

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



Lars T Lih eight-page supplement: no Hegel moment, no April theses break, no turn to Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution

- Letters and debate
- CPGB aggregate
- Ireland's PBP
- SWP's Amy Leather

No 1507 September 19 2024

Towards a mass Communist Party

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Storm Shadows, Scalps, Himars and the threat of nuclear war



LETTERS



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

Programme

Two letters in the September 5 edition - from Ansell Eade and Brynhilda Olding - addressed my August 29 article, 'Solidarity, not sectionalism', on programme and trans liberation.

Comrade Eade's letter is broadly sound, recognising that the dictatorship of the proletariat entails substantial disruption, but that we do not aim for forced collectivisation of small businesses and farms and will therefore be concerned with regulation of a mixed economy. He concludes: "If this is the reality of the situation as the minimum programme is implemented in future, then we need to be upfront about it today." We in the CPGB are upfront about it today in our *Draft programme* - not only in the sentence at the beginning of the introduction to section 5, 'Transition to communism', which comrade Eade quotes, but in the whole of that introduction, and in sub-section 4.3, 'Economic measures', in section 4, 'Character of the revolution'.

I would add to comrade Eade's points only that we know from historical experience that the USA and its vassal states are very likely to respond to the overthrow of capitalist rule in any country - or even the loss of US direct political control - with siege warfare (euphemistically called 'sanctions'), with covert operations towards assassinations and sabotage, and with the vigorous promotion by financial and other material aid, publicity, etc, of oppositional groups, including not only self-identified 'democrats', but also minority nationalities (whether real or alleged, like the Bolivian lowlander latifundista 'self-determination' movement in 2007) and politico-religious groups.

To defeat these operations will need both continental-scale revolution (just as the Russian civil war ended with Red victory in Russia's continental empire, not only in European Russia), and a willingness to use full-scale German Kriegssozialismus, Russian 'war communism', or at least very radical directive planning, as the UK did in 1939-45. Our minimum programme is designed round the rejection of forced collectivisation in favour of a period of transition. But we say, "peacefully if we can, forcefully if we must" - and "forcefully" includes willingness to use such measures.

Comrade Olding's letter does not take us much further forward. It might be that an actually *elaborated argument* from her would do so; but this isn't it. Her conclusion is: "I do not call for the dissolution of the communist movement into a broad coalition of interest groups oppressed by capitalism ... But I do call for communists to take the revolutionary leadership that history pushes us into, in every arena of struggle."

The problem is that her *method* of argument is precisely that of the "coalition of interest groups oppressed by capitalism". She *begins* by saying that my article "fails to fundamentally understand the unique nature of the struggle for trans liberation". But my method is, on the contrary, precisely to seek not *uniqueness*, but the *commonalities* between the struggle for trans liberation and other struggles for

liberation, and the (core) struggle for the emancipation of the working class as a class.

Comrade Olding "take[s] umbrage" at my drawing an analogy between the idea that trans is *as such* an act of resistance against capitalist patriarchy, with the 1970s political idea that being gay or lesbian was *as such* an act of resistance. She goes on to emphasise that "changing one's gender is fundamentally a rejection of the capitalist paradigm of social reproduction" - which is exactly the sort of view that 1970s radical gay men and lesbians took of their own identification. She emphasises conservative and mainstream-media 'othering' of trans people. This latter point casually downplays the very real risks of queer-bashing and other forms of victimisation experienced by people who were identified by others as gay or lesbian in the 1970s.

What remains - from her letter - as the "unique nature of the struggle for trans liberation" is the cost of medical transitioning. But, while this is certainly distinct from lesbians and gay men, it is part of the common problem of the cost of medical care - taking different forms in different countries, but affecting the working class and the lower middle class more generally.

Comrade Olding argues: "The crucial role that communists play in the fight against capitalism must by necessity require the intervention into arenas not directly related to the class struggle, and winning them over to a basis of class politics. This will include ethnic and religious minorities, as well as sexual and gender ones. This fight must emphasise the fundamental nature of the notion that the negation of class oppression will not in and of itself negate their oppression, but the negation of capitalism is the only way for total human liberation". This is a half-truth, formulated so as to involve a misconception of what communists can offer.

In the first place, "the class struggle" includes all the divide-and-rule means used by the capitalist class and its state to maintain its rule. This includes right now (but not 10 years ago) the demonisation of trans rights, as well as now (but not 30 years ago) the demonisation of Islam. Suggesting that these are "not directly related to the class struggle" is to legitimise the implicit business-unionism ('economism') of the class-gender-race 'trinity' idea.

Secondly, the claim that "the negation of class oppression will not in and of itself negate their oppression, but the negation of capitalism is the only way for total human liberation" involves, in the form stated in comrade Olding's letter, precisely the errors of sub-Eurocommunist and sub-western, soft-Maoist intersectionalism.

This brings us back to comrade Eade's correct point. Capitalist rule leads, in current life, to conservative and Christianist witch-hunting of trans people. It also leads to US geostrategic policy producing US support for Israeli genocide in Palestine; in the UK, to deregulation resulting in 72 killed at Grenfell Tower, many injured and many more impoverished and living in fear of fire; and so on and on. In order to pass beyond capitalism as such to communism, we have *first* to pass beyond capitalist political rule. The way *out* of capitalist political rule has to be through working class political rule, which is posed because the working class as a class needs organised collective action in a way that other oppressed groups don't. This class

perspective is counterposed to the 'intersectionalist' perspective.

Mike Macnair
Oxford

Soft?

Leszek Karlik's arguments for nuclear energy are serious and interesting ('Another useful innocent', September 12). I am not enough of an expert to make an independent assessment of them, but it is very good that the *Weekly Worker* published his piece. However, in the ingress to the article itself, Karlik's party, Razem, is characterised in a way that requires a critical comment.

If "soft-left" is thought to mean the same as 'reformist left' - a view that capitalism can be reformed without any fundamental structural change - then that view does not at all seem to be the one that the Polish comrade argues for. To the contrary, he writes: "When we transition to the eco-socialist economy that we envision for our future, there will be no corporations that bend politicians to their will." This shows very clearly that the writer argues for nuclear energy *in the context* of workers' power: that is, after a radical change in power relations - first perhaps in Europe, but then with an internationalist perspective, in the whole world.

Or maybe the adjective "soft" is meant to be taken not in a political, but in an epistemological, sense. In that case all social sciences, including those with a Marxist approach, are 'soft' - in contrast to physics and other fundamental studies of nature.

My guess is that the expression, "soft-left", is simply a pejorative epithet with neither political nor intellectual content.

Hannu Reime
Helsinki

Pet experts

Comrade GG appears to be deliberately choosing not to understand the difference between two very simple concepts (Letters, September 12). There is a *difference* between people claiming to speak on behalf of the Palestinian people versus *listening to voices from the Palestinian people themselves*. And for a paper claiming to be a communist, internationalist paper, it is beyond belief that it does not include articles from the *Palestinian* communist and wider Marxist perspectives.

I actually think the *Weekly Worker* is a very good communist paper and unprecedented in the space for debate it allows in the letters pages. I agree with the majority of the articles it publishes, although obviously not everything in them. However, its weak - even blind - spots are genuinely startling.

With the best will in the world, neither Tony Greenstein nor Moshé Machover - nor, I suspect, comrade GG - are Palestinians, let alone Palestinian communists. Yes, very typically, all three praise each other to the skies - they are all such *fantastic* pro-Palestinian campaigners and *wonderful* socialists! They say that about each other and about themselves so it must be true!

Greenstein has "friends who are Palestinians" (Letters, September 5), so why bother asking *Palestinian* communists to write when the *Weekly Worker* has Greenstein as one of two pet experts? There is no such thing as a Palestinian perspective, says Greenstein, so *why not* rely on Greenstein to speak on their behalf! The Palestinians are *ever so grateful* (or should be) for "anti-Zionist Jews" like Greenstein and Machover, who will help liberate them!!

What absolutely insufferable, appalling arrogance, impudence and utter self-aggrandisement! Something of a 'Messiah complex'

appears to afflict both Greenstein and Machover ...

On the point about there being no single Palestinian perspective, of course that is right, but there *are* more specifically *Palestinian communist and Marxist perspectives*, so why not try and include these in the *Weekly Worker*? Yes, ideally in place of Greenstein and Machover.

Comrade GG states correctly I am highly critical of Machover and Greenstein and I have provided extensive reasoning as to why I am critical and why in my judgement I wouldn't touch either of them with a very long barge pole as pet 'experts' on Israel/Palestine.

Jack Conrad in his 'Ancient myths as today's weapons' (September 5) produced the very article *exposing* the myths and ideologies of the Old Testament that Machover *should* have done three editions previously, but signally failed to. Was it a pure coincidence that we had Conrad's article on the Old Testament so quickly after Machover's dreadful effort? I suspect not.

Comrade GG fails to respond to any of the specific points I raised about Greenstein and Machover, and that is fine - we clearly disagree and have very different perspectives, experiences and probably cultural backgrounds as well. But I suspect my words have had a wider resonance beyond the highly select and narrow Greenstein and Machover fan club: Numbers 1 and 2 members Greenstein and Machover themselves!

GG makes sweeping grandiose comments about me daring to criticise such fine "anti-Zionists" as Greenstein and Machover and on my apparent politics as well! Here, I suspect we start to come close to the real issue at the heart of all this.

Yes, I am a communist and very proud to be so. I am very much in the mainstream communist tradition. I believe in the fundamental Marxist principles that the working classes, the wider working masses and oppressed peoples, should liberate themselves, with the solidarity of working and oppressed people everywhere. They should *not* rely on 'liberator messiahs' to come to their rescue, to tell them what to do, tell them to be grateful for their 'help', to wait for the perfect external revolution (designed in King's College London) to come and save them.

As a communist and internationalist, I pay close attention to what my comrades in the Palestinian and Arab communist movement, parties and groups have to say. They obviously have a range of views and approaches, but ultimately come from the same basic Marxist and communist values, principles and perspectives of seeking the emancipation of all working peoples from imperialism and capitalism.

No doubt our two 'anti-Zionist' paragons (plus one or two others) would describe all such (and obviously myself) as "Stalinist". As it happens, I am not a "Stalinist", if one is defined as thinking that every single thing that Stalin said or did was 100% correct at all times, or that everything that happened in the Soviet Union was completely justifiable or supportable.

Significant parts of the mainstream communist tradition are highly critical of Stalin and what is more appropriately described as 'Stalinism', being approaches, modes of rule, organisation of economy and society which were *specifically* characteristic of the USSR under his leadership.

Greenstein's 'big (and only!) criticism' of Stalin is that some people who happened to be *Jewish* were executed or at risk of execution (Letters, September 5). Rather narrow and limited, I have to say, but very

revealing.

But the term 'Stalinist' as used by Greenstein, Gerry Downing and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, is *not* used in this more defined and meaningful sense. It is used precisely to attack *the whole of the* communist tradition. All these are bitterly and hatefully anti-communist to and from their cores. Which is fine. We know where they are coming from and act accordingly.

But I genuinely thought GG from their previous correspondence on other issues was far better than that. I hope I was right.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

One-off ban

Those riots took place just around the corner from where I live in Hull, but I wasn't brave enough to leave the safety of my flat. I'm all for riots and crimes against retail property and council authority, but not misdirected acts of ignorant savagery.

I haven't yet had the time to read all of last week's *Weekly Worker* - that treat lies in store. But I did take exception to the letter by Bruno Kretzschmar, who is very shy about what country he is writing from, never mind what city. Also, I think you made it blindingly clear why you had taken the unusual step regarding Daniel Lazare. It's a one-off and precise decision that no-one who calls themselves a humanist, never mind a socialist, should have any problem with.

To use this wise and necessary decision to suggest that a fellow, regular letter writer, Andrew Northall, should also be banned from the letters page is plainly petty-minded, comical and insensitive to what is happening in Gaza. Andrew Northall may not be everyone's cup of tea, but he's a committed communist who knows what he's talking about. The Soviet Union was - and is - a democratic adventure which raised 250 million people out of poverty, war and illiteracy. I say 'is', because I view the fall as a temporary phenomenon and we will see its rise again.

Elijah Traven
Hull

Stalinist

I will leave it up to comrade Andrew Northall to reply to the letter of GG from the USA about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, I would like to make a few points about GG's concluding remarks relating to Tony Greenstein's criticism of Northall as a Stalinist.

For a long time, most of the communist movement have based themselves on an anti-dialectical view of the past, with the partial exception of the leadership of the Communist Party of China under Mao, following Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin back in 1956. In Khrushchev's view Stalin was all bad. But, when Mao was leading the party in China, he pointed out that there was a positive side to Stalin as well. Most historians and communists will agree, for instance, that without Stalin's crash industrialisation drive the Nazis would have defeated the Soviet Union. In other words, Stalin played a decisive role in saving Europe and potentially the world from the victory of Nazism and racism.

So, although there was a negative side to Stalin in dealing with his political rivals in the Communist Party, there was also a more important positive side. While there is no reason to deny the negative side, neither should we deny the positive. This applies to all the other great leaders of the communist movement, from Marx to Mao.

Tony Clark
For Democratic Socialism

UKRAINE

Upping the ante

Vladimir Putin warns that we are on brink of nuclear war, writes Eddie Ford. Perhaps, not yet, but with the kabuki dance over Storm Shadows the evidence of 'mission creep' is unmistakable

Last week Sir Keir Starmer and foreign secretary David Lammy visited Washington to meet Joe Biden and other officials from the US administration. This followed a week of diplomatic choreography between the British and Americans, culminating on September 11 - going for maximum symbolism - when both Lammy and the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, travelled to Kyiv.

Now, we do not know exactly what was discussed at the White House. We read widely that they agreed a "strong position" over the Ukraine war, which everybody takes as a reference to British Storm Shadows - and other Nato-supplied medium ranged missiles that Volodymyr Zelensky wants to use to strike deep into the territory of the Russian Federation.

If that happens Vladimir Putin and a range of Kremlin insiders have warned that this would mean that Russia would be at war with Nato and all that that means in terms of nuclear weapons. Dmitry Medvedev, the former prime minister, has ominously talked of reducing Kyiv to a "giant melted spot." Sabre-rattling - for the moment anyway.

Owing to the sensitivity and significance of giving the go-ahead for Ukrainian use of Storm Shadow and other such medium range missiles, there has been an elaborate kabuki dance going on. The Biden administration does not want to be seen to be taking the lead in upping the ante in Ukraine. So he calls in his favourite yap dog, the UK, to come to Washington to lobby him and then go off round Europe doing the same thing. We saw it with supplying main battle tanks, we saw it with F-16 fighter-bombers.

If others join the UK warmonger, as the US clearly wants, then not only will Kyiv be given permission to use Storm Shadows against Russia. France and crucially the US will follow suit in giving permission for the use of the missiles they have supplied: ie, France's Scalps and America's Himars and Atacms.

The lifting of western restrictions on the use of medium-range missiles inside Russia would mark a significant diplomatic development - if not a pivotal military moment. Storm Shadows are tactical, not strategic, weapons. They have a range of 155 miles, but, unlike drones, they move fast and low and carry enough of an explosive payload to penetrate bunkers or knock out command posts.

Impasse

Throughout the current conflict, the US and its allies have sought to strike a balance between giving Ukraine enough weapons to resist Russia on the one hand, and not doing anything too overtly provocative on the other. Naturally this has infuriated the Zelensky regime in Kyiv ... and its social-imperialist cheerleaders such as the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, Anticapitalist Resistance and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. They plead for, demand, all the arms Ukraine needs and with no restrictions placed on their use. Effectively this bomb, bomb, bomb Russia line poses a 'guns or butter' choice in the west, with the social-imperialists demanding guns, ie, supplying Ukraine with massively increased supplies of modern fighter aircraft, tanks and missiles.



View from cockpit of Ukrainian MiG-29: firing missile

If, as looks likely, the US and the UK will give the go-ahead for the use of Storm Shadows against targets within the Russian Federation, does this mean we stand immediately on the threshold of nuclear war in Europe or a generalised nuclear exchange between Russia and the United States? This seems unlikely, as such a war would be unwinnable and spell disaster for humanity as a whole - but miscalculations can always happen.

Meanwhile the war of attrition continues. Clearly, as long argued in these pages, the military situation broadly resembles the western front during World War I - static lines with slow advances here or there, sometimes followed by a retreat, then a counter-offensive before it splutters out.

True, we have seen some dramatic Ukrainian advances - like the recent incursion into the Kursk oblast - but no decisive breakthroughs by either side, with no indication that we will see any such thing this year or the next or the next. Kursk is not going to lead to the collapse of the Russian army, nor is the Ukrainian army about to crumble, even if, as seems possible, Pokrovsk falls. Things will grind on for years and years, and precisely under those circumstances, there is on both sides an incentive to go in for what has been called 'mission creep'.

Looking at the situation objectively, it is impossible to imagine Storm Shadows being a *winner* for Ukraine. Yes, they will make a marginal difference, but not turn the tide of the war. Russia has already moved its most important command posts, airforce bases and major storage facilities inside Russia beyond their range. But their importance lies in how everybody is turning up the dial over the conflict. For instance, the Polish foreign minister has been speculating about the possibility of Nato protecting Ukrainian nuclear facilities. But, of course, it is Ukrainian forces that have been recklessly shelling the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia power plant - not the other way round, as crazily suggested by large parts of the western media.

That alone is reason to worry. According to UN observers, with grossly "inadequate" staffing levels due to the war, this has "significantly increased the risk of a nuclear accident" in a country which already witnessed the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. Zaporizhzhia

is very unlikely to explode - it is under cold shutdown - but shelling or a missile strike could still release significant amounts of deadly radiation. Depending on the prevailing winds, this could badly affect people in neighbouring Turkey, Belarus, Poland, Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria.

Clearly nuclear power is inherently dangerous and only a fool would urge on a capitalist government to build yet more of them in the name of saving the planet from climate disaster.

Strategic aim

We need to look at the bigger picture. This is not a war simply between a big Russian bear and poor little Ukraine, which is how it is near universally portrayed by mainstream bourgeois politicians and the social-imperialists. It has to be understood as a proxy war long envisaged by a declining US hegemon - one that does not face any sort of serious challenge from Russia, but does from China. From this perspective, Nato's steady expansion to the east is fundamentally directed against China, not Russia.

As part of this anti-Beijing drive, it is important to reiterate that a crucial strategic aim of the United States through the war in Ukraine is to bring about regime change in Moscow, replacing Vladimir Putin with someone not unlike the first post-Soviet Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, or the now dead oppositionist, Alexei Navalny. Yet this runs the danger, as US leaders must know, of producing the very opposite of what they want - a super-aggressive alternative in the Kremlin willing to risk *Götterdämmerung* in the attempt to defend the honour of mother Russia. But the US is banking on Putin being shoved aside either in a palace coup or by a colour revolution which results in the break-up of the Russian Federation and a series of pliant neocolonies. A setup that would see China surrounded from the north by Russia and to the south by India, as well as to the east by the formidable American fleet - strangling China in the process.

America would then control Halford Mackinder's 'world island' and could indisputably dominate the globe. A possibility that both Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping clearly have every reason to resist ●

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ACTION

Stop Farage - protest Reform UK conference

Friday September 20, 5pm: Protest outside Reform UK conference, NEC, Birmingham B40. Reform MPs give confidence to far-right thugs on the streets by whipping up Islamophobia, racism and anti-migrant rhetoric. Organised by Stand Up to Racism: x.com/AntiRacismDay/status/1826279190624350252.

Labour Party conference Palestine protest

Saturday September 21, 12 noon: Demonstration. Assemble at St George's Plateau, opposite Lime Street station, Liverpool L1. Call on the government to push for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and immediately end its support for apartheid Israel's genocide. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

Austerity is a political choice: tax the rich

Sunday September 22, 12 noon: Protest outside Labour Party conference. Assemble by the Wheel of Liverpool, ACC, Kings Dock, Liverpool L3. Come dressed in rags, bring bowls and spoons ready to make some noise. 'Sir Keir Starver' and 'Rachel Thieves' will tell us to tighten our belts and prepare for painful times ahead. Organised by The People's Assembly: thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Welfare, not warfare - stop arming Israel

Sunday September 22, 6pm: Fringe meeting, Racquet Club Hotel, 5 Chapel Street, Liverpool L3. Britain is implicated in two wars. The government stands by Israel, while it pursues genocide in Gaza. And Britain is escalating the Ukraine war, even when it is clear there can be no winners. Speakers include Salma Yaqoob, Lindsey German and Andrew Murray (Stop the War) and Fran Heathcote (PCS). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

Threads 40th anniversary screening

Monday September 23, 7pm: Film screening, Broomhall Centre, Broomspring Lane, Sheffield S10. Originally aired in the cold war, *Threads* imagines nuclear war unfolding. Set in Sheffield, the film shows the devastating impact, and post-apocalyptic aftermath, of a nuclear attack. Tickets £5 (£3). Organised by Sheffield Transformed: www.sheffieldtransformed.org/events.

Arms out of Edinburgh

Monday September 23, 7pm: Arms out! film tour, Augustine United Church, 41 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH1. Showing *When the music stops: Yemen, art and war* from Declassified and *Seven myths that sustain the global arms trade* by Demilitarise Education. Followed by discussion. Registration free. Organised by Edinburgh Campaign Against Arms Trade: caat.org.uk/events/arms-out-of-edinburgh-edinburgh-caat.

What made us human?

Tuesday September 24, 6.30pm: Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'Did matriarchy ever exist?' Speaker: Chris Knight. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/451544957846232.

Stop the far right! no fascists in London

Saturday September 28, 12 noon: Counter-protest. Assemble Trafalgar Square, London WC2. Stop the far-right thugs who are attacking Muslims, mosques, refugees, black and Asian people on the streets of Britain. Organised by Stand Up to Racism: www.facebook.com/events/543602381563028.

Anti-war assembly

Sunday September 29, 2pm to 5pm: Conference, Tyneside Irish Centre, 43 Gallowgate, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1. End Britain's support of the US for genocide in Palestine; End Britain's support of the US for escalating war through Nato in Ukraine and elsewhere. Organised by Newcastle Stop the War: www.facebook.com/events/2276077929407348.

Your right to protest

Friday October 4, 7pm: Book launch, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. Human rights barrister and campaigner Christian Weaver introduces his new book. This guide details your rights and the laws that protect you - and those laws you may inadvertently break as a political activist. Entrance £3.50 (£1). Organised by Housmans Bookshop: housmans.com/events.

Troublemakers at work

Saturday October 5, 9.30am to 5pm: Conference for trade unionists, Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester M1. Share experiences with other workers: from organising from scratch or reviving a moribund union to resisting a rotten deal or winning a strike. Tickets £10 (£5). Organised by Troublemakers At Work: troublemakersatwork/conference-2024.

End the genocide - stop arming Israel

Saturday October 5, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble central London, venue tbc. Demand the government ends complicity in Israel's genocide and pushes for a permanent ceasefire now. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org.

Defend the winter fuel payment

Monday October 7, 12.30pm: Protest and lobby of Parliament. Assemble by George V Statue, Abingdon Street, London SW1. The government's decision to axe universal winter fuel payments is the latest policy to target the oldest and most vulnerable in society. Organised by National Pensioners Convention: www.npcuk.org/post/lobby-of-parliament.

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.

AGGREGATE

Political organisation is key

Against the background of the escalation of the war in Ukraine, genocide in Gaza and a US election which may influence both, this month's CPGB aggregate examined the drive to wider international conflict and the left's political problems. Ian Spencer reports

Jack Conrad of the Provisional Central Committee opened the September 15 aggregate of CPGB comrades and invited guests with his views on the escalating war in Ukraine.

Vladimir Putin has stated that the deployment of medium-range missiles to Ukraine - with Nato permission to use them against the Russian Federation - will be taken as "a declaration of war". Comrade Conrad noted that the Ukrainian conflict, from its outset, has been a Nato proxy war against Russia - one in which Ukraine will bear the brunt of the dead, maimed and wounded. The deployment of British Challenger II and German Leopard tanks and American HIMARS in a direct attack on Russia is already beyond dispute - namely in the Kursk oblast, where Ukraine has seized a patch of territory.

What then is different about the deployment of British Storm Shadows? After all, Nato drones have already been used against targets deep inside Russia. But drones carry only modest payloads and are vulnerable to counter-measures. The potential impact of medium-range missiles is far greater, due to their destructive capacity and the ability to evade anti-missile defences. They can also neutralise Russian command centres and Putin has already taken steps to move such infrastructure further back from the front line. Medium-range missiles represent an inexorable 'mission creep' in a war which is unwinnable by either Ukraine or Russia in the short term.

Crucially, the war needs to be understood in terms of the decline of the US hegemon, continued comrade Conrad. The strategic objective of reducing Russia to a geographically dismembered vassal state was set out by Zbigniew Brzezinski, former US national security advisor, in his book, *The grand chessboard*. Nato's aim is to create a crisis in Russia, but this is merely the first step. The ultimate geopolitical aim of the USA is the encirclement and containment of China. Currently there is a stalemate in the war and clearly it is in the interest of the US to perpetuate it. At the same time, the war has strengthened China as a supplier to Russia and its defeat would be against Chinese interests. Recent movements on the ground, such as the Ukrainian incursion into Kursk or the possibility that Russia may take Pokrovsk, are unlikely to significantly alter the balance of forces, even if Russia can secure the whole of the Donbass.

It is worth considering the position of the British left regarding the war. Broadly speaking, they fall into three opportunist camps. Firstly, the pro-imperialist camp, typified by the Anticapitalist Resistance and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Justifying its stance with 'the right of Ukrainian self-determination', the AWL is effectively supporting Nato and calling for a more vigorous prosecution of the war. This can ultimately only serve the interests of the ruling class. There is a small pro-Kremlin left, consisting of near extinct outfits such as the New Communist Party and Arthur Scargill's SLP along with a smattering of Trotskyist sects of one. But the bulk of what passes for the left nowadays hold to a social pacifism typified by the Stop the War Coalition (eg, *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, the Socialist Workers Party, Counterfire and what remains of the



Evacuation of Pokrovsk

Labour left). The illusion is spread that capitalism can be nice and peaceful as long as governments act reasonably and abide by international agreements.

To the left of this block there is a fourth opportunist camp, which might take what superficially appears to be a principled position but holds back on criticisms of the social imperialists and social pacifists out of a fear of offending and therefore damaging future left unity prospects. This block includes what the comrade called Cargo Cult Centrists who make purely verbal claims in favour of the formation of a mass Communist Party but who refuse to seriously talk or otherwise engage with the CPGB.

In arriving at our position, we begin from the stance that the main enemy is at home. Russia is ruled by a rightwing nationalist regime, as is Ukraine. So we do not support Russia just because it is in conflict with Nato. But we do primarily oppose Nato and the UK ruling class, which is a key supporter of the US hegemon. Moreover, we draw out the interconnectedness between the genocide in Gaza, being conducted by Israel as the gendarme of the Middle East, and the war in Ukraine. Both are the consequence of the military expression of US imperialism, aided and abetted by its client states in Nato.

Debate

Comrade Farzad Kamangar stressed the connection of the Ukraine war with the conflicts in the Middle East. Iran has allegedly sold thousands of missiles to Russia in return for assistance with its nuclear programme. The use by the left of terminology such as 'eastern imperialism' in relation to powers like Iran fails to understand the distinction between mere territorial gain and imperialism. China plays an exploitative role in third-world countries and is taking a long-term view of itself as a potential leading world power. But it is not enough to take a neutral stance between two imperialisms. The non-equivalence is symbolised by the BBC's extensive media coverage of the killing of children in Ukraine and the relative silence on the killing of far larger numbers in Gaza.

The confusion of the left in choosing one imperialist camp over another was highlighted by comrade Carla Roberts. She illustrated the contradiction by the case of Greta Thunberg, who, on the one hand, supports Ukraine, but recently made statements in support of Palestine. The criticisms of Prometheus and Communist Future should be seen in the context of their silence on many issues. One possibility, comrade Roberts

suggested is an open conference on the war, which other groups could participate in. Comrade Jim Nelson observed that "international law is whatever the USA says it is" and that Nato is already at war with Russia *de facto*.

Drawing upon historical analogies with the second Balkan war, comrade Mike Macnair argued that the strategy of encirclement was a feature of attempting to contain Germany by the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. If Russia wins this war, it could potentially become an imperialist power, just as Japan became one because of its victory over first China and later Russia. The problem with centrist equivocation is that, without a party with clearly demarcated lines of principle, one ends up being dragged behind the manoeuvres of one or other sections of the ruling class. It is vital to call out opportunism, wherever we see it. Britain is, after all, a co-belligerent with Israel and Ukraine.

Comrade Conrad clarified his position regarding groups such as CF, saying that he was not suggesting it had softened its position on Ukraine because it has accepted financial backing from members in groups like Anticapitalist Resistance and Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century (RS21), but because of the perceived need to fudge issues in order to make friends. The list of affiliates to Ukraine Solidarity Campaign still includes Anticapitalist Resistance and used to include RS21.

Invited guest Tam Dean Burn supported the emphasis by the CPGB on the interconnectedness of the Ukraine and Gaza wars. Many organisations have come out with statements on Gaza, but not Ukraine. Thunberg met Zelensky, he commented, supposedly to look at the environmental impact of the Ukraine war. But, while it is important to understand the relationship between war and climate crisis, we are right to stress the role of US imperialism in all of these issues.

Comrade Conrad suggested that Thunberg is being used by Nato as a "useful idiot". Russia has indeed caused huge environmental damage and the nuclear issue is particularly important here. But so has Ukraine, often without the mainstream media pointing the finger of guilt.

CU assessment

The second part of the aggregate was opened by comrade Kamangar, who gave a positive report on the quality of the talks given at Communist University. All the speakers who had committed to the event presented excellent talks.

However, Covid has left a legacy in the way people work, she said, and very many more registered for the Zoom sessions than those attending in person - and this included long-standing party comrades. While this had an impact on the quality of the discussion after the presentations, it is a feature of many conferences, and it may be that we must move to a shorter face-to-face CU, possibly supported by other conferences via Zoom.

Comrade Conrad was not in favour of such a proposal, but sympathetic to the notion behind it - debate is marred by a lack of attendees in person. By contrast, comrade Roberts was in favour of moving to a shorter in-person CU, pointing out that an eight-day conference can be physically demanding, as well as difficult for people with childcare and work commitments. She also made a series of suggestions, such as improved advertising of the event, well in advance, and not just in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*. The CPGB must reach out in terms of communication and recruitment and it had already made valuable steps in that direction, such as the establishment of a designated cell for the task. Potential new members need to have a well-thought-out induction programme, she thought, while chairs need a clear idea of what is expected of them.

Comrade Nelson agreed that we cannot just expect people to turn up, although some other groups manage it a little better. As tiring as it can be, we come to CU for knowledgeable presentations and good-quality discussion. Comrade McShane, agreeing that many organisations had seen a similar decline in attendance at their events, supported the idea of a shorter winter CU to help build for the summer face-to-face event.

Comrade Macnair agreed that online events in spring and winter are a good idea. The nature of CU is closer to being a "cadre school" than the SWP's annual showcase event,

Marxism, which caters for participants at all levels. CU requires a certain level of development, but he agreed with comrade Roberts on the importance of recruitment. On this topic, comrade Roberts pointed out that, while the RCP, for example, enjoyed buoyant recruitment, new members tend to leave in large numbers too. While we only recruit in small numbers, there are many who are politically close to us and may well join. We need to focus on cadre expansion and the development of supporters with a better-defined pathway to membership, possibly including a communist unity school.

Comrade Kamangar pointed out that, while recruitment opportunities were missed in the past, we do make efforts to develop comrades, and the cell is a key place for that. When we consider people who have left, they may have had differences, but never developed them or were prepared to debate. It would be better to have a shorter, more concentrated CU and use the presentations from this and the spring and winter CUs for induction purposes.

Comrade Conrad pointed out that the left in general is in a parlous state. The much vaunted revival of the Young Communist League seems to have come to exactly naught. The Socialist Appeal/RCP success in recruiting young people has been hugely exaggerated. In reality it is a Potemkin village. Internationally too the left is doing badly. For example the Democratic Socialists of America have declined from 100,000 registered members to around half that now. Meanwhile, there has been the complete collapse of the Corbyn project. This has had an adverse effect, but without people learning the lessons.

Instead there is the search by the flotsam and jetsam for the next soft left alliance, broad party, anti-cuts initiative or some other such nonsense. What is needed is commitment to founding a Communist Party ●

Fighting fund

Do your bit

Good news - the last week, as expected, saw a marked increase in the total raised for the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund for this month. £696 came our way - just less than the £705 we had after the first 11 days of September.

That takes our running total up to £1,401 towards our £2,250 monthly target, which means we still need another £849 with 12 days still remaining, as I write. Readers and supporters, you can do it!

Topping the list in terms of generosity this week was comrade KB, who contributed no less than £170. That despite the fact he has been seriously ill for several months (hopefully he's going to see an improvement pretty soon). Other generous donors were MM (£75), PB (£70), plus AN, TW and GB (£50 each).

All those comrades contributed via bank transfer or standing order, as did TR (£40), DL (£30), OG (£24), GS (£20), SS (£15) and SA (£12). Then

there was PM (£50), AK (£30) and MZ (£10), who all got us the money by clicking on that PayPal button.

If you want to know where to find that button, see the link below, where you'll find details of all other ways you can chip in to the fund. And we really need you to do that - we still need to raise another £849 before the end of September!

But I'm really confident we can do it. I've been doing this long enough to know just how much the *Weekly Worker* is appreciated by all those who know the central role it plays in the campaign for a united, fully democratic, Marxist party.

If you're one of them, please do your bit. We can get there! ●

Robbie Rix

Our bank account details are name: Weekly Worker sort code: 30-99-64 account number: 00744310 To make a donation or set up a regular payment visit weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate

SWP

Amy Leather vanishes

What lies behind the mid-term changes at the top? The central committee limits itself to a single gnomish pronouncement. Meanwhile, Paul Demarty investigates

Every Monday, members of the Socialist Workers Party receive their weekly organising bulletin, *Party Notes*, in their email.

Its contents vary so little, frankly, that it is easy to miss when there is truly something of note. But on September 2, buried in the usual roll-call of upcoming demonstrations and fund drives, there was an item that was something like news:

The central committee would like to make comrades aware of two changes to the CC. The first is that Amy Leather has decided to step down from the CC. We would like to thank her for all her work over the years. The second is [that] Tomáš Tengely-Evans is taking over as editor of *Socialist Worker* this week, replacing Charlie Kimber. Charlie will remain on the CC. The proposed slate for the central committee standing for election at conference this year will be circulated in *Pre-Conference Bulletin* one. Comrades are able to put forward an alternative slate.

No further details seem to be forthcoming. The question thus arises: why have these comrades stepped down from their positions, and why now? After all, *Socialist Worker* editor is a central responsibility. As for comrade Leather, she was joint national secretary, and widely recognised as effectively being in charge of the SWP apparatus.

There is the possibility that there is no real political interest here. People get burnt out, or just plain ill, and need to step back from their roles; or there is some family emergency, or whatever. If this were the case, surely the SWP CC would think nothing of adding 'due to illness' or 'due to family circumstances'; although, having said that, the SWP is prone to a certain amount of 'toytown Bolshevism', when it comes to internal secrecy (more of which anon).

Backstory

All interpretations are necessarily speculative and based on hearsay, therefore; but let us propose one. The story starts - when else? - in 2013, when the SWP was tearing itself to pieces over allegations of rape against CC member Martin Smith, which had been dismissed by the internal disputes committee (DC) the previous year. A faction had formed to contest this at the SWP's annual conference, when the DC offered its report, but the faction's members were immediately expelled for technical breaches of the official procedures (factions are only permitted to exist in the pre-conference period and labour under various rules that more or less guarantee that they cannot prevail against the only permitted faction, which is to say, the central committee). The furore this created resulted in the formation of two much larger opposition factions.

The DC report is usually a formality, but this time was approved only on a knife-edge vote. Transcripts were leaked to various left outlets, including this one, and rapidly published, resulting in the factional struggle becoming public (and therefore illegal, according to SWP rules). The response of the leadership was to adopt a siege mentality, brook no compromise and drive what was probably



Speaking tools of a self-perpetuating leadership

around half the active membership out of the organisation. Yet all this was happening - again - publicly, generating coverage in the bourgeois press, and so quickly destroyed the group's reputation, such as it was, in the wider movement. The subsequent decade of SWP history has seen the organisation duck and dive endless attempts to proscribe it on campuses and student unions, and occasional attempts, fruitlessly, to draw a line under the matter.

The last such attempt came this May, with a formal press release accepting responsibility for various failings in the handling of the Smith case, which we discussed at the time.¹ That statement seemed to come out of the blue, as well, but presumably did not. It was an indication that this fiasco was still being used to attack the SWP - an impression confirmed at least by anecdotal reports.

What does this have to do with Kimber and Leather? For a start, they are two of the eight current CC members who were also elected to the leadership at the conference which sparked the crisis. As national secretary at the time, Kimber was formally responsible for the various purges that followed. Leather, meanwhile, emerged over the course of the year as the most vociferous defender of Smith, and the most unhinged in her demands for retribution. It would certainly not take anybody much Googling to discover that.

It also raises the question: how does she feel about the SWP writing grovelling statements on its failures during that struggle? All statements on this are bound by collective CC responsibility. We have no idea if the decision to address this was contentious, but with such overwhelming continuity of personnel with the 2013 regime, surely it must have been.

According to some anonymous reports, Leather has faced criticism internally for failing to promote the May statement. Her name was curiously marginal at this year's Marxism festival - while last year she gave a speech at the closing rally, this time around she offered one talk on the rather *recherché* topic of 'The invention of the western diet: capitalism, food and colonialism': diverting, no doubt, but it was not lost on savvy attendees that this was something of a downgrade.

So that is the working theory. It is, as we warned, not based on much - a rough coincidence with the latest attempt to address the unending fallout from the Smith case; a few historical details; whispers on the grapevine (people are used to calling the *Weekly Worker* a 'gossip sheet' for far better sourced articles than this one). It is perfectly possible that there is some other, perfectly reasonable explanation for the discreet disappearance of Amy Leather, and the changing of the guard at *Socialist Worker*.

Openness

We do not have any such explanation, however, because the SWP refuses to offer one - indeed, it has not even told anyone of the changes outside its ranks. (The SWP's Wikipedia page still erroneously lists Leather as joint national secretary.)

This is the real problem here. Imagine, if you will, the Labour Party announcing the resignation of its general secretary in a membership mailout with no explanation. No doubt journalists would get to the bottom of it in short order, but a big part of the story would be the absurd, bungled secrecy of the whole affair. The SWP holds itself to lower standards than the routine expectations we all have of bourgeois parties (or frankly of village lawn-bowls clubs).

This is perhaps understandable if our little theory is correct. The other six surviving members of the 2013 CC are equally culpable in the catastrophic mishandling of the Smith case. Alex Callinicos, the SWP's leading intellectual, even at one point threatened the opposition with "lynch mobs".² Why should Leather go, and not him? Maybe because he has at length repented for his role (but, if he has, he has kept it to himself). Such minor matters of political accounting are conducted strictly on a 'not in front of the children' basis.

This contempt for SWP members' intelligence - never mind us poor souls who merely have to work alongside the SWP in the wider movement - is ultimately indissociable from the political method and strategy it employs. For the SWP, the ordinary consciousness of workers under capitalism is rendered docile and reformist by the basic operation of the system,

and moreover the proceduralism of bourgeois politics. This veil is pierced when workers move into action, and likewise when the oppressed move to confront their oppressors. This leads to the valorisation of strikes and demonstrations, and the subordination of all other goals to getting people out on the picket lines and the streets.

This in turn demands total centralisation of activity, since the largely passive SWP membership must be dragooned into action according to the latest passing obsession of the leadership. The regime thus allows no room for debate. There is no worse fate for the SWP than the existence of rival strategies and tactics. Thus the leadership must present a monolithic outward face to the membership, and the membership must likewise appear as a monolith to the outside world. This results in a vicious cycle of intellectual deskilling: members are never asked to decide on a political matter, and thus their ability to do so withers on the vine, leaving initiative all the more concentrated in the leadership.

It is this culture that makes it so difficult for the SWP to account honestly for its changes of leadership, but it is also this culture that makes it more likely for scandals like the Smith case to emerge - and more or less guarantees a full-blown crisis when they do. The command and control structure introduces a steep hierarchy between leaders and members - and hierarchy enables mistreatment, including sexual exploitation, of those below by those above. (It is one of the many reasons we are all trying to get rid of it.) Once the scandal blows up, the appearance of monolithic unity is destroyed, which will inevitably be interpreted as an existential threat to the group, and thus lead to the sort of purges and recriminations we saw in 2013.

Leninism

All of this is done in the name of 'Leninism' - as the title of one Callinicos fusillade of early 2013 has it, "Is Leninism finished?"³ He thought not, and presumably still thinks not; but his interpretation of Leninism is one of a minority "vanguard party", which "collectively intervened in the struggles of the Russian working class ... help[ing] to advance the

struggle in question". By doing so, they encouraged support for Bolshevism in a kind of "dialogue" with the class.

This is a false reading of what Bolshevism was, as we will see, but perhaps more striking than the theoretical difference is the different attitudes to open political struggle of the SWP and the Bolsheviks. Callinicos's article, after all, was directly a rebuke to people who refused to dissolve their faction after the short period oh-so-generously allowed it by the SWP rules. He denounced them for bringing their criticisms into the public eye.

The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, were not, to begin with, a party as such, but a public faction, formed after the 1903, 2nd congress, of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, led the previously existing *Iskra* faction to split. Far from winding up after a short period, they continued with their own press, elected leadership and *duma* deputies (until 1912 when the Menshevik liquidators were expelled). They did not keep the reasons for their split as a private matter, but explained and explained again in open polemics such as Lenin's *One step forward, two steps back* (1904). They published the stenographic minutes of the congress, so that people - whether revolutionary workers or tsarist secret police - could check out their factional origins.

But then the Bolsheviks had a very different idea of what making a revolution meant. Yes, particular spontaneous struggles were important, but the point was to use all available methods to expand the membership deep into the Russian working class. A member of the party was not some automaton, to be activated in pursuit of the latest shiny initiative, but a thinking activist, who understood Marxism and had the requisite street smarts to not get arrested by the tsarist police. It was not a minoritarian, but a majoritarian, strategy - and as such placed much higher demands on members than being mere speaking tools. If they were going to run society, Russian workers had to learn the ropes of running *anything at all* as soon as possible.

Callinicos was at least proven right about his opponents at that time, who largely collapsed into liberal identity politics with a little sprinkling of socialism. Can we blame them, however, given the nature of the 'Leninism' they were taught by SWP leaders, and the grotesque results it produced in 2013?[●]

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Notes

1. 'Regrets, they've had a few' *Weekly Worker* May 23: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1492/regrets-theyve-had-a-few.
2. P Demarty, 'Lynch mobs and lèse-majesté' *Weekly Worker* February 21 2013: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/950/swp-crisis-lynch-mobs-and-lese-majeste.
3. socialistworker.co.uk/socialist-review-archive/leninism-finished.

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IRELAND

Best laid plans go awry

People Before Profit's long held commitment to supporting a 'left government' led by Sinn Féin is heading for the rocks. But, argues **Anne McShane**, aspirations of becoming junior ministers were always about the lure of careerism and narrow personal advantage

After more than four years of a Fianna Fáil/Fine Gael government we are now in the run-up to a general election.

It was an unprecedented moment in Irish politics when the two main bourgeois parties formed a governing coalition in 2020. These 'free state' bourgeois parties have faced each other off as rivals since 1932 - a duopoly - with smaller parties and independent TDs (MPs) propping up each regime. In 2020 it was the Green Party.

It was an innovative deal resulting in three governments since that year; the first led by Micheál Martin of FF, the second by Leo Varadkar of FG, and the third by Simon Harris. And, despite only having 79 out of 160 seats between the main parties, it has been a stable entity, able to rely either on the Greens or so-called 'independents', eager for their slice of the pie. Many being former members of FF and FG and therefore well versed on how to cut a lucrative deal.

The impulse behind the two parties overcoming their traditional enmity was, of course, the rise of Sinn Féin. It won the second highest number of seats, going from 23 to 37, and the majority of first-preference votes. If it had stood the same number of candidates as the main parties, it could have won 47 seats, making it the major coalition partner in any government. Both FF and FG refused to go into government with it, depicting it as an extremist nationalist party with continuing links to the 'terrorist' IRA.

Mary-Lou McDonald, president of SF, set about ensuring that it did not fall short again. Since 2020, as well as campaigning to build the party's profile and recruiting more candidates to stand, she has steered it even further to the right, towards an unquestionably pro-imperialist stance. In 2022 Michelle O'Neill, then vice-president of SF, attended Queen Elizabeth's funeral in Westminster Abbey. She subsequently accepted an invitation to be among the gathering at King Charles's coronation in May 2023. In February 2024, in her capacity as first minister, O'Neill sent her best wishes following his cancer diagnosis. SF now wants to reassure the UK that the British state has nothing to fear from it, and everything to gain. Resistance to British imperialism has been replaced by fawning diplomacy.

Right shift

In the war on Gaza, SF has lobbied the government for more action at the International Court of Justice and to pass the Occupied Territories Bill, banning the import of goods from illegally settled land. It has promoted the Palestinian Authority, organising tours of schools, universities and local councils to introduce its ambassador, Jilan Wahba Abdalmajid, while protecting her from criticisms about the treacherous role of the PA. But, when the Irish Palestine Solidarity Movement demanded that it boycott the Patrick's Day celebrations at the White House with the arch-imperialist warmonger, Joe Biden, McDonald refused. Both she and O'Neill attended, with the latter making an utterly nauseating speech, completely uncritical of Biden's arming of Israel's genocide in Gaza.

SF has also shifted its position



Richard Boyd Barrett: the 'collective' leader

on Nato. In 2023 it stated that, if elected to government, it would not withdraw from any existing EU and Nato 'defence' arrangements. Now in 2024 its defence spokesperson, Matt Carthy, has gone further, stating that "Sinn Féin are not opposed to defence cooperation with other states or international bodies". It is beyond doubt that, if elected, SF will be a willing servant of international imperialism.

On February 3 Michelle O'Neill was appointed first minister of Northern Ireland. There were many predictions that this would end with SF in government both north and south. However, its standing in the polls began to slip. In May it was at its lowest point in the polls since 2020, with a significant loss of support among younger voters, who had supported it enthusiastically in 2020. The local and European elections confirmed this. SF emerged with 21 councillors, an increase of just over 2.5%, and only one additional MEP. The government parties came out of the elections unharmed, with nationalist independents gaining new ground. McDonald admitted that it had been a bad election and "lessons would be learned". And, of course, that meant another shift to the right.

It would be a remarkably big one. On July 15 McDonald featured on RTE, the national radio station, where she announced that she had been "told directly by our base" that issues relating to immigration and the housing of asylum-seekers "needed to be aired respectfully". The following week SF published

its new policy, which committed it to establish the "partial designation" of some countries as "safe", meaning that more asylum-seekers could be deported. A SF government would "institute bilateral arrangements between Dublin and London to ensure safe return of asylum-seekers."

Remarkably, SF spokesperson Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire stated that this would include establishing a border police unit between north and south. Its new policy complains that the government has failed to effectively deport failed asylum-seekers and it will make sure that those who are "not eligible for international protection here in Ireland really leave".¹ It wants state-owned reception and processing centres, and a dedicated police force, to ensure that nobody escapes detection.

SF is steering to the right of the government in its migrant policy, which is saying something. At the present time, single male asylum-seekers are not being accommodated, resulting in more than 2,000 sleeping on the streets. These migrants - a significant number from Congo, Palestine, Afghanistan and Syria - face brutal attacks from far-right groups. The number of so-called 'safe countries', where human rights are said to be protected in spite of asylum claims, has increased to 13, including Egypt and Algeria. The European Pact on Migration and Asylum, being introduced to strengthen the borders of Fortress Europe, will mean even

more dehumanising treatment for migrants.

The right lurch of SF on migration has produced problems for those tied to the notion of a left government. The most prominent being People Before Profit, which is, of course, dominated by the 'collective leadership' of Richard Boyd Barrett and his Socialist Workers Network (an affiliate of the International Socialist Tendency). At the moment PBP has just four TDs, but RBB clearly has grand ambitions, beginning modestly enough with serving as a junior minister in a Mary-Lou McDonald government.

SF's right lurch has caused a crisis in PBP. As shown by the September 14 national council meeting, not a few fear that PBP itself risks being dragged to the right in the pursuit of promoting individual careers. Leaks to the *Irish Independent* of an internal briefing showed that there was a demand for action against PBP councillor in Sligo, Gino O'Boyle, who allegedly entered into a deal with SF to vote for an FF mayor in exchange for him being supported for the deputy mayor position. The article published on September 8 described a motion from the Cork branch which stated that if it was proved that he had done so, O'Boyle should be formally asked to resign as deputy mayor "as taking this role under a FF mayor is not in line with PBP's position on kicking out FF and FG, as stated prominently in our local election manifesto". Further, any repetition of his actions "will be incompatible with continued membership of PBP" and the steering committee should make clear that the party "does not accept any logic of 'special circumstances' used to excuse such actions".² This motion was successful, despite determined push-back efforts by the 'collective leadership'.

Cork branch

Another motion put forward by the Cork branch was unfortunately not successful. The Red Network, one of three of the permitted factions in PBP, published its position on Sinn Féin on its website on September 9. The second Cork motion called on the 'collective leadership' to reconsider its position on SF and the 'left government' slogan. Red Network states that the current position of PBP is to go into government with SF, but use the 'red lines' tactic "as an excuse to walk out and support Sinn Féin externally and case by case". RN has "never agreed with this dishonest position". And, while it concurs with the need to get rid of the FF/FG government, "we have to tell the truth about Sinn Féin's hesitation to challenge the establishment, and the danger that, without external pressure from the working class, they would coalesce with the establishment". Its position is that PBP should not enter government with SF, but instead "offer external support for a Sinn Féin-led government and vote for it on a case-by-case basis".³

The Socialist Party in Ireland, which stands as Solidarity in the Solidarity/PBP coalition, has been engaging in debate with members of the Rise faction of PBP. A recent article makes some very useful points against the PBP majority. It argues that

PBP's mistaken approach to Sinn Féin is only becoming more problematic, as Sinn Féin responds to pressure from the establishment and the far right by shifting its own position to the right - most notably, and disgracefully, on the issue of immigration. To be clear, Sinn Féin hasn't just failed to resist the rise in anti-immigration sentiments (which it was in a strong position to do): its approach on this issue (criticising the government's policy from the right, not the left) has added to them - effectively legitimising the lies and scaremongering of the far right, with all the dangerous consequences this has for migrants and people of colour especially.⁴

However, the SP is also a proponent of a "left government":

We of course agree with highlighting the demand for a left government, as an essential part of realising the socialist policies that are so necessary to resolve the multitude of crises facing working class people today. Moreover, we agree with the need to imbue people with the confidence that realising such a left government is possible - pointing especially to the potential power of movements of workers and young people.

Here is the crux of the problem. While the Cork branch of PBP, Red Network and the SP all quite rightly point to the dangerous illusions being created by the commitment to enter into government with SF, they subscribe and promote a dangerous illusion themselves - the possibility of a "left government" under capitalism, most likely led by SF. They argue that this would be a step forward for the working class. They have not learned the lessons of the disaster of Syriza in Greece - a disaster borne by the Greek working class, which found itself on the sharp end of EU austerity, as government attempts to resist collapsed in chaos.

Comrades must see that the only way for the working class to transcend the system is by building its own revolutionary party - committed to fight for our class to become the ruling class. And this has to happen as part of a European revolution at the very least. There are no short cuts. The election of socialist TDs means building a platform to build our working class strength against capitalism, not a compromise with a populist party, which PBP knows will be an enemy of our class.

When SF promises attacks on migrants, it is promising attacks on the working class itself. The SP is wrong that it is simply a "mistaken approach". For PBP to press ahead with a project to put that party in power is an act of opportunist treachery ●

Notes

1. www.sinnfein.ie/files/2024/International-Protection-A-fair-system-that-works.pdf.
2. www.independent.ie/irish-news/people-before-profit-deputy-mayor-gino-oboyles-ff-vote-in-sligo-infuriates-his-party/a1368083964.html.
3. rednetwork.net/articles/2024/09/pbp-national-council-left-government-and-the-sligo-rep-that-voted-fianna-fail.
4. www.socialistparty.ie/2024/08/debate-the-folly-of-rising-and-falling-with-sinn-fein-a-reply-to-rupture-pbp.

REVIEW



Ronnie Kasrils: guerrilla commander turned intelligence minister

Missing a trick

Paul du Toit (writer/director) *The unlikely secret agent* Marylebone Theatre

On the flyer which accompanied this play were the words, “All shall be afforded dignity” - a motto clearly dear to the heart of writer-director Paul du Toit - a South African born actor now based in Canada. Having premiered in Britain on June 9 at The Drama Factory in Somerset West, the play ran for only four days in London’s Marylebone Theatre, but will hopefully soon be performed in a venue near you.

The unlikely secret agent is the story of Eleanor Kasrils, the wife of Ronnie Kasrils. During the apartheid era Ronnie was one of the founding members, guerrilla fighters and eventually one of the leaders behind Umkhonto we Sizwe, the fighting arm of the African National Congress. Eleanor was a single mother, Ronnie’s partner and employee in a bookstore owned by her parents. But she became an important part of the secret actions of the ANC underground, until she and Ronnie were forced to leave South Africa. The sad part of their departure (they went to the UK) was that Eleanor was forced to leave her daughter behind, and did not see her for 11 years.

The play is based on the book of the same name, written by Ronnie after Eleanor’s death in 2007. The action takes place in 1963, when political protest becomes ‘sabotage’, and all resistance to the apartheid regime is crushed by government forces. One of the draconian bills passed allowed the South African Special Branch to arrest and detain for 90 days anyone they thought was involved in underground activities - incommunicado, without access to family or attorneys - and to re-arrest them as often as they wanted.

The first part of the play shows the Kasrils’ gradually blossoming relationship and Eleanor’s personal bravery, as she becomes involved in the underground resistance movement. However, there was something that neither she nor Ronnie, or anyone else in the ANC, knew at the time: there was a traitor in their midst.

Eleanor and Ronnie were involved in a series of explosions, whose targets included state assets and, cheekily, the offices of the Special Branch. But the agency was

unable to locate and arrest Ronnie because he had been spirited away by Eleanor, so they arrested her, having been tipped off by their agent. The second half of the play deals with her interrogations, her time in a mental hospital instead of prison, her escape from the hospital and eventual reunion with Ronnie.

There were five actors, all South African - four men (Wessel Pretorius, De Klerk Oelofse, Sanda Shandu and Ntlanhla Kutu) and one woman (Erika Breytenbach-Marais). Each of the men took on three or four personae, switching genders and races when needed, which occasionally was a bit confusing if you did not know the story, but was a *tour de force* for the actors involved. Erika Breytenbach-Marais played Eleanor, of course, playing no other role, and was on the stage during the entire play. All of the actors deserve praise for the way in which they embraced their parts.

I received the impression that many in the audience had been involved in the struggle in South Africa, and so the story was probably known to them. At the end of the performance I attended, there was a standing ovation, although I was not clear if it was mainly directed in favour of the anti-apartheid political message or the actors and others involved in the play itself.

However, I had several reservations. Firstly, even if one knew the story beforehand, following the action was not always easy. The rapid changes of personnel amongst the men was at times rather confusing.

Secondly, having read both the book and the play script beforehand, I found some of the characterisations troubling - especially those of the women in the hospital.

In addition, several times, the background story was told by Eleanor, who often came to the front of the stage to talk to the audience. After a while I found this disconcerting: usually in a play (Hamlet notwithstanding) one wants the action to be shown, not told. But I got the impression that too much action was crammed into too short a play.

And, having read the book beforehand, I was also aware of its differences with the play. I am

always in two minds when watching something that is supposed to be biographical. Should the viewer ignore the differences between what is biographical and how it is portrayed? Or should we accept that the two might be different, depending on the interpretation of the writer/actor/director of the play? I have not resolved this dichotomy to my satisfaction, even after many years of reading books and watching plays and films about them.

In the end, I had a curate’s egg view of the play - the politics in retrospect took me back to my youth, while watching the men do their rapid changing was fascinating. But I also think Paul du Toit missed a trick - if the play had had less of the beginning of Ronnie’s and Eleanor’s relationship

and had included a scene about how they were smuggled out of the country, that would have made a very exciting closing episode.

Anyone interested in the struggles in South Africa should see it if they can. The story of the upsurge against apartheid, including the political contradictions, is instructive - especially for those who were not around at the time. But read the book too - it would please Ronnie (who left the ANC after the fall of apartheid in protest against the oppressive policies of the ANC government of the time), and give the reader a wider picture of the period, as well as the bravery of the hundreds of people who were involved in the heroic resistance against apartheid ●

Gaby Rubin

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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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Failure isn't merely paved with good intentions: it's walled and roofed with them

Corbyn's maybe party

An eclectic mixture of soft lefts, reformist has-beens, committed localists, inveterate unity-mongers and the plain deluded have been secretly meeting. But, asks **Carla Roberts**, can we expect anything more than yet another Labour Party mark two?

You really cannot charge Jeremy Corbyn with being hasty or precipitous. For nearly four years, ever since he was suspended by Sir Keir, he has been asked, urged and begged by his small army of loyal supporters to found a new party - any party. The more naive commentators might have assumed that most of the 325,000 who joined Labour after his election as leader in 2016 would have followed him to form a new organisation - and might even still do it now. That, though, is not going to happen.

In any case, the pre-party formation, Collective, has apparently just decided - at a "private meeting" held in London on September 15 - to "begin drawing up democratic structures for a new party to launch". Not only was the meeting "private" - we also have to read *The Guardian* to find out about it. Not a peep from Collective itself - not even a quick email to its fee-paying 'supporters'. There is nothing on the website, nothing on social media.

Attendees

Corbyn was among the attendees, we read, as were ex-Unite leader Len McCluskey, film director Ken Loach, former North of Tyne mayor Jamie Driscoll, anti-apartheid activist Andrew Feinstein and Lutfur Rahman, mayor of Tower Hamlets. According to the *Canary* website, the participants were "unaware" that *The Guardian* would be reporting on the meeting - and "were unsure how the media outlet found out". Secrets have the habit of being outed.

A spokesperson for Corbyn later said that his attendance was "not an official endorsement" and that he had just come along in order to "listen to and share a variety of views about the way forward for the left". Oh, and he was given the opening speech, naturally. Corbyn might try to pretend Collective has nothing to do with him, but that is clearly nonsense: the formation has adopted the 'programme' of Corbyn's tame Peace and Justice Project (all five minimal points of it) and was registered at Company's House on February 28 this year as 'Justice Collective Ltd', with journalist Justin Schlosberg and Pamela Fitzpatrick as directors. The latter is also co-director of the 'Peace and Justice Project' (the other one is Jeremy Corbyn). Fitzpatrick apparently said at the meeting that "now is the time" to become an established party.

We hear that it is, however, not a done deal. Andrew Feinstein and Jamie Driscoll apparently disagreed with forming a party just yet and Corbyn himself wrote only two months ago that he opposes "a new centralised party, based around the personality of one person". Naturally, we too oppose leader cults, though communists argue that a democratic left party would have to be "centralised" to be effective.

Corbyn, on the other hand, argues for "local people's assemblies everywhere" instead of a party. Only once his idea of a "grassroots model" and "real community power" (which allegedly led to his election victory in Islington North - nothing to do with name recognition or data resources accumulated as a long-time sitting MP) has been "replicated elsewhere, could it become the genesis of a new movement" that "will eventually run in elections".¹

Writing in the *Morning Star* a couple of weeks ago, Jamie Driscoll too *seemed* to be arguing against setting up a political party, waffling about "people power" instead. On the one hand, he writes:

Is the logical next step to set up a new party? Many have tried. Under 'first past the post', none have prospered. Sometimes among the left, there's a nervousness about innovative organisation, and a retreat to minutes and matters arising. A political party that wants to change the way politics is done is a paradox.

Instead he wants "us" to "develop manifestos" (plural!) "to bring communities into politics", as well as "putting people power in town halls up and down in Britain".

But he also admits that, "We want innovation and freedom, yet need consistency and discipline." How on earth does he imagine "consistency and discipline" without forming a party? He does not elaborate, showing his deep political confusion - no doubt, like so many, he has been burned by his experiences with Labour and is contemptuous of the confessional sects that grandly declare themselves to be the 'party'.

Interestingly, we also read that Fiona Lali - member of the newly renamed Revolutionary Communist Party (aka Socialist Appeal) - was present at the meeting. This might have been by personal invitation of Pamela Fitzpatrick, as both were standing as 'independents' in north London constituencies in the July 4 general election and had organised a few joint events. It seems very unlikely that the RCP would, so shortly after its relaunch, consider joining another party - and one in which it would probably be exposed as the small fish it actually is. After all, just in May it declared itself

"a clean break from the so-called left". It claimed to be focused on "preparing for power", as "our party will, within the next five or ten years, be hurled into the turmoil of the British revolution". They would be struggling to uphold that mad outlook within an organisation led by

soft left Labourites. Could be fun to watch, mind.

There is also a question mark over Corbyn's relationship with the four new independent MPs with whom he has only just set up the Independent Alliance in parliament. According to *The Guardian*, they are unlikely to join the new Collective party. Clearly, Corbyn and the four have very little in common politically, apart from their opposition to the war in Gaza.

Owen Jones

That obvious fact seems less clear to Owen Jones, who as a general rule is always on the wrong side of an argument. He is centrally involved in the 'We Deserve Better' campaign, which was also 'represented' at the private Collective gathering. Just last week, he argued in one of his god-awful *Guardian* commentaries that the five independent MPs should get together with the four new Green MPs and, hey presto, we've got ourselves "the biggest parliamentary grouping elected on a left-of-Labour platform in British history". That could "lay the foundations for a historic political breakthrough". All it takes now is "discipline and focus" to make it happen and turn the alleged crisis of expectations into something wonderful.²

This is, as an aside, the same Owen Jones who repeatedly stabbed Corbyn in the back when he was Labour leader. He also bought fully into the 'anti-Semitism' smear campaign, publicly legitimising the witch-hunt of Jackie Walker, Ken Livingstone and Chris Williamson and later naively declaring that "Starmer can succeed and he deserves

Weak politics can only add to the confusion ruling on the soft left



our support".³ He made his grand final stand in March 2024, publicly resigning from the Labour Party, listing as one of the main reasons for his departure the leadership's support for Israel's genocidal war. He clearly still does not understand what the campaign to conflate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism - a big lie which he still appears to believe in - was all about. Well, Owen, the whole campaign was designed to get rid of that troublesome Corbyn and close down any criticism of the state of Israel.

As an aside, it is also extremely questionable whether the Green Party would be the slightest bit interested in joining the new Corbyn party - after all, it is fully on board with the anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism lie, has dropped its opposition to Nato and hankers after being a safe coalition partner with this or that mainstream bourgeois party in the future. Naturally then, they also support plucky little Ukraine. In fact, they are going exactly the way of the German Greens - marching in lockstep with imperialism.

Last week, a new grouping called 'Greens Organise' was set up by 200 Green Party members and supporters to challenge the leadership's trajectory and fight for "an internationalist, anti-capitalist and ecologically transformative agenda".⁴ No chance, in our humble opinion. But it is quite feasible that this new grouping - or a section of it - might jump into the new Corbyn party, especially considering who has signed up: among them, for example, are Matt Zarb-Cousin ("former spokesperson for Jeremy Corbyn"⁵), a handful of former Labour Party councillors and former Labour members, like the restless Philip Proudfoot, who in 2020 helped found and lead the ridiculous Northern Independence Party, before he left in 2022 to join the Greens.

Not invited

The pressure to form a new 'left' party is certainly there, as is the political space. One unnamed Collective organiser told *The Guardian* that "there will be a new left party that will contest the next election and hopefully be a meaningful counterweight to Reform and the rightwing drift of the Labour Party". Clearly, this will not be a Marxist party and we suspect the word 'socialist' might also be absent, at least in any meaningful sense.

Various left groups that have sprung up after Corbyn's defeat (and have shrivelled back to near nothing) are already listed as "in solidarity" with Collective on its website, including Transform, Reliance, Assemble and the Liverpool Community Independents.⁶ After its disastrous electoral performance, both the Socialist Party

in England and Wales and its Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition are now on board too, as is The Muslim Vote. They might also be joined by the five suspended Labour MPs who rebelled for a second time last week, voting to retain the winter fuel allowance. John McDonnell, Apsana Begum, Richard Burgon, Ian Byrne and Zarah Sultana now face possible expulsion by the Labour Party.⁷

Missing is the Workers Party of Britain - George Galloway was not invited, we understand. But he too has repeatedly called on Corbyn to lead some sort of "popular front movement or party" (perhaps because, while some candidates of the Workers Party did quite well on July 4 - when they stood in areas with a large Muslim population - most of them did as badly as the rest of the left). Would he liquidate the WPB into the Corbyn Project? There is not much difference between them *politically* for sure (though Galloway has complained that Corbyn blanked him the entire time he was leader of the Labour Party).

The differences between them are matters of style, really. Both are decades-long Bennite Labourites, through and through - focused on the futile idea that they could run national capitalism *on behalf of* the working class. In order to be allowed into government, of course you have to make compromises. Corbyn, for example, readily dropped his decades-long fight against Trident and his anti-monarchist views - and that is before he got anywhere near No10!

Galloway is more openly populist, showing off how 'hard' he would be in dealing with migrants and protecting Britain's borders. But then Corbyn's former advisor, Andrew Fisher, has just given the thumbs up to Italy's rightwing prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, and her asylum scheme, which offloads refugees for processing to Albania - all those unsuccessful get sent straight back: "That scheme makes logical sense", applauds Fisher. Keir Starmer should copy it and the only problem Fisher has is the question, "Who could be our Albania?"⁸

Rather than fighting for what the working class *needs*, these Labourites always focus on what they believe is *possible* (not much at the moment, clearly). Collective might or might not come into existence as a fully registered party, but one thing is for sure: it won't fight for the self-liberation of the working class ●

Notes

1. *The Guardian* July 12.
2. *The Guardian* September 6.
3. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/04/keir-starmer-labour-leader-committing-policies-the-left.
4. [greensorganise.uk](https://www.greensorganise.uk).
5. www.theguardian.com/profile/matt-zarb-cousin.
6. we-are-collective.org.
7. *The i* September 17.
8. *Ibid*.

SUPPLEMENT

A hundred years is enough

Three books, all published in 1924, laid the ideological groundwork for a Lenin cult, which is still responsible for the confessional sects and academic historians alike getting the Bolsheviks and the Russian Revolution so wrong. **Lars T Lih** shows that there was no Hegel moment, no April theses break, no conversion to Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. Lenin and the Bolsheviks consistently upheld revolutionary social democracy

Even though Lenin's stroke in spring 1923 put him permanently out of commission, his physical death in January 1924 means that his centennial was celebrated in 2024. But another centennial should also be marked, although certainly not celebrated: 1924 was the birth year of the Lenin cult and its various offshoots. And this cult is responsible for many of the false beliefs about Lenin and the Russian Revolution still prevalent today.

I place three small books on my desk, all published in 1924: *Foundations of Leninism* by Iosif Stalin, *Lenin* by Georg Lukács, and *Lessons of October* by Lev Trotsky. These three books laid the ideological groundwork for the Lenin cult by turning Lenin into a theoretical innovator of genius and a heroic rebel against his own socialist camp. According to both Stalin and Lukács, Lenin rejected the entire 'Marxism of the Second International'. According to Trotsky, Lenin dismissed the 'Old Bolshevism' of his former Bolshevik lieutenants. In each of these narratives, a Marxist 'other' is embodied in some hapless individual - for example, Karl Kautsky for Lukács and Stalin, or Lev Kamenev for Trotsky. A sacred narrative is told and retold: Lenin defeats the Marxist (or should I write 'Marxist' in scare quotes) 'other' and thus opens the road to the glorious victory of October. One other feature unites these foundational documents of the Lenin cult: their picture of Lenin is completely at odds with how the historical figure, Vladimir Ulyanov, saw himself.

The Lenin cult is not something that is safely stowed away in the Soviet past. Many of today's unquestioned claims about Lenin come directly and indirectly from these three little books. But my critique of the Lenin cult today will proceed on two different levels, and I ask readers to carefully distinguish them. One level is against a set of beliefs about Lenin inherited from the past that do not stand up to empirical investigation. These inherited beliefs are an affliction for all of us (myself certainly included!). Sharing these beliefs does not make anyone a member of a cult. But it is hardly a secret that there do exist people out there whose primary loyalty is to retelling the inherited sacred narrative rather than presenting an empirically responsible picture of Lenin and the Russian Revolution. I call these people *fundamentalists*, because they greet any suspicion about the inerrancy of the inherited story with cries of heresy.

This essay comes in three parts. Part 1 looks at the three most influential manifestations of the Lenin cult: Lenin against Kautsky and the Second International (Stalin); Lenin against Kamenev and most other Bolshevik leaders (Trotsky); Lenin against all that is good and true (the inverted cult of the academic historians). Part 2 discusses more recent cult narratives: Trotsky against 'stagism' (a spinoff cult, in which Trotsky is the central hero), and finally Lenin against non-dialectical Marxists (a more recently invented legend of Lenin's encounter with Hegel in 1914). Part 3 presents a concrete case study of how the various Lenin cults have distorted the political dynamics of 1917; it analyses the endlessly recycled anecdote, according to which Bolshevik leaders Kamenev and Stalin expressed their support for the war in March 1917, prior to Lenin's arrival.

Part 1: mainstream

Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism*, written immediately after Lenin's death, is by far the most influential contribution to Lenin studies ever made.¹ Its impact has nothing to do with one's political attitude. Indeed, the writers who are the most staunchly anti-Stalinist (the Trotsky tradition and the academic historians) are often the ones most loyal to the distortions introduced by the Soviet leader.

Stalin's little pamphlet is not much read today, no doubt, but this only makes its argument more acceptable in today's political environment. Stalin introduced three themes that are deeply at odds with how Lenin presented himself and



Traditional iconography: Isaak Brodsky 'Vladimir Lenin 1 May 1920' (1927)

how he was seen by admiring comrades during his lifetime: Lenin's attitude toward the pre-war Second International, his attitude toward Karl Kautsky, and his attitude toward his own originality.

In 1915, Lenin conducted a polemic with Aleksandr Potresov - a Russian Social Democrat on the very right wing of the party. Here is Lenin's summary of his *opponent's* view of the Second International:

The impression is produced that [social democracy] remained a single whole that, generally speaking, was pervaded with gradualism, turned nationalist, was by degrees weaned away from breaks in gradualness and from catastrophes, and grew petty and mildewed.

Doesn't this description sound familiar? Indeed, this view of the Second International lies at the heart of every manifestation of the Lenin cult. Yet Lenin promptly skewered his opponent's portrait with gusto. In actuality, he argued, there was a deep split *within* the Second International between its left wing and its right wing - or, to use the labels employed at the time, 'revolutionary social democracy' vs 'opportunism'.

Lenin was a proud member of this left wing. On many occasions, he went out of his way to stress that *Bolshevism was the Russian version of revolutionary social democracy* - no more, but no less. As he energetically affirmed in 1907-08, "it is necessary to underscore decisively that Bolshevism is carrying out the tactic of revolutionary social democracy in all areas of the struggle, in all fields of activity".² He did not recant after his break with Kautsky in 1914. In 1915, Lenin had occasion to take a glance at Bolshevik history, and he described early disputes among Russian social democrats in these words:

'Economism' was the opportunist current in Russian social democracy ... The old *Iskra* [1900-03] carried out a victorious struggle with 'economism' in the name of the principles of revolutionary social democracy ...

The era of the bourgeois-democratic revolution [1905-07] gave birth to a new struggle of currents within social democracy

that was the direct continuation of the previous one ... The revolution of 1905 tested, strengthened, deepened and tempered the militant revolutionary social democratic tactic in Russia.³

As we see, Lenin and his opponent, Potresov, had dramatically opposed pictures of the Second International.

We now turn to *Foundations of Leninism* to find out where Stalin stands in this debate. Here is a sample of his portrait of the Second International:

It must not be forgotten that between Marx and Engels, on the one hand, and Lenin, on the other, there lies a whole period of *undivided domination* of the opportunism of the Second International, and the ruthless struggle against this opportunism could not but constitute one of the most important tasks of Leninism ...

It had become necessary to overhaul *the entire activity* of the Second International, its entire method of work, and to drive out all philistinism, narrow-mindedness, political scheming, renegade, social-chauvinism and social-pacifism. It became necessary to examine *the entire arsenal* of the Second International, to throw out all that was rusty and antiquated, to forge new weapons [all emphasis added].

Stalin's description of the Second International is almost a copy of the outlook that was skewered by Lenin in his 1915 polemic. Nevertheless, today this portrait is accepted as gospel by a majority of the most influential writers on Lenin, and especially by those who pride themselves on their anti-Stalin credentials. One well-known feature of the Stalin era is the doctoring of historical photographs in order to airbrush out people who had fallen into disfavour. A similar but more grandiose operation was undertaken by Stalin in *Foundations of Leninism*: here he airbrushed out of the historical record the entire left wing of the Second International.⁴

For the most part, *Foundations of Leninism* gives a fairly accurate picture of Lenin's political views (exception being made for issues relating to 'socialism in one country'). But, since Stalin had completely eliminated revolutionary social

democracy from the scene, he was able to present Lenin as a great innovative theorist who singlehandedly created the entire outlook of the Second International's left wing out of his own head. True, in order to do this, Stalin had to combat a 'strange opinion' that was common among Lenin's own comrades:

Some think that Leninism is the precedence of practice over theory in the sense that its main point is the translation of the Marxist theses into deeds, their execution; as for theory, it is alleged that Leninism is rather unconcerned about it ... I must declare that this more than strange opinion about Lenin and Leninism is quite wrong and bears no relation whatever to the truth.⁵

A good hero narrative needs an anti-hero, and Stalin assigned this role to Karl Kautsky. In *Foundations of Leninism*, Kautsky is just about the only prominent figure of the Second International who is mentioned by name. He thus becomes an icon of all the failings of the Second International: a reformist, a fatalist, a revisionist, etc. In reality, previous to the war, Kautsky was the authoritative spokesman of international revolutionary social democracy and, as such, he was regarded by the Bolsheviks - including Stalin! - as their mentor. After the 1905 revolution, when Kautsky intervened in Russian disputes, he endorsed Bolshevik tactics, to the great glee of Lenin and his friends. In 1909, Lenin wrote:

Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Kautsky are social democrats who have often written for a Russian audience and to that extent are members of our party. And we have won them over ideologically - and this, despite the fact that at the beginning of the split (1903) all their sympathies were on the side of the Mensheviks. They were won over because the Bolsheviks never showed any indulgence to 'critics' of Marxism - and also because the Bolsheviks were not defending the letter of *their* own factional theory for its own sake, but rather the general spirit and sense of the tactic of revolutionary social democracy.⁶

For similar remarks about Kautsky made by Stalin around the same time, see the first page of volume 2 of his *Works*.

After 1914, Lenin became bitterly disillusioned with Kautsky as a *political leader* - but *not* with Kautsky's pre-war writings! On the contrary, Lenin continued to express his warmest admiration for "Kautsky when he was a Marxist"; he regarded Kautsky as a "renegade" precisely because Kautsky failed to live up to his own correct positions. This attitude toward Kautsky is unambiguous and a matter of public record, and Stalin's effort to dig a huge chasm between Lenin and Kautsky is a profound distortion. The continued defence of this picture by those in a position to know better can only be explained by stubborn loyalty to a sacred narrative.⁷

Lukács and other 'western Marxists' - intellectuals radicalised by World War I and the Russian Revolution, but with no particular memory or inside experience of the Second International - also contributed to the 'othering' of Kautsky.⁸ The picture of the 'fatalist' Kautsky is identical in Lukács and Stalin. Also identical is the obfuscation of Lenin's real attitude toward Kautsky (knowing by Stalin, probably unknowing by Lukács). To be fair, Kautsky's role after 1917 as an indefatigable denouncer of Russian Bolshevism must have made his historical role as Bolshevik mentor seem weirdly paradoxical. Thanks in great part to Stalin, it still does!

Stalin portrays Lenin as the highly original theorist, as someone who singlehandedly took on "the Marxism of the Second International" and as someone who rejected all of Karl Kautsky's heritage. All these features of Stalin's foundational cult portrait clash directly with

SUPPLEMENT

Lenin's own sense of his political identity. Nevertheless, these same features also quickly became an integral part of all the other versions of the cult, to which we now turn.

'Rearming the party'

Toward the end of 1924, Trotsky published his *Lessons of October*. In this essay, he told the story of the Russian Revolution in a new and unexpected way: the focus was no longer on the Bolshevik struggle to establish soviet power, but rather on an internal struggle within the Bolshevik Party. Lenin had to fight against all his former comrades, because otherwise the Bolshevik Party would have become anti-revolutionary. Trotsky's scorn is illustrated by his description of how the party reacted to Lenin's suggestion that its name be changed to 'Communist' (an issue that barely existed in 1917 itself and was later carried out without much trouble in early 1918):

The opposition of the party leaders was so strong that a whole year had to pass by - in the course of which all of Russia cast off the filthy garments of bourgeois domination - before the party could make up its mind to take a new name, returning to the tradition of Marx and Engels.

This incident of renaming the party serves as a symbolic expression of Lenin's role throughout the whole of 1917: during the sharpest turning point in history, he was all the while waging an *intense struggle* within the party against the day that had passed in the name of the day to come. And the opposition, belonging to the day that had passed, marching under the banner of 'tradition,' became at times aggravated to the extreme [my emphases].

Using a phrase coined by Trotsky, we can call this the "rearming the party" narrative. The following story is told and retold:

At the outbreak of the 1917 revolution in February and March, Bolshevik leaders such as Kamenev remained loyal to the old Bolshevik doctrine they had previously learned from Lenin - a doctrine that had become hopelessly reformist in the new revolutionary situation. When Lenin returned to Russia, he was forced to rearm the party with his April theses that called for socialist revolution in Russia. (Although Trotsky modestly does not say so explicitly, Lenin is pictured as replacing old Bolshevism with old Trotskyism: that is, the 'permanent revolution' theory from 1906). At once there commenced a struggle between supporters of Lenin's innovative rearming and his dogged conservative opponents, who were led by Kamenev and represented at least half of the party. This struggle reached its climax in the fall, when Lenin and Trotsky together carried out the October revolution in the teeth of ... *Bolshevik* opposition.

This story has all the earmarks of a good heroic narrative. First, it is an exciting story, full of colourful, corroborative detail and dramatic episodes. Just like Stalin's hero narrative published a few months earlier in spring 1924, Trotsky's story gives us a Lenin as a theoretical innovator and a rebel against established dogma - even though, in this case, the established dogma was his own earlier doctrine! A new anti-Lenin figure is introduced: Lev Kamenev. Despite the fact that Kamenev was one of Lenin's top lieutenants for over a decade, he now becomes an icon for the bad, 'semi-Menshevik' sort of Bolshevik.

As we see, the hero narratives created by Stalin and Trotsky are compatible. In fact, in the fully developed Stalinist narrative found in the pages of the notorious *Short course* of the history of the Soviet Communist Party published in the late 30s, we find a number of borrowings from Trotsky. Since Kamenev had moved into opposition to Stalin in the mid-20s, the *Vozhd* and his historians were happy to take over Trotsky's portrait of him as a symbolic anti-Lenin. Stalin also decided to make the April theses the site of a theoretical innovation by Lenin about "setting a course for socialist revolution". The *Short course* narrative can therefore be called 'Rearming Lite'.

Of course, in Trotsky's telling (and even more in the story as recited by his later admirers), Lenin did not really innovate - he simply recognised in belated fashion the correctness of Trotsky's earlier 'permanent revolution' scenario.⁹ In *Lessons of October*, Trotsky says that true Bolshevism - its Platonic ideal, as it were - consists of a truly revolutionary *doctrine* plus a truly revolutionary *spirit*. Left mostly

unsaid, but perfectly obvious to any reader, is the implication about *who* is the best Bolshevik in this Platonic sense. According to Trotsky, the revolution of 1917 revealed that most pre-war Bolshevik leaders lacked *both* correct doctrine *and* revolutionary spirit. Lenin always had revolutionary *spirit*, of course, but for many years he believed and taught the wrong *doctrine*. There is only one person who *always* had revolutionary spirit *and* correct doctrine: namely, Trotsky.¹⁰ The conclusion is inescapable: even though he only joined the party in 1917, Lev Trotsky is the fullest incarnation of the essence of Bolshevism.

Lessons of October is the germ of Trotsky's later three-volume classic *History of the Russian Revolution*. I make no comment here about the many brilliant things to be found in the *History*, but instead focus on the overall schema imported from *Lessons*. Is Trotsky's rearming narrative good history? No: the picture given of an intense and aggravated struggle within the party over fundamental issues bears no relation to reality. Trotsky wrote *Lessons* as the introduction to the volume of his complete works dedicated to 1917. Perhaps ironically, the actual Trotsky documents from the revolutionary period published in the same volume give very little support to his 1924 essay. For example, there is no sign of a supposedly titanic intra-Bolshevik struggle over 'socialist revolution'. On the contrary!¹¹ I have embarked on a project for the *Historical Materialism* series to translate the relevant volume of Trotsky's complete works, and a full analysis will be found there when completed.

Here I will merely point out that once again a heroic narrative that stirs hearts today clashes directly with Lenin's own sense of what he was saying and doing. Take the core episode of the April theses.¹² According to the rearming narrative, Lenin came home and breathed a new radical spirit into the party to counter laggard semi-Mensheviks such as Kamenev. The story as told by Lenin himself a few years later is very different: "On April 7, I published my theses, in which I called for caution and patience."¹³ He goes on to tell his 1921 audience that in April 1917, a "left tendency demanded the immediate overthrow of the government", but that he "proceeded from the assumption that the masses had to be won over. [The government] cannot be overthrown just now [in April 1917], for it holds the *vlast* due to support from the worker soviets; to date, the government enjoys the confidence of the workers."

According to the rearming narrative, the danger Lenin faced on his return was (allegedly) from conciliatory 'semi-Mensheviks', such as Kamenev and Stalin. According to Lenin himself in 1921, the danger he faced consisted of impatient leftists, who needed to be slowed down. And when we turn to the text of the theses, we find - surprise, surprise! - Lenin's memory did not fail him. The need for "patient explanation" (Lenin's mantra after his return to Russia) was the central novelty of the theses. Here is one passage extracted for illustrative purposes:

We must recognise the fact that, in most of the soviets of worker deputies, our party is in a minority - as yet, a weak minority. Our task, as long as [the alternative government represented by the soviets] succumbs to the influence of the bourgeoisie, can only be patient, systematic, persistent explanation of mistakes and tactics - an explanation conducted in a manner that is especially adapted to the practical needs of the masses.

Just as important as the *presence* of this call for patient explanation is the *absence* of any novel or scandalous call for immediate socialist revolution in the April theses. But, owing to the continuing influence of the rearming narrative, today 'everyone knows' that he did exactly that! Even today, the following description made by Kamenev the day after the first publication of the April theses is brandished as an accurate paraphrase of Lenin's argument:

As for the general scheme of comrade Lenin, it seems to us unacceptable, since it proceeds from the recognition of the bourgeois-democratic revolution as *completed*; it counts on the immediate transformation of this revolution into a socialist revolution [Kamenev's emphasis].¹⁴

Ignored is Lenin's quick and unambiguous response:

Comrade Kamenev chides me, saying that my scheme "counts on the immediate transformation of this bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution".

This is incorrect. I not only do not "count on the immediate transformation" of our revolution into a socialist one, but I actually warn against it, since in number eight of my theses I state: "It is not our immediate task to 'introduce' socialism ..." Is it not clear that anyone who depends on the immediate transformation of our revolution into a socialist revolution [as Kamenev describes Lenin as doing] would not protest [as Lenin did] against the immediate task of introducing socialism?¹⁵

In account after account of 1917, you will read that Lenin's theses called for 'bourgeois-democratic revolution' to be replaced by 'socialist revolution' - and yet, despite ubiquitous quote marks, neither these words nor any equivalent expression appears in Lenin's text. They appear, however, in *Kamenev's* text. In response, Lenin loudly asserted that Kamenev had distorted his meaning. In great measure thanks to Trotsky's version of the Lenin cult, Lenin's rebuttal is forgotten, and Kamenev's hasty reading of the April theses is accepted as gospel. (In Part 3 below, we will take a closer look at March/April 1917.)

The inverted cult

The official Lenin cult portrays Lenin as a hero, who almost singlehandedly creates the party and carries out the revolution. The inverted Lenin cult found in a vast majority of academic and popular accounts today portrays Lenin as a Machiavellian figure of evil, who almost singlehandedly creates the party and carries out the revolution. This inverted cult relies heavily on the narratives created by Stalin and Trotsky in 1924, but it flips the plus-and-minus evaluative signs.

When I wrote my commentary on *What is to be done?* (1902) two decades ago, I inveighed against the "textbook interpretation" of the message of Lenin's book.¹⁶ This interpretation located the essence of Lenin's outlook in his hostility to "spontaneity" and his advocacy of a "vanguard party". According to the textbook interpretation, these two features were highly original: an all-out attack on Marxism and on the "democratic mass parties" of the Second International. Original, but also proto-tyrannical. As a highly influential political-science textbook put it in the 1950s, "... the argument and the flavour of *What is to be done?* have remained imbedded in the values and beliefs of the Soviet system. They are evident in the pronouncements of Khrushchev, as they were in those of Stalin and Lenin."¹⁷

My commentary in *Lenin rediscovered* showed that hostility to 'spontaneity' (the standard but highly misleading translation of the Russian word *stikhiinost*) was common to all Russian social democrats - indeed to social democrats everywhere, who saw it as their task to bring organisation and the socialist message to the working class. The primary connotation of the Russian word *stikhiinost* points to chaotic outbursts, primitive disorganisation, unfocused anger ... and who wants that? In fact, the Mensheviks were the ones who worried most about *stikhiinost*; they regularly accused the Bolsheviks, especially in 1917, of attaining popularity by demagogic manipulation of the *stikhiinyi* (spontaneous masses).

Lenin rediscovered showed that, far from rejecting western social democratic parties, such as the German SPD, Lenin was passionately devoted to importing the German model into Russia to the extent possible under repressive tsarist absolutism. 'Look at the Germans!' is the cry that reverberates through *What is to be done?* The German party was itself a "vanguard party", because it saw itself as possessing the true socialist doctrine that the working class as a whole needed to learn.

What I did not realise when writing my book is that the academic textbook interpretation goes back straight to Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism* and the *Short course*. In these books, Stalin celebrates hostility to *stikhiinost* and advocacy of a vanguard party as Lenin's *original* contributions and as a rebellion against the dull old Second International. Of course, Stalin does not go on to interpret these ideas as equivalent to advocacy of an elite conspiratorial party that was hostile to workers and restricted to intellectuals. This concoction was the creation of the inverted Lenin cult.

Similarly, the inverted cult of the academics glommed on to a phrase from Stalinist historiography: 'party of a new type'. Lenin himself never used this phrase nor any equivalent, but this fact does not stop people from putting quote marks around the phrase (an almost *de rigueur* typographical move). The late Carter Elwood was a Canadian scholar whom I respect as one of the most empirically oriented scholars writing on Lenin and the social democratic underground. Yet even Elwood presented his factual findings in unconscious imitation of the cult narrative found in Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism*. In his description of Lenin's attempt to call a Sixth Party Congress in 1914, Elwood states that this congress would have "very likely completed the task of building an all-Bolshevik 'party of a new type' which Lenin had begun more than a decade earlier".¹⁸ This interpretive framework is a direct descendant of the narrative that Stalin spins in *Foundations of Leninism* and the *Short course*. In a passage inserted into the *Short course* by Stalin himself:

The Bolsheviks wanted to create a new party, a *Bolshevist* party, which would serve as a model for all who wanted to have a real revolutionary Marxist party. The Bolsheviks had been working to build such a party ever since the time of the old *Iskra*. They worked for it stubbornly, persistently, in spite of everything. A fundamental and decisive part was played in this work by the writings of Lenin - *What is to be done?*, *Two tactics*, etc.

Trotsky's rearming narrative in *Lessons of October* was also quickly picked up by anti-Bolshevik writers. Aha, wrote observers such as Kautsky and Irakli Tsereteli (spokesman of Menshevism in 1917), here we see a prominent Bolshevik leader who admits - indeed brags about - the fact that October was "an insurrection against other revolutionaries, who have to be defeated if they will not allow themselves to be commanded by Lenin and Trotsky".¹⁹ Even today, academic historians of the 1917 revolution are heavily indebted to Trotsky's rearming narrative from 1924 (in Part 3 we examine a fascinating example). American historians in particular wanted to combat the Soviet narrative of Lenin leading a monolithic party by focusing on the divisions within the Bolsheviks. And, once again, Kamenev is cast in the role of the anti-Lenin. A key assertion by Alexander Rabinowitch reveals the debt to Trotsky's 1924 rearming narrative:

There were, among others, 'moderate' or 'right' Bolsheviks, who consistently rejected almost all of Lenin's fundamental theoretical and strategic assumptions. Their best known and most articulate spokesman was the 34-year-old, Moscow-born Lev Kamenev, a Bolshevik since 1903.²⁰

A "Bolshevik since 1903" who "consistently rejected almost all of Lenin's fundamental theoretical and strategic assumptions"! (One is compelled to wonder which were the lucky assumptions that were *not* rejected.) There is a certain academic-speak about Lenin that is ubiquitous in accounts of 1917: Lenin never wins an argument or persuades people based on, say, cogent observation or invoking a common outlook: he 'imposes his will' on his hapless comrades. Kamenev, the anti-Lenin, is praised for standing up to Lenin, but is then contemptuously dismissed as a worm when he changes his mind - excuse me, I mean to say, when he bows to Lenin's imperious will! The irony is that, by separating Lenin from the rest of the party and digging a vast gulf between his outlook and theirs, these historians have made Lenin a demiurge of the revolution beyond the wildest dreams of Soviet apologists.

Thus, without realising it, the academic historians present the entire course of 1917 as due to the decisive interventions of one individual. Lenin arrives in Russia and imposes his will on an otherwise moderate party. In October, Lenin singlehandedly thwarts the desire of just about everybody - of course, as symbolised by Kamenev - for a 'moderate' soviet power, one that excluded all 'bourgeois' parties, but also included all socialists in a broad, multi-party coalition 'from the Bolsheviks to the Popular Socialists' (the name of a small party on the right fringe of the socialist spectrum that in fact was violently opposed to soviet power in any form whatsoever). As Leopold Haimson puts it, Lenin's position in October was "not only widely resisted [by Bolsheviks], but also remained beyond the comprehension of even

his closest followers".²¹ Finally, once more imposing his will by single-handedly disbanding the Constituent Assembly in January 1918, Lenin again makes an otherwise avoidable civil war unavoidable.

True enough, Lenin was the strong leader of a unified party - but the party was not unified because Lenin was a strong leader: rather, Lenin was a strong leader because he led a party that was unified in its basic outlook. In contrast, according to the rearming narrative of 1917 shared by activists and academics alike, the Bolsheviks were a deeply divided party that accomplished great (or greatly terrible) things only because of the mighty *vozhd* who imposed his will on a recalcitrant and uncomprehending party. One wonders how this bunch of squabbling losers managed to pull off October and win the civil war!

Part 2: Recent versions

The Lenin cult is not entirely stuck in the past - it retains the ability to generate new legends. We now examine two examples from the last quarter of the previous century: Trotsky takes on Lenin's role as a theorist of genius, and Lenin embraces the dialectic after reading Hegel.

Firstly, Trotsky vs 'stagism'. In 1981 appeared another little book that aimed at transforming a genuine revolutionary hero into a theorist of genius: Michael Löwy's *The politics of combined and uneven development: the theory of permanent revolution*.²² Löwy may not have been the first to make these claims, but certainly his book is a classic statement of the case. It stands in relation to Trotsky somewhat as Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism* stands in relation to Lenin: Trotsky is made to look like a genius by the simple device of making all other Marxists look like idiots.

Reading Löwy's treatise, one quickly gets the idea: Trotsky and, later, Lenin are "dialectical" (repeated endlessly like a mantra), while all other Marxists are "mechanical", "fatalistic", "evolutionist" and, worst of all, "stagist". "Stagism", we are told, is "a naturalistic and reified conception of history, in which socio-economic stages and classes succeed each other according to a necessity as objective and inevitable as the succession of the seasons during the year". Stagism rests on "the evolutionist conception of history as a succession of rigidly predetermined stages", in stark contrast to the "dialectical view of historical development through sudden leaps and contradictory fusions".²³

Of course, Plekhanov, Kautsky, Kamenev and Stalin are all 'stagists'. Even Marx and Engels were only intermittently 'permanentist' (the opposite of stagist). Löwy portrays them as earnest, but rather primitive, precursors of Trotsky:

Marx's conceptions of a permanentist strategy remained unconsolidated because he was, so to speak, trapped in the epoch of transition between the ages of bourgeois and socialist revolution ...

[In 1850,] Marx shifted from a rigid stagism towards a perspective of permanent revolution. [Nevertheless,] the writings of Marx and Engels [reveal] a contradiction between stagist and permanentist visions of revolution ... At one moment they insisted on the incapacity of the bourgeoisie to play a revolutionary role, while at another they emphasised the immaturity of the proletariat. They grappled heroically with this dilemma, but its solution evaded them.²⁴

Luckily, Trotsky's pamphlet on permanent revolution in 1906 produced this evasive solution, making it a "great leap forward" that placed him "in the ideological and political vanguard of European Marxism".²⁵ This stunningly new view only received full expression decades later in "the law of uneven and combined development" (Löwy's phrase - I am not sure Trotsky ever used these exact words), which expresses "a new understanding of human history", no less. As an example of the insight made possible by this "new understanding", Löwy quotes the first chapter of Trotsky's history of the revolution: "Savages throw away their bows and arrows for rifles all at once, without travelling the road which lay between those two weapons in the past."²⁶

Let us be clear here. The phrase, "uneven and combined development", points to some real and highly significant phenomena of the modern age that certainly warrant careful analysis. At the same time, it also points to some highly banal observations and journalistic clichés.

The opening pages of any traveller's book on Russia from, say, around 1900 is sure to make a contrast between the primitive peasant *izba* and the gleaming state-of-the-art factories found in the cities. Everyone was aware of these dramatic juxtapositions - except, evidently, Marxists such as "Kautsky, Plekhanov and others, [who] had defined an orthodoxy, according to which modes of production succeeded each other automatically in response to the development of the productive forces".²⁷ Marxism, so it seems, makes you stupid.

I know I am going to make some people sad, but all the observations about "uneven and combined development" that Löwy attributes solely to Trotsky's brilliance were set out in detail by that icon of mechanistic fatalism, Karl Kautsky. The Kautsky articles collected by Richard Day and Daniel Gaido in their commendable anthology *Witnesses to permanent revolution* make this clear.²⁸ This anthology contains Kautsky's classic 1906 article on hegemony that both Trotsky and Lenin went out of their way to translate and endorse. The final paragraphs of this article tell us:

Clearly, however, we may experience some surprises. We do not know how much longer the Russian revolution will last - and the forms that it has now adopted suggest that it has no desire to come quickly to an end. We also do not know what influence it will exert on western Europe and how it will stimulate the proletarian movement there. Finally, we do not yet have any idea how the resulting successes of the western European proletariat will in their turn act on the Russians. We should do well to remember that we are approaching completely new situations and problems, for which no earlier stereotype is appropriate.

We should probably best do justice to the Russian revolution and the tasks that it sets us if we view it as neither a bourgeois revolution in the traditional sense nor a socialist one, but as a completely unique process that is happening on the borderline between bourgeois and socialist society - one that requires the dissolution of the one, while preparing the formation of the other, and, in any case, one that is bringing all of humanity [*die ganze Menschheit*] living within capitalist civilisation a powerful stage further in its development.²⁹

We can easily understand why Trotsky strongly equated Kautsky's outlook with his own views, as set out in *Results and prospects*, his classic exposition of 'permanent revolution': "I have no reason whatever to reject even a single one of the positions [of Kautsky's 1906 article], because the development of our thinking in these two articles is identical."³⁰ In a private letter to Kautsky in 1908, Trotsky told him that Kautsky's article was "the best theoretical statement of my own views and gives me great satisfaction".³¹

Any claim that some revolutionary of the past was a highly original theorist can only be usefully made by someone deeply conversant with the work of the other Marxists of the period. Writers such as Löwy and Alex Callinicos manifestly do not fit this description. Take Callinicos's summary statement on Trotsky's originality: "These three propositions - the international character of capitalism, the tendency for democratic revolutions to 'grow over' into socialist ones, and the necessity of world revolution - form the essence of Trotsky's theory."³² As we have seen (and can further document at much greater length), all these ideas can be found in Kautsky "when he was a Marxist" - and not only in Kautsky, but in all the major writers in the camp of revolutionary social democracy (see Nikolai Bukharin's 1915 book *Imperialism and world economy*).

Even more striking, they can all be found in Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism*. Take a look at the section entitled 'The theory of the proletarian revolution'. It is all there (along with much more dubious arguments not relevant here): the international character of capitalism, the 'growing over' of one type of revolution to another, the necessity of world revolution. Although Stalin does not use the word itself, we even find here a critique of the alleged stagism of "the heroes of the Second International", who assert (in Stalin's words) that "between the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the proletarian revolution there is a chasm, or at any rate a Chinese Wall, separating one from the other by a more or less protracted interval of time ... This interval is usually reckoned

to extend over many decades, if not longer". Following his usual *modus operandi*, Stalin takes standard talking points of revolutionary social democracy, and then attributes them solely to Lenin.

Stalin also gave much attention to the "uneven and spasmodic development" of capitalism, leading to worldwide revolution; he gives the credit for discovering this "law" to Lenin.³³ Most striking of all is 'growing over' - a term Callinicos puts in quote marks, as if it were Trotsky's own. As a matter of fact, this is Stalin's term, and I would be somewhat surprised if Trotsky ever used it. 'Growing over', *pererastanie*, is used in passing by Lenin late in his career; Stalin seized on it and made it a permanent part of Soviet discourse. In *Foundations of Leninism*, he describes "Lenin's idea about the growing-over of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a proletarian one, about utilising the bourgeois revolution for an 'immediate' growing-over to proletarian revolution".

Stalin airbrushed Kautsky and revolutionary social democracy out of the historical picture and attributed all their ideas directly to Lenin. Löwy and Callinicos take over Stalin's framework lock, stock and barrel - except that the role of the genius who came up with all these ideas is now given to Trotsky. Stalin is now relegated to the ignominious role of just another "hero of the Second International" (poetic justice!), while Lenin is given some subsidiary credit for catching up with, but never overtaking, Trotsky.

One may certainly argue that the debate over, say, 'socialism in one country' shows that Trotsky applied these standard ideas with more insight and integrity than Stalin. But this assertion is a far, far cry from attributing the ideas themselves solely to Trotsky's vast theoretical originality. Trotsky himself would have been the first to laugh at such claims. Indeed, in *The revolution betrayed*, he sneered at Stalin, just because Stalin asserted that 'the law of uneven development' was Lenin's original contribution:

In justifying his break with the Marxist tradition of internationalism, Stalin was incautious enough to remark that Marx and Engels were unacquainted with the law of uneven development of capitalism supposedly discovered by Lenin.³⁴ In a catalogue of intellectual curiosities, that remark ought really to occupy a foremost place.

Trotsky quotes Georg Vollmar - "a very second-rate theoretician" - and continues: "In this work, written [in 1878] when Lenin was eight years old, the law of uneven development receives a far more correct interpretation than that to be found among the Soviet epigones."

Trotsky was a great revolutionary leader and a highly insightful observer who is always worth listening to. There is no need to puff him up by slandering all other Marxists. The insistence on his unique and original "new view of human history", and on making claims for Trotsky that he never made for himself, is the clue that we are dealing with cultist glorification rather than rational admiration. Perhaps it is fortunate that Trotsky did not live to read his admirers.

New cult legend

Another hero narrative that has been advanced only rather recently is the 'Lenin meets Hegel' story, which has gained traction only since the 1990s. The story has been told by pro-Lenin Marxist intellectuals, such as Kevin Anderson and Stathis Kouvelakis, as well as by anti-Lenin academics, such as Neil Harding. This story is so charming and so pleasing to its advocates that I really feel like a grinch poking holes in it. But needs must! And here I admit to a personal stake in the matter. A couple of decades ago, I was challenged to produce evidence that Lenin had *not* repudiated the writings of the pre-war Kautsky - 'Kautsky when he was a Marxist' (to use Lenin's ubiquitous phrase). I did so and went on to demonstrate the continuity in Lenin's views before and after 1914.

But lately my findings have been attacked from another angle. In a generally positive discussion of my new book published in France,³⁵ Marina Garrisi says that I overlook the profound theoretical rupture that allegedly took place in 1914, and she gives a specific reference to Stathis Kouvelakis's *passionnant* article on Lenin's encounter with Hegel.³⁶ In the same vein, a recent conference in Bilbao was informed that Hegel's encounter with Lenin demonstrated that Lih *could not* be right. And I agree - if Lenin's encounter with Hegel did in

fact lead him to radically rethink Marxism, then my own understanding of Lenin is all wrong!³⁷

As usual, the claims about Lenin's rupture with the Marxist past are presented by means of a piquant story, which I call the 'Lengel legend' (my label ties together *Lenin* and *Hegel*). According to this legend, Lenin is devastated by social democracy's failure to condemn the imperialist war in 1914. He feels completely isolated, even from Bolshevik comrades. He realises that Marxism needs to be rethought top to bottom, and so he holes up in the public library in Berne, Switzerland. There he abjures politics for a time and embarks on a serious study of the most abstruse book of the most abstruse philosopher, Georg Hegel's *Science of logic*. Through diligent note-taking, he discovers the profound essence of the dialectic that eluded him heretofore. He girds on this new understanding like a revolutionary sword and goes out to accomplish great deeds. Since Lenin himself never made any explicit connection between his reading of Hegel and any particular policy, each teller of the story is free to connect the dots in their own way. The April theses are usually part of the mix, so that the Lengel legend hooks up neatly with the rearming narrative.

By now, this style of story should be familiar to us. Consider a recent retelling by Michael Brie that is highly reminiscent of *Foundations of Leninism* in content as well as in rhetorical style:

The Second International had treated dialectics like a dead dog. It succumbed to the ideology of evolutionary progress, becoming incapable of conceptualising ruptures. Placing their trust in the "universal principles", to which they reduced Marxism, they closed their minds to the realisation that what is required is to recognise the potential offered by the individual event for breaking out of the universal prison of complicity with capitalism and imperialism ... In the place of evolution, Lenin came to see 'leaps' as central, which suddenly placed everything on its head.³⁸

All the hallmarks of a hero narrative are present in the 'Lengel legend'. Lenin the great theoretical innovator: check - thanks to Hegel. Presence of an iconic anti-Lenin: check - Georgii Plekhanov, the elder statesman of Russian social democracy, is given the role of spokesman for the bad, "mechanistic" understanding of the dialectic. Just as, once upon a time, Lenin revered Kautsky and saw Kamenev as a faithful Bolshevik lieutenant, so had he stoutly defended Plekhanov, especially in his 1908 book *Materialism and empirio-criticism* - but then, according to the cult narratives, he disavowed all three. Finally, Lenin's wholesale rejection of his own socialist camp: check.

According to Stalin, Lenin rejected the "Marxism of the Second International"; according to Trotsky, Lenin rejected old Bolshevism - but, according to the 'Lengel legend', Lenin rejects nothing less than all of post-Marx Marxism. Purveyors of the legend like to quote this "aphorism" from Lenin's notes on Hegel: "Aphorism: it is impossible fully to grasp Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, if you have not studied through and understood the whole of Hegel's *Logic*. Consequently, none of the Marxists for the past half century have understood Marx!"³⁹

One can easily see why this story is so attractive to a Marxist intellectual: owing to Lenin's deep dive into a book that would make a philosophy graduate student quail, he carries out a world-shaking revolution. Unfortunately, this attractive quality is the only thing going for the new legend, for it quickly collapses under empirical examination. It immediately runs up against a familiar roadblock: it presents us with a Lenin that has no connection whatsoever with Lenin's own sense of his own political identity, of who he was and what he stood for.

Let us recall the main features of the Lenin portrayed in the 'Lengel legend': Lenin realises that the crisis of European Marx-based social democracy is due to the ideological weakness of "the Marxism of the Second International". He realises that a major rethinking of Marxism is therefore necessary. He realises that such a project requires deep solitude and a vacation from active politics. Embarking on the requisite rethinking, he realises that Hegel had been shamefully neglected by Plekhanov and co, and that Hegel's dialectics provides the key to rethinking. Finally, he realises that highly abstract philosophical positions had direct, real-world applications in practical politics.

SUPPLEMENT

Here is a rather startling fact: there is *no* concrete evidence - none - that Lenin *ever* consciously affirmed a single one of these propositions. He never said that the crisis of 1914 called for a major rethinking of the Marxism of the Second International. He never said that he had revised any earlier position of his due to a better understanding of the dialectic. He never said that any of his post-1914 policies were due to any kind of philosophical rethinking. He never said that Hegel needed to be rediscovered or that Marxists such as Plekhanov had forgotten all about the need for 'leaps', 'rupture', and the like. And, finally, even his notebooks on the *Science of logic* are bereft of any discussion of practical political issues.

Take a look at the famous 'aphorism' quoted earlier. According to the 'Lengel legend', this observation should be taken in a maximalist sense: all post-Marx Marxism, all post-Marx social democracy - everything that had earlier constituted Lenin's deepest political identity - was fundamentally flawed and needed to be replaced. And yet all the comment actually says is that Marx's method of exposition in *Capital* has not yet been fully grasped. And, when you go back and look at the aphorism in its original context, it looks a lot more like an off-hand paradox than an earth-shaking revelation. It stands alone in the text without any further explication. But this aphorism is always quoted for a very good reason: it is the only one anywhere in Lenin's notes that remotely suggests the need for a major rethinking of Marxism.

Given the paucity or rather total absence of relevant comments by Lenin, how do the advocates of the 'Lengel legend' build up their case? By means of three word-pictures, often presented with impressive literary eloquence. First, a picture of the past: the dreary desert of the Second International and its miserable 'heroes', Kautsky and Plekhanov. Second, a picture of Lenin in Berne in late 1914: holed up with Hegel in the town library, abjuring all activity in profound solitude. Third, a description of Lenin's post-1914 policies as 'dialectical' and therefore a result of reading Hegel (*post hoc, ergo propter hoc*). These word-pictures are so dazzling that the absence of confirmation by Lenin himself goes unnoticed.

The ability to build up such an imposing intellectual edifice with so little actual evidence is rather impressive in its way. But the absence of evidence is not the half of it! Lenin seems to have gone out of his way to *explicitly* refute all the assertions of his future admirers. Here is a list of four rather short articles by Lenin in late 1914 and 1915 that can easily be accessed; they will, I am sure, inoculate any diligent reader against the 'Lengel legend'. To the list I add the relevant sections of the memoirs of Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, that describe the crucial months in Berne in late 1914:

- 'Dead chauvinism and living socialism: how the International can be restored'.⁴⁰
- 'Under a false flag'.⁴¹
- Encyclopaedia article on Marx.⁴²
- 'Opportunism and the collapse of the Second International'.⁴³

According to the 'Lengel legend', after Lenin arrived in Berne in September 1914, he felt completely isolated and absented himself from politics awhile; he recognised that the ideology of the Second International was the culprit responsible for the crisis of social democracy; he plunged into a deep rethinking of Marxism, and therefore holed up in the city library with Hegel.

Krupskaya's chapter on this period paints an entirely different portrait: a happy warrior, energetically defending his long-time positions, connecting with the comrades who shared his outlook both abroad and in Russia. He was much heartened by the actions of the Bolsheviks in Russia, who had required no directive from abroad to take what Lenin considered the correct line. In Europe, "the voices against chauvinism, the voices of the internationalists, still sounded very weak on the whole, isolated and uncertain, but Ilyich [Lenin] was sure that they would grow steadily stronger. His fighting spirit was high throughout the autumn".⁴⁴

The very first day after arriving in Berne, a meeting with fellow Bolsheviks affirmed the basic slogans of Lenin's wartime policies, such as "Turn the imperialist war into a civil war". By November, he had worked out "a clear line of struggle" that he could propagandise in a newly revived Bolshevik journal. Krupskaya emphasises continuity with "the long years of preliminary work" in Russia.

She mentions Lenin's encyclopaedia article on Karl Marx (described in more detail below):

In connection with the chapters on philosophic materialism and dialectics, Ilyich began diligently to reread Hegel and other philosophers, and kept up this study even after he had finished the article. The object of his philosophic studies was to master the method of transforming philosophy into a concrete guide to action.

In this connection, she mentions some later remarks by Lenin in 1921, to which we shall return, since they explain what Krupskaya means here. She goes on to say that Lenin's rereading of Hegel "was a continuation of his philosophic studies of 1908-09, when he had combated the Machists". She refers here to Lenin's *Empirio-criticism*, a book he is supposed to have discarded after his epiphany with Hegel. In other words, Lenin's interest in Hegel was sparked off by a commissioned encyclopaedia article and this interest was a continuation of his earlier studies. If Lenin felt that Hegel had caused a huge rupture in his outlook, he did not tell his wife.

Let us now turn to the four articles listed above. We have already looked at the article, 'Under a false flag', from early 1915. Here Lenin says, with all the vehemence at his impressive command: read my lips - no rethinking! His polemical opponent, the rightwing Social Democrat Aleksandr Potresov, did make the case that the Marxism of the Second International needed to be rethought, but Lenin refuted him point by point. Potresov had overlooked the split between opportunism and revolutionary social democracy that permeated all of European social democracy, and Lenin strongly endorses the outlook of revolutionary social democracy. The article was finally published in 1917 - that is, well after Lenin is supposed to have arrived at a radically new understanding.

Could Lenin have been any more explicit? Yes, he could, and he was, in an article entitled 'Dead chauvinism and living socialism'. Here he says that what is needed to understand socialist support for the war was:

... a most precise definition of one's attitude towards German social democracy. What was it in the past? What is it today? What will it be in the future? A reply to the first of these questions may be found in *The road to power*, a pamphlet written by K Kautsky in 1909 and translated into many European languages.

What is Lenin's own reply to his question about German social democracy? According to the 'Lengel legend' (and to many other writers), the answer is easy to predict: Lenin will place the blame for the collapse of German social democracy squarely on Kautsky's faulty Marxism. Is this prediction borne out?

Lenin tells us that he will "recall Kautsky's little book in some detail" in order to reveal "forgotten ideals that are so often barefacedly cast aside". He then flips through the pages of *Road to power* and comes up with a page-and-a-half list of quotations that he wholeheartedly endorses. He comments: "This is how Kautsky wrote in times long, long past, fully five years ago. This is what German social democracy was, or, more correctly, what it promised to be. This was the kind of social democracy that could and had to be respected."⁴⁵ In other words, the crisis of 1914 was *not* caused by the faulty ideals of the Second International - it was caused by barefacedly casting aside its admirable, but now forgotten, ideals.

An article written in late 1915, although not published at the time, is entitled 'Opportunism and the collapse of the Second International'. Here, if anywhere, we may expect a declaration of the need for rethinking. And, as the title indicates, Lenin does blame opportunism for the craven response of the official social democratic parties - but, as we should expect by now, he does *not* equate opportunism with the outlook of the Second International. Instead, Lenin points to the anti-war manifesto passed in 1912 at the emergency international congress in Basel:

The Basel Manifesto sums up the vast amount of propaganda and agitation material of the entire epoch of the Second International - namely, the period between 1889 and 1914. This manifesto *summarises*, without any exaggeration, *millions upon millions* of leaflets, press articles, books and speeches by socialists of all lands. To declare this manifesto erroneous means declaring the entire Second International erroneous

- the work done in decades and decades by all social democratic parties. To brush aside the Basel Manifesto means brushing aside the entire history of socialism. The Basel Manifesto says nothing *unusual* or *out of the ordinary*.⁴⁶

As we see, Lenin rebels against the very idea of "declaring the entire Second International erroneous". He proceeds to justify his own wartime policy by quoting the manifesto: the war is imperialist, "defence of the fatherland" is indefensible, and "social revolution is *ripe*, it is *possible*, it is *approaching* in connection with the war". He sums up: "The Basel Manifesto *has decided* this question: it has mapped out the line of tactics - that of proletarian revolutionary action and civil war."

"It would be erroneous to think that the Basel Manifesto is a piece of empty declamation, a bureaucratic phrase, a none-too-serious threat." Lenin's protest describes exactly how Stalin presents the matter in *Foundations of Leninism*. But, continues Lenin, "this is not the truth!" The truth is that there has always been a split between revolutionary social democracy and opportunism, and *this very same split* is now playing itself out in relation to the war. Displaying his remarkably detailed knowledge of social democratic parties in each European country, Lenin examines eight and concludes that "it is from revolutionary social democrats in *all* these countries that a more or less sharp protest has emanated against social chauvinism" (Lenin's emphasis). In two other countries (France and Belgium), "internationalists are *weak* but not absent". In other words, Lenin did *not* feel he had to reject the past, he did *not* feel isolated and without support. He felt rather that he was *continuing* to fight the good fight alongside his fellow revolutionary social democrats.

Our fourth and final item is the encyclopaedia article mentioned by Krupskaya on Karl Marx (republished in 1918 with a preface by Lenin). The article as a whole is fascinating, but here I want to focus on the amazing bibliography. One's first impression is that Lenin must have been a total bookworm! The range of his reading on Marx and Marxism is frightening. Following on this first impression is the realisation that scholarly discussion about Marx in the late 19th and early 20th century was extremely broad and dense. One needs to have great confidence in oneself to simply dismiss all of this without further ado as the maunderings of deluded reformers, whose outlook Lenin overturned after a few weeks of note-taking and reflection in 1914.

A full analysis of the bibliography would be highly instructive, but we must content ourselves here with a few highlights. Following what we have seen to be his usual approach, Lenin divided writings into three categories: bourgeois writers hostile to Marx; "Marxists who, in important matters, adhere to Marx's point of view"; and, finally, "revisionists, who, while claiming to accept certain fundamentals of Marxism, in fact replace it with bourgeois conceptions". Among the writers in the genuine Marxist category - "the radical or orthodox current" - are Karl Kautsky, Jules Guesde, Paul Lafargue, Anton Pannekoek, Rosa Luxemburg (although, we are told, she needs to be corrected on a few points by Otto Bauer). Of course, Kautsky is far and away the most cited living author. There is no hint that these authors do not express the correct Marxist viewpoint.

Lenin inserts a few works of his own into the bibliography, but these are mostly technical works written to refute revisionism in agricultural policy. In the bibliography as published in 1914-15, the only more substantive work is *Empirio-criticism*, his philosophical treatise of 1908, whose main argument he is supposed to have rejected. Works such as *What is to be done?* are not mentioned.⁴⁷

'Dialectical materialism' is not neglected in the bibliography. Highly relevant to our present inquiry is the following item: "Also J Kaufmann's review of *Capital* in 1872 - an article marked by the fact that, in his addendum to the second edition of *Capital*, Marx quoted Kaufmann's arguments, recognising them as a correct exposition of his dialectical materialist method".⁴⁸ Lenin's pride in his Russian compatriot shines through. But note well: for Lenin, a correct exposition of Marx's dialectical method was already available in 1872. Lenin is also proud of another Russian: Georgy Plekhanov. Despite his long-time political enmity *vis-à-vis* Plekhanov, Lenin tells the reader that "on the question of Marxist

philosophy and historical materialism, the best exposition is given by GV Plekhanov". He then lists seven specific titles, plus unnamed "other works".

Keep in mind that Lenin's alleged rejection of Plekhanov is a *key plank* in the 'Lengel legend'. But Lenin's high opinion of Plekhanov's philosophic writings is remarkably consistent over the years; it finds expression in pre-war writings, in late 1914 (as we have just seen), and even as late as 1921. During the polemics of the so-called 'trade-union controversy', Lenin lectured his young comrade, Nikolai Bukharin, on the meaning of the dialectic. In the course of his remarks, Lenin wrote the following:

Dialectical logic holds that 'truth is always concrete, never abstract', as the late Plekhanov liked to say after Hegel. (Let me add in parenthesis for the benefit of young party members that you cannot hope to become a real intelligent communist without making a study - and I mean study - of all of Plekhanov's philosophical writings, because nothing better has been written on Marxism anywhere in the world.)⁴⁹

So we see that Lenin got his sense of Hegel directly from Plekhanov and he therefore did not feel any need to reject the one to embrace the other. And the quoted comment was not just a personal opinion; in a footnote, he added some instructions in his capacity as head of state:

By the way, it would be a good thing, first, if the current edition of Plekhanov's works contained a special volume or volumes of all his philosophical articles, with detailed indexes, etc, to be included in a series of standard textbooks on communism; secondly, I think the worker state must demand the professors of philosophy should have a knowledge of Plekhanov's exposition of Marxist philosophy and the ability to impart it to their students.

In the recent conference on Lenin's legacy in Bilbao, these remarks from early 1921 were the focus of a useful discussion between the various speakers.⁵⁰ With commendable intellectual honesty, defenders of the 'Lengel legend' themselves brought up what Lenin said about Plekhanov on this occasion and acknowledged that it presented difficulties for the thesis that Lenin had radically revised his views about Plekhanov.

As might be expected, I argued that the damage caused by this passage is in fact fatal. In response, two points were made. First, perhaps Lenin did not mean it! Might not he have had personal, polemical or political reasons to keep his real views hidden? Let the reader read the full passage just cited and then decide whether this suggestion is even slightly plausible. The second approach adopted was to admit that Lenin's Hegelianism was strangely 'ambivalent'. But Lenin's views on Plekhanov, Hegel and the dialectic were not ambivalent in the slightest. He had strong, explicit, consistent views on these issues, and he expressed them at appropriate points throughout his career.

I have only been able here to give a brief overview of all the difficulties besetting the 'Lengel legend', so I will sum up by pointing to a startling contrast: on the one hand, the *entire absence* of evidence that Lenin was even aware of the rethinking mission ascribed to him *vs the mountain* of evidence that he explicitly and indeed passionately *rejected the whole idea of rethinking Marx and the outlook of the Second International*, especially as represented by revolutionary social democracy. And may I suggest that only the insidious seduction of a hero narrative could cause such independence from ascertainable fact?

Part 3: Pravda editorials

The April theses are a focal point for the Lenin cult in all its manifestations. Each version has a stake in the dramatic story of Lenin arriving home from exile after the February revolution and turning the Bolshevik party around.

Consequently, this episode has acquired a bodyguard of supportive stories that are flourished whenever the narrative of the April theses is challenged. I have termed these stories *anekdotchiki*, 'little anecdotes', or, using an even more dismissive label, "recycled one-liners". Much of my writing over the last decade has been dedicated to a critical examination of these recycled *anekdotchiki*.

In a recent review of my book *Lénine, une enquête historique* - a generous and accurate

review for which I am grateful - the Swiss historian, Éric Aunoble, finds my attitude too dismissive. He points to *Pravda* editorials by Kamenev and Stalin in March 1917:

According to Lih, “specialists rely on a series of *anekdotchiki* - short and piquant anecdotes that arise who knows where and that are endlessly repeated” (p230); the specialists use these to argue for a schism between the “old Bolsheviks” and Lenin. But can *Pravda*’s editorial on March 15 be considered a [misleading] anecdote, when it affirms that ‘Down with the war!’ was an “empty formula” and that the Bolsheviks should “put pressure” on the Provisional Government rather than overthrowing it?⁵¹

According to Aunoble, all I have shown is that the Bolsheviks were not monolithic, and Alexander Rabinowitch told us that 50 years ago. The activist, Louis Proyect, also challenges me over the same episode. He directly quotes Rabinowitch: “‘The slogan, Down with the war, is useless,’ echoed Stalin”. He says: “Did [Rabinowitch] fabricate the Stalin quote about the slogan being useless? If he did, I must denounce him as a rascal.”⁵²

Proyect obviously thinks that it is I, not Rabinowitch, who is the rascal.

Thus, both academic historian and activist accuse me of overlooking well-known evidence fatal to my case: namely, the mid-March editorials in *Pravda* by Kamenev and Stalin on the subject of the war.⁵³ Is this episode really an *anekdotchik*, in my dismissive sense of the word? Yes, indeed it is! It is a stellar example, a paradigm, of what I mean by *anekdotchik*. Since I have been directly challenged on this issue - and since the March *Pravda* editorials of Kamenev and Stalin are indeed of major historical importance - I feel obliged to respond with a detailed case study. And, as we shall see, the Lenin cult is directly responsible for this *anekdotchik* and its distortions.

In early April 1917, after his return to Russia, Lenin published his famous theses and stated in the first one:

In our attitude towards the war, which under the new [Provisional Government] of Lvov and co unquestionably remains on Russia’s part a predatory imperialist war owing to the capitalist nature of that government, not the slightest concession to ‘revolutionary defensism’ is permissible.

The purposive proletariat can give its consent to a revolutionary war that would genuinely justify revolutionary defensism only on these conditions: (a) the transfer of the power [*vlast*] to the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants aligned with the proletariat; (b) that all annexations be renounced in deed and not in word; (c) that a complete break be carried out in actual fact with all capitalist interests.⁵⁴

Do these words constitute a rupture with the Bolshevik past? Are they aimed primarily at fellow Bolsheviks rather than at the socialist ‘revolutionary defencists’ who really did support the war and the Provisional Government? I say no, but the *anekdotchik* of the *Pravda* editorials is brought out to support an affirmative answer to both questions. Here are the basic facts:

The Bolshevik leaders Lev Kamenev and Iosif Stalin were in Siberian exile in early 1917, but freed by the February revolution. They hurried back to Petrograd, where, by virtue of party seniority, they defined the overall Bolshevik line. On March 15, Kamenev published an editorial with proposals for a new slogan about the war. There was an immediate pushback to this editorial from many Bolshevik activists and so, on the following day, the Bolshevik paper published two more editorials, one unsigned (and therefore authoritative), one by Stalin. These editorials put forth the same concrete proposal as did Kamenev, but they strived to avoid earlier misunderstandings.

The interpretation of this episode has always relied heavily on the testimony of two Bolsheviks who were personally hostile to Kamenev: Aleksandr Shliapnikov and Lev Trotsky.⁵⁵ The *anekdotchik* as we know it today goes back at least to 1955, when Leonard Schapiro’s *Origin of the communist autocracy* was published. Here we find Stalin’s one-liner already in its canonical form: “According to Stalin, ‘the basic slogan, Down with the war, is completely useless’.”⁵⁶

But no-one reads Schapiro these days. As we have already seen, the authority used now to

give legitimacy to the *anekdotchik* is Alexander Rabinowitch, justly regarded as the dean of the academic study of Bolshevism in 1917. In 1968, in the first of his three magisterial works on the Bolsheviks in Petrograd, Rabinowitch presents the *anekdotchik* as it is remembered today:

Beginning with the March 14 issue, the central Bolshevik organ swung sharply to the right. Henceforth articles by Kamenev and Stalin advocated limited support for the Provisional Government, rejection of the slogan, ‘Down with the war’ and an end to disorganising activities at the front. “While there is no peace,” wrote Kamenev in *Pravda* on March 15, “the people must remain steadfastly at their posts, answering bullet with bullet and shell with shell.” “The slogan, ‘Down with the war’, is useless,” echoed Stalin the next day.⁵⁷

That is it! These few lines constitute just about the whole of later Anglo-American historiography on this subject. Nothing has been added over the years, nothing has been forgotten. Over a half-century later, Aunoble and Proyect repeat these lines almost verbatim, with close to the same few words quoted from the editorials themselves.

Proyect asks sarcastically whether I think Rabinowitch fabricated the Stalin quote. No, he did not, and neither he nor I are “rascals”. I have the greatest respect for Rabinowitch as a scholar and colleague, but, in this case, I think he and the historians have misinterpreted the meaning of these editorials (yes, it is possible to disagree with people whom you greatly respect!). I state here with as much emphasis as possible that my critique is *not* aimed at Rabinowitch himself, but rather at historians who turned his few lines into a classic *anekdotchik*, endlessly recycled in account after account, without the slightest critical examination, without the slightest effort to add context.⁵⁸

The story of the March editorials illustrates all the qualities of what I mean by an *anekdotchik*. First of all, it is short! The words actually quoted from Kamenev and Stalin add up to two lines, but I hope I may be allowed to use ‘one-liner’ in a figurative sense. The story is ‘piquant’ because it is dramatic and mildly paradoxical. Imagine! Two senior Bolsheviks who later played crucial leadership roles in the revolution and who helped create the Lenin cult, and look at them! - cluelessly disoriented after February, advocating a mild reformist line, and getting into deep trouble with their *vozhd*.

Nowadays, these same paradoxes are so familiar that anyone who challenges them is viewed as the paradox-monger. But oddly enough, the little ironies of our *anekdotchik* have led to a studied in curiosity by scholars that inhibits further study. But, as we shall see later, the inherent implausibility of our *anekdotchik* is in reality severely underplayed.

Repeating the *anekdotchik* has taken the place of any further research into Bolshevik attitudes toward the war prior to Lenin’s return. Loyalty to the *anekdotchik* also allows us to ignore Soviet research. Soon after *Prelude to revolution* was published in 1968, outstanding monographs on the overall political situation in March and on the Bolshevik Party prior to Lenin’s return were published by Vitalii Startsev and VA Kuvshinov.⁵⁹ These two historians come from different camps in the Soviet historical community, and I have serious disagreements with both, but their detailed investigations are indispensable. They have had zero impact on western accounts of the revolution.

Of course, some people who retail these *anekdotchiki* do so to shut down debate, others to open it up. Consider the present case. Gerry Downing lobs the following at me in a blog post, relying on the authority of Proyect, who relies on the authority of Rabinowitch:

Louis Proyect tells us that on March 16 Stalin wrote, “The slogan, ‘Down with the war’, is useless”. “Obviously,” says Proyect, “this position contrasted sharply with the views expressed by Lenin in his ‘Letters from afar’, and it is not surprising that *Pravda* published only the first of these and with numerous deletions at that ... Kamenev and Stalin surely understood the target of his ire included them as well. So definitely a whopping lie here from Lars T.”⁶⁰

In contrast, after challenging me about *anekdotchiki*, Eric Aunoble writes:

Lih’s book cannot therefore close the debates over Lenin’s outlook, but it may have the great merit of reviving them. By forcing readers to discard a burdensome historiographical heritage, Lars Lih’s essay encourages them to look at Lenin with a new eye and to realise that the history of Bolshevism is still being written.

Gerry Downing will no doubt dismiss the following case study as just one more example of what he calls the “Lars T Lih School of Falsification”. I write for such as Aunoble, whether academic historian or informed activist: those who are ready and eager to examine new evidence.

Implausibility

What is our *anekdotchik* about *Pravda* and the war supposed to prove? This question is somewhat tricky to answer, since (as we saw) the story is usually just flourished about, as if it constituted a knock-down argument in and of itself. We are told, for instance, that Stalin rejected the slogan, ‘Down with the war!’, as useless. What does this tell us about Stalin’s attitude toward the war? Are we to assume that now he supported the slogan, ‘Long live the war’?

Despite these difficulties, I think the following five claims accurately state what we are expected to believe on the basis of our *anekdotchik*:

1. Kamenev and Stalin gave ‘conditional support’ to the war and the Provisional Government; they were *de facto* semi-Menshevik ‘revolutionary defencists’.
2. The Bolshevik leaders called for ‘pressure’ and ‘demands’ on the Provisional Government *rather than* calling for its replacement by a revolutionary *vlast* based on the soviets.
3. The mid-March *Pravda* editorials marked a sharp turn to the right in the Bolshevik Party line that continued until Lenin arrived at the beginning of April.
4. Lenin’s ‘Letters from afar’ (before his return) and April theses (afterwards) contain a powerful condemnation of the position of his fellow Bolsheviks.
5. The April theses mark a sharp *rupture* and *discontinuity* in Bolshevik attitudes toward the war (and much else), leading to a large-scale *rearming of the party*.

I shall refute each of these in turn. Before proceeding, let us consider what we are being asked to believe. I will set the scene with a brief survey of the political map in March 1917. In one corner we find the Provisional Government, staffed entirely with ‘censitarians’ (the word used at the time to describe members of the educated elite), with only Aleksandr Kerensky as a partial exception. Paul Miliukov was the foreign minister and Alexei Guchkov was the war minister. The political profile of these two political celebrities was known to all: determined opponents of tsar Nicholas, but also determined advocates of an imperialist, annexationist policy. Miliukov had gone to some trouble after the overthrow of the tsar to reassure Allied governments that the Provisional Government remained loyal to the treaty commitments of the previous government.

Over in the other corner, we find the ‘revolutionary defencists’, led by the Menshevik, Irakli Tsereteli. These socialists assured the worker-soldier soviets that the Provisional Government was working diligently to revise Russia’s war aims, but, of course, only in agreement with the Allies. In the meantime, the revolutionary defencists strongly urged all-out mobilisation in support of the war effort. For the time being, the revolutionary defencists had the strong support of the soviet constituency.

And, finally, we see two Bolshevik leaders whose party monikers bragged about their hard-line attitude: Steel (Stalin) and Stone (Kamenev). These two had been Bolsheviks since the beginning of the faction. Both of them had acquired a long paper-trail in the form of a decade’s worth of Bolshevik polemics, in which principal targets were none other than Miliukov and Guchkov, whom they incessantly pilloried as “liberal imperialists”. Kamenev even predicted at one point that Miliukov would be foreign minister in any liberal government. Lenin’s return did not change their leadership status: in the votes for the Bolshevik central committee carried out at the party conference in mid-April, these leaders came in third (Stalin) and fourth (Kamenev) - not too distant from the votes given to the returning exile leaders, Lenin and Zinoviev.

And we are asked to believe that these two leaders suddenly became squishy in March 1917,

declared that the war was no longer imperialist, urged conditional support for the government of Miliukov and Guchkov, and sincerely believed that these two would carry out an aggressive peace policy if ‘pressure’ from below was applied. And, after this mind-boggling betrayal of Bolshevik principles, we are further asked to believe that a secret party ballot put them in the core group of the top leadership. We are told to believe all this on the basis of a couple of recycled one-liners and *anekdotchiki*.

Here, then, is a key question for judging this century-old *anekdotchik* about the scandalous *Pravda* editorials on the war: is it remotely plausible that Kamenev and Stalin, being who they were, genuinely believed that pressure from the street might persuade Miliukov and Guchkov, being who *they* were, to embrace a peace policy aimed at stirring up revolution against Russia’s allies? In my view, such an absurd belief on the part of Kamenev and Stalin is not just highly implausible, but well-nigh impossible. In a better world than this, the burden of proof would rest on those who make such a fanciful assertion (see David Hume on miracles). But, given the (literally!) sacrosanct status of our *anekdotchik*, I realise that the burden of proof is on critics such as myself! Here is a brief outline of a more adequate account:

To the slogan, ‘rearming the party’, I counterpose the slogan, ‘the Bolshevik Party adjustment’. When the various Bolshevik Party leaders - Kamenev, Stalin, Kollontai, Lenin, Zinoviev - returned to Petrograd after the February revolution, they were all shocked and surprised to discover the minority status of the Bolsheviks among the Petrograd working class, not to mention the garrison soldiers. Based on their underground experience on the eve of the war and during the war, the Bolsheviks felt that they were easily winning the battle with the Mensheviks for dominant influence among the workers. The massive entry into the public arena of previously apolitical masses belied these expectations.

As soon as Kamenev and Stalin got back to Petrograd in mid-March, they realised that the minority status of the Bolsheviks mandated an aggressive agitation campaign to persuade the soviet constituency of the essential Bolshevik message - namely, that the counterrevolutionary Provisional Government had to be replaced with a soviet-based *vlast*. They decided that the traditional slogan, ‘Down with the war!’, was useless for the purposes of this campaign. To find a more adequate slogan, they reached into the Bolshevik playbook, as set forth by Lenin at various times and places, and came up with the following: ‘We demand that the government immediately start peace negotiations with all belligerents!’

This campaign was well under way when Lenin returned from exile. He too immediately insisted on the imperative of winning over the support of the soviet constituency before any open attempt to replace the Provisional Government. He objected to the wording of slogans that ‘demanded’ this or that, but this issue was relatively secondary, a matter of agitation technique. Otherwise, Lenin was on board: he explicitly endorsed the campaign itself, the concrete slogan of peace negotiations, the necessity of putting the slogan ‘Down with the war!’ on the backburner, and the disavowal of ‘anarchist’ methods (disobeying orders, encouraging desertion, etc). All in all, the *Pravda* editorials of March 15 and 16 were a vital step *toward* - and not away from - the Bolshevik conquest of power.

We will now demolish one by one the five claims that have been made on the basis of the *Pravda* editorials. As we dismantle the famous *anekdotchik*, we will at the same time provide the scaffolding for a new and better account.

Claim 1

Stalin, as we are told again and again, rejected the slogan, ‘Down with the war!’, as ‘useless’. Useless for what? Once we ask this question and turn to the text of the *Pravda* editorials, the answer is clear: useless for the massive agitation campaign that would win over the soviet constituency of workers, soldiers and peasants to the Bolshevik point of view.

Let us review the sequence of events. Kamenev first put forth this argument in his *Pravda* editorial of March 15. Many Bolshevik underground activists - including Aleksandr Shliapnikov, who wrote about it later - were scandalised by what they thought was a rejection of the anti-war sentiment behind ‘Down with the war!’ So, the next day, two further editorials appeared - one by Stalin and the other unsigned

SUPPLEMENT

(that is, as an authoritative opinion by the whole editorial board). This unsigned editorial has been completely forgotten by historians. The two editorials published on March 16 tried to allay the misgivings of Shliapnikov and the other activists, but they did not retreat an inch from Kamenev's substantive argument about the best slogan for a mass campaign.

Let us now turn to *Pravda* and listen to the case made by Kamenev, Stalin and the unsigned editorial. Here is a brief paraphrase: we need a large-scale campaign to open the eyes of the workers and soldiers to the grim realities of the imperialist war and its causes. 'Down with the war!' is unsuitable for such a mass campaign, not because it is wrong, but because it is too abstract and does not spell out any concrete policies. Here is a better slogan: the Russian revolutionary government must make a public announcement of its willingness to open immediate peace negotiations with all belligerents.

This argument can be documented step by step with passages from the three editorials. What kind of war are we dealing with? "The present war is an imperialist war. Its principal aim is the seizure (annexation) of foreign, chiefly agrarian, territories by capitalistically developed states" (Stalin). What kind of government are we dealing with, here in Russia? "The *vlast* in Russia now is in the hands of the representatives of liberal society with clear imperialist desires" (unsigned). And, unfortunately, some parts of the soviet constituency also support the revolutionary defencists who are "hypnotised by nationalistic ideas" (unsigned).

We Bolsheviks therefore need to turn to a time-honoured tool of international social democracy: mass agitation campaigns (what I have elsewhere labelled 'campaignism'). As with all agitation campaigns, the aim is to *open eyes*:

■ When millions of soldiers and workers on all fronts see clearly the actual aims of the governments that dragged them into the bloody shambles, it will mean not only an end to the war, but also a decisive step against the system of violence and exploitation that causes all these wars (Kamenev).

■ To tear the mask off the imperialists, to open the eyes of the masses to the real motives for the present war precisely, this is to declare war on war in a real way, to make the present war impossible (Stalin).

Is 'Down with the war!' an adequate slogan for such a campaign? No. All three editorials strive to make this point, but the two editorials that appeared on the second day (March 16) went out of their way to show that *Pravda* was not rejecting the anti-war *sentiment* behind the traditional slogan, but merely suggesting a better way of *realising* this sentiment. In the words of the unsigned editorial, the anti-war Zimmerwald and Kienthal conferences

gave us a general formula; they boiled down the universal cry of horror before the global butchery into the words, 'Down with the war!' But this slogan is too general; it does not give us concrete advice on how best to carry out the struggle for peace in a given country and with a given correlation of the forces of the various classes.

Let us look at how Stalin made the case common to all three editorials:

What are the practical ways and means capable of leading to the fastest termination of the war?

First of all, it is unquestionable that the bare slogan, 'Down with the war!', is absolutely useless as a practical means, because, since it does not go beyond propaganda of the idea of peace in general, it does not and cannot provide anything capable of exerting practical influence on the belligerent forces to compel them to stop the war ...

Only [with such a campaign] will the slogan, 'Down with the war!', not run the risk of being transformed into empty and meaningless pacifism; only then will it be able to flow into and express itself in a mighty political campaign which will unmask the imperialists and disclose the actual motives for the present war.

Our *anekdotchik* sums up Stalin's argument in one sentence: "'The slogan, Down with the war, is useless,' echoed Stalin the next day." I submit that this dismissive one-liner woefully fails to convey Stalin's train of thought.

We now arrive at what all three editorialists put forth as a *practical suggestion for a more*

useful slogan to take the place of 'Down with the war!':

Not the disorganisation of the revolutionary and revolutionising army; not the empty slogan, 'Down with the war!' - these are not our slogans. Our slogan: pressure on the Provisional Government with the aim of compelling it openly, before the popular masses of the whole world, to immediately try to get all the belligerent countries to an immediate opening of talks about ways of ending the world war [Kamenev].

The proletariat of Russia has a stronger method of influencing the entire international situation ["in order to set ablaze a global revolutionary struggle"], and it must resort to this method. This method consists of compelling its government to step forth with a statement before the face of the whole world that the peoples of Russia prefer peace to the shedding of more blood and that they are ready on their side to enter into negotiations for an immediate end to the war on the basis of the self-determination of nations [unsigned].

The solution is to bring pressure on the Provisional Government to make it declare that it agrees to start peace negotiations immediately. The workers, soldiers and peasants must arrange meetings and demonstrations and demand that the Provisional Government shall *come out openly and publicly in an effort to induce all the belligerent powers to start peace negotiations immediately, on the basis of recognition of the right of nations to self-determination* [Stalin, original emphasis].

Here we see the concrete proposal that was intended to replace 'Down with the war!': a revolutionary government must announce that it is ready to begin peace negotiations immediately on the basis of national self-determination. Where did the Bolshevik leaders get the idea for this slogan? Out of their own heads? No, they took it from previous Bolshevik policy, whose main author was, of course, Lenin.

In October 1915, the Bolshevik journal *Sotsial-Demokrat* published a short unsigned article entitled 'Several theses proposed by the editors'. Looking back after February, Lenin said more than once that these October theses (as we may call them) predicted exactly what did happen in February 1917. According to them, "To the question of what the party of the proletariat would do if the revolution placed power in its hands in the present war, our answer is as follows: we would propose peace to all the belligerents on the condition that freedom is given to the colonies and all peoples that are dependent, oppressed and deprived of rights."⁶¹

Lenin repeated this point and called attention to his earlier October theses in his fourth 'letter from afar', dated March 12, and thus a few days before the *Pravda* editorials (the text of this letter did not reach Petrograd before Lenin himself did):

If political power in Russia were in the hands of the Soviets of Worker, Soldier and Peasant Deputies, these soviets, and the All-Russian Soviet elected by them, could, and no doubt would, agree to carry out the peace programme which our party (the Russian Social Democratic Worker Party) outlined as early as October 13 1915, in No47 of its central organ, *Sotsial-Demokrat* ... It would immediately bring to the knowledge of all the people our peace terms, the peace terms of the workers and peasants: liberation of all colonies; liberation of all dependent, oppressed and unequal nations.⁶²

Note that this 'letter from afar' still unproblematically assumes that the soviets would adopt the Bolshevik peace programme. Only after his arrival in Petrograd did Lenin come face to face with the inescapable political reality that a large majority of the soviet constituency of workers and soldiers supported revolutionary defencism. Having arrived in the capital a few weeks earlier, Kamenev and Stalin had already realised that the Bolsheviks needed to win over the soviet constituency with large-scale agitation campaigns. Their projected campaign on the war was built solidly around what Lenin had already defined as the Bolshevik peace programme.

Claim 2

But there is more to the proposed campaign slogans than just the actual policy proposal.

Looking at the passages from the editorials just quoted, some words immediately jump out: 'demands', 'pressure', 'compel' the government. Do not such expressions show (as Eric Aunoble phrases it) that the *Pravda* editorials merely wanted to put pressure on the Provisional Government "rather than overthrowing it" [my emphasis]?⁶³

Aunoble's paraphrase reflects the thinking, not of the Bolsheviks, but of Irakli Tsereteli and the revolutionary defencists. These people did indeed put pressure on the Provisional Government to revise its war aims precisely, because they did *not* want to replace it. They therefore opposed any slogan that would embarrass the Provisional Government by asking too much. When the Bolsheviks introduced a resolution at the March soviet conference to publish the secret treaties, Tsereteli came to the floor to oppose it.

The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, were only too happy to embarrass the government. They proposed a mass agitation campaign - not *instead* of overthrowing the government, but as a means of *obtaining the support of the soviet constituency* in order to overthrow it in the future. In the Bolshevik debates in April, Kamenev succinctly explained this rationale for making 'demands'. He cites the example of publishing the secret treaties, which was already a distinctively Bolshevik campaign slogan:

Should we, as a political party, take on ourselves to demand the publication of the secret treaties - announce that this is our political demand? People [such as comrade Lenin!] will say to me: excuse me, you're demanding something impossible. But the demands I make are not founded on the expectation that Miliukov will respond to me and publish the treaties. The policy of making demands that I am advocating is an agitational device for the development of the masses, a method of exposure of the fact that Guchkov and Miliukov cannot do this, that they do not want the publication of the secret treaties, that they are against the policy of peace.

Making demands is a device for showing the masses that if they really want to create a revolutionary policy on an international level, then the *vlast* must be transferred into the hands of the Soviet.⁶⁴

Not for one second did Kamenev and Stalin believe that Miliukov and Guchkov would ever carry out a policy aimed at revolutionary upheaval within the Allied countries (and if they did believe this, they were badly informed fools). When we turn to the March editorials, we easily see that the authors were in fact *counting on* getting a refusal from these long-time imperialists. Stalin, for example, states that any refusal to negotiate will simply enable people "to see for themselves the predatory character of the war and the bloodstained countenance of the imperialist groups, in whose rapacious interests they are sacrificing the lives of their sons".

Claim 3

When Lenin returned from exile, one of the first things he did was sit down with a huge pile of *Pravda* issues and gave them a thorough reading. What did he think of these notorious editorials and of the agitation campaigns that were already underway?

Well, he strongly objected to framing the slogans in terms of 'demands', because he felt that to do so fostered the illusion in the target audience that the demand might actually be successful. But there is no indication he accused Kamenev and Stalin themselves of sharing this illusion - and this is the accusation at the heart of our *anekdotchik*. A lively *practical* debate over this issue took place at the April party conferences. Seasoned Bolshevik activists made a good case that using 'demands' was in fact an essential tool for *exposing* the counterrevolutionary nature of the government. Later on, Bolshevik agitators did make plenty of 'demands' at rallies and during elections.

But otherwise Lenin had no problem with these editorials. Why would he object to an agitation campaign based squarely on his own definition of the Bolshevik peace programme? This campaign was already in full swing by the time Lenin returned home, along with a sister campaign based on another concrete policy demand: namely, 'Publish the secret treaties!' (treaties between the tsarist government and the Allies that the Provisional Government still intended to honour). These campaigns were strongly endorsed by the official resolutions of

the April party conference, and they continued throughout the year. In fact, the *Pravda* editorials of mid-March opened up a road leading *directly* to the Second Congress of Soviets in October that finally made the long-demanded offer of peace negotiations in the form of the Decree on Peace.

But Lenin also went on to *explicitly* endorse aspects of the editorials that, if we believe the historians, he should have rejected with horror. Rabinowitch writes that Kamenev and Stalin advocated "an end to disorganising activities at the front". This is misleading, since the Bolsheviks never did engage in encouraging refusal of orders, desertion and the like. Indeed, one major criticism of Kamenev's editorial from other Bolsheviks was that it seemed to imply that the party had *ever* encouraged such actions.⁶⁵ But the editorials certainly did reject 'anarchist methods' of fighting the war, and this line was consistent throughout the month.

In his polemics from 1914 to early 1917, Lenin had insisted on the slogan of 'defeatism', but as soon as he arrived back in Russia he understood that any reluctance to disavow the hostile image of the Bolsheviks as defeatist semi-saboteurs would be political suicide. On his journey to Petrograd (as he related in his very first speeches), he met a 'defencist' soldier who argued that "we can't just stick our bayonets [*shtyky*] in the ground and go home". Lenin endorsed the soldier's imagery, and he thenceforward often insisted that the Bolsheviks did not endorse the '*shtyk in the mud*' strategy for ending the war.

In an article published in June, Lenin observes that the Russian army suffered from demoralisation - but this was certainly not the fault of the Bolsheviks! On the contrary, where Bolsheviks are allowed to speak openly, "excesses, demoralisation and pseudo-Bolsheviks" were absent. But (continued Lenin), the enemies of the Bolsheviks "need a pretext for saying, 'The Bolsheviks are demoralising the army' and thereafter shutting their mouths".

Lenin goes on to quote at considerable length a pamphlet by the Bolshevik agitator, Nikolai Krylenko, and to give this pamphlet his strong endorsement. And indeed, Krylenko's words are well worth reading as a succinct statement of the Bolshevik message about the war. For our purposes, the key sentence is the following: "Beware of those who, posing as Bolsheviks, will try to provoke you to disorders and riots [*bunty*] as a screen for their own cowardice! Know that, though they are with you now, they will sell you out to the old regime at the first hint of danger."⁶⁶

Kamenev and Stalin argued that 'Down with the war!' should be discarded as a working campaign slogan. Did this argument offend or infuriate Lenin? No, in fact, he went out of his way to endorse it:

The slogan, 'Down with the war!', is correct, of course, but it does not take into account the peculiarity of the task of the moment: namely, the need to find another way to approach the masses. In my opinion, it resembles the slogan, 'Down with the tsar!', that was used by inexperienced agitators back in the day [during the 'going to the people' movement of the 1870s]: they went simply and directly to the village [using this slogan] - and got beaten up ...

'Down with the war!' does not mean simply throwing down our bayonets [here Lenin refers to his '*shtyk in the mud*' argument].⁶⁷

The episode of the *Pravda* editorials cannot be used to illustrate any alleged chasm between Lenin and his lieutenants. The reality is much more straightforward. Kamenev and Stalin - two long-time Bolsheviks who grasped the central realities of the post-February situation - proposed a mass campaign based solidly on the existing Bolshevik programme. While not necessarily agreeing with every detail, Lenin had no reason to be scandalised by their work. On the contrary, he explicitly endorsed their rejection of 'anarchist methods' and their search for a more effective slogan.

Claim 4

Our *anekdotchik* makes claims, not only about the mid-month editorials themselves, but about a 'swing to the right' in the Bolshevik line prior to Lenin's return. We are thus led to expect to find a series of articles in *Pravda* that go easy on the war and on the Provisional Government. My curiosity aroused by what seemed to me to be a very improbable claim, I recently gave

myself the task of trying to find evidence for this dramatic shift to the right in the second half of the month. Instead, I found prominent anti-war articles in almost every other issue of the Bolshevik paper.⁶⁸

Just as a sample, let us take a look at a short front-page editorial that was unsigned and therefore spoke for the newspaper as a whole. It was published on March 25 - that is, about a week after the notorious editorials on the war. Entitled 'Down with the policies of the imperialists!', it deals with a recent newspaper interview given by foreign minister Miliukov, in which he opposed the idea of "peace without annexations". As *Pravda* pointed out, although Miliukov decried national oppression in Germany, Turkey and Austria, he conveniently forgot about the nationalities that were oppressed by Allied countries. In the following passage from the article, great emphasis is given to the word *all*, that is, Russia's Allies as well as Germany:

[Miliukov] understands the tasks of foreign policy just like - precisely like - completely like - the way they were understood by tsar Nicholas II and his diplomats ...

This is a purely imperialist policy, a policy of territorial seizures, a policy that will drag out the war. More than that: it is a counterrevolutionary policy, [leading to] a horrifying economic and food-supply crisis ...

The whole world, and first of all the workers and soldiers of *all* belligerent countries must know that in Russia there are two policies: the policy of a handful of imperialists, who dream of seizing foreign land, the policy of Mr Miliukov - and the policy of the proletariat and revolutionary democracy, who, uniting their forces with the workers of *all* belligerent countries, want to conquer peace, bread and freedom.⁶⁹

For our purposes, great interest attaches to the following assertion: "We warned you earlier of the imperialist nature of the new government, we forewarned the workers and soldiers that this government was bound hand and foot to the interests of Allied capital." What chutzpah! *Pravda* brags about its consistency barely a week after prominent editorials had urged support for the war! Or - another possibility - perhaps historians have misinterpreted the earlier editorials of Kamenev and Stalin.

Claim 5

Ultimately, our *anekdotchik* serves to make plausible the rearming narrative as a whole. If top Bolshevik leaders were now supporting the war, then, of course, Lenin had to rearm the party big time and to impose a dramatic rupture on the party's whole attitude.

To test this claim, let us take a step away from individual pronouncements by Kamenev, Stalin and Lenin and look at *official party resolutions* on the war issued in March (before Lenin's return) and in April (after the April theses). According to the rearming narrative, there should be a *dramatic contrast* between March Bolshevism and April Bolshevism. What we find instead is a remarkable *continuity*, not only in content, but even in verbal formulation. Let us follow the paper trail created by this string of party resolutions.

On March 21, *Pravda* published resolutions passed by the top party leadership committee (and thus Kamenev and Stalin) in Petrograd. A resolution declared that the imperialist war threatened all present and future conquests of the revolution. Let us follow the further fate of this crucial resolution. At the end of March, just before Lenin's return from exile, there was held an all-Russia conference of soviets. The Bolsheviks took advantage of that conference to hold their own national party conference, which adopted a modified version of the earlier Bolshevik resolution:

Only a complete liquidation of the entire foreign policy of tsarism and the imperialist bourgeoisie, together with the liquidation of the international secret treaties and a genuine transfer of the *vlast* into the hands of the proletariat and the revolutionary democracy, would herald a [genuine] change in the imperialist character of the war, as far as Russia is concerned.

At the conference of soviets, on the national stage, Kamenev introduced this anti-war resolution, where it was energetically opposed by Tsereteli, the leader of the revolutionary

defencists. In fact, this national conference of soviets featured a rhetorical duel between Kamenev and Tsereteli on the war issue, during which Kamenev did his best to rouse the rabble: "Too many high-sounding words have covered up the robber policies that triumphed and led to war. Not high-sounding words, not a cover-up for the imperialist war, but the truth, the naked truth about what kind of war this is - this is what the peoples demand."⁷⁰

If you talked to a participant of this conference and informed them that Kamenev and Tsereteli were actually in agreement, they would look at you quizzically and perhaps start carefully moving away. Kamenev's resolution got only a few votes on this occasion (Bolsheviks plus some Left Socialist Revolutionaries), since the soviet majority still strongly supported revolutionary defencism.

A short time later, defending *Pravda* against what he thought were Lenin's unfair attacks in his April theses, Kamenev pointed to this resolution as an expression of *Pravda's* position on the war and he also called attention to *Pravda's* fight against revolutionary defencism. Was Kamenev correct to counterpose Lenin's April theses to the Bolshevik resolutions issued in March? We can give a definite answer to this question by comparing the resolution submitted by the Bolsheviks at the national soviet conference in March to the corresponding resolution drafted by Lenin and adopted by the Bolshevik party conference in April. Below is a sentence-by-sentence comparison of the opening lines of the two resolutions. It immediately becomes apparent that, when Lenin drafted the April resolution, he had the March resolution on his desk right in front of him. Lenin brought out the continuity of the Bolshevik Party line by using the March resolution as a basis for his own text, even while sharpening up its prose:

1. The war is imperialist.

March resolution: The existing war arose on the ground of imperialist (aiming at conquest) aspirations of the dominant classes of all countries, aiming at the conquest of new lands and at the subjugation of small and backward states.

April resolution: The present war is, on the part of both groups of the belligerent powers, an imperialist war: that is, one waged by the capitalists for the division of the profits obtained from world domination, for markets for finance (banking) capital, for the subjugation of the weaker nationalities, and so forth.

2. Each further day of war is disastrous.

March resolution: Each extra day of war enriches the financial and industrial bourgeoisie and destroys and exhausts the forces of the proletariat and the peasantry of all the warring countries.

April resolution: Each day of war enriches the financial and industrial bourgeoisie and destroys and exhausts the strength of the proletariat and the peasantry of all the warring as well as of the neutral countries.

3. The war poses a mortal danger to the revolution in Russia.

March resolution: In Russia itself, moreover, prolongation of the war creates a menacing danger to securing the conquests of the revolution and to carrying it out to the end [*do kontsa*].

April resolution: In Russia itself, moreover, prolongation of the war involves a grave danger to the conquests of the revolution and its further development.

4. Peace negotiations must be opened as soon as possible.

March resolution: On the other hand, on the agenda stands the necessity of compelling the Russian Provisional Government not only to reject all plans of conquest, but to immediately and openly formulate the will of the peoples of Russia: that is, to propose to all warring countries a peace without annexations or indemnities, and with the right of the peoples to self-determination.

April resolution: The revolutionary class, if it takes the state *vlast* into its hands in Russia ... will immediately and openly offer to all the peoples a democratic peace on the basis of a complete renunciation of every possible form of annexation and indemnity.

There is only one real change of note: the March resolution talks of "compelling the Russian Provisional Government", while the April resolution talks about an offer that will be made in the future by a proletarian *vlast*. See our earlier discussion about 'demands' for the meaning and

modest scope of this change. And, if we look back at the resolution introduced by Kamenev at the March soviet conference, we see that it already affirmed that "a genuine transfer of the *vlast* into the hands of the proletariat and the revolutionary democracy" was the only thing that could legitimise the war.

We are compelled to conclude that Kamenev overreacted to the April theses, since Lenin was *not* rejecting the substance of the party resolutions presented in March. More to the point, we are compelled to conclude that the predictions of rupture and discontinuity generated by our *anekdotchik* have failed spectacularly. Rather than a massive 'rearming' of 'old Bolshevism', we find no more than a tactical adjustment to unexpected minority status. And, if we compare party resolutions in March and April on other fundamental topics, such as the Provisional Government and party unification, we will find the same substantive and verbal continuity. Here is a paraphrase of the Bolshevik consensus on the issue that concerns us most, the war:

Russia's war is imperialist, fought for unworthy goals and thoroughly illegitimate. The February revolution did not change its status. The Provisional Government is made up of long-time imperialists who strive to carry out the imperialist policy of the tsarist government. Its foreign policy is just one indication of the counterrevolutionary nature of the Provisional Government. The only road to a genuine democratic peace is through revolutionary action from below in both Germany and the Allies. We do not fight against the war by 'anarchist' methods, such as sabotage or encouraging desertion, but rather by launching large-scale agitation campaigns around slogans calling for concrete action (for example, "an immediate offer of peace negotiations to *all* belligerents" or "publish the secret treaties").⁷¹

The Anekdotchik

We asked ourselves an unusual question: what were the actual views of Kamenev, Stalin and the Petrograd Bolsheviks toward the imperialist war and toward revolutionary defencism before Lenin's return? We consulted the following directly relevant evidence:

- Pre-war writings by Kamenev and Stalin;
- The full text of the notorious *Pravda* editorials, including the forgotten unsigned editorial;
- Other *Pravda* articles published in March;
- Overlooked passages in Aleksandr Shliapnikov's participant memoir;
- Official party resolutions: the resolution of the bureau of the central committee in March, the resolution submitted in opposition to the official revolutionary defencists at the all-Russia conference of soviets at the end of March, and the resolution adopted at the Bolshevik party conference a month later;
- The rhetorical duel at the March all-Russia conference of soviets between Kamenev as spokesman of the 'internationalists' and Tsereteli as spokesman of the revolutionary defencists;
- Overlooked comments by Lenin in April: for example, when he himself dismissed the usefulness of the 'Down with the war!' slogan;
- The *absence* of any debate on the war during the Bolshevik brouhaha over the April theses;
- Those parts of Kamenev's response to the April theses in which he rejected revolutionary defencism and made clear his revolutionary rationale for making 'demands';
- Soviet historical monographs from the Brezhnev era.

Our conclusion was that the attitudes of Kamenev and Stalin towards the war and towards revolutionary defencism in March was the same as the preacher in his sermon on sin: they were 'agin'em'. The preceding pages have spelled out our argument, so now let us ask another question. All of the evidence just listed has long been available in published sources, and, in this digital age, all of it can be downloaded in short order. All of it is obviously relevant to any discussion of the views of the Bolsheviks in the crucial months of March and April. And yet there never has been any debate over *interpretation* of any of this evidence, for the simple reason that *none of it* is ever mentioned in post-Rabinowitch historiography. Our *anekdotchik* about the *Pravda* editorials reigns supreme, because directly relevant and easily available evidence is ignored.

A principal reason for this outcome is that the community of western scholars dedicated to rigorous research in 1917 is very small, and the subset of those interested in high politics is even smaller. Once a topic has been treated by some scholar, there is very little intellectual or career incentive to spend further time on it; perhaps

only someone rather eccentric and with few career prospects would undertake such a project. But I believe another force is at work.

The *anekdotchik* about the scandalous *Pravda* editorials was created by the Lenin cult for the Lenin cult. In our earlier survey of the various versions of the cult, we overlooked one central use to which it has been put: namely, as a weapon in intra-Bolshevik ideological and political struggles. Once Lenin's untouchable status as a thinker and leader was established, any disagreement with him at any point in his career was viewed as a mortal political sin. And, if not enough genuine disagreements could be found, suitable disagreements could always be manufactured.

This feature of the Lenin cult can be found already in a polemic about 'permanent revolution' in *Foundations of Leninism*. Although Trotsky is not named, this section of Stalin's little book was no doubt meant as a warning to him not to get too uppity, because the other leaders could always mobilise the long and impressive record of disputes and insults between him and Lenin. Of course, this vulnerability did not suit Trotsky's book, so, like a good jiu-jitsu fighter, he used his opponent's moves against him. The moral of his essay, *Lessons of October*, which came out a few months later, is essentially this: *I am not the one who had strong disagreements with Lenin - you are!*

To this end, Trotsky constructed a story that centred on alleged fundamental disputes between Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders during 1917. Any item that could be possibly worked into the overall narrative was seized upon, anything that did not fit the narrative or flatly contradicted it was ignored. And Trotsky's counterjab was a huge success - leastwise, in historiography. He delivered a blow to Kamenev and Stalin, from which they are still reeling.

The *Pravda* editorials of mid-March provide a good example of Trotsky's *modus operandi*. Without mentioning the names of the authors, he cites passages from the editorials, peppered heavily with indignant exclamation points and accompanied with sarcastic glosses. He concludes:

At the time when *Pravda* was advocating "exerting pressure" on the Provisional Government in order to induce it to intervene in favour of peace "before the eyes of world democracy", Lenin was writing:

"To urge the Guchkov-Milyukov government to conclude a speedy, honest, democratic and good neighbourly peace is like the good village priest urging the landlords and the merchants to 'walk in the way of God', to love their neighbours and to turn the other cheek."

On April 4, the day after his arrival at Petrograd, Lenin came out decisively against the position of *Pravda* on the question of war and peace.

Trotsky is quoting Lenin's fourth 'letter from afar'. Earlier, I quoted the same letter to show that Lenin endorsed the new campaign slogan in advance, as it were. The passage quoted by Trotsky is a critique of the writer, Maxim Gorki, who really did pin unrealistic hopes on the Provisional Government; Trotsky invites us to believe Lenin's words were directed against Kamenev and Stalin. He also requires us to believe that Lenin himself was willing to turn the other cheek and to reward apostasy toward Bolshevik fundamentals by positions in the top leadership.

Trotsky's sleight of hand here is (unfortunately) typical of *Lessons of October*. Something similar to "exerting pressure" can indeed be found in the editorials. And Lenin did pour scorn on the idea of persuading Miliukov and Guchkov to carry out a genuine peace policy. Trotsky then runs these two little facts together to affirm that Kamenev and Stalin were naive boobs who trusted Miliukov and Guchkov: the opposite of the truth. And he further tells the reader that, after his return, Lenin "came out decisively against the position of *Pravda* on the question of war and peace": the opposite of the truth. He sums up with about the nastiest insult in the nastiest language that one Bolshevik could lob at another: the offending editorials were "crypto-defencist and agreementising in character".

We can easily see Trotsky's motive for distorting the facts in the way he did. The alleged support given to the Provisional Government by Kamenev and Stalin documents the reason why Lenin had to "rearm the party" with his April theses. If the theses denounced support for the

SUPPLEMENT

war, they must have been aimed at his fellow Bolsheviks. And, if Kamenev expressed his unease with the April theses, that was because, of course, he really wanted to show “conditional support” for those nice people in the Provisional Government. And, in this way, Kamenev’s short editorial in the middle of March helps explain why he was a determined opponent of Lenin throughout 1917 - just as Trotsky wants us to believe.

We conclude that Trotsky is the original author of our *anekdotchik*: his discussion is short in word count, but vast in implications. Whatever Trotsky mentioned in his 1924 account is still remembered by the historians; whatever he did not see fit to mention (the unsigned editorial of March 16, the official Bolshevik resolutions in March, the debates at the March soviet conference, Lenin’s endorsement of key arguments, and so on) is totally forgotten. Trotsky’s manufactured episode seems plausible to someone who does not know the facts - or who does not want to know.

Stalin’s canonical *Short course of party history* (1938) gratefully took advantage of Trotsky’s invented scandal - but, of course, only against Kamenev and not against Stalin. In a passage added by Stalin personally, we read the following about Kamenev and his fellow “enemies of the people”:

[In March 1917], Kamenev and several workers of the Moscow organisation - for example, Rykov, Bubnov and Nogin - held a semi-Menshevik position of conditionally supporting the Provisional Government and the policy of the defencists. Stalin, who had just returned from exile, Molotov and others, together with the majority of the party, upheld a policy of no confidence in the Provisional Government, came out against defencism, and called for an active struggle for peace, a struggle against the imperialist war.

Most historians would say that Stalin is fairly accurate about Kamenev, but lies about himself. In reality, he is lying about Kamenev and fairly accurate about himself.⁷²

In the ‘thaw’ decade immediately following Stalin’s death in 1953, there was an effort to use the Lenin cult to break up the Stalin cult. Among such efforts were articles by historians who returned to Trotsky’s story in order to pin the role of ‘crypto-defencist’ on Stalin as well as Kamenev. Natural sympathy for these embattled anti-Stalin historians made people somewhat uncritical about their historical arguments.

In the 1960s and 70s, American historians such as Leonard Schapiro and Alexander Rabinowitch took up Trotsky’s story and gave it the form in which we know it today. The *anekdotchik* in its final form fits in nicely with the inverted anti-Lenin cult: the feeble efforts at common-sense reformism by ‘moderate’ Bolsheviks are crushed by Lenin’s fanatical will to power. In this new telling, *all* the Bolsheviks look bad. After the fall of the Soviet Union, our *anekdotchik* seems to have achieved the status of established fact in Russia. The prominent Russian historian, Oleg Khlevniuk, retells the story à la Trotsky and Rabinowitch and then draws the anti-Bolshevik moral:

Kamenev’s and Stalin’s moderate positions opened the door to cooperation among the main socialist parties, but the cooperation never materialised. From the standpoint of the country’s well-being, cooperation in a joint effort to keep radicalism at bay was the only correct course. From the standpoint of [Lenin’s] ultimate goal of a Bolshevik takeover of sole power, it was ruinous.⁷³

Thus, *all* versions of the Lenin cult have a stake in our *anekdotchik*, and all have added their two-cents-worth in elaborating it. In demolishing this particular story, I also hope to strike a blow against the malign influence of the Lenin cult as a whole.

Summary

In this article, we have examined various manifestations of the Lenin cult and its offshoots: Stalin’s *Foundations of Leninism*, Trotsky’s *Lessons of October*, the inverted academic cult, the Trotsky spinoff cult, and the ‘Lengel legend’. We then looked at a concrete case of the damage done by the Lenin cult to historiography - a case study that has the personal advantage of allowing a direct response to some spirited challenges to my work.

When Stalin wrote *Foundations of Leninism* in 1924, he was consciously creating a cult

narrative, and he was undoubtedly aware of the many distortions he introduced. This duplicity cannot be charged against those responsible for later versions of the cult. Nevertheless, all versions share basic features: Lenin becomes the protagonist of a hero narrative, who is responsible single-handedly for mighty deeds. He is a highly innovative theorist of genius, so that the main focus is not on his battle with class enemies, but on his battle with his fellow Marxists. For the greater glory of Lenin’s originality, the Marxist mainstream is dismissed (with next to no documentation) with all sorts of opprobrious epithets (‘fatalist’, ‘mechanistic’, and on and on).

Narrative vividness is assured by creating an anti-Lenin out of some hapless Marxist whose name is familiar, but whose books are not read, thus allowing the tale-spinner to attribute to them whatever views make them sound appropriately stupid. The main icon of the Marxist ‘other’ in these narratives is Karl Kautsky, but Georgii Plekhanov, Lev Kamenev and (in some versions) Iosif Stalin have also been saddled with this role. All the above features can also be found in offshoot cults, such as the one created posthumously for Trotsky.

All versions of the Lenin cult suffer from two mortal defects: first, the description provided of the outlook of other prominent Marxists - Kautsky, Plekhanov, and *tutti quanti* - is beneath criticism; second, the description of Lenin’s own outlook clashes head-on with his own profound self-image. Neither Lenin himself nor his closest and most admiring comrades ever saw him as a great and innovative theorist. His loyalty to revolutionary social democracy - the left wing of the Second International - is a matter of record, but it is ignored or denied. Lenin saw himself (correctly) as a great political leader, not a great political theorist.

The Lenin cult in its various forms has done great harm to all of us with an abiding interest in the Russian Revolution. It has created legends that are uncritically accepted even by those who are otherwise distant from the cult. The canonical *anekdotchik* about the *Pravda* editorials is a good example: invented by Trotsky and authoritatively endorsed by professional historians, it reigns supreme to this day, despite its *prima facie* implausibility. When these inherited beliefs are challenged, most interested parties react with curiosity, perhaps with scepticism, but show themselves ready to listen to the evidence. If required, the familiar narratives are modified or abandoned, even if with regret. But for others, whom we may call ‘fundamentalists’, the inherited narrative is sacred, and any attack on its inerrancy is met with cries of heresy.

The task facing historians today is to critically examine all the beliefs which we have inherited from the Lenin cult in its various forms and to rebuild a solid and empirically based account of Bolshevism ●

Notes

1. For the English text, see www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1924/foundations-leninism/index.htm.
2. VI Lenin *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii (PSS)*, fifth edition.
3. VI Lenin *PSS* pp333-35 (‘Socialism and the war’).
4. For a more detailed exposition of this three-way debate between Potresov, Lenin and Stalin, see my article in *Rethinking Marxism* (Vol 35, issue 4, 2023): ‘Airbrushing out revolutionary social democracy’.
5. When Nikolai Bukharin gave a speech in February 1924 on ‘Lenin as theorist’, he too had to confront the same ‘strange’ opinion in the party that Lenin was a great *praktik* but not an innovative theorist. On the contrary, Bukharin now announced, Lenin was also a *genialneishii teoretik* (a theoretician of the highest genius). See N Bukharin *Izbrannnye proizvedeniia* 1988, p50.
6. VI Lenin *PSS* 19:105.
7. See my ‘Kautsky-when-he-was-a-Marxist’ (Database of post-1914 comments by Lenin): johnriddell.com/2019/08/05/lenin-kautsky-post-1914-database.
8. For the English text of Lukács’s ‘Lenin’, see www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/1924/lenin.
9. ‘As everyone knows, in April 1917 Lenin abandoned the formula of the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, and adopted Trotsky’s strategy. The result was October 1917’ (Alex Callinicos in *International Socialism* spring 1982). Indeed, everyone ‘knows’ this!
10. According to Trotsky, Trotsky’s tactical choices in October 1917 were also superior to Lenin’s, and Lenin admitted as much - according to Trotsky.
11. For further details, see my essay: johnriddell.com/2017/10/25/the-character-of-the-russian-revolution-trotsky-1917-vs-trotsky-1924.
12. For further details, see my article in the *Weekly Worker* on Vladimir Nevsky: ‘Supplement: Back to Nevsky’, July 6 2023: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1450/supplement-back-to-nevsky.
13. VI Lenin *PSS* 44:57-9; for the English text, see *Collected works* Vol 42, pp324-28.
14. *Pravda* April 8 1917 (the day after Lenin’s theses were published).
15. VI Lenin *PSS* pp139-142. In a more extensive

follow-up article published on April 12, Kamenev does not use the formulation to which Lenin objected. In this later article, Kamenev quotes the same statement by Lenin, which Lenin recalled in 1921: “... we need to overthrow the Provisional Government, but definitely not right now”. Kamenev then goes on to say that Lenin “undoubtedly is correct about this” (*Pravda* April 12 1917). And so any dispute between them was assuredly *not* about the desirability of overthrowing the Provisional Government! (For Lenin’s rebuttal of Plekhanov’s similar misreading of the April theses, see my online essay at johnriddell.com/2017/08/15/a-basic-question-lenin-glosses-the-april-theses).

16. LT Lih *Lenin rediscovered: ‘What is to be done?’ in context* (Leiden 2006).
17. See Adam Ulam in A Ulam and S Beer (eds) *Patterns of government* New York 1962, p615.
18. C Elwood *The non-geometric Lenin: essays on the development of the Bolshevik Party 1910-1914* London 2011, pp57-58.
19. These words are taken from Kautsky’s 1925 essay, as reprinted in FC Corney *Trotsky’s challenge* Leiden 2016, p698. Tsereteli’s comments can be found in his memoirs.
20. A Rabinowitch *The Bolsheviks come to power* New York 1978, pxx.
21. L Haimson *Russia’s revolutionary experience, 1905-1917* New York 2005, p94. Luckily, we have scholars like Haimson to “decipher” (his word) Lenin’s real outlook. Note how this approach consigns Lenin’s actual words to irrelevance.
22. M Löwy *The politics of combined and uneven development: the theory of permanent revolution* Chicago 2010. When delving into Trotsky’s scattered remarks on this topic, I found much guidance from Ian Thatcher’s *Uneven and combined development: revolutionary Russia* London 1991.
23. M Löwy *op cit* pp33, 87.
24. M Löwy *op cit* pp19, 27-8, 53. For my own view of these issues, see my article, ‘Why did Marx declare the revolution permanent? : the tactical principles of the manifesto’ *Historical Materialism*: philpapers.org/rec/LIHWDM.
25. The text of Trotsky’s *Results and prospects* can be found at www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/tpr/tp-index.htm.
26. M Löwy *op cit* pp44, 87.
27. Alex Callinicos in *International Socialism* spring 1982.
28. R Day and D Gaido *Witnesses to permanent revolution* Leiden 2009.
29. That is my translation. For a more detailed discussion, see johnriddell.com/2017/04/26/the-proletariat-and-its-ally-the-logic-of-bolshevik-hegemony.
30. R Day and D Gaido *op cit* p580.
31. As quoted by Moira Donald in *Marxism and revolution: Karl Kautsky and the Russian Marxists 1900-1924* New Haven 1993, p91. See also my online essay at johnriddell.com/2017/04/26/the-proletariat-and-its-ally-the-logic-of-bolshevik-hegemony.
32. *International Socialism* Spring 1982.
33. See also the programme adopted at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1929 (www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/6th-congress/ch04.htm): “Uneven economic and political development is an absolute law of capitalism.”
34. Alas, in the standard English edition, the translator (Max Eastman) got mixed up with his double negatives and wrote “not unacquainted” here!
35. LT Lih *Lénine, une enquête historique: le message des bolchéviques* Paris 2024.
36. www.revolutionpermanente.fr/Un-siecle-apres-pourquoi-relire-Lenine. Garrisi gives this link to Kouvelakis’s article - revueperiode.net/lenine-lecteur-de-hegel - to which I responded in my essay cited below.
37. In 2014, I published an article that refuted the Lenin-Hegel legend; see “‘A new era of war and revolution’: Lenin, Kautsky, Hegel and the outbreak of World War I”, in A Anievas (ed) *Cataclysm 1914: the First World War and the making of modern world politics* Leiden 2014. For Kevin Anderson’s response, see his *Lenin, Hegel and western Marxism: a critical study* Brill 2022. Owing to the more recent challenges, I have revisited the question; I have been greatly aided by the following informative articles: V Oittinen, ‘Which kind of dialectician was Lenin?’ in T Rockmore and N Levine (eds) *The Palgrave handbook of Leninist political philosophy* London 2018; N Coombs, ‘Did Lenin refound Marxist dialectics in 1914?’ in *The European Legacy* January 21 2016; R Boer, ‘Between vulgar and ruptural dialectics: reassessing Lenin on Hegel’ in *International Critical Thought* January 5 2015.
38. M Brie, ‘Lenin on the centenary of his death’: socialistproject.ca/2024/03/lenin-centenary-of-his-death.
39. Lenin 1958-60, 38, p180.
40. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/dec/12.htm.
41. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/mar/x01.htm.
42. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/granat/index.htm.
43. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/dec/x01.htm.
44. michaelharrison.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Reminiscences-of-Lenin-Nadezhda-Krupskaya.pdf.
45. Lenin 1960-68, 21:94-101. For more detail, see LT Lih, ‘The tasks of our times: Kautsky’s *Road to power* in Germany and Russia’ *Studies in East European Thought* 2018.
46. Lenin 1958-64, 21, p44; Lenin 1960-68, 27, p102 (Lenin’s emphasis is retained in all quotations from this article).
47. Although the bibliography was not included when the article was republished in 1918, Lenin had evidently begun to revise it, since we find a mention of the 1917 publication of his *Imperialism*, inserted without fanfare, as just one more work on imperialism. In Lenin’s preface to the 1918 republication, the reason given for dropping the bibliography was that it consisted mainly of foreign authors of no interest to Russian workers.
48. Marx’s long quotation can be found in the afterword to the second German edition of 1873.
49. Lenin 1958-60, 32, p94 (PSS, 42:290). As Robert Mayer shows in an indispensable article, Lenin had a lifelong admiration for the dialectic because he saw it as a method for understanding concrete situations; see R Mayer, ‘Lenin and the practice of dialectical thinking’ *Science and Society* spring 1999.
50. ‘Lenin 1924-2024: the validity of revolutionary theory’ - a conference organised by the Institute for

Socialist Studies and held in Bilbao in April 2024. My thanks to the organisers for their hospitality and a conference that provided stimulating discussions at a very high level.

51. lms.hypotheses.org/18193 - review from *Mouvement social* June 22 2024 (my translation). I was rather surprised to realise that I did not discuss this issue in my book, so Aunoble’s question is well taken. I must also retract my comment that the origins of these *anekdotchiki* are lost to us: my present research about this particular example allows me to pinpoint its origin quite precisely.
52. louisproycaet.wordpress.com/2017/05/07/lars-lih-versus-nikolai-sukhanov-who-is-more-credible-on-old-bolshevism.
53. I earlier provided the full texts of the editorials here: johnriddell.com/2018/04/02/march-1917-editorials-on-the-war-by-kamenev-and-stalin; I discussed them in the context of the slogan, ‘Publish the secret treaties’, here: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1197/supplement-biography-of-a-sister-slogan.
54. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/04.htm.
55. Trotsky’s version is discussed later. Historians cherry-pick the passages from Shliapnikov suitable for their interpretation and ignore the rest.
56. L Schapiro *The origin of the communist autocracy* New York 1955, p26 (my thanks to Kees Boterbloem for directing me to these pre-Rabinowitch sources).
57. A Rabinowitch *Prelude to revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 uprising* Bloomington IN 1968, pp35-36.
58. Exception must be made here for those interested in Stalin as an individual - for example, this article by Erik Van Ree, which set me on the right path: ‘Stalin’s Bolshevism: the year of the revolution’ *Revolutionary Russia* January 13 2000. But biographical studies such as this do not independently investigate the surrounding political context, nor have they had any impact on the historiography of the revolution. About Kamenev, there is nothing.
59. V Startsev *Revolutsiia i vlast’: Petrogradskii sovet and Vremennoe pravitel'stvo v marte-aprele 1917 g* Moscow 1978; VA Kuvshinov *Partiia bol'shevikov posle sverzheniia samoderzhaviiia (mart-nachalo aprelia 1917 g* Moscow 1975.
60. socialistfight.com/2017/08/24/falsifier-of-the-history-of-the-russian-revolution-lars-t-lih (Downing attributes to Procyet words actually written by Rabinowitch). There is an obvious chronological problem here: Lenin’s ‘Letters from afar’ were written in faraway Switzerland before Kamenev and Stalin had even arrived in Petrograd from Siberian exile, so ‘surely’ the letters were not aimed at them.
61. This short but crucial article can be found at www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/oct/13.htm.
62. See www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/lfafar/fourth.htm#v23pp64h-333.
63. Here too Aunoble follows in the footsteps of Rabinowitch. In his later volume, *The Bolsheviks come to power*, Rabinowitch does not directly mention the editorials, but he asserts that “the mild-mannered Kamenev, from the time of his return to Petrograd from Siberia in mid-March 1917, advocated vigilant socialist control over the Provisional Government rather than the latter’s removal!” [ppx, emphasis added].
64. *Aprélskie konferentsii* 71, 85.
65. This was the critique that Shliapnikov levelled at Kamenev and Stalin: “The comrades [newly arrived from Siberia] believed the philistine title-tattle that the Bolsheviks wanted the soldiers to stick their bayonets in the grounds and thus end the war. There were no such cranks in the party.” In my view, Kamenev did *not* believe the title-tattle, but he understood better than did Shliapnikov the urgent political imperative of distancing the Bolsheviks from the hostile image of them as defeatist semi-saboteurs. See A Shliapnikov *Kanun semnadsatogo goda; Semnadsatyi god* Moscow 1992.
66. *Pravda* June 3 1917 (‘Bolshevism and “demoralisation” of the army’ can be found in MIA at www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/jun/03.htm). For a detailed study of Lenin’s ‘defeatism’ slogan in 1917, see Hal Draper’s 1952 study *The myth of Lenin’s ‘revolutionary defeatism’* (available online).
67. This passage comes from ‘Tasks of the proletariat in our revolution’, a pamphlet written on April 10; see VI Lenin *PSS* 31:160, 243.
68. This finding is confirmed by Shliapnikov, who tells us that Stalin repudiated what Shliapnikov considered to be Kamenev’s mistakes: “In general *Pravda* again took up almost the same tendency as before, and thus called forth even greater outraged slander from the bourgeois and social-chauvinist press” (*Kanun* 2:452). Another participant, VN Zalezhsy, made the same assertion about *Pravda* during March (*Peterburgskii komitet RSDRP(b)*, 2003, p. 133). But these witnesses are only quoted when they support the standard story.
69. This article and others like it belie the assertion of EH Carr that in the latter half of March *Pravda* “refrained from any fundamental attack on the Provisional Government or on its war policy”; see *The Bolshevik Revolution* New York 1951. Nevertheless, Carr’s discussion of this episode is superior to any later version I have seen.
70. *Vserossiiskoe soveshchanie sovetov rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov: stenograficheskii otchet* Moscow 1927, pp45-48. My translation of the main speeches at this conference has been uploaded to academia.edu.
71. The claim is often made that Stalin in 1924 admitted that Trotsky was right about March 1917 and that he, Stalin, had rejected key parts of the post-March consensus. In actuality, Stalin’s 1924 discussion strongly supports my analysis. He says explicitly (and correctly) that the Bolsheviks in March were very well aware that the war was imperialist and the Provisional Government was counterrevolutionary. He ‘admits’ only that including ‘pressure’ in slogans was a tactical mistake, since it might lead to illusions in the target audience. Stalin’s discussion can be found here: www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1924/11_19.htm#s2.
72. *Stalin’s master narrative* pp351-52 (my translation of the Russian text). In comparison with the text provided by a committee, Stalin takes some baby steps toward greater accuracy: ‘Menshevik’ has become merely ‘semi-Menshevik’ and ‘supporting’ is diluted to ‘conditionally supporting’. The original committee draft had gone so far as to claim that Kamenev “called upon workers and peasants to continue the imperialist war”!
73. OV Khlevniuk *Stalin: new biography of a dictator* New Haven 2016, pp42-47.