

**Charles
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**Class
Struggles
in the
USSR**



First Period: 1917-1923

[Section 1 -- Preface,
Introduction, and Part 1]

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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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Preface

It seems to me essential to explain to the reader why and how I have written this book and how it relates to my previous writings.

The simplest procedure is undoubtedly to begin by showing how the book began and how what was at first a project of limited scope developed into a more ambitious one.

What gave the immediate impetus to this work was the invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet forces. Those who claim to be Marxists cannot confine themselves to condemning or deploring political acts; they have also to explain them. Regrets and wishes may help the people to endure their woes, but they do not help them either to perceive their causes or to struggle to get rid of them or to prevent their reemergence. By explaining the reasons for something that does indeed deserve condemnation from the standpoint of the interests of the working people, we can contribute, however, to causing political forces to evolve in such a way that the "regrettable" events do not recur.

In the case of the invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia, I thought it all the more necessary not to confine myself to expressions of regret because what was at issue was, besides the fate of a people which had already suffered many occupations, the judgment to be passed upon what the Soviet Union has become today, since it was Russian forces, together with their "allies," that carried out this act of violence.

If I felt justified in dealing with the problems of the Soviet Union, this was because I have been studying that country for nearly forty years and because I believe that everything concerning it has worldwide significance and implications. That was my opinion in 1934, when I began to learn Russian; in

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1936, when I visited the USSR to study Soviet planning; in 1939, when I published a book on the subject; in 1946, when I published another book dealing with the theoretical and practical problems of planning; in 1950, when I published a book on the Soviet economy; and since then, in several visits to the country and in other books on planning^[1] and on the transition to socialism.^[2]

Basically, my interest in the Soviet Union since the mid-1930s has been determined by identification of what was happening in that country with the first experience of socialist construction. Without being blind to the difficulties and contradictions that marked this process (how could I be, when I was in Moscow in 1936, at the time of the first of the "great trials,"^[3] and was able to sense every day the confusion into which the city's inhabitants had been thrown and the fear of voicing their opinions that was felt by the most ordinary people as well as by old members of the Bolshevik Party and the Communist International?), I nevertheless considered, not only that the October Revolution had opened a new era in the history of mankind (which I still believe), but also that the economic and social development of the Soviet Union provided a sort of "model" for the building of socialism. The difficulties and contradictions accompanying this development seemed to me, despite their seriousness, to be due above all to the special historical conditions of Russia. I thought there was no reason why they should reappear elsewhere, or should prevent Russia from continuing to advance toward socialism and communism.

The undeniable economic successes achieved by the USSR, especially in the industrial field (from the five year plans onward), the Red Army's victory over Hitlerism, the rapidity with which economic reconstruction was carried out after the war, the improvement in the Soviet people's standard of living, the help rendered by the government of the USSR to socialist China, all seemed, moreover, to confirm the appreciations and forecasts I have mentioned, even though the social inequalities that developed during the first five year plans were tending not to diminish but rather to intensify.

The Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party,

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although it offered no analysis of the difficulties and contradictions that had led to the acts of repression committed indiscriminately and on a large scale during the preceding years, but confined itself to substituting for such an analysis personal accusations against Stalin (who was made solely "responsible" for the "negative" aspects of the past period), seemed to confirm that the Soviet Union, having reached a certain level of economic development, was now about to enter upon a phase of greater socialist democracy, thus opening up vast opportunities for working-class initiative. This congress seemed to show, too, that the party had retained -- or rather, had recovered -- the capacity for self-criticism that was essential if errors were to be rectified.^[4]

Actually this was not at all the case. The contradictory reality of Soviet history and Soviet society was not subject to the least analysis. The aspects of reality which needed to be condemned and transformed were not explained in relation to the inner contradictions of the Soviet Union. They were presented as being "perversions" due to the actions of a certain "personality," namely, Stalin. The acceptance by the Soviet Communist Party of such a pseudoexplanation testified to its abandonment of Marxism as a tool of analysis. This made the party incapable of helping to transform the social relations that had given rise to that which was being condemned in words. The pseudoexplanation given thus fulfilled its task of consolidating the class relations which concentrated economic and political power in the hands of a minority, so that the contradictions engendered by these class relations, far from diminishing, were actually deepened.

Among many other consequences, this deepening of the social contradictions resulted in a worsening of the conditions in which the USSR's economy functioned. The same thing happened in those countries linked with the USSR whose leaders followed the same political line. Instead of an attack being launched on the social contradictions themselves, "economic reforms" were introduced which were attempts to make the economic system "work better" by increasing the powers of factory managers and giving ever-greater scope to capitalist forms and

criteria of economic management.

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Contrary to the hopes of the leaders of the Soviet Union and the "fraternal countries," the various "reforms" have not radically solved any of the difficulties with which these leaders are faced. To be sure, momentary successes have been obtained in limited fields, but failures predominate: there is greater dependence on foreign techniques, increased foreign indebtedness, a marked reduction in the rate of industrial growth, and difficulties in the field of food supplies. Signs of discontent on the part of the working people with their situation and with the impact of the "economic reforms," become more and more apparent.

The whole world saw what happened in Poland in December 1970, when the workers in the big Baltic coast cities of Gdansk, Gdynia, Szczecin, and Sopot went on strike against a government policy which meant price increases and a lower standard of living for the working people. The repressive measures taken against the struggling Polish workers caused them to counterattack by occupying the offices of the party and of the political police and organizing a strike committee which formed a workers' militia. Although the security forces then resorted to still more intense repression, killing or wounding a number of the workers, the latter resisted, kept up their strike, and compelled the authorities to modify the composition of the ruling group, to negotiate, and to yield on a certain number of the workers' demands.^[5]

The events in Poland were a turning point in the relations between the working class in the countries of the Soviet zone and the political authorities of these countries. We know that they produced a profound echo among the working class of the USSR and aroused a wave of fear among the leading circles there -- fear which was reflected in the revision of the economic plans for 1971, and also in intensified repression.

In the USSR itself there has indeed been in recent years a tendency to increased repression which has become more and more obvious, as shown in the adoption of new police measures and in what we know of the population of the camps -- now, according to available estimates, amounting to about two million.

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On the basis of these deepening internal contradictions, the international policy of the USSR is marked by increasing negation of what formerly made up the socialist aspects of Soviet foreign policy. Instead of the aid that once was given to China and Albania, we have seen since 1960 a deliberate attempt, in the name of ideological "divergences," to sabotage the economic development of these countries through unilateral repudiation of signed agreements, cutting off of supplies needed for factories under construction, withdrawal of technicians, etc. The Soviet Union is in this way trying, unsuccessfully, to make use of the economic relations it established with these countries in the past to bring severe pressure to bear upon them and subject them to its hegemony.

In general, the USSR's international policy appears more and more like that of a great power seeking to secure as many economic and political advantages as possible for itself by utilizing the close relations it has formed with other countries. This imperialist type of policy leads the USSR both to collaborate with and to come into contradiction with the USA. These two great powers are both struggling for world hegemony. They are also led to make compromises at the expense of the peoples. They talk about "detente" while engaging in an armaments race exceeding anything previously known to history, and while American imperialism continues to carry on its wars against Third World peoples.

By taking its stand on the same ground as the USA, that is, by entering into competition with

that country for world hegemony, the USSR has been led to build offensive armed forces of unprecedented strength, equipping itself with gigantic means for intervention anywhere in the world. So as to be able to wield such a potential, equal or even superior in some fields to that of the USA, the USSR is now devoting 25 to 30 percent of its Gross National Product to military expenditure, as against 7 to 8 percent in the case of the USA. It is increasing year by year the number of divisions it keeps on a war footing on the frontiers of China; but its main military potential is turned toward Western Europe, and is also increasing rapidly.

In order to have at their disposal instruments of an

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imperialist-type foreign policy, the Soviet leaders are imposing a heavy burden on the people of the USSR, which hinders the country's economic development. Ultimately they have been compelled to seek financial and technical aid from American imperialism even while constantly clashing with the latter.

A review of this process of evolution (in which the occupation of Czechoslovakia figures as one moment) caused me to reconsider also the past of the Soviet Union, for it is impossible to suppose that the course being followed by that country results merely from the "personal responsibility" of a few leaders. The accession to power of these leaders and their ability to operate the policy I have described are necessarily to be explained by the social relations that now prevail in the USSR, and that took shape over a long preceding period. Hence the need to analyze these relations.

In the analysis which I was thus led to undertake, I was also able to draw upon the experience I had had of the economic and political transformations effected in China and Cuba.

As regards the latter country, this was a very concrete practical experience, as I participated on several occasions in discussion of the problems that arose in planning the Cuban economy in the years 1960-1966. On the basis of this experience I found myself thereafter questioning a set of conceptions regarding the conditions for working out economic plans, the significance of planning in the transition to socialism, and the implications of the existence of commodity and money relations in social formations in which state ownership of the means of production plays an important role.

So as to clarify the nature of the theses set forth in the present book and help the reader to situate them better in relation to those which I expounded in two previous books (and which were very largely the result of my experience of Cuba's problems), it is appropriate to recall what were the limits of my questioning of previously held conceptions.

In *The Transition to Socialist Economy*, which brings together a series of writings produced between 1962 and 1967, I

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applied myself to showing the connection between the existence of commodity and money relations, in Cuba as in the USSR, and of units of production which function, de facto, in relative independence of each other (despite the working of an economic plan), thus operating as "economic subjects."^[6.]

The analysis I then put forward tended to explain the existence of commodity and money relations, and of wage relations, by that of real social relations which function independently of men's will (and which cannot therefore be made to "disappear" merely by proclaiming them to be "abolished"). In the setting of this analysis, therefore, commodity and money relations

appear as the manifestation of underlying social relations: they are effects of these relations, and objective requirements for the reproduction of these relations.

Today I consider that the specific form of the analysis I offered in 1962 and 1967 was not satisfactory. I have been induced to modify very seriously the terms of my analysis in the light of further thinking about the conditions under which socialism is being built in China, and in particular about the lessons to be drawn from the Cultural Revolution.

The chief shortcoming of my writings of 1962-1967 lies in the fact that what is there treated as something dictated by objective requirements is essentially related to the level of development of productive forces.^[7] Although the concept of "the nature of the productive forces" is mentioned in these writings, the precise significance of the concept is not developed. Consequently, it is not made clear that the main obstacle to a socially unified policy (of which the economic plan can only be the means) consists not in the level of development of the productive forces but rather in the nature of the dominant social relations -- that is, both in the reproduction of the capitalist division of labor and in the ideological and political relations which, while being an effect of this division, also constitute the social conditions for this reproduction (by causing individuals and enterprises to "function" as "subjects" which accord priority to their own interests over the collective interest: the latter, moreover, possibly being

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only momentary or illusory if it is not identified with the demands of a policy that really works to create the conditions for the disappearance of antagonistic class interests).

What therefore fails to come out clearly in the writings collected under the title *The Transition to Socialist Economy* is that the development of the productive forces can never, by itself, cause the capitalist forms of the division of labor, or the other bourgeois social relations, to disappear. What is not said is that only a *class struggle* developing under the dictatorship of the proletariat and correctly led -- thanks to scientific experimentation on a mass scale and to theoretical analysis -- can bring about the disappearance of capitalist economic relations, by attacking the capitalist division of labor and, at the same time, the ideological and political relations that make it possible for relations of exploitation and oppression to be reproduced.

If in 1962-1967 I did not set out the formulations which I now put forward, this was because I was still strongly influenced by a certain conception of "Marxism" which has been widely prevalent in Europe, and which is nothing but a special form of what Lenin called "economism."^[8] It was the lessons to be drawn from the Cultural Revolution in China that enabled me to carry further my break with economism and so to reestablish contact with the revolutionary content of Marxism, a content masked and "overgrown" by the long years of economic practice that have characterized the European labor movement.^[9]

In *Economic Calculation and Forms of Property*, in which I mentioned that I was preparing an analysis of the Soviet social formation, I began to turn away from my previous problematic, in which the disappearance of commodity and money relations and the progress of socialist planning tended to be seen as dependent above all on the development of the productive forces (this development being conceived, moreover, in somewhat unilinear fashion), and not, first and foremost, on the revolutionization of social relations. As I have said, it is in the course of these last few years and, in part, through think-

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ing about the Cultural Revolution and its significance, that I have come to take account more systematically of what is implied by rejection of the "problematic of the productive forces," that is, of a conception which unilaterally subordinates the transformation of social relations to the

development of the productive forces.

These were the circumstances in which, between 1968 and the present time, I wrote a number of articles on some problems of socialism,^[10] and undertook a fresh analysis of the Soviet Union, with a view to defining better the specific nature of state capitalism and the relations and practices of the classes which dominate that country today.

At the beginning of 1969, I finished writing a first essay (unpublished) setting out the results of this analysis, from which it emerges that, under cover of state ownership, relations of exploitation exist today in the USSR which are similar to those existing in the other capitalist countries, so that it is only the *form* of these relations that is distinctive there. This distinctive form is that of state capitalism; and we have known since Engels's time that state capitalism is merely capitalism "pushed to an extreme."

Nevertheless, when I critically reread the essay I had written, it struck me that what was lacking in it was historical background. It is indeed impossible to understand the Soviet Union's present without relating it to the country's past. It is not enough to show the relations and practices that are dominant today; one must also explain how they have become dominant. One needs therefore to consider how, through what struggles and contradictions, the first country of the dictatorship of the proletariat has become transformed into a country carrying out an imperialist policy, which does not hesitate to send its armed forces into other countries in order to uphold its great-power interests.

Analysis of the transformation that the Soviet Union has undergone is at least as important as analysis of the present situation taken on its own; such an analysis can serve as an invaluable source of instruction, and help other proletarian

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revolutions to avoid taking the same road and ending up not with socialism, but with a specific form of capitalism just as oppressive and aggressive as the "classical" forms.

The present period demands, despite the difficulties involved, that this task be fulfilled. Even if it falls short of perfection, the effort to accomplish it cannot but help us to understand a past which is also our present, and to grasp how a proletarian revolution can be transformed into its opposite, namely, a bourgeois counter-revolution.

The Soviet experience confirms that what is hardest is not the overthrow of the former dominant classes: the hardest task is, first, to destroy the former social relations -- upon which a system of exploitation similar to the one supposed to have been overthrown for good can be reconstituted -- and then to prevent these relations from being reconstituted on the basis of those elements of the old that still remain present for a long time in the new social relations.

In our time it is therefore vital that we understand the reasons why the first victorious socialist revolution has ultimately produced the Soviet reality of today. If this is not understood, then, despite the positive and invaluable lessons to be drawn from the successes of the Chinese Revolution, the risks are indeed tremendous that what may begin, here or elsewhere, as a proletarian revolution, could result in the end in something quite different from socialism.

The essay I wrote in 1969 therefore seemed to me inadequate, and before publishing it in updated form I thought it necessary to complete my work by making an analysis of the Soviet Union's past. When I took up this task I appreciated that it was at least as complex as the already tackled one: first, because it covered an historical period that was much longer and richer in events and conflicts, and secondly, because one had to try to discover, through and beyond the particular history of the Soviet Union, the general movement of the contradictions

of which this very particularity was the form of existence. By itself, indeed, this particularity might seem accidental or fortuitous and would not enable us to draw the necessary lessons from what has happened in the USSR.

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The objective was to arrive at a knowledge of the history of the Soviet Union sufficiently precise to make it possible to write something other than a history of that country: to subject the class struggles in the USSR since the October Revolution to an analysis of sufficiently universal bearing, even though presenting itself in the specific shape of a contemporary history of the USSR. I thus had to analyze the decisive moments through which the Soviet social formation has passed and determine the nature of the social relations that have existed and have been dominant at each of these moments. I also sought to define the nature of the social forces that have contributed to altering the articulation of these relations, even when, as often happened, struggles were carried on that aimed at changes quite different from those which actually ensued. The present volume sets out the first results of this work, the ultimate aim of which is to provide an analysis of present-day Soviet reality -- an analysis that would remain to some extent incomprehensible in the absence of an adequate knowledge of the conditions in which today's reality took shape.

These analyses thus continue the work of rectification which I began between 1962 and 1967.

My work of rectification and of concrete analysis of the Soviet Union, of its present and past, caused me gradually to break with a certain congealed and simplistic conception of Marxism and to reestablish contact with what I believe to be the revolutionary content of historical and dialectical materialism.[\[1\]](#)

Only a part of the results of this work is included in the present volume, but I must provide a general survey in this foreword, for what is involved goes far beyond what might be a mere personal itinerary of no great interest to the reader.

As mentioned earlier, the simplified Marxism from which I tried to break free was not something personal to me: it had become that which the European sections of the Third International, departing further and further from Leninism, had caused to prevail in Europe, starting in the early 1930s, at the time when I began to think about the problems of socialism.

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This simplified Marxism bore within itself, moreover -- if not in germ then at least as a possibility to which it was exposed -- the premises of modern revisionism, that is, of a bourgeois ideology which has contributed to consolidating the existence of capitalist social relations in the Soviet Union and also outside it.

It would be futile to claim that I have analyzed all aspects of the congealed Marxism with which I have had to break in order to render intelligible what has happened in the Soviet Union (a reading of the book will reveal the most important of these aspects). It is necessary, however, to set forth and discuss some of the theses, explicit or implicit, of this kind of Marxism, so as to afford a better understanding of the meaning of the rectification being carried out in the pages that follow, and of the significance of the conclusions that will be brought together in the last volume of the work.

Three of the fundamental theses of the congealed Marxism with which one must break in order to restore a true revolutionary character to historical and dialectical materialism concern (1) the basis of class relations, (2) the role of the productive forces, and (3) the conditions for

the existence of the state and for its "withering away." I shall say just a few words about these three theses and their objective ideological and political functions.

Class relations and legal forms of ownership

The first thesis with which one has to break is that which makes a mechanistic identification of legal forms of ownership with class relations, particularly where the transition to socialism is concerned.

This thesis was explicitly expounded by Stalin in his report on the draft constitution of the USSR, presented on November 25, 1936, to the Seventh Congress of Soviets of the USSR.^[12]

In his report, Stalin summed up the transformation of forms of ownership that had taken place in Russia during the period

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1924-1936. He showed that in this period legal private ownership of the means of production and exchange had been practically abolished, and replaced by two other forms of ownership -- state property, which predominated in industry, transport, trade, and banking; and collective-farm property, which predominated in agriculture; and he concluded: "The capitalist class in the sphere of industry has ceased to exist. The kulak class in the sphere of agriculture has ceased to exist, and the merchants and profiteers in the sphere of trade have ceased to exist. Thus all the exploiting classes have now been eliminated."^[13]

According to this report, there were now only the working class, the peasant class, and the intelligentsia, who "must serve the people, for there are no longer any exploiting classes."^[14]

In conclusion, this part of Stalin's report asserted that, as a result, economic and political contradictions between classes (that is, between the peasants, the workers, and the intellectuals) "are declining and becoming obliterated."^[15] Acceptance of this thesis obstructs analysis of the contradictions which in fact continued to manifest themselves in the Soviet Union. It makes incomprehensible the idea that the proletariat could lose power to any sort of bourgeoisie, since the latter seems to be incapable of existence unless capitalist private property is reconstituted. Such a thesis disarms the proletariat by persuading it that the class struggle is now a thing of the past.

Life has made it its business to show, or rather to recall, that changes in legal forms of ownership do not suffice to cause the conditions for the existence of classes and for class struggle to disappear. These conditions are rooted, as Marx and Lenin often emphasized, not in legal forms of ownership but in *production relations*, that is, in the form of the social process of appropriation, in the place that the form of this process assigns to the agents of production -- in fact, in the relations that are established between them in social production.^[16]

The existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat and of state or collective forms of property is not enough to "abolish" capitalist production relations and for the antagonistic classes,

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proletariat and bourgeoisie, to "disappear." The bourgeoisie can continue to exist in different forms and, in particular, can assume the form of a state bourgeoisie.

The historical role of the dictatorship of the proletariat is not only to change the forms of

ownership but also -- and this is a much more complex and protracted task -- to transform the social process of appropriation and thereby destroy the old production relations and build new ones, thus ensuring the transition from the capitalist mode of production to the communist mode: the transition to socialism meaning this transition, which alone enables bourgeois social relations, and the bourgeoisie as a class, to be eliminated.

The above is nothing new, but quite literally, a return to Marx and Lenin -- to Marx, for whom the dictatorship of the proletariat is the necessary point of transition for arriving at the abolition of class differences in general;^[17] and to Lenin, who frequently recalled that "classes *still* remain and *will remain* in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat," adding that "every class has undergone a change," so that their *relations* have also altered, and the class struggle, while continuing, "assumes different forms."^[18]

It is because the task of the socialist revolution is not confined to transforming legal property relations, and that what is fundamental is to transform social relations as a whole, including production relations, that Lenin comes back so often to the essential idea that it is comparatively "easy . . . to start the revolution . . . but it will be more difficult . . . to continue the revolution and bring it to its consummation."^[19] Thus, the transition to socialism inevitably occupies a long period of history, and cannot be "accomplished" within a few years.^[20]

It is clear that if one is to understand the changes in Soviet society and the possibility of the reestablishment of a bourgeois dictatorship in the USSR (without any change in legal property relations), one has to abandon the thesis that exploiting classes have ceased to exist merely because there is a dictatorship of the proletariat (over what class would the proletariat be exercising its dictatorship, in that case?) and

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because state and collective-farm property predominates; one needs to go back to Lenin's conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat as "the continuation of the class struggle in new

The primacy of the development of the productive forces

A second thesis characteristic of the simplification of Marxism which tended to impose itself during the 1930s in the European sections of the Third International was that of the primacy of the development of the productive forces. This thesis presented the development of the productive forces as the "driving force of history."

For a certain period, acceptance of this thesis gave one the illusion of possessing an "explanation" of the contradictions in the Soviet social formation -- an explanation that was no longer to be sought in the class struggle, as this was supposed to be "on its way out," or even to have ceased altogether with the disappearance of antagonistic classes.

In a very general form, the thesis according to which the productive forces are the driving force of history was set forth by Stalin in his essay of September 1938 entitled "[Dialectical and Historical Materialism](#),"^[21] in which he wrote. "First the productive forces of society change and develop, and then, *depending* on these changes and *in conformity with them*, men's relations of production, their economic relations, change."^[22]

The thesis thus formulated does not deny the role of the class struggle -- in so far as there is a society in which antagonistic classes confront one another -- but relegates this to the secondary level: the class struggle intervenes essentially in order to smash production relations that hinder

the development of the productive forces, thus engendering new production relations which conform to the needs of the development of the productive forces.

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Actually, in the passage quoted above, Stalin acknowledges that the new production relations can appear independently of a revolutionary process, when he writes: "The rise of new productive forces and of the relations of production corresponding to them does not take place separately from the old system, after the disappearance of the old system, but within the old system . . . "[23]

One can certainly find passages in Marx which suggest a similar problematic: but his work as a whole shows that, for him, *the driving force of history is the class struggle*, and that, as long as classes exist, it is through conflicts between classes that social relations are transformed; it shows also that socialist social relations can arise only through class struggle. Similarly, Lenin would never have been able to formulate his theory of "the weakest link in the imperialist chain" -- the theory which explains why a proletarian revolution could take place *in Russia* -- if, like the Mensheviks, he had held to a conception which put the main stress on the development of the productive forces, since, according to this conception, a proletarian revolution could not happen elsewhere than in the most highly industrialized countries.

The thesis of the primacy of the productive forces prevents one from using rigorously the concepts of historical materialism, and leads to incorrect political formulations, such as this one, put forward by Stalin in the above-quoted essay: "If it is not to err in policy, the party of the proletariat must both in drafting its programme and in its practical activities proceed primarily from the laws of development of production, from the laws of economic development of society." [24] The conception of the productive forces developed in this way certainly gave rise to a number of difficulties when it came to fitting it into the theses of historical materialism as a whole; but it was a necessary corollary to the thesis about the disappearance from the USSR of exploiting classes, and therefore also of exploited ones.

The connection between these theses is seen, for example, when Stalin writes that "the basis of the relations of production under the socialist system . . . is the social ownership of

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the means of production. Here there are no longer exploiters and exploited . . . Here the relations of production fully correspond to the state of productive forces . . . "[25]

One of the difficulties arising from this formulation (according to which there is "full conformity" between productive forces and production relations) is that it does away with any possibility of contradiction between the two elements of the economic basis. This led Stalin in 1952 to make a partial rectification of his earlier formulation, when he reproached A. Ya. Notkin for having taken literally his formulation regarding "full conformity," and said that this referred only to the fact that "under socialism . . . society is in a position to take timely steps to bring the lagging relations of production into conformity with the character of the productive forces. Socialist society is in a position to do so because it does not include obsolescent classes that might organise resistance." [26]

Ideologically and politically, these two theses on the disappearance of exploiting and exploited classes in the USSR and on the primacy of the development of the productive forces, have contributed to blocking any organized action by the Soviet proletariat to transform the production relations, that is, to destroy the existing forms of the process of appropriation, the basis for the reproduction of class relations, and build a new process of appropriation, excluding the social division between the function of management and that of execution, the

separation between manual and mental labor, and the differences between town and country and between workers and peasants -- in short, to destroy the objective basis for the existence of classes. On the one hand, classes were supposed to have disappeared, and on the other, the production relations were supposed to correspond perfectly to the productive forces, and any contradiction that might seem to exist was supposed to be bound to disappear in good time, thanks to the action of "socialist society."

Under these conditions, the fundamental problem for the Soviet proletariat to solve seemed to be that of increasing production as quickly as possible: in building "the material foundations of socialism" it was "guaranteed" that the corre-

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sponding production relations and the appropriate superstructure would also develop. Hence the slogans of the period: "Technique decides everything" and "Catch up with and surpass the most advanced capitalist countries."

It is understandable that the Chinese Communist Party considered itself justified in saying, in the publication [*On Khrushchev's Phony Communism and Its Historical Lessons for the World*](#) : "Stalin departed from Marxist-Leninist dialectics in his understanding of the laws of class struggle in socialist society."^[27]

Actually, this understanding of the laws of the class struggle was not particular to Stalin. Here, as on many other matters (for example, on how to conceive the relations between struggle and unity within the party), Stalin merely expressed in systematic fashion the views of the leading strata of the Bolshevik Party. Despite appearances, his role was essentially that of transmitting and concentrating orientations which reflected the changes going on within Soviet society and the Bolshevik Party. This role was due to the fact that the party itself was becoming less and less capable of going against the tide, that is, of revolutionizing practice and theory. Even when Stalin, at certain moments, disregarded the fears and reservations of the Central Committee and the Political Bureau, he did not go "against the tide" in the strict sense,^[28] but merely deduced the ultimate consequences of the conceptions prevailing in the party's leading circles. It was this will to go through to the end that placed Stalin apparently "above" the party and caused to seem specifically "his" some conceptions which, except in a few cases,^[29] were not peculiar to him but acquired exceptional authority through the support he gave them: this was just what happened with the understanding of the laws of the class struggle in socialist society.

The fact is that this "understanding" dominated the ideological and political conceptions of the European sections of the Third International, and thereby helped to conceal the existence of classes and of class struggle in the Soviet Union, thus encouraging people to seek "elsewhere" than in class

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contradictions the causes of the grave difficulties being experienced by the Soviet Union.

This "elsewhere" was signposted by the thesis on the primacy of the productive forces: it was because those forces were "insufficiently developed" that the USSR had to cope with enormous difficulties and therefore was obliged to take a series of measures that were remote from what the Bolshevik Party's old program thought corresponded with the demands of the building of socialism: increased wage differentials, development of a bonus system, growing privileges accorded to technicians, strengthening of the personal authority of the manager of an enterprise, etc.

For a whole generation, my own generation, the two theses mentioned above enjoyed a sort of "obviousness" which caused us to avoid analyzing the real contradictions and problems: even when these were not ignored, their "solution" was put off till later -- it would in due course be provided by the development of the productive forces.

In order to appreciate the "obviousness" of these theses (a quality which they have retained both for modern revisionism and for what is called Trotskyism), one must remember that they expressed the view not only of Stalin personally but also of *the most revolutionary wing of the European Marxist movement of the time*.^[30]

It will not be out of place to quote here some of Trotsky's statements regarding these two theses: although his attitude to them was close to Stalin's, it nevertheless caused him to draw very different conclusions.

Like Stalin, Trotsky accepted that, after the collectivization or statization of the means of production, "there are no possessing classes,"^[31] since "private property" no longer exists. Explaining his idea, Trotsky added that there were no "possessing classes" in the USSR because the establishment of "state property" prevented any "bureaucrat" from acquiring "stocks or goods" which he could "transmit to his heirs."^[32] He also observed that "in civilised societies, property relations are validated by laws,"^[33] leaving it to be assumed that produc-

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tion relations belong to the superstructure and do not correspond to the relations established in the social process of production and reproduction.

We also find in Trotsky, although in caricatured form, Stalin's formula according to which the communist program must "proceed primarily from the laws of development of production," as when he writes: "Marxism sets out from the development of technique as the fundamental spring of progress, and constructs the communist programme upon the dynamic of the productive forces."^[34]

These similarities render all the more striking the difference between the practical conclusions drawn by Stalin and Trotsky respectively.

For Stalin, socialism had been achieved, in essentials, at the end of the first five year plan. For Trotsky, this conclusion was unacceptable for two main reasons: on the one hand, as he saw it, there could be no question of "socialism in a single country," and, on the other (and this calls for particular notice), "the achieved productivity of labour" was too low in the Soviet Union for it to be possible to talk of socialism having been realized there.^[35] Thus, Trotsky acknowledges that the social content of one and the same legal form can vary, but this variation is not related, for him, to different production relations (indeed, the concept of production relations is practically absent from his writings on this subject), but to "the achieved productivity of labour," and this leads him to declare that "the 'root' of every social organization is the productive forces."^[36]

Finally, from the standpoint with which we are concerned here, what characterizes Trotsky's conception is that it accepts the thesis of the primacy of the development of the productive forces in its uttermost implications, notably in the two following respects.

First, reference to the level of the productive forces enables Trotsky to bring in the notion of "bourgeois norms of distribution,"^[37] which have been dictated to the USSR by the low level of the productive forces, and which could lead to a restoration of private property. The idea of a restoration of

bourgeois domination within the setting of state property is thus implicitly rejected by Trotsky, though he is unable to bring forward any genuine arguments to justify this rejection.

Second, the role which Trotsky ascribes to the development of the productive forces goes so far that it completely replaces the class struggle, so that he can write: "The strength and stability of regimes are determined in the long run by the relative productivity of their labour. A socialist economy possessing a technique superior to that of capitalism would really be guaranteed in its socialist development for sure -- so to speak, automatically . . ." [38]

I have quoted Trotsky at this length, alongside Stalin, in order to show the extent to which, despite the different conclusions drawn, the two theses (on the disappearance of antagonistic classes in the USSR and on the primacy of the development of the productive forces) were a sort of "commonplace" in "European Marxism" in the 1930s (remaining so until a comparatively recent date), which tended to obstruct analysis of the transformation of society in terms of the class struggle.

I shall endeavor later on to state what, in my view, were the reasons that enabled these two theses to play for so long their particular ideological and political role. Before doing this, however, I must say something about a third thesis which was linked with the two discussed so far.

The existence of the state and the disappearance of exploiting classes

One of the difficulties to which acceptance of the thesis of the disappearance of exploiting classes gives rise relates to the existence of the Soviet state, not as a transitional form becoming transformed into a no, a "commune" -- to use the formulation employed by Engels in a letter to Bebel, and taken over by Lenin -- but as a state becoming more and more separate from the masses, endowed with an apparatus increas-

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ingly jealous to safeguard its "secrets," and functioning in a hierarchical manner, with each "echelon" subordinate to a "higher" one.

From the Marxist standpoint, the form of existence of the Soviet state and the nature of its apparatuses created a problem, since, for historical materialism, this type of state can exist only on the basis of class antagonisms: the strengthening of such a state machine is a symptom of the deepening of these antagonisms, whereas their disappearance is accompanied by the extinction of the state in the strict sense (as an organ of repression) and its replacement by organs of self-administration by the masses.

This problem was considered by Stalin, notably in his report to the Eighteenth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party. [39] In his address Stalin recalled Engels's formulation in *Anti-Duhring* : "As soon as there is no longer any social class to be held in subjection; as soon as class rule, and the individual struggle for existence based upon our present anarchy in production, with the collisions and excesses arising from these, are removed, nothing more remains to be repressed, and a special repressive force, a state, is no longer necessary." [40]

In order to solve the problem thus presented, Stalin was obliged to declare that "certain of the general propositions in the Marxist doctrine of the state were incompletely worked out and

inadequate."^[41] He then proposed that this inadequacy be repaired by claiming that the Soviet Union needed a state and a vast state machine not because of internal social relations but owing to an external factor, namely, capitalist encirclement. This produced the following formulation:

The function of military suppression inside the country died away . . . In place of this function of suppression the state acquired the function of protecting socialist property from thieves and pilferers of the people's property. The function of defending the country from foreign attack fully remained: consequently, the Red Army and the Navy also fully remained, as did the punitive organs and the intelligence service, which are indispensable for the detection and punishment of the spies,

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assassins and wreckers sent into our country by foreign intelligence services.^[42]

Apart from the theoretical difficulty that arises from asserting the need for a huge force specializing in *internal* repression in order to deal with an external danger, when the masses' own organizations ought to be capable of coping with the task of detecting the hostile elements "sent into our country by foreign intelligence services," in a country where, in principle, no class was ready to cooperate with such elements, this thesis on the need to maintain a state machine came up against a more concrete difficulty (the full dimensions of which became apparent only when the scale of the repression became known -- using this modest term "repression" to mean the arrest, imprisonment, and deportation of several million persons): how to explain that such numerous measures of coercion needed to be taken if it was merely a matter of striking at elements "sent in," together with "thieves and pilferers of the people's property," or persons who, out of "weaknesses," "vanity," or "slackness of will" had allowed foreign foes "to enmesh them in their espionage nets"?^[43] It is hard to answer this question when so formulated. However, the scale of the repression carried out, the forms it assumed, and the contradictions shown in it can be much better understood when we set these facts in relation not mainly to the activity of foreign spies and the "slackness of will" of Soviet citizens but to *a class struggle that was both furious and blind*.

Trotsky, having also accepted the thesis of the disappearance of class oppression, was faced with the same problem in explaining the existence of a state machine. The "solution" he offered was purely economic in character. Taking up the formulation by Engels quoted above, he singled out from it "the individual struggle for existence," and declared that it was because this had not disappeared in the USSR that the state continued to exist -- and that it would also exist after a revolution "even in America, on the basis of the most advanced capitalism."^[44] It is worth quoting also this curious prognosti-

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cation: "In so far as the social organisation has become socialistic, the soviets [in other words, precisely the organs of self-administration by the masses, the "nonstate" -- C.B.] ought to drop away like the scaffolding after a building is finished."^[45]

Nevertheless, however unsatisfactory the thesis according to which the form of existence of the Soviet state was explicable by the threat from outside and the "slackness of will" of the citizens of the USSR, acceptance of the first two theses made it almost inevitable.

This flashback should help the reader to understand the quasi-impossibility for those who accepted the theses discussed (and until recently that meant, in Europe at least, the overwhelming majority of all who recognized that the October Revolution had opened a new era in the history of mankind) to carry out a Marxist analysis of Soviet society, since essential to such an analysis would be not to shut one's eyes to class relations and the effects of the class struggle, but on the contrary, to perceive that here are relations and a struggle which are of decisive importance, and destined to remain so until a classless, communist society has been

built.

But this review of the past still fails to provide an answer to the following question: why did the economic problematic, of which the theses discussed above formed parts, play for so long (and why does it still play) its specific ideological role?

I. The dominance of the problematic of the productive forces

In answering this question it must not be forgotten that the problematic of the productive forces -- one of the aspects of the problematic of economism -- was historically bound up, in an indissoluble way, not only with the European labor movement of the years 1880-1914 but also, in transformed fashion, with the history of the Russian Revolution, especially from the end of the 1920s onward, during the first attempt ever made

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to build socialism. The prestige which this attempt acquired in the eyes of the great majority of those who rightly saw in capitalism the "perfected" system of exploitation of man by man -- a system which has already produced two world wars and innumerable wars of lesser dimensions -- was bound, to some degree necessarily, to cast reflected glory upon the theoretical problematic connected with this attempt.

This is, however, only half an answer, for we still have to ask why this historical link was formed between the first attempt to build socialism and the theses that lie at the heart of the problematic we are discussing.

To this second aspect of the question I shall try, in this preface, to give only some elements of a reply, elements which will themselves be developed in the present volume and its successors (insofar as such development is required for an analysis of the transformation of the Soviet social formation).

(a) The cessation of the fight against economism in the Bolshevik Party

The first element of my reply relates to the ideology of the Bolshevik Party itself. This party, despite the far-reaching changes it underwent--through the mere fact of its revolutionary activity, and through Lenin's ideological struggle against economism, was far from having rid itself of all economic conceptions at the moment when, with Lenin's departure, the fight against economism ceased to be a feature of the ideological struggle inside the party.

It should be recalled that the term "economism" was used by Lenin to characterize critically a conception of Marxism which sought to reduce it to a mere "economic theory" by means of which all social changes could be interpreted. Such a conception can assume a variety of forms. When not systematized, it may play only a relatively secondary role, and it is possible then to speak only of a "tendency to economism."

Because economism defines the development of the productive forces as the driving force of history, one of its chief

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effects is to depict the political struggle between classes as the direct and immediate result of economic contradictions. The latter are thus supposed to be able by themselves to "engender" social changes and, "when the time is ripe," revolutionary struggles. The working class thus appears to be spontaneously urged toward revolution (it is therefore not necessary to form a proletarian party). The same problematic tends to deny that exploited and oppressed classes other than the proletariat are capable of struggling for socialism.^[46]

At another level of analysis, economism is characterized by the fact that it tends to identify productive forces with the material means of production, thus denying that the principal productive force consists of the producers themselves: consequently, economism ascribes the major role in the building of socialism not to the initiative of the working people but to the accumulation of new means of production and technical knowledge.

Economism can appear in a variety of forms, even contradictory ones. Depending on the conjuncture of the class struggle, it can appear as rightist or leftist (actually, it is always both). In the Bolshevik Party, economism fostered certain attitudes taken by opposition groups in 1918 and in 1920-1925, including the trade-union oppositions, whose right-wing character was especially clear.^[47]

Among the "rightist-leftist" effects of economism in the Bolshevik Party must also be mentioned the positions taken during the "war communism" period by Bukharin, Trotsky, and Preobrazhensky, who contemplated a "direct transition to communism" by way of generalized resort to state compulsion (militarization of labor, discipline imposed from above, requisitioning and rationing of agricultural produce), this being defined as the expression of "proletarian self-discipline," as a result of abstractly identifying the Soviet state with a "workers' state."

This form of economism made of centralized management of the economy the essence of "communism." It can be regarded as rightist in that it subjected the working people to an

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apparatus of coercion. It seemed thus to stand in opposition to a left-wing economism which declared, implicitly at least, that the unification of the working class and the unity of this class with the other toiling classes can be effected spontaneously through the convergence of the interests of all the working people. In reality these two conceptions both deny the decisive role of the ideological and political class struggle and the necessity (in order to carry this struggle through to victory of a Marxist-Leninist party guided by a correct political line. The first conception tends to substitute state coercion for political and ideological leadership of the proletariat,^[48] while the second tends to replace this leadership by the activity of the trade unions. As will be seen, these two "interpretations of Marxism" led certain Bolsheviks, when "war communism" came to an end, to call for "statization of the trade unions," while others came out in favor of "trade unionization of the state."

If it is necessary to dwell at such length here upon economism, this is not only because it has played an increasingly influential role in the European sections of the Third International, but also because the existence of economism, in one form or another, constantly confronts the labor movement with new problems. It is an illusion to imagine that Marxism and Marxist parties can be "wholly and finally" purged of it. This is in fact the form that bourgeois ideology takes within Marxism, and this ideology has its roots in bourgeois social relations that can disappear only when classes themselves disappear.

Struggle against economism is thus necessarily a part of the life of Marxism, and is even the principal form taken by the ideological class struggle in this field. Marx and Lenin waged this struggle in their writings.

Lenin's activity enabled the Bolshevik Party to shake off the crudest forms of economism, but tendencies to economism continued very strong within it. This was the reason why Lenin often had difficulty in making his views prevail. It also explains why economism marked so deeply the way in which the NEP was implemented, and the conception of collectiv-

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zation and industrialization that prevailed in the Soviet Union, assigning the most important role to accumulation and treating technique as though it were "above" classes.

What has been said does not yet enable us to understand more than partially the historical link between the first attempt to build socialism and economism. In order to arrive at a fuller understanding of this link, two other series of ideas need to be followed through, concerning, first, the *social foundations* of economism, and secondly, the explicit revival of a number of economic theses at the time of the five year plans.

(b) *The social foundations of economism*

Without entering into a debate for which this is not the place, it needs to be recalled that economism is itself a product, within Marxism, of the class struggle. To forget this is to fall into idealism -- to suppose that ideas develop by their own motion and affect history independently of social contradictions.

In its original form, economism arose in the Second International, in the German Social Democratic Party. In its rightist variant it was connected with the existence within this party of a powerful political and trade-union apparatus which became integrated with the German state machine. The heads of this powerful apparatus were able to delude themselves that a steady increase in their organizational activity and pressure for workers' demands would eventually create the conditions for capitalism to be overthrown. They were all the more attached to this illusion because, by indulging it, they could strengthen their own positions in the German labor movement without, apparently, having to incur the risks inherent in revolutionary activity. In this way there emerged a bourgeois ideology, decked out with a few seemingly Marxist formulations which exercised a considerable influence on the German labor movement as a whole, insofar as the operations of the movement's political and trade-union apparatus and the strength of German imperialism enabled some strata of the

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working class to secure an improvement in their living standards. Conversely, in tsarist Russia,) where the conditions for the development of a legal labor movement were not present, the Mensheviks' economism found no echo in the Russian working class, apart from a few relatively "privileged" sections such as the railroad workers.

In the Bolshevik Party itself the trade-union leaders proved on a number of occasions to be the principal agents of a right-wing economism, and after the October Revolution, the growth among party members of a stratum of administrators and of business, planning, and financial officials favored the development of economism in new forms. As will be seen, these new forms assumed a rightist or leftist appearance depending on the course of the class struggle and on the characteristics of those strata of the workers that could provide a social basis for them.

In its turn, the economism which had developed in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union found a response in the sections of the Communist International established in those countries where it was possible for the labor movement to develop in forms akin to those of the German labor movement before the First World War.

(c) The explicit revival of economic theses during the implementation of the five year plans

The explicit revival of economic theses which was expressed in a particularly systematic way in the writings mentioned above needs to be considered in two aspects -- as the result of a profound evolution of Russian society and the Bolshevik Party, and in connection with the new authority acquired by these theses through their having been expounded by Stalin. The first aspect is clearly the decisive one. It was the many changes undergone by Soviet Russia and by the Bolshevik Party between October 1917 and the beginning of 1929 that made it possible for conceptions to be adopted -- at first only

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implicitly, in practice -- which identified the building of socialism with the fastest possible development of the productive forces,^[49] and of industry in particular, even at the expense of the alliance between the working class and the peasantry.

The economic theses, in the form in which they triumphed at the end of the 1920s, were never fundamentally challenged by the various oppositionist trends. What the latter challenged were only particular concrete measures or groups of measures, of a political or administrative character, decided on the basis of a general orientation which they did not challenge fundamentally. Even the objections raised by Bukharin against an industrialization campaign which he thought was being conducted too hastily, were aimed at warning against the long-term negative economic effects of an initial industrial effort which he considered excessive. His argument was essentially that a smaller initial effort would make it possible to accomplish more quickly the same sort of industrialization that was aimed at by the five year plans. He did not question whether this type of industrialization was in conformity with the needs of socialist construction (though he did disagree that the type of collectivization carried through from 1929 onward would really enable socialist relations to be built in the countryside).

While it is true that the economic conceptions which triumphed with the first five year plans corresponded to deep-seated tendencies in the Bolshevik Party of that period, it is no less true, as has been observed, that the explicit assertion by Stalin of the economic theses in question endowed the latter with exceptional weight, by virtue of the equally exceptional authority attached to his interventions. Here arises one of the aspects of what has been called "the question of Stalin."

In raising this question (which cannot be properly studied until the second volume of this work, in connection with my analysis of the period 1924-1953 as a whole), it must be kept in mind, first and foremost, that Lenin and Stalin had very different attitudes regarding problems of ideological struggle within the party.

Lenin, generally speaking, always put this struggle in the

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forefront. He never hesitated to go "against the tide," as a result of which he more than once found himself in a minority in the Central Committee, and this on questions of vital importance -- which shows, incidentally (and it is a point I shall return to at some length), how mistaken it is to see the Bolshevik Party as a "Leninist" party.

Stalin saw his leading role in a different way. On major problems he endeavored above all (particularly until 1934) to give expression to profound tendencies existing in the party, for

which he thus acted as spokesman. From this standpoint, polemical attacks leveled against Stalin on the grounds that, by means of his "personality," he imposed on the party conceptions that were alien to it, are groundless. They relate to something quite different, namely, that Stalin persevered with inflexible rigor in putting into effect measures called for by conceptions that were not only his but also those of almost all the party members, including most of those who opposed certain of these measures.

Furthermore, the party was constantly changing: the social forces largely operative within it in 1929 were different from what they had been in 1917, and were different again in 1934 and in 1952, these changes being themselves bound up with changes in Soviet society.

However, and this is the second point that needs to be considered, by making himself the spokesman of profound tendencies in the party, Stalin gave additional weight to these tendencies, greatly reinforcing them. This was especially so in the case of the economic conceptions which prevailed from 1929 onward.

The additional weight conferred by Stalin upon the theses he backed was a consequence of his own authority. This was not mainly due -- as some like to imagine -- to the fact that Stalin was the General Secretary of the Bolshevik Party (for that fact also has to be explained, without resorting, as is so often done, to anecdotes about Stalin's "personality" which, even when they are true, explain nothing at all). His authority was due to what almost the entire party, from the early 1930s onward, saw as the exceptional twofold merit of Stalin -- that

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he had not given up the idea of building socialism in the USSR, and that he had worked out a policy which, as the party saw it, would successfully bring about that result.

When, after Lenin's death, the other Bolshevik leaders were ready to allow the continuation of a NEP that would have meant development toward private capitalism, or else to advocate certain measures of industrialization which they declined to present as leading to the establishment of socialism, Stalin, taking up a thesis of Lenin's,^[50] reaffirmed that it was possible to undertake the building of socialism in the USSR without making this dependent on the victory of the proletarian revolution in Europe or in the rest of the world.

By adopting this line, and then by framing a policy aimed at drawing the logical consequences from it, Stalin intended to give back confidence to the Soviet working class; he provided the party with an objective other than merely trying to keep itself in power while waiting for better days; and in this way he contributed to the inception of a gigantic transformation process, which was to create the conditions needed for defense of the Soviet Union's independence and for intensification of the divisions in the imperialist camp, as a result of which the Soviet Union was able to play a decisive part in the defeat of Hitlerism. The policy of industrialization kept alight the beacon of the October Revolution, sustained the people's confidence in the victorious outcome of their struggles, and thus objectively helped to ensure the success of the Chinese Revolution.

By proclaiming that the Soviet Union could advance to socialism, Stalin, contrary to Trotsky's claims, appeared as heir to Lenin's position, several of whose writings, especially the last, asserted this possibility. This was one of the sources of Stalin's authority, which was linked with the theses he propounded. Actually, the enormous authority that Stalin enjoyed, especially right after the Second World War, was due not only to the theses he had upheld, but also to the efforts, courage, and self-sacrifice of the Soviet people. It was through the toil and heroism of this people that the industry of the USSR had been built and the Hitlerite armies defeated.

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Nevertheless, it was Stalin who had directed these efforts and struggles by giving them the right objectives.

True, life has shown that, in respect of the precise path to be followed and the concrete measures to be taken in order to arrive at the objective decided upon, Stalin made serious mistakes, but their exact nature was not immediately apparent at the time.^[51] Moreover, in the situation that the Soviet Union and the Bolshevik Party were in at the end of the 1920s, the mistakes made were doubtless historically inevitable.

The fact that these mistakes were made, and that they entailed grave political consequences (especially the blind repression which struck not only at the enemies of socialism but also at the masses and at genuine revolutionaries, while real enemies were spared), has given the world proletariat an exemplary lesson. It has been finally demonstrated that certain forms of attack against capitalism are illusory and only strengthen the bourgeoisie within the machinery of political and economic administration. The lessons drawn by Lenin from the comparable, even though limited, experience of "war communism" have thus been confirmed.

For the moment, however, the fact that the Soviet Union accomplished in a few years changes of extraordinary scope, resulting in the elimination of private capitalism and precapitalist forms of production, gave unprecedented authority to the theses upheld by the Bolshevik Party and formulated by Stalin. This strengthened still further the "obviousness" which these theses were seen as possessing by the great majority of members of the revolutionary movement, not only in the Soviet Union but also in Europe and elsewhere.

(d) Economism in the labor movements and Communist parties of Europe

Another factor helps to account for the role played, outside the Soviet Union, by the economistic conception of the building of socialism. This factor is the circumstance that the economism which Lenin had combated in the Bolshevik Party was much more widespread and lively in the European sec-

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tions of the Third International than in its Russian section. In Europe -- more precisely in Western Europe, and especially in Germany and France -- economism had a long history which was largely identical with that of Europe's Social Democratic parties, mainly from the time when European capitalism entered the phase of imperialism. Since economism had not been combated in the rest of Europe as it had been in Russia, it is easy to understand that the revolutionary workers' movement in Europe was quite prepared to accept as "obvious" the economistic theses of the Soviet Communist Party.

Today, the economistic problematic of the building of socialism has been severely shaken (at least with respect to the form it took from the late 1920s onward) for at least two reasons.

The first of these is external to the USSR. It is the Chinese Revolution. What is happening in China proves that a low level of development of the productive forces is no obstacle to a socialist transformation of social relations, and does not necessarily require passing through forms of primitive accumulation, with aggravation of social inequalities, and so on.

China's example shows that it is not necessary (and, indeed, that it is dangerous) to aspire to build *first of all* the material foundations of socialist society, putting off *till later* the transformation of social relations, which will thus be brought into conformity with more highly developed productive forces. China's example shows that socialist transformation of the

superstructure must *accompany* the development of the productive forces and that this transformation is a condition for truly socialist economic development. It shows, too, that when the transformations are carried out in this way, industrialization does not require, in contrast to what happened in the Soviet Union, the levying of tribute from the peasantry, a procedure which seriously threatens the alliance between the workers and the peasants.

The second reason why the economic problematic of the building of socialism has been severely shaken is the actual disappearance of the "facts" from which the economic the

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ses under discussion claimed to derive their "obvious" character.

As long as the Soviet Union was economically weak, with only a mediocre degree of industrial development, that which seemed, in the economic and political relations obtaining in that country, to be in contradiction with what Marx, Engels, and Lenin had said about socialism could be attributed by economism to this economic weakness of the USSR. The economic conceptions left room for hope that when the Soviet Union ceased to be weak there would be an end to the restrictions imposed on freedom of expression by the masses, the inequality of incomes would be reduced, the many privileges enjoyed by a minority of cadres and technicians would be abolished, and the repression extended to wide sections of the population would cease. The "negative" features of Soviet society could thus be seen as the "price" that had to be paid in order to build the "material foundations" of socialism, as "transient" phenomena that must disappear automatically when this objective was attained or was being approached. The "facts" thus seemed to justify the economic problematic and render pointless any analysis of Soviet reality in terms of class struggles that might express the rise of a state bourgeoisie^[52] which was taking over all positions of command and setting up the apparatus needed to ensure its domination.

Today the situation is quite different. Although still experiencing great economic difficulties,^[53] which have to be explained, the Soviet Union has long since become the world's second industrial power and Europe's first, and in many fields of science and technology it holds the leading position. Furthermore, it is bordered by European countries closely associated with it, which possess a far from negligible economic potential. And yet the phenomena which economism claimed to account for by the "backwardness" of the USSR, and which therefore should have been only transient, far from disappearing, are being maintained and developed. The privileges that, when they arose in the recent

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past, were regarded as having been imposed by the conditions of the moment, by the needs of accumulation, are today officially recognized elements in the system of social relations within which it is claimed that the Soviet Union is "building the material foundations of communism." For the Soviet Communist Party there is no question of dismantling this system: on the contrary, it seeks to reinforce it. There is no question of allowing the Soviet workers to exercise collective control over the utilization of the means of production, over the way current production is used, or over the activity of the party and its members. The factories are run by managers whose relations with "their" workers are relations of command, and who are responsible only to their superiors. Agricultural enterprises are run in practically similar ways. In general, the direct producers have no right to express themselves -- or rather, they can do so only when ritually called upon to approve decisions or "proposals" worked out independently of them in the "higher circles" of the state and the party.

The rules governing the management of Soviet enterprises^[54] are to an increasing degree copied from those of the "advanced" capitalist countries, and many Soviet managers go for

training to the business schools of the United States and Japan. What was supposed to give rise to increasingly socialist relations has instead produced relations that are essentially capitalist, so that behind the screen of "economic plans," it is the laws of capitalist accumulation, and so of profit, that decide how the means of production are utilized.

The producers are still wage earners working to valorize the means of production, with the latter functioning as collective capital managed by a state bourgeoisie. This bourgeoisie forms, like any other capitalist class, the corps of "functionaries of capital," to use Marx's definition of the capitalist class. The party in power offers to the working people only an indefinite renewal of these social relations. It is, in practice, the party of the "functionaries of capital," acting as such on both the national and international planes.

For anyone who faces the facts, life itself has dispelled any

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hopes one might have cherished for the consolidation -- and, a fortiori, the extension -- of the gains of the proletarian revolution in the Soviet Union. Today we need to try and understand why these hopes have been dashed, so as to appreciate what the USSR has become, and by way of what transformations. These are two of the aims of this work, which I have thought it necessary to pursue for several reasons.

II. The need to determine the prevailing social relations in the USSR and the conditions for their formation

The first reason is that there are still many people who do not want to face the facts. They still identify the Soviet Union with socialism. This has important effects on the workers' class struggles, especially in the industrialized countries. In the eyes of the workers of these countries, even those who are most militant and most convinced of the need to do away with capitalism, the lot of the Soviet workers does not seem an enviable one, and they therefore fear that what -- with the Soviet Union held up as an example -- is offered as an alternative to capitalism is not really an alternative. Accordingly, the leaders of the Western communist parties, while claiming still to see the Soviet Union as "the socialist fatherland," at the same time try to assure the workers of their own countries that the socialism they propose to build will be different from that which, they say, exists in the Soviet Union. Explanations of the how and why of this difference remain rather cursory -- related, at best, to the alleged psychology of nations, e.g., "The French are not the Russians" -- and have nothing in common with a political analysis. They can therefore convince only those who want to be convinced: for the rest, the equation USSR = socialism serves to put them off socialism.^[55]

The second reason why it is of the highest importance to understand why the Soviet Union has become what it is today, and to find an explanation which is independent of the merely

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"Russian" aspect of Soviet history,^[56] is that this "why" is closely bound up with the "official Marxism" of the communist parties which identify the Soviet Union with socialism, a Marxism that is still burdened with the economistic heritage of the Second International.

One of the essential aspects of the ideological struggle for socialism has always been the struggle against economism (whether of right or left). And when we analyze why the Soviet Union has become what it is today -- a capitalist state of a particular type -- we see clearly the

help that economism has rendered to the bourgeois social forces which were promoting this evolution, for it has disoriented revolutionaries and ideologically disarmed the Soviet workers.

Analysis of the transformations that the Soviet Union has undergone and the struggles through which these have been accomplished is thus extremely topical in its implications. What has been at issue in these struggles is precisely the conceptions that still largely prevail in the labor movement of the industrialized countries (in their inverted form, that is, as leftism in various shapes, they are also often present in the revolutionary movements of the underindustrialized countries). Analyzing as concretely as possible, through the example given by the experience of the Soviet Union, the mistakes to which these conceptions lead thus provides a "negative" lesson that cannot but help those who want to fight for socialism in getting rid of these conceptions.

Analysis of what has happened and is happening in the USSR is of special importance for members and sympathizers of the revisionist parties. These are, indeed, ideologically "paralyzed" by their inability to understand the Soviet Union's past, and therefore its present as well. One expression of this "paralysis" is the resort to empty formulations about the "personality cult," or the attitude that consists in distancing oneself somewhat from the Soviet Union while continuing to proclaim one's fidelity to "the socialist fatherland."

Such formulations and attitudes testify to an ideological crisis which is deeper than it seems, and which may turn out to be the prelude to thinking that will finally challenge refor-

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mist and revisionist practice. This thinking needs to be nourished by an attempt to understand the past and the present of the Soviet Union. Without it, one remains more or less doomed to remain imprisoned in schemas that conceal historical truth. The revisionist leaders are clearly frightened of such thinking, which is why, once again, we hear formulas of incantation about anti-Sovietism whenever there is any sign of critical thinking about the concrete history of the USSR. The only purpose of these formulas is to prevent members and sympathizers of the revisionist parties from posing the vital questions, those which could lead the struggles of the proletariat and the people to result in something other than the triad of parliamentary reformism, trade-union struggles allegedly independent of any political organization, and the cult of spontaneity.

Of course, analysis of Soviet reality, past and present, is only one factor that can help to bring about ideological clarification and so contribute indirectly to rescue the labor movement, and especially the sclerotic Marxism that prevails over a large part of the world today, from the circle in which it seems to be imprisoned. Fortunately, however, there are other factors, too.

One of these factors is the worsening of capitalism's own crisis, both on the economic plane (where it has begun in the form of a tremendous international monetary crisis) and on the planes of ideology (shown in the refusal of a large section of the population of the industrialized countries, particularly working-class youth, students, and women, to put up with the forms of subjection previously forced upon them by capitalism) and politics (with the rise of national and revolutionary struggles in many underindustrialized countries).

Another factor contributing to give new life to the people's struggles and their orientation is the positive lessons which, in contrast to the Soviet Union's failure, can be drawn from the building of socialism in China. There, life -- meaning the struggle of the masses, led by a genuine Marxist-Leninist party -- has shown how to solve the problems presented by the socialist transformation of social relations. Marxism-Leninism has thus found fresh vigor and clarified a series of questions

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which could indeed be clarified only through social practice. Thereby, too, as has already been observed, we can today understand more clearly the nature of the transformations undergone by the Soviet Union.

More precisely, by rejecting the economistic problematic we can grasp that what has happened to the Soviet Union is the result of a process of class struggle, a process which the Bolshevik Party controlled badly, and even controlled less and less well as time went by, through not being able to unite the popular forces and find at each moment the correct line of demarcation between the forces in society that could give support to the proletarian revolution, those that were inevitably hostile to it, and those that could be neutralized. In the class struggle that went on in Russia and in the Soviet Union the proletariat therefore suffered serious defeats: but the struggle of the proletariat and the peasantry continues, and will inevitably -- after delays and through ups and downs about which it is futile to speculate -- lead the working people of the Soviet republics to restore their power and resume the building of socialism.

-- January 1974

Notes

1. *Planification et croissance accélérée*. [p. 10]
2. *La Transition vers l'économie socialiste* and *Calcul économique et formes de propriété*. These two books also bear the marks of two great social and political experiences -- the Chinese and Cuban revolutions, which I have followed closely since 1958 and 1960, respectively -- and also of the revival of Marxist thought in France. This revival has been connected especially with the increasingly widespread influence of Mao Tse-tung's ideas and has been affected by the break made by L. Althusser and his associates with the "economistic" interpretation of Marx's *Capital*. [p. 10]
3. This was the trial in which the chief accused were Zinoviev and

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Kamenev. The Muscovites queued up at the newsstands in the early hours of the morning in order to be sure of buying a paper with a report of the hearings. [p. 10]

4. This was also the opinion of the Chinese Communist Party, as expressed in the articles "[On the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat](#)" and "[More on the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat](#)" which are usually attributed to Mao Tse-tung. *People's Daily*, April 5, 1956, and December 29, 1956. [p. 11]
5. There are detailed accounts of what happened in the Polish ports and of the discussions that followed the armed clashes in December 1970 (see *Gierek face aux grévistes*). [p. 12]
6. Bettelheim, *The Transition to Socialist Economy*, pp. 31 ff. The problem is discussed in particular on pp. 65 ff. and 163 ff. [p. 15]
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-71, especially pp. 46-47. [p. 15]
8. The problem of "economism" is discussed later. [p. 16]
9. Bettelheim, [Cultural Revolution and Industrial Organization in China](#). [p. 16]
10. *On the Transition to Socialism*, by Paul M. Sweezy and Charles Bettelheim. [p. 17]
11. "Reestablishing contact" with the revolutionary content of Marx ism

obviously does not mean "finding afresh" these that Marx and Engels allegedly formulated nearly a century ago, before the lessons were available that we can draw today from the class struggles which have taken place since then. "Reestablishing contact" means getting rid of conceptions that are wrong in content (even though they may have seemed true at a certain period) and thus obstruct the development of Marxist theory on the basis of the concrete analysis of class struggles and their effects. As Lenin wrote, discussing the attitude of revolutionary Marxists to Marxist theory: "We do not regard Marx's theory as something completed and inviolable; on the contrary, we are convinced that it has only laid the foundation stone of the science which socialists *must* develop in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life" ("[Our Programme](#)," in *CW*, vol. 4, pp. 211-212). [p. 19]

12. Stalin, *Leninism*, pp. 561 ff. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Stalin's "[On the Draft Constitution of the U.S.S.R.](#)" -- *DJR*] [p. 20]
13. *Ibid.*, p. 565. [p. 21]
14. *Ibid.*, p. 567. [p. 21]
15. *Ibid.* [p. 21]
16. "Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by

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the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated by law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another one owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy" (Lenin, "[A Great Beginning](#)," in *CW*, vol. 29, p. 421). It will be observed that though Lenin observes that the places occupied by different social classes may be "fixed and formulated by law," he mentions this only as a possibility. The existence of a "legal relation" to the means of production does not come into the actual definition of classes. [p. 21]

17. See the first formulation of this idea in Marx's letter to Weydemeyer, March 5, 1852, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*. [p. 22]
18. Lenin, "[Economics and politics in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat](#)," November 7, 1919, in *CW*, vol. 30, p. 115. [p. 22]
19. *CW*, vol. 31, p. 64. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder](#)." -- *DJR*] [p. 22]
20. The pressure that bourgeois ideology exerts upon Marxism (and which is manifested in the struggle between the two lines, bourgeois and proletarian, within Marxism itself) has more than once given rise to the tendency to reduce production relations to mere legal relations. This occurred in Soviet Russia during the civil war, with the illusion that the extension of nationalization and the ban on private trade (which was replaced by measures of requisition and rationing that did not involve the market) were equivalent to "establishing" communist relations -- from which came the incorrect description of this period as that of "war communism." As Lenin acknowledged, the illusions which arose at that time resulted in "a more serious defeat on the economic front than any defeat inflicted upon us by Kolchak, Denikin or Pilsudski" (*CW*, vol. 33, p. 63). [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[The New Economic Policy and the Tasks of the Political Education Departments](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. 22]
21. Stalin, *Leninism*, pp. 591 ff. [p. 23]
22. *Ibid.*, p. 608. [p. 23]
23. *Ibid.*, p. 615. While the thesis that the socialist productive forces, with their corresponding social relations, "arise" within the capitalist mode of production itself contradicts the teachings of historical materialism, it does nevertheless hint at the fact that "the material conditions of production and the corresponding

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- relations of exchange (*Verkehrverhältnisse*) for a classless society" are already "concealed in society as it is" (Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 159). Marx is here referring to the fact that capitalism breaks down local particularisms, developing conditions for comparisons and relations on a "universal" scale (ibid., pp. 160-162). [p. 24]
24. Stalin, *Leninism*, p. 608. [p. 24]
25. Ibid., pp. 613-614. [p. 25]
26. Stalin, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, p. 57. [p. 25]
27. Mao Tse-tung, *On Khrushchev's Phoney Communism*, p. 15. [p. 26]
28. "Going against the tide" means, for a member of a revolutionary party, whatever position he may hold, *striving*, when he finds himself in a minority, to *persuade* those who do not agree with him of the correctness of his point of view. "Putting into practice" his own ideas by changing the balance of forces in the party through compromises which obscure the differences of view, or through use of whatever power he wields to bring pressure to bear on certain people or to alter the composition of leading bodies, etc., is not really "going against the tide" but carrying on a struggle at the organizational level in order to impose his own view (which may, of course, be a sound one). [p. 26]
29. The rare instances in which Stalin overruled conceptions that were dominant in the party were of immense historical importance, and I shall examine the reasons for them in the next volume, but in these cases the method of *persuasion* played only a small part in his mode of action. [p. 26]
30. There were theoreticians claiming to be Marxist, and even some small organizations, especially in Germany, who, at one moment or another, voiced disagreement with the political conclusions of these theses and with some of their ideological premises, but these theoreticians and movements (which were part of the "leftism" of that time) remained marginal, for, on the most fundamental theoretical questions, they never took their stand on any ground different from that of those whom they were criticizing, this common ground being "economism." [p. 27]
31. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 19. [p. 27]
32. Ibid., p. 249. [p. 27]
33. Ibid., p. 248. [p. 27]
34. Ibid., p. 45. [p. 28]
35. Ibid., p. 47. [p. 28]
36. Ibid., p. 64. [p. 28]

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37. Ibid., p. 244. Everyone knows that Marx, in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, speaks of the "bourgeois limitation" which affects the distribution of goods during "the first phase of Communist society", however, this "limitation" is not related to the level of the productive forces, but to "the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour" and to the corresponding social relations which hinder the development of the productive forces (Marx and Engels, *Selected Works in Three Volumes*, vol. 3, pp. 18-19). [p. 28]
38. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, pp. 47-48. [p. 29]
39. Report presented on March 10, 1939: in Stalin, *Leninism*, pp. 619 ff. [Transcriber's Note: See Stalin's "[Report to the Eighteenth Congress of the C.P.S.U.\(B.\) on the Work of the Central Committee](#)". -- DJR] [p. 30]
40. [p. 30]
41. Stalin, *Leninism*, p. 687. [p. 30]
42. Ibid., p. 662. [p. 31]
43. Ibid., p. 657. [p. 31]
44. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 53. [p. 31]

45. Ibid., p. 64. [p. [32](#)]
46. It will be seen that the term "economism" is here being used not to describe one of the *particular forms* assumed by this conception (for example, the one that Lenin combated at the beginning of the century) but the whole set of forms in which it can appear. [p. [34](#)]
47. The trade-union oppositions called for independence of the trade unions (considered as defending the basic interest of the working class) in relation to the Bolshevik Party. Such independence can give an advantage to the economic demands of the working class, thus placing it in conflict with the other classes whose support is needed for the advance of the proletarian revolution; and that can undermine the *leading role* of the proletariat, a role which implies that the latter shows readiness to sacrifice some of its immediate interests to those of the revolution. The tendency to put in the forefront "immediate demands," even those of particular categories or sections, is inherent in syndicalist and "self-management" conceptions. This tendency was present in the program of most of the "left" oppositions in the Bolshevik Party between 1921 and 1928. [p. [34](#)]
48. This caused Preobrazhensky, for instance, to consider that once the dictatorship of the proletariat had been "established," the party ceased to be of any use, and its role could thenceforth be played by the state machine (see Broué, *Le Parti bolchévique*, p. 129). [p. [35](#)]

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49. This identification has often been confused with Lenin's view, expressed at certain precise conjunctures (for example, at the end of "war communism"), according to which, at certain moments the task of rapidly reviving agricultural and industrial production and exchange between town and country had to be seen as the most urgent task. [p. [38](#)]
- This reaffirmation of Lenin's thesis concerning the possibility of building socialism in the USSR undoubtedly helped to endow Stalin, both inside and
50. outside the party, with a prestige that was enjoyed by no other member of the leadership (this, moreover, for reasons not always connected with defense of the interests of the proletariat, as was shown by the "support" given Stalin's policy by the nationalist section of the Russian bourgeoisie represented by the *Smenovekhovtsy*). Stalin's stand on this question was most explicitly affirmed in his article in *Pravda* of December 20, 1924, entitled "October and Comrade Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution," in which he departed from the much more hesitant line he had still been advocating a few months earlier in *Pravda* of April 30, 1927 [1924 -- DJR] (see Stalin, *Works*, vol. 6, pp. 391-392 [Transcriber's Note: See Stalin's "[The October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists](#)". -- DJR] and 110-111 [Transcriber's Note: See Stalin's [The Foundations of Leninism](#). -- DJR]). [p. [40](#)]
51. The reference is to Stalin's mistakes at the end of the 1920s and during the 1930s. Today we can see that these mistakes were connected with a certain number of general political and theoretical positions which had caused Stalin to come into conflict with Lenin on problems of major importance, such as the relations between Soviet Russia and the non-Russian peoples. The fact that Stalin defended these views against Lenin's criticism also has to be related to the position held by Stalin in the Bolshevik Party. By virtue of this position (he was General Secretary), Stalin was subject to pressure from the party and state apparatuses and consequently tended to adopt such measures as were immediately "effective," even when theoretical analysis could show that this immediate "effectiveness" entailed grave dangers for the future (as would have been the case if Lenin had not had his way in the matter of retaining the state monopoly of foreign trade). [p. [41](#)]
52. The concept of "state bourgeoisie" (or state-bureaucratic bourgeoisie) cannot be expanded here. I will merely say that it refers to those agents of social reproduction, other than the immediate producers, who, by virtue of the existing system of social relations and prevailing social practice, have de facto *at*

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their disposal the means of production and of their products which, formally speaking, belong to the state. The economic basis for the existence of this bourgeoisie is constituted by the forms of division and unity in the process of reproduction (see Bettelheim, *Cultural Revolution*, p. 19); its real place in the process depends on the class struggle which permits (or forbids) the state bourgeoisie and its representatives to occupy certain positions in the machinery of state and, given certain circumstances, to change the class nature of the state. The representatives of the state bourgeoisie are not necessarily its "conscious agents": they are what they are because "in their minds they do not get beyond the limits" which this class does not "get beyond in life," so that "they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter practically. This is, in general, the relationship between the political and literary representatives of a class and the class they represent" (Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, p. 424). [p. 43]

53. These difficulties are illustrated by the way the Soviet leaders are seeking to obtain capital, technical assistance, and foodstuffs from the United States, Japan, West Germany, etc. The policy of "cooperation" with the Western imperialists which is advocated by the Soviet leaders in another aspect of this search for support. I shall come back to these points when, in the third volume, I deal with Soviet revisionism. [p. 43]
54. The management of Soviet enterprises is based on two main principles: management by a single manager who is responsible to higher authority, and "financial autonomy," which obliges each enterprise to try to make a profit. When these two principles were introduced in 1918 and 1921, Lenin emphasized that they corresponded to a temporary "retreat" dictated by the circumstances of the time, and that their application brought capitalist relations into the state sector. Speaking of the "financial autonomy" conferred on state enterprises, Lenin mentioned that to a large extent it put these enterprises "on a commercial capitalist basis" (Lenin, *CW*, vol. 42, p. 376 [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Draft Theses on the Role and Functions of the Trade Unions Under the New Economic Policy](#)". -- DJR]). Since 1965 the financial autonomy of enterprises and the striving for profitability have made substantial progress. [p. 44]
55. The Soviet leaders try, of course, to safeguard their policy and the realities of their country from any criticism by translating this equation into the form: "Anti-Sovietism (meaning analysis of

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Soviet reality or of the consequences of the USSR's international policy) = anticommunism." [p. 45]

56. This is not intended to mean that Soviet society does not bear the marks of the tsarist society from which it issued. To the extent that the work of the revolution was not carried through thoroughly, *many social relations characteristic of the old Russia were not smashed* and this explains the astonishing resemblances observable between the Russia of today and "Holy Russia." [p. 46]

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Introduction to the "first period"

This volume aims to analyze the principal aspects and effects of the class struggle during the first years of Soviet power, until Lenin's departure from the scene. As will be noticed, the plan adopted is not chronological, because my task is to show the changes that took place in that period in the relations between classes and in economic, political, and ideological relations. These various changes are themselves analyzed as they developed historically, which necessitates frequent references to the main stages through which the Soviet revolution passed during those years. It is only at the end of this overall analysis, however, in Part Five of the present volume, that the significance and implications of these stages will be ready for discussion. For this reason it will be useful briefly to review here the principal subdivisions of the period being studied.

The first stage of the Soviet revolution after its victory was that of the establishment of proletarian power and the initial economic and political changes connected with this -- a stage that runs from the insurrection of October 1917 to the beginning of the White rebellions at the end of May 1918. During these months, the Soviet power strove to break the economic power possessed by the bourgeoisie by virtue of its ownership of the principal means of production and exchange, by nationalizing large industrial enterprises, mines, banks, etc., and placing the economy as a whole under supervision by the working class, while not proceeding to widespread measures of nationalization. Lenin called this policy one of "state capitalism,"^[1] which was destined to pass on later "to the second step towards socialism, i.e., to pass on to workers' regulation of production."^[2] During the first months of 1918, it

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did not look as though this second step would be taken very soon, for a number of reasons, some of which were connected with the unsatisfactory functioning of the soviets,^[3] while others were bound up with the idea, generally accepted in the Bolshevik Party, that only an upsurge of the proletarian revolution in the rest of Europe would enable Russia's march to socialism to be speeded up.^[4]

In fact, the outbreak of the White rebellions and the intervention by the imperialist armies led to the development of economic and political practices that were very different from those originally envisaged. These methods, in which the predominant role was played by the state apparatus, and in which coercion by the state, especially in the form of requisitioning agricultural produce, constituted what was called "war communism," prevailed in the period running from June 1918 to March 1921.

At the close of the period of civil war and foreign intervention, Russia was devastated and on the brink of famine. The methods of "war communism" seemed incapable of helping to improve this situation. The New Economic Policy (NEP) was adopted. This policy appeared at first to be a return to the "state capitalism" of the winter of 1917-1918. The NEP conception underwent several changes until it was abandoned in 1929. One of its principal aspects was the reestablishment of freedom of trade in agricultural produce and the end of requisitioning.

If this first volume is largely devoted to analysis of the changes that took place before Lenin's death, the reason is that that event coincided with the actual transition of the Russian Revolution from one phase to another: with the ending of military operations, production began to recover and an active industrial proletariat was reconstituted, while increasing social differentiation began to become apparent among the peasantry. This new phase is clearly distinct from the first years of Soviet power, with special features that necessitate separate analysis. For this reason, the actual consequences of NEP are not examined in this volume, and only the different notions of NEP held by various Bolshevik leaders are dis-

cussed, these being expressions of underlying differences about the social and political conditions for the building of socialism.

The analysis of social and political changes in the pages that follow is based on documents of the time (inquiries, censuses, congress reports, etc.), on the works of historians and economists both Russian and non-Russian, and to a very large extent on many of Lenin's writings. The latter are, indeed, of exceptional importance. They not only show the orientations that Lenin endeavored to give to Soviet policy, many of them provide a clear and unembellished analysis of the situation, and where the past is concerned offer a critical evaluation of the policy followed.^[5] It is to these writings that I especially refer, for they are exceptionally instructive. The ones that define political orientations are, of course, instructive as well, but not in the same way: they enable us to grasp the political conclusions that Lenin drew from a certain analysis, but we need to take care not to confuse these conclusions, and the measures advocated by Lenin, with the actual changes in, or even the actual policy of, the Soviet state and the Bolshevik Party. The implementing of Lenin's orientations often, in fact, came up against substantial resistance, either because the objective process of the class struggle and the real strength of the classes involved determined changes other than those aimed at, or because the machinery of party and state followed only imperfectly the orientations indicated (this being, as a rule, an effect of the class struggle).

In the first part of this volume I examine the main features of the revolutionary mass movement which developed from the winter of 1916-1917 onward, one of the effects of which was the setting up of Soviet power in October 1917. The dual character of this movement -- proletarian in the towns and democratic in the countryside -- is analyzed and related to the characteristics of the system of proletarian dictatorship established after October. The specific role played by the Bolshevik Party in the revolutionary movement and in the political relations formed after October is given special attention.

Part Two is devoted to analyzing the changes that took place

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in class relations between 1917 and 1922, while Part Three seeks to reveal the changes in the main instruments of the proletarian dictatorship during that period; Part Four sets out the ideological and political struggles between various tendencies within the Bolshevik Party, and also relates these struggles to the general movement of class contradictions and the changes in the economic situation and the international conjuncture. Finally, Part Five endeavors to draw up a balance sheet of this period, estimating the actual implications and the real impact of the changes that had been made down to the end of it, so as to bring out the principal tasks facing the Bolshevik Party at the moment Lenin left the stage.

Generally speaking, the analysis that follows tries to break with a certain conception of the history of the Soviet revolution which presents this history as the "outcome" of decisions and "choices" made by the Bolshevik Party, and thus in imagination making the party a demiurge responsible for all the successes and failures of the Russian Revolution. Although this way of conceiving history is completely false to the real movement of events and to historical materialism, which enables us to understand this movement, from the beginning of the 1930s it very soon became characteristic of most Soviet historians, leading them to provide an apologetic picture in which the achievements of the Russian Revolution appeared as the work of the Bolshevik Party and even, more particularly, of Lenin, followed by Stalin. Thereby there vanished the real substance of the movement of history: the development and the shifting of contradictions, and, first and foremost, of class contradictions.

It is this movement that the following pages seek to understand, without always succeeding very well, for it is extremely complex, and has only rarely been analyzed as it should be, namely, as an objective process.

In breaking, or trying to break, with a "subjectivist" conception of the Russian Revolution and the subsequent changes in Soviet society, one has to recognize that what is being analyzed is not the result of the will or the intentions of the Bolshevik Party or of the Russian proletariat. It has to be

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appreciated that the Russian Revolution and the subsequent changes in Soviet society resulted from an *objective process of conflict between social forces* (which themselves changed in the course of this very process) and from the interventions of their ideological and political representatives.

Consequently, analysis has to be centered on the social classes, the mutual relations in which these were caught, the struggle between the classes, and the effects -- political, ideological, and economic -- of these struggles. It has to be accepted, in conformity with reality, that the social changes resulting from these struggles were only to a very limited extent anticipated or willed. This way of analyzing the historical process does not mean denying the reality of the activity of the Bolshevik Party, but it does oblige us to situate this activity differently from when the party is imagined to be the "subject of history." It compels us to recognize that the Bolshevik Party, like any other proletarian revolutionary party linked with the masses, participates in the movement of history, but does not *determine* it.

The revolutionary party's participation in the movement of history enables it, in certain definite circumstances, to affect the course of this movement by ensuring that the changes with which the movement is potentially pregnant do in fact take place. This is the meaning of the revolutionary party's intervention in the historical process in which it participates, an intervention which can take a variety of forms, but which is effectual (that is, produces the effects aimed at) only insofar as the revolutionary party finds its bearings correctly amid the contradictions, and helps the masses to act upon the latter through a sufficiently correct line based on the real movement and taking account of its potentialities.

The conditions for an effectual intervention by the revolutionary party in the historical process are extremely variable, but it is only when they have been appreciated that the party really plays a leading role. This was the role that the Bolshevik Party did in fact play in October 1917 and in a certain number of other situations so that its activity had decisive historical significance. Even when this is the case, however, it

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is the objective process that determines the changes, although the dominant factor in this process is the party's intervention.

The leading role of the Bolshevik Party resulted from the way it was inserted in the movement of history, its relations with the social forces whose actions were decisive, and its capacity to guide them on the basis of a Marxist analysis of the contradictions. This role was shown in striking fashion at the moment of the revolutionary upheaval brought about by the October days of 1917, and also, even if in a less immediately obvious way, in the party's day-to-day work. This is the fundamental work of a revolutionary party, which consists in helping the masses to organize themselves and to transform, through their own practice, their consciousness of their capacity for action, and also to discover the forms this action needs to take. Basically, this is the principal aspect of the party's leading role. Mao Tse-tung gave a

remarkable definition of what this role means when he wrote: "Leadership is neither a slogan to be shouted from morning till night nor an arrogant demand for obedience; it consists rather in using the Party's correct policies and the example we set by our own work to convince and educate people outside the Party so that they willingly accept our proposals."^[6]

Whenever the conditions for effectual intervention by the Bolshevik Party were not present -- because it had not correctly analyzed the contradictions, worked out a sufficiently correct line, or kept to a nonauthoritarian style of leadership, so that its relations with the masses had deteriorated (as frequently happened during the period of "war communism") -- the objective process of history developed without the party exerting a positive influence on its course. Consequently, the decisions taken failed to produce the results expected. This is why it is precisely the objective process of class struggle that must be first of all subjected to analysis. It is in relation to the development of this process that we need to examine the party's political line, the measures it adopted, and the struggles carried on within it. This is the type of analysis that has been attempted in these pages.

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Notes

1. An analysis of the various conceptions of "state capitalism," "war communism," and NEP will be found in Part Five. [p. 57]
2. Lenin, "[The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government](#)" in *CW*, vol. 27, p. 255. [p. 57]
3. At the Seventh Congress of the Bolshevik Party in March 1918, Lenin, speaking of the task of building a new type of state "without a bureaucracy, without police, without a regular army," said: "In Russia this has scarcely begun and has begun badly" (ibid., p. 133). [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's [Extraordinary Seventh Congress of the R.C.P.\(B.\)](#). -- DJR] [p. 58]
4. The initial weakness of the Bolshevik Party, which took power under the pressure of a rapid upsurge of class contradictions, led Lenin to consider for a certain period that what the Bolsheviks had above all to do was to "hold on" until the revolution spread to the rest of Europe, thereby bringing new strength to the Russian revolutionary movement. When the moment came when the Soviet government had lasted longer than the Paris Commune, this was seen as a tremendous achievement by Lenin and his comrades-in-arms. [p. 58]
5. Lenin constantly stressed the need for a revolutionary party to carry out such analyses and critiques, as this was a vital means whereby the party could help the masses to see clearly. Thus, for instance, when Lenin proposed that high salaries be paid to former engineers and managers, he said: "To conceal from the people the fact that the enlistment of bourgeois experts by means of extremely high salaries is a retreat from the principles of the Paris Commune would be sinking to the level of bourgeois politicians and deceiving the people. Frankly explaining how and why we took this step backward, and then publicly discussing what means are available for making up for lost time, means educating the people and learning from experience, learning together with the people how to build socialism" (ibid., p. 249). [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government](#)". -- DJR] [p. 59]
6. Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works*, vol. 2, p. 418. [Transcriber's Note: See Mao's "[On the Question of Political Power in the Anti-Japanese Base Areas](#)". -- DJR] [p. 62]

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Part 1

The October Revolution and the establishment of Soviet power

The Russian bourgeoisie and landlord class lost power on October 25, 1917.^[1] On that day the armed workers, together with the soldiers and sailors of Petrograd and Kronstadt, formed the insurrectionary forces of the revolution led by the Bolshevik Party, and went into action. Within a few hours, all the important public buildings in the capital had fallen into the hands of the revolutionary forces. In the early morning of October 26, the Winter Palace, seat of Kerensky's Provisional Government, was occupied and the ministers found there taken prisoner.

On October 25 the Petrograd Soviet had confirmed the removal of the Provisional Government, which had been decreed that morning by the Soviet's Military Revolutionary Committee. In the evening the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets assembled. The Bolsheviks had a majority. During the night of October 25-26, the congress (from which most of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries (SRs) had withdrawn^[2]) also confirmed the downfall of the Provisional Government. It declared that the powers of the previous central executive committee of the soviets had expired, and itself took power. In the hours that followed, the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets decided to form a provisional workers' and peasants' government, bearing the name of the Council of People's Commissars and made up of leaders of the Bolshevik Party. The congress instructed this government to "start immediate negotiations for a just, democratic peace"^[3] and adopted the Decree on Land which abolished the landlords' ownership of land.^[4]

The armed insurrection triumphed at almost the same time

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in Moscow (then the second capital) and in the other big towns. This victory testified to the former Provisional Government's loss of authority in the eyes of the masses. Though Kerensky escaped from Petrograd, he was no longer obeyed by the bulk of the army. Only a few sections still followed him, and they were so few and so demoralized that the offensive he tried to launch against Petrograd immediately after the October days proved a miserable failure. The test of arms thus confirmed that the bourgeoisie had indeed lost power and that this was now wielded by the soviets under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party.

The succession of events that occurred in the capitals on October 25 and 26, and the leading role played by the Bolshevik Party, the revolutionary party of the proletariat, are not in themselves, however, enough to determine fully the characteristics of the new stage into which the Russian Revolution then entered, or the class character of the new ruling power. These characteristics were also determined by all the class struggles that had taken place between February and October 1917, which were of a specific sort, connected with the interweaving of the democratic and proletarian revolutionary processes that made up the substance of the Russian Revolution. This interweaving was to have, moreover, a great influence on the relations established between the dominant political apparatuses of Soviet power and on the subsequent course of the revolution.

Notes

1. Until February 1918 (according to the calendar in use in Western Europe), Russia used the Julian calendar. All dates between November 7, 1917 (i.e., October 25, 1917, by the Julian calendar) and February 13, 1918 (January 31, 1918) are given here in accordance with the old calendar, and thereafter according to the Western European calendar. [p. 65]
2. The Mensheviks claimed to be Marxists, like the Bolsheviks, but

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refused to accept that a proletarian revolution was possible in Russia, and therefore favored a bourgeois government. The SRs were the most important element in a political tendency claiming to unite all the "toilers" under the formal leadership of "the peasantry," and in fact leaving power in the hands of the bourgeoisie. These Trudoviks ("spokesmen of the toilers") were even ready to agree to a "constitutional monarchy." As Lenin wrote in 1906: "The typical Trudovik is a politically conscious peasant . . . His main efforts are concentrated on the fight against the landlords for land, on the fight against the feudal state and for democracy. His idea is to abolish exploitation; but he conceives this abolition in a petty-bourgeois fashion, and therefore, *in fact*, his strivings are converted into a struggle, not against all exploitation, but only against the exploitation practised by the landlords and the big financiers." (*CW*, vol. 11, p. 229 [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[An Attempt at a Classification of the Political Parties of Russia](#)". -- *DJR*]). During the revolution the SRs split into "Right SRs" and "Left SRs," and the latter agreed during the winter of 1917-1918 to collaborate with the Bolsheviks. [p. 65]

3. Lenin, *CW*, vol. 26, p. 249. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. 65]
4. *Ibid.*, p. 258. [p. 65]

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1. The interweaving of the revolutionary processes between February and October 1917

From late 1916 onward, the discontent of the masses of workers and peasants, condemned to increasingly difficult living conditions, increased rapidly, together with the anger of the soldiers who were undergoing indescribable hardships in a war the imperialist character of which they realized more and more clearly. In the middle of February 1917, the discontent of the Petrograd workers and of the soldiers stationed in the capital found open expression. Strikes and demonstrations followed each other, partly spontaneous, partly (and increasingly) organized by the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. They spread to Moscow and the industrial centers. On

February 25 the soldiers in Petrograd began to fraternize with the workers of the capital and its outlying districts. On the twenty-sixth mutinies broke out in the garrison, and on the twenty-seventh workers and soldiers joined forces. The Winter Palace was taken, and the tsar abdicated.

So ended the first act of the Russian Revolution. It had occurred in a country whose specific features made it, in Lenin's words, "the weakest link in the imperialist chain."

The Russia of before October 1917 was both an imperialist country and one heavily dependent on world imperialism (mainly on British and French imperialism) which had invested millions of francs in loans to the tsarist state, in the extraction of oil and coal, and in the iron-and-steel and engineering industries.

The dependence of Russian imperialism on British and French capital was one of the sources of its weakness and was itself a consequence of the specific way in which Russian

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imperialism had developed, with an industrial-capitalist basis that was extremely narrow. Russian imperialism thus bore a dual character: it resulted from a close combination of two forms of imperialism -- capitalist and precapitalist. To the first of these corresponded a high degree of capitalist concentration in industry and the existence of bank capital closely linked with industrial capital, so forming a finance capital which pressed toward imperialist expansion in alliance with Anglo-French imperialism. To the second form of imperialism corresponded Russia's essentially "military" expansionism. The economic bases of this expansionism -- which was manifested vigorously from Peter the Great's time onward -- call for separate analysis. Here, let it merely be mentioned that tsarist expansionism was rooted in the internal contradictions of Russian society, which urged the tsarist state into making a series of moves that prepared the way for Russian capitalism. Once the latter had arisen, the contradictions of the old Russian society and those of nascent capitalism led the tsarist state to go ahead with its military expansion and to support the development of Russian capitalist industry by various means, in particular by the so-called "emancipation" of the serfs, decreed in 1861, which enabled the state to carry out accumulation at the expense of the peasantry.

Russia's expansion, begun seriously under Peter the Great, proceeded thereafter without interruption. In Europe it was directed toward Finland, the Baltic countries, and Poland. To the south it was directed toward Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan and, beyond them, toward India, with Russia aiming to secure access to warm water, in the Mediterranean, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean. This drive brought Russia into conflict with Britain on more than one occasion.

Eastward, Russia's expansion was directed toward Siberia, China, and even the American continent. Already in the seventeenth century the conquest of Siberia was practically complete, and the Russians continued their thrust to the East, across the Bering Strait, occupying Alaska (which Russia was compelled to "sell" to the United States in 1867).

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Toward China, Russia's expansion was marked by a series of clashes followed by treaties which the Russians regularly broke. Of particular importance were the treaties imposed on China by Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century.^[1] These operations, carried out in conjunction with the aggressions of France and Britain against China, enabled tsardom to annex from that country nearly 1.5 million square kilometers of territory.

Thus, the tsarist Russia which collapsed in February 1917 had behind it a long past of expansion and colonization,^[2] originally commercial-mercantile in character, and later

increasingly industrial-capitalist.

The dual character of Russian imperialism corresponded to the weak capacity for accumulation possessed by Russian big capital, a reflection of the relative weakness of the bourgeoisie, which was unable to struggle against tsardom for its own class aims. This incapacity explains the fear that gripped the Russian bourgeoisie whenever the established order was threatened. After the Revolution of 1905, the Russian bourgeoisie knew that it was faced by a working class capable of determined struggle. The power of the Russian proletariat grew steadily.^[3] Thanks to its organization, it was increasingly ready to take advantage of every revolutionary change. The bourgeoisie was thus paralyzed and doomed to leave the initiative for revolution to the proletariat and the peasantry,^[4] which was what happened in February 1917.

The lack of any real political initiative on the part of the bourgeoisie^[5] in relation to tsardom, which granted it hardly any political rights, was also due to its economic dependence on tsardom. The relatively rapid process of industrialization which developed in the last years of the nineteenth century and the years preceding the First World War was, in fact, based only partly on accumulation of industrial profits and expansion of the home market. It depended partly on foreign investment, but also on government money -- loans from the state bank, orders from the public services, etc. To a large extent Russia's industrial expansion was still based on a

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"primitive accumulation" (an increasing expropriation of the peasantry) of which the tsardom was the political and ideological instrument. The lack of real political initiative by the bourgeoisie explains the peculiarities of the February Revolution of 1917, which began by throwing up soviets, whereas the bourgeois Provisional Government was not formed till later.^[6]

On February 27, 1917, indeed, there came into being the Provisional Executive Committee of the Council of Workers' Deputies, mainly consisting of leading members of the Socialist and SR parties. This committee called on the workers and soldiers of the capital to choose delegates to a Petrograd soviet, which duly held its first meeting on the twenty-eighth. The committee issued a decree subordinating all the troops in the capital to the soviet. In the days and weeks that followed, soviets of workers, peasants, and soldiers, and also factory committees, were formed all over the country, though the make-up of these bodies varied, as the class struggle of the proletariat and peasantry developed very unevenly from one town or region to another.

At the end of February 1917, the only organ that could speak in the name of the revolution which had just come about was the Petrograd soviet, with behind it the soviets that were being set up all over Russia. This soviet power, backed by the mutinous troops, was seemingly confronted by no other power. The only organ that might have claimed to oppose it, namely the committee derived from the Imperial Duma (tsardom's parody of a parliament) enjoyed no prestige among the revolutionary masses, for it consisted of representatives of the bourgeoisie and the landlords. But the Petrograd soviet, consisting mainly of Mensheviks and SRs, made a pact with the Duma committee on March 1, and by virtue of this a Provisional Government composed of bourgeois politicians was formed, and the soviet undertook to support this government on certain conditions.^[7] In this way began the situation which Lenin described as "dual power" (the soviet power and the power of the Provisional Government)^[8] -- a situation which ended in October 1917 as a result of the development of the

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soviet organizations, the strengthening of the Bolshevik Party's influence within them, and, finally, the triumph of the October Revolution.

I. The rise of the soviet movement

From March 1917 onward, soviets of workers and soldiers were formed in all the towns of the Russian Empire. The movement began in the big cities and spread to the middle-sized towns. After a time, peasant soviets also came into being. It was estimated that there were 400 soviets in May, 600 in August, and 900 in October.^[9] Parallel with this process went the formation of factory committees, and of district soviets in towns of a certain size.

In considering the spread of this movement, it is in practice impossible to distinguish between what was due to "spontaneity" and what resulted from the activity of Menshevik and (especially) Bolshevik militants. The presence of such militants in nearly all the soviets, and the role that they played in them, show that the movement, while certainly corresponding to an aspiration on the part of the revolutionary masses to organize themselves for action, assumed the scale that it did as a result of the work of political activists.

The Mensheviks and SRs did not want to see the soviets as organs of power. For them, the soviets were organs of revolutionary struggle and propaganda, while the factory committees were assigned the task, in the main, of carrying out trade-union functions.

In fact, owing to the loss of authority among the masses suffered by the Provisional Government, and to the persevering activity of the Bolshevik Party, the soviets tended to transform themselves into local organs of power and take on the solving of numerous administrative problems. They also elected delegates to soviets of regions and provinces, and to the All-Russia Congress of Soviets.

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At the end of March 1917, the First All-Russia Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Soviets was held, and on June 3 the First All-Russia Congress of Soviets. From the latter emerged the Central Executive Committee of Russia, in which the SRs had a big majority. This committee sought unsuccessfully to compete with the Petrograd soviet, which enjoyed great authority throughout Russia and became increasingly dominated by the Bolsheviks.

The extremely different level of activity of the soviet organizations in the big towns and in the regions where there was little industry, and the equally very different political composition of these organizations, reflected the very unequal participation of different classes in the soviet movement. The movement excluded the bourgeoisie as such,^[10] through the way of electing delegates (workers, peasants, and soldiers) on which it was based. This, of course, did not prevent some of these delegates from speaking for the bourgeois, and especially petty bourgeois, ideological and political tendencies that were influential among sections of the masses. This was the case immediately after the February Revolution, when the SRs were well represented in most of the soviets, and even more so in the executive committees elected by the latter.

(a) The working class and the upsurge of the soviets

During the months between February and October 1917, the soviet movement was essentially proletarian. It was so first of all in its social basis, and then, increasingly, because the workers' soviets took up revolutionary proletarian positions. While the SRs and Mensheviks lost credit through their collaboration with the bourgeoisie and their support for the continuance of the imperialist war, the influence of the Bolsheviks grew in the workers' soviets.

The radicalization of the working-class soviets developed slowly at first, then with startling rapidity. When, on March 6, 1917, a Bolshevik fraction was formed in the Petrograd soviet,

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it had only forty members among the two to three thousand delegates (whose numbers varied constantly and rapidly). At the First All-Russia Congress of Soviets, in June, there were still only 105 Bolsheviks out of a total of 1,090 delegates, but the Bolsheviks already dominated the workers' section of the congress, in which a resolution expressing their views was passed by 173 votes to 144. In October the Bolsheviks, based in the working class, had a majority in the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets, as well as in the Petrograd soviet.

The principal social and organizational basis on which the "bolshevization" of the town soviets developed was provided by the factory committees. These committees increased rapidly after the February Revolution. Although the Bolsheviks were still in a minority in many town and regional soviets, they captured the majority in nearly all the big industrial centers and garrison towns^[11] and they were in the majority in the Central Council elected at the First Conference of Factory Committees of the city of Petrograd, held in the spring of 1917. Their ascendancy was still greater at the Second Conference, which met in August. Radicalization proceeded more slowly in Moscow and in the provinces, but speeded up in the course of the summer. On the eve of the October Revolution, the All-Russia Conference of Factory Committees numbered 96 Bolsheviks among its 167 delegates, with only 24 SRs, 13 Anarchists, and 7 Mensheviks.^[12]

The main point is that between August and October the slogans of the Bolshevik Party made rapid headway among the working-class masses. A minority party in February, the Bolsheviks thus advanced to become the majority party of the proletariat of Russia! The "craze" Lenin had talked of in April faded away. The proletariat became aware of the blind alley into which the policy of the Mensheviks and SRs was leading them (and some of the SRs themselves broke off to form a left SR tendency). They realized more and more clearly that it was necessary to get rid of the Provisional Government and install a Soviet government led by the Bolshevik Party, which would be able to put an end to Russia's participation in the im-

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perialist war, help the masses in their struggle to satisfy their revolutionary desires, and organize the fight against the forces of counter-revolution.

(b) The soldiers and peasants and the upsurge of the soviets

The peasants and the soldiers (who were mainly peasants, but peasants who had been uprooted from the conditions of village life and who were concerned primarily to bring about a quick peace) formed the other component of the soviet movement.

The soldiers in the rear, the garrison troops, were very directly influenced by the working class, and their delegates to the soviets became radicalized at much the same rate as the workers' representatives. The movement progressed more slowly among the soldiers at the front. Until June they remained under the influence of the SRs and Mensheviks. During the summer the bloody failure of the offensive decided on by Kerensky, and the increasingly well-organized propaganda of the Bolsheviks, quickly transformed the situation, and in October the soldiers at the front, like those in the rear, gave massive backing to the Bolsheviks' policy.

The peasants in the strict sense of the term, however, entered much more hesitantly into the

soviet movement, and were far from rallying en masse to the Bolshevik line.

To be sure, the peasantry was already organized in the spring of 1917, but the center of gravity of their organization was not the soviet system but the system of Land Committees, which were set up mainly at the level of provinces, counties, and districts, that is, remote from the villages themselves. These committees worked with the Provisional Government, and were dominated by the rural petty bourgeoisie (agronomists, teachers, Zemstvo representatives, organizers of cooperative societies, etc.). Politically, they were largely under the influence of the SRs, and that situation did not change much between February and October.

Soviets of peasants' deputies gradually arose to confront the

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Land Committees. The initiative in forming these came not from within the villages but from peasants in uniform, from soldiers. In fact, the movement for the creation of peasants' soviets remained fundamentally a movement led from above. This too was promoted by the SRs and by the Cooperative Union, which united mainly well-to-do peasants under SR influence. The reason the latter took such an interest in developing peasants' soviets was that they saw them as a means of offsetting the radicalization of the town soviets. Formally speaking, the SRs succeeded well enough: at the First Congress of Peasants, held May 4-28, 537 delegates out of 1,115 were SRs and only 14 were Bolsheviks. On the very eve of the October Revolution the peasant soviets at county and province level were mostly dominated by the SRs. At that time, most of the peasant soviets were opposed to participation in the All-Russia Congress of Soviets. [13] Until October the peasant soviets were, in the main, organs that functioned at county and province level: there were few at district level, and fewer still in the villages.

In fact, between February and October 1917, the activity of the peasant masses hardly took the soviet form at all. The peasant masses remained ideologically under SR influence and did not raise the question of power. Their activity was essentially focused on the agrarian revolution, formulated in terms of expropriating and dividing up the great estates of the landowners, the state, and the clergy. They thus followed the same line as in past peasant struggles: local risings and direct seizure of land.

Nevertheless, between May and October this mass revolutionary activity grew in scope, [14] escaped from control by the SRs, and objectively prepared the way for the October Revolution.

One of the features of the peasant movement between February and October 1917 was thus its indifference to the question of power, and so to the establishing of local organs of power. Left to itself, without the support and leadership of the town proletariat, this movement was doomed to suffer the same defeat as all previous peasant revolts, for it was incapa-

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ble of offering organized and unified resistance to repression by a state acting to protect the interests of the property-owning classes. Left to itself, unsupported by the movement and the organization of the proletariat, it was equally incapable of destroying that state and of building a state that would defend the interests of the toiling masses.

There were many reasons why the activity of the peasant masses themselves remained confined within the limits of direct action in relation to the land, and did not turn toward organized alliance with the proletariat of the towns. The ideological and political factors are easily perceived: the strength of the influence of the SRs and the feeble influence exercised by the Bolsheviks. But these two aspects of one and the same political situation need to be explained. If we turn to the past, however, the explanation is seen to be relatively simple: the

Bolsheviks had done little by way of propaganda and organization among the peasant masses, whereas the SRs, operating through the rural intelligentsia, had acquired a certain degree of influence over an entire section of the peasantry. Between February and October the Bolsheviks could not redress the situation for lack of available forces.

Besides, the very structure of the village, the existence of traditional village assemblies (the *skhod* [15] usually dominated by rich and middle peasants, tended to block the formation of village soviets and a thorough radicalization of the peasant movement. Indeed, the old village structure (which combined legal "common ownership" of the soil with individual exploitation thereof), although undermined by the development of capitalism, still helped make every village a little world of its own, more or less self-enclosed, whose problems, it seemed, could be settled on the spot. This structure -- the basis of autocracy and bureaucratic despotism as well as of revolts, continually renewed and always unsuccessful, against the exploitation made possible by this order of things -- presented a strong obstacle to penetration of the Russian village by the revolutionary ideas of the proletariat, and even by bourgeois democratic ideas.

Between February and October 1917 many motions were

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indeed put forward from rural sources which included "radical" political demands, calling for the establishment of a "democratic republic," universal suffrage, the convening of a constituent assembly, etc.[16] But the circumstances in which these notions were composed -- by the rural intelligentsia, in a situation where the peasants themselves were not organized -- and the content of the agrarian demands included in them (which hardly mentioned the *obshchina* and rarely called for the abolition of private ownership) give reason to suppose that they expressed not so much the aspirations of the peasant masses, still deeply attached to communal forms of property, as those of the well-to-do peasants, the kulaks, and the landowners who had left the *mir*. These strata of the peasantry were the first to speak up, but the rest soon took practical action, and a section of the well-to-do peasants and kulaks joined them so as to get a share for themselves in the division of the expropriated estates.

II. The ripening of the conditions for the October Revolution

Throughout the period between February and October the Provisional Government, backed by the Mensheviks and SRs, sought to keep the movement of the masses within the framework of "bourgeois legality," trying to deceive the workers and peasants with promises of concessions that were put off again and again. In this way the contradictions between the aspirations of the masses and the class nature of the Provisional Government become greater and greater.

(a) The development of a new revolutionary situation between February and October 1917

Between February and April 1917 the mass of the workers and the soldiers were still in the state of having, as Lenin put

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it, "succumbed to the craze of 'revolutionary' defencism," and he fought against this "craze,"

calling on the party, then still in the minority, not to "succumb to the general epidemic" on the poor pretext that they wished "to remain with the masses."^[17] After April, and especially after June and July, the situation changed rapidly. Experience taught the masses new lessons. The workers and soldiers saw with growing clarity that continuance of the war did not correspond to the interests of the people but to those of the Russian bourgeoisie and of Anglo-French imperialism. They came to realize that the Provisional Government, the Mensheviks, and the SRs upheld the interests of the bourgeoisie, and that the Bolsheviks alone fought against the latter. It was therefore urgently necessary to get rid of the Provisional Government, transfer power to the soviets, and act to ensure that leadership in the latter was held by the Bolsheviks. A revolutionary mass movement had to be developed in order to drive out the Provisional Government, which would not depart of its own accord. Insofar as these ideas took hold of the mass of the workers and of the soldiers -- and this happened in the two capitals and in many industrial centers and garrison towns -- the conditions for a new revolution, for a proletarian revolution, were maturing.

The confidence that the peasantry still placed in the SRs, even on the eve of October, showed that they had not yet drawn from the experience they had undergone all the lessons drawn by the workers and by the soldiers, especially in the garrison towns. Nevertheless, the bulk of the peasantry gradually moved into action, seizing the land in disregard of the ban placed on such conduct by the Provisional Government and the exhortations of the majority of the SRs. The Bolshevik Party supported the revolutionary movement of the peasant masses. The analysis given by Lenin in April allowed this new situation to be seen as a de facto breakdown in the class collaboration between the bourgeoisie and the peasantry, as, the opening of "a new stage in the bourgeois-democratic revolution."^[18]

The ripening of the conditions for proletarian revolution in the towns, and the entry into a new stage of the democratic

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revolution in the countryside, confirmed the analysis made by Lenin, who had shown that Russia was the weakest link in the imperialist chain and that a proletarian revolution could be victorious there through the explosive combination of the exploitation of the masses -- by landlords, Russian capitalists, and foreign capital -- with state oppression which served both the expansionist tendencies of Russian imperialism and the demands of primitive accumulation. This specific combination of exploitation and oppression was the source of the misery of large sections of the people and of the profound discontent of part of the intelligentsia. The imperialist war intensified to the utmost the contradictions in Russia's situation, and the experience of the Provisional Government proved that the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie were incapable of rescuing the country from the hopeless situation it was in. The increasingly open revolt of the masses -- workers, soldiers, and peasants -- led the Bolshevik Party -- and Lenin in the first place, for several of the Bolshevik leaders hesitated -- to decide on the October insurrection.

*(b) Insurrection and revolution, October
1917*

The overthrow of the power of the bourgeoisie, exercised by Kerensky's Provisional Government, and the establishment of a new ruling power resulted from an armed conflict in the form of insurrection. This armed conflict had to take place in order to consolidate the relationship of forces in favor of the proletarian revolution and demonstrate in practice that real power was now in the hands of the soviets and of the Bolshevik Party.

On October 25, 1917, the Bolshevik Party showed concretely that it was able, by taking the

initiative in operations, to sweep away the Provisional Government as a material fact, by making Kerensky take to his heels and by arresting some of his ministers.

It showed also, and especially, through the combination of military and political action, that the forces organized in the

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soviets could effectively cease to "recognize" the existence of the Provisional Government, thereby compelling the General Staff (made up of former tsarist generals) to bow to the accomplished fact, since, as a result of the political transformation carried out on the initiative of the Bolsheviks, the General Staff had ceased to be able to dispose of the bulk of the forces it had been able to count on the day before.

What happened on October 25 was thus neither the culmination of a people's war nor of a rebellion, but of an insurrection supported by the masses and carried out, in accordance with a preconceived plan, by armed forces. These armed forces^[19] were drawn from the working class and the garrisons, and operated so as to achieve precise aims which had been assigned to them by the Bolshevik Party. As Lenin often pointed out, "insurrection is an art."

The insurrectionary form of action was dictated by the course that the class struggle followed between February and October 1917. On the one hand, the extent of the peasant revolt testified to the profundity of the revolutionary crisis into which the country had entered. On the other, the characteristics of this revolt meant that it was in grave danger of being crushed: the peasant movement did not itself raise the question of power, and it was developing in a disunited, localized way, so that it could be suppressed "bit by bit." Under these conditions, survival of the Provisional Government meant danger that the peasants would be defeated, and, with them, the revolution. As Lenin wrote, if the Bolsheviks failed to take the offensive against the Provisional Government, which was crushing the peasants, they would be "traitors" to the peasants and to the revolution, for "to tolerate the suppression of the peasant revolt by [the] government . . . would be to *ruin* the whole revolution."^[20]

The peasants' entry into the struggle for land carried the Russian Revolution into a new stage. It signified a *de facto* breakdown of the alliance between the peasantry and the bourgeoisie, that alliance which had made it possible for the Provisional Government to be formed and had given strength to the bourgeoisie.^[21] Thereafter, a clash between the bourgeoisie and the revolutionary masses was inevitable, and

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it was imperative that the proletariat and the Bolshevik Party act quickly. There could be no question of waiting for the coming congress of soviets to discuss matters "peacefully," or for a mass movement to develop in the towns. Waiting would mean leaving the initiative to the Provisional Government, permitting it not only to put down the peasantry but also to concentrate against Petrograd the troops-still loyal to it and take the offensive at the moment and in the conditions of its own choice. Therefore, Lenin called on the Bolsheviks to "launch a *surprise* attack." They must not hesitate, for they were sure of the support of the masses throughout Russia, while in Petrograd they had at their disposal "*thousands* of armed workers in Petrograd who could *at once* seize the Winter Palace, the General Staff building," etc. Lenin added that the Soviet government formed in the course of the insurrection could not be overcome by the bourgeoisie: "Agitational work in the army will be such as to make it *impossible* to combat this government of peace, of land for the peasants, and so forth."^[22]

Facts were to show that Lenin's analysis was correct, that it was possible to establish Soviet power through armed insurrection, and that this power, the establishment of which opened a

new stage in world history, would be remarkably firmly grounded. Nevertheless, it was only with great difficulty that the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party agreed to the idea of insurrection and recognized its urgency.^[23] The point is important because, together with other similar cases, it shows the gap that often existed -- especially on matters and at moments of a decisive character -- between Lenin and the majority of the party leadership, a situation that was to have consequences later on.

III. The stages of the Russian Revolution between April and October 1917

In order to appreciate the new stage into which the Russian Revolution entered as a result of the October insurrection and

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to understand its distinctive features, we must start from the situation existing in April 1917. This situation was marked by the "interweaving" of domination by the bourgeoisie and revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, the "dual power" which then constituted the peculiarity of the situation in Russia.^[24]

"Dual power" meant that in April 1917 the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry was both realized (for, "actually" in Petrograd, the power is in the hands of the workers and soldiers") and not realized, for, through the SRs, the majority of the people supported a line of class collaboration, so that "the bourgeoisie is in power."^[25] This situation of dual power was highly unstable. It implied that Russia was then in "a period of transition from the first stage of the revolution to the second."^[26]

This peculiarity of the Russian Revolution was itself due to the "interweaving" of two revolutionary processes: that of the proletarian revolution and that of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. After October this "interweaving" did not cease to exist, but assumed entirely new features.

Already in April 1917 Lenin forecast that "there will be a new stage in the bourgeois-democratic revolution," beginning "when the peasantry separates from the bourgeoisie, seizes the land and power despite the bourgeoisie."^[27] Things happened, in fact, in a different way from what Lenin expected at that time. To use one of his own expressions in this same article, life, in putting this forecast into practice, "concretized it and thereby modified it."^[28]

What actually happened was that the Russian Revolution passed through two distinct and complementary stages.

(a) The revolutionary struggle of the peasants for the land and the new democratic stage traversed by the revolution during the summer of 1917

The first of these two stages resembled the one that Lenin had forecast, although it presented some different features.

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From the summer of 1917 onward, the peasantry separated itself in practice from the

bourgeoisie, for it began to seize the land; however, ideologically and politically it did not decisively break with the bourgeoisie. The peasantry, in the main, did not withdraw its confidence from the SRs, and did not raise the question of power. It could raise this question, and answer it, only by accepting the leadership of the working class and the Bolshevik Party, which at that time it was not prepared to do. Lenin recognized this on the very evening of October 25 when, in addressing the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, he raised the question of winning the confidence of the peasants, declaring: A single decree putting an end to landed proprietorship will win us the confidence of the peasants. The peasants will understand that the salvation of the peasantry lies only in an alliance with the workers."^[29]

The revolutionary struggle waged by the peasants from the summer through the autumn of 1917 thus marked a new stage in the bourgeois-democratic revolution, for its aims were the division of the land and the development of private exploitation of the soil, aims which remained wholly within the limits of the bourgeois order.

The framework within which the division of the land took place was normally the *mir*. The latter was supposed, in principle, to carry out a periodic redistribution of land among its members. While such a periodic redistribution might delay the development of capitalism in agriculture, it could not prevent this, for the conditions in which it took place were affected by the development of capitalism outside agriculture and by the social inequalities which this development brought about within the *mir* itself.

If, during the summer and early autumn of 1917, the bourgeois power represented by the Provisional Government was repressing the peasantry, this was not because the peasants' activities were destroying the foundations of capitalist development, but because the immediate interests of the Russian bourgeoisie were closely bound up with those of the landlords. It was in order to protect these immediate interests

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that the Provisional Government resorted to a repression that jeopardized the entire revolutionary process, so that the intervention of the proletariat was needed in order to enable the revolution to proceed and dig deeper.

As a result of this intervention, that is, of the October insurrection, a new stage was reached in the Russian Revolution. The entry of the revolution into this new, proletarian stage did not mean, however, that all the democratic tasks of the revolution had been accomplished. On the contrary, the relations between classes were then such that these democratic tasks could be fully accomplished only in connection with the rise and triumph of the proletarian revolution. This was true of the democratic aims pursued by the peasantry. It was true also of the national aims of the non-Russian peoples of the former tsarist empire. In 1917 these peoples entered into battle to win their national independence. By setting up their own governments they freed themselves from foreign oppression and helped the Russian proletariat to smash bourgeois domination. Lenin understood very quickly the dialectical unity of these revolutionary movements, and succeeded in convincing the Bolshevik Party of this, so that it asserted, in the name of proletarian internationalism, the right of these peoples to "separate" and form their own states. One of Lenin's historical merits is that he grasped the revolutionary implications of the movement of the peoples formerly subjected to Russian domination and the need for the Bolshevik Party to support this movement.^[30] It is well known that this need was not understood either by certain Bolsheviks or by the revolutionary wing of the German Social Democrats. Rosa Luxemburg, for instance, saw, in the main, the bourgeois aspect of the national movements and did not realize that the democratic aspect of these movements demanded that they be supported by the proletariat, just as the proletariat must support the movement of the peasants fighting for the land.

*(b) The revolutionary struggle of the workers
to overthrow the Provisional Government
and the new proletarian stage of the
revolution begun in October 1917*

The rise of the revolutionary peasant movement (with the distinctive features that have just been recalled) and of the revolutionary movement of the non-Russian peoples, combined with a powerful advance of the proletarian forces, determined the possibility and necessity of the October insurrection, in order that the revolution might continue. The victory of the October insurrection radically altered the characteristics of the Russian Revolution, the conditions in which the peasants' struggle for the land went forward, and the nature of the ruling class.

From October onward, the principal aspect of the Russian Revolution was its proletarian aspect. Thereafter, the revolutionary struggle of the peasants proceeded as a democratic revolution. It took place under the political hegemony of the proletariat, but was not actually led by the proletariat and its party, a circumstance that gave rise to some special features in the subsequent course of the Russian Revolution and also to *certain special features of the dictatorship of the proletariat* established by the October Revolution.

Notes

1. The first of these was the Treaty of Aigun (1858), which enabled Russia to take over extensive territories to the north of the river Amur (and some to the south of it), right up to the Pacific. Russia was thus able to found the city of Vladivostok and strengthen its position on the island of Sakhalin. By the Treaty of Peking (1860) Russia seized further territory to the south of the river Amur and in the Ussuri region, so that it had access to "warm water" (free from ice). Later, after invading part of Central Asia, Russia obliged China to cede important territories in that region, thereby

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- installing itself on the borders of Sinkiang and on the Pamirs, and coming close to India. [p. 71]
2. What is meant here is colonization in the etymological sense of the settlement of *colonists*. By doing this, the tsardom reduced the pressure that increased population in Russia put upon agrarian structures which changed only very slowly, and which the autocracy sought to control, since these structures formed the essential social basis of its existence. Colonization also gave the tsardom fresh means for future expansion, a typical example of this policy being the establishment of "colonies" of Cossacks. [p. 71]
3. It was estimated that in 1913 the Russian proletariat made up 14 percent of the population, but this proletariat was highly concentrated in a few big industrial centers and its wretched conditions drove it to rebellion. [p. 71]
4. In 1913 the peasantry accounted for nearly 67 percent of the population (this percentage and that mentioned in the previous note are taken from *Narodnoye Kh. SSSR v. 1970 g.*, p. 22). Poor and middle peasants constituted the majority of the peasantry. [p. 71]
5. This lack of real political initiative on the part of the bourgeoisie did not, of course, prevent certain political representatives of this bourgeoisie from engaging in various intrigues, some directed against the ruling power. In the period just before the events of February 1917, especially after December

1916, certain generals, encouraged by discontent with Tsar Nicholas II in "liberal" circles, were apparently preparing a coup d'etat in favor of his son, with a view to appointing as regent the tsar's brother, who was thought to be more favorable to a parliamentary form of government. The February Revolution put an end to these palace intrigues. [p. 71]

6. It is not possible to give a more detailed analysis here except to mention that the Russian industrial bourgeoisie at the beginning of the twentieth century was clearly divided into two main sections. One section, closely dependent on the state and most intimately linked with French and British imperialism, gave more direct support to tsarist expansionism. The principal center of activity of this section was St. Petersburg. The other section was comparatively more independent of the autocracy, for its own financial foundations were more solid. The principal center of activity of this section of the bourgeoisie was Moscow. The Soviet economic historian N. N. Vanag, in an article published in *Istoriya marksizma*, no. 12 (1929), described St. Petersburg as "the

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incarnation of the 'extra-national' (*nenatsionalnyi*) system of finance capital," while Moscow incarnated the system of national capital (*ibid.*, p. 43). See on this subject, James D. White, "Moscow, Petersburg and the Russian Industrialists," in *Soviet Studies* (January 1973), pp. 414 ff. [p. 72]

7. See O. Anweiler, *Die Rätebewegung*, pp. 127-130 and 158 ff. [p. 72]
8. Among Lenin's writings on the "transitional" nature of the situation that existed in the spring of 1917 and on dual power, should be mentioned his "[April Theses](#)" (*CW*, vol. 24, pp. 20-26) and "[The Dual Power](#)" (*ibid.*, pp. 38-41). [p. 72]
9. Anweiler, *Die Rätebewegung*, p. 140. [p. 73]
10. Anweiler notes that one of the reasons given by the Mensheviks and SRs for opposing the slogan "All Power to the Soviets!" was that "the Soviets are class organisations which unite only part of the population," so that, they said, if the Soviets took power, "the other social groups -- the bourgeoisie first and foremost, but also part of the peasantry -- would break with the revolution, and the proletariat, the live force of Soviet power, would find itself . . . reduced to isolation" (*ibid.*, pp. 173-174). [p. 74]
11. *Ibid.*, p. 156. [p. 75]
12. *Ibid.*, especially pp. 156-157. [p. 75]
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 150 and 229. [p. 77]
14. Official statistics recorded 49 "peasant riots" in March 1917, 378 in April, 678 in May, 988 in June, 957 in July, 760 in August, 803 in September and 1,169 in October (S. Dubrowski, *Die Bauernbewegung in der Russischen Revolution 1917*, p. 90, quoted in Anweiler, *Die Rätebewegung*, p. 148, n. 114). [p. 77]
15. The *Skhod* was formally in charge of the land of the *obshchina*, the village community, which was also often called the *mir*. [p. 78]
16. Marc Ferro, *The Russian Revolution of February 1917*, pp. 121-130. [p. 79]
17. Lenin, "[First Letter on Tactics](#)," in *CW*, vol. 24, p. 54. [p. 80]
18. *Ibid.*, p. 47. [p. 80]
19. They were the Red Guards. Estimates of their total number in Russia as a whole vary widely. The two extreme figures usually quoted are 75,000 and 200,000. For Petrograd alone, estimates vary between 4,000 and 40,000, the figure of 20,000 being the one most widely accepted. In any case, the numbers involved were not very large. Furthermore, the Red Guards were poorly organized. If their action was decisive, this was because of the political situation -- the break-up of the armed forces of the Pro-

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visional Government. As regards their social origin, the indications

- available show that the Red Guards were mostly workers in large-scale industry. (On these points see D. N. Collins, "A Note on the Numerical Strength of the Red Guards in October 1917," in *Soviet Studies* [October 1972], pp. 270 ff., an article which includes an extensive bibliography.) [p. [82](#)]
20. Lenin, "[The Crisis has Matured](#)," in *CW*, vol. 26, p. 81. [p. [82](#)]
 21. The repression of the working class and of the Bolshevik Party by the government after the popular demonstrations of July 1917, and the fact that the Bolshevik Party then had to go more or less underground, showed that, at the same time the masses had been becoming radicalized, the bourgeoisie and its government had made use of the months that had passed since February to organize their forces and acquire the power to launch a counter-revolutionary offensive. The attempted coup d'etat by General Kornilov in August, which was frustrated through the activity of the Bolsheviks, also testified to a regrouping of some of its forces by the bourgeoisie. [p. [82](#)]
 22. Lenin, *CW*, vol. 26, pp. 83-84. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. [83](#)]
 23. It was on October 10, after several weeks of hesitation, that the Central Committee declared in favor of insurrection. Until then it had left unanswered the appeals from Lenin, and had even "censored" some of his articles, as a result of which Lenin had offered the Central Committee his resignation, so that he might "campaign among the rank and file of the Party and at the Party Congress" for his views (*ibid.*, p. 84). [p. [83](#)]
 24. Lenin, "[Letters on Tactics](#)," in *CW*, vol. 24, p. 46. [p. [84](#)]
 25. *Ibid.*, p. 46. [p. [84](#)]
 26. *Ibid.*, p. 43. [p. [84](#)]
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 47. [p. [84](#)]
 28. *Ibid.*, p. 45. [p. [84](#)]
 29. *CW*, vol. 26, p. 240. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Meeting of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. [85](#)]
 30. Thanks to this internationalist attitude the Bolshevik Party recruited many non-Russian members, who came to constitute a considerable proportion of the party leaders, and this helped to give a proletarian character to many of the national movements in the old Russia, which accepted Bolshevik leadership. (The introduction to G. Haupt and J.-J. Marie, *Makers of the Russian Revolution*, p. 26, gives details of the national origin of the Bolshevik leaders of 1917: out of the 246 leading party members whose biographies are included in this book, only 127 were Russian by nationality.) [p. [86](#)]

2. The dictatorship of the proletariat and class relations on the morrow of October

The October insurrection put an end to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and established the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia. It thus enabled the proletariat to form itself into the dominant class in order to continue the revolution, carry out the tasks of the democratic revolution, and take the first steps toward socialism.

The October insurrection made it possible to smash the power of the bourgeoisie because it constituted a moment in an overall revolutionary process which at that point reached a certain degree of maturity.

It was, of course, not the occupation of a few public buildings or the arrest of a few ministers (whom the bourgeoisie could easily have replaced if it had had the capacity) that enabled the proletariat to substitute its rule for that of the bourgeoisie. What made possible this world-historic change was the new relations of forces between classes which the October insurrection *revealed*, at the same time as it helped to consolidate this, for *power is precisely a relation between classes*, and not an "object" which is "seized."

If the October insurrection was able to reveal and at the same time consolidate the existence of a new relation between classes, the reason was that this event demonstrated that it was no longer the bourgeoisie but the proletariat, together with its party, "which was in command of the guns." It revealed that the new dominant class had acquired, and the old dominant class had lost, decisive military power.^[1]

In October 1917 the proletariat possessed decisive military power because *the armed forces which were in a position to decide the fate of the revolution were no longer prepared to*

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fight for the bourgeoisie.^[2] They had rallied to the revolution for ideological and political reasons, because they could not escape the pressure and activity of the masses. The latter were urged forward by the hopeless situation in which the Russian bourgeoisie was holding the country. The thrust of the working-class masses became irresistible thanks to the Bolshevik Party, which helped these masses to grasp the character of the situation, and to act unitedly and at the right moment.^[3] It was thus the combination of overall revolutionary conditions and the action of the Bolshevik Party which made possible the victory of the October insurrection and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Of the various factors that facilitated the October victory -- the hopelessness of the situation, the exasperation of the masses, the pressure they exerted which caused a decisive section of the armed forces to come over to the camp of revolution, the leading role played by the Bolshevik Party, etc. -- it was the party's leadership of the urban masses, and first and foremost of the working-class masses of Petrograd, Moscow, and the other main industrial centers, that determined the proletarian character of the ruling power resulting from this victory. For the class content of the October Revolution and the ruling power emerging from it, what was decisive was the leading role played by the Bolshevik Party.

All revolutions are due to the resolute action and heroism of the masses, and in particular, when this class is present, of the working class. That was so in the case of the revolution of February 1917, in which the working classes of Petrograd, Moscow, and other towns played the determining role, and yet this revolution did not lead to the establishment of proletarian rule. The October Revolution was unlike all previous revolutions, except the Paris Commune, by virtue of the fact that it was carried through under the guidance of proletarian ideas.

The Bolshevik Party was the organized carrier of these ideas, and it was this that enabled the Russian proletariat to make itself the dominant class. Thanks to the ties of con-

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fidence established between it and the most combative sections of the proletariat, the party served as the instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It remained such as long as it maintained these ties and also continued to be the carrier of proletarian ideology and practice:

the second condition being always the decisive one, for a party may possess an extensive base in the working class and yet be only a "bourgeois labor party," through failing to uphold proletarian ideology and practice.

I. Characteristics and limitations of the leading role of the Bolshevik Party in 1917 and immediately after October

The leadership exercised by the Bolshevik Party in the revolutionary process bore two aspects, the ideological and the political. Of these the ideological was the dominant one, although this was itself the product of the party's political activity, its work in organizing and uniting mass struggles, for it was this work that enabled the party to enrich its theoretical conceptions, define its political line, and spread this line among the people.

The leading ideological role of the Bolshevik Party corresponded to the ideological leadership of the revolution by the proletariat, whose party concentrated the most combative forces and revolutionary initiatives. This leading ideological role was one of the conditions for the *hegemony of the proletariat* [\[4\]](#) in the revolution.

Proletarian hegemony and the leading ideological role of the proletariat must obviously not be confused with the dominance of proletarian ideology. The latter can be achieved only as the result of a protracted class struggle carried on under the dictatorship of the proletariat and bringing about a revolutionary transformation in social relations.

The leading ideological role of the proletariat and its party constitutes a necessary point of transition on the road to politi-

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cal power. The Bolshevik Party's activity had succeeded in reaching this point on the eve of October through the political and ideological work carried out by its militants.

What marks the conquest of a leading ideological role by the proletariat and its party is that a certain number of revolutionary ideas concerning the immediate situation, the contradictions in the situation, and the way to resolve them, have seized hold of the masses to a sufficient degree to become "material forces" and shake the dominance of bourgeois ideology. This was one of the results achieved by the Bolshevik Party's activity on the eve of October, a result that expressed itself in the fact that the masses ceased to bow before the existing order and the soldiers refused to use their weapons against those who were pointed out to them as targets by the beneficiaries of this order. Having reached that point, the leading ideological role of the proletariat could be transformed into proletarian hegemony, which enabled the political power of the proletariat to be established, as was done by the October Revolution.

In October 1917 the leading role of the Bolshevik Party was subject to a certain number of limitations which must be mentioned here, as they had important effects on the subsequent course of the revolution and on relations between the different parts of the state machine.

The first of these limitations, which was a specific feature of the revolutionary situation of that time, has already been indicated. This was the fact that at the moment of the October insurrection the leading role of the Bolshevik Party was mainly established in relation to the working-class masses, whereas it was still comparatively weak where the peasantry was concerned. The consequences of this limitation were to be all the more important because it would be very difficult thereafter for the Bolshevik Party to effect any radical change in the

situation. True, during the civil war a decisive section of the peasantry came to accept the political leadership of the Bolshevik Party (especially in the military sphere). It fought under the party's leadership and thereby enabled the Soviet power to defeat the White Guards and the foreign interven-

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tionists; but this rallying to the Bolshevik banner did not mean that the peasant masses had, in the main, accepted the ideas propagated by the party, either in the field of revolutionary Marxism or even in that of immediate measures.

The second limitation on the leading role of the Bolshevik Party was that, even among the workers, the leading ideological role of the party was principally political. What had to a large extent penetrated a decisive section of the working-class masses were not the fundamental ideas of revolutionary Marxism -- those which light up the path to socialism and reveal what is necessary for the march to communism -- but those that corresponded to what Lenin called "immediate tasks."^[5]

As a result of these various limitations on its leading role, and of the immediate tasks of the revolution, the Bolshevik Party could not set itself the aim, once Soviet power had been established, of tackling the tasks of socialist transformation straight away. In 1917 and at the beginning of 1918, the party rightly considered that to try to rapidly attain socialist objectives, except in relation to certain points, would be utopian and therefore extremely dangerous.

This necessary momentary restriction of the party's tasks was the theme of many reminders issued by Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders. In Lenin's "April Theses," for instance, he declared: "It is not our immediate task to 'introduce' socialism, but only to bring social production and the distribution of products at once under the control of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies."^[6]

He reaffirmed this conception shortly before the October Revolution,^[7] proclaimed it afresh on the very day of the insurrection,^[8] and repeated it with emphasis six months later.^[9] As we see, Lenin in those days stressed consistently that Russia was only at the beginning of the transition to socialism, pointing out that what had been done in October 1917, and then between October 1917 and April 1918, though essential, was still only enough to allow the first steps to be taken in the direction of socialism.

From most of Lenin's writings we get the impression that

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the main reason he thought it was not possible to go faster and farther toward socialism was the economic situation -- the breakdown of industry, the general disorganization, famine, etc. But this main reason was itself dependent on a more fundamental one, connected with the type of leadership that the Bolshevik Party was then in a position to exercise, that is, with the limitations restricting the party's leading role at that time. Thus we observe that the party thought it would be easy to "pass directly into communism" from the second half of 1918 onward, when economic conditions had become still worse, but when it seemed that the political and ideological conditions were greatly improved, with the peasant masses united around the Soviet power in order to resist the White Guards and the imperialist forces.

In this period of civil war the leading role of the party was indeed considerably enlarged, but not to the point of allowing it, without grave danger, to advance beyond the line it had drawn in 1917.^[10] The party recognized this in 1921, and came to see the problems of the conditions for progress toward socialism in terms essentially similar (though modified on some important

points) to those which had been established nearly four years earlier.

It is in the light of what has been said of the leading role of the Bolshevik Party, its characteristics and its limitations, in October and in the period immediately after October, that we can examine the problem of the forms of proletarian power and its specific features in that period.

II. The forms of proletarian power in October 1917 and its specific features

The revolutionary struggle of the workers in the large towns, led by the Bolshevik Party, thus brought into being a proletarian hegemony, an ideological and then a political power of the proletariat. *This power was first and foremost a relation between classes.* It cannot be identified with a *par-*

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ticular political institution : the same class power may, depending on concrete circumstances and conditions, be "accomplished in reality" in a variety of "political institutions."^[11]

After October 1917 the power of the proletariat, its organization as the dominant class, was wielded through the Bolshevik Party. It was this party that "accomplished in reality" proletarian power, which concept included state power but was not confined to it: indeed, proletarian power dominated state power. We must therefore distinguish between political power and the Bolshevik Party which "accomplished in reality" this power; state power, through which coercion of the bourgeoisie and the counter-revolutionary elements was exercised; the forms assumed by this power; and the machinery and organizations which concretely enabled this power to carry out particular actions (but could also obstruct the power of the proletariat insofar as, under the pressure of other classes or as a result of mistakes made by the party, they separated themselves from the proletariat and became "independent").

(a) The system of the dictatorship of the proletariat

The power of the proletariat, the dictatorship of the proletariat, constitutes a *system* : Lenin calls it, indeed, "the system of the dictatorship of the proletariat."

In this system, the proletariat and the classes with which it is allied, the class organizations, and the class machinery occupy different places, and these are not immutable. They can alter as a result of the class struggle and its effects on social relations as a whole, relations between classes, and more especially, the ideological relations prevailing between the proletariat, the proletarian party, and the classes allied with the working class.

During the years following the October Revolution, the system of the dictatorship of the proletariat presented a certain number of characteristics which Lenin described in his address, already quoted, on "[The Trade Unions, the Present Situation and Trotsky's Mistakes](#)."

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In the system as it then existed the party held the leading place because, as Lenin put it, "the Party, shall we say, absorbs the vanguard of the proletariat," and "this vanguard exercises the dictatorship of the proletariat," which placed it higher than state power.^[12]

Between the latter and the party Lenin placed the trade unions as organizations embracing all the workers in industry and capable of forming "a *link* between the vanguard and the masses."^[13] This must be a two-way link: from the "leading circles" to the rank and file, and from the rank and file to the "leading circles." In fact, the place thus assigned by Lenin to the Soviet trade unions was never really occupied by them, and the question remains open: can the trade unions, given their structure, which reproduces a certain division in the working class, occupy this place, and, if so, under what conditions?

As regards state power, it did not possess, in the circumstances then obtaining, a truly proletarian character; from which followed, according to Lenin, the need "to protect the material and spiritual interests of the massively organised proletariat from that very same state power."^[14]

The reasons why the proletariat in power needs to be protected from state power are not clearly stated in the passage quoted, nor indeed in any other statement by Lenin or the Bolshevik Party.

Lenin offered two explanations in this passage. The first related to the class alliance which the proletariat had had to conclude with the peasantry in order to be able to wield its dictatorship in a country with a peasant majority. (As Lenin said, "Ours is not actually a workers' state but a workers' and peasants' state.")^[15] The second explanation put forward by Lenin related to what he calls the "bureaucratic twist"^[16] which had been given to the Soviet state. This distortion affected the machinery of the state. It needs to be related to what Lenin observed as early as the beginning of 1918 (and it had not got any better between then and December 1920), namely, that within the system of the dictatorship of the proletariat, "there is much that is crude and unfinished in our

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Soviets," so that, as regards the functioning of the system as a soviet system, "this has scarcely begun and has begun badly."^[17]

The indications Lenin gave so frankly and plainly between 1918 and 1920, and which he continued to give right down to his last writings, concerning the characteristics of Soviet "state power" are of great importance. They contrast with the apologetic style that was to prevail later on, and help us to understand better the "crude and unfinished" quality of the Soviet system of that period. At the same time -- and there is no reason to be surprised at this, given the lack of sufficiently protracted experience, which would have made it possible to acquire a more thorough knowledge of the relations underlying these characteristics -- Lenin's formulations do not always provide real explanations, but rather a series of observations.

One of the aims of this book is, indeed, to endeavor, as is possible today with the advantage of hindsight, to provide a fuller characterization of the system of the dictatorship of the proletariat as it existed in Russia between 1917 and 1923 and subsequently. This should also make it possible to appreciate better the nature of the social relations and class struggles which determined the characteristics of the system and contributed to its later evolution. In this connection, we must turn back to Lenin's previously quoted formulation: "Ours is not actually a workers' state, but a workers' and peasants' state."

(b) *"State power" and the
worker-peasant alliance*

If it is not clarified, this formula raises more problems than it explains. Lenin returned to it in what he called a "correction," accompanied by a brief commentary.

The "correction" was made in an article published in *Pravda* of January 21, 1921, under the title "[The Party Crisis](#)." In the course of this article Lenin replied in a few sentences to a comment made by Bukharin at the meeting on December 30, 1920, at which Lenin had spoken of a "workers' and peasants' state." Bukharin had interrupted Lenin, exclaiming: "What

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kind of state? A workers' and peasants' state?" In "The Party Crisis" Lenin wrote: "I was wrong and Comrade Bukharin was right. What I should have said is 'A workers' state is an abstraction. What we actually have is a workers' state, with this peculiarity, firstly, that it is not the working class but the peasant population that predominates in the country, and, secondly, that it is a workers' state with bureaucratic distortions.

In expressing himself like this Lenin was using, as he himself wrote, terms that were closer to those he had used during the discussion at the Eighth Congress of Soviets, but he virtually maintained what he had said before, as he emphasized in his conclusion: "This correction makes no difference to my reasoning or conclusions."^[18]

Actually, this "correction" made Lenin's idea more precise, since it enabled him to point out something that certain Bolsheviks tended to forget, namely that the concrete reality of the Soviet state was necessarily affected by the nature of the relations that the peasant population -- the determining social force in a country with a peasant majority -- maintained with the proletariat, the leading social force operating through its party.

The problem here presented is twofold -- that of the contradiction between the massive presence of nonproletarian (mainly the peasants) and the proletarian and democratic character of the ruling power,^[19] and that of the correct handling of this contradiction.

In the given circumstances, this was a necessary condition: while the system of the dictatorship of the proletariat must be led by the proletariat and its party, this system had also to be based on the broad masses of the people, even if these were nonproletarian, and these masses must therefore find a place, and a substantial one, in the organs of the proletarian power -- first and foremost in its organs of self-administration and government, namely, the soviets.

This contradiction is more or less acute depending on the characteristics of the ideological and political leadership exercised by the proletariat and its party over the popular masses

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themselves. It becomes especially acute when, insofar as a section of the masses is concerned, this leadership, this leading activity, is weak, or comparatively so. This was the case in Russia, apart from a few rather short periods, where the peasants were concerned.

As is known, the weakness of the leading activity of the party in relation to the peasantry was connected with the apparently independent form assumed by the revolutionary activity of the peasantry and its success. Actually, this success was won and consolidated only because the working-class masses and the Bolshevik Party had ensured the victory of the proletarian revolution in the towns and so protected the revolutionary movement of the peasantry,^[20] but the close connection between the proletarian revolution in the towns and the democratic revolution in the countryside was not fully apparent to the peasants, as the Bolshevik Party was not there on the spot or present among them. Hence the need, reasserted again and again, to convince the peasant masses of the identity between their fundamental interests and those of the proletariat. Hence, too, the tension that frequently developed between the Soviet power and wide sections of the peasantry.^[21]

Thus, Lenin's formulation, "a workers' and peasants' state," referred primarily to the effects on the life of the soviet organs (in the villages, districts, counties, etc.) which were an integral part of the system of the dictatorship of the proletariat that might be produced by a numerous peasantry liable to develop political activity independent of the dictatorship of the proletariat. There was thus a danger that the soviet organs might take a line of action that would weaken the proletarian dictatorship.

This danger could not be banished by simply excluding the peasant masses from the soviets. That would only reduce the popular foundation on which the dictatorship of the proletariat had to base itself. It would weaken the indispensable bonds of alliance between proletariat and peasantry, hinder the fulfillment of the democratic tasks of the revolution, and render it impossible to develop the party's leading role. This role can,

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indeed, be developed only insofar as the party of the proletariat itself shows confidence in the masses and so enables them, *through their own experience*, to rally ever more closely around the proletarian party.

If the party departs from this path, if it does not handle correctly the contradiction between the proletarian character of the ruling power and the necessary involvement of broad nonproletarian masses in the organs of power, it runs into another danger, namely, that of the management of public affairs becoming concentrated in the hands of a small number of persons. Such concentration reinforces the *state* aspect of the organization of the ruling power, the separation of the machinery of government from the masses, and leads to non-democratic forms of centralization. It leads to the spread, rather than the contraction, of bourgeois political relations, and so compromises the proletarian character of the ruling power. We know that the latter is *not only* a state power, for the political power of the proletariat does not mean the existence of a "state in the strict sense" but a power which is "no longer a state in the proper sense of the word."[\[22\]](#)

It can be seen that Lenin's formulation about the workers' and peasants' state also points to the need for correct handling of the contradictions revealed by this formulation. History has shown the mistakes that were made in Russia in the handling of this contradiction.

At the level of the functioning of the organs of power, the existence of a numerous peasantry among whom the leading activity of the proletariat was exercised to only a slight degree gave rise, shortly after the October Revolution, to a certain number of measures and decisions. Formally, the most significant of these was the fixing of peasant representation at the ratio of 1 deputy for every 125,000 inhabitants and the representation of townfolk at 1 deputy for every 25,000 *electors*.[\[23\]](#) As Lenin saw it, the difference thus established was justified by the fact that the organization of the proletariat had progressed more rapidly than that of the peasantry, and this gave the workers a real advantage.[\[24\]](#)

The adoption of this measure of discrimination against the

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peasantry was not unconnected with the results of the elections to the Constituent Assembly, which was dissolved almost as soon as it met, on the night of January 5-6, 1918. These elections, organized under Soviet rule, gave only 175 seats of a total of 707 to the Bolsheviks, as against 410 to the SRs, 17 to the Cadets,[\[25\]](#) 16 to the Mensheviks, and 84 to various national groups.[\[26\]](#)

The same considerations led the Bolsheviks first to restrict to a serious degree, and then

practically to ban, the activity of parties other than their own, including the SR Party, which was closely linked with the well-to-do strata in the countryside.

It is hard to determine the effects of these various measures on the attitude of the peasants to the soviets. In any case, at the level of the county soviets (those in which the peasantry could best make themselves felt, and about which we have adequate information), the proportion of Communist delegates, which was nearly 61 percent in 1918, fell steadily, to 43 percent in 1920 and 44 percent in 1921. The disappearance of delegates belonging to the other parties was not accompanied by any increase in the numbers of Communist delegates but only by an increase in "non-party" delegates. In 1920 and 1921, these even outnumbered the Communist delegates.^[27]

The most important political effect of the contradiction between the proletarian ruling power and the predominance of a peasant population subject to only a rather slight degree to proletarian leadership was, of course, not only in the electoral sphere, but in the unsatisfactory functioning of the soviets.^[28]

This situation was not the outcome of a long historical process: it was present from the very proclamation of Soviet power. It corresponded to the "transitional form," as Lenin put it, then assumed by the dictatorship of the proletariat. The effects of this situation are clearly revealed when we analyze the characteristics and relations of the two main elements in the system of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia: namely, the organization of the soviets, as established after October, and the dominant element in the system of proletarian dictatorship, the Bolshevik Party, the party whose ideol-

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ogy, political line, style of leadership, capacity to develop the alliance between the working class and the peasantry and, consequently, relations with the masses, constituted the ultimate guarantee of the proletarian character of the ruling power.

III. The establishment of the soviet organs and of the Soviet government

The place occupied immediately after October by the soviet organs, and in the first place by the central soviet organs which issued from the Second Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Soviets, resulted from the actual movement of the revolution and the leading role that the Bolshevik Party had played in the insurrection.

Actually, it was not the soviet organs, many of which were still dominated by the SRs and Mensheviks and had even refused to take part in the Second Congress, that had overthrown the Provisional Government, but the working-class masses led by the Bolshevik Party. As Stalin said some years after October, "the Congress of Soviets merely *took over* power from the Petrograd Soviet,"^[29] that is, from the hands of the Bolshevik Party, which presided over its decisions.^[30]

As has been said, power, being a relation between classes and not a "thing," cannot be "handed over." The very dynamic of the revolution and its own initiative at the head of the working-class masses invested the Bolshevik Party, and not the soviets, with effective power, and if part of the state power was indeed wielded, under conditions which we shall examine, by organs which emerged from the Second Congress of Soviets and from subsequent congresses, this resulted from the policy followed by the Bolshevik Party itself.

The relations thus established between the soviet organs and the party corresponded both to

the real relation of forces between the classes and to the conception that the Bolshevik Party, and especially Lenin,^[31] had formed of what the respec-

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tive positions of the party and the soviets should be in the system of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Lenin never held a "fetishist" conception of the role of the soviets. When, in the course of the year 1917, the danger loomed that domination of the soviets by the petty bourgeois chauvinist parties which were ready to follow an anti-Bolshevik policy might become more or less consolidated, Lenin withdrew the slogan "All Power to the Soviets!" -- pointing out that the latter could become transformed "into mere fig-leaves of the counter-revolution."^[32] During the summer of 1917 he explained that "the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets!' was a slogan for peaceful development of the revolution which was possible in April, May, June, and up to July 5-9 . . . This slogan is no longer correct, for it does not take into account that power has changed hands and that the revolution has in fact been completely betrayed by the S.R.s and Mensheviks."^[33]

Lenin then put in the forefront (though without renouncing legal *combined* with illegal activity, and while advising against any rashness) the slogan of armed insurrection, with as its aim "to transfer power to the proletariat supported by the poor peasants with a view to putting our Party programme into effect."^[34]

During September, the defeat of Kornilov's attempted coup d'etat and the strengthening of Bolshevik representation in the soviets led Lenin again to advocate the slogan: "All Power to the Soviets!"

The Bolshevik Party's policy with regard to the soviet organs thus consisted in recognizing that they had a place in the system of proletarian dictatorship, but were not to be identified with the latter. They could therefore not occupy the dominant position in it, the less so because the peasant soviets were undifferentiated, and the agricultural workers and poor peasants did not play a preponderant role in them.

The relations which developed between the Bolshevik Party and the soviet organs, and, more particularly, between the Council of People's Commissars and the All-Russia Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, the two central or-

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gans of government, become clearer in the light of the foregoing.

(a) *The Sovnarkom*

In the evening of October 26, 1917, the All-Russia Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Soviets, at its second and last session, approved the formation of a Council of People's Commissars (in Russian, for short, "Sovnarkom") -- "the first workers' and peasants' government." This first Sovnarkom was composed exclusively of Bolsheviks, its members being nominated by the party.

During a short period between the end of November 1917 and the summer of 1918, some left SRs were included in the Sovnarkom, that is, the government, but the growing hostility of the left SRs to the Bolshevik Party's policy (in particular, to the signing of the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany) led to their removal. Thereafter, the Sovnarkom was composed

exclusively of Bolsheviks. Lenin was its chairman until his death.

(b) The VTsIK

The All-Russia Central Executive Committee of the Soviets (VTsIK, using the Russian initials of its title) was, legally, the supreme organ of power. It was elected by the Congress of Soviets.

The VTsIK that emerged from the Second Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Soviets was made up of sixty-two Bolsheviks, twenty-nine left SRs, and ten other socialists, thus reflecting the composition of the congress after the withdrawal of the right SRs and delegates of other parties who refused to continue to participate in the congress, as a protest against the insurrection.

After this congress, the membership of the VTsIK was enlarged by the addition of peasant delegates elected by the Congress of Peasants' Soviets, in numbers equal to those of the workers' delegates who had been elected by the Congress

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of Workers' and Soldiers' Soviets, together with one hundred delegates from the army and navy and fifty delegates from the trade unions. The new VTsIK, formed on November 15, 1917, consisted of over 350 members and was officially called the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies. The first Soviet Constitution, that of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (RSFSR), approved in July 1918 by the Fifth Congress of Soviets, ratified the same proportions for urban and rural representation, but fixed the number of members of the VTsIK at "not more than 200." The Constitution provided that the VTsIK was to carry out the functions of the congress between its sessions, and to "appoint" the Sovnarkom. In theory, the VTsIK was supposed to sit more or less continuously, but in fact an organ which it elected from among its members, the Presidium of the VTsIK, carried out its functions for most of the time. As a result of a resolution adopted by the Eighth Congress of the Bolshevik Party in 1919, the Congress of Soviets confirmed this practice.

(c) Relations between the VTsIK and the Sovnarkom

De jure, the Sovnarkom was thus subordinate to the VTsIK. The Constitution also stated (Chapter 5, Article 12) that promulgation of decrees, orders, and instructions was effected by the VTsIK, that "supreme authority" in the RSFSR was to be vested in the All-Russia Congress of Soviets, and during the period between congresses, in the VTsIK, while the Sovnarkom was responsible for the "general direction of affairs" (Chapter 7, Article 35).

The practice was quite different. On October 30, 1917, the Sovnarkom passed a decree giving it legislative powers. In principle, this decree was to remain valid only until the meeting of the Constituent Assembly, but in fact it continued in force after the assembly had been dissolved. By the time the Constitution of the RSFSR was adopted the situation had been settled: the Sovnarkom had taken precedence over the VTsIK,

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which was thereafter merely an organ for ratifying decisions or proposals which it had, as a rule, not initiated. Governmental power was concentrated in the Sovnarkom. The left SRs having been removed from the latter, this meant that governmental power was concentrated in

the hands of the Bolshevik Party -- to an increasing degree, in those of its Central Committee (CC), and eventually of its Political Bureau, which considered the majority of important decisions at the same time as the Sovnarkom, or even, more often than not, before they were considered by that body.

The process which deprived the VTsIK of effective governmental power, to the advantage of the Sovnarkom and of the CC of the Bolshevik Party, is of considerable importance. This process decided the question of where the supreme political authority was to lie in favor of the Bolshevik Party, and against the VTsIK -- that emanation of the soviet organs.

Before the victory of the October Revolution the idea of forming an organ of government like the Sovnarkom, constituting an organism distinct from the soviet organization, had never actually been discussed. It had seemed that all power would be concentrated in the soviet organs in the strict sense. At the conclusion of the process just described, the situation was a different one. It was the Sovnarkom, whose members were chosen by the Bolshevik Party, and which did not issue directly from the soviet organs, as the VTsIK did, that wielded governmental power. What had resulted, therefore, was a power structure different from that which had been contemplated before the October Revolution -- by the Bolshevik Party as well as by others.

It is possible to think that the process whereby this structure of government became constituted and consolidated is to be explained mainly by the specific constellation of political forces at the time of the October Revolution: in particular the still far from negligible influence enjoyed by the Mensheviks and SRs in the soviet organizations as well as elsewhere. According to this view, it was for "conjunctural" reasons, so as to "safeguard" the power of government from all possible

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direct interference by representatives of bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties, that the Sovnarkom, formed by the Bolsheviks and on the initiative of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, was created and set de facto in a dominant position in relation to the VTsIK.

While this view takes account of the concrete historical process, it does not go to the root of the matter, remaining concerned with the succession of events, and considering only the most external aspect of class relations, which were what was fundamentally involved here.

The establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat means that the proletariat sets itself up as the ruling class, and this cannot be done through organs of the soviet type, which are mass organizations, or through state organs exclusively derived from these. The constitution of the proletariat as ruling class is necessarily effected through an apparatus that is specifically proletarian in ideology and aims, and in the role of leadership and unification that it plays in relation to the masses: in other words, through a proletarian party that plays this leading role, politically and ideologically, and plays it, too, in relation to the machinery of state issuing from the mass organizations.

This being so, the concrete forms of articulation between the state machinery of the proletarian dictatorship and the party of the proletariat, the instrument of this dictatorship, can be very diverse. This diversity reflects the extreme diversity of the possible relations between classes and of the effects of the class struggle, including its effects inside the proletarian party.

In the case of Soviet Russia, there can be no doubt that the specific forms of articulation between the state machinery and the proletarian party were largely determined by the weakness of the Bolshevik Party's direct influence among important sections of the masses, in the first place among the peasants, and also by a certain tendency on the part of the party to seek to

solve problems of leadership by resorting to organizational rules rather than ideological struggle. This tendency

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was reinforced, moreover, by the urgency of the tasks that the party was obliged to carry out in order to consolidate the proletarian dictatorship.

(d) The central government and the local authorities

Consideration of the way the Soviet form of government was organized also brings up the problem of relations between the central soviet organs and the local ones, and of their respective powers. The Constitution of the RSFSR did not really settle these questions. It declared at one and the same time that "all authority within the Russian Republic is invested in the entire working population of the country, organized in the urban and rural soviets" (Chapter 5, Article 10), and that "supreme authority in the RSFSR is vested in the All-Russia Congress of Soviets, and during the period between the Congresses, in the VTsIK" (Chapter 5, Article 12). The first formulation implies that every local soviet is "sovereign," whereas the second subordinates the local soviets to the authority of the central bodies.

In practice, listing the powers of the central organs and, still more, day-to-day practice, quickly led to the local soviets becoming subordinate to the central organs on all important questions. Together with this, the leading role of the party was also asserted on the local level, this being reflected in the preeminence of the party committees over the local administrative organs at the different territorial levels -- though this situation was not really firmly established in Lenin's lifetime. At the end of the civil war, indeed, the basic organizations of the party were very weak, did not exist everywhere, and where they were present did not always possess effective capacity to guide the administrative machinery of the state, which retained and sometimes even strengthened its independence in relation to the central organs of the party.

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(e) The administrative machinery of the state

When it was formed, the Sovnarkom tried to establish its own administrative machinery on new foundations, but this attempt came to very little. The various People's Commissariats were in practice obliged to use, or try to use, a large part of the old administrative machine, which underwent only relatively minor internal changes.

This was a very important fact, to which I shall return. It must be pointed out at once, however, that owing to the class composition of the state administrative machinery, and, more profoundly, to the nature of its relations with the masses, its internal hierarchy, and to its relations with the leading organ of the proletarian dictatorship (the Bolshevik Party), this machinery strongly resisted orders coming from the highest source of power. There was therefore frequently a quite deep divergence between the policy formally adopted by the Central Committee, the policy that the Sovnarkom tried to apply, and the actual conduct of the state administration. Moreover, this administration tended to erect a screen between the Soviet power and the masses. Consequently, when the rank and file of the party were not in a position to inform the Bolshevik leaders directly, the latter were out of touch with what was happening, especially in the country areas, and also, of course, within the state machine itself.

The Bolshevik Party sought to remedy this state of affairs on many occasions. Its first attempt was made in March 1918, with the establishment of a People's Commissariat for

Control of the state. This had little real effect, which was not surprising, since it aimed at bringing the machinery of state under the control of the highest authority through the medium of another piece of state machinery.

There were three exceptions to this difficult situation: the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, the Red Army, and the new political police, the Cheka.^[35] I shall return to the subject of what became of the latter; for the moment, I shall confine myself to considering the Red Army.

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(f) *The Red Army*

In the military sphere, the Soviet power did not at first have at its disposal an apparatus which it had developed for its own purposes before the revolution and in which the Bolshevik Party organically played a leading role. The conditions in which the October Revolution took place did not allow for such a development.

To be sure, the Bolshevik Party had, since 1905, possessed a "military organization," but this was in no sense an army, even in embryo. Its role was to coordinate the work of Bolshevik propaganda in the tsarist army. Between February and October 1917 this "military organization" played an active role in creating Bolshevik organizations in the army of the Provisional Government, and began publishing a paper, *Soldatskaya Pravda*. Shortly before October it helped set up the Petrograd Military Revolutionary Committee, which prepared the insurrection.

On the other hand, shortly before October the workers of Petrograd and other cities began to organize themselves in a military way, with the Bolsheviks' help, and so the Red Guard came into being. It played a considerable role between October 1917 and March 1918 in combating counter-revolutionary attempts by various groups of officers. In fact, Red Guards, assisted by the peasant partisans and workers' militias, formed at first the only armed force proper at the disposal of the proletarian power. The old tsarist army was still formally in existence after October, and a large part of it was theoretically under the orders of the Soviet power, but it was in a state of utter disintegration, and in March 1918 the Soviet power decided to dissolve it. In that same month the decision was taken to form a Red Army, and Trotsky was entrusted with the task of organizing it. Initially, the new army was to be based on voluntary service, but already in April 1918 this was replaced by conscription. We shall see the characteristics of this army later on, especially as regards relations between officers and the ranks.

If, as the facts show, the Red Army, formed in this way, was

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an instrument of great efficacy in the struggle against the White Guards and the imperialist armed forces, this was essentially due to the heroism, spirit of sacrifice, and abnegation of the workers and peasants who defended the revolution; but this army was not and could not become an apparatus that helped revolutionize ideological relations and develop proletarian practices. On the contrary, bourgeois, and even feudal, practices were retained in it. Already in 1918, "external forms of respect" (the military salute and special formulas for addressing one's "superiors") were reintroduced, and officers were accorded various privileges, notably as regards their quarters. Later, the officers' training schools, although recruiting their students from among the workers and peasants (as well as from among the old intelligentsia and scions of the former officer class who had come over to the Soviet power), reproduced the hierarchical and ideological relations characteristic of bourgeois armies.

IV. The Bolshevik Party and its leading role

The leading role played by the Bolshevik Party in the October Revolution and in the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship in Russia was not merely the result of "the luck of history." It corresponded to a profound necessity: to be victorious, the proletarian revolution needs to be led by a party which is guided by revolutionary Marxism. This is a fact constantly confirmed by experience and which Lenin summed up in the phrase: "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement."^[36]

Lenin directly associated the revolutionary proletarian movement's need for theory with its need for a party armed with Marxism when he added: "The role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory."^[37]

The leading role of the Bolshevik Party did not cease with the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat; quite

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the contrary. After October, as before, the party fought to maintain its leading ideological and political role. To do this it had to draw upon revolutionary theory and work out its political line by learning the lessons taught by the activity of the masses.

In 1917 and 1918 the strength of the Bolshevik Party and its leading role were not based mainly on the use of force, but resulted from its capacity to produce correct theoretical analyses and to translate these into a political line, measures, and slogans which ensured for the party close relations with the most combative elements of the masses. In the last analysis, the leading role of the Bolshevik Party was bound up with its revolutionary development of Marxism in relation to the struggles of the proletariat and peasantry.

The role played in 1917 by the Bolshevik Party must not, however, make us forget that it had existed as such for only five years; it had been born at the conference held in Prague on January 5-17, 1912, as the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Bolshevik). This conference was able to launch a party which was not just a mere grouping of a few militants or a few revolutionary intellectuals because its foundation had been preceded by over ten years of theoretical and organizational activity, in which Lenin was one of the principal workers, especially in the theoretical field.

In order, therefore, to understand the leading role played by the party in October 1917 and subsequently, as well as the way in which this party coped with the problems that confronted it after October, it is essential to recall the principal stages in the struggle waged by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, the struggle that enabled the party to win the position it occupied in 1917.

(a) The theoretical struggle for the primacy of revolutionary Marxism in the Russian labor movement

It was in 1894 that Lenin, the future founder and leader of the Bolshevik Party, entered the theoretical struggle for the

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first time. He was then twenty-four years old and had been politically active for six years. He had already stated his position publicly on many occasions, especially against Narodism.^[38]

At that time the struggle of Marxism against Narodism had been in progress for several years, mainly on Plekhanov's initiative. In 1883 he had founded, along with Vera Zasulich and others, the group called "Emancipation of Labor," and helped to make Marxism known in Russia both through his own writings and by translating several of the works of Marx and Engels.

In his essay of 1894, "[What the 'Friends of the People' Are and How They Fight the Social Democrats](#),"^[39] Lenin carried the critique of Narodism farther than Plekhanov had taken it, and at the same time showed the role that the peasantry, in alliance with the proletariat, could play in the coming Russian revolution.

Arrested in December 1895 and sent to Siberia (for his activity as organizer of the group he founded, called the "League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class"), then in exile abroad from 1900 onward, Lenin carried on the ideological struggle, first against Narodism and then against economism and "legal Marxism." The latter doctrine claimed that Russia should "go to school under capitalism," and that, given the country's low level of industrialization, the Russian proletariat should wage only economic struggles, while supporting the bourgeoisie's "democratic demands."?

In the ideological fight against these conceptions, Lenin's decisive intervention, which opened the way for the Bolshevik movement to emerge, was [What Is to Be Done?](#), published in 1902.^[40] In this book he defined the principles that would govern the formation and working of the Bolshevik Party (and which in its essentials continue to govern the working of those Communist parties which have not forsaken revolutionary Marxism). He exposed the errors of economism and of the "cult of spontaneity" with which it is linked. Thus, he wrote: "All worship of the spontaneity of the working-class movement, all belittling of the role of 'the conscious element',

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of the role of Social-Democracy, *means quite independently of whether he who belittles that role desires it or not, a strengthening of the influence of bourgeois ideology upon the workers.*"^[41]

The publication of *What Is to Be Done?* and the assimilation of its contents by the revolutionary militants signified a major defeat for economism and the cult of spontaneity in the form that these tendencies assumed in Russia at that time.

In 1904, with the publication of [One Step Forward, Two Steps Back](#),^[42] Lenin developed and perfected the organizational principles of the future Bolshevik Party. In this work he defined the relations between class and party, stressed the decisive role of organization, the necessity for a close link between the party and the masses, and for democratic centralism, discipline and unity (this unity and discipline are not to be confused with a factitious unanimity, since they presuppose an open discussion such as alone can enable Marxism to advance).

With the publication in July 1905 of [Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution](#),^[43] Lenin developed his fight against Menshevism, which then represented the chief form of opportunism in Russia. In this pamphlet Lenin stressed as the main question the participation of the peasantry in the democratic revolution, with the latter taking place under the leadership of the proletariat, and not, as the Mensheviks proposed, under that of the bourgeoisie. He wrote on this subject: "*The proletariat must carry the democratic revolution to completion, allying to itself the mass of the peasantry in order to crush the autocracy's resistance by force and paralyse the bourgeoisie's instability. The proletariat must accomplish the socialist revolution, allying to itself the mass of the semi-proletarian elements of the population, so as to crush the bourgeoisie's resistance by force and paralyse the instability of*

the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie."^[44]

Two Tactics distinguishes clearly between two stages in the revolution, while indicating the possibility of a transition from the first stage to the second and defining the corresponding class alignments.^[45] It shows the leading role to be played by the proletariat in relation to the masses, and the significance of the

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slogan of the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.

It was then that Lenin laid the foundations on the basis of which he was able, taking account of the changes in the situation introduced by the February Revolution, to formulate his theses of April 1917 (the theory of the transformation of the democratic revolution into the socialist revolution was present from that time onward). The Bolshevik Party was thus in a position to work out the essential features of the political line it was to follow after October.

In *Two Tactics* Lenin set forth the theory of the socialist revolution led by the proletariat exercising hegemony and playing a leading role. This theory broke with the conceptions, inherited from Lassalle, which were prevalent at that time in Western Europe and which saw the proletariat as the only revolutionary class.

The revolution of 1905 provided a striking confirmation of Lenin's analysis in *Two Tactics*, in particular as regards the role that could be played by mass political strikes at the beginning of an insurrection and during its course. The role of such strikes was confirmed afresh in 1917.

During the revolution of 1905 Lenin returned to Russia for a short time. He continued to lead the theoretical struggle that the Bolsheviks were waging on two fronts: against the "liquidators," who, under the blows of the reaction headed by Stolypin, were ready to wind up the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party as a whole, and against the *otzovists* (those who advocated *recalling* ^[46] the Social-Democratic deputies from the 1906 Duma). In 1909 *otzovism* was formally condemned by the Bolsheviks.

At the same time he was fighting these battles, Lenin was also carrying on a struggle on the philosophical front, by writing [Materialism and Empirio-criticism](#), which was published in 1909. This book attacked antimaterialist conceptions which are presented in the guise of Marxism, and which Lenin denounced as a "subtle falsification" of Marxism, a falsification characteristic of revisionism, "in political economy as in problems of tactics and in philosophy in general."

Thus, when the Bolshevik Party was formed in 1912 it

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possessed a number of theoretical writings which constituted an ideological armament incomparably better than what was possessed at that time by the other working-class parties claiming to be Marxist.

The Bolshevik Party's ideological armament was subsequently completed, as far as the main problems were concerned, by the publication of two other works from Lenin's pen: [Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism](#),^[47] and [The State and Revolution](#).^[48]

The first of these gave a concrete analysis of the development of capitalism in that period and showed what its contradictions and characteristics were. This analysis guided a whole aspect of the activity of the Bolshevik Party, and of the Third International during the first years of its

existence.

The second developed further the theory of the state and of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and made a radical break with certain Kautskyist conceptions that still prevailed in the Bolshevik Party.

Armed ideologically in this way, the Bolshevik Party was able to guide the Russian proletariat so as to enable it to win a series of victories of historic significance. It was inevitable, however, that where problems were concerned to which no previous experience was relevant, the theory at the disposal of the Bolshevik Party should show gaps. These caused the party to intervene in mistaken ways in the revolutionary process. Some mistakes were later corrected, but others were not, or the corrections made theoretically were not translated into corresponding practice, and this resulted in grave difficulties for the Russian Revolution.

(b) The political struggle for the building and development of the Bolshevik Party

The Bolshevik Party was constructed essentially on the basis of the principles and theories expounded by Lenin in his books, pamphlets, articles, speeches, letters, etc. These principles and theories were themselves developed in the day to-day political and organizational activity of the Bolsheviks. Especially after 1905, the latter carried on intense political

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activity and accomplished a great deal of work in the field of organization: organization of the members themselves and of their newspapers and periodicals, and organization of the ever larger masses who were turning toward the revolutionary movement.

This organizational work was closely linked with the intensification of the contradictions in Russian society and with the economic and political class struggles which, with periods of advance and retreat, accompanied the deepening of the social contradictions. One important stage in these struggles was the rise of the mass movement which culminated in the revolution of 1905. Other large-scale struggles took place between 1912 and 1914. Finally, after the confusion caused by the war, there began, toward the end of 1916, a new upsurge which resulted in the great flare-ups of the February and October revolutions of 1917.

One of the characteristic features of the Bolshevik Party and of Lenin's activity was that theoretical analyses constantly accompanied mass struggles, sometimes preceding and guiding them, sometimes following them, so as to draw lessons from them. The development of Marxism thus did not take the form of a mere accretion of new ideas and theories, but of a dialectical development proceeding by breaks which, on the basis of what was taught by life itself, made it possible to reject and correct whatever had proved to be mistaken. This process of breaking and correcting, of dialectical development, made possible the formation of a revolutionary party without precedent in history, stoutly armed theoretically and closely linked with the masses. It was this party that enabled the Russian proletariat in 1917 to organize itself as the ruling class. This party, as it existed in October, was the outcome of an uninterrupted struggle, first to establish the party itself, and then, from 1912 onward, to accomplish its development and consolidation.

1. The struggle to build the party

The struggle to establish the Bolshevik Party was waged within the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP),

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and took the form of a struggle to transform it into a party guided by revolutionary Marxism.

The RSDLP held its first congress in March 1898, when Lenin was in Siberia. This was only an abortive first attempt. The congress adopted neither program nor rules, and no leadership came out of it capable of organizing a link-up between the Marxist groups which had existed in Russia for several years, and which, with few exceptions, were not involved in a practical way in the workers' movement for immediate demands. One of the first mergers between the Marxist groups and the labor movement had, however, been effected by Lenin, in 1895, with the formation in Petersburg of the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, which, as Lenin himself put it, was "the embryo of a revolutionary party based on the labour movement."

The real beginning of the formation of a revolutionary party came with the foundation in 1900 of the newspaper *Iskra* (The Spark), which was launched by Lenin jointly with Plekhanov's group. *Iskra* had correspondents all over Russia. Despite its illegal status it managed to circulate more or less regularly. It expounded essentially the same themes as those discussed in *What Is to Be Done?* and had decisive influence in the preparation of the Second Congress of the RSDLP.

This Second Congress was held in July 1903, first in Brussels and then in London. During its discussions the supporters of the *Iskra* line not only came into conflict with the opponents of this line, but were themselves divided on a number of questions. On the whole, however, the line upheld by Lenin secured the majority (*bolshinstvo* in Russian), from which came the term "Bolsheviks," used to describe the supporters of this line, and "Mensheviks" for the members of the minority (*menshinstvo*) who were opposed to it.

After the congress, however, Plekhanov and his group joined forces with the Mensheviks and took over *Iskra*. The Bolsheviks fought against the splitters by carrying on organizational work and by launching a paper of their own called *Vpered* (Forward) in January 1905. Thus, at the time when the mass struggle was about to experience a great upsurge, the

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Bolsheviks had a new paper and had begun to form a Bolshevik faction in the RSDLP.

At the beginning of 1905 the Bolsheviks numbered about 8,000, but they did not aim to increase their numbers too rapidly. They were, and wished to be, militants who devoted their lives to work for the revolution. The Third Congress of the RSDLP took place in January 1905. As the Mensheviks had practically broken away, this was de facto a Bolshevik congress.

The upheaval of the revolution of 1905 made possible a considerable increase in the influence of the Bolsheviks. Legal activity became momentarily possible. Consequently, the Bolsheviks altered some of their forms of work, as they were to do again after February 1917. They kept their underground apparatus in being, of course, but their propaganda work was carried on practically openly. They recruited new members, and elected the leaders of their organization at various levels, something which had been almost impossible while the party had had to work underground.

The revolutionary upheaval was accompanied among some members, especially those who had joined recently, by an urge for unity aiming at fusion of the Bolshevik and Menshevik organizations. The Menshevik leaders, especially Martov (with whom Trotsky had been cooperating since the Second Congress), made some formal concessions, and as a result the Fourth Congress of the RSDLP was held in Stockholm in April 1906, reuniting the two

organizations. At that stage the Bolsheviks had 14,000 members and the Mensheviks (whose conditions of membership were less demanding) 94,000. The Bolsheviks were in the minority in the new Central Committee elected by this congress.

This reunification remained a formality. The Bolsheviks fought to recover their majority in the RSDLP. They were organized as a faction and had a paper, *Proletary*, the organ of the St. Petersburg Party Committee, headed by Zinoviev.

At the Fifth Congress of the RSDLP, held in London in May 1907, the delegates had been elected by 77,000 members of the party in Russia (to whom were added the Polish and

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Lettish delegates and those of the Jewish Bund). The Bolsheviks had been very active and their membership had been swelled by many new working-class cadres who had participated in the soviets of 1905, and so they were in the majority at the congress and in the new Central Committee, which included Lenin, Rykov, and Zinoviev. The congress adopted the principle of democratic centralism, which implies submission by the minority to decisions taken by the majority after a broad discussion.

The Bolsheviks continued to be organized as a faction, with their own elected leadership. The latter consisted of fifteen members, and was responsible for maintaining the unity of the Bolsheviks so that they could operate as a bloc applying a single tactical line within the party.

After the middle of 1907 the labor movement declined, and this decline became serious when Stolypin's repressions began. The membership of the RSDLP shrank (in 1910 it was less than 10,000) and divisions within it intensified, both between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks and among the Bolsheviks themselves. Lenin fought against a series of negative tendencies within Bolshevism, in particular against *otzovism* and the idealistic tendencies of Gorky and Bogdanov. The leaders of the Bolshevik faction had to take drastic measures.^[49]

After this period of division, Lenin agreed to a new attempt at unity with the Mensheviks, which was made in January 1910. He expressed his views about this unity move in a letter to Maxim Gorky in April 1910:

There have been deep and serious factors leading to Party unity: in the ideological field -- the need to purge Social-Democracy from liquidationism and otzovism; in the practical field -- the terribly difficult plight of the Party and of all Social-Democratic work, and the coming to maturity of a new type of Social-Democratic worker. At the C.C. plenum . . . to these serious and deep-lying factors . . . were added . . . a mood of "conciliation in general" (without any clear notion with whom, for what, and how); hatred of the Bolshevik Centre for its implacable ideological struggle; squabbling on the part of the Mensheviks, who

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were spoiling for a fight, and as a result -- an infant covered with blisters.^[50]

In fact, the attempt at reunification failed. In face of the revival of the labor movement (once more, strikes and demonstrations took place on a very large scale), Lenin considered it necessary to consolidate the unity of the Bolsheviks, retain their press organs, and establish a school for cadres. This last was set up in France, at Longjumeau, in 1911, under the direction of Zinoviev. Many Bolshevik cadres were trained there, to return secretly to Russia.

In January 1912 the situation was ripe for taking a decisive step forward. The Bolsheviks could now form themselves into a separate party. This was done at a national conference held in Prague. The conference expelled the Mensheviks and thereafter functioned as a party congress.

It adopted a minimum program including such immediate slogans as: a democratic republic, an eight-hour day, and the confiscation of all the land of the landlords. The congress decided that the Bolsheviks would take part in the electoral campaign for the Fourth State Duma, and elected a Central Committee in which, along with Lenin, sat Ordzhonikidze, Stalin, and Sverdlov. Thus the RSDLP (B), the Bolshevik Party, came into being.

2. The struggle to develop the party

The newborn party developed rapidly between 1912 and 1914, in keeping with the upsurge of working-class struggle that marked that period, but the outbreak of the First World War at first weakened it considerably, both on the plane of organization and on that of ideological unity. Repression, which was already severe, became unprecedentedly harsh during the war. In November 1914 the police raided a conference of the Central Committee's "Russian bureau" and of the Bolshevik Duma deputies; all the participants were imprisoned or sent to Siberia. Not until a year and a half later was it possible to form a new "Russian bureau," with Molotov and

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Shlyapnikov among its members. Throughout the country the Bolshevik organizations, which had at first been seriously affected by the wave of repression, began to re-form, especially during 1916, but contact between them amounted to very little.

The war also brought new ideological divisions, and only gradually was a certain degree of unity created around the slogans put forward by Lenin in 1914: transform the imperialist war into civil war, defeat one's own government in the imperialist war. At the Zimmerwald Conference, where Bolsheviks and "internationalist" Social Democrats like Trotsky met, Lenin's slogans were rejected, and in Russia some of the imprisoned Bolshevik deputies, together with a few of the Bolshevik leaders who were at liberty, took a stand for "national unity for the duration." The party's confusion at the time of the February Revolution, when Stalin came out at first for support of the Provisional Government, was typical of the situation that prevailed. This was not put right (and then only with difficulty) until Lenin himself took a hand, especially after his return to Russia, when he set forth his "April Theses."

It remains true that, even during the most difficult years of repression, a certain number of groups and individuals who considered themselves Bolsheviks carried on activity in the factories, especially the war industries, and in the armies. In February 1917 the party had about 40,000 members.^[51] Its influence was weaker than that of the Mensheviks (who continued to call their organization the RSDLP), but it developed rapidly and ended by greatly surpassing the Mensheviks in influence in the second half of 1917.

In April 1917 the party had 80,000 members, and by August 240,000. From a party of militants it was becoming a mass party. At the time of the October insurrection its membership stood at about 300,000.

Lenin was not, however, in favor of too rapid an increase in membership, which meant an influx of persons with little political experience; and at its Eighth Congress, in March 1919, the party still had only a little over 300,000 members.^[52]

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While, as regards discipline, the Bolshevik Party was usually united firmly around its leaders, that is, its Central Committee, this did not mean that its decisions were taken unanimously. In fact, as will be seen later, a number of divergences occurred. Lenin certainly

played a preeminent part in it, but he was far from always able to make his view prevail, and he often came up against strong resistance when he considered it necessary to correct the line previously followed, or some analysis that had until then been accepted. The Bolshevik Party can be called "Leninist" only in the sense that it acknowledged Lenin as that one of its leaders who was best equipped theoretically, and the one to whom the party was most indebted for being what it was. The term "Leninist" is inappropriate if understood to mean that the Bolshevik Party rallied "spontaneously" or easily to the new directions indicated by Lenin at certain moments, or that Lenin's analyses were the "expression" of what the party or its leadership was already thinking, more or less.^[53] This was far from being the case, and that fact needs to be kept in mind if one is to understand some of the problems that arose between 1918 and 1923.

Nor must it be overlooked that, in October 1917 and in the years immediately following, the Bolshevik Party still had extremely weak roots in many localities and factories, not to mention villages. In many localities there were no members capable of explaining on the spot what the party line was and transforming it into living reality or, what was at least equally important, bringing to the notice of the party leadership the concrete problems that arose and the way in which the party's policy was received by the masses. In this respect the Bolshevik Party was still young and inexperienced, and this is another consideration which helps us to understand the difficulties encountered in consolidating the proletarian dictatorship in Russia.

To this it should be added that the support given to the Bolshevik Party by the masses was based mainly on coincidence between the party's immediate political slogans and the desire of the masses for peace and of the peasants for land. A

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section of the masses, however, especially among the peasants, did not in the least support the socialist aims of the party. Accordingly, the latter, at least until the summer of 1918, did not consider that the situation was ripe for doing more than taking a few steps "in the direction of socialism." After the summer of 1918, though, as a result of the outbreak of civil war and the beginning of foreign intervention, the policy followed by the Bolshevik Party changed, and the revolution entered the period of "war communism." During this period the pressure of the exigencies of war, the place accorded to state centralization, and the significance attributed by the party to this centralization altered the conditions of the class struggle in Russia, together with the relations between classes. It is this process of transformation that must now be analyzed.

Notes

1. The proletariat, of course, possessed no "army" in the strict sense of the word. [p. 91]

In the lecture he gave in Zurich in early 1917 to a gathering of young Swiss workers, Lenin, speaking of the 1905 revolution mentioned that, already at that time, "the revolutionary ferment among the people could not but spread to the armed forces," but that what was lacking was, "on the one hand, persistence and determination among the masses -- they were too much afflicted with the malady of trustfulness -- and, on the other, organisation of revolutionary Social-Democratic workers in military uniform -- they lacked the ability to take the leadership into their own hands, march at the head of the revolutionary army and launch an offensive against the government." Lenin added this remark aimed against petty bourgeois antimilitarism: "It is not sufficient simply to denounce, revile and 'repudiate' militarism . . . it is foolish peacefully to refuse to perform military service. The task is to keep

the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat tense and train its best elements, not only in a general way, but concretely, so that when popular ferment reaches the highest pitch, they will put themselves at the head of the revolu-

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tionary army" (*CW*, vol. 23, pp. 236-253) [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Lecture on the 1905 Revolution](#)". -- *DJR*]. It was precisely this that happened in October 1917, which had not happened in 1905 or in February 1917, despite the rallying of the army to the revolution, for the latter was not on those occasions being led by the proletariat. [p. 92]

3. In July the Bolshevik Party succeeded in preventing a premature uprising by the proletariat of Petrograd. If this uprising had taken place at that time, at a moment when the revolutionary movement of the peasantry had hardly begun, it would have been crushed, and the chances of victory for a proletarian revolution would have been considerably reduced. [p. 92]
4. This term was employed by Lenin in one of his writings which is of fundamental importance for understanding the problems discussed here, namely, his address to the Eighth Congress of Soviets on December 30, 1920, published under the title "[The Trade Unions, the Present Situation and Trotsky's Mistakes](#)" (*CW*, vol. 32, pp. 19 ff.). Lenin said that the transition from capitalism to communism "cannot be achieved without the [hegemony] of that class which is the only class capitalism has trained for large-scale production" (*ibid.*, p. 21). ("Hegemony" renders more accurately than "leadership" [the word used in the official English translation] the meaning of Lenin's own Russian word *glavenstvo*, which includes the idea of preponderance, primacy, supremacy.) [p. 93]

It is not possible here to detail the reasons why the leading role of the

5. Bolshevik Party was limited in this way. A few observations may, however, be made.
 - (a) In any case, before a revolutionary proletarian party has political power at its disposal, such a party's leading role is necessarily subject to limitations. What changes, in accordance with concrete conditions, is the nature of these limitations, the classes in regard to which they are most felt, the forms they assume, etc.
 - (b) As regards the Bolshevik Party in 1917, the limitations on its leading role were all the greater because it was a relatively young party (the first conference of the Bolshevik groups had been held only thirteen years before, and Bolshevism was subject to the heavy ideological pressure of the petty bourgeois conceptions of the Second International, which it combated under very difficult conditions), and because it had to cope, with only a handful of experienced militants, with a situation which

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was evolving at prodigious speed: each week of the imperialist war was equivalent, for the masses, to several ordinary years.

(c) Finally, where the Bolshevik Party's activity among the peasants was concerned, this was restricted by the nature of the social relations existing in the Russian countryside, by the predominant influence which the petty bourgeois ideology of the SRs had acquired there, and by the party's own underestimation of the determining role that the revolutionary movement of the peasantry was to play.

It is easy to see how different the leading role played by the Chinese Communist Party could be in 1949 -- with twenty-eight years of activity behind it, including twenty years at the head of the Red bases and liberated areas, where it had been able to carry on mass activity in the political, military, ideological, and economic spheres. [p. 95]

6. "[The Tasks of the Proletariat](#) [in the Present Revolution]," in *CW*, vol. 24, p. 24. [p. 95]
7. "[From a Publicist's Diary](#)," in *CW*, vol. 25, pp. 298-300. [p. 95]
8. Lenin told the Petrograd Soviet of Workers and Soldiers that it was "in the end" that the new stage of the revolution would "lead to the victory of

- socialism" (*CW*, vol. 26, p. 239). [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Meeting of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. 95]
9. "[The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government](#)," in *CW*, vol. 27, pp. 243-244. [p. 95]
 10. In China, where the ideological and political conditions in 1949 were more favorable to rapid development on socialist lines than they had been in the Russia of 1917, it was only from 1956 onward that such development was undertaken on a large scale. [p. 96]
 11. See on this point, Lenin's remark in the first of his "[Letters on Tactics](#)," in *CW*, vol. 24, pp. 44-45. [p. 97]
 12. *CW*, vol. 32, p. 20. [p. 98]
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 20. [p. 98]
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 24. [p. 98]
 15. *Ibid.* [p. 98]
 16. *Ibid.* [p. 98]
 17. Lenin's report on the revision of the party program, presented to the Seventh party Congress (March 8, 1918), in *CW*, vol. 27, pp. 132-133. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Extraordinary Seventh Congress of the R.C.P.\(B.\)](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. 99]
 18. *CW*, vol. 32, p. 48. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[The Party Crisis](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. 100]
 19. It should perhaps be pointed out that in almost all countries the proletariat, in the strict sense, forms a minority, and that what was specific to Russia at this time -- but is the case in all countries where little industrialization has taken place -- was that, among

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the nonproletarian masses, the predominant element consisted of peasants. [p. 100]

20. It is a historical fact that the peasant movement, left to itself, is incapable of mobilizing forces that are sufficiently united to win a decisive victory over the forces of a centralized state machine. Even in China it was the presence among the peasantry of the Chinese Communist Party and of working-class militants that enabled a real army to be formed. In the period of the first Red bases, Mao Tse-tung emphasized this point: "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 but no regular Red Army, then we cannot cope with the regular White forces, but only with the landlords' levies. Therefore, even when the masses of workers and peasants are active, it is definitely impossible to create an independent regime, let alone an independent regime which is durable and grows daily, unless we have regular forces of adequate strength" (Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, p. 66) [*Transcriber's Note*: See Mao's "[Why Is It that Red Political Power Can Exist in China?](#)". -- *DJR*]. In Russia, between October 1917 and May 1918, the revolutionary peasant movement did not need a regular army to protect itself against counter-revolution, but the situation changed when the latter went over to the offensive with the backing of the imperialist powers. The peasant masses then appreciated their need of the Bolshevik Party's leadership (even when they disagreed with some particular measure taken by the party). For lack, however, of adequate roots in the countryside, the party's leading activity among the peasants was exercised only in a relatively superficial way, it assumed to only a slight extent the character of an ideological leadership, and it tended to weaken as soon as the need for it ceased to be immediately felt. [p. 101]
21. As will be seen, this tension was kept up because of mistakes committed by the Bolshevik Party in its policy toward the peasantry, especially during the period of "war communism." [p. 101]
22. See Lenin in [The State and Revolution](#), in *CW*, vol. 25, especially p. 457, and in a number of his other writings, e.g., in *CW*, vol. 24, p. 85 [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution](#)". -- *DJR*].

Lenin was here only repeating the conclusions of Marx and Engels, who, after the experience of the Paris Commune, proposed that in the party program the word "state" be replaced by "commune" when the political power of the workers was referred to (Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 3, p. 35). [p. 102]

23. It is necessary to speak here of "townsfolk" rather than "work-

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ers" because all inhabitants of the towns had the right to vote, except "those who employ others for the sake of profit," "private businessmen," "those who live on income not arising from their own labour," and "monks and priests," as well as criminals and imbeciles. Intellectuals and members of the professions had votes, and also the specialists and office staff employed by the government. (See E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, pp. 152-153.) [p. 102]

24. See Lenin's report to the Eighth Congress of the RCP(B) on the party program, in *CW*, vol. 29, especially pp. 184-185. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's [Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.\(B.\)](#). -- DJR] It was in this report that Lenin summed up the constitutional measures taken regarding the franchise by saying: "Our constitution recognises the precedence of the proletariat in respect of the peasants and disfranchises the exploiters." He mentioned that the latter measure was determined by specific circumstances: "We do not at all regard the question of disfranchising the bourgeoisie from an absolute point of view, because it is theoretically quite conceivable that the dictatorship of the proletariat may suppress the bourgeoisie without disfranchising them" (ibid., p. 184). [p. 102]
25. The Cadet party (from the letters KD, standing for the Russian words for "Constitutional Democratic") was a typical bourgeois party. As Lenin put it: "the Cadet is a typical stockbroker. His ideal is to perpetuate bourgeois exploitation in respectable, civilised, parliamentary forms." ("[An Attempt at Classification of the Political Parties of Russia](#)," in *CW*, vol. 11, p. 229.) This description, made in 1906, was still valid in 1917. [p. 103]
26. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 120. [p. 103]
27. See the statistical table in Anweiler, *Die Rätebewegung*, p. 324. [p. 103]
28. Lenin, *CW*, vol. 29, p. 183. [p. 103]
29. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 6, p. 362. [Transcriber's Note: See Stalin's "[Trotskyism or Leninism?](#)" -- DJR] [p. 104]
30. When, on October 26, Trotsky announced to the Congress of Soviets that the Provisional Government had been overthrown, in order that this congress might take power, he added: "We as a party considered it our task to create a real chance for the Congress of Soviets to take power into its hands . . . To achieve this task, what was needed was a party which would wrest the power from the hands of the counter-revolutionaries and say to you: 'Here is the power and you are obliged to take it!'" (*Leon Trotsky Speaks*, p. 80). [p. 104]
31. On this point as on others the party was far from unanimous. Some of the Bolshevik leaders, like Zinoviev and Kamenev, who

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had not been in favor of the launching of the October insurrection, were also against the preeminent position taken by the party in the period after it. [p. 104]

32. See Lenin's article, "[The Political Situation](#)," in *CW*, vol. 25, p. 177. [p. 105]
33. Ibid., pp. 177-178. [p. 105]
34. Ibid., p. 178. [p. 105]
35. The Cheka, or "Extraordinary Commission," was the first political police established by the Soviet power. It was derived from the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet. When this committee

was dissolved, a decree of the Sovnarkom dated December 7, 1917, retained the "Extraordinary Commission." [p. 111]

36. "[What Is to Be Done?](#)" in *CW*, vol. 5, p. 369. [p. 113]
37. Ibid., p.370. Lenin recalled in this connection that in his book on *The Peasants' War in Germany* Friedrich Engels stressed the importance of theory, mentioning that the Social Democrats, the organized political movement of the proletariat of that period, must wage a struggle not in two forms only, political and economic, but in three forms, "placing the theoretical struggle on a par with the first two." Engels even saw its "indifference to all theory" as "one of the main reasons why the English working class movement crawls along so slowly," applying the same notion in the cases of France and Belgium as well (ibid., p. 371). See Engels, preface to *The Peasants' War in Germany*, pp. 32-33. [p. 113]
38. Narodism, the movement of the Narodniki, was a Russian revolutionary movement which came into being in the nineteenth century. It emphasized the potentialities of a peasant revolution which would be faithful to Russia's national traditions and take account of the country's peculiar features. The Narodniki tried to make propaganda among the peasants, and when this failed they turned to terrorism. In the twentieth century, the SRs were their de facto successors, but with a real base in the petty bourgeoisie and the rural intelligentsia. [p. 115]
39. Lenin, *CW*, vol. 1, pp. 129-332. [p. 115]
40. *CW*, vol. 5, pp. 347-529. [p. 115]
41. Ibid., pp. 382-383. [p. 116]
42. *CW*, vol. 7, pp. 203-425. [p. 116]
43. *CW*, vol. 9, pp. 15-140. [p. 116]
44. Ibid., p. 100. [p. 116]

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45. In "[Social-Democracy's Attitude Toward the Peasant Movement](#)" (*CW*, vol. 9, pp. 230-239), Lenin returns to this question and writes (p. 237): "We stand for uninterrupted revolution." [p. 116]
46. *Otzovat'* is Russian for "to recall." [p. 117]
47. *CW*, vol. 22, pp. 185-304. [p. 118]
48. Ibid., vol. 25, pp. 381-492. [p. 118]
49. Lenin's correspondence enables us to follow the "non-public" part of the disputes among the Bolsheviks. See *CW*, vol. 34, especially the correspondence of the years 1907-1910. [p. 122]
50. Ibid., pp. 419-420. [p. 123]
51. See the estimated figures given in the *Bulshaya Sovyetskaya Entsiklopedia*, p. 531, and T. H. Rigby, *Communist Party Membership*, p. 61. According to earlier sources, the Bolshevik Party had only between 10,000 and 20,000 members in January 1917. [p. 124]
52. *Entsiklopedichesky slovar'*, vol. 1, p. 521. [p. 124]
53. The term "Leninist" used in relation to the party must not cause one to ignore, either, the fact that when the Bolshevik Party led the October Revolution it was a party very different from the one that Lenin had headed in 1914. On the one hand, many of the old militants had disappeared during the war and been replaced by new ones with a less solid training. On the other, at the level of the leading cadres, there had been a merger between the old Bolshevik leaders (who, moreover, were far from being all "Leninists," as their many disputes with Lenin showed) and leaders who had come from other revolutionary organizations. The latter, indeed, made up about half of the "Bolshevik" leaders in October 1917. See G. Haupt and J.-J. Marie, *Makers of the Russian Revolution*, p. 22. [p. 125]

From Marx to Mao	Other Documents	Reading Guide	On to Section 2, Bettelheim's Text
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