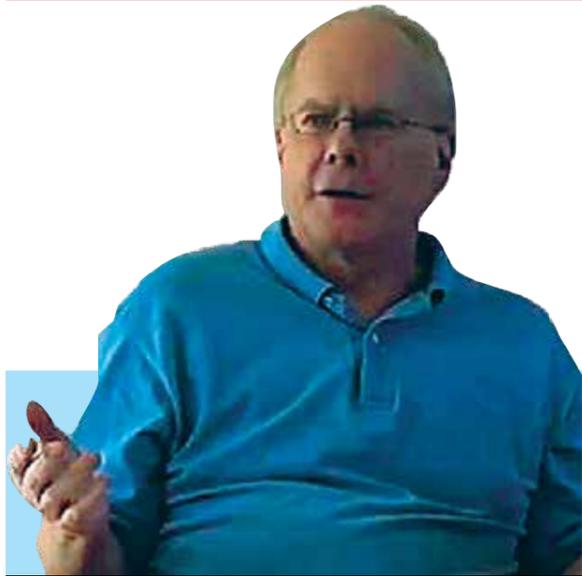


A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



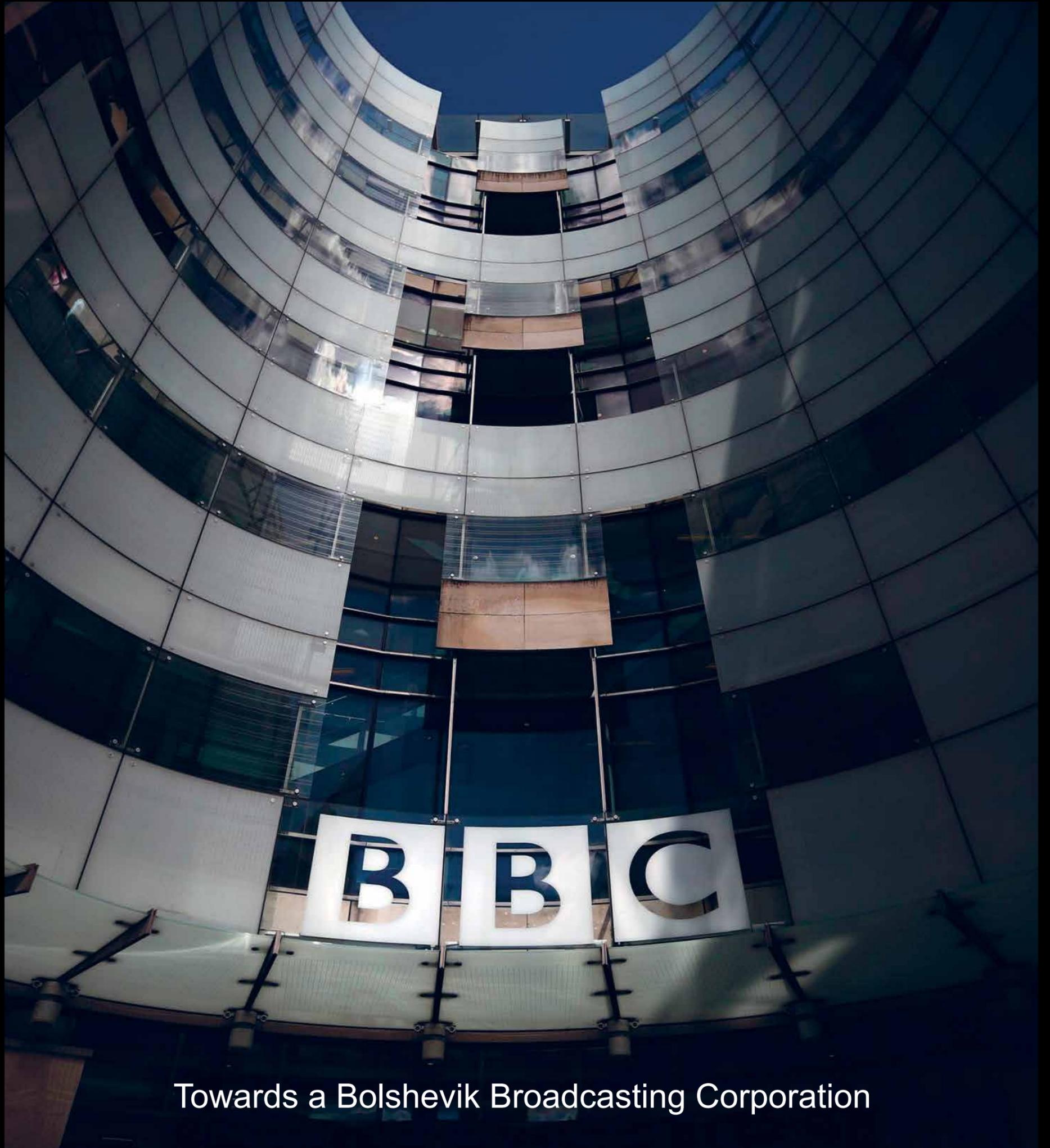
**Supplement - Lars T Lih: did
Petrograd Bolsheviks vote
13:2 against April theses?**

- Letters and debate
- Bernie Sanders
- Race and eugenics
- 1917 leaflets

No 1165 Thursday July 27 2017

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Towards a Bolshevik Broadcasting Corporation

LETTERS



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

Discredit

Gerry Downing continues to bring discredit to the cause of socialism (Letters, July 13). When not explaining the foreign policy of the United States with reference to the "overrepresentation" of Jews within its ruling circles, he is, stupidly, determined to defend a thoroughly discredited version of the history of the Russian Revolution, crucially when it comes to post-February 1917 events.

His latest offering characteristically begins with accusations of dishonesty. Lars T Lih is guilty of peddling falsehoods because he dares to question the verities of standard history (not only liberal and cold war academia, but Stalinite, Trotskyite and Cliffite too). Eg, Lenin held the mass of so-called ordinary workers in contempt, wanted to found a narrow, confessional sect, had no time for democracy, was a semi-Menshevik till, in April 1917, he became a Trotskyite and junked the entire programme of old Bolshevism.

If Lars T Lih had presented no well-researched evidence, no reasoned argument, if he had a long and sustained record of traducing Lenin and the Bolsheviks, then it would be right to distrust what he writes. But he does present well-researched evidence, does present reasoned argument, has a long and sustained record of giving us a corrected, richer, far more worthwhile picture of Lenin and the Bolsheviks (eg, his splendid book *Lenin rediscovered*).

Comrade Downing brushes aside Lars T Lih's six-page *Weekly Worker* supplement (June 20). The idea that the various editors of *Pravda* - Lev Kamenev, Joseph Stalin, Alexander Shliapnikov, Petr Zalutski, Matvei Muranov, Alexandra Kollontai, Vyacheslav Molotov, Mikhail Olminsky and Maria Ulyanova - could have trimmed, revised, retrofitted Lenin's first 'Letter from afar' in good faith is dismissed out of hand. They had to be dishonest.

But, as Lars T Lih painstakingly demonstrates, Lenin, still trapped in his Swiss exile, suffered from a profound lack of information about what was really going on in Russia. Lenin himself, readily admits that he was "obliged to rely on meagre foreign press dispatches" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 23, Moscow 1974, p300). Then there is time. It took two very long weeks before his first 'Letter from afar' reached Petrograd and appeared in the eagerly-read pages of *Pravda*. And, of course, events moved rapidly. Exceedingly rapidly.

Lack of information explains why, for example, Lenin *wrongly* attributed a leading role in tsar Nicholas II's abdication to the machinations of Anglo-French imperialism, why he *wrongly* believed that people such as Alexander Guchkov, and reformist-socialist parties - ie, the Octobrists and the Peaceful Renovation party - were in control of the "really important" posts in the Provisional Government, that the Cadets and their leader, Pavel Milyukov, were mere "decorations", and that the Trudovik, Alexander Kerensky, the future prime minister, was nothing but a "balalaika" played to "deceive the workers and peasants".

Pravda's editors removed such blatantly *misconceived* statements. Yes, that is right - they did not want their much esteemed leader - their *vozhd*, Vladimir Lenin - to appear to be a "complete idiot" before public opinion (comrade Downing's phrase).

But all comrade Downing can see is Bolshevik dishonesty, Bolshevik appeasing of the provisional government and Bolshevik support for the imperialist war. We are touchingly told that under Shliapnikov and

Molotov *Pravda* was "absolutely anti-war", but under Kamenev and Stalin the Bolshevik's daily paper "took a conciliatory tone towards the provisional government" and "supported the war effort".

As evidence, comrade Downing cites Kamenev saying: "When army faces army, it would be the most insane policy to suggest to one of those armies to lay down its arms and go home. This would not be a policy of peace, but a policy of slavery, which would be rejected by a free people." Stalin is also quoted: "The slogan, 'Down with the war', is useless".

True, Kamenev argued for an approach nowadays commonly described as 'critical support'. If the Provisional government conceded to our demands and distributed land to the tillers, armed the people, passed power to the soviets, renounced the imperialist war aims of tsarism, etc, then the Bolsheviks would defend it. However, everyone, but everyone, knew that the Provisional government would do no such thing. In other words, Kamenev sought to expose, not support, the Provisional government.

Clearly, Lenin *initially* disagreed with this tactic. Nevertheless, shortly after his return to Russia, we find Lenin writing that the slogan, 'Down with the Provisional Government', is "an incorrect one at the present moment". Why? Because the "majority of the people are not yet on the side of the revolutionary proletariat". Hence the slogan is *denounced* as either "empty" or "adventurist" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p210-11).

Lenin also says his differences with Kamenev "are not very great". Both leader and leading lieutenant advocate explaining, explaining and explaining again Bolshevik policy to the worker and peasant masses.

What about the war? While Lenin remained in *neutral* Switzerland, it is doubtless right to say that he did not fully appreciate the extent of the "honest defencism" that had taken hold amongst the minds of Russia's workers and peasants (especially amongst rank-and-file soldiers - peasants in uniform). And, of course, what Kamenev and Stalin were attempting to do in *Pravda* was to win those very masses to Bolshevism, while, at the same time, maintaining Bolshevik opposition to the warmongering socialists. A task that could not be shirked, though it involved tactical difficulties.

Gregory Zinoviev's engaging, often moving account, translated by our Ben Lewis, of the journey on the famous sealed train - from Switzerland to Petrograd's Finland station - testifies to the speed with which Lenin grasped the salient political fact of *popular* revolutionary defencism:

"Then [once they had entered Russian territory - JC] we came across Russian revolutionary soldiers, who Vladimir Ilych deemed 'conscientious defenders of the fatherland', whom in particular we had to 'patiently educate' Vladimir Ilych 'bit' into these soldiers; they talked about the nation, war and the new Russia. Vladimir Ilych's particular, well-known manner of approaching everyday workers and peasants ensured that in a short time he established an excellent, comradely relationship with the soldiers. The discussions continued throughout the night without interruption. The soldiers, the 'defenders of the fatherland', insisted that they were right. The first thing that Vladimir Ilych took from this exchange was that the ideology of 'defending the fatherland' remained a powerful force. In order to struggle against it we needed a stubborn rigidity, but patience and a shrewd manner of approaching the masses were equally necessary" ('Lenin's arrival in Russia', April 6).

Till then, Lenin's focus had been

on uncompromising polemics against factional opponents: pro-war socialists, social pacifists, centrists and waverers of every kind. Now the Bolsheviks had to learn how to speak to the masses once again. Did Lenin call upon soldiers to fraternise? Yes. Did he call upon soldiers to defy pro-war officers and join pro-Bolshevik demonstrations? Yes. Did he urge them to head off back to their village homes? No. Did he urge the Bolshevik Party to send out agitators to undermine the fighting capacity of the army? Again no.

Perhaps Lenin's most impassioned rendition of the new line adopted by Bolshevism can be found in retrospect - ie, after the October Revolution. The March 14-16 1918, 4th (extraordinary) Congress of Soviets, saw a bitter, stormy - and frank - debate between the Bolsheviks and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries (the main bone of contention being signing the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty with Germany). Answering the Left SR's Boris Kamkov, and his claim that, in 1917, the Bolsheviks had been responsible for "disrupting the army", Lenin delivered this, off the cuff, nonetheless highly informative, put-down:

"But how did we demoralise the army? We were defeatists at the time of the tsar, but at the time of Tsereteli and Chernov [top Menshevik and SR ministers in the Provisional government] we were not defeatists. We published in *Pravda* a proclamation which Krylenko, [a leading member of the Bolshevik's military organisation in 1917], who was then still being persecuted, addressed to the army: 'Why I am going to Petrograd'. He said: 'We are not calling on you for mutinies.' That was not demoralisation of the army. Those who declared this war to be a great war were the ones who demoralised the army And I assert that we - beginning from this appeal of Krylenko's, which was not the first, and which I am recalling because it stuck in my mind - we did not demoralise the army, but said: hold the front - the sooner you take power, the easier will it be to retain it" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 27, Moscow 1977, pp193-94).

There is, finally, the issue of Kamenev proposing a Bolshevik-Internationalist Menshevik merger ... on the political basis of the 1915 "vacillating", "Kautskyite", "centrist" Zimmerwald manifesto (main author: Leon Trotsky).

Lenin quite rightly, in my opinion, given the circumstances of 1917, opposed all such attempts. Instead, he wanted to "seek closer relations" and "support unity" with true internationalists, resolute opponents of their *own* imperialist bourgeoisie and in favour of a "definite break" with pacifistic phrase-mongering.

We modern-day Bolsheviks have nothing to fear from the truth.

John Bridge
London

Rubbed my eyes

Jack Conrad (Letters, July 13) takes exception to my description of his argument as a "non-sequitur" ('The Corbyn phenomenon', July 6). Apparently Jack believes that his statements that "the purpose of making such predictions [that Labour would be badly defeated in the election] was actually to promote a particular strategic line". This then is an exercise in the principles of clear logical thinking!

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a *non-sequitur* consists of a conclusion that does not follow logically from the previous argument or statement. Is Jack really saying that his purpose in making a false prediction was in order to develop a particular strategy? What happens when he gets it right?

My purpose in pointing out that I, lacking such a sophisticated strategic

argument, had got it right, was not in order to 'boast' of my powers of prediction. That is to reduce political argument to the level of a personal squabble. My purpose was to show that Jack Conrad and the CPGB had failed to understand the Corbyn phenomenon and that without re-examining the political basis of his rise to the leadership of the Labour Party everything else is empirical and subjective.

I do not have a crystal ball. I do not possess magical powers, nor do I have any contact with the paranormal. However, it has been clear to me for some time that what began with mass disillusionment, with the failure of Miliband, has grown into a movement of considerable mass behind Corbyn. Those who joined Labour around the time of Corbyn's election and subsequently represent the tip of a very large iceberg. For example, here in Brighton there are over 8,000 Labour Party members. That is phenomenal. It means that nearly one in 15 adults is a member. Is it any wonder that a Tory marginal held by 690 votes was transformed into a Labour majority of nearly 10,000?

It is the job of Marxists not to simply wave slogans at people and to engage in ritualistic chanting. Our first task is to understand the age we live in and those around us. There is mass disillusion with neoliberalism, permanent war, the transfer of wealth from poor to rich, the sense of powerlessness people feel in society that manifests itself in catastrophes like Grenfell Tower and the fact that students will leave college with £50K debts.

If we don't understand the movement that has grown up around Corbyn, then we will not understand its strengths and its weaknesses. We are faced with people who rail at the effects of a market economy without ever understanding that the problems they face, such as poor, overpriced housing, are a consequence of capitalism. Such people can go to the right with Ukip, Brexit and worse, or to the left. Our role is to see that it is the latter.

The title of my first article on April 20 was 'Labour can win if Corbyn is bold'. The second article on June 3 was headed 'Is Labour on the threshold of victory?' It is quite clear that I was suggesting Labour could indeed turn the tables on the pundits, but, yes, I did include caveats and warnings.

Of course, it is easy to be wise with hindsight, but if Jack turns his mind back to the beginning of the election campaign, then there was a wall-to-wall consensus that Corbyn was going to be humiliated. It was therefore with some trepidation that I tried to suggest an alternative, something that the *Weekly Worker* did not even entertain.

Jack says that my criticism really amounts to saying that the opinion polls should not be taken seriously and that "if he has another, better, more accurate, method of judging the public mood outside a general election then he should let us into the secret". It would moreover be "stupid" to ignore the fact that the polls gave May a 21% lead at the beginning of the election campaign.

I must confess that I rubbed my eyes in amazement. Is this really what a Marxist analysis and understanding comes down to? The uncritical acceptance of opinion polls? Perhaps we need a debate on how such polls, at best, reflect the volume of propaganda that is directed at the populace. These polls were skin-deep. Even worse, they were adjusted for differential turnout - in other words, there was a built-in assumption that young people who were overwhelmingly pro-Corbyn would not vote. Of course, one doesn't ignore them, but nor should one live by them either.

The massive meetings that Corbyn addressed should have warned Jack and

the CPGB that something was afoot. To get a meeting of 8,000 in Leamington Spa, in the heart of Tory Warwickshire, surely said something?

This is not an abstract argument because it goes to the heart of the isolation of the revolutionary left. We are not simply left versions of bourgeois pundits. Our role is to try and change society, not simply to comment on it.

The problem we face now is one of an entirely different order altogether. The mass movement behind Corbyn is politically very weak. It wants a non-exploitative capitalism. It does not have an anti-capitalist understanding. The majority of those around Momentum seriously believe that a well-meaning, radical Labour government can deliver on its anti-austerity pledges, whilst the capitalist class and their supporters sit idly by. It is the political weakness of Corbyn's supporters, coupled with the conscious and determined efforts of Jon Lansman and the Momentum leadership to depoliticise the membership of Momentum, which should be our first target.

But we cannot do that if we do not understand why Corbyn defied all the bourgeois pundits and their echo chambers.

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

Polish left

On July 20, the conservative majority in the Polish parliament voted to disband the country's supreme court. All judges will now be appointed from governmental candidates. The new law also provides further means for the ministry of justice to control all sections of the courts.

The liberal opposition has called for street protests and asked for help from EU institutions. The presidential palace was surrounded by 20,000-30,000 people on July 21. There were demonstrations in around 100 cities in Poland and the same happened on July 22. The pro-liberal media and liberal opposition calls for permanent protest, but there is no left voice at all despite attendance on the protests of members of the 'Together' party. The opposition has nothing more to offer to the protestors than - protest again. The opposition is obviously hoping that protests will force the government to change their policy - as happened in 2016, when plans to change the abortion law ended in numerous street protests, which stopped the planned changes. But it is a very unlikely.

The government also pushed through new anti-communist legislation that will remove all Soviet-period monuments and symbols. The ministry of justice is announcing a campaign to delegalise the Communist Party of Poland, of which three members had already been convicted and fined for "promoting totalitarian ideology".

The left is small and confused. The Labour Party of Poland was disbanded around February 2017. The CP is small and conflicted, as well as being repressed. The post-'communist' Alliance of the Democratic Left is no longer in parliament for the first time in its history and enjoys only around 5% national support, according to polls. The Polish 'Podemos-style' new left and anti-communist Razem (Together) party has around 3% support. Trotskyists are represented by two tiny fractions of the Committee for a Workers' International and International Socialist Tendency sections.

There is the small 'Progressive Youth', which tries to organise people in Poland and the UK, plus the Movement for Social Justice, formed by a former Polish Socialist Party MP, Piotr Ikonowicz. This has some solid support from (mainly Warsaw) tenants, who were defended by the movement against eviction. The left-backed Social

ACTION

Justice Chamber is giving legal and political support.

Together is actively involved in the current protests, but it fails to distinguish its message from the liberals', despite the fact that it organised one of the first protests against the 'reforms'. The IST section, Workers' Democracy, claims to be against the changes, but doesn't offer solidarity to those using 'the legal system', while the CWI's Socialist Alternative proposes a 'left united front' rather than joining the protests organised and dominated by liberals. Due to their activity, the Movement for Social Justice is very sceptical toward the protests and doesn't support the official view.

The newly established left party, Zmiana ('Change'), is also under repression - the courts have stopped their legal registration process. Their chairman, Mateusz Piskorski, has been imprisoned for more than a year. He has been charged with 'espionage' on behalf of the People's Republic of China.

As you can see, the left's situation in Poland is not an easy one, even by European standards.

Andrzej Zorawski
Warsaw

Peakist

In reply to Jack Conrad, the peak oil debate has always been divided into two competing camps: the peakists and the cornucopians (Letters, July 20). The former believe that international, conventional, cheap oil production is close to peak, while the latter believe that the peak is a long way off, and any problems which we encounter when it finally arrives will be solved by market forces.

To understand the peakist position it is necessary to know that peak oil is about the maximum production of oil. Peak oil is not about the exact date when the peak will occur: it is more about the economic and social consequences of the peak. In 2014 global oil production reached about 78 million barrels per day. That is a lot of oil, and I wondered whether global oil production would peak at around 80 million barrels per day based on what I had been researching, but in 2016 global production reached the dizzy heights of around 97 million barrels per day. It is no easy task to predict the actual year of the peak. Will oil production peak at 100 or 120 million barrels per day? Who can say? The debate is really about how close we are to the peak and its consequences.

This is important because the global economy literally runs on cheap oil, the significance of which comrade Conrad seems to have difficulty grasping. It wouldn't surprise me if he didn't drive a car, for people who do are more aware of what rising energy costs can mean. He thinks my concern with the issue is obsessive, but again this doesn't surprise me, because he and most of the left base themselves on a 19th century Marxist narrative, which ignores the primary role of energy in society. The bottom line is that, if a theory of society ignores the primary role of energy in society, it is flawed. Period. In relation to modern industrial society I am, of course, referring to non-renewable energy. There is no reason for anyone to confuse peak oil with Malthusian theory, because Malthus argued that improved food production or abundance would lead to unsustainable population growth, whereas the consequences of peak oil leads to the reversal of population growth.

The comrade also argues, incorrectly, that the turn to non-conventional sources of oil was spurred on by the "scientific and technological revolution". But people go for the low-hanging fruits first before they reach for the harder-to-get fruits. Depletion of oil wells was what caused the turn to unconventional oil. Surely anyone can grasp this point. The discovery of new oil reserves has been falling since the middle of the 1960s. All the giant conventional oilfields

have been found. They are the easiest to find. Unconventional oil has been known about for a long time and the turn to them now is a sign of conventional oil depletion. The biggest oilfield in the world, Ghawar in Saudi Arabia, is now facing depletion. Water injection is used to push the remaining oil out. And insiders say that the water cut is getting larger.

The big difference between modern capitalism and previous societies we know about is that modern - ie, industrial - society is based on non-renewable energy. Even nuclear energy is non-renewable. The only 19th century economist who understood the primary role of energy was Jevons. This is why he stands out, not because he got the date of Britain's coal depletion wrong. But Jevons is not counted among the classical economists who Marx critiqued - I doubt if anyone will find any mention of Jevons in any of Marx's writings. Why? The answer is that Marx did not start from the primary role of energy in society. I am sure the difference here with Jevons has something to do with the German tendency for theorisation, contrasted with the English tendency towards the more practical empiricism. Marx's whole theory of capitalism is about the movement of money - that is why there are few academic Marxists in the past who realised that an energy crisis can cause the downfall of capitalism. One barrel of oil contains the energy equivalent of one man working non-stop for eight years. That is the importance of oil for the economy.

Comrade Conrad refuses to accept the simple idea that capitalism is a product of cheap energy and based on cheap energy. Of course, if you don't accept this simple point, how can you understand the consequences of rising energy costs? He says Marx didn't treat energy as just another commodity, but the point is he never treated energy at all in its non-human form - something he shares with the classical economists. When I say that capitalism is a product of cheap energy, naturally I am referring to modern, industrial society. In 2008 the global economy responded to oil prices at \$147 per barrel by going into recession. The same thing happened in the 1970s, when Opec engineered a politically-induced oil shortage in collusion with the oil companies. Believe it or not, rising oil prices can bring the accumulation process to a halt. If the comrade can't see this, I would suggest it is due to a dogmatic approach to his 19th century Marxist narrative. I don't claim that all Marxists would make this mistake. Obviously, if you are spending more of your profits on energy costs, you will have less to accumulate.

As for the question of feudalism which Marx refers to in the *Grundrisse* and other writings, the point is that all the interrelated reasons for the decline of feudalism were related to the energy crisis caused by wood depletion - the most important contributory factor was the period known as the little ice age, which followed the medieval warm period; this colder period lasted from 1400 to 1800 and covers the period of wood depletion, as people struggled to keep warm, which in turn triggered the industrial revolution. Not many people know that a change in climate contributed to the demise of feudalism and the rise of modern capitalism, based on non-renewable energy. Most people on the left are unfamiliar with this due to only being exposed to mostly Marxist narratives. The problem is that this narrative conceals the primary role of energy in the transition to modern society.

Comrade Conrad thinks I am displaying profound ignorance of Marx by claiming that Marx believed that money makes the world go round. He brings out the *Communist manifesto* and throws it at me with a quote from the master himself: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle." This opening statement

by Marx is one of the most notorious falsehoods ever pronounced by anyone, because it ignores thousands of years of primitive communist societies, when there was no class struggle. I haven't met many Marxists who know that Marx's most famous statement is untrue.

While I no longer use Marxism to rationalise my support for social ownership of the means of production, and while I would not argue in a dogmatic fashion that non-conventional oil cannot stave off an energy crisis (I think that its promising appearance is due to the fact that conventional depletion is still in its early stages), and while I am not totally convinced that global warming is the biggest danger we face - when the temperature started to cool, they quickly changed the name from 'global warming' to 'climate change' - I would totally agree with comrade Conrad's view that production for need is the way forward. This is why we need to fight for a democratic socialist society.

Tony Clark
Labour supporter

Torture

I was shocked at hearing about the terrible treatment meted out to Doug Lowe (Letters, July 20). Every week he is being made to read letters from myself and Gerry Downing. It's sheer hell on earth. I have heard of prisoners being made to listen to very loud music, but never thought we'd have something similar happening here with the *Weekly Worker*.

It's no laughing matter. Doug is worried what will happen if "I have to read any more of this crap". He fears he'll be pushing up daisies soon, so could we wait until he is dead? This only goes to show how bad things have got under Theresa May's strong and stable dictatorship. People are not only being forced to read the *Weekly Worker* against their will, but, even worse, forced to read "long-winded guff".

Now, of course, I admit to being a bit long-winded and should write shorter letters. But, as Doug knows, I have been going on about 'democratic revolution' and republicanism and the proletariat as the vanguard fighter for democracy and not forgetting the absolute necessity for every internationalist in England to be a militant anti-unionist. There is much more.

I am well aware that all Labourites, Corbynistas and left reformists, along with Trotskyists and ultra-left sectarians, think this is "crap" and "guff" and "total and utter nonsense". I am not surprised to see where Doug is coming from. He is not alone in hating these ideas.

I may not like Doug's hostility to democratic revolution and working class republicanism, but I will fight tooth and nail to defend his right not to have to read this sort of stuff - at least until he is dead.

Steve Freeman
Left Unity and Rise

Coming out

Bruno Kretzschmar's letter is typical of people who come from a segregated background (July 20). They have been brainwashed into thinking that all they have to do is open their mouths and truth and logic comes out. The self-importance of such people is astounding.

The question of European Union membership was put to the people last year and the majority voted to leave. It's a final decision and there is a team at government level meeting up with EU Brexit officials regularly each week to get the divorce finalised. They are not arguing the toss about EU membership. Their focus is on separating the UK and the EU from each other. It's a done deal. They're just sorting out the technicalities - a purely administrative process. It no longer matters whether we support the EU or oppose it: we're coming out.

Elijah Traven
Hull

London Communist Forum

Sunday July 30, 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 Nimitz'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.

Profits of destruction

Saturday July 29, 2pm: Protest against arms fair, Quaker Meeting House, 74 Mutley Plain, Plymouth PL4.

Organised by Stop The Arms Fair: www.stopthearmsfair.org.uk/events/stop-the-arms-fair-comes-to-plymouth.

Seven men of Jarrow

Saturday July 29, 1.30pm: Commemoration, Royal Oak, 117 Grange Road, Jarrow upon Tyne, NE32.

Organised by Follonsby Miners Lodge Banner Heritage and Community Association: www.facebook.com/follonsby.

What is Trotskyism?

Thursday, August 3, 7.30pm: Open lecture, Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, London NW1. Part 3: 'From the Nazi victory in Germany in January 1933 to the assassination of Trotsky in August 1940'.

Organised by Socialist Fight: <https://socialistfight.com>.

Remembering Hiroshima

Sunday August 6, 4pm: Peace picnic, East Greenwich Pleasance, Chevening Road, London SE10.

Organised by Lewisham and Greenwich CND: www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=128147993881224.

No to the arms fair

Saturday August 12, 10am to 4pm: Workshop, Friends Meeting House, 188 Woodhouse Lane, Carlton Hill, Leeds LS2.

Organised by Stop the Arms Fair: www.stopthearmsfair.org.uk/events/leeds-stop-arms-fair-workshop.

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.

Stop arming Israel

Monday September 4, 9am till late: Protest, Western Terrace, Excel Centre, Royal Victoria Dock, 1 Western Gateway, London E16.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org/events/stop-arming-israel-arms-fair-protest.

Radical bargains

Saturday September 9, 11am to 3pm: Book sale of radical left and Marxist literature, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1.

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

No to the arms trade

Saturday September 9, 10am: Art exhibition, ExCeL Exhibition Centre, London Docklands, Royal Victoria Dock, 1 Western Gateway, London E16.

Organised by Art The Arms Fair: <https://artthearmsfair.org>.

Scrap the pay cap

Sunday September 10, 1pm: Rally at TUC Congress, Arundel Suite, Holiday Inn, 137 King's Road, Brighton BN1. Confirmed speakers: Mark Serwotka (PCS), Steve Gillan (POA), Ronnie Draper (BFAWU), Sean Hoyle (RMT), Amy Murphy (Usdaw).

Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: <http://shopstewards.net>.

No to war

Wednesday September 20, 6.30pm to 8.30pm: Rally, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1.

Organised by North London Stop the War: www.facebook.com/nlondon.stwc.7.

Social histories of the Russian Revolution

Thursday September 28, 6.30pm: Discussion meeting, Birkbeck, University of London, 26 Russell Square, London WC1. 'Taking power: remaking the family, levelling wages, planning the economy'. Speaker: Wendy Goldman.

Organised by Social Histories of the Russian Revolution: <https://socialhistories1917.wordpress.com>.

Making a world without war

Monday October 2, 7.30pm: Talk, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Speaker: Dr Scilla Elworthy.

Organised by Conway Hall Ethical Society: <https://conwayhall.org.uk/ethical-society>.

Make it right for Palestine

Saturday November 4, 12 noon to 4pm: National march and rally, central London - details to be confirmed. Demanding justice and equal rights for Palestinians.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org/events/national-rally-central-london.

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.

BBC

Towards a Bolshevik Broadcasting Corporation

The disclosure of the BBC list of highest paid 'stars' raises the question: what is the corporation for? **William Kane** investigates

The new requirement that the BBC publish all salaries above £150,000 has borne fruit at last, and given rise inevitably to a pearl-clutching scandal.

There are many available cries of injustice here - above all the injustice of Chris Evans being paid more than everyone else, when it is surely doubtful that even the most loyal listeners of his Radio 2 breakfast show would claim any more than that he is a safe pair of hands: successfully preventing dead air, according to broadcasting best practices, by flapping his gums and playing tedious music. We guess that a big part of that packet has something to do with the calamitous attempt to put him up as a replacement Jeremy Clarkson for *Top gear* presenting duties, but still - *Chris Evans*? The unacceptable face of the 1990s? Surely the only reason to pay him £2.2 million is for promising to go away.

The hierarchy of the whole seems a bit random, with some relatively well-known TV faces being thoroughly humbled by more obscure radio presenters, from which we might surmise that a large part of this phenomenon is down to brinkmanship at the negotiating table. Celebrity is not a fungible commodity: you cannot just replace Graham Norton with another man of the same height and build. On the other hand, Graham Norton would not get remotely the same audience reach and prospects for continued work in light entertainment if he were merely chattering away on some YouTube channel, and certainly nothing like the same level of money would then be available to him. Thus we are not dealing with a job market in the usual sense, but rather something like two monopolists attempting to price-gouge each other on a single transaction, in an undignified display of mutual parasitism.

It is worth bearing in mind, also, that salaries are only part of the story: stars often collect money through their own production companies, so some of these numbers will be dramatically unrepresentative of the real benefit of the licence fee to certain individuals. One early adopter of the 'personal production company' model, incidentally, is Chris Evans.

Much of the commentary on this issue has been dedicated to the very clear disparity between the genders in this pay list - everyone earning better than £500,000 is male, with Claudia Winkelmann the top paid woman, coming in somewhere between £450,000 and £499,999. This is despite decades of diversity initiatives and the like, and indeed a generous sprinkling of women among the BBC's senior management, in roles where they will presumably be having some kind of impact on the salaries obtained by

'the stars'. In broader life, there is the small matter of men having, on average, a greater degree of confidence to demand higher wages; but you would have thought that the BBC's 'sleb' contingent would be drawn from the most brash and extroverted members of both genders, overwhelmingly from born-to-rule establishment types, and thus the advantage would be cancelled out. Apparently not.

The underlying political issue, however, is not so much the pay gap as the BBC itself - after all, we can hardly accuse the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun*, currently denouncing the BBC's rampant sexism, of impeccable feminist credentials. (Let's see some *Mail* columnists' fees, and count the X chromosomes while we're at it ...) The whole thing is being exploited as a means of bashing the Beeb. No doubt if the top seven earners were women, we would read in the *Mail* that it was 'political correctness gone mad'; or if the gender distribution was more random, then some other aspect of the case would be lifted up as evidence of the BBC's degeneracy. Indeed, how did we get here? Thanks to the Tory government, which made the publication of top salaries a condition of the corporation's new charter: clearly a calculated move to embarrass an institution that is increasingly regarded as a public menace by the rightwing part of the establishment.

This is really a most peculiar outcome. The Beeb, after all, was founded by Lord Reith on explicitly Tory principles; his was the sort of mindset that viewed the existence of a commercial popular press - never mind the radical alternatives affiliated to the labour movement - as a civilisational disaster, and he argued successfully that the government ought to get ahead of things in the radio world. The BBC began as a cartel of radio manufacturers with the austere, god-fearing Reith as its spiritual guide, licensed by the general post office to "inform, educate and entertain".

Its first serious test was the 1926 general strike; Reith and his minions despised the strike, of course, but wanted to at least maintain the appearance of neutrality; but that was not good enough for Stanley Baldwin and especially Winston Churchill, who forced the delay even of the broadcast of a peace-mongering sermon from the archbishop of Canterbury. As reward for services rendered, the BBC obtained a Royal Charter, and increasingly outgrew its commercial roots.

It became an odd, chimerical creature, in that it was plainly a state broadcaster, just as much as *Russia Today* or anything else, but one from which the government of the day has generally deemed it politic to keep a polite distance. It is funded not out of

general taxation, but a direct flat tax on television viewers (and, before that, wireless owners); thus the opportunities for government direction are focused on charter renewals. Obedience to the establishment is traditionally ensured merely by hiring from its ranks - not for nothing is received pronunciation sometimes called the 'BBC accent'.

Politics of envy

This is a picture of the BBC that would be difficult to contest as late as the 1980s, and even today is an accurate likeness if you are on the left (and have to put up with the relentless Tory spin of the likes of Nick Robinson, Andrew Neil and Laura Kuenssberg). Yet it is not the portrait painted by the commercial press, especially on the right. The BBC is dominated by the 'liberal elite'. It is crippled by political correctness. It is the 'Bolshevik Broadcasting Corporation'. How did this come to pass?

In a sense, it is the same difficulty faced by Reith in 1926 - for the preachers of social warfare, friendly neutrality is never going to be enough. The archbishop's sanctimonious message of peace and goodwill between men was plainly directed at the workers' surrender; but the very fact that it would call for understanding and Christian humility on all sides rendered it suspect to the likes of Churchill, who was directing squads of fascist scabs and contemplating the massacre of strikers. Likewise, the vexatious Toryism of Neil and Kuenssberg will never be enough for Paul Dacre, as long as there is even one *Eastenders* storyline expressing sympathy for the plight of illegal migrants.

There are, of course, also the vulgar economic imperatives. We may not think of the Beeb and the *Mail* as direct competitors, but in reality they are, if only inasmuch as both are the maintainers of high-traffic news websites with global reach and importance. (*Mail Online* is notoriously the most popular news website in the world, although how much that has to do with its 'serious' content and how much the celebrity cleavage in the sidebar of shame is open to question.)

As for the Murdoch press, umbilically linked to film studios and TV stations, the conflict is even more obvious. The world's most powerful media dynasty has the distinct virtue of having spelt out plainly what its real problem with the BBC is. In 2009, James Murdoch delivered the MacTaggart lecture with the basic argument that the BBC's licence-fee model strangles competition by allowing it to produce high-quality content without having to prove itself as a business:

The corporation is incapable of distinguishing between what is good

for it and what is good for the country ... Funded by a hypothecated tax, the BBC feels empowered to offer something for everyone, even in areas well served by the market. The scope of its activities and ambitions is chilling.¹

This was, on the face of it, quite an extraordinary concession from the Murdoch clan, the most vociferous defenders in the bourgeois media of naked capitalism: that the pursuit of profit, far from giving the commercial media an advantage through the remorseless, evolutionary logic of market competition, actually gives the state-funded likes of the BBC a leg-up if they are not suitably constrained by the hand of government. 'It's not fair,' Murdoch seems to say. Well, life's not fair ...

Of course, the picture he painted back then was absurd, and would be absurd today - of his dynasty, the only media organisation popularly referred to as an 'empire' (and for good reason) being some sort of plucky underdog: a lone voice crying in the wilderness for media diversity. The acquisitive, domineering character of News Corporation and its corporate satellites is plain for any observer to see: we should remember that Rupert Murdoch prints 40% of all newspapers in this country, and that, had the phone hacking crisis not come to a head at the wrong moment, he would now have a formidable monopolistic advantage in the British media, as a result of outright ownership of BSkyB. His complaint is ultimately that the BBC stands in the way of these ambitions; he (and the other press barons) would prefer a far more restrictive charter, which would conveniently absolve the Beeb of doing anything remotely popular, after the fashion of America's PBS.

Better future

Where does this leave the left and the workers' movement? It is plainly the case that the BBC as an institution is an enemy, and (Murdoch junior is quite correct) a powerful one. It is a propaganda apparatus of the state that undergirds capitalist exploitation.

Yet all such apparatuses of the state are subject to the anxious logic of contradiction; for they are not mechanical apparatuses, but rather composed of people, whose affiliation is ultimately conditional on the delivery of wages for not overly onerous work in a timely and satisfactory fashion. In other words, once we walk ourselves down the BBC pay scale - past the £150,000 point, where last week's disclosure came into force, towards the £20,000 point that media union Bectu said that many BBC workers receive - we are talking (with some exceptions) about *proletarians*. In any case, we are

dealing with *people*, not machines, whose individual motivations are not reducible to the structural role of their employer. Soldiers, likewise, are 90% of the time merely the bloody instrument of British imperialism; but they need not be, and it would be a dim-witted Marxist indeed who denied the value of agitation in the ranks.

In a successful socialist society, 'media diversity' would be more than a cheap flag of convenience for a Murdoch scion or a half-forgotten regulatory objective: it would rather be the natural outcome of radical egalitarianism and the unleashing of popular creativity and power. On the road to that society, we must have a meaningful programme for the BBC - if its radio stations, TV channels and web outlets are to be worth a damn to the cause of human progress, what transformations are necessary, and what convictions must be spread in its own trenches?

In some respects, we even agree with James Murdoch. It is difficult to defend light entertainment as a 'public good': however superficially populist the glitz of prime-time talent shows, in reality the demotism is false and cynical, and the exclusive desire for such material is merely projected onto the broad masses by - yes - a 'media elite', liberal or otherwise. Given real control over such decisions, it is doubtful whether the popular mood, even as it is today, would demand merely more *Strictly*, more of the time.

So control must be moved downwards: BBC managers must be subject to election by their charges, and their remuneration packages not merely rubber-stamped by the gang of establishment cronies in the BBC trust, but carefully meted out by committees of ordinary workers. The BBC defends itself often on the basis of its community efforts and cultivation of new, young talent, but in reality this function has wasted away since the days of *Cathy come home*: it must be restored to its former glory, and the grey river of sameness interrupted with a new wave of innovative work. On the factual media side, there is one area where capitalism has failed most dramatically of all to meet needs, and that is local media: if ever there was a place for a non-capitalist institution to play a valuable role, it is there, transformed into an instrument of plebeian power from a power over us.

The BBC worth having would not spend millions on the chunterings of Chris Evans, but instead be put at the service of a revival of genuinely popular culture ●

Notes

1. <http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Media/documents/2009/08/28/JamesMurdochMacTaggartLecture.pdf>.

SUPPLEMENT

Thirteen to two?

Did the Petrograd Bolsheviks overwhelmingly reject Lenin's April theses when they were first proposed? The records show otherwise, argues Lars T Lih

"Everywhere and always, every day, we have to show the masses that, until the *vlast* has been transferred into the hands of the Soviets of Worker and Soldier Deputies, there is no hope for an early end of the war and no possibility for the realisation of their programme."

(Sergei Bagdatev, explaining his misgivings about Lenin's April theses at the April conference of the Bolshevik Party)

In almost any account of the doings of the Bolshevik Party in spring 1917, you will find a statement along the following lines: Lenin's April theses were so shocking to party members that a meeting on April 8 of the Petrograd committee rejected the theses by a vote of 13 to two (and one abstention). No more than a single sentence is ever devoted to this episode, but just by itself this one certainly packs a wallop. Thirteen to two! The Petrograd Bolsheviks must really have been scandalised by Lenin's radical new approach.

The power of a good story should not be underestimated. The anecdote about the 13-2 vote after Lenin's arrival stands side by side with the anecdote about the alleged 'censorship' of Lenin's 'Letters from afar' before his return to Russia. The status of these two anecdotes as unquestioned fact probably gives more support to the standard rearming narrative than any amount of serious argument. Earlier in the series, I looked at the episode of Lenin's Letters and showed that they were a 'turncoat document' - one that changes sides under interrogation. In that case, an anecdote that previously supported the 'rearming' narrative - that the April theses were a radical break with the long-standing Bolshevik outlook - now supports the 'fully armed' narrative.

In this article, we turn our attention to the other major anecdotal pillar of the 'rearming' narrative. Indeed, one can argue that the 13-2 vote is the *one* hard fact showing widespread, total rejection of the April theses by party members. But on close inspection this 'hard fact' melts away like snow in sunshine. Our knowledge of the debate comes from a rather confused set of minutes that was first published in 1927. As far as I know, these minutes have not been investigated in detail by anyone after their first publication. When I embarked on such an investigation, I quickly saw that something was wrong with the standard account.

The 13-2 vote implies that only two people supported the theses - but, when we look at the remarks of the six people who spoke during the committee discussion, we find that four of them had nothing but praise for them. The other two speakers (one of whom was a non-voting guest) were worried about the possible implications of some of the theses that in their view would cause difficulties for practical agitation. Even these two speakers had warm words for the theses as a whole.

According to the minutes published in 1927, the 13-2 vote was about whether to accept the theses "as a whole" (*v tselom vse*). Since all participants made clear their general support for the theses, the committee vote *cannot be understood* as a wholesale rejection. Rather, it indicates that some committee members had



Vital: unity between workers and peasants

reservations that prevented the committee from giving unqualified support.

These facts about the vote are not the only reason why the debate in the Petrograd committee undermines rather than supports the standard 'rearming' narrative. According to this narrative, resistance to the April theses is read as resistance to the whole idea of overthrowing the Provisional government and replacing it with soviet power. Yet the committee member who expressed the most misgivings about Lenin's theses was Sergei Bagdatev, a Bolshevik who was so eager for soviet power that he was rapped on the knuckles by Lenin and the central committee for issuing the slogan, "Down with the Provisional government!", during the anti-government demonstrations that took place at the end of April.

As the epigraph to this article shows, Bagdatev affirmed his support for soviet power *in order to explain* his misgivings about the theses. During both the Petrograd committee meeting and the April party conferences, Bagdatev stressed that he spoke as a

praktik - that is, as someone directly concerned with what worked and what did not when addressing the Bolshevik target audience:

I go to the rallies and listen attentively to the voice of the masses, and I have come to the conclusion about what we should demand from the Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies - more accurately from the Provisional government *via* the Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies.¹

At least one historian has noted that Bagdatev is not playing the role assigned to him in the rearming narrative. In his biography of Lenin, Tony Cliff writes about this episode:

Bagdatev, the left extremist secretary of the Bolshevik committee of the Putilov works ... could say: "Kamenev's report on the whole anticipated my position. I also find that the bourgeois democratic revolution has not ended and Kamenev's resolution is acceptable for me ... I think that comrade Lenin had too early rejected the point of view of old Bolshevism."²

At the same time [Bagdatev] showed his radicalism by stating: "everywhere and always, every day, we have to show the masses that until power has been transferred into the hands of the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, there is no hope for an early end of the war and no possibility for the realisation of their programme."³

What muddled thinking!

Cliff is to be commended for noting an anomaly: that is, existing evidence that the standard interpretation is hard put to assimilate. Unfortunately, instead of considering the possibility that the standard narrative is muddled, Cliff simply assumes that the long-time Bolshevik activist is muddled. As we shall see, Bagdatev is not muddled at all: his misgivings about the April theses are shrewd and to the point.

Voice from the archives

After arriving at the conclusion that something was seriously wrong with the anecdote of the 13-2 vote, I had

the somewhat unsettling but gratifying experience of receiving confirmation by a voice from the grave - that is, by an archival document written in 1934, but only published in 2003. This document has been completely overlooked to date, and I myself only ran across it last year (2016).

Owing to a projected republication of the committee minutes in 1934 (which never occurred), the two major participants in the original 1917 debate - Bagdatev and VN Zalezhsy - wrote a letter to the Leningrad Institute for Party History in order to set the record straight: the original stenographer had misinterpreted the 13-2 vote. The committee had actually voted *unanimous approval* of the theses as a whole; the recorded 13-2 vote was on a motion by Zalezhsy, who wanted an even greater show of solidarity and proposed that the theses be accepted without any reservations or criticisms whatsoever. *This* was the proposal that was rejected by a large margin. Bagdatev's and Zalezhsy's statement from March 1934 poses a direct challenge to the entire 'rearming' narrative of Lenin's April theses 'exploding like a bomb' among Bolshevik activists. Given its crucial importance, I have translated it in its entirety (see appendix).

Any lingering doubts that the 1934 document was perhaps some sort of post-facto revisionism were laid to rest when I looked up an article published by Zalezhsy in 1923. This article was written while memories were still fresh and before the whole issue of the April theses was politicised by Trotsky's 1924 pamphlet *Lessons of October*. Zalezhsy's 1923 account was vetted by Aleksandr Shliapnikov, a senior Bolshevik leader also present in Petrograd at the time, who corrected some details. Since Zalezhsy was not yet misled by the confusing set of minutes, he stated as a fact that "it was precisely among the members of the [Petrograd committee] that [Lenin's] famous theses ... found the greatest sympathy and the swiftest recognition" (the relevant passages from this article are provided in the appendix).

One final nail can be hammered into the coffin of the standard anecdote. After the debate on April 8, committee members went around to district party committees (Petrogradskoi, Vasileostrovskoi, second Gorodskoi) around the city. Members of the city-wide committee, such as Liudmilla Stal and Zalezhsy, successfully proposed resolutions that repeated the line taken by the committee: "After considering Lenin's theses, the meeting judged them correct in general [*v obshchem i tselom*] and mandated its representatives to defend them, but during the debates at the conference they can introduce this or the other particular correction."³ As a result, as Zalezhsy remarked in 1923, "district after district showed their solidarity with the theses, and at the all-Russian party conference that began on April 22, the Petersburg organisation as a whole spoke in favour of the theses".

To sum up: new archival evidence shows that Lenin's April theses were unanimously accepted as a whole by the Petrograd Bolshevik committee on April 8. The 13-2 vote does *not* mean that 13 members of the committee rejected the theses as a whole. It does not even mean that 13 members had specific objections in mind. It only means that 13 members thought that

SUPPLEMENT

Bagdatev or any other critic had the right to bring forward their misgivings at the upcoming party conferences.

Turncoat documents

The minutes of the Petrograd committee meeting in April are yet another turncoat document that seems to offer strong support for one narrative, but, under intensive interrogation, switches sides and offers strong support for a rival. The new understanding of the 13-2 vote is not the only reason for this switch in allegiance. Let us summarise the crucial points brought out by an examination of the substantive course of the debate:

1. The common assumption that a large majority of Petrograd Bolshevik activists rejected the April theses in toto is a myth. On the contrary, the Petrograd committee showed strong support for the crucial parts of the theses, accompanied with requests for clarification on the practical implications of certain points.
2. Those Bolsheviks who supported the theses without reservation all stressed the continuity of Lenin's views with the past - with pre-war Bolshevism as well as the committee's own recent position in March 1917. Thus these supporters of the theses saw no need to 'rearm' old Bolshevism with a radical overhaul.
3. The Bolshevik *praktiki* in Russia did not need an émigré from Switzerland to tell them that the war was imperialist, that the Provisional government was counterrevolutionary, or that soviet power was a priority goal. These parts of the April theses did not spark controversy. Indeed, the misgivings of the *praktiki* arose from the suspicion that some of Lenin's Theses would hamper their drive to persuade the masses of these crucial points.
4. The practical methods defended by these Bolshevik critics were the ones actually used throughout the year - the methods that led to victory in October. To say that Bolshevik critics were right is not at all to say that Lenin was wrong. The critics said to Lenin something like the following: "Your theses, as presented upon your arrival here, seem to imply x, y or z. Do you really mean that? Because, if you do, we foresee big problems in obtaining mass support for Soviet power." Lenin's response to such questions, for the most part, was to say: "No, I don't mean that" (as I will explain in part 5 of this series). And by the time he had succeeded in clarifying what he actually had in mind the Bolsheviks realised that they were all essentially on the same page.

An examination of the course of the debate in the Petrograd committee will illustrate these points.

Non-controversial

Historians often operate with the dubious assumption that the reaction to the April theses was either thumbs-up or thumbs-down - that people were either for or against them as a whole. According to Christopher Read, there was no point of contact between Lenin and the Petrograd Bolsheviks, so that "when he arrived back he did not, in any real sense, have a party". His theses "had the impact of a hand grenade", forcing Lenin to act "like a schoolmaster in front of a dim class".⁴ Read goes through the theses point by point on the evident assumption that if a position is in there the Petrograd Bolsheviks disagreed with it. (From my point of view, the "dim class" had something to teach the schoolmaster.)

Perhaps one reason for this unwarranted assumption is precisely the anecdote of the 13-2 vote in the Petrograd committee: imagine - a large majority completely rejects the April theses as a whole! In actuality, a proper examination of this episode will show us which points in the April theses were controversial and which were accepted without demur. Bagdatev had specific criticisms relating to four of Lenin's 10 theses. In no case did he object to everything contained even in these four paragraphs. Let us set these

particular points aside, however, and list all the theses that were evidently non-controversial and taken for granted by members of the Petrograd committee (Lenin's numbering):

1. No concession to 'revolutionary defencism'. Only soviet power can justify the war.
2. Russia is going through a transition from the first stage of the revolution - one that gave the *vlast* (power) to the bourgeoisie - to a second stage that will create a *vlast* resting on the proletariat and poorest peasantry. This transition requires a new kind of party work, one aimed at the newly awakened mass constituency.
3. "No support for the Provisional Government." No objection was made to this assertion, but rather to Lenin's insistence in this same point that no "demands" should be made on the government.
4. As long as the Bolsheviks are in a minority in the soviets, we must preach the necessity of transferring all of the *vlast* to the soviets in order to persuade them in a peaceable manner.
6. Confiscation of gentry land, nationalisation of all land, etc.
7. Amalgamation of the banks into one national bank under government regulation.
10. Creation of a new, revolutionary International.

These non-controversial theses set out the basic political strategy of the Bolsheviks: full soviet power, rejection of 'revolutionary defencism', exposure campaigns aimed at winning over the soviet constituency, land to the peasants, state regulation of the economy, a sharp break with the existing socialist International. Controversies only arose about *how best to achieve these aims held in common*. Let us now turn to the specific misgivings expressed by Bagdatev at the Petrograd committee on April 8, as well as at the party conferences held in the following weeks.

One of the reasons for the long misapprehension of the Petrograd committee debate is the unsatisfactory state of the minutes. As all who have worked with these minutes discover, the secretary who recorded the debate was often out of her depth, with the result that the speakers sometimes make no sense and other times their remarks require emendation. Fortunately, in the case of the most important speakers - Bagdatev, Zalezhsy and Stal - we have other sources that guarantee that all remarks quoted here represent their views. Bagdatev and Stal spoke at the two Bolshevik conferences in April; Zalezhsy's later memoirs and analyses are also helpful in establishing the meaning of the text.⁵

In the text that follows, 'CC' indicates the Petrograd city conference and 'ARC' indicates the All-Russian conference.

Misgivings

In his remarks both at the Petrograd committee meeting and at the April party conferences, Bagdatev stressed that he accepted the general thrust of the theses. Nevertheless, he had misgivings about the possible implications of some of them for practical Bolshevik agitation. We should bear in mind that Lenin's theses were first published in *Pravda* only one day previously in the form of 10 pithy epigrams, and their implications were far from clear.

Bagdatev's misgivings arose out of his commitment to the political strategy worked out in March, so let us review it (for more detail, see earlier articles in this series). The Petrograd Bolsheviks took over from pre-war Bolshevism the axiomatic goal of establishing a *vlast* based on the workers and peasants, probably in the form of the soviets. The task of this revolutionary *vlast* was to carry out the aims of the revolution 'to the end'; the socialist proletariat and its party would provide essential political leadership. After the February revolution, the Bolsheviks were confronted with the fact that the actually existing soviets were not yet ready to

live up to the role assigned to them in the old Bolshevik scenario. The first task of the Bolsheviks was therefore to persuade the soviet constituency to fight for full soviet power. But this task presented unexpected challenges, since this constituency included non-'purposive' workers and soldier/peasants and not just the milieu of purposive workers, in which the underground party had thrived.

The response of the Petrograd Bolsheviks to this tactical challenge can be paraphrased as follows:

We Bolsheviks can feel assured that the counterrevolutionary, elite-based Provisional government cannot solve the problems of the revolution, of the war and of the spiralling economic crisis (the *razrukha*). Not only will the government fail to live up to its commitments to the soviets, but it is sure to resort soon to an open offensive against the soviets. But how do we get the soviet constituency to realise all this, while avoiding any risk of premature attempts to overthrow the government? Solution: we will mount agitation campaigns that will place carefully chosen demands on the Provisional government - demands (a) that the soviet constituency will accept as reasonable, and (b) that the Provisional government will reliably refuse to carry out, no matter what its rhetoric. As a result, the soviet constituency will realise the utter inadequacy of the Provisional government and therefore that a soviet *vlast* is the only viable alternative.

An energetic campaign that fulfilled these criteria was launched in March and called for the publication of the secret treaties. This campaign continued throughout the year and was vital to Bolshevik success. At the April conferences, Kamenev defended demands of this kind as "an agitational device for the development of the masses, a method of exposure".

As we shall see, Bagdatev's four misgivings were aimed at protecting what he rightly thought of as a winning strategy.

First misgiving Does Lenin really mean to ban the use of 'demands' in agitation campaigns?

Lenin came back to Russia dead set against two kinds of 'demands'. First, he condemned socialists who made demands on the government in the genuine hope that the government would carry them out. This kind of 'demand' was the essence of what was to be called "agreementism" (*soglashatelstvo*). No Bolshevik disagreed with Lenin about this, but immediately after his arrival Lenin also opposed demands made with a very different aim: namely, to expose and thus condemn "agreementism" itself. This kind of demand would enable the soviet constituency to see in practice the futility of any expectation that the government would ever fulfil the soviet program. Demands of this kind were at the heart of agitation campaigns that aimed at discrediting the government's false rhetoric. The aim was not to shore up "agreementism", but rather to undermine it.

Lenin wanted "the utter falsity of all the Provisional government's promises" to be made clear - but at the same time he rejected the use of 'demands'. What was required was "Exposure in place of the impermissible, illusion-breeding 'demand' that this government, a government of capitalists, should cease to be an imperialist government." But from the point of view of the *praktiki*, it made no sense to choose between exposure and making demands: the latter was a means to the former.

Lenin's rejection of campaign-oriented demands was clearly a product of his polemical obsession with west European socialists such as Kautsky, who (according to Lenin) fostered illusions by making 'demands' for peace, etc. But this obsession did not fit the Russian situation, where the Bolsheviks were not engaged in intra-

socialist polemics, but in winning over the masses.

When Lenin looked over the March *Pravda* during the train trip home, he darkly suspected that the demands therein mentioned were perhaps a form of agreementism unworthy of Bolsheviks. Even if this were not the case, he felt, 'demands' were an improper and/or ineffective method of exposing the government, since they sowed illusions that the government might actually fulfil the request. Besides, to make a demand in and of itself implies support. In contrast, Lenin advocated "patient explanation" that would discourage the soviet constituency from making demands of any sort.

To the *praktiki*, this advice asked them to switch from mass campaigns - noisy processions in the street, carrying placards that demanded this or that, or mass rallies and factory meetings that passed resolutions calling on the government to do this or that - and to rely on lectures by propagandists expatiating on the class basis of society ('propaganda' was a technical term used by the *praktiki* to mean intensive educational efforts aimed at small groups). In response to Lenin, Bagdatev insisted that demand-based exposure campaigns aimed at a mass constituency were an essential tool for achieving soviet power:

Approaching the mass in concrete terms, we must tell them that the Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies must take over the *vlast*, since the Provisional government cannot realise the democratic demands of the masses. And we must set forth these demands in order to show the masses that in real life [na dele] the government is unable to satisfy them and for this reason we must transfer the *vlast* to the Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies (CC 18).

He was understandably upset to learn from the April theses that "Com Lenin is against making demands on the government" (CC 17):

Is Lenin correct, [or is it rather] good practice to demand that the Provisional government repudiate annexations and contributions [?]? It is practical. Is [making demands just] another illusion[?]? But it can't be done otherwise! ...

We say: we demand the publication of the treaties, knowing ahead of time that this is hopeless. Sometimes doing this is necessary. The experience of reality is necessary. Let the crowd see [for themselves]. An object lesson, and a necessary one ...

Lenin's theses are basically correct, but they pose problems for *praktiki*, since the demand for peace, for the publication of treaties and the eight-hour working day are [all] concrete demands.

Making this sort of demand did not imply support for the government - it was merely a recognition of reality:

I didn't say anything about supporting the Provisional government. As long as the troops follow the orders of the Provisional government, we say [to them]: demand this and that from it. We say to the *narod* [people], to the army: if you don't believe us, support the Provisional government, demand this or that [from it]. This is a question of practice.

Instead of arguing about *whether* to make demands, the Bolsheviks would be better advised to think about *which concrete demands* to make - for example, the pros and cons of demanding land confiscation vs demanding the publication of secret treaties:

About the confiscation of [gentry] lands: in our case, this is the most advantageous issue on which to give battle. Here the Provisional government

cannot talk its way out, as it does with the publication of secret treaties, [by arguing that this is equivalent to] a separate peace.

Bagdatev's discussion of demands shows that his misgivings on this score were not due to some highfalutin ideological objection or to dogged loyalty to an out-of-date old Bolshevism. He and Lenin want the same thing: to win over the soviet constituency as a first step to replacing the Provisional government with soviet power. As a hands-on activist, Bagdatev thought he had something useful to say to an émigré who had arrived only a week earlier. I think most informed observers - once they grasp Bagdatev's point - will agree with him.

Second misgiving Does Lenin really mean to say that the 'bourgeois-democratic' revolution is over and thus that we no longer need peasant allies?

"The whole question is whether the bourgeois-democratic revolution is completed." So Bagdatev proclaimed during the Petrograd committee debates. According to a tradition that goes back to Trotsky in 1924 and was later enshrined in Stalin's *Short course* - a tradition still unchallenged today - Bagdatev's assertion is logically equivalent to proclaiming, 'Let the bourgeois Provisional government rest undisturbed, since there is no ideological rationale for soviet power.' But, as we have seen, Bagdatev was an energetic advocate for replacing the Provisional government with soviet power. There are two possibilities: *either* Bagdatev is very muddled indeed *or* the currently unchallenged scholarly tradition has completely mistaken the import of Bagdatev's assertion about the unfinished revolution. The second alternative is correct.

Let us translate Bagdatev's assertion out of Bolshevik-ese. The old Bolshevik scenario said that a revolutionary government based on the workers and peasants was necessary in order to combat bourgeois liberal leadership of the revolution and to drive the 'bourgeois-democratic' revolution "to the end" [*do kontsa*]. Only when the revolution was completed would the rationale for a worker-peasant *vlast* recede. Therefore, for a Bolshevik to say that the bourgeois-democratic revolution was *not* yet completed [*ne zakonchena*] was equivalent to affirming that a worker-peasant *vlast* was still necessary. By the same token, to affirm that the bourgeois-democratic revolution was already completed was equivalent to saying *there was no longer a rationale for a worker-peasant class alliance* (see my previous comments on the logic of 'hegemony').

Not only in the April theses, but in other scattered comments after his return, Lenin seemed disillusioned about the prospect of the Russian peasants supporting even a thorough-going *democratic* revolution, much less a socialist one.⁶ Bagdatev reacted strongly against this scepticism, arguing as follows:

Lenin thinks that the revolutionary democracy - that is, the non-proletarian section of the *narod* - is already imperialist in its views, and that the petty bourgeoisie has a material interest in these policies. This attitude can be put down to émigré scepticism: "If he has doubts about the peasantry, then I think that this points to a simple lack of knowledge or a real feel for the peasant mass." Our peasantry is not like the European one: "In my opinion, com Lenin's evaluation is mistaken: here in Russia, imperialism has not set down such deep roots" as in Europe.

Bagdatev's misgivings on this issue, like all his other misgivings, arose from very practical concerns, not ideological pedantry. A central question of revolutionary strategy in 1917 was: can we rely on the peasantry? If the Bolsheviks insisted that the peasant majority first had to come

over “to our point of view” - that is, become committed socialists - then the party certainly could not count on them as allies in the coming months of revolution. This reasoning was axiomatic for all Russian social democrats (including Trotsky). And, if the Bolsheviks gave up on enlisting the peasants as allies, Bagdatev said, what was the point of even talking about transferring the *vlast* to “soviets of worker, soldier and peasant deputies”?

It would be incorrect to assume that the Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies could not take over the *vlast* unless they came over to our point of view [about socialism]. And the entire essence of our disagreements is bound up in this: com Lenin assumes that the Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies must [first] come over to our view of things and only then can it take the *vlast* in its hands and begin to sketch out socialist steps (ARC).

Bagdatev also used socialist jargon about “the minimum programme” vs “the maximum programme”. Again, we need to translate from Bolshevik-ese. The “minimum programme” may sound unambitious, but it actually refers to the *maximum* transformation of Russia possible while retaining capitalism. Thus, in 1917, the “minimum programme” meant achieving the most highly advanced democratic republic in Europe, the liquidation of the gentry landowners as a class, a radical change in foreign policy, and extensive government regulation of the economy. For Bagdatev, then, the various concrete measures mentioned in the April theses (confiscation of the estates, bank regulation) were all part of the minimum programme.

Just as important, the “minimum programme” in Bolshevik discourse implied “the programme we share with the peasants”. To go from the minimum programme to the “maximum programme” - direct socialist transformation - meant leaving behind peasant allies. It meant focusing the party’s attention on converting peasants to “our point of view” about socialism rather than fighting alongside the soldiers and peasants to achieve all the ambitious “democratic” tasks just mentioned:

The whole question consists of this: can we step forward now with the maximum programme of our revolution? For example, the confiscation of gentry lands [part of the minimum programme] does not logically contradict the ideology of the Soviet of worker and soldier deputies ...

I think that com Lenin is too quick to abandon old Bolshevik point of view. We always thought that nationalisation of banks, and railroads, etc would not go beyond capitalism, would not take us to the socialist system [and thus these measures are also part of the minimum programme]. The old Bolsheviks assume that the dictatorship of the workers and peasants is still on the agenda ...

Therefore, my thought is as follows: the bourgeois-democratic revolution is still not completed. Implementing the eight-hour day, a huge progressive tax on capital, arming the whole *narod* - all of these are principles of our minimum programme which the Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies can carry out without coming over to our point of view.

I have been at pains to translate Bagdatev’s argument out of Bolshevik-ese for the benefit of all those scholars who have not yet learned to ‘read Bolshevik’. This is a difficult task, with plenty of scope for misunderstanding. I mention this not just out of self-pity, but because the Bolsheviks faced the same problem in 1917. Language that made perfect sense within the circle of long-time activists made no

sense to the larger soviet constituency. In particular, labelling the ongoing Russian Revolution as “bourgeois-democratic” was a non-starter.

The Bolsheviks therefore dropped the qualifier, “bourgeois-democratic”, and simply talked about “the revolution”. They did *not* start talking about the “socialist revolution” - a term that is conspicuous by its absence in Bolshevik rhetoric before October (except when talking about international revolution). In fact, the meaning of “revolution” in the Bolshevik message in 1917 is pretty much what Bagdatev sketched out in these comments in April: a large-scale programme of democratic transformation (including extensive regulation of the economy) carried out by a worker-peasant *vlast*. The Bolshevik message in 1917 was: ‘The revolution is far from finished - let’s carry it out to the end.’

To sum up: historians have not understood why Bagdatev and others were so insistent that the bourgeois-democratic revolution had not been completed. To make sense of it, they have imputed all sorts of implausible motives. Perhaps this assertion was due to a militant lack of ambition: an absolute insistence that the revolution limit itself to petty reformism.⁷ Or perhaps it was due to ‘stagism’: that is, a pedantically Marxist insistence that history proceed by proper stages: feudal, bourgeois, socialist. Or maybe it was a fussy loyalty to the terminology of old Bolshevism. In the rare case where a historian notices that Bagdatev was in fact an ardent partisan of soviet power, his position is simply put down to muddled thinking.

None of the above. Bagdatev was a revolutionary *praktik*, and his insistence on this point was based on a central question of practical politics: the class forces driving the revolution. Soviet power made sense only if the non-proletarian section of the *narod* - primarily the peasants - were on board. Bagdatev had good reason to be unsure of Lenin’s position on this vital issue. It was up to Lenin to allay these misgivings, and (as we shall see) he eventually did so.

Third misgiving Does Lenin really want to give up on the slogan, ‘Convene the Constituent Assembly’?

Long before 1917, Russian revolutionaries had traditionally called for a Constituent Assembly that would establish a new post-revolutionary political order. An elected Constituent Assembly would be the cleanest and most radical break with the existing tsarist system - a guarantee that the tsarist government itself could not influence the outlines of the future. Even though the February revolution disposed of the tsar and his government more sweepingly than expected, a Constituent Assembly remained an axiomatic goal in 1917 - one accepted by the entire political spectrum.

Like everybody else in spring 1917, Bagdatev could only guess at the future relations between the Constituent Assembly, the soviets, the Provisional government and local self-government. What prompted his worries about the April theses on this point was Lenin’s assertion that a republic of soviets superseded parliamentary government. Bagdatev was not interested in assessing the theoretical advantages of a soviet-based republic over a parliamentary one, nor was he interested in whether or not such an advanced form of democracy was suitable for Russia in 1917. Rather, he saw the call for a Constituent Assembly as an effective slogan that would help overthrow the Provisional government, and he was worried that Lenin’s rejection of “parliamentarianism” implied a rejection of this slogan:

Com Lenin says that to go from the soviets back to parliamentarianism would be to go backwards and not forward - that Soviets of Worker and

Soldier Deputies can replace local self-government, and therefore, [it seems to follow] that they can replace the Constituent Assembly as well. [But] the best method to force the Provisional government to leave is to demand the promptest possible calling of the Constituent Assembly, after it has turned into a demand of the majority. In Lenin’s theses, there is nothing about the Constituent Assembly.

Was Bagdatev’s misgiving justified - that is, did the April theses really entail a rejection of the Constituent Assembly? This is a tricky question to answer. If we look at Lenin’s pronouncements *after* October 1917, the answer is ‘yes’. Lenin justified the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly in January 1918 by claiming that soviet-style democracy was superior to “parliamentarianism”. Furthermore, he pointed to the April theses and the resolution of the April party conference as a clear statement of this position and therefore a justification in advance of the Bolshevik attitude toward the Constituent Assembly in January 1918. In fact, most of Lenin’s retrospective allusions to the April theses focus on this contrast between soviet democracy and parliamentarianism.

If we look at the statements of Lenin and indeed of the entire party issued *prior* to October, a startlingly different picture emerges. Not only did the Bolsheviks *support* the convening of the Constituent Assembly: they pictured themselves as its great champion against the Provisional government. In his urgent and confidential missives to his party comrades in fall 1917, Lenin insisted on the danger to the Constituent Assembly, should the Provisional government not be promptly overthrown. The strong contrast between the statements issued before and after October was an embarrassment to the Bolsheviks and led to various attempts to explain it away.⁸

These later events were, of course, unknown to Bagdatev when the Petrograd committee debated the theses on April 8. Nevertheless, by the time of the debate, Lenin had already twice made clear that there was no clash between his theses and the call for a Constituent Assembly. In his speech to a group of Bolsheviks the day after he arrived, he said (according to the minutes):

I would be happy if the Constituent Assembly were called for tomorrow, but to believe that Guchkov [a minister in the Provisional government] will call the Constituent Assembly is naive ... The Soviet of Worker Deputies is the only government that can summon this assembly.

In the first publication of the theses that appeared in *Pravda* the day before the Petrograd committee debates, Lenin was exasperated with his critics:

I attacked the Provisional government for *not* having appointed an early date or any date at all for the calling of the Constituent Assembly, and for trying to get out of it just with promises. I argued that *without* the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, the calling of the Constituent Assembly is not secured and its success is impossible. And the view is attributed to me that I am opposed to the earliest possible calling of the Constituent Assembly!

We historians have had a long time to assimilate the April theses; Bagdatev had one day. If he overlooked this comment in Lenin’s article (not in the theses themselves), he can be forgiven. Thus his misgivings on this point seem like a simple misunderstanding. Furthermore, as far as I can make out (the recorded remarks are a little hard to decipher), the Bolsheviks who defended the April theses all assumed the future existence of the Constituent Assembly.

Bagdatev was not the only participant

in the Petrograd committee to express misgivings about Lenin’s call for a republic of soviets. The familiar question arose: what class forces would support this republic? The following exchange is telling.

The first speaker is Konstantin Iurenev, a leader of the Mezhrainytsy, the group that Trotsky joined when he returned to Russia a month later.⁹ Iurenev’s presence as a guest in this Bolshevik debate indicates that a *de facto* amalgamation of the two groups was already in progress (it became official in August). The second speaker, Liudmilla Stal, was one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the April theses, calling them “a breath of fresh air”.

Iurenev: When Lenin talks about the soviets, he always mentions the soviet of *worker* deputies, but we should be talking about the soviet of worker and *soldier* deputies ... The slogan of a Soviet of worker and *batrak* [agricultural wage worker] deputies - that will come later. Now we need [to focus on] the Soviet of worker and soldier deputies, for we have to rely on the army. For the revolution (as long as it does not carry a socialist character), we need only the soviets of worker and soldier deputies.

Stal: Lenin didn’t mention soldiers when he spoke about the soviet of worker deputies, because the soldiers will become the *narod*, so that we need to demobilise the army and arm the whole *narod*.

Iurenev’s insistence on the full title of the Petrograd Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies was very far from punctilious pedantry. The soviet’s role as the only legitimate representative of the peasant soldiers in the Petrograd garrison was *central* to the dynamics of the Russian Revolution. The Petrograd Bolsheviks had corrected Lenin on this point even before he arrived back in Russia: in his ‘Letter from afar’, as published in March, the *Pravda* editors simply added ‘Soldier’ to every mention of the soviet (as explained in an earlier article in this series).

Iurenev’s remark here can be decoded as follows: if the revolution really carried a “socialist character”, we could rely entirely on the proletariat: that is, a combination of the urban worker and the *batrak*. But we are not at that stage, if only because we need the peasant army to defend soviet power.

Liudmilla Stal’s rejoinder tells us two things. First, the Bolsheviks saw themselves as the representative and leader, not just of the workers, but the *narod* as a whole (some historians still deny this). Second, Stal’s defence of the April theses was off base. Lenin overlooked the presence of “soldier deputies” in the theses, not because he wanted to make some subtle point, but simply because he had not fully grasped the situation in Russia when he penned the theses on the sealed train. Go back and look at my two earlier quotations from Lenin about the Constituent Assembly. In remarks made the day after his arrival, he does not include the soldiers as part of the soviet constituency. In his *Pravda* article published a few days later, the correct title is used. In this case, Lenin’s friendly critics understood his position better than his uncritical friends.

The dispute over the Constituent Assembly brings out once again the central lesson of the debate in the Petrograd committee: *both sides* were searching for the best way to replace the Provisional government with soviet power. As the following remark shows, Bagdatev did not foresee the actual fate of the Constituent Assembly. What he *did* foresee quite well was the use made of the Constituent Assembly as a talking point against the Provisional government and for soviet power:

We should allow the bourgeoisie into

the Constituent Assembly and not try to crush them from below - that would be disadvantageous to us; we need to meet them in the Constituent Assembly. Without waiting for the calling of the Constituent Assembly, we can overthrow the Provisional government and summon the Constituent Assembly on our own initiative, but give battle to them there.

Fourth misgiving Does Lenin really think this is a good time to forego the advantages of a long-established brand?

Point 9 of the April theses is devoted to specifically “party tasks” - one of which was to “change of name of the party”. In a footnote, Lenin gives his rationale: “Instead of ‘Social Democracy’, whose official *vozhdi* [leaders] throughout the world have betrayed socialism and deserted to the bourgeoisie (the ‘defencists’ and the vacillating ‘Kautskyites’), we must call ourselves the *Communist Party*.”

Lenin’s desire to change the name of the party arose out of his disgust at the ‘betrayal’ on the part of the *vozhdi* of the west European parties. (NB: Lenin takes care not to anathematise the parties *per se*). Lenin was not signalling his ideological disillusionment with the outlook of pre-war “revolutionary Social Democracy”, but rather his continued loyalty to it and his outrage at those who had failed to live up to it.

From the point of view of Russian Bolshevik *praktiki*, Lenin’s insistence on this point was an import from foreign socialist polemics that overlooked the disadvantages for the party in Russia. As Kalinin remarked at the city party conference, “I understand the comrades who have arrived from abroad, where the word ‘social democrat’ has been so befouled. But that’s not the case with us.” Kalinin did not oppose the name change in and of itself, but he felt that more time should be taken to explain the reasons for it.

In the dispute over this issue at the April 8 meeting of the Petrograd committee, both sides framed it as an exercise in cost-benefit analysis, with general agreement on the nature of both the benefits and the costs. The benefit was making a clear-cut distinction between the Bolsheviks and the wishy-washy ‘centre’; the cost was the confusion the name change would cause in the wider soviet constituency - as in the cry that later became famous: “Down with the communists! Long live the Bolsheviks!”

Bagdatev: Point 9. On changing the name of the party, Lenin is wrong here. We mustn’t hurry with this change of the party [before] the congress. We want to expand entry into the party, and not cut off the comrades from ourselves. Now is not the time to divide the mass just because they don’t fully understand [some complicated issue]. This [whole] point on party tasks is superfluous.

Zalezhsy: On changing the name of the party: of course, this is not a very important issue, but I don’t agree with [Bagdatev’s] rationale: namely, the fear of cutting off the centre. For Lenin wants to name the party in such a way as to sharply divide us from those chauvinists and in general those who now name themselves social democrats.

Antipov: The name change would be a loss for revisionism, but not for us. Pushing away the mass would indeed be undesirable, but cutting off the centre would be great.

Stal: Lenin’s point of view has sweep. People are afraid of changes in our *rand* [vyveska] - they shouldn’t be.

In this exchange, Zalezhsy says that Bagdatev was opposed to cutting off the centre, but Antipov realised that Bagdatev’s real concern was “pushing away the mass”. Bagdatev was not against the name change *per se*, if the

SUPPLEMENT

groundwork for explaining its rationale was done properly.

As Zalezhsy says, the name change was not an important issue, especially in 1917. Only a party congress could make the change, and the semi-underground 6th Congress in August 1917, with many top leaders absent, was hardly the time and place to do it. Lenin rammed the name change through at the 7th Congress in March 1918. Throughout 1917, the whole issue was conspicuous by its absence.

Like every other misgiving expressed by Bagdatev, his stand on the name change issue was motivated by the standpoint of a *praktik* who was searching for the most effective way of obtaining mass support for soviet power. The *praktiki* were the ones who had to address a rally of factory workers and who feared they would meet with blank incomprehension after saying, 'The communists propose such and such a resolution'. During two decades of struggle, the Russian Social Democratic party had built up a proud reputation as a champion of the proletariat. Why throw away this hard-won respect just to spit at the German Social Democrats?

Not a radical break

Historians today almost invariably present the April theses as a sharp break with earlier Bolshevism. When we listen to the first Bolshevik supporters of the theses, we find the opposite: a great stress on continuity with Bolshevik positions in the past. As Mikhail Kalinin at the April city conference said, "Our picture of the revolution and our tactics [in March] differ in no way from com Lenin's theses... The method of thinking remains an old Bolshevik one that can handle the particularities of this revolution."

The debate at the Petrograd

committee took place a week or so earlier than Kalinin's remarks, yet the most fervid supporters of the theses on the Petrograd committee made similar claims.

1. VN Zalezhsy was an enthusiastic supporter who urged that Lenin's theses be accepted without demur. During the debate, he argued that "Lenin has not changed his views, and he earlier thought about revolution in the same way as now. The opinion of international socialism in the event of war [was that] the proletariat should deepen the conflict that was created during wartime." Zalezhsy is alluding here to the Basel Manifesto - a document of immense importance in Bolshevik rhetoric. Zalezhsy also argued that Lenin's theses were consistent with the Petrograd committee's own stand during March, since the Petrograd committee never had a policy of support for the Provisional government (Zalezhsy reaffirmed this argument in the 1923 article excerpted in the appendix below).

2. NK Antipov, another defender of the theses in this debate, stated "there is absolutely nothing new in Lenin's theses".

3. Liudmilla Stal call the theses a "breath of fresh air", yet she also insisted that "when Lenin put forth the slogan 'socialist revolution', a lot of people got scared. But we already said earlier that our revolution will find an echo in the west." Note that the words 'socialist revolution' do not occur in the April theses.

On the topic of socialist revolution, a comment made by Stal at the April conference of the Petrograd Bolsheviks is extremely revealing. In the April theses, Lenin called for a "state-commune", which he defined in a cryptic footnote as "the kind of state prefigured by the Paris Commune". An objection heard in at least one local district Bolshevik meeting was that

Russia was not ready for a "commune-state".¹⁰ Stal responded:

By taking up Lenin's slogans, we will be doing what life itself is telling us. There's no need to fear the commune, because - it is alleged - this means a worker government. The Paris Commune was not based only on the workers, but also on the petty bourgeoisie. In Kautsky's opinion, the Russian Revolution should be something between a socialist and democratic one.

The phrase "worker government" was a slogan associated with Parvus and Trotsky (how accurately is not the question here). The Kautsky article to which Stal refers, 'The driving forces and prospects of the Russian Revolution' (1906), was regarded by all Bolsheviks as almost a manifesto of Bolshevik political strategy, as discussed at length in an earlier article. Stal is here making the point we have seen over and over again in these debates: our 'petty bourgeois' peasant allies are *crucial*. The label we give the revolution - democratic, socialist, or something in between - is a secondary matter, as long as we align ourselves with the actual class forces driving it.¹¹

Take-home points

1. Every time we read in a standard account of the events of 1917 about the 13-2 vote in the Petrograd committee we should reflect that the author is perforce drawing completely the wrong lessons from this episode. The Petrograd Bolsheviks were not rejecting the April theses *in toto* with horror at Lenin's radicalism - on the contrary: they found nothing even controversial about the core message. Although they supported the theses as a whole, they did not think it *lèse-majesté* to make specific criticisms and ask for clarifications. Although the episode of the

Petrograd committee vote rarely takes up more than a sentence in presentations of the standard narrative, its removal has wide implications: when we look around for other hard facts to support the 'rearming the party' interpretation, we will see that they are not easy to find.

2. The particular misgivings voiced by critics such as Bagdatev - 'demands' as an agitational technique, the Constituent Assembly as a talking point against the government, the 'unfinished bourgeois-democratic revolution' and the peasants, the downside of a sudden name change - concerned *practical* questions within a generally accepted political strategy. All sides accepted the near-term goal of replacing the Provisional government with soviet power; all sides accepted that the soviet constituency had to be won over - but how best to do all this?

3. The key issue behind the misgivings expressed by Bolshevik activists was the question: which class forces are driving the revolution? In particular, is it worthwhile to win over the soldiers and peasants? This was the crucial *practical* question behind arcane-seeming disputes such as the one over whether the 'bourgeois-democratic' revolution was finished or unfinished.

4. There were more misunderstandings than genuine differences of opinion between Lenin and the Petrograd Bolsheviks. And, on reflection, such misunderstandings were inevitable. The full implications of the 'theses written on a train' were not clear to anybody - including Lenin! And the returning émigrés had their own share of misunderstandings about the post-February situation in the capital and the country. A period of adjustment and mutual clarification was necessary - and that is what we see ●

Notes

1. Unless otherwise stated, all citations are from *Petersburgskii komitet RSDRP(B) v 1917 godu: Protokoly i materialy zasedanii* (St Petersburg 2003), pp178-96.

- www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/1976/lenin2/07-rearm2.htm Lenin 2 (chapter 7: 'Lenin rearms the party').
- Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie* for April, pp60, 83-84.
- C Read *Lenin: a revolutionary life* London 2005, pp142-50; see also his *War and revolution in Russia, 1914-22: the collapse of tsarism and the establishment of soviet power* (Basingstoke 2013).
- Citations from the party conferences in April come from *Sed'maia (aprel'skaia) vsrossiiskaia konferentsiia RSDRP (bol'shevikov): Petrogradskaia obshchegorodskaia konferentsiia RSDRP (bol'shevikov)* (Moscow 1958).
- For more discussion, see LT Lih, 'The ironic triumph of old Bolshevism: the debates of April 1917 in context' *Russian History* 38 (2011), pp199-242. A preliminary, abridged draft of this text is available here: <https://johnriddell.wordpress.com/2015/06/01/lars-lih-the-ironic-triumph-of-old-bolshevism>.
- L Trotsky *The lessons of October*: www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lessons.
- In his short history of the revolution, written in early 1918, Trotsky made no reference to the later dogma about the superiority of soviets to parliaments, and in consequence his defence of disbanding the Constituent Assembly is more to the point. (The Marxists Internet Archive contains Trotsky's history under the title, 'History of the Russian Revolution to Brest-Litovsk'; the relevant passage can be found at www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1918/hrv/ch03.htm.)
- For essential background, see I Thatcher, 'The St Petersburg/Petrograd Mezhrainka, 1913-1917: the rise and fall of a Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party Unity Faction' at *Slavonic and East European Review* 87:2 (2009), pp284-321.
- The following response to this objection was made: "Com Magidov and the rapporteur [V Kosior] answered com Kochetov by pointing to a series of arguments that Lenin's viewpoint was correct, that the issue of the war could be solved by a world socialist revolution, and that conditions for a socialist revolution had fully developed in the west." Thus Lenin's defenders did not see him as arguing for socialist revolution in Russia itself (*Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie* for April, p60).
- One of the themes of my research over the last decade has been Lenin's explicit and admitted debt to Karl Kautsky. Lenin's disgust with Kautsky after 1914 was fuelled by the charge that Kautsky was a "renegade" to his own earlier outlook - an outlook to which Lenin himself remained explicitly loyal. Many critics absolutely refuse to accept this finding. And now we see a Bolshevik activist enthusiastically accepting Lenin's April theses - and quoting Kautsky to explain her support! Add Stal to the list of "muddled thinkers" whose remarks have to be explained away. I discuss Kautsky's 1906 article further and provide its final section in part 2 of the present series: 'All power to the soviets!' (*Weekly Worker* May 4).

Appendix

Letter of VN Zelezhsy and C Bagdatev to the Leningrad Institute for Party History [Istpart] about the meeting of the PK [Bolshevik Petrograd Committee] RSDRP(B) on April 8 (21) 1917 and its minutes [from 2003 edition of PK records, pp193-94]

To the Leningrad Istpart

In the publication of the Leningrad Istpart entitled 'The first legal Petersburg committee of the Bolshevik in 1917', a crude error has crept into the published minutes of the meeting of the PK from April 8 (21) 1917 (No12).

On page 88, we find printed: "All of Lenin's theses were put to a vote as a whole (Members of the PK voted this motion): 2 for, 13 against, 1 abstaining."

This version as printed implies that a very large majority of the PK voted against Lenin's theses *as a whole*. Meanwhile, as is evident from the content of the majority report by com Bagdatev and from the minority report by com Zalezhsy, and also from the concluding remarks by com Bagdatev, the PK considered the theses correct in general and as a whole (p88, lines 8 and 9 from the top).

The differences between com Bagdatev's majority report and com Zalezhsy's minority report concerned only separate points in the theses, and specifically about points 3, 8 and 9 (in the minutes on p85, line 19 from the top, "point 5" is mistakenly printed for point 8).

Com Zalezhsy considered it necessary to accept these points of Lenin's theses without any change. Com Bagdatev, along with a majority of the PK, proposed - due to practical considerations - to introduce corrections to points 3 and 8, and to exclude point 9 "until the congress" (p85, 13 lines from the top) [in actuality, first line from the top - LTL].

At the end of the debate the *theses as a whole* were put to a vote, and everybody voted in favour. To make this clear to the reader, this sentence on

p88 [of the published version] should be re-edited: "All of Lenin's theses were put to a vote as a whole." This sentence should read: "Lenin's theses were put to a vote as a whole. All voted [in favour]."

After voting for the theses as a whole, com Zalezhsy put to a vote a proposal to reject the corrections proposed by com Bagdatev to theses 3 and 8 and the exclusion of thesis 9. It was this proposal that was voted on. The results we find in the minutes apply to the vote on this proposal: "two for, 13 against, one abstaining" (p88).

In connection with this, com Zalezhsy commented in his remarks found in the first edition (pp88-90) to the effect that the vast majority of the members of the committee spoke against com Lenin's basic ideas. This comment must be applied only to the three points named above.

To avoid an incorrect exposition of the PK's position in regard to Lenin's theses as a whole, these remarks of com Zalezhsy should be excluded from the new edition. Appropriate corrections should be made to the minutes.

In the foreword written by com Kudelli (ppXII-XII), she does not notice this slip of the pen and she also did not really understand a series of other unclear points. She therefore completely incorrectly fastens the attention of the reader on the assertion that supposedly the PK spoke out against Lenin's theses as a whole. Therefore, it is necessary to remove the relevant paragraphs from the foreword ●

V Zalezhsy
S Bagdatev
March 24 1934

Two excerpts from VN Zalezhsy's 'First legal PK' published in *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia, 1923, No1 (13)*

pp145-46: The issue of our attitude toward the Provisional government came before the PK [Petrograd committee] on March 2 or 3 in connection with the position taken by the Ispolkom [central committee] of the soviet, which, as we know, adopted on the advice of that 'prudent Ulysses', Chkheidze, the famous formula of support: "insofar as" [*postolku-poskolku*]. The PK, as the directive organisation of the mass of the Petersburg proletariat, of course had to respond immediately to this formula. I well remember the debates in the PK about this issue.

In the discussions on this issue about our attitude toward the Provisional government, it was pointed out that at this particular moment in time, given the decision of the soviet, this issue was one of practical action: do we call the masses to an immediate armed overthrow of the government to whom the soviet promised support, even if conditional: that is, should the PK in response [to the soviet] announce a slogan of direct, active struggle of the masses on the street? Or, in the evolving situation, was it politically

more expedient to adopt a position that would give our revolutionary activity sufficient room to manoeuvre and to accumulate strength, while at the same time avoiding bringing the PK into sharp conflict with the soviet?

As a result of discussions it was decided not to call for an overthrow of the Provisional government, and thereby at the same time to call for struggle with the soviet, but rather to take the soviet's formula, "insofar as", while giving it a completely new content and thus defanging it internally. Our resolution announced: "The PK of the RSDWP, in connection with the resolution concerning the Provisional government adopted by the Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies, announces that it will not contest the *vlast* [*protivodeistvuet vlasti*] of the Provisional government insofar as its actions correspond to the interests of the proletariat and the wide masses of the democracy and the *narod*. It also states its decision to carry out the most merciless struggle against any attempt by the Provisional government to establish a monarchical form of government of any kind." As can be seen, this formula broadly untied our hands: all it said was that at the given moment the PK was not summoning the masses to overthrow the Provisional government.

p156, final page: The day of com Lenin's arrival, in my view, ends the first period in the life of activity of the Petersburg committee and its first cohort during the legal existence of our party. New times arrived, and to the ideological and tactical position of the party came clarity and definition.

I would still like to point out that the PK not only greeted Ilich [Lenin] to its residence with warm feelings, but also that it was precisely among the members of the PK that his famous theses - the ones set forth in the report that com Lenin made on April 4, the day of his arrival, before a meeting of the Bolshevik delegates to the All-Russian Conference of Soviets, and also repeated at a meeting of Bolshevik and Menshevik delegates at the invitation of the Menshevik leaders - found the greatest sympathy and the swiftest recognition.

As I recall, the Menshevik leaders put forward the possibility of an agreement with us and proposed that Lenin set forth his views. Com Lenin's theses produced the effect of an exploding bomb [among the Mensheviks]. In the debates that then unfolded, the Menshevik Goldenberg characterised the theses in this way: "For many years the place of Bakunin in the Russian Revolution remained unoccupied, but now it is occupied by Lenin." On that day, com Lenin did not find open advocates even in our ranks. At that meeting, the only one to support him was com Kollontai.

In the discussions that started within our ranks about the theses, a series of members of the PK spoke out in its defence. District after district showed their solidarity with them and, at the All-Russian party conference that began on April 22, the Petersburg organisation as a whole spoke in favour of the theses ●

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

USA

Opening up possibilities

Leila Lilazi looks back at the Bernie Sanders phenomenon and can still feel the fire burning

To understand what is happening in USA today, we must look back to the roots of the current corporate onslaught directed against the working class, and how the liberals and their representative, the Democratic Party, ceased pretending to be the defenders of the middle class and more and more joined forces with the ever-growing corporate machine.

Strangely Ralph Nader says that Richard Nixon was the last president to take note of the “rumble from the people coming out of the 60s” and went for some “progressive” legislation in his first term.¹ He proposed a better health insurance system than Bill Clinton did years later. He also adopted a minimum incomes policy, although Congress rejected it. But Ronald Reagan came along with his tax cuts and market deregulation, a doctrine of cold war and ‘trickle-down’ economics, taking the US and the world economy towards what we know today.

The US was once again the playground of corporations, pulling both parties in their direction. The Democrats did not want those trying to stand up for labour - people like Clinton and Obama spoke the traditional language of liberalism, pretending to defend the interests of working men and women and the poor, while serving corporate power.

According to Oxfam, the richest 85 people in the world have as much wealth as the poorest 3.5 billion - or half the world’s entire population:

A recent US study presented compelling statistical evidence that the interests of the wealthy are overwhelmingly represented by the US government compared with those of the middle classes. The preferences of the poorest had no impact on the votes of elected officials.²

Occupy Wall Street

In this situation of extreme wealth and power - with the working class left behind and the poor drowning in misery - decades of non-stop war, followed by the 2008 market meltdown and bailouts that helped protect corporate profit, the Occupy movement hit the US like a tsunami.

But Occupy Wall Street, as exciting and unexpected as it was, could not organise the masses. I felt the excitement too and in 2011 spent a few nights with Occupy Toronto alongside defenders of native rights and young punks dancing and singing all night. But could the force of anarchy overcome giant and powerful structures? While anger and hope are potent elements, what about the solidarity of the working class? What about organisation, a coherent platform of ideas and unity in action? A movement targeting the system has to have one collective voice, one collective face and one collective fist. Occupy rapidly became confused and soon lost its attraction. Too soon, I would say.

It dreamt of stopping the system by building alternative, horizontal, participatory, democratic institutions based on a grassroots movement. But in the anti-communist US environment, its leaders tried to make sure there was a clear distance between Occupy and any type of Marxist ideology. There was, of course, no revolutionary structure - it was more like a giant wave that crashes against the wall and then subsides. We could see this in the way its leaders were thinking. In September 2013 Chris Hedges, one of Occupy Wall Street’s best known figures, wrote:

... our struggle [is] different from



Bernie Sanders: into the arms of Democrat establishment

revolutionary struggles in industrial societies in the past. Our revolt will look more like what erupted in the less industrialised Slavic republics, Russia, Spain and China, and uprisings led by a disenfranchised rural and urban working class and peasantry in the liberation movements that swept through Africa and Latin America. The dispossessed working poor, along with unemployed college graduates and students, unemployed journalists, artists, lawyers and teachers, will form our movement. This is why the fight for a higher minimum wage is crucial to uniting service workers with the alienated college-educated sons and daughters of the old middle class. Bakunin, unlike Marx, considered *déclassé* intellectuals essential for successful revolt.³

As exciting as Occupy was, surely those “*déclassé* intellectuals” were the movement’s Achilles heel? However, I will leave that discussion for another time.

But next we had Barack Obama, with his promise of change. He took the world by surprise: black, young and well-educated, he was presented as the epitome of the new-found model of diversity and change in the US. But that ‘change’ was short and sweet. He was soon bailing out the corporations and banks, and building up hostility towards the remaining “rogue states” like Libya and Syria. He showed that, while the US could change face from the grumpy, unpopular George Bush to the hip and cool Obama, ‘reality is still reality’ and nothing was going to change.

If anything, Obama, with the absolute support of Wall Street, made things worse. He increased US domination through trade agreements like the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, stepped up the hysteria against the ‘Russian threat’ and donated the highest proportion of ‘aid’ in US history to the Netanyahu government in Israel. Record amounts of weaponry were sold to the Saudi royals, who were busy arming Islamist extremists in the Middle East and north Africa. Africom was empowered, starting a new era of modern, militaristic neocolonialism in Obama’s African fatherland. Not only did he *not* end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as he had promised, but new adventures in Libya and Syria worsened the situation in the Middle East dramatically. He built up Nato and took it to the very border of Russia.

Rise of Sanders

It was in this situation that the 2016 presidential election approached. But the Democratic Party had a setback: Joe Biden’s son had died and this potential candidate, who was closest to Obama, was not able to run against the party’s sweetheart, Hillary Clinton. In stepped Bernie Sanders, a principled congressman (as much as we can call any politician principled), who had run as an independent for decades, challenging the status quo here and there within the framework of the system. But at the same time he had always managed to act as a true patriot, helping to shore up the wall of the establishment brick by brick, albeit with a degree of honesty and independence.

It was rather a special time in world politics: Syriza in Greece and Jeremy Corbyn in the UK showed the possibility of an opening up in the public perception of socialism. Once more we all felt the buzz: maybe this time will be different? But it never is. Not through engineered elections under a system dominated by corporate-affiliated faces, committed to the policies of finance and war. I get frustrated reading my own text, but we all know that we cannot get change through taking what we are given - only through fighting to win it.

Sanders came out with that long-lost word in US politics: he was a ‘socialist’. ‘Socialism’ is, of course, a pejorative term in America, usually referring to increased government control over the economy, or policies that promote the redistribution of wealth. It is a fact that the US is decades behind what exists in Europe, where capitalist states provided welfare under social democratic governments. In the US we have a private healthcare and education system, low corporate taxation and high military spending, an industrial prison system and ever-growing class differences. Sanders took this all in and started a new narrative: ‘People! We need social democracy!’

It felt good. To all of us - working class, single mothers, immigrants and students - hearing the word ‘socialism’ in the context of US politics was like a breath of fresh air. Like the Occupy movement, Sanders attacked class differentiation and the power of Wall Street. He championed the ‘betrayed 99%’ against the 1% and called for universal healthcare, free post-secondary education and a protected environment. All this hit a chord with

the youth and suddenly the idealist old social democrat became the centre of attention.

Sanders’ mistake from the beginning was in joining the Democratic Party. Of course, the Democrat establishment never dreamed of him gaining any momentum. In the absence of Biden, Sanders seemed like a harmless choice - good enough to build up interest in the primary. In fact, by giving voice to some progressive ideas, he could even provide the Democrats with something they needed: the appearance of a diverse party with room for minority voices.

But on the other side of the spectrum Donald Trump, strange as it seems, was going for a similar constituency - voicing the anger of the white working class and poor against neoliberal policies, the corporate machine and a corrupt government. The slogans of the two men had some interesting similarities: both were for a form of US protectionism, against trade agreements like TTIP and Nafta, as well as outsourcing and ‘excessive’ military spending. These policies all resonated with ordinary Americans and the rallies of both men brought the two parties onto unfamiliar and unpredictable territory. The corporate machine decisively rejected both candidates and gave huge support to Clinton.

In the primary elections, although everything had seemed to be in Hillary’s favour, she was barely ahead. Sanders was getting stronger by the day. Clinton benefited from huge donations from the pharma, oil, gas and defence industries, but in contrast the Sanders campaign received an unbelievable amount from ordinary people donating \$20 or \$30.

It may seem strange to those unfamiliar with US politics, but the unions mainly supported Clinton. While Sanders advocated a \$15-an-hour minimum wage, she was content with \$12 - and her position on the board of Walmart showed which side she was on. The role of the union bureaucracy could clearly be seen, but at the same time the excitement of the members grew during the primary election, with many going against the advice of the leadership and supporting the ‘wrong’ candidate.

Then there was the game of identity politics, in which Sanders was not a good player. But Clinton was targeting blacks, Latinos and women - the pillars of the Democratic Party’s popular vote. Statist and corporate feminists featured in the media and things got interesting. It seemed like the young, middle class women did not react to Hillary’s agenda as well as expected and Democratic national committee chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz came out in her defence, while former secretary of state Madeleine Albright had a special message for female voters who were not supporting Clinton: “There’s a special place in hell for women who don’t help each other.”

Weaknesses

But where was Bernie? He did not respond to any of these dirty games, avoiding almost all confrontation within the Democratic Party. He focused more and more on Trump, ignoring the game of identity politics. He attacked Clinton on occasion, but not the Democrat establishment.

Things got messier when Wikileaks issued 20,000 emails showing that the party leadership was actively trying to undermine the Sanders campaign. Wasserman Schultz was forced to resign, but it was too late. Clinton was clearly heading for victory and the party

was now secure once again.

Sanders had no trouble in condemning Henry Kissinger as “one of the most destructive secretaries of state in the modern history of this country”, but, when asked to name his favourite politician, he plumped for ... Winston Churchill! The man who once said: “Socialism is the philosophy of failure, the creed of ignorance and the gospel of envy. Its inherent virtue is the equal sharing of misery.” The people of India must have felt the burn badly that night - as did all socialists, I suppose.

Sanders’ protectionist approach alienated immigrants, while at the same time his insistence on seeing black oppression only in terms of poverty, lack of education and alienation, and not as a systematic problem rooted in the core of capitalist ideology, alienated black voters. We should not forget that a network of black churches, social clubs and associations were firmly under the Democrats’ influence and they were rooting for Hillary from day one.

In foreign policy Sanders showed all the elements of a cold-war mentality. Although he had not voted in favour of the Iraq war, he had supported US/Nato attacks on Serbia and Afghanistan, and talked about the USA playing an ‘important part’ in the world, where no doubt its role as wise policeman could be improved under a Sanders presidency. Of course, in comparison to the horrifying language of Clinton, he seemed like a progressive, but it was the same old picture of the US ruling the world, only expressed in Sanders’ sweet language of hope.

His loss was not unexpected, but more interesting was the way he handled what he himself called a “revolution” after the primaries. There was a strong movement calling on him to break his ties with the Democrats and set up a rival organisation, even a new party. But it was not long before all such hopes were dashed. I remember the day I read this: “Bernie Sanders endorses Hillary Clinton, hoping to unify Democrats”⁴ and later on: “Sanders: ‘Clinton will make an outstanding president’.”⁵

And Clinton was not ungrateful: “Senator Sanders has brought people off the sidelines and into the political process,” she said. “He has energised and inspired a generation of young people who care deeply about our country.”⁶

It all seemed to confirm what the not so optimistic left had said from the beginning: the Democrats would aim to seize everything for themselves: they would try to bring the Sanders movement under control and use it for their own purposes.

Another election, another game of party politics, and another president. What happened was interesting, and even necessary. I still think of the energy and hope of those young men and women in the Sanders campaign, and feel the fire burning in the heart of this country. It is a fire that will shine bright and warm in the future - I strongly believe that its time will come ●

Notes

1. http://therealnews.com/2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=1498.
2. www.oxfam.org.uk/media-centre/press-releases/2014/01/rigged-rules-mean-economic-growth-is-increasingly-winner-takes-all-for-rich-elites.
3. www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/19127-the-sparks-of-rebellion.
4. www.nytimes.com/2016/07/13/us/politics/bernie-sanders-hillary-clinton.html.
5. www.politico.com/story/2016/07/bernie-sanders-endorses-hillary-clinton-225412.
6. www.cnn.com/2016/07/12/sanders-endorses-clinton-in-new-hampshire.html.

GENETICS

Racialism and eugenics

In the second article in a four-part series **Mike Belbin** looks at the many and varied classifications of race

In the 16th and 17th centuries - the period of mercantile capitalism - the justification of a nature-based inequality had been down to interpretation of the *Bible* and certain laws regarding the treatment of jobless 'vagrants'.

The use of slavery on sugar plantations and mineral mining in the Americas had expanded the wealth basis of Europeans, even as ideas of freedom and free trade had battled with the crown and monopolies. The slave trade was abolished in 1807 and the 1861-65 war was fought in the US which included amongst its aims the ending of slavery. Nevertheless, the concept of there being *culturally* advanced nations justified further colonialism with the expansion of imperialism in Africa. This encouraged notions of advanced and backward nations, which could be based on 'scientific' classification.

During the 1880s - the era of the 'new imperialism' and the colonisation of Africa - Europeans began classifying in an extensive way. For some, this involved phrenology: measuring the dimensions of the head to support statements about the inclinations of different minds. The Englishman Francis Galton (1822-1911) came up with the study of twins to test the hypothesis of heritability - the inheritance of mental characteristics, such as intelligence (assertions about twins would return in the 20th century). In a letter to *The Times* in 1873, Galton suggested that the Chinese were a group capable of "high civilisation" and should, in his opinion, migrate to Africa and replace the indigenous populations.

From 1890, typologies of race had a field day. Vacher de Lapouge (1854-1936) classified humanity in a table which listed groups from the *Homo europaeus* to the Teutonic Protestant, the *Homo alpinus*, the Turkish - not forgetting the "brachycephalic": the "mediocre and inert" Jew.

In response to this, Chaim Zhitlovsky came up with a counter in his own classification of the *Yiddishkayt* or Ashkenazi Jewishness. Moses Hess joined in by asserting the idea of history as a struggle of races and began to shape a vision of the Jews as more than a religious community, but a race and a nation. The Zionist movement built on this, as well as the idea that Europe was unsafe and that Jews were threatened with a great massacre. Security could only be had by acquiring a territory of their own. The movement was offered Uganda, but rejected it. Calling on the *Bible* story of the Israelites, the movement fixed on Palestine, though it was not clear whether the land's current inhabitants were descendants of the pre-diaspora Jews or not.

European thinkers could not agree on how many races there actually were. Lapouge with his table had declared that in Europe alone there were three races, while Joseph Deniker said there were 10 in the world - six "primary" and four "sub-races". English theorists like Julian Huxley preferred terms like "ethnic group" or "type" and as late as 1939 the Harvard anthropologist, Carleton S. Coon, in *The Races of Europe* divided *homo sapiens* over the millennia into a spectrum of races from Caucasoid to Australoid. But then which of them had invented fire?

By the end of the 19th century race no longer meant only division by colour: white Europeans themselves were being divided into various hierarchies too. In a book also entitled *The Races of Europe* (1899) William Z. Ripley had come up with three races

inside Europe - the Teutons, Alpine and Mediterranean. Teutons was another term for what previous race theorists, like Arthur de Gobineau and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, had called the Aryan, the Indo-European or Germanic. These all had the same physical characteristics of fair hair, tall frames and longer heads. Ripley further divided the contemporary citizens of Poland into two racial types - blond, tall types and short types, calling them 'high brows' and 'low brows' - a division later used in the US to describe different attitudes to culture: high brows liked classical music; low brows popular song.

The race theorists might defend themselves by saying they were only going by physical features, but many consistently linked physique to cultural qualities - Friedrich Nietzsche thought fair-headed Aryans were the 'creative' people, while archaeologist Carleton Coon referred to Nordics as the 'corded ware culture' - inventors of beakers and artefacts that are now acknowledged as an advance on the early Stone Age. In practice, race thinking rarely separates physique and culture in these accounts.

Not all 19th century theorists based race classification on biology. Ernest Renan, the French writer famous for his *Life of Jesus* (1863), came up with a list of generalised *cultural* differences: "The Chinese race ... have wonderful manual dexterity and admit no sense of honour ... [whereas] a race of tillers of the soil [is] the Negro ... [and] a race of masters and soldiers [is] the European race ..." This being the era of struggle for empire in Africa, soldiering was important to Renan: "the nations are military creations and maintained by the sword; they are the work of peasants and soldiers ... towards establishing them the Jews have contributed nothing."

For Renan, the Semitic peoples - Jews and Arabs - were contrasted with the Aryans, whom Renan identified with the ancients of Greece, India and Germany. The historical Jesus, of course, had been a Jew, but Renan argued that he had managed to become Aryan by rejecting "Jewish traits". Christianity too, Renan pointed out, had managed to break away from its Jewish beginnings. His theology was based to a great extent on the Gospel of John - the last, most mystical and Romano-Greek gospel. In contrast to Nazi doctrine, Renan thought that the Jewish mind was limited by "dogmatism", so Jews were *lacking* in "a cosmopolitan concept of civilisation". Later the Nazis thought the World Jewish Conspiracy would adopt any belief system to get its way - liberalism, Marxism, Christianity, assimilation - proving they were far too cosmopolitan: that is, anti-nationalist. Gilles Manceron (2005) described Renan's brand as "republican racism".

'Applied' genetics

The general interest in evolution and genetic determinism led to various proposals for applying this knowledge to actual human populations: the practice of *eugenics*. At the time of the Boer War (1899-1902), the British state discovered that those joining the armed forces were of a very low physical quality, as to height and weight, though they were probably less puny than many today on our high-sugar diet. The very same Francis Galton who wanted to fill Africa with Chinese was a half-cousin of Darwin's, and in 1883 was the first to take a systemic approach to promoting good breeding among humans. Galton believed that desirable qualities of



British colonial arrogance

physique or character were hereditary and might be promoted through legal and medical interference - measures such as support for those deemed 'fitter' to reproduce, together with the use of sterilisation and prohibitions on marriage for those deemed 'unfit', like people with disabilities.

In the early 20th century, special organisations or 'societies' were set up in Britain and America to promote the magic bullet of eugenics. One policy that gained support during the 1920s was the sterilising of patients in mental asylums and this was implemented in Belgium, Brazil, Canada and even Sweden. More recently, with the development of reproductive technologies like IVF and the fashion for chemical solutions like Prozac, eugenics has begun to be reconsidered. Troy Duster, a Berkeley sociologist, has argued that the trend to gene research is a back door to the revival of eugenics - either surreptitiously 'forced' by states or consumer-led by those who can afford 'enhancement'.

No-one rejects finding better conditions for health, but there is a debate over what an improved human being actually is or indeed whether improvement actually works without adverse side effects. The first stiff criticism of the notion that interference with heredity could 'improve the stock' was made by Thomas Hunt Morgan in 1915. Morgan used fruit flies to demonstrate that major genetic changes could occur outside of inheritance, arguing furthermore that the idea of intelligence was subject to different definitions and could therefore not be linked to heredity as a single cause.

More doubts about eugenics were raised as to its claims to effectiveness. Disease traits in children could be

severely reduced, but not eliminated, unless the complete make-up of all members of the gene pool was known. Eliminating a gene was not like removing a pimple or tattoo; any 'improvement' could result in side-effects, such as greater vulnerability to disease or the extinction of positive traits. Conditions like sickle-cell disease and cystic fibrosis, for example, confer immunity to malaria and resistance to cholera respectively; the careful proviso being that stamping something out may have unintended consequences.

These reservations about eugenic meddling are worth remembering when we hear talk about a future in which gene manipulation will lengthen our lives and enhance our offspring. Ethical debate also continues as to whether conditions like autism or deafness are 'illnesses' rather than human differences like height or skin shade. On the horizon, but still lacking in authoritative support, are related policies, such as sterilisation, or what one academic called "moral enhancement" - for example, making people more docile through the water supply.

Racialist culture

The widespread European belief in racial hierarchies and trust in eugenic experiments was inherited by the Nazis. An adaptation of Darwin's theory of natural selection proposed that there existed a war of survival between physically specified groups. This had been used to support Europeans running empires - particularly the English and French. However, rather than racial or national excellence, the supremacy of the English had been a piece of luck, due to them being 'late comers' to the

bonanza of the slave plantations. The Spanish and Portuguese, first to reach the Americas, had mined silver and gold; the English had cultivated sugar and tobacco. These did not run out in mines, but could be grown afresh.

They had used the massive resource of African bodies to expand these plantations, even if many of the workers died early deaths. This wealth from the trade led to wage-labour becoming relatively expensive in Britain. Investment in a search for labour-saving technology followed and it was the new technology of ships, steam and electricity that built the empire. None of this was down to planning or special qualities of foresight or intelligence. Nevertheless the Asiatic, black and various aboriginal peoples were judged to have lost because they were 'backward' in coming up with the new science.

The Nazis drew not only on eugenics, but the works of the Englishman, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who added a political dimension in his 1899 book *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*. Chamberlain praised European - in particular German - culture for its creativity and idealism, while denouncing "Jewish" selfishness and materialism. The Jews were a threat, because their liberalism and their socialism threatened the 'purity' of the German spirit. The infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* blamed a secret Jewish conspiracy for the threat of democracy to the old order. In fact the text was concocted by Russian ministers to convince the tsar himself to have no more to do with modernity. This forgery from Russia was simply rewritten to portray a Jewish threat to other Europeans.

Hitler admired all these works, aspiring not only to create a Greater Germany - *Grossdeuschland* - but to becoming the defender of all Europe against liberalism and Marxism, which he named *Judeo-Bolshevism*. In their bid to build a community of sturdy men and hardy mothers the Nazis discriminated against all so-called defilers of the nation's health, such as the disabled, gays and racial minorities. To do this, they called on a specific interpretation of post-Darwin gene theory, associated with Gregor Mendel. This reinforced the proposal that people did not just inherit physical particularities from their parents, but also mental proclivities, such as inventiveness and criminal behaviour.

Racialism as an overt policy was required to justify mass slavery and as part of a fascist programme, but it was unstable as a policy when racism was simply structural. In the USA when this, the legacy of slavery and imperialism, was combined with 'democratic ideas' and a meritocratic market ideology, it led to the area becoming the crucible of a civil rights struggle leading to multiculturalism.

But, whereas the various tables of racial-cultural superiority have vanished, along with overt colour prejudice, the interest in biology, in genes, in being the fittest, is not dead. Respectable scientific ideas may no longer find human character in group membership - that is, 'race' - but plenty of researchers are looking for it in an individual's physical make-up, in people's genetic 'nature', which will mark the individual as one of life's losers.

The third part of this survey will consider the ideas about genetic inheritance of character that are growing more popular with fund-seeking researchers ●

1917

Everything 'in our favour'

'1917: The view from the streets' - leaflets of the Russian Revolution, Nos16-17

One hundred years ago, the Bolsheviks responded to the 'July days' setback by calling on working people to ignore provocations and expose rightist slanders.

The July demonstrations subsided quickly due to the

Provisional government's success in painting the Bolsheviks as German-sponsored saboteurs of the Russian war effort; an upsurge in violence associated with the demonstrations; and news that loyal troops were on their way

to Petrograd. The government quickly shut down *Pravda*, evicted the Bolsheviks from their headquarters and arrested many of their leaders. Lenin escaped by going underground and fleeing in disguise to Finland. The two documents

below represent the Bolsheviks' responses to the rapidly developing situation.

Leaflets were selected, translated and annotated by Barbara Allen. Source: AG Shliapnikov *Semnadtsatyi god* Vol 4, 1931, pp282, 300.

Don't yield to provocation

Appeal from the central committee of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party, the Petersburg Committee of the RSDWP, the Military Organisation of the RSDWP, and the inter-district committee of the United Social Democratic Internationalists, July 18 (5) 1917.

Calm and restraint! Workers, soldiers!

The demonstration of July 16-17 (3-4) has ended. You told the ruling classes what your goals are. Dark and criminal forces are casting a shadow over your demonstration by calling for blood to be shed. Together with you and all revolutionary Russia, we mourn for the recently fallen sons of the people. Responsibility for victims falls upon the underground enemies of the revolution. But they did not and will not succeed in distorting the meaning of our demonstration.

Now it remains to wait and see what response your appeal, 'All power to the soviets', will meet across the entire country. The demonstration has ended. Days of persistent agitation to enlighten the backward masses and to enlist the provinces to join our side are beginning anew.

Worker and soldier comrades! We call upon you to be calm and practise restraint. Don't give the malicious forces of reaction any reason to accuse you of violent acts. Don't yield to provocation. Don't come out onto the streets or engage in any clashes.

Worker comrades! Return peacefully to your work benches.

Soldier comrades! Remain peacefully in your units.

Everything that exists is working in our favour. Victory will be ours. There is no need for rash acts.

Steadfastness, restraint and calm are our watchword.

Slander should be exposed

Leaflet from the central committee of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party, countering the charges of being German agents, July 18 (5) 1917.

To the people of Petrograd! To workers! To soldiers! To all honest citizens! Slander should be exposed! Take the slanderers to court! An unprecedented accusation has been lodged against comrade Lenin - the charge that he received and still receives money from German sources for his agitation. Newspapers have already aired this monstrous slander. Already we see underground leaflets making reference to the former deputy [Grigory] Alexinsky. They already print calls to murder Bolsheviks. Deceived soldiers are already circulating from hand to hand lists of people who may be exterminated.

The goal is clear. The counterrevolutionary forces want to use the simplest means to deprive the revolution of a leader, to sow discord among the masses and to stir them up against the most popular leaders - the meritorious worthy fighters for revolution.

We declare: all information about comrade Lenin's financial ties or other ties to the ruling classes of Germany is a lie and slander.

[Grigory] Alexinsky, who initiated the case, is a notorious slanderer, who has accused many people of having been bribed by the Germans. In France, a union of journalists from Russia, Britain, Italy and neutral countries already condemned him for dishonesty and malicious slander and excluded him from all the democratic organisations of Paris. He was not admitted to the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

We demand from the Provisional government and from the central executive committee of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies an immediate, public investigation of all the circumstances surrounding the mean conspiracy by pogromists and hired slanderers against the honour and lives of the leaders of the working class.

This entire affair needs to be cleared up. This investigation will convince all the people that there is not even one stain on comrade Lenin's revolutionary honour.

Take the slanderers and distributors of slander to court! Subject pogromists and liars to public ridicule!



Lenin: forced into hiding

Summer Offensive

Expect a call!

Three substantial donations have come our way this week, as the CPGB's annual Summer Offensive fundraising drive begins to pick up pace.

In this intensive, seven-week campaign ending on August 20, we aim to raise £30,000 to help boost the finances of both the party and our paper, and set us in good stead for the year ahead. It's a cause to which a good number of dedicated comrades are committed and amongst them this week were SK, who came up with no less than £230 for the *Weekly Worker*.

Then there is comrade MM - a regular supporter of our paper, who always comes into his own during the SO. He paid us £110 by PayPal (he was among six people who used that method, by the way, and they were among 2,592 online readers of our paper over the last seven days). MM promises that there will be "more next month". That's what we like to hear, comrade.

The third donor worth a particular mention was comrade PM, who paid £100 exactly - and those three

were among a couple of dozen who contributed in one way or another to this week's total of £1,679. But a number of supporters who have pledged a donation have not yet come up with the goods - there's less than a month to go now, comrades! And let's not forget those who haven't yet pledged anything, but who we think might help us out - expect a nice phone call very soon!

In the meantime, the running total is £11,496 - which means we still need £18,504 by August 20! True, the final week of the campaign, which coincides with our annual Communist University, is always the most productive - from a monetary point of view, as well as in terms of stimulating debate! But don't let's leave things to chance. If you haven't contributed yet, comrades, you know what they say - there's no time like the present! ●

Peter Manson

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

Afterword

This instalment is the last in this series of leaflets taken from Alexander Shlyapnikov's memoir *The year 1917*, which breaks off in the month of July. Subsequently, Shlyapnikov led the Petrograd Metalworkers Union in successfully negotiating a wage rates agreement with factory owners.

Yet the inability of a wage rates agreement to address fundamental inequities in the relationship between workers and owners encouraged Shlyapnikov's revolutionary impulses in the fall of 1917. He gave his support (and 50,000 roubles from the union treasury) to help achieve the objective of soviet power in October 1917.

After the Bolsheviks came

to power, Shlyapnikov became people's commissar of labour. For more information on his role in the Russian revolutionary movement and subsequent fate, see Barbara C Allen, *Alexander Shlyapnikov, 1885-1937: life of an old Bolshevik* (Chicago 2016).

Barbara Allan

Originally published at <https://johnriddell.wordpress.com>.

References

BC Allen *Alexander Shlyapnikov, 1885-1937: life of an old Bolshevik* Chicago 2016, pp89-90.
A Rabinowitch *Prelude to revolution: the Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 uprising* Bloomington 1991, pp135-214.
RA Wade *The Russian Revolution, 1917* Cambridge Mass 2000, pp172-84

What we fight for

■ 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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Government retreats from hard Brexit

Check out, but never leave

The reality of Brexit is starting to become apparent, writes **Eddie Ford**. And the government is increasingly under pressure from big business

This paper has previously made the point that, compared to recent times, big business in the 1950s and 60s was politically active and often highly visible. As for those businesses or companies that liked to keep their activities, donations, links, etc, more secret, you had institutions like the Labour Research Department (originally set up by the Fabians in 1912 as the 'Committee of Inquiry into the Control of Industry') which insisted on examining the books and generally poking around: finding out who was sitting on the boards, who has what, and so on.¹ Indeed, the LRD also investigated the use of blacklists and other nefarious practices.

Nowadays though, in terms of the role of big business and politics, it seems to play a very peripheral role - which is rather odd. Rather, what you tend to get with regards to people who openly back and fund political parties, is *rogue* millionaires or billionaires. Like Arron Banks with the UK Independence Party, Lord Ashcroft with the Tories, or John Mills with Labour. But, quite obviously, these people are not core members of the bourgeoisie, or representatives of the key institutions of British capitalism - not the head of Barclays Bank, for instance, or Lloyds of London. Those institutions seemed to have retreated from playing that role.

Maybe this was because for a certain time it seemed to the bourgeoisie that they had three capitalist parties, so were safe - Labour under Blair, the Liberal Democrats and, it goes without saying, the Tories. Why do we need overt political intervention under these circumstances? However, recently things have happened that were not meant to happen. Such as the idiotic David Cameron, spooked by polls showing a Ukup surge, nearly losing Scotland and then going on to lose the European Union referendum - an unforgivable act as far as wide sections of the British establishment were concerned. Then the bourgeoisie 'lost' Labour with the sudden ascendancy of Jeremy Corbyn - another thing that was definitely not meant to happen.

Though still hardly clamouring away, big business is beginning to find its voice again in response to the new, unwelcome situation. Increasingly, both openly and in private, big business is beginning to agitate and put pressure on government - first and foremost over Brexit, of course.

Transitional

Now barely a week goes by without some company announcing that it is opening up a new, important office in Paris, Dublin, Vienna or Frankfurt, with the loss of so many jobs. For example, it emerged last week that the US investment bank, Morgan Stanley, has selected Frankfurt to be its new European hub in preparation for Britain's departure from the EU.²

Lucia Puttrich, Europe minister in the government of the state of Hesse, told *The Guardian* that she had been in talks with several banks about expanding their presence in



Money is at stake

Frankfurt, explaining that there "will be a transfer from those who need to have an office in the European Union because London will not be in the internal market". Researchers at the Bruegel think-tank have forecast that Frankfurt will take the biggest share of London's post-Brexit business in a report that predicted the loss of 30,000 jobs in the City.

Alarmed by Brexit, 30 chief executives of the UK's top companies on July 7 had a 'private' meeting with Theresa May at Chevening House, the official residence of the foreign secretary - but, of course, it was fully reported in the *Financial Times*. The newspaper disapprovingly noted that, since May entered Downing Street a year ago, she has "displayed indifference towards business and its views on what makes the economy work" - but "her humiliation in last month's election has forced a rethink" (July 6). Hard to disagree. The paper also observes that, although big business "accepts that Brexit will happen", albeit reluctantly, "what they want is greater certainty about the form Brexit will take". Indeed, it insists that continued membership of the customs union and the single market during the "transition period" would offer the most stability. In reality, of course, big business would much prefer the UK to stay in the EU - or, failing that, adopt some sort of Norwegian or Swiss arrangement, or at the very least an indefinite "transition period".

Two weeks after Chevening we had the inaugural meeting of the 'business council' - which will be a regular

meeting between the prime minister and various business leaders, ironically less than a year after May disbanded a similar body set up by David Cameron. The *FT* acidly notes that May was "shielded from direct encounters with business leaders" for almost a year by her former chiefs of staff, Nick Timothy and Fiona Hill, "as part of a conscious effort to rebrand the Conservatives as a party of the working class" (July 20).

Summing up the mood at the business council, Stuart Rose - the Tory peer and chairman of online grocer Ocado, who backed 'remain' - said the general election had been a "proxy re-referendum" against 'hard' Brexit. In attendance were the heads of five lobby groups, including the Federation of Small Businesses, and seven leaders of companies with a big interest in Brexit: Jaguar Land Rover, National Grid, Prudential, Risk Capital, Decoded, Tesco and BAE Systems.

Theresa May was told in no uncertain terms that 'no deal' with the EU was not an acceptable option and that she needs to back away from the Brexit cliff edge - by which they meant that the British government must strike a transitional deal lasting at least two or three years to protect business from a post-Brexit upheaval. Furthermore, City of London participants urged the prime minister to recognise the "importance" of the financial services sector and its need for "high-quality international talent" - ie, please don't cut off all EU immigration.

The prime minister, flanked by chancellor Philip Hammond and business secretary Greg Clark, promised there would be "no cliff

edge" and May has instructed her ministers to talk of an "implementation phase" rather than a transitional period - sophistry that fools no-one.

Pragmatic

Gritting their teeth, more and more ministers have simply come to accept that the Brexit negotiations will be more complex and time-consuming than previously imagined and that therefore a transitional deal of some description is an unavoidable political reality. After saying only a week ago that a Brexit deal will be one of the "easiest in human history", and that interim arrangements for trade, customs and migration should last no longer than "a few months", trade secretary Liam Fox has now conceded that Britain is likely to seek a transitional deal with the EU that will last until 2022 - though such arrangements should not "drag on" beyond the next general election.

Brexit secretary David Davis has publicly softened his approach in recent weeks, telling a House of Lords select committee that "practicalities" would force a need for a transition period. Meanwhile, environment secretary Michael Gove said the cabinet is "united" behind a transitional period, but, rather than stating how long he thought that would last, he noted that "pragmatism is the watchword". Ditto with free movement: a "pragmatic approach" was needed to give "reassurance" to businesses.

Everything indicates that the government is seeking an "off-the-shelf" arrangement, in which Britain would likely remain in the single market and retain free movement for at least two years after the UK formally leaves the EU in March 2019 - not to mention the continued operation in some form of the European Court of Justice. One possibility during the transition period is membership of the European Economic Area, which includes single-market access and exemption from some EU rules, though members still have to make budget contributions and accept free movement. Or there is the Swiss model with membership of the European Free Trade Association, which entails access to the EU market for some, but not all, areas of trade, continued free movement, but no duty to apply EU laws. However, committed 'hard' Brexiters would see either option as treachery.

For example, Charlie Elphicke, an officer of the influential European Research Group of Tory backbenchers which wants the government to just

get on with Brexit as fast as possible, remarked that any implementation phase had to be *genuinely* "transitional", not indefinite or open-ended. "Otherwise people will worry that we will end up in a 'Hotel California' situation," he said: "You can check out, but you can never leave."

We are clearly witnessing a distinct shift in the British government's stance, with the likes of foreign secretary Boris Johnson, Gove, Davis and now even Fox moving towards the position of Hammond, who has always been a staunch proponent of a transitional deal that retains the current trading arrangement with the EU. Interestingly, the trade secretary previously clashed with Hammond over whether the UK should be prioritising seeking free trade deals, with the chancellor saying such deals would have limited benefit for the UK. He declared at the G20 summit in Hamburg that "much of our trade with the world is service trade, where free trade agreements won't make any particular difference". Fox chided Hammond about this in an article for *The Sunday Times*, writing: "Having the world's largest economy publicly show commitment to increasing trade with us is not something we should sneer at" - obviously referring to Donald Trump's comments about a quick trade deal with the UK post-Brexit (July 23).

But, sniping aside, the direction of march is clear - towards a transition period and continued free movement. The Brexiters have even surrendered to the idea that the UK will have to pay a substantial divorce bill to the EU, whether that be £20 billion or £100 billion. The EU will not have to "go whistle" for its money (Johnson), but just put its hand out for the cheque - thank you very much. Cold, sobering Brexit reality is starting to bite for the British government.

All this repositioning and new-found pragmatism is precisely what Nigel Farage has always feared: the systematic undermining of the Brexit vote. And, after keeping its mouth shut for so long, big business is moving to put its own imprimatur on the Brexit negotiations - whatever we eventually end up with ●

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Notes

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Research_Department.
2. www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-06-22/morgan-stanley-said-close-to-choosing-frankfurt-for-new-eu-hub.

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