Balance sheet of a revolution / Bilan d'une révolution

As one of the major works of the communist left, Bilan d'une révolution covers the undistorted reality of the great Bolshevik revolution, the various false interpretations that still surround it, as well as the development of the Russian economy up until the 1960s and, in much detail, its capitalist character.

Notes on this version: This is a combination of two translations that were created around the same time. Part I was translated by an anonymous group, Part II and III by the ICP - "Il Partito Comunista". The title was lifted from the translation by the anonymous group, the ICP on the other hand calls this text "A Revolution Summed Up".

We decided on "Balance sheet / Bilan" due to the historical importance of balance sheet texts within the communist left, as well as to keep this source in line with other already existing translations of works in the same tradition that use this phrase.

Bilan d’une révolution was written in 1967-68 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Russian revolution and appeared in our French language theoretical magazine at the time, Programme communiste. It is fully aligned with all the theoretical work of Marxism from its foundation text in 1848 to the current epoch.

At the time of writing, everyone on the entire bourgeois political spectrum from conservatism to Trotskyism presented the USSR as “communist”. Western conservatives and liberals delighted in pointing to the Soviet Union as a monolith that threatened freedom and world peace, as well as the relative poverty of the Russian working class. The existence of an imperialist rival with an “alien” ideology was used to justify not only massive increases in arms expenditure, but also the infiltration and corruption of cultural, scientific and educational institutions as part of a global offensive against any emergence, however weak, of resistance to capitalism. In reality, the USSR was no match for the USA and its NATO allies. Social democrats, for their part, insisted that the aftermath of 1917 demonstrated the danger of revolution. Socialism could only be achieved through the slow process of democratic reform, and radical socialism only played into the hands of conservatives. A few years before this text was written, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), once the jewel in the crown of proletarian movement, formally and definitively removed all reference in its constitution to Marxism and the class struggle.

The Stalinist and post-Stalinist official Communist Parties, at the peak of their electoral influence in countries such as France and Italy in 1967, systematically falsified Marxism and the theses defended by Lenin in their efforts to present the USSR as a workers’ paradise. Trotskyists added to the confusion, falsely portraying the Soviet economy as essentially socialist, while calling for an overthrow of “the bureaucracy”. In the mid-sixties a variety of new “libertarian communist” and third-worldist critiques of the Soviet Union emerged, as well as that other great polluter of proletarian theory and practice, Maoism. The democratic and self-managerial deviations of the “new left” moved further and further away from authentic Marxism, but were often co-opted by parties claiming a Marxist heritage, such as the Socialist Workers’ Party in the United Kingdom – so the ideological mush was complete. It is the task of our party, the International Communist Party, to debunk all of these falsifications and restore the crystal-clear doctrine of revolutionary Marxism.

The victory of the counter-revolution in Russia was not the result of a fatal flaw in Bolshevism such as the lack of “party democracy”, nor of an alleged invincibility of the bourgeoisie and the capitalist mode of production. Nor was the revolution defeated on the field of battle. Lenin and the Bolsheviks knew perfectly well that it ran counter to everything Marxism teaches to believe that the revolution could survive in an isolated and backward country like Russia. The Bolshevik revolution must be understood, as Lenin understood it, in the context of proletarian internationalism. Communist-led Russia lasted only a few years and Marxist orthodoxy was gradually abandoned, a process that started during Lenin’s final illness; the interests of the Russian State were then placed before those of the international revolution. There is no need to list here all the crimes committed against the working class of all countries in the interest of Stalin’s Russia. Suffice it to say that in 1943 the Russians themselves acknowledged the uselessness of the International and abolished it.

For Stalin and the clique around him, the (corrupted) Marxist language of the class struggle provided a suitable foil for carrying through the entirely capitalist reforms at great human cost, most notably through the “dekulakization” campaign. The retreat of the western communist parties of the 1920s, then of the International, enabled opportunism, democratism, class collaborationism, popular frontism and political and economic romanticism to flourish in leftist and pseudo-Marxist circles.

Developments in Russia since 1967 have been entirely in line with our party’s expectations (though nobody could have predicted the exact form they would take; in China, for example, the evolution of the political superstructure has followed a different course). As shown in the final section of this work, the process of “liberalization” of the Soviet economy – i.e. its steady adjustment to capitalist norms – began in the 1950s with the reforms of the Khrushchev era. By the late eighties, in the Gorbachev era, it was clear to many in the Soviet leadership that the USSR was too bankrupt, dictatorial and over-centralized to keep pace with its main competitor, the USA.

But, as the Communist Left had pointed out since the Stalinist counter-revolution of the mid to late 20s, the direction of the USSR was entirely capitalist and bourgeois. Wherever wage labour, capital, and an economy based on exchange exist, we
are in the presence of capitalism, its economic cycles and the falling rate of profit. This is quite simply, and has always been, the authentic Marxist position. Despite the terrible ideological defeat suffered by the working class that has resulted from the portrayal, by all schools of thought across the bourgeois spectrum, of the Soviet Union as “communist”, we know that this defeat is not definitive. That is why in August 1991 we published an article entitled “Communism Is Dead, Long Live Communism!” It was not communism that was dead, but rather the false myth of socialism in one country: “We asserted in the past that when the Russian myth had collapsed, as was bound to happen, we shouldn’t expect an honest recognition of our foresight, but rather, if anything, oppression or silence. And such it is. But this is not what rankles... We anticipate and know that an entire historical cycle must come to a close for communism to arise again as an urgent necessity... ‘The national roads to socialism’ have degenerated into conflicts, which, though apparently ethnic and racist, are in fact nothing other than the expressions of struggles within the bourgeois class camouflaged in the most horrible and cannibalistic way”.

The Communist Left was the only current that made a thorough Marxist analysis of Soviet Russia’s degeneration. Our critique of the USSR began with a famous intervention at the 1926 Sixth Enlarged Executive of the Communist International, which was the subject of organic works presented at our General Meetings through the 1950s; of these, The Economic and Social Structure of Russia Today is an outstanding example, and is being translated and published in our international magazine, Communist Left.

All of our work demonstrates that the USSR was nothing more than a capitalist State, distinguished from western capitalist States merely by the amount of State capital present in its industrial and commercial enterprises, a phenomenon already envisaged by Marxists, notably in Frederick Engels’ Anti-Dühring of 1878, which is cited at length in Part 2 of this work. The alleged “fall of communism” that took place in 1991 proved that a centralized and planned capitalism is impossible. The USSR was nothing other than a fascist State, one of many versions of capitalist rule, and even proved unable to convert to a democratic regime as demonstrated by Putin’s tricks to stay in power forever with the persecution of opponents, selected assassinations and the rigging of elections, and most recently, the 2020 referendum on the constitution. The really strong bourgeois State is the one that can control the population by means of “deception, flattery, fine phrases, promises by the million” (Lenin) through the mass media, schools, religion, flags, national anthems and other democratic paraphernalia, resorting to violence only in extreme situations.

Nevertheless, the material pressure exerted by the economic laws of capitalism will push the working class to rebel against worsening living and working conditions. Whereas in 1967 the industrialized countries were at the peak of the post-war boom, since then inequality has grown and economic crises have worsened, while capitalism, unable to free itself from its own iron laws, rampages through the environment and destroys public health, despite all the technological advances that have taken place since 1967. Only revolutionary Marxism can make sense of this anarchy and offer a way forward not just for the working class but for the whole of humanity.

This translation of a great Marxist text broadly covers three main themes: in Part I, it examines what the Bolshevik revolution was, and what it was not. In Part II, it considers the various false interpretations of October 1917 and it explores, in much greater depth, the most pernicious falsification of all: modern day Trotskyism, while hailing the unparalleled contribution of Trotsky himself to proletarian theory and practice. In Parts III the text goes on to examine the development of the Russian economy from the New Economic Policy of the early 1920s, through Stalin’s struggles against the Marxist left and Marxist right of the Bolshevik Party, up to the time the text was written in 1967-68.

This book is dedicated to the new generation of militants who are rediscovering the Marxist doctrine of proletarian internationalism and communist revolution.

Balance sheet of a revolution (Bilan d’une révolution) - Part I: The great lessons of October 1917

A historical analysis and balance sheet of the October Revolution from the perspective of invariant communism, showing what lessons to learn from its victory and fall, and what foundation a future proletarian movement must base itself upon. Translators’ note on quotation and citation: Citations and footnotes are entirely based on the French original. This English translation itself is based on the original French text, as well as its German translation. Where fitting, quotes were replaced with already existing English translations of these works in order to provide some literary consistency. In other places, quotes were directly translated from the original versions of this text, so as to make sure its theoretical potency, as well as its stylistic and thematic eloquence, remain preserved. Not meant as a work of academic pedantry, we will let the text speak for itself.

Quote:

“What is now happening to Marx’s theory has, in the course of history, happened repeatedly to the theories of revolutionary thinkers and leaders of oppressed classes fighting for emancipation. During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their theories with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonize them, so to say, and to hallow their names...
to a certain extent for the “consolation” of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time robbing the revolutionary theory of its substance, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarizing it.”

When he wrote these lines at the beginning of The State and the Revolution, Lenin certainly did not think that the same fate would be reserved for his “theories” and, even less, for that revolution to which his “name” was soon to be indissolubly attached.

It is indeed with the “most furious hatred” that the armies of the international bourgeoisie threw themselves at the communist dictatorship of Russia, the center of this world proletarian revolution of which it proclaimed itself the first fortress and the torch, and of which it would never have thought of separating its own fate from. For years, the guardians of Capital erected and maintained, all around the Russian powder keg, the cordon sanitaire of military intervention and political counterattack. There is nothing the bourgeois counter-revolution did not attempt in order to prevent the revolutionary flame of October from spreading to the citadels of the capitalist West and destroying it in the firestorm of the Socialist Revolution. Where weapons were not enough (and they were not enough!) heavy artillery of lies and slander were mobilised; and even though the latter proved to be powerless, the servile army of opportunism launched an assault behind the barrage of Capital. And for good reason. The bourgeoisie knew better than any other class that October was a living example, a shining "lesson"; that it was not a local or national event. They knew that there, in Russia, a link in the iron chain of its world domination had just been broken. Since then, fifty years have passed, the bourgeoisie of all countries has forgotten the terrors of the time and, for them, October has gone down in history; it is a museum piece, a body without "soul", a weapon with a blunt edge. The time for commemoration has come: October is dead. At least we think so.

The heirs and successors of the worst adversaries of the Bolsheviks of those distant years can sing their praises with impunity; the heirs and successors of this Stalinism, which began its career so well by mummifying Lenin's body and sanctifying his "name" after having distorted the "content" of his doctrine, can commemorate it at their ease, just like the leaders of the bourgeois forces, they also put October in the archives. They have transformed this crucial moment in the tragic history of the global class struggle into the day of foundation of the modern Russian nation-state. Out of this flag, this torch of the world proletarian revolution, they have made a rallying point for strictly national interests. October belonged to the international proletariat: they have made it the thing of Capital which accumulates behind the well-defended borders of the Russian state. The learnings and teachings of the revolution are for them in no way to be analysed as class struggle, rather they transformed it into a miserable catechism for the use by careerists and cadres of their country. For them, the origins of October are Russian, exclusively Russian, and the same goes for its historical results. October is fifty years old: we go to the mausoleum out of conscience, we don't go there to remember and learn. October is dead. Rest in peace.

In 1918 Lenin cried out: "The Russian Revolution is just one example, a first step in a series of revolutions." And in 1919: "In essence, the Russian revolution was a dress rehearsal [...] of the world proletarian revolution." For the band of mystifiers whose arid brains gave birth to such writings as “Theses for the fiftieth anniversary of the great socialist October Revolution”, this can no longer hold true - on the contrary, the revolution to them was only an exception to the rule, a phenomenon - unique history that will never be repeated. Also, once its roots have been cut, which were entrenched in the global antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, the archivist on duty can easily say, with the appearance of expertise, that October "exercised a very profound influence on all the successive course of world history " (world history is no longer the history of classes, but the history of all: priests and minions included). It is exactly in the same way that one could say of a rock detached from the mountain that put others in motion, mechanically, by simple force of inertia, without imposing on them a determined direction, in leaving them "free" to each follow their own - to complete the metaphor - national, exclusive, inimitable path towards a goal. A goal that is ignored since its definition is up to the mysterious national genius, to national history with all its traditions and its Pantheon. Its origins, its nature as a collective heritage of a single class, its international perspectives thus put on display in the museum of a false and frozen national history, October is dead - very dead. At least we think so. But the two sentences above from Lenin would suffice to remind us that this is not how the Marxists waged the gigantic October battle, nor did they commemorate it year after year in this spirit. Marxism is a “guide for action”. However, it can only be a guide because it is a general and complete conception of the emancipation movement of the working class. In these great periods of upheaval when the classes seize the weapons for a merciless battle, this guide checks its predictions, drawing from the present facts themselves that momentum which will give greater relief to its predictions, thanks to the persuasive force of historical facts. In 1848-49 and in 1871, it was in contact with real class struggles that Marx and Engels sharpened their weapons of criticism - struggles whose results did not concern just the French or German proletariat, but the world proletariat in totality. With his gaze fixed on Petrograd, which is not only Petrograd but London, Berlin, or Paris, Lenin returns in the State and the Revolution to these brilliant verifications of doctrine. As in the entire period from 1905 to 1917, it provides the tools for translating those experiences into real events of history, not only in Russia but also world-wide.

During a century and a half of uprisings to heavenly heights and declines into the deepest depths of hell, which Marxists have celebrated and cursed, it is always the definitive confirmation of a universal doctrine and program that they have sought, and what they drew from it is a certainty of the future, caring all the less to commemorate the past. So let them all imagine - some believe that October is dead, others that they killed it. In truth, however, it is purely up to the revolutionary proletariat to rediscover it in order to throw it in the face of all its enemies!
In the first chapters of “Left-Wing” Communism - An Infantile Disorder, intended to remind communists of all countries of the features of international importance 2 of the October Revolution, Lenin emphasises as "one of the essential conditions for the success of the Bolsheviks" the necessity of having had to search outside national limits of Russia a theory "proved by the universal experience of the entire 19th century", subsequently confirmed by "the experience of the seekings and vacillations, the errors and disappointments of revolutionary thought in Russia". In exactly the same way, Marx and Engels, also "exiles", had found confirmation in the hesitations and errors of the petty-bourgeois socialists during the great struggles of 1848 or the years preceding the Paris Commune. The Bolsheviks who proposed, according to the program drawn up by What Is To Be Done?, to import Marxism into the Russian working class, had therefore, in turn, imported it from the West. They had drawn their inspiration neither from the depths of Slavic genius, like the Pan-Slavists, nor from the national "model" of mir, like the populists, but from a doctrine born from the historical and current experiences of the working class. They did not draw inspiration from the "specific peculiarities" of a country that would today be called "underdeveloped" either, but, if we may use the expression, from the "non-specific peculiarities" of the countries of the most evolved capitalism. Instead of conceiving "novelties", they adopted the results of half a century of class struggle and its theoretical expression: Marxism. Their path was already marked out there; their glory, their pride as militants who always disdained to claim particular merits, both for themselves and for "their" working class 3, is to have stuck to this path, that was already called "dogmatist" in 1903.

For Marxism, the revolutionary (or counter-revolutionary: the two terms are dialectically linked) destiny of Russia fits into a whole which, since the Manifesto, is by definition global. The shadow of Tsarist Russia, the stronghold of the European counter-revolution, obscures the revolutionary perspectives of 1848: it is no longer a question of the distant land of the Sarmatians dear to the bourgeois publicist, but the issue of a leading role in the drama, just like Metternich's Austria; without its defeat, the European revolution cannot win. After 1860, while remaining European, which at the time meant global, the Marxist perspective changed: the looming Russian revolution "would have enormous importance for all of Europe, if only for the reason that 'by destroying in one swoop the last reserve of pan-European reaction, untouched until now', it will be able to initiate the leap "from the peasant communities, this already decomposed form of the ancient common property of the land [...] to the superior communist form of land property". It however had to become "the signal for a workers' revolution in the West, with both complementing each other " 4. In the nineties, this hypothetical perspective in turn disappeared. Russia having engaged in the capitalist whirlwind, the anti-feudal and anti-Tsarist revolution promises to be the great upheaval which, by tearing the peasants "from the isolation of their villages, which form their universe" 5, and by pushing them "onto the big stage where they will learn to know the outside world and therefore also to know themselves ", will give "to the Western workers' movement a new impetus, new and better conditions for struggle and, thereby will bring victory closer to the modern industrial proletariat, without which today's Russia can neither leave the peasant commune nor capitalism to move towards a socialist transformation " 6.

From its birth, Bolshevism was in continuity with this international tradition of Marxism: in these sentences of Engels, there is already the whole Bolshevik perspective of 1905 and 1917, as well as that framework of a possible counter-revolution which will only be realized later in 1926.

For us, the first of the lessons of October, from its brilliant beginnings to its tragic fallout, is indeed this flawless continuity established by the Party, twenty years before the Revolution, with the historic lineage of battles of the proletariat in the countries of fully developed capitalism and with the general doctrine and the program which predicted them and fed on them all at the same time. Without this unbroken link, no victory of the working class has been or will be possible. The Bolsheviks knew how to embrace 1917, 1848, 1871, or even 1894 with that same glance; likewise, it is in the fruitful perspective of the great past struggles in all countries, and their reflections in doctrine, that we must consider the future resurgence of class struggle. The fertilization of the Russian workers' movement by Marxism therefore dates back to those distant years when Engels, while predicting that Russia would inevitably pass through the capitalist phase, opened up to the working class of the immense country and its Marxist Party the prospect of a revolution which would certainly be anti-feudal since it had above all to allow the peasants access to land, an objective specific to bourgeois revolutions, but which could also rise to the level of a proletarian revolution on condition of uniting with the revolutionary movement of the socialist proletariat of the West. No other European proletariat has assimilated the Marxist doctrine as fully as the Russian proletariat, no other has thus appropriated it as a whole. From 1894 (date of the polemic against Mikhailovsky and of Engels' last writing on Social Relations in Russia) to 1905, Lenin's struggle was summed up in a passionate defense of the entirety of Marxist doctrine, both against the perspective of a purely peasant social and political revolution, the idea having its roots in the heritage of mir which the populists vaguely dreamed of, as well as against the revisionism of the economists and against the eclectic pragmatism of the spontaneousists. At the same time, Lenin highlights the fundamental role of theory, of the program, of the Party in short and of their "importation" into the class 7, openly rejecting any "freedom of criticism" with regard to the theory or the program. It is necessary to accept both, as Lenin himself says and repeats, in their "entirety", in their "together", globally and without mutilation. This is the other aspect of this continuity in which we have recognized the fundamental premise and the first "lesson" of October.

The other aspect, we claim, is the assimilation of the theory as a unitary and invariable whole.

Two facts, also of an international nature, shaped his fundamental understandings, as Lenin shows in Infantile Disorder: "Subject to the yoke of savage and reactionary Tsarism", the proletarian vanguard was forced to seek its theory beyond national borders, in exile which brought it into contact with the great struggles, both theoretical and practical, of the European socialist movement (Lenin was trained at the school of the exile Plekhanov and all Bolshevism was formed at the school of the exile Lenin); moreover, "no other country has known, in such a short period of time, such a rich concentration
of forms, nuances, methods in the struggle of all classes of contemporary society” 8. And this last fact is indeed of an international nature since this dynamism was born from the import of capitalism into a backward country, from the establishment of a capitalism that has reached full maturity in a region that was historically (and therefore also economically and socially) backward. As master dialecticians that they were, it is there that Trotsky and Lenin will seek the key to the future Russian revolution: “In our time the scholastic criteria, inspired by an obtuse pedantry, are useless. It is the world evolution which tore Russia from its state of backwardness and its Asian barbarism”; and the other will write: “The leading role of the Russian proletariat in the world workers’ movement cannot be explained by the economic development of our country: it is exactly the opposite that is true” 9. It is precisely because this economically backward country has seen a state-of-the-art Capitalism grafted onto its “Asian” and “barbaric” structure that terrible upheavals have shaken its foundations, that the stages have been burned, the historical deadlines shortened. This is why the bourgeois and sub-bourgeois classes have exhausted, in such a short period of time, all their chances of directly intervening, of directing and of controlling the social and political struggle, and the proletariat, hardly born, found itself faced with its historical tasks. Faced with the “last word” of capitalism, it had in fact to seek the “last word” of revolutionary doctrine, a doctrine strong in the confirmations brought by fifty years of history - and Tsarist absolutism could only help it. This is why the young vanguard so early on demonstrated an extraordinary maturity 10, that is to say, immediately understood that apart from the doctrine there was no salvation.

If Bolshevism has had a historical merit, it is that of having claimed the invariance of Marxism, that is to say, of having occupied the only platform from which the proletarian class is called upon to destroy capitalism that does not risk “slipping into the swamp” as Lenin said in What Is To Be Done?. And if after 1917 he was able to “re-import” into the West the theory in which the latter had forgotten or disfigured, that is what he owed it to. Those who uphold the “creative Marxism” of the Kremlin or the absurd “Maoist Marxism” of Beijing, who want to make Marxism an “elastic” doctrine therefore have no right to commemorate October.

... At its birth, the Russian Marxist movement therefore found its way clear. Eight years before the revolution of 1905, they knew perfectly well that their task was twofold: "The practical activity of the Social Democrats is assigned the task of leading the class struggle of the proletariat and of organizing this struggle under two aspects: socialist (struggle against the capitalist class, a struggle which aims to destroy the class regime and to organize socialist society) and democratic (struggle against absolutism, a struggle which aims to win political freedom for Russia and to democratize the political and social regime of this country ” 11. “Political and social” means in the first place, the destruction of large landholdings. To fulfill it, they will have to support “the progressive classes of society against the representatives of privileged land ownership and caste, and against the body of officials; the big bourgeoisie against the reactionary greed of the petty bourgeoisie ” 12. But this solidarity will necessarily take on a “temporary and conditional character”, not only because "the proletariat is a separate class, which tomorrow may prove to be the adversary of its allies of today" 13, but as well because its "class condition" makes it the only class "capable of pushing the democratization of the political and social regime to the end since such democratization would put this regime in the hands of the workers". Following the path traced by the Communist Manifesto, the Address of 1858, and the class struggles in France and Germany, the Russian Marxist movement therefore recognizes the proletariat as the true protagonist of the imminent revolution, although it remains confined within democratic and therefore bourgeois limits.

This is the task of the working class in countries which, having not yet accomplished their bourgeois revolution, are subject to outside pressure of rapidly expanding productive forces. It should also be noted that, for Lenin, “bourgeois” and “democratic” are always synonymous terms, and that if the proletariat is to fulfill democratic-bourgeois tasks (in these countries only, never in those where capitalism has already traveled its revolutionary cycle), it is in absolute independence from the classes and parties of the bourgeoisie that it must do so: it is the proletariat, and it alone, that can accomplish them in full! Today’s “commemorators” have instead defied democracy and socialism, putting the Party behind the democrats even in countries of more than mature capitalism.

Since it is a question of a bourgeois revolution, the pedants Mensheviks will say before and after 1905, the initiative and the direction must be left to the bourgeoisie (some will even go so far as to conclude that it is necessary to participate in the bourgeois government!); drowned in their hazy idealism, the populists whose supreme goal was the destruction of the great seigniorial property, proclaim for their part that the initiative and the direction must return to the peasantry; until 1917 and beyond, the position of the Bolsheviks will remain, on the contrary, that the revolution though economically and socially bourgeois cannot be accomplished “to the end” without the working class taking the lead. If it is ready to take on this enormous burden, it is because it knows that once the bourgeois revolution is carried to this extreme limit that the petty-bourgeoisie or the peasantry will never cross, the proletariat will see, with the help of the proletariat of the countries of advanced capitalism, the prospect of its own revolution. In 1905, Lenin will say how justified the “dreams” of the Russian Marxists were, who thought they would “achieve with an unprecedented amplitude all democratic transformations, all (their) minimum program” because, once that has been achieved, “the revolutionary fire which took hold would extend to all of Europe […] the European worker would rise up in his turn and show (them) how to do it”. As for the current “commemorators”: It was them (or their spiritual fathers) who, in the China of 1927, delivered the working class, hand and foot to the "brother party" of the Kuomintang, thus prohibiting the proletariat from taking over the head of the double revolution in the Far East; they again who, in the “underdeveloped” zones, urge the workers to follow the “national bourgeoisie”, even local satraps!

In essence, the terms of the Bolsheviks’ perspective will remain unchanged until October. Only the relations between the classes and therefore also the position of the main protagonist of the bourgeois revolution in Russia, the proletariat, changed, under the action of extranational factors as well. In a very "evolved" world from the point of view of the
productive forces, five years count for fifty in backward countries; the historical "phases" overlap and merge into each other, the timeframes are shortened, and it is with extreme rapidity that the fronts of the class war are made and unmade, then reformed in a new way. *The Address of 1850* foresaw for Germany (and it suffices to transpose to Russia) a rupture between the revolutionary bourgeoisie, on the one hand, the united petty-bourgeoisie and the proletariat, on the other. Then, immediately after, a new rupture, between the petty bourgeoisie and the workers this time, which should take the form of an armed struggle leading to the socialist revolution led exclusively by the proletarian class, provided that the revolution breaks out in France ("in the West", we would say for Russia). But, for Marx as for Lenin in *The Tasks of Social Democracy*, the historical delays are relatively long and he foresees that "the German workers will be able to seize power [...] only after a long revolutionary development". In Russia, as in all of today's underdeveloped countries, the historical course is, on the contrary, infinitely faster: in 1905, the liberal bourgeoisie had already burnt all its revolutionary carriages by openly alloying itself with the large landowners and Tsarism; among the bourgeois classes or subclasses, the peasantry therefore remains the only possible "ally" (but, as Lenin always reminds us, the ally of today will be the enemy of tomorrow!). In its impetuous advance, international capitalism has driven a deep divide between the classes, even - and perhaps especially - in the backward countries, forcing them, not to "jump" over entire historical stages, but to shorten them considerably. In Russia, the proletariat is therefore naturally the vanguard and we are even seeing the dawning of the day when it will remain alone, abandoned by the only "ally" that the rupture of the front of all the bourgeois classes had allowed it.

This is an October teaching, which today only applies to a few regions of the world, but that is enough to keep it important. In opposition to this invariance, only the obtuse corporalism of Stalin and his followers could decree, as he did in 1926, that, once the revolutionary fire was ignited in China, it would develop by respecting distinct stages, each of which had to be entirely "completed" before one could move on to the next, and conclude on the basis of this mechanical conception that the proletariat had to wait as massed behind the "national classes", for "experts" in revolutionary strategy to proclaim its time. The tragic result was, as we know, that the proletariat realized too late that this time had irretrievably passed! The resounding Russian victory, as well as the crushing Chinese defeat of 1927, showed that the truth was exactly the opposite of this conception: even if the proletariat was in the background during the first tremors of the social earthquake, it is inevitably pushed to the head of the revolutionary movement when this earthquake reaches its climax; then, it is no longer a question for it "pushing" the bourgeois revolution "to the end", but of seizing the rudder by force and, with the support of the peasantry, for imposing its hegemony on all other classes of society. The Leninist formula of "democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants" has no other meaning.

"Dictatorship", because we cannot do without "despotic interventions", violent incursions, not so much in the forms of the political superstructure, which is only a fragile and secondary aspect of social upheaval, but in property relations - the only way to liberate the productive forces whose large noble property hinders development and to free the peasants from absolutism, both central and local.

"Democratic dictatorship" because democracy is the political form corresponding to the bourgeois limitation of the revolution on the economic and social level. This dictatorship is nevertheless exercised against the bourgeoisie allied to feudalism, and that is why it does not respect any of the myths of political democracy and legal equality, even if its economic mission is bourgeois.

Oh, "Commemorators", for Lenin, even when it comes to fulfilling historical bourgeois tasks, the proletariat and its Party need the terrible, the scandalous, the non-conformist Dictatorship, even if it means sharing it with another class like the peasantry!

Perspectives? It is important to recall them, not for academic reasons, but to shed light on the problems of the "after October". In *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* (1905), Lenin writes: "This victory (the decisive victory over Tsarism) will be precisely a dictatorship, that is to say, it must necessarily 'lean on armed force, on the arming of the masses, on the insurrection and not on such and such institutions constituted 'legally', by the ''peaceful way''. It can only be a dictatorship because the changes absolutely and immediately necessary for the proletariat and the peasantry will provoke desperate resistance on the part of the landowners, the big bourgeoisie, and Tsarism. Without a dictatorship, it would be impossible to break this resistance, to repel the attacks of the counter-revolution. However, it will not be a socialist dictatorship, but a democratic dictatorship. It will not be able to touch (without the revolution having passed through various intermediate stages) the foundations of capitalism. It will be able, in the best case, to proceed to a radical redistribution of land ownership for the benefit of the peasantry; to fully apply a consistent democratism up to and including in the proclamation of the Republic; to eradicate not only from the life of the countryside but also from the life of the factories, the survivals of Asiatic despotism; to begin to seriously improve the condition of the workers and to raise their standard of living; and last but not least, to extend the revolutionary fire to Europe. This victory will not yet turn our bourgeois revolution into a socialist revolution; the democratic revolution will not go directly outside the framework of bourgeois social and economic relations, but this victory will nonetheless have immense significance for the future development of Russia and the whole world”. And again: "This victory will allow us to lift up Europe: and the socialist proletariat of Europe, after having shaken off the yoke of the bourgeoisie, will help us, in turn, to carry out the socialist revolution" (we find here verbatim the last words of Engels on *Social Relations in Russia*). This "two-man dictatorship" is, as Lenin will never fail to repeat, an uninterrupted process of struggles against the past and for the future, during which the proletariat is, in reality, the force which "directs" the peasants. Does this vision have anything in common with the idyllic coexistence ("pre-established harmony") as Trotsky puts it) that later, on behalf and on the orders of Stalin, the academy of the "red professors" will present as the real image of these "good relations" between the working class and the peasantry in which Lenin saw a simple prelude to the final socialist revolution? Let Lenin himself answer: "A day will come when the struggle against the Russian autocracy will be over and the era of the democratic
revolution will be over for Russia: from then on it will even be RIDICULOUS to speak of “unity of will" between proletariat and peasantry, democratic dictatorship, etc. [...] We will then think directly of the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat [...] The proletariat must carry out the democratic revolution to the end, by adding the peasant mass, to crush by force the resistance of the autocracy and paralyze the instability of the bourgeoisie. The proletariat must make the socialist revolution by adding the mass of the semi-proletarian elements of the population, paralyzing the instability of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie" 18.

It is, in fact, certain that when the proletariat enters into the running for its own demands, or even only when it poses the limit-demand that should be satisfied by a bourgeois revolution led by the bourgeois classes, namely the nationalization of the land (let us recall that the Address already claimed it in 1850, a terrible struggle will be unleashed and "the peasantry, as a class of landowners, will play in this struggle the same role of betrayal and inconstancy that the bourgeoisie plays, now in the struggle for democracy" 19.

Aware that "the small owner will inevitably turn against the proletariat after the complete victory of the democratic revolution", the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, turn their eyes to the European revolution: "Our democratic republic has no other reserves than the socialist proletariat of the West".

... If we insisted on the "prologue" of October at the risk of sacrificing part of the “epic" that it represents, it is because opportunism tries to present the Russian revolution as an “autonomous and unforeseen episode”, while it was prepared during an uninterrupted theoretical and practical struggle which lasted for many years. They paint it as an event which could not fit into a world revolutionary strategy, in short as a kind of "historical anomaly", a "discovery" which is no doubt brilliant, but which will not be repeated and which is to be blamed not so much on a Party as on the individual Lenin. On the contrary, it is a theoretical thesis and a fundamental practical teaching that the October Revolution was the fruit of a long preparation during which the following principles had been defined with increasing clarity: the determining role of the Class Party; leading role, then hegemony of the proletariat in the planned revolution in Russia; the need for a reciprocal link between this revolution and the European revolution; the inevitable passage of the alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry in the bourgeois revolution "carried to the end" in the struggle for socialism, which will only end in victory in Russia with the support of the victorious proletariat in one or more countries of advanced capitalism.

This revolutionary "prologue" demonstrates (and this is the main reason why we lingered on it) that, in all fidelity to Marxism, the Bolsheviks immediately excluded any possibility of "building socialism" in Russia without the help of a world communist revolution.

This international perspective, invoked a thousand times, became a tangible reality at the outbreak of the world war of 1914-18. The Bolsheviks proclaim without hesitation that the "supreme phase of capitalism" is beginning; for the entire historical period opened by the first world massacre, and for all countries, the alternative is: "war or revolution", and from its birth, the Third International will translate this perspective into the following political terms: "Either dictatorship of the proletariat or dictatorship of the bourgeoisie". All the justifications put forward to induce the working class to renounce its historic mission by joining the war will be irrevocably rejected; no "defensism" is admitted under any pretext: the proletariat has no "civilization", no "democracy". There is nothing to save or defend: you have to attack and destroy. May the proletariat not implore peace, may it practice revolutionary defeatism, may it fraternalize with its class brothers over the trenches, may it sabotage its "homeland", may it struggle to "transform the imperialist war into a civil war", may the proletariat strike with the same condemnation the open adhesion to the war, as well as the refusal to oppose it. The only proletarian solution: revolution!

These slogans know no borders: they are valid for the proletariat of France as well as for the proletariat of Germany, England, and Russia, since if the latter is not yet bourgeois enough to be fully capitalist, it is still enough to be forced to act as an imperialist force, united in an imperialist "single stream of blood" with all the other bourgeoisies of the world and tied to their destiny. In Petrograd as in Paris or London, as in Vienna or Berlin, it is futile to invoke the need to defend the motherland in order to preserve the supreme good of threatened "democracy" or "civilization" - this applies not only to Tsarism allied with western democracies, but also to bourgeois democracy, which replaced Tsarism after the February Revolution and possibly had an even greater interest in the military victory of the Entente. The Bolshevik perspective is unique and immediate; its framework is global: the revolution will break out in Russia and, at the beginning at least, it will be a "democratic revolution pushed to the end"; in Europe, the socialist revolution will break out: "In all the advanced countries, war puts socialist revolution on the agenda, a slogan which is imposed all the more imperatively as the burdens of war weigh more heavily on the shoulders of the proletariat and as the role of the latter must be more active in the reconstruction of Europe, after the horrors of the current "patriotic" barbarism, multiplied by the gigantic technical progress of capitalism" 20.

Finally, the continuation of the war will bring even more to the stage the need to found a new International on the ruins of the Second, the end of which were the social-chauvinist or social-pacifist parties, whose conciliating "center" is just as reactionary as the "right", perhaps more so.

October will be born in the din of these endlessly repeated and amplified proclamations which announce the opening of an irreversible and world-wide cycle of revolutions led by those who are still called “social democrats”, but who will soon shed their dirty “shirts”, in order “to use the name of communists”. An “exception”, October? A departure from the rule of peaceful accession to power? The exclusive feat of a single proletariat whose unique conditions for struggle would justify the use of the term “exception”? No! The triumph of the general rule, the victory of universal and invariable doctrines, clearly defined in advance! What is the base of the absurd legend of non-revolutionary paths or, worse still, "national paths to socialism"? History undoubtedly prohibits backward countries from stepping over the economic degrees which lead to full socialism by their own means and which the "advanced" countries have already climbed (but with what contempt
Lenin speaks of "gigantic technical progress of the great capitalism"; it is indeed determined by world events and therefore has nothing "national" about it. Is it then a question, initially, of laying only the "bases of socialism", that is to say of raising the state of the lowest economic degree, represented by pre-capitalist or even patriarchal structures, to the highest degree, that is, to full capitalism? Here too, history knows no other means than revolution, the iron dictatorship of the proletariat, and internationalism.

The Lenin who, at the conferences of Zimmerwald and Kiental, in Imperialism and in countless writings of the wartime period (Against the Current!) kept coming back with all his power to the vital and urgent historical task: "to transform imperialist war into civil war", the Lenin who so harshly castigated the pacifist illusions, the Lenin who worked feverishly for the birth of a new International founded on these principles, the Lenin who always associated the revolutions of the West and the East and showed to the proletariat, everywhere, and to its Party, in each country, the path of the revolutionary conquest of power, whatever the immediate economic program imposed by objective conditions might have been - would this Lenin therefore be the father of "peaceful and national paths to socialism", the theorist of "peaceful co-existence", and not their mortal enemy? Would the Lenin of The Military Program of the Proletarian Revolution therefore be the leader of the peace marches, the respectful defender of national and democratic "values"?

In short, would Lenin have been the first to betray the Red October?

... We will not be able to follow step by step the dense history of the few months which separate Lenin's return to Russia in April 1917 from the dazzling victory in October. Moreover, many texts and many meetings of our Party have already been devoted to it. On the other hand, it is important to identify the broad outlines, which will extend well beyond the event, by insisting on the general scope of the lessons that result from it.

The main stages are known: from the April Theses to the Party Conference of the same month; from the 1st All-Russian Congress of Soviets to the July Days; from the Sixth Clandestine Congress in July to the fight against Kornilov in August; the Party's intense vigil of arms, devoted both to the restoration of Marxist doctrine (The State and the Revolution) and the fight against resistance to the insurrection which manifested itself in the Central Committee itself; from the insurrection, through the boycott of the preparation of Kerensky, to the seizure of power and the establishment of the Council of People's Commissars; from the first major decrees to the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly; from the peace of Brest-Litovsk to the liquidation of the residues of the alliance with the left socialist-revolutionaries and to the start of civil war on all fronts. In these few months which put an end to a whole phase of history, to whole decades and which will, in turn, weigh heavily on the decades to come, where to look for the lessons of the proletarian and communist October?

In the economic program of the revolution, in its authoritarian interventions in the field of production and exchange? No! In a series of texts published before and after the insurrection and until the famous speech on Tax in Kind of 1921, Lenin will not stop repeating, on behalf of the Bolsheviks, that these measures were intended to channel backward Russia towards the fully developed capitalism or, to put it better, to build the "bases of socialism" at the cost of a bitter struggle against petty-bourgeois, rural and urban micro-production, the outcome of which depends on the extension of the proletarian revolution in the countries of developed capitalism. This program conceals nothing of the difficulties to be overcome, concedes nothing to the demagoguery of promises unrealizable within Russia alone, and fits perfectly into the Marxist tradition: it suffices to reread the Communist Manifesto of 1848 or the Address of 1850 to be convinced. Moreover, there is nothing to allow us to suppose that the application of another program would have been possible or even desirable, nor therefore that this one was too "modest", as certain militants, carried away by their revolutionary enthusiasm, have believed. However, it is not in the economic program that we will find the proletarian and communist mark of October, the spark which will ignite the proletarian masses all over the world in the scorching years of the first post-war period, because taken in itself, it in no way indicates the universal path of workers' emancipation. In realizing this, the victorious proletarian power worked above all for its own consolidation while waiting for the European communist revolution to tear Russia from its backwardness and cut its Gordian knot thanks to a massive contribution of productive forces and technical resources torn from developed capitalism. Once the land was nationalized, they had to try to move agriculture towards more advanced forms of associated labor. Industry, as well as its financial and commercial apparatus, had to be first controlled, then forced to concentrate (forced cartelization), and finally managed by the State which intended to use it as a political weapon much more than an economic one to accelerate the development of the countryside and prepare itself, in the event of a further delay in the external revolution, to face the inevitable conflict with the peasantry on its own. The decisive factor was that this immediate and local economic program was subordinate to the political program of the proletarian revolution, and can only be understood in the light of this political program: global dictatorship of the Communist Party! The carrier of this organic bond was the international party itself, as the leader of the international revolutionary struggle. And if we continue to develop this thought: only after it had broken this vital bond and physically liquidated its bearer by means of state repression, Stalinism could develop not only "economic capitalism" but also "political capitalism". It turned October Russia into a great Nation, the revolutionary parties into the guardians of democracy and order, and led them into the furnace of the second imperialist war to defend the very foundations of Capital. From this political break and from the exploitation of the economic base that was so painstakingly conquered by the October Revolution, the Soviet Union grew towards peaceful coexistence. Only this victory of the counter-revolution enabled the international bourgeoisie to commemorate an October so "sterilized" that it can take its place in the Palace of "Culture" by integrating itself into this "common heritage" that the bourgeoisie considers history to be - without any trace of class struggle; in short, they commemorate an October of which there is nothing left. But we know that the real October may well emerge from this nothingness much sooner than one would have thought, in all its force and splendor.
This strength and this brilliance are concealed so well from the exploited class that they can foresee no other future than the endless agony of today's decadent bourgeois society. However, they would emerge clearly from a faithful overall picture of the Revolution, including the economic measures of the years 1917-21 suitably placed in their historical framework, with their true significance.

From the April Theses to the founding of the Third International, the political line defended by the Bolshevik Party forms a flawless whole. In its bitter struggle, it got rid of any element, even purely formal, which could have led anyone to believe that between democracy and socialism there was some link: "The term democracy is not only scientifically incorrect when applied to the Communist Party; it has now, since March 1917, simply become a blindfold put on the eyes of the revolutionary people and prevented them from boldly and freely, on their own initiative, building up the new: the Soviets of Workers', Peasants', and all other Deputies, as the sole power in the "State" and as the harbinger of the "withering away" of the state in every form." 21. The Party (and the International with it) will be communist without question or compromise. The Bolshevik party knew very well what international responsibility it had. The fall of Tsarism in February 1917 put the party in a revolutionary situation, a "historically privileged position." It had to take advantage of this situation to conquer the first fortress for the international proletariat and to fulfil other responsibilities: "To whom much is given, much will be asked [...] It is precisely for us, and precisely at the present time, that it behooves us to found without delay a new International, a revolutionary, proletarian International; more exactly, we must not be afraid to proclaim loudly that it is already founded and that it is acting. It is the International of "true internationalists" [...] They, and they alone, are the representatives, and not the corrupters, of the revolutionary internationalist masses". That these internationalist communists are then very few in number is not to frighten them: "it is not the number that matters, but the faithful expression of the ideas and the policies of the truly revolutionary proletariat. The main thing is not to "proclaim" internationalism; it is knowing how to be, even in the most difficult moments, true internationalists". The interaction of historical conditions, which were independent of the will of the bourgeoisie (these conditions had been imposed on the bourgeoisie by the relentless course of the class struggle), had turned Russia after the February Revolution into a country where tremendous "freedom" prevailed - so let us take advantage of this freedom, not to preach the support of the bourgeoisie or of bourgeois "revolutionary to the end", but to found boldly, honestly, as proletarians, like Liebknecht, the Third International, an irreducible enemy of both the social-chauvinist traitors and the hesitant "centrists" 22. This duty towards the international proletariat always comes to the foreground in the consciousness of the Party, which regards it as its main task. It will endow the new International with a Marxism restored in its revolutionary entirety and enhanced by the victories of Petrograd and Moscow: The State and the Revolution and October are contemporary; Lenin's The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky and Trotsky's Terrorism and Communism take stock of three years of civil war in theory and practice; the Theses of the First and Second Congress of the International send the message to the proletarians all over the world, not of the Russian Party as such, but of integral Marxism whose dynamics of class struggle make it again the pole of attraction for the exploited classes of the whole world.

To evoke 1917 as it should be, one would need the pen of a Trotsky, but what we want is simply to demonstrate that the contours of October were already taking shape long before the victory of the insurrection, in the writings, the speeches, the theses and the struggles of the Bolshevik Party. For October encompasses not only the civil war and the founding of the Communist International and its first congresses, but also the NEP, not only the victory but also the counter-revolution, not only the events in Russia but also the world events which affected them, and shows that they are linked.

The Bolshevik Party did not throw itself blindly into the revolution. It did not expect the movement of the masses to solve the enigmas of history and indicate the route to follow, the goal to reach; for it, on the contrary, October was the endpoint planned, expected, prepared, announced daily to the masses by word and deed - an endpoint which was to become a point of departure. The February Revolution handed over power from the bloody hands of Tsarism to the hands of the bourgeoisie, eager to soak them too in that same blood, but at the same time it created, together with the Soviet of Workers and Soldiers? Deputies of Petrograd, a "Power based not on the law, but on the direct strength of the armed masses". Two powers that cannot coexist for long within the same state - what in Russia keeps them entangled? What determines the Petrograd Soviet to "voluntarily hand over state power to the bourgeoisie and its provisional government" when it has it? The "formidable petty-bourgeois wave," replied Lenin; it "submerged everything; it has crushed the conscious proletariat not only by numbers but also by its ideology, that is to say, it has spread in very large working-class circles, contaminated them with its petty-bourgeois political ideas" 23 (the epidemic, we will add, even reached a fraction of the Bolshevik party). October, this "second stage" of the revolution which, according to the April Theses, "must give power to the proletariat and to the poor layers of the peasantry", will only be possible if one "pours vinegar and gall in the sugar water of revolutionary democratic phrases "and if we“ detoxify the proletariat in the grip of the “general” petty-bourgeois intoxication " 24. Therein lies the brake which prevents the seething masses from following their path, the possibility for the enemy to curb the rising tide of "the proletariat and the poor layers of the peasantry" while keeping in reserve the weapon of direct bourgeois repression.

Purely Russian experience? “National” phenomenon? Not at all. Having behind it three-quarters of a century of proletarian struggles, backed by the assessment drawn up by Marx and Engels of class struggles in Germany and France, the Bolshevik Party can assert, on the eve of October and for any October to come, that “All over the world, the experience of the governments of the bourgeoisie and of the big landowners has developed two methods to keep the people in oppression. First, violence. Nicholas Romanov I and Nicholas II showed the Russian people the maximum of what is possible and impossible with this torturing process. But there is another process, which has been best developed by the English and French bourgeoisies, champions and "models" of democracy, who “learned their lesson” in a series of great revolutions and
revolutionary movements of the masses. It is the method of deception, flattery, fine phrases, promises by the million, petty
sops, and concessions of the unessential while retaining the essential." 25. Education is permanent and universal: the
proletarian revolution cannot win without crushing this insidious enemy that is petty-bourgeois ideology rooted in rural and
urban micro-production. The leaders of the petty-bourgeoisie "must" (it is indeed an objective fact, determined by real class
relations) teach the proletariat to trust the bourgeoisie. The proletarians owe it to themselves to teach them mistrust (see
note 25).

This is the first lesson that the Communist International will retain. Fifty years later, it is against you, commemorator-
 gravediggers, that it is directed!

The gulf created by October separated the proletariat not only from the bourgeoisie but from all the middle classes. It is in
this that the Russian Revolution manifested its proletarian and communist character, it is in this that it belongs to us and
that it condemns the parties, the tendencies or the men who delight in "democratic phrases" which, today, have nothing
revolutionary about them. This is why, in August 1918, the Bolsheviks could proclaim: "Our revolution began as a world
revolution", this is why we can repeat it, fifty years later.

At the time of the great coup de barre of the April Theses 26, Lenin asserts first of all that, under the new bourgeois
democratic regime, the war "undoubtedly remained an imperialist war of brigandage" from which we could not escape
without "overthrowing capital"; for this purpose, it is necessary to spread defeatism in the ranks of the army, to encourage
fraternalization across borders, to transform imperialist war into civil war, "because objectively the problem of war arises
only on the revolutionary level". Again, what was preventing the masses from understanding it? Lenin replies: "Revolutionary
extremism ["revolutionary to the endism"] must be regarded as the most serious, the most brilliant manifestation of the petty-bourgeois wave which has "almost everything" submerged. It is the worst enemy of the further
progress and success of the Russian revolution". Participation in the "defense of the fatherland" under the pretext that
democratic conquests are threatened, petty-bourgeois dreams of understanding between belligerent governments, calls for
"good will", "internationalism in words, pusillanimous opportunism and complacency for the social-chauvinists in fact",
pious wishes for disarmament: the Bolshevik criticism ruthlessly descended on the whole "reign of the petty-bourgeois
phrases crammed with good intentions". For Lenin, the social-chauvinists and their servants in the "center" represent an
objective phenomenon: they directly or indirectly defend bourgeois domination, and if the revolution has already taken its
first step, it must now move on to the second, that is to give state power to the proletariat which alone can "ensure the
cessation of war". He adds: "It will be the beginning of the 'breaking of the front' all over the world - of the front of the
interests of Capital - and it is only by breaking this front that the proletariat can save humanity from the horrors of war, to
provide it with the benefits of lasting peace". 27. Pacifism does not find a place in the October program: war against war, by
all the means of revolutionary defeatism, until the revolutionary conquest of state power; only then, if the "world front of
Capital" is broken, can peace reign.

The Bolshevik struggle against the "pretexts" that the ever-reviving petty-bourgeois ideology invokes to drag the proletariat
into the imperialist massacre will continue to deepen and amplify between February and October. The Party is making
immense, ceaseless efforts to convince the proletariat that it is necessary to take power if only to put an end to the terrible
hemorrhage of the world war. And it's with its eyes set on this global solution that the proletarian power, that the
Communist Party, will sign in March 1918, the "incredibly heavy and humiliating" peace of Brest-Litovsk, its "Treaty of
Tilsit"; for if they signed it, it was not out of pacifism, but in the name of the international proletarian revolution. If the
revolution had broken out in Europe in the momentum of October, it would not have been necessary; but since they are
forced to do so, they consent to that "infamous peace" with the certainty that, whatever sacrifices imposed, their withdrawal
from the imperialist war will strengthen the ties forged between the proletarian dictatorship and the masses in Russia. It
will also sow the ferment of defeatism in the imperialist armies still struggling in Europe. They also agree "in the interest of
a serious preparation" for the revolutionary war, the necessity of which they have long recognized, that it be defensive and
imposed by the foreseeable, and even inevitable, attack of the foreign bourgeoisie not yet dispossessed of power by the
revolution, or that it be offensive and unleashed by the first proletarian state against the capitalist powers which surround it
intending to come to the aid of the proletarians who are insurgent or who are about to rise up against Capital. 28. Before and
after the conquest of power, not the slightest trace of pacifism in the October program! In his Report on War and Peace 29,
in March 1918 Lenin proclaimed: "Our watchword can only be this: seriously study the art of war" and, addressing his
comrades who were impatient to leave for the front of the world revolutionary war: "Take hold of the truce, even of an
hour, since it is offered to you, in order to maintain contact with the zone far from the rear and to form there new armies".

In The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky, he will define, in a magnificent dialectical passage, the two
inseparable phases of the conquest and the revolutionary exercise of power: "There is no great revolution which has
manifested its proletarian and communist character, it is in this that it belongs to us and not to the middle classes. It is in
this that the Russian Revolution separated the proletariat not only from the bourgeoisie but from all the middle classes. It is in
this that the Russian Revolution manifested its proletarian and communist character, it is in this that it belongs to us and
that it condemns the parties, the tendencies or the men who delight in "democratic phrases" which, today, have nothing
revolutionary about them. This is why, in August 1918, the Bolsheviks could proclaim: "Our revolution began as a world
revolution", this is why we can repeat it, fifty years later.

The immense scope of the October Revolution was in a way illustrated by the Bolsheviks in advance by exhuming the
Marxist doctrine of the State from the dust where the reformists had forgotten it. Today's commemorative gravediggers have
not quite forgotten this fact, so they go to great lengths to erase from the memory of the proletariat any vestige of the
great Marxist texts and of the masterful lesson of revolutionary struggles. The Bolsheviks, for their part, took the same
historical path as the Communards, the one Marx and Engels had always advocated before, during, and after the Paris
Commune, the main path, the only path that the Communists recognize, whatever their country and their generation. It is
certainly not an accident that the April Theses assign to the Party (which must become itself again by getting rid of its

"dirty shirts" of reformism and opportunism) the task of redefining its program, especially with regard to "the attitude towards the State and our claim of the ‘Commune-State’". This had to be done so that the historical absurdity of the "duality of power" would disappear and so that, at last freed from the shackles of petty-bourgeois phraseology thanks to the decisive influence of the Party, the Soviet would find the strength to openly unite the ruling class, to proclaim not only: "No support for the Provisional Government!" but above all: "Down with the Parliamentary Republic!". This was necessary for the Soviet to agree to become itself "the sole power of the state", a power not based on any law, but on the "armed force of the masses". It was then to become quite clear that there was no need to linger for a single moment in the hope of a gradual passage from the first stage to the second, that such an evolution was excluded and that to break down the machine of the bourgeois state and build another - a state just as dictatorial as the old one, but proletarian in nature; a class state, just like the bourgeois state, but disdaining to conceal its nature, unlike the latter; a state destined to repress the enemy class, just as the bourgeois state has always done it without ever agreeing willingly, while the proletarians will and they will say it. But - the eternal "but" of the "worker-friendly", "progressive" educated citizen - this "qualitative leap", this whole affair with the armed insurrection, dictatorship, red terror, etc. (in short, the abolition of the "pure democracy" of the bourgeoisie), all that was necessary only because of the historical, geographical, even racial peculiarities of Russia! Russia is different from the other countries! Why shouldn't you be able to go any other way in the other countries? Well no, that is simply not possible! In this month of intense struggle, when history implacably challenges the Bolshevik Central Committee to assume its responsibilities, The State and the Revolution answers this question in a definitive way: 1) "The bourgeois state cannot give way to the proletarian state (to the dictatorship of the proletariat) by way of "extinction" but only, as a rule, by a violent revolution"; 2) "The doctrine of the class struggle applied by Marx to the State and to the socialist revolution, necessarily leads to the recognition of the political domination of the proletariat, of its dictatorship, that is to say of a power that it does not share with anyone and that relies directly on the armed force of the masses. [...] "The State, that is to say, the proletariat organized as a dominant class". This theory of the state developed by Marx is indissolubly linked to all his doctrine on the revolutionary role of the proletariat in history. The culmination of this role is the dictatorship of the proletariat, the political domination of the proletariat. But if the proletariat needs the state as a special organization of violence against the bourgeoisie, a question arises: is such an organization conceivable without first being destroyed, demolished, the state machine that the bourgeoisie has created for itself?"; 3) "They alone have assimilated the doctrine of Marx on the State, who understood that the dictatorship of one class is necessary not only for any class society in general, not only for the proletariat which will have overthrown the bourgeoisie, but also for the whole historical period which separates capitalism from the "classless society", from communism. The forms of bourgeois state are extremely varied, but their essence is one: in the final analysis, all these states are, in one way or another, but necessarily, a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The passage from capitalism to communism obviously cannot fail to provide a great abundance and a wide diversity of political forms, but their essence will necessarily be one: the dictatorship of the proletariat". The demand for the dictatorship of the proletariat "for an entire historical period", far from being a subjective claim of this class, is only the translation of an objective demand in so far as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are the only protagonists of the contemporary historical drama: "The domination of the bourgeoisie can only be overthrown by the proletariat, a distinct class whose economic conditions of existence prepare it for this overthrow, and offer the possibility and the strength to accomplish it. While the bourgeoisie splits up and disseminates the peasantry and all the petty-bourgeois layers, it groups, unites, and organizes the proletariat. Given the economic role which it plays in large-scale production, the proletariat alone is capable of being the guide of all the toiling and exploited masses whom the bourgeoisie often exploits, oppresses and crushes not less, but more than the proletarians, and who are incapable of an independent struggle for their liberation [...] The proletariat needs state power, a centralized organization of force, an organization of violence, both to suppress the resistance of the exploiters and to lead the great mass of the population - peasantry, petty bourgeoisie, semi-proletarians - into the "establishment" of the socialist production". This passage is crucial. All the experience of the months preceding October shows in fact that the petty-bourgeois necessarily slows down the upward movement of the revolution. It was under its insidious influence that the Soviet, "the only possible form of revolutionary government", had since February recoiled from the task entrusted to it by history: to take and exercise all power, without sharing it with anyone. And this experience has a general value, it is a datum of "social mechanisms" destined to play out everywhere, the dangerous pitfall which threatens any communist revolution. "After the experience of July 1917, it is precisely the revolutionary proletariat which must take power: outside of that, no victory is possible for the revolution". Lenin had written a few months earlier, showing that if the Communists remained "partisans of a state built on the type of the Soviets", they [the Soviets] could not be "the Soviets of today, (of) these organs of compliance with the bourgeoisie - these new Soviets would emerge from that new revolution. By virtue of this need to dictatorially "lead" the masses, October will be the totalitarian and violent seizure of power by the Party, relying on the armed force of the working class; the liquidation of all democratic and parliamentary fiction, with the boycott of the pre-parliament first, the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly then; despotic intervention in the economy and the building of an army on the ruins of the democratic-tsarist army. Exemplary in this too, the hand that then wrote The State and the Revolution will leave the pamphlet unfinished to seize the rudder of the insurrection: it would have been futile to have traced the revolutionary path in theoretical texts and then not to take it, when the time comes, in the reality of the class struggle! Winner or vanquished, it is through combat that we prepare for the future. Certainly, the final victory of socialism is impossible in one country" (heirs of Stalinism, shudder!), but here is what is possible: "The living
example, the action begun in any country, is more effective than all proclamations and conferences; this is what excites the working masses of all countries” 37. July 1918, when the fire of the civil war casts its first glimmers: “Gaining power as a proletarian communist party while the capitalist bourgeoisie still maintained its domination in other countries, our most urgent duty was, I repeat, to maintain this power, this torch of socialism, so that it can launch as many sparks as possible on the growing fire of the world revolution” 38.

This is the teaching of October! Oh gravedigger-commemorators, October never meant the development of "fair trade", of "peaceful coexistence", of the "painless path" to what you call socialism, you would like that the 'living example' remains forever buried in the soil of 1917-18 Russia!

"Leading the masses". Leading them first in the insurrectional conquest of power by the Soviets soaked and purified by the struggle; then leading them in the gigantic struggle against "the resistance of the exploiters, who cannot at once be deprived of their wealth, of their advantages of organisation and knowledge, and consequently for a fairly long period will inevitably try to overthrow the hated rule of the poor” 39, and against the weight of traditions, habits, the tenacious influence of petty-bourgeois ideology creeping into every pore of a painfully changing society. How to direct them? It is not enough to educate, it is also necessary to “neutralize” and “repress” the forces of the past which constantly reappear and threaten the future; it should be known that "any great revolution in general, and any socialist revolution in particular, is unthinkable without an internal war, that is to say without a civil war, which involves an economic ruin even greater than the external war, which involves thousands and millions of examples of hesitation and of moving from one camp to another, an extreme state of uncertainty, imbalance and chaos” (see note 39).

We must therefore rule dictatorially, because “all the elements of decomposition of the old society, which are inevitably very numerous and connected mainly with the petty bourgeoisie (because it is the petty bourgeoisie that every war and every crisis ruins and destroys first), are bound to “reveal themselves” during such a profound revolution [...] To put these down requires time and requires an iron fist". This is the great lesson of the Red October: the tireless battle on all fronts of the war unleashed by the internal and external counter-revolution, the national and international bourgeoisie, must be accompanied by dictatorial control on the part of of a single class exerted on the "elements of decomposition" which are born or constantly reborn from the living bosom of the intermediate classes, these rejects of a "dead bourgeoisie" which cling desperately to "living history" and threaten to make it sink straight.

For all these reasons, without even one of them being able to be omitted, Lenin will say in his polemic against Kautsky that “the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is a power conquered and maintained by violence, which the proletariat exercises over the bourgeoisie, a power that is not bound by any law”. Consequently, "the necessary sign, the express condition of dictatorship, is the violent repression of exploiters as a class and consequently the violation of "pure democracy"” 40. The October revolution will not only deprive the bourgeoisie of all political rights but will impose on the peasant petty-bourgeoisie rights inferior to those of the proletariat. For all these reasons and even without an external war, the necessary Red Terror is the political manifestation of the proletarian dictatorship, its means of intervention in economic and social relations, its instrument of military action. For all these reasons, common to all countries, the dictatorship of the proletariat implies the existence of the (Communist) political party.

* * *

Hegemony of the proletariat - hegemony of the Party. The two terms are inseparable, just as in the Manifesto the “organization of the proletariat as a ruling class” is inconceivable without the “organization of the proletariat as a class and therefore as a Party”.

The story of October is that of two inverse processes whose points of contact are so many bloody clashes. While the masses are moving away from the Provisional Government, deserting the front, clashing in the streets with the police, pushing for insurrection, demanding power with rifles and not with ballots, the parties who claim to belong to the working class, but which reflect the hesitations, cowardice, servility of the petty bourgeoisie, align themselves one after another on the front of parliamentary democracy and war. Opposed we can find the Party which since April has been proclaiming the urgency of breaking thisaccursed front and is effectively acting for the conquest of power in the name of "the proletariat and the poor layers of the peasantry", the Single Party of Revolution and Dictatorship. After the test of strength of the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, there is only one last possible ally left for this Party: the socialist-revolutionaries of the left. The peace of Brest-Litovsk will break this last link, and in the civil war, up to Kronstadt and beyond, the proletarian power will come up at every step against the democratic, popular, centrifugal or anarchist resurgences of the old groups or parties and they will sweep them away in their march forward.

This "decantation" of political and social forces was not a new fact. In their study of class struggles in France and Germany, Marx and Engels had already shown, for the construction of the revolutionary proletariat and its Party, that it was inevitable that the groups and parties defending the middle classes and embodying economic interests, habits and ideology gradually pass over to the enemy. The greatness of the Bolsheviks lies precisely in that, for the first time in the history of the workers' movement, they drew from this harsh negative lesson an active force, a factor of victory. Leaving the dead to bury the dead, they accepted, magnificently on their own and alone, the responsibility of power. Nothing could make them hesitate, not even the indecision and the “democratic scruples” of some of their comrades (comrades with a long past as communist militants) who recoiled before this “leap into the unknown” that was the insurrection. Not even the inevitable desertions were by any means taken by surprise. They left them aside and consciously opened the era of Party dictatorship in the name of the proletarian class. Healthy proletarian energies had emerged from the composite magma of social forces; it is the historical necessity which made the revolution of a single class the revolution of a single Party: the hegemony of the proletariat could only be expressed by the hegemony of the Party which was at the same time its theoretical conscience, the organized will, the organ of conquest and the exercise of power. And this was its victory.
In September 1917, linking as always the "qualitative leaps" of the Russian revolution to the experience of the world proletarian struggle, Lenin wrote: "The shameful end of the Socialist-Revolutionary and Menshevik parties is no accident - it is the result, repeatedly confirmed by the European experience, of the economic situation of the small bosses, of the petty bourgeoisie". Consequently, the Party will lead the insurrection alone, will take power alone, knowing full well that the real movement of the masses is not to be determined by scrutinizing the souls of parties infested by petty-bourgeois inertia, nor even that of the masses - mass organs born out of the Revolution, where the hesitations, the "following", the "force of habit" specific to the old society are free to manifest themselves. Only the theory based on an assessment, a balance sheet ("bilan") of past class struggles makes it possible to predict the natural disposition of class forces at the decisive hour, to know that this hour has struck and to intervene then, not to "make" the revolution, but to lead it, and lead it well beyond the seizure of power, since this is only the first act of the social drama, since the enemy will not fail to raise its head and the Party (a single Party) will be more necessary than ever to exercise power. In 1920, in An Infantile Disorder, Lenin will thus restore to the Western proletariat the lesson received from him and enriched by the results of three years of civil war and communist dictatorship: "The dictatorship of the proletariat is the most heroic war and the most implacable of the new class against a more powerful enemy, against the bourgeoisie whose resistance is increased tenfold from its overthrow (if only in one country) and whose power does not reside only in the strength of international capital, in the strength and solidity of the bourgeoisie's international links, but also in the strength of habit, in the strength of small production [...] Whoever weakens the iron discipline in the party of the proletariat to any extent (especially during its dictatorship), in reality helps the bourgeoisie against the proletariat [...] Denying the necessity of the party (and for Lenin, it is, of course, the Communist Party) and party discipline [...] this is precisely equivalent to making these defects of the petty bourgeoisie, which are dispersion, instability, and inaptitude towards firmness, union, and combined action, faults which will inevitably cause the loss of any revolutionary movement of the proletariat if they are encouraged".

The dictatorship of the proletariat is centralization and discipline, and therefore the Party dictatorship. Trotsky will express the same idea in a concise formula which has the merit of linking this "iron discipline" of the Party to the very foundations of real centralization (an essential aspect on which our current will continually insist in the congresses of the Communist International, not for academic luxury, but because it is a vital requirement of the revolutionary movement), that is to say the continuity of program and organization and their organic connection to the tactics employed which oppose doctrinal eclecticism supplemented by the tendency to practical improvisation so well rooted in the "workers" parties influenced by the petty bourgeoisie and its intelligentsia: "It is only with the help of a party which relies on its historical past, which theoretically foresees the course of development and all its stages and deduces therefrom (which we read attentively: it is from the theoretical prediction of historical development which it "deduces" and not from this passive observation of history which results in some unforeseeable "discovery"!) what form of action is right at a given moment, it is only with the help of such a party that the proletariat can free itself from the need to repeat its own history, its own oscillations, its own indecision and its own mistakes".

The revolution of tomorrow will have to unearth this force, under certainty of pain and death, which allowed the October insurrection to triumph and the proletariat to win in the civil war. In writing the lines quoted above, Lenin and Trotsky were thinking more of the terrible period of the Civil War than of the brief phase of the uprising or its immediate aftermath, such as the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and the break with left-wing socialist-revolutionaries. We could thus summarize their capital teaching: when the working class presents itself on the historical scene (or worse, on the parliamentary scene, but this concerns relatively little the Russia of 1917) divided into several parties, the solution is not sharing power between these parties. This principle of Party hegemony is found as such in the work of Marx and Engels, and more especially in their long polemic against the anarchists who attacked the General Council of the First International, but the great force of revolutions, even when they are finally overcome, is to bring vividly to light and prominence the enduring principles of doctrine and program. There was therefore nothing new in the theses on the role of the Communist Party in the proletarian revolution that the II Congress of the Communist International adopted in 1920, at the end of the bloody civil war in Russia; simply the heroic struggle of the Bolshevik proletariat gave new weight to the universal principles. "The Communist International most categorically rejects the opinion that the proletariat can carry out its revolution without having its political party. The goal of this struggle, which inevitably tends to turn into civil war, is the conquest of political power. But political power can only be taken, organized and led by a political party [...] The appearance of the Soviets, the main historical form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, in no way diminishes the leading role of the Communist Party in the proletarian revolution. The history of the Russian revolution shows us at a certain moment the Soviets going against the proletarian Party and supporting the agents of the bourgeoisie. The same has been observed in Germany and it can also happen in other countries before and during the conquest of power, but also after it [...] The need for a political party of the proletariat only disappears with the social classes".

A deep internationalism permeates this entire October Revolution in which the Party's struggle for the transformation of imperialist war into civil war, into world socialist revolution, merges completely with the impetuous force of the working masses of the great industrial centers of Russia.

When Lenin and Trotsky defined the coming revolution as "a link in the chain of international revolution", the Russian masses defending with arms the power conquered as "a detachment of the international army of the proletariat", Russia as a "besieged fortress" waiting for the "other detachments of the international revolution" to come to its aid, it was not only the militants of the Party but all the proletarians of Russia who felt the truth of these ardent words, because then the "Political education was done quickly" (a few days, a few months) in the factories and working-class neighborhoods, in the midst of meetings and revolutionary demonstrations. In the proud preamble to the Declaration of the Rights of the Working and
Exploited People, the Republic of Soviets set itself the task of "the victory of socialism in all countries" and from the rostrum of the Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets, it was this grandiose perspective that Lenin offered to his audience: "Events [...] have given us the honorable role of vanguard of the international socialist revolution, and now we see clearly the prospect of the development of the revolution: the Russian has started (and elsewhere: "Whoever is in the the most favorable situation must begin"), the German, the French, the English will complete and socialism will triumph." 45.

It was much more than words: beyond the rhetoric, the revolution thus expressed the feeling and the passion which armed the arm and mobilized the brain of immense proletarian masses. It was the impersonal language of a class struggle which the combatants could never have admitted was simply "Russian", narrowly "national"; with their eyes open to the world, their will stretched out, ready for any sacrifice, they knew no borders and their hearts were set on fire at the news of the struggle of their class siblings beyond these borders that the revolution was giving itself the mission to abolish. "We are not alone, before us there is the whole of Europe" cried Lenin to the hesitant, to the conciliators, to the cowards. And the proletarians who had fought tirelessly during nine tumultuous months and who still had to fight during the two and a half years of civil war knew like him, knew by instinct, knew without perhaps ever having read the battle cry at the end of the "Communist Manifesto" that they were the fighters of an international class war. For those proletarians, it was natural that their revolution would be the beginning of the world revolution.

In April, Lenin had said that the International of "de facto internationalists" was already acting, although it had not yet had a formal existence: it was embodied in the proletarians of Petrograd and Moscow as in Liebknecht in Berlin, it manifested itself in a practical and active internationalism, through unlimited dedication to the universal cause of socialism. During the dramatic episode of Brest-Litovsk, when the revolutionary cause may seem lost, Lenin justifies with his usual courage the "ignominious" treaty and, oh grave-diggers, he defines as "the greatest historical problem of the Russian Revolution" and "the greatest difficulty" that it has to overcome as "the need to resolve international problems, the need to provoke an international revolution, to effect this passage from our revolution, narrowly national, to revolution global". 46 Born as a world revolution, October put to the foreground its international tasks, its duties towards the world revolution, duties which do not derive from any moral code but imposed by the international character of the struggle for emancipation of the proletariat and of capitalist expansion. Once again, a lot will be asked of those who have already given a lot: the magnificent proletarians of October will not hesitate to give the best of themselves so that "the German, the French, the English" can complete the work begun, because if it should be easier for them to complete it, "it is infinitely more difficult for them to start the revolution". Even before the Communists of "the different countries of Europe, America and Asia" gathered in Moscow to found the Third International, internationalism was the blood and the oxygen on which the fighters of the gigantic Russian civil war fed daily. The "bulletins" of the front of European class struggles mixed with the burning communes that Trotsky sent from the thousand fronts of the civil war, and thus the armed Russian workers and peasants learned that their enemy was the international bourgeoisie. "You know," Lenin tells the 8th All-Russian Congress of Soviets, "how far capital is an international force, how far the most important factories, enterprises and capitalist stores are linked together in the whole world and that, consequently, to bring it down in totality, a common action of the workers on an international scale is necessary". No one, in truth, could know better than the heroic Russian detachment of the world proletarian revolutionary army because nobody in their ranks believed that the clash between classes could be a destiny different according to the nations. That the proletarians have "no fatherland", was taught to them by harsh reality.

The people, the Party, the proletarians for whom the Russian revolution was a world revolution and had no "greater historical problem" than to leave its narrow national framework to spread over the whole world, could they have any help? Another perspective than that of Lenin: "Salvation is only possible on the sole path of the international socialist revolution on which we are committed. As long as we remain alone, our task is to save the revolution, to preserve for it a certain dose of socialism, however weak it may be, until the moment when the revolution breaks out in the other countries and other detachments will come to the rescue". 47 Could they conceive of "their" revolution other than as a "dress rehearsal of the world proletarian revolution" on which they necessarily "bet" since "the communist revolution can only win as a world revolution"? 48 Certain of the outbreak of at least a European revolution, the Bolsheviks had secured the moment of respite for the peace of Brest-Litovsk and had defeated the white hordes; "Having passed from war to peace" in 1920, they did not forget that "as long as capitalism and socialism coexist, one cannot live in peace; in the end, one or the other must win: there will be a requiem mass either for the Republic of Soviets or for world imperialism". They knew that to defeat the world organization of capitalism there was only one weapon, "the extension of the revolution at least to some advanced countries".

It was a vital condition, even simply for the maintenance of the political power of the Bolsheviks. But the October Revolution was aimed at socialism and that is why internationalism was not for it a ritual formula, but the very condition of victory.

This was all the more true since it was a double revolution and since the proletariat in power had therefore also to fulfill the tasks of a bourgeois revolution "pushed to the end". In the Manifesto of 1848 Marx and Engels regarded Germany with special attention; it was then a country where feudal structures still dominated economics and politics, and which was "on the eve of a bourgeois revolution". In this revolution, they saw "the immediate prelude of a proletarian revolution" which was to take on European dimensions (where therefore social-democratic pedantry could well have "discovered" their misunderstanding that for Marx and Engels the revolution must necessarily break out in an advanced country?), because, they said, Germany "will accomplish this revolution under the more advanced conditions" of European civilization and with a proletariat infinitely more developed than England in the 17th or France in the 18th century. 49 Let the opportunist philistine measure the degree of maturity of the socialist revolution by evaluating the "economic and social level" reached in a given country considered in isolation: for Marxism,
this degree of maturity is evaluated on a world scale (in 1848, the world is reduced to Europe!) and it is on the same scale that the proletarian revolution can triumph or perish. In Russia, likewise, the "more advanced conditions of European (and world) civilization" and the existence of a proletariat not only more numerous than at the time of the English and French bourgeois revolutions, but extremely concentrated (just like the semi-feudal political power of Tsarism), had accelerated the revolutionary course: starting from the "Asian and barbaric" stagnation, proletarian after a brief interlude of bourgeois power: the "immediate prelude" had become "growth" from bourgeoisie revolution to proletarian revolution, the triumph of the second making the accomplishment of the political tasks of the first anachronistic. Not only was this development not sufficient to liquidate Russia's delay in a "more advanced" world civilization, but as Lenin said in 1918 and repeated it in 1920, without this delay, precisely, the proletariat would not have taken the lead and power as easily as one "lifts a feather". The happy congregation of these two conditions (which can only seem contradictory to those who limit their horizons to national borders) had placed the Russian working class at the forefront of the world socialist revolution; but the backwardness remained and "the more backward the country is which, as a result of the zigzags of history, has had to start the socialist revolution, the more difficult it is for it to move from old capitalist relations to socialist relations" 50. How was this historical problem, certainly more complex than that of the seizure of power, resolved in the European (that is to say, global, at the time) perspective of Marx and Engels? The German proletariat of 1848 had to bring the doctrine and it could become the protagonist of the double revolution in Germany insofar as the political conditions of the socialist revolution were fulfilled in France and the economic and social conditions in England: thus could be accelerated the conquest of power in Germany and bridged the secular gulf which separated the economy of Central Europe and that of Western Europe.

For the Bolsheviks, the perspective was no different. Socialism presupposes large-scale industry and modern agriculture; the first was manifestly insufficient in Russia, the second almost completely absent, but "if one thinks of a large prosperous industry capable of satisfying the peasantry by supplying them without delay all the products they need, one must say that this condition exists; to consider the question on a global scale, this large flourishing industry, capable of supplying the world with all products, exists on earth [...] There are countries on earth endowed with a large advanced industry, sufficient to immediately supply hundreds of millions of backward peasants." 51. The material conditions for the transition to socialism therefore came from the World or at least European revolution that the proletarian dictatorship in Russia awaits. It was only in this way that the foundations could be laid for a gigantic leap forward in industry first, then in agriculture: as stated in the Theses on the National and Colonial Question adopted in 1920, at the Second Congress of the Communist International, this leap forward over the capitalist phase (envisaged in this case for the colonial countries, even more backward than Russia back then) was only possible through the "creation of a global economy forming a single whole, on the basis of a universal plan controlled by the proletariat of all nations". The extension of the socialist revolution at least to a few advanced countries is therefore the first condition for the existence of a socialist economy in Russia: "The socialist revolution can only be achieved in a country where the vast majority of the population is made up of small agricultural producers by means of a whole series of special transitional measures, completely unnecessary in the developed capitalist countries where the salaried industrial workers and agricultural workers are in the overwhelming majority [...] We have stressed in many books, in all our speeches, in all the press, that the situation is different in Russia: industrial workers are in the minority and small farmers in the overwhelming majority. In this country, the socialist revolution can only win definitively on two conditions. First, if it is supported in due time by a socialist revolution in one or more advanced countries [...]"

52. Taking again the great perspective of Marx in 1848, we can say that the Russian proletariat brought to the European revolution the political flame, as well as a complete restoration of the doctrine (roles formerly devolved to France and Germany); Germany, England, France or even just one of them would have provided it with its economic base. In the meantime, as the international revolution cannot break out either on command, or following a "methodical progression", or simultaneously, the communist power had to manage an economy still backward with the help of "transitory measures [...] completely unnecessary in the countries of advanced capitalism", analogous in substance to the "despotic interventions" recommended by the Manifesto and whose results could not go beyond the construction of the material bases of socialism. Far from making a secret of it, the Bolsheviks had said it over and over again, the April Theses declaring with the greatest frankness: "Our immediate task is not to 'introduce' socialism, but only to pass right away the control of social production and the distribution of products to the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies" 53. Five months later, in September, Lenin defined the measures for "averting impending catastrophe" as follows: "control, supervision, accounting, regulation by the state, introduction of a proper distribution of labour-power in the production and distribution of goods, husbanding of the people's forces, the elimination of all wasteful effort, economy of effort", which, in the field of industrial production and its financial apparatus, supposed “the merger of all the banks into one; the nationalization of the syndicates, the abolition of commercial secrecy, compulsory syndication, [and] compulsory organisation of the population into consumers' societies, or encouragement of such operation, and the exercise of control over it”. But he also explained that these measures, which only the dictatorial power of the workers and poor peasants could apply, would represent “A step towards socialism, for socialism is nothing more than the step immediately following the state-capitalist monopoly [...] The imperialist war marks the eve of the socialist revolution. Not only because its horrors engender proletarian insurrection - no insurrection will create socialism unless it is ripe - but also because state-monopoly capitalism is the most complete material preparation for socialism, the antechamber of socialism, the stage of history that no other intermediate stage separates from socialism” 54. Anxious to find a "left" cover for their class collaboration, the Mensheviks and revolutionary socialists shouted that this program was too timid, that it was not "socialist", without realizing that it was only a question of "Progress towards socialism (progression conditioned and determined by the level of technology and culture)"; socialism being moreover "at the end of all avenues of modern capitalism", appearing "directly and practically in every important disposition constituting
a step forward on the basis of this modern capitalism”. The Bolshevik program was timid compared to the final goals of socialism, but daring when one considers the level reached by “technology and culture, both a little and a lot so that without a world socialist revolution to bridge the gap between its aspirations and its possibilities, socialism was not possible in Russia 55. “How many transitional steps we will have to take towards socialism, we do not know nor can we know. It depends on when the European revolution has really started on a large scale” 56. The question of the "steps towards socialism" was therefore not administrative, but political and, depending on international conditions, it could not be decided at will by the Russian revolutionaries.

As in regards to agriculture, the measures endlessly recommended by the Bolsheviks from 1906 to 1917 are even more radical if one takes into account the extremely low level of development of the agrarian productive forces - did they go beyond the limits of a bourgeois-democratic revolution? Certainly, only a revolutionary power in the hands of the proletariat and supported by the poor peasants could nationalize the land, but this nationalization remained nonetheless "a bourgeois measure” 57. Nevertheless, the Party of the proletariat had to strive to achieve it by all means, because it “implies freedom for the class struggle and freedom of land tenure from all non-bourgeois adjuncts to the greatest possible degree conceivable in a capitalist society”; moreover, it was to deal “a formidable blow to the private property of all means of production in general”. In addition, the Party knew, since 1906 at least, that "The more determined and consistent the break-up and elimination of the landed estates and the more determined and consistent the bourgeois-democratic agrarian reform in Russia in general, the more vigorous and speedy will be the development of the class struggle of the agricultural proletariat against the well-to-do peasants (the peasant bourgeoisie)”. Consequently, "depending on whether this mass succeeds in rallying the rural proletariat and adding to it the mass of semi-proletarians in the countryside, or whether this mass follows the peasant bourgeoisie, inclined to ally [...] with the capitalists and the big landowners and, in general, the counter-revolution, the fate and the outcome of the Russian revolution will be decided in one direction or another, insofar as the incipient proletarian revolution in Europe does not directly exercise, on our country, its powerful influence” 58.

Prophetic words: the European revolution will indeed be slow in coming and if its upheavals in Germany, Bavaria, Hungary, its outbursts in Italy or Bulgaria, will be enough to loosen the stranglehold of the foreign counter-revolution threatening the Bolshevik dictatorship, they will not be enough to tear Russia away from its "barbaric" isolation. The whole fate of the October Revolution, after 1918, when Lenin was already outlining the future NEP (still impracticable due to the civil war), depended on the answer of the facts to this fundamental question: “Will we be able to hold on with our small and very small peasant production, with the state of disrepair of our country, until the day when the capitalist countries of Western Europe will have completed their development towards socialism? [...] We are not civilized enough to be able to go directly to socialism, even though we have the political prerequisites” 59. The complete nationalization of industry, imposed in 1918 by the necessities of the civil war, and the monopoly of foreign trade, will give the proletarian dictatorship an advantage more political than economic: a means of controlling the ever-reviving hydra of the micro-production, an instrument to accelerate, by modern means of production, the evolution towards large-scale agricultural production employing associated labor, and above all a weapon against the external and especially internal enemy. It will thus be possible to “use capitalism (above all by orienting it in the direction of state capitalism) as an intermediate link between small production and socialism; as a means of ensuring the increase of the productive forces” and “to arrive, after a long series of gradual transitions, at mechanized, large-scale, collective agriculture” 60; it will be possible to "put in place the economic foundations of the new socialist edifice, instead of the demolished feudal edifice and the half-demolished capitalist edifice” 61. This was not to achieve socialism, but constituted a radical struggle between the proletarian power controlling state capitalism and using it as a political weapon of economic transformation and "the millions and millions of small bosses (who), by their elusive, daily, habitual activity achieve the same results which are necessary for the bourgeoisie, which restore the bourgeoisie” 62.

It was to be the continuation of the civil war by other means, and the outcome of this new phase of the class struggle should not only depend on the possession of power and control over big industry but also and above all on the vicissitudes of the international struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat. In his The Economic Situation of Soviet Russia from the Standpoint of the Socialist Revolution presented to the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, Trotsky will say: “Just as in the civil war we fought largely to conquer the peasantry politically, so today the struggle has as its main object the domination of the peasant market. In this struggle, the proletariat has for itself powerful advantages: the most highly developed productive forces in the country and political power; for its part, the bourgeoisie has greater skill and, to a certain extent, its relations with foreign capital, especially emigration capital”. That the proletariat of the "more advanced" countries did not raise up arms in hand against this international bourgeois force, that is the whole drama of the years 20-26. In defining the NEP, Lenin said: “History [...] has followed such special paths that in 1918 it gave birth to two halves of socialism, separated and neighboring like two future chicks under the common shell of international imperialism. Germany and Russia embody in 1918, with a special highlight, the material realization of the conditions of socialism, conditions economic, productive and social, on the one hand, and political conditions, on the other. A victorious proletarian revolution in Germany would immediately and with the greatest ease break all the shells of imperialism [...] and would undoubtedly ensure the victory of world socialism [and therefore also the victory of socialism in Russia; Editor's note] without difficulties or with insignificant difficulties, on condition obviously to consider the "difficulties" on the scale of world history, and not that of some group of Philistines” 63. The two separate halves of socialism could not be united. And while the revolutionary power in Russia finally managed “to learn from the state capitalism of the Germans, to take it over with all its might, not shying away from dictatorial methods, in order to accelerate this takeover even more than Peter accelerated the takeover of western culture by barbarian Russia, utilising barbaric methods against barbarism”, they could not succeed without the help of the second "halve". The Russian revolutionary power could not resist the pressure of the
bourgeois and petty-bourgeois classes in the long run giving the "tax" of the Russian state a direction that was opposite to that desired by the Bolsheviks. The fight flared up again in the cities and in the country; the productive forces of a past, not only pre-socialist but even pre-capitalist, rear up [i.e. revolted] under the vigorous central economic management; and this new class war was so bitter that some party and state leaders who had previously believed that they could hide the reality behind demagogic optimism (which, incidentally, was completely alien to Lenin) forced themselves to realize it at the XIV party conference in late 1925 and finally saw that a change in the balance of power was underway and consolidated.

In 1921, with regard to the NEP, Lenin had said: "It only takes ten, twenty years of good relations with the peasants and victory is assured throughout the world, even if the proletarian revolutions which are brewing were still to be delayed; otherwise, we will have twenty years or forty years of torment under the white terror". The White Terror began long before Lenin's ten or twenty years or the fifty years Trotsky spoke of, for the forces which opposed the establishment of "rational relations" with the peasantry were too powerful to possibly to contain and ultimately to defeat with the sole resources of the Russian proletariat. And it was the Stalinist counter-revolution, whose cult of false "socialism in one country" poorly covered the cruel reality: forced capitalist accumulation and massacre of the old Bolshevik guard.

The story of Lenin's long struggle on the deathbed to convince the Party of the need to accept the risks of the NEP as the only way forward while remaining fully aware that it meant construction of capitalism, this struggle to safeguard the rigorously classist and internationalist character of the Party was all the more necessary as the dangers presented by the NEP were greater. It alone deserves a separate chapter and will undoubtedly be the subject of a collective study by the Party. The same goes for the history of the Oppositions: As Lenin's intransigence was diluted, they waged an energetic, albeit belated and desperate battle against Stalinism, against its political abdication in the face of opportunism and its nefarious theory of "socialism in one country", for the safeguard of doctrine (whose keystone is precisely proletarian internationalism, as demonstrated a contrario the tragic outcome of October) and for its transmission to future generations. Lenin was too good a Marxist to ignore that even defeat can be fruitful, on condition that he fought to the end without giving in anything and being beaten while standing, without having denied anything, and that is why he exclaimed one day: "Even if the Bolshevik power were overthrown tomorrow, we would not regret for a single second having taken it". Was the final outcome preventable? Was it possible to prevent the Bolshevik power ending up being controlled and even overthrown by the capitalism it sought to control and build while awaiting the world revolution? The imperialists could not manage to topple the proletarian power. Could it have been prevented that the internal bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces slowly took power of the "state machinery", that the enemy did not just turn out victorious, but, even worse, that a primitive capitalist accumulation (which in the light of the Russian backwardness took on even more gruesome forms than the same accumulation at the first appearance of capitalism on the world stage) presented itself as "socialist construction"?

This is an idle question in many ways since history has ruled and ruled against us, like it or not. Yet, it deserves to be asked if not to moan about the past, but to prepare for the future. It must be done by looking at things on an international scale and by seeking the answer outside the borders of Russia. In 1926-1927, in the debates of the Russian Party and of the 7th and 8th Enlarged Executives of the International devoted to the economic and social questions of Russia, the Opposition spoke on behalf of a working class that the civil war, the hunger, and economic reconstruction had decimated and exhausted despite its exemplary fighting spirit. The drama of the Opposition is doubtless due to the fact that the development and the victory of capitalism in Russia had triggered a social wave which irresistibly carried forward the official leadership of the Party it was trying to fight.

October had drawn most of its strength from an international source, but in 1926-1927 the source had dried up and the Russian Opposition was alone. At the Fifth Congress of the Communist International, the Communist Left had courageously called on the international communist movement to restore to the Bolshevik Party some of the formidable theoretical and practical contributions they had made to it a few years earlier, but the call had fallen into the void. At the enlarged Sixth Executive, at the beginning of 1926, the same Communist Left showed that it was urgently necessary to overturn the "pyramid" of the International in unstable equilibrium on its summit, since it rested on a Bolshevik Party which had lost its homogeneity, and to establish this pyramid on a more stable basis, that is to say on a world communist movement conscious of its duties; unfortunately, this base was already cracked too. The Left also asked the world movement to take up the "Russian question" and discuss it as a vital question since it was essentially international; but the International abdicated, no force capable of fulfilling this duty having had the courage to respond to the call. The International no longer delegated to Moscow just Social Democrats but also Mensheviks and centrists, in short, all that political scum which had nested in the various "national" parties and which felt that it was once again its hour. Thälmann, Smeral, the Cachins, the Sémards, the Martynovs (behind whom were social forces and very specific political traditions) were eager to become Stalin's corporals after having been the obtuse executioners of the Communists of the Opposition.

The heroic struggle of the Chinese proletarians and the English miners during the same years could only be in vain without a vanguard to guide it since their Party had been submerged by this social-democratic scum. The dialectic of the counterrevolution had been fulfilled: the opportunistic degeneration of the International, determined by the ebb of the revolutionary wave and by the pressure of conditions in Russia, now became itself a determinant of the international retreat of the proletariat and the definitive victory of the capitalist counter-revolution in Russia; the capitalist counter-revolution in Russia, determined by the international weakness of the proletariat, had an effect on that international proletariat and ushered in the greatest counterrevolutionary period in the history of the labor movement. It would be childish and above all anti-Marxist to invoke a single factor to explain the appalling decline of the international communist movement; but it would be just as childish and, worse still, defeatist, to attribute everything to "objective facts", as if they constituted a "fatality" to which, like the Ancients, one would have to resign oneself, and not to put in evidence
the "subjective" factor that is the Party and, in this case, the World Party, the Communist International which is the source of decisive lessons. Now, on this level, we, the Communist Left, have the right to say that the lesson we have learned from the rout of 1926, the starting point of the most terrible counter-revolution of which the working class has ever been a victim - we assert this not a posteriori, but as the confirmation of our forecasts of 1920, a confirmation valid for all countries and all situations, a forecast from which the future proletarian revolution will profit.

If the Communists of the West saw in Bolshevism a prestigious master to whom they recognized the right to "teach them", this is due to the fact that it had stubbornly advocated theoretical intransigence and had shown itself capable of translating it in action. It never hesitated to irrevocably cut the bridges, not only with right-wing revisionism but also with centrist revisionism, more subtle and therefore more pernicious: having isolated and identified the social and political origins of one and the other, it knew in advance that they would be on the other side of the barricades. This is what the demarcation of the Leninist left from the pacifist left at the conference of Zimmerwald had proved, the April Theses and the "coup de barre" which they gave to the Party. It is from this that October drew the strength to liquidate the last alliances with other groups or parties, to exercise dictatorship and red terror, to lead the civil war. This is the main lesson that communists and revolutionary proletarians all over the world should have learned from the Russian Revolution. This is all the more true for the defeat that was suffered shortly afterwards in Hungary which showed clearly and precisely what price you pay if you forget this doctrine, not to mention that the Comintern's 21 conditions of admission made it obligatory for the Communists to strictly remember and internalise this doctrine.

The Bolsheviks were the first to forget this lesson when they lost sight of the fact that it was even more valid in the West than in Russia. Here, the economic structure was that of a developed capitalism, but a century of governmental experience had enabled the bourgeoisie to firmly establish its parliamentary democracy. As Lenin repeated a hundred times, these political conditions made it more difficult to start the revolution, while economic and social conditions would have made it easy to bring it to fruition. Theoretical and organizational intransigence, the "sectarian" courage to separate organically from dubious elements, even those tinted with "maximalism", and the awareness of the irrevocable nature of the borders drawn by history between communism and all the variants of opportunism, starting with centrism, should have played with maximum force in the world political organization of the revolutionary proletariat. It was not so. At the Second Congress of the International, the Communist Left showed that the lack of severity of the admission requirements risked allowing opportunism "driven out the door to come in through the window": if [the Communist Left] deeply regretted that it had not defined in a clear and precise manner, from the outset, the theoretical and programmatic bases of the international movement to deduce defined tactical rules that are just as precise and just as "mandatory"; its long experience enabled it to highlight the dissolving effects of electoral and parliamentary practices on Western parties and it therefore proposed a tactic of electoral abstention, which had nothing in common with anarchist, unionist or other positions, instead of the tactics of "revolutionary parliamentarism" which the majority of the Third International wanted to apply; it proposed that the splits take place as far as possible on the left. Finally, it asked that the adherence to the Communist Party of each country (but it would have preferred that there existed a World Party, unique by its program, its doctrine and the anticipated definition of its tactics and its organization) be individual, never collective. From that moment on, it did not hesitate to insist on the danger of a degeneration and internalise this doctrine.

While the revolutionary situation seemed to intensify, the "subjective forces", which stood firmly on the ground of communism, were still too small in these crucial countries of the West to have a decisive influence on the working masses of Russia and therefore, reflecting back, the world.

The Bolsheviks therefore preferred to adopt a "more elastic", "lighter" method to accelerate the formation of communist parties. For example, centrist wings and groups were included in the national sections of the Comintern in the hope that the purifying power of the revolutionary crucible would remove the centrist leaders, or that they could be assimilated and disciplined under the communist authority of Bolshevism. As a counterweight (to neutralize right-wing tendencies), attempts were made to rely on radical left-wing groups. However, the Bolsheviks placed their hopes, alongside Lenin and Trotsky, on the purifying flames of the European revolution, the tradition of their own party's theoretical and practical intransigence, and finally, with Lenin dead and Trotsky silenced, in the self-immunisation of the "Vanguard Party" against any opportunistic poison. The prerequisites for this "generous" maneuver gradually disappeared under the pressure of material conditions, but the methods based on these prerequisites were not changed, on the contrary sharpened: the return of the revolutionary wave, the weakening of the Bolshevik party, and the opportunistic mistakes of the communist parties in the other countries led, not to a temporary and orderly withdrawal, but increasingly to a "flight forward" for the Comintern, and, with that, to an increasing dissolution of the invariant limits of the movement in organization and tactics. With the tactic of the "political united front" on the 3rd World Congress (1921) the Comintern also relativized the counter-revolutionary role of social democracy (in 1923 the KPD would throw overboard this fundamental premise of communist doctrine and declare the transition of social democracy to the side of the revolution as a result of these efforts). In 1922 the central slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat was weakened by the demand for a "workers' government" (later even for a "workers' and peasants' government"). The slogan of "conquering the majority of the working class", which meant for Lenin the conquest of the greatest possible real influence and was therefore a matter of self-evidence (this is always to be emphasized), was transformed in the interpretation of the epigones into the ideal of the numerical majority, an abstract one, a measure of the effectiveness of the communist parties, completely detached from any deterministic view. People did not understand or did not want to understand, despite the best Bolshevist tradition, that if the Party is a factor of history, it is also its product, and that the tactics that it employs are not indifferent, that on the contrary, it is a force which reacts to those who employ it and sets in motion objective forces which, depending on the direction given to it, can obstruct the road to revolution instead of smoothing it out. They forgot that a slogan, by the mere fact that it is issued, becomes an objective
fact which determines the Party itself, whatever its intentions, and that however skilful he may be, the apprentice-sorcerer cannot dominate the demons that he himself unleashed.

The history of the Communist International is that of the destructive usury which the instruments of tactics and organisation, arbitrarily detached from the principles, exercised on those who employed them. First errors of organization, then of tactics, finally (and consequently, this is what must be understood!) a revision of the theoretical principles and of the program: opportunism driven out the door could enter through the window... in the name of "Bolshevization" by decree. When we fought against these successive missteps, we never claimed to offer the International an infallible recipe for victory: it was only a question of preventing social-democratic infection, of protecting the Party from it, within the limits allowed by history, to help it to preserve its own physiognomy, moving forward through the storms of class struggle, that is to say, to preserve its capacity to orient the proletarian masses in a determined direction, and only in this direction; to automatically close the door to defectors of revisionism, to their ideology as well as to their practice; to make the International, really and no longer only formally, the one World Party of the Revolution. This also meant to allow it, if necessary, to safeguard in defeat, from which then the conditions of the recovery can be built, instead of losing everything. On the contrary, all was lost. In 1926-27, the Opposition found itself alone in front of the enemy it had unconsciously helped to install within the movement. It remained a prisoner of the forces against which it had not considered it useful to build an effective rampart. It had to fight in the Party against the worst agents of reformist conformism who should never have been able to enter it. It was not supported by an international movement capable of standing up as one force against the denial of all principles, for it was no longer unitary and it was no longer even itself. This in no way diminishes the greatness of a Trotsky who strongly claims internationalism against what he called the “Monroe doctrine” of Stalin's and, alas, Bukharin's International, nor the greatness of a Zinoviev who, at the enlarged Sixth Executive, himself dug his grave by demonstrating that "Socialism in one country" was the negation of all Marxism and therefore also of "Leninism". But that was not enough; it was necessary to give up "elastic" tactics and methods of organization, it was already too late to do so and it was not they who could.

...We, in the dark tunnel of a counter-revolution whose end we can only glimpse, turn our eyes to the past for the sole purpose of finding the road to the future, all this is part of the lessons of October. The events could not have happened otherwise, but the past has forged, in the form of historical lessons, the only weapons capable within the realm where the "subjective" factor, the action of the Party, is determining, to prevent the class which holds the keys of the future from "repeating its own errors, its own oscillations, its own uncertainties" by reopening for it the unique path of revolution which setbacks and defeats can temporarily block, but which the proletariat will inevitably have to clear even if, like it is the case today, it needs to start from scratch.

The counter-revolution may have crushed October, but it could not and never will be able to prevent capitalism from accumulating the explosive charges of a revolutionary renaissance, more powerful than ever. Historical development reduces the "national peculiarities" on which Stalinism has nourished itself to a vulgar pasteboard scaffolding which cannot conceal the deep unity of the world. In this world, the proletarian revolution, the only one possible in contemporary times, is objectively on the agenda of all the key countries of the world capitalist system. It is set on this material base, this granite base, that is armed with the teachings of both the defeat and the victory of October.


2. The text specifies that we must understand international importance "in the narrowest sense of the word": "the international value or the inevitable historical repetition, on an international scale, of what happened at home"; complete works, volume 31, pp. 15-20.
3. "The Russian revolution is in no way due to a particular merit of the Russian proletariat but due to the general sequence of historical events, which means that this proletarian is provisionally at the forefront of the world revolution"; Lenin, Report On Combating The Famine, Complete Works, Volume 27, p. 449.
5. Should we add that any country, for a Marxist, is a mir, a closed universe where the exploited are locked in a degrading solitude?
6. Engels - Afterword to Social Relations in Russia.
7. No revolution is possible without the union of what we could call "consciousness", that is to say precisely the doctrine, the program, the Party as definitive anticipations of the historical course of the real physical struggles of the proletariat - and the “spontaneity” of mass actions.
8. complete works, T. 31, p. 20.
10. It was the dialectical consequence of the maturity of capitalism which, as Trotsky will show in one of his powerful synthesizes, the core of which can be found in Lenin's pages, is not measured within the limits of a single country, but on a global scale.
12. What a slap in the face for the “Leninists” of today who join in the lamentations that the “monopolies” are wringing from the petty bourgeoisie.
13. Indeed, the bourgeoisie will ally with absolutism against the peasants claiming the land and against the workers demanding more humane working conditions; the petty bourgeoisie, modern Janus, will present its two faces alternately depending on whether it is attracted to one or the other of the fundamental classes of society; as for the "educated people and the intelligentsia," their agitation will not suffice to stifle their servility.

14. Important extracts from the Address of the Central Committee of the League of Communists were published in Programme Communiste No. 14, under the title: "The Proletarian Party and National and Democratic Movements".

15. Or even the "historical inertia" of a part of the Bolsheviks in February-April 1917. Trotsky will speak in this connection of "social democratic recurrence" in the face of the great turning points in history, and it is undeniable that this wing of the Bolshevik old guard then fell back to the level of Menshevism of the years 1905-07.


17. Trotsky will say "dragging behind him" and the pedants of "Leninist" exegesis will split hairs to make this "nuance" into an abyss!


21. Lenin, The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution (April 10, 1917); complete works, T. 24, p. 79.

22. Ibidem, pp. 75-76.


26. This change of direction, let us remember, was not intended to change the course followed until then by the Bolshevik Party, but to react energetically against the abandonment of the program by the Bolshevik "conciliators".

27. The tasks of the proletariat in our revolution. comp. works, T. 24, p. 59.

28. These two cases are explicitly provided for in Opportunism and the Bankruptcy of the Second International (1915) and The Slogan of the United States of Europe (1916); the April Theses likewise instilled recourse to revolutionary war provided the following conditions are met: "a) passage of power to the proletariat and to the poor elements of the peasantry, close to the proletariat; b) effective, and non-verbal, renunciation of any annexation; c) total break in practice with all the interests of Capital".

29. complete works, T. 27, p. 83.

30. "The success of the Russian revolution and the world revolution (when will we find these two separate terms in the revolutionary literature of October?) Depends on two or three days of struggle", Lenin, Advice of an Onlooker (8-21/10/17), complete works, T. 26, p. 184.

31. complete works, T. 25, c. 433.

32. complete works, T. 25, pp. 437-438.

33. complete works, T. 25, p. 446.

34. complete works, T. 25, p. 437.

35. On Slogans, complete works, T. 25, pp. 204-205.

36. The drafting of the VII Chapter of State and Revolution, "The Experience of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1907", did not go beyond the beginnings, but "It is nicer and more useful to participate in the experience of a revolution than to write about it ", Lenin would say by way of justification. Let us add that we leave to the Philistines the idea that the literary or revolutionary work of Lenin belongs to a "man", to an "exceptional individual"; for us Lenin, beyond his personal gifts, was and remains the weapon of a class and a Party - and this is the greatest homage that can be paid to him.


38. Speech At a Joint Session of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee, the Moscow Soviet, Factory Committees and Trade Unions of Moscow (7/29/1918). complete works, T. 28, p. 19.


40. The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky, complete works, T. 28, pp. 244 and 264.


42. complete works T. 31, pp. 17, 38 and 39.

43. The teachings of the Municipality, 1920; this text is published as an annex in the brochure Insegnamenti dell'Ottobre, published by our Party.

44. Manifestos, Theses and Resolutions of the first four Congresses of the CI (1919-1923); Librairie du Travail, 1934, p. 50.

45. complete works, T. 26, p. 494.


47. The Chief Task of Our Day, complete works. T. 27, p. 162.

48. ABC of Communism, Bukharin and Preobrazhensky. In his Principles of Communism, the first draft of the Manifesto of the Communist Party, written in 1847, Engels, to the question: "Will the proletarian revolution take place in one country?" Replied with the same clarity: "No [...] It will be a world revolution and will therefore have to have global ground."
Balance sheet of a revolution (Bilan d’une révolution) - Part II: False lessons about the counter-revolution in Russia

This chapter of Bilan takes on those false interpretations espoused by Anarchists, Social Democrats, Trotskyists, and the like, all while also examining the deep disconnect between Trotsky and his disciples.

Only Marxism can draw the lessons of history

The 20th century has so far had only a very imperfect awareness of the meaning and impact of the Russian revolution and counter-revolution that have unfolded from 1917 to the present day and in which, fifty years after October, the essence of the proletarian struggle in the imperialist era is still unhappily summarized.

With the exception of the Soviets – and the most obtuse anti-Soviets – there are, however, no parties, currents or schools that have more or less clearly understood that the final historical results of the Russian Revolution were not only unrelated to the aims of the Bolshevik Party of 1917, but diametrically opposed. This disparity proved that the October Revolution,
rather than progressing victoriously along its original trajectory, had been followed by a counter-revolution. Few, however, have understood this, or have an interest in stating it. But even among those who are not entirely deceived by the camouflage provided for this counter-revolution by the apparent permanence of the same ruling party in the USSR, who has been able to characterize its exact nature, in both the political and economic domains? Nobody, because outside of today’s small proletarian party, none of them have failed to see the “bureaucratic nationalism” of Stalin’s party against an alleged internationalist “democristm” of Lenin’s party, and none of them have refused to see in the Russian economy and society some form of “socialism” or at least a “post-capitalism”.

This scientific impotence of the bourgeoisie world did not of course prevent it from “drawing” in its own way the “lessons” of the Stalinist counter-revolution, that is to say of a historical process which it had neither understood nor even simply observed in many cases: such is the obscurantism of the class enemy of the proletariat. For traditional bourgeois currents, the gap between the aims and the results of the October Revolution would “prove” the natural and therefore indestructible nature of capitalist relations of production, of the division of society into classes, of the institution of the State, in other words, the utopian character of communism, its radical impossibility. For the social democrats, it would “prove” that revolution is madness in general and even more so the revolution in a country where capitalist development is weak. For libertarians, it would “prove” that any revolution that fails to destroy the State, whatever its nature, on the spot, is condemned to defeat. For the workerists (who include anarcho-syndicalists, social-barbarists, and advocates of self-managed socialism of all kinds), it would “prove” that the dictatorship of the proletariat must be an unlimited political democracy for the workers, and socialism an unlimited economic democracy for producers in general. For the Trotskyists, it would “prove” that communism can degenerate politically when it banishes democracy, while subsisting in the economy, and thus become in need of a purely political revolution. The simple enunciation of these so-called “lessons” of the Russian counter-revolution with which the bourgeois world has unceasingly overwhelmed the working class for forty years is already enough to show that the bourgeoisie has never “drawn” from the historical experience any conclusions other than those which were already there in advance, based either on a quite understandable class hatred, or else based on the ravages of ideology even in the brains of the self-appointed “champions” of the proletariat. Indeed, if all of these “lessons” are never more than the repetition of age-worn tropes, they all have, despite their differences, one common characteristic: they are all directed against Marxism or revolutionary communism, that is to say that they either proclaim bankruptcy or error, or – worse still – they disfigure it under the pretext of “freeing it from blame” for the advent of Stalinism and “saving its honour”; not hesitating, for this purpose, posthumously to transform great communists such as Lenin and Trotsky into “authentic democrats”.

Objectively speaking, the proletarian defeat in Russia appears as a new failure of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat, attested in the 19th century by the battles of 1848 and 1871 and at the beginning of our century by that of 1905. If this defeat is the great proletarian defeat of the 20th century, it is because the October Revolution was the first great victory. And if it is at the same time the greatest defeat in the history of the workers’ movement, it is because, in all this history, the Russian October was the only victory won at the level of a large country. The only thing that saved communism from an accusation of doctrinal and practical “bankruptcy” during the previous defeats of the proletariat is that, as a Party, it was not yet strong enough to lead the movement. But for the bourgeoisie enemy to attempt to overwhelm it today under this accusation about the outcomes of the Russian October, it was first necessary for communism to strengthen itself to the point of becoming the only party of the revolution and of its victory. This was not by chance, but it is what all the revisionists forget. When the bourgeoisie comes to bury communism in general under the ruins of the Russian Revolution it logically applies the laws of war: Woe to the vanquished! But when so-called “champions” of this same vanquished class “revise, they do not learn more “lessons of history” than the bourgeoisie: they only lower their heads under the invective. The entire bourgeois world behaves as though the idea that Lenin’s Communist Party pursued this and that objective but achieved this and that diametrically opposite outcome is a logical absurdity. If this were true, it would undoubtedly testify against us. But it so happens that throughout the history of class society, the outcomes of struggles have only in exceptional cases coincided with the objectives pursued; the contradiction between them has always been the rule, not the exception. It is historical materialism itself that has had the merit of highlighting this truth to demonstrate that, like the evolution of nature, the course of history obeys objective laws and not the conscience or the will of men, classes and parties. In other words, historical materialism has established that men make history but not in conditions of their own choosing. This truth is inaccessible not only to the bourgeoisie, but also to every variant of revisionism. Indeed, none of them is able to grasp the fact that if our Party’s defeat in Russia proves anything, it is simply that, no more than any other men, Communists cannot escape historical determinism.

If you want to know how the proletarian Party approaches the defeats of its own class, you could do no better than to study the luminous passage in which Frederick Engels, in Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of the Classical German Philosophy (1888) defines the specific method of dialectical materialism:

“In one point, however, the history of the development of society proves to be essentially different from that of nature. In nature – insofar as we ignore man’s reaction upon nature – there are only blind, unconscious agencies acting upon one another, out of whose interplay the general law comes into operation. Nothing of all that happens – whether in the innumerable apparent accidents observable upon the surface, or in the ultimate results which confirm the regularity inherent in these accidents – happens as a consciously desired aim. In the history of society, on the contrary, the actors are all endowed with consciousness, are men acting with deliberation or passion, working towards definite goals; nothing happens without a conscious purpose, without an intended aim.

“But this distinction, important as it is for historical investigation, particularly of single epochs and events, cannot alter the fact that the course of history is governed by inner general laws. For here, also, on the whole, in spite of the consciously desired aims of all individuals, accident apparently reigns on the surface. That which is willed happens but rarely; in most
instances the numerous desired ends cross and conflict with one another, or these ends themselves are from the outset incapable of realization, or the means of attaining them are insufficient. Thus, the conflicts of innumerable individual wills and individual actions in the domain of history produce a situation entirely analogous to that prevailing in the realm of unconscious nature. The ends of the actions are intended, but the results that actually follow from these actions are not intended; or when they do seem to correspond to the end intended, they ultimately have consequences quite other than those intended. Historical events thus appear on the whole to be likewise governed by chance. But where on the surface accident holds sway, there it is actually always governed by inner, hidden laws, and it is only a matter of discovering these laws”.

Thus:

“Men make their own history, whatever its outcome may be, in that each person follows his own consciously desired end, and it is precisely the resultant of these many wills operating in different directions, and of their manifold effects upon the outer world, that constitutes history. But, on the one hand, we have seen that the many individual wills active in history for the most part produce results quite other than those intended – often quite the opposite; that their motives, therefore, in relation to the total result are likewise of only secondary importance. On the other hand, the further question arises: What driving forces in turn stand behind these motives? What are the historical forces which transform themselves into these motives in the brains of the actors? The old materialism never put this question to itself”.

And neither do modern-day revisionists!

Discovering “the inner, hidden laws” of the Russian counter-revolution; finding the driving forces, the historical causes of the motives that men – masses, parties and leaders – give themselves to act and to struggle, here is the what only the proletarian Party can explain and what it realizes in applying this other brilliant definition from Engels, in Anti-Dühring:

“The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or estates is dependent upon what is produced, how it is produced, and how the products are exchanged. From this point of view the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men’s brains, not in man’s better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange”.

This cannot be grasped by all those currents which, shifting between certain Marxist truths and the traditional outlook, undoubtedly transfer the realm of Consciousness and the Will of individuals and leaders to classes and parties, but consider them always as the sovereign authority, in an idealistic way, without realizing that this is not to resolve the problem of determinism, but simply to displace it. This is also why they do not see that understanding History, even the history of the momentary defeat of one’s own camp, is to demonstrate the inevitability of what happened, and to learn from it; this is not to revise the programme of scientific socialism, but to define more rigorously, in the light of the facts, the conditions for its victory. It therefore remains for them to search in the abstract, drawing from the arsenal of age-old prejudices, for what other Consciousness and what other Will could have given past history a course more in keeping with their wishes (which themselves are more or less arbitrary) and would infallibly guarantee victory in the future? At this point, the dogma of the sect, and even of individual fantasy, replaces the secular cause of the proletariat according to the fashion of the day, the revolutionary militants being replaced by prophets who are more or less inspired by revealed truths, which are never anything but some form of revision, and the bourgeoisie triumphs!

The bourgeois “lesson”

The “lesson” of the Russian counter-revolution that conforms to classical bourgeois thought would doubtless be difficult to illustrate today, given that the bourgeoisie affects to be “socialist”, but it is easy to reconstruct. It has two forms – one of them vulgar, the other highbrow – which have undoubtedly always more or less coexisted, but the first of which responds better to the “Stalinist” phase of the counter-revolution and the second to its “Khrushchevite” and “post-Khrushchevite” phases.

The vulgar “lesson” consists in saying that “communism is worse than capitalism”. The mass of misery, obscurantism, oppression, deceit and what Trotsky once called the sombre irrationality of the Stalin era assured this thesis a success that its vulgarity did not deserve, but it is certainly not in order to defend communism that Stalin’s worldwide movement has, for decades, carried out the most extraordinary falsifications in the hope that the truth would remain unknown to the workers of the West. The proletarian Party has two responses to this version. The first and obvious one is that Stalinist Russia, and all the more so Khrushchevite Russia, has never had anything to do with communism, nor with any form of movement towards communism as an economic and social form. This conclusion does not belong to the proletarian Party in particular. But the second response is more original. It indeed shows that the phase of Russian history that not only Stalinism, but also the bourgeois and even Trotskyism passed off as communist without it being so in the least, was not simply the absurd and useless agony of a whole people, the series of superfluous convulsions provoked by the “arbitrariness” of the despots Stalin that gormless Western propaganda has portrayed; rather, it was a great social revolution, of a nature opposed to the revolution that the communists in Lenin’s time had wanted, and yet everything other than historically sterile. It was on the contrary rich in explosive developments for the distant future: the same capitalist revolution that all advanced countries have also suffered in the past, but whose horrors and immeasurable torments they have long since forgotten.

The bourgeoisie would undoubtedly not have been able to formulate the highbrow “lesson” about the Russian counter-revolution without the help of the social-democratic pedants of Germany or Austria, at the time of Stalin, while today it is enough to repeat what the “communists” of the East themselves put forward. We can reconstruct it by saying that if Russia (and the Eastern bloc) has not managed to escape from capitalist laws (the law of value, the general law of capitalist accumulation, the law of reproduction of capital); if it did not manage to find any mechanism other than exchange to link
production to consumption and if, along with trade between the town and the countryside, it retained the sale and purchase of labour power, that is to say the wage labour that communism wanted to abolish, then it is because these laws and this social organization are natural and therefore as immutable as the order of the planets, for example. In other words, the Russian counter-revolution could not have been a counter-revolution, but rather the return to an order that the Bolsheviks vainly and foolishly wanted to try to modify and, at the same time, this is the historical proof of the utopian and unreal character of what we call scientific socialism.

By drawing to our attention, in the framework of a confirmation of its conservative and anti-proletarian theses, the bourgeoisie unscrupulously applies victor’s justice but as a “lesson in history”, its conclusion is doubly null and void. The first reason is that the Bolshevik Party and Lenin never claimed to be able to destroy, at short notice, the economic and social form of capitalism in Russia, as they had done to Tsarist-bourgeois political domination (has the bourgeois world really got no wind of this fact for half a century?) On the contrary, they proclaimed that they were starting an international proletarian revolution whose triumph alone would make it possible, certainly not to “decree” socialism in backward Russia one day, but to shorten to the minimum the necessary phase of capitalist economic development under the political control of the proletariat. The bourgeois “lesson” therefore only proves that the “democratic freedoms” of the West did not in any way allow it to form a less stupid idea of the Bolshevik revolution than that which was imposed as a State dogma for dozens of years in Russia by the much-maligned Stalinist dictatorship.

This lesson is therefore void, and above all for the overriding reason that scientific socialism constitutes a whole conception of history and of the world, for which the ideologues of the bourgeoisie (no more than before October 1917) were incapable of providing a theoretical refutation, and from which, on the contrary, they are forced by reality to plunder some truths. One could not therefore do better than to oppose true communism to the lightweight bourgeois accusation of “utopia”. The point here is obviously not to “convince” the class enemy, but to fight defeatism in the proletariat, and above all clearly to establish the theoretical basis for the refutation of the revisionist “lessons” that we will do later, since, without ever presenting the same obscurantist audacity as in the bourgeois “lessons”, they reflect the same rejection of scientific socialism or the same powerlessness to understand it.

To this end, we will summarize the classic, unsurpassable, but little-known account that Engels made in Chapter II of Part Three of the Anti-Dühring. “Socialism”, reordering it in a different way to highlight the periods of a form of economy and society which, far from having existed at all times, was born out of well-defined historical conditions and which, far from conforming to an immutable “reason” is, from the start, affected by the irrationality implied by this origin and which it tries, but in vain, to overcome and which, finally, far from being eternal is destined, by the development of its own internal contradictions, to disappear in the greatest social revolution in history. The market economy, cradle of capitalism

Prior to capitalist production, small-scale production generally prevailed, based upon the workers’ private ownership of their means of production. The instruments of labour (land, agricultural equipment, the workshop, artisan tools) were the instruments of labour of single individuals, adapted for individual use; therefore of necessity puny, dwarfish, circumscribed. But where the spontaneous division of labour within society is the fundamental form of production, it imprints on the products the form of commodities, the mutual exchange, purchase and sale of which enable the individual producers to satisfy their manifold wants. In commodity production in the Middle Ages, any question concerning the identity of the owner of the product of labour just couldn’t arise. The individual producer had generally produced it from his own raw material, which was often his own handiwork, with his own instruments of labour, and by his own or his family’s manual labour. There was no need whatever for him to appropriate the product to begin with, it belonged to him as a matter of course. His ownership of the product was therefore based upon his own labour. But every society based upon the production of commodities has this peculiarity: that the producers have lost control over their own social interrelations. Each man produces for himself with such means of production as he may happen to have, and for such exchange as he may require to satisfy his remaining wants. No one knows whether his individual product will meet an actual demand, whether he will be able to make good his costs of production or even to sell his commodity at all. Anarchy reigns in socialized production. But the production of commodities, like every other form of production, has its peculiar, inherent laws inseparable from it, and these laws work, despite anarchy, in and through anarchy. They reveal themselves in the only persistent form of social interrelations, i.e., in exchange, and here they affect the individual producers as compulsory laws of competition. They are, at first, unknown to these producers themselves, and have to be discovered by them gradually and as the result of experience. They work themselves out, therefore, independently of the producers, and in antagonism to them, as inexorable natural laws of their particular form of production. The product governs the producers. The capitalist revolution is only a demi-revolution

To concentrate these scattered, limited means of production, to enlarge them, to turn them into the powerful levers of production of the present day – this was precisely the historic role of capitalist production and of its upholder, the bourgeoisie. But the bourgeoisie could not transform these puny means of production into mighty productive forces without transforming them, at the same time, from means of production of the individual into social means of production only workable by a collectivity of men. And in like manner, production itself changed from a series of individual into a series of social acts, and the products from individual to social products. No one person could say of them: “I made that; this is my product”. Into this society of individual producers, of commodity producers, the new mode of production thrust itself. In the midst of the old division of labour, grown up spontaneously and upon no definite plan, which had governed the whole of society, now arose division of labour upon a definite plan, as organized in the factory; side by side with individual production appeared social production. Individual production succumbed in one department after another. Socialized production revolutionized all the old methods of production.
But its revolutionary character was, at the same time, so little recognized that it was, on the contrary, introduced as a means of increasing and developing the production of commodities. When it arose, it found readymade, and made liberal use of, certain machinery for the production and exchange of commodities: merchants’ capital, handicraft, wage-labour. Socialized production thus introducing itself as a new form of the production of commodities, it was a matter of course that under it the old forms of appropriation remained in full swing... But the socialized means of production and their products were still treated, after this change, just as they had been before, i.e., as the means of production and the products of individuals. Hitherto, the owner of the instruments of labour had himself appropriated the product, because, as a rule, it was his own product and the assistance of others was the exception. Now the owner of the instruments of labour always appropriated to himself the product, although it was no longer his product but exclusively the product of the labour of others. The means of production, and production itself had become in essence socialized. But they were subjected to a form of appropriation which presupposes the private production of individuals, under which, therefore, everyone owns his own product and brings it to market. The mode of production is subjected to this form of appropriation, although it abolishes the conditions upon which the latter rests.

**The incompatibility between socialized production and capitalistic appropriation is the secret behind the tragic course of bourgeois domination**

This contradiction, which gives to the new mode of production its capitalistic character, contains the germ of all of the social antagonisms of today. The greater the mastery obtained by the new mode of production over all decisive fields of production and in all economically decisive countries, the more clearly was brought out the incompatibility of socialized production with capitalistic appropriation.

With the introduction of the capitalist mode of production, the laws of commodity production, hitherto latent, came into action more openly and with greater force. The anarchy of social production became apparent and grew to greater and greater heights. But the chief means by which the capitalist mode of production intensified this anarchy of socialized production was the exact opposite of anarchy. It was the increasing organization of production, upon a social basis, in every individual productive establishment. Wherever this organization of production was introduced into a branch of industry, it brooked no other method of production by its side. The field of labour became a battle-ground. The war did not simply break out between the individual producers of particular localities. The local struggles bogot in their turn national conflicts... modern industry and the opening of the world market made the struggle universal, and at the same time gave it an unheard-of virulence. Advantages in natural or artificial conditions of production now decide the existence or non-existence of individual capitalists, as well as of whole industries and countries. It is the Darwinian struggle of the individual for existence transferred from nature to society with intensified violence. The conditions of existence natural to the animal appear as the final term of human development. The contradiction between socialized production and capitalist appropriation now presents itself as an antagonism between the organization of production in the individual workshop, and the anarchy of production in society generally.

It is the compelling force of anarchy in social production that turns the limitless perfectibility of machinery under modern industry into a compulsory law by which every individual industrial capitalist must perfect his machinery more and more, under penalty of ruin. The bare possibility of extending the field of production is transformed for him into a similar compulsory law. The enormous expansive force of modern industry... appears to us now as a necessity for expansion, both qualitative and quantitative, that laughs at all resistance. Such resistance is offered by consumption, by sales, by the markets for the products of modern industry. But the capacity for extension, extensive and intensive, of the markets is primarily governed by quite different laws that work much less energetically. The extension of the markets cannot keep pace with the extension of production. The collision becomes inevitable (and so do crises). In these crises, the contradiction between socialized production and capitalist appropriation ends in a violent explosion. The circulation of commodities is, for the time being, stopped. Money, the means of circulation, becomes a hindrance to circulation. All the laws of production and circulation of commodities are turned upside down. The economic collision has reached its apogee. The mode of production is in rebellion against the mode of exchange, the productive forces in rebellion against the mode of production which they have outgrown.

**Vain bourgeois attempts at harmonization**

This rebellion of the productive forces, as they grow more and more powerful, against their quality as capital, this stronger and stronger command that their social character shall be recognized, forces the capitalist class itself to treat them more and more as social productive forces, so far as this is possible under capitalist conditions. It is this form of the socialization of great masses of the means of production which we meet with in the different kinds of joint-stock companies; then come the trusts, cartels whose goal is to regulate production (determining the quantity to be produced, and the division between them). But as these trusts generally fall apart in the first period of bad business, they push for an even more concentrated socialization: the entire industrial branch is transformed into a single large joint stock company, competition gives way to the internal monopoly of this unique company. The production without a plan of capitalist society capitulates before the planned production of the approaching socialist society. If the crises demonstrate the incapacity of the bourgeoisie for managing any longer modern productive forces, the transformation of the great establishments for production and distribution into joint-stock companies and State property shows how unnecessary the bourgeoisie are for that purpose. All the social functions of the capitalist are now performed by salaried employees. But the transformation, either into joint-stock companies, or into State ownership, does not do away with the capitalistic nature of the productive forces. In the joint-stock companies this is obvious. And the modern State, again, is only the organization that bourgeois society takes on in order to support the general external conditions of the capitalist mode of production against the encroachments as well of the workers as of individual capitalists. The modern State, no matter what its form, is essentially a capitalist machine, the State of the capitalists, the ideal personification of the total national capital. The more it proceeds to the taking over of
productive forces, the more does it actually become the national capitalist, the more citizens does it exploit. The workers remain wage-workers – proletarians. The capitalist relation is not done away with. It is rather brought to a head.

**The fundamental contradiction of capitalism calls for the revolutionary solution**

But, brought to a head, it topples over. State ownership of the productive forces is not the solution of the conflict but concealed within it are the technical conditions that form the elements of that solution. This solution can only consist in the practical recognition of the social nature of the modern forces of production, and therefore in the harmonizing of the modes of production, appropriation, and exchange with the socialized character of the means of production. And this can only come about by society openly and directly taking possession of the productive forces which have outgrown all control except that of society as a whole.

So long as we obstinately refuse to understand the nature and the character of these social means of action – and this understanding goes against the grain of the capitalist mode of production and its defenders – so long these forces are at work in spite of us, in opposition to us, so long they master us, as we have shown above in detail. But once their nature is understood, they can, in the hands of the producers working together, be transformed from master demons into willing servants.

**The historic mission of the proletariat**

An awareness of the need for a revolutionary solution to the contradiction is insufficient for making it actually happen in history: there must also exist a social force capable of translating this awareness into acts. Capitalism itself produced this social force; by increasingly transforming the vast majority of the population into proletarians, capitalism at the same time created the power which, on pain of death, is obliged to accomplish this upheaval. Throughout bourgeois history, the contradiction between social production and capitalist appropriation manifests itself as the antagonism of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, that is, of the class of producers whom the capitalist revolution has separated from the means of production, and who have been reduced to having only their labour power on the one hand, and on the other, the class which concentrates in its hands (or in those of its State) these means of production. This growing contradiction, the resulting class antagonism is also destined to deepen. At the culmination of its struggle, the proletariat seizes political power, destroys the State apparatus of the bourgeoisie and builds its own class State. It gradually transforms all the means of production into property of this State, as it tears them away from the classes that previously held them. But in doing so, it suppresses these latter as classes and, at the same time, it suppresses itself as a proletariat. As a class State, the proletarian State effectively becomes the representative of all of society insofar as all class differences and oppositions have disappeared within it. But then it renders itself unnecessary. As soon as there is no longer any social class to be held in subjection, as soon as class rule, and the individual struggle for existence based upon the present anarchy in production, with the collisions and excesses arising from this struggle, are removed, nothing more remains to be held in subjection – nothing necessitating a special coercive force, a State. Its intervention in social relationships becomes superfluous in one area after another and then it naturally drifts into sleep. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The State is not “abolished”. It withers away.

With the seizing of the means of production by society, the production of commodities is done away with, and, simultaneously, the mastery of the product over the producer. Anarchy in social production is replaced by systematic, definite organization. The struggle for individual existence disappears. Then for the first time man, in a certain sense, is finally marked off from the rest of the animal kingdom and emerges from mere animal conditions of existence into really human ones. To accomplish this act of universal emancipation is the historical mission of the modern proletariat. To thoroughly comprehend the historical conditions and thus the very nature of this act, to impart to the now oppressed class a full knowledge of the conditions and of the meaning of the momentous act it is called upon to accomplish, this is the task of the theoretical expression of the proletarian movement, scientific socialism.

This is the formidable edifice that Communism opposes to the sinister bourgeois reveries of the eternal reign of Capital, of its class oppression, of its crises and of the repeated genocides of its reactionary imperialist conflicts. An edifice that not only the final defeat of October, but also a whole series of possible new defeats would be powerless to shake, because from its origin, it rested on a prodigious anticipation on the future, on this last phase of capitalism that we are living through, and of which those fifty years since October are, although they seem endless, only the beginning.

**The social-democratic “lesson”**

The social-democratic “lesson” about the Stalinist counter-revolution is presented in no purer a form than the “bourgeois” lesson, but it is also not difficult to reconstruct it, insofar as the “revisions”, while calling themselves modern, invent nothing and are content to take up, in one form or another, the conclusions of the classical currents of the past. Historically, social democracy is that deviation from the workers’ movement which, by dint of fighting for reforms in the relatively idyllic atmosphere of capitalism before 1911, had given up preparing the working class for its revolutionary task and which, in the modified conditions created by the first great imperialist war, fulfilled the exact opposite task, strangling revolutionary energy, opposing the proletarian movement (as the Mensheviks did in Russia) and even repressing it (as the Noske-Scheidemanns did in Germany). At the time of Lenin and the Russian Revolution, this deviation was embodied, much more than by the right, which had openly passed to the enemy, by the conciliating centre, whose “international” theorist was Karl Kautsky. It was distinguished from traditional bourgeois currents in that it did not go so far as to assert that capitalism is eternal and that classless and stateless society is only a utopia. But in practice, that is to say in the real class struggle, social democracy joined the bourgeois parties by refusing to admit that socialism can be achieved through a class and party dictatorship, which would violate electoral principles and parliamentary democracy. Without necessarily denying, at least in the abstract, the “right to revolution”, social democracy joined with them at any rate to the extent that it never deigned to recognize that the conditions for this revolution were ripe: in Russia, because the economic development of the country was insufficient to allow socialization of the means of production; in the West, on the contrary,
because a revolution would have lowered the economic standard that had been attained, because of the armed struggle, which a revolution presupposes, because of the alleged lack of preparation of the working class for taking on the functions of the ruling class, etc.; for the social-democratic right, moreover, because the revolution itself was no longer justified in a century in which, unlike what had happened in the previous century, the working class had "conquests" to defend within bourgeois society. In short, if at the time we could still speak of a workers’ movement (which is no longer the case today), social democracy could hardly be better defined than as the negation of this movement which, as Marx noted, is revolutionary or is nothing.

The social-democratic “lesson” of the Russian counter-revolution flows naturally from the characteristics we have just recalled. Having fought the Bolshevik revolution on the pretext that Russia was not ripe for socialism, social democracy presented the entire economic development of the USSR towards capitalism from the NEP as proof of the merits of its opposition to the revolution. This obviously implies that it saw in what Stalin himself called the construction of national socialism a capitalist evolution, but this “scientific” superiority must not conceal from us the emptiness of this so-called “lesson” and even less, its infamy. We too characterize the economic development of Russia from the end of the civil war to today as capitalist, we too consider that it was historically inevitable; but we deplored it as an effect and a manifestation of the class defeat of the proletariat in the first post-war period, when social democracy, which had become conservative, had the gall to rejoice in this defeat; above all, we considered it inevitable only if the European proletariat did not manage to make its own revolution and we fought with all our strength for this revolution, whereas social democracy on the one hand gave up on the Russian Revolution as being lost as a socialist revolution, and on the other, fought to defeat the revolution in the West.

The infinite duplicity of the social-democratic “lesson” about the Russian counter-revolution is entirely due to the fact that, despite its scientific claims, it makes an abstraction of the crucial factor: the paralysing influence that social democracy, precisely, exercised over the Western proletariat and which, by preventing the revolution’s extension, condemned Russia to capitalism; but to make an abstraction of the fact that, without the maintenance of bourgeois domination in Europe, a nationalist current like Stalinism could not have triumphed in Russia, to present this odious Stalinism as a punishment for the revolutionary sins of the Russian proletariat, when in fact it was the legitimate child of the bourgeois reaction favoured by reformism, is to reduce the lessons of history to this miserable truism: “Without revolutions, there would never be counter-revolutions”. Here is what gives the exact measure of this “theoretical superiority” that European reformism boasted about so strongly in the face of Bolshevism, while it still existed as a “workers’” party.

The dull social-democratic “lesson” has failed to demonstrate, in order to be plausible, two things. Firstly, that the October Revolution did not meet any historical necessity and was only an accident of history attributable to Bolshevik “voluntarism” and, secondly, that the maintenance of capitalism in the world, after October, has been historically beneficial to the proletariat and, in general, to the human race, and has perfectly confirmed all the social-democratic forecasts of an uninterrupted peaceful march towards socialism.

Not only did social democracy never demonstrate the first point, but – at least in its centrist current, that of the so-called Second and a Half International, which wanted to be independent both of right-wing socialism and communism – it did not even dare, at the time of the Revolution, to frankly condemn October.

By way of illustration, we will cite the characteristic article of a declared admirer of the German centrist Kautsky, published under the title “The Bolsheviks and Us” in the Austrian social-democratic review, Der Kampf, in March 19189. “The theory and practice of the Bolsheviks”, says the old centrist article, “are the adaptation of socialism to a country in which capitalism is still young and undeveloped, and the proletariat is therefore still a minority of the nation; the adaptation of socialism to Russia’s economic backwardness”. In what sense? Soviet Russia (like the Commune in France in 1871) is inevitably the “ideal of the State” of the revolutionary proletariat in the countries where it is still the minority of the population. Besides, “The existence of the capitalist social order is incompatible with the interests of the proletariat. In the possession of political power, the proletariat has to strive to bring industrial production under its rule. But the revolution had destroyed the old bureaucratic regime without building a new democratic administrative organization. The Bolsheviks were therefore unable to subject industry to the control of the organs of a democratic community; they subject every industrial enterprise to the control of the workers who are employed in it: the railways to the railroad workers. The textile factories to the textile workers etc. But in doing so they abandoned the socialist principle that every branch of industry is subject to the whole of society and in so doing approached the ideal of syndicalism. The French workers, a minority of the nation, who, thanks to the slow growth in France’s population, cannot hope to soon become a majority, do not see their ideal in the subjugation of industry to the democratic republic, which would mean the domination of industrial workers by the peasant and petty-bourgeois majority, but in the submission of each branch of industry to the rule of the union of that branch of industry. Russian workers are now trying to realize this ideal of French syndicalism. The ‘workers’ control’ in factories’ decreed by the Bolsheviks is the principle of industrial organization, which workers must aim at where they cannot hope to dominate a democratic community and, through it, industry. German socialism owes its theoretical superiority to the fact that the German proletariat is the majority, a rapidly growing majority of the German nation and can therefore hope to conquer power in the State on the basis of democracy, and dominate industry through the democratic State. Where the proletariat is only a minority of the nation and can still temporarily seize power, in 1848 and 1871 in France, today in Russia, socialism takes on a different appearance: there the class organization of the proletariat (Commune or Soviet) fights against democracy, the syndicalist ‘workers’ control’ in the factories’ fights against the socialist submission of industry to the democratic community. The attempt by the Russian proletariat to break the domination of capitalism and achieve socialism was inevitable, but the defeat was also inevitable, and the causes of this defeat were the same as in 1848 and 1871: ‘The development of the industrial proletariat is, in general, conditioned by the development of the industrial bourgeoisie. Only under its rule does the proletariat gain that extensive national existence which can raise its revolution to a
national one...” (Marx, The Class Struggles in France). There, where capitalist industry is only a sporadic phenomenon, the abolition of capitalist domination cannot be the content of the national revolution”.

What political conclusion can be drawn from all this, when you are a pedant imbued with the superiority of “German socialism”, but you do not want, however, to fall into the excesses of the right, for which the October Revolution was only a crazy adventure? A conclusion that cruelly betrays the author’s predicament: “Ahead of their opponents, the Mensheviks had the insight that the social revolution was only possible at a certain stage of capitalist development [sic] and that Russia had not yet reached this stage of development. But, convinced that Russia was undergoing a bourgeois revolution, they demanded from the proletariat that it give up power without a struggle, to abdicate in favour of the bourgeoisie. In their constant fear of the counter-revolution, which could bypass any bold action of the proletariat, they refrained from pursuing a consistent, courageous proletarian policy within the framework of the bourgeois revolution. So they themselves pushed the proletariat away and drove it into the arms of the Bolsheviks.

“The Bolsheviks took the lead in the proletariat’s class struggle against the bourgeoisie, which the bourgeois revolution inevitably had to unleash. In the storms of the revolution they faithfully expressed the moods, the will and the ideals of the Russian proletariat. But going into the proletariat, they also shared its illusions. So they led the proletariat to experiments that can only end with a defeat of the proletariat”. In this disappointing reality, the good “enlightened” social democrat of 1918 saw a glimmer of hope, in the “happy medium” as, of course: “There are also Social Democrats in Russia who are free from the illusions of the right and left. These are the Menshevik internationalists led by Martov, Martinov, Semkovsky; the internationalists who flock to Maxim Gorki’s Novaya Zhizn (Awilow, Basarow, etc.); the minority of the Bolsheviks who are fighting the dictatorship of Lenin and Trotsky under the leadership of Riazanov [sic]!... Against the right and the left, they have fulfilled the task incumbent on the Marxist: not opposing the proletariat [sic!] like the Mensheviks; but also not, like the Bolsheviks, to fall into any of the illusions [sic!] of the proletariat, and instead to defend the superior conception that the Marxist analysis of the conditions of development and struggle give us against these illusions. In stormy times, the extremes of right and left always win; the centre is always condemned to impotence [sic!] But only those who worship success see it as proof that the centre... is wrong.

“Today I am convinced, as in October, that history will finally prove, in Russia as elsewhere, that the Marxist ‘centre’, which is represented by the internationalists in Russia, is right”. But then, what tasks did the Austrian and international equivalents of Mensheviks à la Martov acknowledge in the advanced countries? The article concludes carefully: “The Russian Revolution is a victory for the Russian proletariat and the Bolsheviks today speak for the Russian proletariat. We owe them our sympathy and our help, just as we owe it to the proletariat in struggle in all countries, insofar as we are capable of doing so. The hateful attacks against the Bolsheviks... now, when German imperialism is entering the field against the Bolsheviks in the name of bourgeois order, are a gross violation of the duties arising from the international solidarity of the proletariat. But that does not mean, of course, that we share the Bolsheviks’ illusions... Marxism has... to represent the general interests of the international proletariat... against momentary interests... to defend the doctrines against aberrations on the right and illusions on the left. Marxists have to... represent the principles of Marxist politics... both against the opportunism on our right... and against ‘left-wing radicalism’... whose basic error is the delusion that the proletariat just has to want to lift the capitalist world off its hinges, without taking account of the objective conditions of its struggle”. H. Weber (Otto Bauer): “The Bolsheviks and Us”, Der Kampf, March 1918, Vienna.

What a sad picture the dusty old article evokes in our eyes, fifty years later! Sure that they would start a European revolution, which would be the historic punishment of the bourgeoisie for the imperialist war it has launched, the Russian proletariat and the Bolsheviks had fought and were preparing to fight like lions. Through revolution, they had brought the imperialist war to a halt in their country and were crying out to the international proletariat to imitate their example. They had built a completely new State which, going beyond the shortcomings of the Paris Commune itself, gave flesh and blood to the Marxist formula of the “dictatorship of the proletariat”, showing the working class of the world how “we can and we must” govern a large country without parliamentarism, how we can and we must remove all political power from the big bourgeoisie, how we can and we must resist the oscillations of the petty bourgeoisie, and, soon, how a determined and disciplined proletariat would win the war civil. And meanwhile, Western “socialist leaders” believed that they had fulfilled their revolutionary duties when they had “excused” the Russian proletariat for not having bowed to the petty-bourgeois majorities and for having violated democratic principles; when they recognized (how could they do otherwise?) the broad and enthusiastic proletarian and popular support for the Bolsheviks and when, in the midst of the compliments, they criticized the Mensheviks! That said, they had nothing more important to do than to heap opprobrium on the revolutionary will to overthrow the capitalist world and, in addition, to lecture the Bolsheviks on the difference between the respective principles of industrial organization of revolutionary trade unionism and socialism, and to teach them, in all earnestness, that socialism is centralizing! All they can say about the tasks of a Marxist party during an acute class struggle is that it must not oppose the proletariat, but they refuse to recognize its tasks of leadership, the framing of the struggle, without which the revolution cannot even take place; they erect the eternal oscillation, the eternal indecision of the Russian “non-Bolshevik internationalists” as a universal model. But the worst of all is that having thus hypocritically condemned the Russian revolution (after having recognized that it was inevitable!) “because the objective conditions” of the Russian economy did not allow for the construction of socialism there, they take great care not to explain in what way the objective conditions of the industrial and advanced West would also rule out any hope of eradicating the capitalist economy after defeating it by political means. For any answer to this crucial question, they have, themselves, the champions of the fight against “illusions”, only one hope to offer: it is that in the far off epoch, when the proletariat becomes the absolute social majority, it can “conquer power in the State on the basis of democracy, and dominate industry [sic!] through the democratic State”. Such is “the superior conception” that, according to them, “Marxism gives us of the development and struggle”, the
only realistic conception. We do not have to look further for the secret of global bourgeois reaction that followed the Russian revolution and the weak wave of post-war social unrest in the West, of which Stalinism was never more than the local manifestation in Russia: when the hour of the death struggle had struck, it was “leaders” of the sort that the majority of the proletariat continued to follow.

That said, if the fifty years that followed had confirmed the social-democratic forecasts, according to which “the future belonged to the centre”, that is to say, according to which the proletariat would democratically come to power and carry out the socialist transformation without a prior revolution, using the existing State apparatus and under the leadership of the Kautskys, the Bauers and the Martovs, and without the least attempt on the part of the bourgeoisie to defend itself, communism would only have to bow its head and acknowledge the error of its ways and, at the same time, accept the social-democratic accusation according to which it is communism itself that has the historical responsibility for the terrible Stalinist episode. As we said above, it is only on this basis that the social-democratic “lesson” could rise to the level of a lesson in history, instead of simply being a rehashing of a slogan of the kind: “The only way sure way of not being beaten is not to fight”.

It suffices to mention the last fifty years to demonstrate that they have totally ruined the social-democratic perspectives of the progressive absorption of antagonisms of all kinds, the triumph of peaceful methods, and idyllic social progress. To appreciate the total fiasco of social democratism it is enough to evoke the unheard-of torments of the crises, of the second imperialist war, of the colonial wars, of the brutal oppression unleashed not only in Russia, devastated “by the communist revolution”, as the social democrats insinuated, but also in Italy and in Germany, the heartland of social democracy, in short all the climate of tragedy and torpor that characterizes our beautiful century and which the military victory of the democratic powers over the fascist powers did not make any less onerous.

This is why, far from being able to demonstrate the historical advantage of the survival of capitalism and the absence of a European revolution after 1917, social democracy was forced by history to liquidate itself, not just as a class party, but as any kind of party, becoming a simple apparatus that was completely discredited, a shadow of what it had been – for the misfortune of the proletariat – a ghost from the past condemned to a languid existence that its younger brother, national communism, is elsewhere condemned to share with it.

If, by chance, the observation of contemporary reality had not convinced the reader of this fact, all it would take would be to pay a moment’s attention to the way in which the social democrats themselves retrace their own story via the pen of Herr Carlo Schmid, member of the Presidium of the SPD: the suggestive picture is borrowed from the Hundert Jahre Sozialdemokratische Partei (1863-1963) Festvortrag by this author, who, having lost all modesty, throws the most intense spotlight on this process of liquidation, which is due to nothing but a yawning contrast between social-democratic forecasts and historical reality: “The leadership of the party did not want the revolution of 191811. But once it had been declared, Friedrich Ebert and others took it in hand and saved democracy, refusing any experiment that could lead to the dictatorship of the proletariat”. It would be impossible to confess more graciously that at the time, Lenin and the communists were doing German social democracy no injustice when they denounced its counter-revolutionary role. Let us now see what rewards the proletariat drew from this renunciation of revolution which, in theory, should have enabled it to achieve socialism at lower cost, by avoiding violence and civil war, in short by a more certain path: “During the fourteen-year period of the Weimar Republic, socialists were members of the Reich government for only two and a half years, with intervals. They were only given power in precarious situations”. So much for our austro-marxist’s earlier forecast that the future belongs to those who fall “neither for the illusions of the right, nor those of the left”, and especially for his hope that the numerous proletariat of the advanced countries would conquer power and control of the economy on the basis of democracy, by means of the existing State. As to the reasons why they (that is to say the bourgeoisie) “give” power to socialists only in “precarious situations”, they are clear: it is in such situations that, worrying about threats of “experiments that could lead to the dictatorship of the proletariat”, the bourgeoisie feels the need to call for help from the “workers’ party” that “refuses these experiments”. It would be impossible to admit more frankly that while the electorate proposes, the ruling class disposes. Let us now consider the verification of the “superior theory of German socialism” in the peaceful character of historical development in the contemporary epoch “During the whole Weimar period the Party remained, officially and in theory, Marxist, but its politics became more and more reformist. Finally, the 1931 programme declared unequivocally that the German Social Democratic Party was a reformist and democratic party, for which democracy was already a value in itself12. 1933 intervened. From the very start, the Nazi regime filled the concentration camps with socialists and communists. Thousands of them were murdered in the first weeks. The parliamentary socialist group was the only one to vote against the Enabling Act giving Hitler carte blanche. The speech delivered in this case… saved the honour of democracy in Germany”. Words fail us...

“After the war, everything had to be rethought on the ideological level”. It is understandable that the “honour” saved by... a speech did not constitute a sufficient basis for the pure and simple maintenance of the old ideology! “The party undertook this immense task with remarkable energy and boldness. The result of its work was included in Godesberg’s programme in 1959. The party no longer wanted to be Marxist. It judged that history is the work of men’s wants, and not the automatism of dialectical materialism”. A quite remarkable boldness, indeed: because who, after the First World War, fought against the “men who wanted” to abolish capitalism by the revolution, if not those who pro-claimed the automatism of the march towards socialism, i.e. the predecessors, the spiritual fathers of the people of Godesberg?

“Democracy is the essential value in politics”. Essential in the sense that if we cannot save it, we must always save its honour. “But the party wants real [democracy] and not only formal: the worker must not be elevated to the dignity of citizen only in the political order; he must also become a citizen in the economic and social order, hence the demand for co-management. Private property is not an evil, it is an indispensable good in a free society. It is necessary to create as many individual fortunes as possible. A man must be able to say ‘no’ without risking his social existence at any time, but trusts
and cartels must be prevented from becoming instruments of domination in the hands of an uncontrolled minority”. At this point, social democracy, which was only a negation of proletarian Marxism, ends up denying itself: “The German Social Democratic Party wants to be a national, European and popular party; it is no longer the party of a single pre-determined class. We do not want to socialize man; we want to humanize society”.

In summary, at the time of the Russian Revolution, German social democracy proudly proclaimed its “theoretical superiority” over communism, and on that basis, practical superiority. It claimed to draw from the Stalinist counter-revolution the proof that you cannot achieve socialism by means of violent revolution and dictatorship, and the proof that by violating the indispensable principles of democracy, you inevitably turn your back on it. Now, by the admission of one of its current representatives, the same social democracy publicly announced, at least twice, in 1931 and in 1959, its own liquidation, that is to say, recognized what reality had inflicted on it, since it would otherwise have had no reason to modify its views and principles even in the slightest. Should we believe that the social-democratic “lesson” about the Russian counter-revolution was the verdict of History itself? Should we consider it possible and legitimate to give it any credence, even partial? To tolerate within communist ranks even the slightest democratic criticism of Bolshevism? This is what we deny, and we are the only ones to deny it.

The anarchist “lesson”

At the time of the Second International, then after the victory of Stalinism in the Third, anarchism (also called libertarian communism) could pass for a radical movement, more revolutionary than scientific socialism. The reason is simple: anarchism has never repudiated the use of violence and insurrection; whereas, on the contrary, the social-democratic and, later, Stalinist deviations from Marxism did not content themselves with putting the emphasis on parliamentary and legal action in favour of social reforms or, worse, the defence of parliamentary democracy against the bourgeois right: they condemned any violent action by the proletariat as a manifestation of adventurism. For these historical reasons, the prejudice that anarchism is much more extremist than Marxism would become firmly entrenched in our time. In reality, the relationship between anarchism and Marxism is exactly the opposite. Originally, that is to say at the time of Marx’s polemic against Proudhon (in 1847), it was scientific socialism that denounced anarchism as “bourgeois socialism” and condemned the opposition of its leader in class struggle and revolution. Later, in the First International (1864-72), when Marx and Engels and their disciples fought Proudhon’s disciple, Bakunin, it was not because he was “too” revolutionary, but because his revolutionism (which he himself defined as “a Proudhonian broadly developed and pushed to its extreme consequences”) is not consistent. The same goes for Lenin with regard to the anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists of his time. Today, when it is impossible to doubt the shameful deviations from Marxism, all that anarchism can find to reproach scientific socialism for is that it is “authoritarian” socialism. It was therefore inevitable that the involution of the proletarian and Bolshevik republic of 1917-18 into a national police State practising the cult of the great Stalin appeared to anarchism to be a formidable historical confirmation of its age-old criticism of Marxism and of the correctness of its own conception of socialism. There are even a few “lessons” from the Russian counter-revolution that have such a strong power of suggestion, even on those who do not want to give up on revolution. The main misfortune for this version of events is that it did not wait for the counter-revolution to impose itself, since, in the midst of the civil war between the Russian proletariat and the international bourgeoisie, which had ganged up against it, Russian anarchists did not refrain from exploiting the terrible difficulties against which red power, Bolshevik power, was struggling, to try to win a victory for what they called the “third revolution”.

It is a historical fact to remember, even if (to their credit) not all the Russian and European anarchists (in particular Italian) compromised themselves in this insane and unconscious support for the effort of all the enemies of communism to restore bourgeois order. One of two possibilities, then: either the “lesson” according to which Stalinism came to “prove” what reactionary inevitabilities were always implicit in the “authoritarian” socialism of Marx and Lenin means nothing at all, or else it means that if the Russian masses had listened to the warnings of the libertarians, they would have avoided the Stalinist counter-revolution and established socialism. For this to be plausible, the libertarians ranged against proletarian and communist power, against the non-parliamentary power of Russia from 1917-21, would really have had to open up a third way, one distinct from both supporters of the bourgeois Constituent Assembly and supporters of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but at least as capable as the latter of preventing a restoration. This is what they neither did, nor could do, contenting themselves with disorganizing the defences of one of the adversaries in struggle – the communist proletariat! – and proving at the same time that after Red October, there was no room for a third revolution.

Superficially directed against a principle of scientific socialism – the political principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat – anarchist criticism is in reality directed against the whole new concept defended by socialism from its birth, which is the materialist conception of history. A hundred years later, the more or less avowed, more or less loyal followers of Bakunin have not yet assimilated this “novelty”, rejected as they were in their libertarian old-fashioned ways by the defeat of the proletarian revolution in Russia.

Marx once gave scientific socialism a terse definition that will help us to show that by characterizing it as “authoritarian” socialism, the anarchists have only displaced the real problem, which is certainly not to know whether we should, in the absolute and in the abstract, proclaim ourselves in favour of Authority or on the contrary of Liberty, but whether socialism is an ideal or a historical necessity and inevitability. “What I did that was new was to prove: (1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular historical phases in the development of production (historische Entwicklungphasen der Produktion), (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat, (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society”. (Letter to Weydemeyer, 5 March 1852). Everyone has, of course, the “right” to disagree with these three fundamental theses, but no one has the right to ignore that for Marx and all Marxists worthy of the name they result from the scientific discovery of an objective process,
and that if they adopted them as a Party programme, it was not because they responded to who knows what subjective preference for Authority, but because they seemed to summarize the entire direction of history. To reproach such a conception for being “authoritarian” is nonsense: the only legitimate thing would be to demonstrate that History itself is not “authoritarian”, but conforms by itself to the ideal of Liberté born with the great French Revolution, a thesis particularly unsustainable in our imperialist and totalitarian century. One of two possibilities, then: either it makes no sense to say that the Russian counter-revolution confirmed the anarchist criticism of Marxism, or it means that it proved that historical materialism was scientifically false, not in accordance with the real laws of human development. Not only has anarchism never demonstrated any such thing, but it has never even undertaken it, precisely because it has always placed itself on the abstract terrain of the ideal, and never on that of the reality of class society. Besides, it suffices to pose the question in its correct terms to see that the Russian counter-revolution could not prove anything of the kind: because when did scientific socialism ever say that by taking power and establishing its dictatorship, the proletariat would inevitably go to socialism, regardless of the economic and political, national and international conditions in which this event had taken place? To prove that the opposition between Marxism and anarchism is something quite different from an opposition between lovers of Authority on the one hand and lovers of Freedom on the other, we only need to quote the anarchists themselves and to compare their theses with the above quotation from Marx. Honour where it is due: let’s start with Proudhon, father of anarchism, even if his authority has been shaken after Bakunin and, after anarcho-syndicalism, even in the libertarian ranks. Why does he fight the “governmental, dictatorial, authoritarian, doctrinaire communist system?” Because its attitude would be the eternal attitude of “the slave who has always aped the master”, because “like an army that has removed the guns of the enemy”, it intends “to turn its own artillery against the army of property owners” – that is to say State power – because the dictatorship of the proletariat “would borrow its formulas from the old absolutism: undivided power – absorbing centralization – systematic destruction of all individual, corporate and local thought, known as dissident, an inquisitorial police force” and would only be a “compact democracy, apparently founded on the dictatorship of the masses, but where the masses only have enough power to ensure universal servitude”. Of course, our anarchist adversaries will still be able to sacrifice Proudhon, a hundred years after Marx showed that his socialism was a bourgeois socialism, but can they do the same for the insurrectionist Bakunin, the undisputed hero of any libertarian? Bakunin sings from the same hymn sheet as the unfortunate Proudhon, who never tried to refute Marx’s refutation of his Philosophy of Poverty and for good reason, because it was Bakunin who cried out one day without any idle pretence: “I detest communism, because it is the negation of liberty. I cannot conceive of humanity without liberty. I am not a communist because communism concentrates and absorbs all the powers of society in the State; it necessarily ends with the concentration of property in the hands of the State. I, on the other hand, want the abolition of the State, the radical elimination of the principle of authority and of tutelage by the State. Under the pretext of making men moral and civilized, the State has enslaved, oppressed, exploited and corrupted them. I want the organization of society and collective, social property by free association from the bottom up, not by authority from the top down, regardless of what sort. This is how I am collectivist and not at all communist” [our emphases].

For Proudhon, therefore, State power is the specific weapon of the “property-owners”, that is to say the bourgeoisie, and it cannot therefore suit the needs of the oppressed; for Bakunin, it is a corrupting “principle”. However, the State is neither: all societies divided into classes have known the State, and like the society that is born from the fall of bourgeois domination cannot ignore any class division overnight, nor can it do without any State; if this institution is common to all class societies, it is indeed not because, up until the doctrinaires Proudhon and Bakunin, humanity suffered from an aberration of the principles from which the new revolutionaries would have come to deliver it; it is because as long as classes exist, and therefore also the class struggle, whether muted or open, which classes cannot avoid engaging in, the state is necessary for the survival of society. We simply have to read the brilliant lines of Engels in his Anti-Dühring on this subject to grasp all the superiority of the materialist explanation of history over the prognostications of the libertarian prophets: “Society thus far, based upon class antagonisms, had need of the State, that is, of an organization of the particular class, which was pro tempore the exploiting class, for the maintenance of its external conditions of production, and, therefore, especially, for the purpose of forcibly keeping the exploited classes in the condition of oppression corresponding with the given mode of production (slavery, serfdom, wage-labour). The State was the official representative of society as a whole; the gathering of it together into a visible embodiment. But it was this only insofar as it was the State of that class which itself represented, for the time being, society as a whole: in ancient times, the State of slave-owning citizens; in the Middle Ages, the feudal lords; in our own time, the bourgeoisie” (Anti-Dühring).

“The State is, therefore, by no means a power forced on society from without; just as little is it ‘the reality of the ethical idea’, ‘the image and reality of reason’, as Hegel maintains. Rather, it is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, these classes with conflicting economic interests, might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have a power, seemingly standing above society, that would alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of ‘order’” (Origin of the Family). This need, which has imposed itself on the exploiting classes of the past, is just as much of an imposition on the proletariat, at least during a certain phase of history: to be revolutionary is nothing other than to recognize it, to accept it, and put it into practice when the need arises, as did Lenin and the Bolsheviks in Russia. It is necessary, says Proudhon, expressly to reject “revolutionary action as a means of social reform”, to deny the proletariat the right to turn “the artillery” that constitutes the State apparatus against the class enemy, and only to see in the powerfully original claim of the dictatorship of the proletariat a simple imitation of the past, a regression compared to bourgeois democracy, even a return to the old absolutism! For the proletariat, to establish its own State is to use organized violence to break the resistance of the
bourgeoisie rather than laying down its arms and letting the whole old order be reconstituted while proclaiming “the abolition of the State”. This is not an aberration due to the influence of outdated ideas: it is a matter of life and death in the real struggle. But the doctrinaire blindness of the anarchists is such that Voline, a fighter for the so-called “third revolution” against the Russian Bolsheviks and author of The Unknown Revolution, which presents the libertarian version of the great events of Russia in the years 1917-20, thought he was able to draw from them precisely “formal proof” that “if the social revolution is about to prevail (so that capital, soil, subsoil, factories, means of communication, money, begin to pass to the people and the army makes common cause with the latter) there is no need to worry about ‘political power’.” If the defeated classes tried, by tradition, to form one, what importance could it have?” No need to “worry” about wrestling control of the administration, the police and the army from the bourgeoisie? No, the Russian anarchist Voline replied in substance, in the heat of the events. Unimportant, the attempt at a Tsarist-bourgeois political counter-revolution, supported by foreign imperialism in the years 1918-21? A simple matter of old obsolete and outdated ideas? Yes, he replied again. And he explained: “political power is not a force in itself: it is strong as long as it can rely on Capital, on the framework of the State, on the army, on the police. Without this support, it remains ‘suspended in a vacuum’, helpless and ineffective. The Russian revolution gives us the formal proof of this”. It was not a madman or a partisan of the bourgeoisie who spoke like this: it was a Russian anarchist convinced of being “revolutionary”!

What the Russian revolution gave “formal proof” of is that even during a powerful social revolution, the bourgeoisie and its parties do not remain and cannot remain absolutely and definitively without support in the mass of the population; it is also because even after the military victory has been won over the main enemy, the need for a power “preventing society from being consumed in a sterile struggle”, “keeping it within the limits of order” continues to be felt: that is the whole secret of the NEP, that is to say of the policy intended to maintain the proletariat’s alliance with the peasantry within the limits of Russian industrialization under the control of the proletarian party. As disastrous as the subsequent development has been, for reasons that have nothing to do with the “centralization of property in the hands of the State”, given that the whole vast Russian agricultural sector eluded the workers’ State in practice, what the Russian revolution has at the same time proved, formally and definitively, is the powerlessness of anarchism to grasp reality and to rise to the level of the demands of the radical proletarian struggle, and above all its counter-revolutionary role as soon as it tries to manifest itself independently of communism, to convince the masses of the whims of its doctrinaires and force their fulfilment in history.

The self-managed socialist “lesson” 15

We saw above how the anarchist Bakunin defined his “socialism” as “the organization of society and collective property” from the bottom up by means of association and how he rejected the “centralization of property in the hands of the State”. In the same way, there was in the Bolshevik Party of the years 1920-21 a Workers’ Opposition (Kollontai, Myasnikov and Shliapnikov, with whom much more recent groups have claimed alignment) who denied that the Party and the Soviet State had to exercise their authority in the economic field and to assume the management of industry and who affirmed that, in this matter, the decision had to revert to the “producers themselves”, to the “congress of producers”, peasants on the one hand and on the other the factory councils from different companies. What Bakunin claimed in the name of Liberty, the Workers’ Opposition claimed in the name of proletarian interests and as the only guarantee that the dictatorship of the proletariat would not be transformed into dictatorship over the proletariat; but the economic vision is the same, and it could be found in Italian Ordinovism 16. The unfortunate thing is that the failure of the revolution of 1917, as a socialist revolution at least, is to say the fact that the State management of industry (if not of the whole economy) established by the Bolsheviks did not lead to socialism, but to modern Russian national capitalism, seemed to a bunch of people historical proof of the “prophetic correctness” of Bakunin’s views, a bunch of people who, in politics, did not however use anarchism by name. This is how, in matters of society, our era has simply fallen back into Proudhonism (Proudhon being the recognized master of Bakunin, and unrecognized master by many other people). Its great formula is “socialism, yes, but in freedom”, accompanied – in the best cases – by the other formula: the dictatorship of the proletariat, yes, but not over the proletariat. The great “lesson” that this liberal, associative socialism, which we shall call “self-managed socialism” learned from the Stalinist counter-revolution is that Marxist “statism” cannot lead to the liquidation of capitalism, but only to the fierce reign of an omnipotent bureaucracy; that the class party has no role to play in the economic transformation, which must be left to the “working class itself” and to producers in general. Undoubtedly, no “lesson” is as difficult to destroy, given the force of suggestion of the counter-revolution and the voluntarist caricature that Stalinism made of the Marxist doctrine of the role of the Party by diverting it the power to create socialism at will, on the condition that it is obeyed; yet it is just as lamentable in theory and practically as disastrous as all of the ones we have just examined.

In fact, the opposition dreamed of by libertarians and their disciples, whether conscious or not, between their “economy of free association” and the “State economy” of Marxist communism is purely imaginary. We can only speak of “association” (free or not) if we start from a postulate of the existence of productive units managed autonomously. It is not difficult to imagine what they might well be after the overthrow of the employers’ class: there would simply be companies inherited from the capitalist era but liberated, by the revolution, from their traditional management and fallen into the hands of the workers on the one hand, and on the other the multiple small agricultural or industrial farms that capitalist development will have allowed to survive despite the concentration of the productive forces that it achieves. To say that such productive units must not become “property of the State” simply means that they must maintain their autonomy of management, that is to say that they should not be subject to any general regulation, to any central authority, but only to the will of their staff, democratically expressed by a majority of votes probably, and, in the best of cases, to the local authority of a duly “elected” management committee or manager, assuming that some authority is recognized as necessary for the functioning of an organism as complex as a large modern factory, something that the “libertarians” might still find dubious. Let us admit that, in the euphoria of the revolution, such an organization has the effect of giving the workers the feeling of being “free”
because they will be rid of managerial curmudgeons, of the boss’s petty despots, and they will now only have to obey technical requirements, rather than these exigencies of production for profit. Let us admit this, for the time being. The main problem will remain: how will all these autonomous businesses interact? How will the production in its entirety adapt to meet all needs while escaping, in this way, all central decision and control under the pretext of avoiding “bureaucratization”? In capitalism, this was done through the market, though not without any central regulation. In a post-revolutionary economy which, according to the absurd hypothesis, would conform to the whims of “liberal” or “libertarian” communist doctrinaires, it could not do otherwise. It takes a considerable dose of ignorance to imagine that the market relationships subsisting between companies and between the two major sectors of the economy (agriculture and industry) could be abolished within companies and each of these sectors; that the amount of salary, the duration and intensity of work, and even the weight of authority in force within the production unit could be determined “freely”, that is to say exclusively according to the “will” of workers so as no longer to be exploited under such conditions! The capitalist exploitation taking place in the form of a levy of surplus value on the proletariat is indissolubly linked to the mercantile nature of this economy. It is because products are commodities that labour is also one and therefore the proletarian is an employee. It is an absurdity to believe that you could abolish the system of wage labour (that is to say the regime that attaches the material treatment of the proletarian both to the value of his commodity labour power and to the demands of the valorisation of capital) without abolishing market production, and no less absurd to believe that one could abolish this production while preserving the conditions from which it derives, and which are essentially the existence of autonomous enterprises.

The replacement of the boss and bourgeois control by some “factory council” elected as democratically as one would like, in other words the replacement of the capitalist enterprise by a cooperative enterprise, would not advance the necessary transformation of the social economy by one single step. We know that the attempts of workers’ production cooperatives in the nineteenth century, even if they had the merit of showing that we could do without the social character of the capitalist, ended in resounding failures, because they could not resist bourgeois competition. It would not be otherwise if competition were no longer between employers’ enterprises and workers’ cooperatives, but between as many workers’ cooperatives as there were enterprises. Again, two possibilities: either they would pretend to operate other than as capitalist enterprises, all other conditions remaining bourgeois (liaison through the intermediary of the market) in which case they would be swept away; or if they intended to survive, they could only function as capitalist enterprises with money capital, wages, profits, a sinking fund and capital investments, credit and interest, etc. Competition between them would not be abolished, and neither would the system of contracts, civil law and the State institution necessary to defend it. So the question is first of all in what respect such “associations” could be more “free” than bourgeois enterprises and how the process of concentration in ever larger productive units, which manifested itself throughout the capitalist phase and which had nothing to do with being “free and voluntary”, since it was determined precisely by the requirements of competition, could well give way – with this competition surviving – to a “voluntary process of free association from the bottom up” inspired by no one knows what superior social ethics. All the socialization of the economy (in the sense of employment of associated labour and mass production) that could be achieved “by means of free association” was already done under capitalism, with the reservation that the term “freedom” is ambiguous when applied to a process subjected to such a rigid determinism. A “social revolution” that would simply propose continuing on the same path and by the same means, finally to reach the vaguely dreamed-of collective economy, contenting itself with changing the actors of the social drama and replacing entrepreneurs or bourgeois trusts with factory committees or workers’ cooperative associations would be so little a social revolution that it would inevitably lead in a short time to the restoration of all the old relations of production and this at the cost of convulsions of which the Spanish “revolution” can give us some idea. Not only would such a “revolution” not abolish the State but on the contrary, it would create all the conditions which make it essential for a general and central authority to impose itself, precisely to defend the freedom and autonomy of the associations, that is to say, the need to settle many sources of conflict and internal clashes, as even an individualist anarchist like Stirner was able to understand. In conclusion, the march towards a collectivist economy by way of free association is a doctrinaire outlook poisoned by the theories that the bourgeoisie directed against the old absolutist interventionism at the time of its revolution; and it is incapable of realizing that if, as Marx pointed out to Proudhon, bourgeois competition had left feudal monopoly, it had led to the modern bourgeois monopoly, and that it was an absurdity to believe that we could get out of the capitalist cycle and enter the reign of freedom by turning backwards, as if the return to competition, even under modified conditions, could lead to something other than this same monopoly, let alone to socialism. Such a vision is devoid of all reality, and does not at all constitute the happy historical possibility that, according to the self-managed socialists, did not come about in Russia “because of Lenin and the Bolsheviks” and, beyond them, Marxism itself and its “statist and authoritarian outlook”. One of two possibilities, in fact: either an alternative really existed, and one cannot see how even a Stalin and a party as “totalitarian” as you like would be able to impose the worst possible solution – the capitalist solution – unless historical materialism is nothing but a heap of nonsense; or else, historical materialism tells the truth by affirming that social forms depend on the degree of development of the productive forces, and if the counter-revolution prevailed, it was precisely because the alternative was purely imaginary, that there was no other possible historical outcome. This is not the place to go over the entire history of October: to clarify the above statement it will suffice to recall what disastrous results Russian workers’ naive attempts at autonomous management had, which the Bolshevik Party had to fight not only to stop the economic catastrophe as such, but above all to prevent it from leading to defeat in the civil war against the Whites, Tsarists or supporters of the Constituent Assembly. If the first term of the opposition established by Bakunin is therefore entirely imaginary, the second – the one which claims to define communism as a “State economy” – could not possibly be more wrong. It is true that the communist movement gives the workers’ State, and the revolutionary party that brings it into being, a leading role in the socialist transformation
of the economy; it assigns, it is true, to the dictatorship of the proletariat the mission of achieving this transformation, which it judges impossible without it, but that is not to say that communism itself can be defined as “a State economy”, an economy in which the State “would absorb all the powers of society” to use Bakunin’s expression, and in which it would confront that society for all eternity as owner of the means of production. This is the outlook of a philistine incapable of grasping the real link between the relations of production and a form of society and of the State, and this is why those who believe in it have not stopped repeating for forty years that “the Russian experience” had only too well confirmed the merits of Bakunin’s fears with regard to communist theories and demonstrated the prophetic nature of his criticism. Communism cannot be a “State economy” for a very simple reason: if the need to establish its own power and its own State is imposed on the proletariat as on all the classes that preceded it, it is nevertheless distinguished fundamentally from them by a characteristic of capital importance: it is not and could not become an exploiting class, but on the contrary the first class called upon to abolish all division of society into classes, and at the same time all class oppression. On the question of the State, this characteristic has a critically important consequence: the State of the proletariat can only be a transitory State, since to the extent that it will carry out its tasks, that is to say, to the extent that it will progressively make classes and their opposition disappear, it will by the same token remove the conditions that underpin the existence of the political State and the need for the ruling class to hold the other classes in subjugation. Under communism therefore, the State and with it political authority will disappear, that is to say public functions will lose their political character and will become simple administrative functions, which will watch over the interests of society (Engels, Controversy with the Anarchists, quoted by Lenin in The State and Revolution.) Lenin rightly notes that at a certain degree of its withering away, this “withering State” can be called a non-political State. This means that communist society will not be devoid of all administration, but that public administration will no longer have the oppressive character, the class character that it has always assumed in the past, that it will on the contrary be a social administration in two ways, first, because it will no longer be the monopoly of a particular social group within the framework of a division between manual and intellectual labour, as this division will have long since become obsolete, second, and especially, because administration will be a function of the needs of the whole of society, and not of a privileged fraction within it. Under these conditions, characterizing communism as the property of the State is nonsense. because the concept of “social property” is itself nonsense: when society as a whole becomes master of its conditions of existence, because it has ceased to be torn apart by internal antagonisms, we have by no means the advent of “social property”, but rather the abolition of property as a fact and therefore also as a concept. How indeed is property defined, if not by excluding others from the use or enjoyment of the object of said property? When there is no one left to exclude, there is no more ownership or possible owner, “society” less so than any other.

All this has a consequence of capital importance: wherever the State owns or at least claims to own anything, we can be sure that there is no communism. There can be two reasons for this. The first is that we are on the path that leads to communism, but we are still very far from the goal; in other words, there is still a proletariat fighting against other classes to clear the way for the social economy in its entirety, which is its goal, and in this case, we are dealing with a proletarian State led by a revolutionary party, which is easily recognizable if not in the economic measures that it is likely to take in themselves, then at least in its doctrine and the direction of its action, both national and international. This was the case with Lenin’s party after October, during the civil war, and even in the very first years of the NEP. The second, quite opposite reason is that the State that is born proletarian may very well change function under the pressure of enemy classes and turn its back on the final communist goal: in this case, State property may well continue for a long time as capitalist property, that is, as a power hostile not only to the proletariat but, to a certain extent, to the greater part of society. Such was the case with the Stalinist and even the partially post-Stalinist State, but then appears all the foolishness of the enterprise-socialist “lesson” of the Russian counter-revolution, which begins by defining communism for what it is not – State ownership – and which, then contemplating State ownership as it existed and still partially exists in Russia exclaims: “Look at this monstrosity that communism has led to! Just imagine what we would have spared ourselves if we had followed the path of free association!”

Everything sinister evoked by the single word “Stalinism” in the minds of most of our contemporaries - the appalling misery of Russia after 1920; the draconian labour laws imposed on it; the reign of the police and the practice of political assassination erected to a principle; the agrarian revolution “from above” of the years 1927-28 and its terrible consequences; “the Soviet Famine” of 1932; the mass repressions; the sinister farce of show trials and the delusional self-accusations of the victims; and above all the odious and unchanging litany of the victorious march of the USSR towards a liberating communism under the leadership of its great party and its beloved leader – all this, absolutely everything could have a simple explanation, one of truly magical convenience: State management, of course, or even, which amounts to the same thing: the uncontrolled reign of the Stalinist bureaucracy. But then, what about the fact that the revolution took place after the war, the weight of the Russian peasantry, the numerical weakness of the proletariat aggravated by the bloodletting of the civil war and by its lack of education, the low level of culture in general, the weight and the inertia of feudal traditions and gross brutality, the isolation of the proletarian Marxist party, international conditions, the barbaric statist tradition of Asian despotism, the demands of the political counter-revolution? These are mere trifles in the eyes of the self-managed socialists, mere trifles that do not explain a thousandth of what their two magic words say: “State management” or “uncontrolled bureaucracy” thanks to the insidious influence that the age-old poppycock of Proudhon and Bakunin exercises on them! How else did they think that, in the absence of “State management”, the oppressed can control anything before the terrible steamroller of capitalist accumulation and bourgeois domination?

**The Trotskyist “lesson”**

Contrary to all the currents studied above, the one called “Trotskyism” has a distant communist origin in this left Opposition which, from 1923 onwards, led an unequal struggle against opportunism in the Bolshevik Party, culminating in
its political eviction and physical destruction in the years 1927-1938. Today, that is to say, thirty or rather forty years after this terrible defeat, this origin has become unrecognizable in the movement that continues to bear the name of the leader of this opposition, Leon Trotsky, theorist of the Permanent Revolution, founder of the Red Army, defeated fighter against the “adjustment” of the Communist International, Soviet power and the Bolshevik Party and finally the abused founder of what he believed to be the future Fourth International. Without doctrine and even more without links to the working class, today’s “Trotskyism” is reduced to a cluster of small sects whose positions contradict each other in a thousand ways (some of them are moreover concerned about very few theoretical issues), but who more or less share this curious position, which is one of the strangest products of the absence of principles, and of empiricism, according to which the USSR and its bloc are indeed socialist, but need a political revolution to restore workers’ democracy.

The “lesson” that would emerge from this awkward platform, if Trotskyism were to risk theoretical generalizations, could be formulated as follows: the nationalization of the means of production by the ruling Party of the proletariat defines a socialist regime as long as it remains in force, but this socialism is not complete until it is accompanied by political democracy and “workers’ participation” in “economic choices”. All that remains of communism in this is the idea of the necessity of the violent revolution, but for the rest it is a return to the two deviations studied above: social democracy and “self-managed socialism”. As for the idea of violent revolution itself, it remains so nebulous that in the forty years it has existed, “Trotskyism” has never been able to describe even a reasonably firm and sensible course of action to reorganize revolutionary forces.

We cannot deny that there exists some connection between, on the one hand, this doctrinal monster, this curiosity of history which will astonish future generations if it ever comes to their knowledge, and on the other hand the positions successively taken by Trotsky and the Opposition. But this link is made by the attachment of today’s Trotskyists not to Trotsky’s authentic revolutionary teaching, but to his mistakes or to his weakest positions. This means that if Trotsky must bear some responsibility for the formation of the lame “doctrine” that bears his name, he was, as an authentic communist, far and away above it.

It is true that, as was still done in their generation, Trotsky and Lenin did not refrain from using the ambiguous term “workers’ democracy”.17 It is also a fact that the Bolshevik Party made some use of the formal democratic mechanism in its internal life, and the dramatic meetings of the Central Committee, where the major decisions of the Revolution (the question of the insurrection, the Brest-Litovsk talks and the continuation or cessation of the war, the NEP) were taken “by a majority of votes” are a common memory. To conclude, as the Trotskyists do18, that a Trotsky or a Lenin were “democrats”, in contrast to Stalin, who was only a “tyrant”, is a crude misinterpretation of their work, and in any case testifies to a most suspicious readiness to cleanse them of the accusation made by the worst bourgeois and opportunists, who claim that they cleared the way for Stalinism by imposing a dictatorship: true communists disdain these statements of the class enemy, and they certainly do not stoop to water down the figure of the great revolutionaries of the past to make it more sympathetic or more tolerable to “progressive” dilettantism. In the same way, it is really to miss the central point, or worse, to rush it up for opportunistic reasons, to characterize the cruel contrast that opposes the party of Lenin to that of Stalin (the two names are only there to designate two historical phases) by saying that the first worked “democratically” and the second did not. The opposition is one of substance, of which the famous “mode of operation”, which is so important to the philistines, is only the expression. However, this opposition is such that, if there is a democratic mode of operation in the true sense of the word, it is indeed in the party in the process of Stalinist degeneration, and not at all in the Bolshevik Party of Lenin’s time. The latter is indeed a class party, a revolutionary party obeying a defined body of doctrine – Marxism – that its ruling core has restored and defended against opportunism. By its very nature, such a party resists fluctuations of opinion, which democratic parties theoretically at least have a duty to obey; by its very nature, what drives the action of such a party is its programme and not the “opinion” of its members; the capital function of the ruling nucleus comes from the real history of the party and the successive selections that have taken place there (gradual elimination of leaders unsuitable for the party’s task or simply uncertain, or, on the contrary, rallying elements that were mistaken at one time, as in Trotsky’s brilliant example); it is therefore not delegated to it by “free” individual choice as democratic mythology requires, nor by the means invariably used by the latter, which are propaganda for or against individuals, including false apologetics on the one hand and defamation on the other.

What such a party seeks is a continuity of action, and this requires a certain stability of leadership and not at all the individual freedom of its members, as in those democratic parties whose behaviour fluctuates because it does not obey any principles, and whose leadership changes, because the leadership function is subject to electoral favour. Not only can it be said to be “democratic”, but all its positive characteristics prove the lie of democratic postulates and their inadequacy for the accomplishment of revolutionary tasks. Under these conditions the practice of voting and counting votes is only a simple use of a convenient mechanism, nothing more. Far from being a “guarantee”, the use of such forms can only be explained by relative immaturity, since a party with the maximum historical experience and achieving maximum cohesion is no longer at all likely to present even on practical issues these violent oppositions that the Bolshevik Party unfortunately still knew and could not avoid, straddling as it did the last democratic revolution and the first socialist revolution in Europe. This is so true that never did an important decision (the signing of the peace in 1919, for example, or the ending of the war against Poland) actually depend on the placid count of the opinions of Central Committee members: once the demands of internal unity and harmony of the party had been conceded to them by means of what Lenin called “party legality”, no Bolshevik leader – especially not Lenin – was ever seen to renounce the most energetic struggle against his own comrades when the fate of the revolution was at stake. That this struggle was loyal and open, that it targeted the positions and solutions proposed, and not the people, that the position in the party of all the militants who intended to continue to militate in its ranks remained assured, even after the most serious crises (for example the cases of Zinoviev and Kamenev who broke the party’s discipline on the crucial issue of insurrection), that there was no hesitation in accepting into the party
experienced revolutionaries like Trotsky and some of his comrades when they renounced their past mistakes and that, as long as the revolution maintained its initial momentum, there was never any thought of using State sanctions or worse, the police force against party members, is all very true, and these are all features that distinguish Lenin’s party from Stalin’s: but to see this as a democratic characteristic is to allow oneself to be singularly misled by the terms, to concede to democracy virtues that it cannot offer, and to show a good deal of stupidity. This whole party practice is far superior to the current practice of electoral parties precisely because, to be what it is, it only had to be communist, and not at all to conform to the respect for the individual that bourgeois democracy claims as one of its most cherished principles, and for which Trotskyists praise the Bolshevik Party in Lenin’s time while simultaneously denouncing the manoeuvring, terror and violence of the regime in Stalin’s time. Bolshevik practice on the one hand and Stalinist practice on the other prove quite the opposite to what degenerated Trotskyism claims and to what vulgar democratism sees in them; the former vividly demonstrates that the proclamation of collective and class objectives and the denial of the bourgeois ideology of freedom in no way entail the notorious “crushing of the individual” of which the bourgeoisie have always accused Marxism, with their usual stupidity. The reason is simple: like all relationships that can be considered, the relationship between the individual and the collectivity to which he belongs depends not on the fictions of the law, but on the very nature of that collectivity.

As far as the revolutionary party is concerned, it neither opposes nor can it oppose as a whole each of its members considered individually: on the contrary, it exists itself only so far as there are militants who have managed to coordinate their efforts with maximum efficiency to achieve their common goal; conversely, each of these militants exists as such only insofar as he or she is an element of the whole. Far from oppressing or crushing the individual, the party is ultimately only the rational use of a series of individual efforts that, outside it, would not only be lost, but would not even have been born; if, therefore, we wish (in response to the democrats and not because it would be important to us) to define the relationship between the individual and the collectivity in a party that denies bourgeois individualism and democratic guarantees on principle, it must be said that it is precisely in him and through him that the individual gets rid of the purely fictitious sovereignty to which democratism condemns him in order to become a real force, within the limits of determinism. Of course.

What happened in the Stalinist party, by contrast? Degenerate Trotskyism, following vulgar democratism, deplores the fact that the famous habeas corpus “guarantees” for militants were abolished and that, instead of being assured freedom of expression, they were subjected to a dictatorship. That’s the crux of the matter! The so-called “Stalinist” party is the Bolshevik Party at a certain point in its historical existence that can be characterized as such: it has behind it a great revolutionary victory, but it has lost its working class elite in the civil war and it finds itself faced with tasks for which it was not only unprepared, but for which, to tell the truth, it was not created, since it was a question of managing, according to sound bourgeois principles, an economy that had been disorganized by the sabotage and flight of the bourgeoisie, in addition to which the different and opposite principles of socialist management were in this case inapplicable. In the context of Russia, what is at stake, as well as revolutionary political continuity, is economic recovery or death, reconstruction or collapse in the worst social convulsions with the threat of the worst white terror. The result of all this is a complete change in the composition of the party and at the same time a complete change in its mentality; immediatist praxis tends inevitably to prevail over the concerns of theoretical rigour and fidelity to principles when such conditions exert their pressure. Of course, immediate pragmatism was ultimately to prevail since no help came from outside (i.e., from the International) to the Russian party. It could not do so by simply throwing overboard all the traditions and memories of the past; but since it was by its nature the living negation, there remained only one resort: on the one hand to display a political and theoretical continuity that would not have stood up to the slightest examination, however slight, if it had been possible, and on the other hand getting rid of any resistance by the revolutionaries to this “new course”, and doing this precisely by appealing to the opinion, to the conscience, to the feelings of this new party that the Bolshevik Party had already become to a certain extent, in short, by opposing the sovereign authority of the democratic majority to the only authority that Lenin and so many Bolsheviks formerly recognized: that of Communist principles, of Communist doctrine, of the Communist programme. What, in this phase appears to true Marxists as a thousand times more ignoble than sanctions (expulsion, exclusion, imprisonment, deportation and later outright massacre) is precisely this exploitation by Stalinism of democratic legality, of purely formal rule, the mystifying falsehood of the sovereignty of the majority, in short this odious fiction which, on the scale of the whole of society, has been used for more than a hundred years by the bourgeoisie not to “ensure the freedom of the individual” as it claims, but to crush the proletariat and the revolution! That the alteration of the party was very often insufficient to obtain this majority for the Stalin fraction, that it had on the contrary to rig it by manipulations, campaigns, manoeuvres, this in no way proves that the Stalinist party was not “truly democratic”, but that the abandonment of communist practice, which rests entirely on the collective effort to align collective action to revolutionary goals and therefore to common doctrine, and the transition to democratic practice, which only seeks to obtain majorities, necessarily brings about the return of every flaw of bourgeois political life. The Stalinist party was materially democratic, not only by its recourse to the democratic fiction revealed more than a century earlier by Marxism, but by the infamy of all its interior life.

When in 1923 Trotsky wrote his The New Course to call for a cleaning up of the internal regime, he was aware of all this, and what he demanded, as we will see later, was not “democratic guarantees”, but a return to the normal life of a revolutionary party. Whatever his positions may have been at the time of his personal decline, and whatever language he used at that time and that of the language of the party and even of the International19, Trotsky was absolutely pure of democratic illusions and form-alism, certainly no less pure than Lenin himself. Obviously, we cannot cite everything, but three references will suffice here.

In The Lessons of the Paris Commune he endeavours, drawing a parallel between the Commune and the Russian Revolution, to show all the superiority of the Party organization and the insufficiency of the elective principle to provide
the proletariat with a political and military leadership capable of winning victory. He writes: “The Central Committee of the National Guard [whose role in the Commune is known to us] was in effect a Council of Deputies of the armed workers and the petty bourgeoisie. Such a Council, elected directly by the masses who have taken the revolutionary road, represents an excellent apparatus for action. But at the same time, and just because of its immediate and elementary connection with the masses who are in the state in which the revolutionary has found them, it reflects not only all the strong sides but also the weak sides of the masses, and it reflects at first the weak sides still more than it does the strong”. Having shown that “at the very moment when this responsibility was enormous” (the government had fled to Versailles) the democratically constituted National Guard “lastened to unload its responsibility”, and instead of acting in a revolutionary way, “imagined legal elections to the Commune”, it shows that “Passivity and indiscipline were supported in this case by the sacred principle of federation and autonomy”, well reflecting “without a doubt the weak side of a certain section of the French proletariat” at the time, “hostility to capitalist organization – a heritage of petty bourgeois localism and autonomism”. It is therefore on the basis of the facts that he demonstrates the superiority of an organization “which rests upon the whole history of its past, which foresees theoretically the paths of development”, an organization which is not “a machine for parliamentary manoeuvres”, but “the accumulated and organized experience of the proletariat”, in short of the workers’ party above any elected form of workers’ organization which, precisely because of its direct connection with the masses, cannot fail to reflect all its weak sides.

Passing from the political to the military question, Trotsky’s criticism of the democratic conception of the proletarian struggle hardened further: to rid, he said, “the National Guard of the counter-revolutionary command. Complete electability was the only means for it, the majority of the National Guard being composed of workers and revolutionary petty bourgeoisie”. But, he added, this demand for “electability in this case had as its immediate task not to give good commanders to the battalions, but to liberate them from commanders devoted to the bourgeoisie”, explaining, based on his own revolutionary experience as the founder of the Red Army: “As a rule, the elected command is pretty weak from the technical-military standpoint and with regard to the maintenance of order and of discipline. Thus, at the moment when the army frees itself from the old counter-revolutionary command which oppressed it, the question arises of giving it a revolutionary command capable of fulfilling its mission... And this question can only be decided by means of simple elections... Electability can in no wise be a fetish, a remedy for all evils... a strong party leadership is needed”. This is a lesson taken from revolutionary experience, a communist principle which, for today’s “Trotskyists” has become a dead letter.

In Terrorism and Communism, we also find this brilliant refutation of the criticisms that the backward defenders of “working-class democracy” already addressed to the “dictatorship of the Bolshevik Party”: “We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of our party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the clarity of its theoretical vision and its strong revolutionary organization that the party has afforded to the Soviets the possibility of becoming transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this “substitution” of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality, there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class. It is quite natural that, in the period in which history brings up those interests, in all their magnitude, on to the order of the day, the Communists have become the recognized representatives of the working class as a whole. But where is your guarantee, certain wise men ask us, that it is just your party that expresses the interests of historical development? Destroying or driving underground the other parties, you have thereby prevented their political competition with you, and consequently you have deprived yourselves of the possibility of testing your line of action. This idea is dictated by a purely liberal conception of the course of the revolution. In a period in which all antagonisms assume an open character, and the political struggle swiftly passes into a civil war, the ruling party has sufficient material standard by which to test its line of action, without the possible circulation of Menshevik papers. Noske crushes the Communists, but they grow. We have suppressed the Mensheviks and the SRs – and they have disappeared. This criterion is sufficient for us. At all events, our problem is not at every given moment statistically to measure the grouping of tendencies; but to render victory for our tendency secure. That tendency is the tendency of the revolutionary dictatorship; and in the course of the latter, in its internal friction, we must find a sufficient criterion for self-examination”.

When in 1936, in The Revolution Betrayed, Trotsky unfortunately would come to demand his “Soviet democracy” against the “Stalinist dictatorship”, he could only justify his shift with a banality completely unworthy of him and of Marxism: “Everything is relative in this world, where change alone endures”. But thirty years later the disciples of his decline have still not noticed this.

The third text, “Is the conversion of the Soviets into parliamentary democracy likely?” (which appeared in the syndicalist review, La Révolution prolétarienne, in May 1929) has the benefit of hindsight after the defeat of the Russian Opposition. By then Trotsky’s struggle against Stalinism had already run off the rails in terms of principles and even historical reality, but the great revolutionary had not yet, as we will see, forgotten anything from the Marxist criticism of democratism. “If the Soviet power struggles with increasing difficulties, if the crisis... of the dictatorship becomes more and more accentuated, if the Bonapartist danger is not averted, is it not better to set out towards democracy? This open or implied question arises in a number of articles devoted to the latest events in the USSR. I am not making a judgement here on what is better or not. I am trying to clarify what flows from the objective logic of development. And I come to this deduction that nothing is less likely than the conversion of the Soviets into parliamentary democracy, or to be more precise, this conversion is absolutely impossible”. In 1929 Trotsky replied to his social-democratic adversaries that, whatever one might wish, the return of the USSR to parliamentary democracy was historically excluded. In 1936, he made this return the central political demand of the Opposition for the USSR. Our Party’s thesis is that, in so doing, he shifted from the terrain...
of communism onto that of social democracy. It is therefore essential to show that the justified criticism made by the Trotsky of 1929 of his social-democratic opponents was entirely at odds with the Trotsky of 1936, as well as his disciples in 1968.

The reasons invoked by Trotsky are twofold: those that are international and general, and those specifically Russian, the two naturally linked. Let’s look first at the international reasons:

“To express my idea more clearly, I must put aside its geographical limits and it will suffice to recall certain trends in Europe’s political development since the war which has not been an episode but rather, the bloody prologue of the new era. Nearly all the wartime leaders are still alive. For the most part, they said... that it was the last war and that it would be followed by the reign of democracy and peace... Now, not a single one of them would dare say these words. Why? Because war has brought us to a time of great tensions, great struggles, with the prospect of new wars. Powerful trains are rushing towards each other at the present moment, on the rails of universal domination. We cannot measure our era by the yardstick of the 19th century, which was the century par excellence for the extension of democracy. The 20th century in many respects will be distinguished more from the 19th century than all modern history is distinguished from the Middle Ages... By analogy with electro-technology, democracy can be defined as a system of switches and insulators against the too strong currents of the national or social struggle. There has not been an epoch in human history so saturated with antagonisms as our own... Under too high a tension of class and international contradictions, the switches of democracy melt and shatter. Such are the short circuits of dictatorship. The weakest switches obviously go first. But the strength of internal and global contradictions is not diminishing, it is increasing. One could hardly be reassured by noting that the process has only taken hold of the periphery of the capitalist world. Gout begins with the little finger of the hand or the big toe; but once on its way, it goes to the heart”. This is very well observed and expressed. Our party thesis is that the communist movement had to draw all the consequences from this reality of the 20th century: it made no sense to implore the bourgeoisie to keep the “switches” of democracy, which had always been installed against us, but which had become useless for the bourgeoisie; we had to blow them ourselves, with the high-voltage current of the proletarian revolution. The Moscow centre of the Communist International did not draw all these consequences, including Trotsky. This was one of the reasons for the ruin of the International. But it was the same error, applied this time to the struggle against Stalin, and no longer against Mussolini or Hitler, which made Trotsky’s Fourth International a stillborn organism.

Let us now see the more specifically Russian reasons why Trotsky considered it impossible in 1929 to re-establish parliamentary democracy in Russia: “When we oppose parliamentary democracy to the Soviets, we have in mind a particular parliamentary system, and we forget another – essential – aspect of the question, namely that the October 1917 revolution was revealed as the greatest democratic revolution in human history. The confiscation of land ownership, the complete liquidation of class distinctions and privileges, the destruction of the Tsarist bureaucratic and military apparatus, the introduction of national egalitarianism and the right of peoples to self-determination, this is an essentially democratic task that was undertaken, which the February revolution hardly came close to, leaving it almost entirely to the October revolution. Only the inconsistency of the liberal-socialist coalition made the Soviet dictatorship possible, based on the union of workers, peasants and oppressed nationalities. The reasons that prevented our weak and backward democracy from accomplishing its historic task will not allow it, even in the future, to place itself at the head of the country, because in recent times the problems and difficulties have become greater, and democracy smaller... The Soviet system is not a simple form of government that could be compared in the abstract with parliamentary democracy: it essentially deals with the ownership of land, banks, mines, factories and railways. We must not forget these ‘trifles’ by getting drunk on the common ground with democracy. We will fight against the return of the landowner, the peasant, today as ten years ago, to the last drop of blood... To tell the truth, the peasant would more easily tolerate the return of the capitalist, because State industry so far only provides peasants with manufactured products on conditions less advantageous than those of the merchant of the past... But the peasant remembers that the landowner and the capitalist were the Siamese twins of the old regime... the peasant understands that the capitalist would not return alone, but only in the company of the landowner. That is why he does not want either of them; this is the powerful, albeit negative, reason for the strength of the Soviet regime. We should call a spade a spade. It is not a matter of the introduction of an insubstantial democracy, but Russia’s return onto the path of capitalism. But what would this second edition of Russian capitalism be? Over the past 15 years, the global picture has changed profoundly. The strong have become infinitely stronger, the weak have become incomparably weaker. The struggle for world supremacy has taken on gigantic proportions. Each stage of this struggle was waged on the bones of weak and backward nations. Capitalist Russia could not at present occupy even the third-class position in the global system to which Tsarist Russia had been consigned by the onward march of the last war. Russian capitalism would now be an enslaved capitalism, a semi-colonized capitalism, with no future. Today’s Russia Mark 2 would occupy a place somewhere between Russia Mark 1 and India. The Soviet system of nationalized industry and the monopoly of foreign trade, despite all its contradictions and difficulties, is a protective system for the independence of the country’s culture and economy. This was understood by the many democrats themselves who were drawn to the side of the Soviet government not by socialism, but by a patriotism which had assimilated the elementary lessons of history... A handful of impotent doctrinaires would have liked a democracy without capitalism. But the serious social forces, the enemies of the Soviet regime, want capitalism without democracy.”

Trotsky’s Marxist reasoning is a hundred cubits above the formal and abstract reasoning of his social-democratic adversaries of 1929, but also (a conclusion which matters more to us here) way above that of his “disciples” of 1968, who never did anything but push his own abstract and formal reasoning in 1936 to the point of absurdity.

The struggle, he rightly says, is a social struggle and it is on the outcome of this social struggle that the political form destined to triumph depends. Parliamentary democracy succumbed to the blows of the democratic revolution. His supporters – those who reason in political rather than social terms – do not understand that wishing for its re-establishment...
amounts to wishing for the liquidation of the conquests of this democratic revolution. “The serious social forces” (that is to say the classes dispossessed by the October Revolution) would, without a doubt, wish to liquidate these conquests to return to the old order, but the possibility of doing so by democratic means has been excluded by history. Even in 1929, the Russian peasantry would not allow itself to be dispossessed of the land without a second civil war: where would the classes dispossessed by October find the force necessary to fight almost the entire Russian population? Trotsky does not say it here, but he knows it and it is obvious: they could only find it in the armies of the imperialist powers, intervening once again against Russia and defeating it (just as the European coalition intervened against Napoleonic France, where the Bourbons would not have never been restored without that coalition’s victory over all the French people). But then, the political form intended to triumph would in no way be the national parliament dreamed of by the “impotent doctrinaires”, but, as we might say today, a puppet republic of the kind that the USA supports in the regions of Asia that it controls.

The same reasons that set Trotsky against the social democrats still prevented him, in 1929, from putting his struggle against Stalin behind the flag of Soviet democracy: Trotsky knew full well that in the Soviets there were both supporters of socialism like him and forces which, without being in the least socialist, simply did not want Russia to return to a state of semi-colonial dependence on Western capitalism and therefore also did not want a restoration. These forces were all the non-proletarian strata and enemies of revolutionary internationalism, who, whether outside or inside the Party, approved the Stalinist orientation out of “democratic patriotism, which had assimilated the elementary lessons of history”. It was this “Ustryalovism” that Lenin was the first to denounce and which, born in the most informed circles of émigrés, infiltrated the ruling Party – Trotsky never ceased to denounce the fact – under the banner of “socialism in one country”. As for Soviet democracy, this “switch”, this “isolator” intended by the Bolsheviks to prevent the revolution from collapsing in a sterile struggle between the socialist proletariat and the lower-bourgeois peasantry, Trotsky knew full well that it was the high-voltage current of the civil war that shattered it, imposing the pure proletarian dictatorship of war communism, with its forced requisitions and its “authoritarian” drafting of the revolutionary peasants into the Red Army. It would take many years before this defender of the Bolshevik dictatorship of the proletariat, the author of the passage from Terrorism and Communism quoted above, invoked it against the Stalinist party!

In fact, there are three phases in Trotsky’s long struggle as leader of the Opposition. In the first – well illustrated by the 1923 text, The New Course – he vigorously denounced the anomalies of the internal regime of the Party and the policy of the Central Committee, tried to alert the Party to the danger of degeneration to which the policies (international as well that interior) were exposing the proletarian dictatorship, of which the Party was the only guarantor; but very far from presenting himself as a candidate for the leadership of the Party, he stood aside to some extent, satisfied with refuting the inventions of the campaign that the Central Committee orchestrated against him from 1921, so far aside that when he wrote The New Course, he was still ignoring the real situation, which would not be revealed to him until 1923, when Kamenev and Zinoviev broke with Stalin.

In other words, in the first phase, he responded to the parliamentary campaign that had been launched against him and which aimed at the same goal as all campaigns of this kind: to cut off his path to power. In this regard, it is important to note that where bourgeois imbecility has seen proof of the misdeeds of “communist totalitarianism”, our current has recognized the misdeeds of the elective principle and of democracy applied to the party organ. The fact that the campaign broke out in the party which called itself “communist” is easily explained by the fact that in the USSR there was no parliament, but what is a power struggle founded on the competition of individuals and the disregard for all principles, if not a parliamentary type of struggle?

In the second phase, Trotsky no longer confined himself to defending Marxist positions against revisionism in power. He entered onto the “path of reform of the Soviet regime” as he himself would say in The Revolution Betrayed, to characterize the phase before 1936. In the absence of a parliament, this reformist struggle could not take the form of a struggle for the legal replacement of a government judged incapable of keeping the USSR on the road of socialism by the better government of the Opposition. In substance, however, this is what it was. For the reformist socialist, the “obstacle” to socialist transformation is the parliamentary majorities supporting bourgeois governments. To the Trotskyist Opposition at the time, this “obstacle” seemed to be the majority supporting the Stalinist Central Committee, or rather the internal regime of the party that was supposedly preventing the Opposition from wresting its majority away from Stalinism. In reality, in the first case, the obstacle is not this or that government, but the existence of the bourgeois State, which must be destroyed and not “reformed”; in the second case, the obstacle equally lay in the existence of the State, in the power of a party whose degeneration was irreversible and which, far from resulting from the internal regime, was itself the very reason for this regime. What prevents the vulgar socialist from identifying the real obstacle is that he is not revolutionary; what drove the revolutionary Trotsky to fall into a reformist error with regard to the Soviet State was his inability to separate himself completely from the party of “socialism in one country”. In this phase, however, his positions retain a final link with the Marxist tradition: it is on the party and the party alone that the fate of the dictatorship of the proletariat depends. In the third phase, this final link would be broken. Trotsky would move on from the revolutionary parliamentarism in the party that characterized the previous phase, to pure parliamentarism in society, that is, to the demand for the restoration of electoral freedom in the USSR.

To illustrate the first phase, we refer to the text from 1923 cited above, The New Course. If the terminology already presents the ambiguity denounced above, like all the terminology used for that matter by the Bolshevik Party, even in its good period, the methodology is not at all formal, since Trotsky studied the determinism which, under the conditions of power, risked making the party lose its nature as the most revolutionary fraction of the proletariat and consequently its function as a class party, due to “the question of the party generations” and “the question of social composition” and above all questions of State and administrative tasks. The alert he launched does not concern the lack of freedom of party members, as in popular social-democratic criticism, but the alteration of the organic relationships between centre and
periphery, summit and base within the party, the alteration of the relations between party and State, and, to crown it all, the alteration of the real tradition of the party at the same time as its purely formal invocation. Let us judge:

“There is one thing that ought to be clearly understood from the start: the essence of the present disagreements and difficulties does not lie in the fact that the ‘secretaries’ have overreached themselves on certain points and must be called back to order, but in the fact that the party as a whole is about to move on to a higher historical stage... To be sure, it is not a question of breaking the organizational principles of Bolshevism, as some are trying to have us believe, but to apply them to the conditions of the new stage in the development of the party23. It is a question primarily of instituting healthier relations between the old cadres and the majority of the members who came to the party after October... Theoretical preparation, revolutionary tempering, political experience, these represent the party’s basic political capital whose principal possessors, in the first place, are the old cadres of the party. On the other hand, the party is essentially a democratic organization, that is, a collective which decides upon its road by the thought and the will of all its members. It is completely clear that in the complicated situation of the period immediately following October, the party made its way all the better for the fact that it utilized to the full the experience accumulated by the older generation, to whose representatives it entrusted the most important positions in the organization. The result of this state of things has been that, in playing the role of party leader and being absorbed by the questions of administration... For the communist masses, it brings to the forefront purely bookish, pedagogical methods of participating in political life: elementary political training courses, examinations of the knowledge of its members, party schools, etc. Thence the bureaucratism of the apparatus, its cliquism, its exclusive internal life, in a word, all the traits that constitute the profoundly negative side of the old course. The fact that the party lives on two separate storeys bears within it numerous dangers... The chief danger of the old course, a result of general historical causes as well as of our own mistakes, is that the apparatus manifests a growing tendency to counterpose a few thousand comrades, who form the leading cadres, to the rest of the mass whom they look upon only as an object of action. If this regime should persist, it would threaten to provoke, in the long run, a degeneration of the party at both its poles, that is, among the party youth and among the leading cadres... In its prolonged development, bureaucratization threatens to detach the leaders from the masses, to bring them to concentrate their attention solely upon questions of administration, of appointments and transfers, of narrowing their horizon, of weakening their revolutionary spirit, that is, of provoking a more or less opportunistic degeneration of the Old Guard, or at the very least of a considerable part of it”. Then, considering the social composition of the party, Trotsky noted:

“The proletariat realizes its dictatorship through the Soviet State. The communist party is the leading party of the proletariat and, consequently, of its State. The whole question is to realize this leadership without merging into the bureaucratic apparatus of the State... The communists find themselves variously grouped in the party and the State apparatus. In the latter, they are hierarchically dependent upon each other and stand in complex personal reciprocal relations to the non-party mass. In the party, they are all equal in all that concerns the determination of the tasks and the fundamental working methods of the party. The communists working at the bench are part of the factory committees, administrate the enterprises, the trusts and the syndicates, are at the head of the Council of People’s Economy, etc. In the direction that it exercises over the economy, the party takes and should take into account the experience, the observations, the opinions of all its members placed at the various rungs of the ladder of economic administration. The essential, incomparable advantage of our party consists in its being able, at every moment, to look at industry with the eyes of the communist machinist, the communist specialist, the communist director, and the communist merchant, collect the experiences of these mutually complementary workers, draw conclusions from them, and thus determine its line for the proletariat in general and each enterprise in particular. It is clear that such leadership is realizable only on the basis of a vibrant and active democracy inside the party24. When, contrariwise, the methods of the ‘apparatus’ prevail, the leadership of the party gives way to administration by its executive organs (committee, bureau, secretary, etc.). With such a degeneration of the leadership, the principal superiority of the party, its multiple collective experience, retires to the background. Leadership takes on a purely organizational character and frequently degenerates into order-giving and meddling. The party apparatus goes more and more into the details of the tasks of the Soviet apparatus, lives the life of its day to day cares, lets itself be influenced increasingly by it and fails to see the forest for the trees... The whole daily bureaucratic practice of the Soviet State thus infiltrates the party apparatus and introduces bureaucratism into it. The party, as a collectivity, does not feel its leadership, because it does not realize it. Thence the discontentment or the lack of understanding, even in those cases where leadership is correctly exercised. But this leadership cannot maintain itself on the right line unless it avoids crumbling up in paltry details, and assumes a systematic, rational and collective character. So it is that bureaucratism not only destroys the internal cohesion of the party but weakens the necessary exertion of influence by the latter over the State apparatus. This is what completely escapes the notice and the understanding of those who yell the loudest about the leading role of the party in its relationships to the Soviet State”.

With regard to factional groups and formations, Trotsky in no way claimed the ridiculous “democratic right” to form them. But while considering them, as a Marxist, to be “dangerous anomalies”, he denied that it was possible to prevent their birth or to promote their absorption “by purely formal measures”; he noted that the bureaucratic regime of the party was on the contrary one of the main sources of factionalism, rightly accused the defenders of the purely formal party unity of constituting themselves the worst faction, “the bureaucratic conservative fraction” and concluded in a perfectly correct way that the only way to prevent the formation of factions was “a certain policy, a correct course adapted to the real situation”25.

Not a trace of democratic illusion in all this. The anomalies in the life of the party (including, in the last chapter, the continual references to Lenin and Leninism, marking the worst manifestations of opportunism) are justly characterized, as well as their historical causes: not the “exercise of power” in general as the anarchists claimed, but the exercise of power in a deeply heterogeneous society, since between the proletariat (in any case too weak and weakened still further by the civil
war) and the an vast peasantry there existed no identity of daily and fundamental interests as the party leadership seemed to believe in a society further afflicted with a very low cultural level and isolated from the rest of the world by capitalist intrigue. Sadly, Trotsky would never again attain this high level of critique. But until the fatal slide of 1936, despite all its mistakes, he remained faithful to the magnificent conclusion of Chapter 4 of The New Course:

“The most important historical instrument for the accomplishment of all these tasks is the party. Naturally, not even the party can tear itself away from the social and cultural conditions of the country. But as the voluntary organization of the vanguard, of the best, the most active and the most conscious elements of the working class, it is able to preserve itself much better than can the State apparatus from the tendencies of bureaucratism. For that, it must see the danger clearly and combat it without let-up.”

When in the second phase Trotsky went over to the struggle for the “democratization of the party”, social democracy saw there, not without some reason, its adversary taking a step in its direction. Indignant, Trotsky replied to these allegations: “It is a great misunderstanding that is easily exposed. Social democracy is for the restoration of capitalism in Russia. But it is only possible to steer in this direction by pushing the proletarian vanguard into the background. If social democracy approves of Stalin’s economic policy, it will also have to come to terms with his political methods. A real transition to capitalism could only be ensured by a dictatorial power. It is ridiculous to demand the restoration of capitalism in Russia and, at the same time, to sigh for democracy”. The attack was justified, but the fact that it is ridiculous to sigh for democracy when hoping for the restoration of capitalism, does not make it, in the least, a condition of fighting for socialism, that ceased to be the case! If a Marxist of Trotsky’s calibre did not take note of this objection, it was because the following seemed very obvious to him: if the course towards capitalism went through the annihilation of the proletarian vanguard within the party itself, then the resistance (also within the party) of this vanguard to being annihilated was the only possible political expression of resistance to this course. Reasoning that lacked only a “small” condition to be correct: that the course towards capitalism remained a more or less distant risk, and that the adversary confronted within the party was not precisely the political embodiment of the class enemy, since in no case can the class enemy be beaten peacefully, imploring it to respect “legality”, whatever that may be. Unlike the dullards who claim to be his disciples, Trotsky felt this so well that in his Defence of the USSR (1929), he wrote in full: “It would be Quixotic, not to say idiotic, to fight for democracy in a party which is realizing the rule of a class hostile to us... But for the Opposition the struggle for party democracy has meaning only on the basis of the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat”.

The passionate refusal to recognize that the proletariat was defeated, that the party would never again become revolutionary, is what characterizes the Trotskyism of the second phase. The quotes below will show with what a dangerously seductive face (which he would not retain, and would never find again), Trotskyist opportunism came into being. Here, for example, is an extract from Trotsky’s speech before the Central Control Commission before which he appeared in June 1927 on the accusation of having violated party discipline by “delivering fractional speeches” at the recent session of the Executive Committee of the Communist International and for having taken part in the demonstrations in favour of Smilga, an oppositionist exiled to Siberia:

“What have you done with this in a few years?... In meetings, especially in workers and peasants cells, you say God knows what about the Opposition, you ask with what ‘resources’ the Opposition carries out its task: workers, perhaps out of ignorance, perhaps unconsciously, perhaps also sent by you, ask these ultra-reactionary questions. And there are speakers who are cowardly enough to answer these questions in an evasive manner. To put it bluntly, if you were truly a Central Control Commission you would have a duty to put an end to this filthy, miserable, disgusting, Stalinist campaign!”

To the Stalinist Aaron Soltz who, reproaching Trotsky for the Opposition’s “Platform of 83”, had said to him: “Where does it lead then? Do you know the history of the French Revolution, and where did it end up? To arrests and the guillotine”, Trotsky replied with this speech: “We must refresh our knowledge of the French Revolution at all costs. During the French Revolution, many people were guillotined. And we have shot many. But the French Revolution included two major chapters, one of which unfolded thus (ascending curve) and the other thus (descending curve)... When the chapter entered the rising curve, the French Jacobins, the Bolsheviks of that time, guillotined the royalists and the Girondins. We knew this chapter when we, the Opposition, shot the White Guards and the Girondins, with you. Then a new chapter opened in France when... the Thermidorians and the Bonapartists, together with the Jacobins on the right began to banish and shoot the Jacobins on the left, the Bolsheviks at the time... There is not one among us who is afraid of the shootings. We are all old revolutionaries. But you have to know who to shoot and in which chapter. When we shot, we knew full well which chapter we were in. But today, do you clearly understand within which chapter you are preparing to shoot us? I’m afraid you’re going to shoot us... in the Thermidor chapter... It is certainly necessary to learn the lessons of the French Revolution. But does that mean it is necessary to repeat them?”

What is reflected, clear as day, in these passages is the “Ustyralovist” counter-revolution in progress, but Trotsky continued, despite the violence of his struggle, to speak the language of a party comrade to Stalinist agents. The violence must therefore not obscure the fact that the demand for “democratization of the party” was only a particular application of the United Front tactics dear to the Bolsheviks (including Trotsky); without a united political front with the Ustyralovists within the party, the organizational break would have been inevitable; but, as soon as Trotsky refused this rupture, precisely because he considered the United Front not only possible, but necessary, this political front was fatally translated in terms of organization, the two currents formally belonging to the same left.

If you need to be convinced of the reality of this frontism (also accompanied by a fatal blindness of Trotsky on the class divide which from 1927 separated his current of that of national communism), it will be enough for you to read this passage from the same speech of June 1927 cited above which, forty years later, can only cause anger and despair in the revolutionary Marxist, while, in its infinite unconsciousness, contemporary Trotskyism blissfully admires it:
“If we lived in the conditions that existed before the imperialist war, before the revolution, in the conditions of a relatively slow accumulation of antagonisms, I believe that the split would be infinitely more likely than the maintenance of unity. But the situation today is different. Our differences of opinion have worsened considerably, the antagonisms have grown enormously... But at the same time, we have, first, an immense revolutionary power concentrated in the party, an immense wealth of experience concentrated in the works of Lenin, in the programme and traditions of the party. We have wasted a lot of this capital... but we still have a lot of pure gold. Secondly, the current period is a historical period of abrupt turns, gigantic events, colossal lessons from which it is necessary and possible to learn. Grandiose events have occurred which allow us to verify the two political lines that confront each other. The party can facilitate or hinder the knowledge of these lessons and their assimilation. You are hindering it. [This is a tragic euphemism that Trotsky is using to define the process of liquidation of the class party by national communism!] But we, we are fighting, and we will continue to fight for the political league of the October Revolution. We are so deeply convinced of the correctness of our line that we have no doubt that it will end up implanting itself in the consciousness of the proletarian majority of our party. What then is the duty of the Central Control Commission under these conditions? I think that this duty should consist in creating in this period of abrupt turns a more flexible and healthier regime in the party, in order to allow the gigantic events to verify, without shaking, the political lines confronting one another. The party must be given the opportunity to engage in self-criticism... based on major events. If we decide this, I reply that before a year or two, the course of the party will have been straightened. We do not have to proceed quickly; we must not take decisions that would then be difficult to repair. Take care not to be forced to say, ‘We separated from those we should have kept, and we kept those from whom we should have separated.’ This strange conclusion at least has the merit of revealing to us the secret of Trotsky’s political frontism: faced with the threat of the restoration of the regime prior to the revolution of 1917, which was historically achievable (as we saw above) by means of imperialist foreign intervention, a threat which haunted both the national communists and the proletarian internationalists and would haunt them all to the end, the Ustryalovists of the Party (in other words the Stalinist national communists) could not, he believed, do without the proletarian internationalists any more than the latter could do without Ustryalovists! Such is the crazy illusion that lies at the basis of the policy of “democratization of the party”. We see that here, frontism is also a form of the Sacred Union which, under all other conditions, Trotsky would have fought against with all the revolutionary passion of which he was capable; only the organic bond that attached him to the not only socialist, but democratic revolution of October could make him fall into this trap! The Sacred Union under the real or supposed threat of the bourgeois-democratic counter-revolution, what other explanation is there for the desperate efforts of Trotsky, as the following passage eloquently testifies, to keep the necessary response to the war that the Ustryalovist fraction had unleashed against the proletarian current within the framework of the democratic legality of the same party?

“The party regime flows from all the policy of the leadership. Behind the extremists of the Party Apparatus stands the reborn inner bourgeoisie. Behind it stands the world bourgeoisie. All these forces weigh on the proletarian vanguard and prevent it from raising its head, opening its mouth. The more the policy of the Central Committee deviates from the class line, the more it is forced to impose this policy from above on the proletarian vanguard by means of coercion. This is the origin of the revolting regime that reigns in the party... Stalin’s immediate goal: to split the party, to split the Opposition, to accustom the party to methods of physical annihilation, to set up teams of fascist hecklers, men working with fisticuffs, slaps, cudgels, putting people behind bars, that’s where the Stalinist course momentarily stopped before going further. Stalinism finds its unbridled expression by unleashing veritable thuggery. So now we repeat, these fascist methods are only the blind, unconscious fulfilment of a social order emanating from other classes (than the proletariat). The goal: to amputate the Opposition from the party and to destroy it physically. Already, voices are heard: ‘We will exclude a thousand, we will shoot a hundred and everything will become calm in the party.’ Thus speak the unfortunate blind, frightened and unleashed at the same time. It is the voice of Thermidor”. And here is the other panel of the diptych: “The violence will shatter against a just political line, which has the revolutionary courage of opposition cadres to serve it. Stalin will not create two parties. We say openly to the party: The dictatorship of the proletariat is in danger. And we firmly believe that the party – its proletarian core – will hear, understand, and rectify. The party is already deeply moved. Tomorrow it will be shaken to its roots...

“We hold the lever of Bolshevism. You will not tear it from our hands. We will apply it. You will not cut us off from the party, you will not cut us from the working class. We have experienced repression; we are used to blows. We will not deliver the October Revolution to Stalin’s policy, the essence of which can be expressed in a few words: The opposition is invincible. Exclude us today from the Central Committee, as you have arrested so many others: our platform will find its way... Prosecutions, exclusions, arrests will make our platform the most popular and precious document, closest to the heart of the international workers’ movement. Exclude us; you will not stop the victories of the Opposition: they will be the victories of the revolutionary unity of our party and of the Communist International”. We could fill pages with quotes proving that, until 1936, Trotsky did not believe that the counter-revolution had occurred. September 1929, in The Defence of the Soviet Union and the Opposition: “To regard the Communist Party – not its apparatus of functionaries but its proletarian core and the masses that follow it – as a finished, dead and buried organization, is to fall into sectarianism”. February 1930, in The Bolshevik-Leninists in the USSR: “I consider that there is no possibility of predicting the internal resources of the October Revolution and that there is no reason to draw the conclusion that they are exhausted and that Stalin should not be prevented from doing what he does. No one has designated us as the inspectors of historical development. We are the representatives of a particular tendency of Bolshevism, and we defend it at all turns and in all conditions”. October 1932: exiled to Prinkipo, this is how Trotsky concludes his criticism of the second five-year plan: “Tackling the economy is the business of politics. The party is the weapon of politics. The task
of all tasks: to regenerate the party and following the party, the Soviets and the unions. The reconstruction of all Soviet organizations is the most important and the most pressing task of the year 1933”.

As early as 1926, Stalin and his acolytes had responded to the Opposition’s struggle for democratization and recovery of the party32: “You will only challenge these cadres through civil war”. Democratic governments, more hypocritically, refer to elections, and it is the proletarian Party that warns the working class that without civil war, it will never get rid of bourgeois political domination and administration. Of course, it is not in the failure to start the civil war against the Stalinist State, but in the failure to give the same warning to the Russian and world proletariat and in the failure to have renounced democratic reform of the party and the State at the very moment when the enemy was declaring its own war, that the Trotskyist opposition lost all historic opportunity to contribute to the long-term historical reconstruction of the scattered and battered world communist movement.

That said, you’d have to be completely blind not to see that he had not yet moved his weapons and baggage into the camp of “democracy in general”. Only contemporary Trotskyist imbecility can deny that 1936 was, at the same time as being the logical outcome of a series of errors, a denial of Trotsky by Trotsky himself: such is the fatal dialectic of opportunism. 1936 indeed opens the third phase of Trotskyism, whose disastrous positions are formulated in The Revolution Betrayed. This time, Trotsky finally bows to the historical evidence: “The old Bolshevik Party is dead. And no force will resurrect it. A new revolution is unavoidable... Thus it is no longer a question of the ‘danger’ as it was twelve or thirteen years ago of a second party, but of its historic necessity as the sole power capable of further advancing the cause of the October revolution”. Be careful, precision is essential: the “revolutionary” programme that we are going to read is not (nor was it ever in Trotsky’s mind) the international programme of the Socialist Revolution, a kind of correction imposed by the “lessons of history” on the programme of that Revolution: that is just the stupidity of “disciples” who have read Trotsky exactly the same way as the Stalinists read... Lenin, as one might imagine; it is simply the programme of a still hypothetical revolution that would providentially reconnect the thread broken by Stalinism with the democratic and socialist revolution of October, correct the gap between the hopes of 1917 and the historical reality of 1936, in short, avenge the revolutionaries by abolishing at a stroke an odious present to bring them back to the radiant starting point. That a revolution thus conceived was only a fevered dream, history has proven beyond doubt, since it did not take place; and if its programme was carried out to a certain extent, it was not at all by a revolution, but by reform; not at all by a revolutionary party but by political forces that Trotsky would have hated if he could have seen them at work, just as much as he hated the social democrats of his time: namely the “destalinizing” heirs of Stalin. What interests us here, however, is not the unrealistic predictions, but the break with previous principles.

The programme of the “anti-bureaucratic” revolution states the following:

“The restoration of the right of criticism, and a genuine freedom of elections, are necessary conditions for the further development of the country. This assumes a revival of freedom of Soviet parties, beginning with the party of Bolsheviks, and a resurrection of the trade unions. The bringing of democracy into industry means a radical revision of plans in the interests of the toilers. Free discussion of economic problems will decrease the overhead expense of bureaucratic mistakes and zigzags. Ostentatious playthings... will be crowded out in favour of workers’ dwellings. ‘Bourgeois norms of distribution’ will be confined within the limits of strict necessity, and, in step with the growth of social wealth, will give way to socialist equality. Ranks will be immediately abolished. The tinsel of decorations will go into the melting pot. The youth will receive the opportunity to breathe freely, criticize, make mistakes, and grow up. Science and art will be freed of their chains. And, finally, foreign policy will return to the traditions of revolutionary internationalism”. There are two possibilities: either communism is nothing other than the denial of any possibility of abolishing not only classes, but even the smallest flaws of bourgeois civilization by means of political democracy, in which case such a programme is chucking communism overboard to throw itself headlong into social democratism, or else this programme is not social democratic, in which case someone will have to tell us what communism is!

To this dilemma, the “theoretical diplomacy” of degenerate Trotskyism has found a way out that resembles the kind of remedies that are said to be worse than the illness. This is how Isaac Deutscher (a Polish Trotskyist who became an expert on Eastern questions among the enlightened Anglo-Saxon bourgeoisie) wrote in his The Unfinished Revolution: “In post-capitalist society [such as that of the USSR] freedom of expression and association must fulfil a function radically different from that which it has in a capitalist regime”. Why’s that? Because, hold on, “in a post-capitalist society, there are no economic mechanisms that can keep the masses in bondage. Only political force can do this”. This doesn’t only not avoid social democratism, but also falls into an anarchist idiocy incapable of understanding that there has never existed, anywhere in history, “political force”, that is to say to say organized coercion, which is not born from the existence of some “economic mechanisms of enslavement” within society! Poor Trotsky, the luckless great Marxist, your disciples did not even realize that you had spent most of your opposition life describing the “economic mechanisms of enslavement” at work in Russian society after October!

In his terrible perplexity when viewing Russian society and the Russian economy, in his expressly formulated concern to “abandon such finished social categories as capitalism (and therewith ‘State capitalism’) and also socialism” (The Revolution Betrayed) Trotsky would not have disowned the term “post-capitalism”: two generations of “militants” who, in matters of revolutionary faith and even of Marxism, were just pygmies compared with him, made a mockery of his “logical contradictions”, as we can see. But this is not the point. We must allow opportunists (with the “right to criticize”) the cowardice that consists in blaming the failures, even real, of “leaders” for their own lack of principle. Let us suppose, for the sake of clarity, that Trotsky went so far as to say: the USSR is 50% socialist, but 50% bourgeois and even 50% sub-bourgeois too. The question raised by the foolish justification that Deutscher (taken as just one specimen of contemporary Trotskyism) gives for the reintroduction of communism into communism would remain exactly the same: was this
democratic “revolution” dreamed of by Trotsky aimed at the “socialist half” or on the contrary, the “capitalist half” of society after October?
This question may seem bizarre, but it turns out that as early as 1929, Trotsky himself answered it in a controversy (“The Defence of the Soviet Union and the Opposition”) with a certain comrade Urbahns who wanted, from that time, to bring Russia back onto the path of socialism... by means of a democratic struggle against Stalin. “The freedom to organize signifies a ‘freedom’ (we know its character very well) to carry on the class struggle in a society whose economy is based on capitalist anarchy, while its politics are kept within the framework of the so-called democracy. Socialism, on the other hand, is unthinkable... without the systematization of all social relations... [The role of the unions therefore] has nothing in common with the role of the trade unions in bourgeois states, where the ‘freedom to organize’ is itself not only a reflection of capitalist anarchy but an active element in it...

“Yet Urbahns advances the slogan of freedom to organize precisely in the general democratic sense. This would be absolutely correct33 – on one trifling condition, namely: if one recognizes that Thermidor is accomplished34. But in that case, it is already Urbahns himself who does not go far enough. To put forward the freedom to organize as an isolated demand is a caricature of politics. Freedom to organize is inconceivable without freedom of assembly, freedom of the press and all the other ‘freedoms’... And these freedoms are unthinkable outside the regime of democracy, that is, outside of capitalism. You have to learn to think things through”

A crucial passage. The question that occupies us, “thinking things through”, is understanding that the programme for a neo-liberal revolution conceived by the communist Trotsky for the USSR of 1936 has nothing to do with what he may have said or even thought of the existence of a post-capitalism in Russia, but is on the contrary perfectly consistent with his obstinate denial of Russian socialism, even if it is not in the least consistent with his own characterization of the twentieth century and with the Marxist critique of political democracy. The assertion will scandalize both “disciples” and a number of adversaries, in particular those who have only known how to react to Trotsky’s neo-social-democratic deviation with a neo-anarcho-syndicalist deviation. These unfortunates indeed believe equally strongly in the reality of the “new society” characterized by the class domination of the bureaucracy, this famous bureaucracy which is at the same time proletarian, insofar as it defended the property of the State, and bourgeois insofar as it oppressed the proletariat and risked leading the country to defeat in the imperialist war, and therefore to the restoration of the regime of the bourgeois Constituent Assembly, with all the threats of a return to the old regime that this entailed. And their misfortune consists in never having noticed that this “bureaucracy” was never anything but a bad attempt at social personification of the historical role of Stalinism, in other words the foolish attempt to present all the contradictions of Stalinism as a single social group out of the same mold35, whereas all the evidence points to a complex of national and international conditions being sufficient to explain it. If they had noticed this instead of interpreting Trotsky’s perplexities as the mystery of a new society, they would also have understood that “post-capitalism”, as a pseudo-duality of the role of bureaucracy with regard to socialism, was never more than the ideological justification for the political United Front, in which Trotsky tried, against all the odds, to cling onto what was left of the class party, now riveted to the “Ustryalovist” party in Russia. We must “learn to think things through” and also to distinguish between cause and effect! If we indeed ask what is the point of this United Front, “post-capitalism” will not give us any answer. “Post-capitalism”, for Trotsky, exists only to the extent that there exists for Russian society a historic possibility of going towards socialism, a possibility defined, internally, by the absence of the restoration of the regime of the Constituent Assembly with all that it would have implied for the conquests of the democratic Revolution carried out in October, and, externally, by the proletarian revolution. “Post-capitalism” is not some degree of “socialism”, but simply a kind of no man’s land in which the tendencies towards socialism continue their struggle against the tendencies towards capitalism embodied by Stalinism. It obviously takes two to make a United Front. But the fact of being two does not explain the United Front itself! Hateful as a gravedigger of the proletarian and Marxist tradition of Bolshevism, as a fulcrum of all the opportunist deviations of the International, as a strike force against all its proletarian currents, Stalinism, this ignoble nationalist deviation from the proletariat’s point of view, is never, from the point of view of the Russian democratic revolution, anything but a variant of Ustryalovism, that is to say of a current that no longer calls into question the conquests of this revolution, which renounces the restoration of the Constituent regime, and therefore, at the same time, prevents Russia from returning to its previous position of an “enslaved, semi-colonial capitalism, without a future”... in short it fulfills the “historic progressive mission” that consists of developing the productive forces, of liquidating the pre-bourgeois relations in which Russia would have remained frozen without the October Revolution. Class considerations in the broad sense – that is, in the sense of the interests of the international communist movement – drove Trotsky to fight, violently, the political opportunism of Stalinism; class considerations in the narrow sense – that is to say in the sense of the immediate interests of Russian workers who were subjected, by the “corps of overseers” who constituted the new State, to the most terrible pressure ever suffered by the working class – prompted him to fight just as violently against “socialism in one country”, that is to say the ideological camouflage covering true social oppression. But neither in the broad sense, nor even in the narrow sense, would any class consideration convince Trotsky – at least until 1936 – to break radically with Stalinism as Russian Ustryalovism, that is to say as the historic agent of an authentic economic and social revolution that his socialist scruples could wish to control and discipline, but not prevent, since it obviously created those famous “material bases” without which socialism is inconceivable. Such was the fatal error, the recognition of the progressive role of capitalism by Marxism having been everywhere and always accompanied not only by a total intransigence of the class party on its own social postulates, but by the maximum political independence with regard to the opposing party, when at least the class party was not gangedrened by opportunism. However, it is in the very nature of a political error of principle not to be able to find a definite theoretical foundation. On the contrary, the political error of principle is condemned to the lame justifications of ideology, and the devil knows if those Trotsky gave of his own were thus. But to see this you must be at least as Marxist as he was; you must understand that socialism is impossible without the
prior development of its material bases, which the disciples of Trotsky, having fallen back into self-managed socialism, reducing everything to the replacement of the bosses’ management by workers’ management, showed themselves to be incapable of understanding, if on the other hand they had the merit of refusing to follow this in the field of political democracy; but it was also necessary to understand what Trotsky always rightly affirmed, namely that democracy is inconceivable outside of capitalism, (which in no way leads to the consequence that capitalism cannot be conceived without democracy!) Unable to grasp this elementary Marxist truth, the “disciples” did not see that even if Trotsky had never written a single line to demonstrate the non-existence of the least bit of socialism in Russia, his neo-liberal revolution programme of 1936 alone would have been an implicit demonstration of this non-existence.

In reality, Trotsky never believed in Russian socialism, nor did he ever confuse the characteristics of socialism with those of capitalism, unlike his degenerate disciples, who speak to us of democratic socialism only to the extent that they believe in a market socialism, and believe in market socialism because once again, they have understood nothing of Trotsky’s polemic against Stalinism. When at the time of the first two five-year plans he ridiculed the latter’s claim to “throw the NEP overboard”, that is to say, to abolish market relations by virtue of administrative will alone, in other words to curb bourgeois anarchy by the sole virtue of political authority, Trotsky took aim at the voluntarist utopia of socialism in one country, and in doing so he was only faithfully defending the policy of controlled capitalism that Lenin had rightly considered as being the only option while awaiting the world revolution. But while he was still as informed and above all penetrating, his dufflers of disciples said that he was defending “the true economic policy of socialism” against the “false policy” of Stalin and concluded – just like the Stalinists of the following era – that socialism cannot do without the market or without wage earners! 36 Leaving aside this boring cascade of blunders, we must leave it to Trotsky himself to demonstrate, in The Revolution Betrayed, what we affirm:

“In industry, State ownership of the means of production prevails almost universally. In agriculture it prevails absolutely only in the Soviet farms (sovkhозы), which comprise no more than 10 percent of the tilled land. In the collective farms (kolkhozes), co-operative or group ownership is combined in various proportions with State and private ownership. The land, although legally belonging to the State, has been transferred to the collectives for ‘perpetual’ use, which differs little from group ownership... The new constitution... says, ‘... State property – that is, the possessions of the whole people’. This identification is the fundamental sophism of the official doctrine. It is perfectly true that Marxists, beginning with Marx himself, have employed in relation to the workers’ State the terms State, national and socialist property as simple synonyms. On a large historic scale, such a mode of speech involves no special inconveniences. But it becomes the source of crude mistakes, and of downright deceit, when applied to the first and still unassured stages of the development of a new society, and one moreover isolated and economically lagging behind the capitalist countries. In order to become social, private property must as inevitably pass through the State stage, as the caterpillar, in order to become a butterfly must pass through the pupal stage. But the pupa is not a butterfly. Myriads of pupae perish without ever becoming butterflies. State property becomes the property of ‘the whole people’ only to the degree that social privilege and differentiation disappear, and therewith the necessity of the State. In other words: State property is converted into socialist property in proportion as it ceases to be State property. And the contrary is true: the higher the Soviet State rises above the people, and the more fiercely it opposes itself as the guardian of property to the people as its squanderer, the more obviously does it testify against the socialist character of this State property... The enormous and wholly indubitable statistical superiority of the State and collective forms of economy, important though it is for the future, does not remove another and no less important question: that of the strength of bourgeois tendencies within the ‘socialist’ sector itself, and this not only in agriculture but in industry. The material level already attained is high enough to awaken increased demands in all, but wholly insufficient to satisfy them. Therefore, the very dynamic of economic progress involves an awakening of petty bourgeois appetites, not only among the peasants and representatives of ‘intellectual’ labour, but also among the upper circles of the proletariat37. A bare antithesis between individual proprietors and collective farmers, between private craftsmen and State industries, does not give the slightest idea of the explosive power of these appetites, which imbue the whole economy of the country, and express themselves, generally speaking, in the desire of each and every one to give as little as possible to society and receive as much as possible from it... While the State finds itself in continual struggle with the molecular action of these centrifugal forces, the ruling group itself forms the chief reservoir of legal and illegal personal accumulations. Masked as they are with new juridical norms, the petty bourgeois tendencies cannot, of course, be easily determined statistically. But their actual predominance in economic life is proven primarily by the ‘socialist’ bureaucracy itself... that monstrous and continually growing social distortion, which in turn becomes the source of malignant growths in society. ‘The worker in our country is not a wage slave and is not the seller of a commodity called labour power. He is a free workman’ (says Pravda). For the present period, this unctuous formula is unacceptable bragging. The transfer of the factories to the State changed the situation of the worker only juridically. In reality, he is compelled to live in need to work a definite number of hours for a definite wage. Those hopes which the worker formerly had placed in the party and the trade unions, he transferred after the revolution to the State created by him. But the useful functioning of this State turned out to be limited by the level of technology and culture. In order to raise this level, the new State resorted to the old methods of pressure upon the muscles and nerves of the worker. There grew up a corps of slave drivers... With piecework payment, hard conditions of material existence, lack of free movement, with terrible police repression penetrating the life of every factory, it is hard indeed for the worker to feel himself a ‘free workman.’ In the bureaucracy he sees the manager, in the State, the employer...”

“The struggle to raise the productivity of labour, together with concern about defence, is the fundamental content of the activity of the Soviet government. At various stages in the evolution of the Union this struggle has assumed various characters. The methods applied during the years of the first five-year plan and the beginning of the second, the methods of ‘shock brigade-ism’... The attempt to introduce a kind of piecework payment... The system of State distribution of products
had replaced the flexible differential valuation of labour with a so-called ‘premium system’ which meant, in essence, bureaucratic caprice. Only the abolition of the card system, the beginning of stabilization and the unification of prices, created the condition for the application of piecework payment. It was not the Soviet administrators who invented the secret of piecework payment. That system, which strains the nerves without visible external compulsion, Marx considered the most suitable to capitalistic methods of production”.

The return to piecework, leading to the rehabilitation of the rouble represented, according to Trotsky, not the renunciation of socialism, but merely the “abandonment of crude illusions”. “The form of wage payment is simply brought into better correspondence with the real resources of the country. ‘Law can never be higher than the economic structure,’” he wrote, quoting Marx.

“However, the ruling stratum of the Soviet Union cannot yet get along without a social disguise. [For them] ‘The rouble is becoming the sole real means for the realization of a socialist (?) principle of payment for labour’. Although in the old monarchy everything, even down to the public pissoirs, was called royal, this does not mean that in a workers’ State everything automatically becomes socialist. The rouble is the ‘sole real means’ for the realization of a capitalist principle of payment for labour, even though on a basis of socialist forms of property. When the rhythm of labour is determined by the chase after the rouble, then people do not expend themselves ‘according to ability’ – that is, according to the condition of their nerves and muscles – but in violation of themselves. This method can only be justified conditionally and by reference to stern necessity. To declare it ‘the fundamental principle of socialism’ means cynically to trample the idea of a new and higher culture in the familiar filth of capitalism... Socialism, or the lowest stage of communism, demands, to be sure, a strict control of the amount of labour and the amount of consumption, but it assumes in any case more humane forms of control than those invented by the exploitive genius of capital... In any case, State ownership of the means of production does not turn manure into gold, and does not surround with a halo of sanctity the sweatshop system, which wears out the greatest of all productive forces: man”.

“State compulsion like money compulsion is an inheritance from class society... In a communist society, the State and money will disappear. Their gradual dying away ought consequently to begin under socialism. We shall be able to speak of the actual triumph of socialism only at that historical moment when the State turns into a semi-State, and money begins to lose its magic power. This will mean that socialism, having freed itself from capitalist fetishes, is beginning to create a more lucid, free and worthy relation among men... The nationalization of the means of production and credit, the cooperative or State-izing of internal trade, the monopoly of foreign trade, the collectivization of agriculture, the law on inheritance – set strict limits upon the personal accumulation of money and hinder its conversion into private capital (usufruct, commercial and industrial). These functions of money, however, bound up as they are with exploitation, are not liquidated at the beginning of a proletarian revolution, but in a modified form are transferred to the State, the universal merchant, creditor and industrialist. The role of money in the Soviet economy is not only unfinished but, as we have said, still has a long growth ahead”.

Only the capitalist reality described above could lead Trotsky to the conviction that a new revolution was necessary; only this capitalist reality could suggest this analogy to him: “History has known elsewhere not only social revolutions which substituted the bourgeois for the feudal regime, but also political revolutions which, without destroying the economic foundations of society, swept out an old ruling upper crust (1830 and 1848 in France, February 1917 in Russia, etc.) The overthrow of the Bonapartist caste will, of course, have deep social consequences, but in itself it will be confined within the limits of political revolution”.

Whether we admit as the degenerate Trotskyists of today that this political revolution takes place on the basis of socialism, or to express itself in less static terms at a given time in the socialist transformation of society, the inconsistency becomes obvious, and the questions arise in droves: is the dictatorship of the proletariat therefore not necessary for socialist transformation? The socialist transformation can therefore continue when power has already been taken from the hands of the proletariat, which must then take it back through revolution, while only having to continue on the same path economically and socially? If we admit that the base is capitalist, everything becomes clear, if not exact: the proletariat has lost power; therefore the capitalist transformation of petty-bourgeois Russia is no longer part of a march to socialism, but part of a phase of world reaction; to reopen the path to socialism, the proletariat must regain power; but if it succeeds, it cannot, less than twenty years after October, pass to the phase of lower socialism within the national framework; it still cannot abolish the market, wage-labour, bourgeois relations of production; it can only climb a few additional steps in the succession of historical modes of production: the revolution is political, not social. The enormous inconsistency is to imagine that, just as in 1917, the proletariat could be brought (or better restored) to power by a popular revolution: the original alliance of the socialist proletariat and the democratic peasantry had in 1917 its raison d’être: the necessity of the democratic revolution, that is to say the liquidation of the landed aristocracy. In 1936, this revolution was no longer needed: it was completed; even in the event of a restoration, it is doubtful that the Constituent Assembly regime could have gone any further in the abolition of the social results of the democratic revolution than the Bourbons achieved on their return to France after the fall of the Napoleonic Empire. Under these new conditions, the alliance of the proletariat with all the popular classes can no longer have the revolutionary sense that it had in 1917: even conceived within the framework of an insurrectionary movement, it can only have a vulgar democratic and social-democratic sense; the union of all the people for freedom, the ignoble emblem of anti-fascism, which never succeeded even in a “purely political” revolution. Thus, inspired by a nostalgia for October, by a generous indignation against the growing social oppression within the framework of “socialism in one country”, Trotsky’s position in 1936 is nonetheless the liquidation of his Marxism and its communist principles.

It is certain that the “logical contradictions” of the Leader of the Opposition greatly contributed to preventing his disciples from deciphering the meaning of the turning point in 1936. But armed with its doctrine and its critical method, the Class
Party does without the logic of individuals; attached to principles that are the conquests of living experience, of the proletariat’s struggle, it does not run the risk, like opportunism, of confusing the humanly inevitable failings of defeated revolutionaries with the “lessons of history”!

Translation taken from: A Revolution Summed Up - Part 2: The false lessons about the counter-revolution in Russia; International Communist Party

1. “Social-barbarists” refers to the left-libertarian grouping Socialisme ou Barbarisme, which existed from 1948 to 1967.

2. If we absolutely must have examples, think of the aristocratic reaction before 1789, which accelerated the Revolution, or of Jacobinism, virtuous and egalitarian, which culminated in the bourgeois society of Thermidor and Empire.

3. Stalinism did not shy away from claiming the contrary, implicitly boasting of having built socialism within the national framework of Russia, which did not have the material premises for it in 1917 nor even ten years later, and explicitly because Stalin, in his Economic Problems of Socialism, claimed to “take advantage” of economic laws whose mere persistence proves the continued existence of a capitalist economy, and because the pseudo-theses of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary stated imperturbably that if socialism could have been achieved in Russia despite conditions that the Marxists of the past would have deemed unfavourable, this was explained by Lenin’s “scientific plan”!

4. The development of this point would go beyond the framework of this text (but the development of the Russian economy has been covered at length by our Party elsewhere).

5. Lenin never forgot it, he who always took care to distinguish not only State capitalism under the domination of the bourgeoisie from State capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat, but also this latter form of State capitalism from socialism itself. At the Fourteenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party in April 1925, the struggle between the Leningrad faction on the one hand, and the partisans of “socialism in one country” grouped around Bukharin and Stalin on the other, focused precisely on this distinction: whereas Stalin-Bukharin revised Lenin by arguing that it would be “defeatist” to consider that State capitalism was the dominant economic form in Russian industry of 1925, and not socialism, Zinoviev-Kamenev demonstrated that the liquidation of Lenin’s position was equivalent to an embalishment of the NEP, to a concealment of the real class conflict and to a transformation of the Proletarian Party into the National Party, with no other aim than to obtain an increase in workers’ output, a piece of demagoguery, in which the workers themselves could not help but feel all the falsehood. Trotsky (who did not take part in this Congress, because the divide between the Leningrad faction and Stalin, who until then had agreed against him, caught him off guard) never made a sufficient distinction between economic forms as such, always bringing up the political aspect, not only when it was legitimate, as during the first years of the Russian revolution, but also later, when he himself denounced the degeneration of power, and spoke not of State capitalism but of a socialism “using” the methods of capitalist accounting, a theoretically unsustainable position.

6. It is quite clear that this was not the case in the Russia of October, which suffered not from a plethora, but from an insufficiency of capitalist development, expressed not only by the low specific gravity of the islets of urban industry in the national economy, but still more so because of the predominance of small-scale farming. This is precisely why Lenin did not want the State management of all industry; it was rather imposed by the massive expropriations carried out by workers on the one hand and the flight of entrepreneurs on the other.

7. Even the pre-1914 revisionist, Eduard Bernstein, did not dare to formally deny this “right”, he who wrote in The Preconditions for Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy (1899): “Social democracy [should] make up its mind to appear what it is in reality today: a democratic, socialist party of reform. It is not a question of renouncing the so-called right of revolution, this purely speculative right which can be put in no paragraph of a constitution and which no statute book can prohibit, this right which will last as long as the law of nature forces us to die if we abandon the right to breathe. This imprescriptible and inalienable right is as little touched if we place ourselves on the path of reform as the right of self-defence is done away with when we make laws to regulate our personal and property disputes”. It is exactly by the same sleight of hand that social democracy, after 1914, eluded the central problem of the violent revolution, with the former adversary of Bernstein, Karl Kautsky, making himself his spiritual heir.

8. The old social democrats of the pre-1914 school rightly laughed at Stalin’s pretensions of building a national socialism. It just proves that about forty years ago, we were less ignorant, even in the camp of the liquidators, in matters of doctrine; that we still knew that socialism and market economy are incompatible, which not only the post-Stalinists, but even the “Trotskyists” have forgotten; but that does not change in the slightest the defeatism and overtly counter-revolutionary role of social democracy in the first post-war period.

9. When we leaf through this review, of which we can find a collection at Feltrinelli [a publishing house in Milan], we notice amazement that until this date in March 1918, the theoretical review of the proud Austrian social-democratic party published in Vienna, did not utter a word about the October Revolution, even though it was appearing with perfect regularity! And when it did so for the first time, it was, as we shall see, to proclaim abruptly... the defeat of this revolution – which, on the contrary, was to overcome the ordeal of the civil war so brilliantly. Lenin himself, who nevertheless appreciated Western opportunists for their true value, could not believe his ears when one day he asked Trotsky what official social democracy said about October, he replied that it preferred not to talk about it...

10. This accusation was formulated by the old social-democratic pontiff Rudolph Hilferding, with all the triviality that suited him, in the following way: “Lenin and Trotsky with a select group of followers who were never able to come to independent decisions as a party but always remained an instrument in the hands of the leaders (the same was true later with the fascist and national-socialist parties) [the reader can treat the identification of Lenin-Trotsky with Mussolini-Hitler with the contempt it deserves!] seized power at a time when the old State apparatus was collapsing”. The remark merits examination. It aims both to diminish the virtue of the Bolsheviks (by suggesting that it is “easy” to make a revolution
where the State apparatus has broken down!)] and to justify the inertia of Western social democracy, which had before it a terribly robust and well-armed bourgeois State power. Pitiful subterfuge! It is perfectly obvious that one of the characteristics of a revolutionary situation is precisely the decomposing of State power, and that nowhere in Europe had the situation been as revolutionary as in Russia. Whoever denied it? The facts remain: 1) That this revolutionary situation would have immediately aborted, even in Russia, if instead of Bolsheviks of the Lenin and Trotsky type there had been only... “non-Bolshevik Internationalists” of the Ryazanov or Martov stamp; 2) That the absence of an acute revolutionary situation in the West is in no way an excuse for the political cowardice of social-democratic centrist and even less for its betrayal! “They changed the State apparatus to suit their needs as rulers, eliminating democracy and establishing their own dictatorship... Thus they created the first totalitarian State – even before the name was invented. Stalin carried on with the job, removing his rivals through the instrument of the State apparatus and establishing an unlimited personal dictatorship” (Rudolf Hilferding, State Capitalism or Totalitarian State Economy, published in The Modern Review, 1947). The social-democratic nature of the accusation reveals itself by no longer seeing, as in Marxism, the class struggle as the basis for understanding history, but the opposition between Dictatorship and of Democracy as political forms. It is sad to note that the numerous oppositions which, in various forms, have also reproached Bolshevism for having incubated Stalinism within it and for having allowed it to be born (!) did not realize that their reasoning was the same as that of the vile old social democracy.

11. In reality it was not a “revolution”, but the agitation that led in November 1918 to the abdication of the Kaiser, the proclamation of the Republic of Germany and the formation of the Ebert-Noske social-democratic government, in which the Independents, that is to say the centrists of the time, took part.

12. A late confession, which signifies the express renunciation of the traditional position as well as being badly preserved in words considering democracy as a simple means (Lenin showed how inadequate it was in the imperialist era!) to achieve socialism, the latter remaining the supreme goal of the party.

13. It is characteristic that in March 1921, Umanità nuova, organ of the anarchists of Italy, published, eleven days apart, a report of the Third Conference of Ukrainian Anarchists of Nabat, which was held illegally in Russia, 3-8 September 1920, and which concluded that it was necessary to continue the struggle “against the obscure reaction of the socialist State” (that is to say against the Bolshevik power) and then, on the occasion of the events in Kronstadt, an article that in spite of everything concluded in solidarity with revolutionary Russia. Umanità nuova, although not daring to denote the action of the Ukrainian anarchists, nevertheless did not express solidarity with their resolution, which we publish below and which you can find in an old number, dated 11 March 1921 of the newspaper; likewise, faced with a fact which, afterwards, when the communist movement had lost all its revolutionary characteristics, was exploited unscrupulously by anti-communists of all stripes (the repressive acts of self-defence that the Bolsheviks were forced to take against the Kronstadt insurrection of March 1921), Umanità nuova took a position that today seems surprisingly measured. What does this demonstrate if not that when the communist movement still deserved this name, its influence and prestige in the proletariat were more than sufficient to contain “libertarian” hesitations and indiscipline within certain limits and lead anarchists to consider in cold blood the harsh necessities of the class struggle? But, just as it was the social-democratic deviation that favoured the development of the anarchist deviation at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, it was the Stalinist deviation which, after 1920, gave it a new impetus, pushing it towards increasingly inconsistent positions, destroying all of Lenin’s work and that of authentic communism: the trend towards the unification of all truly revolutionary forces on the platform of scientific socialism. Here is what the report on the third conference at Nabat stated (Umanità nuova, 11 March 1921): “In an inexorable struggle against any form of State, the anarchists of Nabat do not submit to any compromise. With regard to the Soviets, however, they behaved differently for a certain time. [By which they mean until the start of the civil war which, demanding by its very nature the greatest discipline and the most thorough centralization, cooled the revolutionary intoxication of the anarchists – or at least a section of them – and pushed them to resume their opposition]. The marvellous impetus of October, the efforts to emancipate the working classes from all power, the anarchistic phraseology of the Bolshevik leaders [here the libertarians fall into the same error as the conservative social democrats for whom everything that was not vile reformism and pure class collaboration was condemned as ‘anarchist’ or ‘anarchistic’] and in particular, the struggle to be waged against world imperialism, which was trying to strangle the revolution, all this forced the anarchists to keep a certain reserve and almost condescension [sic] with regard to Bolshevik power. They called on the working and peasant masses to come together for revolutionary independence, issued their warnings to the new masters, advised them, and subjected them to criticism from their comrades. But after three years of dictatorship, the power of the Soviets born of the revolution became a powerful State machine. It replaced the bourgeoisie with the dictatorship of a party and a minority of the proletariat over the mass of the working people. This dictatorship crushed the will of the working masses, who lost their creative spirit, which alone is capable of facing the various tasks of the revolution. All of this is a lesson for workers in all countries, and that is why anarchists still see the need to remain on the front line of the struggle:

1) The power of the Soviets, as a result of its resistance to the revolutionary spirit of the working masses, turned into a ferocious dictatorship, thus becoming the executioner of the revolution.
2) The war of the Soviets against the bourgeoisie can no longer be considered a mitigating circumstance since the Soviet power strangled the revolution and thus indirectly helped its enemies.
3) The revolutionary attitude taken by Soviet power in the international movement must be regarded as ambiguous, since, if it calls for struggle against the bourgeoisie, it also threatens the revolution by the harmful means of the dictatorship.

For all these reasons, the current conference calls on all anarchists and all sincere revolutionaries to fight against the power of the Soviets, which is no less dangerous than open enemies of the revolution like Wrangel and the Entente. Anarchists oppose the Red Army, as they oppose all armies of the State. They cannot recognize it as revolutionary since it is in the
hands of a few, who are their enemies... This is why the entry of anarchists into the Red Army to defend the revolution is a mistake and could only be justified by the desire to revolutionize it by vocal and written means so that at the time of the ‘insurrection of the workers and peasants against the new oppressors, the soldiers fraternize with it for the common salvation’

Here, as symmetrical twin to this declaration by utter “scabs” in the civil war, the embarrassed article of Umanità Nuova, 23 March 1921, confronted with the serious Kronstadt crisis: “Kronstadt, the Ukraine... We are puzzled by these facts, which are the logical consequence of the Bolsheviks’ dictatorial error [sic] and which were therefore inevitable, but from which could emerge either a great evil or a great good for the revolution. We understand that, if suffocated, the spirit of freedom will explode and if the international bourgeoisie was not on the lookout, this would not concern us and we would think that perhaps the overthrow of the Moscow government would give a new the revolution a new aspect. But bourgeois military reaction is watching on the borders, waiting until the revolution is exhausted in internal struggles to swoop down on it and to exterminate both the Bolsheviks and the insurgents of today that it is toying with from afar [something that today’s anarchists have become incapable of understanding, let it be noted!] From these insurrections can therefore arise both a revolutionary recovery and the beginning of a reaction [this uncertainty is the fruit of the conflict between libertarian doctrine and the reality of class conflict!] It all depends on whether the internal struggle ends before the imperialist hyenas have the time and the means to intervene. They are planning a new intervention against Russia in the spring, and then, whether Russia remains under the Bolshevik regime or succeeds in getting a more libertarian one (as we wish), what matters is that it is able to repel the new invasion and make the vile western militarist bite the dust [this shows that the anarchist of 1921 was not as stupid as the anarchist of 1968, not by a long shot]. We Western anarchists cannot influence the internal development of Russia and we can never be up to such a serious task [an honest confession!] We are also too far from making a final judgment, but there is one thing that we must do, and which is a duty of honour for us: to prevent by all means the capitalist governments from sending arms and armies against Russia. Once again, comrades, proletarians, as long as we still have a little breath and energy, let us be ready to stand up for proletarian and communist Russia. By defending it we will have waged a good fight, even for our own freedom”.

What better refutation of the demand for freedom and the rejection of centralism than this terrible discord in the slogans of the same current, calling at the same time in the Ukraine for “the struggle against the power of the Soviets, considered as dangerous as Wrench and the Entente” in Russia, and in Italy the “defence of proletarian and communist Russia”!

14. Here is how Proudhon expressed himself on revolution in a letter dated May 1847 addressed to Karl Marx, that is to say at the time when he was preparing his The Philosophy of Poverty: “Perhaps you hold the opinion that no reform is possible without a helping hand, without what was once called a revolution... This opinion which I appreciate, which I excuse, which I would gladly discuss, having myself shared it for a long time, I confess that my last studies made me come back from it completely. I believe that we do not need that to succeed, and that consequently we must not pose revolutionary action as a means of social reform, because this pretended means would be quite simply an invitation to violence, to arbitrariness, in short, a contradiction. I pose the problem thus: to bring back into society, by an economic combination, the wealth that has left society by another economic combination”. To Marx’s offer to be part of an international information office, the same man who had “come back” from the idea of revolution replied: “Let us search together if you want the laws of society... but, for God’s sake! after having demolished all dogmatisms a priori, let’s not think in our turn of indoctrinating the people... Because we are at the head of a movement, let us not be the leaders of a new intolerance. Welcome and encourage all protests... Never regard a question as exhausted, and when we have used our last argument, let us start again if necessary with eloquence and irony”. Here, together with the strictly economic content of his “doctrine” (which does not interest us here, though we return to it in the next section) is what earned him, under the heading “Conservative or Bourgeois Socialism”, this characterization in the Communist Manifesto of 1848: “A part of the bourgeoisie is desirous of redressing social grievances in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society. To this section belong economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organizers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, hole-and-corner reformers of every imaginable kind... We may cite Proudhon’s Philosophie de la Misère as an example of this form. The bourgeois socialists want all the advantages of modern social conditions without the struggles and dangers necessarily resulting therefrom. They desire the existing state of society, minus its revolutionary and disintegrating elements. They wish for a bourgeoisie without a proletariat... A second, and more practical, but less systematic, form of this Socialism sought to depreciate every revolutionary movement in the eyes of the working class by showing that no mere political reform, but only a change in the material conditions of existence, in economic relations, could be of any advantage to them... By changes in the material conditions of existence, this form of Socialism, however, by no means understands abolition of the bourgeois relations of production, an abolition that can be affected only by a revolution, but administrative reforms, based on the continued existence of these relations; reforms, therefore, that in no respect affect the relations between capital and labour”.

15. “Enterprise socialism” is the term used in the original French, an umbrella term that covers the Italian factory councils movement of the early twenties (Ordinovism, so named after the theoretical journal edited by Antonio Gramsci, L’Ordine Nuovo) and “council communism”, as well as more recent manifestations. The position of the Italian left was stated in our newspaper at the time, Il Soviet (4 January 1920). “To maintain as the comrades of Ordine Nuovo of Turin do, that even before the fall of the bourgeoisie, the workers’ councils are already not only organs of political struggle, but also of economico-technical preparation for the communist system, is a pure and simple return to socialist gradualism: this viewpoint, which is called reformism or trade unionism, is defined by the false idea that the proletariat can emancipate itself by gaining ground in economic relations even though capitalism, along with the State, still holds political power”.

16. It is evident that the exact same goes for the Sorelian concept of union management of the future economy. Here is what we said in “The Foundations of Marxist Revolutionary Communism in the Doctrine and History of the International Proletarian Struggle” (published for the first time in Programme communiste of July-August 1957): “To understand the Sorelian formula of union management of the future economy, it therefore remains for us to imagine an apparatus of economic management formed from the national leaderships of category unions, making the usual reservations about the possibilities of the victory of socialism in one isolated country. To fix the ideas, let us imagine for example the organization of the production of bread and other similar products by the ‘Federation of Bread and Pastry Industries’, and so on for all the sectors of production and industry. This amounts to imagining that all the products of a given category are made available to large organizations (national trusts of some sort), having gotten rid of capitalist bosses and deciding on the use of all production (and, in the particular case, of bread, pastry etc.) so as to receive from parallel organizations all that is necessary for them: consumer items for their members, raw materials, working instruments, etc....

“Such an economy is an economy of exchange, and we can conceive of it in two ways: in a higher form (to speak briefly) this exchange takes place only at the top and it is all these sectors of production which then distribute consumer goods and means of production from top to bottom. But this system of exchange at the top remains a mercantile system; it needs a law of equivalence of the values contained in the stocks of goods held by the unions, of which it is easy to predict that they will be numerous, and that each of them will have to enter into negotiations with almost all the others.

“Let us not even ask ourselves who will establish the system of equivalences of value, and what will guarantee autonomy and ‘equality’ between all these unions of ‘producers’ who are involved in all these fantastic constructions: let us push liberalism so far as to believe it possible that the various relationships of equivalence can result ‘peacefully’ from ‘spontaneously’ established balances!

Such a complex measurement system cannot function without the millennial expedient of the general equivalent, in a word, without money, the logical measure of all trade.

“It is no less easy to conclude that we will fall back to a second form lower than that which we have just examined. Indeed, in a similar society, the manipulation of money cannot be done only between the management of production trusts (the word union [the French word for a trade union, syndicat, also means syndicate] is not at all out of place here), this power will be granted to each partner of the trust, that is to say to each worker who ‘buys’, whatever he wants, after having received from the vertical organization of which he is a part his share of money, that is to say a wage, of which the entire difference with the current wage system would reside in its claim to be ‘entire’ (as in Dühring, Lassalle and others), due to the abolition of the employer’s levy.

“It is a bourgeois and liberal illusion to imagine that each union is independent of the other when it negotiates the conditions for the transfer of the supplies it monopolizes; this other one, which is always present, wants each producer to be paid according to the total output of their work (nonsense ridiculed by Marx) and to be able to decide their own level of consumption. This is where the asses get trapped and where these ‘producer economies’ reveal how far they are (and even further than the capitalist economy itself) from the social economy that Marx calls Socialism and Communism.

“In the socialist economy the deliberative subject, not only in terms of production, but also of consumption (how, and how much), is no longer the individual, but society, humanity. Everything is there. Producer autonomy is one of those empty democratic phrases that do not solve anything. The employee, today’s slave of capital, is not autonomous as a producer, but is autonomous as a consumer insofar as within a certain quantitative limit (which is not that of pure and simple hunger unlike Lassalle and his brazen law, but which will on the contrary increase as society develops) he does what he wants with his pay. In bourgeois society, the proletarian produces as the capitalist wants – or, more generally and scientifically, as the laws of the capitalist mode of production want, as capital wants, a supra-human monster – and, at least within a certain limit, he cannot consume all he wants, but certainly as he wants. In socialist society, the individual will be autonomous neither in the choice of his acts of production nor even in his acts of consumption, the two spheres being governed by society and for society”.

17. This is not the place to examine the historical reasons for this fact. Let us content ourselves with recalling that the Marxists of the Italian left, a generation younger than the Bolsheviks and Spartacists, warned the Communist International against this ambiguous terminology, in particular in a classic article in their review Rassegna Comunista (February 1922):

“The use of certain terms in the exposition of the principles of communism very often gives rise to ambiguities because of the different meanings that they can be given. Such is the case with the words democracy and democratic. In its affirmations of principle, Marxist communism presents itself as a criticism and a negation of democracy. However, communists often defend the democratic character of proletarian organizations and the application of democracy within them. There is obviously no contradiction here: we cannot object to the dilemma bourgeois democracy or proletarian democracy as equivalent to bourgeois democracy or dictatorship of the proletariat... (but) we might wish that a different term be used, in order to avoid ambiguity and not to upgrade the concept of democracy. Even if we renounce it, it will be useful to deepen the very content of the democratic principle, not only in its general meaning, but in its particular application to homogeneous organizations from the class point of view. This will prevent us from setting up workers’ democracy as an absolute principle of truth and justice, and therefore from falling back into an apriorism foreign to all our doctrine at the very moment when we are trying, by means of our critique, to clear the ground of lies and arbitrary liberal theories”. Such was the introduction to this article, truly prophetic if one thinks of precisely what “Trotskyism” did with the teachings of Trotsky. The conclusion was no less so, saying, “The Communists have no codified constitutions to propose. They have a world of lies and constitutions crystallized in the law and in the force of the ruling class to destroy. They know that only a revolutionary and totalitarian apparatus of force and power, which does not exclude any means, can prevent the infamous remnants of a period of barbarism from re-emerging, and that hungry for vengeance and servitude, the monster of social privilege will raise its head, launching for the thousandth time the cry of Liberty!”
18. This is the case with Pierre Broué, author of a history of the Bolshevik Party, which seems to have been written only for this purpose.

19. We saw above that our current tried to purify this language of its ambiguous terms.

20. Named after the emigrant Nikolay Vasilyevich Ustryalov, who was the first to predict the conversion of the Soviet State into a normal bourgeois State that should be supported.

21. Owing to Lenin’s illness, a “secret political bureau” had been created, of which all members of the official political bureau except Trotsky were a part, the purpose of this plot being to prevent him from leading the Party. “All questions were decided in advance in this clandestine political bureau whose members were bound by collective responsibility. They made a commitment not to carry out polemics against each other and at the same time to seek every pretext to intervene” against Trotsky. “There existed in local organizations similar secret centres linked to the Moscow ‘Septumvirate’ and observing a strict discipline. Correspondence was done in special encrypted language. Party and State functionaries were systematically selected with this one criterion: against Trotsky... Party members who protested against this policy fell victim to treacherous attacks launched for unrelated and often fabricated reasons. And on the other hand people... who, during the first lustre of Soviet power, would have been ruthlessly eliminated from the Party, ensured their position by making a simple hostile intervention against Trotsky. From the end of 1923, the same task was carried out in all parties of the Communist International. They selected not the best, but those who adapted most easily, by arbitrary means. The leaders became accountable for their situation only to the Apparatus. Towards the end of 1923, this Apparatus was already three-quarters chosen: it was possible to take the struggle to the mass. In the autumn of 1923 and the autumn of 1924, the campaign against Trotsky began: his old differences with Lenin, dating not only from before the Revolution, but also before the war... were suddenly brought out, disfigured, exaggerated and presented to the uninformed mass as a burning topical issue. The mass was stunned, confused, intimidated. Meanwhile the selection process went down to an even lower degree. It was no longer possible to exercise the function of factory director, workshop cell secretary, president of the municipal executive committee, accountant or typist without presenting your anti-Trotskyism as a reference”. (Trotsky’s insights into Stalin’s methods are described in Trotsky’s article How Could This Happen?, Constantinople, February 1929).

22. See note 74 above concerning the Italian Left’s critique of the use of the terms “democracy” and “democratic”.

23. This is the “stage” defined by the vanishing of hopes placed in the German revolution in October 1923, therefore by the foreseeable prolongation of the isolation of the USSR from the world, on the one hand, and by the persistent internal economic crisis despite the easing brought by the NEP, on the other.

24. The term is used here to designate opposite relations to those which, in society, derive from the social division of labour and class antagonism: bureaucratic constraint on the one hand, passivity or muted resistance on the other; command and obedience; “administrative science” and ignorance, etc., all things which, in the class party, tend to disappear insofar as, even if it cannot completely escape from the ambient bourgeois conditions, it is nevertheless a voluntary association of individuals aiming at a common goal and where this goal is precisely the classless society, without social division of labour and therefore without political or even administrative constraint.

25. Likewise, the Italian Left had opposed to the “ideological terrorism” of Stalinism not the “democratic rights” of party members, but the centre’s loyalty to the common heritage of principles which, if adhered to, allows the party to be run as smoothly as possible.

26. The genuinely democratic deviation that Trotsky then fights as a Marxist is to “underestimate” the class contrast between the proletariat and the peasantry and to note it in the apology for the “new democracy”, Soviet democracy.

27. These are the obvious reasons why our current has always rejected anti-fascist tactics. Although plain enough to the most mediocre intelligence, they were not understood by the International, which persevered in this absurd way. As a “tactic” the struggle for “democratization of the party of the USSR” falls under exactly the same criticism as the so-called “proletarian anti-fascism” practised by the International, as we have already seen above.

28. An ambiguous formulation, perhaps due to a bad translation, but the meaning is unequivocal from the context: if you stubbornly say that the dictatorship of the proletariat still exists in the USSR, something Trotsky was clearly saying, against all evidence.

29. An authentically democratic process since it speculates on the proletarian’s unconsciousness of the rank.

30. Why, is another question that we will deal with later. The question is no longer only tactical as in the United Front with social democracy, which all Communists recognized as being counter-revolutionary in function; for Stalinism, its counter-revolutionary function is just as obvious, if we ask the question in terms of an international class struggle. But in the Russian national framework (from which no Russian revolutionary could escape, since it is in this framework that the Russian proletariat had taken power and had momentarily to contest it with the enemy) it was no longer so easy to decipher, since the Stalinist regime was undoubtedly the heir to the democratic revolution contained in the double revolution of 1917 and, at the same time, a bulwark against the possible restoration of the Constituent Assembly regime, that is to say of Russia before the democratic revolution. But that in no way alters the fact that, as a tactic, the political United Front with Stalinist Ustryalovism involved in the struggle for “party democratization” was just as opportunist as the international political front with social democracy, and was to have the same fatal consequences.

31. There is no better commentary on this other form of “frontism” than the tragic confessions of all the members of the old guard at the famous Moscow trials! What other link would have seen the persecuted so directly chained to the persecutors, the Bolsheviks to the “Ustryalovists” who were so violently opposed on the class terrain, if not their same objective alignment against the restoration? The only difference is that at the Moscow trials, it was Stalin who implicitly led the “blackmail of restoration” while in the speech quoted here, it was Trotsky!!!

32. Trotsky recalls it himself in The Revolution Betrayed.

33. Our disagreement with the “tactics” of the democratic slogans advocated for capitalist countries are of little consequence here: what is important to us is to show that democracy only has meaning in capitalism.

34. That is to say, the October Revolution has been defeated, that we are in a pure capitalism, although little developed.

35. Simplistic application of Marxist determinism: which class is represented? It was not the national bourgeoisie that was driven out in October; it was not the economically oppressed and politically dispossessed proletariat; it was not even the peasantry, since Stalinism played the peasants against the kulaks first and then made these peasants, authoritatively grouped into collective farms, pay to an extent for the capitalist industrialization of the country. All that remains is the “bureaucracy”... But Trotsky was so well aware of the weakness of such a solution that at the same time he energetically denied that the bureaucracy was a class! In our humble opinion, he was much better inspired when speaking of Bonapartist power.

36. This applies as much to Trotsky’s neo-social democratic “disciples” as to his neo-anarcho-syndicalist “disciples” such as the late Socialisme ou Barbarisme.

37. If this were true in 1936, all the more so thirty years later! It is the unleashing of these “petty-bourgeois appetites” even in the “socialist” sector (that is to say, not the kolkhozes) that corresponds to the “political liberalization” started under Khrushchev with its obligatory accompaniment of the glorification of capitalism in economic matters. It is the product of the dynamism of the economic boom after the Second World War, but in no way the “return to Lenin” that the Trotskyists imagined! But those Trotskyists have read their Trotsky in pretty much the same way as the Stalinists have “read” Lenin!

38. An allusion to the communist formula: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his means”, reviewed and corrected by the Stalinists to “from each according to his capacities, to each according to his work” which, in its first part, is a lie in a mercantile society and, in its second, is purely bourgeois.


40. The transition from the “United Front” policy with Stalinism to the policy of the anti-bureaucratic revolution did not prevent Trotsky from remaining faithful to the national defence policy of the USSR in the event of war, a policy which he wanted to impose not only on the Soviets, but on the international proletariat! In this case, it was the renunciation of the principle of principles: the revolutionary internationalism of the proletariat!

Balance sheet of a revolution (Bilan d’une révolution) - Part III: The Soviet economy after October

In its last chapter, the balance sheet of the 1917 revolution examines the development of the Russian economy from the New Economic Policy of the early 1920s, through Stalin’s struggles against the Marxist left and Marxist right of the Bolshevik Party, up to the late 1960s.

**Introduction**

Our party theses on the Soviet economy have an importance that goes far beyond their purpose; they are indeed an integral part of the defence of the communist programme, which some believe has been proved to be utopianism by the “Russian experiment”, and which others have totally falsified in three ways: first by claiming that the tasks carried out by the proletarian party in Russia in 1917, as formulated by the Bolsheviks, were socialist tasks; second, by claiming that the “achievements” of the Stalin era were in perfect continuity with the goals of the initial programme; and third, by passing off these “achievements” as the “construction of socialism” itself; thus, as a new global mode of production destined to succeed capitalism after a revolution and the establishment of a class dictatorship, successively winning over all the countries and continents of the world, that it is in the conception of Marx and Lenin, that socialism would become the business of national states animated by a single party, but speaking a democratic and populist language and living in peaceful coexistence with the white guard of bourgeois order, the super-imperialism of the USA. Conscious or unconscious, interested or blind, these distortions all have one only effect: not to destroy the faith of the proletariat in socialism, since it was seriously shaken by the Stalinist counter-revolution, but to paralyse the class’s recovery, that is to say the reorganization, based on an authentic communist programme, of the proletarian forces which the already overt bourgeois crisis pushes to struggle and revolt after so many years of apathy – in short to obstruct the reconstitution of the proletarian international on the ruins of the old communist movement, stranded in shame and denial. If this is true for the Western proletariat, what can we say about the proletariat of Germany and Central Europe, which witnessed Stalinist “socialism” directly before their eyes and felt it in their flesh? They can hardly escape all the bourgeois and democratic insinuations of the “destalinizers” [note: this refers to the leaders of the USSR who followed Stalin] and all the less so if their theses are even further from the socialist theses than those of the old “despot”; they are also the product of the purely bourgeois economic progress that has been accomplished under his stick. It is this bourgeois progress to which the oppressed masses cannot be insensitive and it is this alone that allows Stalin’s heirs to adorn themselves with the prestige of a superior wisdom as they sink deeper than ever into the swamp of bourgeois ideology.

In radical opposition to all these distortions, the class party’s theses on the Russian question are briefly as follows:

1) The initial Bolshevik economic programme and some of the political formulations corresponding to it (Soviet democracy) are neither the programme nor the formulations of the transformation of a developed capitalist economy into a socialist economy, since in Russia there existed only the nuclei of a such a capitalist economy, drowned in the sea of small-scale agricultural production; in no way could they be transported as such, that is to say detached from the Russian and
world context of 1917-26, into the immediate programme of the future socialist revolution in Europe and America. We could not be so positive that the dynamics of the social struggle could push a proletarian party of the Bolshevik type to the fore in Africa and Asia; but this is based precisely on an assumption that the absence of proletarian revolutionary traditions, even remotely comparable to those from which Bolshevism emerged in the framework of pre-1914 Europe and the Second International, makes this highly improbable, if not absurd, especially if we add to it the crystallization of a purely bourgeois anti-imperialist current, and the transition on the part of imperialism itself (except [in 1967] for China and Vietnam) from the policy of economic blockade to one of capital export.

2) This initial Bolshevik economic programme is also not the programme of transition from pre-bourgeois Russia to full capitalism. If Lenin and the Bolsheviks never believed it possible to “skip” the capitalist phase entirely, if they even radically excluded the possibility of shortening it without the help of the World Revolution, they also never accepted the idea of becoming the managers of a national capitalism pure and simple, even if this was as “progressive” as anyone would like in the strictly Russian framework: on the contrary, they predicted the fall of the dictatorship of the proletariat if this revolution were to fail. In reality, their programme was a set of measures intended for two contradictory ends: on the one hand to revive economic life within the frameworks imposed by the past; then, pending the revolution, to implant capitalist progress (increase in the productivity of labour and production through the mechanization of agriculture and the nationalization of industry) in a still barbaric country; on the other hand, to combat the political and social effects of such resuscitation and such progress, namely the opportunist corruption of the party, social differentiation, and the oppression of the working class. It was only when this struggle to control renascent capitalism in the class interest of the proletariat would stop that the theory of socialism in one country would appear at the same time and with its... uncontrolled capitalism.

3) Already under the NEP and during Lenin’s lifetime, real economic development no longer responded to the Leninist programme of “controlled capitalism”, because it was accompanied by phenomena that the Marxist wing of the party vainly tried to combat, and which, under the appearances of bureaucratization (to use Lenin and Trotsky’s term as they refer to them) reflect, on the contrary, the victory of mercantile and bourgeois anarchy over revolutionary will. The first manifestation of the new opportunism in Russia consisted in denying these phenomena, in idealizing the NEP, in rejecting any attempt to combat them as a threat directed against the democratic alliance of workers and peasants. The second – much more serious – consisted in claiming that, even without the technical bases of advanced capitalism, it was possible to curb the anarchy resulting from the predominance of petty commodity production by the sole virtue of the sovereign authority of the State and proceed with what Trotsky, with cruel but justifiable irony, would call the “administrative liquidation of the NEP”. Here, the nationalist deviation is accompanied by a voluntarist deviation. In the domestic sphere, the opposition of “socialism in one country” to the initial Bolshevik programme is twofold: it poisoned as “socialist” all those categories (value, price, wages, capital) and relationships (exchange, factory despotism, State oppression, swelling of the administrative apparatus) which Lenin and the true Bolsheviks had never defined as anything other than capitalist; it abandoned all preoccupations with class defence of the proletariat against the effects of “necessary capitalism”, going so far as to re-establish, in the name of socialism, the forms of exploitation of labour proper to the ferocious opening period of the bourgeois era. In the international field, this was accompanied by “capitulation to world capitalism, conciliation with social-democratic opportunism and the crushing of the proletarian current in the International”.

In conclusion, Stalin’s uncontrolled capitalism in socialist disguise emerged from Lenin’s “controlled capitalism”, this resulted on the one hand from economic laws stronger than the will of the best revolutionary party and on the other from the failure of the European and global proletariat, which did not respond to the genuinely communist call for the double revolution in Russia. It was therefore an irreversible process; it was impossible to start from the beginning again to correct the historic course from October in a direction that would be more favourable to us: this is what condemns the programme of the “anti-bureaucratic revolution”, politics born purely out of Trotsky’s nostalgia for the first glorious years of the Bolshevik Revolution. The paths of history are not crossed twice. Besides, the painful road travelled will not have been just a useless torment: today, after fifty-one years of Russian and world capitalist development, one can calmly affirm that finally having got rid of all “transitional tasks”, the future International will be able to tackle its great task directly, the only one that has ever mattered to the proletariat and its party: the socialist transformation of the vile bourgeois world.

Initial Bolshevik programme and socialism

Contained in the programmatic article: The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It (September 1917), this programme is both inferior to the social programme of an advanced bourgeois republic and extremely daring for the Russia of the time. It simply advocates State intervention in economic life to avoid the crisis, to which the political inertia resulting from the February revolution was inevitably leading, a crisis that would obviously weigh cruelly on the proletariat and the poor peasants. This “intervention” was limited to a merger of the banks into a single bank under State control, giving visibility into the movement of capital “without removing a single kopeck from any depositor”; a nationalization of the capitalist syndicates controlling production and consumption in certain sectors, a measure which would make it easier for the State to regulate industrialists without expropriating them either of their capital or their profits; the abolition of commercial secrecy, without which State control over the flight of profits and surplus profits was impossible; forced cartelization, that is, the obligation for private employers to unionize; the regulation of consumption, in other words, the fight against the “black market”, which favoured the rich; finally, against financial bankruptcy, a highly progressive tax on capital.

Of all these measures, Lenin said three essential things: they were not in the least socialist in character, since belligerent states had taken similar measures in less backward countries than Russia; they would never be taken by the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks in spite of their intrinsic modesty and it would require nothing less than the proletarian revolution, supported by the peasants, to apply them; if in the advanced countries the transition (which had taken place since the start of the war) from private capitalism to monopoly capitalism and from the latter to State monopoly capitalism
opened the economic anti-chamber of socialism to the proletarian revolution, in Russia, where much more backward forms predominated, they could only take steps in this direction: “But socialism is now gazing at us from all the windows of modern capitalism; socialism is outlined directly, practically, by every important measure that constitutes a forward step on the basis of this modern capitalism”. To understand this position, two things are necessary: first, understanding that for Lenin, this appreciation is tied to the prospect of a victory for the proletarian revolution, at least in Europe; second, knowing what socialism is in real Marxist doctrine and not the current bogus versions. This is what we will define briefly to avoid any ambiguity, before starting the next part.

Socialism can be characterized as a new and original mode of distribution of products among members of society, resulting from an equally new and original distribution of the conditions of production. This distribution is characterized by the disappearance of the exchange of equivalents (or the law of value) and its replacement by an allocation, first of all contingent, then unlimited, of the social product to all members of society, based exclusively on the social productivity of labour. The role of the proletarian dictatorship, at all stages of development, is precisely to break down the barriers opposing the new distribution of the conditions of production, without which the new mode of distribution cannot appear, and to introduce it, sector by sector, as soon as the conditions exist. But the programme of this dictatorship necessarily changes, depending on whether the obstacle is constituted, as in Russia, by the existence of an enormous sector of small-scale market production, or on the contrary, as was the case in the West, by the domination of a powerful capitalist class imposing economic and social objectives on all of society that are in contradiction with the development of its productive forces and the class interests of the proletariat.

In small-scale market production, the distribution of products according to the principle of the exchange of equivalents results from the private character of the work: because they do not produce all the use values necessary for existence, independent producers can only obtain them from other independent producers; but, without a measurement of the working time contained in their product and a comparison with that which is contained in the product of others, in each of these acts they would risk being robbed of a greater or lesser part of their effort, if by chance the products they sell required more work than the ones they receive. Such conditions of production rigorously impose the form of commodities on products and therefore their exchange; it is thus impossible to graft on them a different and higher mode of distribution. In capitalist production, where labour is already collective and social production is social, the obstacle lies less in private ownership of the means of production and in the independence of enterprises that has been inherited from simple small-scale market production than in the class objectives that it pursues. Here, the exchange of products results essentially from the reduction of the labour force itself to the state of a commodity and its exchange for wages (whereas when capitalism first emerged, it was the exchange of labour power which, on the contrary, necessarily resulted from the exchange of products). It is indeed this act that makes it possible to define capitalist objectives as the pursuit of surplus value, the use of labour power to provide more value to the capitalist than the worker receives in payment for this commodity, the only commodity that the worker takes to the market.

In this second case, the destruction of the bourgeois State, the legal abolition of the property of companies and trusts and their taking into possession by the proletarian State are the sufficient conditions for a reorganization which tends to coordinate all previously disparate and competing economic units into one harmonious whole. The reason is that production is already social in nature; the economy has already undergone concentration. Above all, the productivity of labour is at such a level as to render useless the odious limitation of the share of social product returning to producers, which is imposed by the bourgeois practice of considering labour power to be a commodity that can only be sold at “its fair price” (and more often below rather than above this price). These developments also render useless the excessive length of the working day, the prison-like regime of factories, in short, all the flaws resulting from the exigencies of the production of value and surplus value which turn wage labour into a new form of slavery. In the first case, on the contrary, neither political dictatorship nor legal measures can overcome the disadvantages resulting from the scattering of the means of production, rudimentary technology, low labour productivity and therefore the meagre surplus likely to return to society once the requirements of the direct producer are met. Then the “obstacle” becomes a mountain. A whole phase of mechanization, rationalization, technical progress and concentration becomes necessary, a whole phase of bourgeois progress that goes into reverse, even at the very core of the country’s economic activity, the moment that the capitalist dynamic ceases to drive profit and a quantitative increase in production and ceases to subordinate the immediate interests of the working class to this goal. So the principle of the exchange of products and of labour power itself still has a long future ahead of it and the pretension to be able to abolish it quickly is only a voluntarist utopia. And yet, without this abolition, no emancipation of the proletariat is possible.

The economic measures taken after the insurrection

The measures taken by the Soviet government1 equally constitute stages in the realization of the programme formulated before the insurrection: not the expropriation of the capitalists, but the organization of State capitalism under the Soviet regime and in support of workers’ control. This control, to which Lenin attached the greatest importance, was designed to prevent any sabotage by employers in industries of national importance. Owners and workers’ delegates were responsible to the Soviet State for order and discipline in production. But the control commissions had no responsibilities for the management of companies, nor the right to give orders, nor the right to deal with financial matters. The main concern was to ensure the best possible functioning of a severely shaken economy by leaving companies in the hands of those who had management and business experience and by submitting them to the supervision of workers, but without giving up centralization and unity, the bêtes noires of “self-managed socialism”. This is what gives real meaning to the more distant prospect of “workers’ control of production”; in any case, it would not have been able to obey autonomist principles! The anarcho-syndicalists therefore have no more right to attach themselves to the “early Lenin” than the partisans of “socialism in one country”.


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In the agrarian domain, the measures taken were the abolition of private ownership of the soil and the nationalization of all land: these are not socialist measures nor even State capitalist insofar as their scope is purely legal and not economic; in fact, the land confiscated without compensation was handed over to the local municipalities, which were left to share it according to the principle of “equal possession”. A petty-bourgeois utopia of the Socialist Revolutionaries, egalitarian possession of the land could only immobilize Russian agriculture in its ancient backwardness and, leaving to the small peasant the integral product of his work (from which the nobleman, the religious order and the State previously took the greater part), expose proletarian towns and cities to starvation. The Bolsheviks could not but hope for the formation of larger units than family plots and the introduction of associated labour and mechanization; but neither could they not make a compromise with the Socialist Revolutionaries’ demands, which were those of the enormous peasant masses, and which alone could pull them behind the proletariat. There was nothing “opportunist” about such a compromise, however, since Bolshevism in so doing did not in the least renounce any more advanced measures that were immediately achievable, and still less did it renounce the use of purely legal nationalization to promote the gradual introduction of large-scale modern agriculture.

The “State capitalism under the workers’ and peasants’ Soviets” established by these first measures was soon to collapse under the pressure of its internal contradictions, the worsening of the economic situation and finally the civil war, which ended it definitively. On the one hand, business owners resisted workers’ control, sabotaged production, or took flight. On the other hand, the workers, strong in the political power that they held, expropriated more than they could manage, in spite of the Bolsheviks’ counsels of moderation. Thus the communist power was forced to move, even before the outbreak of the civil war, to a transformation of all joint stock companies into State property. It was not yet a general nationalization of the whole economy, but it was nevertheless more than had been planned and justified only as an “extraordinary measure”. The balance upset by the unleashing of the class struggle would soon be shaken even more deeply by the civil war and foreign intervention, which put an end to the transitional regime and opened the phase of “war communism”.

**War communism**

“Military communism was, in essence, the systematic regimentation of consumption in a besieged fortress”, wrote Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed*. It was indeed a question of making the best use of the scarce existing resources, of saving the proletarian towns and cities from starvation, and of supporting the war industry to ensure the victory of the proletariat in the civil war. These aims could only be achieved by strengthening the dictatorship of the proletariat in the framework of the democratic alliance with the peasantry. So long as the civil war lasted, this alliance would nevertheless persist, the peasantry supporting the “Commune” out of hatred and fear of restoration.

Trade was prohibited; the State directly appropriated production, and distributed products directly. Foodstuffs that were sorely lacking were requisitioned in the countryside by detachments of armed workers who gave “nothing in exchange except varicoloured pieces of paper, named, according to ancient memory, money”. We are dealing here with a kind of “socialism of distribution”, which had a clear revolutionary efficiency, but had nothing to do with the first phase of socialism, the technological and economic base being completely missing. It is true that in the field of production, war communism was characterized by the complete expropriation of big industry and of a large part of small and medium-sized industrial enterprises, with the substitution of workers’ management by workers’ control, and with the heroic attempt to reorganize entire branches of industrial production by direct coordination, rather than by exchange, but none of this could compensate for the extreme shortage of reserves, the dilapidation of the productive apparatus and the lack of management experience. Trotsky testifies that, “The Soviet government hoped and strove to develop these methods of regimentation directly into a system of planned economy in distribution as well as production” and he recalled that the programme of 1919 stated: “In the sphere of distribution the present task of the Soviet Government is unwaveringly to continue on a planned, organized and State-wide scale to replace trade by the distribution of products”. How can we explain such a contradiction with the previous programme, and above all a theoretical error that emerges from all that we said above?

Trotsky replies: “The theoretical mistake of the ruling party remains inexplicable, however, only if you leave out of account the fact that all calculations at that time were based on the hope of an early victory of the revolution in the West”. Such an honest mistake by the Bolshevik internationalists is far more respectable than that of the renegades who not only later ceased to hope for the international revolution, but who torpedoed it and who had the impudence to assert that socialism is compatible with exchange, trade and the market!

**The “New Economic Policy” (spring 1921-1928)**

If, in the short period before the civil war, Lenin and the Bolsheviks considered that in backward Russia all the economic tasks of the proletarian party were limited to “warding off the imminent catastrophe” threatening the poor classes of society, in 1921, after more than three years of fierce struggle, the whole “novelty” consisted in acknowledging that the catastrophe had already occurred and that it was necessary to escape from it at all costs. What was called the New Economic Policy was therefore only a return of the Bolsheviks to the modest – but exceedingly difficult – initial programme under the new conditions created by the intensification of the class struggle up to the civil war. These conditions were the total ruin of productive forces, both industrial and agricultural, the decrease and dispersion of the small nucleus of the urban proletariat, which had carried the burden of all the weight of the revolution, and the deterioration of the relations between Bolshevik power (the proletarian “Commune”) and the vast peasantry. Under such conditions, to claim that once the civil war had been won, the economic task was to “eradicate capitalism” from Russia was no longer simply an ultra-leftist error, but pure nonsense. You cannot “eradicate” what does not exist. A “capitalism” whose production fell by 69% – the most spectacular fall in history – is no longer “capitalism”2. A “capitalism” that provides only one kilo of pig iron – a key product for industry – per person (3% of the pre-war figure, less than was needed just for the annual production of nails, nibs and needles) is no longer “capitalism”. At this level, the quantitative fall is equivalent to a qualitative regression to a pre-bourgeois level of the economy. At this level, the crucial question of knowing who has
control of the means of production, and who sets them to work, no longer even arises: when companies no longer have usable machines, or the supply of fuels and raw materials, or workers, or managers, whoever controls them – even the most revolutionary power – disposes of no material reality, there is nothing over which they can exercise any right. The only question which then arises is to mobilize the few remaining productive forces, to coordinate and associate them by any means (administrative constraint as well as the call for revolutionary enthusiasm, material profit as well as free communist work) in order to revive production, the basis of all life in society. But at the time it mattered little who was the agent of this resuscitation, provided that it took place: foreign capitalism, if it accepted offers of concessions, Russian capitalists if there were any left, communists if they were capable of it and if the defection of the former forced them to do so. It mattered little what forms the new life would take, provided death could be avoided; when we fight to emerge from total ruin, there is no question of realizing at the same time a superior model of economy and society: as distant as it is from socialism, even under the political regime of the dictatorship of the proletariat, State capitalism would already be a tremendous success, an enviable success for communists who came to power in a country dominated by a peasant petty bourgeoisie, were fought against by the world bourgeoisie and were deprived of the aid of the international proletariat for an indefinite period. This is the general meaning of Lenin’s violent attacks in the Congress that adopted the NEP against those who, in the name of the “purity of communism” did not want to renounce the methods of war communism.

On the general economic level, it is certain that the whole question boiled down to developing the productive forces, even in capitalist forms, under the control of the proletariat, and Lenin rightly pointed out that the NEP, far from being anything new, fell perfectly within the framework of the theory of “State capitalism”, which he had always supported. But Lenin also knew very well that the economic question being posed within the framework of a society that was still divided into classes could only be resolved by a class struggle. However, this same NEP assigned such narrow limits to this struggle by setting as its main objective the restoration of the alliance of the two fundamental classes of Soviet society – the proletariat and the peasantry – that Lenin also qualified it (and rightly so) as a retreat of the proletariat and its party. We must now show that there was no inconsistency in making these two apparently contradictory statements, or rather that the contradiction was not in Lenin’s head, but in the terrible situation in which the delay in the world revolution had placed the Russian proletariat and the Communist Party of Russia.

Asking the questions that result from the end of the civil war and the persistent isolation of the revolution no longer in general economic terms, but in class terms, what does Lenin say? “War communism... Was not a policy corresponding to the economic tasks of the proletariat. It could not be so. It was a temporary measure. The correct policy of the proletariat, which carries out its dictatorship in a country of the small peasantry, rests on the exchange of cereals for the industrial products that the peasant needs. It is no other than a food policy corresponding to the tasks of the proletariat, it is only this that is capable of strengthening the foundations of socialism and bringing about its total victory.”

During war communism, there was no “exchange” between industry and agriculture, but the forcible removal from the peasants of the minimum amount of food necessary to save the cities from starvation and for the Red Army to fight. The peasants had tolerated these requisitions for better or for worse out of fear of a restoration, but they had also reacted economically, and the result had been a fall in cereal production from an average of 770 million quintals to an average of 494 million! Continuing this coercion, even after the military victory over the Whites, could only aggravate the fall in agricultural production and would, moreover, risk peasant insurrections that could bring down the Bolshevik power. This is the precise and limited meaning of Lenin’s definition: “The policy... which carries out the dictatorship of the proletariat in a country of the small peasantry, rests on the exchange of cereals for the industrial products that the peasant needs”. Does this mean that this exchange automatically ensures political supremacy and economic advantage for the proletariat? Does this mean that, on condition of giving the peasants the possibility of trading in their products and offering them the manufactured articles they need, on the market at suitable prices, the proletariat was assured not only of not being driven out of power, but of making its own internal and international class policy triumph? This is the question. It is certain that the Russian peasantry was hostile to the Communist International and to the links of Soviet power with this “foreign” organization: the only possible exception being the poorest peasants (the distribution of land having in no way abolished social differences in the countryside), but in 1921 and even much later, the Party recognized that it lacked direct supporters in the countryside and even quite simply a communist newspaper readable by the peasants. However, the peasant, being pragmatic in outlook and therefore showing little inclination to reason in terms of principles, meant that this circumstance should not be an obstacle to the maintenance of the proletarian dictatorship, provided that it did not manifest itself economically. However, having had to accept its defeat in the field during the Russian civil war, the international bourgeoisie subjected Bolshevik Russia to a terrible economic blockade, which obviously had repercussions on the peasantry. To be able simply to supply the peasantry with manufactured goods on conditions as advantageous as the Russian bourgeoisie did before the war, or would have done if it had kept power and at the same time maintained Russia’s ties with the world market, the proletariat already had to make an enormous productive effort; but in order to supply it, moreover, with all the means of production necessary for the passage from the miserable fragmented agriculture then predominant to collective large-scale agriculture, it had to forego even a very slight improvement in its living and working conditions for a very long time. The exchange of industrial products for agricultural products was indeed a necessary condition for the maintenance of Bolshevik power and, if you like, “the policy achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat”, insofar as it proved that the proletariat was capable of taking charge of the general interests of society and not simply defending corporative interests, as some workers would have liked. But it was also the dagger that Russia’s enormous petty bourgeoisie held to the throat of the proletariat, the overwhelming weight that forced the proletariat to pull small-scale commodity production, with its disisory yield, behind it; the merciless constraint that the attachment of the rural petty bourgeoisie to small property and plot management inflicted upon it. In short, partnership with the peasantry, far from
expressing the democratic equality of the two classes, contrary to what the renegades would later assert, let alone providing a solid foundation for the political supremacy of the proletariat, meant that the latter was the class condemned to pay all the costs of the revolution, leaving its dictatorship with a fragile and compromised foundation.

Lenin had faith in the Communist Party of Russia and in the international revolution which, sooner or later, would come to the aid of the Russian proletariat. But he was well aware of the unequal balance of power, he who denounced “the error of those who do not see that the main enemy of socialism in our country is the petty-bourgeois character of the economy and the petty-bourgeois element”, which defined the struggle as follows: “It is not State capitalism that is at war with socialism, but the petty bourgeoisie plus private capitalism fighting together against State capitalism and socialism. The petty bourgeoisie oppose every kind of State interference, accounting and control, whether it be State-capitalist or State-socialist”; finally, it was he who concluded, in the exact opposite of current opportunism, all oriented towards the middle classes and vilifying monopolies: What is needed is “an agreement, an alliance, a bloc between the Soviet, i.e., proletarian, State power and State capitalism against the small-proprietor (patriarchal and petty-bourgeois) element”. The precariousness of the proletariat’s position appears in any case clearly in this other definition that Lenin gives of the NEP and which sums up the whole question: “... not to break up the old social economic system – trade, petty production, petty proprietorship, capitalism – but to revive trade, petty proprietorship, capitalism, while cautiously and gradually getting the upper hand over them, or making it possible to subject them to State regulation only to the extent that they revive”. This did not prevent, a few years later, less than a decade, the forces that had long passed for the “centrist” current of Bolshevism, from proclaiming that it was time to “liquidate the NEP”, to move onto the attack and enter upon the royal path of the Stalinist counter-revolution therefore ridicule themselves from proclaiming that it was time to “liquidate the NEP”, to move onto the attack and enter upon the royal path of the Stalinist counter-revolution.

Bankruptcy of the NEP

Nonetheless, the historical question that arises is obviously whether or not the NEP achieved its goals, and why. There are two essential consequences of the above: from the economic point of view, the goal of the NEP was neither an impossible national socialism (!) nor (a less crude thesis, but just as false and dangerous) a simple “escalation” from small commodity production to State capitalism. In other words, it is not even State capitalism in general, as the most advanced form of capitalism and, therefore, the closest, in time, to socialism: “State capitalism is capitalism which we shall be able to restrain, and the limits of which we shall be able to fix” in the immediate and long-term interests of the proletariat, said Lenin. To answer the question, however, it is not only the economic, but also the political goals of the NEP that need to be clearly understood. Just like the revolution of 1917, this political goal is fundamentally double: to ensure economic conditions such that Soviet power, considered in its entirety, cannot collapse, causing with its fall the democratic conquests of the revolution and delivering the country to white terror, but also to fight, both economically (if possible) and politically so that this Soviet power in general remains proletarian and therefore internationalist, an enterprise infinitely more difficult than avoiding outright restoration, but which is the characteristic and the function par excellence of the Communist Party of Russia, without which there would no longer be either Bolshevism or Leninism, and which, consequently, it is impossible to ignore even momentarily if one wants to understand the least thing about the NEP and the debates that it aroused. Our party thesis, supported by a multitude of programmatic texts to which we will not return here, is that the political counter-revolution occurred before the economic phase of the NEP had ended, so much so that even if the dreaded restoration did not take place, even if the power remained “Soviet” although not communist at all, it is impossible to admit that the NEP had achieved its goal. This is all the more true if the collapse of the dictatorship of the proletariat (or rather the liquidation of what remained proletarian in Soviet power, so long as there were true revolutionary communists in the ruling party) was not accompanied by the collapse of the Soviet State as such; this was not at all thanks to the NEP, but rather thanks to its liquidation in 1928. The current heirs of the Stalinist counter-revolution therefore ridicule themselves doubly when, in their theses on the fiftieth anniversary, they present the NEP not only as the “scientific plan” imagined by Lenin to make socialism in a country where vain “doctrinaire” Marxists had judged this to be impossible, but as the true source of all the wonders that can be beheld in Russia – because if the first statement is a theoretical monstrosity, the second is a crude historical falsification.

The political question having been elucidated, it remains to study the economic determinism which not only undermined and liquidated the dictatorship of the proletariat in the years 1923-27, but pushed the Russian economy in directions that it irresistibly followed from the liquidation of the NEP in 1928 to its so-called “re-establishment” from 1956. For agriculture, the abolition of forced requisitions and their replacement by a tax in kind (payment by the peasants of a certain quantity of cereals to the State, the quantity being fixed district by district and year by year according to uniform criteria) and the restoration of free trade in agricultural surpluses; for the urban economy, the re-establishment of the freedom of trade in manufactured goods, in short, the very simple and clear practical measures adopted by the Party in 1921 quickly had the undoubted effect of reviving economic activity. To start with cereal production – of capital importance since feeding the cities depended on it – we have the following progression in millions of quintals5.
However, these figures are insufficient to enlighten us on the vital question of supplying cities in these harsh years. It is the percentage of wheat actually marketed that is of more interest in this regard. But in this case, the progression turns into a regression, since we have: 1913 25% - 1925-26: 14.5% - 1927-28: 11% (that is to say, 200 million quintals for 1913, 106 for 1926 and 81 for 1928). The difference between the two series proves one thing: the Russian peasantry, chronically undernourished under Tsarism, derived from the October Revolution the advantage that it could feed itself better; in this sense, the spectre of the peasant counter-revolution that hung over the country in 1921 receded throughout the NEP, and also in this sense, the Soviet regime was strengthened. That said, the Soviet regime was a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasants, which implied that the improvement of even the immediate and basic conditions of material life in the cities and among the workers did not greatly delay any improvement that appeared in the countryside and among the peasants. Without re-establishing more normal economic relations than those attested by the two sets of figures mentioned above, Soviet power may well have been strengthened, but it rested on an imbalance working to the detriment of the urban working class, which, in the long run, made its proletarian character and the effective predominance of the proletariat in the common dictatorship hypothetical, even if, obviously, neither this character nor this predominance could be reduced to a question of relative consumption of calories by the worker and the peasant, and if, on the contrary, they depended on infinitely more complex and higher questions, such as the orientation of the State in the international class struggle and the subordination of its immediate policy to the final socialist goals even with regard to the domestic situation. As trivial as they may seem at first, these two scenarios alone would be enough to ruin the opportunistic idealization of “Soviet democracy” and to reveal the latent antagonism between the two temporarily allied classes, even on the humble immediate level and therefore all the more so with regard to historical ends. In addition, the question of their interpretation poses almost all the most crucial questions of the “transition period”, the very ones that objectively caused the loss of the communist and proletarian dictatorship (the NEP could not resolve them given, on the one hand, the dilapidated state of industry and on the other the economic blockade of the USSR by the bourgeois countries). If you are indeed wondering why, production having increased, the cereals available for the working class were decreasing, creating a perilous situation for working class power, there are three causes, whose relative importance is very difficult to establish in the absence of sufficient statistical information: 1) The extension of the small peasant economy with low economic surplus and large relative subsistence consumption due to the division of land through the democratic agrarian revolution; 2) The persistence of a sector of capitalist agricultural economy likely to produce such a surplus, but actually producing it only under favourable market conditions; 3) The need for Soviet power to export a fraction of its agricultural production, in spite of workers’ malnutrition, as the only means, in the give-and-take capitalist conditions in force throughout the world, to procure the few essential means of production, if only to restart industry. But that amounted, based on a simple and concrete example understandable to the least informed, to point out the triple pressure exerted on the Russian working class, its party and its power by the very small rural bourgeoisie, by the residual agrarian capitalist-class kulaks and, last but not least, by the great imperialist world bourgeoisie.

We regret that we only know the absolute quantities of grain in these cruel years of hunger, when the proletariat had to deny itself adequate nourishment to pay for the few machines that it could import, but the simple juxtaposition of the shrinking volumes of wheat being marketed on the one hand and, on the other, the growth in exports of this same wheat, a condition for the growth of the much-needed imports of manufactured products, illustrates with enough eloquence the terrible contradictions in which the isolation of the revolution inexorably locked up the soviet proletariat and its party. However, it is immediately obvious that if this growth did not continue much beyond the NEP (it stopped abruptly in 1930-31), the subsequent decrease, which corresponds to the concerted autarky of the era of “socialism in one country”, does not illustrate any alleviation of the economic situation of the workers, quite the contrary, and moreover constitutes the logical continuation of the political counter-revolution within the Soviet camp.
Balance sheet of a revolution / Bilan d’une révolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Imports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>1.192</td>
<td>1.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>747</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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In millions of roubles based on 1 January 1961 values, these are the figures for the period which interests us now, according to the Soviet Encyclopaedia.

Export growth is limited by grain production, which, from 1926, plateaued at an average of 730 million quintals. Thus, it was not only the supply of cities that was compromised, but also industrial development which, within the framework of the NEP, and in the absence of foreign capital, depended essentially on the exchange of Russian wheat for foreign machinery and fertilizers. Still within the NEP framework, the key question is therefore that of increasing agricultural production. Compared to the pre-war period, there was still a deficit of more than 40 million quintals, while from 1918 to 1926 the population increased by 10 million and continued to increase each year by three million inhabitants. The increase in agricultural production and, moreover, that of the availability of grain (which depends on the first but is not the same thing, as we have seen) is not only an economic question, but also social: increasing productivity obviously depends on a technical revolution, the means of which can only be provided by industrial development, and, more precisely, by massive production of agricultural machinery and fertilizers; but on the one hand this industrial development is precisely limited by low agricultural productivity and, on the other hand, the rational use of hypothetical new means of production presupposes the overcoming of the fragmented structure of agriculture: the big kulak enterprise is obviously superior to the economy based on small plots both in terms of its ability to use subsequent technical progress and in terms of its immediate productivity, but this advantage does not directly affect the social availability of cereals, because it is private production, which expands or contracts not exclusively according to technical and natural possibilities, but according to the market, and which therefore cannot be regulated at will by revolutionary power. The whole secret of the counter-revolution that took place in the Soviet camp, even before the end of the NEP, must therefore be sought in the social structure of Russian agriculture, but it is unfortunately very difficult to get a complete picture of it, due to the absence of statistics. If we rely on the speech made by the Stalinist Molotov at the 15th Congress (the Congress at which the unified left of Trotsky-Zinoviev-Kamenev was liquidated in December 1927), we can admit that the extension of the small-plot production which, before the revolution, was at 60 million hectares had grown, due to the division of the land belonging to the nobility, the Church and the Tsarist State, to 100 million hectares, to which should be added 40 million hectares of “idle land” before 1917 that had been recovered for cultivation, and 36 million hectares, if it is true that out of 40 million hectares belonging to wealthy peasants before October, they did not have more than 4 million left in 1927, the difference having been returned to middling and poor peasants. According to the same speech, made towards the end of the NEP, there would still have been 24 million small farms, of which eight million were so small that “even the employment of the horse was too expensive” and which therefore would not have provided any surplus, even supposing that they fed their owners. Thus, almost 98% of the soil was in the hands of small farms with small surpluses, while the rest, which contributed more than 50% to marketable production, was in the hands of a capitalist class which, to put it mildly, was in no way interested in the success of the NEP and which, without feeding an “opposition in principle” to the Soviet regime, should of course produce and deliver its production for the market only to the extent that it had an interest in it, strong enough to store its surpluses when the prices did not suit it in order to force them upwards. To consider this situation in agriculture, “everything depended on industrialization”, but at the very low level to which the productive forces had fallen and in the framework of the exchange between town and country, the weakness of agriculture could only act as a brake on industrial development, since agriculture was unable to provide industry with either capital or market; nor could it provide food surpluses for a working class in the process of growth. Thus, although at a level much lower than that of socialist transformation, the demand for industrial development posed insoluble questions within the framework of the economic liberalization of the NEP. In industry, 1913 levels of production seem to have been reached in 1926, but at the cost of an extreme social tension. In some sectors, it would have been surpassed in 1927-28. It was no coincidence that this was when the crisis broke out and the great turning point occurred which, with “dekulakization” and small and medium peasants being forced into collective farms on the one hand, and the forced march towards industrialization on the other, would open the “Stalinist” era proper, under the absurd and false banner of “socialism in one country”. But if this turning point obeyed a determinism independent of the “ideas” of the leaders and was situated in real economic relations, it was also conditioned by the political counter-revolution of 1926-27.
The economic debate and the struggle over principles in the Bolshevik Party from 1923 to 1928

The explosive contradictions of the Russian economy and society, subjected as it was to the criminal blockade of the world bourgeoisie, could not fail to be reflected in the internal life of the party. Each economic crisis – first 1923, then 1925 and 1927-28 – corresponds to a crisis in the party. The struggle was very lively at each phase and it is not always easy to distinguish differences of principles from those having only secondary significance. Until 1928, the struggle seemed to be between a liberal right, whose theorist was Bukharin, and an interventionist left, whose theorists were Trotsky and Yevgeni Preobrazhensky, with a centre represented by Stalin, tacking a course between the two. From 1925 on, this left and this right did not only oppose each other on questions of practical economic policy, but also on a question of principle, the question of the possibility or not of socialism in a single country, a question on which the entire orientation of the party depended, and therefore also that of the Russian State in the international class struggle and (insofar as the Russian section exercised a preponderant influence in the International) the entire orientation of the latter as well. Up until 1928, because the liberal right was in the same camp as partisans of “socialism in one country” while the interventionists were in the internationalist camp, it may see that the same class frontier separating national socialism and internationalism also separated the interventionism of Trotsky and Preobrazhensky from the liberalism of Bukharin. Russian militants were so permeated by this false belief that when Stalin made his “left turn” of 1928 in practical economic policy, without renouncing, far from it, his national communism in principle, the disarray would be such among those who believed that they saw in Bukharin’s liberalism the main danger and anti-proletarian opportunism par excellence, that the majority of the militants of the unified opposition would judge the time to join the Stalinists, the very first of them being Preobrazhensky, whom Stalin would use to apply the programme. It must be said in honour of Trotsky that he would not capitulate.

Unlike in 1928, the crisis of 1923 was a “crisis of growth”. Cities underwent a renaissance and industrial production, still representing only a quarter of what it was in 1913, nevertheless increased by 46% compared with the previous year. State industry’s share of this increase was much lower than that of artisan industry and the private companies that dominated in light industry, companies leased to individuals by the workers’ State, which was unable to manage everything that had been nationalized. The consequence was holding back heavy industry, which remained in the hands of the State and was organized in companies operating in relation to the market for raw materials, labour and products as isolated businesses having their own balance sheet and receiving a profit, that is to say as companies organized in the capitalist way with the difference, compared to the private sector, that their profit returned to the workers’ State, which thus had economic resources that it could, theoretically at the very least, use for class purposes, which explains why the Bolsheviks designated them as “socialist enterprises” despite their economic characteristics. The strengthening of industry leased to private entrepreneurs in relation to State industry should not be seen as a strengthening of capitalism in relation to a non-existent socialism, despite this ambiguous terminology used by the Russian Communists; but it nonetheless constituted a danger, insofar as it marked the extension of an uncontrollable economic sector compared to the only one that was subject to a certain degree of control.

That said, both the private sector and the State sector were, as a result of the increase in industrial prices, faced with the need to reduce their overhead costs, which resulted in the closure of unprofitable companies for the purpose reorganization, and stagnant wages. Unemployment rose from 500,000 at the end of 1922 to 1,250,000 in the summer of 1923, while “red industrialists” and executives in State industry exerted pressure on the workers with a view to increasing their productive effort, which the unions were concerned about. Compared to the curve of agricultural prices, which stagnated at around 50% of their pre-war levels, the rise in industrial prices, which reached 180 and 190% of pre-war levels, defined what Trotsky denounced at the 12th Party Congress as the “scissors crisis”, a direct threat to the development of agriculture insofar as it robbed peasants of a part of the fruit of their labour, and therefore threatened the political alliance between the working class and the peasantry. To close the “scissors”, Trotsky proposed a correction of the NEP with aid to industry and planning intended to encourage the recovery of heavy industry. Most members of the political bureau, on the contrary, wanted to maintain the NEP in full, that is to say the policy of conciliation with the peasants, by resorting to an authoritarian reduction in industrial prices on the one hand and, on the other, by reducing the tax burden on the peasants. They only foresaw an increase in exports to improve industrial equipment, postponing the development of heavy industry.

In fact, at the 12th Congress, there was not yet a conflict in the Bolshevik Party on the economic question. Furthermore, it was not the adoption of the status quo in this matter that would push Trotsky into opposition. It was the otherwise crucial question of the threat of degeneration of the party, which Bukharin, the future “right-winger” in economic matters, as well as Preobrazhensky and so many others who were considered to be leftists in this respect, had been denouncing since February 1923, just as Lenin himself did before his illness. This alignment in 1923 was not circumstantial: it was all that was healthy in the party, drawn up against the foreign body represented by Stalin and his methods, with whom, to their subsequent misfortune, old companions of Lenin like Kamenev and Zinoviev, entered into alliance. We must not forget that, whatever the internal struggles between “right” and “left” and the appearances provoked by individual failures during the great turning point of 1928, it was the same alignment of the Marxist party against Stalinist national communism that we find in the unfortunately short-lived attempt at an alliance between Bukharin and Trotsky during the “liquidation of the NEP”. Trotsky would join the Opposition in October 1923. Writing from that date to December his famous The New Course, which, without being devoted to economic policy, nevertheless contained the positions which, in the absence of Trotsky, the Opposition would support at the 12th conference of January 1924 through the mouth of Preobrazhensky, encountering a resistance from the Stalinists and Kamenev, whose source was clearly outside of the economic question. In The New Course, as he foresaw at that time the outburst of demagoguery that did indeed occur, Trotsky began by recalling that he was the first to advocate the NEP for the rural areas and that this proposal was “linked to another dealing with the new organization of industry, a less definitive and much more circumspect proposal, but directed on the whole against the...
regime of the glavs11 which was destroying all contact between industry and agriculture”. Thus, it was neither a question of “underestimating the peasantry”, nor of imposing on industry a return to the regime of war communism: “The capital economic task of the day consists in establishing between industry and agriculture and, consequently, in industry, a correlation that would permit industry to develop with a minimum of crises, collisions and upheavals, and in assuring industry and State commerce a growing preponderance over private capital... what methods should be followed in the establishment of a rational correlation between town and country, between transportation, finance and industry, between industry and commerce? Which institutions are chosen to apply these methods? What, finally, are the concrete statistical data that make it possible at any given moment to establish the plans and the economic calculations best suited to the situation? Each one, obviously, a question whose solution cannot be predetermined by any general political formula whatever... Do these questions bear a principled or programmatic character? No, for neither the programme nor the theoretical traditions of the party have bound us, nor could they bind us, on this point, due to the lack of necessary experience and its generalization. Is the practical importance of these questions great? Immeasurably. Upon their solution depends the fate of the revolution... There ought to be an end to the jabbering about underestimating the role of the peasantry. What is really needed is to lower the price of merchandise for the peasants”.

What is important, from the point of view of principle, is that, contrary to what would happen later, when he got carried away with his fight against the right around Bukharin, Trotsky, who fought vigorously in The New Course for the defence of the party, recognized that in economic policy, on the one hand there are no principles you can rely on, and on the other, that all the questions raised concerned the conditions for the survival of Soviet power and not the socialist transformation of the Russian economy and society. With regard to industrialization, Trotsky insisted that “it is absurd to assert that the question boils down to the tempo of the development” and that what really mattered in reality was the direction of development. In this regard, his demands were most measured: put an end to improvisations, strive to specify a production plan for State industry in accordance with material conditions and resources, taking into account the fact that “it is impossible to get an exact advance estimate of the peasant market and of the world market” and that “errors of evaluation are inevitable, if only because of the variability of the harvest, etc.”; not to claim that the principal branches of State industry and transportation12 will yield a profit in the third year of the NEP, but rather limit the losses suffered, more than was the case in the second year, by streamlining the activity of State industry; in short, act in such a way as to ward off the danger of a smychka (“welding together”) of the anarchic peasant economy and private capital, which would “restart the process of primitive accumulation, first in the commercial domain, then in the industrial domain” and would thus tend to intervene between the workers’ State and the peasantry, acquiring an economic and therefore political influence over the latter, a serious symptom of the possibility that the counter-revolution would triumph.

While placing enormous emphasis on “the correct organization of the work by our State Planning Commission” (Gosplan), “the direct and rational way of approaching successfully the solution of the questions relating to the smychka [is] not by suppressing the market, but on the basis of the market”, Trotsky conceded that “the question does not depend solely on Gosplan” and that “the factors and conditions on which the advance of industry depends run into dozens” but that it is “only with a solid Gosplan... that it will be possible to appreciate how it suits these factors and conditions and to adjust our action accordingly”. In conclusion, Trotsky wants the party to expect more from industry and less from State aid for the recovery of agriculture: “The workers’ State must come to the aid of the peasants (to the degree that its means will permit!) by the institution of agricultural credits and agronomical assistance, so as to lighten the task of exporting their products (grain, meat, butter, etc.) on the world market. Nevertheless, it is mainly through industry that we can act directly, if not indirectly, upon agriculture. It must furnish the countryside with agricultural implements and machines at accessible prices... In order to organize and develop agricultural credits, the State needs a substantial revolving fund. In order to procure it, its industry must yield profits, which is impossible unless its constituent parts are rationally harmonized among themselves”. Just like Lenin, Trotsky linked these prudent economic considerations to the international question: “If the counter-revolutionary danger rises up, as we have said, out of certain social relationships, this in no wise means that by a rational policy it is not possible to parry this danger (even under unfavourable economic conditions for the revolution), to reduce it, to postpone it, Sushia a postponement is in turn apt to save the revolution by assuring it either a favourable economic shift at home or contact with the victorious revolution in Europe”. The only weakness of Trotsky’s position lay in the fact that, judging that “the kulaks, the middlemen, the retailers, the concessionaries” are “much more capable of surrounding the State apparatus than the party itself”, he seemed to think that, on the basis of a revived State industry, but functioning, in the last analysis, in a capitalist fashion, the party could victoriously contest the State apparatus with all these bourgeois strata and, recruiting new forces in the proletariat on the basis of the successes of State industry, preserve, thanks to this contribution, its threatened proletarian character. When he ponders the paths of the counter-revolution, it is on the political paths that it could take, if the economic hypothesis of a victory of private capitalism over State capitalism is verified. Thus, “there could be many: either the direct overthrow of the workers’ party, or its progressive degeneration, or finally, the conjunction of a partial degeneration, splits, and counter-revolutionary upheavals”. If he also cites the danger resulting from the merger of the party and the State apparatus, and from the penetration of administrative methods into the life of the party, whose functioning it fundamentally changes, if he notes that at the time when he was writing: “This is precisely the danger that is now most obvious and direct. The struggle against the other dangers must under present conditions begin with the struggle against bureaucratism”, he does not seem to be aware of the fact that in the event of the development of State industry, this danger would not decrease, but increase; on the contrary, he concludes that: “The struggle against the bureaucratism of the State apparatus is an exceptionally important but prolonged task, one that runs more or less parallel to our other fundamental tasks: economic reconstruction and the elevation of the cultural level of the masses”. But – however great the courage of the militant who only defined the difficulties and warned of the dangers in
order to combat them all the better – the insoluble character of the contradictions within which the defection of the European proletariat confined the Russian revolution is nonetheless cruelly apparent in the entire text. At the 13th conference in January 1924, the left, which defended these economic theses through the voice of Preobrazhensky, while also especially demanding a cleansing of the party’s internal regime, underwent a total defeat. In fact, the real object of the debate was by no means the question of economic policy, on which the Stalinists only weighed in ironically, denouncing the danger that “bureaucratization” would cause the USSR if the party listened to Trotsky! Rather, it was the question of the party, to which the main report, that of Stalin, was devoted. The opposition was accused of having issued the slogan of “the destruction of the party apparatus by seeking to transfer the centre of gravity of the fight against the State bureaucracy to the party itself” and it was condemned as the trouble-maker behind “an abandonment of Leninism, objectively reflecting the pressure exerted by the petty bourgeoisie”. So there was no struggle between two currents of the party defending different economic policies: there was only the mobilization of dark forces (who would soon reveal their true nature), not for the defence of principles, but against certain people (in the first place, Trotsky), the ruling fraction being imposed not by force of argument, but by threats of repression and the empty invocation of the name of Lenin, whose illness only emboldened them, in reality, to strike such blows at party traditions that they overturned them.

The victory of the opponents of the left in 1923 obviously could not prevent the explosion of the objective contradictions of the NEP, which, far from being attenuated, were aggravated by economic development itself. Thus, in 1925, a new crisis brought back all the problems of 1923 and provoked a new controversy in the party, all the more violent since it did not only concern the questions of practical economic policy, but a question much higher in principle and programme, on which depended the fate of Soviet power as a proletarian power, its relationship to the international proletarian struggle and the direction in which its influence on the communist international would be exercised. In fact, these were two entirely different polemics, but they inevitably overlapped one another, the first bringing a right and a left into opposition on the question of industrialization and relations with the Russian peasantry, the second (the famous question of socialism in one country) establishing, against the left, a deceptive coalition of the right and of a centre whose true nature and true importance would only reveal themselves to all actors too late in the drama. Forty years later, we must therefore carefully distinguish them from each other, and above all rid the entire debate of the prejudices fuelled by the militants of the time and which history has invalidated.

From 1923 to 1925, agricultural and industrial production resumed, transport was reorganized, trade and commerce intensified. However, a peasant revolt in Georgia, from the summer of 1924, and in 1925, a further reduction in wheat deliveries (so severe that it provoked a supply crisis in cities and the cancellation of orders for industry that the State intended to finance through exports of agricultural products) resurfaced the central problem of the NEP, that of the relations between proletarian power and the peasantry. In fact, the peasantry was in the long run dissatisfied by the concessions that had already been granted with the renunciation of war communism and the re-establishment of free trade. It put pressure on the State for the reduction of taxes and the increase in agricultural prices, to which the communist power had hitherto not consented, on the one hand for the sake of industrialization, and on the other to defend industrial workers’ standard of living (which was still lower than in 1913). More seriously, in the country the wealthy peasantry was calling for the abolition of constitutional prohibitions on the employment of hired labour in agriculture and the leasing of land, and, in general, the abolition of all measures which, hitting the richest peasants with a higher tax and depriving them moreover of the right to vote, discouraged the average peasants from making the least improvement in their operations for fear of being classified in this category.

The party’s first reaction to this situation was given by the decisions of the 14th Conference in April 1925, in which everyone agreed on the need for a retreat within the framework of the NEP: reduction of the agricultural tax, relaxation of restrictions on the employment of hired labour and leasing and therefore the development of private capital in the countryside. It was only after the fact – and in the face of the developing implications of this retreat – that the rupture occurred between the adversaries, hitherto still united within the left of 1923, which would split into a right (Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky) and the new left (Zinoviev, Kamenev and the entire Leningrad section of the party) and a centre (Stalin, Molotov and Kalinin). However, it is impossible to understand the meaning of these arguments without referring to the party’s previous positions with regard to the peasantry. During the civil war, with the military and political questions taking precedence over economic questions, the party relied on the poor peasants, as the natural and unreserved allies of the urban proletarians, and whose committees had played an important role in the establishment of the Red Army. The transition to the NEP had prompted Lenin to focus on the average peasants, whose economic reserves were slightly less in deficit than those of the poor peasants on the one hand and who, on the other, being neither exploiters of labour nor speculators like the rich peasants, were not a priori opponents of proletarian power. In times of economic reconstruction, it was therefore natural that, without disguising the average peasant’s nature and faults as a petty bourgeoisie, Lenin had been led to make him an “impressive defence”, showing the party that the supply of food to the cities depended entirely on this social category.

There was still no question of giving up the struggle against the kulak as a loan shark and speculator, and also as a potential supporter of the restoration of the Constituent regime. At most, according to Lenin, his quality as a producer of essential commodities for the city earned him less rigorous treatment than that suffered by the urban bourgeoisie.

In 1925, after four years of tolerance towards the average peasant and limitation of the kulak economy, it was this very pattern that was challenged, not by one tendency, but by the facts themselves, because the “bourgeois cooperation” on which Lenin had placed great hopes, not of socialism but of modernization of agriculture, had not advanced by a single step, due to the weak development of industry. The right was the current which, drawing conclusions from the facts, boldly passed from the policy of support for the average peasant to a policy favouring the development of private capitalism in the countryside; the left violently resisted this turning point, considering the previous policy of limiting the kulak economy,
defence by the proletarian power of the poorest strata of the countryside against the exploitation and usury of the kulaks, and economic assistance to the latter to be sacrosanct; as for the centre, it was not on this question that it was destined to distinguish itself: accepting the policy of the right for the sake of saving the State, it disapproved the too visible encouragement of the rural bourgeoisie by means of a petty-bourgeois anti-capitalism and concern for formal party orthodoxy; drowning the whole debate in eclectic formulas, supporting the policy of the right in the name of the principles of the previous phase (the alliance with the average peasant), it appeared as a “conciliator” in the eyes of all, while all the time preparing the “purification” of the party of its two Marxist wings, and therefore its destruction. Leaving the centre aside for the moment, we must see if the opposition between right and left was really the opposition between the “pro-kulak” current and the purely proletarian current that the left believed and said, while at the same time being between “anti-industrialists” and “industrialists”.

In reality, no one in the Russian party was an opponent of industrialization, everyone knowing perfectly well that it was indispensable to the recovery and concentration of agriculture and, to varying degrees, dangerous to the dictatorship of the proletariat insofar as it could only be done on the basis of wage labour and the accumulation of capital. The divergence does not relate to the need for industrialization, but to the paths it should follow. For the Trotskyist left of 1923, industrialization essentially depended on State volition and on the deliberate choice of an industrialization policy. It is no coincidence that, in 1925, Zinoviev and Kamenev adhered to this position, in perfect logical alignment with their resistance to a turning point which they considered to be “in favour of the kulak”. For the right, on the contrary, industrialization was as much the result of as the condition for of the organic recovery of the rural economy. Noting that the first development of industry served to expand industrial production itself, while also enriching the social strata linked to trade rather than serving the development of agriculture, Bukharin concluded that workers’ power must allow the rural petty bourgeoisie itself to accumulate the working capital essential for increasing output, which was impossible if the employment of hired labour remained illegal in the countryside and if the party persisted in a policy of assistance to the poor strata which, without freeing them from misery, turned them into economically parasitic strata. The Bukharin compromise was in fact a “Lenin compromise”: the direct transition from the small fragmented economy to State capitalism being impossible in the countryside, it was necessary, according to Bukharin, to accept an indirect passage through private capitalism. All development – including that of State industry – being condemned to take place within the forms of commerce and wage labour, this is no more a renunciation of socialism than the NEP of 1921 itself.

Indignant at Bukharin’s provocative “get rich” exhortation to the peasants, which does not mean “eat more off the backs of the proletariat”, but rather, accumulate the agricultural capital that the economy needs to get out of stagnation, since we cannot do it, the left accused the Bukharin right of “defending the kulak”; in reality, the right never advocated the abolition of the nationalization of land, it did not favour the formation of a class of agrarian capitalists rich in land, but only of a class of large State farmers employing salaried workers under its control while waiting to be expropriated when the necessary degree of concentration of rural capital was reached. The accusation of the left is therefore scientifically unsustainable, even if it remains in the Marxist tradition when, relying on Engels, it objects to Bukharin that, while being an opponent of petty land ownership, the proletariat must implement a policy on the peasant question distinct from capitalist politics, which vows the ruin, pure and simple, of small farmers, whom it abandons without hesitation to misery and stagnation. It would not have been difficult for the right to respond to this valid objection theoretically by noting that the proletarian power defended the poor peasant, who became an agricultural waged worker on the same basis as industrial waged workers, but it could not respond practically by actually protecting him against the abuses of the kulak, and this is the reason why the left never converted to the right’s viewpoint nor even recognized its validity from the Marxist point of view.

If it is impossible for us today to associate the politics of the right with a policy of “restoring capitalism” and “social-democratic degeneration” of the State, as the left did in the years 1925-27, and at the same time to associate the politics of the left with a policy which, without political defeat, would have marched without deviation in the direction of socialism, this is not only because historically, it was not the right that presided over the transformation of the double revolution into a purely capitalist revolution, but because it had to a certain extent foreseen and tried in advance to conjure up the particular type of “capitalist restoration”, which occurred in the guise of a turn to the left, and which turned out to be worse for the world communist movement than it would have been under the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries. Nowhere is this more evident than in the debate in 1925 between the leader of the right, Bukharin, and a member of the 1923 opposition, the “Trotskyist” Preobrazhensky, while Trotsky himself remained silent. The “left” thesis of the “industrialist” Preobrazhensky was as follows: The economy of a backward and isolated country (or even of a group of countries that have not reached maximum capitalist development) where a proletarian power, directing a nationalized industry, strives to create the material bases of socialism, obeys objective laws which, for better or worse, will end up being imposed on this power and which are those of “primitive socialist accumulation”. Far from trying to resist these laws, the proletarian party must therefore promote their manifestation through its political activity. It must use its “socialist monopoly” (that is to say the State authority it exercises over industry and foreign trade) to implementug a pricing policy that ensures the syphoning off of funds normally intended for the income of the peasantry towards the State industrialization fund, the only way to put an end to the “blackmail that the kulaks exert on it” on the one hand, and rural overpopulation on the other. Furthermore, such syphoning being insufficient to allow it rapidly to go beyond the critical point where the country of the revolution has lost the advantages of the capitalist regime, without yet having attained those of the socialist regime, the “socialist monopoly” must not hesitate to syphon off funds from the incomes and revenues of the private industrial sector. Preobrazhensky admitted that in the event of a revolutionary victory in Europe, this phase of “primitive socialist accumulation” could not last less than twenty years (and therefore more without such a revolutionary victory) and that it could not go without clearly anti-socialist effects: the exploitation (in the economic and non-moralizing...
sense of the term) of the peasantry whose income, according to him, should grow more slowly than that of the proletariat under a regime of workers’ dictatorship; the development of a huge monopoly apparatus with parasitic tendencies, which is also a nest of social privilege. Convinced that “workers’ action exercised from the point of view of the consumer” would be enough to correct the parasitic tendencies of the monopoly “exercised from the point of view of the producer”, Preobrazhensky nevertheless invited the Party to abandon all the preparation of the right to embark on this path resolutely. What he had not foreseen was that a “socialist monopolism” thus conceived was irreconcilable with any form of “workers’ action”, so that in order to take such a path, the Party should first have ceased to be the proletarian party. Bukharin immediately branded the so-called “law of primitive socialist accumulation” as a monstrosity, justifying not only the exploitation of the peasantry, but that of the proletariat, and the rebirth of a new exploiting class hidden under the cover of a State apparatus with a socialist label. If it were really only a question of sharing, once and for all, a given output between the worker and the peasant, the “truly workers’ policy”, he said, would consist in obtaining the maximum share. “But then there would be no question of raising production, nor of progressing towards communism, nor of defending the alliance of workers and peasants. It is incumbent upon the working class to take responsibility for the national economy, and it must ensure that this process is conducted in the right direction, that is to say, that it does not fall into a narrow corporatism by taking care only of its own immediate interests while betraying general interests, and it must understand the interdependence of the constituent parts of the national economy”. And: “It is not by extracting every year the maximum of resources from the peasantry to put them in industry that we will ensure the maximum rate of industrial development. The greatest permanent rhythm will be obtained by a combination in which industry grows on the basis of a rapidly growing economy”. It is industry that provides the lever for the radical transformation of agriculture, but the authoritarian maintenance of low agricultural prices, the measures preventing the affluent layer of the peasantry from accumulating and the poor peasants from becoming wage earners for hire not only caused discontent among all the peasant strata, not only created enormous costs of assistance to the State, but also slowed down industrialization itself. The proletariat must maintain its hegemony in the Soviet State, but the lesson of war communism and the meaning of the NEP were that it must be exercised by other methods than during the civil war. The proletariat cannot run the economy in its entirety: “If it takes on this task, it will be obliged to build a colossal administrative apparatus... The attempt to replace all the small producers, the small peasants, by bureaucrats produces such a colossal apparatus that the expenditure to maintain it is incomparably greater than the unproductive expenditure resulting from the anarchic conditions of small production; in short, the entire economic apparatus of the proletarian State not only will not facilitate, but will only hinder the development of the productive forces. It will lead to the direct of opposite of what it was intended to achieve”. Bukharin’s conclusion was that Preobrazhensky’s theses were only an idealization of the methods of war communism, that “an imperative necessity compelled the proletariat to destroy the entire economic apparatus inherited from that time, and that if it did not do so, other forces would overthrow its domination”.

It took more than 25 years before these “other forces” – as foreign and hostile to the proletariat and socialism as Bukharin had feared – manifested themselves, denouncing in turn, with Krushchev and the rest of the gang of “destalinizers”, the brake opposed to “the development of the productive forces” by the “State economic apparatus” born of the irresistible anti-bourgeois revolution of October, but which, as a State apparatus, never had and never could have anything “proletarian” about it, the strength of the working class being embodied in its party and not in any “apparatus”, and the march to socialism accompanied not by a strengthening of any such “apparatus”, but, on the contrary, by its decline22; but it did not take more than two years for the left to be liquidated politically, no more than four for the right to suffer the same fate, that is to say, for the complete destruction of the Bolshevik Party, which by the same token meant the overthrow of the political domination of the proletariat, something Bukharin had feared no less than the left, but which he had not realized was being prepared in the debate on the principle of socialism in one country that raged from the Fourteenth Congress of the Russian Party of December 1925 to the Fifteenth Congress of December 1927, via the Enlarged Executive Committee of the Communist International of 1926, in which he covered himself with opprobrium by uniting with the centre against the left, and worse, by lending his help as a theorist to the coarse empiricism of Stalin.

It was inevitable that the justified Marxist condemnation of socialism in one country spilled over onto the economic policy defended by the right, that no one even made the necessary distinction between renegade doctrine and “right-wing” policy. This was however wrong, and it is one of the great merits of the Italian left to have pointed it out23. The left expected the counter-revolution that it foresaw all too well to come from the right, and it was with the left alone that the right identified the dangers threatening the revolution: now it was the centre that was the real agent of the counter-revolution; the centre that no one had ever considered as a separate current, the centre that was despised by all, that now suddenly “empowered” itself, striking the left in 1927 and the right in 1929 before massacring them less than ten years later.

Carried out, at least in its initial phase, more quietly than the counter-revolutions of the past that had put an end to great historical revolutions, it also hid behind the façade of the same party. In reality, the empowerment of the centre in relation to the Marxist right and the Marxist left did indeed signify the appearance of a new party, and the destruction of the party of October. In the international field, this is evidenced by the dismantling of the Communist International, which was in any case debilitated by opportunism and its reduction to the role of “border guard” for the USSR. Everything changed in domestic affairs, too. We cannot speak of an economic regression from socialism to capitalism to the extent that, as all of Lenin’s work confirms, there was not a single atom of economic socialism in the USSR in 1927-29, but the Stalinist regime identified itself with the Bolshevik regime in the grossest fashion in that, from the dictatorship of the proletariat, a political conquest that had always been threatened and passionately defended, and now of course destroyed and conflated with Soviet democracy, there emerged an intangible constitutional creed: in the USSR the State became a “workers’ State”, just as elsewhere the State is monarchical or republican. In the same way socialism ceased to be a still distant objective (but one that will be a definite and demonstrable reality when it actually appears in history) and became a sort of constitutional
principle; the USSR became “the motherland of socialism”, which means that its economy is socialist like that of France is French or that of Germany is German. Any doubt in this regard became a matter for the police: as to appearances to the contrary, they were the results of sabotage and conspiracy. This lead-footed palinode was slavishly diffused under the name of “Marxism-Leninism” by the official communist parties of the whole world, but it was through the show trials, designed to make the most famous old Bolsheviks appear “beyond question” as saboteurs, conspirators and spies of foreign imperialism that less than ten years later the Soviet State undertook to demonstrate once and for all the “truth” to the working masses of Russia and the world. The destruction of Bolshevism opened the darkest phase of reaction that has ever affected the international proletarian movement.

The crisis of 1927-28 and the liquidation of the NEP

The elimination of the unified left of the Bolshevik Party in 1927 and that of the Bukharin right in November 1929 heralded, beyond dispute, the end of the brief proletarian cycle of the revolution, but not of the revolutionary cycle itself. The reason is simple. First, it was not enough to imprison and deport the revolutionaries or to keep them hostage in the new party after spectacular “recantations” in order to settle the peasant problem; second, the elimination of the Marxists did not in any way imply the renunciation of revolutionary, that is to say non-peaceful, methods, since the use of violence is by no means the prerogative of Marxism. Of course, by “purging” the party, the counter-revolution wanted to unburden itself of the yoke of principles and of the communist programme which, at the end of the reconstruction, became an obstacle not only to the country’s capitalist development, but also to the conquest of its independence from Western capitalism, for which Tsarist Russia had never been more than a semi-colony – a hindrance that it regarded as odious; but such an “emancipation” had no reason to act in the exclusive sense of unleashing conciliatory tendencies. With regard to the international class struggle, where the party had originally been intransigent, it would act in this conciliatory direction, and only in this direction. It was no coincidence that, of all the opponents, Trotsky was the one most hated by the Stalinists: he was the only one to fightconciliation with the bourgeoisie and world social democracy, which the opportunism of Zinoviev and Bukharin, on the contrary, accommodated very well. But in the economic field, the opposite was true. The party’s position in this respect being one of compromise from the start24. In short, the logic of the Stalinist counter-revolution in no way involved the transition to universal conciliation, but only the reversal of authentic Bolshevik positions: conciliation in international politics, but a “revolutionary” method in the domestic sphere insofar as conservation of the State and national independence required it. Easily understandable today, this logic nonetheless threw communists trained in the struggle against reformist (and also revolutionary syndicalist) deviations into complete disarray, obeying a different logic. This inversion also placed them in an ambiguous position since it led them to reproach the Stalinist party, whose conciliatory approach they had previously denounced, for wanting to settle the peasant question with violence. Thus the Opposition seemed to have all the appearances of bad faith, whereas the Stalinist party, by bravely returning to methods of civil war in the years 1929-30, gave the impression of “having more rights than the left opposition (and a fortiori than the right) to proclaim themselves the champions of intransigent communism”25.

Without a prior political counter-revolution, the “dekulakization” and the forced so-called “collectivization” would not have been possible, and it is precisely because a truly Marxist and proletarian party could never have carried out such a task that its defeat was inevitable; for it is perfectly true that “collectivization” responded to a historical necessity and that the whole complex of conditions that existed in 1929-30, and which were inherited from the previous era, did not allow any other policy26. That said, it is untrue that this dekulakization and this forced “collectivization” responded to a concerted plan, and all the more untrue to claim that they had always been planned in the Bolshevik programme for the day when reconstruction would be completed. This is simply an a posteriori justification for the dismantling of the party, which tends precisely to deny the counter-revolutionary character of this act: it suggests that, on the path of the “second revolution”, of the “new October” (these rascals dared to speak of a “Peasant October”!) harmoniously complementing the “first revolution” of October 1917, the party had encountered resistance from “opportunists”, “pacifists”, “enemies of the muzhiks” and “friends of the kulaks” who had delayed their arrival until 1929-30. It was a very effective version since it put Trotskyists and Bukharin’s followers in the position of neo-Mensheviks and neo-Revolutionary Socialists, and Stalin in the role of a new Lenin, but this beautiful symmetry collapses as soon as we expose the precise course of the so-called “second October revolution” and especially its economic and social effects. The reality of the agrarian revolution of 1929-30, of course, remains27, but not only the “socialist”, but simply “progressive” sheen with which the gravediggers of the Bolshevik Party wanted to embellish it fades away pitifully; the nature of the cause it really served dazzles the eyes, as does the odiously defeatist character of the comparison between the universal proletarian and communist October and the confused and painful convulsions from which Capitalist Russia Mark 2 finally emerged.

A week after the 15th Congress of the CPSU, which had condemned the positions of the left and rejected the request for reintegration of a certain number of its members, the Russian cities were again threatened with famine and incidents broke out between the wheat collectors and peasants demanding further price increases. In January 1928, the quantity of wheat delivered to the market was found to be 25 percent less than that of the previous year, the deficit against the minimum necessary for urban food supplies being two million tons. At the congress, Stalin mocked the “panickers” of the left, “who call for help as soon as the kulaks poke their noses in a corner”, but when the Political Bureau met on 6 January to examine the situation, he blamed the crisis on hoarding by the kulaks. Emergency measures were taken in secret: the order was given to apply Article 107 of the Criminal Code to the kulaks, providing for the confiscation of stocks held by speculators and, to encourage them to help with detection, the distribution of a quarter of the seized grains to poor peasants. The results were meagre, which seems to attest much more to a genuine shortage than speculative storage. From February to July, a real mobilization was organized of the city against the countryside, poor peasants against the kulaks; hit squads of young workers supervised by ten thousand party activists were sent against the rural population, the poor peasants invited to “wage the class struggle” against the rich and to participate in the seizures on the promise of a distribution of a fraction of...
the loot. New exceptional measures were taken publicly: forced loans, the prohibition of sales and direct purchases in the village. As for the press, it not only denounced “the kulak renaissance”, but also the invasion of the party and the State apparatus by elements “who do not see social classes in the village” and who “seek to live in peace with the kulak”, is what to say the right, whose policy had been reaffirmed a few months earlier. While the fear of famine reigned in the cities, the atmosphere of war communism revived in the countryside; the peasantry resisted: according to Bukharin, the State had to suppress more than 150 peasant revolts in the first six months of 1928. In April, thanks to the seizures impacting all categories of peasants, stocks in the cities were sufficient to dispel the spectre of famine; the Central Committee then condemned “administrative arbitrariness, violation of revolutionary law, raids on peasants’ houses and illegal excavations”, prohibited confiscations (except in the case of speculative storage) and compulsory borrowing, and finally re-established the freedom of sales and purchases in the village. Stalin affirmed: “NEP is the basis of our economic policy and will remain so for a long time”; but when the grain crisis seemed to rebound for the following month, in May 1928, this sufficed for the same Stalin to unveil, in a public speech, a new line breaking with the clear line of the 15th Congress: the way out of the grain crisis, he now said, “lies in the transition from individual peasant farming to collective, socially-conducted economy in agriculture”; moreover, under no circumstances “should the development of heavy industry be retarded”, nor should “light industry, which produces chiefly for the peasant market, [be] the basis of our industry”. Far from having defended, as it would pretend a posteriori, a clear line, a distinct party line and opposed as much to the “deviation of the left” as to “that of the right”, the Stalinist centre thus oscillated at the whim of the crisis, supporting the economic policy of the right against the left first, then rallying that of the left and imposing it on the right when the first difficulty arose, demonstrating constancy and continuity in one thing and one thing only: the systematic demolition of the party of Lenin. The right, for its part, fully maintained the positions that it had unceasingly defended since the first controversy in 1923, not out of blindness, but because they were based on reasons of principle that were stronger than the intimations of the crisis. This is why it is appropriate to evoke the final battle fought by Bukharin in response to the “leftist” turn of the Stalinist fraction in May 1928. Bukharin conceded that the increase in agricultural production depended on the gradual replacement of capitalist enterprises by cooperatives of middle and poor peasants and on the transition from small to large enterprises on this basis, but he maintained that this process would take place through the development of individual farms and not through economic pressure on the peasantry. He also conceded that the development of agriculture depended on the development of industry, but at the same time he rejected the idea of an acceleration of the rhythms of industrialization, warning against the source of the pressure in this direction: “the gigantic State apparatus in which nestled elements of bureaucratic degeneration, absolutely indifferent to the interests of the masses, their lives, their material and cultural interests” and “functionaries... ready to work out any old plan”. Despite the sarcasm of the left, which saw in the crisis a vivid confirmation of its own positions, what Bukharin defended in this final phase of the struggle was the programme of Lenin, that is to say the principle of control by the Party of the natural tendency of capital, even State-controlled, towards the frenzied accumulation on the back of the working class and the peasants, a tendency for which the State machine is the natural channel, the blind and inert agent, but an agent which cannot fail to triumph over all socialist intentions if, unfortunately, instead of trying to maintain its control over this machine, the party begins to obey its injunctions, which are only the injunctions of an impersonal Capital, by inscribing to its own programme the “acceleration of industrialization”. In doing so, Bukharin also defended the Marxist conception of the role of the proletarian dictatorship against the distortion to which, without realizing it, the left was subjecting it, under the suggestion of an economic environment characterized by insufficient capitalist development. In Marxist doctrine, which is based on the hypothesis of a revolution occurring in an advanced capitalist country, the role of the proletarian dictatorship is to break down the obstacles opposing the advent of a new economy, full stop. At this stage, there is no opposition between the party on the one hand and the State apparatus on the other: insofar as the revolutionary will of the party goes in the direction of the demands of a society that the imperatives of the accumulation of capital condemned to a perpetual crisis and which, precisely for this reason, had to go through a violent revolution, nothing is easier for the party than to direct the machine of the State in the direction it wants, this machine having absolutely no energy of its own, being by itself, presenting an image, just bodywork, the engine obviously being elsewhere.

What Bukharin vainly tried to make his adversaries understand is that at the lowest stage of the struggle for socialism, where Russia was (at the stage where the very material bases of this socialism are lacking) there is no reversal at all of the very material bases of this socialism are lacking) there is no reversal at all of the role of the party and of the proletarian dictatorship which, from being the breakers of shackles, would become transformed into the forces of “construction and “enlightenment”. The only real force of “construction” and “enlightenment” is found in the very dynamics of a still backward economy, which naturally tends towards capitalism. At this stage, the influence of revolutionary will, of the political factor of the class dictatorship, is exercised with results that are quite different from those that they would have at a more advanced stage, but it cannot be exercised by any other method: party and dictatorship have no other means of acting on the economy than prohibiting or lifting prohibitions; the difficulty is that, if they ban all capitalist development, they block all progress at the same time, condemning them to act like a reactionary brake in the short term, whereas if they lift all the prohibitions they renounce all influence. If they believe, however, that they can escape this harsh alternative by giving up their strictly political role, by attempting to carry out an economic task directly, it is even worse: it is not their influence that they lose, it is their own nature as instruments of the proletariat. Thus it is at the moment when they believe they are reaching maximum influence that the specific aspect of their influence is cancelled out. The economic dynamic finds in the apparatus of the State, which has replaced the bourgeois class as a result of the revolution, its natural transmission belt. At the lower stage of the struggle for socialism, there is consequently a latent conflict between the party and this apparatus, inconceivable at a higher stage where, having lost the historic initiative, capitalism also largely loses the power to compete with the proletarian party for influence over the State apparatus.
This conflict derives quite simply from the conflict which opposes the communist party to capitalism. It cannot ban capitalism, but on the other hand, it cannot renounce the task of restricting capitalism without negating itself.

The party’s acceleration of industrialization and shifting of all resources from light industry to heavy industry would signify the party’s abdication before the capitalist dynamics of the economy for which, in the absence of an established capitalist class, the economic apparatus of the State found itself fulfilling all the requirements of capitalist development, without regard for the needs of the proletarian class and the masses in general. All this explains why in the industrial field, the measures advocated by Bukharin seemed, to the left, to be pitifully modest in view of the immense needs: being content to maintain the rate of growth already achieved by compressing the enormous unproductive expenditure, by shortening the time to production, which was twelve times higher than time to production in the advanced industries of the United States, by fighting against waste, given that the quantity of materials used in Russia for a given output reached one and a half and two times what was required in America, in short rationalizing and economizing rather than proceeding at breakneck speed.

The concern that inspired him is obvious: that Russia’s industrialization should not weigh too heavily on the condition of workers. It was a class concern to which the Stalinist centre was totally indifferent, but the warning was prophetic: the proof is that, faced with Stalinist industrialization, the criticism of Trotsky himself would take on “Bukharinian” accents.

From the speech of May 1928 (which marked the turning point for Stalin on the peasant question and on that of industrialization) to April 1929, when for the first time Bukharin was denounced as the leader of the right, and to November 1929, when he capitulated, the struggle unfolded according to the usual Stalinist schema: “purging” of the party on the one hand, and a violent campaign against its infiltration by kulaks, but perpetual oscillations in the economic policy on the other. In July 1928, the Central Committee took “unanimous” right wing measures: a second ban on searches and seizures among peasants, and a 20 percent increase in wheat prices. However, at the same time, the Stalinist faction demanded a “cruel struggle against the kulak”, accused the right of being “neither Marxist nor Leninist, but made up of peasant philosophers looking towards the past”. According to his usual eclecticism, Stalin did not deny wanting any less to turn his back on the NEP and spoke of a “new phase” within its framework; in July 1928 he wrote again: “There are people who think that individual peasant farming has exhausted its potentialities and that there is no point in supporting it. That is not true, comrades. These people have nothing in common with the line of our Party”. At the end of 1929, the first five-year plan approved by the party provided that in 1933, only 20 percent of the cultivated area would be “collectivized”, that is to say, managed by peasant cooperatives. In the spring of 1929, Stalin still maintained that “poor and middle individual peasant farming plays a predominant part in supplying industry with food and raw materials, and will continue to do so in the immediate future”. A few months later, the so-called “general collectivization” was in full swing.

The so-called “second revolution”, whose violent phase covered the entire second half of 1929 and lasted until the beginning of March 1930, was not only an improvisation carried out under the pressure of the facts, but also a compromise, the worst possible option. First of all, the form of “collectivization” provided for in Stalin’s speech in May 1928 was not the sovkhoz, or State enterprise run by any civil servant and employing hired labour, but the artel, a form of intermediary kolkhoz between the simple farm enterprise and the commune. In this, Stalin did not innovate at all, since in previous years, no Bolshevik ever asserted that it was possible to generalize the sovkhoz form rapidly, given that the State had neither the enormous capital (machines, tools, fertilizers, etc...) nor the immense skilled workforce (agronomists and mechanics) necessary to allow its direct substitution for fragmented peasant enterprises, and given that the scheme could not survive the attempt to turn millions and millions of peasants into pure workers.

On the other hand, Stalin gave, through his anti-kulak demagogy, a strong opportunist imprint to the policy that he advocated: it was this anti-capitalist demagogy that served to pass off the artel, a simple cooperative functioning as an autonomous enterprise in relation to the market, as a communist form, even though it was still inferior to the State capitalistic form of the sovkhoz, itself a simple lever for socialist transformation under certain conditions. It was a huge falsification, desperately trying to equate the rivalry between poor and average peasants and rich peasants for the possession of the land and its products, with the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. However, the Marxist party knew very well from the Manifesto that only this struggle was emancipatory, while that of the layers linked to private property to defend their living conditions was reactionary, seeking to turn the wheel of history backwards. That said, the kolkhoz form, which finally prevailed after violent convulsions and whose “statute” was not defined until 1935, was still inferior to the artel, not because the government had wanted it but because it had to take the route it did, which only goes to show the stupidity of the bureaucratic optimism which in 1929-30 claimed to be “introducing communism into agriculture”. What is rather difficult to establish is, what were the exact relationships between “forced collectivization” and “dekulakization”? If it were possible to impute the agrarian crisis of 1927-29 to the extension of the kulak economy, the thing would be easy: threatened with collapse by the economic blackmail of the kulak, Soviet power would have found salvation only by delivering the peasant class rich in pasture to the covetousness of the poorer strata, that is to say by handing over the kulaks’ land and their machines, even if it meant using force to bring them into cooperatives themselves, which, even without the technical equipment essential for increasing agricultural output, could provide a global product more in line with the needs of the cities by the mere fact of the substitution of individual effort by collective effort. But what seems precisely most questionable (despite the convergence of the positions of the left opposition and the Stalinists on this point, or perhaps because of this convergence) is that the decline in agricultural stocks available on the market was due not to the growth of the fragmented production of the average peasant (seredniak), but to the growth of the capitalist enterprise of the rich and speculative peasant (kulak). The speech given by Stalin in person on December 27, 1929 to justify “the liquidation of the kulak as a class” invalidates this thesis without realizing it, since it states that kulak production was respectively 1,900 million poods (1 pood =16.38 kg) of grain before the revolution and 600 million in 1927, whereas that of the seredniaks and bedniaks (poor peasants) increased from 2,500 million to 5,000 million poods in the same period. Stalin’s concern to demonstrate the benefits drawn by poor and average peasants from the October
Revolution explains the obvious exaggeration of this increase of 100% (!) But the figures for the kulak economy indicate
the complete opposite of a strengthening of the kulak class.
In this case, the turning point of 1929 could be explained not so much by the urgency of the kulak danger as by the fact
that Bukharin’s approach to the progressive transformation of peasant smallholders into kulak employees exclusively by means
of the market was much too slow, while the liquidation of small-scale production had become a vital necessity; rather than
being the origin of “forced collectivization”, dekulakization then appears as its complement: the expropriation of wealthy
peasants in favour of collective farms constituted both a weak element of economic start-up for these poorly equipped
cooperatives, an anti-bourgeois camouflage for the State capitalist offensive against the rural petty bourgeoisie and sub-
bourgeoisie, that is to say the demagogic compensation that the State offered them to better bend them to its harsh coercion
and finally the surest way of preventing country dwellers from rallying around the most enterprising (because least poor)
and resisting the dictatorship of the city. The first interpretation (the urgency of the kulak danger) is more compatible with
the positions of the left, the second (compensation to the rural petty bourgeoisie for forced collectivization) with those of
the Marxist right, but whether you adopt the one or the other, the conclusion is the same: the policy of Stalinist pseudo-
centrism was resolutely anti-Marxist and anti-proletarian.
On the one hand, it was the success of the forced requisitioning of grain, and on the other, the encouraging reports from
State institutions on the cooperative training movement in the second half of 1929 that encouraged the Stalinist fraction to
push for “collectivization” well beyond the limits originally set. Indeed, these successes demonstrated that the peasantry as
a whole was much less capable of resistance than had been feared and that the poorer peasant strata were also more
amenable to the campaign for collectivization than had been hoped. Being incapable of respecting any principles, when
Stalin’s fear of the peasantry had subsided enough, he put aside any last hesitations which, until mid-1929, still bound him
to the right. Never mind that in 1929, only 7,000 tractors were available, while by Stalin’s own admission 250,000 would
have been needed; it did not matter that the “collectivization” of 5 to 8 million tiny holdings still using wooden swing
ploughs bore no relation to the conquest of a higher mode of production: the order was given to the administration to
“hasten collectivization” and “strike at the kulaks, strike so hard as to prevent them from rising to their feet again”. From
October 1929 to May 1930, the proportion of families supervised in collective farms would officially rise from 4.1% to
58.1% without the number of machines of course having changed appreciably. But this result was obtained at the cost of
such a struggle, with such disastrous economic effects, and caused such an aggravation of the tension between cities and
countryside that Stalin would have to put an end to his administrative “revolution”. If we take as exact the statistics fixing
the number of heads of prosperous agricultural holdings at between one and a half and two million, those of poor farms at
between five and eight million, and those of medium-sized farms at between 15 and 18 million, it is clear that,
comprising more than half of peasant farms, the forced establishment of collective farms mainly impacted upon the
average peasantry, all the more so since the families of the kulaks were excluded. This is the whole secret of the violent
character assumed by the operation, the peasant’s attachment to his plot increasing “with the differential rent”, as Trotsky
noted in an article that we quote below; but it is probable that the poorest strata really welcomed it with the enthusiasm that
has been claimed, insofar as it did not worsen their already desperate situation.32
We must leave to bourgeois liberalism the simplistic thesis that “if they had left the peasants alone, everything would have
gone much better in the USSR” and that, inspired by an ultra-moralistic but hypocritical horror of violence, makes the
great mistake of forgetting that nowhere in the world has the capitalist mode of production established itself without
violence, sparing small producers, during its stage of primitive accumulation, no more than the proletarians themselves.
That said, without the slightest concession to the pacifist ideology of its adversary, the proletarian party could not and
cannot approve a policy which, under the pretext of accelerating the course of history, could only delay it
disproportionately, without taking into account that it exposed communist politics to the most sinister comparisons with the
worst exploits of ruling classes past and present. “The liquidation of the kulak as a class” (the official euphemism
suggesting that Stalin had nothing against the millions of well-to-do peasants or their family members, but only their mode
of production) and “accelerated collectivization” translated in reality into the uprooting and deportation of ten million
people (the USSR then had 160 million inhabitants). Sometimes the small peasants eagerly shared out the spoils left by the
kulaks, sometimes they united with them, in which case the rebel villages were surrounded by machine guns and forced to
surrender. The pillage that certain urban brigades engaged in, the excessive zeal of an ignorant or terrified administration
that went so far as to “collectivize” the shoes, clothing and even the glasses of rural people, the cynical corruption of
authorities selling goods back to the “kulaks” that they had robbed from them: all this increased tenfold the despair of the
peasants who not only assassinated as many “communists” (and, more generally, townspeople) as they could, but also
slaughtered their cattle, even destroyed material and burned the harvest to leave nothing to the collective farm, where they
knew they would receive little more than a worker’s salary. The Stalinist State would wait three years (until January 1934)
before revealing the immense economic devastation thus provoked: the disappearance of 55 percent of horses (18 million
animals) in a country almost totally lacking tractors, 40 percent of horned animals (11 million animals), 55 percent of pigs,
66 percent of sheep, and the transformation of vast cultivated areas into fallow land.
Insurrections flared up across the entire USSR.34 The improvised and exhilarated government operation degenerated into a
civil war, but in this civil war the Stalinist authorities could not firmly rely on the Red Army, in which a very large number
of officers turned out to be the sons of kulaks and whose soldiers were mainly peasants, nor could it even rely on the
working class of the cities which, in 1929, was mainly formed of recent emigrants from the countryside, and which lost its
initial sympathy at the beginning for the “collectivization” all the more quickly as the pressure on the peasants worsened
food supplies. Moreover, such a policy was likely to limit spring sowing to a much greater extent than that of previous
years and therefore provoke shortages that were likely to spell the end of Soviet power this time. This mortal danger forced
Stalin to publish in the 2 March 1930 edition of Pravda the infamous article “Dizzy with Success: Concerning Questions of
the Collective-Farm Movement” whose repercussion throughout the country (which considered it as a decree) was immense. He denounced the use of coercion to bring the peasants into the collective farms (whereas a few months earlier, he had loftily insulted Engels and his caution), the confusion between average peasants and kulaks, the purely administrative setting up of collective farms with insufficient preparation, the establishment of agricultural communes instead of artels, and of course blamed the militants and officials who suffered a new and rigorous “purge”. This article was followed on 15 March 1930 by a party decree, On the Deviations from the Party Line in the Kolchhoz Movement, deciding that henceforth the entry of peasants into collective farms would be exclusively voluntary, that the “intolerable denaturation of the class struggle in the countryside” should cease (but “the liquidation of the kulak as a class” should continue relentlessly) and – quite symptomatically – it was also necessary to end the intensive anti-religious propaganda and the compulsory closure of churches! Having also authorized peasants to leave the collective farms that had already been established, the decree caused “decollectivization” at an even faster rate than the “collectivization”: the number of families organized in cooperatives fell from the official 58 percent (the figure was higher in wheat-producing farms, lower elsewhere) to 23 percent. The confusion was extreme, but completely incapable of forming its own political movement, the peasantry ceased resistance as soon as the pressure was released. It is thanks to this and also to the fact that the harvest of 1930 was a good one that the regime, which had been on the brink, was able to stand its ground. So it was that with lies and violence, boasting and denials, a Capitalist Russia Mark 2 emerged from the NEP in less than three years under the iron fist of Stalin, gravedigger of Bolshevism. The unprecedented crisis of 1929-30, which followed many other ordeals, the depth of social antagonisms that “the disappearance of the bourgeoisie” did nothing to attenuate and which national isolation further exasperated, all that marked it for a long time with a sinister but original imprint. And that is why, under the mask of socialism, it would have another half a century to disconcert and sometimes terrify the world.

Capitalist Russia Mark 2

To put it in a few words, we will start with a good formulation of the position that is the exact opposite of the correct Marxist appreciation of the turning point of 1927-30 and contemporary Russia: “The struggle between the city and the countryside, the clash between the two revolutions dominated the domestic scene of the USSR for at least two decades, throughout the 1920s and the 1930s; Lenin, in his last years, attempted to resolve the dilemma peacefully, by means of the New Economic Policy and a mixed economy; but by 1927 or 1928 the attempt had failed. Stalin then sought to solve the conflict forcibly and embarked on the so-called wholesale collectivization of farming. He divorced the socialist revolution from the bourgeois one by annihilating the latter”36.

According to this thesis, Stalinism represented the current which, not hesitating to hit the kulaks and the rural petty bourgeoisie, aimed to transform the impure socialist revolution of Russia into a purely socialist revolution. As for the left and the right, compared to Stalinism they must only have constituted one large right wing, by opposing, with pacifism and democratism, the emancipation of the socialist revolution from the shackles in which the relations of production inherited from the bourgeois democratic revolution had imprisoned it, that is to say the pre-dominance of unproductive small-plot agriculture. It pains us to see such untruths disseminated to a defenceless public as the quintessence of Marxist thought. It suffices to compare the constitution of 1918 with that of 1936 to see that the party which, in power, capitulated to the democratic-bourgeois revolution, was not the Bolshevik Party of 1917-29, but the Stalinist party that survives as the government party of Russia even in 1968! The first, unlike all constitutions throughout history, proclaimed none of those personal rights (property and security) that characterize the bourgeois era, but which capitalist practice constantly tramples on, nor any other kinds of “personal rights”. On the contrary, it loudly proclaims its socialist aim, incompatible not only with the survival of a class of small farmers, but also with the existence of a class of cooperative members assured for life of the possession of the soil and delivering their products to society through the market: the entire abolition of the division of the people into classes. In this constitution, the nationalization of the land, accompanied by a transfer of plots (without compensation to the dispossessed owners) to the workers, is not misleadingly presented as a socialization of the land, but as a legal measure justified by the fact that this socialization was the final goal, a goal that is only achieved when no obstacle (no cooperative property any more than small plot property or capitalist property) prevents the whole of society from direct access to agricultural production. With the constitution of 1936, everything changed: “The land occupied by collective farms is secured to them for their use free of charge and for an unlimited time, that is, in perpetuity” and cooperative property is proclaimed to be “the sacred and inviolable foundation of the Soviet system”! There is no longer the abolition of classes with a distinct and contrasting mode of production and life: the complex constituted by the cooperative, and machinery and tractors belonging to the State, with the “exchange” of services for agricultural produce is defined as a finished socialist system. At the same time, instead of dissolving, the class opposition between the proletariat and the peasant-owner engaged in a perpetual dispute with the State is completely denied; equal political and voting rights (boldly denied in the declaration of 1918, which attributed four votes to the worker against one for the peasant) is restored. The new regime is officially defined as a political democracy, while the old one proclaimed itself without hesitation as a dictatorship of the proletariat which had only concluded a non-aggression pact with the peasants for the obvious reason that violence is the midwife, and not the mother of progress, which is based on the growth of productive forces. These anti-socialist novelties were fully confirmed in 1953 when, in his Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR, Stalin attacked those who wanted to treat collective farm property, the pillar of the regime, as capitalist property had been treated in 1917 (and in 1929) and he proclaimed, against all evidence, that being a popular property, it was also a socialist property, a stupidity which amounts to saying that the power of a company (and, pushed to the limit, the totality between them all) to make use of its products is equivalent to the power of society in its entirety to dispose of them, on the condition however that it does not officially employ employees (!) In a “socialist revolution” made in this way, there is only one thing missing, if we calmly examine the facts, if it is to constitute a complete capitulation to the “bourgeois-democratic revolution”: to give up tempering productive anarchy by means of State despotism. Everyone knows it took care not to do so; that, on the
contrary, it raised State coercion to such heights that the world bourgeoisie envied Stalin his power, and that it even raised it to the rank of an eternal factor of production insofar as it presented the sacred form of property in the kolkhoz as eternal. Don’t be deceived: have we ever seen the powers erected on the basis created by the bourgeois-democratic revolution respect naïve hopes and illusions?

The only “foundation” of the construction that presents the Stalinist era as the era of pure communist revolution (and which nevertheless resists political scrutiny even less than any other)37 is provided by the fact that the civil war that ended the Bolshevik era was not, as the Bolsheviks feared, the war of the countryside against the city, but rather that of the city against the countryside. Consider this, the renegade thesis tells us, and add to it the fact that this “war” continued, no longer in military but in economic forms, until 1956, that is to say until the Khruschev reforms, and do not forget above all the State ownership of industrial enterprises and planning. Now you have the faithful image of a purely communist revolution. This was enough to pander to the entirely justified distrust and hostility of the proletariat towards the peasant-owner, undoubtedly; the unfortunate thing is that the city’s struggle against the countryside, far from characterizing communism in its own right, is as old as civilization itself! It undoubtedly continues under the dictatorship of the proletariat, in the phase of transition to socialism, but it turns out that it is precisely then and only then that it loses its ancient characteristics of economic, moral and intellectual oppression of the countryside by the city, to transform itself into a progressive abolition of the separation between the city and the countryside. No doubt the proletariat can and must exert its class coercion against the small landowner classes in the countryside. No doubt it may be led (as was the case during the civil war in Russia) to inflict some violence on them. What the proletariat can and will never do at any stage of its struggle (not even at the very low level on which it was forced to lead the struggle in Russia) is to emancipate itself by oppressing and squeezing other classes, condemning them to their misery as owner-classes. Lenin’s politics never committed the sin of “pacifism” nor that of “democratism” (!): his politics simply conformed to the very essence of socialism; and socialism is nothing if not the process of proletarian emancipation, which, contrary to bourgeois emancipation, is not the establishment of the eternal reign of one class over the others, but the dissolution of all classes in the concord of a classless society. Although it claimed that it had achieved “socialism in one country”38, Stalinist policy therefore no longer even deserved to be considered as a continuation of the policy of “building its material bases” which, although infinitely more modest in its claims, deserved to be characterized as proletarian and communist. Whether we consider the relations that prevailed between town and country or the situation of the proletariat in Russian society, its entire economic history after 1929 shows that Russia was dominated by a new primitive accumulation of capital that the owner-State planned in directions that were imposed on it by the demands of the USSR for imperialist greatness; in this effort, the only obstacles it had to remove were the humble needs of the masses – not only workers, but to a certain extent also peasants, and if capitalist cynicism and the centuries-old traditions of deception and class oppression sufficed for this purpose, that did not prevent it from striking the heroic postures of a fight to the death against a powerful and frightening enemy!

The proof obviously starts with the examination of the economic results of the “forced collectivization” carried out, as we have seen, with the help of the large-scale manoeuvre called “strengthening the class struggle in the countryside” and “dekulakization”. Stalin himself estimated the value of the goods transferred from the kulaks to the collective farms at 400 million roubles (!) and a good part of this was certainly wasted in the confusion that followed: this proves the economic inanity of the measure39 for the purposes of any increase in the productivity of under-equipped Russian agriculture. On the other hand, a few years later, Stalin himself would admit the destruction of economic resources caused by the operation, as we saw above. As for the harvest, although it would reach 835 million quintals in 1930, it fell to just 700 in 1931 (compared with 801 in 1913, under the Tsar); it was lower still in 1932-1933 when the terrible “Stalin famine”, which caused millions of deaths, raged through the countryside, similar to the Great Famine in the more backward India of 1876-8, but in this case in the name of a full “revolution” calling itself “purely communist”! This fine result is fortunately not to be credited to the class struggle of the modern proletariat, but to that of the archaic “class struggle in the village” tending to restore the equality of small producers in the exploitation of the land and its products to the detriment of the general interests of society and the development of productive forces40. Stalin did not intend, of course, to put the State at the service of the utopian egalitarian aspirations of small peasants; but if he had been at all concerned to put it at the service of socialist demands, he would never have tried to resuscitate and encourage a reactionary anti-capitalism in the village41, which would only bring that new sufferings and privations to the proletariat by its effects on the urban supply, but also open the way to a modus vivendi between city and countryside constituting a double insult to the emancipatory mission of the proletariat: by draining the maximum value from the countryside to the cities through the policy of low agricultural prices (rightly condemned by Bukharin) on the one hand and, on the other hand, by bringing farmers to the barbarism of family micro-production because, in the new organization of agriculture which, after four years of unheard-of convulsions emerged from the chaos of 1930, granted them free ownership of parcels of land, whose economic importance would grow, by way of compensation for the earlier State pillage. This was the kolkhoz in which, for all the reasons we have seen, we must recognize, along with the brilliant Italian Marxist left (out of which the International Communist Party was born) “the true capitulation of the glories of Bolshevism” in the social-economic domain.

The scope of this policy was limited to supplying, no matter how, meagre fare to the cities, towards which the early stages of accelerated industrialization would draw an increasingly large supply of labour. How is it possible to see the slightest trace of “communism” in this, since at all stages of civilization, even the most backward, the most diverse regimes have had to ensure the supply of food to the cities? It is so little a proletarian task that at roughly the same time as the dekulakization witch hunt was unleashed, the State launched a parallel offensive against the workers. The facts are well known42. “In the middle of the battle against the Moscow right-wingers, on 19 October, the Central Committee agreed a statement laying down a new industrial policy: ‘Because of our technical backwardness, we cannot develop industry to such a level that it not only is not behind the capitalist countries, but catches up and surpasses them, without our setting to
work all the forces of our land, without great perseverance and iron discipline in the proletarian ranks.”” It defined the hesitations of certain layers of the working class and of certain sections of the party as “running away from the difficulties”. The Economic Council opposed the proposal of a Five-Year Plan for industry, and a collision became inevitable with the second of the great bastions of the right, the trade unions, over which Tomsky presided. [Tomsky, a social democrat in 1904, then a Bolshevik, political prisoner under Tsarism, member of the Central Committee from 1919, of the Politburo from 1922, and President of the Central Council of Trade Unions from 1917 to 1929, may have been treated as “the Gompers of the Soviet Union” in reference to the founder of the American AFL, but was in fact an old revolutionary militant, we might add!] “Tomsky... had thoroughly made up his mind to preserve for the unions their general function of defending the workers’ interests, which was... in his opinion, an indispensable element of Soviet organization. The new policy would reduce the role of the trade unions simply to the struggle to raise profits and production. In June 1928, the Central Committee criticized numerous ‘bureaucratic abuses’ in the activity of the trade union apparatus and called on the party ‘fractions’ to work to correct them. In this way the party could intervene directly over Tomsky’s head... Pravda turned its guns on the rightists in the trade unions and attacked them for refusing to criticise themselves and failing to mobilise the masses for socialist construction. At the All-Russian Congress of the trade unions (at the end of December 1928) Tomsky admitted some deficiencies but proposed new efforts to raise workers’ pay generally. Nonetheless, the Communist fraction [n.b. this means the Stalinist faction in the trade unions] presented a motion condemning the rightists; it called for accelerated industrialization and rejected the ‘purely working-class’ [sic] conception of the trade unions – the tasks of which were ‘to mobilise the masses’ to ‘overcome the difficulties of the reconstruction period’. This was carried by an overwhelming majority. After having rejected Tomsky in this way, the Conference elected to the new leadership five important members of the party apparatus... The right was well and truly beaten”. It was quite clear that, in this phase, the old distinctions between “right” and “centre” had lost all meaning: there remained nothing to the right of the centre (quite the opposite of Deutscher’s thesis) and the weak defence of the union by Tomsky should not be dismissed as a manifestation of ‘workers’ corporatism’, but recognized as resistance (though pathetically weak, unfortunately) to the crushing of the Russian working class by State capitalism in “socialist” disguise. Once it has been demonstrated that in 1927-29 the Russian working class suffered not only a political defeat, but an economic one, and that it had therefore not won the much-vaunted victory over the rural bourgeoisie and micro-bourgeoisie, it is easy to understand that the peasant policy of Stalinism was ultimately only an exacerbated form of economic oppression that capital has, to a greater or lesser extent, imposed on small producers at all times and in all places. This intensification can be explained without there being any need to invoke any particular essence of Stalinist power, much less Stalin’s “misconceptions” about socialism. Its source lies in the fact that the classic phenomenon (at least in the old world) of imbalance between capitalist industry and petty-bourgeois agriculture had reached a degree in Russia probably never previously observed, and this because of the delay of the bourgeois revolution on the one hand, and on the other hand, the expulsion of the USSR from the world market. If the peasant policy of Stalinism hardly resembles those of the powers which, in the past, had also inherited the conditions of a democratic revolution, it is not because it obeyed non-bourgeois class imperatives, but because the situation to which it responded was unique, since it basically boiled down to a conflict between the 20th century and the “Middle Ages” not between distant continents, but within the same country!

If Stalinism had of course gambled on the so-called “radicalism” of its peasant policy, it nevertheless based its socialist demagogy on the existence of State ownership of the industrial means of production and on the existence of central planning; it was much more liberal with regard to the countryside and much more cautious with regard to the economic utility of State intervention in all the acts of production and circulation. The post-Stalinists [i.e. Khrushchev, Brezhnev etc.] continue to defend the sacred dogma that State ownership of the “principal” means of production and socialism are one and the same thing. Despite the credence that this thesis disastrously earned within the working class, it is inconsistent. The formula of State ownership defines a legal form, not an economic relationship of production, and above all it teaches us absolutely nothing about the direction in which development is taking place. By the very fact that they indicted State enterprise executives for sabotage, corruption or abuse of power now and again, the Stalinists themselves clearly suggested that the replacement of salaried employees of limited companies by State employees had nothing to do with the socialist virtues that they attributed to nationalization, virtues which on the contrary were to be attributed to the vigilant control of the party.

The “theoretical” approach of Moscow revisionism thus consists on the surface in deflecting the potential objector of the uncertain and changing domain of politics to the solid realities of the economy (“yes, many mistakes have been made, but it remains the indisputably socialist property of the State”), although in reality it is still kept locked in a single and unsustainable political axiom: party control is proletarian and socialist control. The Stalinists claimed to introduce entirely new relationships between men within the framework of an economy that remained based on wage labour and had all the other characteristics of capitalism: the dual aspect of use value and exchange value, that is to say, the mercantile nature of production – metamorphoses from commodity capital to finance capital and vice versa. On this basis, the only possible relationships were not universal cooperation, but general competition between all interests: competition between State-owned enterprises, required to carry out the plan, to obtain the essential but insufficient raw materials, as well as labour; competition between the State and its co-contractors, whether they were the peasant collective farms or the “organizations” awarded a thousand different “construction and assembly” contracts; competition between the city and the countryside. Could the working class, theoretically the pillar of the regime, remain outside all of this bourgeois ferment, which so openly contradicted the official myth of the socialist redemption of the Soviets on the basis of wage labour and exchange, under the pretext that the trade union struggle (which is the expression of competition between wage labour and employers) was forbidden to it? Obviously not. On the contrary, harsh necessity cast it into this ferment with greater force than any other social layer, and no class tradition could hold it back from this fall, since it had been formed for the most part from
newly arrived peasants with profoundly individualist habits. It therefore struggled, but underground and in the most primitive forms, ranging from complete productive inertia and the degradation of the instruments of production to the generalized theft of “State property”, in exactly the same manner as the peasantry.

Here, the question of knowing whether or not the ruling party is revolutionary and proletarian does not arise: frankly, it is not to deny outright all State influence over the economy, but any possibility of imposing social control over a mode of production that is not social, either because the fragmented work and property of particular social groups still reign in an immense sector of the economy, or because, even where collective work exists – as in industry – the antagonistic character resulting from the persistence of wage labour and organization into companies far outweighs the social character of the economy, as has always been the case under capitalism. Trotsky, who had nevertheless fought more than anyone in favour of “planning” and the extension of the powers of Gosplan, magnificently refuted this claim of the Stalinist party to defeat mercantile anarchy effectively and therefore to achieve effective control over the economy simply because it cynically made an abstraction of the vital needs of the masses in its “plans”, subordinating them to quantitative growth for the sake of quantitative growth: “If a universal mind existed, of the kind that projected itself into the scientific fancy of Laplace – a mind that could register simultaneously all the processes of nature and society, that could measure the dynamics of their motion, that could forecast the results of their inter-reactions – such a mind, of course, could a priori draw up a faultless and exhaustive economic plan, beginning with the number of acres of wheat down to the last button for a vest. The bureaucracy often imagines that just such a mind is at its disposal... But, in reality, the bureaucracy errs frightfully in its estimate of its spiritual resources. In its projections it is necessarily obliged, in actual performance, to depend upon the proportions (and with equal justice one may say the disproportions) it has inherited from capitalist Russia, upon the data of the economic structure of contemporary capitalist nations, and finally upon the experience of successes and mistakes of the Soviet economy itself.

“But even the most correct combination of all these elements will allow only a most imperfect framework of a plan, not more... The processes of economic construction are not yet taking place within a classless society. The questions relating to the allotment of the national income compose the central focus of the plan [n.b. Trotsky means here not the Stalinist plan, but what would be a ‘plan’ subordinated to the immediate and final interests of the proletariat]. It shifts with the direct development of the class struggle and that of social groups, and among them, the various strata of the proletariat itself. These are the most important social and economic questions: the link between the city and the village, that is, the balance between that which industry obtains from agriculture and that which it supplies to it; the interrelation between accumulation and consumption, between the fund for capital construction and the fund for wages; the regulation of wages for various categories of labour (skilled and unskilled workers, government employees, specialists, the managing bureaucracy); and finally the allotment of that share of national income which falls to the village, between the various strata of the peasantry. All these questions by their very nature do not allow for a priori decisions by the bureaucracy. For Trotsky, there is no question of “surmounting contradictions and disproportions within a few years (this is utopian!), but of their mitigation, and through that the strengthening of the material bases of the dictatorship of the proletariat until the moment when a new and victorious revolution will widen the arena of socialist planning and will reconstruct the system” (The Soviet Economy in Danger, Prinkipo, 1932).

The official phraseology is poles apart from these Marxist considerations: Article 11 of the 1936 Constitution is not afraid to make this preposterous assertion, a splendid expression of Stalinist voluntarism: “The economic life of the USSR is determined and directed by the State national economic plan”. It is quite clear that in reality economic life is determined by the development of the productive forces, class relations and the world situation; as for the power to direct the plan, it must obviously come up against the social defence mechanism that the economic policy of power provokes in the various strata of the population, reality making fun of the constitutional articles of faith. For Stalinist planning, it is poles apart from the class concerns which appear in Trotsky’s text; when Stalin’s heirs come to “rebuild the system” in their own way from 1956 (instead, alas! of the “revolutionary victories”, which are still long overdue), it will not at all be because the economic and social nature of their concerns will have changed, but simply because the USSR will have reached a different stage in the development of its productive forces, including the producers.
Among all the economic figures that we could cite, there are none that more strikingly convey the absolute triumph of capitalist imperatives over – let us not say socialist, but simply proletarian – requirements than those in the table of the comparative evolution of production in Sector A (capital goods) and Sector B (consumer goods), the figures in each of the columns establish the ratio of total industrial production, capital goods and consumer goods in various years with what they were in capitalist Russia in 1913; this latter value is given as equal to 100 in the three cases, not (of course!) because the absolute values were the same for the three items, but because it is not the absolute values that matter, but only the increases.

Even the most unskilful reader of these indicators can see a very simple phenomenon: when the false “socialists” of Russia invite the rabble to admire their “grandiose achievements” in the fact that its industrial production increased 62 times between 1913 and 1964, they of course suggest that the improvement in the lot of the proletarian and peasant masses has been enormous, unrelated to what can be affirmed in the West. In reality, the production of consumer goods of industrial origin increased far more modestly: by 20 times in total and, taking into account the fact that the Russian population grew from 159 million to 208 million between 1913 and 1958, only 12 times per capita. For a population whose standard of living was incomparably lower than in Europe in 1913, this is a most modest result. By contrast, what can we tell from the means of production and armaments in sector A, which by definition are unfit for consumption in the usual sense of the term? Their production increased by 141 times overall, and by 113 times per capita, which is an impressive figure. What does this mean? That under Stalin, Russia’s national power increased spectacularly, without the lot of its population (mainly of its proletariat, of course) improving to any significant degree. This is a vivid confirmation of the Marxist thesis that national grandeur and proletarian interests are not reconcilable, but rather antagonistic, so that socialism in one country is a reactionary utopia. To escape these conclusions, pro-Moscow hypocrisy generally argues that socialism cannot by any means be reduced to increases in individual consumption and it even insinuates that it is rather capitalism that artificially inflates the consumption of the masses by creating for them, by all the means at its disposal, often absurd or even unhealthy needs with the sole aim of opening up new fields of accumulation to capital! This is true, to a certain extent, but it is a bizarre argument when we look not so much at the evolution of consumption in itself, but rather, the striking contrast between the growth of consumption and that of the production of capital equipment.

This is a typically capitalist contrast, which reveals that under the capitalist mode of production, unlike what has always been verified under previous modes, and will be verified again under socialism, the production of consumer goods is not the goal, but a simple condition of economic activity. The mass of products in Sector B represent for companies in this sector commodity-capital, the sale of which makes a profit just like any other. For capitalist society as a whole, it is quite different: the use-goods that leave economic circulation precisely at the moment when they are consumed do not appear as capital, but as income, since they are exchanged either against wages, or against the fraction of the surplus value that the ruling class devotes to its personal consumption. For the bourgeois State, true capital, at the level of the entire country, is formed by capital goods, that is to say all the industrial plants, their equipment and the raw materials that are “consumed productively” as they say. It is the growth in this physical capital (which is not only the apparent source of all the profit that the national economy produces in one year, but the basis of its global economic and military power) which is of the utmost interest to capitalism. Consumption in the literal sense is considered “unproductive”; it is considered only as a means that makes it worthwhile for someone to do business and make a profit on the one hand, and on the other hand as a precondition for the workers continuing work (the table above only includes consumer goods of industrial origin, but it is clear that most

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Industrial product</th>
<th>Sector A Capital Goods</th>
<th>Sector B Consumer Goods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>852</td>
<td>1.554</td>
<td>497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>782</td>
<td>1.744</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>3,662</td>
<td>8.332</td>
<td>1,379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>6,182</td>
<td>14.207</td>
<td>2,023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

agricultural production enters Sector B) and where capitalists would not feel impelled to invest if they were totally disenchanted with the earnings. It is quite clear that capital does not grow and accumulate year after year for the charitable purpose of supplying workers and other labourers with goods of all kinds, as is amply proven by the lamentations provoked by a general strike for the increase in wages exchangeable for consumable goods, or even by the dangerous “ overheating” or “market frenzy” caused by too-strong demand: but it is no more (whatever foolish opportunists say) for the more plausible but overly narrow aim of allowing a handful of big bourgeois to lead the life of nabobs! In short, capitalism turns the subordination of production to meeting human needs on its head, a subordination that had been as old as civilization itself, and creates a new civilization in which the needs of humanity are subjected to the demands of production, down to the last detail.

If this contrast probably presents itself in the Russian economy with even more clarity than in any other, it is not only because, having started from a very low level, it had to acquire a capital base, something that Marxists have never denied, as we have seen; it is also because the ruling party had the “courage” to practice a capitalist policy without making any concession to the “vain illusions” of the naive masses, who imagine that production is supposed to be there to serve humankind, rather than humankind being there to serve production, and a fortiori without making any concessions to the “sentimental and social-democratic” objections of revolutionaries who maintain that this is also the conviction that distinguishes proletarian socialism; but if at least right up to the day after the Second World War, it could still take a similar hard line, it is only because an exceptional relationship of class forces, the one neutralizing the other, allowed it to do so, as well as the USSR’s global isolation, and not because of any intrinsic quality of Soviet institutions! “The problem of economic choice in the USSR”, admits the expert on the Soviet economy Charles Bettelheim, who sees in it a kind of socialism, “is in no way resolved by the simple application of planning instruments”: in other words, economic choice is the result of a policy whose application is made possible by “planning instruments”, but which is determined by class considerations and not by the fact of nationalization, as the fools claim. This is what we are saying. It was the capitalist suggestion of national grandeur which, even in the absence of a recognizable capitalist class, imposed itself on Stalinist and post-Stalinist power and pushed it to opt for the absolute predominance of heavy industry, a credo that the “liberalizers” of today are not about to give up, whatever small reforms they introduce in the administrative management of the economy. The “planning instrument” that allows it to control this choice best of all is the revenue tax on State and cooperative enterprises, which Soviet economists call “one of the most important methods of distribution of socialist accumulation [sic] and financial action on the socialist economy”. This tax, the rate of which varies according to sector and the situation of each institution is one of the main sources of budget finance, along with the tax on company profits (which varies from 10 to 80 percent of the benefits considered), which goes together with the self-financing of these in variable proportions to ensure the necessary capital investments. Perhaps it can be admitted that without the elimination of the more or less autonomous and rival groups that constituted the urban capitalist class and were overthrown in October, the State would never have been able to ensure such a systematic and rigorous transfer of resources from consumer goods industry (Sector B) to capital goods industry (Sector A) by means of heavy taxation, without them however being able to cease their socially necessary activities, which were nevertheless politically of secondary importance in the eyes of neo-capitalist power. But if the depersonalization of capitalism really constituted an “advantage”; it worked only in favour of the most virulent capitalist accumulation and not in favour of the proletariat, to say nothing of socialism which, as we have amply demonstrated, had never been on the Bolsheviks’ immediate programme, and it begins precisely when the questions of funding and subsidies, value transfers and economic policy cease, these belonging either to a very inferior phase in the transition towards the new society, or, as was the case in post-1929 Russia, to the transition to modern imperialism.

### Average yields in quintals per hectare (q)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1903-13</th>
<th>1938-40</th>
<th>1949-53</th>
<th>1954-58</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cereals</td>
<td>6,9</td>
<td>7,7</td>
<td>7,7</td>
<td>9,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar beet</td>
<td>150,0</td>
<td>135,0</td>
<td>150,0</td>
<td>174,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes</td>
<td>78,0</td>
<td>71,0</td>
<td>89,0</td>
<td>90,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raw cotton</td>
<td>13,0</td>
<td>12,1</td>
<td>15,4</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the evolution of agricultural production, which constitutes the essential element of Sector B (consumer goods), since food supply depends on this, we cannot present a table comparable to the previous one, but on the other hand we have
a graph drawn up according to data from Soviet sources\textsuperscript{53}, which is sufficiently eloquent: while the curve of industrial production marks a continuous ascent from 1921, with only a plateau and a fall between 1940 and 1945, the curve for agricultural production has an almost horizontal shape with oscillations above the 100 index, but clearly below the 200 index, until 1953-54, with a fall corresponding to that of industry, but below the 100 index during the war years for obvious reasons. However, we do have a table of average yields per hectare of various crops, which shows the agricultural balance sheet of Capitalist Russia Mark 2 as even more dismal than that of its consumer goods industry.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & 1916 & 1960 & Variations in \% \\
\hline
Beef cattle & 100 & 82 & -18\% \\
Cows & 100 & 77 & -23\% \\
Sheep goats & 100 & 98 & -2\% \\
Pork & 100 & 163 & +63\% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Livestock index per capita}
\end{table}

To properly assess these results with regard to cereals, we must compare them with those of other countries with extensive agriculture and a continental climate: in the USA, yields which were 9.9 quintals per hectare in 1909-13 rose to 13 quintals in 1954-56; in Canada, from 11.2 quintals to 13.7 quintals; the Russian increase is roughly in the same proportions, but smaller; for sugar beets and potatoes, the yields are even more clearly lower than those of countries whose natural environment presents analogies. The gap widens further if we consider the yield of animals, and in particular dairy cows. As for the evolution of the livestock per capita, it marks a clear worsening of the food situation in the country, except with regard to pork.

Another crucial consideration to complete the picture of agriculture in Capitalist Russia Mark 2 is the qualitative evolution of cultures, which is given to us by the following table, again from a Russian source:
This table shows that by the 1960s Russia had still not emerged from the “cereal phase” of agriculture, which characterizes pre-capitalist societies and the early stages of capitalism. By introducing fodder crops in the second half of the 20th century, contemporary Russia started the agricultural revolution 150 years later than when it started in Europe.

What is the meaning of all this data, which is well known and which the most banal bourgeois thought naturally ascribes to communism’s poor record? As regards the contrast between the industrial and agricultural curves, (and when we say industrial, it is true even for the consumer goods industry, the results of which are nevertheless anything but brilliant), it is precisely characteristic of the historical phase of capitalism if only for one obvious reason: the number of possible shifts of direction of capital in a year is much higher in industry than it is in agriculture, which obeys the natural rhythm of the seasons; the acceleration of capital restructuring accompanied by technical progress is precisely a means of combating the fall in the rate of profit; other than in countries populated by immigration, such as the USA or Australia, where the needs for agricultural products increased at an accelerated rate and where small peasant property did not hinder the development of a large capitalist agriculture, capital has therefore always preferred to focus on industry rather than agriculture; food needs being also much less “elastic” than the needs for various industrial products, agriculture remained, despite the concentration of land and progressive mechanization, a petty-bourgeois production sector, the most common recent trend moving towards the disappearance of agricultural workers and the family exploitation of larger and larger areas supported by machinery, while obviously the absolute number of workers in industry has grown.

The backwardness of agriculture compared to Russian industry therefore presents no mystery: it is perfectly in conformance with the laws of the capitalist mode of production; instead, its backwardness compared to the agriculture of the advanced countries is also blamed on “communism”.

It is a fact that Russian agriculture experienced a certain concentration, that it no longer resembled the miserable fragmented agriculture of 1927-28, whose crushing weight on the city caused the defeat of the proletarian party and the big-capitalist offensive of the Stalin era: to what then can we attribute such stagnation? The opponents of communism, of course, blame it on “collectivism”. The explanation is worth nothing: if there is “collectivism” in the USSR, it exists in industry as well as in agriculture: how would it then explain the specific backwardness of the latter? The reactionary backdrop to this vulgar but widespread thesis now becomes clear: what they want to imply is that it is folly to want to organize agricultural work according to principles that are only valid in industry (associated work and the division of tasks, not to be confused with the social division of labour). If this were true, we should mourn all communist hopes, given that, without the suppression of the current antagonism between town and country, between agricultural work and industrial work, we will never arrive at a society working according to a common plan and in which all class differences will have disappeared; however, this is not true, because if we compare the collective farms (mixed units, cooperative and private sector) and the sovkhozes (agricultural enterprises with salaried workers and industrial type organization), we note that it is the latter that perform best.

From Khrushchev’s report to the Central Committee of the government party of 5 December 1958, it appears that the labour costs in the kolkhozes, per unit of production, were greater than those of the sovkhozes in the following ratios:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total surface</th>
<th>Cereals</th>
<th>Industrial crops</th>
<th>Vegetables &amp; potatoes</th>
<th>Fodder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>89.9%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>73.5%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>67.9%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>66.0%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>61.0%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is at issue, therefore, is the kolkhoz, the dominant form today of Soviet agriculture and the relations that the industrialist State maintains with it.

The comparison between industrial investment and agricultural investment and the study of the evolution of the percentage of State investment in agriculture are particularly suggestive. By taking two sets of figures from Bettelheim, which are comparable since they come from the same source, we find the following percentages, which are certainly too big, other sources giving much higher figures for investment in industry, without unfortunately saying anything about those that were made in agriculture; we indicate on the right the percentages that we obtain by using, first, the Bettelheim series for agriculture and second, the other series for industrial investments: the truth must lie between the two but it should be noted that the curve is the same.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Grain</th>
<th>Milk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black soil (chernozem)</td>
<td>2,4 veces</td>
<td>1,3 veces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volga region</td>
<td>2,6 «</td>
<td>1,4 «</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Caucasus</td>
<td>3,0 «</td>
<td>1,4 «</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Siberia</td>
<td>2,2 «</td>
<td>1,2 «</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakh</td>
<td>2,2 «</td>
<td>1,1 «</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Investments in millions of roubles at current prices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>% of Agricultural Investment</th>
<th>as a Part of Total Investm.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>1.880</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>2.615</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>4.115</td>
<td>2.590</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>7.407</td>
<td>3.645</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>10.431</td>
<td>3.820</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>8.864</td>
<td>3.900</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>10.624</td>
<td>4.661</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>11.880</td>
<td>4.983</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>13.956</td>
<td>2.633</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>13.928</td>
<td>2.614</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.600</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.300</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this table (which nevertheless takes pride of place among Stalinists, whose effort to equip agriculture at a miserable level it undoubtedly emphasizes in an exaggerated way) it is however clear that agriculture remained the poor relation, even during the years of acute crisis 1930-35 when the supply of machines and fertilizers to the kolkhozes in the process of being set up was a vital necessity for the survival of the regime; it appears just as clearly that hardly had the danger been averted than the State hastened to transfer a larger fraction of its resources to industry, heavy industry in particular, as we have seen: we now see that from 1936, the percentage of agricultural investment fell to the very mediocre level of 15.8%, still less in 1939 and 1940, when the series of figures in the first column was interrupted, but up to this point it was increasing. For the post-war period, we are reduced to conjecture: after the enormous destruction of the conflict, the Fourth Plan provided for an investment of only 19.9 billion for the years 1945-1950, or 3.3 billion per year. If we consider that, from a Soviet source, the investments of the Fourth Plan were those that we indicate below, the percentage of agricultural investment would have fallen to 7.7% in 1945 and even to 3.6% in 1950!
In his 1961 work "Les paysans soviétiques" ("The Soviet Peasantry") Jean Chombart de Lauwe affirms: “The total investment in agriculture during the first five five-year plans and even up to 1956 was 13 to 15 percent of total investment in the national economy." So great was the concern that the so-called “workers’ State” had for the food supply to urban workers...

Not only is such an investment policy of a strictly capitalist character, since it enhances industrial production to the detriment of agricultural production, but it constitutes the economic root of the preference given by the Stalinist regime to the mixed, private cooperative form of the kolkhoz, over the more advanced form of the State farm or sovkhoz. It is quite clear, in fact, that in order to be able to generalize the sovkhozian form in the years preceding the war (or in the reconstruction period of 1945-50), the State would have had to continue to increase its direct investments in agriculture instead of dropping them to the insignificant percentages that we see from 1936 to 1940 and from 1945 to 1950 and which would not improve (quite the contrary) in the Khrushchev era, as we will see later. It would also have had to face an enemy other than the small industrial proletariat of the cities, in the form of the enormous rural proletariat into which the small producers would have been transformed. Already, even as petty bourgeois individualists that remained in the kolkhozes, they did not cease to frighten the regime from the moment when, as a result of forced "collectivization", they found themselves less dispersed than before. Finally, the generalization of the sovkhoz would not have been compatible with the maintenance of the relative agricultural overpopulation that is borne out in the kolkhoz, thanks precisely to the tolerance towards the exploitation of small plots that it accommodated; it would have “freed up” more labour than industry could immediately absorb, even when fully expanded, and at the same time would have created the risk of the emergence of serious social movements, whereas the kolkhozian system made it possible to maintain, in agriculture, a quantity of labour certainly greater than the normal needs of large mechanized farms; but, for the regime, it was advantageous to be able to draw supplements to industrial labour from this surplus population as and when required. In Russia as elsewhere, it was therefore the demands of capitalist development that, in a form that was admittedly original, prevented the liquidation of the archaism of small production in the countryside. However, its more or less camouflaged persistence, while itself being only a consequence, played its own part in slowing the increase in Russian agricultural yields. In addition to the sparse investment, there was actually a deplorable use of the available capital owing to the indifference of the petty-bourgeois kolkhoz farmer with regard to the interests of society in general, and, in particular, his technical incapacity as a producer working a small plot of land, and for whom the “cultural revolution” (literacy, and the dispatch of specialists of all kinds to kolkhozes) had probably not been accomplished even in the 1960s.

The concentration of land achieved in Capitalist Russia Mark 2 only highlighted the incredible vitality of the parcelized sector of kolkhoz agriculture that the Stalinist opportunism of the years 1934-35 protected as a simple “adjunct” to the kolkhoz (which it was necessary to tolerate in compensation for the draconian demands that it was ready to impose on the
peasantry, as well as the proletariat), without foreseeing that it would become an insatiable parasite that would relentlessly suck in the workforce, even mechanized, that the collective farm needed. Between 1928 (the year of the creation of the first station for machines and tractors) and 1959, the average size of kolkhozes rose from 33 hectares and 13 homesteads to 5,800 hectares (including 2,400 hectares sown) and 300 homesteads. In the kolkhoz of 13 homesteads, the authorized individual plots ranging from 0.25 to 0.70 ha in principle, but reaching 3 to 6 ha with fodder land, the total area exploited privately by peasant families members of the kolkhoz could reach from 39 to 78 ha against the average 33 ha of the collective farm, that is to say from 54 to 70 percent of the total area belonging to kolkhozes. With the same tolerance, privately operated land was allowed to increase to areas between 900 and 1,800 ha within the 300 homestead kolkhozes of 1958, which, compared to the 3,200 ha average of the collective farm did not represent more than 21 to 36% of the total. For a supposedly “collectivized” agriculture, that’s still a lot!

Too much, if one thinks of the “barbaric waste” of labour – and in particular of female labour – that such a mode of production implies, and which is a cruel contradiction of the goals of emancipation of all the working masses under the leadership of the proletariat that was always the aim of Bolshevism. Too much also, given that far from playing a small role in the agricultural economy of Russia, the family farms of the kolkhozes owned 54% of the area devoted to the cultivation of potatoes and vegetables in 1957 and that in 1959 they owned 41% of cattle, 57% of cows, 36% of pigs, 26% of sheep, providing in 1958 half the production of meat and milk for the USSR.

It is useless to underline the impudence of the Soviet regime which, having improperly equated socialism and the State economy (things which are completely incompatible, as we have already seen, the economy having a State character only in the phase of transition to socialism under the dictatorship of the proletariat), dared to maintain that the post 1920-30 economy was fully socialist, while it sheltered like cancer such a considerable private sector in agriculture, to say nothing of the real situation of industry, which we will examine more usefully when we come to the Khrushchev and post-Khrushchev reforms. The only question that arises is whether archaic family-based production showed such vitality in the USSR. Government tolerance alone does not explain much, any more than the “property instinct” of the petty peasantry. In France, where the government has no socialist pretensions and where “tolerance” of small-scale farmers is taken for granted, it is likely that their share of the economy has shrunk by far greater proportions than in Russia over the past 15 or 20 years; as for the “property instinct”, there is nothing about this that is inherent in “human nature” (even among peasants) contrary to what the servants of the bourgeois claim, rather, it is a simple defensive reaction on the part of individuals (obviously attached first and foremost to their own physical preservation) in all societies that doom those who have no capital or no reserves to slavery, to forfeiture, even to death: the dictatorship of the proletariat will bring such an “instinct” to an end, if not easily then at least for certain, by replacing the miserable and illusory “guarantee” of individual property with a social and collective guarantee that is far higher and more effective! The secret of the fossilization of Russian pseudo-socialism in private forms far inferior to those observed in the most advanced Western countries is thus to be found elsewhere; it resides, as you might suspect, in the economic relations between State industry and the kolkhozian peasantry, an issue that is not exhausted by the study of the State’s investment policy.

As early as 1928, Trotsky noted that the accounts between the Soviet State and the Russian peasantry were so muddled that it would have taken a very clever person to establish whether or not the State was the effective owner of the land rent as was its right (that is to say, from a purely legal point of view) as much as the theoretical owner of the land: until the Khrushchev semi-capitulation, we can say that the relations between the Stalinist State and the peasantry remained those of a furious struggle, which took place behind the protective screen of “workers’ and peasants’ democracy” just as the furious struggle of the bourgeois classes against the proletariat takes place behind the much more worm-eaten façade of parliamentary democracy in Western countries; and at stake in this struggle was precisely rent, that is to say the agricultural product exceeding the direct consumption of the peasants, which is by nature uncontrollable.

In agriculture, the so-called planning that admirers of “Russian socialism” are always so full of does not concern production itself, or rather only concerns it very indirectly: it is limited to the investment of State capital in agriculture, which we have seen is very limited; to this should be added the repeated intervention of the authorities to prevent the kolkhozes from distributing funds resulting from the sale of their products at low prices among their members, rather than preserving and increasing the “indivisible funds” prescribed by law and which were supposed to constitute the working capital of the cooperative. So we see that in terms of production, all “planning” is ultimately reduced to encouraging a private accumulation of capital by the collective farms that will relieve the State of the painful obligation to divert part of its resources from heavy industry towards agriculture: it is therefore the complete opposite of socialist planning, which is aimed, on the contrary, at reducing the sector based on private initiatives, because, by definition, private initiatives are uncontrollable and unpredictable.

If there is “planning”, it only intervenes at the product collection stage, which it organizes on the basis of a complicated system of compulsory deliveries to the State: there is no forecasting, without which it is not possible to speak of a plan, but only a constraint that is in no way exercised in favour of the urban proletariat, but in favour of State capitalist industrialism, and again according to the empirical data of “established practice”: the quantities required from each republic, region or district are fixed by “standards” according to the existing location of production and its traditional yield, based on the climate and local production capacities; there is no question of intervening directly on these elements: they are taken into account, that’s all, even if it means modifying the distribution of delivery quotas between regions or farms when this change occurs of itself and becomes obvious: a nice kind of “planning”!

There were no fewer than five distinct distribution channels for agricultural products, at least until the 1958 reform. They are as follows:

**Distribution Channel #1**: The kolkhozes deliver part of their production in kind to the machine and tractor stations (MTS – State industrial enterprises serving several collective farms) which hand them over to the State. As counter-party,...
State operates the MTS, which works for the kolkhoz. Theoretically, the delivery of products by the collective farm is equivalent to the services rendered by the MTS. What is it in reality? The same applies to this allegedly “socialist” exchange as to any other exchange: it is who will cheat the partner; it is all a question of the balance of power; the “planning” State of course claims to win every time, which is rather unlikely; but the kolkhoz, jealous of its autonomy, while complaining bitterly of the tyranny of the State, claims the same thing just as much: the joy of “socialist” harmony!

**Distribution Channel #2:** The kolkhozes must fulfil their compulsory deliveries to the State; the products are paid for to the kolkhoz at a very low price and resold at a much higher price to the consumer; the State therefore makes a significant profit. We remember, on this subject, what Lenin said: in Russia before the revolution, that capitalist exchange only established trade between town and country based on cheating and stealing, but at least, rest assured; we communists cannot unfortunately guarantee this relationship other than by trade given the current situation, but we must ensure that it takes place by means of a modern, European trade and not the primitive, usurious trade of former speculators. What did the Stalinist State do? It did not destroy this old trade, which robbed producers of most of their product: it did the same itself. The State became the loan shark and the chief speculator, and the only thing that concealed this reality from all the mugs who believe in “socialism in one country” is that it was in the service of the accelerated industrialization of the Russia: a fine “dictatorship of the proletariat”!

**Distribution Channel #3:** The kolkhoz enters into State contracts, especially for industrial crops; the State pays the agreed sum and delivers the means of production (fertilizer or seeds) specified in the contract to the kolkhoz. The sale price of the agricultural product to the public being higher than the purchase price from the collective farm, the State also makes a profit from this operation. Note that the “contract”, as a form of exchange, is the opposite of socialism since it supposes the existence of independent and rival economic units.

**Distribution Channel #4:** The State can buy part of the kolkhoz’s production at fixed prices, but much higher than those for compulsory deliveries. The kolkhoz is not obliged to deliver, so prices are close to those of the kolkhoz market.

**Distribution Channel #5:** Once the kolkhoz has fulfilled its obligations towards the MTS and the State, it can sell the rest of its produce to the public directly on the kolkhoz market. Prices (in this case) are the result of supply meeting demand; they are very advantageous for the kolkhoz, but the transactions are for small quantities only.

The whole secret of the survival of the fragmented economy based on small plots is there. In theory, the member of the kolkhoz is a “co-operator” who, in addition to wages calculated according to the “working days” he has rendered, receives his share of the profit from the kolkhoz; but in practice, the State levies are so large in volume and the prices it pays are so low (below market prices, and even, for compulsory deliveries, at cost prices) that once deducted the “indivisible fund” (that is to say the part of money income intended for capitalization, which the State jealously watches over, for the reasons we have seen), there is nothing left to share between the members of the kolkhoz63, whose character is in reality more that of an employer than a cooperative; the kolkhoz peasant receives only a meagre wage, a wage which in technically backward kolkhozes or in poor regions is probably still lower than that of urban workers, all observers noting a marked inferiority of the standard of living in the countryside compared to that of the city. “By selling a few tonnes of vegetables through his own separate activities on the collective farm market, the peasant obtains, with a few hours of work, a higher income than that paid by the collective farm for the entire year”64. In 1958, the income that the peasant earned from micro-commerce still averaged 50% of his total income. It should therefore come as no surprise that for a long time kolkhozian commerce was fuelled for the most part by kolkhozians as opposed to the kolkhozes65: the work that the Soviet peasant performed on his plot was of the same nature as the “cash in hand” work of the poorly paid worker, and as long as the conditions which gave rise to it continued, was just as firmly entrenched. Even if the State had wanted to prohibit such work (al-though that would make no sense, just as the small boss who pays starvation wages would never prohibit his workmen from doing more or less illicit work on the side, as this helps keep them fed), such a prohibition would have had no effect: small production cannot be suppressed by constitutional decree; it only disappears when it has become economically absurd, something that is already happening in more advanced capitalisms than that of Russia, capitalisms which therefore find themselves economically and socially further advanced than Russia on the path towards socialism, even if politically speaking they are just as reactionary. Cruelly denying the official lies about Russian socialism, the small private economy of the kolkhoz did not cease to impose a burden on the “cooperative” economy to the extent that the hours of work devoted to it were (and could only be) stolen from the latter66. The Soviet regime has always made a mockery of socialism, but in the long run it could not make fun of the disastrous results of its agriculture. It should therefore come as no surprise that the agrarian question is at the root of the ultimate mutation that Russia has undergone with the so-called “Khrushchevite” reforms, as it was at the root of other policy turns carried out under entirely different conditions: the NEP, the 1925 liberalization of agrarian policy, then the turning point of 1929-30. It is nevertheless fair to note that, within the framework of Capitalist Russia Mark 2, this ultimate mutation affected many other things besides the government’s agricultural policy.

With its rural proletariat, which the Stalinist regime did not hesitate to subject to a labour law every bit as harsh as the legislation in force at the dawn of capitalism in the motherland of this mode of production, England, and with its immense kolkhozian masses, which this same regime flattered, while at the same time keeping them in the same misery and, what is more, keeping them in the stupefying idiocy of small-production, Capitalist Russia Mark 2 victoriously passed the test of the second imperialist war, bloodily negating the hare-brained doctrine of the emancipation of the proletariat and workers within the national framework, since it cost the Russian population 23 million lives (“Stalin’s most precious capital”); but the country emerging from the reconstruction of 1947-55 (the fourth and fifth five-year plans) was no longer the country of the era of industrialization. There is a lack of information to allow direct comparison with the years 1929-30, that is to say with the start of the offensive of the capitalist revolution, but the progression of the urban population from 56 million in 1938 to 61 million in 1940, 87 million in 1956 and 99.3 million in 1958 is already quite eloquent. Because the rate of
demographic growth was higher in the countryside than in the city, the regression of the rural population was slower than urban growth: from 115 million in 1938, it fell slightly to 113 million in 1956 and 109 million in 1958. More interestingly, the composition of the active population, which reveals a social division of labour sufficient in itself to ruin the thesis of the existence of “socialism” in Russia, allows us to characterize precisely the stage reached by Russian capitalism:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active population: 90,000,000 (45.4% of the total population)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was now an adult capitalism since it had crossed the 50% mark of the active population employed in agriculture; but it was still a young capitalism, as the percentage of peasants was still very high (compared with 12% in the USA and 28% in France at the same time) and the share of services was much lower (27% compared with 51% in the United States and 35% in France); as for the 5% in commercial activities (against 16.5% in the USA and 13.4% in France), this is because of the low circulation of consumer goods and not a hypothetical socialism; if they correspond to “Spartan mores”, as a bourgeois commentator puts it, it is not those of a proletarian regime, which would surely disdain the rampant and imbecile consumerism of western society, but those that the Stalinist capitalist industrialism imposed without great difficulty on a population with reduced needs, because it was little “civilized” at the time of the revolution, besides which it was protected from dangerous covetousness by the infamous Iron Curtain, which not only stopped the inflow of foreign goods, but also any inflow of information about the world beyond the socialist paradise. As poor as it remains, this country has an endowment of productive capacities much higher than those of 1928-29: not just because of the intense mechanization, which you can easily read into the figures on the increase in the production of heavy industry, nor only because of the increase in the number of workers (11,590,000 in 1928; they must be 23-24 million in 1958 if we take the figure of 4 to 5 million various “managers” and “technicians” in industry as exact), but also because of the qualitative transformations that are still observed in the second generation of an urban population of recent rural origin and which, in the case of Russia, were in any case sufficient to allow the abrogation of the fierce labour code in force under Stalin, due to the need to bend millions of peasants, who were accustomed to the slow rhythms of traditional agricultural work, to industrial discipline: uprooted villagers, recalcitrant, desperate, anarchic and powerless... transporting their fierce muzhik individualism to the factories, which Stalinism was able to exploit perfectly with its vast system of individual competition by means of overtime wages, performance bonuses or Stakhanovite rivalry. By “qualitative transformations” we mean all the conditions which, from literacy to the disciplines imposed by industrial and urban life, contribute at least as much as the use of the machine to increased labour productivity; they fall into the category of those “material conditions of socialism” that the Bolsheviks had hoped to be able to develop while awaiting the world revolution, without falling back into the shame and horrors of capitalism. However, far from constituting “socialist conquests” they do not go beyond the framework of similar bourgeois progress that has accompanied industrial development in all countries, but which, at no other time, had drawn the servile respect that we see manifesting itself in today’s pseudo-Marxists tagging along behind the Soviet Union.

The first major consequence of this bourgeois progress, combined with the complex consequences of the war, was that it made it impossible to maintain that Iron Curtain, under whose shelter Stalin imagined he could resist the global capitalist commercial system: the more a national economy is developed, and, at the same time, the greater the needs of its population, the more it needs the world economy and the less tolerable economic self-sufficiency becomes. This consequence which, in politics, was translated into the “doctrine” of “peaceful coexistence” (long practised on the class level, if not on the national level), manifested itself economically by a spectacular reversal of the evolution of Russia’s world trade. However, although the absolute values of this trade had remained very modest, this reversal reflected an underground current that would no longer leave much standing in the laborious edifice of lies that constituted Stalinist “socialism”. In prices in millions of roubles based on the rouble’s 1961 value, this is the picture of Soviet trade: from 1932 to 1945, a spectacular fall, with an average annual decrease of 7% (the import figure of 2,514, recorded in 1945, corresponds to wartime deliveries on loan and lease); from 1946 to 1961 (we do not have more recent comparable figures), an equally spectacular rise, with an average annual increase of 15%:
In connection with this re-establishment of trade relations with the outside world, that is to say with the world capitalist market, a curious change took place in Russia from 1956: after a quarter of a century of “socialism in one country”, there was a demand on all sides for a... return to the NEP! The meaning of this is quite clear: it was not at all a question of softening the pressure that the demands of the accumulation of capital exerted on the proletariat of Russia (or even on its petty peasantry) as a class concern; that bygone era would never return. It was a matter of restructuring the process of accumulation in a capitalist direction. The watchword was: prioritization of heavy industry remained in all its rigour, given

### Volume of external trade of the USSR (in 1961 roubles)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>1.192</td>
<td>1.078</td>
<td>2.270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>2.514</td>
<td>2.757</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Now, the trend is reversed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>1.280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>694</td>
<td>672</td>
<td>1.364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>1.177</td>
<td>1.102</td>
<td>2.279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>1.303</td>
<td>1.340</td>
<td>2.643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>1.615</td>
<td>2.310</td>
<td>2.925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>2.061</td>
<td>1.792</td>
<td>3.853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>2.511</td>
<td>2.255</td>
<td>4.766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>2.653</td>
<td>2.492</td>
<td>5.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>2.900</td>
<td>2.864</td>
<td>5.764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>3.084</td>
<td>2.754</td>
<td>5.838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>3.254</td>
<td>3.251</td>
<td>6.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>3.943</td>
<td>3.544</td>
<td>7.487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>3.868</td>
<td>3.915</td>
<td>7.783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>4.897</td>
<td>4.566</td>
<td>8.463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>5.006</td>
<td>5.066</td>
<td>10.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>5.399</td>
<td>5.249</td>
<td>10.648</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that the obligation to “catch up and overtake” the most developed capitalist country (the USA) also remained, if Russia was not to be crushed economically and then militarily. That this was a race lost before it even started? was not in any way a reason to motivate Russia to give it up; on the other hand, her inferior position, which she felt as a mortal danger, dictated her new slogan: “cut the costs of production!” – an obsession that dictated all the measures it had been taking for ten years [up until 1967] and which bourgeois imbécility presented as a “restoration of capitalism” as if, under Stalin, anything had reigned other than the impersonal Capital of the State!

The background to the increasingly bitter criticism of “old planning” and of the reforms carried out can be summed up in a few words: as long as it was a question of providing Russia with the productive apparatus that it totally lacked, centralizing, authoritarian and bureaucratic methods were very good; now they have become an obstacle to economic development. The industrial reform of 1957 therefore began by replacing vertical national ministries with horizontal regional management: 23 central industrial ministries out of 33 were liquidated and enterprises were attached to local authorities: the sovkhozes, 104 of them across the entire territory. The reform makes perfect sense from a capitalist point of view: how could the pretension of the centralized State that it could control in detail the activity of more than 200,000 industrial enterprises and more than 100,000 construction not lead to administrative anarchy? What was its economic interest? It is not a question, as in socialism, of drawing up balances of resources and needs in order to distribute social tasks according to possibilities and utility, progressively to equalize local conditions and reduce imbalances. It is only a question of not braking production. Central control, essential in socialism, becomes a hindrance from this point of view as soon as the number of production units reaches a certain number. The system of snabzheniye i sbyt (supply and marketing), those administrative organs through which all companies must pass when they wanted to get in touch with each other, was felt to be particularly odious. When the volume of these relationships was further reduced, and the products that were dispatched from one company to another were not very differentiated in quality, it was a good way of distributing the existing means of production as well as possible. But, with the increase in the volume of trade, and above all the differentiation of the needs of companies with regard to the means of production (differentiation ignored by bureaucrats who know nothing about technology without knowing everything about the economy), sbys were the best way to prevent such an enterprise from obtaining, as quickly as possible, some improved or scarce machine that it needed from another company that produced it. The sbys would therefore go to join the central ministries at the museum of “socialism in one country”.

That’s not all. Authoritarian methods are reproached for their purely administrative and anti-economic nature: they relied too much on obedience to hierarchical leaders and not enough on the search for an economic rationality, understood in the capitalist sense of profitability, not of the whole national economy, but of each individual unit. The back-and-forth system of plans from the planning centre to businesses and from businesses back to the planning centre was first resolved by a duel between the latter and central government, the one seeking to obtain the easiest plan to execute, and the other to impose higher targets. Not only is there nothing “scientific” about the final compromise, but it was the best-performing companies that were penalized; this system also encouraged companies not to use their productive capacities to the full, but, on the contrary, to “stock” part of them to cope with a possible increase in the State’s targets that were in the process of being implemented.

Anxious to apply the plan, or even to exceed it, companies were not concerned with making the best use of their plant and equipment. Whether their management was good or bad from this point of view did not influence the allocation of the State funds necessary for the expansion of production; moreover, the equipment being financed from a budgetary allocation without any direct financial participation of the establishments themselves, however small, meant the latter were not responsible for growth or modernization. Under these conditions, even if the principle of the profitability of different economic entities continues to be reaffirmed, the only guide to their real activity is whether they achieve the easiest targets, the execution and exceeding of which ensure the most material benefits for management and even the staff of the company. In order to achieve this “economic rationalism” in the most bourgeois sense of the term, the kolchozes were forced to buy the machinery of the State, which thus became a cooperative capital for which the kolchozes were solely responsible; in this way, the State hoped to instil in them the “healthy” habit of calculating their “costs” and making savings by reducing the scandalous waste that they used to produce when their means of production belonged to the State and their main concern was to produce the quantities of foodstuffs they were forced to deliver.

The same hopes were pinned on an increase in the responsibility of directors of industrial enterprises. The crowning achievement of the whole new edifice resided in a policy of “honest pricing”, based on this overarching principle: if the prices fixed by the State, in particular for agricultural products, are systematically below the true cost, the productive unit has no interest in producing at a lower cost, since it does not derive any profit from its efforts. In the case of the kolkhoz, this lack of profit-sharing favoured the small enterprises on the side at the expense of the collective enterprise and ensured a permanent food crisis unworthy of a civilized country. In short, on all sides, for more than ten years these were nothing but tributes paid to the “great work of Stalin”, and at the same time sighs of lament over the archaism of his methods and a demand for “healthier” economic principles – which just happened to be the tenets of classical capitalism.

Then we see the perfectly idle old discussion on “historical necessities” being dredged up again. With a heavy heart, the old school Stalinists bow down to these necessities while swearing blind that Russian socialism remains Russian socialism. In reality, from the point of view of the historical necessities of capitalism, there is no doubt that the “principles” they are thus throwing overboard are really outdated. But, for Marxists and revolution-aries, the real problem that arises has absolutely nothing to do with the question of whether it is the Stalinists or their critics who are right, whether centralization or decentralization is better, authority or liberalism, material profit-sharing or coercion.

For Marxists and revolutionaries, these debates are perfectly insipid because the genuinely communist conception of economic rationalism differs precisely from economic rationalism as the Soviets conceive it, just as socialism differs from capitalism. In other words, the “historical necessity” that they embody differs from the historical necessity that Soviet
power obeys. From the point of view of this rationality, of this historical necessity, the post-Stalinist critics of Stalinism cut as poor a figure as the Stalinists themselves, and perhaps an even worse figure. To put it in a nutshell, the “rationalism” of these neo-socialists-in-one-country is limited to economy in the use of constant capital to delay and slow down the fall in the rate of profit and to confront “peaceful competition” with the more developed capitalist countries more advantageously on the world market. The only “rationalism” that we proletarian communists recognize as such is the abolition of the gigantic waste of living labour practised by capitalism in all its forms. Their rationalism demands due deference towards the law of value, economic freedom, competition, in short commercial anarchy and sordid bourgeois interests.

Our rationalism, by contrast, sees it as necessary to liquidate this freedom, this competition and therefore this anarchy, through the substitution of the law of value by the law of social utility, through the substitution of “profit-taking” by solidarity. Their rationalism kindled the monstrous Khrushchev doctrine of commercial socialism after the no less monstrous Stalinist doctrine of national socialism. Our rationalism is what inspires today’s small international party to defend, unconditionally, the internationalist and anti-commercial principles that the Bolsheviks never disowned. Their rationalism is leading us towards a third imperialist war. Ours will lead the global working class onto the path of the revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

When the hour strikes again it will not only be the revenge of the glorious Bolshevik October, slowly stifled in the suffocating framework of capitalist forms resuscitated behind the screen of “national socialism”. It will be the beginning of a total emancipation, not only of the proletariat, but of the entire human race, and the end of the barbaric prehistory that capitalist and bourgeois progress will never be able to end.

Translation taken from: A Revolution Summed Up - Part 3: The Soviet economy after October; International Communist Party

1. Decrees on workers’ control, the nationalization of banks, the organization of consumer cooperatives, the suspension of the payment of dividends to shareholders of public limited companies, the cancellation of State loans and the State monopoly of foreign trade.

2. The industrial production index being set equal to 100 for the year 1913, in 1921 it was just 31, i.e. less than a third of what it was before the war.

3. The 10th Congress, held in March 1921, eight days before the outbreak of the Kronstadt revolt and under the threat of a peasant counter-revolution.

4. The meaning is clear: the social base of the party fighting for socialism. The “total victory” which is discussed next is just as clearly a political victory for this party, and not... the triumph of the economic and social form of socialism... in Russia alone, because this would contradict all of Lenin’s assertions about the need for a long struggle for State capitalism.


6. A point that should be noted here, which is of no practical importance but great significance in principle. In 1921-22, Lenin essentially relied on concessions to revive industry, that is to say, the leasing of Soviet enterprises by foreign capital under Bolshevik control. It was, of course, impossible to dress up these concessions as Lenin had to note, but it is significant that concern for “national independence” and “socialist” protectionism (terminology that came later, and was entirely Stalinist) represented everything completely foreign not only to Lenin, but to the whole party at the start of the NEP, since no one thought of opposing this audacious position of Lenin’s.

7. According to the platform of the left opposition for the 15th Congress, which would be held after the exclusion of Trotsky and Zinoviev in December 1927, and which, of course, would not even consider this platform. The proportion is estimated at exactly 53% for 1926.

8. Trotsky attached such importance to the economic question that he focused all his efforts on it, renouncing any intervention on the Georgian question in which Stalin, Ordzhonikidze and Dzerzhinsky were compromised, even though on 5 March Lenin, already in the grip a second sickness, expressly instructed him “to defend the Georgian cause”. Likewise, when Lenin had announced his intention to “throw a bomb” at Stalin at the congress, if he was able participate, Trotsky was silent during the denunciations of the State apparatus and the Stalin-Kamenev-Zinoviev troika, in which Bukharin (who called Stalin’s policy towards nationalities chauvinist) as well as Preobrazhensky (who attacked the internal regime of the party) and Rakovsky (who denounced “russification” on behalf of the Ukrainian delegation) took part. Against the express wishes of Lenin, who, on the night of 5 to 6 March, had sent a letter to Stalin breaking off relations, which spoke volumes about his political judgement, Trotsky did nothing to oppose the re-election of Stalin to the political secretariat, proclaiming the solidarity of the Political Bureau and the Central Committee and appealing to party discipline. It is therefore clear that, for Trotsky, the question of economic policy was the capital question in March 1923; but he did not yet foresee the campaign that would only start in the autumn on his alleged “underestimation of the peasantry”, and which was a purely political campaign with social pretexts!

9. Trotsky’s entry into the Opposition in October, after making desperate efforts to ease the tension in March, provoked in the party by the Troika’s entirely parliamentary struggle for power, is explained by the serious events in the summer. The economic situation having worsened, waged labourers were no longer being paid; wildcat strikes broke out, with party members who had not accepted the NEP intervening to take the lead. These were Gavril Myasnikov and about thirty members of “The Workers Group” as well as Alexander Bogdanov and his group “Workers’ Truth”. These militants would be expelled but – more seriously – they would first be arrested by the GPU and imprisoned, which would give its leader, Dzerzhinsky, the opportunity to ask the Political Bureau that “each member of the party be required to denounce any opposition activity to the GPU”. To Trotsky, who had a very reserved attitude towards the appeals of the Opposition (and especially of Preobrazhensky and Bukharin) “for the restoration of democracy in the party”, this request would reveal such a “deterioration of the situation inside the party since the 12th Congress” that he would immediately break the alliance he had forced himself into with Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin.
10. These were Vyacheslav Molotov and Anastas Mikoyan, who were heavily sarcastic about industrial planning projects for several years and reproached the Opposition for bureaucratic conceptions of the economy and wanting to sacrifice the peasantry for industrial development.

11. These “glavs” were the central economic directorates built during war communism and which managed State industry using authoritarian methods, in the absence of any exchange and any market. They were dissolved in 1921 at the same time as free trade was re-established.

12. At the time of preparation for the 12th Congress, it was Rykov (the future representative of the right) who, while noting that the fixed and working capital of State industry had continued to decrease in 1922-23, nevertheless judged, in 1923, that State industry had to produce profits; an “optimistic hope”, which Trotsky said he did not share.

13. An alarming symptom, which speaks volumes about the state of exhaustion of the party’s healthy forces, especially after the earlier defeat of October 1923 in Germany. “This defeat led to the suicide of old militants like Lutovinov and Yevgenia Bosch, Glatzmann, one of Trotsky’s secretaries and a number of other less-known militants. Others paid in their material situation for taking up a position which was punished by being transferred. Some made up their minds to be more prudent in future” (Broué).

14. A victory that was completed, in January 1925, by the elimination of Trotsky from the Commissariat for War, and therefore from the government, to which Trotsky submitted with perfect discipline and without ever stooping to personal controversy.

15. A thing that is very difficult to establish, given that the two struggling currents in the party said the most contradictory things on this subject and foreign observers, being so struck by the terrible backwardness of Russian agriculture in its entirety that the distinction between poor, middle and rich peasants (bedniaks, seredniaks and kulaks) appeared to them of little economic significance, if they did not go so far as to assert that the “kulaks” were only an invention of local administrators eager to apply the directives of the party (which, for political reasons, attached the greatest importance to social differentiation within the peasantry) even if it meant falsifying the summary of the headcount of the various categories in their sector.

The supposition would not have shocked Lenin who noted at the end of his life: “Our State apparatus is worth absolutely nothing” and who, from March 1919, at the Eighth Party Congress, remarked: “In places careerists and adventurers have attached themselves to us like leeches, people who call themselves Communists and are deceiving us, and who have wormed their way into our ranks because the Communists are now in power, and because the more honest government employees refused to come and work with us on account of their retrograde ideas, while careerists have no ideas, and no honesty”. According to the left, in 1925, the true beneficiaries of the NEP were around three to four percent of the peasants; these, the kulaks, would have held half of the sown land at that time illicitly (ceded by poor or middle peasants who could not afford to work this land, or at least make a living from it) and 60 percent of the machines; two percent of the richest kulaks would have supplied 60 percent of the products brought to market; they would hold three-quarters of the illegally rented land, on which they would employ, still illegally, three and a half million agricultural workers and more than 1.5 million day-labourers receiving wages 40 percent lower than before the war. These figures, quoted by Victor Serge in Towards Industrialization (1927) and cited by Pierre Broué in his Bolshevik Party, are unverifiable.

16. Even Trotsky would admit that these were inevitable concessions, while claiming that they had become so through the fault of “management”, which had neglected the efforts essential for faster industrialization.

17. By “cooperation” the Bolsheviks meant all forms of collective work from the simple tovarishchestvo (or society of culture in common) in the artel and in the commune, this cooperation reaching the stage of State capitalism only in the sovkhoz. In tovarishchestvo, land was cultivated in common, but cattle and other objects remained private property. In the artel, not only was the land cultivated in common, but all farm animals and livestock intended for consumption belonged to the association, and not of its members (in this sense, the future kolkhoz was below the level of the artel). In the commune, the houses themselves, the gardens and the farmyard animals belonged to the association. The distribution of produce was egalitarian and not related to the individual’s actual performance of work: it was therefore a true communist association from the internal point of view, but its relations with the outside were mercantile and bourgeois. In the sovkhoz, the ownership of the working capital passed entirely to the State and the members became pure employees.

18. It should nevertheless be noted that, in his opportunist land policy, Stalin had gone, before the unrest in Georgia, to the point of proposing the denationalization of the soil, which would have meant the renunciation of proletarian power to control or attempt to control the agrarian economy and its developments in any way. Faced with the unanimous opposition from both the right and the left to such a position, Stalin retreated cautiously, claiming that only enemies of Soviet power could have spread such rumours!

19. We know that in 1925, the 900 million roubles placed in private trade annually brought in 400 million in interest, obviously lost to the development of productive forces, which did not bother the Nepmen at all!

20. The reference here is to Engels, who, while strongly attacking the French socialists who wanted to “defend small property”, had noted that the proletarian party did not have to promote the ruin of the peasantry. See Lenin himself, in “Report on the Attitude of the Proletariat to Petty-Bourgeois Democrats” of 27 November 1918.

21. It was exhibited in a two-volume work, The New Economics, of which only the first appeared before the left was outlawed, and which was translated from Russian and known in the West only belatedly.

22. The mere fact that these “other forces” manifested themselves nevertheless proves the correctness of Bukharin’s Marxist thought, which only had the misfortune to “foresee” exactly what was only going to happen a quarter of a century later, but to understand only at the last minute what was happening before his eyes!

23. The Italian left was the only current to do this. The degenerate disciples of Trotsky, as wretched in this as in all things, rehabilitated Bukharin only as a supposed supporter of “proletarian democracy”. Given on the one hand the role he played
against the left, for whom “proletarian democracy” meant “defence of the party”, his rebuff of Trotsky’s proposal in 1927 of a right-left bloc to ensure this defence against the centre, and knowing on the other hand that Bukharin was very probably the author of the 1936 constitution, which was rightly denounced by Trotsky, we can only admire the blinding power of democratic prejudice.

24. Compromise with the peasantry, but also with the world market, in a sense. While he was very aware of the fact that market pressures would impose on Russia the application of strict capitalist methods, Lenin warned of the danger should it avoid the challenge, that is to say, of falling back into economic autarchy. In 1925, this was exactly the position that Bukharin continued to defend when he sought the already clear autarchic tendencies (business leaders demanded “highly protective” tariffs for Russian industry, and not purely fiscal) at the same time that he performed the so-called “pro-kulak” turn. As for the so-called Stalinist “radicalization”, it would break with the world market as much as possible at the same time as it crushed the kulaks.

25. The judgment of an American observer of the forced collectivization, Calvin B. Hoover, author of The Economic Life of Soviet Russia (1931), which perfectly followed to the obtuse “common sense” rightly denounced by Trotsky in Their Morals and Ours on the same question, but which was unfortunately not the prerogative of opponents of communism like Hoover, since it was ultimately he who explained the terrible epidemic of recantations that raged among the Russian communists in the years 1927-30.

26. There is no contradiction between the act of affirming this and the act, for a proletarian current, of refusing to endorse or support such a policy. It is one of the infamies of opportunism to believe that it is necessary to bow to all “historical necessity”, once this has been recognized. Rosa Luxemburg rightly noted that in fact, there were always two historical necessities in struggle, that of capitalism and that of socialism, and that if “theirs” was often the strongest, it nevertheless had “much shorter breath than ours”, which would eventually prevail. We can easily reject the argument that if we admit that the Marxist party could not have applied “revolutionary methods” where Stalin applied them, it was Marxism itself that was compromised, recognizing in it an “inferiority”, precisely the one that Stalin did away with. But Marxism is the doctrine of the socialist revolution, not the doctrine of improving backward countries, a historical work in which it is of little importance to us that other political and social currents can boast of any “superiority”. The only true betrayal of Marxism is precisely if you grant any socialist significance to such work, whether it be the modernization of Russia or that of China, Stalinism or Maoism.

27. A good observer of Russia (where he was during the “forced collectivization”) and an objective historian, but a disastrous and pitiful political theorist, the Stalinist-Trotskyist Isaac Deutscher exclaimed somewhere that if a transformation that overwhelms the mode of production for hundreds of millions of people in the space of a few years is not a “social revolution”, he did not know what else a social revolution could be. Agreed. The International Communist Party has never denied the capitalist revolution carried out in Russia after 1927, any more than its historical necessity, but it affirms that the agrarian transformation of 1929-30 impressed a backward character on this revolution, even as a capitalist revolution, and the proof is the dismal figures on agricultural yield, an indisputable condemnation of what even an observer as well disposed towards the Russians as the urban economist Paul-Henri Chombart de Lauwe rightly called “the aberrant kolkhoz” in his work on the Soviet peasantry.

28. In 1928 Bukharin had not yet realized that the unified left and the Stalinists constituted two parties expressing opposing class interests and that he himself belonged to the same class party as the unified left, and not to Stalin’s party. He therefore addressed himself to Stalin: it was the Stalinist fraction that he wanted to convince, because he thought it was a useful ally to prevent a victory for the left. It was not the latter’s views on the party issue, nor even its criticism of socialism in one country that set Bukharin against the left, because his own rallying behind it was never anything but a political manoeuvre; his scientific convictions on the one hand, and on the other his attitude to the question of the autarchy or non-autarchy of the Russian economy excluded the possibility that he ever took it literally and especially that he shared its nationalist implications. What set Bukharin against the left – which precisely led him to his deadly alliance with Stalinist centrism – was his conviction that the triumph of the left’s conceptions of economic policy would cause a terrible degeneration of the workers’ State, which indeed is what happened when Stalin turned leftwards, but it is quite clear that if anyone could register his warning while there was still time, it was not Stalin, the potential leader of the new party in gestation, but the Bolshevik left.

29. Educated since 1921 in the idea of the importance of “the alliance with the peasantry” and since 1923 in the conviction that “hostility towards the muzhik” was a Trotskyist deviation, the militants and even party officials did not take to the turn easily, opposing emergency measures or criticizing them. The repression was ruthless, as was the ideological campaign against them, but the fiction of the unanimity of the Political Bureau was maintained (with the complicity of Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky) until January 1929. Still in October 1928, in the midst of a struggle with Bukharin, Stalin had the brass neck to affirm: “There are no right-wingers in the Political Bureau. In the Political Bureau, we are united, and we will remain so until the end”. Very imprudently, the right let him get away with this and abandoned its own supporters to his charges: it judged that it should not let itself be chased out of the leadership before the fall of Stalin, which it considered inevitable, and which would constitute a critical moment for the revolution.

30. Trotsky, convinced that the victory of the right was complete, spoke of the “final phase of Thermidor”.

31. Bukharin had only just been publicly denounced.

32. Stalin of course insisted on the spontaneous nature of the collective farm movement and for him it was the occasion for one of those “theories” that are just so many slaps in the face of Marxism. In an article written in March 1930 (published in August) entitled “Stalin as Theoretician” on the economic problems of the USSR, Trotsky presented Stalin’s thesis thus, in order to refute it: “Why”, he asks his unfortunate audience, “do we succeed so easily (!) in demonstrating, under the condition of nationalized land the superiority (of collectives) over the small peasant economies? This is where the
tremendous revolutionary significance of the Soviet agrarian laws lies, which abolished absolute rent... and which established the nationalization of land”. Very satisfied with himself, Trotsky continues... “And here Stalin makes reference – the Marxian agronomists [Trotsky is referring to the followers of Bukharin, whom he wants to shame for their alliance with Stalin] are recommended not to exchange glances, not to blow their noses in confusion, and what is more, not to hide their heads under the table – to the third volume of Capital and to Marx’s theory of ground rent. According to Stalin, it would appear that the Western peasant is tied down to the land by nothing else than ‘absolute rent’. And since we ‘destroyed’ this monster, that in itself caused it to disappear... Under the conditions of market economy, rent is determined by that quantity of products which can be extracted by the owner of the land from the products of the labour applied to it... 

As to the actual liquidation of absolute rent, we will be able to speak of that only after the socialization of the land all over the planet, that is, after the victory of the world revolution. But within national limits, if one may say so without insulting Stalin, not only socialism cannot be constructed, but even absolute rent cannot be abolished. Ground rent finds its expression on the world market in the price of agricultural products. Insofar as the Soviet government is an exporter of the latter – and with the intensification of agriculture grain exports will increase greatly – to that extent, armed with the monopoly of foreign trade, the Soviet government appears on the world market as the owner of the land whose product it exports, and consequently, in the price of these products the Soviet government realizes the ground rent concentrated in its hands. If the technique of our agriculture were not inferior to that of the capitalists and at the same time the technique of our foreign trade, then precisely with us in the USSR absolute rent would appear in its clearest and most concentrated form... If Stalin now brags of our ‘abolition’ of absolute rent, instead of realizing it on the world market, then a temporary right to such bragging is given him by the present weakness of our agricultural export and the irrational character of our foreign trade, in which not only is absolute ground rent sunk without a trace, but many other things as well. This side of the matter, which has no direct relation to the collectivization of the peasant economy, nevertheless shows us by one more example that the idolization of isolation and economic backwardness is one of the basic features of our national-socialist philosopher”. Thus, Trotsky refutes Stalin’s absurd attempt to present “a wide movement, so far very primitive in content, and very unstable, toward collectivization” as a communist movement. This movement is primitive in that it represents – as we have noted – an escape, by a fraction of the peasantry farming small plots from a level of poverty completely unknown in the West at the same time. “Certain elements of the petty conservativism of private ownership are inherent here, consequently not in an abstract category of absolute rent, but in the material conditions of a higher parcellized culture. If it is comparatively easy”, continues Trotsky, “to break the Russian peasants away from a piece of land, it is not at all because Stalin’s ‘new argument’ liberated them from absolute rent but for the very reason for which, prior to the October revolution, periodic repartition of land took place in Russia”. Thus, unlike his degenerate disciples, Trotsky in no way idealized the movement establishing kolkhozes. On the contrary, as a Marxist he recognized them as being backward.

33. An American witness to “accelerated collectivization”, Calvin B. Hoover, wrote in his book The Economic Life of Soviet Russia: “To aid the group of twenty-five thousand workers who had been sent out to organize and administer the new collective farms, every other type of urban inhabitant who could be induced by favours or pressure to go to the villages was pressed into service. For example, in Moscow the students of the advanced musical schools were mobilized for the purpose of carrying the cultural revolution to the kolkhoz. Hospitals and clinics in Moscow were stripped of doctors and nurses in order to supply the needs of the collective farms... School teachers in increasing numbers... Students in the agricultural and technical schools... The peasants were inclined to regard all persons who came from the city as agents of the Soviet Government... In districts inhabited by national minorities, the natives regard all Russians as supporters of the Soviet Government. In raids by insurgents, Russians are often killed regardless of the exact political affiliations of the unfortunate victims. Since self-preservation was involved, every inhabitant of the city who was sent to the country became a soldier for the Commune cause [ Hoover was no Marxist and was totally ignorant of ‘the communist cause’: what he means by this is the government offensive]. Isolated assassinations of workers who had gone out to manage the collective farms were numerous... The most appalling stories of torture and mutilation of these workers by the peasants spread by word of mouth, for the government rarely permitted news of these peasant assassinations to appear in the press... Many stories were told of instances in which the peasants at night had surrounded houses occupied by workers sent out from the city, and had burned their houses and their occupants”.

34. Hoover notes, in the work cited above: “Peasant insurrections flared up all over the Union. In particular, there were risings in the Northern Caucasus, in the small republics making up the Caucasian Federation, in Turkestan, and even in Riazan, which is only a few hours from Moscow. In general, these revolts occurred in districts inhabited by national minorities, where there still existed the tradition of freedom supported by the sword, and where the feeling of racial solidarity had prevented winning over even the bedniaki to the cause of collectivization. But the revolts were not confined wholly to these districts”.

35. There was a case of refusal to obey orders by the army, which had been ordered to shoot peasant crowds. Deutscher, moreover, relates the distress of a GPU officer he met at that time in Russia and who, as an old militant in the civil war of 1918-21, “was utterly in despair about recent events in the countryside”, a state of mind which could not have been out of the ordinary.

36. Thousands of readers will have seen this definition found in The Unfinished Revolution (1967) by the “Marxist” Isaac Deutscher, who must recognize the merit of formulating the most unsustainable theses of opportunism in all their purity, disdaining the demagogy in which they are usually wrapped.

37. The thesis cited above for the purposes of the presentation implies that the destruction of the Bolshevik Party (which only hardened Stalinists dare to deny) did not mean the destruction of the class party of the proletariat and the loss of power by this class, but rather only the elimination of the hitherto predominant current, which constituted a mixture of
communism and revolutionary bourgeois democracy. Let us not shudder at the thought and examine what this actually means. If this were true, then the political counter-revolution of 1927-29 would not have had, with regard to socialism, any greater significance than, with regard to capitalism, the substitution of Napoleon’s bourgeois Empire for the Jacobin Republic (the political form of the democratic revolution, after a series of transitions that we can overlook). In both cases, those who meditate on history to find this political change “regrettable” are free to do so. But the revolutionary internationalism of the Bolshevik Party on a world scale ceases to be capable of being considered as a characteristic, that is to say, an inalienable principle of the communist programme, without which there no longer exists a class party. It becomes a sort of ornament on Lenin’s republic rather like Jacobin virtue appears as an ornament on Robespierre’s republic; both of them ultimately superfluous. The collapse of the Communist International, the global discredit which fell on communism, the second imperialist war and the powerlessness of the working class to put an end to it, the political disorganization that persists a quarter of a century later and gives contemporary capitalism an easy ride, all this is counted for nothing, or considered secondary. One wonders if any doctrine, as conservative and traditionalist as you could imagine, could be more odious than this urbanite watering down of revolutionary Marxism.

38. Deutscher concedes to his unfortunate readers (readers that no party tradition and no class doctrine can protect against his sophistry, since the class party has been reduced to a quasi-impotence and its propaganda only reaches a tiny number of proletarians) that the official economist of the regime, Eugene Varga in person, readily admitted in private, in the 1930s, that the doctrine of “socialism in one country” was only a “doctrine of consolation”. It is obviously an incentive to conclude that ultimately idealization does not matter if the work accomplished has been proletarian. It is to count for nothing the role of the party, which must educate and emancipate, not only the working class, but all the members of society, and not mislead and deceive, as all the other class regimes have done. It is to count for nothing the capital importance of this fatal doctrine of socialism in one country in dismantling the international movement of the proletariat, in forcing it to accept the worst political about turns. This question had already been posed clearly in 1925 at the 14th Congress. Bukharin (who was however never a national communist) objected to the left opportunistically: “If we want to declare to the new layers of the working class that we are building State capitalism instead of socialism, that we will not be able to overcome the difficulties resulting from our defective method and the delay of the world revolution, we have to repudiate and fight this state of mind”. Zinoviev made the following proud retort, much sharper than many made by the great Trotsky himself, but which unfortunately did not pass into posterity: “Workers do not need to be fooled by beautiful phrases. They know perfectly well the strong and the weak sides of our economy, principally in State industry. They know perfectly well that we have conquered these companies and have driven out the exploiters... but they also know that their factories are tied to the market. They see the shortcomings perfectly well and there is no point in sugaring the pill... It is clear that there is capitalism here, and State capitalism. We must say this openly to the workers: if we do not do this, they will notice our falsehoods and in this they will be right. It is a serious political question, which cannot be passed over, and no one will succeed in revising Leninism on this basis any time soon”. (Quoted from La Russie vers le socialisme, library of the French Communist newspaper, l’Humanité).

39. Investment for the year 1929 in industry, while woefully low, reached 7.6 billion! We do not know what fraction of this it would have taken to provide agriculture with the 250,000 tractors then deemed necessary, but the 400 million roubles of kulak goods are certainly a paltry figure beside that.

40. Marx says of this vulgar and “crude communism” that its essence is envy, which is the inverse rather than the negation of bourgeois property.

41. To convince oneself of this, it suffices to compare the hysterical cries in favour of the “extermination” of the kulaks (who, thrown into labour camps, hunted down everywhere and prevented from engaging in any kind of economic activity, even as workers, sometimes turned to banditry, according to Trotsky’s testimony) and Lenin’s lucid pleas in 1921-22 in favour of the lease of Russian companies to foreign capitalists who would eventually agree to invest in them, his sarcasm against the braggarts who boasted of “building communism with their hands”. Lenin’s anti-capitalism is above all a sort of ornament on Lenin’s republic rather like Jacobin virtue appears as an ornament on Robespierre’s republic; both of them ultimately superfluous. The collapse of the Communist International, the global discredit which fell on communism, the second imperialist war and the powerlessness of the working class to put an end to it, the political disorganization that persists a quarter of a century later and gives contemporary capitalism an easy ride, all this is counted for nothing, or considered secondary. One wonders if any doctrine, as conservative and traditionalist as you could imagine, could be more odious than this urbanite watering down of revolutionary Marxism.

42. The citations are from P. Broué, The Bolshevik Party.

43. After 1929, we are dealing with a new working class that no longer has anything in common with the October proletariat, “the wonder of history” as Preobrazhensky aptly called it in a moment of lyricism. We can understand nothing of the tremendous political and social setback that had occurred since the years of the civil war, if we do not have this phenomenon of gigantic change uppermost in mind.

44. It is important to note that Lenin, who would reproach Trotsky precisely in his famous “Testament” for “his too administrative conception of things”, resisted Trotsky’s exhortations for an extension of the powers of Gosplan for quite some time. It was Trotsky himself who, in his criticism of Stalinist planning, highlighted what might have been Lenin’s reasons: no administrative authority can transcend real economic conditions and socialist control of the social economy cannot be realized by the virtue of the will alone. It is not only clear that Bukharin was closer to Lenin and Marxism when he fought the “planners” than Trotsky himself, but also that in the face of the follies of the first Stalinist five-year plan, Trotsky’s criticism took up the substance of Bukharin’s argument. In fact, as we noted in connection with the 1932 controversy, Trotsky never attributed to State planning the magical virtues that Stalinism attributed to it, and his struggle never went beyond the bounds of Marxist determinism. The criticism cited above therefore does not have the significance of a real “turning point”.

45. The irony obviously targets Stalinist voluntarism, which claims to achieve this control of society over its own production by the sole virtue of State authority, which is not intrinsically impossible, contrary to what the post-Stalinist reformers suggest today, but which presupposes the generalization of associated work and the cessation of the struggle of all against all within the empire of need.
It is therefore clear that Trotsky does not claim that if he were still in power, Bolshevism would achieve social control over the commercial economy. His criticism only denounces the illusion that Stalinism wants to create.

We know that in 1932, the date of the text, Trotsky did not recognize that it had been overthrown, which does not detract from the value of a criticism aimed at the braggling about “socialism in one country”.

Food production is part of Sector B. We treat it separately because it not only poses all the questions raised by the table [that follows] but also that of the reaction of the kolkhoz farmers to the economic oppression of big industrial State capital.

A strange fact for people who supposedly “crushed the bourgeois democratic revolution” and developed a “purely communist” revolution. According to the bold construction of Deutscher, the Soviets make no secret of the fact that the October Revolution was of greater material benefit to peasants, whose standard of living increased by 11% than to the working class, which had to be content with just 7%.

Socialism is as much a rationalization of, as an increase in, consumption. It is above all a harmonization of social life as a result of the disappearance of classes with diverging interests; in its ultimate and parasitic phase, capitalism undoubtedly increases the consumption of the masses at times; but these times contrast with others when, as a result of war or crisis, consumption itself falls to very low levels; we must not forget, moreover, that capitalism increases needs more than real consumption, and that if, to a certain extent, it corrupts the working masses, their needs and consumption are always very clearly distinguished in any epoch from the needs and consumption of the upper bourgeoisie and even of the middle classes, whose shameless waste is directly linked to concerns about social prestige. If we look from the viewpoint of people at the start of the 20th century, the current needs of the working masses and their consumption itself may well seem “bourgeois”, but it does not make much sense to do this. What matters is that bourgeois progress inflames rather than attenuates economic antagonism, so that today’s workers are not the copy of the bourgeois of fifty years ago, but the oppressed and the exploited of today, with or without cars, fridges and other trifles of this kind. Any other reasoning is already suspect, but then comes the dodgy practice of equating accelerated mechanization (which is only one aspect of the development of the productive forces that, in the eyes of Marxism, resides essentially in the productive capacities of men, which capitalism maintains at a low level, through stupidity and dismemberment through specialization) and socialism on the one hand and increased consumption and... capitalism on the other!

From 33 to 88% on the production of vegetable oils, edible fats and meat; 100% for tobacco and brandy, which is less shocking.

That of the Tsar, with his semi-colonial dependence on the Entente countries and the extraordinary archaism of his army, was not modern at all!

Published by J. Chombart de Lauwe in his well-documented work Les paysans soviétiqques (1961). It is from him that we have borrowed the data concerning the yield per hectare and the qualitative evolution of crops.

For 1965, the results are as follows. Cattle: index 110 (+ 10%) cows: 95 (- 5%) pigs: 180 (+ 80%) sheep: 103 (+ 3%)

We will neglect here the extra-economic and extra-historical argument according to which this revolution that introduced, then generalized, meat as a foodstuff alongside traditional cereals was disastrous for the health of the species, a doctrine which is a variety of the “bourgeois socialism”, mocked by Marx and Engels: “vegetarianism”.

The other series gives, for industrial investments: 1929 7.6 billion (instead of 2.615 in the table above); 1930: 18.7; 1931: 18.4; 1932: 21.6; 1933: 18; 1934: 23.7; 1935: 27.8; 1936: 33.8; 1937: 38.1 billion (instead of 13.928); 1939: 40.8 billion; 1940: 43.2 billion. It is from a Soviet source like the first, and we do not know the reasons for these enormous differences. Bettelheim, who draws his figures from a 1936 work, SSSR Strana sotsializma, himself indicates a percentage of 25% for the year 1931, 20% for 1932 and 18% for 1935, which are clearly lower than those than can be calculated on these; it seems that the difference comes from the fact that he relates the figures for agricultural investment not to those of investment in industry, but also to investment in the economy in general, taking account of transport and trade.

The progression of the kolkhozes appears in the following series from Soviet sources, which gives the percentage of land cultivated by them: 1929: 3.9% (before the autumn offensive, of course); 1930: 52.7%; 1932: 61.5%; 1937: 93%

Here, Chombart de Lauwe refers to an “unpublished document” that he probably obtained from a member of the scientific institutes he attended, but which the pseudo-communist party obviously had no interest in disseminating since it sheds light on one of the reasons for its agrarian bankruptcy. The naive French specialist, who equates Stalinism with communism, did not realize it, since he judges (in the official perspective of the regime) that “if we adopt the perspective of agricultural policy of the USSR based on the march to communism, the absolute priority given to heavy industry is not shocking”!!! He is another one who does not understand that “the march to communism” is the process of emancipation of the proletariat, which cannot of course be reduced to good food, but which takes it for granted – especially after fifty years of a so-called communist regime!

In his Stalin, Isaak Deutscher notes that in January 1934, when the height of the crisis of “dekulakization” and famine had passed, Stalin assured a plenary session of the Central Committee that the danger having been averted, it was no longer necessary to push industrialization at the same accelerated pace as during the first five-year period. He adds that: “A few days later, he was found again on the platform, describing the dangers that threatened the countryside. He surprised the party by saying that collective farms could become even more dangerous for the regime than private farms. In the past, the peasants were scattered and slow to react. Since collectivization, they were organized in compact bodies that could support the Soviets, but also turn against them more effectivly than the independent cultivators could. Rural political sections were established so that the party could monitor them more closely”. We can gauge here the vast difference in party function compared to the Bolshevik era: then, when we deplored the weak political implantation of the Communist Party of Russia in the countryside, it was because this translated into weak proletarian and communist influence; in 1934, by contrast, it was to bolster the State police in the countryside!
70. Figures supplied by Chombart de Lauwe in his Les paysans soviétiques. This author has the merit of insisting on the fact that this does not at all mean the liquidation of the individual kolkhoz economy, whose disastrous weight on the general agrarian economy the Soviet regime did not want to recognize, for the quite obvious reason that the fact is a clear contradiction of the doctrine of the 1936 Constitution and the Kolkhoz Statute (1935) according to which, “The path of kolkhozes, the path of Socialism [sic] is the only right path for the toiling peasants”. According to these two monuments of opportunistic infamy, by taking "upon themselves an obligation to strengthen their artel, to work honestly, to distribute the kolkhoz income according to the amount of work done, to guard the common property, to take care of the kolkhoz goods, to keep the tractors and machinery in good order, to tend the horses carefully, to execute the tasks imposed by the workers’ and peasants’ State in order to make their kolkhoz a Bolshevik one and all members of the kolkhoz affluent people”. But “affluence” being late in coming, the peasants did none of all that, which moreover had nothing to do with “Bolshevism”.


72. This clear description is taken from Les paysans soviétiques by Chombart de Lauwe as well as the details below.

73. An excellent factual proof of Marx’s critique of the utopia of the emancipation of the workers by the substitution of cooperatives for employer enterprise.

67. Especially 28-year-old socialism, as would be the case if you wanted to accept the thesis of the pure communist revolution of 1929-30!

68. With both Deutscher and Chombart de Lauwe we found the surprising figure of 17-18 million kolkhoz workers. This is probably because only heads of households are counted.

69. It is impossible to distinguish the number of real workers in this overall figure.

70. Deutscher: The Unfinished Revolution.

71. It is for this reason that, all other considerations aside, the Opposition on the right as on the left pointed out to the Stalinists that to be proud of Russia’s “splendid isolation” was to be proud of its backwardness.

72. This point has been abundantly developed in all of our party studies on Russia and we will not return to it again here. New readers just need to know one thing: while Capitalist Russia Mark 2 runs out of breath behind its American competitor the latter does not wait placidly for Russia to catch up: it runs at the speed that its strength and age allow, benefitting from a considerable lead. Now, if Russia benefited for many years from the considerable annual growth rates of the youngest capitalisms, it was also subject to the law of decreasing annual growth, which is a reflection of the law of the downward trend of the rate of profit and which is verified for all capitalist countries. In everyday terms, as we get older, the competitor gets a considerable lead. Now, if Russia benefited for many years from the considerable annual growth rates of the youngest capitalisms, it was also subject to the law of decreasing annual growth, which is a reflection of the law of the downward trend of the rate of profit and which is verified for all capitalist countries. In everyday terms, as we get older, the competitor gets a considerable lead.

73. And even more so, the economic rationalism of the bogus “Communist” regimes still in power in China, Vietnam etc.