

II

The Russian Revolution: an ideology in power

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The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 marked the beginning of the global conflict between communism and capitalism that was to dominate the politics of the twentieth century and redraw the map of modern ideologies. On the mainstream left a bitter schism developed between gradualist 'Western' social democracy and revolutionary 'Eastern' communism. On the peripheries a host of splinter groupings emerged whose identities revolved around their conflicting interpretations of the Soviet experience. Socialism was, hereafter, organisationally and ideologically fractured: at war with itself.

The revolution and the Soviet experience also became, of course, the Other for many ideologies of the right and a cautionary tale for their seminal thinkers. The lapse into authoritarian or totalitarian practices was variously attributed to the pretensions of socialist states to eliminate the free market economy (Hayek 1976), their contempt for the civilising restraints of the rule of law (Friedrich 1954; Schapiro 1972) or their reckless pursuit of messianic patterns of thought that lie deep within the Western intellectual tradition (Talmon 1961; Popper 1980; Walicki, 1995).

It is clear that for both left and right the fate of revolutionary Marxism and that of the Russian Revolution were closely entwined. This chapter concerns itself with the manner in which the Bolsheviks redefined revolutionary Marxism in the twentieth century. It examines some of the disputations that surrounded the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917 and the theories that were developed to justify the state-building process that then ensued. It is the condensed story of an ideology coming to power, legitimating a unique state formation and, finally, imploding as an explanatory or justificatory system of ideas.

Could a socialist revolution in Russia be justified in Marxist terms?

There were two revolutions in Russia in 1917. The first occurred in February. It was largely spontaneous and supported by virtually all sections of the populace. In brief, the appalling management of the war with Germany and the consequent privations suffered by the people had become intolerable. The dynasty of the Romanovs was abruptly terminated by a largely bloodless popular uprising led by the workers of Petrograd. When the troops called out to suppress the huge street demonstrations went over to the insurgents, the Tsar abdicated. Power in the state was assumed by a group of aristocratic and middle-class politicians hitherto prominent in the Duma (which the Tsar had been obliged to convoke following an earlier revolution in 1905). The Duma had been merely a consultative body with no control of the budget or the ministry. Now regenerated as an executive Provisional Government it set itself the tasks of more effectively organising the war effort, feeding the populace and placating the increasingly radical demands of the urban workers and the land hunger of the peasants, as well as introducing democracy and civic freedoms to Russia for the very first time. It became apparent that to attempt to deal with all these tasks simultaneously was not possible.

The position of the Provisional Government was, from the outset, compromised by the existence of another centre of power and authority – the soviets (Russian for ‘councils’). Workers’ soviets had emerged in the revolution of 1905 primarily to coordinate the economic and political strikes that came close to overthrowing the Tsar. They were revived in February 1917 as the principal vehicles of worker organisation and expression (Anweiler 1974, pp. 97–143). Soldiers’ and sailors’ soviets were rapidly formed and, crucially, they merged their activities with the workers’ soviets. At the head of this vibrant and often chaotic network of debating and deliberating bodies stood the Petrograd soviet. Most of the principal leaders of the main socialist parties sat on its executive and in the eyes of millions they had a greater legitimacy and authority than the unelected members of the Provisional Government.

It is undeniable that, had they so desired, the soviet leaders in Petrograd could simply have assumed power on the day they (and the Provisional Government) came into existence. As the year progressed, and especially after July, there were insistent calls, from the insurgent populace and from the soldiers, that the soviet leadership should take the power that was offered to them. They constantly refused. Russia, they insisted, was not in Marxist

terms ripe for a socialist revolution. The slogan 'All power to the soviets' was, according to the Menshevik Statement of July 1917, 'a dangerous one' threatening to divide the revolutionary forces. There could be no separate peace and no fomenting of anti-capitalist sentiment: 'our immediate aim [is] to help the state in its struggle against the economic chaos' (Ascher 1976, pp. 98–9). The Mensheviks (generally considered to be the orthodox Marxists) and Socialist Revolutionaries (or SRs, a mainly peasant party) supported the war, called for order and discipline and became increasingly identified with the unpopular policies of the Provisional Government.

The Mensheviks argued that Russia had only just overthrown three centuries of Romanov autocracy; she was just at the threshold of a bourgeois democratic revolution. Elections for a Constituent Assembly were in the offing, civic rights and the rule of law were just emerging and the country was immersed in a debilitating war of defence against Germany. The nation would not lightly forgive adventurers who, in this critical situation, threatened its unity by counselling a civil war for socialism. In the Menshevik view, such people would assuredly be adventurers, for the good reason that they flouted the exacting conditions that Marx had specified in the matter of deciding whether conditions were ripe for a socialist revolution.

There were, in the first place, 'objective conditions' having to do with the development of productive forces. Since socialism presumed an end to material scarcity, it could only be securely based upon an extensive and advanced industrial system. This meant, in turn, the refinement of what Marx termed the 'forces of production' – machines and technology and the buildings that housed them and the communications networks that they required to exchange materials, goods and labour. In Marx's account of history, the development and refinement of productive forces are always progressive and so long as social, economic and political conditions allow such development, there could be no prospect of revolution. 'No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself' (Marx and Engels 1962, vol. I, p. 363). Manifestly, Russia had not reached the point where capitalism had exhausted its progressive potential.

Just as importantly, Marx had specified the maturation of certain 'subjective conditions' having to do with the consciousness and organisation of the class that was destined to accomplish the socialist revolution – the proletariat. The minimal definition of this class was that they shared a common

relationship to the ownership of the means of production – they were all non-owners and they were obliged to sell their labour power. This common designation made them a class ‘in themselves’ but not ‘for themselves’. For the class to emerge as historical actor, it had to be capable of articulating its *general* interests (as distinct from local, trade or gender interests). Therefore, it had to be organised as a distinct political party, because ‘every class struggle is a political struggle’ (Marx and Engels 1962, vol. I, p. 42). A lengthy period of democratic experience would be necessary to prepare the proletariat for power. It was, in the view of the Mensheviks, adherence to the restraints that these conditions enjoined that *defined* a Marxist in Russia. The existence of a power vacuum in a volatile situation was no warrant for a Marxist to attempt a seizure of power. On the contrary, it behoved Marxists to counsel restraint and to invoke a self-denying ordinance until such time as the conditions for a genuine majoritarian and conscious advance to socialism had properly matured. The alternatives, the Mensheviks fervently believed, were likely to issue in authoritarian violence exercised against the whole Russian people.

The soviet movement was both a product of, and an actor in, the extraordinary radicalisation of social and political attitudes that occurred in Russia in 1917. The fall of the Romanov dynasty saw, coincidentally, the collapse of the social power of the nobility and the gentry. Their economic power, too, was rapidly eroded by peasant expropriations of their estates. In the towns the workers were increasingly unprepared to accept the authority of their bosses. There was an escalating ‘plebian war on privilege’ in which ‘the popular term *burzhooi*... was used as a general form of abuse against employers, officers, landowners, priests, merchants, Jews, students, professionals or anyone else well dressed, foreign looking or seemingly well-to-do’ (Figs 1997, pp. 522–3). A considerable factor promoting this radicalisation was, of course, the Bolshevik Party, especially Lenin.

Lenin had been a central figure in the Marxist revolutionary movement for more than twenty years prior to 1917, both as an activist and as a theorist. In 1903 he was instrumental in splitting the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party into two sections: Mensheviks (or men of the minority) and Bolsheviks (or men of the majority). He was the undisputed leader of the Bolshevik, or ultra tendency which, in 1918, constituted itself as the Russian Communist Party.

When Lenin returned to Russia in the famous sealed train in April 1917, he announced to his colleagues and to the people of Russia a programme of

such extreme radicalness that virtually all his associates, including those who had been closest to him in the past, were scandalised. ‘Lenin’s voice, heard straight from the train, was a “voice from outside”’ (Sukhanov 1955, p. 274). His April Theses denounced the war as ‘a predatory imperialistic war’ inseparably connected to capitalism. Ending the one could only be achieved by overthrowing the other. Russia, Lenin went on, is passing from the first stage of the revolution, where power had been gifted to the bourgeois, to the second stage, where the proletariat and poor peasants would take power. It followed that there could be no support for the Provisional Government and that the ‘soviets of workers’ deputies are the *only possible* form of revolutionary government’ – all state power should pass into their hands. Police, army and bureaucracy were to be eliminated and replaced by the armed people; all officials were to be elected and their mandates revocable; all land was to be nationalised and a single national bank created; there was to be no retreat to a parliamentary republic but a state form ‘modelled on the Paris Commune’; finally, a genuinely revolutionary Socialist International was to be created – these were the tasks of the revolution (Lenin 1960–70, vol. XXIV, pp. 21–6).

Lenin’s April Theses constituted a clarion call for the restitution of revolutionary Marxism. As a theory and practice of revolution, Marxism had all but withered away by the beginning of the twentieth century. In practice, and increasingly in theory, the politics of gradual peaceful transformation of capitalism through democratic means was overwhelmingly dominant in the socialist parties of Europe. The creation of mass social democratic parties led, as Michels and Weber had pointed out, to the growth in power of centralising bureaucratic structures and the waning of local activism. The proletarian element of the movement was increasingly discounted. ‘The tendency is’, Rosa Luxemburg lamented, ‘for the directing organs of the socialist party to play a conservative role’ (Luxemburg 1951, p. 93). The climax of this reformist politics came on 4 August 1914, when the French and German socialist parties, assembled in parliament, voted war credits for their governments. The Social Democrats came in from the cold into the warm embrace of the national (capitalist) community. The threat of war demanded social peace – a *union sacrée* or *Burgfrieden*, with the social democratic and labour leaders as its most authoritative officers. In Lenin’s view, there was no more conclusive evidence of the canker of reformism and the erosion of revolutionary commitment than the activities of so-called Marxists joining national governments and pledging their support to bourgeois states

at the very moment of their greatest frailty. His conclusion in 1914 was that all such social traitors had abnegated the right to be called Marxists. They had become recruiting sergeants and policemen of the imperialist state formation and were therefore, unambiguously, part of the enemy camp.

Lenin spent the years from 1914 to 1917 pondering and theorising the sources of what he took to be the apostasy of the theoreticians and leaders he had hitherto revered, especially Karl Kautsky, the erstwhile Pope of European socialism. So fundamental were their derelictions that the source of their errors had to lie deep in their methodologies. His first concern after the outbreak of war was to explore in Marx, Hegel and Feuerbach the true nature of Marx's dialectical method. He then went on to examine how the changing nature of the world economy led to war and to the growth of revisionism. Finally, Lenin embarked (1916–17) on a study of the relationship between the capitalist state formation and the demands of monopoly capitalism. He concluded from these theoretical studies that: (i) the dominant economic realities were global; monopoly capitalism was international capitalism; (ii) monopoly capitalism repressed rather than advanced the development of the productive forces and was therefore historically regressive rather than progressive; (iii) it also produced fierce competition for economic territory (imperialism) leading to militarism and global war; (iv) its capacity to sustain and reproduce itself was undoubtedly tied to a hugely expanded and oppressive state; (v) there could be no peace without the simultaneous overthrow of finance capital and its organisational focus, the imperialist state; (vi) the appropriate administrative form to replace the state was the one outlined in Marx's account of the Paris Commune; (vii) assessment of ripeness for socialist revolutions had to be conducted on a global rather than a narrowly national basis; and (viii) the barbarism and slaughter of imperialist war could be terminated only by international socialist revolution organised and coordinated by a Communist International organisation.

These formulations, the bedrock of Lenin's revolutionary analysis, were far from being mere slogans. They summarise a complex process of theoretical analysis in the period 1914–17. His voluminous *Philosophical Notebooks* (Lenin 1960–70, vol. XXXVIII) were followed by the economic analysis of *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* in 1916 (Lenin 1960–70, vol. XXII) and the extensive (if unfinished) reconstruction of the Marxist theory of the state in *The State and Revolution* (Lenin 1960–70, vol. XXV). He had theorised the nature of modern capitalism, the origins

and character of the war, social democracy and the contemporary state, the conditions for global revolution and the imperatives for beginning it, long before arriving in Petrograd.

The theoretical disputes regarding Russia's ripeness for socialist revolution were, very largely, dialogues of the deaf. The Mensheviks and their foreign allies consistently maintained that within Russia neither the objective nor the subjective conditions had been realised. A socialist revolution in Russia, Kautsky warned, could only constitute 'a grandiose attempt to clear by bold leaps or remove by legal enactments the obstacles offered by the successive phases of normal development' (Kautsky 1965, p. 98). For many commentators, then as now, the Bolshevik programme of 1917 was fundamentally a rehash of Lenin's earlier work on party building, *What Is To Be Done?* (Lenin 1960–70, vol. V). There, it is widely maintained, Lenin first despaired of the proletariat as the bearers of socialism and proposed substituting for them the disciplined party of conscious revolutionaries. The elitism and voluntarism of his formative years is conventionally projected forward to account for his advocacy of a premature seizure of power by the Bolshevik Party. The revolution was, in this account, a minority coup not a popular revolution: Jacobin rather than Marxist, Eastern rather than Western. It was fated, because of its prematurity, to impose the will of a party/state upon the recalcitrant realities of the Russian economy and the cultural backwardness of the Russian people. To make both fit for socialism would, it was predicted, entail wholesale restructuring of society and the coercive refashioning of attitudes and dispositions. This analysis of a Jacobin impatience with backwardness fed into, and was complemented by, later Western theories of totalitarianism. The dystopia of arbitrary power, terror and the extinction of civil society, and autonomous selfhood arose, in these interpretations, from the unbridgeable gap between the limitless aspirations of a ruling elite and the finite malleability of people and things.

A great burden of subsequent analysis and interpretation bears down upon the question of revolutionary ripeness, but it is clear that no authoritative answers can be found in Marxism itself. There is, in the first place, the vexed question of which Marx we are to take. According to some, Lenin's revolutionary stance in 1917 fits perfectly comfortably with Marx's in the period 1848–51 (Wolfe 1956). Marx too, it has frequently been observed, was far from punctilious in attempting to measure the maturation of objective and subjective conditions. He had, after all, attempted to provoke international socialist revolution in 1848 in countries that were then no more developed

than Russia in 1917. Engels was later forced to admit that 'History has proved us, and all who thought like us wrong. It has made it clear that the state of economic development on the continent at that time was not, by a long way, ripe for the elimination of capitalist production' (Marx and Engels 1962, vol. I, p. 125).

It was part of Lenin's case that the true disciples of Marx were revealed by their consistent application of his method rather than the ritual in-toning of his prescriptions. And Marx's method, Lenin rediscovered in 1914, was emphatically dialectical, and therefore revolutionary. This method, Lenin insisted, had nothing to do with the optimistic positivism or vulgar evolutionism of the revisionists. Its principal finding was that the evolutionary development of all phenomena (including, evidently, classes, modes of production and epochs of history) had always a finite limit – the break or rupture – at which point they were abruptly transformed into different phenomena. All things at all times were to be understood as being in a state of constant change: they never were, they were always becoming. They could and did undergo a process of incremental change (the addition of an extra quantum at each particular moment) and this was referred to as quantitative change. However, a point was always reached at which the addition of a further quantum could no longer be accommodated by the form of the given phenomenon and it was abruptly transformed into something qualitatively different. In the social, economic and political realms the dialectic expressed itself, as Marx and Engels reminded their followers, as the history of class struggle. 'Proletariat and wealth', they insisted 'are opposites' (Marx and Engels 1975–86, vol. IV, p. 35). Class war was, therefore, irreducibly present in bourgeois society. It could not be negotiated away or suspended for the duration of the war because it transgressed 'national unity' or was unpopular or dangerous. The real traitors to Marx were those who renounced the implications of Marx's revolutionary method and made common purpose with the bourgeoisie to make war on their brother proletarians. The doctrine of unripeness was, in 1917, a veil to hide the cowardice of the class collaborationists.

The cowardice of the defencist socialists in Russia in 1917 was, according to Lenin, the more wretched because in Russia uniquely the workers were supported by the soldiers, they had their own powerful organisational foci – the soviets – and they had unrestricted freedoms of assembly and publication. They owed to the workers of the belligerent countries the responsibility of beginning the revolution against war, against finance capitalism and its oppressive Leviathan state. Russia being uniquely blessed in

these respects had a responsibility to *begin* the global revolution for socialism. All of this, of course, presupposed that the world as a whole was ripe for socialism.

The analysis of imperialism and the imperialist war

The crucial transformations of capitalism that had occurred at the turn of the century, and had accelerated during the preparations for and prosecution of the war, had barely been noticed by the Russian proponents of unripe time. Marxist theorists such as Hilferding (1910), Luxemburg (1951) and the Bolshevik Bukharin (1972) had, from the 1890s onwards, begun to articulate an analysis of a qualitatively new phase in the development of capitalism that had been only half anticipated in Marx's writings. Their conclusions were that the 1890s had witnessed a remarkably rapid concentration of capital under the control of the big banks, which consequently became the directing centres of the accumulation and reproduction of capital. Under their direction there occurred a simultaneous process of amalgamation of productive units into huge corporations or trusts that effectively monopolised whole sectors of industry. Finance (or banking) capital came to prevail over manufacturing or industrial capital and monopoly displaced competition. But as competition was eroded, so capitalism finally forfeited its historical right to exist, for, in the Marxist canon, only competition kept it progressive. Without competition the imperative constantly to revolutionise the forces of production ceases to operate. Capitalism becomes historically retrogressive. This finding was, clearly, fraught with large revolutionary consequences. If the theorists of monopoly capitalism were right, then it followed that capitalism had entered its final degenerate stage. This account of an epochal transition formed a central part of Lenin's mindset (and his popular propaganda in 1917). It was a crucial element in what Lukács called Lenin's sense of the 'actuality of the revolution': the revolution was here, it was now (Lukács 1970).

Among the problems that Marxist theorists had to explain was how capitalism had succeeded (a) in reproducing itself on an extended level; (b) in absorbing its own product; and (c) in avoiding the revolutionary spiral predicted by Marx consequent upon a decline in the rate of profit. The theories of monopoly capitalism that Lenin absorbed provided answers to all these problems.

The problem of the reproduction of capital and absorption of the product had indeed become acute in the leading manufacturing countries in

the 1880s and 1890s. They suffered from a glut of goods that could not be absorbed on the home market. This was followed by an over-production of capital that could find no profitable employment. Goods and capital had, therefore, to be exported on a massive scale in order for the cycle of the reproduction of capital to be completed and renewed. There would, naturally, be resistance to the intrusion of cheap goods and superabundant capital that threatened to disrupt and destroy the host economies. Powerful armies and navies would have to be developed to expand the economic territory available to metropolitan capital. Imperialism was, in this account, a function of monopoly capitalism. Monopoly capitalism, in the age of imperialism, had finally succeeded in realising Marx's prediction that capitalism 'must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere' (Marx and Engels 1962, vol. I, p. 37); that it was to be the first world historical mode of production (Marx and Engels 1975–86, vol. V, p. 49). The frantic imperialist expansion of the 1880s and 1890s finally saturated the territory of the whole world with (monopoly) capitalist relations.

The epoch of global capitalism necessarily universalised the contradictions of capitalism and, in the process, gave rise to a new phenomenon – that of exploiter *nations*. The argument, in brief, was that the export of goods and capital to protected (non-competitive) markets, combined with the ruthless extraction of surplus value from colonial workers unprotected by trade unions (or moral scruples) produced super-profits: that is, profits greatly in excess of those on the home markets. The monopoly capitalists were able to use these super-profits to arrest the general tendency for the rate of profit to decline. They were also able to use part of this surplus to buy off industrial militancy by developing a stratum of better-paid, more secure workers – a workers' aristocracy – whose interests became directly tied to imperialism. It was this stratum that had, in Lenin's view, formed the constituency for revisionism and the politics of gradualness that had issued in the shameless defencism of social democratic leaders.

Not only had Lenin found a materialist explanation for social democratic treachery, he had also set capitalism, and therefore the revolution, against it, in a wholly new perspective. Global capitalism could only be defeated by global revolution. It followed that the assessment of revolutionary ripeness had to be conducted on the integrated global mode of production rather than on the specifics of a national market. The analysis also showed that exploitation was most severe (and revisionism least developed) in the periphery of the global system. It was therefore plausible that the global anti-imperialist

revolution might begin in the colonies or the semi-colonies (like Russia). The imperialist chain would break at its weakest link, not in its metropolitan fortresses.

The imperialist state formation

The war itself was, according to the Bolshevik analysis, the necessary outcome of the ferocious competition for economic territory that mature capitalism was bound to generate. This was, inevitably, a competition between states and it was, equally inevitably, accompanied by the growth of militarism and the reorientation of the economic system to produce means of destruction rather than means of production or consumption. The barons of finance capitalism had, by the first decade of the twentieth century, already recognised the huge importance of the state as authoritative organiser and guarantor of contemporary capitalism and had, therefore, moved in to take control of it. It was the state, after all, that alone had the authority to levy taxes and impose tariffs to pursue an appropriate foreign policy, commit armies and navies and create colonial administrations. The changing nature of capitalism was bound to impact upon the bourgeois state formation. Nikolai Bukharin was the most outstanding theorist of the Bolshevik Party and he anticipated many of Lenin's ideas in the period 1914 to 1917. In 1916 Lenin fell out with Bukharin over what he took to be the near-anarchism of Bukharin's conclusion that smashing finance capitalism entailed smashing the imperialist state; by early 1917 Lenin came to agree with this conclusion. Bukharin led the way in theorising the degeneration from the minimal non-interventionist liberal state to the massively interventionist and totalising imperialist state (Bukharin 1925).

The wartime imperialist state was, in Bukharin's account, far more threatening in its pretensions than any state known to history. It aspired to, and was in the process of implementing, a system of controls that were total and all-embracing in their scope. It had subordinated to itself the hitherto autonomous groupings of civil society. It had annexed the professional bodies: 'Philosophy and medicine, religion and ethics, chemistry and bacteriology – all were "mobilised" and "militarised" exactly in the same way as industry and finance' (Bukharin 1925, p. 29). Finally, it had extinguished the autonomy of the socialist parties and the labour movement. They too absorbed its mythology of the national interest and even vindicated the *étatist* of social and economic life as increments towards 'state socialism'. They had

sold the militant, heroic role of the proletariat in history for some crumbs of state-provided welfare and a few words of flattery. They had treacherously connived at the conversion of the movement into the pliant Labour Department of the imperialist state.

What had occurred, in the view of both Bukharin and Lenin, was the comprehensive swallowing of society by the state. Nothing and no-one escaped its iron grasp: 'Thus there arises the finished form of the contemporary imperialist robber state, an iron organisation, which envelops the living body of society with its tenacious, grasping claws. It is – The New Leviathan, beside which the fantasy of Thomas Hobbes seems but a child's plaything' (Bukharin 1925, p. 30). Bukharin and Lenin were clear that the imperialist state was unlike any previously known to history. It promulgated a single compulsory ideology, effectively decreed the end of politics and bent people's minds to its purposes. In its wartime imperialist form, the state had been brought to its ultimate, putrescent, militarist inversion of purpose. Far from assisting the development of productive forces and the market, the state now served to develop the forces of destruction and had embarked upon the most gigantic process of mutual annihilation in the history of humanity. This was the necrosis of a civilisation, a mode of production and epoch of history. It had become a vast graveyard drenched in the mud and carnage of the world's first total war conducted by the world's first total states. At this juncture in the history of mankind socialism was the only alternative to barbarism. To escape war meant smashing capitalism and this entailed smashing the state. The programme of the revolution was now as radical as it was possible to conceive within the framework of Marxism. The big question that now had to be answered was: if the state had to go, what was to replace it?

It is one of the larger paradoxes of twentieth-century history that the regime that was to epitomise totalitarianism in the popular (and scholarly) mind, began its career as a virulent opponent of the nascent totalitarianism of the contemporary bourgeois state. The Russian revolutionary project of 1917 was expressly theorised as the antidote to this nightmare vision of the modern Leviathan – the militarist, limitless and blood-soaked imperialist robber state (Harding 1996).

The Bolshevik theorists of the Russian Revolution shared with Marx the article of faith that state and society were, historically, locked in a zero-sum game in which the presence of the one was the denial of the other. They were, at least in 1917, unique in resurrecting a discourse that many had thought to be hopelessly outmoded and naïve even at the time when Marx

had given it voice. They enthusiastically recovered, and integrated into their twentieth-century analysis, Marx's narrative about the growth of the state being accomplished only at the cost of society.

The soviets as contemporary forms of the Commune

For Marx the archetype of untrammelled state power was the regime of Louis Bonaparte. He had profited from the class equilibrium revealed by the revolution of 1848. He had played one class against the other (and the peasants against both) to secure the virtual autonomy of the executive and its swollen bands of bureaucrats and generals. In the process of its growth, and as a condition of it, the state had emasculated and exhausted society. 'Only under the second Bonaparte does the state seem to have made itself completely independent' (Marx and Engels 1962, vol. I, p. 333). It was hardly surprising that when the revolution against Louis Bonaparte's regime broke out, it took the form of a revolution not against this or that particular form of the state but a revolution 'against the state itself, of this supernaturalist abortion of society, a resumption by the people, for the people of its own social life. It was not a revolution to transfer it from one faction of the ruling class to another but a revolution to break down this horrid machinery of class-domination itself' (Marx 1970, p. 166). This was the zero-sum: following all state and no society was to dawn the era of all society and no state. The Commune that displaced Louis Bonaparte moved immediately to abolish the standing army and the police. There were no longer to be any 'separate bodies of armed men'; nor were there to be separate bodies of politicians, bureaucrats, judges, jailers or functionaries of any sort. Definitionally, therefore, the state ceased to exist. It was precisely this extraordinary and radical discourse that Lenin spent much of 1917 recovering and restating as the warrant and guide to Bolshevik strategy and the programme of the Russian Revolution. It was to form the substance not only of his bookish manual *The State and Revolution* but of his programmatic and agitational writings too. He rescued from the oblivion into which they had fallen Marx's writings on the Paris Commune of 1871. He identified the Russian soviets as the contemporary forms of the Commune and invested them with the same virulently anti-statist role. Socialists of all lands had tragically forgotten Marx's lesson that there was an alternative to the state.

The history of the state had, thus far, been the history of the development of the pretensions, powers and exclusive prerogatives of specialised functional and political groups. It was an account of the ideas, institutions

and practices in which these prerogatives were located and through which they were justified. The nature of the new time, of the epochal transformation of all these old patterns of domination and subordination, was that the universally armed people, organised in their militias, communes, soviets, factory and regional committees and so on, were to appropriate to themselves all these lost powers. The idea of the revolution had concretised itself as anti-statism or, more properly, socialism – the empowerment of society. It was a revolution against the nation-as-state: the dominant idea of politics since the French Revolution.

This new beginning, Lenin insisted, had become inescapable, not because of theoretical imperatives but because there were no remaining alternatives for the contemporary world. Russia itself, in the six months since the February Revolution of 1917 overthrew the Tsar, had coursed its way through the gamut of available institutions and forms of government. It had been, variously, a monarchy, an aristocratic then a banker's government, a pseudo-constitutional executive of the centre, then of the centre left and, all the while, Russia lurched deeper into crises. The war continued, the dead and maimed piled up, the economy and the communications structures collapsed, and inflation and unemployment spiralled out of control, whilst speculators and profiteers benefited from the general misery and the country fell easy prey to its enemies. All other political forms, Lenin insisted, had been tried and found wanting. None answered, or could answer, to the public needs, because each presumed that leadership and organisation proceeded exclusively from the state. Only the Bolsheviks had the courage to step outside these narrow confines to invoke the raw energy and initiative of the mass. Only in this way, Lenin insisted, was it possible *in practice* to avert the slide to catastrophe. The theoretical imperative had become a practical necessity (Lenin 1960–70, vol. XXV, pp. 323–67).

The political structures of monopoly capitalism were, as we have seen, to be demolished and destroyed. Here the revolution had to be thoroughgoing and radical. As far as the *economic* structures of finance capitalism were concerned, however, Lenin counselled the greatest caution. This part of the inheritance from finance capitalism was not to be 'smashed' or negated. It was, on the contrary, to be allowed to develop all its luxuriant potential. Socialism could, in this way, attach itself unreservedly to the coat tails of modernism. This was the modernist Lenin of the single state bank as the mechanism to bring about a nationwide system of bookkeeping and accountancy, which would 'constitute as much as nine tenths of the socialist apparatus'. This was to be a system of production and distribution that built

upon and developed monopoly capitalist institutions like the trusts and cartels. They not only enormously simplified the business of bringing industry under social control, they also provided mechanisms that lay 'ready to hand' that could be set in motion 'at one stroke by a single decree' and made to serve the needs of the majority rather than the profits of the few. Capitalism had, in short, bequeathed a splendidly articulated set of institutions through which socialist society could effect 'the administration of things' (Lenin 1960–70, vol. XXVI, p. 106). Nor was there any great mystique about the enterprise. The capitalists themselves, after all, did not administer anything. They simply recruited hirelings to do their bidding. In any case, they had so simplified the processes of production, distribution and control that these were accessible to any literate person. Literally all must be taught the art of administration and they would learn it only by experience, by taking upon themselves the responsibility for controlling their own lives. This was, as Lenin tirelessly insisted in the early months of the revolution, the sum and substance of the project for socialism in Russia, the quintessence of the Marxist promise of emancipation.

Class analysis and strategy

The basic questions of the revolution were, according to Lenin, what class could most be trusted with power and what form of state power would best facilitate an advance of socialism? In answer to the first term of the question there were, he maintained, only three possible class contenders in Russia – the bourgeoisie, the peasantry, the proletariat. The policy of the Mensheviks and SRs was, effectively, to fight tooth and nail against the radicalisation of the people in order to ensure the continued allegiance of the bourgeoisie to the revolution. But, in Lenin's view, the bourgeoisie would, as soon as the moment was opportune, betray the democratic revolution, turn on the soviets and rely upon sheer coercion to put down the threat of socialism. They would do this because their economic and social position and their future security demanded that they did so. This was, after all, the burden of Marx's reflections on the European revolutions of 1848 and the lesson of the Russian Revolution of 1905. To imagine that the fate of the revolution and of the soviets was safe in bourgeois hands was, therefore, worse than naïve: it actually disarmed the workers, making them easy prey to the coup that was coming.

According to this analysis, the Provisional Government and the soviets could not co-exist because they embodied two opposing class positions. One

signalled the leadership of the bourgeoisie and the other of the proletariat. One sought to restrict then crush the revolution, the other to expand and develop it. The way forward in class terms was, for Lenin, crystal clear: an end to dual power – all power to the soviets, with the land-hungry peasants and the radical urban workers taking control of production. Thus all movements that extended and deepened the revolution, i.e. sapped the economic and social power of the bourgeoisie and the gentry, were to be supported.

The period after February was for Lenin a period of temporary class equilibrium. It was the crucial period in which each class would maximise and prepare its forces and occupy the best positions for the final confrontation. For the proletarian party this meant, in the first place, securing a majority in the soviets – the representative organs exclusively representing the working class and the peasantry. In the second place, it meant mobilising and directing a preponderance of armed force at the right time and in the right places. Revolutions, Lenin reminded his colleagues, were, in the final resort, trials of arms. The mobilising and military aspects of seizing power had, therefore, to be taken seriously and treated as an art (Lenin 1960–70, vol. XXVI, pp. 22–7). There could, in the matter of making a revolution, be no fetish about parliamentary forms or formal democracy. The soviets were the contemporary form of the Commune and the Commune was, as Marx had insisted, ‘the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour’ (Marx and Engels 1962, vol. I, p. 522). It was the only administrative form suited to the task of socialist construction, immeasurably superior to the talking shops of formal or bourgeois democracy: superior because it was participatory, because it expressly set out to involve the whole of the population, especially the ill-educated, poor and dispossessed, in making, implementing and policing all the policies that most affected their lives. It was the final word of the socialist project because it made of socialism a relationship between equals and a restless activity. In this strategy the activity of the mass to empower themselves was simultaneously the process through which they tested and expanded their capacities for social self-management and the process by which the powers and authority of the state and the old governing classes were neutralised and usurped.

It was, of course, not Marxist theory that shelled the occupants of the Winter Palace into terrified submission, took the Post and Telegraph Offices, secured the bridges and won over the crucial garrisons in October 1917. All of this was the work of organised activists prepared to fight for the

revolutionary cause. Their motives for doing so were diverse, but there is general agreement that, in the months from July to October 1917, there was a massive ebbing of support for the government and the political parties supporting it. After the failure of the Galician offensive, upon which the Kerensky government had, in a sense, gambled everything, the writing was on the wall. Defeat after defeat followed sacrifice after sacrifice; the ordinary Russian people had no more stomach for the war or the government that promoted it. Predictably the officer corps became the focus of a movement on the right to restore order, resurrect patriotism and re-create a disciplined fighting force capable of defending Russia. And all this, they believed, would necessitate a temporary dictatorship exercised by a charismatic leader. It would also, clearly, involve the suppression of all those parties and institutions that threatened their programme – the meddling soviets and the parties of the left. As self-appointed saviour of the nation, General Kornilov rallied his Cossack forces in July and set off on his mission to cleanse Petrograd of its anti-national scourges. As an attempted coup it fizzled out ignominiously, but its consequences were to be enormous. There was, in the first place, sufficient ambiguity about the Provisional Government's role in the Kornilov affair for large numbers of people to accuse it of complicity. Worst of all, in order to be seen to be dealing with the Kornilov coup, the Provisional Government had to enlist the help of all forces that would oppose it. It turned to the Petrograd soviet which promptly established a Military Revolutionary Committee. Bolshevik leaders who had been imprisoned after the abortive spontaneous rising in July were released and immediately assumed control of the arming of pro-soviet worker detachments. The Military Revolutionary Committee was from the outset under their effective control (via Trotsky and his colleagues).

With the failure of Kornilov's coup, the Bolsheviks basked in the glory of the true defenders of the revolution. Their predictions had come true. The bourgeoisie *had* gone over to the counter-revolution, supporting a military adventurer and would-be Napoleon: 'The Kornilov crisis was the critical turning point, for it seemed to confirm their (the Bolsheviks') message that neither peace nor radical social change could be obtained through the politics of compromise with the bourgeoisie' (Figs 1997, p. 457). *None* of the basic problems besetting the people had been attended to – the land, the war, employment or popular welfare. The parties comprising the Provisional Government had comprehensively demonstrated that they could not govern, while the people were increasingly declaring that they would not be governed in the old way. The conditions for a successful

seizure of power were maturing. The radical alternative proposed by the Bolsheviks was rapidly gaining ground. By September the Bolsheviks commanded a majority in the soviets of Moscow and Petrograd. They were on course for a majority in the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets due to convene on 25 October. They had won the allegiance of the key towns, industrial areas, garrisons and naval bases. The revolutionary moment, Lenin insisted, had now arrived. The resistance was at its weakest; the revolutionary forces were in the ascendant. To delay would be fatal. The demands of the world revolution made action in Russia imperative. Russia was honoured to be the first to break the imperialist chain. Lenin now assaulted the hesitant and fearful Central Committee of his party with ever more insistent demands that they mobilise their forces and effect a seizure of power before the Congress of Soviets took place (Lenin 1960–70, vol. XXVI, pp. 19–21). With considerable reservations the decision was finally taken to mount an assault on Petrograd during the night preceding the opening of the Second Congress of Soviets. Almost without resistance the insurgents in Petrograd captured all the positions of power and arrested all the personnel (with the exception of Kerensky) of the old regime. The battle for Moscow proved to be more prolonged and bloody.

The impact of the Bolshevik Revolution upon Russian society was proportionate to the extreme radicalism of its initial programme. That programme not only corroded the legitimacy of the state and all power-holders, it arguably made any sort of social order or continuous production and circulation of goods impossible. The Bolshevik slogan of an end to bossing was taken up with such fervid enthusiasm that it made the very possibility of constituting and justifying authority within the administrative, economic and social life of the country highly problematic. The peasants expelled their landlords and seized the land. Since they no longer had to produce cash crops for sale on the market in order to service debt repayments (now annulled by the revolution), their only incentive to trade in the market was to obtain cash in order to purchase consumer goods they could not themselves produce. But if these goods were not available in the market there could be no remaining incentive for the peasant to trade. He would, as a rational actor, retreat into self-sufficient production for immediate consumption rather than production for the market. And so he did. Urban life and industrial production were in real danger of being starved to extinction by the peasants' refusal to trade.

As far as the industrial workers were concerned, they too had agendas that often ran flatly counter to Bolshevik plans and exhortations. They were not

inclined to discriminate as fastidiously as Lenin had insisted that they should between ownership and control. A spate of nationalisations from below was accompanied by a rejection of all things bourgeois, including all learning and specialist skills. *Spetsii* and men with glasses, anyone with education, and all authority figures were now perceived to be enemies of the people. The October Revolution, Bukharin lamented in 1920, brought merely dissolution of the old patterns of authority and legitimation within society and the state. It dissolved, at every level and in all spheres of activity, the linkage between the technical intelligentsia, the managerial cadres and the workers. The consequent costs were as extensive as the scale of this dissolution. It led to a catastrophic decline in industrial production: 'it must be *a priori* evident that the *proletarian* revolution is inevitably accompanied by a strong decline of productive powers' (Bukharin 1971, p. 106). The compulsion of the capitalist wage relation (i.e. work or starve) had not yet been replaced by alternative moral or material incentives to ensure discipline and application within the work process. No *positive* principles yet informed the mode of production and civilisation that was striving to replace capitalism. What had thus far occurred was the essentially negative process of dissolving and devaluing the old structures of power and their sustaining attitudes.

The dictatorship of the proletariat – discipline and security

By 1920 it was apparent that a great gulf had opened up between the actual practices and power structures of the regime and its foundational legitimating principles. Russia's only representative body ever elected by manhood suffrage was forcibly terminated as soon as it convened in January 1918. The Constituent Assembly (elected in November 1917) had a majority of SRs and would not accept the Bolshevik demands that it approve all the measures enacted since October and acknowledge the supremacy of the soviets. A civil war that was bitter, brutal and centralising then ensued. The leading figure in the civil war was undoubtedly Leon Trotsky. He first rose to prominence during the revolution of 1905 when his fiery oratory and great energy secured his election as deputy chairman of the Petrograd workers' soviet. Subsequently he tried to preserve an independent conciliatory role in the Bolshevik/Menshevik disputes, but by 1917 he sided firmly with Lenin. As Commissar for War, Trotsky reintroduced the authority of army officers and restored discipline and cohesion to the Red Army.

By late 1920 the civil war was effectively over. In the final resort the peasants disliked the Bolsheviks less than they feared a white revival of the

power of landlords. Internal opposition and external intervention had failed to unseat the Bolsheviks. They had, however, as Lenin lamented, grievously impeded the possibilities of building socialism in Russia. Now that the civil war was over, there were powerful voices within the party and outside that called for the retraction of the centralising measures in the military, economic and political spheres that had been justified by the civil war state of emergency. Workers' control of production was the watchword of the Workers' Opposition platform. The Democratic Centralists demanded a restitution of democratic procedures in the party and outside. Prominent soviets demanded a restoration of their powers and freedom for all socialist parties to compete. But Lenin and the Bolsheviks knew that to return to the foundational principles of the revolution would effectively sweep their power away. Free elections would yield majorities to their political opponents. Russia was on its own internationally; internally the Bolsheviks were a diminishing minority, their popular support had ebbed away and pathetically few people – 'a few thousand throughout Russia and no more' (Lenin 1960–70, vol. XXXII, p. 61) – were actually engaged in the business of government and administration: 'the proletariat is declassed, i.e. dislodged from its class groove' (Lenin 1960–70, vol. XXXIII, pp. 23–4). Their proletarian base had, as Lenin reminded the party, withered away.

The old model of socialism as people's power and the legitimating principles of radical commune democracy could no longer serve. The alternative 'positive' model of state development that Marx proposed to his followers was the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is the state form recommended in the Communist Manifesto and expanded upon in the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' (Marx and Engels 1962, vol. II, pp. 18–37). The dictatorship of the proletariat was everything that the Commune was not. It was tightly centralised rather than devolved, transitional rather than the finished form of popular administration. Whereas the Commune sought to transform power relations, the dictatorship of the proletariat set out to transform property relations. The one was necessarily participatory and democratic, the other was wholly agnostic to structures of power and patterns of accountability. Whereas the Commune defined itself in organisational and procedural forms, Lenin's new relativism declared that: 'The form of government has got absolutely nothing to do with it' (Lenin 1960–70, vol. XXVIII, p. 238). If the Commune was socialism as freedom, as activity, the dictatorship of the proletariat was socialism as efficient production and equitable distribution; it was a condition of being free from material need. Its goal was not the end

of alienation but the much more manageable goal of the end of exploitation. It was Marxism in the mode of modernity. Its voice was passive.

By 1920 Lenin, Bukharin and Trotsky insisted that socialism had nothing to do with autonomy, self-activity and freedom. 'We do not promise any freedom, or any democracy' (Lenin 1960–70, vol. XXXII, p. 495). In a chilling phrase that perfectly expressed the new mood, he declared that: 'Industry is indispensable, democracy is not' (Lenin 1960–70, vol. XXXII, p. 27). Bukharin, Trotsky and Lenin were now agreed that the absolute priority was the maximisation of production and this, they insisted, meant maximal discipline and accountability and the imposition of authoritarian control of the process of work. Bukharin was clear that '*revolutionary state power [as] the mightiest lever of economic revolution... turns inward, by constituting a factor of the self-organisation and the compulsory self-discipline of the working people*'. State compulsion and coercion would have to be extended to the ruling class itself, even to its 'proletarian avant-garde which is united in the party of the revolution' (Bukharin 1971, pp. 151–6). Trotsky was more emphatic still. The only model of organisation appropriate to the transition period was the army. Only the army had absolute jurisdiction over the lives of its members, to direct and punish them and to subject them to the unchallengeable authority of one man. The militarisation of labour and of the state was, Trotsky repeatedly insisted in 1920 and 1921, the only way in which a recalcitrant workforce and dislocated economy could be reformed so that the single goal of socialism – the maximisation of production – could be obtained (Trotsky 1961, p. 144). Lenin too was clear that a divided and degraded working class that had become 'dislodged from its class groove' could not create its own dictatorship. Its class power could only be effected by its conscious vanguard concentrated in the party.

The dictatorship of the proletariat was, on the face of it, a much more promising basis than the Commune for establishing the legitimation of state power. The Commune was, from first to last, bitterly anti-statist and its message was emphatic – restore to society all the powers leached by the state. It was a tale about the utmost dispersal of power. Its key words were collegiality, recall, answerability and the absence of mediation or material advantage. It smacked of golden-ageism – a reversion to the face-to-face intimacy of pre-modern society. It implicitly presumed that the volume and complexity of public business was manageable and accessible to the whole population. It was no basis upon which to build an account of modernity or of any permanent structure of power of any sort. The dictatorship of the

proletariat, however, was emphatically a form of state, the most authoritarian form of state, the first openly partisan form of state that admitted and valued only workers. It was to be a centralising body charged with concentrating all the forces of production, distribution and exchange into the hands of the state authority. It was unambiguously modern in its embrace of the machine, division of labour and the virtues of large-scale authoritative organisation. It was bound by no law, morality or convention, but ruthlessly pursued the class interest of the proletariat. It openly recognised, and was proud to declare, that its state power rested upon coercion and terror if need be. By 1920 Bukharin, Lenin and Trotsky all agreed that the road to socialism lay through the maximum conceivable amplification of the state's powers. In formal terms the soviet state would, Bukharin insisted, mimic the centralising authoritarianism of the imperialist state, especially in its control and direction of the economy. The promise of socialism in this second moment of the development of soviet power was to repair and remedy the deficiencies, wastage, planlessness and inequities of the capitalist mode of production. But in order to accomplish these productivist and distributivist goals, it imperatively had to control, on a national scale, the productive forces, the investment resources, the labour power and the distribution of goods and services of the entire society. In the perilous situation in which Russia (and therefore socialism) found itself in 1921, this set of ideas and conception of socialism appealed with compelling force. The country had been devastated. War, civil war and industrial dislocation had reduced gross production, in almost all spheres, to approximately 20 per cent of the 1913 figure; 'in the case of iron and steel it was actually below 5 per cent' (Hosking 1985, p. 120). The towns had been depopulated, the proletariat destroyed and the peasantry devastated by famine. The European revolution that was to redeem Russian backwardness had, against all the predictions of theory, failed to materialise. Isolated internally ('we are but a drop in the ocean of people', Lenin frequently lamented) and isolated externally, the Bolsheviks were in a desperate situation. Their support had ebbed away. They had no significant solid social base. At the most elemental level how were they to reproduce their own power? How were they to guarantee the power of the state which had become their own last bastion?

It was in this situation that Bukharin reflected upon the manner in which the besieged forces of the imperialist bourgeoisie had managed to cling on to power and reproduce their mode of extracting surplus value. They had survived, Bukharin argued, by abrogating democracy, forging a single near-compulsory ideology of national unity, and, above all, by utilising the power

of the state to intervene massively in the economy so as to guarantee the reproduction of their own capital and the continuation of their complex systems for extracting surplus value from the population at large. In all essentials, Bukharin argued, the proletarian state would be the mirror image of the state of the monopoly capitalists: 'Thus the system of state capitalism transforms itself into its own inversion, into the state form of workers' socialism' (Bukharin 1971, p. 79).

Soviet state ideology – the promise of plenty

The theoretical underpinnings of a socialist Leviathan state had been articulated by Lenin, Trotsky and especially Bukharin between 1920 and 1921. However, they proved impossible to implement at that time. In the spring of 1921 the regime faced an accumulation of crises that all but swept it away. Worker unrest in Petrograd was followed by the revolt of the sailors in the ultra-radical Kronstadt naval base, whilst, simultaneously, peasant revolt swept western and southern Russia. The final fling of the post-war revolutionary movement came to an ignominious end with the crushing of the German communists' action of March 1921. The hopes of an international proletariat rising to redeem Russia's backwardness had, evidently, to be indefinitely postponed. The regime was hanging on by its fingertips, presiding over a ruined, disaffected and isolated country.

It was in this situation that the strategic retreat of the New Economic Policy was introduced. The grandiose schemes for comprehensive state direction and management of the economy were put into reverse. The state withdrew from the ownership and management of small and medium enterprises, retaining only the very large-scale strategically important parts of industry and communications. Freedom for peasants and traders to market their goods was extended as the state withdrew. The experiment in War Communism came to an end. Socialism as a new mode of production was put on hold.

It was evident from the outset that comprehensive national planning required state control of all the factors of production – land, capital, labour, transport and the distribution of the product. In 1928 the Russian Communists were, arguably, further from realising this control than many European regimes. It took the Stalin revolution, unleashed in the two five-year plans that were to follow, to transform this situation and to effect, for the first time in history, what came to be known as a planned economy. Stalin had been consistently promoted by Lenin as a reliable apparatus man in charge

of the allocation of key personnel within the party and state machines. After Lenin's death he presented himself as the chosen interpreter of what he termed Leninism and used the power base he built up within the party to attack first the left (associated with Trotsky and his supporters), then the right (grouped around Zinoviev and Kamenev). By 1928 effective control of the party/state machine was in his hands and he proceeded to announce radical plans for the rapid industrialisation of the country and the collectivisation of agriculture. The moderacy of the New Economic Policy was abruptly reversed. We cannot here go into the divergent accounts of the motives behind this abrupt transformation or explore the rival calculations of premature deaths that this holocaust produced, but we can say beyond doubt that this was the most savage and traumatic transformation suffered by any modern society at the hands of its state. An ancestral way of life with all its traditional signifiers, securities and points of identity was smashed forever; and with it whole classes perished. Villages were destroyed, forced labour camps established, crops burnt, livestock slaughtered and the consequent famine killed millions. At unspeakable cost the regime now secured the land under its control. It secured, too, a vast dispossessed workforce to build the cities and industrial complexes, dig the canals and build the hydroelectric stations to fuel the headlong drive for increased production. Stalin presided over this reckless (and largely unplanned) agricultural and industrial transformation (Nove 1992).

It had been a central argument in Stalin's long battle with Trotsky that the Soviet Union could indeed build socialism in one country. It could not, of course, *complete* the building of communism but it could (indeed it had to) proceed to construct a mode of production that would demonstrate its superiority to capitalism (Stalin 1953–5, vol. VI, pp. 110–11). At the most obvious level, socialism as a mode of production had to profess (and ultimately demonstrate) its superiority to capitalism. Chronologically it superseded a mature or degenerating capitalism and its progressive nature rested upon its claim to liberate technological innovation that had been stifled by capitalist monopolies. It promised to end duplication of productive capacity and to eliminate the recurrent gaps between production and consumption that produced successive booms, slumps, wastage of resource and unemployment.

In line with the Saint-Simonian variant of Marxism that thereafter dominated the ideology of the Soviet state, the purpose of society was to assure the individual the continuous satisfaction of material needs. Individuals had elemental needs for food, shelter and clothing that imperatively had to be

satisfied. They could, moreover, through imagination, conceive of more extensive and refined needs. Their existential plight was, however, that as lone individuals not even elemental needs could be continuously satisfied. The foundational concept of Soviet-style socialism is that of a creature with extensive material needs (but limited individual productive capacity) entering society in order to secure their satisfaction. The individual entering society is endowed not with a bundle of pre-existing rights but, rather, with a capacity to labour. Individuals enter society as bearers of labour power. As a condition for enjoying the security and needs satisfaction that society alone can provide them with, individuals must now renounce autonomous control over their labour power. Control over it must be ceded to society, or, more properly, to the authoritative, organising institution of society – the state. The state evidently could not negotiate, monitor and reward a labour plan for each individual. It recognised only more or less sizeable aggregates of labour power, which, in turn, were integrated into national structures controlled by central government ministries. One contributed socially useful labour (and therefore qualified for citizenship) only as a worker within an enterprise contributing to the plan. The work collective had the responsibility to ensure that all its members had proper attitudes towards the disciplined and conscientious performance not only of their work but also of their social responsibilities. It disposed moreover of a graduated hierarchy of welfare inducements and welfare sanctions to ensure that each individual did indeed fulfil the labour targets set. In the first place, and crucially, it was the work collective that effectively decided upon the remuneration of each individual worker. Within the work collective it was the party-dominated management that decided upon appropriate candidates for training and skills acquisition and so determined promotional prospects. It determined what sorts of jobs were done by whom.

The work collective had, however, far broader economic social and moral/political concerns. It often disposed of the available housing stock, determining access to flats and deciding who got the most desirable ones. It disposed of scarce and therefore extremely valued durable consumer goods like cars, colour televisions and washing machines. It ran the recreational facilities available to workers and often owned rest homes and holiday facilities. The work collective was the compulsory and unavoidable locale in which every citizen made his or her way, aware at every juncture of its power over them – its power to grant or withhold all of the most scarce and highly valued goods that the society had to offer. It is hardly to be wondered at that from an early age individuals were socialised, by family, friends

and neighbours, into patterns of behaviour and external significations that proved effective in gaining access to scarce resources. Diligent and disciplined work was, of course, the single most important signifier but it had to be complemented by appropriate dress codes, signals of accepted civility (turning up for meetings, raising the hand, voting, making supportive comments) and the endorsement of current policies and leadership personnel. The enterprise/collective was, therefore, the locus in which not only the material values but also the moral and political values sustaining the whole society were generated and reproduced and reinforced each other.

According to Soviet precepts of distributive justice, the more one produced the more one was to receive. But the greater the stock of values created by the individual and his/her collective, the greater the volume of values accruing to the central planning agencies; that is, the more the strength of the central state apparatus was augmented. The planning system, articulated through ministries, trusts, enterprises and work collectives, was the uniquely all-embracing vehicle whereby the Soviet state formation extracted the social surplus from the whole of the population. *In abstracto* it was a perfect system for reproducing the power of the power-holders – the central allocators. It was they, after all, who by dictating the price of all commodities, goods and services, by controlling taxes and the wages of labour, could thereby control the volume of the social surplus, the disposition of which was exclusively their preserve. Through astute management of the social surplus, and through carefully graduating the returns and benefits obtained by elite groups, the central allocators could guarantee the expanded reproduction of their own power. Everyone within this system was caught in complex webs of complicitous legitimation in which the more one received the more one had to signify, and signifying was, as we have seen, the condition for access at any level (Konrad and Szeleyni 1979; Feher, Heller and Markus 1983; Harding 1984).

The pathology of the Soviet economic system reads as an indictment of the positivist Marxism from which it was derived. The Soviet experience confirmed the view that, in proportion as the units of the Soviet economic system became modernised, complex and interdependent, so they proved increasingly impossible to plan. Far from being the great panacea that finally freed industry from inefficiency and unleashed technological innovation, the State Plan proved itself to be in almost all respects an insurmountable obstacle to innovation and efficiency. The State Plan increasingly became the problem rather than the answer. The modernist, positivist assumptions that informed the planning project proved to be hopelessly optimistic. Even the

best mathematical minds, utilising the most sophisticated computer equipment, proved themselves to be woefully inadequate in their attempts to grasp the volume of variables in their infinite combinations that the central direction of a planned economy had to deal with. It became apparent to more and more people and, finally, to the planners themselves, that planning had failed in its promises. It simply was not assuring to its citizens/producers a greater stock of material benefit than any competitor systems. Nor was it rewarding them according to their productive inputs. But it was these promises that had justified the lack of personal autonomy and control over one's own labour. It was these promises that had been central to the legitimisation of the Soviet regime. The sting in the tail of all social contract theories is, of course, that when the state fails to deliver, the citizens are relieved of their obligation. By the late 1980s, it was evident that the modes of legitimisation retained from Marx and practised within the Soviet Union would no longer serve as the anchor of state power.

Conclusion

Each of the variants of the Marxian emancipatory project had been tried and each had ended in failure. The project for socialism as self-activity and commune-based freedom ended in hunger, isolation and devastation. The project for socialism as efficiency and state-guaranteed security had issued in the terrorist austerity of the Stalin period. Finally, the project for socialism as the promise of plenty generated by the planning mechanisms of the all-people's state terminated in elite corruption and chronic shortages of consumer goods. Only at the very end was there any theoretical (or practical) attempt to grapple with the genuine complexities of modern politics.

There is a strong case to be made that Marxism impoverished political discourse throughout the Soviet period and, arguably, still impedes the emergence of a healthy relationship between state and civil society in Russia. In the entire course of the Soviet experiment issues like how we are to control, limit and hold power-holders accountable were simply undiscussable. Politics as contestation, the open canvassing of alternative political or economic strategies, or public appeal to particular constituencies, simply did not exist. Only at the very end, and even then only fitfully, did Soviet social theorists and political leaders begin to think seriously about the complex reciprocal relationships between civil society, the individual and the state. Only at the end was civil society rediscovered as a sphere that could and should have its own degree of autonomous development, and this, in turn, required new

attitudes towards law and due process. Only at the very end of the Soviet experiment were the virtues of pluralism hesitatingly canvassed. These very radical innovations were hesitantly suggested in Mikhail Gorbachev's programmes *perestroika* (reconstruction) and *demokratizatsiya* (democratisation). Far from stabilising and renewing the Soviet systems of power they had the exactly opposite effect. Democratisation, especially, proved to be radically corrosive of the Communist monopoly of power. It facilitated the rise of new political and national constituencies that soon dissolved the Soviet Union. It was, finally, only with extreme reluctance that certain groups and individuals were allowed to step outside the constraints of the State Plan and the work collective to create cooperative or individual enterprises. But as soon as this dispensation to control one's own labour was conceded, the party and the state saw their power seep away. The power of the party to control access, to grant or withhold welfare benefit, promotional prospects and so on, was abruptly terminated. The regime could no longer reproduce either the material or the moral values necessary for its own survival. It yielded place to the unfettered operation of a perverse variant of capitalism, the luxuriant growth of plebiscitary democracy, and the darkly seductive charms of nationalism.