

CHAPTER THREE

STATE AND REVOLUTION APPLIED TO THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

The arguments Lenin defends in *State and Revolution* relate, at least formally, to the tactics of a proletarian revolution and the formation of a working class state. Lenin therefore depicts the Paris Commune as a proletarian government, interprets Marx's comments on "people's revolution" as being within the acceptable limits of working class revolution, equates the 1917 Soviets with the Commune form of government, and makes occasional appeals to the middle class democrats to follow the lead of the working class. In this way "proletarian revolution" is given a middle class democratic content, and the dictatorship of the proletariat is defined in terms that Lenin had in 1905 applied only to the "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry".

During the course of the Russian revolution, this attempt to lower the tasks of the working class movement to radical democratic measures took the form of a comprehensive confusion of democratic and socialist tasks (something Lenin had criticized the Commune for in 1905), contradictory positions on formal democracy and revolutionary authority, peaceful and revolutionary tactics, and by a general retreat on the issue of "smashing" the bourgeois state.

A. Petty Bourgeois Democracy or Socialism

Lenin could not, however, directly apply his line on the proletarian state to the Russian revolution since the bourgeois-democratic stage had not yet been completed. He therefore revived his 1905 thesis on the "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" as the next logical and necessary step in the Russian revolution. But with this difference: in 1905 Lenin viewed the democratic dictatorship as only a provisional form of government, as a means to insure a complete victory over autocracy and the establishment of full democratic rights against the compromising tendency of the bourgeois democrats. The democratic dictatorship would perform a strictly bourgeois revolution, clear the way for the most rapid development of capitalism, and thus facilitate the future class struggle between labor and capital. The question as to what would follow the revolutionary democratic dictatorship or what transitional forms would be necessary to pass over to proletarian revolution was left untouched.

In 1917, Lenin viewed the democratic dictatorship as something more, as something not yet socialist, but not entirely bourgeois. Where formerly he had opposed any attempt to embellish the democratic revolution with socialist phrases, he now supplied his own socialist phrases, and consequently provided the theoretical basis for portraying what was actually a middle class democratic revolution as a socialist, working class revolution.

The theoretical inconsistencies and confusion of categories in Lenin's writings throughout 1917 are overwhelming. Lenin's 1905 formulation of the "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" was proposed as a class alliance of the proletariat and the entire petty bourgeoisie whose aim was strictly democratic, i.e. a republic, political liberty, overthrow of the landed aristocracy, etc. A socialist revolution, on the other hand, would require an alliance of the working class and only the poorest

strata of the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie, since it would aim to overthrow all capitalist groups, including the rich peasants and upper urban petty bourgeoisie.

Lenin's 1917 "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship", however, is described at various times in this 1905 fashion, but at other times as "the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasants". By this substitution Lenin was able to empower the democratic dictatorship with quasi-socialist, or at least 'non-bourgeois', characteristics without directly renouncing the distinction between democratic and socialist dictatorships that he had formulated previously.

Through the same sort of theoretical muddling, Lenin adjusted his line on imperialist war and defeatist tactics in order to accommodate the democratic nature of the Russian revolution. Throughout 1914-16, he had advocated defeatism in relation to one's own government in imperialist war, and allowed for revolutionary defencism of the nation only in the event of a proletarian revolution. Only a proletarian dictatorship could in principle attempt to withdraw from imperialist war and rightfully defend itself should peace prove impossible. During 1917 Lenin put forward this same line, but with the addition that a democratic dictatorship was also entitled to revolutionary defencism and could justly pursue the same tactics even though capitalism had not actually been overthrown.

As will be evident from the following citations, Lenin does not reject or revise the old formulations outright. Their definitions are simply allowed to drift towards the demands of the moment. Lenin does not, following Engels' example, "tie his hands theoretically", but leaves them free to fashion a variety of principled-sounding positions to cover every instance.

In one of his first articles following the February revolution and the formation of the Kerensky government, Lenin proposes the establishment of "...a workers' government that relies, first on the overwhelming majority of the peasant population, and farm laborers and poor peasants..." (*Draft Thesis* LCW Vol. 23, p.289) as a means to achieve peace, bread and political liberty. From the context of the article, it is unclear whether this workers' government is to be a socialist government or simply a democratic dictatorship. Lenin urges opposition to the Kerensky government and encourages the workers to "...fight for socialism and peace..." (Ibid. p.288) and "...for a democratic republic and socialism..." (Ibid. p.290). But at the same time Lenin allows for a coalition bourgeois-republican government (i.e. including the Bolsheviks) as a possible solution. The workers are thus urged to support the formation of a Social-Democratic government, but that government is still, at this point, an unknown quantity.

Lenin's *Letters from Afar*, written shortly thereafter, represents a transition from this undefined "workers' government" to a clearer thesis on the "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry".

The first letter in the series calls the Soviets "...the embryo of a workers' government..." and a "...comparatively weak workers' government, which expresses the interests of the proletariat and of the entire poor section of the urban and rural population..." (LCW Vol. 23, p.304). In alliance with the poor peasants and the international proletariat, the Russian workers should proceed "...first, to the achievement of a democratic republic and complete

victory of the peasantry over the landlords...and then to socialism which alone can give the war-weary people peace, bread and freedom..." (Ibid. p.308).

This seems clear enough. Socialism alone can achieve peace and practical liberty, a line that is consistent with Lenin's writings during 1914-16.

In the fifth letter, however, Lenin expands this line to show that it is not, after all, "socialism alone", i.e. the dictatorship of the proletariat, that can conclude peace and national well-being, but only the democratic dictatorship: "...Only such a government, of 'such' a class composition ('revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry')..." can achieve "...a really lasting and democratic peace..." (Ibid. p.340).

Where the first letter differentiates between two phases of the revolution ("the achievement of a democratic republic" and "then to socialism"), and accounts for the fact that a democratic republic and peasant revolution alone are not sufficient to achieve peace and concrete political freedom, the fifth letter in effect abolishes that distinction and 'socializes' the strictly democratic stage. This is achieved, on the one hand, by admitting that a socialist revolution in Russia cannot be won directly, i.e. without passing through the bourgeois-democratic stage, and, on the other, by portraying the democratic revolution as such a powerful 'transition to socialism' that it should be treated as if it were indeed socialist.

This affirmation that the proletarian dictatorship and democratic dictatorship are two separate and distinct things and simultaneous denial that this distinction is really that important is succinctly expressed in Lenin's third letter.

Discussing several radical democratic measures—the formation of a popular militia, merging state and military functions, securing bread and provisions for the masses, etc.—Lenin writes that such steps "...would not yet constitute the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', [but] only the 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the poor peasantry'..." (Ibid. p.330), i.e. they would not constitute socialism, but only democracy.

But, Lenin adds, in a phrase that is meant to free his readers from any sense of principle, "...It is not a matter of finding a theoretical classification. We would be committing a great mistake if we attempted to force the complex, urgent, rapidly developing practical tasks of the revolution into the Procrustean bed of narrowly conceived 'theory' instead of regarding theory primarily and predominantly as a guide to action" (Ibid.). That is to say, do not worry about what sort of revolution is being made, but do make it. This rapidly developing theoretical indifference gains even more momentum the closer the Bolsheviks come to winning power.

After reviving and slightly revising his old thesis on "the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" in *Letters From Afar*, Lenin continued to use it side by side with occasional references to a strictly workers' government.

In his April, 1917, article *The Dual Power*, Lenin states that the spontaneously organized Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies are "...of the same type as the Paris Commune of 1871..." (LCW Vol. 24, p.38). Here Lenin is giving his generous *State and Revolution* interpretation of the Commune, and not his 1905 skepticism of *Two Tactics of Social-*

Democracy. Thus the Soviets are associated with a socialist, workers' government, a form of proletarian dictatorship.

In *Letters on Tactics* of the same month, however, Lenin writes that the Soviets are "...the 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' already accomplished in reality..." (LCW Vol. 24, p.45. By this equation Lenin is able to merge "workers' government" with "workers' and peasants' government" without, however, forcing either classification into an identity crisis. Each can borrow freely from the other, depending on circumstances. The Soviets are thus allowed to be either a form of the dictatorship of the proletariat (which was, after all, Engels' estimate of the Commune), or a form of democratic dictatorship. No narrowly conceived theory here, to be sure.

Lenin's thinking is so elastic, in fact, that he completely forgets the formal strategy that the Bolsheviks had previously pursued. Analyzing the coexistence of the Kerensky government and the Soviets, Lenin states that "...according to the old way of thinking, the rule of the bourgeoisie could and should be followed by the rule of the proletariat and the peasantry, by their dictatorship..." but that now "...we have side by side, existing together, simultaneously, both the rule of the bourgeoisie...and a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry..." (Ibid. p.45-46).

In reality, the "old way of thinking", i.e. *Two Tactics*, did not contrast the rule of the bourgeoisie with the rule of the proletariat and peasantry. It contrasted the rule of tsardom, the autocracy and landed aristocracy, with the rule of the proletariat and peasantry. The democratic dictatorship was to be precisely a form of bourgeois rule, a revolution, not against capital, but against semi-feudal reaction. It was to facilitate, not end, the development of capitalism, and consequently the future class struggle between the bourgeoisie (plus rich peasants) and the proletariat (plus poor peasants). Supposing that the bourgeois-democratic revolution was completed, with or without a democratic dictatorship, the next logical step would then be a socialist revolution.

By abridging this "old way of thinking", Lenin is able to insert a new phase in the revolution, namely, the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry", as something in between the bourgeois dictatorship (the Kerensky government) and proletarian dictatorship, as something not yet socialist, but no longer really capitalist (an idea developed fully in his later *Impending Catastrophe*). Despite his declarations that there is no "third way" between the rule of capital and the rule of labor, Lenin allows for and fosters such a third alternative in this formulation.

In the same article Lenin acknowledges that a purely working class revolution is impossible due to Russia's backwardness and states that he has no intention of skipping over the bourgeois-democratic stage: "...I might be incurring this danger if I said: 'No Tsar, but a workers' government. But I did not say that, I said something else. I said there can be no government (barring a bourgeois government) in Russia other than that of the Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Laborers, Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies... In these Soviets, as it happens, it is the peasants, the soldiers, i.e. the petty bourgeoisie, who preponderate..." (Ibid. p.48.)

Thus the Soviets in one instance are organs of an embryonic "workers' government", and in another organs of a preponderate petty bourgeois government. But in any event, they are

not bourgeois. And this is the most essential idea Lenin must put across in order to rally the workers around petty bourgeois democracy.

In advocating this middle class democratic government, Lenin does not even attempt to establish to what extent or in what proportion the working class, i.e. the Bolshevik (Deputies) should be represented in order to have a definite stake in its defense. It is enough for Lenin that the Bolsheviks share some of the power and are able to convince the Socialist-Revolutionaries (the radical peasant party) and Mensheviks (the radical urban petty bourgeois party) to break with Kerensky. We must emphasize this point since at first sight one might think that by “power to the proletariat” Lenin means a proletarian dictatorship. He does not. All that is implied is that the proletariat share power in a government that is overwhelmingly petty bourgeois.

On the issue of withdrawing from the war, for example, Lenin states in *War and Revolution* that “...if the revolutionary class in Russia, the working class, comes to power, it will have to offer peace. And if our terms are rejected...then that class will stand wholly for war...” (LCW Vol. 24, p.418). The same sentiment is expressed in a speech during the Seventh All-Russia Conference in which Lenin states that “...we shall wage a really revolutionary war only when the proletariat is in power...” (LCW Vol. 24, p.237). And it is even more sharply stated in *Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution*: “...It is impossible to slip out of the imperialist war and achieve a democratic non-coercive peace without overthrowing the power of capital and transferring state power to another class, the proletariat...” (LCW Vol. 24, p.67).

By “overthrowing the power of capital” Lenin does not mean, however, overthrowing capitalism. He simply means eliminating the big bourgeoisie from the government and placing restrictions on them. In an article of the same period, *Our Views*, Lenin writes that if the Soviets (which at the time had a Socialist-Revolutionary and Menshevik majority) took power, it would be “...power of the majority of the people, and that majority consists of workers and poor peasants...” and that therefore “...under such conditions we too would agree to a revolutionary war against the capitalists of any country...” (LCW Vol. 24, p.175).

In the first place, “Power to the Soviets” would not have meant “power to the majority of the people”, but only power to the Deputies, i.e. the S.R.’s, Mensheviks, and Bolsheviks, who set themselves up as representatives of the people. It would have meant power to political tendencies that Lenin had historically struggled against precisely because they were incapable of consistently revolutionary or even revolutionary-democratic views.

Further, supposing for a moment that the Deputies did in fact faithfully represent “the people”, “the people” would have included not just workers and poor peasants, but middle and kulak peasants and a wide range of middle and upper level urban petty bourgeois and intelligentsia, as well as revolutionary democrats from the bourgeoisie. The only common basis among all these strata is, as Lenin pointed out in 1905, simple democracy: a republic, political liberty, land reform and anti-monopoly measures to restrict, but not overthrow, the power of big capital. With such a class alliance, any defencist war effort would have been fought to secure the interests, not of the working class, but of the majority of “the people”, i.e. of the petty bourgeoisie and capitalism.

Thus despite his phrases on behalf of the “working class coming to power”, Lenin is justifying, not defense of a proletarian dictatorship, but a national petty bourgeois crusade, the right of petty capital to protect “its own”, and urges the working class to act as a shock force for that crusade. As stated in his June 1917 *Draft Statement*, “...on principle we have been, and are, in favor of all power passing into the hands of [the Soviets], despite the fact that at present it is in the hands of the defencist Mensheviks and S.R.’s, who are hostile to the party of the proletariat...” (LCW Vol. 25, p.77). Lenin’s argument with the Mensheviks and S.R.’s is simply that they are too close to the big bourgeoisie, and their defencism is therefore too imperialistic. Still, he is willing to share power with them providing that they formally break with big capital, i.e. replace the Kerensky government, and that act in turn would provide the rationale for a purely petty bourgeois nationalist defencism.

These affectionate gestures towards the open middle class democrats were interrupted only when the S.R.’s and Mensheviks consented to the Kerensky government’s suppression of the Bolsheviks in July, 1917. Of a sudden, people with whom Lenin had been willing to share power and even defend in a revolutionary war, who had been faulted only for misunderstanding the nature of imperialist war, dragging their feet on land reform, etc., are now called “...participants in and abettors of counter-revolutionary butchery...” who have “...completely betrayed...” the revolution (LCW Vol. 25, p.177 and p.185).

“Power to the Soviets” was quite acceptable even when it meant power to “the defencist Mensheviks and S.R.’s, who are hostile to “the party of the proletariat” and who were already indulging in the counter-revolutionary butchery of imperialist war. But when that butchery was applied to the Bolsheviks themselves, Lenin boldly declares “...you do not conclude agreements or make blocs with people who have deserted for good to the enemy camp...” (LCW Vol. 25, p.244) and advises that the slogan of “Power to the Soviets” be dropped. (Ibid. p.177)

Actually, the class composition and intention of the Soviets (i.e. revolutionary towards the autocracy, but counter-revolutionary towards the working class) had not changed in the least since the February revolution. In the July anti-Bolshevik suppression, the Mensheviks and S.R.’s simply expressed militarily what they had all along expressed politically, namely, that the working class should be subservient to the petty bourgeoisie, and when any party, even a party of the radical intelligentsia like the Bolsheviks, threatened to stir up the workers, they should be suppressed. But for Lenin this was a complete betrayal of the revolution, since he recognized more than any other political leader that a thorough-going petty bourgeois democratic revolution could be won only if the working class was in the front ranks.

After the failure of the spontaneous workers’ uprising in July (which the Bolsheviks had sought to restrain), the Mensheviks and S.R.’s took a more lenient attitude towards the Bolsheviks in order to enlist their support against the Tsarist Cossacks. Lenin returned the favor by reviving the slogan of Soviet Power and support of a Menshevik and S.R. government on the old terms, i.e. no Kerensky.

The most complete programme for this petty bourgeois democratic government is formulated in Lenin's September, 1917, *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It*. The solution to famine, economic chaos, mass unrest, and the successful execution of the war, Lenin writes, lies in a series of nationalization and control measures that can and should be implemented by a "revolutionary democratic", petty bourgeois government.

The nationalization of the banks, for example, would not benefit the workers, but would be an enormous advantage "...to the mass of peasants and small industrialists..." (LCW Vol. 25, p.332). It would "...lower insurance premiums..." and most importantly "...would enhance the country's defense potential..." by regulating economic life (Ibid. p.335).

The nationalization of the major syndicates would prevent "...the dissipation of national labor..." (Ibid. p.336). Likewise, the enthusiasm and initiative of "...the workers and other employees must be drawn on..." and "...a certain proportion of the profits must be assigned to them, provided they institute overall control and increase production..." (Ibid. p.337). Compulsory association of the medium industrialists and compulsory unionization of labor, in turn, should accompany nationalization of the biggest monopolies. In short, the national economy can be stimulated by, on the one hand, accelerating the development of state capitalism, and, on the other, pacifying the workers via profit sharing.

Where formerly Lenin had called "revolutionary democracy" a "...mere phrase..." (LCW Vol. 24, p.149) meant to "...deceive the people knowingly or unknowingly..." (Ibid. p.563), he now flatters the democrats and urges the workers to ally with them. To be a democrat, Lenin explains to the democrats, means "...reckoning in reality with the interests of the majority of the people and not the minority..." and to be a revolutionary "...means destroying everything harmful and obsolete in the most resolute and ruthless manner..." (LCW Vol. 25, p.333).

Since democrats, according to Lenin, are concerned with the majority, they should not fear nationalization, etc., as these measures would only result in the creation of a state-capitalist monopoly under control of the democrats themselves. Nor should they be afraid of socialism, since "...socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly..." (Ibid. p.358). The creation of a democratic state-capitalist monopoly, Lenin urges, is only a step towards socialism, only "...the threshold of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism there are no intermediate rungs..." (Ibid. p.359).

Previously, Lenin had taught that there were no "intermediate rungs" between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The choice was clear: either capitalism or socialism. Now, however, a new rung has in fact been found—the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry—a 'non-bourgeois' state. But in order to pretend consistency with his earlier writings, Lenin assures his comrades that there are no more intermediate "rungs" between this 'non-bourgeois' state and socialism.

The democratic reforms outlined in *Impending Catastrophe* Lenin declares, will result in a situation that will “...still not be socialism, but it will no longer be capitalism...” (Ibid. p.360). It will “still not be socialism”: applause from the petty bourgeoisie. But it will “no longer be capitalism”: applause from the working class. The democratic dictatorship is, in short, a hybrid in which the class contradictions between the petty bourgeoisie and proletariat, as well as their economic basis, simply evaporate into the warm glow of national unity.

This remarkable phenomenon is particularly fruitful in relation to the war, since not only would Lenin’s democratic measures “...greatly enhance the defense potential, or, in other words, the military might of the country...” but would also at one swoop turn “...the war of conquest into a just war...” (Ibid.). As Lenin elaborates, the “...defense potential, the military might, of a country whose banks have been nationalized is superior to that of a country whose banks remain in private hands. The military might of a peasant country whose land is in the hands of peasant committees is superior to that of a country whose land is in the hands of landowners...” (Ibid. p.361). How, Lenin asks the democratic and patriotic petty bourgeois, can you “...expect mass enthusiasm for the war...” (Ibid. p.363) or “...‘miracles’ of mass heroism...” (Ibid. p.361) unless the war effort can be justified as a war of national defense. And a war of national defense cannot be waged “in principle”, i.e. the workers cannot be rallied for it, unless the big bourgeoisie is restrained via a revolutionary-democratic government.

Lenin’s proposals in *Impending Catastrophe* are in all essentials identical with those given in *State and Revolution*. The former, aimed at the middle class democrats, are presented as only “steps towards socialism”, so as not to alienate the petty bourgeoisie, while the latter, aimed at the politically conscious workers, are presented as truly socialist in themselves. By thus merging or eclectically combining democratic and socialist phrases, Lenin proves himself to be a more orthodox and consistent Marxist in 1917 than he had ever hoped to be in 1905.

None of these measures, however, would actually threaten capitalist relations. They simply rationalize them, make them more efficient, restrain the excesses of big capital, liberate the entrepreneurial enthusiasm of the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie, stir mass initiative, coordinate the workforce, and heighten worker productivity by giving them a ‘say’ in production. It is nothing but a blueprint for national development under the guidance of the democratic and socialist petty bourgeoisie, and it indicates theoretically precisely the path that has actually been taken by all the various People’s and socialist revolutions since 1917.

Despite such open appeals to the S.R.’s and Mensheviks, Soviet power was not established until after the Bolsheviks had won a majority of deputies in Petrograd and Moscow. The Bolshevik majority did not, however, effect the class composition of the programme of the “revolutionary democratic dictatorship”, since Lenin had all along advocated a Soviet government regardless of the relative strength of the Bolsheviks within it.

The contradiction between an ordinary democratic revolution and the near-socialist characteristics Lenin had attributed to it was resolved in October by a bold declaration.

Where previously Lenin had at times modestly referred to the proposed government as being simply "...a democratic-bourgeois, peasant state..." or a "...democratic peasant government..." (LCW Vol. 24, p.195), in October he refers to the accomplished "...workers' and peasants' revolution..." (LCW Vol. 26, p.239) as being indeed "...a socialist revolution..." (LCW Vol. 26, p.332).

Of course, calling something socialist does not always make it so, a point Lenin often emphasized in his earlier polemics with the Right-wing Social-Democrats. In January 1918, Lenin explains his declaration by stating that although "...we are far from having completed even the transitional period from capitalism to socialism...", i.e. although Russia is still capitalist, "...it is our duty to say that our Soviet Republic is a socialist republic because we have taken this road..." (LCW Vol. 26, p.465). And in May of the same year he writes that the term Soviet Socialist Republic "...implies the determination of Soviet power to achieve the transition to socialism, and not that the new economic system is recognized as a socialist order..." (LCW Vol. 27, p.335).

There was nothing recognizable as socialism in the new economic system since there was really nothing new in it except democratic reforms. The socialist content of the revolution thus reduces to the socialist intelligentsia's "duty to say" and "determination", that is, to their good intentions and nothing more.

Typical of Lenin's willingness to reject all but the most flattering theoretical classifications, he does not spell out what measures, specifically, will be necessary to achieve the socialist order other than the state-capitalist plans outlined in *Impending Catastrophe*. In fact, his polemics during the early part of 1918 are devoted, not to the defense of socialist measures, but to the defense of state-capitalism.

"Is it not clear..." he writes in "*Left-wing* Childishness, "...that from the material, economic and productive point of view, we are not yet on the 'threshold' of socialism? Is it not clear that we cannot pass through the door of socialism without crossing the 'threshold' [of state capitalism] we have not reached?..." (LCW Vol. 27, p.342). At this point, all that Lenin is arguing for is controls over the bourgeoisie, not their elimination, for the rationalization of capitalism by the state, and not its abolition. In the same article he cites his recommendations in *Impending Catastrophe*, emphasizing that "...this was written when Kerensky was in power, ...we are discussing not the dictatorship of the proletariat, not the socialist state, but the 'revolutionary-democratic' state..." (Ibid.)

Thus although the revolution is socialist by declaration, in reality it has yet to achieve the material, economic and productive goals of a revolutionary-democratic state. And since the success of state-capitalist rationalization depends especially on economic stability, the Bolsheviks did not plan an all-out, socialist offensive against the capitalist classes, but only sought to blunt any opposition to economic planning and controls by the state.

It was not planning, but objective events, specifically the kulak revolt in the summer of 1918, that forced the Bolsheviks to adopt more radical measures.

In *Renegade Kautsky*, written at the end of 1918, Lenin outlines the stages of the revolution and their respective class basis. The February revolution was, in his view, a bourgeois revolution that united the proletariat and the entire peasantry. The October revolution was socialist, and united the proletariat and the poor peasantry. The October revolution “...carried the bourgeois revolution to its conclusion (LCW Vol. 28, p.301) against the monarchy and the landlord system.

But side-by-side with these assertions, Lenin admits that during October “...the peasants supported us as a whole...” (Ibid.), i.e. the October revolution had the same class basis as February, and that “...having completed the bourgeois-democratic revolution in alliance with the peasants as a whole, the Russian proletariat finally passed on to the socialist revolution when it succeeded in splitting the rural population, in winning over the rural proletariat and semi-proletariat, and in uniting them against the kulaks and bourgeoisie...” (Ibid. p.303).

In this statement, Lenin omits the fact that it was the kulaks, not the Bolshevik Party, who took the initiative in splitting the rural population, and that the Bolsheviks in fact tried to retard class differentiation in the countryside so as to avoid the disruption of civil war. Lenin defends the class unity of the proletariat and entire peasantry during October by stating that an attempt to split the peasantry would have revealed “...a failure to understand that a general peasant revolution is still a bourgeois revolution, and that without a series of transitions, of transitional stages, it cannot be transformed into a socialist revolution in a backward country...” (Ibid. p.304).

The catch phrase that Lenin uses to escape from the contradiction of the October Revolution being both a bourgeois and a socialist revolution is that there is no “Chinese wall” between the bourgeois-democratic and socialist revolutions that transitional stages lead from one to the other. Of course, no one could dispute such a commonplace, which is precisely why Lenin uses a commonplace to avoid disputes. The fact remains, however, that a bourgeois-democratic revolution has a definite class basis and definite economic limits, and a socialist revolution has quite different basis and limits. Lenin attempts to ‘socialize’ the October Revolution by saying it was based on the proletariat and poor peasantry, and that although the economy is not yet socialist, everyone is determined that it would be. At the same time, he must admit that it was not, after all, an alliance of the proletariat and poor peasants, since class differentiation in the countryside had not yet come off. The socialist revolution was therefore in reality only a “general peasant revolution” and thus still a bourgeois revolution. But (the saving grace), the kulak revolt precipitated a rural class struggle, and that, in turn, allowed the October, general peasant, bourgeois, socialist revolution to be transformed into...a socialist revolution. Remarkable.

During the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik), Lenin offered the same general explanation of events, stating that “...in October 1917 we seized power together with the peasants as a whole. This was a bourgeois revolution inasmuch as the class struggle in the rural districts had not yet developed. ...the real proletarian revolution in the rural districts began only in the summer of 1918...” (LCW Vol. 29, p.203). The imitation proletarian revolution, which claimed to be, but was not, based on the proletariat

and poor peasants, was declared in 1917; but the real, authentic proletarian revolution, which was possible only after splitting in the countryside, began in 1918.

But even this “real proletarian revolution” was not as real or as proletarian as Lenin claims. The alliance of the proletariat and poor peasantry, something Lenin admits is “...fundamental for all socialists and without which socialists are not socialists...” (Ibid.), did not carry the offensive against the rural bourgeoisie to its conclusion. The Bolsheviks did not aim to eliminate the kulaks as a class, but simply keep them in line. As stated elsewhere, “...we do not say of the kulaks as we do of the capitalist landowner that he must be deprived of all his property. What we do say is that we must break the kulaks’ resistance to indispensable measures, such as the grain monopoly...” (LCW Vol. 28, p.345). That is, the class struggle must be waged only to that extent necessary to persuade the kulaks to go along with state-capitalism. Thus when Lenin states that “...the struggle against the bourgeoisie in the countryside...is also in the main completed...” (LCW Vol. 29, p.203), he is not speaking of a “real proletarian revolution”, but only forcible restraints on certain bourgeois elements who were interfering with the general petty bourgeois democratic programme. During the New Economic Policy (NEP), these forcible restraints would be exchanged for economic incentives for the kulaks, a move indispensable for the development of a state-capitalist national economy, but not quite the stuff of real proletarian revolution.

Lenin’s ambivalent reasoning on the nature of the revolution becomes even more duplicitous in his later writings.

In October, 1917, he refers to the revolution as a “...workers’ and peasants’ revolution...” (LCW Vol. 26, p.239) and to Soviet power as the “...Provisional Workers’ and Peasants’ Government of Russia...” (LCW Vol. 26, p.251). The revolution is described alternately (and sometimes simultaneously) as being bourgeois or socialist, depending on the peculiar qualifications Lenin makes, but he does not “tie his hands theoretically” with hard phrases until nearly a year and a half after the revolution.

In April, 1919, Lenin finally declares that “...the revolution of October, 1917, established the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia...” (LCW Vol. 29, p.119), and that Soviet power, which formerly had been associated only with a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship, was indeed “...the international, world form of the dictatorship of the proletariat...” (LCW Vol. 29, p.145).

With this formulation, Lenin’s adaptation of socialist phrases to the democratic revolution, initiated in a deliberately muddled and hesitant form in *Letters From Afar*, arrives with unmistakable clarity at its intended destination. The democratic revolution is transformed into a socialist revolution, and the “revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” is transformed into the dictatorship of the proletariat. These transformations, however, do not occur in the real world, but only in the heads of socialist theoreticians whose good intentions and middle class democratic prejudice have got the upper hand.

Although by 1919 Lenin finally achieves this opportunist synthesis, he thereafter lapses into his earlier ambiguity when the need arises.

In the polemic against Trotsky at the end of 1920, for example, Lenin raises an objection to Trotsky's use of the phrase "workers' state" and argues that "...this is an abstraction. ...The whole point is that it is not quite a workers' state. ... for one thing, ours is not actually a workers' state but a workers' and peasants' state. And a lot depends on that..." (LCW Vol. 32, p.24). When Bukharin challenged this remark, Lenin referred him to the minutes of the Eighth Congress of Soviets. The following month, Lenin admitted that he was mistaken, after all, and that according to the Eighth Congress, Russia did indeed have a "workers' state". But, Lenin adds to minimize his mistake, "...anyone who reads the whole of my speech will see that this correction makes no difference to my reasoning or conclusions..." (LCW Vol. 32, p.48). Exactly!

To be fair, however, we should note that throughout this time Lenin was knee-deep in telegrams, dispatches, meetings, inner-Party struggle, forging the basis of state-capitalism, and so on, and so it is natural that he might occasionally forget what sort of state he was running and which classes were actually in power.

Lenin's theoretical relapse continued throughout the following year, as shown by his comments at the Third Congress of the Communist International in June 1921.

At the Congress, Lenin observes that "...the peasantry in Russia has certainly gained more from the revolution than the working class. ...From the standpoint of theory, this shows, of course, that our revolution was to some degree a bourgeois revolution..." (LCW Vol. 32, p.489). Since this was precisely the point that the Right Social-Democrats had emphasized in order to restrain the radicalism of the Bolsheviks, Lenin replies that "...Naturally, a revolution which does not expropriate the big landed estates, expel the big landowners or divide the land is only a bourgeois revolution and not a socialist one. But we were the only Party to carry the bourgeois revolution to its conclusion and to facilitate the struggle for the socialist revolution..." (Ibid.).

Lenin does not admit here that a revolution that does expropriate the big landed estates, expel the big landowners and divide the land is also only a bourgeois revolution. Nor does he admit that such a complete, total bourgeois revolution facilitates the struggle for socialism only to the extent that the most rapid development of capitalism carries with it the most rapid aggravation of class antagonisms. What is significant in his remarks is that he implies that the struggle for a socialist revolution has yet to be accomplished, a theoretical step backwards from his earlier proclamation that the socialist revolution had already been achieved.

In an article written two months later, Lenin asks if the October Revolution was in fact a bourgeois revolution, and responds that "...of course it was, insofar as our function was to complete the bourgeois-democratic revolution, insofar as there was as yet no class struggle among the 'peasantry' (LCW Vol. 33, p.22). But, he adds, it was not simply bourgeois, since it developed the working class, dissolved the Constituent Assembly and created Soviet

power. These were all measures “... for the socialist, proletarian revolution...” (Ibid.). Curiously, Lenin does not repeat his previous line about the “real proletarian revolution” beginning in the summer of 1918, evidently because by 1921 he viewed the episode with the kulaks as simply an excess of the early revolution. Thus there is no indication as to whether the socialist, proletarian revolution is past, present or future. It has a pleasant, timeless quality, free from the “Procrustean bed of narrowly conceived ‘theory’”.

Lenin makes his last forthright statement on the subject during the fourth anniversary of the October Revolution.

“The direct and immediate object of the revolution in Russia...”, he writes, “...was a bourgeois-democratic one...” (LCW Vol. 33, p.51). But this is by no means a confession of a repentant socialist opportunist. In a defensive tone Lenin criticizes the Right Social-Democrats who are “...still talking an incredible lot of nonsense about the relation between the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the socialist (that is, proletarian) revolution. The last four years have proven to the hilt that our interpretation of Marxism on this point, and our estimate of former revolutions were correct. We have consummated the bourgeois-democratic revolution as nobody has done before. We are advancing towards the socialist revolution consciously, firmly and unswervingly, knowing that it is not separated from the bourgeois-democratic revolution by a Chinese wall...” (Ibid.).

However, it was the Bolsheviks, not the open reformist Social Democrats, who perpetuated the most “incredible lot of nonsense “about the relation between democratic and socialist revolutions. The Right Social Democrats did not want anything more than a bourgeois-democratic revolution, and so were content to call a spade a spade. The Left Social-Democrats did want something more, a more radical middle class democratic revolution, but spontaneously retreated from (and really had no conception of) a real working class dictatorship. In order to rouse the working class for more radical measures, then, the democratic programme was phrased in socialist terms, even to the extent of calling the democratic revolution a socialist revolution. This was the theoretical task Lenin undertook from early 1917 onwards, and the manifold inconsistencies and contradictions in his logic are the necessary and inevitable consequence.

B. Constituent Assembly or Soviet Power

The issue of a popular constituent assembly, or parliament, has been central to every bourgeois-democratic revolution. The constituent assembly is the means that, at least formally, organizes the ‘rule of the people’. Elected on the basis of universal (or sometimes limited) suffrage, representatives of the various social classes are empowered to conduct the business of state on behalf of their constituents and determine public policy by the principle of majority rule.

In reality, however, this strictly formal democracy has very little to do with the actual exercise of state power. The practical political life of all modern democracies shows that it is not the “will of the majority” that rules the state, but the will of the most economically powerful classes. The power of parliament is limited to public debate, proclamations, and minor affairs of legislation, finance and social reforms, while influence over the real mechanism of state power—the police, military, courts, etc.—is exercised behind the scenes.

As we have seen, Marx and Engels emphasized this hypocritical character of democracy when it was a matter of making the most general and abstract criticisms of the state. When it was a matter of concrete political tactics, however, they viewed the parliamentary apparatus as a viable means to extend and secure Social Democracy’s struggle for power. As is evident from his writings up to December 1917, Lenin inherited these mixed emotions on parliamentarism, and did not theoretically reject the parliamentary form of government as a possible workers’ state until well after the October Revolution.

In their actual class composition, the Soviets in 1905 and 1917, like the Paris Commune before them, were organs of middle class democratic rule, embracing both the working and middle classes. To have been organs of working class rule, they would have had to include, in addition to Commune-type reforms (combination of executive and legislative functions, popular election and recall, workmen’s wages for officials, a proletarian militia, and so on), severe restrictions on the middle class and particularly on the socialist intelligentsia. The 1905 and 1917 Soviets, however, which Lenin viewed (until April, 1919) as a form of “revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry”, willingly included the petty bourgeoisie, and, in combination with the intelligentsia’s leadership of the Russian Communist Party, were dominated and directed by that class.

Supposing for a moment that the Soviets had never been portrayed as working class bodies, as a form of proletarian dictatorship, but had been recognized simply as organs of middle class democracy, it is theoretically self-evident that they were far superior to the ordinary parliamentary system, and in fact should have replaced that system, as a means of popular, i.e. middle class, influence within the framework of capitalism. The desire for cheap and efficient government, which Lenin cites in *State and Revolution* as a main attraction for the petty bourgeoisie, the right to recall officials, a modestly paid bureaucracy, a popular militia, and so on, are all typical middle class aspirations which the Soviet form, at least initially, is capable of realizing.

Lenin’s belief in the parliamentary republic as the most suitable form of bourgeois government and the most logical framework for the development of socialism was so strong, however, that he persistently viewed the Soviets as only a transitory, provisional form of government, a means to secure, not to replace, the establishment of parliament. It was not until January 1919, that Lenin finally posed the question “...’soviet power’ or the bourgeois parliament...” (LCW Vol. 28, p.431) as a choice between two distinct systems, and declared against the parliamentary form.

During the 1905 revolution, Lenin's writings on the "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship" and Soviets relate strictly to a provisional form of revolutionary government whose task it would be to set up a parliamentary republic.

In a letter to Lunacharsky of October, 1905, Lenin states that "...we must fight in a revolutionary way for a strong parliament, and not in an impotent 'parliament' for a revolution..." (LCW Vol. 34, p.353). Here Lenin only juxtaposes two kinds of parliament: an 'impotent parliament', i.e. one set up by the Tsar to overthrow the revolution, and a 'strong parliament', i.e. one set up by the revolution to overthrow the Tsar. By a 'strong parliament', Lenin has in mind a body that, like Engels' comments on the Erfurt Programme, concentrates "real power" in its hands. He thus confuses formal democracy with the real power of state.

As for the Soviets, Lenin's 1905 analysis places them as a revolutionary means to a democratic end. With some caution, Lenin writes that "...I may be wrong, but I believe that politically the Soviets of Workers' Deputies should be regarded as the embryo of a provisional revolutionary government..." (LCW Vol. 10, p.21) and urges the Party to recruit representatives from all revolutionary-democratic parties into the Soviets. The relation between parliamentarism and the Soviets is clearly stated in Lenin's recommendation that the programme of the Soviet government should include the "...convocation of a national constituent assembly that would...have full authority and strength to establish a new order in Russia..." (Ibid. p.25).

In another article of the same period, Lenin writes that "...one cannot conceive of any consistent and logical path..." to the completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution "...save that of calling a constituent assembly of the whole people..." (LCW Vol. 10, p.62). In line with this reasoning, no call is given to actually organize Soviets where they do not already exist. Lenin treats them as temporary, spontaneous mass formations, and simply urges the Party to participate in them, draw in other revolutionary democrats, and use them as a means to harvest the true fruit of the revolution: a parliament.

After the defeat of the 1905 revolution, Lenin summed up the Soviets as "...embryonic organs of revolutionary state power that united the proletariat with the revolutionary democrats..." (LCW Vol. 10, p.252), and which, despite their "...rudimentary, spontaneous, amorphous and diffuse character, in composition and in activity..." (Ibid. p.243) represented the revolutionary authority of the people. The operative words here are "embryonic" and "revolutionary". Lenin makes no attempt to show theoretically how these embryonic organs could develop into mature instruments of power, or what role these revolutionary, i.e. transitional, instruments would place once the revolution was an accomplished fact.

Some eleven years later, on the eve of the 1917 revolution and revival of the Soviets, Lenin writes that the 1905 Soviets were "...a peculiar mass organization..." that "...began more and more to play the part of a provisional revolutionary government..." (LCW Vol. 23, p.248). That is, they were a historical curiosity. Lenin only regrets that the moments of the Soviets were "...all too brief, the 'victories' were too weak, too isolated..." (Ibid.) to provide much in

the way of historical analysis. In reality, it would not have made much difference. The parliamentary form had been around for centuries, and Lenin, after more than twenty years as a socialist theoretician, had not got to the bottom of it yet.

With the outbreak of the Russian revolution in the spring of 1917, Lenin continued to view the Soviets as transitional formations. In April, 1917, Lenin equates the Soviets with the “revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry”, that is, with a provisional bourgeois-democratic form of government, and repeats his 1905 thesis that a Soviet government should convene the parliament (LCW Vol. 23, p.340).

The convocation of a constituent assembly, Lenin declares, “...but by whom? ...I should be glad to have the Constituent Assembly convened tomorrow, but it is naive to believe that Guchkov will call it. All the clatter about forcing the Provisional Government to call the Constituent Assembly is empty talk, a pack of lies. ...The Soviet of Workers’ Deputies is the only government which can call that assembly...” (LCW Vol. 36, p.440). The Kerensky Government will not convene parliament, since the big bourgeoisie has no immediate interest in popular representation. Therefore only the Soviets can convene it. Later in his speech, Lenin comments that “...practice and the revolution tend to push the Constituent Assembly into the background...” (Ibid. p.441) but he himself rescues it from obscurity in his subsequent writings.

Following the repression of the Bolsheviks in July, Lenin warned that the Constituent Assembly could be called only if the people opposed the Cadets (the official bourgeois party) and withdrew support from the S.R.’s and Mensheviks. Otherwise the Assembly would only be a talk-shop (LCW Vol. 25, p.198).

Speaking of the pre-July Soviets, Lenin writes that “...It goes without saying that the Soviets could and should have taken over state power in full. Pending the convocation of the Constituent Assembly there should have been no other power in the state but the Soviets. Only then would our revolution have become a truly popular and truly democratic revolution...” (LCW Vol. 25, p.229). Thus after five months of experience from which to assess the Soviets as representative bodies, Lenin still viewed them only as a vehicle for delivering a formal parliament.

Lenin does not at this point state outright that the Constituent Assembly will simply replace the Soviets, nor does he outline any system of coexistence between the two forms. But clearly one or another arrangement is implied. Either the Constituent Assembly is invested with state power (such as it can be under a parliamentary republic, i.e. formally), in which case the Soviets, as a provisional government, lose their reason for being. Or, a parallel system of representation is established, with both the Constituent Assembly and Soviets sharing the duties of state. Lenin’s reasoning is so vague on this issue, in fact, that he later allows for, and at different times advocates, both solutions, as well as a third solution of simply dissolving the Constituent Assembly.

As the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets in October, 1917, Lenin submitted a resolution “...to establish a provisional workers’ and peasants’ government, to be known as the

Council of People's Commissars, to govern the country until the Constituent Assembly is convened..." (LCW Vol. 26, p.262). The Council, based on the Soviets, is thus declared to be, not **the** government, but only a provisional government. And its rule is set for a definite period, i.e. until the Constituent Assembly is convened. From this it would appear that it is the task of the Constituent Assembly, not the Soviets, to determine the more permanent features of the new republic.

Russia might have developed along more traditional parliamentary lines, and the Soviets might simply have been abandoned, had it not been for the fact that the Constituent Assembly was elected prior to October and therefore had a Cadet, Right S.R. and Menshevik majority. To invest a parliament with that composition with state power would have meant an end to the more radical reformist measures the Bolsheviks wished to introduce. Lenin therefore sought some way to neutralize the Constituent Assembly while retaining Bolshevik control over the state. Where formerly the Soviets had been viewed only as a means to enact and legitimize the Constituent Assembly, Lenin now declared that the Constituent Assembly should be a means to enact and legitimize Soviet power.

In his December, 1917, *Thesis on the Constituent Assembly*, Lenin defends his earlier demand for a parliament as being "...perfectly legitimate..." (LCW Vol. 26, p.379), since it represented the highest form of democracy in a bourgeois republic. But, Lenin continues, since the Soviets are an even higher form of democracy, it would be a step backward to invest power in a parliament. If that is the case, then the question remains as to why, **after** the higher, Soviet form of democracy had already achieved power, Lenin had treated it as a provisional government waiting on the convocation of an official parliament. Lenin could not deal with the facts of the matter, since to do so would have revealed that the Bolsheviks had aimed for a Constituent Assembly all along and opposed it only because of its peculiar, i.e. Cadet, S.R. and Menshevik, composition.

The additional reasons Lenin gives for not investing in the Constituent Assembly show that "higher forms of democracy" did not in fact play such a pivotal role. First, Lenin argues, since the S.R.'s split into left and right wings during and after the October Revolution, the candidates elected in mid-October were no longer truly representative of their constituents. Second, the civil war raging throughout the country would make formal elections for a new Constituent Assembly extremely difficult. And finally, a valid Constituent Assembly could be convened only if a) there were new elections, i.e. after the civil war, and b) the Constituent Assembly recognized Soviet power as the rightful state power.

After offering these muddled excuses for liquidating or at least subordinating the Constituent Assembly, Lenin took the matter to the assembled 'constituents' and declared that it was the parliament, not the Soviets, that was to be provisional.

In January, 1918, Lenin submitted a *Declaration of Rights of the Working People* to the Constituent Assembly which stated that since "...there can be no place for exploiters in any government body..." i.e. not Cadets, Right S.R.'s nor Mensheviks, therefore "...power must be invested wholly and entirely in ...the Soviet..." (LCW Vol. 26, p.425). Thus it was not

principle, but circumstance, that posed the alternatives “Soviet power or Constituent Assembly” and answered in favor of the former.

Ironically, in the same resolution Lenin offers the Constituent Assembly a deal in which it will be allowed to coexist with the Soviets providing its tasks be “...confined to establishing the fundamental principles of the socialist reconstruction of society...” (Ibid.). That is, it would be allowed to continue as a talk-shop, and nothing more. Also ironic is the fact that Lenin is willing to entrust the “establishment of fundamental principles” to the S.R.’s and Mensheviks. One of their first tasks, no doubt, would be to decipher Lenin’s principles on the relationship between parliamentary and Soviet power.

When the Constituent Assembly rejected Lenin’s generous resolutions, the Bolsheviks responded first by declaring any attempt to transfer power from the provisional Soviet government to the Constituent Assembly to be counter-revolutionary (LCW Vol. 26, p.428). They did not, of course, confess their own proposal to do so in October and then by simply abolishing the Constituent Assembly outright.

When Kautsky attacked the Bolsheviks for dissolving the Constituent Assembly and charged them with violating democracy, Lenin replied that Kautsky was overlooking the class content of the Assembly and that “...to say that the Constituent Assembly should not have been dispersed is tantamount to saying that the fight against the bourgeoisie should not have been fought to a finish...” (LCW Vol. 28, p.268). With this response Lenin shows that it was not primarily **which form** of government was more suitable, but only which form had the more suitable class composition at the moment. To lend his argument an air of principle, Lenin adds that the Bolsheviks had always advocated the Soviet form as a superior system, but again he himself overlooks the class content of having advocated the Constituent Assembly in October.

Only the formation of Soviets on an international scale magnified the issue sufficiently for Lenin to finally see that there was indeed a choice “in principle” to be made between the Soviet and parliamentary forms.

When in late 1918 Soviets were formed in Germany and Austria, Lenin wrote with some hesitation “...apparently the chief question of the revolution in Germany and Austria now is: Constituent Assembly or Soviet Government? ...” (LCW Vol. 28, p.368). In January, 1919, Lenin with more confidence writes “...‘Soviet power’ or the bourgeois parliament... That is how world history has formulated the question...” (LCW Vol. 28, p.431). Lenin must credit “world history”, since clearly no socialist theoretician, least of all Lenin himself, did anything to formulate or clarify the issue.

At the First Congress of the Communist International two months later, Lenin attacked the Two and a Half International, and in particular the German Independent Socialists, for advocating a “...ludicrous attempt to combine the Soviet system, i.e. proletarian dictatorship, with the National Assembly, i.e. bourgeois dictatorship...” (LCW Vol. 28, p.467). Such an attempt, Lenin states, “... utterly exposes the paucity of thought of the yellow socialists and Social-Democrats, their reactionary petty bourgeois political outlook,

and their cowardly concessions to the irresistibly growing strength of the new, proletarian democracy..." (Ibid.).

In order to cover for his own paucity of thought on the issue, Lenin explains that "...in our revolution we advanced along the path of practice, and not of theory. For example, formerly we did not raise the question of the Constituent Assembly from the theoretical side, and we did not say we did not recognize the Constituent Assembly. It was only later, when the Soviet organization had spread throughout the country and had captured political power, that we decided to dissolve the Constituent Assembly..." (Ibid. p.472). That is, when the German Independents propose a coexistence of Soviets and parliament, it is sheer stupidity, reactionary petty bourgeois political outlook and cowardice. When the Bolsheviks propose the same thing, it is simply "advancing along the path of practice", i.e. something entirely principled.

In reality, Lenin **had** all along raised the question of the Constituent Assembly from the theoretical side. Declaring the Soviets to be a provisional government until the Constituent Assembly could be convened was, after all, a theory that gave primacy to the Constituent Assembly. Proposing a coexistence of the Soviets with the Assembly as a talk-shop was also a theory. And dissolving the Assembly due to its peculiar class composition was yet another theory. The problem was not lack of "theories", but lack of principled and consistent theories, a situation that was not changed in the least by finally posing the question—Soviet or parliament—nor by criticism of people who were politically much closer to Lenin than he wished to admit.

In later speeches, Lenin referred to the idea of combining Soviet and parliamentary bodies as deserving "...nothing but ridicule..." (LCW Vol. 29, p.27), as being a "...mockery of common sense..." (LCW Vol. 29, p.150), and as a "...brilliantly philistine idea..." (LCW Vol. 29, p.313). But what can we say of an intellectual who allows himself to mock common sense with brilliantly philistine ideas, and who, when "world history" exposes those ideas, attempts to insulate himself by shifting the blame on others. By April, 1919, Lenin was so well insulated that he was able to declare with clear conscience that "... not a single party in our country accepted so monstrous an idea as a combination of workers' councils and a Constituent Assembly..." (LCW Vol. 29, p.145). True, the Cadets, S.R.'s and Mensheviks did in fact reject such a combination. But the fact remains it was Lenin who proposed it in the first place.

C) Parliamentarism or Revolutionary Overthrow

In Marx's and Engels' view, peaceful parliamentary tactics and the tactics of violent overthrow were not mutually exclusive, but complimentary depending on circumstance. In countries with no parliamentary apparatus, a violent revolution would be required to

establish one. In parliamentary countries, on the other hand, violence would be necessary **only** if the bourgeoisie resisted the will of a growing Social-Democratic parliamentary majority.

As shown especially by Engels' later works, the *Manifesto's* programme for an electoral road to power and legislative measures against capital, as well as phrases on behalf of violence if necessary, is consistent throughout their writings and this general programme, in turn, provided the basis for the strategy of the Center and Left wings of the Second International. Only the Right wing Social Democrats rejected the use of violence outright and pursued peace at any price. For the Center and Left, revolutionary tactics were defended as an option, especially for pre-parliamentary conditions. But even then, following the example of Marx and Engels, such tactics were viewed as defensive measures that would be unnecessary if the state submitted to 'the people'.

The parliamentary path to power is based on several assumptions which are difficult at best to defend theoretically and which are in case after case refuted by practical political life.

First, it must be assumed that in addition to the mass of industrial and common workers, a significant portion of the middle class (enough to constitute, with the workers, a numerical majority) can be won to a socialist programme. In practice, the middle class can be won over only when a significant portion of that programme is **not** socialist, e.g. when, as in the case of every socialist and communist party, middle class intellectuals themselves draft the programme.

Second, it must be assumed that (supposing for a moment that an authentic workers' party did exist) the electoral machinery is a suitable means to organize, and is capable of expressing the will of, the allied workers and petty bourgeoisie. In practical life, because it requires the least effort and commitment and yet provides a false sense of political involvement, the electoral apparatus in democratic countries is one of the best means to **disorganize** the working class and maintain its political impotence.

Third, supposing that a parliamentary majority is won, it must be assumed that control of parliament means control of the state, either through direct parliamentary control over the military, or, as Engels wrote, moral influence over a majority of the troops. But, as is obvious theoretically and as the history of even the freest democratic republics have shown, the bourgeoisie does not entrust the true power of state to representative institutions, constitutional restraints notwithstanding. As for moral influence, there is no reason to believe that an electoral majority implies a military majority, especially given that in times of social upheaval the ruling class cultivates a material influence over the military and isolates untrustworthy elements.

And finally, in the event of an armed confrontation, it must be assumed that the working masses, who all along have only been organized to show up at the polls periodically, will be able to rise to the occasion of civil war and put down the resistance.

The parliamentary path is strategically offensive in “getting out the vote”, patient propaganda, mustering of forces for the decisive election, and so on, and strategically defensive in terms of real, i.e. armed, conquest of power. From the standpoint of middle class democratic sentiment, this is entirely understandable since armed struggle requires arming the working class and that, in turn, entails certain dangers. For the middle class democrats, arming the working class is a last resort, and should be undertaken only when political influence over the workers is confidently secured. Otherwise the workers may begin executing, in addition to big-time bourgeois, ‘innocent’ petty bourgeois of every description (Lenin cites the “shameful” shootings of middle class specialists by rambunctious miners in 1922 (LCW Vol. 33, p.194).

Despite good intentions and revolutionary fervor, every socialist intellectual instinctively knows and instinctively acts upon the fact that it is much safer, from the standpoint of self-preservation, to advocate ballots, not bullets. And it is this class instinct that accounts for the fact that the activity of nearly all Marxist and Marxist-Leninist parties and groups revolves around civic, or at least trade union, elections, general propaganda, showy demonstrations and only occasional ‘polite’ confrontations with the police, instead of around the systematic training and arming of a working class militia.

Before 1917, Lenin shared Engels’ views on the parliamentary path for democratic countries, and, since Russia was under an autocracy, recognized that a violent revolution would be necessary to bring it to the parliamentary stage. As he declared in 1905, “...we must fight in a revolutionary way for a strong parliament...” (LCW Vol. 34, p.353), and that parliament, in turn, would be a means to facilitate a higher struggle between labor and capital. In letters to Inessa Armand during the winter of 1916, Lenin discusses Engels’ preface to *The Class Struggles in France* as well as Kautsky’s *Neue Zeit* expose on the editorial cuts Liebknecht made on it, and, while critical of the editing, does not oppose Engels’ thesis on building a parliamentary majority as a precondition for revolution (LCW Vol. 35, p.269 and p.272). In one of his early articles on the world war, Lenin even defends Engels’ comments in *Socialism in Germany* to the effect that in the process of winning a parliamentary majority the Social Democrats should not move offensively until the bourgeoisie “breaks legality”, i.e. violates the bourgeois constitution. These citations show that prior to 1917 Lenin was familiar with and agreed with Engels’ most overtly reformist formulations on parliamentarism, and it is only natural that he would continue to operate from them once the revolution began.

Support for the convocation of a Constituent Assembly by a provisional Soviet government was in itself a parliamentary bias. Clearly, with the Soviets as a more direct, democratic form of representation, there was no reason to support a more traditional parliament. But Lenin was so imbued with parliamentary prejudice that he could not grasp this point until 1919. In the meantime, he pursued parliamentary politics in the only arena then available: the Soviets.

The struggle the Bolsheviks waged within the Soviets was in every respect identical to the ordinary struggle Social Democrats had long waged in ordinary parliaments, i.e. the struggle to muster votes. As long as the Bolsheviks were allowed to run candidates and

freely propagandize their viewpoint in the Soviets, Lenin was content to promote the Soviets as the most viable instrument for taking power. In his April, 1917, *Letters on Tactics*, Lenin writes that he has in mind a democratic, not socialist, government and that "...I very definitely reduced the question to one of a struggle for influence within the Soviets..." (LCW Lenin Collected Works Vol. 24, p.48) as the means to achieve it. But aside from stockpiling Bolshevik Deputies within the Soviets, Lenin offers no other contingency plans for taking power.

The needs for such plans became evident when the Soviets agreed to Kerensky's suppression of the Bolsheviks in July. Just how deeply Lenin had invested in a peaceful cultivation of Bolshevik influence in the Soviets and how unprepared he was to deal with any other possibility is shown by his resigned declaration that "...all hopes for a peaceful development of the Russian revolution have vanished for good..." and his empty appeal for "...a victory for the workers' armed uprising..." (LCW Vol. 25, p.177) against both the Kerensky government and the S.R.-Menshevik Soviets.

The call for a workers armed uprising was an act of desperation, since the Bolsheviks themselves had done nothing to lay the groundwork for it. In fact, the Bolsheviks had attempted to restrain the more militant workers from taking any extra-parliamentary action prior to July. As Lenin later wrote, the Party merely made the mistake of considering "...the general situation in the country less revolutionary that it proved to be..." (LCW Vol. 25, p.313) and had too much faith in the peaceful development via Soviet politicking.

As soon as the opportunity presented itself, however, Lenin proposed a return to peaceful parliamentary competition providing that the S.R.'s and Mensheviks broke with the Cadets and allowed the Bolsheviks to propagandize. If the S.R.'s and Mensheviks agreed to this, Lenin promised that the Party would make no attempt to take power by force (LCW Vol. 25, p.306-07). In late September, Lenin wrote that the "... peaceful struggle of parties within the Soviets..." (LCW Vol. 25, p.367) would be insured if the Soviets took power and dispersed the Kerensky government.

By pursuing this strategy, Lenin sought to build a parliamentary majority of Bolshevik Deputies within the Soviets that, in addition to giving the Bolsheviks a legal status as the dominant government party, would retain the S.R.'s and Mensheviks as allies. Armed struggle would then be necessary only to suppress the already dwindling support for the Kerensky government and intra-petty bourgeois conflict could be avoided.

Once the Bolsheviks had won that parliamentary majority, Lenin proposed that the Soviets take power immediately and not wait for the Constituent Assembly (LCW Vol. 26, p.19), but as we have seen this maneuver was necessitated only by the fact that the Constituent Assembly elections had produced a Right-wing majority.

If the Bolsheviks had won a majority within the Assembly as well as the Soviets, they might have been willing, as shown by Lenin's equivocating on the issue, to wait on a more traditional, constitutional assumption of power. But although Lenin wanted elements of the S.R.'s and Mensheviks as allies, he could not entrust the transfer of power to an

Assembly they dominated. He therefore declared that "...only an alliance of the Bolsheviks with the S.R.'s and Mensheviks, only an immediate transfer of all power to the Soviets would make civil war in Russia impossible (LCW Vol. 26, p.36). In other words, this nasty and possibly very risky business of armed struggle could be avoided altogether if the S.R.'s and Mensheviks agreed to a joint venture with the Bolsheviks, a venture that, after all, did not amount to much more than anti-monopoly legislation and land reform. People who previously had been described as "...participants in and abettors of counter-revolutionary butchery..." (LCW Vol. 25, p.185) were thus now urged to become participants in and abettors of peaceful social reformism.

It was only after the S.R.'s and Mensheviks rejected Lenin's compromises on the Constituent Assembly issue and launched a civil war against the Bolsheviks that Lenin was finally forced to abandon the idea of peaceful parliamentarism.

At a conference of trade unions in June 1918, Lenin concluded that the experience of the revolution shows "...the correctness of the words which always distinguish the representatives of scientific socialism, Marx and his followers, from utopian socialists, from petty bourgeois socialists, from the socialist intellectuals and the socialist dreamers..." (LCW Vol. 27, p.465). The latter, according to Lenin, think "...that it is possible to introduce socialism by persuasion...that the majority of the people will be convinced, and when they become convinced the minority will obey; that the majority will vote and socialism will be introduced..." (Ibid.). But, on the contrary, the revolution has shown clearly "...the furious resistance of the exploiters..." (Ibid.).

Thus Lenin's break with peaceful parliamentarism at this time is based, not on a comprehensive criticism of his former views or the parliamentary attitude of Marx and Engels, but solely on the practical experience of the civil war, which he then adapts to a favorable interpretation of Marxism. Had Lenin been truthful, he would have had to admit that it was the "socialist dreamers" Marx and Engels who proposed that the strength of the revolution rest on a parliamentary majority, who thought it possible to simply reimburse the bourgeoisie, and who left the working class movement defenseless to the "furious resistance" by belittling the need for an armed offensive.

Although Lenin later formulated even harsher criticisms of peaceful parliamentary tactics, he continued to satisfy his democratic appetite on other related issues.

During June, 1917, for example, Lenin discussed the question of how to deal with the big bourgeoisie and, drawing an analogy from the French Revolution, proposed that "...the 'Jacobins' of the twentieth century would not guillotine the capitalists—to follow a good example does not mean copying it. It would be enough to arrest fifty to a hundred financial magnates...for a few weeks to expose their frauds ... Upon exposing the frauds ... we could release them, placing the banks, the capitalist syndicates, and all the contractors 'working' for the government under workers' control..." (LCW Vol. 25, p.57). The capitalists, then, were only to be subjected to a few weeks' harassment, and then back to business as usual under a consolidated and more efficient state-capitalism. Only the stupidity of the

bourgeoisie in rejecting this arrangement necessitated a civil war and with it more left leaning phrases on Lenin's part.

But even the civil war did not completely purge Lenin of his respect for formal democracy. On the issue of suffrage for the bourgeoisie, in particular, Lenin persistently viewed the suspension of rights as a strictly tactical necessity that could easily be repealed in more tranquil times.

In his August, 1918, *Letter to American Workers*, Lenin writes that "...when it is a matter of overthrowing the bourgeoisie, only traitors or idiots can demand formal equality of rights for the bourgeoisie..." (LCW Vol. 28, p.74). But as his following statements show, disfranchisement for the bourgeoisie is to be in effect **only** during the period of overthrow.

Polemizing against Kautsky two months later, Lenin defensively declares that in *State and Revolution* "... I did not say anything at all about restricting the franchise..." and that "... the question of depriving the exploiters of the franchise is a purely Russian question, and not a question of the dictatorship of the proletariat in general..." (LCW Vol. 28, p.255).

This latter point is elaborated during a speech on the Party programme in the spring of 1919 in which Lenin explains that "...we do not at all regard the question of disfranchising the bourgeoisie from an absolute point of view, because it is theoretically quite conceivable that the dictatorship of the proletariat may suppress the bourgeoisie at every step without disfranchising them..." (LCW Vol. 29, p.184). To drive home the point, Lenin repeats, "...This is theoretically quite conceivable. ... while it is essential to suppress the bourgeoisie as a class, it is not essential to deprive them of suffrage and of equality..." (Ibid. p.185)

In another article on the Party programme, Lenin proposes that the implementation of the programme and withdrawal of foreign interventionist troops may make possible "...a situation where the proletarian state will choose other methods of suppressing the resistance of the exploiters and will introduce unrestricted universal suffrage..." (LCW Vol. 19, p.119).

These statements are not simply overtures to pacify the bourgeoisie and "pure democracy" fetishists of the Second International. On the contrary, they accurately reflect Lenin's belief that the bourgeoisie should be contained, not eliminated, that the Jacobin example is too extreme, and that, providing the capitalists cooperate ('work', in quotes, as Lenin says) with developing the national economy, they should be treated as ordinary citizens and equals to the proletariat.

Even when, as in 1920, Lenin took a more critical stand against formal democracy and declared that "...all talk about equality of rights is nonsense..." (LCW Vol. 30, p.510), not only in relation to the bourgeoisie but for sections of the peasantry and proletariat as well, he did not renounce formal equality **in principle**. The dictatorial measures the Bolsheviks employed were in every case implemented defensively, in response to one or another provocation, and if the bourgeoisie and renegade middle class elements had understood

and acted on the fact that the Bolsheviks were bound to consolidate, not socialism, but a superior mode of capitalism, it might have saved everyone a lot of trouble.

Lenin's most astute views on parliamentarism as a whole were not formulated until mid-1919. In a speech at that time Lenin states that "...great revolutions, even when they commence peacefully, as was the case in the great French Revolution, end in furious wars which are instigated by the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie. Nor can it be otherwise, if we look at it from the point of view of the class struggle and not from the point of view of philistine phrase-mongering about liberty, equality, labor democracy and the will of the majority, of all the dull-witted, philistine phrase-mongering to which the Mensheviks, S.R.'s and all these 'democrats' treat us. There can be no peaceful evolution towards socialism..." (LCW Vol. 29, p.363).

One could congratulate Lenin for finally arriving at this forthright statement of class reality, were it not for the fact that in his list of dull-witted, philistine phrase-mongers he omits the **chief architects** of the peaceful parliamentary path to power. It was Marx and Engels, after all, who with the benefit of the history of the French Revolution, the revolutions of 1848, and the Paris Commune nonetheless fostered belief in a parliamentary assumption of power and who side-stepped the inevitability of "furious wars". It was Engels in particular (only, it should be noted, because he outlived Marx) who erected the "will of the majority", i.e. a Social-Democratic parliament, as the barricade behind which the working class was to fight. And it was Lenin who accepted this "philistine phrase-mongering" in its entirety until civil war pushed him to the left.

In subsequent articles throughout 1919 and 1920, Lenin's criticism of parliamentarism becomes sharper and more comprehensive.

In a short article on the state written in July, 1919, he cites Switzerland and the United States as democratic countries in which "...every attempt of the workers to achieve the slightest real improvement in their conditions is immediately met by civil war..." (LCW Vol. 29, p.487). Interestingly, Lenin observes that since those countries have smaller standing armies the bourgeoisie always "hires soldiery" to suppress strikes, and suppresses them with "ruthless severity" (Ibid.). With this statement Lenin inadvertently invalidates his *State and Revolution* defense of Marx and Engels' allowance for a peaceful, parliamentary path in countries with undeveloped military-bureaucratic states. Lenin further comments that in the United States and Switzerland, "...the power of capital is everything, the stock exchange is everything, while parliament and elections are marionettes, puppets..." (Ibid.). But given that this basic relationship was as true in the late 1800's as in the early 1900's, Lenin should have explained why Marx and Engels' parliamentarism was 'understandable' and 'historically justified' while Kautsky's was not.

In *Tasks of the Third International* of the same month, Lenin expanded his critique to the issue of suffrage. Responding to the Right-wing Social Democrats' charges against the Bolsheviks for not abiding by the Constituent Assembly elections, Lenin writes "...Comical pedants! They fail to understand that voting within the bounds, institutions and customs of bourgeois parliamentarism is a part of the bourgeois state machinery that has to be broken

and smashed... They fail to understand that when history places the dictatorship of the proletariat on the order of the day it is not voting, but civil war that decides all serious political problems..." (LCW Vol. 29, p.510).

This point is elaborated in an October address to the Italian, French and German communists that constitutes a covert refutation of Marx and Engels' views on suffrage. "Only scoundrels or simpletons...", Lenin declares, "...can think that the proletariat must first win a majority in elections carried out under the yoke of the bourgeoisie, under the yoke of wage-slavery, and must then win power. This is the height of stupidity or hypocrisy; it is substituting elections, under the old system and with the old power, for class struggle and revolution..." (LCW Vol. 30, p.58). Only, he continues, "parliamentary cretins", "pedants", "living corpses" or "cunning tricksters" could invest in elections "...to ascertain whether they have the sympathy of the majority of the working people..." (Ibid.). On the contrary, "...real life and the history of actual revolutions show that quite often the sympathy of the majority of working people' cannot be demonstrated by any elections..." (Ibid.), but is shown instead by Party growth, Soviet representation, success of a significant strike, success in civil war, etc. Thus according to Lenin, suffrage is not even a "gauge of the maturity of the working class" as Engels observed, and it is certainly no means to set the date for the revolution as Engels openly declared in his later works.

But instead of going against the authority of Marx and Engels, and consequently, against the authority of the socialist intelligentsia as a whole, Lenin pretended that his more penetrating criticisms were what Marx and Engels had taught all along.

In December, 1919, for example, Lenin wrote that "...in mockery of the teachings of Marx, those gentlemen, the opportunists, including the Kautskyites, 'teach' the people that the proletariat must first win a majority by means of universal suffrage, then obtain state power by the vote of that majority, and only after that, on the basis of 'consistent' (some call it 'pure') democracy, organize socialism..." (LCW Vol. 30, p.263).

The proletariat, Lenin explains, must have the majority on its side, but "...to limit that winning to polling a majority of votes in an election under the rule of the bourgeoisie, or to make it the condition for it, is crass stupidity, or else sheer deception of the workers..." (Ibid. p.265). A parliamentary majority as an instrument to win power is an illusion because working people under capitalism are incapable "...of acquiring the high degree of class consciousness, firmness of character, perception and wide political outlook that will enable them to decide, merely by voting, or at all events, to decide in advance ...that they will follow a particular class or a particular party..." (Ibid. p.266). The opportunists are only inventing "...nursery tales about the proletariat under capitalism being able to 'convince' the majority of the working people and win them firmly to its side by voting..." (Ibid. p.268). On the contrary, the working class can win the majority "...only with the aid of an instrument like state power..." (Ibid. p.272), **after** it has overthrown the bourgeoisie. The proletariat, "...even when it constitutes a minority of the population...is capable of overthrowing the bourgeoisie..." because the workers' economic and organizational strength "...is far greater than the proportion it represents of the total population..." (Ibid.).

Although Lenin could not bring himself to admit it, these criticisms constitute a decisive break with Marxism on the question of taking state power, since it was Marx and Engels who initially formulated every proposition he refutes. It was Marx and Engels who, despite occasional phrases to the left, fostered belief in suffrage as “one of the sharpest” weapons for organizing the working class, who viewed it as a means to win over the middle class, who equated “winning the battle of democracy” with the seizure of state power, and who discounted the likelihood of armed struggle on the basis of parliamentary strength. It was thus not the opportunists who were mocking the teachings of Marx and Engels, but Lenin himself.

As a consequence of his growing disillusionment with parliamentary politics, Lenin advised the emergent communist parties not to allow splits over the question of electoral work. Participation in elections was still useful for propaganda purposes and renouncing it outright was a mistake, but, as he wrote to Sylvia Pankhurst in August, 1919, participation was, after all, a “...partial, secondary question...” (LCW Vol. 29, p.562). The new communist parties should be careful not to alienate anti-parliamentary workers, since their hatred of bourgeois politics was understandable.

By the spring of 1920, however, Lenin began to recover from his fits of anti-parliamentary insights. His “*Left-wing Communism*” of April, 1920, is devoted, in part, to proving the necessity of “...disintegrating parliamentarism from within” (LCW Vol. 31, p.80), a phrase reminiscent of Engels’ remarks on the German Social-Democrats’ successes in his preface to *The Class Struggles in France*. And at the Second Congress of the Communist International in July, 1920, Lenin states that “...it is only as a member of the bourgeois parliament that one can, in the given historical conditions, wage a struggle against bourgeois society and parliamentarianism...” (LCW Vol. 31, p.253). To support his argument, Lenin explains that “...theory will have no effect on backward masses; they need practical experience...” (Ibid. p.254). Lenin does not bother explain, however, what terrific value **voting** will have as mass “practical experience”, or how this view relates to his earlier thesis that the backward masses will be won, not by voting under the bourgeoisie, but **after** the working class takes power by revolutionary means.

Thus within a year’s time, electoral politics is rescued from its secondary status and placed once more in the front line of socialist tactics.

D. “Smashing” the Old State Apparatus

The question of “smashing” is complicated by the fact that prior to 1917 Lenin did not support, and by implication denied, Engels’ judgment of the Paris Commune as being the dictatorship of the proletariat, and thus did not appreciate the Commune’s democratic reforms as being a qualitatively different form of state.

Although he was familiar with Marx's 1871 letter to Kugelmann and *The Civil War in France*, Lenin did not incorporate "smashing" into his 1905 line. His call in *Two Tactics* for the "...forcible demolition of the obsolete political superstructure..." (LCW Vol. 9, p.128) and the creation of a new, more democratic superstructure is based, not on "smashing" in particular, but on the general relationship between the economic base and politics. And the 1905 Soviets, as we have seen, were viewed, not as a permanent state system in themselves, but only as a means to deliver a more traditional parliamentary superstructure suited to the needs of the democratic revolution.

During 1917, however, Lenin began to combine the notion of "smashing" with his earlier thesis on the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry", and then, as outlined in *State and Revolution*, theoretically merged these concepts with the dictatorship of the proletariat. By this process, the proletarian dictatorship and the "smashing" necessary to attain it was given a strictly democratic-reformist content and the dividing line between democratic and socialist revolutions was effectively erased.

Lenin's logic was further muddled by the fact that although he began to view the Soviets as a new form of state, he simultaneously defended a Constituent Assembly as a more permanent organ of power once the revolution was secured. In his writings during and after 1917 these categories engage in a promiscuous cohabitation which produce the most perverse theoretical results.

Initially, the Commune-type measures Lenin proposed were characterized as features of a democratic state. In his March, 1917, *Letters From Afar*, Lenin writes that his proposals only constitute "... the 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasantry'..." and "...do not yet constitute socialism..." (LCW Vol. 23, p.329). This is true, Lenin explains, because they only "... concern the distribution of consumption, not the reorganization of production..." (Ibid.).

And that is precisely the point. None of the measures introduced by the Commune to democratize the state, nor any of the measures so succinctly expressed in *Impending Catastrophe*, fundamentally effect the capitalist basis of production.

Thus it is possible to "smash" the old state apparatus from top to bottom, introduce a more representative, Soviet, form of government, pay government officials only workers' wages, abolish the standing army, etc., without smashing capitalism. In the end, all that is "smashed" is the state excesses of the big bourgeoisie, excesses that constantly engender resentment in the middle class and which that class would gladly do away with if only someone would show them the way.

At a Party conference in mid-1917, Lenin proposed that the Soviets take power "...not for the purpose of building an ordinary bourgeois republic, nor for the purpose of making a direct transition to socialism. This cannot be. ...The Soviets must take power in order to make the first concrete steps towards this transition..." (LCW Vol. 24, p.241) via nationalization, a state bank, etc. The Party programme should therefore be revised to

formulate "...a demand for a democratic proletarian-peasant republic...and not for a bourgeois parliamentary republic..." (Ibid. p.278).

Evidently Lenin did not think that the coexistence of the Soviets and a Constituent Assembly would constitute a bourgeois parliamentary republic since, in his view, the bourgeoisie would already be eliminated from the government.

As for the economic impact of a democratic proletarian-peasant republic, Lenin admits that "...nationalization of land is a bourgeois measure, it does not exclude capitalism, nor does capitalism exclude it, but the blow it will deal to private property will be a heavy one..." (Ibid. p.306).

In reality, however, nationalization is only a heavy blow to a **particular kind** of private property, i.e. monopoly ownership. Private property in the means of production (excluding land), in the possession of the final product, in exchange, and so on, escapes any beating at all and in fact is facilitated by nationalization, which is precisely why capitalism does not exclude it. Nationalization limits certain forms of big capital; it **liberates** petty capital. But since Lenin wishes to promote his programme in the working class, he emphasizes only what the workers will find most attractive: "the blow it will deal to private property will be a heavy one".

By the time *Impending Catastrophe* was written in September, Lenin had elevated the measures of the revolutionary-democratic state to a much high stage. A measure like universal labor conscription, for example, "...will still not be socialism, but it will no longer be capitalism..." (LCW Vol. 25, p.364). This is hard to imagine, especially coming from a man who taught for so long that there was no third way between capitalism and socialism that either the bourgeoisie ran things, or the workers would. As we have seen, these 'non-bourgeois' measures were even more promising than Lenin had hoped, and delivered, not just a revolutionary-democratic state, but also the dictatorship of the proletariat itself.

In an article shortly thereafter, Lenin declares that "...'Power to the Soviets' means radically reshaping the entire old state apparatus..." (LCW Vol. 25, p.367). Rearranging the state, though, would prove much more difficult than Lenin imagined, despite his good intentions and anti-bureaucratic phrases. Given the class structure of the Party leadership, the inability of the Bolsheviks to consistently implement even Commune reforms was a historical inevitability.

The first major retreat from radically reshaping the state involved the use of the old bureaucracy.

In *State and Revolution*, Lenin proposed following the model of the Commune is streamlining the old bureaucracy and reducing the salaries of government officials to the level of workers' wages. As soon as the majority of the citizenry took an active part in government functions, the bureaucracy would become increasingly unnecessary and simply fade away.

By early 1918, however, Lenin stated that workers' control and accounting over the state apparatus was not realistic at the time and that in order to function it would be necessary to hire the old bourgeois specialists and bureaucrats at high salaries. Lenin regretfully announced that "...clearly, this measure is a compromise, a departure from the principles of the Paris Commune and of every proletarian power..." and that it "...not only implies the cessation—in a certain field and to a certain degree—of the offensive against capital...it is also a step backward on the part of our socialist Soviet state power..." (LCW Vol. 27, p.249). Although compensating measures, in particular the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, were implemented to police the bureaucracy, these in turn became too bureaucratic to fulfill their mission.

This departure from the reformist principles of the Paris Commune was given added momentum by Lenin's advise that the high salaries of the middle class professionals should be supplemented by a "comradely atmosphere" providing they did not work directly against the state. In response to a letter from a bourgeois specialist, for example, Lenin writes that "...the author demands that the intellectuals should be treated like comrades. He is right. We demand that too..." (LCW Vol. 29, p.232). Such collaboration was rationalized on the plea of "...mutual understanding and friendship between workers by hand and brain whom capitalism kept apart..." (LCW Vol. 29, p.119). "Workers by brain", however, are not workers at all. They are in class position and by inclination wholly middle class, and their "separation", i.e. position above, the working class is not enforced by an abstract "capitalism", but precisely by their own desire to make an easy living and avoid "work by hand". But Lenin is willing to accept these people as highly paid "workers" providing that they do their business for the state and avoid any middle class excesses that might aggravate the working class and thus create unnecessary class hostility.

As for combining legislative and executive functions, a Commune measure which in Lenin's view would eliminate the talk-shop atmosphere of traditional parliamentarism, Lenin discovered that even the Soviet structure was prone to red-tape and bureaucracy. Lenin notes that a "...petty bourgeois tendency to transform members of the Soviets into 'parliamentarians', or else into bureaucrats..." (LCW Vol. 27, p.273). That should have been no surprise, given that the Soviet Deputies were elected from "the people", that the petty bourgeoisie comprised the bulk of "the people", and that those who gravitate to elective office in such conditions are not usually the most conscientious, but the most careerist.

Compounding this problem was the fact that, as Lenin laments at the Eight Party Congress, the tsarist bureaucrats "...began to join the Soviet institutions and practice their bureaucratic methods...to assume the coloring of Communists and, to succeed better in their careers, to procure membership cards of the Russian Communist Party..." (LCW Vol. 29, p.183). As Lenin states later, "...it is natural...that all the worst elements should cling to the ruling party merely because it is the ruling party..." (LCW, Vol. 30, p.186). Lenin could have added that it is just as natural that, since the middle class intelligentsia heads the ruling party, it would be difficult for it to tell bad petty bourgeois from good.

Ironically, in "*Left-wing Communism*", in which he defends participation in parliament as a matter of principle, Lenin also complains of the "...constant revival of absolutely all the

negative traits peculiar to bourgeois parliamentarism..." among the "...Soviet engineers, Soviet school teachers and the privileged, i.e. the most highly skilled and best situated, workers at Soviet factories..." (LCW Vol. 31, p.115). Workers are thus urged to participate in parliament, but not become addicted to it.

As for engineers, school teachers and labor aristocrats, hanging a "Soviet" prefix on them in no way negates their class position, their desire to reinforce their privileged status above the mass of workers, nor consequently their political maneuvering via the "negative traits peculiar to bourgeois parliamentarism". Lenin's criticism is really quite pointless, since it amounts to blaming the petty bourgeoisie for acting like...petty bourgeois.

The abolition of the standing army and police, perhaps **the** most important measure for an efficient reformist "smashing", was also suspended shortly after the revolution. The outbreak of civil war, in fact, demanded consolidation and heightened discipline of the army, as well as the need for a political police to eliminate counter-revolutionaries. The most that was achieved was a limited democratizing of the armed forces, with the election of superior officers by the troops. Under Trotsky's leadership, however, terror and capital punishment were used to maintain discipline in the ranks of the Red Army. The new state, like the old, thus had at its disposal "special bodies of armed men", a source of power more akin to traditional bourgeois states than to the more consistent petty bourgeois democracy of the Commune.

In the end, the only Commune measure to be actually implemented was the right of recall of public officials, a reform common to many ordinary bourgeois-democratic states. But even this right was restricted, due to the process of indirect elections from lower to higher Soviet bodies.

To account for this embarrassing lack of "smashing", Lenin in 1921 termed the new state a "...workers' state with bureaucratic distortion..." (LCW Vol. 32, p.48). The real distortion, however, was the term "workers' state".

Only in his last works did he finally admit that "...we have been bustling for 5 years trying to improve our state apparatus... This bustle created the impression that we were doing something, but in effect it was only clogging up our institutions and our brains..." (LCW Vol. 33, p.489), and that, with the exception of the Foreign Affairs Commissariat, "...our state apparatus is to a considerable extent a survival of the past and has undergone hardly any serious change. It has only been slightly touched up on the surface, but in all other respects is a most typical relic of our old state machine..." (LCW Vol. 33, p.481).

One could suppose it is to Lenin's credit that he could admit even this much. But it would have been considerably more to his credit if he had drawn the obvious conclusion that, with so little "smashing" going on, with the old apparatus essentially intact, and with so much "slightly touching up" with socialist phrases, perhaps the working class had not really been in power all along.

E. The Class Content of the Communist Movement

Historically, the fundamental contradiction in every socialist movement has been between the middle class ideologists, on the one hand, who initiate and define theoretically the tasks and direction of the movement, and the working class rank and file, on the other, who are organized to follow this leadership to the ultimate aim of working class emancipation.

This contradiction is, in turn, based on two very practical, and for the working class, very unfortunate, facts of life, which have in every case resulted in the subordination of the socialist-minded workers to the socialist intelligentsia.

First, the spontaneous struggle of the working class is invariably a trade union struggle, a struggle to improve its economic and social conditions under capitalism, but which in no way attempts to overthrow capitalism outright. The fact that this struggle may at times be accompanied by near-socialist phrases, with bitter resentment towards the factory bosses, or even with armed confrontations does not change its essentially reformist nature. Nor does the fact that, due to the incredible corruption of the trade union bureaucracy, workers are often forced to struggle against both the trade unions and the companies. Any struggle, no matter how militant, which does not attack the actual power base of the capitalists, i.e. the state, and specifically the armed might of the state, can at the most achieve only slight modifications of the system. To overthrow it requires a great deal more.

But even the most embittered workers, those who empathize with the plight of their fellow workers and whose class hatred has driven them towards the commitment necessary for a serious and conscientious struggle, are by and large unable to formulate the tasks necessary for it on their own.

To do so requires a comprehensive understanding of world history, a theoretical view of the interests and activity of every social class, propaganda skills, organizational ability, and unencumbered time in which to put this knowledge to use. In short, it requires the sort of academic training and economic freedom characteristic of the middle class intelligentsia. As a general rule, industrial and common, i.e. unskilled, workers simply do not have the leisure time and intellectual training necessary to independently research and formulate an original understanding of class struggle. And that is why every worker who has been exposed to or striven towards class consciousness relies, not on original research, but on theoretical works already at hand: socialist newspapers, Marx's *Capital*, Lenin's *What is to be Done*, *State and Revolution*, and so on.

The theoretical understanding of even the most politically advanced workers is thus based on the theoretical understanding of the socialist intellectuals, and is consequently tainted to a greater or lesser extent with middle class opportunism.

And second, however dedicated and well-intended particular socialist intellectuals may be, even the very best have proven unaware and unable to overcome their own pervasive middle class prejudice sufficiently to develop theories that consistently conform to the objective requirements of the working class movement.

Subjectively, they have committed themselves to the cause of working class emancipation and the overthrow of class society. Objectively, they are spontaneously attempting to win the working class to the side of the petty bourgeoisie, with the aim of securing their own class position over the workers. And, because their ability to do so depends first and foremost on their ideological monopoly over the politically active workers, all socialist intellectuals have a stake in defending the authority of Marxism as a consistent working class ideology. This authority justifies, among other things, the leading and legitimate role of the socialist intelligentsia itself.

As early as the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels rationalized their own role within the working class movement by declaring that "...in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour...a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole..." (MECW Vol. 6, p.494).

It is not surprising that no one challenges this basic proposition; certainly not the intellectuals, who are trying to impress the workers, and certainly not the workers, who are too busy being impressed. At the most, socialist intellectuals will in their polemics accuse one another of being petty bourgeois, too intellectual, not sufficiently proletarian in outlook, etc., but none will admit to or understand their actual class position.

In a polemic against Right-wing Social Democrats in 1879, Marx and Engels established two criteria for the legitimate migration of intellectuals to the working class.

First, in order to be useful "...these people must bring real educative elements into it..." and second, "...they should not bring any remnants of bourgeois, petty bourgeois, etc., prejudices with them but should whole-heartedly adopt the proletarian outlook..." (MESW Vol. 3, p.93). But an intellectual that whole-heartedly adopts the proletarian outlook and convinces himself and others that he has actually done so overlooks the fact that what is known as "the proletarian outlook" was formulated by **other** intellectuals, and that as long as the intelligentsia is to be its own judge, there can be no objective standard.

Marx and Engels thus judged Bernstein; Lenin judged Kautsky; Stalin judged Trotsky; Mao Tse Tung judged Khrushchev; Enver Hoxha judged Mao Tse Tung; and so on. In their intense competition for influence in the working class, the accusation of being a petty bourgeois intellectual is one of the cardinal insults, and yet it is an unintended admission that the middle class intelligentsia dominates the movement as a whole.

Being from the intelligentsia himself, Lenin naturally adopted Marx and Engels' thinking on this question.

In an article written in the later part of 1905, Lenin described the general relationship between workers and intellectuals as being that “...the intelligentsia is good at solving problems ‘in principle’, good at drawing up plans, good at reasoning about the need for action—while the workers act, and transform drab theory into living reality...” (LCW Vol. 10, p.38). The intellectuals draw up the theoretical plans; the workers implement them. Or, more to the point, the petty bourgeoisie leads, the workers follow.

Lenin, unlike many other socialist theoreticians, constantly urged workers to take a more active part in the movement, and in particular advocated the development of working class intellectuals who could share the Party’s theoretical work. The local Party committees were overwhelmingly composed of intellectuals, and despite the fact that the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party was officially a workers’ Party, Lenin had to fight the committees for a greater working class representation.

During 1905, Lenin wrote to a Party intellectual urging him to “...by all means accept workers on the Committee, to the extent of one-half at least...” (LCW Vol. 34, p.299). His reasoning for this measure, however, is shaded by his remark that “...the Mensheviks will try their damndest to discredit the congress in the eyes of the workers by saying: there are no workers present...” (Ibid.).

Shortly thereafter, Lenin wrote to the Odessa Committee complaining that “...not a single worker writes to *Vyperyod*. This is a scandal...” (LCW Vol. 34, p.307). Eleven years later, Lenin was still complaining about the lack of worker committeemen, and recommended that Party writing and secret work “...not be entrusted to the intelligentsia alone. Certainly not. It can and must be done by the leading workers...” (LCW Vol. 35, p.235).

It should have occurred to Lenin that if after a decade and a half of Party work the leading workers were still not active at the upper levels, perhaps the problem was not reticent workers, but the intellectuals who wished to keep things in their own hands.

As long as the advanced worker trusts and respects the socialist intellectual, the intellectual will always have the upper hand, will be better formulated, more articulate, have a greater store of historical knowledge to draw on, etc. And the advanced worker, out of modesty or intellectual intimidation, will in general go along, knowing that even if he “studies, studies, studies”, he will always be a step behind.

Working class enrollment in the Russian Party did not accelerate until 1917 and after, but since the leading positions were still staffed by the intelligentsia, this influx alone was not sufficient to proletarianize the Party.

In addition to workers, the Party also attracted left-wing elements from the S.R.’s and Mensheviks, ousted elements of every description, and, as cited above, bureaucrats and professionals from the old state apparatus.

The turn of these elements towards the ruling Party resulted in so many opportunist excesses that by 1921-22 Lenin demanded a Party purge and the establishment of stricter conditions for Party membership.

Where formerly Lenin had spoken favorably about unity with the Left S.R.'s and Mensheviks, he now demanded the purge of "99/100ths" of the ex-Mensheviks who had joined the Bolsheviks after 1918 (LCW Vol. 33, p.40). In a letter to the Politburo in December, 1921, Lenin proposed a probation of one and a half years for workers, "...regarding a person a worker if he worked at least ten years in large-scale industry as a ordinary wage-worker..." (LCW Vol. 33, p.138), and three years for everyone else. By March, 1922, Lenin had lowered the probation for industrial workers to six months, but maintained one and a half years for other workers, two years for peasants and Red Army men, and three years for others (LCW Vol. 33, p.254).

As for the quality of workers the Party had been recruiting, Lenin writes that "...there is no doubt that we constantly regard as workers people who have not had the slightest real experience of large-scale industry. There has been case after case of petty bourgeois, who have become workers by chance and only for a short time, being classified as workers..." (Ibid.). Elsewhere he complains that "...very often those who go into the factories are not proletarian; they are casual elements of every description..." (LCW Vol. 33, p.252). The Party must therefore "...define the term 'worker' in such a way as to include only those who have acquired a proletarian mentality from their very conditions of life..." and those who are in the factories "...from ulterior motives..." (LCW Vol. 33, p.257). As shown by Zinoviev's opposition to stricter conditions for Party membership, however, it was extremely difficult for the Bolshevik leadership to distinguish between real and imitation workers, given the natural affinity of the intelligentsia to its own kind.

Thus after more than twenty years of Party existence and more than three years of exercising state power, even the Party rank and file was not truly working class.

Lenin admits that "...there is no doubt that judged by the bulk of its present membership our Party is not proletarian enough..." and that consequently "...the proletarian policy of the Party is no determined by the character of the membership, but by the enormous individual prestige enjoyed by the small group which might be called the Old Guard of the Party..." (LCW Vol. 33, p.256-57).

The "Old Guard of the Party", i.e., Lenin, Stalin, Bukharin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and others, including Trotsky, was really only an inner circle of middle class intellectuals. In class terms, ideologists from the petty bourgeoisie determined the "proletarian" character of the party.

To forestall ideological splits within the Old Guard, Lenin later recommended that the Central Committee be increased, with new members being drawn from "...people closer to being rank and file workers and peasants..." (LCW Vol. 36, p.597). But given the "enormous individual prestige" of the intellectuals, their greater formulation and political influence,

Lenin's proposal would in fact only insure a greater audience for the inevitable power struggle among the top intellectuals.

The emerging communist parties in other countries and the creation of the Third International to coordinate their activities developed along exactly the same class lines. Unskilled workers composed less than a quarter of the leadership of the Communist International (See Lazitch & Drachkovitch: Biological Dictionary of the Comintern, Hoover Institute, 1973)

In "*Left-wing Communism*", Lenin writes that small commodity producers, in particular the peasantry, "...surround the proletariat on every side with a petty bourgeois atmosphere, which permeates and corrupts the proletariat, and constantly causes among the proletariat relapses into petty bourgeois spinelessness, disunity, individualism, and alternating moods of exaltation and dejection..." (LCW Vol. 31, p.24). True, the middle class surrounds the working class and corrupts it with its own narrow striving. But the most dangerous source of middle class influence lies not with the 'innocent' small commodity producer, who, after all, is neither especially articulate nor influential, but with the socialist intelligentsia, which not only surrounds the workers, but aggressively seeks to lead them.