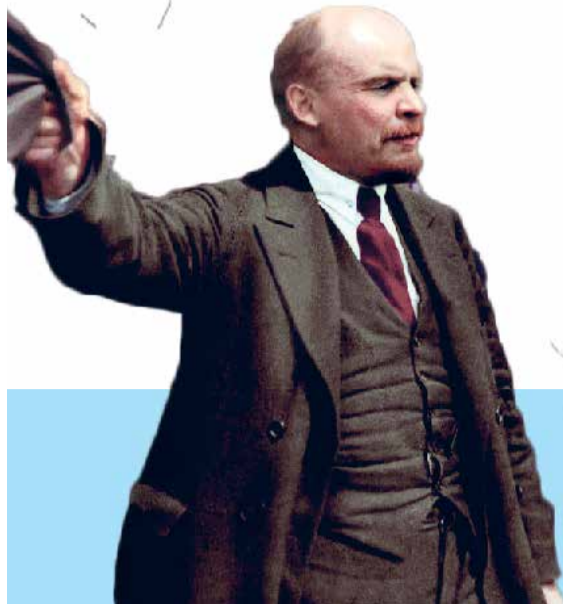


A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



**Six-page supplement:
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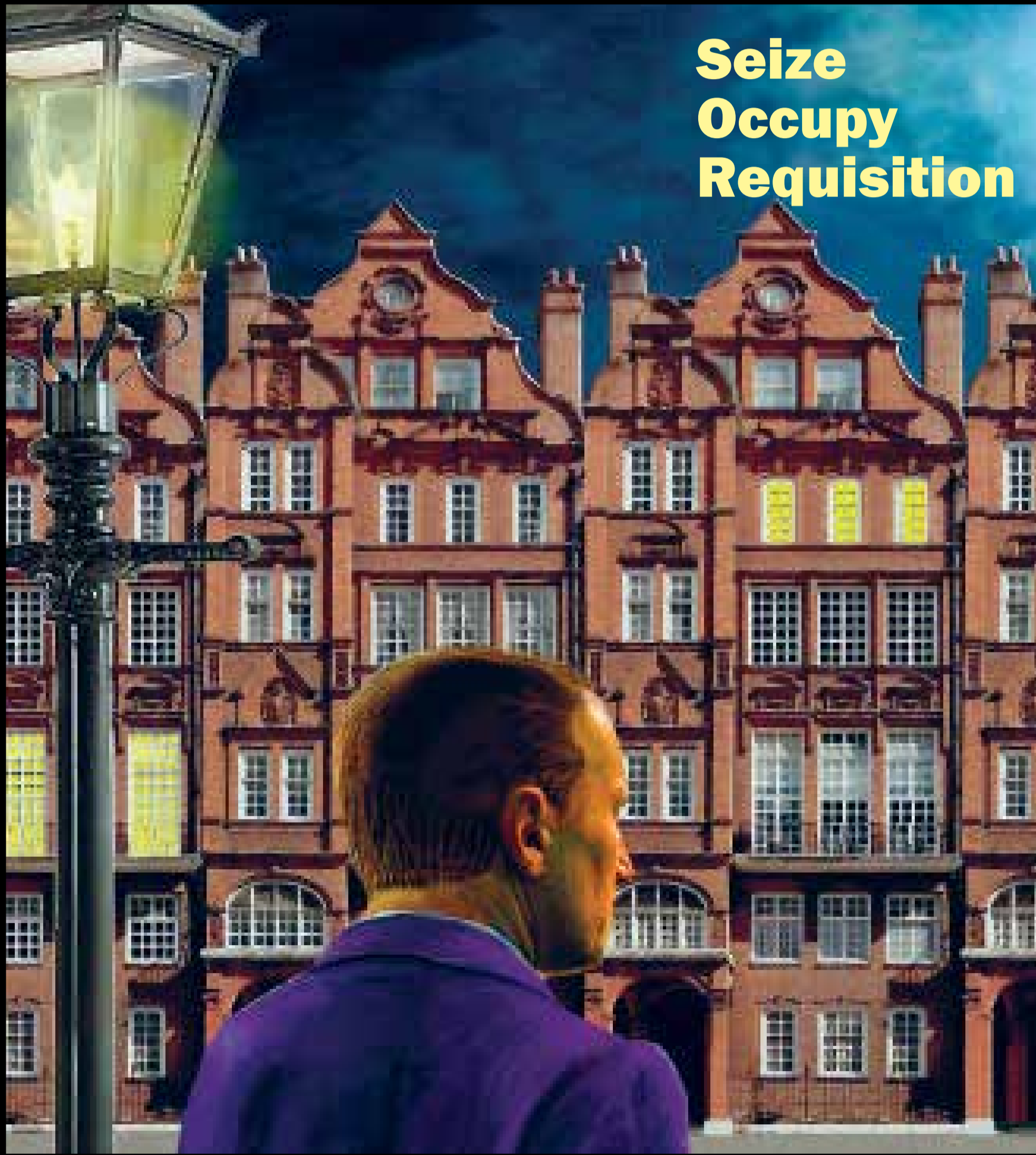
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No 1161 Thursday June 29 2017

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Seize Occupy Requisition



LETTERS

Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed

Unanswered

William Sarsfield (Letters, June 22) seems to have wilfully misread my letter of June 15. Nowhere can it even be inferred that I expected Labour to lose on June 8 "and lose badly". William avoided answering the question I posed - if the major unions affiliated to the Labour Party have not pulled it left, why would PCS, the NUT, the RMT affiliating succeed (as various writers in the *Weekly Worker* ask us to do) where they have totally failed? In fact the super-unions haven't even tried. Unions affiliate to Labour and expect them to promise some modest benefits for their members rather than fight the employers. Knighthoods follow for those union barons.

William is silent on my contention that PCS (and NUT and RMT) affiliating to the Labour Party would simply see us leaned on by Unison, Unite, GMB and told to shut up and not risk Labour's electoral chances by calling for united industrial action over anything!

Next William dismisses my concern that the Labour left did not argue Jeremy should stand for Labour leader nor did they get him the necessary nominations. William's attitude is 'so what?' Corbyn is the leader now. Well, this matters. The left did not put him up nor get him there, so to whom is Jeremy accountable?

Also not answered are my points about the intended castration of Momentum, that the barring of thousands of leftwingers still stands, whether the left is growing in the Labour Party (given the 800,000 members he crowed about) whether the new joiners are actually getting involved in their local parties or are simply just Corbyn worshippers rather than serious activists. Again, all this matters if people like me (and their union) are expected to join Labour and act to pull it left. These questions are damned as my being gloomy and pessimistic.

Also unanswered is the key question of how on earth the organised revolutionary left can actually reach and win Labour Party new members over if they are not active? Thought waves perhaps, William? As for who will be the delegates at the next Labour conference it won't be *any* of the new joiners if they are not active in their CLP! Perhaps William thinks the new young members can just turn up on the day?

William asserts we have an historic opportunity to remake the Labour Party. Er, *how* and *who* will do this and remake it into ... what? The tired old and failed project once again.

I do not believe that the humble pie eaters have changed their stance on Corbyn's principles - they have just accepted he looks more electable now. I did not say the civil war was over - I was being ironic, William. The (unadopted) Chartists demands I referred to also matter, as they determine whether a party's MPs are accountable to their members. By design, from the early days of the Labour Party the PLP is not. Jeremy is doing nothing to change the system of patronage.

As for my accepting the situation today as it is, William clearly does not know me. I am a veteran attender of protests, I agitate for my branch members to get more involved, I put motions to conference on key issues of the day. My main stance is that trade unions are failing to fight back precisely *because* they are affiliated to the Labour Party. I do *not* accept that Labour councils should impose Tory cuts, but Labour-affiliated unions clearly do, as they accept the job cuts,

the outsourcing of services without a serious fightback.

Next we come to the letter of Alan Johnstone (Socialist Party of Great Britain), where he castigates me for opposing open borders and free movement of labour (as did such 'racists' as Arthur Scargill and Bob Crow). Aside from him not being able to quote anything by Marx, Lenin or Trotsky advocating open borders, Alan even goes so far as to declare we should advocate this under capitalism - now! He proudly declares he is more advanced than the CPGB, whose position is that this would be deliverable under world socialism (on that I agree).

Alan is heavy on patronising comments, but totally silent on how this can actually be achieved under capitalism. This vacuousness is common to all open borderists I come across who, once they start being asked the most obvious questions, accuse you of racism and excuse themselves never to discuss the issue with you again. When did so-called Marxists turn into Oxfam humanitarians and guilty white liberals?

Alan resorts to the usual predictable insults rather than answer my simple question about how he would deal, as a Polish shop steward, with a factory being relocated from Britain to Poland, on lower wages with local Poles queuing up for jobs faced with the displaced British 'workers following the movement of capital' being willing to work for even lower wages than those Poles. The trite answer: 'Everyone joins a union and argues for higher wages'. Erm, you cannot join a union usually unless you are employed. Is the Polish shop steward to tell his local fellow Poles, 'We are internationalists - let this employer choose who they want to employ. We are not nasty nationalists and if they choose all these British workers who have come here, so be it.'

Peter Manson did not answer that question either.

I am greeted with the usual silence on whether indigenous people born in a country have any rights whatsoever over those foreigners entering their country. Arguing that Geordies and Scousers are just smaller units like nations is disingenuous. National borders are a reality now. I accept it may be different under world socialism.

Are the Palestinians racist for opposing Zionist settlers taking over 'their country', or isn't it theirs? Workers do not have a right to go anywhere they want, even for a better life, without any regard whatsoever for those already inhabiting the country they have imposed themselves on - illegal immigrants are seeking to impose themselves on others (queue-jumpers).

They may well be desperate, but the consequences of mass, uncontrolled immigration is to make the indigenous population also desperate. The open borderists are the ones driving people to the far right.

One further point I get no answers to - if advocating controlling borders is racist then Jeremy Corbyn's Labour in pledging to 'manage migration' is also racist. So why does the *Weekly Worker*, Johnstone and co support him?

Dave Vincent
Manchester

Too detached

Paul Demarty's journalistic prose not only draws the reader in: it scintillates. That, in addition to his keen political insight, is the reason I devour his articles the day they appear, often with a twinge of writer's envy. His latest piece on the Grenfell Tower is strong on explaining the larger causes of the tragedy, as well as in suggesting programmatic demands socialists could offer in response. Yet I wonder if his criticism of the Socialist Workers Party's Charlie Kimber for overestimating the political significance

of the anger that followed the fire doesn't err in the opposite direction.

Demarty's comparison of post-Grenfell rage with indignation over the MPs' expense scandal of 2009 seems a bit complacent. In a neighbourhood where the luxury flats of executives and bankers stand side by side with high-rise slums; where these slums are prettified on the outside with cheap, flammable materials to protect bourgeois aesthetic sensibilities and property values, and 79 people are incinerated as a result, the reaction cannot be devoid of class content. This is one thing that distinguishes it from general public discontent over political corruption.

Another distinguishing mark is the unmistakable change in the political atmosphere. Voters in the US and UK, partly from pent-up class resentment, are now defying the ruling classes in referendums and casting their voting ballots for political mavericks, some of whom call themselves socialists. Demarty doesn't consider the possibility that, against such a background, the protests of Kensington's neglected half may just resound more loudly than they would have eight years ago.

And, even if Demarty is right to dampen the ardour of those inclined to read too much into the events, I wonder if his tone is a little too detached. It seems to me that Marxist writers should do more than coolly describe the limits of local spontaneous class anger. They should participate in and seek to generalise it. I think Ben Okri's poem, which he reads in the following video, fulfils this requirement better than Demarty's article: <http://tinyurl.com/y8hog4fb>.

Jim Creegan
New York

Socialist Brexit

There can be no doubt that the hyper-neoliberals and Thatcherites of the Tory Party are planning to use the Brexit process to initiate a bout of 'creative destruction' that would shock even the Tory governments of the 1980s.

British capitalism has failed and it cannot compete in the European single market any longer, but the European Union is preventing the elites from opening the economy to the full force of international competition and deregulation that can clear out the old and let in the new. The mass unemployment and bankruptcies that normally accompany failure must be allowed to happen and the Great Repeal Bill and trade deals that open Britain up to China, India, Brazil and the giant corporations will ensure it.

But, of course, the economy will be asset-stripped, tens of thousands of small and medium businesses sent to the wall and millions of workers will be made unemployed and destitute for no good reason, because - even if this was all 'a price worth paying', as the charming Norman Lamont said of the mass unemployment unleashed by his government - there is no possibility of capitalist creation following the social and economic destruction.

Capitalism has reached the end of its road. It has passed its sell-by date. It is globally super-monopolised, stagnant, sclerotic, dead and decaying. Imperialism was the highest stage of capitalism, while Pax Americana and globalisation, now rapidly unravelling, were the highest stage of imperialism. There are no political-economic arrangements that can replace the current ones that could give capitalism a new lease of life - even a technological leap would now cost jobs rather than create them.

A capitalist 'remain' is not an option then, but a capitalist Brexit is not going to solve anything either. This is why a socialist Brexit is the only reasonable option. A Brexit by which the working

class takes the means of production under its wing and protection, and thereby offers the whole of society a way out of this potentially catastrophic impasse.

David Ellis
Leeds

One-sided

In a *New Statesman* article on the British general election, Helen Lewis writes:

"Labour's success on June 8 was driven by its ambiguous stance on Brexit. To 'leavers', it could wink at ending freedom of movement when they worried about immigration; to 'remainers', it offered a critique of the immigrant-bashing rhetoric of recent times. But can that coalition hold, as the true shape of Brexit solidifies? Over the next few months, Jeremy Corbyn's biggest decision will be this: which half of my voters should I disappoint?" (June 23).

This article makes some cogent points, but it is ultimately one-sided. It is not wholly true that Labour did so well in the election because it took an ambiguous stance on Brexit. Nor is it wholly true that Corbyn is an instinctive Brexiteer who opportunistically changed his line and then did not campaign in the referendum so as not to alienate one section of his voters. That is only half the truth.

And to analyse and react to the situation we must see the whole picture. Of course, the EU is a bosses' club, but the question is: which location leaves the British and European working class best placed politically to fight austerity and the coming recession, alone or in conjunction with their comrades in Europe? A reformist conception would say that alone, under British sovereignty, where we can pass laws in favour of the working class, nationalise the rail and other utilities - and then the leading heights of industry and an Enabling Act, and, bingo, we're there: socialism! This is the line from the *Morning Star*, Socialist Party, Socialist Appeal, Socialist Workers Party and Counterfire.

On the other hand, there is the revolutionary and internationalist perspective. The 1917 world revolution one. One continually and progressively being abandoned by the above-mentioned groups.

Corbyn's stance on the referendum was driven by two considerations. From his reformist standpoint of the reformability of the EU, his seven and a half out of 10 was also based on the reactionary character of the Brexit campaign, its anti-immigrant essence, and the encouragement it gave to the far-right little Englanders, with the surge in attacks on immigrants and Muslims. Lexiteers never could take that character away from Nigel Farage and the Tory far right.

So now we come to the question of why Corbyn did so well in the election less than a month ago despite that rightist surge a year ago - and the disastrous results in the local elections just a few weeks before the general elections. Why the eclipse of the UK Independence Party after their great victory in the referendum and winning the EU elections a few years ago? Is it really true, as this *New Statesman* article and John Rees, Lindsey German and Tariq Ali say, that it was Corbyn's acceptance of the 'will of the people' and voting to trigger article 50 that mollified and won over the working class Brexiteers in the north?

That again is half the truth. Probably it is correct that constituencies like many in London and Cambridge and Stroud were won because of the soft Brexit stance, but these are relatively wealthy middle class and not working class.

Missing from this analysis is

another of those historical accidents, in which reality manifested itself. Because Labour's Blairites believed Michael Foot's 1983 leftist election manifesto was "the longest suicide note in history", they reasoned that another such manifesto would produce the same result. The reasoning was faulty then - it was the Malvinas war and the Gang of Four that cost that election, not the manifesto. They allowed the leftist, Andrew Fisher, to produce the killer document which would hopefully kill Corbyn off and return Labour to the safe arms of Blairite reaction.

The plan went disastrously wrong. Although the manifesto was only a mild social democratic document, nevertheless it reversed the Miliband austerity-lite 'cuts too far, too fast' grovelling before the neoliberal agenda, unchallenged since 1997 victory of Blair. It began moving in the other direction - hesitatingly and unconfidently, but moving.

These manifestos and not Brexit issues now determined the character of the election. The Tory manifesto drew howls of outrage even from their own supporters. Many proposals like the dementia tax, free school meals and reinstating foxhunting either had to be withdrawn immediately or did not make it into the queen's speech.

In contrast, Labour's manifesto was warmly received and it was this that won back the working class Brexiteers in the north of England and elsewhere, not the fudge over Brexit as asserted by the *New Statesman* article and the others mentioned above. Abolition of university tuition fees, railway nationalisation, free school meals, social housing, defence of the NHS, etc.

This analysis has serious implications for Labour. If the fudge over Brexit continues, the forward momentum of Labour will be lost over concessions on immigration controls and being forced to accept a final deal without another referendum. All political and industrial struggles are far better tackled on a European-wide and ultimately global basis, not on a little Englander *British road to socialism* one. That is the Trotskyist, internationalist perspective.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

DUP 'morality'

Following Theresa May's deal with the Democratic Unionist Party, I've seen a couple of women defending the DUP, saying that they don't oppose women's rights: they only oppose abortion.

Now, I wish no-one ever felt the need to terminate a pregnancy and know that the decision to do so is only achieved amidst a whole bucketload of soul-searching. But let me explain the DUP stance on abortion. Their rules mean that a woman who finds she is carrying a child with a fatal foetal abnormality is forced to either take her pregnancy to full term and deliver her dead child or until she begins to bleed heavily and spontaneously aborts, putting her own life at considerable risk. Those who become pregnant through rape and/or incest are made to carry and deliver their abuser's child - heaping systemic oppression right on top of the abuse and oppression those women have already suffered at the hands of their attackers.

Unless, of course, you happen not to be poor as well as female, and have the means to flout the DUP's 'Christian' laws. In which case, you still have to travel abroad to seek a termination in the midst of all your turmoil at finding yourself pregnant in these circumstances.

That is quite clearly not supporting women's rights and I challenge anyone to tell me otherwise.

Barbara Campbell
Stockton-on-Tees

AGGREGATE

Bringing out our differences

Peter Manson reports on last weekend's meeting



Jeremy Corbyn at Glastonbury

The main item on the agenda of the June 25 meeting of CPGB and Labour Party Marxists comrades was a discussion on the situation in Britain following the general election. To that end the Provisional Central Committee had put forward a set of theses dealing with the general election. However, comrade Catherine Walker had criticised these theses mainly for their length, and had put forward an alternative, much briefer set of propositions.

In presenting the PCC theses, Jack Conrad declared that there is nothing wrong with "lengthy" theses as such - surely what matters is their content. He wondered if this criticism actually disguised some political difference. In fact, he said, what comrade Walker had omitted in her version - not just Ukip, the Lib Dems and Tories, but the role of the European Union, support amongst some on the left for a so-called 'progressive alliance' and the politicisation of large sections of youth - all these were essential elements in helping us grasp the post-election political situation.

Comrade Walker had also criticised the PCC theses for not being forthright enough in admitting that we, like many others, had got our predictions of the election result wrong. Yes, said comrade Conrad, we thought there would be an increased Tory majority and we were clearly wrong. But the purpose of making such predictions was actually to promote a particular strategic line. By warning of the danger of a bad Labour defeat, we were trying to counter the ensuing demoralisation of those who thought that a Corbyn-led Labour government was the "big prize". We disagreed: our aim must be the transformation of the Labour Party into a united front of a special kind.

And today the mood on much of the left is based on the belief that such a "big prize" is within our grasp. The fact that the manifesto drawn up by Jeremy Corbyn's team, *For the many, not the few*, is not only not socialist, but is actually less radical than, say, Michael Foot's 1983 manifesto, seems to elude them.

We need to emphasise the need for political independence from Corbyn and John McDonnell - after all, a failed Labour government would be likely to make way for a Tory administration that was even more rightwing. Comrade Conrad also criticised the phrase with which comrade Walker began her theses: "*For socialists*, the results of the June 8 general election were almost without exception excellent." While they were excellent for us, what about the likes of the Socialist Workers Party,

he wondered. After all, the SWP calls for Scottish independence, yet the Scottish National Party lost a big slice of its support.

Comrade Walker conceded that point when she began her own introduction - "For socialists" should be dropped, but she thought that the PCC version "doesn't read like theses - they deal with lots of points that have already been covered in the *Weekly Worker*". She also thought it would have been useful to attempt to explain *why* Labour had done so well. But her main criticism, apart from the length, was the fact that the PCC version "doesn't admit we were wrong" in relation to the likely result. She also thought that we had been wrong in another respect - a 'left' programme, of the kind demanded by certain revolutionary groups, *had* succeeded in winning millions of votes. Finally she thought that a set of theses should "distinguish us from others", but these were just "not sharp enough".

Debate

In reply to her claim that many of the points in the PCC theses had already been covered in the *Weekly Worker*, I stated that the same applied to those she had kept in her version. Comrade Walker had reduced the theses to a discussion on the Labour Party - not illegitimate, but the idea was to discuss and bring out disagreements on the current overall political situation, not just on Labour.

Comrade Moshé Machover, a non-CPGB guest at the aggregate, made some general observations about the election result. He pointed out that, just as Margaret Thatcher had managed to shift British politics to the right, Corbyn had shifted it to the left. Labour - now the biggest political party in Europe - had been able to mobilise many, mainly young, canvassers. He also pointed to the failings of opinion polls, based on several invalid assumptions.

However, a Labour government could never be anything but reformist - under Corbyn its basically rightwing policies would be dressed up in 'old Labour' clothes. He agreed that intervening in the Labour Party must be the correct strategy, but that would leave Marxists with a "delicate problem" - how can we support a Labour government that runs capitalism?

For his part, PCC member Mike Macnair agreed with comrade Walker in one respect - there was "too much fat" on the theses. But he still preferred the PCC version (and proposed a couple of minor amendments). Like others, he pointed out that there was very little that was progressive about

For the many. On the anti-trade union laws, for instance, all it proposed was the repeal of the Tories' latest, 2016, act. In other words, a "complete internalisation" of Thatcher.

Comrade Phil Kent said that he too had thought Labour would "get hammered" on June 8, but, although Corbyn is now more popular than ever, we should eventually expect some kind of backlash against Labour.

Another visitor, Lawrence Parker, started by commenting on the Liberal Democrats' electoral showing. Unlike comrade Conrad, he had not expected the Lib Dems to benefit much from their position as the only major party still favouring membership of the European Union - people remember only too well the despicable part they played in the coalition government under David Cameron. He also commented on the role of the media, which he thought was to mainly reinforce people's existing ideas, rather than shape them - and the same applied to social media, he contended.

Vernon Price complained that not enough time had been allocated to the current discussion, especially in view of the length and complexity of the theses. He also said that a "major flaw" was that they did not end in "what we do" - what are our immediate tasks in the post-election situation? Simon Wells also thought the conclusion was "not sharp enough" - he had really wanted the PCC to "go back and rewrite it".

Replying to these points, comrade Conrad said it was rather unsatisfactory to complain in the way the last two speakers had done, yet fail to propose any amendments. He did accept, however, that the last few paragraphs were far from perfect and should not be regarded as "the last word". He also accepted comrade Macnair's amendments, as well as one from comrade Becker, which stressed our failure to predict the election results. He said that it was wrong to say 'No to a Labour government'. While we should not support a manifesto like *For the many*, we should defend any Labour government from attacks from the right. But, of course, our main emphasis was on the aim of transforming the Labour Party.

With comrade Becker agreeing to withdraw her alternative theses, the PCC version, as amended, was then accepted unanimously! ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. The final version can be viewed at <http://tinyurl.com/yayj9zw6>.

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday July 2, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimtz's *Lenin's electoral strategy from Marx and Engels through the revolution of 1905*. This meeting: chapter 1, 'What Marx and Engels bequeathed' (continued).

Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk; and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday July 4, 6.45pm: 'The musical precipitation of spirits, saints and selves: ritual, music and trance in Algerian popular Islam'. Speaker: Tamara Turner.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

The revolution will be photocopied

Saturday July 1, 6pm to midnight: Art exhibition, Library, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. Bar available (last entry 11.30pm) Free admission.

Organised by Bishopsgate Institute: www.bishopsgate.org.uk.

Happy birthday, NHS

Saturday July 1 to Wednesday July 5, all day: Street parties followed by national day of action in support of the NHS, nationwide. 'No cuts, no closures, no privatisation'.

Organised by People's Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

National Shop Stewards Network

Saturday July 1: Annual conference cancelled.

Not one more day

Saturday July 1, 12 noon: Protest against continued Tory government. Assemble BBC Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London W1, for march to parliament.

Organised by People's Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Latin America in crisis?

Tuesday July 4, 6.30pm: Public meeting, ITF House, 49-60 Borough Road, London SE1. With Tariq Ali, Christine Blower and former MP Colin Burgen. Organised by Venezuela Solidarity Campaign: www.venezuelasolidarity.co.uk.

The big meeting

Saturday July 8, 7am till late: Durham Miners' Gala. Main assembly point: Market Place, Durham DH1. Also Durham Marriott Hotel Royal County, Old Elvet, Durham DH1.

Organised by Durham Miners Association: www.durhamminers.org/gala.

Trump vs China: new cold war?

Monday July 10, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Brent Trades Hall (London Apollo Club), 375 High Road, Willesden, London NW10. Speaker: Jude Woodward, writer and journalist.

Organised by Brent Stop the War: <https://en-gb.facebook.com/BrentStoptheWar>.

In conversation with Medea Benjamin

Wednesday July 12, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Sands Films, 82 St Marychurch Street, London SE16. 'Trump, the special relationship and the "war on terror"'. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Afghanistan: the forgotten war

Wednesday July 12, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, Friargate, York YO1. Speaker: Maya Evans (Voices for Creative Non-Violence).

Organised by York Against the War: www.facebook.com/YorkAgainstTheWar.

200 years of protest

Thursday July 13, 6.30pm: History and politics educational, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. Survey of large-scale protest in Britain since the early 19th century. £11. Bar available throughout.

Organised by Bishopsgate Institute: www.bishopsgate.org.uk/event/877/We-Are-Angry---200-Years-of-Protest-in-Britain.

Tolpuddle 2017

Friday July 14, 12 noon to Sunday July 16, 6pm: Festival, Dorchester Road, Tolpuddle, Dorset DT2.

Organised by Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival: www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk.

Britain still needs a pay rise

Monday July 17, 5.30pm: Rally, central London - exact location soon to be announced. Public-sector workers demand higher wages.

Organised by Trades Union Congress: www.tuc.org.uk/events/britain-still-needs-payrise-rally.

It starts here!

Saturday July 22 to Sunday July 23, 10am to 5.30pm: Weekend-long human rights/anti-arms event, Amnesty International Human Rights Action Centre, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2.

Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade: www.facebook.com/campaignagainstarmstrade.

Das Kapital and Marx's economics

Thursday August 31, 7pm: Educational, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. With professor Ben Fine.

Hosted by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

HOUSING

Seize, occupy, requisition

Eddie Ford welcomes Jeremy Corbyn's militant approach to the housing crisis

So far the death toll from the Grenfell Tower fire remains at 79, but the true figure is expected to be higher. Indeed, some believe that the real number of people killed is for the moment being covered up by the authorities. David Lammy, the Labour MP for Tottenham, told the BBC's *Newsnight* that people are saying to him that there could have been "civil unrest" if the true figures had been released immediately.¹

Not exactly exuding faith in the powers that be, Lammy also urged the prime minister to immediately obtain all pertinent documents (emails, minutes of meetings, correspondence with contractors, safety assessments, specifications and reports, etc) before they get destroyed or 'lost'. For Lammy, it is imperative that "everyone culpable for what happened at Grenfell Tower is held to account and feels the full force of the law" - as "we may find that there is blood on the hands of a number of organisations".

Meanwhile, frustrated by the slow progress being made by the various bodies investigating the fire - or maybe suspicious of their motives - a new residents' group of 86 families, called Grenfell United, has been formed on WhatsApp to begin a parallel or alternative investigation by compiling a list of the victims and survivors of the fire. The founder of the group, Sajad Jamalvatan, who lived on the third floor of the block, said he was trying to organise a meeting between the council and all the survivors in one place, but that it was proving difficult to arrange: "They don't want to face 400 people in a room. They prefer to deal with us individually". And another grassroots survivors' group has been setup, Justice 4 Grenfell, which is also attempting to establish an accurate list of those who died.

Whatever the truth of allegations made by Lammy *et al*, the Grenfell fire - started by a faulty fridge-freezer - has exposed the appalling living conditions that millions of people have to endure in today's Britain. Ignored, neglected and abused, their lives are at risk every day, whilst a pampered minority enjoy an opulent lifestyle almost worthy of a Roman emperor - delivered to them by the very British cult of 'home ownership'. At one stage, TV was dominated by near endless programmes about how to buy or sell your property - at insufferable dinner parties you heard about hardly anything else. Your house was just another financial asset.

Telling us all we need to know, at the time of writing safety checks on 120 blocks in 37 areas in England have had a 100% failure rate - a sort of grisly consistency. All the tests conducted so far, it seems, have been on local authority-owned blocks rather than private buildings - though samples of cladding are now being sought from schools and hospitals as well. The NHS has identified as many as 30 hospital trusts in England that have cladding made of material similar to that used at Grenfell or about which there are other unresolved fire safety concerns - nine hospitals deemed to be at "greatest risk" are now receiving support from the regulator, NHS Improvement.

Scarily, at the weekend hundreds of residents were evacuated from five high-rise blocks in Camden - with residents on the Chalcots estate in Swiss Cottage woken during the middle of the night and told to leave immediately, after the council said it could not guarantee their safety - cladding similar to that on Grenfell Tower had been found.² The confused



Squatting: Ivanhoe Hotel, 1946

residents were asked to find alternative accommodation or report to a local leisure centre, where hundreds of mattresses had been laid out - others were offered hotel rooms for the night. Less than reassuringly, a government spokesman said there was a "particular set of circumstances" in Camden, as inspections had also found that hundreds of fire doors were "missing" - despite that, some residents refused to leave.

Theresa May has ordered a "major" national inquiry into the disaster, on top of the previously announced public inquiry. Grenfell residents have written to the prime minister demanding the investigation leaves "no stone unturned" - it "must identify each and every individual and organisation who must bear responsibility and accountability for this tragedy and the mishandling of the aftermath". There must be "swift recommendations", it continues, to "ensure there can be no chance of a repeat of this disaster elsewhere". As far as we can tell at the moment, the central cause of the fire was the gap between the cladding and the insulation acting like a chimney to spread the fire.³

The police are now considering manslaughter charges in relation to the inferno, stating that documents and materials had been seized from a number of organisations. But no-one has been questioned yet, as it was "too early" in the investigation. Using far stronger language, John McDonnell, speaking at Glastonbury - now seemingly the natural venue for senior Labour politicians - said the Grenfell victims had been "murdered by political decisions". This was a natural consequence of what happens when you "view housing as only for financial speculation rather than for meeting a basic human need". With monstrous hypocrisy, MPs and the rightwing press have accused McDonnell of "politicising" the disaster!

Crisis

Responding to the crisis, Jeremy Corbyn said the government should seize or requisition empty homes to house residents of Grenfell Tower. According to the department for communities and local government, the latest figures for Kensington and Chelsea, the borough in which Grenfell is situated, reveal there are 1,399 vacant dwellings as of April 2017 - and the number has not dropped below a thousand for over a decade (in fact, obscenely, some homes have lain empty for up to 15 years).⁴ Given that 600 people 'officially' lived in Grenfell Tower, though the actual number could be higher, there are more than enough empty homes in the borough to house them all.

are being set up to defend the rights and interests of Grenfell residents, and all those in a similar situation - direct action from below is only to be encouraged and supported. Obviously, Tory politicians and the rightwing press are outraged by these attacks on the sanctity of private property. One horrified government minister told *The Daily Telegraph* that the Labour leadership is "on the cusp of encouraging insurrection". The same paper commented that Corbyn's call to seize rich people's houses for Grenfell victims "shows his true, disturbing nature" (June 16) and informs us that the Labour Party's "disregard for property rights is extraordinarily worrying" - but is "significant for confirming what many of us long suspected": that the Labour leader "holds the concept of private property - a necessary foundation of our prosperity and freedom - in disdain" (June 23). With absolute predictability, but no less disgustingly for that, Theresa May flatly rejected Corbyn's demand to requisition empty houses - a spokeswoman for the prime minister saying that "we don't support proposals to seize private property".

A 'just right'

Alas, I do not think the Labour leadership is about to embark on a full-scale frontal assault on private property rights - but, from our perspective, it is madness to expect that capitalism can fulfil the basic human need for shelter. However, Corbyn and Abbott were totally right to suggest - at least implicitly - that vacant properties should be squatted to provide housing for those made homeless by the fire or evacuations. Taking matters into our own hands has a long history in Britain - something that deserves to be celebrated, whether during the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 or the Diggers in the 17th Century. They occupied disused common land and cultivated it collectively on the basis, as Gerrard Winstanley said, that "the poorest man hath as true a title and just right to the land as the richest man".⁶

Often, of course, squatting is a matter of sheer necessity, rather than the product of an egalitarian philosophy - such as after World War II, when so many returning 'heroes' found themselves homeless. The severe post-war housing crisis was even worse than that of 1918, and one of the greatest challenges faced by the new Attlee administration.⁷ The demands of wartime production meant that house-building almost came to a halt for the duration, while the population needing homes grew - and in World War II there was the additional factor of damage to the housing stock from air raids. The number of usable houses fell by 400,000 between 1939 and 1945.

Under the leadership of the Communist Party a huge squatting movement developed. In July and August 1946 former RAF and army camps were targeted. Families moved into Nissen huts. Occupation committees were elected to oversee repairs. The CPGB demanded that the authorities lay on gas, water and electricity. In many areas the squatters got the backing of the local Labour council and MP. In October 1946, Aneurin Bevan reported to the Commons that 1,038 camps in England and Wales were occupied by 39,535 people.

The second wave came in early September 1946. This action, termed the 'Great Sunday Squat', dominated the media for weeks. In London CPGB councillor and district secretary Ted

Bramley led 1,500 homeless people in an invasion of vacant luxury flats in the Tory-controlled boroughs of Kensington, Pimlico and St John's Wood. Stepney councillor Tubby Rosen took a hundred homeless families into Duchess of Bedford House in leafy Holland Park. Lord Ilchester's mansion came next. Another CPGB councillor, Joyce Alergant, took hundreds of homeless people into a vacant block of flats formerly occupied by US soldiers.

The Labour cabinet did not approve. The squatting "has been instigated and organised by the Communist Party and must result in hindering rather than helping the arrangements made for the orderly rehousing of those in need of accommodation". Orders were issued for eviction and the cutting off of gas, electricity and water supplies. Five CPGB councillors were charged with "conspiring to incite and direct trespass" - not wanting to turn them into martyrs, the judge bound them over for good behaviour.

There was a tactical retreat from the more high-profile occupations, Nonetheless, under mass pressure local authorities began to requisition empty properties and find accommodation for the squatters. Many thousands stayed on in the former RAF and army camps for years afterwards.

The lesson for 2017 is obvious. Tenants groups, left organisation, trade unions, local Constituency Labour Parties need to defy the law - and the sacred rights of property - and house the homeless through occupying vacant flats and houses. Follow the lead of the 1946 CPGB ... and Jeremy Corbyn.

More generally, as laid out in the CPGB's *Draft programme* (section 3.8), our demands should include:

- a "massive revival of council and other social house-building programmes";
- council and social housing "must be high-quality, energy-efficient and with spacious rooms";
- accommodation must be "allocated on the basis of need and rents set at a token level" with "life-long tenure";
- "communal housing schemes with shared services, gardens, swimming pools, gyms, etc should be included as part of the mix of housing options";
- all housing estates and blocks of flats "should be democratically run by tenants in conjunction with the local authorities and relevant trade unions";
- a "publicly-owned building corporation" must be established "to ensure that planned targets for house-building are reached and to provide permanent employment and ongoing training for building workers".⁸

Housing must be ripped away from the grasp of sharks and profiteers. Housing is a need just like education and health. It should be considered a "just right" ●

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Notes

1. www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/grenfell-tower-fire-cover-up-death-toll-stop-riot-david-lammy-mp-labour-london-prevent-a7809911.html.
2. www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/23/camden-to-evacuate-taplow-tower-over-fire-safety-fears-after-grenfell-disaster.
3. www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/london-fire-grenfell-tower-cladding-architects-firefighters-experts-reason-why-cause-a7789336.html.
4. <https://whoowensengland.org/2017/06/18/where-are-the-empty-homes-in-kensington>.
5. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earl_Cadogan.
6. From *True commonwealth's freedom* c1649.
7. See H Webber, 'A domestic rebellion: the squatters' movement of 1946' *Ex Historia* No4, pp125-46.
8. <http://cpgb.org.uk/pages/programme/3-immediate-demands>.

SUPPLEMENT

Corrections from up close

Censorship or retrofit? In the third part of the series, 'All power to the soviets', Lars T Lih looks at Lenin's 'Letters from afar' and the reaction of the Bolsheviks

The standard 'rearming the party' interpretation of Bolshevism in 1917 is a gripping and highly dramatic narrative that goes something like this: old Bolshevism is rendered irrelevant by the February revolution, the Russian Bolsheviks flounder until Lenin returns home and rearms the party, and the party is subsequently divided over fundamental issues throughout the year. Party unity is restored - to the extent that it was restored - after the other leading Bolsheviks cave in to Lenin's superior force of will. Only by these means was the party rearmed by a new strategy that proclaimed the socialist nature of the revolution - an essential condition for Bolshevik victory in October.

Observers with strikingly opposed political viewpoints all had their reasons for supporting some version of this 'rearming' narrative.¹ This story seemed doubly confirmed when it became known in the 1950s that the version of Lenin's first 'Letter from afar' that was printed in *Pravda* in March 1917 had been heavily edited, with almost a fourth of the text removed. This fact became the basis of a vivid and persuasive anecdote of how the flabbergasted and frightened Petrograd Bolsheviks censored Lenin, their own *vozhda* (leader).

Here is how the story is usually told: in early March 1917, immediately after the fall of the tsar, Lenin set down his reaction to the cataclysmic events in Russia in four 'Letters from afar', using the skimpy news reports available to him in Switzerland. But the Petrograd Bolsheviks were utterly scandalised by the views expressed in Lenin's letters, owing to his bold innovations that broke fundamentally with old Bolshevism. Lenin's audacity so flustered the editors of *Pravda* that they refused to publish three of the 'Letters from afar', and even the one letter that was actually published was heavily censored with cuts that disfigured its essential message.

Some years ago, while perusing a Soviet-era document collection, I ran across a telegram to Lenin from his sister, Maria, that she sent immediately after the *Pravda* publication of the first (henceforth I will refer to the first 'Letter from afar' as simply the Letter). Maria Ulyanova was a member of the *Pravda* editorial board that had allegedly disfigured Lenin's text, yet she wrote to him saying that his Letter had met with "full solidarity" and asking for more articles. This telegram certainly did not fit the standard story! I quickly realised that neither I nor, it seemed, anybody else had any real grasp of exactly what was cut and what was added in the published version. And so I embarked on a year-long detective adventure, during which I laboriously investigated the mail service between Zurich and Oslo, the internal politics of the Bolsheviks in Petrograd, and the complicated later history of the Letter's text.

My findings were published a year and a half ago in the journal *Kritika* under the title, 'Letter from afar, corrections from up close: the Bolshevik consensus of March 1917'.² I showed that the anecdote of the censored *Pravda* article was a "turncoat narrative": that is, a story that under examination changes sides: instead of serving as a pillar of the standard narrative, it becomes a strong challenge to it. The *Pravda* editors did not refuse to publish any of the 'Letters from afar', since only the first one arrived in Petrograd in time. Far from being scandalised by the political message



Lenin: from factional polemics to mass politics

of Lenin's Letter, the Petrograd Bolsheviks enthusiastically endorsed it. The changes made to his text had specific and limited aims: they were not meant to censor or deform his argument, nor did they have that effect.

As this recital of my conclusions shows, my aim at the time was essentially negative: I wanted to discredit a standard narrative that simply did not fit the facts. Returning to this material after a year and a half with a broader perspective, I now want to bring out the more positive aspects of this episode. The *Pravda* editors did not simply remove a few factual misconceptions on Lenin's part - rather, they actively *retrofitted* Lenin's article with their own hands-on understanding of the Russian political situation. Like any successful retrofit (for example, adding new insulation to an old house), the cuts and additions of the *Pravda* editors did not interfere with the efficient functioning of the original structure - on the contrary, Lenin's essential message came through with less distortion and more force.

The unexpected features of the post-February situation could only be grasped by hands-on experience in Petrograd, the maelstrom of national politics. Kamenev and Stalin had to adjust to these realities when they arrived from Siberia in mid-March, and Lenin and Zinoviev likewise had to adjust when they arrived from Switzerland in early April.

Not that these unexpected realities invalidated the basic Bolshevik strategy of 'hegemony' (as outlined in earlier instalments of this series) - far from

it! But adjustments had to be made, adjustments that were straightforward and logical, but nevertheless not at all automatic. These adjustments can be summed up with this overall formula: the Bolsheviks had to move out of their comfort zone of underground agitation and move into the realm of genuine mass politics on a national level as a serious contender for power.

When Lenin wrote his Letter in March 7, his faulty information caused him to impose an out-of-date framework on post-February politics. When the Petrograd Bolsheviks received his Letter two weeks later, they perforce knew better and moulded Lenin's Letter accordingly. By the time Lenin arrived two weeks after that, he had already made some of the needed adjustments in his original framework and went on to make more, as he immersed himself in the hurly-burly of Petrograd politics. We can even speak of Lenin's *de facto* ratification of the editorial changes to his original draft.

So here is the irony: Lenin's Letter is usually described as unsuccessfully prodding the Petrograd Bolsheviks in the direction of his April theses. On the contrary! We must turn this around and say - the Petrograd Bolsheviks nudged Lenin's Letter in the direction of the April theses.

For this reason, the detailed examination of seemingly small editorial changes gives us an unparalleled dynamic picture of the Bolshevik adjustment in action. We see exactly what facets of the situation were new and unexpected for both Lenin in Switzerland and the Bolsheviks

in Petrograd. We also see the basic contours of the necessary adjustment, first by senior Bolsheviks, such as Kamenev and Stalin, and later by émigrés, such as Lenin and Zinoviev. Instead of censorship, we see teamwork - teamwork that was possible only because of a shared understanding of basic tasks.

China Miéville's recently published book *October* is the first secondary account to contain an accurate account of the 'Letter from afar' (and this is indicative of Miéville's wide and careful reading in the best current research). He is nonetheless reluctant to abandon completely the traditional emphasis on disruption and conflict:

While this particular conflict [the 'Letter from afar'] was largely a retrospective fiction, it undeniably gained in plausibility due to the way Lenin's formulations, including in his intemperate polemics, evinced an uncompromising tendency, a distinguishing political logic that would, in fact, be key to other real disputes within the party. Not ineluctable by any means, but chafing against Bolshevik moderation and coalition. The 'Letters from afar' were thus 'continuity' Bolshevism, and yet contained seeds of a distinct and more trenchant position. One that would become clearer with Lenin's return.³

This is carefully stated and eloquently worded, but in my view it points us in the wrong direction. When we look at the nitty-gritty of the actual changes,

we will have a hard time finding even the germs of later conflict in this episode. We will be less tempted to insist that there *must* have been some sort of boundary line between Lenin and the other Bolsheviks. Of course, as Alexander Rabinowitch has shown us in such detail, there was plenty of conflict within Bolshevik ranks during 1917 (as earlier and later) - but these were conflicts within a shared understanding: tactical conflicts that produced different groupings on different issues.

The following section sets out the factual conclusions that by themselves invalidate the standard account of the Letter (for supporting arguments, qualifications, references, etc, see my original *Kritika* article). The rest of the essay examines the editorial process in detail. While based on my earlier findings, the present discussion employs a new and more comprehensive framework that gives more emphasis to the creative moulding by the *Pravda* team.

Odyssey of the letter

On March 7 1917, a week after the abdication of the tsar, Lenin completed the first 'Letter from afar', which he promptly sent off to Aleksandra Kollontai in Oslo (then Christiania). Although he circulated the texts of the letters in Switzerland, Lenin had his heart set on sending them to Petrograd for publication in the newly revived *Pravda*. Under wartime conditions, using Kollontai as a very circuitous courier seemed the best bet. The other three letters were written between March 8 and 12, after which Lenin concentrated wholly on the practical task of getting back to Russia (he finally got there at the beginning of April).

In Oslo, Kollontai wrote in her diary on March 13:

It is now more important [than ever] to be there [in Russia]. We must give direction to the party in our spirit, we must immediately draw a sharp line between us and the Provisional Government along with the defencists. That is clear. Our work lies ahead ... I am waiting for directives from Vladimir Ilyich, and then I'll start off. I live in an intoxicating state of happiness - it's still so hard to believe ... I can hardly wait for an answer from Lenin.

On March 15, she received the first Letter and sent a telegram to Lenin announcing that she was "thrilled by his ideas"; she set out the next day without waiting for any further letters. Her long journey to Petrograd under wartime conditions required her to travel 800 miles to the northern tip of Sweden and then cross over to Finland before arriving in the Russian capital on March 18. The day after her arrival, Kollontai dropped off the Letter at *Pravda* offices and joined the editorial staff.

The *Pravda* editors took just two days to read the article, decide on necessary changes, make them and otherwise prepare the article for publication on March 21 and 22. Close to one-fourth of the text was removed (Lenin's original draft contains approximately 4,500 words in the English translation, of which approximately 1,100 were cut). The Letter was widely republished in Bolshevik Party newspapers throughout Russia, including Tallin, Moscow, Kiev, Kronstadt, Kharkov and Kazan before Lenin's return in early April, and Helsingfors and the Petrograd

Vyborg district afterwards. This is a surprisingly wide circulation for such an allegedly scandalous article.

Who were the *Pravda* editors in 1917? Among those mentioned in the sources as helping to edit *Pravda* in March 1917 are Aleksandr Shliapnikov, Petr Zalutski, Vyacheslav Molotov, Lev Kamenev, Koba Stalin, Matvei Muranov, Mikhail Olminskii, Mikhail Kalinin, Maria Ulyanova and (after her return on March 18) Aleksandra Kollontai. Most likely, decisions about how to edit Lenin's article were taken collectively and in consultation with the Petrograd party committees. Kollontai's presence is especially significant, since we have already seen her great enthusiasm about Lenin's article. Because we have no clear picture of the concrete decision process, I will refer simply to 'the *Pravda* editors'.

Faced with a text written two weeks earlier by a writer who himself noted that he was "obliged to content himself with meagre foreign press dispatches", the editors were presented with the challenge of presenting it as an effective analysis of a rapidly evolving situation. Publishing an article by the acknowledged leader of the party was a great opportunity, but also a great risk for the Bolsheviks. Lenin's analysis of the basic situation had to be a good one - it had to strike readers as perceptive and insightful rather than out of date and out of touch. The editors could not preface the article with an apology: 'Please excuse comrade Lenin's misapprehensions - remember, he penned this in Zurich two weeks ago.' The editors needed to make Lenin look good and, even more imperatively, they needed to ensure that he did not look silly.

Given these constraints, there was no guarantee that Lenin's article was even publishable. Remarkably, the *Pravda* editors were able to mould the Letter so that Lenin's essential message was accommodated to the new post-February political realities. In the following sections, we will look at the editing process in detail. Here we will present some striking direct evidence that reveals how the Petrograd Bolsheviks felt about the Letter and its message.

In his classic memoir of 1917, *Zapiski iz revoliutsii*, Sukhanov reports a conversation between himself and Kamenev that took place prior to Lenin's return:

I started to ask Kamenev what in general was being done in his party and in what direction was a 'line' being defined. What was Lenin thinking, what was he writing? ... [Kamenev responded:] Lenin? Lenin thought that the revolution up to now had unfolded as might have been predicted [*zakonomerno*], that a bourgeois *vlast* was historically necessary right now and that there could not have been anything else after the overturn.

"Then you are not yet trying to overthrow the elite [*tsenzovoe*] government right away [*seichas*] and do not insist on an immediate *vlast* of the democracy?" I inquired further of my interlocutor, who was opening perspectives that were important for me.

"Neither we here nor Lenin over there have this point of view. Lenin writes that our urgent task now is to organise and mobilise our forces."⁴

Kamenev's description of what "Lenin writes" can only refer to the Letter, which evidently had not yet been published. His interpretation of Lenin's message can be paraphrased as follows: Events are unfolding "*zakonomerno*" - that is, according to predictable regularities. A "bourgeois" government immediately after the fall of the tsar was no doubt inevitable. The situation is not ripe "yet" for an "immediate" overthrow of this bourgeois government "right

away". Our task is therefore to organise and mobilise in order to replace the present government with a *vlast* of the democracy. This project will become practical politics as soon as "our forces" are ready. This reading does not misrepresent Lenin's Letter, either in original or published form.

On March 22 - the day that the second instalment of Lenin's Letter appeared in *Pravda* - his sister, Maria Ulyanova, sent him the following telegram:

Articles received and printed. Full solidarity [*polnaia solidarnost*]. Send articles. Kollontai has arrived. Your arrival desirable, but avoid risk.

Ulyanova states that Lenin's "articles" have already been published. The only possible explanation of the plural is the two-part publication in *Pravda*. The request for more articles implies that no other articles by Lenin were available at the time of writing, and also that the editors were eager for more of Lenin's views, not scandalised by them. Recall that Ulyanova was part of the *Pravda* editorial team and that she sent this telegram *after* all the excisions and modifications had been made. Either she was lying to her brother about "full solidarity" or she thought that the editorial revisions had *not* interfered with Lenin's message.

A few days later, on March 26, Aleksandra Kollontai sent off a long letter to Lenin in Switzerland, in which she informed him that

The beginning of your letters has been printed. Your voice is listened to not only by supporters [*nashi*] but by opponents ... We work closely together at *Pravda*, in full solidarity and without disputes [*tesno, splochenno i bez trenii*].

Kollontai's comment that "the beginning of your letters has been printed" does not contradict Maria Ulyanova's assertion that Lenin's "articles" had already been published. Lenin himself made clear that the Letter was the first instalment of a projected series.

Can we reconcile Kollontai's remarks with the standard story of frightened *Pravda* editors censoring Lenin's article? Consider. Kollontai at this time was extremely loyal to Lenin personally and insisted when still in Norway that Lenin provide "directives". She read the Letter as soon as she received it in Norway and promptly informed Lenin in a telegram that she was "thrilled" with the ideas therein set forth. Afterwards, she was among the first to give wholehearted endorsement of Lenin's April theses. Kollontai worked with the *Pravda* editorial staff immediately after her arrival with the Letter and therefore was perfectly aware of the cuts made in Lenin's text - indeed, she undoubtedly participated in making them. Yet she expresses no outrage that Lenin had been censored or that his "thrilling" argument had been deformed. She does not even inform Lenin that cuts were made. Instead, she says that the Letter, far from causing scandal among the Bolsheviks, was treated with respect even by non-Bolsheviks. She also goes out of her way to emphasise the unanimity of views at *Pravda*. Unless we assume a phenomenal and inexplicable duplicity on Kollontai's part, her letter to Lenin is by itself enough to make the standard story untenable.

These statements testify not only to the attitude of the three people who made them, but also of the entire Bolshevik leadership in Petrograd. By the way, all these pieces of evidence have been available in published form for a long time - close to a century in the case of Kamenev, and 40 or 50 years in the case of Ulyanova and Kollontai.

Lenin wrote three more 'Letters from afar' between March 8 and 12 (the so-called 'fifth letter' is only an

abortive sketch written down on the eve of his departure on the sealed train). None of these letters reached Petrograd before he himself did: Kollontai did not wait for further letters before she set off on her laborious trek back to Russia, and no alternative method for getting them to Russia presented itself. They were first published in 1924, immediately after Lenin's death. Both Trotsky in 1924 and the editors of the 1920s edition of Lenin's works state definitely that only the first Letter arrived in Petrograd.

In general, Lenin did not take kindly to people fooling around with his text. In the pre-war period, he regularly went ballistic about the way the *Pravda* editors in Russia treated his submissions and after returning to Russia in 1917 he was unsparing in his criticism of *Pravda* and its editors for other reasons. Yet there is no evidence that he resented what the editors had done after he arrived back in Russia a couple of weeks after the publication of the Letter - he certainly does not repudiate the article or insist that a full text be printed forthwith. Indeed, he referred in passing to the *Pravda* version as a valid statement of his views.⁵ We can even speak of Lenin's *de facto* ratification of editorial changes, since he adopted most of them in his own rhetoric after his return.

In the 1920s, the Bolshevik leadership may have wanted to keep quiet about the cuts in the Letter - not in order to protect themselves, but in order to protect Lenin: in the context of the Lenin cult, the very fact that he did not fully appreciate every nuance of the situation in Petrograd might be seen as embarrassing.

The only reason we know of the existence of the editorial changes is the publication of Lenin's original draft in the fourth edition of his complete works in 1949. Stalin was still very much alive and in power, and we may say with complete assurance that the original draft was published with Stalin's knowledge and explicit authorisation. If the usual story of Stalin's and Kamenev's censorship of Lenin is true, Stalin's publication of Lenin's draft would be equivalent to a guilty man returning to the scene of the crime and planting new evidence of his own guilt. How plausible is this account of Stalin's motives? Shouldn't we assume that, surprising as it may seem, Stalin was proud of the job he and others did in preparing Lenin's article for publication?

Afterwards, Lenin's original draft became the standard text in all later editions of his works, including the English-language *Collected works*, so that the *Pravda* text - the version read by people at the time, and thus of far greater historical importance than Lenin's original draft - has essentially vanished from public view. When I first started asking myself questions about the changes made to the Letter, I was surprised to run into difficulties when simply trying to locate the *Pravda* text. In this case, an archival document has driven out of circulation a more significant published document.

In the 1950s, pioneering Soviet historians tried to move away from the heavy constraints of the Stalin cult. Our natural admiration for these brave historians who were fighting the good fight should not lead us to overlook their own specific point of view. Historians such as Eduard Burdzhakov or AV Snegov were following a Khrushchev-era anti-Stalin line that aimed at putting as much space between Lenin and Stalin as possible. Since Stalin was a member of the *Pravda* editorial staff, these historians had a vested interest in portraying the changes introduced by the *Pravda* editors as anti-Lenin censorship. This interpretation has been uncritically accepted ever since.

The spin put on the *Pravda* cuts by the Khrushchev-era historians soon congealed into a juicy anecdote that enlivened practically all western

accounts of 1917. As sometimes happens, this anecdote served the bias of opposing camps - both the anti-Lenin academic historians and the pro-Lenin Trotskyist historians - in equal fashion. It did not serve anyone's interest to throw suspicion on the alleged episode - for example, there are no partisans of Kamenev who might be motivated to protect his reputation.

Before moving on, I will summarise some of the reasons why the standard story of befuddled censorship is incompatible with the facts as just reported:

1. Only one Letter reached Petrograd and therefore the *Pravda* editors did not refuse to print the other letters.
2. The *Pravda* version was widely reprinted in Bolshevik newspapers.
3. According to explicit statements by participants made during March 1917 before Lenin's return, Petrograd Bolsheviks expressed "full solidarity" with Lenin's Letter.
4. Lenin's rhetoric after his return to Russia provided *de facto* ratification of most of the specific changes.
5. Stalin's decision to allow publication of the original draft in 1949 is not compatible with a guilty conscience about the matter.
6. The Soviet historians in the Khrushchev era who came up with the story about censorship had a *parti pris* that mandates scepticism about their conclusions.
7. The standard story has never been backed up by any systematic examination of the actual editorial modifications.

Toward a post-February political map

Before the war, the Bolsheviks charted their political strategy by pointing to three fundamental political forces: tsarist reaction, the liberal and quasi-liberal elite opposition, and the *narod* (workers and peasants combined). According to the Bolshevik strategy of "hegemony" or class leadership, the socialist proletariat must strive to lead the *narod* (people) against tsarist reaction, since only the proletariat could do what the liberals refused to do: destroy tsarism and transform Russia in a democratic spirit. In the first days after the February revolution, as Lenin strived to make sense of the fragmented and distorted information at his disposal in Switzerland, he applied this same tripartite map of the post-February situation (all quotations from the Letter in this section come from the original draft):⁶

These three political camps, these three fundamental political forces - (1) the tsarist monarchy, the head of the feudal landlords, of the old bureaucracy and the high military command; (2) bourgeois and landlord-Octoberist-Cadet Russia, with the petty bourgeoisie (of which Kerensky and Chkheidze are the principal representatives) following in its wake; (3) the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, which is looking to make the entire proletariat and the entire mass of the poorest part of the population its allies - these three *fundamental* political forces fully and clearly revealed themselves even in the eight-day 'first stage' and even to an observer so remote from the scene of events as the present writer, who is obliged to content himself with meagre foreign press dispatches [Lenin's emphasis].

This mapping was inadequate for the new political realities even when Lenin wrote it in early March and it only became more so by the time the Bolsheviks received it two weeks later. First, the utter collapse of tsarism meant that the Romanov dynasty was no longer part of anyone's political calculations. As Stalin put it in a speech at the end of the month,

As the revolution develops, the Provisional Government will turn itself (objectively, it must do this) into a bulwark of counterrevolution - not a tsarist counterrevolution (danger does not threaten us from this direction) - but an imperialist one.

Indeed, the whole political spectrum in Russia had lurched to the left after the February events to such an extent that the entire right wing of the pre-revolutionary opposition - what Lenin here calls "landlord-Octoberist Russia" - had also disappeared from the scene, leaving the liberal Cadets (short for the Constitutional Democratic Party) as the single non-socialist party left standing. Not knowing of these developments, Lenin painted a highly inaccurate picture of the Provisional Government:

This new government, in which Lvov and Guchkov of the Octoberists and Peaceful Renovation Party - yesterday's abettors of Stolypin the Hangman - control the posts of *real importance*, the crucial posts, the decisive posts, the army and the bureaucracy - this government, in which Miliukov and the other Cadets serve mostly for decoration, for a signboard, for sugary professorial speeches, and the 'Trudovik' Kerensky plays the role of a balalaika for gulling the workers and peasants.

In actuality, the balance of forces within the government was the reverse of Lenin's picture. To start off, Lenin had got his Lvovs mixed up and confused GF Lvov, the head of the first Provisional Government, with NN Lvov, a leader of the pre-war conservative reform party, Peaceful Renovation. Further, the rightwing Octoberist Guchkov was *not* the heart of the new government, but rather an isolated outsider, who quit the government in frustration at the end of April. If Miliukov was indeed relatively powerless in the cabinet, the reason was not a loose coalition to his right, but rather one to his left consisting of leftwing Cadet liberals plus Kerensky. These forces helped to oust Miliukov shortly after Guchkov's exit.

Lenin also misapprehended Kerensky's role: his presence in the government was not due to rightwing forces who wanted a "balalaika". On the contrary, Kerensky was deputed by the Petrograd Soviet as its representative in the government. Lenin's mistake about Kerensky reflected a more fundamental misapprehension about the role of the Petrograd Soviet. In his tripartite map, Lenin placed Chkheidze and Kerensky directly in the camp of the liberal opposition, while portraying the soviet as already opposed to the new government. But in fact, Chkheidze and Kerensky were leaders of the soviet, and their political influence came from solid majority support among the soviet constituency.

Lenin's misunderstanding of the role of the soviet is even more evident in the second instalment of his 'Letters from afar', written a day or so after completing the first Letter. From the skimpy reports in western newspapers (especially the London *Times*), Lenin drew the conclusion that the Bolsheviks had a commanding influence in the soviet. Thus he describes Kerensky as wavering between "the Provisional Government of the bourgeoisie, the Guchkovs and Miliukovs, and the 'provisional government' of the proletariat and the poorest masses of the people: the Soviet of worker deputies and the Russian Social Democratic Worker Party United by the Central Committee" (the last 10 words constitute the official title of the Bolsheviks at this time).

In contrast to the situation in 1905, the soldiers in the Petrograd garrison had become an integral part of the soviet constituency and were represented in the soviet - in fact, they often outweighed the workers. For Lenin in early March, however, the

soviet was “a worker organisation” that needed to reach out to win over the soldiers. Finally, a crucial political development had occurred only after Lenin sent off his Letter: the appearance of ‘revolutionary defencism’. For Lenin, the only socialist supporters of the war were “social patriots” who contributed directly to the tsarist war effort and denied that the war was imperialist on both sides - people such as K Gvozdev, head of the ‘Workers Group’ that directly strove to mobilise worker support for the tsar’s war. Gvozdev had been enemy number 1 for the local Bolsheviks in the months prior to the February revolution, but after February he and other ‘social patriots’, such as Plekhanov and Potresov, immediately lost whatever influence they had.

In their place came the ‘revolutionary defencists’. Kerensky and Chkheidze were proto-revolutionary defencists, since (as Alexander Shliapnikov informs us) they disavowed Gvozdev and his like even before the revolution. But the real spokesman of revolutionary defencism was the Menshevik, Irakli Tsereteli, who arrived in Petrograd from Siberian exile in mid-March and immediately became the most important leader of the soviet majority.

From the point of view of the Bolsheviks, the revolutionary defencists were ultimately no better than the social patriots. Nevertheless, the old critiques aimed at social patriotism were no longer serviceable. The revolutionary defencists came out of the anti-war Zimmerwald movement, and thus had good credentials as anti-imperialists. Furthermore, their support for the Provisional Government was tied to insistence on an active peace policy and governmental appeals to the proletarians of the warring countries. Lenin was necessarily unaware of this crucial development when he wrote his Letter in early March.

Lenin’s various misapprehensions in no way cast doubt on the validity of the overall hegemony strategy. The task of the party and the socialist proletariat it represented was still to lead the *narod* to the full conclusion of the revolution. But, given the unexpected minority status of the Bolsheviks *within* the soviets, their first task was to win majority backing. In this task, their primary rivals were the ‘agreementists’ (*soglashateli*) - that is, those socialists who at present represented the soviet majority and who sought some sort of ‘agreement’ or coalition with the elite reformers of the Provisional Government.

This adjustment implied a new tripartite political map. Lenin had originally posited three fundamental forces: tsarist reaction; Provisional Government plus petty bourgeois hangers-on; the soviet. The new political map - one more adequate to the realities of 1917 - also had a triangular conflict that consisted of the Provisional Government, the soviet ‘agreementists’ and the soviet ‘internationalists’ (Bolsheviks and others who rejected coalition). After his return in April, Lenin set forth this revised map in colourful fashion:

There is now going on a struggle between three parties: the first is the party of plunderers and murderers; the second consists of those who cover up these plunderers with eloquent words; finally, the third party stands for no support to the plunderers, explanation of everybody’s mistakes, including the mistakes of the executive committee of the Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies.⁷

When senior Bolsheviks Kamenev and Stalin returned to Petrograd in mid-March, they quickly sized up the new and surprising situation. Kamenev’s remarks to his fellow Bolsheviks on March 18 convey both the shock and the adjustment:

After pointing out the [earlier leadership] role of the Bolsheviks versus their insignificant influence in the Petrograd soviet at the present moment, he [Kamenev] examined this incongruity. It is surprising that the Bolsheviks are not occupying a dominant position in the Petrograd Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies - and why do they allow into the soviet the liquidators, who do not express the outlook of the Petrograd workers? We are the representatives of the revolutionary element in Petrograd, but in the meantime it seems that the wide masses do not understand us. Evidently, since we are essentially correct, we are formulating our resolutions and decisions in a way that the masses do not understand.

If we are correct in calling the Provisional Government counterrevolutionary, then, clearly, we should overthrow it and institute a new, revolutionary one. Therefore, either we should declare open war on the Provisional Government or we should take up some other position in regard to it. The latter is just what is necessary. Have we developed to the point that we can create the dictatorship of the proletariat? No. What is important is not taking power - what is important is keeping it [*Nevazhno-vziat’ vlast, vazhno-uderzhat*]. This moment will come, but it will be advantageous for us to put it off, since right now our forces are still inadequate.⁸

The required adjustment had several dimensions. First, accept the new definition of the soviet as representing both worker and *soldier* deputies: a new alignment of forces within the soviet that was both constraint and opportunity. Next, accept the humbling fact of the minority standing for the Bolsheviks, since the soviet constituency at present did not support or even understand the Bolshevik message. The proper response to this sobering reality was not to abandon or modify the essentially correct message, but rather to find better ways to get it across. And this imperative of outreach meant a shift away from the Bolshevik comfort zone of underground agitation aimed at “purposive workers”. The Bolsheviks now faced the challenge of genuine mass politics.

The returning émigrés, Lenin and Zinoviev, had to go through the same sense of shock after their hands-on experience of the Petrograd political situation. As Zinoviev remarked at a party conference a couple of weeks later,

After 1905, the Soviet of Worker Deputies had a glorious reputation. But at present it is not on our side [*on ne nash*]. And what we’re seeing is horrifying: there are members of the Soviet of Worker Deputies who make completely counterrevolutionary speeches. The situation is worse than you can imagine. But the future will be ours. [Still,] the position of the soviet is very ambiguous right now - for example, Kerensky has been delegated by the soviet [to be a member of the Provisional Government].⁹

When Lenin read out his April theses on the night of his arrival, he still had not corrected all his misapprehensions from afar - for example, he still talked about “the soviet of worker deputies” rather than ‘soviet of worker and soldier deputies’. Nevertheless, since writing the first two ‘Letters from afar’ Lenin had become aware of one important fact, with the result that in his theses he called for “recognition of the fact that in the majority of soviets of worker deputies our party is in the minority, for the time being a small one”. Persuasion of the soviet constituency through “patient explanation” was therefore imperative.

As we have seen, this observation was hardly news to the Bolsheviks in Petrograd. Certainly by the time they

received Lenin’s Letter on March 19, they were fully aware of the challenge of winning over a soviet majority. Their task was therefore to retrofit the Letter to fit the new realities: remove the more glaring misapprehensions and mould the Letter’s rhetoric toward the pressing task of winning over the soviet constituency. As I stated earlier, Lenin’s Letter is usually described as unsuccessfully prodding the Petrograd Bolsheviks in the direction of the April theses, but we must turn this around: the Petrograd Bolsheviks nudged Lenin’s Letter in the direction of the April theses.

Retrofitting the letter

We will now look in detail at the process whereby the *Pravda* editors retrofitted Lenin’s Letter with their own hands-on understanding of Russian political realities, helping it convey an effective message that spoke directly to the intended audience. We will start with the straightforward elimination of assertions that the *Pravda* editors thought were clearly mistaken (or, in any event, would be rejected as mistaken by readers), and then move on to more creative interventions.

1. No accusation of a “plot” to overthrow the tsar organised by the British and French embassies, including direct payments to named Russian groups (see excisions E, F, G, H, K). Writing on March 7, Lenin was convinced that there was a direct, cash-on-the-barrelhead conspiracy between the Allied embassies and the liberal elite, including army units. In point of fact, not only was there no conspiracy, but the Allies did not want to see Nicholas deposed in the middle of a war. Judging from what they left in the published article, the *Pravda* editors themselves believed that the British and French embassies had played a direct role in the removal of Nicholas. Where they drew the line was any specific assertion of criminal behaviour. Thus they removed the italicised words in the following passage, replacing them simply with “strove” (excision F):

The whole course of events in the February-March revolution clearly shows that the British and French embassies, with their agents and ‘connections’, who had long been making the most desperate efforts to prevent ‘separate’ agreements and a separate peace between Nicholas the Second (but let us hope and strive to make him ‘the last’) and Wilhelm II, directly *organised a plot along with the Octobrists and Cadets, along with a section of the generals and the officer staff of the army and the St Petersburg garrison, especially to remove Nicholas Romanov.*

Thus Lenin was insistent that there had been a “plot” (a word he used five times). Most instances of this word were simply removed. In one case, “plot” was allowed to remain after it had been defanged. Lenin had written that the Anglo-French imperialists “set up a plot with the officers of the guards”. In the published version, the imperialists merely “set up a plot” (see excision K). Since no indication is given of the goals or co-conspirators of this plot, the *Pravda* version here reads somewhat strangely.

2. *Correcting Lenin’s overestimation of tsarism’s role in post-February politics.* As we have seen, Lenin’s Letter portrayed tsarist reaction as one of the three fundamental forces in current Russian politics. This picture was outdated even when Lenin wrote the article, and it would have struck readers in late March as seriously out of touch. The passage where Lenin set out his tripartite political map could itself be left in (with changes), since Lenin seemed to be describing the lead-up to the February revolution rather than the post-revolutionary situation. In contrast, Lenin’s extrapolations of tsarism’s role

into the post-February political scene were all excised.

At the time of writing the Letter, Lenin was convinced that the Provisional Government was hell-bent on making a deal with the dynasty:

The new government has not yet finished off the tsarist monarchy before it has *begun to make a deal* with the landlord Romanov dynasty. The bourgeoisie of the Octobrist-Cadet type *needs* a monarchy to serve as the head of the bureaucracy and the army in order to protect the privileges of capital against the working people (Lenin’s emphasis, excision P).

By March 21-22, these accusations would have struck readers as seriously out of date. Mikhail Romanov (the brother of the ex-tsar) had also abdicated; the Romanov dynasty and monarchists in general were without influence. The editors therefore excised this passage and others like it (excisions I, J, L, P, S, W, Z).

As we have seen, Lenin’s overestimation of the dynasty’s political influence also led to a misapprehension about the political nature of the Provisional Government. According to Lenin, the overtly monarchist Octobrist party was the “decisive” force in the new government, while “Miliukov and the other Cadets serve mostly for decoration”. This whole passage was removed (excision L).

Other interventions were somewhat more proactive. In one phase, Lenin wrote that “the revolutionary workers were destroying, have destroyed already to a considerable degree and will continue to destroy [*razrushali, razrushili, budet razrushat*]” to its foundations the infamous tsarist monarchy”. Besides extending credit to the soldiers, the *Pravda* version says simply “have destroyed” (when used by itself, the verb form *razrushili* is more final). Presumably by the same reasoning, the editors removed “relative” from the following sentence: “We must now take advantage of the relative freedom of the new order.”

3. *Lenin’s rogues gallery.* Lenin’s Letter is awash with proper names and, although this profusion creates problems for today’s reader, Lenin’s aim was to make his analysis more accessible to his immediate readers: “instead of general critical definitions we use political names familiar in Russia”. These proper names illustrate the key groupings on his political map: tsarist reaction (ex-tsar Nicholas Romanov, his brother Michael, Rasputin), the elite reformers (Guchkov, Lvov, Miliukov), and the rightwing socialists (Plekhanov, Potresov, Gvozdev). The political meaning of these names was unambiguous.

Two other names, however, created real difficulties: Nikolai Chkheidze, the Menshevik chairman of the Petrograd soviet, and Alexander Kerensky, the socialist lawyer deputed by majority vote in the soviet to serve as minister of justice in the Provisional Government. These two figures symbolised the most unexpected and (for Bolsheviks) scandalous post-February reality: the veto power of the Petrograd soviet over the government’s programme and personnel, combined with its support of the “bourgeois” Provisional Government. Lenin’s political map in the Letter did not yet include these realities, so that his references to Chkheidze and Kerensky were vulnerable in the following ways:

● Lenin equated Chkheidze and Kerensky with the Provisional Government and contrasted them with the soviet, instead of accurately portraying them as leaders of the soviet who enjoyed majority support there (excisions C and L).

● Kerensky and Chkheidze are equated without justification with the “social patriots” and “liquidators” such as Plekhanov and Gvozdev (excisions A and T). After his return to Russia, Lenin made the appropriate adjustment: Chkheidze’s name is now paired with

Irakli Tsereteli, the iconic “revolutionary defencist”.

● Lenin calls Chkheidze a “traitor” because he refused to acknowledge that the government was making a deal with the dynasty (excision P, plus the apparent allusion to Chkheidze in G). But the government was *not* making a deal with the dynasty and everybody knew it. If this passage had been printed, the only result would have been to make Lenin look silly.

● Kerensky is described as a crypto-monarchist, a charge implausible in itself and reflective of Lenin’s general overestimation of monarchism as a political force (excisions P and Q).

What about other mentions of Chkheidze and Kerensky in the Letter - how vulnerable were they to removal by the editors? Well, as it happens, there are no other mentions: we have already eliminated every single one. Therefore, although each particular passage was eliminated on its own merits, the end result is just the same *as if* a conscious decision had been made never to mention Chkheidze and Kerensky by name.

In fact, commentators (including myself in my original *Kritika* article) have all assumed that there *was* a blanket decision not to mention these two politicians by name.¹⁰ The only question was, what motivated this decision? In my original article, I argued that the editors wanted to avoid directly insulting people whose cooperation was needed to ensure Lenin’s return. China Miéville has well described the contrast between this and earlier explanations: the editors were “not so much soft, then, as strategic”.

This proposed motivation is not implausible: the Bolsheviks really were trying very hard to get Lenin back just at this time, and Chkheidze, at least, provided invaluable help. Nevertheless, if the removal of *all* mentions of Chkheidze and Kerensky is an accidental by-product of other concerns, then there was no conscious decision and hence no motivation. The editors may not even have noticed that every single mention of these two names had been removed.

Ultimately, I suppose, there is no sure way of assessing motivation or the lack of it. Nevertheless, at present I cannot see any reason for treating Kerensky and Chkheidze as different in principle from Romanov, Guchkov, Gvozdev and the like, whose names were also eliminated on multiple occasions for various reasons. One general motivation suffices for all such cases: removing passages that betray Lenin’s misapprehensions about the concrete political situation in Petrograd.

To conclude: most likely, the *Pravda* editors were neither soft nor strategic - not solicitous in any particular way toward Kerensky and Chkheidze. These two were central figures in the unexpected and (to Bolsheviks) counterintuitive relationship between the Petrograd soviet and the Provisional Government, so Lenin’s various mentions of their names to illustrate his political map were simply more likely to be candidates for excision.

4. *Dialling it down.* In a couple of minor instances, the editors do seem to be motivated by a desire to dial down Lenin’s more abusive rhetoric. The words “conman swindles” (excision R) were removed. A crack about the sincerity of Guchkov and Lvov was taken out. This excision may also have been motivated by stylistic reasons. Compare the following passages:

[Lenin’s original draft:] The government of the Octobrists and Cadets, of the Guchkovs and Milyukovs, is *unable* - even if it sincerely desired this (only infants can think that Guchkov and Lvov are sincere) - *is unable* to give the people *either peace, bread or freedom*.

[Published *Pravda* version:] The

SUPPLEMENT

government of the Octobrists and Cadets, of the Guchkovs and Miliukovs, is *unable* - even if it sincerely desired this - to give *either peace or bread or freedom*.

Lenin's original sentence, with its parenthetical statement within a parenthetical statement, is stylistically clumsy and hard to process. More importantly, the accusation of individual insincerity weakens the political point. Besides being somewhat implausible and hard to prove, the accusation implies that replacing these particular "bourgeois" politicians would at least help to solve the problem. Later in 1917, Lenin himself argues that we should not judge political opponents by their sincerity or lack thereof.

5. *The role of the soviets*. The change of greatest political significance in the *Pravda* text is not a cut, but an addition: "soldiers" is systematically added to every mention of the Petrograd soviet, so that the title now reads: "Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies". Furthermore, every mention of the workers' heroic role in the overthrow of the tsar is widened to share credit with the soldiers. Finally, if the Petrograd soviet already represented soldiers, it could hardly be described as "beginning to win over the soldier and peasant deputies" (excision B).

The reason for these changes is easy to see. The soldiers in the Petrograd garrison who were represented in the soviet had become a political factor of a magnitude that was not apparent to Lenin in Switzerland when he penned the Letter on March 7. As Kollontai wrote to him in her letter of March 26,

The mood here is dictated by the soldier, and it is the soldier who creates the unique atmosphere, where we see all mixed up together the grandeur of vigorously expressed democratic freedoms, the awakening of a civic awareness of equal rights, and a complete incomprehension of the complexity of the moment we are living through.

Because Lenin did not fully take in the fact of Bolshevik minority status, he also revealed a tendency to assert prematurely that the soviet was carrying out Bolshevik policy. Thus, he asserted that the soviet was "seeking ties with the soldiers and peasants, and also with the agricultural workers, with the latter particularly and first of all, of course, more than with the peasants" (excision N). Here he was clearly taking the wish for the fact (the claim that the agricultural workers were a more important target than the peasants was controversial even in Bolshevik ranks and led to disagreements in April).

In excision O, Lenin refers to the soviet as "an organisation of workers". I think the problem here is not so much "workers" (the editors could have simply added "and soldiers"), but rather the implication that the soviet was simply a private organisation, as opposed to "an embryo of a worker government", as Lenin described it in the immediately following words.

6. *Defeatism*. "Defeatism" was a slogan advanced by Lenin (and very few other Bolsheviks) as part of European intra-socialist polemics during the war years. This slogan was never going to fly with a mass audience, as the Bolsheviks quickly discovered in the new post-February context of open mass politics. *Pravda* articles in March 1917 reveal that the Bolsheviks were taking a beating due to the widespread association of their party with 'defeatism'. Indeed, the soldier section of the Petrograd soviet was so 'defencist' that they regarded the 'defeatist' Bolsheviks as traitors. Charges of treason and betrayal of Russia put the Bolsheviks on the defensive, and they had to explain away 'defeatism' as best they could. For example, 'defeatism' was said to be no more than the prediction that the incompetent tsarist autocracy would be defeated and, as such, no longer relevant after the fall of tsarism. Or 'defeatism'

meant nothing more than prioritising the overthrow of tsarism. In any event, *Pravda* insisted, the Bolsheviks did not call for soldiers simply to stick their bayonets in the ground or to voluntarily surrender.

After his return, Lenin also repeated the assurance about not simply sticking bayonets in the ground. But in his Letter, prior to his immersion in mass politics, after noting the "series of extremely severe defeats sustained by Russia and her allies", Lenin went on to make a bitter polemical point in defence of 'defeatism':

Those who, openly grovelling to the bourgeoisie or simply lacking backbone, howled and wailed against 'defeatism' are now faced by the fact of the historical connection between the defeat of the extremely backward and barbarous tsarist monarchy and the *beginning* of the revolutionary conflagration.

This polemical sally was cut (excision D). A gloating reference by the leader of the party to Russia's defeat by Germany was exactly what was *not* needed.

In his magisterial study of the 'defeatism' slogan, Hal Draper makes the point that Lenin's return to Russia was also a journey from an obsession with intra-socialist polemics to genuine mass politics.¹¹ Looking back in 1921 during the Third Comintern Congress, Lenin himself made this point and admitted that, as an émigré, he had focused too insistently on slogans like "civil war". For this reason, "on April 7, I published my theses, in which I called for caution and patience" (not the usual view of the theses today!). In consequence, "we completely changed our position" and accepted the existence of "honest defencism".¹² (Of course, by "honest defencism," Lenin did not mean the "revolutionary defencism" of socialist leaders such as Tsereteli, but rather the very understandable feeling of ordinary workers and soldiers that foreign troops should be prevented from occupying one's country.)

7. *Agitational campaigns*. The switch to mass politics was not only a matter of abandoning sectarian slogans. The above-ground Bolsheviks could now employ time-honoured social democratic techniques that previously they could only envy at a distance: uncensored newspapers, mass rallies and coordinated agitational campaigns. The Bolshevik leaders had already begun to think about how to employ these new/old tools, and these plans are reflected in some of the changes they made to Lenin's Letter. Lenin's original draft describes the Provisional Government in this way:

a government of *plunder* [*grabezh*], one that wants to plunder Armenia, Galicia and Turkey ...

In the *Pravda* version, this passage is changed to read:

a government of *conquest* [*zakhvat*] that has not uttered one word to renounce the tsarist policy of the conquest of Armenia, Galicia and Turkey ...

This simple change is more revealing than is apparent at first glance. In their much-misunderstood editorials in mid-March, Kamenev and Stalin set forth a new plan for getting the Bolshevik message across to the mass soviet constituency. Their thinking can be outlined as follows: first of all, we must make absolutely clear that the Bolsheviks do not intend to call for mutiny in the ranks and sabotage of the army. If we fail to do this, we are consigning ourselves to marginality. But at the same time, we must find a way to demonstrate to this inexperienced new constituency that the Provisional Government is neither willing nor able to carry out a non-imperialist foreign policy. We will drive the point home by using agitational

campaigns that will voice demands that the Provisional Government make radical peace overtures, publish the secret treaties signed by the tsarist government, and so forth. The government's inevitable failure to meet these straightforward and understandable demands will drive the point home better than any amount of propaganda lectures.

A week later, when the *Pravda* editors received Lenin's Letter, they tweaked it to fit in with the projected campaign. One of the themes of this campaign was the Provisional Government's refusal to renounce the treaty obligations undertaken by the tsarist government. The editors therefore inserted the following words into Lenin's sentence: a government of "*conquest* that has not uttered one word to renounce the tsarist policy of the conquest of Armenia, Galicia and Turkey".

In the same *Pravda* issue as the first instalment of Lenin's Letter, an unsigned front-page article entitled 'War and social democracy' expanded the point:

While calling on other peoples to declare war on their own imperialism, the labouring masses of Russia must first of all declare open war on imperialist strivings in their own country. Still today, strivings toward conquest [*zakhvatnye stremleniia*] of tsarism remain the official programme of Russia, since the new government of Russia is in no hurry to renounce them. Still today, the proletarians [in European countries] to whom the Russian revolution has addressed its summons for an uprising are being fooled by their own imperialists and their sidekicks, the social chauvinists, who use the fact - a shameful one for free Russia - that the Provisional Government has not uttered the slightest indication of any renunciation of tsarist foreign policy.

This *Pravda* article not only reveals the preference of the editors for "conquest" instead of Lenin's "plunder", but it also should put paid to the widespread myth that the Petrograd Bolsheviks were some sort of quasi-defencists prior to Lenin's return.

The wording of the new agitational theme was probably also influenced by another 'letter from afar' - Zinoviev's article, 'War and revolution', published in *Pravda* immediately following Lenin's Letter. Writing in early March, Zinoviev had presciently outlined the potential clash on this issue between soviet and Provisional Government, one that eventually resulted in the first big governmental crisis at the end of April: "Meanwhile, all these Miliukovs, Lvovs, Guchkovs and Shingarevs have not renounced tsarist declarations that they do not want to end the war until they get Constantinople."

More evidence of tweaking Lenin's Letter in this direction is provided by the following ringing sentence in the unsigned *Pravda* article, 'War and social democracy', just mentioned: "Just let the governments of belligerent countries stand in the way of realising such a peace, as proposed by the Russian *narod* and supported by the proletariat of *all* belligerent countries!"

The point of emphasising "*all* belligerent countries" was to underscore that the Anglo-French allies of the Provisional Government were just as imperialist as the German enemy. The Bolsheviks therefore demanded that Russian foreign policy rip the mask off Allied war aims and even to incite revolution in France and England - not, of course, because they expected the Provisional Government to do any such thing, but because they felt such a demand would expose the counterrevolutionary nature of the present government and the need for a worker-peasant *vlast* to conduct an effective peace policy.

Turning to Lenin's Letter as printed in *Pravda*, we find the same emphasis

given to the word "all":

Second, the ally of the Russian proletariat is the proletariat of *all* the belligerent countries and of all countries in general.

This emphasis is not in Lenin's original; it was added by the editors to align it with *Pravda*'s new campaign. After his return to Russia, Lenin did not disdain the agitational theme that exposed the Provisional Government's loyalty to tsarist commitments.

Lenin's message

For a while now, we have been peering at Lenin's misapprehension of some of the political realities of post-February Russia. It is time to step back and look at Lenin's positive message - a message, as we have seen, strongly endorsed by the Petrograd Bolsheviks. This message can be stated succinctly as follows: the hegemony strategy of old Bolshevism is still valid, and here's why.

Let us recall the main tenets of the hegemony strategy, as set out originally in 1905-06. This strategy arose out of an empirical reading of the contending class forces in post-1905 Russia. The social democratic proletariat must lead the *narod* (primarily the peasants) in carrying out a compete democratic transformation of Russia. This task requires the creation of a worker/peasant *vlast* (sovereign authority), for which the socialist proletariat and its party will provide essential political leadership. The efforts of liberal elite reformers to lead the revolution must be fought tooth and nail, because they will necessarily strive to halt the revolution midway - indeed, they will inevitably make some sort of deal with tsarist counterrevolution. Socialists who strive for an agreement with liberals are misguided at best, traitors at worst. The full and complete victory of the democratic revolution in Russia is bound to spark off socialist revolution in Europe that in turn will allow backward Russia to move toward socialism in an international framework.

The major new development since the original statement of the hegemony strategy in 1905-06 was, of course, the world war. According to Lenin's presentation in the Letter, the war only strengthens and accelerates the predictions of the hegemony strategy. At home, it deepens the chasm separating the *narod* from a liberal elite that is forcing the Russian people to fight a disastrous war at the behest of foreign governments. Abroad, the war is preparing the ground for an outburst of socialist revolution that will greet the creation of a revolutionary worker/peasant *vlast* in Russia (the forthcoming "second stage" of the revolution).

Thus Lenin hammers home the following themes in his Letter:

- The 1905 revolution revealed the "interests, forces, modes of action and the immediate and ultimate aims" of the various classes in Russian society in ways that are still valid in 1917.
- The war is "a mighty accelerator" of the revolutionary crisis in Russia. The war shows that the bourgeois Provisional Government is an "agent" of the imperialist Allies; it is engendering a "revolutionary crisis" in all the belligerent countries.
- The present revolution is based on the *narod* and therefore the proletariat must fight for influence over its potential allies: "the broad mass of the semi-proletarian and, partly, of the small-peasant population, who number scores of millions and constitute the overwhelming majority of the population of Russia" (of course, given these allies, it follows that the present Russian Revolution, taken by itself, must be a "bourgeois revolution").
- The Provisional Government cannot give "either peace or bread or freedom"; the "cruel lessons of the war" will enlighten the *narod* about the real nature of the government.
- The Soviet is an "embryo *vlast*" that will steadily gain the loyalty of the proletariat's

potential allies. At a later, second, stage of the revolution, the proletariat and its allies will achieve "a democratic republic and complete victory of the peasantry over the landlords" and then, with the help of socialist workers in Europe, the proletariat will move toward socialism. (Compare Lenin's final paragraph in the Letter with his formulation of the 'two allies' framework in October 1915: "The task confronting the proletariat of Russia is carrying out the bourgeois-democratic revolution to the end *in order* to kindle the socialist revolution in Europe. The second task now stands very close to the former, yet it remains a special and second task, for it is a question of the *different classes* who are collaborating with the proletariat of Russia. For the first task, the petty bourgeois peasantry of Russia is the ally [*sotrudnik*]; for the second, the ally is the proletariat of other countries.")¹³

In the version of the Letter printed in *Pravda*, Lenin's message comes through loud and clear without any distortion - and without distracting misapprehensions. Nor was there anything in this message to surprise or shock the Petrograd Bolsheviks. A week earlier, the same basic strategic line was laid down in a *Pravda* editorial drafted by Kamenev: the Provisional Government cannot meet "essential needs of the proletariat and peasantry" and thus "it will inevitably attempt to halt the revolutionary movement". The revolution will "develop and deepen" until the stage is reached when the workers and peasants will take "full and complete *vlast* [*vsia polnota vlasti*] in their own hands". This stage of the revolution will be reached soon, very soon - but in the meantime, "the slogan of the moment still remains: organisation of the forces of the proletariat, consolidation of the forces of the proletariat, peasantry and army by means of the soviets of deputies, absolute lack of belief in any liberal promises".¹⁴

The unexpected realities of the post-February situation required some adjustment, and the changes made to the Letter show the adjustment being made in real time. Nevertheless, the big story here is the shared understanding that united the Bolsheviks, whether in Switzerland or Petrograd: the hegemony strategy, the role of the war, and the drive toward a worker-peasant *vlast* rooted in the soviets. The shared understanding documented in Lenin's 'Letter from afar' became the basis of Bolshevik victory in October ●

This article was originally published at <https://johnriddell.wordpress.com>.

Notes

1. For classic accounts, see L Trotsky *Questions of October* (1924), Stalin's *Short course* (1938), and RV Daniels *Conscience of the revolution* (1960).
2. *Kritika: explorations in Russian and Eurasian history* fall 2015, pp799-834.
3. C Miéville *October: the story of the Russian Revolution* London 2017, p99.
4. N Sukhanov *Zapiski o revoliutsiia* (three volumes) Moscow 1991, Vol 1, p273.
5. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 31, pp132-33.
6. The text of the original draft can be found at www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/lfafar/first.htm#v23pp64h-297.
7. Remarks during the city party conference on April 22: *CW* Vol 31, p325.
8. *Pervyi legal'nyi PK Bol'shevikov v 1917 g* Leningrad 1927, pp49-50. Kamenev was speaking at a meeting of the Petrograd committee.
9. *Sed'maia (aprel'skaia) vsrossiiskaia Aprel'skie konferentsiia RSDRP (bol'shevikov); Petrogradskaia obshchegorodskaia Aprel'skie konferentsiia RSDRP (bol'shevikov)* Moscow 1958, p42.
10. For reasons that now elude me, I also included Prince Lvov as someone whose name had been removed. This is simply an error.
11. H Draper, 'The myth of Lenin's "revolutionary defeatism"', first published in *New Internationalist* Vol 29, Nos 5 and 6; and Vol 20, No1 (1953-54). The text can be accessed at www.marxists.org/archive/draper/1953/defeat/index.htm.
12. My thanks to John Riddell for alerting me to Lenin's comment; it can be found in J Riddell (ed) *To the masses: proceedings of the Third Congress of the Communist International, 1921* Leiden 2015, p1170.
13. 'Several theses', VI Lenin *CW* Vol 27, pp48-51 (Lenin's emphasis).
14. For full text and commentary, see LT Lih, 'Bolshevism was fully armed' *Weekly Worker* February 26 2015.

Appendix I

Lenin's 'Letter from afar', as printed in *Pravda*, March 21 and 22 1917

The location of cuts made by the *Pravda* editors is indicated by bracketed letters, A to Z - the excised passages can be found in appendix II. Text in square brackets was added by the *Pravda* editors.

First stage of the first revolution

The first revolution born out of the global imperialist war has broken out. This first revolution, for certain, will not be the last.

The first stage of this first revolution - namely, the *Russian* revolution of March 1 1917 - judging by the scanty information [at the disposal of the writer of these lines] in Switzerland, has ended. This first stage, for certain, will not be the last stage of our revolution.

How could such a 'miracle' happen, that in eight days - the period indicated by Mr Miliukov in his boastful telegram to all Russia's representatives abroad - a monarchy that has held on for centuries, and that in spite of everything had managed to hold out during three years of the tremendous, nationwide class battles of 1905-07, could utterly collapse?

Miracles in nature or history do not exist, but every abrupt turn in history - and this applies to every revolution - presents such a wealth of content, unfolds such unexpectedly idiosyncratic combinations of forms of struggle and alignment of fighting forces, that to the philistine mind there is much that must appear miraculous.

A combination of a whole series of conditions of world-historic importance was required for the tsarist monarchy to have collapsed in a few days. Let us point out the main ones.

Without the three years of tremendous class battles and the revolutionary energy displayed by the Russian proletariat during 1905-07, the second revolution could not possibly have been so rapid in the sense that its *initial* stage was completed in a few days. The first revolution (1905) deeply ploughed the soil, uprooted age-old prejudices, awakened millions of workers and tens of millions of peasants to political life and political struggle and revealed to each other - and to the whole world - *all* classes (and all the principal parties) of Russian society in their true character and in the actual alignment of their interests, their forces, their modes of action and their immediate and ultimate aims. This first revolution, and the succeeding period of counterrevolution (1907-14), laid bare the very essence of the tsarist monarchy, brought it to its "utmost limit", exposed all the rotteness and vileness, all the cynicism and corruption of the tsar's clique, with that monster, Rasputin, at its head. It exposed all the bestiality of the Romanov family - those pogrom-mongers who drenched Russia in the blood of Jews, workers and revolutionaries, those 'first among equals' of the *landlords*, *controlling millions* of dessiatines of land and ready for any brutality, for any crime, for the ruination and crushing of any number of citizens, all for the sake of preserving this 'sacred right of property' for themselves *and their class*.

Without the revolution of 1905-07 and the counterrevolution of 1907-14, there could not have been that clear 'self-definition' of all classes of the Russian people and of the peoples inhabiting Russia - a definition of the relation of these classes to each other and to the tsarist monarchy, which manifested itself during the eight days of the February-March revolution of 1917. This eight-day revolution was 'performed', if we may use a metaphorical expression, as though after a dozen major and minor rehearsals; the 'actors' knew each other, their parts, their places and their setting in every detail, through and through, down to any more or less significant



Soldiers were prominent from the start

nuance in political tendencies and ways of operating.

For the first and great revolution of 1905, which the Guchkovs and Miliukovs and their hangers-on condemn as a "mighty mutiny", led after 12 years to the "brilliant", the "glorious" Revolution of 1917 - the Guchkovs and Miliukovs have proclaimed it "glorious" because it has given them the power (*so far*). But this required a great, mighty and all-powerful 'stage manager', capable, on the one hand, of vastly accelerating the course of world history and, on the other, of giving birth to worldwide crises of unparalleled intensity - economic, political, national and international. Apart from an extraordinary acceleration of world history, there were also needed particularly abrupt turns, in order that at one such turn the cart of the filthy and blood-stained Romanov monarchy should be overturned *at a stroke*.

This all-powerful 'stage manager', this mighty accelerator was the global imperialist war.

Now it can no longer be doubted that this war is a worldwide one, for the USA and China have already been half-dragged in today, and will be fully involved tomorrow.

Now it can no longer be doubted that this war is imperialist on *both* sides. Only the capitalists and their hangers-on, the social-patriots and social-chauvinists, [A] can deny or suppress this fact. *Both* the German and the Anglo-French bourgeoisie are waging the war for the plunder of foreign countries and the crushing of small nations, for financial supremacy over the world and the sharing and resharing of colonies, and in order to save the doomed capitalist regime by fooling and disuniting the workers of the various countries.

It was objectively inevitable that the imperialist war should have immensely accelerated and intensified to an unprecedented degree the class struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, and then transform itself into a civil war

between hostile classes.

This *transformation has begun* with the February-March revolution of 1917, whose first stage showed us, firstly, a joint blow at tsarism struck by two forces: one, the whole of bourgeois and landlord Russia, with all her unenlightened hangers-on and all her very enlightened managers, the British and French ambassadors and capitalists, and the other, *the Soviet of Worker [and Soldier] Deputies* [B].

These three political camps, these three fundamental political forces - (1) the tsarist monarchy, the head of the feudal landlords, the head of the old bureaucracy and of the high military command; (2) bourgeois and landlord Octobrist-Cadet Russia, with the petty bourgeoisie [C] in its wake; (3) the Soviet of Worker [and Soldier] Deputies, which is looking to make the entire proletariat and the entire mass of the poorest population its allies - these three *fundamental* political forces fully and clearly revealed themselves even in the eight days of the 'first stage' and even to an observer so remote from the scene of events as the present writer, who is obliged to content himself with meagre foreign press dispatches.

But before dealing with this in greater detail I must return to the part of my letter devoted to a factor of prime importance: namely, the worldwide imperialist war.

The war shackled the belligerent powers, the belligerent groups of capitalists, the 'bosses' of the capitalist system, the slave-owners of the capitalist slave system, to each other with *chains of iron*. *One bloody clot* - such is the social and political life of the historical moment we are now living through.

The socialists who went over to the bourgeoisie at the outbreak of the war - all these Davids and Scheidemanns in Germany, these Plekhanovs, Potresovs, Gvozdevs and co in Russia - clamoured loud and long against the 'illusions' of the revolutionaries, against the 'illusions' of the Basel Manifesto, against the

'farical dream' of transforming the imperialist war into a civil war. They sang praises in every key to the strength, tenacity and adaptability allegedly revealed by capitalism - *the very ones* who helped the capitalists 'adapt', tame, fool and disunite the working classes of the various countries!

But 'he who laughs last laughs best'. The bourgeoisie has been unable to delay for long the revolutionary crisis to which the war has given birth. This crisis is growing with irresistible force in all countries, beginning with Germany, which is experiencing "brilliantly organised hunger", as an observer who recently visited that country put it, and ending with England and France, where *hunger is also* looming, but where organisation reveals much less 'brilliance'.

It was natural that the revolutionary crisis should have broken out *before anywhere else* in tsarist Russia, where the disorganisation was the most appalling and the proletariat was the most revolutionary (not by virtue of any special qualities, but because of the living tradition of '05'). This crisis was precipitated by the series of extremely severe defeats sustained by Russia and her allies. The defeats shook up the entire old apparatus of government, the entire old order, and roused the anger of *all* classes of the population against it; they embittered the army, wiped out a very large part of the old body of commanders, composed of backward gentry and an exceptionally rotten officialdom, and replaced it with a young and buoyant one of a predominantly bourgeois, socially mobile, and petty bourgeois origin. [D]

But, while the defeats in the war were a negative factor that hastened the explosion, the *ties* between Anglo-French finance capital, Anglo-French imperialism and Russian Octobrist-Cadet capital was a factor that hastened this crisis. [E]

This highly important aspect of the situation is, for obvious reasons,

hushed up by the Anglo-French press and maliciously emphasised by the German. We who are Marxists must soberly look truth in the face and not allow ourselves to be confused either by the lying officialese, the sugary diplomatic and ministerial lies, of the first group of imperialist belligerents, or by the sniggering and smirking of their financial and military rivals from the other belligerent group. The whole course of events in the February-March revolution clearly shows that the British and French embassies, with their agents and 'connections', who had long been making the most desperate efforts to prevent 'separate' agreements and a separate peace between Nicholas the Second (but let us hope and strive to make him 'the last') and Wilhelm II, directly [F] [strove] to remove Nicholas Romanov.

Let us not harbour any illusions. [G] That the revolution succeeded so quickly and - seemingly, at the first superficial glance - so 'radically' is due only to the fact that, as a result of an extremely unique historical situation, *absolutely dissimilar currents*, *absolutely heterogeneous* class interests, *absolutely contrary* political and social strivings have merged together, and merged in a strikingly 'harmonious' manner. Indeed, the plot of the Anglo-French imperialists, who impelled Miliukov, Guchkov and co to seize power *for the purpose of continuing the imperialist war*, for the purpose of conducting the war still more ferociously and obstinately, for the purpose of *slaughtering fresh millions* of Russian workers and peasants in order that the Guchkovs might obtain Constantinople, the French capitalists Syria, the British capitalists Mesopotamia, and so on. This on the one hand. On the other, there was a profound proletarian and mass popular movement of a revolutionary character (a movement of the entire poorest population of town and country) for *bread*, for *peace*, for *real freedom*.

SUPPLEMENT

[H] The revolutionary workers [and soldiers] [I] have destroyed to its foundations the infamous tsarist *monarchy*. They are neither elated nor dismayed by the fact that at certain brief historical moments of an exceptional combination of circumstances *they are aided* by the struggle of Buchanan, Guchkov, Miliukov and co to replace one monarch by *another* [J].

Thus, and only thus, did matters stand. Thus, and only thus, must be the view of the politician who does not fear the truth, who soberly weighs the balance of social forces in the revolution, who appraises every 'current situation' not only from the standpoint of all its present, ephemeral peculiarities, but also from the standpoint of the more fundamental motives, the deeper interrelations of the interests of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, both in Russia and throughout the world.

The workers [and soldiers] of Petrograd, like the workers [and soldiers] of the whole of Russia, self-sacrificingly fought the tsarist monarchy - fought for freedom, land for the peasants, and *for peace* against the imperialist slaughter. To continue and intensify that slaughter, Anglo-French imperialist capital hatched court intrigues, set up conspiracies [K], incited and encouraged the Guchkovs and Miliukovs, and fixed up a *ready-made new government*, which in fact *did seize power* after the very first blows delivered to tsarism by the proletarian struggle.

[L] This government is not a fortuitous assemblage of persons.

It consists of the representatives of the new class that has risen to political power in Russia, the class of capitalist landlords and bourgeoisie which has long been *ruling* our country economically. This class, not only during the revolution of 1905-07, but also during the counterrevolutionary period of 1907-14, and finally - and with especial rapidity - during the war period of 1914-17, was quick to organise itself politically, taking over control of the local government bodies,

and public education, and congresses of various types, and the duma, and the war industries committees, and so on. This new class was already 'almost completely' *in power* by 1917, and therefore the first blows to tsarism were sufficient to bring it to the ground and clear the way for the bourgeoisie. The imperialist war, which required an incredible exertion of effort, so accelerated the development of backward Russia that we have 'at one stroke' (actually just *seemingly* at one blow) *caught up* with Italy, England and almost with France: we have obtained a government based on a 'coalition', a 'national' (ie, one adapted for carrying on the imperialist slaughter and for fooling the people) and a 'parliamentary' one.

Side by side with this government - which as regards the *present* is essentially the agent of the billion-dollar 'firm', 'England and France' - there has arisen a [new] [M], unofficial, undeveloped and still comparatively weak *worker government*, which expresses the interests of the proletariat and the whole poorest urban and rural population. This is the *Soviet of Worker [and Soldier] Deputies* in Petrograd [N].

Such is the *actual* political situation, which we must first endeavour to establish with the greatest possible objective precision, in order that we may base Marxist tactics on the only solid foundation upon which they should be based - the foundation of *facts*.

The tsarist monarchy has been smashed, but not finally destroyed.

The Octobrist-Cadet bourgeois government, which wants to fight the imperialist war "to the end", and which in reality is the agent of the financial firm, 'England and France', is *forced to promise* the people the *maximum* of liberties and sops compatible with the preservation of this government's power over the people and the possibility of continuing the imperialist slaughter.

The Soviet of Worker [and Soldier] Deputies is [O] the embryo of a worker

government, the representative of the interests of all the poorest masses of the population - ie, of nine-tenths of the population - striving for *peace, bread and freedom*.

The conflict of these three forces determines the situation that has now arisen, a situation that is *transitional* from the first to the second stage of the revolution. [P]

If there is to be a real struggle against the tsarist monarchy, if freedom is to be guaranteed in fact and not merely in words, not in the promises of the phrase-mongers [Q] [of liberalism], it is necessary, *not* that the workers support the new government, but that this government 'support' the workers! For the only *guarantee* of freedom and of the destruction of tsarism to the end is *arming the proletariat*, the strengthening, extending and developing of the role, significance and strength of the Soviet of Worker [and Soldier] Deputies.

All the rest is mere phrases and lies, self-deception on the part of the politicians of the liberal and radical camp [R].

Help, or at least do not hinder, the arming of the workers - and freedom in Russia will be invincible, the monarchy unrestorable, the republic secure.

[S] [Otherwise the people will be deceived. Promises are cheap; promises cost nothing.] All bourgeois politicians in *all* bourgeois revolutions use promises to 'nourish' the people and fool the workers.

Ours is a bourgeois revolution - *therefore* the workers must support the bourgeoisie, [T] [say the worthless politicians from the camp of the liquidators.]

Ours is a bourgeois revolution, we Marxists say - *therefore* the workers must open the eyes of the people to the deception practised by the bourgeois politicians, teach them to put no faith in words, to depend entirely on their *own* strength, their *own* organisation, their *own* unity and their *own* arms.

The government of the Octobrists and Cadets, of the Guchkovs and Miliukovs, is *unable* - even if it sincerely desired this [U] - to give *either peace or bread*

or freedom.

It cannot give peace because it is a war government, a government for the continuation of the imperialist slaughter, a government [V] [of *conquest* that has not uttered one word to renounce the tsarist policy of the conquest of] Armenia, Galicia and Turkey, of capturing Constantinople, of reconquering Poland, Courland, Lithuania, etc. It is a government bound hand and foot by Anglo-French imperialist capital. Russian capital is merely a branch of the worldwide 'firm' that manipulates *hundreds of billions* of roubles and is called 'England and France'.

It cannot give bread because it is a bourgeois government. *At best*, it can give the people 'hunger organised with genius', as Germany has done. But the people will not accept famine. The people will discover, and probably very soon, that there is bread and that it can be obtained, but not otherwise than by methods that *do not respect the sanctity of capital and land ownership*.

It cannot give freedom because it is a landlord and capitalist government that *fears* the people [W].

In another article, we will speak of the tasks of our short-term tactical conduct towards this government. In it, we shall explain the peculiarity of the present situation - a *transition* from the first to the second stage of the revolution - and why the slogan, the 'task of the day', at this moment must be: *Workers, you have performed miracles of proletarian and popular heroism, in the civil war against tsarism. You must perform miracles of proletarian and popular organisation in order to prepare for your victory in the second stage of the revolution*.

Confining ourselves for the *present* to an analysis of the class struggle and the alignment of class forces at this stage of the revolution, we have still to put the question: who are the proletariat's *allies* in this revolution?

It has *two* allies: first, the broad mass of the semi-proletarian and, in part, of the small-peasant population, who number scores of millions and constitute the overwhelming majority of the population of Russia. For this,

mass peace, bread, freedom and land are *essential*. It is inevitable that to a certain extent this mass will find itself under a certain influence of the bourgeoisie, and particularly of the petty bourgeoisie, to which it is most akin in its conditions of life, vacillating between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The cruel lessons of war - and they will be *all the more* cruel, the more vigorously the war is prosecuted by Guchkov, Lvov, Miliukov and co - will inevitably push this mass towards the proletariat, compel it to follow the proletariat. We must now take advantage of the [X] freedom of the new order and of the Soviets of Worker [and Soldier] Deputies to *enlighten* and *organise* this mass first of all and above all. Soviets of Peasant Deputies and Soviets of Agricultural Workers - here is one of the [Y] [most essential] tasks. We will thereby strive not only for the agricultural workers to establish their own separate soviets, but also for the propertyless and poorest peasants to organise *separately* from the well-off peasants. The special tasks and special forms of organisation urgently needed at the present time will be dealt with in the next letter.

Second, the ally of the Russian proletariat is the proletariat of all the belligerent countries and of all countries in general. At present this ally is to a large degree crushed by the war, and all too often the European social-chauvinists speak in its name - those who, like Plekhanov, Gvozdev and Potresov in Russia, have gone over to the bourgeoisie. But the liberation of the proletariat from their influence has progressed with every month of the imperialist war, and the Russian revolution will *inevitably* hasten this process tremendously.

With these two allies, the proletariat, *using the peculiarities* of the present transitional moment, can and will proceed, first, towards the achievement of a democratic republic and complete victory of the peasantry over the landlords [Z], and then towards *socialism*, which alone can give *peace, bread and freedom* to the peoples devastated by war ●

N Lenin

Appendix II

Excised passages are cued by letter to the text provided in appendix I. The following are the words and phrases removed

A: or - if instead of general critical definitions we use political names familiar in Russia - only the Guchkovs and Lvovs, Miliukovs and Shingarevs, on the one hand, and only the Gvozdevs, Potresovs, Chkhenkelis, Kerenskys and Chkheidzes, on the other,

B: [The *Pravda* version changes "Soviet of worker deputies" to "Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies" here and throughout the article (later instances are not flagged). Furthermore, the *Pravda* version does not contain the following words: "which has begun to win over the soldier and peasant deputies".]

C: (of which Kerensky and Chkheidze are the principal representatives)

D: Those who, grovelling to the bourgeoisie or simply lacking backbone, howled and wailed about 'defeatism' are now faced by the fact of the historical connection between the defeat of the extremely backward and barbarous tsarist monarchy and the *beginning* of the revolutionary conflagration.

E: by means of out-and-out *organisation* of a plot against Nicholas Romanov.

F: organised a plot along with the Octobrists and Cadets, along with a section of the generals and the officer staff of the army and the St Petersburg garrison, especially

[The passage is replaced by the word, "stroke"]

G: Let us not make the mistake of those who - like certain 'OC' supporters or 'Mensheviks' who are oscillating between the Gvozdev-Potresov line and internationalism and who only too often slip into petty bourgeois pacifism - are now ready to extol 'agreement' between the workers' party and the Cadets, 'support' of the latter by the former, and so on. In conformity with the old (and by no means Marxist) doctrine that they have learned by rote, they are trying to throw a veil over the plot of the Anglo-French imperialists, along with the Guchkovs and Miliukovs, aimed at removing the 'chief warrior', Nicholas Romanov, and putting more energetic, fresh and more capable *warriors* in his place.

H: It would simply be foolish to speak of the revolutionary proletariat of Russia 'supporting' Cadet-Octobrist imperialism, which has been 'patched up' with English money and is as abominable as tsarist imperialism.

I: [From the passage, "were destroying, have destroyed already to a considerable degree and will continue to destroy", the *Pravda* version retains only "have destroyed".]

J: monarch and also preferably a Romanov!

K: with the officers of the guards

L: This new government, in which Lvov and Guchkov of the Octobrists and Peaceful Renovation Party, yesterday's abettors of Stolypin the Hangman, control the posts of real importance, the crucial posts, the decisive posts, the army and the bureaucracy - this government, in which Miliukov and the other Cadets serve mostly for decoration, for a signboard, for sugary professorial speeches, and the 'Trudovik' Kerensky plays the role of a balalaika for gulling the workers and peasants -

M: [In the *Pravda* version, the word "new" replaces the word "chief" in Lenin's original.]

N: which is seeking ties with the soldiers and peasants, and also with the agricultural workers, with the latter particularly and primarily, of course, more than with the peasants

O: an organisation of workers,

P: The antagonism between the first and second force is *not* profound, it is temporary - the result *solely* of the present conjuncture of circumstances, of the abrupt turn of events in the imperialist war. The *entire* new government is monarchist, for Kerensky's *verbal* republicanism simply cannot be taken seriously, is not worthy of a statesman and, *objectively*, is political chicanery.

The new government has not succeeded in finishing off the tsarist monarchy, has already *begun to make a deal* with the landlord Romanov dynasty. The bourgeoisie of the Octobrist-Cadet type *needs* a monarchy to serve as the head of the bureaucracy and the army in order to protect the privileges of capital against the working people.

He who says that the workers must *support* the new government in the interests of the struggle against tsarist reaction (and apparently this is being said by the Potresovs, Gvozdevs, Chkhenkelis and also, all *evasiveness* notwithstanding, by Chkheidze) is a traitor to the workers, a traitor to the cause of the proletariat, to the cause of peace and freedom. For actually, *precisely* this new government is *already* bound hand and foot by imperialist capital, by the imperialist policy of *war* and *plunder*, has *already* begun to make deals (without consulting the people!) with the dynasty, *is already working to restore the tsarist monarchy*, is already soliciting the candidature of Mikhail Romanov as the new kinglet, is already taking measures to prop up the throne, to substitute for the legitimate (lawful, ruling by virtue of established law) monarchy a Bonapartist, plebiscite monarchy (ruling by virtue of a fraudulent popular vote).

No,

Q: [The *Pravda* version replaces the words, "Miliukov and Kerensky" with

the "of liberalism".]

R: conman swindles

S: Otherwise the Guchkovs and Miliukovs will restore the monarchy and grant *none*, absolutely none of the 'liberties' they promised.

[Instead, the following words appear: "Otherwise the people will be deceived. Promises are cheap; promises cost nothing."]

T: say the Potresovs, Gvozdevs and Chkheidzes, as Plekhanov said yesterday.

[Instead, the following words appear: "say the worthless politicians from the camp of the liquidators".]

U: (only infants can think that Guchkov and Lvov are sincere) to give the people

V: of *plunder*, one that wants to plunder [Instead, the following words appear: "of *conquest* that has not uttered one word to renounce the tsarist policy of the conquest of".]

W: and has already begun to make deals with the Romanov dynasty

X: relative

Y: [In the *Pravda* version, "most essential" replaces "most serious" in Lenin's original.]

Z: instead of the Guchkov-Miliukov semi-monarchy ●

DEBATE

Optimism and pessimism

What is the nature of capitalist crises? Paul B Smith weighs up two contending views

This article discusses a debate between two Marxists, Hillel Ticktin and Michael Roberts, which took place in Glasgow earlier this year.¹ It was organised by the Labour Party Socialist Network.

Roberts works as an economist in the City of London. This gives him the advantage of observing the operations of finance capitalism from the inside. A few years ago, Roberts wrote a book on the ongoing depression, which he has now updated, and he has a lively, popular blog.²

In contrast, Ticktin taught socialist theory and movements at Glasgow University. He was the founding editor of *Critique* - a journal of socialist theory.³ He has written books on the former USSR and the politics of race in South Africa.⁴ He has also edited books on the crisis, and the ideas of Trotsky.⁵ Within *Critique*, he has published articles on political economy, Marxism, decline, finance capital, socialism, consciousness and the crisis.

Roberts and Ticktin have some things in common. Both contribute regularly to the *Weekly Worker* and attend Communist University every August. Both are highly critical of bourgeois economics. There are, however, important differences between them - not least the role that the tendency of the rate of profit to fall plays in a crisis.⁶

At one point during the debate, Roberts attempted a summary of these differences. He stated that he is an optimist regarding the future of capitalism and a pessimist regarding the ability of the working class to bring socialism into being. He described Ticktin in the opposite way - a pessimist about the future of capitalism and an optimist regarding the working class's ability to end it. Ticktin smiled at these remarks. Are these characterisations true? If so why?

Pure ideology

Both thinkers thought we are living through another great depression. They agreed that it is longer and deeper than the two previous ones of 1873-93 and 1929-39. They stated that bourgeois economics has nothing to say to explain or predict how these changes came about. As Ticktin put it, bourgeois economics is "pure ideology".

Roberts began his talk by ridiculing the arrogant ignorance of a range of different bourgeois economists including a Nobel prize-winner, Robert Lucas. Not only did these 'experts' not consider a crisis likely: many thought it was impossible. Some believed the problem of depressions had been solved forever. Ticktin recalled the embarrassment economists felt when the queen visited the London School of Economics in 2007. She asked them why they had failed to predict the collapse of the banks. They answered it was too complicated.

A notable difference between the two was evident early on. This was not just Roberts' confident presentation of his ideas and Ticktin's careful response. It was the notion that Marxist explanations of crisis are necessarily superior to bourgeois ones. Roberts assumed his interpretation based on Marx's law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is the only possible explanation of crises.

Ticktin disagreed with this. He pointed out that Marxists had not done much better than their bourgeois opponents. He cited the Hungarian Stalinist economist, Eugen Varga (1879-1964). Varga had argued that, after 1945, the state would ensure that there would be no more crises of capitalism. Capitalism would be inherently stable from then on. Ticktin then mentioned anti-Stalinist Marxists, such as Ernest Mandel (1923-95) and

Tony Cliff (1917-2000), who did not do much better. They predicted an immediate crisis after World War II. This never happened - global capitalism remained relatively stable until the late



Hillel Ticktin

1960s and early 70s.

The reason Ticktin gave for the failure of Marxist theory was that Stalinism had destroyed the possibility of a healthy left. The role Stalinism played in the defeat of the working class after the October 1917 revolution is responsible for the absence of a left today. This includes a Marxist left. As a consequence, Marxists have difficulty understanding the nature and future of the crisis in the present. Nonetheless Ticktin was optimistic that, the further people moved away from a preoccupation with the former USSR (and national regimes modelled on it), the more likely they would be to be attracted to the idea of socialism as an alternative to a crisis-ridden capitalism. It follows that the conditions for a satisfactory theory of crisis could also emerge.

The debate therefore addressed this absence of a coherent understanding of crisis. Roberts gave a quick outline of what Marx had thought, contrasting him with Keynes. He criticised Keynes for having a "technical" approach, believing that crises were caused by a lack of demand - workers just did not have enough to spend. When demand collapsed, profits and investment went down. A crisis could therefore be solved by lowering interest rates to zero and using the state to invest in the infrastructure. According to Keynes, there was nothing wrong with the engine of capitalism that could not be repaired.

Marx, on the other hand, argued that crises are characterised by overproduction. There are three causes of this. The first is similar to Keynes. Capitalist expansion requires wages to be held down and workers cannot buy what is being produced. The second is what Marx called disproportionality. Overproduction is caused by a disproportionate investment in producer, as opposed to consumer, goods. This is the result of a lack of planning and causes crashes.

Roberts rejected these two alternatives - he thought they did not explain crises sufficiently well. According to Roberts, the only real way to understand them is to look at the nature of capitalism itself. Capitalism is based on making profits - money making more money. The aim of exploitation is to make more money than you invest. The essence of the system is to make profit. Crises therefore take place when profit is not delivered or realised.

Roberts argued that there is a contradiction between the drive to make labour more productive and the aim of getting more profits, which means there is a tendency for profits to fall over time. Capitalists increasingly invest in machines rather than living labour. As they make losses, they lay off workers. As profits fall, there is less investment. Less investment means less employment. A slump happens - no-one can buy and

no-one can sell. This means wiping out constant capital in the form of machinery (and variable in the form of wages), so that investment can start again. This is what Schumpeter called "creative destruction". The difference between a slump and a depression is that in a slump the fall in profits is not as wholesale or prolonged as in a depression. This theory can be proved with empirical data and statistics.

Limited theory

Ticktin agreed that during a crisis all the three aspects Roberts mentioned - underconsumption, disproportionality and falling profits - are present. Nonetheless, he argued that the tendency for the rate of profit to fall is not the only form of explanation.

Certainly Marxists can emphasise one aspect of Marx's writings on crisis as superior to all others. They can pit either one of the aspects against the other two (as Roberts and underconsumptionists have done); or they can uphold two of the aspects against the other one. According to Ticktin, neither approach provides the foundation for a sufficient understanding.

Why did Ticktin think Roberts' approach was limited? For two reasons. The first was that it gave a technical account. The focus was mostly on profitability and productivity. By doing so, it lost sight of the political and historical character of crises. Secondly, it excluded the influence of the class struggle on the development of capitalism as a whole. The class struggle became an afterthought.

Roberts mentioned the class struggle as something that does not disappear during crises, but becomes more difficult. In his final contribution he predicted there will be no confident working class until the present depression ends and there is a recovery. He thought that presently there are only a few groups of workers with any confidence in collective struggle. He gave the railway workers in the UK as an example. I guess this confirms his description of himself as a pessimist concerning the potential of workers to form a class capable of taking power. He did not discuss the role of the state or politics in this process.

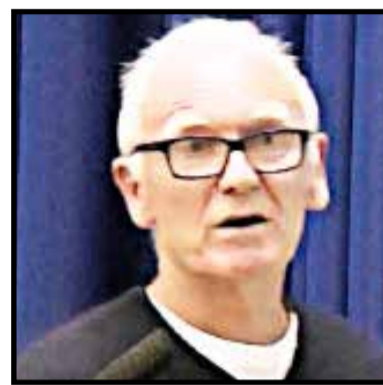
Ticktin's contributions were different. After a short exposition of reasons why he thought it is impossible to provide sufficient data to prove that profits are falling, he gave an historical and political account of crises. Rather than attack the bases of Roberts' interpretation directly, he challenged a latent assumption within it that the contemporary crisis involves the extent of 'creative destruction' Marx described in *Capital*.

Ticktin mentioned Hilferding and Lenin's use of Marx's categories to theorise finance capitalism, imperialism and world wars. These were attempts to explain the ways the capitalist class had responded to crises. Ticktin also integrated crises within the perspective he has developed in *Critique*: capitalism and the law of value is in decline. The growth of monopoly forms part of the empirical confirmation of this perspective and Ticktin spent some time discussing monopoly to prove this point.

Ticktin argued that, after the crisis of 1873-93, imperialism played a crucial role in raising the rate of profit through the export of capital abroad. Imperialism and war have been important to the survival of capitalism ever since. Moreover, the kind of devastation that took place in crises before 1873 was not repeated in 1929-39. A world war was needed to destroy the forces of production, clearing the way for the process of accumulation to start afresh.

However, the capitalist class is not

destroying these forces today - it realises it must live with the working class. If it went for mass unemployment in the form it did in the last depression, it would not survive. The period after World War II



Michael Roberts

saw a vast increase in state expenditure on arms, which guaranteed a period of relative stability. The reduction in arms expenditure from 1986-97 coincided with state guarantees to the stock exchange after the crash of 1987.

Ticktin was at pains to stress that crises and their recovery in the 20th and 21st century involve workers' resistance to the destruction of productive forces. These are political, not technical, issues. To understand them fully, a socialist analysis needs to take into account the objective strength of the working class. Policies of full employment and the welfare state made workers more powerful and led to mass strikes. The turn to finance capital as a means of weakening workers' collective struggles through cuts and privatisation began to fail by the end of the century. This saw crashes of the Long Term Capital Management Fund (1998) and East Asian economies (1997). Arms expenditure on imperialist wars in the Middle East delayed the beginning of the present depression until the crashes of 2007.

Monopoly and decline

Ticktin asked Roberts why he had made no reference to monopoly in his explanation. He wondered whether Roberts agreed with that section of the left that now shares a bourgeois viewpoint once associated with the neoliberal thinker, Milton Friedman (1912-2006). This is that monopolies no longer play an important role in the global economy. He referenced Anwar Shaikh, a Marxist economist. Ticktin alleged that Shaikh denies that monopolies are able to control production by restricting competition.⁷ In contrast, Ticktin cited empirical evidence for increasing industrial and financial concentration within the global economy. Peter Nolan, a specialist on Chinese development, has compiled the data in a recent book. Nolan argues that Chinese companies will be unable to take over the global market, because the latter is dominated by a few huge American and European transnational corporations.⁸

Ticktin compared monopoly - a feature of a declining capitalism - to the mature capitalism Marx described in *Capital*. In the latter there were a large number of competitors, leading to the bankruptcy of many firms during a crisis. Ticktin argued that monopolies avoid overproduction by managing the gap between what is actually produced and what potentially could be produced. Through managerial forms of control they avoid creative destruction and bankruptcy. They invest their surplus capital to a certain level and if there is no demand keep what is left in the bank.

Ticktin cited the \$29 trillion held in the Bank of New York Mellon as evidence of the vast quantities of money

withheld from circulation as productive capital. Rather than a fall in the rate of profit, monopolies control their rates of profit during a crisis, leading to the contradictory situation that money no longer functions as capital, but as sterile hoards. (I would add that monopolies believe they are 'too big to fail'. They are secure in the belief that the state will bail them out if their profits collapse. This is further evidence that there is a tendency for capitalist production to be increasingly socialised and politicised.)

Roberts' reply to Ticktin's challenge was to state he does not see the causes of crisis in that way. The classical model of creative destruction is not over. Capitalism will not stagger on indefinitely until it is overthrown. Competition is real - there is never a total monopoly of a market. The process that Marx describes in *Capital* is happening now: the depression will come to an end, once the weak competitors are cleared out. There will then be a series of further slumps and the introduction of new technologies and forms of exploitation, as capitalism recovers. Profitability will be restored and the hoards of money will flow back into the economy as productive investment again. I guess this is why he described himself as an optimist concerning the future of capitalism.

Roberts also summarised what he thought Ticktin's position is: ie, that imperialism and war have saved capitalism. Marx's model of creative destruction is therefore no longer applicable. The state now plays a crucial role in keeping capitalism going. Crisis is caused by capitalists refusing to invest.

Ticktin did not argue with Roberts' summary of his position. Rather he asked the audience to consider the situation outwith Europe and the United States. People in Brazil and South Africa have difficulty feeding themselves. How is this surplus population going to be absorbed by a fresh expansion of capital? Building socialism in one country is impossible and no solution.

Why should capitalists continue to invest in these countries? Are they going to go for policies of full employment in South Africa and Brazil? How is capital going to expand in the future? A massive investment in technology would lead to a decline in profits. How far will they go with automation? It is surprising how limited it has been so far - how slow the introduction of automation has been. He thought that the aim of the ruling class in the future will be to avoid abandoning capitalism. They will try to maintain the system at a low level with minimal levels of employment for as long as possible.

These are important questions for further debate and discussion that arose during a meeting lasting two and a half hours. It could have gone on much longer! ●

Notes

1. The debate took place on February 4 2017 and can be viewed at <http://tinyurl.com/ydbmfqdr>.
2. M Roberts *The long depression* Chicago 2016. Michael Roberts blogs at <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com>.
3. www.critiquejournal.net.
4. HH Ticktin *Origins of the crisis in the USSR: essays on the political economy of a disintegrating system* London 1992. HH Ticktin *The politics of race: discrimination in South Africa* London 1993.
5. HH Ticktin *The ideas of Leon Trotsky* London 1995; HH Ticktin (ed) *Marxism and the global financial crisis* London 2012.
6. I was unclear whether they had a shared understanding of the nature of crisis. Roberts talked about the difference between booms and slumps and a depression. This may reflect the distinction some people make between cyclical and systemic crises.
7. See A Shaikh *Capitalism: competition, conflict, crises* Oxford 2016.
8. P Nolan *Is China buying the world?* New Jersey 2013.

REVIEW

Crisis and degeneration

David E Lowes (editor), Arthur Ransome **Three accounts of revolutionary Russia** Red Revenant, 2017, £6.90, pp212

Arthur Ransome was once [*The Guardian*] correspondent in Moscow. You perhaps recall rumours of an unconventional life. Chances are, though, you are not fully aware that the man who wrote *Swallows and amazons* [for children] was married for many years to Trotsky's personal secretary; shared a flat with Karl Radek, the Bolshevik chief of propaganda; thought the world of Lenin, with whom he was on excellent terms...

He collaborated with the Cheka - the Bolshevik secret police and forerunner of the KGB - and Lenin saw him as his first source of intelligence on British policy. At the same time, despite serious doubts about his loyalty, he was in the pay of British intelligence as an acknowledged intimate of many of the revolution's leaders: he was ... [probably] a double agent.¹

The crisis in Russia' (1921), the third of Ransome's essays in this volume, is poles apart from the sunny optimism of his earlier 'Six weeks in Russia' (1919) - or Bessie Beatty's *Red heart of Russia* (1917-18) - which were written between the heady days of the October revolution and the end of the first year of the civil war: ie, when the Bolshevik leaders still believed that the international revolution was possible, if only they could hold on to power.

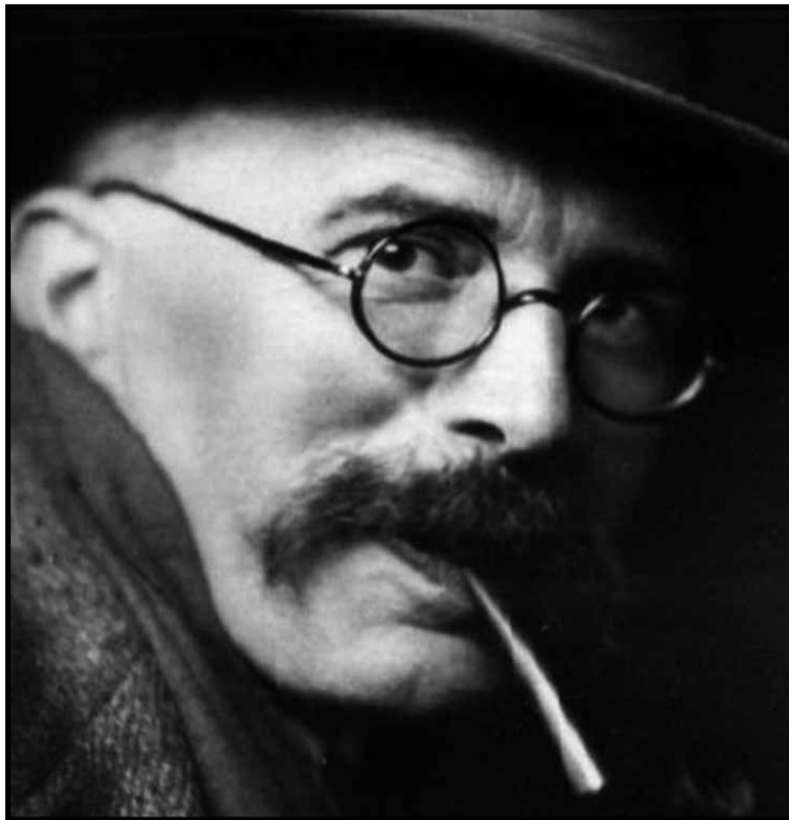
The crisis in Russia covers the period from late 1919 to early 1921, when at least 14 countries, led by the main imperialist powers - not forgetting their Trojan horse (the White armies) - attacked and invaded the revolutionary government from all sides, leading to the shrinking of the Soviet state to about a third of its size. In their attempt to strangle the revolution, they aimed to restore the old order by any means necessary.

This period also ends with the final defeat of the German revolution. As result, the Bolsheviks found themselves alone and the Red Army had to fight terror with terror in a desperate bid to save the revolution. Nevertheless, bourgeois historians like to reverse cause and effect. For them the 'red terror' is the primary cause, not the effect of the imperialist counterrevolution. On the other hand, Trotsky spoke the truth, when he said that civil war (class war) itself is a "disgusting barbarism".² Ransome, the children's writer, understands this. As he says at the start of his first account, *Open letter to America*,

There is nothing here of the Red Terror ... But for its poverty in atrocities, my book will be blamed by fanatics, since they alone desire proofs of past terrors as justification for new ones.³

This account, although it covers the end of the civil war itself, stops short of those even more depressing events, which soon followed: namely the Kronstadt rebellion in March 1921 and the retreat into the New Economic Policy (see below).

But the necessities of life continued to shrink, whilst inequality and bureaucracy continued to grow. Faced with this stark reality, Ransome is less anecdotal than previously. He is more empirical in his approach: ie, reliant on undeniable hard facts and statistics, combined with his own analysis (or that of others). By so doing, his style becomes more brutally realistic. Like



Arthur Ransome: sympathetic eye

the Bolshevik leaders themselves, he is grappling with the growing contradiction between "the power and the dream". Ransome acknowledges the fact that, instead of the dictatorship of the proletariat, a Bolshevik dictatorship had emerged, because the proletariat, which constituted its social base, had collapsed under the exigencies of civil war. Thus the goal of proletarian democracy - itself contingent upon the success of the international revolution - had to be postponed for the time being.

As with my review of *Bessie Beatty on revolutionary Russia*⁴ - published originally as *Red heart of Russia* (1918) - I shall focus on some of the highlights of 'The crisis in Russia'. By so doing, I hope that *Weekly Worker* readers will want to get both books and read them from cover to cover.

Contrary to the standard bourgeois, one-sided approach to the Bolshevik regime in power (which persists to this day) - ie, as a power-hungry regime which started the terror - Ransome relies on objective reality instead:

When the test of crisis is applied, the actual governmental machine in every country looks very much like that of every other ... 'constitutional safeguards' go by the board 'for the public good', in Moscow as elsewhere. Under that stress it becomes clear that, in spite of its novel constitution [being more democratic than even the American], the real directive power lying in the hands of a comparatively small body ... with its conscious will [being forced to drive] a population largely indifferent and inert ... No-one tries to shirk from the fact that the executive committee has fallen into [disuse], from which, when the stress slackens enough, ... it may some day be revived. [Meanwhile, the] bulk of its members have been at the front or here and there about the country, wrestling with the economic problem.

Ransome becomes even more pessimistic:

The threat of a complete collapse of civilisation is more imminent in Russia than elsewhere. But it is clear enough in Poland, it cannot be disregarded in Germany, there is no doubt of its existence in Italy,

France is conscious of it; it is only in England and America that the threat is not among the waking nightmares of everybody ... when countries ... do their utmost to accelerate the economic ruin of each other, we are witnessing something like the suicide of civilisation itself. There are people in both camps who believe that armed and economic conflict between revolutionary and non-revolutionary Europe - or if you like between capitalism and communism - is inevitable (pp127-28).

Shortages

This is the subject of chapter 2. Paradoxically, despite his pessimistic view that the collapse of civilisation in Russia might lead to its collapse elsewhere as well, we also see glimpses of Ransome's literary flare, which he would later put to good use when writing his children's books. He starts with the railways - obviously crucial to a country like Russia, which occupies one-sixth of the earth's surface:

In 1914, Russia had ... 20,057 locomotives ... In 1918 ... the number of locomotives fell from 14,519 in January to 8,457 in April, after the artificially instigated revolt of the Czecho-Slovaks made possible the fostering of civil war on a large scale, and the number fell swiftly to 4,679 in December ... [Thus] Russia possesses one-fifth of the number of locomotives which in 1914 was just sufficient to maintain her railway system in a state of efficiency ... For six years she has been unable to import the necessary machinery for making engines. Further coal and oil have been, until recently, cut off by civil war. The mines are left, after the civil war, in such a condition that no considerable input may be expected from them in the near future (p132).

Ransome goes on to explain that the desperate shortages of railway engines and rolling stock exacerbated the contradiction between the countryside and the city - in particular, the workers' dependence on the peasantry to provide them with sufficient food. Otherwise it would be impossible to increase

the number of workers, along with the production of, for example, farm machinery - necessary for the expansion of agricultural production exponentially, upon which the revolution depended:

Let us now examine the combined effect of ruined transport and the six-years blockade on Russian life in town and country. First of all, was cut off the import of manufactured goods from abroad ... In 1915 [Russia's] own production of [agricultural machinery and implements] had fallen to 15.1% of her already inadequate peacetime output. In 1917 it had fallen to 2.1%.

Therefore,

The agricultural productive powers of Russia are consequently sinking. But things are no better if we turn from the rye and corn fields to the forests. Saws are worn out. Axes are worn out.

There is also an enormous shortage of horses:

Timber can be floated down the rivers. Yes, but it must be brought to the rivers. Surely horses can do that. Yes, but horses must be fed ... [Apart from that the] men who cut the wood cannot do it on empty stomachs ... The towns suffer from lack of transport ... Townsfolk and factory workers lack food, fuel, raw materials and much else that in a civilised state is considered necessary to life ... Townsfolk are starving, and in winter cold. People living in rooms in a flat, complete strangers to each other, by general agreement bring all their beds into the kitchen ... There is no means of heating ... [and a] lack of medicines ... Soap has become so rare ... that for the present is to be treated as a means of safeguarding labour, to be given to workmen for washing after and during work ... And, as one country follows another to the brink, so will the remaining countries be faced by conditions of increasingly narrow self-dependence (pp133-35).

He concludes this section thus:

Russia, in these circumstances, may sink into something very like barbarism ... It would be possible, no doubt, for foreigners to trade with the Russians as with the natives of the cannibal islands, bartering looking-glasses and cheap tools. [But it will be a long time before] western Europe could count once more on getting a considerable portion of its food from Russian corn lands ... But opposed to these tendencies are the united efforts of the communists and of those who, leaving the question of communism aside, work with them for the sake of preventing the collapse of Russian civilisation (pp141-42).

In a neat turn of phrase, Ransome begins by saying

How is that will expressed? What is the organisation welded by adversity, which, in this crisis, supersedes even the Soviet constitution, and stands between [its] people and chaos? ... At the second congress of the Third International, Trotsky remarked [echoing *Their morals and ours* 15 years later]: "A party, as such, in the course of the development of a revolution, becomes identical with that revolution" [ie, for a time, civilised behaviour and democratic

organisation are thrown out the window!].

Lenin, on the same occasion, replying to a critic [of the dictatorship of the proletariat] said: "He says that we understand by [these] words ... what is actually the dictatorship of its determined and conscious minority. And that is the fact." Later he asked: "What is this minority? It may be called a party. If this minority is actually conscious, if it is able to draw the masses after it, if it shows itself capable of replying to every question on the agenda of a political day, it actually constitutes a party."

And Trotsky again, on the same occasion, illustrated the relative positions of the Soviet constitution and the Communist Party, when he said: "And today, now that we have received an offer from the Polish government, who decides the question? Whither are the workers to turn? We have our Council of People's Commissars, of course, but that, too, must be under a certain control. Whose control? The control of the working class as a formless chaotic mass [as it then was]? No. The central committee of the party is called together to discuss the question ... It gives directives to the local committees ... The same applies to every other important matter ..." (p143).

Cheka and party

Here I am more at odds with Ransome's somewhat simplistic approach to the Cheka (Extraordinary Commission for Struggle against the Counterrevolution) and its relationship to the party, which I would attribute to the benefit of hindsight on my part. The more isolated the revolution became, the deeper the breach between party and the people; the black market flourishes. The greater the opportunity for sabotage and betrayal of the revolution, the greater the need for the state to wield its repressive apparatus, instead of withering away. But, to return to Ransome: "I am perfectly aware that without this police force with its spies, its prisons and its troops, the difficulties of the dictatorship would be increased." However, he adds a note of caution: "I believe, too, that the overgrown power of the [Cheka] ... may, as in the French Revolution, bring about the collapse of the system."

For Ransome, the repressive power of the Cheka rises and falls, dependent on the latest defeat for the Red Army in the civil war (eg, against Poland) or victory. But then he goes on to say that the "overgrown power" of the Cheka is a subordinate question to the communist dictatorship - ie, the Bolshevik Party itself - despite his acknowledgement of the growing centralisation of the latter and the growth of bureaucracy.

On the other hand, he is right to assert that we are obliged to distinguish this "communist dictatorship from any other dictatorships, by which it might be supplanted", such as the restoration of the old regime under the tutelage of the imperialist powers. These were high stakes indeed. A party with "611,978 members on April 2 1920" is ruled by just 19 members of the central committee, of which within the Politburo there are five key leaders, who are directing policy from day to day.

On this basis the party (ie, during 1919) was "in the process of persuading 600,000 [party members] of the desirability of ... such measures

What we fight for

as [that] of industrial conscription, which, at first sight, was certainly repugnant to most of them ...” (p146). Later Ransome devotes a whole chapter to industrial conscription: because workers were prone to slack periods, the policy of payment by results was introduced:

... payment of conscripted workers was to be by production, with prizes for specially good work. Specially bad work was also foreseen in the detailed scheme of possible punishments. Offenders were to be brought before the ‘people’s court’ (equivalent to an ordinary civil court), or, in the case of repeated or very bad offences, were to be brought before the far more dreaded revolutionary tribunals.

Six categories of possible offences were placed upon the new code: (1) ... absenteeism, or desertion. (2) The preparation of false documents ... (3) ... giving false information to facilitate these crimes. (4) Purposeful damage of instruments or material. (5) ... careless work. (6) Probably the most serious of all, instigation to any of these actions (p176).

Splits were beginning to develop within the leadership over serious questions: eg, war communism versus the peasantry’s desire to own land and sell their produce for private gain; the danger of great Russian chauvinism versus the rights of nationalities; the militarisation of labour versus proletarian democracy; how the Polish war of 1919 could be won; demands for a programme of full communism versus the reality (ie, that this could only be possible in “an economy of plenty” - Soviet Russia was anything but!) So how could any of these questions be resolved, when the party itself had become a centralised machine, which depended more and more on economic and technical experts? Ransome was witnessing the rapid bureaucratisation of both party and state.

Nevertheless, he is right to conclude this section with the following sardonic observation:

If its only task were to fight those organisations of loosely knit and only momentarily united interests which were opposed to it, those jerry-built alliances of reactionaries with liberals, united-indivisible-Russians with Ukrainians, agrarians with sugar-refiners, monarchists with republicans, that task would long ago have been finished. But it has to fight something infinitely stronger than these in fighting the economic ruin of Russia (p148).

But he should have added that the economic ruin of Russia was a direct consequence of the imperialist counterrevolution: in particular the blockade against Soviet trade with the outside world, which enables all of these “jerry-built alliances” to flourish, because both aspects are working in tandem.

Now for some light relief! Ransome was also fascinated by the fact that art was being forced into the role of agitprop in the defence of the revolution. In this regard, he has something to say about the growing conflict between futurist, experimental art and the more conventional demands of Proletcult - which insisted that art should be subordinated to the interests of the revolution:

When I crossed the Russian front in October 1919, the first thing I noticed in peasants’ cottages, in villages, ... in every railway station along the line, was elaborate pictorial propaganda concerned with the war. There were posters showing Denikin standing straddle over Russia’s coal ...

He also mentions the five propaganda trains, organised by a certain comrade Burov, which travelled to every corner of Soviet-controlled territory. The prosaic “Burov, it seems, has only recently escaped from what he considered a bitter affliction due to the Department of Proletarian Culture, who, in the beginning, for the decoration of his trains, had delivered him bound hand and foot to a number of futurists.” He objected to the fact that the ‘Lenin’ train had been decorated with this revolutionary art, on the grounds that it was inaccessible to the masses; but one year later, it “had been brought under proper control”. Futurist pictures are “art for art’s sake”, and cannot have done more than astonish, and perhaps terrify, the peasants and workmen of the country towns who had the luck to see them.” But the ‘Red Cossack’ is quite different:

As Burov put it with deep satisfaction, “At first we were in the artist’s hands, and now the artists are in our hands” - a sentence suggesting the horrible possibilities of official art under socialism ...

So we know where Ransome’s sympathies lie - because he is, after all, a creative writer himself!

A final word must go to the

cinematograph wagon, with benches to seat about 150 persons ... at night, a giant screen is fixed up in the open. There is a special hole cut in the side of the wagon, and through

this the cinematograph throws its picture on the giant screen outside, so that several thousands could see it at once (pp164-66).

Plans for the future

The highlight of this section is Ransome’s account of Trotsky’s aim to introduce a programme for the reconstruction of Russia, based on centralised planning, which had the full approval of Lenin.

Even in late 1920-21, Trotsky is anticipating the ideas which he would publish later as *The new course*. This book would also become the basis for the struggle of the Left Opposition against the Stalin faction. The latter, of course, was preoccupied with establishing its own power, based on the bureaucratic degeneration of the revolution, as opposed to the need to return to revolutionary principles. As Deutscher writes in his biography of Trotsky, *The prophet unarmed*,

Nobody had gone farther than Trotsky in demanding that every interest and aspiration should be wholly subordinated to the ‘iron dictatorship’. Yet he was the first of the Bolshevik chiefs to turn against the machine of that dictatorship when it began to devour the dream.⁵

Thus he advocated the establishment of a centralised planning, which is essential for socialist construction, along with a return to proletarian democracy; otherwise planning would fall into the hands of the bureaucracy and lead to an entirely different outcome: ie, the meagre surplus would continue to be creamed off for the benefit of the few.

Apropos Trotsky’s proposal (circa 1920-21), Ransome explains that its immediate task is to improve

‘the condition of transport’ in Russia, so that the growing gap between the city and the countryside: concretely the needs of industry and farming, could be addressed. In Trotsky’s own words:

“The fundamental task at this moment is improvement in the condition of our transport, prevention of its further deterioration and preparation of the most elementary stores of food, raw material and fuel. The whole of the first period of our reconstruction will be completely preoccupied in the concentration of labour on the solution of these problems, which is a condition of further progress. The second period, [although it will be difficult to predict when this will begin], depending on many factors, beginning with the international situation and ending with the unanimity or the lack of it in our party, will be occupied in building machines in the interest of transport, and getting the raw materials and provisions. The third period will be occupied with building machinery, with a view to the production of articles in general demand, and, finally, the fourth period will be that in which we are able to produce these articles” (pp184-85).

Next Ransome gives us a glimpse of the real contradiction between the workers and the peasants via a report of one of his numerous talks with Lenin, presumably in late 1920 (certainly before the end of war communism and the introduction of the NEP). Despite everything, Lenin, like all good Marxists, tries to be optimistic:

Lenin talking to me about the general attitude of the peasants [whom he sees as] people who are “part of the nation which does not know what it wants ... it applies equally well to your Arthur Hendersons and Sidney Webbs in England, and all people like yourself who want incompatible things. The peasantry are individualists, but they support us. We have, in some degree, to thank Kolchak and Denikin [White warlords] for that. They are in favour of the Soviet government, but hanker

after free trade, notwithstanding that the two things are self-contradictory. Of course, if they were a united force they could swamp us, but they are disunited both in their interests and geographically. The interests of the poorer and middle class peasants are in contradiction with those of the rich farmer who employs labourers.” [They know that we are on their side.]

I said: “If state agriculture in Russia comes to be on a larger scale, will there not be a sort of proletarianisation of the peasants, so that, in the long run, their interests would become more or less identical with those of the workers [in the factories]?”

He replied: “Something in that direction is being done, but it will have to be done very carefully and must take a very long time ...”

“Did he think they would pull through far enough economically to be able to satisfy the needs of the peasantry before that same peasantry had organised a real political opposition that should overwhelm them?”

Lenin laughed: “If I could answer that question,” he said, “I could answer everything, for on the answer to that question everything depends. I think we can. Yes, I think we can” (pp192-93).

Of course, the introduction of Trotsky’s central plan - as well as the solution to the problem of the peasantry - was frustrated; first of all, by the dire situation that the country was in - in particular, the shortage of food - which prompted Lenin to introduce his New Economic Policy in March 1921 (viz, the partial restoration of the market, which allowed the peasants to produce for profit), in the hopes that this would lead to an immediate increase in food supplies for the workers in the factories. Secondly, centralised planning was frustrated by the developing power struggle between left and right in the party, which ended with the triumph of the Stalin faction and the bureaucracy.

Thus the gap between town and countryside (aka ‘the scissors effect’) continued to grow, along with the aggrandisement of the rich peasants or Kulaks. This meant that the collectivisation of agriculture was delayed even further; hence the imposition of the latter had to be undertaken by the most brutal means.

On this note - that is, the deepening problems of Soviet Russia at the beginning of 1921 - I shall leave the last word to the ever astute Ransome: At the end of the final paragraph of *The crisis in Russia*, he refers to the contradiction between the ultimate aim of the revolution and its immediate needs. By so doing, he anticipates the introduction of the NEP (if not the Kronstadt rebellion, which was just around the corner):

... there is a strange irony in the fact that the communists desire that upheaval [a continuation of the international revolution] and, at the same time, desire a rebirth of the Russian market, which would tend to make that upheaval unlikely, while those who fear upheaval are precisely those who urge us, by making recovery in Russia impossible, to improve the chances of collapse at home. The peasants in Russia are not alone in wanting incompatible things (p200).

Although Ransome did not know it (how could he, as an eye witness of history in the making?), the tide had turned against the October revolution ●

Rex Dunn

Notes

1. J Henley, ‘I spy Arthur Ransome’ *The Guardian* August 12 2009.
2. L. Trotsky *Their morals and ours* New York 1975, p38.
3. A Ransome *Open letter to America*; part of *Three accounts of revolutionary Russia* Liverpool 2017, p29. My emphasis.
4. ‘Witnesses of the revolution’ *Weekly Worker* June 22.
5. I Deutscher *The prophet unarmed: Trotsky 1921-1929* chapter one, London 2003.

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called ‘parties’ on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed ‘line’ are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, ‘One state, one party’.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women’s oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin’s Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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Fighting fund

Made it!

JC, a longstanding Marxist activist who is now a member of the Labour Party, writes: “I have read the *Weekly Worker* for several months, having heard of it through a friend’s recommendation of Mike Macnair’s *Revolutionary strategy* - the second edition of which we are both eagerly awaiting.” I’ll pass on your hint, comrade!

Anyway, JC has finally decided to take out a subscription - and decided to add £3 to each standing order payment. Most welcome, but not as generous as NH, who, just as I was about to write this column, handed a cool £100 to one of our supporters! Or BB, who made a £50 bank transfer to try and ensure we reach our £1,750 June target.

Well, there’s still another day to go, but I’m pleased to say we’ve

already made it! A total of £102 came in through standing orders (thanks go to SS, GT, DC, BB and JT) and £55 via PayPal - thank you, MN (£40), SV (£10) and TL (£5), who were among 2,535 online readers this week. Then there was BD’s generous £50 cheque.

Thanks to all these comrades’ generosity, we pulled in an extra £360 over the last seven days, taking our running total up to £1,839. But if anyone wants to chip in, you’ve still got time if you use PayPal or - better still - make a transfer from your online account ●

Robbie Rix

Fill in a standing order form (back page), donate via our website, or send cheques, payable to *Weekly Worker*

weekly WORKER

Tories suddenly discover loads of money

May is not irreplaceable

More is needed than a removal van outside Number 10, argues Paul Demarty

All around us, the deafening cry is raised: Theresa May must go! Ever since her electoral gamble (which initially seemed barely worthy of the word) backfired so spectacularly, the message from the Labour front bench has been consistent: May went to the country for a mandate, and the country has answered. She is unable to govern with any authority, and clinging on damages the 'national interest'. She should resign immediately, and if no Tory can build a government without her, Labour is a government in waiting. This narrative enjoys, for the time being, the support of even the right of the Parliamentary Labour Party, since they can hardly be seen to dissent from it with their party riding higher in general public approximation than for years.

Those to the left of Labour are hardly less ebullient. "We need to ramp up the fightback to drive the Tories from office," declares a *Socialist Worker* front-pager of the usual type, and, though our predictive powers have suffered a few bruises recently, we confidently expect that this weekend's People's Assembly demonstration will be awash with *SW*-branded placards demanding that May leaves office and that the Tories are driven out. On this point, the left is united with much of the right, with Tory journo's in large numbers horrified at the liability that their erstwhile saviour has become. Among the more Machiavellian of this caste, there is George Osborne, who may not have much in the way of journalistic acumen, but has a Dacre-esque instinct for exploiting his media power to settle his political grudges. Sure enough, the *Evening Standard* is a volcano of anti-May score-settling.

Revenant corpse

Among the many reasons for such unanimity, there is the fact that toppling May has the real sense of an objective that might actually be achieved very soon, with enough of a push. All about her hangs the smell of the revenant corpse. One crisis begets the next; every day, it seems, a new frontbencher is forced to demur, coyly, from the suggestion that the coming weeks might find them lurking in the gloom outside Downing Street, dagger in hand. If they were *all* being honest, then they would be most atypical of the general population of Tories.

She has her 'confidence and supply' arrangement with the Democratic Unionist Party, which ought just about to keep the wolves from the door for a little while; but the latter's Presbyterian Poudjardism is as much a liability as an asset. In Ulster, the DUP can survive almost in the same way as Hamas, or an American prison gang - picking up popular support only incidentally in relation to its stated programme, but above all as sources of some level of material comfort. Ulster is not Gaza, by any stretch of the imagination, but the perverse incentives of the Good Friday regime have made a lot of work for political movements prepared to start from their constituents' wallets. The size of the billion-plus pound deal, widely and accurately described as a 'bung', is plainly the matter that has been holding things up for the last few weeks - surely



Theresa May: borrowed time

even a pope could be bribed for less.

Outside of the dysfunctional six counties statelet, the many unpleasant features of the DUP - the Ulster Defence Association links, the religious fundamentalism - are usually ignorable (out of sight and out of mind). Now, our 'strong and stable' prime minister has made a hostage of the smooth functioning of government to these lunatics. Who could resist a shot at this wide-open goal?

Merely keeping tabs on such 'confidence suppliers' would be trouble enough, but there is the additional source of chaos that May chose as the reason for her disastrous snap election - the Brexit negotiations. No doubt certain Greek leftist ministers will smile in grim recognition, as they watch Jean-Claude Juncker, Donald Tusk, Guy Verhofstadt and co licking their lips at the morsel before them. Their pleasure at telling May to go back and try again over the rights of EU nationals in Britain was almost libidinous. The results of any such process must be legislated. We

look forward with not a little morbid anticipation to the thankless task of party whips in getting anything like a 'great repeal bill', under circumstances of sustained national humiliation, through two houses of parliament, with the numbers as they are.

This cannot end well. A mere seven rebel votes can deprive May of her effective majority. The Scots Tories alone, whose caginess about Brexit is widely noted, can muster double that - add to their number the remaining members of David Cameron's braying yuppie clique, and set against them the dozens of Eurosceptic headbangers who did for her predecessor, and there are countless routes to deadlock and parliamentary defeat.

Ambition

Given all this, the clamour for May's departure is quite understandable. Indeed, there cannot be a more obviously illegitimate leader of government outside the green zone of Kabul. We must introduce a note of caution here for two reasons: firstly,

that the Tories are stronger than May, and indeed any one of their leaders; and, secondly, that the goal of toppling the Tories is insufficiently ambitious.

The Conservative Party - nay, the Conservative and Unionist Party, as its full name reads and as May has begun again to call it as a gesture to her new Scottish colleagues and Northern Irish mercenaries - is a party of power, of the state. Its calculus is based, above all, by its role as the defender of the honour, power and dignity of the crown. A weak Tory leader, indeed, is more or less a contradiction in terms - one does not have to be very much weakened as Tory leader for the party's immune system to kick in to one's great disadvantage. The grubby ambitions of actually-existing Tory politicians, as they devour each other on the way to the top job, is part of how it works; no better illustration can be found, in fact, than the fact that last year's Brexit vote saw May herself rapidly established as the anointed successor, while the *Labour Party*, whose fault it all certainly was not, was

subjected to crisis and coups.

From the left's perspective, things are perhaps counterintuitive. At present, the Tories, and indeed her majesty's government, are headed by a politician denuded of moral and political authority, known to be defeated and a lame duck. If she resigns, or is got rid of by means of a vote of confidence or suchlike, then we should expect the next Tory leader to be in a stronger position, to begin rebuilding the trust of a hostile media and sections of the public, to assume more convincingly the mantle of the national interest. By no means would such a leader be invulnerable - May certainly turned out not to be. But operating conditions for the left would be worse. We do not want a Tory government, with any leader, from any faction of that party. *If there is to be a Tory government*, however, its attacks are more easily repelled, and indeed even positive reforms won, when it is bedevilled with internal divisions, than when it is united.

We are already onto *Socialist Worker's* territory, then, when it is more a matter of 'Tories out' than 'May out'. We could ask the question - sure, the Tories *could* organise a clean coup and get themselves a new leader, so why don't they? Precisely because it *could fail*, and under the current circumstances, with Islington's most famous allotment-keeper sniffing at the door of number 10, stumbling into a losable general election is not high on any sensible Tory's agenda.

Here we meet the lack of ambition. It is not the case, unfortunately, that only the Tories can find themselves stranded in government. Say, then, we got rid of the Tories *tout court*, and Labour came to power on the manifesto it put to the electorate on June 8. Widespread mockery has accrued to May's talk about the 'magic money tree', now that she herself has found a cool billion in the shade of its boughs; however, there certainly *is* a 'magic money funnel', through which capital will pour out of Britain in the event of (likely) even modest incursions on the property of the ruling class. Preventing such sabotage requires a willingness to use coercion and expropriation, and indeed to fight for a *new international regime*, whereby capital is disciplined by democratic power. *None of this was in Corbyn's manifesto*; he would no more have a mandate for it than May has for ... whatever it is she thinks she is doing ●

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