in eliminating those, whether among the rank and file or among the cadres, who were critical of its bureaucratic style of work, or else in reducing them to silence through fear of getting purged. The protests raised at the time suggest that numerous members or supporters of the former "left" oppositions were got rid of in this way. There are, of course, no statistics enabling us to judge the relative importance of this kind of "purge" as compared with those expulsions that were justified on political or moral grounds. It is known, however, from the statements issued by the former Workers' Opposition, that the latter was affected in this way, and that many who held opinions similar to those of this opposition, especially among the working-class members of the party, preferred to leave the party of their own

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accord rather than risk being expelled from it on false pretexts.^[48]

The sharp reversals in recruitment policy also played a role of some significance (though they were not, of course, the only factor) in the transformation of the party's composition -- which, moreover, did not always evolve in the way desired by the party congresses and the party's leading bodies.

One of the inevitable consequences of the expansion of the party's total membership was the reduction in the proportion of its members who had belonged to it before the revolution. Already by March 1919 only 8 percent of the members had been Bolsheviks before February 1917, and only 20 percent had joined before October.^[49] These figures show that after 1919 the great majority of party members had no experience of the party's earlier life and the political relations that then prevailed in it. This facilitated acceptance of the establishment of new relations, especially the lack of control by the rank and file over the selection of cadres, and also contributed to nonparticipation by the rank and file in critical analysis of the party line, of mistakes that the party might have made, and of the behavior of cadres. Furthermore, given the fundamentally new composition of the party (made up to the extent of about 80 percent of fresh, inexperienced members), those, whether among the rank and file or among the middle-ranking cadres, who might have wished to maintain the old relationship in the face of the rise of new ones, found themselves isolated. In fact, from 1921 onward, in the course of the struggle waged against the former Workers' Opposition, a high proportion of old party members of proletarian origin, who had been active during the underground period of the party's history, were excluded from all positions of responsibility, if not expelled altogether.

The changes in the party's social composition are not always revealed very clearly in the available statistics. This unclarity is due in the main to the way that members were classified socially. Classification was based, as a rule, on the occupation followed by each person just before or at the moment of joining the party. It was therefore sufficient to have been a worker

for a very short time, often merely in order to enter the

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party with greater ease: as Lenin noted, this was quite a widespread way of getting oneself regarded as a "proletarian," and forever afterward being classified in the party's statistics as one of its "worker" members.

This point needs to be kept in mind when interpreting statistics relating to the composition of the party. These show that in October 1919, just after the first "purge" period, when a certain number of bourgeois and petty bourgeois elements were eliminated, 52 percent were "workers" -- which means that this had been their social position at a certain moment. The same figures show 15 percent of the membership as "peasants," though we know that this term often merely meant party members living in the country, and included members of the rural intelligentsia. Nevertheless, the statistics enable us to see that the actual distribution of jobs was such that over 53 percent of party members were government officials, 8 percent were party and trade-union officials, and that, among the 11 percent employed in industry, many held managerial and administrative positions.^[50] Less than three years later it was estimated that two-thirds of the party members held positions of "responsibility" which gave them a certain degree of authority and some material advantages.

In order to obtain an overall view of the changes effected in the party's social composition (while not forgetting the limited significance of these figures), one can refer to a statistical table given in the *Bolshaya Sovyetskaya Entsiklopediya*, which gives the following percentages:

Social Composition of the Bolshevik Party ^[51]

	<i>Workers</i>	<i>Peasants</i>	<i>Office workers and others</i>
1917	60.2	7.6	32.2
1918	56.9	14.5	28.6
1919	47.8	21.8	30.4
1920	43.8	25.1	31.1
1921	41.0	28.2	30.8
1922	44.4	26.7	28.9
1923	44.9	25.7	29.4

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If we take the years 1921-1923, when the decision to "proletarianize" the party was being put into effect, it will be seen that this did indeed result in an increase in the percentage of members who were of proletarian origin, together with a decrease in the percentage of those whose origin was other than "worker" or "peasant."

It must be added, though, that it is not by increasing the percentage of worker-members that one automatically brings about a genuine proletarianization of the party, that is, the predominance within it of members having a proletarian world outlook. A certain *ouvriérisme* may even result in the recruiting of workers who lack a high level of political consciousness. Lenin warned against this danger, but recruitment campaigns among the working class did not always avoid it.

Altogether, despite the fact that the Bolshevik Party had been able successfully to lead the

October revolution and the fight against the landlords, the Russian capitalists, and imperialism, and despite its having attracted a high proportion of the most combative elements of the working class, the rapid inflation of its membership, the form taken by the purges, the nature of the tasks to which many of its members were assigned, and the conditions under which they were called upon to accomplish these tasks, gradually had the effect, during the years 1917-1923, of rendering the proletarian character of the party more fragile.

*(c) The fragility of the proletarian character
of the party and of its leadership*

In 1922 Lenin did not regard as remote the dangers threatening the party's stability and its proletarian character as a result of the changes in its internal relations, its style of leadership, and its social composition, and he therefore sought for means of preserving the party from these dangers.

In March 1922 he sent two letters to Molotov, the second within a few days of the first, in which he dealt mainly with the problems connected with maintaining the proletarian character of the party. In the first of these letters, dated March

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24, Lenin referred to the fact that, as things were, many petty bourgeois appeared as "workers" and even managed to pass as such. On this theme he wrote: "There is no doubt that we constantly regard as workers people who have not had the slightest real experience of large-scale industry. There has been case after case of petty-bourgeois, who have become workers by chance and only for a very short time, being classed as workers. All shrewd White-Guards are very definitely banking on the fact that the alleged proletarian character of our party does not in the least safeguard it against the small-proprietor elements gaining predominance in it, and very rapidly too."[\[52\]](#)

In order to cope with this situation and ward off the danger that the Bolshevik Party might become a bourgeois and petty bourgeois party, Lenin suggested a whole series of measures that he considered would enable this danger to be fought or removed. As we know, these suggestions were not carried out. The statutes adopted by the Twelfth Party Congress, held on April 17-25, 1923, when Lenin was ill and remained at Gorki, did not include, otherwise than in a formal way, some of his proposals, and departed from them in their actual content.[\[53\]](#)

On March 26, 1922, in his second letter, Lenin returned to the same subject: "If we do not close our eyes to reality we must admit that at the present time the proletarian policy of the Party is not determined by the character of its membership but by the enormous undivided prestige enjoyed by the small group which might be called the Old Guard of the Party. A slight conflict within this group will be enough, if not to destroy this prestige, at all events to weaken the group to such a degree as to rob it of its power to determine policy."[\[54\]](#)

These lines are of very great importance. They bring out in a striking way one of the essential features of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat, namely, that it cannot conquer and advance toward socialism unless it is guided by a party which is headed by revolutionaries who are well-equipped theoretically and who enjoy the full confidence of the working people. The leading role played within the party by such revolutionaries (who form what was later to be called, in

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China, the "proletarian headquarters") constitutes the ultimate safeguard of the party's proletarian character and of the possibility of preserving it.

By asserting as he did that the party's proletarian policy depended on the unity of the "old guard," Lenin had in mind several dangers.

(1) The danger of an open split that would make it impossible to maintain the dictatorship of the proletariat in a country where most of the population were peasants. In the conditions prevailing at that time, a split would inevitably have engendered two parties: one which would have continued to try to base itself on the working class, but by following an *ouvriériste* policy which would have cut it off from the other popular strata, and a party which would have tried to base itself mainly on the peasantry, increasing the "concessions" made to the latter. We shall see later that many elements in the platform of the "left" oppositions involved especially the first of these dangerous possibilities, because of their *ouvriériste* character. This was the danger that Lenin had in mind in his "[Letter to the Congress.](#)"^[55]

In this memorandum Lenin mentioned the danger that an open split could be caused by the development of growing contradictions between the working class and the peasantry. He wrote: "Our Party relies on two classes and therefore its instability would be possible and its downfall inevitable if there were no agreement between those two classes. In that event this or that measure, and generally all talk about the stability of our C.C., would be futile. No measures of any kind could prevent a split in such a case."^[56]

(2) The danger of a hidden split which could occur as a result of the expulsion of some of the members of the party leadership at that time. This type of split is referred to in the succeeding part of this same "Letter to the Congress." Lenin does not link this danger directly with divergences regarding the political line, but rather with the style of work of two of the principal party leaders, Stalin and Trotsky. Of the former Lenin says that he "has unlimited authority concentrated in his hands, and I am not sure whether he will always be

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capable of using that authority with sufficient caution." Of the latter he says: "He is personally perhaps the most capable man in the present C.C., but he has displayed excessive self-assurance and shown excessive preoccupation with the purely administrative side of the work."^[57]

These observations have often been interpreted as referring to certain features of the "psychology" of the two leaders, and that is not wrong; but they relate above all to a certain style of which, in Lenin's view, was dangerous for the unity of the party. Accordingly, after having made these comments, Lenin goes on: "These two qualities of the two outstanding leaders of the present C.C. can inadvertently lead to a split, and if our Party does not take steps to avert this, the split may come unexpectedly."^[58]

Ten days after dictating this letter, Lenin added a postscript in which he recorded an even more severe judgment on Stalin's type of leadership and his character:

Stalin is too rude and this defect, although quite tolerable in our midst and in dealings among us Communists, becomes intolerable in a Secretary-General. That is why I suggest that the comrades think about a way of removing Stalin from that post and appointing another man in his stead who in all other respects differs from Comrade Stalin in having only one advantage, namely, that of being more tolerant, more loyal, more polite and more considerate to the comrades, less capricious, etc. This circumstance may appear to be a negligible detail. But I think that from the standpoint of safeguards against a split and from the standpoint of what I wrote above about the relationship between Stalin and Trotsky it is not a detail, or it is a detail which can assume decisive importance.^[59]

(3) The danger that the party line might no longer be determined by the "old guard," that is by a proletarian leading nucleus which had proved itself during many hard years of struggle and enjoyed a high degree of prestige. If this danger materialized, it would mean that the party's political line would no longer be decided by a truly "proletarian headquarters" but by the party's administrative apparatus, and this would open the way to loss of power by the proletariat and to

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the restoration of a bourgeois dictatorship operating through a state machinery which had lost its proletarian character.

(4) Finally, Lenin saw emerging, even if there were no open or hidden split, the threat of worsening relations of trust between the party and the masses, such as would make it ever more difficult to elaborate a proletarian political line and rectify mistakes. The danger of such a development was all the more serious in that the party had seen, in the early months of 1921, at the time of the Kronstadt rising, the beginning of a deterioration of this kind, and in 1923 its effects had not been completely overcome. We shall see later the fundamentally important political consequences which Lenin deduced from this situation when he drew up his balance sheet of five years of revolution.

In order, however, to appreciate fully the implications and significance of the changes experienced by the Bolshevik Party, it is essential to see these changes in the setting of the overall social process which developed in the period 1917-1923, and then to analyze the way in which the class struggle produced effects inside the Bolshevik Party, in the form of clashes between different tendencies or different political lines, or elements of such lines. This will be examined in Part Four, after I have explained what I have meant up to now in referring to the process whereby the state machinery became "independent."

Notes

1. *CW*, vol. 33, p. 255. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Conditions for Admitting New Members to the Party](#)". -- DJR] [p. [293](#)]
2. Lenin's report, March 8, 1921, to the Tenth Party Congress, in *CW*, vol. 32, p. 177. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.\(B.\)](#)". -- DJR] [p. [293](#)]
3. See Narkiewicz, *The Making of the Soviet State Apparatus*, pp. 64-65. [p. [294](#)]
4. See the report of the proceedings of the Eighth Party Congress for details. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.\(B.\)](#)". -- DJR] [p. [295](#)]
5. *CW*, vol. 33, p. 279. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Eleventh Congress of the R.C.P.\(B.\)](#)". -- DJR] [p. [295](#)]
6. Ustryalov was a former Cadet who had emigrated. Together with other émigrés, including former "ministers" of the White Guard "government" formed by Kolchak, Ustryalov published in Prague a symposium entitled *Smena Vekh* ("A change of land marks"), in which he advocated penetration of the Soviet machinery by his cothinkers. He considered that, with the NEP, which was beginning at the time when he formed his group, evolution toward capitalism was inevitable. He claimed that "the Bolsheviks . . . will arrive at the ordinary bourgeois state, and we must support them. History proceeds in devious ways" (quoted by Lenin in *ibid.*, p. 286). [p. [296](#)]
7. *CW*, vol. 33, p. 286. [p. [296](#)]

8. Lenin's political report of the Central Committee, presented to the Eleventh Party Congress, March 27, 1922, in *ibid.*, p. 288. [p. [296](#)]
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 288-289. [p. [296](#)]
10. *Ibid.*, p. 288. [p. [296](#)]
11. This was a talk given in Petrograd on February 5, 1923, and published as a pamphlet, *Proletarskaya revolyutsuja i kultura*. [p. [297](#)]
12. *CW*, vol. 33, p. 287. [p. [297](#)]
13. The name was derived from *Smena Vekh* (see [note 6](#)). See also Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, vol. 1, pp. 56 ff. [p. [297](#)]
14. Quotations from Bukharin, *Proletarian Revolution and Culture*, pp. 6-8. [p. [298](#)]
15. *Ibid.*, p. 33. [p. [298](#)]
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-35. [p. [299](#)]
17. *Ibid.*, p. 43. [p. [299](#)]
18. *Ibid.*, p. 44. [p. [299](#)]
19. The content of these discussions and disputes are discussed in Part Four. [p. [300](#)]
20. In the early months of 1918 the "left Communists" issued a publication of their own, entitled *Kommunist*. [p. [300](#)]
21. These expressions were used by Mao Tse-tung to describe the forms of "ideological struggle" of which invective and intimidation are features. See on this point his writings "[Rectify the Party's Style of Work](#)" and "[Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing](#)," in *Selected Works*, vol. 3, pp. 35-68. [p. [301](#)]
22. Except in the special case of Soviet Latvia, on which see Broué, *Le Parti bolchévique*, p. 129. [p. [302](#)]
23. See the *Izvestiya* of the CC of the RCP(B), a bulletin which appeared regularly from May 1919 to October 1929, especially the issues of December 2, 1919, March 5, 1921, and March 1923: quoted in Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, p. 250. [p. [303](#)]

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24. See Schapiro, *The Communist Party*, p. 253. [p. [304](#)]
25. *Ibid.*, p. 258. [p. [305](#)]
26. *K.P.S.S. v Rezolyutsiyakh*, vol. 1, p. 636. [p. [306](#)]
27. *CW*, vol. 33, pp. 39 ff. [p. [306](#)]
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40. [p. [307](#)]
29. *K.P.S.S. v Rezolyutsiyakh*, vol. 1, p. 621. [p. [307](#)]
30. *CW*, vol. 33, p. 256. [p. [308](#)]
31. *Ibid.*, p. 257. [p. [309](#)]
32. For instance, in a letter he sent to Kamenev on October 6, 1922, in which he wrote: "I declare war to the death on dominant-nation chauvinism." (This was published for the first time in *Pravda* of January 21, 1937. See *CW*, vol. 33, p. 372 [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Memo to the Political Bureau on Combatting Dominant Nation Chauvinism](#)". -- DJR], and vol. 42, p. 605. [Transcriber's Note: See the endnote to Lenin's "[On the Establishment of the U.S.S.R.](#)" -- DJR]) He expressed the same attitude in his memorandum on "[The Question of Nationalities or 'Autonomisation](#),'" in *CW*, vol. 36, pp. 605 ff. [p. [310](#)]
33. Quoted by Kamenev in *Pravda*, December 13, 1923. [p. [310](#)]
34. Broué, *Le Parti bolchévique*, p. 182. [p. [310](#)]
35. *CW*, vol. 33, pp. 256-258. The contents of part of this letter will be discussed later. [p. [311](#)]
36. Sosnovsky, *Dvela i lyudi* [a series of articles reprinted from *Pravda*], pp. 173-174. The article quoted appeared in 1921. [p. [312](#)]
37. Reports and resolutions of the Tenth Party Congress; see Broué, *Le Parti*

- bolchévique*, p. 159. [p. [313](#)]
38. *CW*, vol. 33, pp. 42, 275. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Tasks of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection and How They Are to Be Understood and Fulfilled](#)" and [Eleventh Congress of the R.C.P.\(B.\)](#)., respectively. -- DJR] [p. [313](#)]
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 487 ff. [p. [313](#)]
40. As Christian Rakovsky has pointed out, "There is no Communist brochure which, in relating the treason of the German Social-Democratic Party on 4 August 1914, does not at the same time point out the fatal role which the bureaucratic upper circles both of the Party and the trade unions played in the history of the backsliding of this Party" (see "The Occupational Hazards of Power," written by Rakovsky in August 1928. The passage quoted will be found on page 126 of the book *De la bureaucratie*, by Preobrazhensky, Rakovsky, and Trotsky, in which the early meanings of the term "bureaucracy" are to be observed). An English translation of Rakovsky's work was published, under the title "Power and the Russian Workers" (the quoted passage is on p. 108). [p. [314](#)]
41. This is, for example, the conception of Claude Lefort, in *Eléments d'une critique de la bureaucratie*. [p. [314](#)]
42. *CW*, vol. 29, pp. 182-183. [p. [315](#)]
43. *CW*, vol. 33, p. 257. [p. [315](#)]
44. *Ibid.*, p. 254. Lenin's recommendation was not followed. [p. [315](#)]
45. *CW*, vol. 33, p. 497. [p. [317](#)]
46. Broué, *Le Parti bolchévique*, p. 131, and *Problèmes politiques et sociaux*, p. 33. [p. [317](#)]
47. See Report of Tenth Party Congress (1921), especially pp. 230-231 and 330-331: see also Rigby, *Communist Party Membership*, pp. 93-94. [p. [318](#)]
48. See Schapiro, *The Communist Party*, p. 237. [p. [319](#)]
49. *Ibid.*, p. 237. [p. [319](#)]
50. *Ibid.*, p. 238. [p. [320](#)]
51. *Bolshaya Sovyetskaya Entsiklopediya*, vol. 11, article "V.K.P.(b)," column 533. The figures were usually compiled on the eve of the party congress, about March or April of each year. [p. [320](#)]
52. *CW*, vol. 33, p. 254. [p. [322](#)]
53. *K.P.S.S. v Rezolyutsiyakh*, pp. 655 and 656. [p. [322](#)]
54. *CW*, vol. 33, p. 257. [p. [322](#)]
55. The letter was to have been read to the party congress which met after Lenin's death, but this did not happen. Only a partial "communication" of its contents was made to an enlarged session of the Central Committee. The complete contents of the letter remained an official secret until 1956. [p. [323](#)]
56. *CW*, vol. 36, p. 594. [p. [323](#)]
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 594-595. [p. [324](#)]
58. *Ibid.*, p. 595. [p. [324](#)]
59. *Ibid.*, p. 596. [p. [324](#)]

3. The objective character of the process whereby the state machinery of the proletarian dictatorship acquired independence

The tendency for the state administrative apparatus to acquire independence, the development of bourgeois practices and relations within the coercive apparatus of the proletarian dictatorship, and the transformations that took place inside the Bolshevik Party itself constituted, at bottom, different aspects of one and the same objective process which, for convenience, I shall call the process whereby the state machinery of the proletarian dictatorship acquired independence.

Lenin commented on many occasions that the Soviet organs were not being run by the working people themselves. He denounced the usurpation, by an anonymous and elusive apparatus, of power that should have been exercised by the soviets. He stressed the need to "give power back to the soviets." However, the process whereby the state machinery was acquiring independence triumphed over the resolutions of the party congresses, over the decisions of the party's leading bodies, and over Lenin's appeals. Before examining the social foundations of this process we must show what its class effects were.

I. The class effects of the process of acquiring independence and the call for a new destruction of the state machine

The class effects of this process consisted in a weakening of the conditions for the exercise of proletarian dictatorship, through the penetration of the apparatus of this dictatorship by

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bourgeois elements and the reinforcement of bourgeois practices.

Lenin acknowledged this situation when, addressing the Eighth Party Congress in 1919, he said that the Soviet power had been obliged, after it had "dispersed these old bureaucrats," to "place them in new posts." He added: "The Tsarist bureaucrats began to join the Soviet institutions and practise their bureaucratic methods, they began to assume the colouring of Communists, and, to succeed better in their careers, to procure membership cards of the Russian Communist Party. And so, they have been thrown out of the door but they creep back in through the window."^[1]

The "bureaucratic distortion" of which Lenin spoke in December 1920 gave a particular character to the dictatorship of the proletariat in the USSR, which was also connected with the place occupied by the bourgeoisie and bourgeois practices in the machinery of the dictatorship.

A little over a year later, in January 1922, in his theses on the role of the trade unions and the NEP, which were adopted by the Eleventh Party Congress, Lenin drew precise conclusions from what he had said in December 1920, for he now spoke of the existing state as being a "*transitional type* of proletarian state," so that a proletarian class struggle needed to be waged against its shortcomings and mistakes, against the capitalist appetites which eluded its control, and against "all sorts of survivals of the old capitalist system in the government offices,"

which were such as to justify having recourse to "*the strike struggle*."^[2]

At the end of 1922, addressing the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, Lenin went further in his characterization of the state administrative apparatus, which he identified with the tsarist apparatus:

We took over the old machinery of state, and that was our misfortune . . . We now have a vast army of government employees, but lack sufficiently educated forces to exercise real control over them. In practice it often happens that here at the top, where we exercise political power, the machine functions somehow, but, down below, government employees have arbitrary control and they often exercise it in such a way as to counteract our measures

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. . . Down below . . . there are hundreds of thousands of old officials whom we got from the Tsar and from bourgeois society and who, partly deliberately and partly unwittingly, work against us.^[3]

Finally, not long before he was definitely condemned to silence by illness, Lenin delivered his most severe judgment on the "Soviet" state machine. It was nothing, he said, but the machine "which . . . we took over from Tsarism and slightly anointed with Soviet oil." And he added that "the apparatus we call ours is, in fact, still quite alien to us; it is a bourgeois and Tsarist hotch-potch . . ." ^[4] Thus, right down to his last writings, Lenin denounced the process whereby the state machinery was acquiring independence, and the resurgence of an apparatus "taken over from Tsarism." Toward the end of 1920 Lenin went so far as to say: "It is the task of the Soviet government to completely destroy the old machinery of state as it was destroyed in October, and to transfer power to the Soviets."^[5]

As we know, the reconstituted old machinery of state was never destroyed as Lenin demanded -- on the contrary, it developed and became consolidated. After the end of NEP, that is, after the disappearance of the private bourgeoisie, it became one of the centers in which the bourgeois forces became concentrated.

The class effects of the process whereby the state machinery acquired independence were a weakening of the proletariat's leading role in its own state machinery and, correlatively, a strengthening of the bourgeoisie. It was therefore a process of class struggle. We must examine the objective basis for this process, and the conditions that enabled it to develop as it did.

II. The objective basis of the process

The objective basis for the process of class struggle which led to the machinery of the proletarian dictatorship acquiring independence cannot be reduced merely to the existence of classes in general. This basis must be sought in the totality of

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relations and practices which existed concretely at that moment and gave specific features to the classes confronting each other. It was, in fact, these relations, and the practices that developed on the basis of these relations, which determined both the forms of existence of the classes and the forms assumed by the struggle between them.

To realize what the objective basis was for the process whereby the state machinery acquired independence, it is necessary to start from the stage at which the Russian Revolution

found itself in the years 1917-1923. It was the characteristics of this stage that determined the changes which occurred in social practice and relations, and therefore in the forms in which the bourgeoisie and the proletariat clashed in this period.

What was characteristic of the stage at which the Russian Revolution then stood was that its principal task was still democratic. It was still, above all, a matter of the proletariat in power helping the peasant masses in the struggle against the White Guards, that is, against the landlords, and thereby strengthening the alliance between the proletariat and peasantry under the leadership of the proletariat. This was the main task, both during "war communism" and at the beginning of the NEP.

Indeed, the fact that the Bolshevik Party believed for a time (beginning in the second half of 1918) that the "building of communism" was already on the agenda did not make this come true. This illusion -- subsequently acknowledged to be such by Lenin^[6] -- merely made more difficult the accomplishment of the revolution's principal task, it did not cause it to "go away."

The nature of the stage of the Russian Revolution at that time, and the concrete conditions of the revolution's previous development, limited the transformations that could take place in social relations and relations between classes. The transformations realized within these "limits" were of fundamental historical importance: they corresponded to the transfer of power into the hands of the proletariat, and the expropriation of the landlords and of a large part of the private bourgeoisie. On the other hand, the socialist transformation of

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the economic relations could only begin to appear: the socialization of the means of production had been barely started. A transformation of that kind can be effected only in the course of a relatively long historical period and can be effected on a large scale only when it is the principal task before the proletariat and its party. This can be the case only after contradictions such as those that were still dominant in 1917-1923 have already been dealt with -- that is, after the tasks of the democratic revolution have been accomplished, in the main, and the worker-peasant alliance has been consolidated.

Between 1917 and 1923, the Russian Revolution did not and could not attain the strictly socialist stage of the development of the revolutionary process. Consequently, bourgeois or prebourgeois economic relations, unaltered or hardly altered, were still dominant. The capitalist division of labor was almost intact, individual or patriarchal production predominated in the countryside, and the division of labor between town and country was unaltered. On the basis of these bourgeois or prebourgeois relations, bourgeois or prebourgeois ideological and political relations developed. To use Marx's own expression,^[7] these economic relations were the "secret" of the political forms that came into being at that time -- in other words, of the process whereby the machinery of state acquired independence.

What has been said enables us to grasp the basis of the process, but does not reveal the conditions that made it possible, or that would have permitted a struggle to have been waged against it. These conditions must now be analyzed.

III. The conditions for the development of the process whereby the state machine acquired independence, and for struggle against this process

The fundamental condition for the process to occur whereby the state machinery of the proletarian dictatorship acquired independence, was the predominance of bourgeois

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or prebourgeois social relations and the development, on that basis, of bourgeois social practices. These practices made possible the reproduction of capitalist relations, or the transformation into capitalist relations of "precapitalist" relations.

When the bourgeoisie is in power, it is the dominant agent of the expanded reproduction of capitalist relations, but it is also -- under the constraint of the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production -- the agent of a contradictory practice of transformation of capitalist relations. Thus, elements that prefigure socialist relations are introduced. They are placed in a wholly subordinate position, subjected to the requirements of overall reproduction of capitalist relations, and they cannot but remain so, in the absence of a proletarian revolution which can make them dominant. As Marx points out more than once when he deals with joint-stock companies, the stock exchange, trusts, capitalist nationalization, and so on, the process of conserving capitalist relations proceeds by way of the formal transformation of these relations.

Historical materialism enabled Marx to show the contradictory character of the capitalist process of reproduction, which, though it reproduces the dominant relations, it also transforms them. Marx thus founded, in contrast to the various "utopian socialisms" which were unable to change the world, scientific socialism which reveals, in the very womb of present-day society, the conditions for the socialism which the proletariat will have to compel this society to give birth to. This is the significance of what Marx says in the *Grundrisse*, when he writes: "But with bourgeois society . . . there arise relations of circulation as well as of production which are so many mines to explode it. (A mass of antithetical forms of the social unity, whose antithetical character can never be abolished through quiet metamorphosis. On the other hand, if we did not find concealed in society as it is the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of exchange prerequisite for a classless society, then all attempts to explode it would be quixotic.)^[8]

This analysis gives its full meaning to the metaphor of the *bringing to birth* of a new world with which present-day

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society is "pregnant" -- this bringing to birth for which the proletariat acts as midwife, provided that it develops revolutionary practice.

The social practices of the proletariat, inserted in the antagonistic social relations of capitalism, also bear a dual character: they are practices of conservation and of transformation of the existing social relations. To the extent that the proletariat remains fundamentally dominated by bourgeois ideology, its practices, including its practice of class struggle, remain subordinate to the requirements of capitalist reproduction (and this is still so under the dictatorship of the proletariat): this dictates the limits to trade-union action which has not been transformed by a revolutionary orientation with a scientific basis (utopian aspirations are not enough to change the world). It is only insofar as the proletariat is guided by revolutionary theory (itself the product of analysis of its own struggles, the struggles of all the oppressed classes, and the conditions of reproduction and transformation of the existing relations), that it can cause to predominate practices which transform social relations, and which, instead of ensuring the conservation of existing relations and the continued dominance of capitalism, smash these relations and this dominance, open the way to socialism, and so constitute not merely proletarian practices but proletarian revolutionary practices.

To return to the process whereby the state machinery of the proletarian dictatorship acquires independence (which is the beginning of a process of domination by the bourgeoisie concealed in this machinery), we see that the fundamental condition for an effective struggle against this process is the predominance of proletarian revolutionary practices in the sphere of the relations to be transformed. These practices, and these alone, make possible a revolutionary transformation of social relations, dominance for the socialist elements in these relations -- provided that they intervene at the appropriate moment in history, when united and coordinated action by the revolutionary forces is possible.

At the level of generalization corresponding to the above propositions, it can therefore be said that the condition for the

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process to be possible whereby the state machinery of the proletarian dictatorship acquired independence in the period 1917-1923, was the predominance of bourgeois practices and the weakness of revolutionary practices in the sphere of the relations to be transformed. This predominance was closely linked with the historical moment at which the Russian Revolution then stood, and this is the reason why the process developed with the speed and in the forms we have seen.

For a fuller understanding of the process, however, without which no lesson can be drawn from the way it actually developed, we need to advance beyond the foregoing generalities and return to the historical moment in which the process was situated, and so to the concrete characteristics of the period in which it took place. These characteristics were such as to compel the concentration of revolutionary efforts upon a first-priority aim, namely, the defense of the proletarian dictatorship. They did not permit the socialist transformation of social relations as a whole to be put on the immediate agenda.

(a) The urgent immediate tasks

Here the decisive pressure of urgent immediate tasks made itself felt. During "war communism," the Soviet power, which had only just come into being, had to cope with the combined military onslaught of the White Guards and the interventionist forces of most of the imperialist powers. It was necessary, at any price, to feed the towns and the armies at the front without delay, or otherwise the Soviet power would simply have been swept away.

In the conditions in which the proletarian power had been established, and given the predominance of commodity relations and petty bourgeois practices among the peasantry (the practice of "giving nothing for nothing"), when industry had almost nothing to offer to the villages and the urgent needs of war made it impossible to wait, the Soviet power had in practice no other course open to it but the one that it followed.

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It had to resort to requisitioning, and to discipline imposed either by "vanguard" workers or by the state machine. This had to be done, even if it was bound to mean a momentary worsening of relations between the proletariat and part of the peasantry, and so to a development of the contradictions between the apparatus of Soviet power and the section of the masses upon which this apparatus exerted constraint.

Repeating in June 1920 the slogan he had issued earlier, "Everything for the war!" Lenin emphasized the nature of the emergency:

This is a question of saving the lives of tens of thousands of our finest comrades, who are perishing at the front, in the foremost ranks. It is a matter of saving ourselves from the famine which is imminent just because we are not fighting the war to a finish, when we can and must do that, and quickly too. For this, discipline and subordination must be enforced at all costs and with the utmost severity. The least condonement, the least slackness displayed here, in the rear, in any peaceful pursuit, will mean the loss of thousands of lives, and starvation in the rear.^[9]

(b) The historical relations between the Bolshevik Party and the rural population

The emergency situation gave all the less opportunity for the Bolshevik Party to develop other methods, and thereby help the peasantry to transform its own practices, in that it was itself almost entirely unrepresented, as an organization in the countryside. We have seen how the attempt to set up genuine poor peasants' committees failed. With few exceptions, these committees were neither developed nor consolidated, while the rural soviets remained largely under the control of the village bourgeois, themselves influenced by the SRs, who were often engaged in counter-revolutionary activity. The proletarian political cadres were still too few in number, and their presence at the front too essential, for it to be possible for them to be sent en masse into the countryside, or to help the poor and middle peasants to escape from the ideological influ-

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ence of the rural bourgeoisie, and help them develop a revolutionary practice of thoroughgoing and systematic solidarity with the front and with the towns.

The slightness of the Bolshevik Party's direct influence in the countryside was reflected in the slight degree of participation by the peasants in elections to the rural soviets. Between 1919 and 1922 this participation was of the order of 22 percent, falling sometimes even as low as 9 percent,^[10] and the percentage of party members in the rural soviets of the Russian provinces varied between 0.3 percent and 1.8 percent.^[11] Their influence was thus extremely limited. At the level of the rural district (*volost*), the party's position was a little better: 11.7 percent of the deputies to the soviets at this level were party members. Only at the level of the county soviets was the situation very different, especially if one looks at the executive committees, which in 1922 consisted to the extent of 81 percent of party members, or candidates for party membership -- but 76 percent of these deputies had joined the party only after the revolution, and many of them were administrators who had belonged to the old state machine. As for the administration serving the soviets and their executive committees, it was composed mainly of the remains of the former administration, which had been first smashed and then put together again,^[12] as Lenin pointed out on several occasions.

The extreme weakness of the party's roots in the countryside was thus one reason why bourgeois and petty bourgeois practices predominated over vast areas of Russia. In most villages, and even in many small and middle-sized towns, the party members were only "a drop in the ocean," as Lenin put it. Their numerical weakness prevented them from undertaking broad campaigns of explanation and from systematically gathering from the masses opinions and suggestions that would have made it possible to develop new practices. Consequently, the weight of the reconstituted former apparatus (or that of the new apparatus which was no less separated from the masses) was all the heavier, and bourgeois practices developed within it.

In its turn, the reconstitution of a state machine similar to

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that of tsardom, and the development of authoritarian relations between this machine and the masses, produced ideological effects which included distrust on the part of some of the workers and peasants toward the "established authorities" and even fear of repression. These ideological effects contributed to more or less isolate from the masses those party members who found themselves far from the centers and the Soviet organizations in which the party effectively exercised its leading role. The fact that these centers and organizations existed played a decisive role in the defense of the proletarian power; but it could not suffice to bring about a proletarian transformation of social practices on a countrywide scale.

*(c) The lack of adequate previous experience
of the requirements for socialist transformation
of social relations and social practices*

Between 1917 and 1923, there thus prevailed in Russia objective conditions which favored the process whereby the state machinery acquired independence, with the reconstitution of an apparatus of the bourgeois or prebourgeois type or, in Lenin's striking phrase, "a Tsarist apparatus slightly anointed with Soviet oil." There were other factors, too, which set limits to the Bolshevik Party's action, connected with the party's lack of experience regarding the conditions for transforming social practices and relations, and also determined by certain theoretical conceptions which were held by the party.

Without claiming that the Bolshevik Party's line of action could have been really very different from what it was, given the stage at which the Russian Revolution found itself, the urgency and magnitude of the tasks facing the party, and the latter's size and distribution, it is nevertheless possible to conceive that the process whereby the machinery of the proletarian state acquired independence could have been combated more effectively, and so slowed down, if the party had possessed previous experience of the requirements for struggle against a process of this sort. It is a historical fact that this

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experience was lacking and that the very general pointers to correct action which were suggested by a limited amount of practice proved inadequate.

What might or ought to have been done to combat the process whereby the state machine acquired independence, positions of the bourgeoisie in Russian society became strengthened (in new forms), was not something that could be "invented." It was necessary to learn from actual practice, drawing lessons from the mistakes made and compiling a balance sheet of these mistakes. Ideas do not fall from heaven, they arise from practice. Not necessarily from successful practice; they can also arise from setbacks, provided that those who have suffered these setbacks (or others placed in more or less similar conditions) draw the lesson to be learned from them. It was only in and after 1921 and 1922, that the Bolshevik Party, and Lenin in particular, were able to start drawing lessons from their own experience. I shall come back to this point in Part Five.

*(d) The party's theoretical conceptions and the
balance sheet of the years 1917-1922*

We are justified in thinking today, when we compare the practices and the theoretical formulations which were dominant in the Bolshevik Party in 1917-1922 with the formulations and practices which dominate the thought and action of the Chinese Communist Party, that some of the conceptions prevalent in the Bolshevik Party constituted an obstacle to the path

that might have led to an effectual struggle against the process whereby the state machinery of Soviet power acquired independence. It is, of course, ridiculous to "write history with ifs" and to try and imagine "what would have happened if conditions had been different": all the same, it is possible to affirm, for it is a fact, that some of the Bolshevik Party's theoretical conceptions prevented the party, for a time, from understanding and foreseeing the real nature and implications of a process some of the effects of which it condemned.

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Among the conceptions which had the effect of concealing what was happening may be mentioned (I shall come back to the point at the end of the book) the party's notions regarding the role that could be played by certain forms of centralization and state capitalism. Up to a certain point, and within the narrow limits imposed by the objective conditions, these notions had the effect of preventing the Bolshevik Party from marking out a path that would have enabled the masses to develop, on the basis of their own experience, practices differing from those which then predominated on many occasions -- revolutionary practices which (within these limits) would have given more life to the soviets and the mass organizations.

Some additional observations are certainly pertinent here.

It must be stressed, first and foremost, that mistaken conceptions are never the determining factor in a social process. What determines the development of such a process is the existing state of social relations and social practices. It is not ideas (even those ideas of which the party is the bearer), that make history, but the masses.

The role played by correct conceptions is nevertheless a vital one. Such conceptions can help the masses to develop in a systematic way their own revolutionary practices and give up practices which enslave them. Correct conceptions open up a path, but they "create" nothing, except possibilities: possibilities for the masses to strengthen their revolutionary practices, to unify and coordinate them. Correct conceptions do no more than this, but also no less.

This is what Lenin rightly asserted in *What Is to Be Done?*: "Without revolutionary theory, no revolutionary movement." This proposition obviously does not mean that it is theory that "creates" the revolutionary movement, but that theory guides this movement, showing it the path that enables it to continue to advance. It does not do this by "inventing" anything, but by drawing lessons of theoretical importance, of universal bearing, from the movement itself in all its historical magnitude.

To return to the problem with which we are concerned

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here, that of the process whereby the state machinery of the proletarian dictatorship acquired independence, we must conclude from the foregoing that it was not the weak points in the theoretical conceptions of Bolshevism that lay "at the origin" of this process, as is claimed by an idealist conception of history, but that these conceptions and their inadequate subsequent rectification contributed to the fact that the Russian masses were not guided along the path that would have enabled them to develop, unify, and coordinate their revolutionary practices to the degree necessary to "destroy afresh" the reconstituted tsarist apparatus.

The theoretical conceptions of Bolshevism included a certain number of weak points because they were in part inherited from a labor movement which had departed from revolutionary Marxism. The Bolshevik Party, emerging as it did from the Second International, was not able to rid itself at one blow, in the absence of practical experience, of

everything that had been wrong in the Second International's conceptions. This elimination process could take place only gradually, through a class struggle in theory itself.

Here, too, we must look at the historical circumstances, for it is not at just any moment at all that the weaknesses in revolutionary theory -- those features in which the influence of bourgeois ideology is still felt -- can be eliminated. This elimination, and the rectifications it makes possible, are themselves part of an objective process. They become possible only on the basis of a maturing of contradictions, a maturing that the application of an inadequate theory brings about within the revolutionary movement: they take place at the moment when these contradictions can be effectively dealt with.

When we speak of the "theoretical heritage" of the second International which the Bolshevik Party did not manage to shake off, we must include in this a certain conception of centralism which was not democratic centralism, and a certain conception of the role of the centralized machinery of state. Also, when we consider the reasons why the Bolshevik Party

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did not succeed in ridding itself of these conceptions in 1917-1922, we must remember that these reasons were partly bound up with the nature of the stage at which the Russian Revolution then found itself -- the principal democratic task the revolution was then fulfilling. The predominance of this task tended to cause methods and notions to prevail which were similar to those that characterized the French Revolution, namely, Jacobin notions and methods, which were, indeed, included in the heritage of the Second International.

Rosa Luxemburg, who supported the October Revolution, noted the points of similarity between the French and Russian revolutions when, toward the end of 1918, she wrote of "a dictatorship in the bourgeois sense, in the sense of the rule of the Jacobins."^[13] She observed that, with political relations of this kind prevailing, "life in the soviets must . . . become more and more crippled," with a fading-out of vitality from the public institutions, so that "only the bureaucracy remains as the active element."^[14]

At the same time she acknowledged that "it would be demanding something superhuman from Lenin and his comrades if we should expect of them that under such circumstances they should conjure forth the finest democracy, the most exemplary dictatorship of the proletariat . . ."^[15] By recognizing the part played by concrete historical conditions, Rosa Luxemburg took her stand on the ground of historical materialism and not of idealism.

The tendency for Jacobin methods to predominate in this period was indeed the result of the conjunction of the effects of particular historical conditions with Jacobin conceptions which were not at all alien to Bolshevism,^[16] though Marx and Engels had warned against nostalgia for .^[17]

At all events, during the years 1917-1922 the process whereby the principal state machinery of the proletarian dictatorship acquired independence was already a reality, and this fact did not fail to affect to a considerable degree the ideological and political struggles that went on inside the Bolshevik Party.

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Notes

1. *CW*, vol. 29, pp. 182-183. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's [Eighth Congress of](#)

- [the R.C.P.\(B.\)](#). -- DJR] [p. [330](#)]
2. *CW*, vol. 33, p. 187 (my emphases -- C.B.) [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[The Role and Functions of the Trade Unions Under the New Economic Policy](#)". -- DJR] [p. [330](#)]
 3. *Ibid.*, pp. 428-429. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Fourth Congress of the Communist International](#)". -- DJR] [p. [331](#)]
 4. *CW*, vol. 36, pp. 605, 606. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[The Question of Nationalities or 'Autonomisation'](#)". -- DJR] [p. [331](#)]
 5. *CW*, vol. 31, pp. 408 ff.; quotation on p. 421. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Our Foreign and Domestic Position and the Tasks of the Party](#)". -- DJR] [p. [331](#)]
 6. See Part Five. [p. [332](#)]
 7. Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, p. 772. [p. [333](#)]
 8. Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 159. What Marx means by *Verkehrsverhältnisse*, here rendered as "relations of circulation," is what he elsewhere refers to as "generalised interdependence." [p. [334](#)]
 9. *CW*, vol. 31, p. 175. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Speech Delivered at the Second All-Russia Conference of Organizers Responsible for Rural Work](#)". -- DJR] [p. [337](#)]
 10. See Narkiewicz, *The Making of the Soviet State Apparatus*, p. 60. [p. [338](#)]
 11. In the non-Russian provinces, where a special effort seems to have been made to ensure that the party's influence in the soviets was greater, the corresponding percentage ranged from 11 to 25 percent; *ibid.* [p. [338](#)]
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 61. [p. [338](#)]
 13. Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, p. 48. [p. [343](#)]
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 47. [p. [343](#)]
 15. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55. [p. [343](#)]
 16. For example, in 1904, in [One Step Forward, Two Steps Back](#), Lenin defined a "revolutionary Social-Democrat" as "a Jacobin who wholly identifies himself with the organisation of the proletariat -- a proletariat conscious of its class interests." (*CW*, vol. 7, p. 383). [p. [343](#)]
 17. See *The Holy Family*, pp. 163-165, and Engels's letter to Marx, September 4, 1870, in *Selected Correspondence*, pp. 302-303. [p. [343](#)]

From Marx to Mao	Other Documents	Reading Guide	On to Section 4, Bettelheim's Text
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