

Loren Golner, July 2, 2014

## The Agrarian Question in the Russian Revolution: From Material Community to Productivism, and Back

---

 [breaktheirhaughtypower.org/the-agrarian-question-in-the-russian-revolution-from-material-community-to-productivism-and-back](http://breaktheirhaughtypower.org/the-agrarian-question-in-the-russian-revolution-from-material-community-to-productivism-and-back)  
bthp

“If Russia follows the path that it took after 1861, it will miss the greatest chance to leap over all the fatal alternatives of the capitalist regime that history has ever offered to a people. Like all other countries, it will have to submit to the inexorable laws of that system”.

Marx, Letter to Vera Zasulich, 1881

“Socialism has demonstrated its right to victory, not on the pages of *Das Kapital*...not in the language of dialectics, but in the language of steel, cement and electricity.”

Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, 1937

Buried under almost a century of ideology, the “Russian question”, the historical meaning of the defeat of the Russian revolution, is the question that will not go away. World capitalism since the 1970’s has been in a crisis without end, yet the reigning ideology, despite all the headwinds of the years since the 2007-08 meltdown, still proclaims: “get used to it; there is no alternative to capitalism.” And yet, for anyone who does think about an alternative to the disintegrating world visible all around, even in the unfathomable historical amnesia of the present, the question of “what went wrong in Russia?” is never too far from the surface.

The following article is not a rehash of the debates of the 1960’s and 1970’s on the “class nature of the Soviet Union”, important as those debates may have been and in some way still are. In the subsequent four decades, a whole broadly-shared framework for discussing that question has been largely lost, in the contemporary world of post-history, post-modernism, identity politics, the World Social Forum and NGOs. That framework was obviously lost because it no longer seemed a viable guide to the contemporary world, especially after 1989-1991.

The article had its origin in a series of talks I gave in summer 2013 on the Russian, German, Chinese and Spanish revolutions [2]. The background (re)reading for those talks got me thinking about how the political void of the past 40 years influences our ability to relate those revolutions to present developments. Even more, it got me thinking about all the alternative currents—anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism, revolutionary syndicalism, the IWW, council communism—which were effectively steamrollered by Bolshevism and by the reach of the Third International for a whole epoch, an epoch which began to end ca. 1968. In fact, the article was conceived as Part One of a three-part series which would be: 1) the revolutionary epoch 1917-1923, and the ultimately disastrous international influence of the Russian Revolution, illustrated in the cases of the very early French, German, Italian and U.S. Communist Parties 2) the failed return of the “vanguard party”

(Trotskyism, Maoism) in the period from 1968 to 1977 and 3) the ongoing recomposition of the world working class, and forms of worker organization and self-organization, today and tomorrow.

Thinking about the historical semi-oblivion of non-Bolshevik “projects for a different society” brought me up against the (hardly original) question of why revolutionary Marxism, which (at least in the ideologized variant of the Second International), had (seemingly) been embraced by hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of working people in mass movements in the West from the 1880’s to the 1920’s, and had then, after the mid-1920’s, increasingly become the outlook of “generals without an army”, small sects of whatever stripe existing on the fringes of the mass movements of the 1930’s and 1960’s, but in no way hegemonic in the way revolutionary Marxism had seemed to be just before and after World War I. Rosa Luxemburg in that earlier period had spoken all over Germany to large crowds; Angelica Balabanova similarly recounts[3] regularly speaking to crowds of 5000 in a series of small towns in Italy in the same period.

A large part (at least) of the answer to that conundrum was tied up with the “Russian question”. Not merely (to reiterate) in the finely-tuned debates of 40 years ago about whether the Soviet Union was state capitalist or bureaucratic collectivist or a degenerated workers’ state; the problem lay deeper. Virtually all the protagonists in those debates seemed to rather casually assume that Russia in 1917 was something close to a fully European capitalist society, very backward to be sure, but ultimately on a continuum with the rest[4]. Didn’t Trotsky—whose framework shaped, consciously or otherwise, those debates more than anyone, pro or con (at least among most anti-Stalinist would-be revolutionary currents)—talk about Tsarist Russia having the largest and most modern factories in the world, alongside a vast population of petty producer peasants?[5] Hadn’t the two dozen best-known Bolsheviks of 1917 (when Stalin was totally unknown, though already fundamental in the underground apparatus[6]) spent decades in European exile?

The timing seemed too perfect: Marxism, in even ideological form, receded as a mass phenomenon in most “advanced capitalist” countries in the decade after 1917, following 1) the Russian Revolution, 2) the emergence of mass movements of workers and still more of peasants in the semi-colonial and colonial world from China and Vietnam to Africa by way of India, and, last but hardly least, 3) in the transition from the formal to the real domination of capital, which overlaps with what some people call the decadence of the capitalist mode of production. Max Eastman wrote in his memoirs of the mindset of Greenwich Village radicalism before 1914: “We were living in times innocent of world war, of fascism, of nazism, sovietism, the Fuehrerprinzip, the totalitarian state. Nothing we were talking about had ever been tried. We thought of political democracy with its basic rights and freedoms as good things permanently secured. Planting ourselves on that firm basis, we proposed to climb higher to industrial or ‘real’ democracy.”[7] To this we can add, where Western Marxism was (with few exceptions) concerned, times innocent of a successful mass insurrection of three million Russian

workers greatly abetted by 100 million peasants who were in fact not—*pace* the entirety of Russian Marxists, starting with Lenin— capitalist petty producers but living overwhelmingly in household economies only tangentially related to any market; similar movements with even smaller working classes and larger peasantries in China or Vietnam or India; or, in our own time, mass movements in the Moslem world ostensibly (at least) fighting for an Islamic republic or even the restoration of the caliphate.

In short, pre-1920's Marxism broke up, as a mass movement in the West, on the shoals of the "Russian question", and beyond that, the realities of the world's huge peasant populations, in countries where capitalism had an even more tenuous hold than in Russia, and where, after 1914, little real development, and a lot of outright retrogression, took place.

Looking back, it seems clear that the transformation of the work of Karl Marx into a modernization ideology for developing or backward countries, at the hands of his ostensible followers, the very people who prompted him to exclaim "I am not a Marxist", bears an important responsibility for that crack-up. (I should make clear that I am not saying that the mainstream Marxists of the Second International "had the wrong ideas". Their "ideas" were integral to their role in propelling capital from its phase of formal to real domination, of which more below.)

We know today, more clearly than was possible in the 1960's and 1970's, that Marx himself was already deeply interested in the non-Western world[8], and specifically said that the theses of *Capital* and *Theories of Surplus Value* were valid only for western Europe and the U.S., and that other parts of the world might well follow "different roads". The collapse of Stalinism, the post-1978 emergence of a dynamic capitalism in China, and the ebb of "Marxism-Leninism", Maoism and Third Worldist development ideologies in much of Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America has revealed the great diversity, and adaptability, of social formations in those parts of the world that were hidden behind the apparent march toward "modernization" under the likes of the Shah of Iran, Nasser, Nehru, or Sékou Touré.

Only in 2010 did the world's rural population drop below 50% of the total. The great majority of those remaining in the countryside are petty-producer peasants, artisans and rural proletarian laborers. Considering only India and China, with close to 40% of the world's population between them, it is clear that the "agrarian question", on a world scale, remains central to any possible creation of a renewed communism. This is all the more urgent in light of the one million people a *day* who arrive from the countryside in the world's cities, as capitalism increasingly makes their way of life unviable and draws them into a dubious future in the world's shantytowns[9] or China's 270 million migrant workers.

To reconnect with the political and social realities of the world's rural population, both historically and for today, in a project to create a viable, non-developmental Marxism for the world after Stalinism, Maoism and Third Worldism, also takes us back to another largely forgotten dimension of Marx: the critique of the separation of city and

countryside as a fundamental alienation, the separation of the producers from their means of production in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century as “*the*” original alienation to be overcome in a future “activity as all-sided in its production as in its consumption” (*Grundrisse*)[10] , Marx’s call for the “more even distribution of the population around the earth’s surface” (*Communist Manifesto*) when cities, owing their existence to the centralization of capital, can be superseded, and finally, and hardly last, the ever more pressing question of the environment.

All these dimensions are opened up by an inquiry into the agrarian question in the Russian Revolution.

## I. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and the Russian Peasant Commune: Origins of an Ideology

---

In the 1870’s, Karl Marx first took a serious interest in the Russian revolutionary movement, partly through the (initially) surprising impact of his own work[11] in a country he had previously viewed as the colossal “gendarme of Europe”, and even more so by contact with the Russian Populists, both through their impressive actions[12] and through their correspondence with him, requesting advice on strategy and tactics.

In short order, Marx set aside work on volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital*, taught himself Russian, and spent much of the last decade of his life studying Russian agriculture. He concealed this turn in his work from his lifelong collaborator, Engels. Aside from important correspondence with Russian revolutionaries, he never wrote a text of any length based on his new interest, but at his death left two cubic meters of notes on Russia.

What ensued was a fundamental step in the transformation of Marx’s work into an ideology, one whose influence reached into the 1970’s. When Engels discovered these materials after Marx’s death, and realized they were the reason that Marx had not finished *Capital*, he was furious, and apparently wanted to burn them[13].

Marx, in his research on Russia (as well as on other non-Western countries and regions[14]) had discarded his earlier claims of a single path of world capitalist development, one in which “England held up to the world the mirror of its own future”, and had also recognized that the validity of his work up to that point was confined to the conditions of western Europe.

At the center of Marx’s “Russian road”[15] was the peasant commune, or mir (also called the *obshchina*). The mir had been studied in depth in the early 1840’s by the German Baron Haxthausen , whose three-volume work of 1843 led to a controversy in Russia about the mir’s significance, involving every Russian intellectual faction from the backward-looking Slavophiles to the exile Alexander Herzen to the Westernizers[16]. The commune then became central to the Populists’ claim that Russia could, or should, skip

the capitalist “stage” of development, a sentiment reinforced by Marx’s preface to the 1882 Russian translation of the *Communist Manifesto*[17], not to mention the portrayal of real conditions in England which they found in *Capital* .

In his discovery of the still-viable Russian commune, Marx was reconnecting with his 1840’s writings about “community” (“Gemeinwesen” in German)[18]. He was reasserting that for him, communism was first of all about the “material human community”, and not about forced-march industrialization and productivist five-year plans[19].

This debate between the self-styled Marxists of different kinds and the “romantic” “subjectivist” Populists about the viability of the mir lasted into the early 1900’s, greatly skewed by Engels’ suppression of Marx’s Russian studies[20]. Even some of the Populists who had received Marx’s letters about Russia’s unique possibilities resulting from the mir, who had then become Marxists themselves, all but participated in the suppression[21]. Later, the Social Revolutionaries (SRs), the rivals to the Bolsheviks and many of whose members considered themselves Marxists, claimed to be the true heirs of Marx based on his suppressed letters on the mir[22].

One should not romanticize the mir; Chernyshevsky,,who had known it close up near the provincial town of his boyhood, had distinctly mixed feelings about it as a prototype for socialism, yet he was one of the first, in the 1850’s, to argue that the mir, combined with Western technology after a successful revolution in Europe, could be the basis for a “communist development”, as Marx and Engels later put it in 1882.

What exactly was the mir as a lived experience for Russian peasants? Franco Venturi, author of the classic study of the Russian Populist movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, wrote about how the mir figured in the modernizing plans of the Tsarist state prior to the serf emancipation of the 1861, which was intended to put Russia on the path of capitalist development, and sketched themes that would remain present right up to Stalin’s destruction of the mir in his 1929-1932 collectivizations:

“The enquiry of 1836 had shown how much this spirit of equality, latent in the very forms of serfdom and peasant tradition, had in fact been undermined by the rise of a group of richer farmers who began to have considerable influence on the entire life of the obshchina (or mir-LG). These farmers, for instance, tipped the scales of periodic redistribution in their own favor and...subjected the community of poorer peasants to their control. But the enquiry had also shown how deeply these traditional forms were rooted. The assiduous inspectors were often shocked by the disorder, the vulgarity and the violence which prevailed in the meetings of the mir, and also by its many obvious injustices. Nevertheless it was in the obshchina and the mir that the peasants expressed those ideas on land ownership which had so impressed and irritated Kiselev and Périer[23]. It was through these organizations, the only ones at its disposal, that peasant society defended itself. The communities naturally differed from district to district, reflecting the entire range of peasant life...Yet, despite all this variety, there was one common factor; the obshchina represented the tradition and ideal of the peasant masses. How then could it be broken?”[24]

That latter question would continue to vex Tsarist planners right up to 1917, and in a different way, would be the barrier on which different Bolshevik plans for industrialization as well would break up in the 1920's.

From Engels to Plekhanov, "the father of Russian Marxism", to Kautsky and Lenin, the linear, evolutionist, "matter-motion" view of "dialectical materialism" spread worldwide as the orthodoxy of the Second International. With the consolidation of Stalinism, it became identified with "real existing socialism" itself. 'Dialectical materialism" was in fact the vulgar recapitulation of the bourgeois materialism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and not accidentally promoted by movements and regimes which were, like the 18<sup>th</sup> century template, completing the bourgeois revolution, in the eradication of pre-capitalist agriculture, whatever their ideology and stated goals. Elements of this ideology persist today in various types of productivism that confuse the tasks of the bourgeois and socialist revolutions[25].

But a still larger context was shaping this post-Marx ideological development: the global transition from the formal to the real domination of capital. In the formal phase, capital takes over pre-capitalist production (e.g., guilds, cooperation, manufacture) without modifying them materially; in the latter, real phase, capital reduces all aspects of production, reproduction and of life generally to its adequate capitalism form. In industry, the German and American "rationalization movements" (i.e. capital-intensive innovation) of the 1920's were the cutting edge of this "materialization of a social relationship[26]"; in agriculture, this meant, ultimately, California-style agribusiness, and comparable developments in other major grain exporters such as Canada and Australia[27], as well as the professional, agronomy-trained farmer who has replaced western Europe's classical peasants since World War II. In the arc from the U.S. to Russia, by way of the smaller agricultures of France, Italy and Germany, one finds a near-perfect congruence of lingering pre-capitalist agriculture, i.e. the agriculture of formal domination (exemplified in the individual land-owning peasant who emerged from the French Revolution) and, later, Communist Parties: the stronger pre-capitalist agriculture, the stronger the Third International parties after 1917[28]. Pre-1914 Social Democracy and post-1917 Communism were the adequate form of working-class organization to propel this transition, and were notably marginal in countries like the U.S. or Great Britain, where these tasks were complete. We can thus agree with Lars Lih when he argues[29] that Lenin was an "Erfurtian Social Democrat" in the extreme conditions of Tsarist autocracy, as long as we recognize that Erfurtian Social Democracy in Germany[30], like the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) of the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, were the organizational expression for this transition. One might sketch the two phases like this:

Formal Domination

Real Domination

(Extensive Accumulation)

(Intensive Accumulation)

1. trade unions combated

1. trade unions tolerated, promoted

2. parliamentarism	2. state bureaucracy
3. non-militarist	3. Militarist
4. colonialism	4. Imperialism
5. liberal professions	5. technical professions
6. peasants into workers	6. expansion of tertiary sector
7. state as minimal consumer	7. state as major consumer
8. laissez-faire capitalism	8. concentration, regulation
9. secondary role of finance capital	9. hegemony of finance capital
10. low financial-interrelations ratio[31]	10. high FIRO
11. gold standard (Ricardo)	11. fiat money (Keynes, Schacht)
12. working class as pariah class	12. "community of labor"[32]
13. urbanization	13. Suburbanization
14. absolute surplus value[33]	14. relative surplus value
15. primitive accumulation off petty producers	15. primitive accumulation by internal wage gouging
16. labor retains craft aspects	16. rationalization, Taylorism
17. labor struggles to shorten the working day	17. technical intensification of the labor process

The roots of "Erfurtian Social Democracy", as a project for state power, then, were ultimately in the absolutist state of the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, which in its Tudor phase in England (1485-1603) had began the process of clearing the countryside[34], a process which then spread to the continent, in the French Bourbon state and its taxation of the peasantry, and the Prussian state, with the Stein-Hardenburg top-down reforms during and after the Napoleonic wars[35]. Thus the linear evolutionist "matter-motion" world view developed by Engels, Plekhanov, Kautsky and inherited by Lenin, as opposed to Marx's discovery of "another road" for Russia in the combination of the mir with a western European revolution, amounted to a latter-day "modernization" ideology for countries still dealing with pre-capitalist agriculture, a "substitute bourgeois revolution" with a key role played by the working class, a continuation of the bourgeois revolution with red flags. This was, for obvious reasons, hardly recognized or articulated at the time, and required an historical unfolding over decades of the American, German or Russian

variants to become visible. Nor were these outcomes a “telos” of the earlier (Lassallean, Social Democratic, or Bolshevik) formulations on organization; the road was hardly straight and narrow and major working-class defeats were required to bring the later form to maturity. Nonetheless, looked at in comparative perspective, the road is there, as it emerged in the pre-1914 world when capitalism was converting peasants and farmers into production workers in the advanced sector[36], whereas after World War I and especially World War II it was increasingly using high productivity to support the rapidly growing population of unproductive consumers in the “service sector”, with production workers as a declining percentage of the total work force.

It is hardly surprising to find agriculture and the vast Russian peasantry (85-90% of the population in 1917) as the decisive factor in the fate of the revolution, once the anticipated world revolution that would materially aid backward Russia failed to materialize. The Reds won the civil war ultimately because they had at least the grudging support of a significant part of the peasantry against the Whites who, with their ties to the old regime, could not bring themselves to accept land reform. Stalin triumphed in the debates of the 1920's, which centered on the agrarian question[37]. Stalin's collectivization of 1929-1932 irreversibly ruined Russian agriculture, costing the regime the previous, reluctant acceptance by the peasantry, with ten million dead and the destruction of 40% of all livestock (horses, cows and pigs) by the peasants themselves. For the remaining six decades of the Soviet Union, Russian agriculture, prior to 1914 a major grain exporter to the world, never fully recovered, making impossible the decisive cheapening of food as a portion of working-class consumption that had opened the way for mass consumer durables in the West, and Russia was itself compelled to import grain by the mid-1950's.

Most Marxist attempts outside the Soviet Union to analyze the mode of production there, with the important exception of the Italian Communist Left (which had other problems), had the same urban-industrial bias as the Second International, focused on the relations between the party, the state and the working class, to the neglect of the peasantry, and in their own way embraced elements of the linear-evolutionist assumptions of the Engels-Plekhanov-Kautsky world view that emerged from the suppression of Marx's Russian studies.

## II. The Agrarian Question in the Second International and in Russia

---

Karl Kautsky's 1899 book *The Agrarian Question*[38] set down the “official Marxist” position on that subject for the world socialist movement prior to World War I. It is symptomatic of a whole, industry-centered sensibility that the book was largely forgotten within a decade, despite Marx's earlier extensive comments on the agrarian world in volumes I and III of *Capital*[39] and in *Theories of Surplus Value*, especially on the question of ground rent, and his insistence (against common coin on the left to this day) that there were *three* classes in society: capitalists (who live from profits), proletarians (who live from wages) and landlords (who live from ground rent). For Marx, as indicated in our preface,

the violent separation “in fire and blood” of the English peasantry from its means of production, in the process of primitive accumulation, was *the* original separation to be overcome in communism, and the “more equal distribution of the population over the surface of the earth” ( *Communist Manifesto* ) would be the overcoming of the fundamental (and also largely forgotten) alienation between city and countryside.

Kautsky's book was, among other things, a polemic (without mentioning names) against some right-wingers in the SPD such as the Bavarian members David and Vollmar, who already in the early 1890's (following the re-legalization of the party in 1890) were calling for a peasant program.

Kautsky became known as the “Torquemada”[40] of the SPD on the agrarian question, whose message was that the workers' movement had nothing to say to petty bourgeois peasants, a class doomed to disappear into the polarization of a rural bourgeoisie and rural wage-labor proletariat. Peasants could at best look forward to being integrated into cooperatives after the working class seized power. A significant part of small peasant produce was for family consumption, and the sector was an important source of primitive accumulation for the system as a whole. In his early formulations, Kautsky strongly argued that in agriculture as in industry, bigger was better, and discounted the survivability of highly productive family farms. The task of socialists was to neutralize the peasantry as a social force, not to mobilize it.

Interestingly, the factions within the SPD on the question of a peasant program were not aligned in the typical left-to-right spectrum that emerged at the end of the 1890's in the “revisionism” debate or later. Left-wingers Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht both sided with Vollmar in advocating an agrarian program at the 1895 party congress, but the party supported Kautsky. Ferdinand Lassalle's old formulation that all classes except workers are “one reactionary mass”—a view attacked in Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program* — was also a backdrop to the discussion.

In the long run, Kautsky's view of the inevitable disappearance of the smallholder peasant was refuted in the prospering modern farms of countries such as Austria and Denmark[41]. It was far more problematic when Lenin applied it to Russia.

In the 1890's, Lenin shared Kautsky's views on the peasants (and just about everything else). This is particularly curious, since he spent the years 1887-1893, (after his older brother's execution for involvement in a plot to assassinate the Tsar), in several provincial towns where apparently the last survivors of the Populist and terrorist group Zemla i Volya, (to whom Marx had been sympathetic in their years of peak activity 1878-1881[42]) and Marxists mingled in rather comradely form. (It is significant that at this time, the term “Narodnik”, which later came to be known strictly and pejoratively as the term for a pro-peasant and subjective romantic, idealizing the commune and downplaying the advance of capitalism in Russia, originally meant anyone concerned with the affairs of the common people; only after the polemics of the last phase of Populism did it acquire its negative overtones.) Lenin, opposing even his mentor Plekhanov, distinguished himself during the famine of 1891-92 by his attacks on

humanitarian attempts in “progressive” circles to help the stricken peasantry, reaffirming the supposedly Marxist position that the peasantry was a doomed social class and its disappearance should not be hindered, so that capitalism could complete its work[43].

This is especially significant because there is no doubt that Lenin had read deeply in the Russian Populist tradition, going back to the 1850’s/1860’s writings of Chernyshevsky[44] and Dobrolyubov[45]. According to different people who knew him personally, Lenin read Chernyshevsky’s proto-socialist realist novel *What Is To Be Done?* many times[46]. The turgid, intentionally anti-aesthetic novel tells the story of young people of the generation of the 1860’s who break with their bourgeois families to live communally, supporting themselves with Fourierist artisanal collectives. It inspired tens of thousands of readers to follow that model for their life choices in the stifling oppression of Tsarist Russia. Of further significance is the character Rakhmetov, a veritable prototype of Lenin, a full-time, austere revolutionary. The title of Lenin’s 1902 pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* is an obvious homage to Chernyshevsky’s book., however different the content[47].

Lenin spent several years in the late 1890’s in Siberian exile, during which he wrote his first major work, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899), which is often mistaken for his definitive views on the peasantry, whereas they later evolved considerably under the impact of events. Lenin in this book is at pains to show that, contrary to the lingering views of the Populists, capitalism had fully triumphed in Russia. The work is deeply flawed by a largely “market” (as opposed to value) view of what capitalism is. The mir, which at the time constituted four-fifths of all cultivated land in European Russia, is barely mentioned, since for Lenin it was merely a “juridical imposition” of the Tsarist state[48]. The large foreign loans and rapid industrial development under the management of Finance Minister Witte are also unmentioned[49]. Lenin winds up concluding that fully 51% of the Russian population consists of wage labor proletarians, and that the polarization of rich peasant capitalists and rural laborers in the countryside is largely complete[50]. Lenin includes all peasants “almost” separated from their means of production in the category of poor peasants, [51] meaning that any peasant with a tiny plot, owning a horse and a cow, barely supporting himself and his family, and elsewhere performing occasional wage labor a few months of the year, was a “proletarian”. The large estates, for Lenin, were rapidly becoming capitalist, when in fact the big landowners were alien to any idea of accumulation and profitability of capital[52]. Lenin also sees “technological progress” where in fact the peasants were working with very simple, primitive implements long in use. If the manorial estates were largely capitalist, how to explain the restrictions on peasants’ mobility, tying them to one place, as had always been the case with serfs? Lenin’s view of capitalism was limited to the sphere of circulation alone[53]. Already in his first text of 1893 (“New Economic Transformations in Peasant Life”) Lenin had asserted that the mir was no obstacle to capitalism :

“We are in no way interested in the form of landed property among the peasants. Whatever the form, the relationship between the peasant bourgeoisie and the rural proletariat is always the same.”

During this period, according to Chantal de Crisenoy, individual peasant plots were actually in decline and the communes retained all their importance.[54]

As Crisenoy puts it:

“By denying all specificity to the mir, Lenin shows himself more attached to preconceived ideas ...than attentive to existing social relations... In his analysis, we find a total inversion of reality: everything that is a factor of primitive accumulation –mandatory services, taxes—is seen as a “survival” blocking the emergence of capitalism; everything that is an obstacle to the appearance of capital—the handicraft industries, the rural commune—is designated as being “its most profound basis”.[55]

In the 1897 article “What heritage do we renounce?”[56], Lenin presents the mir as “a village of small agrarians”;

“...when he wants to prove, against the populists, the existence of a working class in the midst of the obschina, he advances the concept of the “sedentary proletarian” and applies it to these same communal peasants... In 1899 he finds three times the number of wage workers generally accepted on the eve of 1914.[57]

Lenin, however, was (with Trotsky[58]) one of the few Russian Marxists who felt it necessary to devote any serious attention at all to the peasantry, against the dismissive attitude of Plekhanov. In 1902, several provinces rose up in response to famine, and Lenin at the same time drafted the first program addressed to the peasantry, “The Agrarian Program of Russian Social Democracy”[59], adopted by the party in 1903. He remained ambivalent on the peasants’ future role, seeing them as either supporting a “revolutionary democratic” party or lining up with the “party of order”[60]. Many Russian Social Democrats condemned the entire program, as Kautsky had done earlier in Germany. It called for cancellation of the debts from 1861[61], free use of land for the peasants, restitution to the peasants of the “otrezki”, (choice strips of land that had been retained by the landowners in the 1861 reform) and cancellation of excessive rents and exploitative contracts. Lenin felt these changes would “expand the internal market”, and “raise peasant livings standards and hasten the development of capitalism in agriculture[62].

After the 1902 uprisings, Lenin wrote “To the Rural Poor”, still maintaining his earlier views on the dynamic in the countryside. But in the article, as Kingston-Mann points out,

“the repartitional commune, which had provided the institutional framework for so many of the outbreaks, was completely ignored.[63]

All in all,

“Peasant action could only be...’anti-feudal,’ and feudal survivals had to be the major concern of the Social Democratic agrarian program.”[64]

In 1903, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Party Congress adopted Lenin's agrarian program, without any mention thus far of a "worker-peasant alliance". Lenin warned against such an alliance. To ally with the proletariat, in his view, the peasants must give up "their own class viewpoint" and adopt "that of the proletariat." [65]

### III. 1905-1907: Ideology Meets Reality

---

In January 1905, Father Gapon, Orthodox priest and also Tsarist agent provocateur, led a mass worker demonstration in St. Petersburg to the tsar's palace with petitions virtually begging the tsar to grant certain basic rights. The Cossacks fired on the crowd, killing hundreds, and the 1905-1907 revolution, the "dress rehearsal" for 1917, was on [66]. During those years, the Russian peasants revolted as intensely as did the working class, completely upsetting the schemas by which Russian Marxism, under Kautsky's influence, had predicted that peasants would aspire to individual private plots of land and nothing more.

The peasants in 1905 themselves submitted, all told, 60,000 petitions to the government. (The substance of numerous peasant demands for all land to the mir was not taken seriously by any Russian Marxist at this time. [67]) The peasants invaded forests and grazing lands from which they had been excluded; they robbed stores, warehouses and manors, burning estates and killing the squires [68]. The large majority of rural strikes in Russia in 1905-07 were strikes of peasant small holders, partly or seasonally employed. Most of these strikes were directed by the communal assemblies [69]. In 1905, the crops had failed again in 25 of Russia's provinces, closely linked to the locales of the uprisings. [70] As Shanin put it "Once the tsar's will could no longer be treated as a force of nature... the whole social world of rural Russia came apart. Everything seemed possible now." [71] The uprisings peaked initially in June 1905. The differentiations between wealthy, middle and poor peasants, which Lenin had so laboriously worked out in his 1899 book, seemed to recede in importance, as wealthier peasants helped poor neighbors with food [72].

Under the impact of these events, Lenin, still in Zurich exile in the spring of 1905, prior to his return to Russia, proposed a "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasants" to establish a provisional government for the bourgeois-democratic revolution. "This formulation was so inconsistent with pre-revolutionary Marxist programs that Lenin would be forced to prove again and again that he had not sacrificed his Marxist principles." [73]

Lenin's peasant policy, during all the struggles of the summer of 1905, is summarized by Crisenoy as "support the peasant movement, but above all don't tie one's hands for the future. It is necessary to advance and strike hard blows for revolutionary bourgeois democracy...to march separately and strike together, not hiding divergent interests, and to watch over one's ally one would an enemy." [74] There remained, she points out, still a sort of fear about peasant struggles, fear of their spontaneity, and great contempt for the peasant's "lack of culture" [75].

Meanwhile, the action of the peasants and the statements of their representatives “were a striking refutation of (Lenin’s) assessments.”[76] In the summer of 1905, the peasants created a central organization with delegates from several provinces. The Pan-Russian Union of Peasants met for the first time clandestinely at the end of July and called for the abolition of private property and the expropriation of the big landowners; a majority favored no indemnification.[77] The peasants did not limit themselves to the land question but also demanded free public education, amnesty for political prisoners, convocation of a Duma, and a Constitutional Assembly.[78] Lenin conceded that the peasant congress grasped its own interests well.[79]

The Social Democrats called for the formation of revolutionary peasant committees, but they played no role in the countryside. It was young peasants back from the factories who spread revolutionary ideas.[80] In the summer of 1905 the Bolsheviks held their Third Congress in London, with the peasant question as a major issue. They were divided, unable to foresee or control events. Lenin was torn; the party program was unsatisfactory from a political viewpoint, but perfectly founded, in his view, from a theoretical viewpoint.[81] When the peasants went beyond the party slogan of taking over the *otrezki* (once again, the strips of land retained from the 1861 reform by the big landowners) , and seized other lands, were they “reactionary”? There was a constant contradiction between what Lenin saw as politically necessary and his economic analysis; if he continued to defend points from his 1902 agrarian program, it was because he remained convinced of the domination of capitalism on the large estates. In March 1905 he continued to assert that “in Russia there are few vestiges of feudalism”.[82]

On October 17<sup>th</sup> the tsar issued a manifesto in response to the months of insurrection, “speaking much about freedom and saying nothing about land—the one thing that mattered.”[83] It had no impact, and in October 1905 “attacks on estates erupted on an unprecedented scale and rapidly turned into mass destruction of manor houses in the Black Earth belt.”[84] This was no blind explosion; the peasants wanted to be rid of the squires and to ensure that they never returned; 2000 manor houses were destroyed. The government strategy consisted of heavy repression and ineffectual appeasement in the manifesto of November 3<sup>rd</sup>, which abolished payments still due from the 1861 serf emancipation. State repression was, however, an “orgy of brutality.”[85] It did manage to temporarily staunch the worker uprisings but the peasant revolts did not stop, climaxing only in July 1906. The June 1906 eruptions of rural violence had been so serious that the Emperor of Austria considered military intervention. In July 1906 as well, Lenin argued that the peasantry was “revolutionary democratic”, but that the Social Democrats would fight it when it became “reactionary and anti-proletarian.” As Kingston-Mann put it, “Despite the extraordinary incisiveness of his political insight into the problems of his adversaries, the deficiencies of Lenin’s economics and sociology continued to render the concept of a Marxian peasant revolution a contradiction in terms.”[86]

Prior to these developments, the first Duma had met in April, and had not even considered peasant demands[87]. The movement finally ebbed, and the state and the squires regrouped. This did not prevent grazing lands from being invaded for a third time

in the winter of 1906-07.

Meanwhile, in April 1906, the RSDLP held a Bolshevik-Menshevik “unity conference” in Stockholm. There, Lenin called for the nationalization of all landed property[88]. Lenin, then, favored nationalization as opening the way to capitalism; for the peasants, on the other hand, it meant *expanding communal property to the national level*. The Mensheviks feared that fragmenting large properties would slow down the development of capitalism. Plekhanov argued that transfer of land to the state would leave the autocracy with more land than ever before.[89] (Kautsky, in the Second International journal of record *Neue Zeit*, had come out once again against any Social Democratic program for the peasantry.)\_ Lenin quoted from Marx’s *Capital* about transferring land to the state as a bourgeois measure which would create competition, as in the American West. The Congress ultimately voted to approve the Menshevik Maslow’s plan for the municipalization of land.[90] Lenin opposed this, saying it would only give power to local elites.

The initial slogans of the peasant uprisings were expressed in a language different from that of the urban revolts, expressing a desire for political power and civil rights, land reform, “charitable government”, “liberty” and “being listened to”.[91] In Shanin’s view, many doubted the very existence of general peasant political goals in rural Russia in 1905-07, and Lenin said in 1917 that the problem with the peasant revolt of those years was that they did not finish the job, burning down only part of the manors.[92]

Other breakthroughs occurred in places such as Georgia, where in Guria province what Shanin called “the first case in history of a peasant rule led by a Marxist elite” held out from 1903 to 1906, and news of which moreover traveled widely. The Latvian Social Democrats led widespread attacks on manors in the Baltic provinces in a “mini-civil war” situation, during which 459 manor houses were destroyed in Latvia and 114 in Estonia. [93] The designated enemies of the revolts throughout the Russian Empire were the state apparatus, the kulak (wealthy peasant) “commune eaters” who bought up communal lands for themselves, and the reactionary bands of the “Black Hundreds”. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Duma met in 1907, was more radical than the first, and the peasants were more anti-government. “Peasants looked at their lives in ways unthinkable before.”[94] They were very sophisticated, and the demand for transfer of land to the peasantry and for the abolition of private land ownership was total.[95]

Under the impact of these cumulative events, Lenin called for the revision of the RSDLP’s 1903 Agrarian Program[96] and said, in contrast to his 1899 book, that “the economy of the squires in Russia is based on repressive enserfing and not on a capitalist system... Those who refuse to see it cannot explain the contemporary broad and deep peasant revolutionary movement in Russia.”[97] Most Social Democrats now admitted that the 1903 program was overly pessimistic about the peasants’ revolutionary potential. This change of attitude was formulated as a call for a “democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants” that would promote an “American road” of agricultural development under a revolutionary regime. [98] The forces of reaction also had to revise their views on the

peasantry: "As manors burned and the first and second Dumas heaped abuse on the government, the commune was singled out more and more as the reason for the peasant rebellion." [99] This shift in perception presaged the post-1907 policy of Stolypin, who replaced Witte as Finance Minister in 1906, and attempted to undermine the communes by subsidizing individual peasants who wished to leave them and farm their own plots. [100] The peasants did end the 1905-07 upsurge with more results than any other group. Rents went down and rural wages went up; most peasant debt was cancelled by the state. There had also been an important leap in peasant self-esteem. [101]

## IV. Years of Reaction: Stolypin's Attempt at a "Prussian"-Style Revolution from Above

---

In 1906, P.A. Stolypin took over from the fallen Witte as the most powerful minister in the Tsarist government, carrying out harsh repression against the 1905-1907 revolution and simultaneously pursuing a policy of breaking up the peasant commune. His many executions of revolutionaries by hanging became known as "Stolypin's neckties".

Under the impact of the revolution, the government almost more than the Marxists had become aware that the commune, previously viewed as a pillar of the regime, was in fact the main source of peasant radicalism. Stolypin and his advisers looked back to the Prussian reformers of the 1820's who had carried out a revolution from above to prevent a revolution from below. [102] Private enterprise was to be promoted throughout the economy, and in agriculture this meant creating credits to enable individual peasants to leave the communes and acquire their own land, often by privatizing communal land. Stolypin was assassinated in 1911, but his policy, aimed at breaking up the commune, remained in effect until 1917, in the hope of creating a Russian "Vendée" against any future revolutionary movement [103].

As Crisenoy put it, "the ruling classes were not mistaken...After 1905-07, the mir became in their eyes one of the causes of peasant radicalism ... We have to say that, aside from the Social Democrats, this link between the mir, the revolutionary peasant movement and its demands for land was obvious to all. But Lenin was convinced of the opposite. For him the commune was still nothing but a 'juridical envelope maintained artificially'... For Lenin, the peasant's call for the nationalization of land was negative, and should not mask his instinct to be an 'owner' ... In Lenin's view, the peasant did not know what he wanted, didn't even know what he was saying... For Lenin, (there was) no uncertainty: the nationalization of the land necessary brings with it a capitalist agrarian organization. "[104]

In fact, Lenin and Stolypin had rather similar views on the entrepreneurial peasant as a promoter of capitalist development in Russia. To defend this change of orientation from the one he had held from 1899 until 1905, "Lenin had to abandon his earlier claims that Russia was already capitalist." [105] Lenin, like Stolypin, saw the role of the Russian government as similar to the earlier Prussian model. Stolypin's reform, in his view, would

“encourage the economically incompetent landlords to become Prussian-style bourgeois ‘Junkers’”. [106] Nationalization would clear away feudal vestiges and make possible free competition, as in America [107]. “Despite quotes from *Capital* and *Theories of Surplus Value*, Lenin was hard pressed to make the case that Marx ‘had taken pride in the economic virtues of the small farmer.’” [108] As Kingston-Mann put it, “His was a tactical move that reflected the strain which the complex reality of the Russian situation placed upon his Western-centered ideology....The commune played no role in Lenin’s plans and strategies...Lenin ridiculed the idea that the ‘medieval’ commune retained any of its equalizing functions.” [109] “In 1907-08, Lenin argued that the process of rural differentiation had already destroyed the commune in all but name. A still functioning commune remained inconceivable to Lenin...Certain that the peasantry lacked historically significant forms of social organization, Lenin inaccurately referred to commune peasants as only the tool of the village kulak... Lenin had however moved far closer to a realistic approach than any other members of RSDLP .” [110]

Under the auspices of Stolypin’s agrarian reforms, between one-fourth and one-third of all Russian peasants, by some estimates, left the communes between 1906 and 1917. (Russia in these years became one of the world’s biggest exporters of cereals while also having terrible famines.) Communal peasants often responded to these desertions with violence [111]. Two to three millions peasants got property in the decade after 1906, or about one-fourth of the twelve million peasant households in European Russia [112]. Some of the obstacles to the reform were lack of roads, long winters, and the village assemblies proposing the worst and most distant lands to those who wished to leave [113]. In Crisenoy’s view, Stolypin’s reforms also ran up against overpopulation, the lack of land, and communal tenure. [114] She also sees Lenin’s post-1905-07 break with Second International conceptions as “very relative”; he continued, as in 1899, to confuse capitalist agriculture and commodity agriculture. In 1915, he was still writing: “The development of capitalism consists above all in the passage from natural economy to commodity economy.” [115] To recognize his error, Crisenoy writes, would mean breaking with what he had been saying for twenty years. “By failing to recognize the attachment of the peasants to the mir, Lenin missed the reason for the failure of (Stolypin’s) reform and one of the reasons for the 1917 revolution.” [116] In the revolutionary years 1917-1919, serious violence was still being brought to bear against “splitters-off” from the communes, and not, as Lenin’s theory would predict, between rich and poor peasants.

## VI. Russian Peasants and the Commune in 1917 and Thereafter

---

Within a month of the February revolution that overthrew the Romanov dynasty, the peasantry had risen en masse. They attacked the large landowners and the commune peasants attacked the separate farms. As in 1905, the commune was at the center of peasant struggles, taking charge of confiscations and the redistribution of lands.

After “reorienting” the Bolshevik Party following his return from exile and the famous

"April Theses", Lenin was arguing that the rural soviets had already shown far greater creative social imagination than the Provisional Government[117]. A Bolshevik rural Red Guard had formed in March-April 1917. In the Apr 4<sup>th</sup> edition of *Pravda*, Lenin wrote: "If the revolution is not settled by the Russian peasant, it will not be settled by the German worker." [118] Lenin's draft program in April-May 1917 was 1) nationalization of all land 2) transformation of large estates into model farms, under soviets of agricultural workers and run by agronomists. But these formulations, observed Crisenoy, were deeply alien to the peasant movement[119].

The Bolsheviks, at this point, were still a minority, outnumbered by the Mensheviks and the SRs. Workers and soldiers had beaten up demonstrators carrying Bolshevik signs in April. By May, nonetheless, Lenin was telling the Congress of Peasant Deputies that peasants should at once seize all land, to the consternation of the Provisional Government and in particular of the SRs, who headed ministries and were prevaricating on the land question. The SR and Menshevik ministers were ready to defer any transfer of land to the peasants until a Constitutional Assembly could meet. Some SR observers noted with dismay the impact of Lenin's appeal for land seizures and the damaging political case the Bolsheviks made against the SR ministers in the coalition [120]. The leading SR political figure, Chernov, was assaulted by a peasant shouting "Why don't you take power, you s.o.b, when it's given to you?"[121] The Congress of Peasant Deputies in fact called for soviets of peasants everywhere, and attacks on individualized property accelerated.

As the Provisional Government and above all the front disintegrated in the summer of 1917, peasants were deserting the army in droves and returning to their villages to get their share of the land newly distributed from the gentry estates. This movement, like the soviets in 1905, was the work of no political party. Peasant disturbances peaked in October 1917. Immediately after overthrowing the Provisional Government, the Bolsheviks issued their Land Decree, recognizing the fait accompli of land seizures in the countryside; under the decree, peasants were free to set up communes or artels (cooperatives). The Bolshevik Land Decree was essentially the SR program. A wave of egalitarianism had swept the countryside and in 1917-1918 the peasant commune had extended beyond any previous historical frontier[122]. The peasants distributed gentry, church and monastery lands to families based on the traditional criterion of the "number of eaters"; some independent peasants from Stolypin's reform were forced back into communes.[123] The confiscations were largely complete by the spring of 1918. 96.8% of all lands were in peasant hands, and three million landless peasants had received allotments. The commune at this point encompassed almost all rural households.[124]

Lenin, in Kingston-Mann's account, had always insisted that the dangers involved in peasant land seizures were always outweighed by benefits from attacks on bourgeois property. The land decree of October 1917, taken from 242 peasant mandates and from the SR agrarian program, had abolished private property in land, and went against the Russian Marxist tradition in its respect for peasant communal traditions. Its terms were populist, and the non-Bolshevik left recognized its expedient, even opportunist character:

"The Russian Marxist tradition was rooted in a denial of the sociological insights which Marx himself had praised in the work of populists like Daniel'son." [125]... "Unaware that peasants re-entered the communes in increasing numbers during the pre-war period, Bolsheviks and Mensheviks found no constructive socialist significance in the peasantry's successful efforts to return the otrubshchiki (the Stolypin-promoted "splitters off"-LG) to the communes in the course of 1917." [126] "...obsessions with capitalism in the countryside...and awareness of the individualistic property fanatics and bigots among the peasants, had blinded Russian Marxists to much evidence about the agricultural economy, about the widespread resistance to the Stolypin reforms, and about the collectivist notions of peasants who demanded abolition of private property in land... Fears of the kulak flourished in official circles, as peasant communes carried out an unprecedented equalization of land on behalf of the poor without any help from the Soviet authorities." [127]

Early on, the Soviet government was interfering with the distribution of animals and farm materials, a policy aimed at leaving the poor peasants unable to farm and encouraging them toward the new state farms (sovkhoz). Once in power, the Bolsheviks had discouraged further destruction of estates, which the peasants, for their part, saw as a further guarantee that the former owners would never return. Bolshevik policy favored specialists in the countryside (as sovkhoz directors). At the 7<sup>th</sup> Congress of Soviets, there was already criticism of the privileges of the specialists. Sometimes the director of the sovkhoz was the former landowner! In these debates, Lenin again turned to the example of German (Prussian) state capitalism: its modern techniques were in the service of imperialism and the Junkers, but "replace 'state capitalism' with 'the Soviet state' and you have all the conditions of socialism." [128]

But quarrels over administrative measures were soon to be greatly complicated by the drastic falloff in agricultural production. In November 1917, Russia had still produced 641 million tons of wheat. Requisitions to feed the cities began in early 1918, when already only 7% of the grain planned for Petrograd and Moscow was delivered. As the civil war intensified in the summer of 1918, some fertile lands fell under the control of the Whites, and famine set in. In response to requisitions, peasants cut back production to the basic needs of their families; land under cultivation declined by 16% by 1919. The Bolsheviks had counted on the support of the poorest peasants but land distribution had moved many of them out of that category; the committees of poor peasants had great difficulty functioning. The party cells in the countryside had 14,700 members but were mainly made up of functionaries. By 1921, after three years of civil war, harvests were at 40% of 1914 levels. Between 1918 and 1920, in the years of war communism, epidemics, hunger and cold killed 7.5 million Russians; four million had died in the civil war. People returned to the land to survive; of the 3 million workers who made the proletarian side of the "dual revolution" in 1917, only 1.2 million remained in the factories by 1922.

By 1921, furthermore, the proletarian democracy of 1917, embodied in the soviets and workers' councils, had been destroyed or turned into rubber stamps of the party. The left SRs, who shared power with the Bolsheviks for a few months, were suppressed in July 1918 after they assassinated the German ambassador, in an attempt to undermine the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk[129]. Repression against anarchist "bandits" had begun in early 1918. The Bolsheviks crushed the Kronstadt uprising in March 1921, and had earlier crushed the anarchist peasant Makhno movement in the Ukraine. At the 10<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, also in March 1921, internal factions within the party itself had been suppressed. That Congress also inaugurated the market-driven New Economic Policy (NEP). Oppositional currents within the Bolshevik Party, such as Miasnikov's Workers Group or the Democratic Centralists, had been suppressed. By 1922, the remaining independent Mensheviks were offered the choice of execution or exile. From that point onward, the only open discussions remaining in Soviet Russia with any real influence over events involved a few hundred Old Bolsheviks at the top echelons of a party ruling uneasily over 150 million people, the great majority of them peasants. That party had also absorbed hundreds of thousands of new members after the October seizure of power, often people more interested in jobs and careers than in the real history and outlooks of Bolshevism.[130] A number of former bourgeois and even large landowners rallied to the new power, often becoming directors of sovkhozes, factories and mines. [131] The nucleus of a new ruling class was in place[132]. 90% of state functionaries were carried over from the Tsarist regime, and 90% of officers in the Red Army had been Tsarist officers.

The legacy of modernizing Second International Marxism on the agrarian question remained the outlook of the Bolshevik Party in power. Thus the disconnect between the emerging factions of the regime—all of them— and the reality of the countryside, having the overwhelming majority of the population, remained as great as it had been prior to the Bolsheviks' arrival in power. As historian John Marot put it, to implement the development plans of all factions—the Trotskyist left, the Bukharinist right and the Stalinist "center"— meant "to destroy the peasant way of life"[133], the commune. Lenin had recognized after 1905 that he had exaggerated the presence of capitalism in the Russian countryside, but, as indicated earlier, he merely set the clock back on the same dynamic.

The fundamental problem was that the peasant world, centered on the mir, was not on Lenin's timetable at all, belated, contemporary or otherwise; the owners of the newly-distributed private plots within the framework of the mir were not capitalist peasants producing for a market, but were participating in household economies, producing primarily for their own use, occasionally using markets to acquire the relatively few goods they could not produce themselves. Their surplus had previously gone to the Tsarist state through taxation to pay for industrialization, and to the landlords for their consumption. With those two burdens removed, the sole external compulsion remained the modest taxation of the Soviet state.. No industrialization program assuming a peasant capitalist rationality had any chance of achieving its goals. The peasant

economy, as Marot put it, was neither capitalist nor socialist, and “the peasants had little or no interest in the collective organization of production and distribution beyond the confines of the village.”[134]

By the spring of 1921, the ebb and isolation of the Russian Revolution, internationalist from the beginning in the strategic conceptions of Lenin and Trotsky (in their different theoretical frameworks; cf. below) could not have been more clear. The world revolution which had in 1917-1918 seemed weeks or at most months away henceforth had to be reckoned in years. In quick succession the spring of 1921 saw the suppression of the Kronstadt uprising, the failure of the “March Action” Germany, the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement, the implementation of the market-driven New Economic Policy (NEP), the suppression of factions in the Bolshevik Party, the Treaty of Riga, formalizing the Soviet defeat in the 1920 war with Poland, and the commercial treaty with Attaturk’s nationalist government in Turkey, which a mere two months earlier (January 1921) had murdered the entire central committee of the Turkish Communist Party[135]. This general ebb of hopes for revolution in western Europe weakened the position of the internationalist, cosmopolitan wing of the Bolshevik Party and strengthened the position of the internal “praktiki”, the long-term veterans of the party apparatus from the years of clandestinity under Tsarist autocracy, personified of course by Joseph Stalin. The regime turned inward, and with famine still raging in the countryside, nothing had a higher priority than the peasant question.

For Lenin, the Bolshevik regime was a dual revolution, based on the “democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants”, completing the bourgeois revolution of eradicating pre-capitalist agriculture. He wrote:

“Yes, our revolution is a bourgeois revolution, *as long as we march* with the peasantry as a whole...we have said it hundreds and thousands of times since 1905...”[136].

This bourgeois revolution, in his view, could move to a socialist phase when aided, and only when aided, by revolution in the West. The alliance with the peasantry (the so-called “smychka”) remained crucial in Lenin’s strategic perspective for the rest of his political life. He would have viscerally rejected Stalin’s 1924 proclamation of “socialism in one country”. [137]

My purpose here cannot be to put forward a specific theory of the “class nature of the Soviet Union”, harking back to the state capitalist/ bureaucratic collectivist/ degenerated workers’ state debates of the 1960’s/1970’s. I merely signal my agreement with some variant of the class, as opposed to workers’ state theories, but explaining my analysis in detail would further shift the focus away from my main purpose, namely tracing the impact of the agrarian question and the fate of the Russian peasant commune in shaping that outcome. I mention Trotsky and his theory of permanent revolution primarily to indicate the difference between his framework and Lenin’s, who never accepted that theory[138], however close they were in the spring of 1917.

The Russian working class had its own thoughts about the NEP, built on the destruction of the soviets and workers' councils they had created in 1917, and the return of the managerial elite they thought they had overthrown in that year. It waged a series of militant strikes in August and September 1923. A second Workers' Group had formed in the spring of that year and played an important coordinating role in these strikes; according to Marot,

“(it) sought out alliances with elements of previous oppositions. Denouncing the New Economic Policy as the New Exploitation of the Proletariat by bureaucratically-appointed factory managers and directors of industry, the Workers' Group tried to recruit among party and non-party workers. It strove to lend political definition and direction to the massive strike wave...It even looked for support abroad, among left-wing elements of the German Communist Party...and among Gorter's Dutch Communists.”[139]

And where was Trotsky while these strikes were going on? Marot is eloquent:

“Trotsky's political opposition toward the factional activity of the Workers' Group of 1923 outwardly expressed (his) firmly-held and ideologically internalized insistence on unitary, single-party rule...Trotsky even refused public solidarity with the over two-hundred members who dared to participate actively in the workers' strike movement, and who had been subsequently expelled from the party...Although Trotsky did next to nothing to lend political guidance to rank-and-file dissent outside the Communist Party, he was almost always prepared to respond favorably to invitations of political co-operation by one or another of the party leadership.”[140]

Lenin was forced by rapidly declining health to withdraw from political activity in early 1923, and died one year later. In the last months of his very reduced activity, he had planned to “throw a bomb” under Stalin at a forthcoming party congress and, in his testament, called for Stalin's removal from the position of general secretary of the party[141].

The fact that Soviet Russia emerged from the civil war in 1921 with the nucleus of a new ruling class in power still leaves open the fate of the mir, in which 98.5% of the peasantry—itsself at least 90% of the Russian population—lived, up to its demise in 1929-30. It is thus important to sketch out the faction fight in the “commanding heights” of the Bolshevik Party up to Stalin's collectivizations. There was nothing foreordained about what actually happened, which transformed Soviet Russia from the “guided capitalism” of the NEP of 1921, conceived as a holding action prior to revolution in the West, into the mature totalitarian form consolidated under Stalin in 1929-32. No one in the three-way faction fight up to 1927, Stalin included, advocated the violent collectivizations that finally gave the Soviet Union the definitive contours through which it became known to the world as “communism”[142], [143].

Here is how Moshe Lewin (though offering statistics somewhat at odds with those cited previously) describes the situation of the mir, shortly before its destruction in 1929-1930:

“On the eve of revolution, fewer than 50% of the peasants were still members of the mir...Eight million households held their land as private property, while 7.4 million holdings were still communally owned. The decay of this relic of the ancient peasant community was hastened by the increasing degree of social stratification within the peasantry. However, at the time of the revolution, the mir took on a miraculous new lease on life. The miracle can be explained by the fact that the agrarian reform, which freed the peasants from the bonds of feudalism, also evened out the differences between them to a very considerable degree. Having got rid of the pomeshchiki (the last descendants of the service aristocracy of the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries-LG) and some of the kulaks, the peasants reverted to the old egalitarian relationships of the mir, and by the same token to the institution itself...Ample evidence of the...communal form of land tenure is afforded by the agrarian code of 1922, which deals with it in great detail. The Party, however, appeared to take little account of this factor, and of its possible implications...between 1922 and 1927 the village society, by virtue of the general improvement in the economy, had grown considerably in strength, its budget had increased and, despite the efforts of the authorities to encourage the (rural soviets-LG) it was the mir which continued to be the ‘sole organization in charge of the economic life of the village.’[144]

The 1921 turn to the NEP (New Economic Policy) did revive both industry and agriculture, in terms of the Bolshevik strategy of “guiding capitalism” while marking time until revolution in the West. The NEP cannot be critiqued as a “restoration of capitalism” because capitalism had never been abolished in the first place. To the charge of the Workers’ Opposition, at the 10<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in March 1921, that the Bolsheviks were creating state capitalism, Lenin replied that state capitalism would be a major step forward for backward Russia, dominated as it was by petty producers.

Under the NEP, peasant food production by 1925 approached for the first time pre-World War I levels, in contrast to the famine conditions of 1921-22.

The NEP, however, also led to the famous “Scissors Crisis” of 1923 and 1925, in which the prices of industrial goods produced in the cities rose much higher than the prices for agricultural produce from the countryside, making it impossible for peasants to buy, and undermining the strategy of a controlled “socialist primitive accumulation” off the peasantry advocated by the economist of Trotsky’s left-wing faction, Evgeni Preobrazhensky[145]. This strategy, moreover, was doomed because, as indicated earlier, nothing, short of force, compelled the peasants to interact with the urban-industrial economy on the scale envisioned by the planners of the left, or for that matter by Bukharin and the “socialism at a snail’s pace” theorists of the “right”[146]. By the mid-1920’s, it was clear that the differences between the Trotskyist left and the Bukharinist right were more quantitative than qualitative, coming down to differences over the appropriate pace of “pumping” the peasants, as Bukharin increasingly recognized the need to industrialize with a surplus taken from agriculture. Bukharin early on had prophetically written, against the left’s industrialization plans,

“...Taking too much on itself, (the proletariat) has to create a colossal administrative apparatus. To fulfill the economic functions of the small producers, small peasants, etc., it requires too many employees and administrators. The attempt to replace all these small figures with state *chinovniki* (see footnote)—call them what you want, in fact they are state *chinovniki*—gives birth to such a colossal apparatus that the expenditure for its maintenance proves to be incomparably more significant than the unproductive costs which derive from the anarchistic condition of small production; as a result, this entire form of management, the entire economic apparatus of the proletarian state, does not facilitate, but only impedes the development of the forces of production. In reality it flows into the direct opposite of what was intended, and therefore iron necessity compels that it be broken...If the proletariat itself does not do this, then other forces will overthrow it.”[147]

By the end of 1927, Stalin and his “center” had defeated, marginalized and expelled the Trotskyist left from the party, with the support of Bukharin and his faction[148]. Even then, the left remained largely clueless about the real danger represented by this “center”. Trotsky had said, prior to his own initial exile to Alma Ata (in Kazakhstan): “With Stalin against Bukharin, perhaps. With Bukharin against Stalin, never.” What was ultimately at stake was the preservation of the “smyshka”, the worker-peasant alliance, the last pillar of Lenin’s “dual revolution”, which would not survive any concerted attempt to squeeze the peasantry harder to pay for industrialization. Many figures, across the political spectrum within the party, imagined the NEP lasting for years, perhaps decades, into the future.

The break in the situation occurred with two successive years of crop failure in 1928 and 1929. Breadlines were forming in Moscow by the end of 1928, and Stalin used the emergency to launch his infamous “war on the kulak” (the wealthiest stratum of peasants, estimated at 4-5% of the total). Party cadre were ordered to confiscate whatever food they could find in the countryside, using “Uralo-Mongolian” (i.e. violent) methods, in what amounted to military operations going beyond anything done in the confiscations during the civil war. The fine distinctions among the peasants, which Lenin had first laboriously worked out in his 1899 book and which had never been terribly successful for political purposes such as rousing the poor peasants against wealthier strata, were largely obliterated in the frenzy to meet quotas. Further, food confiscations were combined with forcing peasants into collective farms (the sovkhoz) or into the cooperatives (the kolkhoz).

The peasants resisted violently. Not only did they murder party cadre where they could, but, faced with no future but unremunerative wage labor on the collective farms, they destroyed their own crops and slaughtered something on the order of 40% of all livestock (horses, cows and pigs), often in order not to appear as kulaks. In many situations, far from dividing along the “class lines” predicted by misguided theory, peasants of all strata banded together in self-defense. Significantly, during a few months’ breather decreed by Stalin in the spring of 1930, many peasants rushed back into the

communes, but it was not to last. By 1932, an estimated 10 million peasants had died in forced collectivizations and relocations, and all communes, 98.5% of all Russian rural territory in 1918, had been destroyed.

Stalin, as he had done before and would do again, used the very real crop failures of 1927 and 1928 to achieve political ends, which in this case meant the destruction of the Bukharinist “right”. The smyshka, which Lenin had seen as the foundation of the regime for the foreseeable future, was at an end, and “bacchanalian planning”, with tremendous speedup, piece work, and armed GPU units overseeing work in the factories, could begin.

In conclusion, it is important to note the reaction of the Trotskyist “left” (minus, it must be said, Trotsky himself, already in exile) to Stalin’s “left” turn after 1927, in which he “crudely and brutally” took over the bulk of the left’s program. The general attitude was: Stalin is implementing our program; we must support him. Dozens, possibly hundreds of members of the left clamored for readmission to the party so they could participate in the collectivizations. Typical was the case of Ivan Smirnov, former convinced Trotskyist, who capitulated in October 1929: “I cannot remain inactive! I must build! The Center Committee is building for the future, barbarous and stupid though its methods may be. Our ideological differences are relatively unimportant compared to the building of major new industries.”[149]

## VIII. From Five-Year Plan to Final Collapse

---

Soviet agriculture never fully recovered from Stalin’s 1929-1932 “war on the kulak”, and thus became a permanent drag on the economy and society as a whole. The peasantry was permanently alienated from the regime. Quite apart from the huge loss of human life, the massacre of so many horses in a country with almost no metallic plows crippled the planting season for years into the future. Agricultural activity was henceforth organized in the wage-labor collective farm (sovkhoz) and the cooperative (kolkhoz), with additional small private plots, consisting of about 1% of all land under cultivation, and yet which over time produced a remarkable percentage of all food delivered to the cities.

The low productivity of the sovkhoz and kolkhoz sectors of Soviet agriculture played a large role in the ultimate collapse of the system in 1991. After the post-World War II reconstruction period, the Soviet rate of growth was slowing from the late 1950’s onward, from one five-year plan to the next. The so-called Liberman reforms of 1965 were an attempt to reverse the downward trend by a certain decentralization of the planning process to the regions and to managers at the plant level; they failed against the resistance of the bureaucracy. The planners bent over their statistics to discover the obstacles in the system, only to discover that the “plan” itself, and the bureaucracy promoting it, were the main domestic obstacles (quite aside from the fundamental alienation of the workers and peasants, and from the pressure of the capitalist world market and the Western embargo on key technologies). There was in reality no plan[150]; the plan was more like an ideological superstructure underneath which

competition between firms—above all competition for skilled labor, scarce resources and perhaps most importantly for spare parts—raged just as intensely as in any openly capitalist economy[151]. By the 1960's at the latest, corruption was endemic and also essential to the operation of the real economy. In some Eastern European (Comecon) countries such as Poland, if not in the Soviet Union itself, the U.S. dollar was indispensable for managers in need of key supplies. Over time, the underground economy was to a large extent *the* economy that worked at all. A further albatross was the very significant military sector, which drained the best technical workers and resources for this further sinkhole of unproductive consumption. (In addition to national defense, Soviet bloc arms sales were an important source of foreign exchange.)

The 1929-32 crippling of the agricultural sector, which still included almost 40% of the work force (also involving huge hidden unemployment) when the system collapsed in 1991, was, however, a key factor in the overall crisis. In the West, the 1873-1896 world agrarian depression, marking the entry into the world market of the major grain and meat exporters Canada, Australia, Argentina, the U.S. and Russia itself, combined with the transport revolution of steamships and trains, made possible the long-term reduction of the cost of food in the worker's wage from 50% ca. 1850 to substantially lower levels. This new purchasing power of workers made possible access to consumer durables (radios, household appliances, and later cars) that was a fundamental part of the phase of real domination of capital, the reduction of labor power to its abstract interchangeable form. In the postwar World War II boom in the West, the total wage bill of the productive work force (as opposed to the ever-growing population of middle-class unproductive consumers) declined as a percentage of the total social product while the material content of the average working-class wage rose.

Yet after World War I, it was precisely the impact of this 19<sup>th</sup> century worldwide remaking of working-class consumption by the agrarian and transport revolutions that was sorely lacking in Soviet Russia. Hence the ever-increasing post-World War II demand for consumer goods ran up against the barrier of generalized low productivity and hence higher prices for food. The only alternative was to import consumer goods from the West, at the cost of ever-increasing foreign indebtedness, which was \$51 billion at the time of the Soviet collapse in 1991.

## VIII. Conclusion

---

"The multiplication of human powers is its own goal."

Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*

The peasant question, almost 25 years later, is still with us on a world scale. Space does not permit an overview of its many contemporary forms, from the rural insurgencies in India to the Chinese regime's inability to meaningfully absorb its several hundred million remaining peasants, by way of Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Today even more than 100 years ago, the combined agricultural capacity of the U.S., Canada, western Europe, Australia and Argentina, in a global order producing for use,

could feed the entire world several times over. That potential, blocked as it is by capitalist social relations, hangs over the agrarian subsistence producers of much of the rest of the world like a sword of Damocles; decades of world trade negotiations (as most recently the so-called Doha round) have shattered upon it. U.S. and Canadian agricultural exports, after the conclusion of NAFTA[152] in 1993, swamped what remained of Mexico's peasant economy. Today's "Fortress Europe" (the European Union), like "El Norte" (the U.S.), are magnets attracting millions of people, including millions of peasants, from the devastated rural economies of Latin America, Africa and the Middle East, risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean or the Sonoran desert in hopes of joining the ranks of the sub-proletariat in the so-called developed world, providing the "reserve army of the unemployed" for capital and conveniently, in the bargain, the perfect scapegoat for whipping up nationalist/racist populism in the indigenous working class.

In this reality, emerging from the rubble of the ex-Soviet bloc as the former apparent alternative to capitalism, Marx's decade-long fascination with the Russian peasant commune returns with all its urgency as the international left increasingly reconnects with the full dimensions of Marx's project, first suppressed by Engels, and lost for more than a century in the Second, Third and Fourth International confusion of the developmental tasks of the bourgeois revolution and those of the proletarian revolution. That latter revolution does not "build socialism" but rather "midwives" a higher form of social organization already present and implicit as the "determinate negation" of the moribund old order, the "real movement unfolding before our eyes", as the *Manifesto* put it[153].

For four decades, since the 1970's, world capitalism, in fits and starts, has struggled against the growing evidence of its superannuation, both for truly developing global humanity and increasingly for avoiding environmental apocalypse. China and India may have, in those decades, given rise to some tens of millions (out of, let us recall, a combined 2.6 billion people) of a newly-affluent middle class striving for a "Western life style" of consumption centered on the automobile. Nonetheless, the most elementary extrapolation of the resources and environmental destruction (pollution, atmospheric degradation, shortened life expectancy) involved in such a "life style" to the world's 7.5 billion people (9 billion by 2050) shows its future existence as a grand "fallacy of linear composition". And this recognition takes us to the "future past" of Marx's vision of the *reappropriation* of the world's productive forces, correcting, obviously on a far higher level, the fundamental "schism" of the expropriation which began more than 500 years ago; to the overcoming of the separation of city and countryside and hence to the more even distribution of the world's population over the earth's surface (in the U.S., for example, 99% of the population currently lives on 1% of the land).

The coming revolution will not have as its goal the elaboration of a five-year plan in order to out-produce capitalism in "steel, cement and electricity", to return to our initial quote from Trotsky, (though it may do that, incidentally, as part of its realization of more fundamental tasks). It will rather, for starters, dismantle worldwide the several hundred

million jobs, from Wall Streets “quants” to tolltakers, existing solely to administer capitalism, freeing that labor power for socially useful activity and combining it with the several billion people marginalized by capitalism altogether, to radically shorten the working day for all. With the dismantling of the car-steel-oil-rubber complex still at the center of both capitalist production and consumption (not to mention capitalism’s “imaginary”) the social labor time lost in commutes and traffic jams alone, in North America, Europe and East Asia, largely a product of the post-World War II urban, suburban and exurban development schemes framed by real estate priorities, will be regained by society; similarly with the huge expenditure of fossil fuels made necessary by the conscious suppression of mass transit by the auto and oil industries, as a cursory tour of most American cities will reveal. Unraveling the full social, material and energy costs of urban, suburban and exurban space as it currently exists will already be a giant step toward the full de-commodification of human life. Or as Marx put it 150 years ago:

“...When the narrow bourgeois form has been peeled away, what is wealth, if not the universality of needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive powers, etc. of individuals, produced in universal exchange? What, if not the full development of human control over the forces of nature—those of his own nature as well as those of so-called “nature”? What, if not the absolute elaboration of his creative dispositions, without any preconditions other than antecedent historical evolution which makes the totality of this evolution—i.e. the evolution of all human powers as such, unmeasured by any previously established yardstick, an end in itself? What is this, if not a situation where man does not produce himself in any determined form, but produces his totality? Where he does not seek to remain something formed by the past, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?” (*Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*)

## Notes

---

[1] I am indebted to John Marot, Henri Simon, James D. White and Hillel Ticktin, in addition to friends who read various drafts, for help with this article.

[2] The talks on Russia and Germany are on the Break Their Haughty Power web site <http://home.earthlink.net/~lrgoldner>; the China and Spain talks drew from the content of recent articles on Maoism and Spain on the same site.

[3] In her memoirs, *My Life as a Rebel*.

[4] Lost to view by most Western Marxists was the fact that Marx, Plekhanov, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and later Riazanov all at different times discussed the “Asiatic” or “semi-Asiatic” character of the Tsarist state. See Marx’s 1856 pamphlet “History of the Secret Diplomacy of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century”.

[5] Old myths die hard. British investors visiting those factories before 1914 did in fact find them to be huge, with thousands of workers, but were also shocked at the shoddy goods and by the absence of techniques, such as the Bessemer process in steel making, which had been in use in Britain since the 1860’s.

[6] Stalin did not make even a cameo appearance in either John Reed's 1918 classic *Ten Days That Shook the World* or in Max Eastman's documentary film *From Tsar to Lenin*, made in the early 1920's but released only in 1937, when it was boycotted worldwide by throngs of idolizers of Stalin (DVD available through [http://: wsws.org](http://wsws.org)) . But already in November 1917, he was one of only two people—the other being Trotsky—authorized to walk into Lenin's office without an appointment.

[7] See my article on Eastman at <http://home.earthlink.net/~lrgoldner/eastman.html>

[8] See Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins* (2010), and, before him, the work of Lawrence Krader on *The Asiatic mode of production* (1972) and his edition of Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks* (1975).

[9] See Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (2006)

[10] p. 325 of the 1973 Penguin edition.

[11] The first translation of vol. I of *Capital* in any foreign language appeared in Russian in 1872.

[12] From 1878 to 1881, one faction of the group Zemla I Volya (Land and Freedom) waged a campaign of terror that virtually paralyzed the Tsarist government, culminating in the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881. Marx supported them for waging what seemed to be the sole form of struggle available in conditions of extreme repression, and also kept at arm's Russian self-styled Marxists who wrote learned treatises in the safety of Swiss exile. Marx, unlike his followers, was never troubled by the problem of being an orthodox Marxist.

[13] See James D. White, *Karl Marx and the Origins of Dialectical Materialism* (1994), p. 281.

[14] Again, see Kevin Anderson op. cit. (2010)

[15] See Teodor Shanin, *The Late Marx and the Russian Road* (1981) and James D. White, op. cit. Ch. 5.

[16] The anti-Enlightenment Slavophiles idealized the commune as an eternal expression of a Slavic soul; Herzen was aware that such communes had once existed in much of Europe, but thought they could be part of a Russian revolution; the westernizers tended to deride its importance as a "judicial imposition" and looked forward to its speedy disappearance with the advance of capitalism. Cherneshevski, who had written pioneering sociological works on Russian society, did not idealize the commune, which he knew from childhood experience growing up in a provincial town, but did anticipate Marx's later view that it could, in a revolutionary upheaval, "provide the basis for a non-capitalist economic development." See Esther Kingston-Mann, *Lenin and the Problem of Marxist Peasant Revolution* (1985) pp. 23-24.

[17] "If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement one another, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist development."

[18] He was also reconnecting with personal memories of a similar Germanic commune near Trier, his birthplace, which had disappeared only one generation before his birth, as well as his "determinate negation" of elements of German romanticism. See James D. White, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-206, for Marx's letter to Engels of March 1854, in which he writes of the resilience of the communal form in Germany and elsewhere, preceding his discovery of the Russian commune by almost two decades.

[19] James D. White, *op. cit.*; Amadeo Bordiga. *Russie et revolution dans la théorie marxiste* (1975);

[20] Plekhanov refused to confront the issues of Marx's correspondence with Daniel'son, Mikhailovski, and Zasluch. "In early writings he had referred to Marx's favorable comments on the commune, but in *Our Differences* (1885) no longer did." See Kingston-Mann, *op. cit.* p. 33.

[21] This included Vera Zasluch, who later worked with Gyorgi Plekhanov in Switzerland.

[22] See Jacques Baynac, *Les Socialistes-Revolutionnaires* (1979) vol. 1.

[23] Key figures of the Tsar's investigating commission.

[24] F. Venturi. *Roots of Revolution*. (1960 English trans.) p. 70.

[25] "The Bolshevik revolution had shattered the old Marxist assumption that industrialization was the exclusive task of capitalism." (in Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution* (1973), p. 170. Or, as Amadeo Bordiga put it more succinctly and accurately in the 1950's, responding to Stalinist propaganda: "It is exactly right that the 'foundations of socialism are being laid in the Soviet Union'", which was exactly why he consider it as a capitalist society.

[26] See Robert Brady, *The Rationalization Movement in German Industry* (1933) and Fritz Sternberg's *Der Untergang des deutschen Kapitalismus* (1933). In both Germany and the U.S. in the 1920's, chronic unemployment remained at 8% or higher in the brief boom years before 1929, an unprecedented level compared to pre-1914 standards. For some material on the similar link between rationalization and structural unemployment in the U.S. cf. Irving Bernstein, *History of the American Worker: vol. 1. The Lean Years 1920-1933*. (1960)

[27] The Argentine Raul Prebisch, founder of the 1950's and 1960's "import substitution" strategy of development and hardly a Marxist, studied the differences between Argentina, a major exporter of grain and beef by the 1880's, and similar exporters such as Australia and Canada, concluding that Argentina, unlike the British Commonwealth

countries, was hobbled by the pre-capitalist legacy of Spanish colonialism in the persistence of the latifundia, into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Cf. E. Dosman, *The Life and Times of Raul Prebisch, 1901-1986* (2008), p. 49.

[28] See my articles "The Non-Formation of a Working Class Party in the U.S., 1900-1945" and "Communism is the Material Human Community: Amadeo Bordiga Today" at <http://home.earthlink.net/~lrgoldner>

[29] Lars Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered* (2006) "Erfurtian Social Democrat" is Lih's term for a disciple of Karl Kautsky and pre-1914 German Social Democracy (the SPD), which Lenin surely was. Curious that Lih makes little or nothing of Engels' critique of the Erfurt Program, which resulted from the SPD's 1891 congress in that city.

[30] See the classic on the integration of the SPD into German capitalism: Dieter Groh, *Negative Integration und revolutionärer Attentismus* (1973), and the earlier book of Carl Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905-1917* (1954)

[31] The "financial interrelations ratio" measures the total capital assets in manufacture to total assets in finance and real estate.

[32] Absolute surplus value, for Marx, is obtained by the lengthening of the working day above and beyond the reproduction time for labor employed; relative surplus value is obtained by technical intensification of the production process, i.e. by increasing the productivity of labor.

[33] The glorification of labor, common to fascist, Stalinist and Popular Front/New Deal ideology in the 1930's, was the common ideological thread that mobilized the working class for the new phase of accumulation in the interwar period. This little-studied phenomenon, expressed in the Italian *dopolavoro*, the Nazi "Kraft durch Freude" campaigns and in the social realist art of the Stalinist school, or in that generated by the American New Deal, was the *condensed* form of mass consumption which, after 1945, achieved its *diffuse* form in the mass-consumer ideology of the "affluent society" (Debord)

[34] See Marx's chapter on "Primitive Accumulation" in vol. I of *Capital* and the draconian methods used by the Tudors to herd peasants off the land and into the wage labor work force, destitution and the work house.

[35] See Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (1974). Other important absolutisms in countries that later developed important Communist Parties were in Bourbon Spain, the Portugal of Pombal, and regional absolutisms (Piedmont, Naples) in what became Italy. All of them were, in different ways, involved in the capitalization of agriculture. See, again, my article on the non-formation of a working-class party in America.

[36] The industrial working class in both Britain and Germany peaked in the pre-1914 period at roughly 40% of the total work force.

[37][37] See Alexander Erlich, *The Soviet Industrialization Debate* (1960); see also John Marot, *The Russian Revolution in Retrospect and Prospect* (2012). As is generally known, three factions confronted each other in these debates: the advocates of rapid industrialization in the Trotskyist left, the “socialism at a snail’s base” Bukharinist right, and the most dangerous faction of all, the “vacillating” Stalinist “center”. The victory of the Stalinist “center” ruined communism internationally for an epoch, whereas Bukharin had rightly said, in the course of the debate, that the implementation of the left’s program would require a huge bureaucracy and that the social costs of regulation would be much greater than the potential downside of market-driven stratification of the peasantry (see below). The entire left except for Trotsky, seeing Bukharin as the threat of “capitalist restoration”, capitulated to Stalin, on a productivist basis. See the analysis of the Italian Communist Left on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, *Bilan d’une révolution (Programme Communiste, 1967-1968)* for a balanced rectification of Bukharin as a “right communist” against the far more dangerous Stalin. See also Marot, (op. cit. Ch. 2) for a devastating account of how the Trotskyist “left” embraced Stalin’s collectivizations. The Trotskyists to this day retain the blind spot of seeing Stalin as a “center” and Bukharin as the “right”, and as the cat’s paw of a “capitalist restoration”, as if that, had it taken place, would have been worse for world socialism than what actually happened.

[38] Unbelievably, translated into English only in 1988.

[39] Marx for example intensely studied the innovations in fertilizer of the German chemist Liebig, and their impact on higher crop yields in British and German agriculture.

[40] Tomas de Torquemada was a major figure in the Spanish Inquisition in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

[41] I am indebted in the preceding paragraphs to the Shanin/Alavi preface to the 1988 English translation of *The Agrarian Question*, vol. I, pp. xiii-xxxiii. Shanin wrote elsewhere of Kautsky’s view, as applied to Russia, that it envisioned “a ‘self-contradictory’ revolution which must and can be bourgeois only. And yet, taking place in a period when in all the rest of Europe only a socialist revolution was possible.” Teodor Shanin, *Russia, 1905-1907*, vol. 2, p. 187. After 1905, Kautsky actually hoped that the revolutionary élan of the Russian Marxists would rejuvenate the Second International. (ibid. p. 253)

[42] Marx called the late 1870’s Russian terrorists “the leading detachment of the revolutionary movement in Europe”.

[43] 300,000 peasants died in the famine; from 1889 to 1917 one year out of two were years of famine. See Kingston-Mann, op. cit. pp. 33-34.

[44] Nicolai Chernyshevsky (1828-1889) was a Populist writer who emerged in the 1850’s with some of the first sociological studies of Russian society. In 1862 he was exiled for the rest of his life to Siberia.

[45] Nicolai Dobrolyubov (1836-1861) was a radical activist and literary figure of the

1850's. Like Chernyshevsky, he wrote for the most important oppositional journal of the day, *The Contemporary*.

[46] See for example the account of Valentinov, *Encounters with Lenin*, (1968) pp. 63-68.

[47] Claudio Sergio Ingerflom, *Le citoyen impossible: Les racines russes du leninisme* (1988). Cherneshevski in particular had developed the notion of "aziatzvo", the crushing "semi-Asiatic" weight of the Tsarist state which atomized the entire Russian population and made impossible any coherent popular revolt, any conscious "class for itself". For Lenin, the working class which began to form and to rebel after the 1870's was the first force to form "outside" of this atomization, a view confirmed by the militant strikes of 1896 and thereafter. In Ingerflom's view, Lenin, with his own *What Is To Be Done?*, returns to elements of his Chernyshevskian roots in attacking the narrow point-of-production focus of the Economists, calling on revolutionaries, like the literary prototype Rachmetov, to go into all classes of Russian society, to denounce all oppressions, and to thus constitute themselves as a "tribune of the people".

[48] . Lenin's 1899 draft of the party program did not deal with the mass of commune peasants except to claim that most of them were "really" proletarians. See Kingston-Mann, op. cit. p. 48. Teodor Shanin points out, in volume 2 of his key 1986 book *Russia 1905-07*, that the formative period of Russian Social Democracy, from the mid-1880's to 1902, was a nadir of peasant struggle (p. 146).

[49] The late 1890's , when Lenin was writing the book, were actually boom years for Russian industry under Witte's management. See T. von Laue, *Sergei Witte and the Industrialization of Russia* (1963). Witte had become Finance Minister in 1892 and placed the tax burden for Russian industrialization on the peasantry.

[50] After 1905, Lenin did admit that he was wrong about this polarization (Kingston-Mann, p 53) , but did not give up the basic view of the direction of development; it had merely been an error of timing.

[51] Chantal de Crisenoy, *Lenine face aux moujiks* (1971) , p. 83.

[52] Ibid. p. 99.

[53] Ibid. p. 103.

[54] Ibid. p. 110.

[55] Ibid. pp. 111-112.

[56] In vol. 2 of the *Complete Works*.

[57] Crisenoy, p. 115.

[58] Trotsky said: "In the coming revolution, we have to ally with the peasantry." (quoted in Lenin's 1904 *One step forward, two steps backward*)

[59] Lenin's 1899 draft of the party program did not deal with mass of commune peasants except to claim that most of them were "really" proletarians. Kingston-Mann, op. cit. p. 48.

[60] Crisenoy, p. 155-156. Just before this outbreak, Lenin had written: "'We will make a last effort (with the program) to stir up the remnants of the peasants' class hostility to the feudal lords.' Scarcely had he written these lines when the peasants (in several regions-LG) destroyed 100 estates, seized the property of the big landowners, broke into barns to distribute food to the hungry...for the first time, they showed hostility to the tsar, meeting the Cossacks with axes and pitchforks..."

[61] The 1861 emancipation of the serfs had been a patchwork of changes that saddled those freed serfs receiving land with decades of debts to pay for it.

[62] Ibid. p. 159. Lenin went on, in the framework of his 1899 book, imagining that capital had largely conquered the countryside, saying that (in general) "support for small property is reactionary, because it is aimed at the economy of a big capital...but in the present case, we want to support small property not against capitalism, but against serfdom..." (ibid. p. 160)

[63] Kingston-Mann p. 65. A "repartitional" commune was one in which lands were periodically redistributed based on peasants' family size.

[64] Ibid. p. 70.

[65] Lenin's agrarian program, quoted in Crisenoy, op. cit. p. 166. As she comments (p. 167) "Lenin remains close to the most orthodox positions of the Second International and the refusal of any alliance between workers and peasants."

[66] In the interest of keeping the main theme of this text, the Russian peasants and the mir, I am skirting a blow-by-blow account of the 1905 revolution, which included, with prompting from no political party, the invention in praxis of the "soviet" by the working class. For an overview of the whole, see Trotsky's *1905* (original 1907-1908, English trans. 1971).

[67] Ibid. p. 98.

[68] Teodor Shanin, *Russia, 1905-07. Revolution as a Moment of Truth*. Vol. 2. 1986. p. 84. Much of the following account of the countryside in 1905-07 is based on Shanin, Kingston-Mann and Crisenoy.

[69] Shanin, op. cit. pp. 85-87.

[70] Ibid. p. 88.

[71] Ibid. p. 89. Crisenoy reports (pp. 171-172) "Of 7000 actions listed by the Okhrana between 1905 and 1907, 5000 are directed against the landed estates." In April 1905, Lenin considered the transfer of all land to the peasants, to give agrarian capitalism "a

larger basis” and to hasten the transition to an “American type” agriculture. But he continued to view the large landowners as capitalists and refused to come out clearly for peasant property. On the other hand, he was lucid enough to recognize the inadequacy of the agrarian program. (ibid.)

[72] “Lenin’s intricate distinctions between farmhands, semi-proletarians, middle peasants, and the rural poor remained difficult even for his most loyal supporter to fully comprehend” (Kingston-Mann, p. 167)

[73] Kingston-Mann, op. cit. p. 79. The Menshevik conference of May 1905 criticized Lenin’s idea of Social Democrats leading a bourgeois government. Plekhanov and his allies, themselves still within the classical Kautskyian framework, criticized peasant activism, saying it could only fragment large-scale capitalist enterprises (ibid. p. 82) .

[74] “Social democracy and the revolutionary government”, March 1905, Vol. VIII of Lenin’s Complete Works.

[75] “General plan of resolutions at the III. Congress, Feb 1905, Complete Works, Vol. VIII.

[76] Crisenoy, p. 174.

[77] Ibid. p 175.

[78] Ibid. p. 176. Later, in November 1905, the peasants ran off the Tsarist civil servants and elected their own “elders” (starost). Many directly attacked the whole system, the state and its representatives: police, army, and civil servants. The police reported 1041 actions of this kind between 1905 and 1907. 1000 manors were burned, and in several provinces, all estates were destroyed. There were peasant militias in the Ukraine, Lithuania, Georgia and the Volga Region. The mir retained all its influence.

[79] Shanin, op. cit. p. 126.

[80] Crisenoy, p. 179.

[81] Ibid. p. 180.

[82] “Revolution of a 1789 or 1848 Type?”, March-April 1905, Vol. VIII of Lenin’s Complete Works, quoted in Crisenoy, pp. 180-181.

[83] Shanin, op. cit. p. 92.

[84] Ibid. p. 93. The Black Earth belt was the term for the most fertile lands.

[85] Ibid. pp. 93-95. The original emancipation of the serfs in 1861 had scheduled decades of payments to the state for the redistributed land.

[86] Kingston-Mann, op. cit. p. 100. Trotsky, who was the one Russian Marxist who agreed with Lenin on the importance of an alliance with the peasantry in 1903, took a different view after 1905-07, , attacking Lenin's "democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants", and saying that peasants could not play an independent political role or form a party of their own. See Shanin (op. cit. p. 257). Trotsky felt that peasants did little of political significance in 1905, somewhat more in 1906, but that their role overall was meager He did not bother to consider the massive 1906 vote for the Social Revolutionaries in St. Petersburg. For Shanin, "Trotsky's harsh anti-populism and anti-peasantism put him with the most conservative of the Mensheviks." *ibid.* p. 258.

[87] The Tsarist regime responded to the mass uprisings by conceding a series of four elected Dumas, or legislatures, each one dissolved and reconvened with fewer powers than the preceding one.

[88] Kingston-Mann, op. cit. p. 92. Crisenoy, op. cit. p. 192.

[89] *Ibid.* p. 93.

[90] *Ibid.* p. 95.

[91] Shanin op. cit. p. 100.

[92] *Ibid.* p 101.

[93] *Ibid.* p. 109.

[94] *Ibid.* p. 131.

[95] *Ibid.* p. 133.

[96] As Shanin put it (pp. 152-168), after 1905 Lenin's practical orientation changed but theoretically little changed. He did not update *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, on which his early agrarian program was based. Shanin credits Lenin's "on the spot" reporting in 1905-07 and "the courage with which he championed new unorthodox tactics against his own comrades" . But he also points out that "70 years of research has not produced the name of one Bolshevik who was a peasant leader in 1905-07." "At the peak of Russia's largest peasant revolt in centuries, the number of peasants within the cadres of the Bolsheviks was about zero, as was the number of the Bolsheviks elected to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duma by the "electoral college" of the peasantry. Workers and peasants, on the other hand, learned from each others' struggles. The All-Russian Peasant Union rejected a Social Democratic worker delegation saying "We have just got rid of self-appointed teachers and supervisors." The Congress then passed a resolution of full solidarity with our "brother workers in struggle". Peasant participation in political parties was remarkable by its absence. The utopianism of the SRs, formulated as the "socialization of all land", was attacked as naïve by the Social Democrats but was adopted in part or in full at the RSDLP's 4<sup>th</sup> Congress... When Lenin said Russia was not yet capitalist, he stayed within the earlier theoretical structure but just "moved the clock back".

[97] Ibid. p. 146. Plekhanov at the 4<sup>th</sup> Party Congress said that “Lenin looks at the nationalization of the land with the eye of an SR. He even begins to adopt their terminology, i.e. talks of popular creativity... Nice to meet old acquaintances but it is unpleasant to see how Social Democrats adopt populist points of view.” Ibid. p 149.

[98] Ibid. p. 150. Lenin was fascinated by two foreign models of agricultural development, the Prussian “revolution from above” under Bismarck and his successors, and the American policy of free land for farmers to develop the west.

[99] Ibid. p. 142.

[100] In 1906 there were mass sales of land by gentry terrified of the insurrection in the countryside; sales to peasants were facilitated by the Peasant Land Bank. D. Atkinson. *The End of the Russian Land Commune 1905-1930* (1983), p. 68.

[101] Ibid. pp. 197-198.

[102] Stolypin was remembered, in Shanin’s view, as “last great defender of the autocracy. Stolypin was defeated by the Russian conservative lobby. He had been touted to be Russia’s “second Bismarck”. (the first having been Witte-LG) Shanin, op. cit p. 236

[103] Kingston-Mann, op. cit. p. 102. The Vendée was a region of western France whose peasants had joined counter-revolutionary forces against the Jacobins in 1792.

[104] Crisenoy, op. cit. pp. 194-196.

[105] Ibid. p. 103.

[106] Ibid. p. 104. The Junkers were pre-capitalist landowners in Eastern Prussia who had reinvented themselves as capitalists while preserving quasi-feudal social relations on their estates. For a portrait, see Alexander Gershenkron, *Bread and Democracy* (1943). Lenin also felt that American farmers in the west prospered because land there belonged to the state, hence creating no superfluous expenditures for rent or purchase.

[107] Crisenoy, op. cit. p. 105.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid. pp. 106-107.

[110] Ibid. pp. 107-110.

[111] Most recent scholarship, according to Kingston-Mann, has emphasized the ephemeral character of the reform’s impact; in 1915, two-thirds of “new proprietors” were still plowing on scattered strips intermingled with communal lands. (Ibid. p. 123).

[112] In 1913 agriculture made up 43% of Russia's national income, and grain exports sustained Russia's balance of payments. By comparison, in 1914 60% of the French population was still rural but national income per capita was four times higher than in Russia. By 1914, the Russian rural population was 37% higher than in 1897. Atkinson, op. cit. pp. 102-104.

[113] Thus does Crisenoy explain this "meager result". (Crisenoy op. cit. pp. 229-230)

[114] Atkinson, op. cit. p. 81, arrives at a different estimate: by 1916 16 million dessiatins (1 dessiatin=2.3 acres) were individualized; this represented 14% of the 115 million dessiatins of land in communes in 1905. Peasants in 1915 owned 35% of the 97 millions of dessiatins of privately owned land. But collective land ownership actually rose during this period.

[115] Lenin's article "New Facts", from vol. XXII of his works, quoted in Crisenoy op. cit. p. 248. In her view, both Lenin and Stolypin have the same dream of transforming the Russian peasant into a European peasant (p. 249). "Lenin, like Stolypin, is a fervent defender of the disappearance of the rural commune." (p. 251). He remains convinced of the anti-commune sentiments of the peasant, as elaborated in his article "Our Detractors" in Vol. XVII, January-February 1911.

[116] Ibid. p. 253.

[117] Kingston-Mann, op. cit. p. 141.

[118] Ibid. pp. 142-143.

[119] Lenin was aware of this. A few months later, before the October Revolution, he admitted "what (the peasants) want is to keep their small property, preserve egalitarian norms and renew them periodically." ("Pages from the journal of a publicist" Sept 1917, Vol. XXV) Quoted in Crisenoy, p. 273. But Lenin's realism made him admit the attachment of the peasants to the commune, and their desire to see it enlarged.

[120] Ibid. p. 157.

[121] Ibid. p. 162.

[122] Atkinson op. cit. p. 174.

[123] Ibid. p. 176.

[124] Ibid. p. 185.

[125] Ibid. p. 173, 179, 183.

[126] Ibid. p. 185.

[127] Ibid. pp. 193-194.

[128] Crisenoy, pp. 277-279; the Lenin quote is from "On left infantilism and petty bourgeois ideas" in Complete Works, vol. XXVII, quoted in Crisenoy pp. 281-282.

[129] The Treaty of Brest Litovsk was the treaty of Soviet surrender to the Central Powers on the eastern front, signed at the end of February 1918. Under its terms, Russia ceded 34% of her population, 32% of her agricultural land, 54% of her industry and 89% of her coal mines. The Bolshevik Party decided to approve the treaty following a series of tumultuous meetings, in which a majority initially rejected it. For the basic story, see (among many other accounts), I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed. Trotsky 1879-1921* (1980 ed. ) p. 359-394. From Lenin's viewpoint, it was a successful gamble which paid off months later when the Central Powers collapsed, nullifying the treaty. For those who opposed it, Brest-Litovsk was a first step whereby the Soviet Union placed national interests ahead of the international revolution. For an analysis of the treaty in this perspective, see Guy Sabatier <http://libcom.org/book/export/html/45641>

[130] Charles Bettelheim, not a source I like to quote, recounts the story of the group around Oustrialov, an ex-Cadet in Paris exile, known as the *Smenovekhovtsy*, from the name of their journal meaning "new orientation". This group called on any bourgeois intellectuals remaining in Russia to rally to the regime, which in their view had entered its Thermidor period. Bukharin analyzed these "friends" of a very special type, who hoped that under the cover of the "monopoly of knowledge" bourgeois power might be restored in Soviet Russia. They believed that the October Revolution had accomplished an indispensable historic task, of which a new bourgeoisie could take advantage. The revolution had mobilized "the most courageous and pitiless adversaries of the rotting Tsarist regime, crushing the corrupted strata of the intelligentsia which only knew how to speak of God and the devil...they opened the way to the creation of a new bourgeoisie." Quoted in Bettelheim, *Les luttes de classes en URSS*, vol. I (1973), p. 263. (Bettelheim's book, despite insights of this kind, is vitiated by his numerous bows in the direction of Mao's China, in 1973 at the peak of its prestige in Paris.)

[131] Crisenoy, op. cit. p. 332.

[132] See Simon Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920-1924*. Available on Libcom: <http://libcom.org/history/russian-revolution-retreat-1920-24-soviet-workers-new-communist-elite-simon-pirani>

[133] Marot, op. cit. p. 11.

[134] Ibid. p. 35.

[135] See my article "Socialism in One Country before Stalin: The Case of Turkey, 1917-1925" at <http://home.earthlink.net/~lrgoldner/turkey.html>

[136] Lenin, in "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky", quoted in Marcel van der Linden. *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union*, (2009 ed.), p. 16. Trotsky himself further elaborates on this in *Permanent Revolution*, Ch. 5: "The Bolshevik slogan (of 'democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants'-LG) was realized in fact – not as a

morphological trait but as a very great historical reality. Only, it was realized *not before, but after October*. The peasant war, in the words of Marx, supported the dictatorship of the proletariat. The collaboration of the two classes was realized through October on a gigantic scale...And Lenin himself estimated the October Revolution – its first stage – as the *true* realization of the democratic revolution, and by that also as the true, even if changed, embodiment of the strategic slogan of the Bolsheviks.”(<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/tpr/pr05.htm>):

[137] Because Trotsky looms so large in the left-wing anti-Stalinist currents in the West, it is necessary at this point to signal his differences with Lenin’s formulation in 1917-1918; Trotsky’s analysis of Stalinism also set down the framework for many would-be revolutionaries who later broke with him to declare Russia a class society (usually “state capitalist”), such as CLR James, Castoriadis, Shachtman, or Dunayevskaya. Trotsky’s analysis of the revolution at the time of the NEP flowed from the theory of “permanent revolution” he developed with Parvus at the time of the revolution of 1905. In this view, the weakness of the bourgeoisie in a backward country such as Russia made it possible for the working class there to lead a revolution which, in conjunction with a proletarian revolution in the West, would collapse the “bourgeois stage” into an international proletarian revolution.

[138] One good, and typical, example of a state capitalist analysis of the Soviet phenomenon that breaks with Trotsky, but which emerges directly from Trotsky’s framework, is Walter Daum’s 1990 *The Life and Death of Stalinism*. While generally superior to most other works in the state capitalism camp, Daum’s book never mentions the mir, and it discusses the peasantry, like most other works in the genre, only in passing as a backdrop to the 1920’s faction fight.

[139] Marot, op. cit. p. 94.

[140] Ibid. p. 95.

[141] For a full account, see Moshe Lewin’s *Lenin’s Last Struggle* (1968).

[142] In taking this tack, I take my distance from some attitudes current in the libertarian or left communist milieu, in which I generally situate myself. I first of all reject the commonplace view one finds among anarchists, who see nothing problematic to be explained in the emergence of Stalinist Russia. Did not Bakunin already predict, in his 1860’s struggle with Marx, that a Marxist-led revolution would result in the authoritarian rule of a centralizing intellectual elite? I do not believe, further, that there exists a straight line, or much of any line, from Lenin’s 1902 pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* to Stalin’s Russia, especially since Lenin admitted after 1905 that he had been wrong. Such a “teleological” approach does not hold up in a close, month-to-month analysis of developments from the 1890’s to the 1920’s. I cannot fathom the mindset of a milieu in which it has long been fashionable to refer to C.L.R. James, or more recently, in certain circles, to Amadeo Bordiga, whereas it has been distinctly unfashionable to refer to Lenin, whom both James and Bordiga greatly admired.

[143] *What Is To Be Done?*, briefly, is as much Lenin's anti-workerist anti- point of production (anti-"Economist", in the language of the day) polemic, arguing, against a narrow focus on workers' struggles alone, that revolutionaries should carry their denunciations of oppression into *all* classes of society, and be "the tribune of the people", as it is about his use of Kautsky's notion of "bringing consciousness from the outside" and his call for a tightly disciplined elite organization of revolutionaries. It should not be forgotten that the Mensheviks, who rejected Lenin's narrower criteria for party membership at the famous 1903 "split" conference, calmly voted those very criteria into the party statutes in 1906. Further, under the impact of 1905, Lenin wrote that the "... working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social Democratic (i.e. revolutionary-LG), and more than 10 years of work put in by Social Democracy has done a great deal to transform this spontaneity into consciousness." (in "The Reorganization of the Party", Works, vol. 10, p. 32, quoted in Daum op. cit. p. 106.) C.L.R. James wrote, in *Facing Reality*, (1974 ed. pp. 93-94) about the "old type of Marxist organization" (by which he meant the vanguard party): "All these beliefs led to the conclusion that the organization was the true *subject*...And if the organization, in philosophical terms, was the subject of history, the proletariat was the object...This conception of the organization is inherent in the extreme views that Lenin expounded in *What Is To Be Done?* He repudiated them later, but not with the force and thoroughness which were needed to prevent them from doing infinite mischief."

[144] From M. Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivization*. (French original 1966, English translation 1968), pp. 85-86.

[145] This strategy is spelled out in Preobrazhensky's 1926 book *The New Economics*. Marot (op. cit. p. 39) writes: "In 1923 and 1925, factory managers and enterprising peasants respectively were redistributing the pie of goodies by gaming the market."

[146] I put "right" in quotes because no one was more reactionary than the leader of the "center", Stalin. I am here neglecting here the important foreign policy debates that were intertwined with factional positions on Soviet economic policy, starting with the failure of the aborted 1923 uprising in Germany, the failed British General Strike of 1926, and above all the disastrous Soviet intervention in China from 1925 to 1927, the latter two laid at the door of Stalin and Bukharin.

[147] Quoted in Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution* (1973), p. 140. The "*chinovniki*" were originally Tsarist bureaucrats, strictly organized according to rank ("*chin*" in Russian). Bukharin accused the left of advocating a "Genghis Khan" plan.

[148] For a full account of the faction fight, see Marot op. cit., Chs. 1-2. His book stands out, among left-wing anti-Stalinist accounts, for the devastating portrait of how the Trotskyist left (minus, it must be said, Trotsky himself) not merely capitulated to Stalin's "left turn" beginning in 1928, but positively embraced it.

[149] Quoted in Moshe Lewin, op. cit. p. 377. Smirnov was executed by Stalin in 1936. See Victor Serge's tribute: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/serge/1936/08/smirnov.htm>

[150] See Hillel Ticktin "Political Economy of the USSR" in *Critique*, No. 1, 1974, for an analysis which captures many aspects of the late Soviet system, and on the basis of which Ticktin predicted its collapse fifteen years before it took place.

[151] Recalling, from another context, Bordiga's remark that "The hell of capitalism is the firm, not the fact that the firm has a boss."

[152] The North American Free Trade Agreement, which in reality was mainly an agreement to dismantle Mexico's remaining barriers to untrammelled imports and investment.

[153] See Insurgent Notes No. 1, "The Historical Moment Which Produced Us" and the program elaborated therein for a fuller view of the "first hundred days" of implementing a communist program today ( <http://insurgentnotes.com> )