The Role of Bolshevik Ideology in the Birth of the Bureaucracy

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1964

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Note from Marxists Internet Archive

This article was first published as an introduction to Alexandra Kollontai's *The Workers Opposition*, but it can stand alone as a refutation of the standard Leninist/Trotskyist claim that the Soviet Union only *degenerated* post 1924, i.e. after Lenin's death, and as such has been published in pamphlet form by a number of groups.

[1. The Significance of the Russian Revolution]

We are happy to present to our readers the first translation into French of Alexandra Kollontai's pamphlet *The Workers' Opposition in Russia*. This pamphlet was published in Moscow at the beginning of 1921, during the violent controversy that preceded the Tenth Congress of the Bolshevik party. This Congress was to close discussion forever on this controversy as well as on all the others.[(1)]

People have not finished talking about the Russian Revolution, its problems, its degeneration, and about the regime it ultimately produced. And how could one? Of all the revolts of the working class, the Russian Revolution was the only victorious one. And of all the working class's failures, it was the most thoroughgoing and the most revealing.

The crushing of the Paris Commune in 1871 and of the Budapest uprising in 1956 teach us that insurgent workers encounter immensely difficult organisational and political problems, that an insurrection can find itself isolated, that the ruling classes will not hesitate to employ any kind of violence or barbarian savagery when their power is at stake. The Russian Revolution, however, obliges us to reflect not only on the conditions for a proletarian victory but also on the content and the possible fate of such a victory, on its consolidation and development, on the seeds of a failure whose import infinitely surpasses the victory of the troops of the Versailles, of Franco's army, or of Khrushchev's tanks.

Since it crushed the White armies and yet succumbed to a bureaucracy it had itself generated, the Russian Revolution puts us face to face with problems of a different order from those involving a study of the tactics and methods of an armed insurrection or a correct analysis of the relation of forces at a given moment. It obliges us to reflect on the nature of the power of labouring people and on what we mean by socialism. Culminating in a regime in which economic concentration, the totalitarian power of the rulers, and the exploitation of the labouring population have been pushed to the limit, and producing to an extreme degree the centralisation of capital and its fusion with the State, in its outcome this revolution presents us with what has

[(1)] This text served as the introduction to Alexandra Kollontai's "L'Opposition ouvrière," which was published in the same issue of *S. ou B.*; it was based on the 1921 English translation. A new French translation based on the original has now been announced [T/E: translated by Pierre Pascal (Paris: Seuil, 1974)]. Since then, Maurice Brinton of Solidarity has produced a remarkable work, *Bolsheviks and Worker's Control*, in French translation of which has just appeared in *Autogestion*, 24–25 (September-December 1973). [T/E: *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control, 1917 to 1921; The State and Counter-Revolution* (to cite the full and correct title) was originally published by Solidarity in 1970. Black and Red (Detroit) reprinted this 86-page pamphlet in 1972 and again in 1975. Brinton's introduction to his Solidarity translation of Castoriadis's text notes that "the first English translation" of *The Workers Opposition in Russia* "had appeared (between April 22 and August 19, 1921) in successive issues of Sylvia Pankhurst's *Workers Dreadnought*." Solidarity had reprinted this 1921 English translation in 1962. this Solidarity edition is now also available from Left Bank Books, Seattle, Washington.]

been and in certain respects still remains the most highly developed and the "purest" form of a modern exploitative society.

Embodying Marxism for the first time in history — only to make us see immediately in this incarnation a monstrous disfiguration of it — the Russian Revolution allows us to understand more about Marxism than what Marxism itself has been able to help us to understand about the Revolution. The regime the Revolution produced has become the touchstone for all current ideas, not only those of classical Marxism, of course, but just as much those of the bourgeois ideologies. This regime has proved the ruination of Marxism through its very realisation and has proved the triumph of the deepest layers of these other ideologies through its very refutations of them. Even as this regime has expanded to embrace a third of the globe, has been challenged by workers' revolts against it over the past ten years, has attempted to reform itself, and has now split into two opposing poles, the Russian and the Chinese, it has not ceased to raise questions of the most pressing importance and to act as the clearest as well as the most enigmatic indicator of world history. The world we live in, reflect in, and act in was launched on its present course by the workers and Bolsheviks of Petrograd in October 1917.

[2. The Main Questions]

Among the innumerable questions raised by the fate of the Russian Revolution, two form the poles around which we may organise all the others.

The first question is: What kind of society was produced by the degeneration of the revolution? (What is the nature and the dynamic of this regime? What is the Russian bureaucracy? What is its relation to capitalism and to the proletariat? What is its place in history? What are its present problems?) This question has already been discussed on several occasions in *S. ou B.*[1] and will be again.[2]

The second question is, How can a workers' revolution give birth to a bureaucracy, and how did this occur in Russia? We have examined this question in its theoretical form,[3] but so far we have said little from the concrete historical point of view. Indeed, there is an almost insurmountable obstacle to a close study of this particularly obscure period extending from October 1917 to March 1921, during which the fate of the revolution was played out. The question of most concern to us is, in effect, the following: To what extent did the Russian workers try to take upon themselves the direction of society, the management of production, the regulation of the economy, and the orientation of political life? What was their conscious awareness of these problems, the character of their autonomous activity? What was their attitude toward the Bolshevik party, toward the nascent bureaucracy? Now, we should point out that it is not workers who write history. It is

[1] See, among other articles, *RPR*, "L'Exploitatiion de la paysannerie sous le capitalisme bureaucratique" (*SB 1*, pp. 283–312), and *RPB* [T/E: *RPR* and "The Exploitation of the Peasantry under Bureaucratic Capitalism" appear in *PSW 1*; *PRAB* appears in *PSW 2*]; Claude Lefort, "Le Totalitarisme sans Staline" (*S. ou B.*, 19 [July 1956]; reprinted in *Eléments d'une critique de la bureaucratie* [Geneva: Droz, 1971], pp. 130–90 [T/E: now available from Gallimard (Paris, 1979), pp. 155–235; abridged translation, "Totalitarianism without Stalin," in *The Political Forms of Modern Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, and Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1986), pp 52–88)].

[2] The texts on the postindustrial Russian economy and society, which were announced in the note, will be published in *SB 3*. [T/E: This volume was never published. *Devant la guerre* (Paris: Fayard, 1981), however, includes an updated analysis of the Russian economy and society.]

[3] Beyond the texts cited in note 1, see *SB* and *CS 1*.

always *the others*. And these others, whoever they may be, have a historical existence only insofar as the masses are passive, or active simply to support them, and this is precisely what "the others" will tell us at every opportunity. Most of the time these others will not even possess eyes to see and ears to hear the gestures and utterances that express people's autonomous activity. In the best of instances, they will sing the praises of this activity so long as it *miraculously* coincides with their own line, but they will radically condemn it, and impute to it the basest motives, as soon as it strays there from. Thus Trotsky describes in grandiose terms the anonymous workers of Petrograd moving ahead of the Bolshevik party or mobilising themselves during the Civil War, but later on he was to characterise the Kronstadt rebels as "stool pigeons" and "hirelings of the French High Command." They lack the categories of thought — the brain cells, we might dare say — necessary to understand, or even to record, this activity as it really occurs: to them, an activity that is not instituted, that has neither boss nor program, has no status; it is not even clearly perceivable, except perhaps in the mode of "disorder" and "troubles." The autonomous activity of the masses belongs by definition to what is *repressed* in history.

Thus, it is not only that the documentary records most interesting to us during this period are fragmentary, or even that they were and continue to be systematically suppressed by the triumphant bureaucracy. It is that this record of events is infinitely more *selective* and *slanted* than any other historical testimony. The reactionary rage of bourgeois witnesses and the almost equally vicious hostility of the social democrats; the delirious ravings of the anarchists; the official historiography, periodically rewritten to suit the needs of the bureaucracy, and that of the Trotskyist tendency concerned exclusively with justifying itself after the fact and with hiding its role during the first stages of degeneration — all this "historical evidence" converges on one point: it ignores the signs of the autonomous activity of the masses during this period, or, if necessary, "proves" the a priori impossibility of its very existence. In this regard, the information contained in Alexandra Kollontai's text is of priceless value. First, because of the direct indications it supplies concerning the attitudes and reactions of Russian workers toward the policy of the Bolshevik party; second and more important, because it shows that a large portion of the working-class base of the Party was aware of the process of bureaucratization that was taking place, and was taking a stand against it. It is no longer possible, after reading this text, to continue to describe the Russia of 1920 as "just chaos," "a pile of ruins," where the thought of Lenin and the "iron will" of the Bolsheviks were the only elements of order in a country whose proletariat had been pulverised. The workers wanted something, and they showed what they wanted through the Workers' Opposition within the Party and the Petrograd strikes and the Kronstadt revolt outside the Party. Both the intraparty and the extraparty challenges had to be crushed by Lenin and Trotsky for Stalin later to emerge triumphant.

[3. The Traditional "Answers"]

Back to the main question: How could the Russian Revolution have produced a bureaucratic regime? The current answer (first advanced by Trotsky, later taken up by the fellow travellers of Stalinism, and today by Khrushchev's men themselves in order to "explain" the "bureaucratic deformations of the socialist system") is the following: the Revolution took place in a backward country, which in any case could not have built socialism on its own; it found itself isolated by the

defeat of the revolution in Europe (and more particularly in Germany between 1919 and 1923); and what is more, the country was completely divested by the Civil War.

This answer would not deserve a moment's consideration, were it not for the fact that it is widely accepted and that it continues to play a mystificatory role. For it is completely beside the point.

The backwardness, isolation, and devastation of the country — all incontestable facts in themselves — might just as well have explained a pure and simple defeat of the revolution and the restoration of classical capitalism. What we are asking, however, is precisely why there was no pure and simple defeat, why the Revolution overcame its external enemies only to collapse from within, why it "degenerated" precisely in such a way that it led to the power of the bureaucracy.

Trotsky's answer, if we may use a metaphor, is like saying, "This patient developed tuberculosis because he was run down." Feeling run down, however, he might have died instead, or contracted some other disease. Why did he contract *this particular* disease? What has to be explained in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution is why it was specifically a *bureaucratic* degeneration. This cannot be done by referring to factors as general as "backwardness" or "isolation." Let us add in passing that this "response" teaches us nothing we could extend beyond the confines of the Russian situation in 1920. The sole conclusion to be drawn from this kind of "analysis" is that revolutionaries should ardently hope that future revolutions break out an more advanced countries, that they should not remain isolated, and that civil wars should not in the least be devastating.

After all, the fact that [since the Second World War] the bureaucratic system of rule has extended its frontiers well beyond the boundaries of Russia, that it has installed similar regimes in countries that in no way can be characterised as backward (such as Czechoslovakia or East Germany), and that industrialisation — which has made Russia the second strongest power in the world — has not weakened this bureaucracy at all, shows that all discussion in terms of "backwardness," "isolation," V and so forth, is purely and simply anachronistic.

[4. Bureaucracy in the Modern World]

If we wish to understand the emergence of the bureaucracy as an increasingly preponderant managerial stratum in the contemporary world, we are obliged to note at the outset that, paradoxically, it appears at the two opposite poles of social development. On the one hand, it has emerged as the organic product of the maturation process of capitalist society. On the other hand, it appears as the "forced answer" backward countries give to the problem of their own *passage* to the stage of industrialisation.

[A. Modern Capitalist Countries]

In the first case, the emergence of the bureaucracy offers us no mystery. The concentration of production necessarily leads to the appearance within business firms of a stratum whose function is to take on the collective management of immense economic units. The task to be performed goes qualitatively beyond the capacities of any individual owner. At first in the economic realm, but gradually also in other spheres, the growing role of the State leads both to a quantitative extension of the bureaucratic state apparatus and to a qualitative change in its nature.

At the opposite pole within advanced capitalist societies, the workers' movement degenerates as it becomes bureaucratised, it becomes bureaucratised as it becomes integrated into the established order, and it cannot become integrated into this order without becoming bureaucratised. The various techno-economic, state-political, and "working-class" elements constitutive of the bureaucracy coexist with varying degrees of success. They coexist both with each other and with the more properly "bourgeois" elements of society (owners of the means of production). In any case, as the bureaucracy evolves, the importance of these bureaucratic elements for the management of society constantly increases. In this sense, one can say that the emergence of the bureaucracy corresponds to an "ultimate" phase in the process of capital concentration, that the bureaucracy personifies or embodies capital during this phase, in the same way that the bourgeoisie did during the previous phase.

At least as far as its origins and its social-historical function are concerned, this bureaucracy can be understood in terms of the categories of classical Marxism. (It matters little, in this respect, that today's alleged Marxists, who fall forever short of the possibilities entailed by the theory they claim as theirs, remain incapable of granting the bureaucracy any kind of socio-historical status. These so-called Marxists believe that there is no name for this thing in their ideas, and so in practice they deny its existence and speak of capitalism, as if nothing had changed within capitalism for the past century or half century.)

[B. Economically Backward Countries]

In the second case, the bureaucracy emerges, one might say, from the very void found in this type of society. In almost all backward countries, the old ruling strata are clearly incapable of undertaking the industrialisation of the country. Foreign capital creates, at "best," merely isolated pockets of modern exploitation, and the late-born national bourgeoisie in such countries has neither the strength nor the courage necessary to revolutionise the old social structures from top to bottom, as would be required by the process of modernisation. Let us add that, because of this very fact, the national proletariat is too weak to play the role assigned to it by the schema of "permanent revolution," that is, it is too weak to eliminate the old ruling strata and to undertake the process of transformation that would lead, in an uninterrupted fashion, from the "bourgeois-democratic" phase through to socialism.

What can happen then? A backward society can stagnate and remain stagnant for a longer or shorter period of time. (This is the situation today of backward countries, whether or not they have been constituted as States only recently.) But this process of stagnation in fact signifies a relative and sometimes an absolute deterioration of their economic and social situation, as well as a rupture of the old equilibrium built into these societies. Aggravated almost always by apparently "accidental" factors (which in fact recur inevitably and which are amplified to an infinitely greater degree in a society undergoing disintegration), each upset in the balance of these societies turns into a crisis, often coloured by some "national" component. This can result in an overt and prolonged national-social struggle (China, Algeria, Cuba, Indochina) or a coup d'état, almost inevitably military in nature (Egypt).

These two examples exhibit immense differences, but they also share a common point.

In the first type of example (China, etc.), the politico-military leadership of the struggle gradually erects itself into an autonomous stratum that manages the "revolution" and, after victory, takes in hand the reconstruction of the country. To this end, it naturally incorporates all those

members of the old privileged strata who have rallied to its cause while also selecting certain members of the masses. And as the country industrialises, it constitutes these elements into a hierarchical pyramid that will serve as the skeleton of the new social structure. This industrialisation is carried out, of course, according to the classical methods of primitive accumulation. These methods involve intense exploitation of the workers and an even more intense exploitation of the peasantry, who are more or less press-ganged into an industrial army of labour.

In the second example (Egypt, etc.), the state-military bureaucracy, while playing a role of tutelage with regard to the existing privileged strata, does not completely eliminate these strata or the social situation they represent. Also, one can almost always foresee that the country will not be fully transformed and industrialised until there is a further violent convulsion.

In both instances, however, what we discover is that the bureaucracy substitutes or tends to substitute itself for the bourgeoisie as the social stratum that carries out the task of primitive accumulation.

We must note that this bureaucracy has effectively shattered the traditional categories of Marxism. In no way can it be said that this new social stratum has been constituted and has grown within the womb of the preceding society. Nor is it born out of a new mode of production whose development had become incompatible with the maintenance of old forms of economic and social life. It is, on the contrary the bureaucracy that gives birth to this new mode of production in the societies we are considering. It is not itself born out of the normal functioning of society, but rather out of the inability of this society to function. Almost without metaphor, we can say that it has its origin in the social void: its historical roots plunge wholly into the future. It obviously makes no sense to say that the Chinese bureaucracy is the product of the country's industrialisation when it would be infinitely more reasonable to say that the industrialisation of China is the product of the bureaucracy's accession to power. We can only move beyond this antinomy by pointing out that in the present epoch, and short of a revolutionary solution on an international scale, a backward country can industrialise only by becoming bureaucratised.

[C. Russia]

In the case of Russia, one might say that, after the fact, the bureaucracy seems to have fulfilled the "historical function"[4] of the bourgeoisie of earlier times, or of the bureaucracy of a backward country today. Up to a certain point, therefore, the Russian bureaucracy can be compared to the latter sort of bureaucracy.[5] The conditions under which it arose, however, are different. And this difference is due precisely to the fact that the Russia of 1917 was not simply a "backward" country, but a country that, besides its backwardness, exhibited certain well-developed features of capitalism (Russia was, in 1913, the fifth strongest industrial power in the world) — so well developed, as a matter of fact, that it was the theatre of a proletarian revolution proclaiming itself socialist (long before this word had come to signify anything one wants and nothing at all).

[4] When we speak of a "historical function" in this context, we are not doing metaphysics, nor are we making a posteriori rationalizations. This is an abbreviation for saying: Either Russia would have developed a modern form of large-scale industry or the new State would have been crushed in some conflict or other (at the latest, in 1941).

[5] It is in this sense that there is an element of truth in the connection Trotsky established between bureaucracy and backwardness (a theme ponderously repeated today be [Isaac] Deutscher, for example). What one obviously forgets to add is that in that case it really is a matter of an *exploitative regime* that carries out the process of primitive accumulation.

The first bureaucracy to have become a ruling class in its society, the Russian bureaucracy appears precisely as the end product of a revolution that everyone thought had given power to the proletariat. It therefore represents a third, quite specific type (although in fact it was the first clearly to emerge within modern history): the bureaucracy born from the degeneration of a working-class revolution. It is this degeneration — even if, from the outset, the Russian bureaucracy accomplishes such functions as "manager of centralised capital" and acts as the "stratum for developing a modern industrial economy by every means available."

[5. The Working Class in the Russian Revolution]

Keeping in mind precisely what came afterward, and recollecting too that the October 1917 "seizure of power" was organised and directed by the Bolshevik party and that this Party in fact assumed this power as its own from day one, in what sense can one say that the October Revolution was proletarian (that is, if one refuses at least to identify a class simply with the party claiming power in that class' name)? Why not say — indeed, there has been no lack of people to say it — that there never was in Russia anything other than a coup d'état carried out by a party that, having somehow obtained the support of the working class, was merely trying to instaurate its own dictatorship and succeeded in doing so?

We have no intention of discussing this problem in scholastic terms. Our aim is not to ask whether the Russian Revolution fits into the category of "proletarian revolutions." The question that matters for us is this: Did the Russian working class play a historical role *of its own* during this period, or was it simply a sort of infantry, mobilised in the service of other, already established forces? In other words, did it appear as a relatively autonomous pole in the struggle and the whirlwind of actions, organisational forms, demands, and ideas of this period, or was it just a tool manipulated without great difficulty or risk, a relay station for impulses coming from elsewhere?

Anyone who has studied the history of the Russian Revolution even to the slight degree could answer without hesitation. Petrograd in 1917 and even afterward, was neither Prague in 1948 nor Canton in 1949. The proletariat's independent role was clearly apparent — even, to begin with, by the very way workers flocked into the ranks of the Bolshevik party, giving it majority support, which no one could have extorted from them or forced upon them at the time. This independent role was also shown by the rapport between the workers and this party and by the burden of the Civil War, which they spontaneously took upon themselves. Above all, however, it is shown by the autonomous actions they themselves undertook, already in February and July 1917 and even more so after October, when they expropriated the capitalists without waiting for, or even in acting against, the expressed will of the Party and when they organised production on their own. Finally, it is shown in the autonomous organs they set up: the soviets, and in particular, the factory committees.

The Revolution's success was made possible only because a vast movement of total revolt on the part of the working masses, whose will was to change the conditions of their existence and rid themselves of bosses and Czar, converged with the activity of the Bolshevik party. It is true that the Bolshevik party alone, in October 1917, was able to give articulate expression and an *intermediate objective* to the aspirations of the workers, the peasants, and the soldiers (the overthrow of the Provisional Government). This in no way means, however, that the workers were their passive infantry. Without these workers, both inside and outside its ranks, the Party

was nothing, neither physically nor politically a force to be reckoned with. Without the pressure arising from their increasing radicalisation, it would not even have adopted a revolutionary line. And at no moment, even long months after the seizure of power, could it be said that the Party "controlled" the movements of the working masses.

This convergence, however, which actually culminated in the overthrow of the Provisional Government and in the formation of a predominantly Bolshevik government, turned out to be temporary. Signs of a gap between the Party and the masses appeared rather early on, even though, by its very nature, such a gap could not be grasped in as a clear-cut a way as one between organised political tendencies.

The workers certainly expected of the Revolution a total change in the conditions of their existence. They undoubtedly were expecting an improvement in their material conditions — knowing quite well that such an improvement would not come about immediately. Only the narrow-minded would tie the Revolution to this factor alone — or the workers' subsequent dissatisfaction to the new regime's incapacity to satisfy these hopes for material advancement. The Revolution began, in a certain sense, with a demand for bread. Long before October, however, it had already gone beyond the question of bread, and had engaged people's total, passionate commitment.

For more than three years, the Russian workers put up with the most extreme material privations without flinching. At the same time, they supplied the bulk of the forces that were going to defeat the White armies. For them, it was a question of freeing themselves from the oppression of the capitalist class and of its State. Organised in the soviets and in the factory committees, they found it inconceivable, even before but particularly after October, that the capitalists would be allowed to stay on. And in chasing them out of the factories, they were led to discover that they would have to organise and manage production themselves. The workers themselves expropriated the capitalists, doing so on their own authority and acting against the line of the Bolshevik party (the nationalisation decree of the summer of 1918 merely ratified what already had been done). And it was the workers who got the factories running once again.

[6. Bolshevik Policy]

As for the Bolshevik party, this was not at all what they were after. Insofar as the Party developed any clear-cut line after October (and contrary to the mythology put out by Stalinists and Trotskyists alike, it can easily be shown, backed up by documentary records, that before and after October the Bolshevik party was totally in the dark as to what it wanted to do after the seizure of power), it aimed at instaurating in Russia a "well-organized" economy along the lines of the capitalist model of the time,[6] a form of "state capitalism" (the expression unceasingly

[6] One quotation among a hundred: "And history … has taken such a peculiar course that it *has given birth* in 1918 to two unconnected halves of socialism existing side by side like two future chickens in the single shell of international imperialism. In 1918 Germany and Russia have become the most striking embodiment of the material realization of the economic, the productive and the socio-economic conditions for socialism, on the one hand, and the political conditions, on the other" (V. I. Lenin, " 'Left-Wing' Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality," in *Selected Works: One-Volume Edition* [New York: International Publishers, 1971], p. 444). [T/E: As when Castoriadis cited this passage in "The Relations of Production in Russia," *PSW 1*, p. 118, he omits Lenin's parenthetical swipe against "Menshevik block-heads." The careful reader might also note slight discrepancies between this English version of the quotation and the earlier one. My apologies. The above quotation is the one to be found in the volume cited. The version in *PSW 1* came from another edition of Lenin's *Selected Writings*, which I failed to alter after I change the page citation to correlate with the one-volume edition.]

used by Lenin), upon which would be superimposed a "working-class" political power — in fact, this power would be exercised by the party of the "working class," the Bolshevik party. "Socialism" (which effectively implies, Lenin writes without hesitation, the "collective management of production") will come afterward.

And this is not just a question of a "line," of something simply said or thought. In its deep-down mentality and in its real attitude, the Party was permeated from top to bottom with the unquestionable conviction that it ought to *lead*, *direct*, *manage* [*diriger*], in the full sense of the[se] term[s]. This conviction, which already existed long before the Revolution began (as Trotsky showed when he spoke of the "committee mentality" in his biography of Stalin), was indeed shared by all the socialists of the era (with a few exceptions, such as Rosa Luxemburg, the Gorter-Pannekoek tendency in Holland, and the "Left Communists" in Germany).This conviction was to be tremendously reinforced by the seizure of power, the Civil War, and the Party's consolidation of power. Trotsky himself clearly expressed this attitude at the time when he proclaimed the Party's "historical birthright."

This mentality was more than just a mentality: after the seizure of power, it almost immediately became a part of the *real social situation*. Individually, party members assumed leadership posts in all spheres of social life — in part, of course, because "one cannot do otherwise." This in turn, however, came to mean: because everything the Party did ensured that it could not be done otherwise.

Collectively, the only real instance of power is the Party, and very soon, only the summits of the Party. Immediately after the seizure of power the soviets as institutions are reduced to the status of pure window-dressing (we need only look at the fact that, already at the beginning of 1918 in the discussions leading up to the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty, their role was absolutely nil).

If it is true that people's real social existence determines their consciousness, it is from that moment illusory to expect the Bolshevik party to act in any other fashion than according to its real social position. The real social situation of the Party is that of a directorial organ, and its point of view toward this society henceforth is not necessarily the same as the one this society has toward itself.

The workers offered no serious resistance to this evolution of events, or rather to this sudden revelation of the essence of the Bolshevik party. At least we have no direct sign of such resistance. Between the eviction of the capitalists, followed by the restarting of the factories at the beginning of the revolutionary period, and the Petrograd strikes and the Kronstadt Revolt at its end (winter of 1920–21), we know of no articulate manifestation of autonomous activity on the part of the workers.[(2)] The Civil War and the continuous mobilisation of military forces during this period, the serious nature of immediate practical problems (production, food supplies, etc.), the very obscurity of the issues at stake, and, without doubt, above all the workers' confidence in the Party explain this lack of autonomous expression.

Two elements go to make up the workers' attitudes in this regard. On the one hand, the aspiration to rid themselves of all domination, to take the management of their affairs into their hands. On the other hand, the tendency to delegate power to this party that had just proven itself to be the sole irreconcilable opponent of the capitalist class and that was in fact conducting war

[(2)] This statement can now admit of some nuances in light of more recent studies; see, for example, Brinton, Bolsheviks and Workers' Control, and the works referred to in this pamphlet.

against this class. The opposition, the contradiction, between these two elements was not and, one would be tempted to say, could not have been clearly perceived at this time.

It *was* seen, however, and with great insight, within the Party itself. From the beginning of 1918 until the banning of factions in March 1921, tendencies within the Bolshevik party were formed that, with farsightedness and sometimes an astonishing clarity, expressed opposition to the Party's bureaucratic line and to its very rapid bureaucratisation. These were the "Left Communists" (at the beginning of 1918), then the "Democratic Centralist" tendency (1919), and finally the "Workers' Opposition" (1920–21).

One will find in the *Historical Notes* we publish following Alexandra Kollontai's text details on the ideas and activities of these tendencies.[3] In them were expressed the reactions of working-class members of the Party — and, no doubt, the attitudes of proletarian circles outside the Party — to the "state-capitalist" line of the leadership. They also expressed at the same time what can be called the "other component" of Marxism, the one that appeals to the masses' own activity and that proclaims that the emancipation of labouring people will be the work of these people themselves.

Nevertheless, these oppositional tendencies were defeated one by one, and finally eliminated in 1921, the same time that the Kronstadt revolt was crushed. The very feeble echoes of their critique of the bureaucracy that can be found later in the (Trotskyist) "Left Opposition" after 1923 do not have the same signification. Trotsky was opposed to the *bad policies* of the bureaucracy and to the excesses of its power. He never put into question its essential nature. Until practically the end of his life, he never brought up the questions raised by the various oppositions of the period from 1918 to 1921 (in essence: "Who manages production?" and "What is the proletariat supposed to do during the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', other than work and follow the orders of 'its' party?").

We may therefore conclude that, contrary to the prevailing mythology, it was not in 1927, or in 1923, or even in 1921 that the game was played and lost, but much earlier, during the period from 1918 to 1920. Already in 1921, a revolution in the full sense of the term was needed in order to re-establish the situation. As events proved, a revolt such as the one at Kronstadt was not enough to bring about any essential changes. This warning shot did induce the Bolshevik party to rectify certain aberrations relative to other problems (basically those concerning the peasantry and the relationship between the urban and agrarian economy). It thus led to a lessening of the tensions provoked by the country's economic collapse and to the beginning of the reconstruction of the productive apparatus. This reconstruction effort, however, was already firmly set in the groove of bureaucratic capitalism.

It was, indeed, between 1917 and 1920 that the Bolshevik party established itself so firmly in power that it no longer could have been dislodged except by force of arms. And it was from the beginning of this period that the uncertainties of its line were ironed out, the ambiguities lifted, and the contradictions resolved. In the new State, the proletariat was to work, to be mobilised, and, should the need arise, to die in defence of the new power. It was to give its most "conscious" and most "capable" members to "its" party, where they would become the leaders of society. It was to be "active" and it had to "participate" whenever it was asked to do so, but it was to do so only and exactly to the extent that the Party demanded this of the proletariat. Finally, it was to bow completely to the Party's will on all essential matters. As Trotsky wrote during this period

[3] See, on this topic, Brinton's work, which we have already cited.

in a text that had an enormous circulation both inside and outside Russia, "The worker does not merely bargain with the Soviet State; no, he is subordinated to the Soviet State, under its orders in every direction — for it is *his* State."[7]

[7. The Management of Production]

The role of the proletariat in the new State was thus quite clear. It was that of enthusiastic and passive citizens. And the role of the proletariat in work and in production was no less clear. On the whole, it was the same as before — under capitalism — except that workers of "character and capacity"[8] were to be chosen to replace factory managers who had fled. The main concern of the Bolshevik party during this period was not how one could facilitate the process of workers' collectives taking over the management of production, but rather was: What is the most rapid way of developing a stratum of managers and administrators for industry and for the economy as a whole?

One need only read the *official* texts of this period to eliminate all doubts on this score. The formation and training of a bureaucracy as the managerial stratum in production (with the economic privileges that inevitably go along with this status) was, practically from the beginning, *the conscious, straight forward and, sincere policy of the Bolshevik party, headed by Lenin and Trotsky.* This was honestly and sincerely thought to be a socialist policy — or, more precisely, an "administrative technique" that could be put in the service of socialism, since the class of administrators managing production were to remain under the control of the working class, "personified by its Communist party." The decision to place a manager at the head of a factory instead of a workers' board [*bureau ouvrier*], wrote Trotsky, had no political significance:

It may be correct or incorrect from the point of view L technique of administration… It would consequently be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the heads of factories. The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy over the whole Soviet mechanism of the collective will of the workers, and not at all in the form in which individual economic enterprises are administered."[9]

Trotsky's phrase, "the collective will of the workers," is a metaphorical expression used to designate the will of the Bolshevik party. The Bolshevik bosses stated this without any hypocrisy, unlike certain of their "defenders" today. Trotsky wrote at the time:

In this 'substitution' of the power of the Party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class. It is quite natural that in the period which brings up those interests, in all their magnitude, on to the order of the day, the Communists have become the recognised representatives of the working class as a whole."[10]

One can easily find dozens of quotations from Lenin expressing the same idea.

So we end up with the uncontested power of managers in the factories, and the Party's exclusive "control" (in reality, what kind of control was it, anyway?). A there was the uncontested

[7] L[eon] Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), p. 168.
[8] Ibid., p. 260.
[9] Ibid., p. 162.
[10] Ibid., p. 109.

power of the Party over society, without any From that point on, nobody could prevent these two powers from merging, could anyone stop the two strata embodying them from merging, nor could the consolidation of an irremovable bureaucracy ruling over all sectors of social life halted. The process may have been accelerated or magnified by the entry of proletarian elements into the Party, as they rushed to jump on the bandwagon — this was a *consequence*, and not a cause, of the Party's orientation.

It was during the discussion of the "trade-union question" (1920–21), which preceded the Tenth Party Congress, that opposition to this orientation of the Party was most forcefully expressed within the Party itself. Formally, the question that of the role of the trade unions in the management of production and of the economy. The discussion inevitably focused once again on the problems of "one-man management" in the factories and on "the role of specialists," questions that had ready been discussed bitterly and at great length during the previous two years. Kollontai's text and in the appended *Historical Notes*, the reader will find a description of the various opposing stands on these issues.

Briefly, the party leadership, with Lenin at its head, reaffirmed that the management of production should be in the hands of individual administrators bourgeois "specialists" or workers selected for their "character and capacity") under the control of the Party. The trade unions were to have the tasks of educating the workers of defending them against the production managers and the state managers. Trotsky demanded the trade unions' complete subordination to the State, their transformation into organs and appendages of the State (and of the Party). His argument al was the same: since we are in a Workers' State, the State and the workers are same thing, and therefore workers have no need for some separate organ defend them from "their" State. The Workers' Opposition demanded that management of production and of the economy gradually be entrusted to "workers' collectives" in the factories, as these had been organised in the trade unions. They wanted "one-man management" to be replaced by a "collegial management" and the role of specialists and technicians to be reduced. The Workers' Opposition emphasised that the development of production under post-revolutionary conditions was an essentially social and political problem whose solution depended on the deployment of the creativity and initiative of the labouring masses, and that this problem is not merely administrative and technical. It denounced the increasing bureaucratisation of the State and of the Party (already at this time, all posts involving responsibility of the least importance were filled by nomination from above and not election), as well as the growing separation of the Party from the workers.

On certain points, it is true, the ideas of the Workers' Opposition were confused, and on the whole the discussion seems to have taken place on a formal level, just as the solutions proposed by both sides were also formal rather than substantive (the substance, in any case, had already been decided on elsewhere than in the Party Congresses). Thus, the Opposition (and Kollontai in her text) did not distinguish clearly between the (indispensable) role to be played by specialists and technicians qua specialists and technicians, under the control of workers, and the transformation of these specialists and technicians into unchecked [*incontrôlés*] managers of the production process. It developed a general critique of specialists and technicians without differentiating between the two categories, thus leaving its flanks exposed to the attacks of Lenin and Trotsky, who had an easy time showing that there could not be factories without engineers. From this position of advantage, Lenin and Trotsky came to the astonishing conclusion that this was a sufficient reason to entrust these engineers with dictatorial managerial powers over the whole operation of the factory. The Opposition fought ferociously for "collegial," as opposed to "one-

man" management, a fairly formal aspect of the problem (a collegial form of management can be just as bureaucratic as one-man management), leaving in the shadows real problem, that of the true source of authority. Thus was Trotsky free to say, "The independence of the workers is determined and measured, not by whether three workers or one are placed at the head of a factory, but by factors and phenomena of a much more profound character."[11] This absolved him from having to discuss the real problem, which is that of the relationship between the "one" or "three" men and the collectivity of producers in the enterprise.

The Opposition also showed a relative amount of trade-union fetishism at a time when the unions had already fallen under the practically complete control of the Party bureaucracy.

The continuous 'independence' of the trade-union movement, in the period of the proletarian revolution, is just as much an impossibility as the policy of coalition. The trade unions become the most important economic organs of the proletariat in power. Thereby they fall under the leadership of the Communist Party. Not only questions of principle in the trade-union movement, but serious conflicts of organisation within it, are decided by the Central Committee of our Party."[12]

This being written by Trotsky in response to Kautsky's criticism of the anti-democratic character of Bolshevik power, Trotsky had no reason to exaggerate the extent of the Party's grip over the trade unions.

Nevertheless, despite these weaknesses and despite this relative confusion, the Workers' Opposition posed the real problem: Who is to manage production in the "Workers' State"? And it provided the correct answer: the collective organs of labouring people. What the party leadership wanted, what it had already imposed — and on this point there was no difference between Lenin and Trotsky — was a hierarchy directed from above. We know that this was the conception that triumphed. We know, too, where this "victory" led.

[8. On "Ends" and "Means"]

In the struggle between the Workers' Opposition and the leadership of the Bolshevik party, we witness how the two contradictory elements of Marxism became dissociated. These two elements had coexisted in a paradoxical fashion in Marxism generally and in its incarnation in Russia in particular. For the last time in the history of the official Marxist movement, the Workers' Opposition made audible this appeal to the masses to act on their own, this confidence in the creative capacities of the proletariat, this conviction that with the socialist revolution commences a genuinely new period in human history, in which the ideas of the preceding period barely retain any of their value and in which the edifice of society is to be rebuilt from the roots up. The Opposition's theses constitute an attempt to embody these ideas in a political program concerning the fundamentally important domain that is production.

The triumph of the Leninist outlook is the triumph of the other element of Marxism, which, to be sure, had long since — and even in Marx himself — become the dominant element in socialist thought and action. In all Lenin's speeches and writings of this period, what recurs again and again like an obsession is the idea that Russia ought to learn from the advanced capitalist countries; that there are not a hundred and one different ways of developing production and labour productivity if one wants to emerge from backwardness and chaos; that one must adopt capital-

[11] Ibid., p. 161 (reading "much" for "such").
[12] Ibid., p. 110.

ist methods of rationalisation" and management as well as capitalist forms of work "incentives." All these, for Lenin, are just "means" that apparently could freely be placed in the service of a radically different historical end, the building of socialism.

Thus Trotsky, when discussing the merits of militarism, came to separate the army itself, its structure and its methods, from the social system it serves. What is criticisable in bourgeois militarism and in the bourgeois army, Trotsky says in substance, is that they are in the service of the bourgeoisie. Except for that, there is nothing in them to be criticised. The sole difference, he says, lies in this: "*Who is in power?*"[13] Likewise, the dictatorship of the proletariat is not expressed by the "form in which individual economic enterprises are administered."[14]

The idea that like means cannot be placed indifferently into the service of different ends; that there is an intrinsic relationship between the instruments used and the result obtained; that, especially, neither the army nor the factory are simple "means" or instruments," but social structures in which are organised two fundamental aspects of human relations (production and violence); that in them can be seen in condensed form the essential expression of the type of social relations that characterise an era — this idea, though perfectly obvious and banal for Marxists, was totally "forgotten." It was just a matter of developing production, using proven methods and structures. That among these "proofs" the principal one was the development of *capitalism* as a social system and that a factory produces not so much cloth or steel but proletariat and capital were facts that were utterly ignored.

Obviously, behind this "forgetfulness" is hidden something else. At the time, of course, there was the desperate concern to revive production as soon as possible and to put a collapsing economy back on its feet. This preoccupation, however, does not fatally dictate the choice of "means." If it seemed obvious to Bolshevik leaders that the sole effective means were capitalist ones, it was because they were imbued with the conviction that capitalism was the only effective and rational system of production. Faithful in this respect to Marx, they wanted to abolish private property and market anarchy, but not the type of organisation capitalism had achieved at the point of production. They wanted to modify the *economy*, not the relations between people at work or the nature of labour itself.

At a deeper level still their philosophy was to develop the forces of production. Here too they were the faithful inheritors of Marx — or at least one side of Marx, which became the predominant one in his mature writings. The development of the forces of production was, if not the ultimate goal, at any rate the *essential means*, in the sense that everything else would follow as a by-product and that everything else had to be subordinated to it. Men, as well? Men, too, of course. "As a general rule, man strives to avoid labour … man is a fairly lazy animal."[15] To combat this indolence, all means of proven effectiveness must be put to work: compulsory labour — whose character changes completely when it is imposed by a "socialist dictatorship"[16] — and available technical and economic means:

Under capitalism, the system of piece-work and of grading, the application of the Taylor system, etc., have as their object to increase the exploitation of the workers by the squeezing out of surplus value. Under socialist production, piece-work, bonuses, etc., have as their problem to increase the volume of social product, and consequently to raise the general well-being. Those

[13] Ibid., p. 172 [T/E: We have retained the emphasis found in the French, but not in the English, translation.
[14] Ibid., p. 162.
[15] Ibid., p. 133.
[16] Ibid., p. 149.

workers who do more for the general interests than others receive the right to a greater quantity of the social product than the lazy, the careless, and the disorganizers."[17]

This isn't Stalin speaking (in 1939); it is Trotsky (in 1919).

The socialist reorganisation of production during the initial period is inconceivable without some "work obligation" — who does not work does not eat. That is certain. There probably also will be an attempt to standardise the amount of effort furnished by various shops and enterprises, which would require the establishment of certain norms and indices of work. All Trotsky's sophisms about the fact that "free labour" has never existed in history and will not exist until there is full communism should not make anyone forget, however, the crucial question: *Who* establishes these norms? *Who* controls people's work obligations, and *who* punishes those who do not fulfil these obligations? Will it be the organized collectives of labouring people? Or a specific social category, whose function therefore is to manage the work of others?

To manage the work of others — this is the beginning and the end of the whole cycle of exploitation. The "need" for a specific social category to manage the work of others in production (and the activity of others in politics and in society), the "need" for a separate business management and for a Party to rule the State — this is what Bolshevism proclaimed as soon as it seized power, and this is what it zealously laboured to impose. We know that it achieved its ends. Insofar as ideas play a role in the development of history — and, *in the final analysis*, they play an enormous role — the Bolshevik ideology (and with it, the Marxist ideology lying behind it) was a decisive factor in the birth of the Russian bureaucracy.

[17] Ibid., p. 147.

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Cornelius Castoriadis
The Role of Bolshevik Ideology in the Birth of the Bureaucracy
1964

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https://www.marxists.org/archive/castoriadis/1964/bureaucracy.htm
Published: Originally as “Le Rôle de l’idéologie bolchevique dans la naissance de la bureaucratie,” *Socialism ou Barbarie*, 35 (January 1964). Translated into English by Maurice Brinton and published as “From Bolshevism to the Bureaucracy,” Solidarity Pamphlet, 24 [1964?], 18 pp. Brinton, whose added subtitles we retain here within brackets, notes that “the present pamphlet was later translated into Italian (under the title “Dal Bolscevismo all Burocrazia”) und published in 1968 by the Quaderni della Rivoluzione dei Consigli (V. C. Rolando 8/8, Ge-Sampierdarenda). Later in the same year, it was also translated into Swedish (under the title “Bolsjevism, Byråkrati!”) and published by Libertad (Allmänna vägen 6, 41460 Göteborg).”
Transcription: Class Against Class
HTML-markup: Jonas Holmgren

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