



Essays on the general strike

Part I

Classical Marxism and the general strike

These essays on the general strike have their origin in 1992 and 1993. During the massive upsurge against Michael Heseltine's programme of pit closures the question acquired particular importance. In the *Weekly Worker* we consistently agitated for the preparation of a general strike with or without the TUC. Others, most notably the Socialist Workers Party and Militant, came out with rather different perspectives. On the one hand the SWP issued the anarcho-bureaucratic slogan, 'TUC, get off your knees - call the general strike'. Militant preferred a more moderate 24-hour general strike.

In the SWP the politics of the Workers Revolutionary Party found new life (since it began publication in 1976 *News Line* had been daily demanding a TUC-led general strike). Clearly 1992 represented the triumph of opportunist practice over opportunist theory. The SWP had previously stood against demands for a general strike in 1972 and 1984-5 and its founder-leader has written a history belittling its actuality in May 1926.

The SWP's adopted slogan sounds radical. In reality it is hollow. Making the TUC pivotal let the SWP off the hook. The TUC general council could be relied upon not to call *the*, or any other, general strike.

The TUC is essentially the same creature it was in 1926. Willis, Monks, Edmonds and Jordan were from the same mould as Citrine, Thomas, Bevin, and Clynes. What of Morris, Knapp and Fullick? Were they any different from the left reformists like Hicks, Purcell, and Swales, who provided a left face for the monumental act of betrayal in 1926? The answer is no. And yet if the pronouncements of *Socialist Worker* in the 1990s are to be believed, reformists right and left only have to be advised, pressurised and cajoled and they will become class warriors.

Evidently the SWP is well to the right of the 1926 Communist Party of Great Britain Tony Cliff so easily disparages. When the SWP calls for *the* one big strike, it makes no reference to the necessity of councils of action, subverting the army, let alone fighting for an alternative centre of working class leadership and initiative which could not only rival and then replace the TUC, but the government.

For those SWPers who dismiss such talk as wild leftism, that was exactly what your Chris Harman was insisting on in the *Socialist Worker Review* of January 1985: "Once the point is reached where the slogan of the general strike is correct you have to be ready to supplement it with other slogans that begin to cope with the question of power - demands about how the strike is organised (strike committees, workers' councils), with how the strike defends itself (flying pickets, mass pickets, workers' defence guards) and with how it takes

the offensive against the state (organising within the army and the police)."

Of course in the miners' Great Strike of 1984-5 the SWP was arguing *against* the call for a general strike. Despite the fact that it was both possible and necessary. Harman was trying to scare his rank and file with the implications of a general strike slogan, not equip them programmatically.

The Tories were better servants of *their* class. They did everything they could in 1984-85 to prevent other workers joining the miners. They bent over backwards to buy off the Militant-led Liverpool council, a railway strike and two national dock strikes. In its own way the SWP complemented them. It bent over backwards to rubbish the demand for a general strike.

If the idea of *really* taking a step along the road to revolution was not enough to scare the SWP rank and file, there was always the labour bureaucracy to reassure them. A general strike was impossible because "the Labour Party leadership and the TUC general council have sabotaged the movement in solidarity with the miners".¹

Did the TUC or the SWP undergo a sudden conversion between 1985 and 1992? Either way, one would have thought that the decision to launch the call for a general strike would have been done with an extensive article by one of the SWP's theorists, maybe Tony Cliff. More, that this would have been followed by extensive debate, with inevitably some branches and individual comrades staying loyal to the old line. But, no - it was done without debate. Then, as now, the SWP has neither programme nor democracy.

Militant did at least defend its call for a 24-hour strike with a short article by Peter Taaffe.² *Why a 24-hour general strike?* marked a significant left turn. Previously Militant had stuck to its version of the parliamentary road to socialism, enshrined in the periodically re-issued programmatic pamphlet, *Militant: What we stand for*, authored by none other than Taaffe himself. For a moment in October 1992 socialism was no longer reliant on a parliamentary majority. Instead he argued that a TUC-called 24-hour general strike *could*, "as the appetite grows with the eating", lay the basis for dual power and finally socialism through transforming organs of working class struggle into organs of working class state power.

Nevertheless Taaffe's method remained highly schematic. In the *Daily Worker* we argued that the retreat imposed on the Tory government by the miners should have been used to *prepare* for a general strike which "united all sectional struggles", welding all into one around the fight to smash the Tories' anti-trade union laws.³ Militant, in contrast, doggedly stuck to its one-stage-at-a-time call for a 24-hour general strike. Taaffe ad-

mitted that in itself it would be unlikely to stop the government in its tracks or force a reversal of its pit closure programme. He also admitted the danger that the TUC would "sanction" a 24-hour general strike only "as a means of the working class letting off steam".

So Taaffe needed some deft centrist footwork to justify the claim that the "best slogan to prepare the working class for further battles is a 24-hour general strike." Self-evidently a 24-hour general strike could only be a protest action. What begins on midnight and says it will end on the following midnight lacks any internal dynamic. Taaffe disagreed. It would be a "political earthquake" after which things would never be "the same again". Furthermore, he promised, a successful 24-hour general strike would be "a powerful warning", and "could fuse the working class together in opposition not just to the government but to capitalism itself".

How could Taaffe make such a claim for an unofficial one-day holiday? The reasoning was faultless, if formal. "Failure to retreat on the part of the government and ruling class would lay the ground for more decisive action." First, it would seem, a *series* of 24-hour general strikes. Finally though, "an all-out general strike" which "poses the issue of the working class taking power". As can be seen, Taaffe treats a living working class movement, up to and including "taking power", as a series of punishments to be inflicted upon the government if it refuses to back down.

This stageism is defended in terms of practicality. Hence Militant's case against an open-ended general strike in 1992 was founded on the contention that it will "not at this stage be supported by the great mass of the working class". That may well have been true. But surely it was also the case that support for a 24-hour general strike would "not at this stage" have been supported by the *great mass* of the working class.

Marxists base their slogans on the concrete. By that we do not mean acquiescence. On the contrary we fight for what is necessary. That involves actively linking the present with the future, the now with what needs to become. Of course, we 'enquire', through agitation, what the "great mass of the working class" think. But we do not meekly accept the popular verdict. We develop a dialogue, which - given the right conditions - can produce a mass movement, making what is necessary into a material force.

Militant's method, if it were consistent, should see it lowering its sights to the point where its slogans meet the statistical average. That would lead it to bourgeois acceptability and absurdity: a one-hour strike, a one-minute silence? When did the great mass of the working class refuse to pay the poll tax? Yet Militant's slogan was 'Don't pay'. When did the great mass indicate their will-

Supplement

ingness to vote for its Militant Labour parliamentary candidates? In the April 1992 election all three Militant supporters, including two sitting MPs, lost. Do the great mass of the working class support socialism? Unfortunately, no. That has never stopped Militant advocating socialism, albeit usually of a reformist variety.

As with the SWP, nowhere in Taaffe's *Why a 24-hour general strike?* article, was the *idea* of insurrection mentioned. The necessity of the workers arming themselves, the inevitability of violence, was completely ignored. Yet Taaffe admitted that the "very essence" of a general strike, which was meant to flow from his 24-hour protest, "poses the issue of the working class taking power, establishing its own democratic workers' government and state and organising a socialist planned economy".

An indefinite general strike is diametrically opposite to a 24-hour Grand Old Duke of York affair, where the TUC safely marches us round Hyde Park. Government ministers could not shrug it off. Nor could the stock exchange and currency dealers view developments with equanimity. A 24-hour general strike declares from the beginning its intention to surrender. That the day after will be the same as the day before. An indefinite general strike would on day one send stocks and shares plummeting, the pound nose-diving and the government into panic over whether to compromise or go for broke with a repressive clampdown.

By its very nature the TUC would do everything in its power to keep things within the well established conduits of protest politics and through to a quick compromise. Yet a general strike would unleash a deluge of self-activity from below. Workers learn in one day of a general strike more than in 10 normal years. So, with every day that passes, the greater the chance of a such an action bursting free, taking its own course and engulfing the whole of bourgeois society.

Those who raise the perspective for a general strike, even if it is to be initiated by 24-hour protests, have a duty to link it with the measures needed to defend and take it forward to a positive conclusion - insurrection. That Taaffe did not is no aberration. In *Militant: What we stand for* Taaffe dismisses the "cry" that Militant "would establish a socialist Britain by violence" as a "red herring". According to him, "It is the capitalists, not the working class or the Marxists, who have always attempted by violence to overturn the results of elections that threaten their position."⁴

The fact of the matter is that the October 1992 *Why a 24-hour general strike?* was not about junking the parliamentary illusions of the 1990 *Militant: What we stand for*. What took place in 1992 was a left turn within the *framework* of centrism. We have no difficulty whatsoever in proving this. One week, *one edition* after Taaffe was waxing lyrical about workers' councils being a "new potential government power", his paper's "message to the Tories" was for a "general election now!"⁵ Soon its slogan "For a 24-hour general strike" was being given equal prominence to the slogan "Force a general election".⁶

Without doubt if the general strike Militant says it wanted actually occurred and actually proceeded to the point of dual power, then any left organisation calling for a general election would be making a fundamental mistake. The ruling class might well turn to a general election in order to stop, not just a general strike, but a revolution. It would rely on the atomised, backward, non-activated, sections of the population outnumbering those who have arrived at revolutionary consciousness and conclusions.

Quite possibly, under such circumstances a general election would land them with a Ken Livingstone as prime minister. Livingstone would not be their first choice. But needs must. If he was not available another would be invented. Someone with 'hard left' credentials could *democratically* save the system. A radical left Labour government would confuse the forces of the left and give the bourgeoisie time to regroup and prepare. True, sweeping social reforms and all sorts of other expensive concessions would have to be given. Yet, when the masses had been deactivated and their revolutionary ardour cooled, the time would be right for the crisis in society to be resolved negatively. That would mean not a recreation of German Nazism, the Italian Fascists, but a *fascismo Britannica*. Draping itself in the traditions and trappings of Britain, its mythological king Arthur, its World War II finest hour, maybe its royalty and church, it would carry through a counterrevolution. Death squads, concentration camps, torture, terror and the imposition of a totalitarian regime would momentarily overcome divisions above and smash opposition below. That is the price we would pay for *not making revolution*.

So a revolutionary situation is not a choice between a John Major and a Ken Livingstone. It is

a choice between revolution and counter-revolution, between the workers' state and the fascist state, between life and death. That is why, if the bourgeoisie announced elections in the midst of a revolutionary situation, counterrevolutionary elections in conditions of dual power, we communists would almost certainly call for a boycott. Our efforts would be directed to making revolution.

My intention in 1993 was to write a pamphlet which would reassert the Marxist theory of the general strike. It would provide historic context and re-examine the nine days of May 1926 and the controversies surrounding it, look at the events of France 1968, and show why Britain's relative decline since the 1960s put the general strike slogan back onto the political agenda of the militant working class. Besides examining the significance of the eclipse of social democracy, the idea was to analyse the battles of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the 1984-5 miners' strike. I wanted to conclude with a rounded polemic against Militant Labour and the SWP, as well as others, for having failed to learn from history, and show why a reformed Communist Party is vital if a general strike is to be taken to its logical conclusion.

As it was the thing never got completed. Events moved on and so did my priorities. Nevertheless enough material stands in its own right to provide five supplements which will be published in the *Weekly Worker* over the coming months to coincide with our marking of the 70th anniversary of the 1926 General Strike. Apart from minor editing I have left it as it was in 1993. By its very nature it does not need any updating or extensive reworking.

In this, the first, supplement we survey the 'classic' Marxist position on the general strike and the way it was informed by 1840s Chartism. We will see that later Engels in particular took responsibility for combating the anarchist general strike strategy. Then we deal with the opportunist attempt to misuse the polemics of Marx and Engels against the anarchists to distort their whole theory of the class struggle. Having done that, we show how during the 1905 revolution in Russia Lenin and the Bolsheviks learnt from the masses and combined the general strike tactic with the perspective of insurrection. Finally in this supplement we turn to the open polemical struggle Rosa Luxemburg conducted to make available the weapon of the general strike to the working class in Germany and ask what significance there was in the different way she approached the question compared to Lenin.

Our second supplement will concentrate on the historic conditions which led to the 1926 General Strike. Beginning with Britain as the workshop of the world, we trace its decline, turn to imperialism and the sustained challenge presented by the working class, from the great industrial unrest that began in 1910 and lasted till August 1914. The platonic threat of the general strike slogan could not prevent the outbreak of world war. But world war produced the conditions for the general strike - conditions which persisted from the end of World War I to the actuality of May 1926.

The third and fourth supplements will show the creativity of the masses and the treachery of the labour and trade union bureaucracy in May 1926. We will attempt to separate myth from reality concerning the record of the CPGB in order to present our own considered criticisms.

The final, fifth, supplement, deals with the 1968 events in France which prove that a general strike can happen spontaneously even in a stable and economically successful advanced capitalist country - and how it brings with it the possibility of revolution. We argue that in France the lack of a genuine Communist Party meant that the working class did not act as a vanguard and as a result Gaullism was given an extended life term - a crucial lesson for our own times.

Introduction

Sketchy though it may be, pre-class societies provide us with tantalising evidence of what might be called strikes. Chris Knight, the anthropologist, suggests in his book *Blood relations* that some 74,000 years ago following the onset of the last ice age there was a female sex strike. A general act of menstrual solidarity which he says paved the way for the revolutionary transition from savagery to primitive communism that we know took place during the upper palaeolithic.

And though it is completely non-historic (maybe pacifist invention?), Aristophanes' play *Lysistrata* speaks for itself. It has a storyline with a similar collective action by the wives of the Athenian citizenry during the Peloponnesian war. Surely this was more than a farcical idea designed to get belly laughs from the all-male audiences at the Theatre of Dionysus; for sexual gratification they had ready access to prostitutes or *hetairai*

courtesans. Every fiction has a grain of truth. Who knows, perhaps in this case some dim memory of primordial resistance to what Engels called the "world historical defeat of the female sex" that happened with the emergence of class society.⁷

When it comes to class society itself we are on firmer ground. Scraps of papyrus discovered at Oxyrhynchus reveal how the pyramid builders in ancient Egypt unitedly downed chisel and mallet on more than one occasion in order to petition for improved rations and living conditions in the necropolis. It is also known that exhausted state slaves of Athens struck and occupied the silver mines of Laurium in 135-3 BC.⁸ The cradle of western civilization had them walled in and left to starve.

In the corporate feudal town apprentices and journeymen, with the coordination provided by their well established societies, could win real advances. Nevertheless their strikes were little more than small acts of indiscipline within a highly fragmented, workshop-based patriarchal system of craft production. Other guild masters regarded them as not much more than a family squabble and an irritating example that others might follow. Writing about pre-industrial England, Edward Thompson makes the telling point that the "insubordination of the poor was an inconvenience; it was not a menace".⁹

The main *collective* form of class struggle employed by those below in ancient and feudal times was not the strike. From Spartacus to Wat Tyler, from Jesus of Nazareth to Thomas Munzer, the popular classes punctured the supposedly seamless fabric of official society with utopian and sometimes despairing revolt - riot in the city, *jacquerie* in the countryside. Such uprisings could on occasion force upon the upper classes conditions which they regarded as onerous - not the least of which was democracy. However for all their rights the Athenian peasant-citizen, the Roman plebeian, the Icelandic yeoman farmer existed in a subordinate position within an oligarchical slave-owning system.

There was always the danger of the aristocrats of birth or wealth regaining their unrestricted rule. The mob gets drunk quickly and just as quickly loses cohesion. Because of economic geography the peasant is dispersed to begin with. So even when united revolt overcomes the tyranny of distance, the moment of collective triumph over the manor or town is never permanent. Peasants are pulled back to helpless separation by the irresistible need to plant and harvest. The rulers deserved to fail. But even when the ruled successfully revolted, they could not provide a viable economic alternative which abolished the reproduction of class relations.

The nascent bourgeoisie - economically a powerful class within the womb of dissolving feudalism - introduced a dynamic element into the never ending cycle of primitive revolt. When money *did not* serve them better, when there seemed no other way, the bourgeoisie was quite prepared to smash, terrorise and overturn. To perform such a political act the bourgeoisie need a universal philosophy of emancipation. To remove kingly, aristocratic and church barriers to their developing economic order the bourgeoisie formed itself into a class of liberators. It not only put men of action - Oldenbarneveldt, Cromwell, Washington, Robespierre, Garibaldi - at the head of the *popular* movement. It used preachers, poets and pamphleteers - Calvin, Voltaire, Milton, Paine - as the "enchanter's wand" to inspire the masses with promises of heaven on earth.

Hence the classic form of the *bourgeois revolution* was the barricade behind which stood the people who had been won to believe that they were fighting for *liberté, fraternité et égalité*, or - given different times and countries - something equivalent to it. But whatever dreams were spinning in their heads objectively, while they remained under bourgeois hegemony, the participants fought not for the rights of man, but public debt and a home market fit for capitalist accumulation and the unrestricted exploitation of man by man.

Haunting the rise of bourgeoisdom and the consolidation of the capitalist state - whether monarchical or plutocratic - was the ever-present threat of popular democracy. Levellers and *sans culottes* wanted a political system that would have greatly curbed the power of capital. However the greatest threat to capitalism was its own creation - the modern proletariat. Sucked into factories, mines and mills by the never ending and most elementary needs of capital, the 'swinish multitude' was transformed not only by a new common relationship to *capital*, but into a class because of a common struggle *against capital*.

Marx and Engels were emphatic that individuals become a class only to the extent "they have to carry on a common battle with another class".¹⁰ For workers then, it was not only material conditions of everyday life - housing, education, lei-

sure and work - which moulded them into a class. It was the war against capital: beginning with combinations to limit competition between themselves as otherwise atomised sellers of labour power. EP Thompson considers that our working class was formed through self-making economic, political and cultural struggle between the years 1780 and 1832; by which time "most English working people came to feel an identity of interests as between themselves, and as against their rulers and employers".¹¹

Marx and Engels were among the first to grasp the *universal* nature of this new class. Uniquely, because of its place in history and relationship to other classes and the forces of production, it had an inescapable interest in not only improving its own lot. Precisely through its own condition, the working class is, in the last analysis, compelled to act in a revolutionary way, which ultimately must have as its object the abolition of class relations and the liberation of humanity.

Those who own no means of production other than their ability to work have a ready and for them a self-evident weapon at hand to achieve their immediate ends, no matter how limited. The collective withdrawal of labour power. That does not mean that once a strike begins there is a pre-set mechanism which operates to take workers up an inexorable series of organisational, political and ideological steps which ends in final liberation. In and of itself, what Marx called in his pamphlet *Wages, price and profit* the "incessant struggle" in the workplaces can only be a matter of resistance to the encroachments of capital.¹² No different in essence then to the resistance of artisans, slaves, peasants and journeymen of previous times. That explains why during the early stages of capitalism communistic philosophers (Fourier, Owen, Saint-Simon, etc) *limited* themselves to utopian dreams about what society should be like. The working class had yet to constitute itself as a militant class. But once it had, the *real* movement began to develop its own momentum and capability for qualitative self-development.¹³

When it came to this real movement both Marx and Engels stressed the relationship and yet at the same time the difference between economic and political struggle. The strike to compel a particular employer or a particular group of employers to up wages or reduce hours is and will remain a purely economic struggle, and therefore a containable movement of the underclass. On the other hand the movement to force through a general wage increase or a general limitation on the working day is *political* in that it has as its object the enforcement of *general* interests "in a general form, in a form possessing general, coercive force": ie, it contains within it the seeds of a new social hegemony.¹⁴ It is not an either-or situation. Through, or out of, the *training* provided by *separate* economic movements the conditions are provided for a *political* movement in which the working class takes the lead against the state.

The political movement of the working class can however only come about because there has been a certain degree of previous economic organisation. Capitalism in part does this spontaneously. With the concentration and centralisation of production workers come to possess a huge latent economic and therefore political power. One point, one area, one branch of production relies and is connected with another in a mosaic of national and global interdependence. Strikes affect the immediate employers. They also, if they are *generalised*, threaten not only the profits of other individual capitalists, but the collective power: ie, the "political power of the ruling class".¹⁵

Having been cleaved into separate categories by the rise of capitalism, economics and politics come together again in the working class (the class that can become both the subject and object of history). After even the first few steps the *generalised* economic struggle can take on new dimensions. Met by the forces of the employer and the state's laws and courts, fighting in an integrated economy where scabs can easily be brought in, police employed and production transferred, workers are predisposed to and actively search out the totalizing world view of communism: ie, their own self-knowing scientific theory. Through these politics the working class can express its championship of all who are oppressed by the state and its own will to power.

Even on the lowest level the cooperation, rigid discipline and primacy of need over profit means that within themselves strikes contain a kernel of both proletarian economics and proletarian state power. As I have said, that does not mean there is an A to B course from the trade union strike against the employer to the socialist order. Nevertheless, as we will see, there is a living connection between the generalised strike and a challenge to the system itself. Proving it, the history of the working class under capitalism (and bureaucratic socialism for that matter) is replete with strikes

which because of their internal dynamic start off with the most modest economic demands and yet lead to the question of state power.

1. Marxism and the general strike

Throughout their political lives Marx and Engels, the founders of scientific communism, intransigently argued against the proposition that the working class could liberate itself by the simple device of staging one big general strike. Given the division of labour that existed between them, it was invariably the latter who took the lead in the associated polemics.

1.1. Chartism and 1842: Engels' analysis

On a number of occasions Engels understandably referred back to his brilliant book - published in 1845 when he was only in his mid-20s - *The condition of the working class in England*. We will do the same. In it after all, Engels touched upon how in 1839 the world's first proletarian party, the British Chartists, agreed a resolution calling for a 'holy month'. This had nothing to do with worship of the godhead. It was a proposed month-long general strike which would, or so its advocates thought, be more than enough to get the Tory government to meet their, in effect, revolutionary demands for universal male suffrage and secret voting.¹⁶

Ironically, again as explained in Engels' book, it was the bourgeoisie of industrial Northern England who were consciously responsible for putting the 'holy month' to the test in July 1842. It was not, Engels said, that workers wished to quit work, but the manufacturers "who wished to close their mills and send the operatives into the country parishes upon the property of the aristocracy".¹⁷ Putting aside their social contract with the aristocracy and their law-abiding creed of moral persuasion, the industrial bourgeoisie seem to have provoked, or taken advantage of, a general strike in order to use the working class as pawns. Letting loose proletarian anger was meant, in Richard Cobden's, words to "frighten the aristocracy", so much so that it would bow before demands for the repeal of the Corn Laws¹⁸ and in the process bring the industrial bourgeoisie one step nearer the day when it could finally crown itself the governing class.¹⁹

Predictably, because the industrial bourgeoisie and their Anti-Corn Law League led from behind; because for those below there was no clear goal in mind; because the workers were driven into revolt by a plan hatched from above; because none wished to be shot for the sake of ending the Corn Laws; the whole thing did not take long to fizzle out. For our purposes however it is particularly germane that at its height the general strike of 1842 "involved up to half a million workers and covered an area which stretched from Dundee and the Scottish coalfields to South Wales and Cornwall".²⁰ An independent working class politics was being forged, politics which went much further than those resulting from the simple antagonism that is by definition endemic between employer and employee.

Economic demands were joined with demands "for the revolutionary transformation of society".²¹ As well as striking against pay cuts and short time working, drawing the plugs from mill boilers and 'sweeping' out those still in the factories, workers burnt the property of those they hated and stormed workhouses - loathed by the poor and loved by the free-market liberals. Led by Thomas Cooper, a minority argued that there ought to be a physical-force insurrection to carry through the programme of Chartism. The majority around Fergus O'Conner agreed, but considered such a move premature.²²

For the industrial bourgeoisie it was all too much. The propertyless were threatening "the destruction of those who had property".²³ Having been released and shown itself self-willed and uncontrollable, the proletarian genie had to be returned to its dark hovels. The industrial bourgeoisie resumed a constitutional stance, abandoned its last Jacobin vestiges and moved to place itself at the service of the government. Its trusted retainers were armed and sworn in as special constables and in Preston were given the command to fire upon the crowd. The unintentional general strike therefore stood opposed not only by the government but all exploiting classes.

Arising from the events of July 1842 a number of Chartists were arrested, prosecuted, convicted and sentenced. There were, however, far more positive consequences. Crucially, the industrial bourgeoisie and the working class "decisively" separated.²⁴ Chartism freed itself from bourgeois hangers-on and became a purely proletarian movement. The British industrial bourgeoisie had burnt its fingers trying to manipulate working class revolution. Chastised, it refused any longer to listen to physical-force talk. Fear of the work-

ing class now weighed more heavily than dissatisfaction with the governing landed aristocracy.

1.2. Engels' polemic with the anarchists

Despite the negative experience of history's first proletarian general strike, the idea was taken up by socialists in France and Belgium after the failure of the 1848 revolutions. That said, it was the anarchists, under the leadership of Bakunin, who in the 1860s and 70s made the general strike strategy their own.²⁵ The general strike, in the anarchist programme, was the lever which in their hands would bring about the social revolution. Engels mercilessly tore into this abstract perspective, not least in his pamphlet *The Bakuninists at work*. "One fine morning," he mocked, the anarchists imagine "all the workers in all the industries of a country, or even of the whole world, stop work, thus forcing the propertied classes either humbly to submit within four weeks at most, or to attack the workers, who would then have the right to defend themselves and use the opportunity to pull down the entire old society."²⁶

Events in Spain in 1873 gave an "unsurpassed example of how a revolution should not be made". Here was a country where the anarchists enjoyed a considerable following. Confronted by a serious revolutionary situation however, the anarchists were compelled to ditch virtually their entire programme. Instead of abstaining from political and electoral activity and abolishing the state, they constituted themselves an impotent rump within an archipelago of patently bourgeois 'cantonal' governments. Finding themselves drawn into useless, senseless and uncoordinated uprisings, their only remaining so-called principle of federation and local autonomy gave counterrevolution the initiative and allowed it to concentrate its forces and crush one town at a time before turning to the next.

Obviously anarchist politics stood in flat contradiction to the living economic and political struggle. Indeed, even as the Spanish fiasco unfolded, the hopeless utopianism of its general strike strategy could still be found peppering their pronouncements. Despite that, at the September 1 1873 Geneva congress of the anarchist Alliance of Social Democracy, it was admitted that to carry out the general strike strategy there had to be a perfect organisation of the working class and a full war chest.

Engels had no problem in pointing out that here was the "rub". On the one hand, no government would sit idly by while workers religiously accumulated their pennies for such a project. On the other hand, almost by definition, the real class struggle would bring about the liberation of the working class long before any perfect organisation, with colossal reserves of funds, had ever been achieved. Furthermore, if by some strange quirk such an organisation had been built, then surely there would be no need for the "roundabout way of the general strike" in order to attain the objects of the working class. Here was the reasoning that shaped the Marxist approach to the general strike strategy and which went on to colour the attitude of the Second International.

Formed in 1889, the Second International expanded at a fantastic pace. By the early years of the 20th century it included within its ranks every mass working class party in the world (they were often newly formed). Unlike the First International, which was a smaller, but very broad affair, embracing not only Marxists, but Proudhonists, Blanquists, Owenites, British trade unionists as well as anarchists, the Second International accepted Marxism as its natural world outlook.²⁷ Anarchism found itself completely marginalised, losing almost all the influence it once enjoyed.

The Second International grew in an extended period of social peace. Fertile conditions for many of its parties and their most prominent leaders to be seduced by the specialised business of trade unionism, parliamentarianism, journalism ... and the bourgeoisie. Hence there was a large body of influential social democratic theoreticians, editors, MPs, officials and trade union functionaries who wanted to forget (even censor) the countless and very inconvenient revolutionary statements in the writings of Marx and Engels. How for example they called for the smashing of the capitalist state, proletarian dictatorship and insurrection. Instead all that was recalled were the attacks on the anarchists - who were now little more than a phantom - not least their dreams of the general strike making the revolution.

It is true that in 1891 and 1893 Belgian workers staged two 24-hour general strikes to force the government to extend the franchise. That in 1903 a strike on the Dutch railways grew into a brief general strike. That in Italy, in 1904, a wave of violent strikes saw street fighting in several cities. Nevertheless among most theoreticians of the workers' movement the general strike was seen as something primitive or unobtainably utopian. In

that spirit the famous German opportunist Ignaz Auer coined the catchphrase, "*Generalstreik ist Generalunsinn*" ("General strike is general lunacy"). The Russian revolution of 1905 changed all that. It anticipated the end of capitalism's peaceful period of development and the beginning of a period of wars and revolutions. It also catapulted the general strike question to the forefront of political action and debate.

1.3. From general strike to insurrection: experience of Russia 1905

Russia's first revolution started on January 9 1905, a cold and terrible Sunday.²⁸ Partially through stupidity, partially through premeditated plan, Tsarist troops were ordered to open fire on the huge march led by the priest (and police dupe) Gapon. Pushed on by disgust with the futile Russo-Japanese war, mass deprivation and a crop of economic strikes, he had intended submitting a half humble and, because of communist agitation, half threatening petition to the 'little father' in his St Petersburg Winter Palace.

It listed almost every popular grievance and demand. Everything from workshops open to "draughts, rain and snow", withdrawal of the navy from abroad, the eight-hour day, "separation of church and state" to the convening of a Constituent Assembly elected by "universal, secret and equal suffrage" - the "most important of our requests". In its final peroration the famous petition bluntly and ominously stated that there were only "two paths". Either "happiness and freedom" or the "grave".²⁹ Tsarism horrifically proved it was the path to the grave. In the hail of bullets hundreds were killed, thousands more injured.³⁰

Gapon all of a sudden found himself world famous. From afar his mix of Ezekiel and Marx made him appear some sort of new age prophet. Fakir he was. But not one destined to be Russia's Gandhi, its Mahdi, its Makarios or its Khomeini. Even while his "halo of indignation" dazzled liberal opinion and his "pastor's curses" still rained down on the Tsar's head, the communists had emerged from the underground and after overcoming initial mistrust began to exert a decisive influence over the people. Initiative slipped from the petty bourgeois individual, the insubstantial Gapon, and slowly passed to the proletarian Party, the "politically conscious workers who had been through the school of socialism". Again in the words of one of its foremost future leaders, a certain Lev Bronstein, it formed "an iron ring" around Gapon, "a ring from which he could not have broken loose even if he had wanted to".³¹ So it was not the naive orthodox priest employed at a St Petersburg transit prison but the working class which was to be the Tsar's real protagonist.

The January 9 massacre - Bloody Sunday, as it instantly became known - provoked outrage and a rolling nationwide general strike. One million workers stopped work. They took to the streets and shook the Tsar and the whole autocratic system to its foundations. Without any guiding strategy, in many cases without advancing any clear demands; stopping, starting, "obedient only to the instinct of solidarity"; for almost two months the "strike ruled the land".³²

A spontaneous general strike wave such as January and February 1905 could only but exhaust itself. It had no idea of consummating itself in revolution. Moreover these strikers did not get strike pay. Such an action thus had physical limits determined by the workers' stomachs, not trade union coffers. The revolutionary situation, however, continued unabated. Breaking out here as peasant land seizures, there as sailors' mutiny and everywhere as street demonstrations and clashes with police and troops, the decisive moment was coming.

October was its herald. Trumpeted by a strike on the Moscow-Kazan railway, things quickly and enormously fanned out in terms of numbers, character and prospects. Isolated economic strikes again became general political strikes. Demonstrations united workers and radical students around revolutionary slogans.³³ Strike committees came together to establish workers' councils or soviets - organs of struggle - and, as Lenin was soon to appreciate, "embryonic forms of a new revolutionary authority".³⁴ Clearly the situation had changed since January. What was unconscious had, like the human embryo, nine months after conception become conscious. Now, the revolution possessed a guiding strategy. Now, it had clear political demands. Now, for the most advanced detachments, the call for general strike was combined with preparation for armed uprising. Responsibility for this qualitative development rested entirely with the Communist Party - the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, as it was then known - and its power and prestige, which with every month grew in leaps and bounds.

To organise and make effective the sudden re-

lease of popular anger and surge of self-movement Lenin had quite rightly almost straightaway demanded the opening up of the Party and mass recruitment, especially of young workers. That did not mean he rejected as wrong his ideas of building the revolutionary Party outlined in the celebrated 1902 pamphlet *What is to be done?* The Party would still be built and directed top down. But now centralism was to be complemented and completed with mass initiative and democracy from below.

The fact of the matter was that communists in Russia could on the changed terrain operate with considerable freedom. The battle lines had been shifted. The enemy's defences had been breached, its forces were in disarray and those of the workers in rapid advance. Tsarism was powerless to prevent the flow of ideas and growth of the Party. Exiles returned from Britain, Switzerland, France and Siberia as popular heroes. The cadres, formed until then without the oxygen of open mass activity and trained only by internal faction fights, no longer worked underground, no longer operated as persecuted committee men. Now they led and gave political clarity to an army of trade unions, student societies and workers' soviets which had sprung up like the dragons' teeth of Aetes. Standing before the people as tribunes of the oppressed, the communists addressed mass meetings by the score, legally published and widely circulated their literature, and in a moment encaded a generation - workers joined up in the tens of thousands.³⁵

Even before the beginning of Bolshevism as a trend in 1903, Lenin had argued that only a proletarian-led insurrection, with the mass of peasants behind it, could rid Russia of Tsarism and carry through a social transformation. With the events of January 1905 and the revolutionary months that followed, preparation for this became a matter of urgent necessity. That meant arming the people. The Mensheviks objected: "We have to arm the workers, not with weapons, but first with the burning consciousness of the necessity of arming themselves".

The Bolsheviks gave an excellent answer: "You regard Russian workers as little children, you want to 'arm them with consciousness'; but that time has passed. They have the consciousness; now they need to be armed with rifles to strike at the Tsar and the bourgeoisie."³⁶ Only an armed people could defend themselves and their new found liberties. Only an armed people could look to the future with confidence. Only an armed people could win over sections of the Tsar's army. As Lenin said:

The sooner the proletariat succeeds in arming, and the longer it holds its fighting positions as striker and revolutionary, the sooner will the army begin to waver; more and more soldiers will at last begin to realise what they are doing and they will join sides with the people against the fiends, against the tyrant, against the murderers of defenceless workers and of their wives and children.³⁷

If October was the herald, December was the decisive moment. Generalised political strikes once more broke out across the country. Demonstrations attracted ever greater numbers. Soviets began to exercise local power. The hour had arrived for nationwide insurrection. This time Moscow, not St Petersburg, was the torch bearer. The St Petersburg soviet, first under the Menshevik Khrustalev, and then under Trotsky and Parvus - two outstanding Mensheviks who were moving away from Menshevism, decided against a physical confrontation with Tsarism.³⁸ Moscow did not. Its Bolshevik leadership had been getting ready for months. Workplace meetings had declared for an uprising. Fraternisation with the local garrison produced a soldiers' soviet. Party cells were established in the army. Weapons illegally imported from abroad. Workers instructed in their use. Fighting detachments were formed ... The people had been armed!

Though members of the Moscow Bolshevik committee had just been arrested, the decision was made to go ahead. On December 7 it began. Key buildings were seized. Barricades webbed the city. Against enormous odds, but with the active support of its proletarian population, some thousand guerrillas broke the grip of Tsarism in Moscow for nine days. Operating in small units of three or four, these *druzhinniki* "proved" in Lenin's words that the "open armed struggle of the people is possible even against modern troops".³⁹

Uprisings broke out in Krasnoyarsk, Motovilikha, Novorossisk, Sormovo, Sevastopol, Kronstadt, the Donetz Basin, Georgia, Finland and Latvia. The Moscow garrison vacillated. Sadly no more. Having concluded a peace with Japan, the Tsarist government managed to bring in substantial reinforcements. They were free of Bolshevik contamination. Officers gave instructions to spare no bullets and take no prisoners. Artillery was used to smash and blast buildings and

barricades. Morale among the populus began to wane. The *druzhinniki* fought on. But, lacking an authoritative directing centre, the uprising faltered and began to break apart into a series of disconnected defensive actions. The initiative was lost. A fatal weakness. Moscow was crushed. The other outposts of the revolutionary uprising followed.

Engels was right when back in 1882 he suggested that Russia might become the world's revolutionary centre.⁴⁰ The December 1905 uprising was therefore not simply a local event. It was a precursor, a mirror of what was to come in other countries. Marx's old mole had resurfaced in Moscow. Where it would burrow next in time and space no one could tell, but clearly capitalism as a whole was facing a new general crisis. After over three decades, the era of peaceful parliamentarianism and trade unionism was coming to an end. A new era had arrived - an era of revolution. That meant new tasks and new tactics.

Marxism by definition always learns from life. It organises, generalises and gives conscious expression to the struggles and creative developments brought about by the masses themselves. Unlike anarchists and reformists, Marxists have no ready-made formulas nor a list of forbidden methods of struggle. In principle we positively recognise all tactical forms. So naturally with its shattering of social peace, its soviets and its new general strike and barricade tactics, the 1905 revolution had a profound effect on Marxist thinking.⁴¹ "There are," as Zinoviev said, "defeats which are more valuable than any victory."

The revolution had through its own momentum created alternative organs of power exactly on the pattern of the 1871 Paris Commune: ie, workers' soviets. That this had been done with a general strike acting as midwife in no way refuted Marx and Engels. On the contrary it bore out their method and showed that the anarchist strategy of overthrowing the bourgeoisie with one big general strike was a non-starter. The land of Bakunin's birth provided an unsurpassed example of how to make a revolution. Yet no thanks to the marginalised anarchists. It was the Marxists who led and gave the general strikes, mass demonstrations and urban uprisings their revolutionary programme. Even the terroristic Socialist Revolutionaries claimed, albeit falsely, to be followers of Marx.

Not only did the anarchists play no significant role whatsoever, but the idea of a general strike as a panacea was explicitly rejected. Having discovered the general strike as a tactic,⁴² "essential under certain conditions", its limitations were also discovered.⁴³ The spontaneous general strike might have sounded the approach of revolution. However, even if led by the Party, it could not take things to the finish. To do that an armed uprising was necessary. That is why Lenin argued in the course of the revolution that as an "independent and predominant form of struggle" the general strike was "out of date". The combination of general strike with insurrection was needed. That was the main lesson Lenin wanted to drive home when it came to the temporary reunification of the Bolshevik and Menshevik wings of the RSDLP in 1906. In the "tactical platform for the unity congress" the Bolsheviks wanted amongst other points the following accepted:

With further growth of the movement, the peaceful general strike proved inadequate, while partial recourse to it failed its aim and disorganised the forces of the proletariat In the present stage of the movement, the general political strike must be regarded not so much as an independent means of struggle as an auxiliary means in relation to insurrection; that therefore the timing of such a strike, and the choice of its place and of the industries it is to involve, should preferably depend upon the time and circumstances of the main form of struggle: namely, the armed uprising.⁴⁴

Needless to say most Mensheviks were not prepared to accept any such thing. For Plekhanov, leader of the Mensheviks, the key lesson of the Moscow uprising was that "they should not have taken up arms".⁴⁵ A view shared in no uncertain terms by the right wing in the Social Democratic Party of Germany - the most prestigious party in the Second International.

Those deputies in its large parliamentary fraction who had grown complacent in that self-important little world, those bureaucrats who had become dismissive of anything beyond the narrow confines of trade union politics, those who had succumbed to the blandishments of the bourgeoisie not only viewed Moscow's barricades and guerrillas with disquiet, but Russia's general strikes as well. Though social tensions were becoming more intense, general strikes would be completely out of place in the *Vaterland*, they chorused. True, the Jena congress of the party in 1905 adopted a resolution moved by August Bebel which agreed to the use of the general strike.

But only in defence of the franchise!⁴⁶ In the same year the Cologne trade union congress scandalously ruled out any discussion of the question. To do otherwise would be "playing with fire".

1.4. Luxemburg and the general strike

Those who paid lip service to Marx but feared the very idea of going beyond parliamentarianism and trade unionism met a brilliant, devastating and deflating opponent in Rosa Luxemburg. After it had been fearfully sidelined by party and trade union leaderships, she was determined to reopen discussion on the general strike and take the whole issue to a higher level.

This she did primarily in her *The mass strike, the political party and the trade unions*, a pamphlet usually simply known as *The mass strike*. The conclusions in it were different to Lenin's. In part that arose from whom they were out to convince. Lenin had no hesitation in enthusiastically embracing the general strike tactic. That said, his main concern was to emphasise to Russian workers the limitations of the general strike compared with the armed uprising. Luxemburg, on the other hand, wanted to show German workers the vistas offered by the general strike tactic compared with the dull routine that surrounded and limited accepted practice in Germany. So there was a different approach stemming from national conditions. Between 1905 and 1907 Russia experienced a tremendous revolutionary convulsion. Germany only the slow decay of social peace.

However, though intimately associated with Russian politics and a critical ally of the Bolsheviks, her account fails to fully appreciate the crucial role of the Party and scientific theory. This was not the result of what Gramsci unfairly called her "iron economic determinism".⁴⁷ Rather it was Luxemburg's tendency to produce universal theories based on only partial - ie, one-sided - truths. Thus on the national question Luxemburg came out in opposition to self-determination as a principle because of her correct view that the workers of Russia and her native Poland had no interest in fighting for separation (Poland was at that time part of the Tsarist empire). In the same way, having adopted Germany and the German workers' movement, she hardened her theoretical over-reliance on the revolutionary spontaneity of the masses. Given her earlier opposition to Lenin's "ultra"-centralism, this was true to form.⁴⁸

Her belief that "the directing organs of the socialist party ... play a conservative role" and that revolution is primarily "a spontaneous act", theorised against Lenin in 1904, was confirmed by later personal experience of something more than mere bureaucratic ineptitude by the social democratic apparatus in Germany.⁴⁹ She was, even at this stage, sure it would act as a barrier to revolution. So the spontaneous movement of the future was not to be led by the party, but freed from its "barbed wire". Libertarian and unsatisfactory though many aspects of her thought were, we should not let the baby go down the plughole with the bathwater. Luxemburg's generalisations of the lessons of 1905 might not be fully rounded, but they remain of great value, not least because they recognise the lightning speed with which events can move in any country and the tremendous creativity of the masses once events begin to move. She did not suffer from that dire pessimism of the intellect nor the paralysing construction that the workers of Western Europe were forever doomed to trench-like warfare. Taking into account our own situation deep in the dug-out, what Rosa Luxemburg had to say is particularly relevant.

There were those on the SDP right who accused her of wanting to foist the general strike - or the mass strike, as she called it - on Germany through winning a 51% congress resolution. Countering them, Luxemburg argued that: "It is just as impossible to 'propagate' the mass strike as an abstract means of struggle as it is to propagate the 'revolution'".⁵⁰ Resolutions at party congresses do not bring about a general strike. No party, no matter how strong, no matter how high the esteem of its leaders, can call a general strike without regard to the concrete historical situation. Luxemburg was convinced that Germany was heading towards crisis. So was world capitalism. With this in mind there was nothing artificial about the workers' movement in Germany learning from Russia. The general strike was not a specific product of Russia. It was a tactic which objectively resulted from developments in world capitalism and its class antagonisms. The general strike "signifies nothing but an external form of the class struggle". As such its use can have sense and meaning only in "connection with a definite political situation". The general strike which fuses the political and economic into an anti-state movement represented a new and valuable tactical weapon for the future. Nothing more. In principle it was no different from other tactics such

as parliamentarianism or protest demonstrations.

Trade union officials had their own particular fears and were quick to voice them. After decades of slow and patient work building the unions into strong organisations they did not want to risk disaster through importing Russia's general strike and unleashing a revolutionary storm. Or so they pleaded. According to Luxemburg these guardians of the trade unions treated them not as weapons but "like rare porcelain". The general strike, she argued, is not a crafty device that can speed up the process of objective development. History cannot be cheated. The general strike can only be understood from the point of view of what is historically inevitable. General strikes result from social crises. They cannot produce revolution: the revolution produces them.

The bureaucrats had another excuse. The unions were too weak! Luxemburg had no difficulty in holing that one either. General strikes do not come onto the agenda when trade union membership reaches a certain level. The class struggle cannot be conducted by "counting heads". Furthermore, taking the example of Russia, it was clear that out of the "fire and the glow" of general strikes and street fighting there had emerged "like Venus from the foam, fresh, young, powerful, buoyant trade unions". Before the revolution unions hardly existed in Russia.⁵¹ In the course of it, because of it, one industry after another spawned them, till working conditions and hours had been won that in Germany had been "declared in social legislation to be an unobtainable goal".⁵²

Luxemburg was sure that a general strike in Germany would see the unions enormously grow in numbers and authority. The bureaucrats could do as they like. They were not the agents of history, merely the objects. Once those above cannot rule in the old way and those below refuse to be ruled in the old way, things are ready to move in a revolutionary direction according to the will and determination of the masses. A general strike would be an organic part of such a change. It would be a people's movement which organises the unorganised through a torrent of self-education and self-organisation. The workers would lay hold of the nearest weapon at hand. They would flood into trade unions and, if they could, refashion them according to their new needs.

Luxemburg derided those who insisted for their own reasons in presenting the idea of a general strike as if they were debating with the anarchists. The general strike should not be seen as "one act, one isolated action" which overthrows the bourgeoisie. Rather - as an elemental movement made up of millions of people now being economic, now being political - the general strike would represent the culmination of a whole period of the class struggle which had lasted years, perhaps decades. Drawing in all strands of the class struggle, the general strike leads to a direct confrontation with the capitalist state. Thus the general strike "is inseparable from the revolution".⁵³

On the basis of all this Luxemburg advocated that the German SDP and the trade unions take on board the general strike tactic. Not only as a method of defence, but as a method of attack. If that were done it would greatly enhance the morale of the workers. Those who expressed fright at the very suggestion of the general strike were themselves responsible for sapping the morale of the workers:

A consistent, resolute, progressive tactics on the part of the social democracy produces in the masses a feeling of security, self-confidence and desire for struggle; a vacillating, weak tactics, based on an underestimation of the proletariat, has a crippling and confusing effect upon the masses.⁵⁴

Jack Conrad

¹Chris Harman *Socialist Worker Review* January 1985.

²*Militants* October 30 1992.

³*Daily Worker* October 23 1992.

⁴Peter Taaffe *Militants: What we stand for*, 1990, p42.

⁵*Militants* November 6 1992.

⁶*Militants* November 20 1992.

⁷Engels *MECW* Vol 26, Moscow 1990, p165.

⁸See GEM de Ste Croix *The class struggle in the ancient world*, London 1983, p562.

⁹EP Thompson *Customs in common*, London 1991, p42.

¹⁰K Marx *Pre-capitalist economic formations*, London 1978, p132.

¹¹EP Thompson *The making of the English working class*, Harmondsworth 1981, p11.

¹²K Marx *Marx-Engels Selected Works*, Moscow 1968, p224.

¹³By 1833 the Owenite movement was actively canvassing an "alliance between the trade unionists of England, France and Germany" (EP Thompson *The making of the English working class*, Harmondsworth 1981, p912).

¹⁴K Marx *Marx-Engels Selected Works*, Moscow 1968, p683.

¹⁵*Ibid*, p683.

¹⁶Robert Owen had prepared the ground for this with his disdain for political action. But as Edward Thompson explains, after 1832 there was a "swing to general unionism". The years that followed were rich with proposals to use strike action for political ends: the Grand National Holiday in the industrial districts canvassed by Benbow; the lectures of John Francis Bray; the Society for National Regeneration with its remedy of the general strike for the eight-hour day. (EP Thompson *The making of the English working class*, Harmondsworth 1981, p910).

¹⁷Engels *The condition of the working class in England*,

Harmondsworth 1972, p257.

¹⁸The Corn Laws were first introduced in 1804 by a parliament dominated by landed interests. War with France perpetuated conditions whereby the most parasitic elements could hang on to governing power and push through legislation that ran counter to the 'rational' interests of the bourgeois nation. Though big landlords maintained their enormous and bloated wealth by the levying of a protective duty on corn imports, for the mass of the population that meant a high price for bread and for the industrial capitalists an upward pressure on the price of labour power. A combination of Anti-Corn Law League agitation and the famine in Ireland was eventually responsible for their final repeal in June 1846.

¹⁹The industrial bourgeoisie secured full voting entry into the parliamentary political system with the Reform Act of 1832. Edward Thompson suggests that this resolved a revolutionary situation in Britain and hence prevented an explosion that would have undoubtedly gone way beyond the Jacobin Year II of France. Maybe even putting political power into the hands of a British version of the *enragés* (EP Thompson *The poverty of theory*, London 1981, pp257-266). Though *real* capitalism was now the dominant mode of production, even at this decisive *reformist* moment the industrial bourgeoisie failed to constitute itself an independent, let alone dominant, political force in parliament. Except for the handful of Radicals the industrial bourgeoisie lined up behind the Whig Party (a prefiguration of the *reformist* entry of working class voters onto the political scene less than half a century later). Capital exercised power not through a bourgeois political class, but socially as a dominant mode of production. The landed aristocracy - which had through capitalist farming and charging capitalist ground rent on mines become bourgeoisie - continued to staff the governing caste throughout the 19th century. Between 1818 and 1900 there was no discernible increase in the number of commoners in British cabinets. Indeed before Edward Heath most Tory leaders boasted a long aristocratic pedigree.

²⁰M Jenkins *The general strike of 1842*, London 1980, p21

²¹*Ibid*, p23.

²²See D Thompson *The Chartist*, Aldershot 1986, pp271-98.

²³The Lord Chief Justice quoted in M Jenkins *The general strike of 1842*, London 1980, p15.

²⁴Engels *The condition of the working class in England*, Harmondsworth 1972, p259.

²⁵Mikhail Bakunin (1814-76) - Russian anarchist and one of its leading ideologists. Took part in the February 1848 revolution in Paris, was imprisoned in Saxony in 1849 and handed over to the Tsarist authorities, who sent him to exile in Siberia. Escaped in 1861. As a member of the First International, from 1864 he waged a fierce factional struggle against its general council led by Marx.

²⁶Engels *MECW* Vol 23, Moscow 1988, p584.

²⁷Bakunin and other anarchists were expelled from the First International at its Hague congress in 1872. A similar fate befell the anarchists at the Second International's 1896 congress in London.

²⁸Before February 1 1918 the Julian calendar was in use in Russia. This is 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar. Therefore January 9 in the Russia of 1905 corresponds to January 22 according to the calendar we use.

²⁹Quoted in Neil Harding (ed) *Marxism in Russia*, Cambridge 1983, p312.

³⁰Exact figures are impossible because the Tsarist authorities did their best to suppress them. The dead were secretly buried. Certainly though the number of dead ran into the hundreds; the number of wounded into the thousands.

³¹L Trotsky 1905, Harmondsworth 1973, p93.

³²*Ibid*, p98.

³³On the eve of the revolution, in January 1905, the Bolsheviks consisted of no more than 8,400 members. By the spring of 1906 membership of the reunited Russian Social Democratic Labour Party stood at 48,000, of whom 34,000 were Bolsheviks and 14,000 Mensheviks. In the October of that year membership exceeded 70,000 and in 1907 the figures given at the London congress show that there were 84,000 members (that did not include the Bund, and the Polish and Lettish sections). The Bolsheviks were still the largest trend with 46,000 supporters, compared to the Mensheviks' 38,000. (Figures quoted in Marcel Liebman *Leninism under Lenin*, London 1980, p47).

³⁴VI Lenin *CW* Vol 10, Moscow 1977, p155.

³⁵Lenin welcomed the fact that "revolutionary workers and radical students no longer regarded each other as outsiders at open actions by the people" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 9, Moscow 1977, p348).

³⁶Quoted in G Zinoviev *History of the Bolshevik Party*, London 1973, p123.

³⁷VI Lenin *CW* Vol 8, Moscow 1977, pp98-99.

³⁸Trotsky, writing before he became a Bolshevik, admits that the "indecision" in the capital could be explained "by the fact that the Petersburg workers realised very clearly that this time it was not a matter of a strike or demonstration, but a life or death struggle" (L Trotsky 1905, Harmondsworth 1973, p249).

³⁹VI Lenin *CW* Vol 10, Moscow 1977, p152.

⁴⁰In 1882 Engels had declared that "Today ... Russia forms the vanguard of revolutionary action in Europe" (F Engels 'preface to 1882 edition', *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Moscow 1973, p11).

⁴¹James Connolly was particularly impressed by how Moscow had advanced barricade tactics. Writing in May 1915, he wrote how it was "wise" that, unlike the French revolutionaries of an earlier time, the Russians did not "man the barricades" but used surprise tactics, attacking only when the enemy was in "range of their inferior weapons" (J Connolly *Selected Writings*, London 1988, p226).

⁴²After over 100,000 workers had been locked out by the St Petersburg employers the Bolsheviks sponsored a resolution to the executive committee of the city's soviet. It was adopted on November 14 1905.

Following a brief preamble condemning the reactionary bourgeoisie, it called for "a general political strike and other forms of resolute struggle." (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 10, Moscow 1977, p51).

⁴³VI Lenin *CW* Vol 11, Moscow 1977, p214.

⁴⁴*Ibid* Vol 10, pp152-3.

⁴⁵Quoted in G Zinoviev *History of the Bolshevik Party*, London 1973, p127.

⁴⁶In February 1906 the SDP's central committee secretly agreed with the trade union leaders not to implement the Jena resolution. Despite that in the following years the Second International, in which the German party played a vanguard role, passed a number of resolutions which threatened the use of any means - and everyone knew that also meant a general strike - in the event of an inter-imperialist war (See J Riddle *Lenin's struggle for a revolutionary International*, New York 1984, pp23,25,33-37).

⁴⁷A Gramsci *Prison notebooks*, London 1973, p233.

⁴⁸R Luxemburg *Selected political writings*, New York 1972, pp93-105.

⁴⁹*Ibid* pp102-103.

⁵⁰R Luxemburg *The mass strike*, London no date, p17.

⁵¹The only independent - ie, non-police - trade union before 1905 was that of the printers, which was established in 1903. The 1905-7 period of revolution produced a huge number of small unions. Of the 600 or so only 22 had memberships over 2,000. It was the factory commissions, however, which began to "take charge of all matters affecting the internal life of the factory, drawing up collective wage agreements and overseeing the hiring and firing of workers" (SA Smith *Red Petrograd*, Cambridge 1983, pp57-8). The 1917 revolutions produced even more rapid growth. By October 1917 there were some two million trade union members, with Petrograd having "one of the highest levels of unionisation in the world" (*Ibid* p109). Incidentally at that point in time all major trade unions except the railworkers, postal and telegraph and printers had been won to Bolshevik leadership.

⁵²R Luxemburg *The mass strike*, London no date, p34.

⁵³*Ibid*, p47.

⁵⁴*Ibid*, p52.