Anarcho
How the Revolution was Lost?
July 16, 2008

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A critique of the standard Leninist account of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, using the SWP's **How the Revolution was Lost** (by Chris Harman) as its basis.

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not above the mass and the professional, technical, defence and other branches."[64] By creating a (so-called) workers' state and so substituting party power for workers power, the Russian Revolution had made its first fatal step towards Stalinism.

[64] Voline, **The Unknown Revolution** (Black & Red/Solidarity, Detroit/Chicago, 1974) p. 197

sheviks. What 'taking power' really implies is that the vast majority of the working class at last realises its ability to manage both production and society and organises to this end. As Russia shows, any attempt to replace self-management with party rule "objectively" creates the class structure of state capitalism.

Finally, we must stress that there is a counter-example which shows the impact of Bolshevik ideology on the fate of the revolution and that alternative policies could exist. This is the anarchist influenced Makhnovist movement.[63] Defending the revolution in the Ukraine against all groups aiming to impose their will on the masses, the Makhnovists were operating in the same objective conditions facing the Bolsheviks — civil war, economic disruption, isolation and so forth. However, the policies the Makhnovists implemented were radically different than those of the Bolsheviks. While the Makhnovists called soviet congresses, the Bolsheviks disbanded them. The former encouraged free speech and organisation, the latter crushed both. While the Bolsheviks raised party dictatorship and one-man management to ideological truisms, the Makhnovists they stood for and implemented workplace, army, village and soviet self-management. This shows the failure of Bolshevism cannot be put down to purely objective factors like the civil war, the politics of Marxism played their part.

Only when working people actually run themselves society will a revolution be successful. For anarchists, this meant that *"effective emancipation can be achieved only by the **direct, widespread, and independent action** ... **of the workers themselves**, grouped ... in their own class organisations ... on the basis of concrete action and self-government, **helped but not governed**, by revolutionaries working in the very midst of, and*

[63] Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement** (Freedom Press, London, 1987); Alexandre Skirda,, **Nestor Makhno Anarchy's Cossack: The struggle for free soviets in the Ukraine 1917–1921** (AK Press, Edinburgh/Oakland, 2004); Michael Malet, **Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War** (MacMillan Press, London, 1982).

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tive which sees class consciousness as resting in the party, we are left with a very small jump to the Bolshevik orthodoxy of party dictatorship. After all, if the workers reject the party then, clearly, their consciousness has dropped, so necessitating party dictatorship over a "declassed" proletariat. Which, of course, is exactly what the Bolsheviks did do and justify ideologically. As Noam Chomsky summarises:

*"In the stages leading up to the Bolshevik coup in October 1917, there **were** incipient socialist institutions developing in Russia — workers' councils, collectives, things like that. And they survived to an extent once the Bolsheviks took over — but not for very long; Lenin and Trotsky pretty much eliminated them as they consolidated their power. I mean, you can argue about the **justification** for eliminating them, but the fact is that the socialist initiatives were pretty quickly eliminated.*

*"Now, people who want to justify it say, 'The Bolsheviks had to do it' — that's the standard justification: Lenin and Trotsky had to do it, because of the contingencies of the civil war, for survival, there wouldn't have been food otherwise, this and that. Well, obviously the question is, was that true. To answer that, you've got to look at the historical facts: I don't think it was true. In fact, I think the incipient socialist structures in Russia were dismantled **before** the really dire conditions arose ... But reading their own writings, my feeling is that Lenin and Trotsky knew what they were doing, it was conscious and understandable."*[62]

Chomsky is right on both counts. The attack on the basic building blocks of genuine socialism started before the civil war. Moreover, it did not happen by accident. It was rooted in the Bolshevik vision of socialism.

For anarchists, the lessons of the Russian Revolution are clear. Working class power cannot be identified or equated with the power of the Party — as it repeatedly was by the Bol-

[62] **Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky** (The New Press, New York, 2002), p. 226

Opposition supported the Bolshevik "principle" of party dictatorship and that Lenin had advocated "one-man management" since early 1918. His accounts of Kronstadt and the death of soviet democracy have failed to survive more recent research (unlike anarchist accounts). The attempt to exonerate Bolshevik politics for the rise of Stalinism simply fails. Bolshevik politics played a key role in the degeneration of the revolution. Rather than seeing *"workers' democracy as central to socialism"* Bolshevism (including its anti-Stalinist factions) raised the dictatorship of the party over workers' democracy into an ideological truism (and, of course, practised it).

Once the distortions of Harman's account are corrected and supplemented by further research, it is not hard to agree with Maurice Brinton's conclusion that *"there is a clear-cut and incontrovertible link between what happened under Lenin and Trotsky and the later practices of Stalinism ... The more one unearths about this period the more difficult it becomes to define — or even to see — the 'gulf' allegedly separating what happened in Lenin's time from what happened later. Real knowledge of the facts also makes it impossible to accept ... that the whole course of events was 'historically inevitable' and 'objectively determined'. Bolshevik ideology and practice were themselves important and sometimes decisive factors in the equation, at every critical stage of this critical period."*[60]

Part of the problem is that Harman considers as *"the essence of socialist democracy,"* namely *"the democratic interaction of leaders and led."*[61] In other words, a vision of "socialism" based on the division between leaders (order givers) and led (order takers). Rather than seeing socialism as being based on self-management, the Bolshevik tradition equates rule by the party with rule by the working class. Combine this with a perspec-

[60] **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 84

[61] *"Party and Class"*, contained in Tony Cliff, Duncan Hallas, Chris Harman and Leon Trotsky, **Party and Class**, (Bookmarks, London, 1996), p. 66

Part I

This year marks the 90th anniversary of the Russian Revolution. While the Bolshevik Myth appears to be on the decline, some radicals are some infatuated with it and so, unfortunately, anarchists still need to explain why Leninism lead to Stalinism. An effective way of doing so is to contrast the claims of Leninists with reality. Chris Harman's ***"How the Revolution was Lost"*** is an attempt by the British SWP to explain the rise of Stalinism while exonerating the politics of Bolshevism at the same time.[1] First published in 1967 to mark the 50th anniversary of the revolution, this essay is still used by the party and contains all the basic themes they, and other Leninists, use to defend the Bolsheviks. Therefore, it is worth looking at in order to see how its claims have survived recent research and whether the original assertions bear up to analysis. They do not.

Needless to say, Harman places the blame on the degeneration of the revolution on the civil war and the isolation of the revolution. In effect, the exceptional circumstances facing the revolution were the source of the deviations of Bolshevik policies from socialist ideas. However, as Lenin himself acknowledged in 1917, *"revolution ..., in its development, would give rise to exceptionally complicated circumstances"* and *"revolution is the sharpest, most furious, desperate class war and civil war. Not a single great revolution in history has escaped civil war. No one who does not live in a shell could imagine that civil war is conceivable without exceptionally complicated circumstances."*[2] As such, it seems difficult to blame the inescapable resistance by

[1] Chris Harman, *"Russia – How the Revolution was Lost,"* first published in **International Socialism 30**, Autumn 1967 and subsequently reprinted as a pamphlet and included in **Russia: From Workers' State to State Capitalism**.

[2] Lenin, **Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?** (Sutton Publishing Ltd, Stroud, 1997), p. 80, p. 81

the ruling class for the problems of a revolution. If it cannot handle the inevitable, then Bolshevism is clearly to be avoided.

Got no class?

Harman sees the key as *"the dislocation of the working class. It was reduced to 43 per cent of its former numbers. The others were returned to their villages or dead on the battlefield. In purely quantitative terms, the class that had led the revolution, the class whose democratic processes had constituted the living core of Soviet power, was halved in importance... What remained was not even half of that class"* as what was left was atomised. Thus the *"decimation of the working class"* meant that *"of necessity the Soviet institutions took on a life independently of the class they had arisen from."*

The major problem with this assertion is simply that the Russian working class was more than capable of collective action throughout the Civil War period — against the Bolsheviks. In the Moscow area, while it is *"impossible to say what proportion of workers were involved in the various disturbances,"* following the lull after the defeat of the workers' conference movement in mid-1918 *"each wave of unrest was more powerful than the last, culminating in the mass movement from late 1920."* For example, at the end of June 1919, *"a Moscow committee of defence (KOM) was formed to deal with the rising tide of disturbances ... KOM concentrated emergency power in its hands, overriding the Moscow Soviet, and demanding obedience from the population. The disturbances died down under the pressure of repression."* In early 1921, *"military units called in"* against striking workers *"refused to open fire, and they were replaced by the armed communist detachments"* who did. *"The following day several factories went on strike"* and troops *"disarmed and locked in as a precaution"* by the government against possible fraternising. On February 23rd, *"Moscow was placed under martial law with a*

minor positions in remote areas" and in 1928 Stalin *"began to imitate the Tsars directly and deport revolutionaries to Siberia. In the long run, even this was not to be enough. He was to do what even the Romanoffs had been unable to do: systematically murder those who had constituted the revolutionary Party of 1917."* However, all this also occurred under Lenin. For example, *"Anarchist prisoners ... were sent to concentration camps near Archangel in the frozen north"* after Kronstadt.[58] Mensheviks were also banished to remote locations, including Siberia. During the Civil War, *"Yurenev ... spoke at the [Bolshevik's] Ninth Congress (April 1920) of the methods used by the Central Committee to suppress criticism, including virtual exile of critics: 'One goes to Christiana, another sent to the Urals, a third — to Siberia.'"*[59] Given that the murder of anarchists and other opposition socialists by the Cheka under Lenin was commonplace, Harman seems to be complaining that Stalin implemented ***within*** the party policies which had been used ***outside*** the party by Lenin.

Therefore, a new class had taken power in Russia long before 1928, a class of party leaders and bureaucrats who repressed the workers to maintain their own power and privileges. What should be explained is not the rise of Stalinism under these circumstances but rather how Trotsky could still argue for party dictatorship in 1937, never mind in 1927, and why the SWP consider him a leading exponent of "socialism from below"!

Conclusion

All in all, Harman's account of the degeneration of the Russian revolution leaves much to be desired. He misuses source material, fails to mention that the apparently "democratic" Left

[58] Paul Avrich, **The Russian Anarchists** (W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1978), p. 234

[59] E.H. Carr, **The Bolshevik Revolution**, vol. 1 (Pelican Books, 1966), p. 184

Thus Harman's "analysis" of the rise of Stalinism concentrates on the rhetoric of those in charge, not the class structure within society (which he admits had not changed). In 1928, nothing changed beyond a change in some of the management. This can be seen from Harman's assertion that Stalin *"had a social basis of his own. He could survive when neither the proletariat nor the peasantry exercised power."* Yet this was true of the Bolsheviks under Lenin (to re-quote Harman, *"direct workers' power had not existed since 1918"*). Thus his attempt to justify the SWP's argument that Stalinism represented a new class system fails.[57]

Harman ends by arguing that *"there can be no doubt that by 1928 a new class had taken power in Russia. It did not have to engage in direct military conflict with the workers to gain power, because direct workers' power had not existed since 1918."* Indeed, *"direct workers' power"* had been broken by the Bolsheviks long before 1928. In early 1918, *"direct military conflict with the workers"* ***had*** taken place to maintain Bolshevik power, which had raised the *"principle"* of party dictatorship to an ideological truism in 1919. Not that you would know this from Harman's account. As such, when he argues that *"the one class with the capacity for exercising genuinely socialist pressures – the working class – was the weakest, the most disorganised, the least able to exert such pressures"* we are not surprised as the Bolsheviks had to repress it to remain in power!

Discussing the tactics used against the Left Opposition, Harman states that they were *"likely to find themselves assigned to*

[57] It should be noted that Tony Cliff, the SWP's founder and main ideologue, considered Stalinism to be "state capitalism" not because of capitalist social relationships within production but because it was in military (and, to a lesser degree, economic) competition with the capitalist West. Not only does this makes as much sense as calling Native American tribes "capitalist" when they were fighting for survival against the US Army, it also suggests that Lenin's regime was also state capitalist as it, too, was in (direct and indirect) military competition with the Imperialist powers. Someone should have explained to him what "mode of production" means.

24-hour watch on factories by the communist detachments and trustworthy army units."[3]

Nor was this collective struggle limited to Moscow. *"Strike action remained endemic in the first nine months of 1920"* and *"in the first six months of 1920 strikes had occurred in seventy-seven per cent of middle-sized and large works."* For the Petrograd province, soviet figures state that in 1919 there were 52 strikes with 65,625 participants and in 1920 73 strikes with 85,645, both high figures as according to one set of figures, which are by no means the lowest, there were 109,100 workers there. In February and March 1921 *"industrial unrest broke out in a nation-wide wave of discontent ... General strikes, or very widespread unrest, hit Petrograd, Moscow, Saratov and Ekaterinoslavl."* Only one major industrial region was unaffected. In response to the general strike in Petrograd, the Bolsheviks replied with a *"military clamp-down, mass arrests and other coercive measures, such as the closure of enterprises, the purging of the workforce and stopping of rations which accompanied them."*[4]

Given this collective rebellion all across the industrial centres of Russia throughout the Civil War and after, it hard to take Harman seriously when he argues that the working class had *"ceased to exist in any meaningful sense."*[5] Clearly it had and was capable of collective action and organisation — until it was repressed by the Bolsheviks. This implies that a key fac-

[3] Richard Sakwa, **Soviet Communists in Power: a study of Moscow during the Civil War, 1918–21** (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1987), p. 94, pp. 94–5, p. 245

[4] J. Aves, **Workers Against Lenin: Labour Protest and the Bolshevik Dictatorship** (Tauris Academic Studies, London, 1996), p. 69, p. 109, p. 120

[5] The fact that the Russian working class was capable of collective action was known in 1967. For example, Ida Mett: *"And if the proletariat was that exhausted how come it was still capable of waging virtually total general strikes in the largest and most heavily industrialised cities?"* [Ida Mett, **The Kronstadt Rebellion** (Solidarity, London, date unknown), p. 81] As such, ideological reasons explain Harman's assertions.

tor in rise of Stalinism was ***political*** — the simple fact that the workers would not vote Bolshevik in free soviet and union elections and so they were not allowed to. As one Soviet Historian put it, *"taking the account of the mood of the workers, the demand for free elections to the soviets [raised in early 1921] meant the implementation in practice of the infamous slogan of soviets without communists,"* although there is little evidence that the strikers actually raised that *"infamous"* slogan.[6] It should also be noted that Bolshevik orthodoxy at the time stressed that, to quote Lenin, that *"the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class ... It can be exercised only by a vanguard."*[7] Zinoviev clarified what this meant: *"the dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party."*[8]

Harman presents a somewhat contradictory account of the working class in this period, arguing that many workers fled *"returned to their villages"* ***and*** that *"raw peasants from the countryside, without socialist traditions or aspirations, took their place."*[9] Why would peasants come to the starving towns when workers were fleeing them? Looking at the strike wave of early 1921, the *"strongest reason"* for accepting that it was established workers who were behind it was *"the form and course of protest"* which reached *"back through the spring of 1917 and beyond [and] were an important factor"* in its organisation.[10]

[6] quoted by Aves, p. 123

[7] Lenin stressed that this formula was applicable "*in all capitalist countries"* as *"the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 32, p. 21]

[8] **Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920** (Pathfinder, New York, 1991), vol. 1, p. 152

[9] Ironically, the Mensheviks blamed the rise of Bolshevik popularity before the war and in 1917 precisely on its appeal to the "new proletariat," i.e. those new to the cities and still tied to its village origin.

[10] Aves, p. 126

Harman argues that it is *"often said that the rise of Stalinism in Russian cannot be called 'counter-revolution' because it was a gradual process ... But this is to misconstrue the Marxist method. It is not the case that the transition from one sort of society to another always involves a single sudden change."* While this is the case *"for the transition from a capitalist State to a workers' State,"* it is not the case in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. In the transition to capitalism, there are *"a whole series of different intensities and at different levels, as the decisive economic class (the bourgeoisie) forces political concessions in its favour."* He argues that the *"counter-revolution in Russia proceeded along the second path rather than the first."* Of course, the bourgeoisie was fighting against an existing ruling class and its class position was already well defined. Thus, Harman's analogy undermines his argument as the bureaucracy also built on its existing class position.

Harman acknowledges this by arguing that the *"bureaucracy did not have to seize power from the workers all at once"* due to the *"decimation of the working class"* and so its *"members controlled industry and the police and the army."* As such, it was ***already*** the ruling class (*"It did not even have to wrest control of the State apparatus to bring it into line with its economic power"* in Harman's words). Thus, the "new" ruling class *"merely had to bring a political and industrial structure that it already controlled into line with its own interests"* and did so by changing *"the mode of operation of the Party"* to bring it *"into line with the demands of the central bureaucracy."* This could be achieved *"only ... by a direct confrontation with those elements in the Party which ... still adhered to the revolutionary socialist tradition."* In other words, the bureaucracy was already (objectively) the ruling class and so 1928 did not mark any change at all in the class structure of Russian society and so does ***not***, obviously, signify any change in the nature of the regime. If Russia was state capitalist in 1928, it had already been so under Lenin and Trotsky.

such a judgement. One may ... have doubts as to whether the bureaucratic deformations of the Bolshevik regime would have been straightened out by the winds coming from revolutions in other countries."[56]

A "new" class?

Harman's article is an attempt to show how Leninism and Stalinism were different, that the former was a new class (state capitalist) system. However, he fails to prove his argument. As Harman himself acknowledges, the class structure of *"state capitalism"* already existed under Lenin. In 1921 *"it was objectively the case that power in the Party and State lay in the hands of a small group of functionaries."* He argues that *"these were by no means a cohesive ruling class"* and *"were far from being aware of sharing a common intent."* However, these groups were *"cohesive"* enough to resist working class and peasant revolt in order to defend their rule. During the 1920s, he argues, this changed: *"the bureaucracy was developing from being a class in itself to being a class for itself."* Thus the class structure did not change during this time.

So we have a paradox. While ("objectively") Lenin's regime was state capitalist, Harman argues that it was not. This is because the *"policies they [the bureaucracy] implemented were shaped by elements in the Party still strongly influenced by the traditions of revolutionary socialism."* Thus Lenin's regime was not state capitalist because, well, Lenin was a "revolutionary socialist" and he was in charge of it! Does this mean that a capitalist state becomes less so when a Labour government holds office? Thus Harman's argument rests on the good intentions of those in power. Eschewing any discussion of changing social relationships and class structures, we are left with an example of philosophical idealism at its worse, i.e. that ideas somehow determine the nature of a regime.

[56] **The Kronstadt Revolt**, p. 82

Clearly, Harman's argument can be faulted. Nor is it particularly original, as it dates back to Lenin and was first formulated *"to justify a political clamp-down"* in response to ***rising*** working class protest rather than its lack: *"As discontent amongst workers became more and more difficult to ignore, Lenin ... began to argue that the consciousness of the working class had deteriorated ... workers had become 'declassed.'"* However, there *"is little evidence to suggest that the demands that workers made at the end of 1920 ... represented a fundamental change in aspirations since 1917."*[11] So while the *" working class had decreased in size and changed in composition,... the protest movement from late 1920 made clear that it was not a negligible force and that in an inchoate way it retained a vision of socialism which was not identified entirely with Bolshevik power ... Lenin's arguments on the declassing of the proletariat was more a way of avoiding this unpleasant truth than a real reflection of what remained, in Moscow at least, a substantial physical and ideological force."*[12]

This explains why working class struggle during this period generally fails to get mentioned by the likes of the SWP. It simply undermines their justifications for Bolshevik dictatorship.

Divide and Rule?

Harman argues that *"to keep alive"* many workers *"resorted to direct barter of their products – or even parts of their machines – with peasants for food. Not only was the leading class of the revolution decimated, but the ties linking its members together were fast disintegrating."* This seems ironic, for two reasons.

Firstly, in 1918 Lenin had argued that *"those who believe that socialism will be built at a time of peace and tranquillity are profoundly mistaken: it will everywhere be built at a time of disruption, at a time of famine."*[13] Again, if Bolshevism becomes un-

[11] Aves, p. 18, p. 90 and p. 91.
[12] Sakwa, p. 261
[13] Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol.27 p. 517

stuck by the inevitable side effects of revolution, then it should be avoided.[14]

Secondly, there is the issue of Bolshevik ideology. For example, Bolshevik policies banning trade helped undermine a collective response to the problems of exchange between city and country. For example, a delegation of workers from the Main Workshops of the Nikolaev Railroad to Moscow reported to a well-attended meeting that *"the government had rejected their request [to obtain permission to buy food collectively] arguing that to permit the free purchase of food would destroy its efforts to come to grips with hunger by establishing a 'food dictatorship.'"*[15] Bolshevik ideology replaced collective working class action with an abstract "collective" response via the state, which turned the workers into isolated and atomised individuals.[16] Other policies undermined working class collectivity. For example, in early 1918 Lenin stated that *"we must raise the question of piece-work and apply it ... in practice."*[17] As Tony

[14] It should be noted that the Russian revolution confirmed Kropotkin's argument that any revolution would see economic disruption and dislocation (see **Conquest of Bread** and **Act for Yourselves**). Leading Bolsheviks like Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin came to realise this decades later and, unlike their followers, saw it as a "law" of revolutions.

[15] David Mandel, **The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power: from the July days 1917 to July 1918** (MacMillan, London, 1984), p. 392

[16] As such, the Bolsheviks provided a good example to support Malatesta's argument that *"if ... one means government action when one talks of social action, then this is still the resultant of individual forces, but only of those individuals who form the government ... it follows... that far from resulting in an increase in the productive, organising and protective forces in society, it would greatly reduce them, limiting initiative to a few, and giving them the right to do everything without, of course, being able to provide them with the gift of being all-knowing."* [**Anarchy** (Freedom Press, London, 1974), pp. 36–7] Can it be surprising, then, that Bolshevik policies aided the atomisation of the working class by replacing collective organisation and action by state bureaucracy?

[17] **The Immediate Tasks Of The Soviet Government** (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1970), p. 23

Given this Bolshevik orthodoxy, it seems incredulous that Harman states that *"if at home objective conditions made workers' democracy non-existent, at least there was the possibility of those motivated by the Party's traditions bringing about its restoration given industrial recovery at home and revolution abroad."* After all, party dictatorship was the prevailing Bolshevik orthodoxy. Those Bolsheviks, like **Miasnikov's** Workers' Group, who stood for ***real*** workers democracy had been expelled and repressed.[55] Ida Mett shows a greater appreciation of reality: *"would not a revolution in another country have been influenced by the spirit of the Russian Revolution? When one considers the enormous moral authority of the Russian Revolution throughout the world one may ask oneself whether the deviations of this Revolution would not eventually have left an imprint on other countries. Many historical facts allow*

revolution" fits in well with Bolshevik ideology in the run up to Stalinism. [**Writings 1936–37** (Pathfinder Press, New York, 1978), pp. 513–4]

[55] Paul Avrich, *"Bolshevik Opposition to Lenin: G. T. Miasnikov and the Workers' Group"*, **Russian Review**, Vol. 43, No. 1; G. P. Maximoff, **The Guillotine at Work: twenty years of terror in Russia (data and documents)**, (Chicago Section of the Alexander Berkman Fund, Chicago, 1940), pp. 268–71. The response of Trotsky to the state repression of the **Workers' Group** is significant, given that for most modern Leninists he raised the banner of "authentic" Leninism against the obvious evils of Stalinism. Tony Cliff notes that in July and August 1923 Moscow and Petrograd *"were shaken by industrial unrest ... Unofficial strikes broke out in many places ... In November 1923, rumours of a general strike circulated throughout Moscow, and the movement seems at the point of turning into a political revolt. Not since the Kronstadt rising of 1921 had there been so much tension in the working class and so much alarm in the ruling circles."* The ruling elite, including Trotsky, acted to maintain their position and the secret police turned on any political group which could influence the movement. As the *"strike wave gave a new lease of life to the Mensheviks ... the GPU carried out a massive round up of Mensheviks, and as many as one thousand were arrested in Moscow alone."* When it was the turn of the **Workers Group**, Trotsky *"did not condemn their persecution"* and *"did not support their incitement of workers to industrial unrest."* Moreover, *"[n]or was Trotsky ready to support the demand for workers' democracy in the extreme form"*(i.e., genuine form) they had raised it [**Trotsky**, vol. 3 (Bookmarks, London, 1991), pp. 25–7]

the leading role of our party would mean to bring into question all the achievements of the revolution and its future."[52]

Trotsky was just stating mainstream Bolshevik ideology, echoing a statement made in March 1923 by the Central Committee (of which he and Lenin were members) to mark the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party. It sums up the lessons gained from the revolution and states that *"the party of the Bolsheviks proved able to stand out fearlessly against the vacillations within its own class, vacillations which, with the slightest weakness in the vanguard, could turn into an unprecedented defeat for the proletariat."* Vacillations, of course, are expressed by workers' democracy. Little wonder the statement rejects it: *"The dictatorship of the working class finds its expression in the dictatorship of the party."*[53]

Needless to say, Harman fails to mention this particular Bolshevik orthodoxy (which dates back to at least 1919). He also fails to mention that the 1927 **Platform of the Opposition** (a merger of the Left and Zinoviev Oppositions) shared this perspective, ironically attacking Stalin for ***weakening*** the party's dictatorship: *"[the] growing replacement of the party by its own apparatus is promoted by a 'theory' of Stalin's which denies the Leninist principle, inviolable for every Bolshevik, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is and can be realised only through the dictatorship of the party."* As Harman does not bother to mention this particular *"principle,"* we cannot discover how party dictatorship and workers' democracy can be reconciled.[54]

[52] **Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 158, p. 160

[53] *"To the Workers of the USSR"* in G. Zinoviev, **History of the Bolshevik Party: A Popular Outline** (New Park Publications, London, 1973), p. 213, p. 214. It should be noted that Trotsky had made identical comments in 1921 at the Tenth Party Congress (see Brinton, p. 78).

[54] Given that Trotsky was still talking about the *"objective necessity"* of the *"revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party"* in 1937, Harman's comment that the **Left Opposition** *"adhered"* to the Bolshevik tradition takes on a new meaning! Trotsky's comment that the *"revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-*

Cliff (of all people) noted, *"the employers have at their disposal a number of effective methods of disrupting th[e] unity [of workers as a class]. Once of the most important of these is the fostering of competition between workers by means of piece-work systems."* He notes that these were used by the Nazis and the Stalinists *"for the same purpose."*[18] Obviously piece-work has different consequences (and aims?) when Lenin introduces it!

Combine these with the turning of the soviets and unions into rubber-stamps for the Bolshevik party, the undermining of the factory committees, the disbanding of solider committees and the elimination of freedom of assembly, press and organisation for workers, little wonder the masses ceased to play a role in the revolution!

From soviets to state

We must stress that this process started ***before*** the start of the Civil war that Harman blames for all the problems of Bolshevism in power. He states that *"until the Civil War was well under way"* the *"democratic dialectic of party and class could continue. The Bolsheviks held power as the majority party in the Soviets. But other parties continued to exist there too. The Mensheviks continued to operate legally and compete with the Bolsheviks for support until June 1918."*

Given that the Civil War started on the 25th of May and the Mensheviks were expelled from the Soviets on the 14th of June, it is clear that Harman is being less than honest in his account. Indeed, extensive evidence exists to disprove his assertions. Looking at Getzler's **Martov** (which Harman quotes to prove Bolshevik popularity in October 1917), we discover that *"Menshevik newspapers and activists in the trade unions, the Soviets, and the factories had made a considerable impact on a working class which was becoming increasingly disillusioned*

[18] **State Capitalism in Russia** (Bookmarks, London, 1988), pp. 18–9

with the Bolshevik regime, so much so that in many places the Bolsheviks felt constrained to dissolve Soviets or prevent re-elections where Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries had gained majorities."[19]

The Bolsheviks expelled the Mensheviks in the context of political loses ***before*** the Civil War. As Getzler notes the Bolsheviks *"drove them underground, just on the eve of the elections to the Fifth Congress of Soviets in which the Mensheviks were expected to make significant gains."*[20] Recent research disproves Harman's claim and confirms Getzler. *"The Bolshevik's soviet electoral hegemony began to significantly erode"* by the spring of 1918 with *"big gains by the SRs and particularly by the Mensheviks."* In all the provincial capitals of European Russia where elections were held on which data exists, the Mensheviks and the SRs won majorities and *"Bolshevik armed force usually overthrew the results"* of these elections (as well as the resulting workers' protests).[21]

In Petrograd, the elections of June 1918 saw the Bolsheviks *"lost the absolute majority in the soviet they had previously enjoyed"* but remained the largest party. However, the results of these elections where irrelevant as a *"Bolshevik victory was assured by the numerically quite significant representation now given to trade unions, district soviets, factory-shop committees, district workers conferences, and Red Army and naval units, in which the Bolsheviks had overwhelming strength."*[22] Similar

[19] Israel Getzler, **Martov: A Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat** (Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1967), p. 179

[20] While the Bolsheviks *"offered some formidable fictions to justify the expulsions"* there was *"of course no substance in the charge that the Mensheviks had been mixed in counter-revolutionary activities on the Don, in the Urals, in Siberia, with the Czechoslovaks, or that they had joined the worst Black Hundreds."* [Israel Getzler, **Martov**, p. 181]

[21] Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Democracy** (Polity Press, Oxford, 1990), pp. 22–4

[22] Alexander Rabinowitch, *"The Evolution of Local Soviets in Petrograd"*, pp. 20–37, **Slavic Review**, Vol. 36, No. 1, p. 36f

general upheaval." Ultimately, it seems strange that Harman blames the side effects of every revolution for the failure of the Russian one.[51]

Part III

Bolshevism and Party Dictatorship

While Harman notes that the idea of extending the revolution abroad was *"Bolshevik orthodoxy in 1923,"* yet he fails to comment on that other Bolshevik orthodoxy at the time, namely dictatorship by the party.

Harman notes that *"in 1923 when the Left Opposition developed, it was still possible for it to express its views in* ***Pravda****, although there were ten articles defending the leadership to every one opposing it."* He claims *"there can be no doubt that in terms of its ideas"* it was *"the faction in the Party that adhered most closely to the revolutionary socialist tradition of Bolshevism ... It retained the view of workers' democracy as central to socialism."* One of their *"three interlinked central planks"* was that *"industrial development had to be accompanied by increased workers' democracy, so as to end bureaucratic tendencies in the Party and State."*

The only problem with this is that it is not true. He fails to mention that in 1923, Trotsky (leader of the ***Left Opposition***) was arguing that *"if there is one question which basically not only does not require revision but does not so much as admit the thought of revision, it is the question of the dictatorship of the Party, and its leadership in all spheres of our work."* He stressed that *"our party is the ruling party ... To allow any changes whatever in this field, to allow the idea of a partial ... curtailment of*

[51] Kropotkin, **Conquest of Bread** (Elephant Editions, Catania, 1985), p. 70

monplace. However, on closer inspection the idea that a German revolution would have saved the Russian one is flawed.

As, according to Harman, *"direct workers' power had not existed since 1918,"* we need to compare Germany in the period 1918–19 to Russia in 1917–18. Simply put, Germany was in as bad a state as Russia. In the year the revolution started, production had fallen by 23% in Russia (from 1913 to 1917) and by 43% in Germany (from 1913 to 1918). Once revolution had effectively started, production fell even more. In Russia, it fell to 65% of its pre-war level in 1918, in Germany it fell to 62% of its pre-war level in 1919. Thus, in 1919, the *"industrial production reached an all-time low"* and it *"took until the late 1920s for [food] production to recover its 1912 level ... In 1921 grain production was still ... some 30 per cent below the 1912 figure."* Of course, in Germany revolution did not go as far as in Russia, and so production did rise somewhat in 1920 and afterwards. What is significant is that in 1923, production fell dramatically by 34% (from around 70% of its pre-war level to around 45% of that level). This economic collapse did not deter the Communists from trying to provoke a revolution in Germany that year, so it seems strange that while economic collapse under capitalism equates to a revolutionary situation, a similar collapse under the Bolsheviks equates to a situation where revolution is undermined.[50]

Thus, if a combination of civil war and economic disruption caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, then why would a similarly afflicted Germany help Russia? Equally, Russia and Germany both prove Kropotkin's argument that a revolution means *"the unavoidable stoppage of at least half the factories and workshops,"* the *"complete disorganisation"* of capitalism and that "*exchange and industry suffer most from the*

[50] Tony Cliff, **Lenin: The Revolution Besieged**, vol. 3 (Pluto Press, London, 1978); V. R. Berghahn, **Modern Germany: society, economy and politics in the twentieth century**, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987).

"packing" of soviets was evident in the Moscow elections of early 1920.[23]

Rather than the Civil War disrupting the *"democratic dialectic of party and class,"* it was in fact the Bolsheviks who did so in face of rising working class dissent and disillusionment in the spring of 1918. In fact, *"after the initial weeks of 'triumph' ... Bolshevik labour relations after October"* changed and *"soon lead to open conflict, repression, and the consolidation of Bolshevik dictatorship over the proletariat in place of proletarian dictatorship itself."* For example, on June 20th the Obukhov works issued an appeal to the unofficial (and Menshevik influenced) Conference of Factory and Plant Representatives *"to declare a one-day strike of protest on June 25th"* against Bolshevik reprisals against the assassination of a leading Bolshevik. *"The Bolsheviks responded by 'invading' the whole Nevskii district with troops and shutting down Obukhov completely. Meetings everywhere were forbidden."* Faced with a general strike called for July 2nd, the Bolsheviks set up *"machine guns ... at main points throughout the Petrograd and Moscow railroad junctions, and elsewhere in both cities as well. Controls were tightened in factories. Meetings were forcefully dispersed."*[24] The early months of Bolshevik rule were marked by *"worker protests, which then precipitated violent repressions against hostile workers. Such treatment further intensified the disenchantment of significant segments of Petrograd labour with Bolshevik-dominated Soviet rule."*[25]

While Harman argues (in his discussion on Kronstadt, ironically enough) that *"for all its faults, it was precisely the Bolshe-*

[23] Sakwa, p. 177

[24] William Rosenberg, *"Russian labour and Bolshevik Power,"* pp. 98–131, **The Workers' revolution in Russia, 1917**, Daniel H. Kaiser (ed.), (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987), p. 117, pp. 126–7 and p. 127

[25] Alexander Rabinowitch, *"Early Disenchantment with Bolshevik Rule: New Data form the Archives of the Extraordinary Assembly of Delegates from Petrograd Factories"*, **Politics and Society under the Bolsheviks**, Dermott, Kevin and Morison, John (eds.) (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1999), p. 37

vik party that had alone whole-heartedly supported Soviet power," the facts are that the Bolsheviks only supported "Soviet power" when the soviets were Bolshevik.[26] If the workers voted for others, "soviet power" was quickly replaced by party power (the real aim). Harman is correct to state that *"the Soviets that remained [by the end of the civil war] were increasingly just a front for Bolshevik power"* but this had been the situation before its start, not after its end! As such, his assertion that *"the Soviet State of 1917 had been replaced by the single-party State of 1920 onwards"* is simply unsupportable. The Bolsheviks had consolidated their position in early 1918, turning the Soviet State into a de facto one party state by gerrymandering and disbanding of soviets before the start of the Civil War.

Thus, when Harman that argues that *"of necessity the Soviet institutions took on a life independently of the class they had arisen from,"* the "necessity" in question was not the Civil War, but rather the necessity to maintain Bolshevik power (which Lenin continually identified with working class power).

Harman maintains that *"those workers and peasants who fought the Civil War could not govern themselves collectively from their places in the factories."* The obvious question arises as to why these workers and peasants could not *"govern themselves collectively"* while in the Red Army. The answer is simple — the Bolsheviks had eliminated soldier democracy in March 1918 (again, ***before*** the start of the Civil War). In the words of Trotsky, *"the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree."*[27] An army with appointed commanders

[26] As recognised by Martov, who argued that the Bolsheviks loved Soviets only when they were *"in the hands of the Bolshevik party."* [Getzler, p. 174]

[27] quoted by Brintin, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control 1917 to 1921: the State and Counter-Revolution**, (Solidarity and Black and Red, London and Detroit, 1975), pp. 37–8.

sheviks and a free market in agriculture." However, the Kronstadt rebellion did not raise either of those demands. As Paul Avrich notes, *"'Soviets without Communists' was not, as is often maintained by both Soviet and non-Soviet writers, a Kronstadt slogan."*[47] As for agriculture, Kronstadt demanded *"the granting to the peasants of freedom of action on their own soil, and of the right to own cattle, provided they look after them themselves and do not employ hired labour."*[48] This was point 11 of 15, indicating its importance in their eyes. Ironically, most workers' strikes during the civil war period raised the demand for free trade (including the general strike in Petrograd which the Kronstadt sailors rebelled in solidarity with).

In reality, what the Kronstadt rebellion demanded first and foremost was free elections to the soviets, freedom of assembly, organisation speech and press for working people and the end of party dictatorship: *"In effect, the Petropavlovsk resolution was an appeal to the Soviet government to live up to its own constitution, a bold statement of those very rights and freedom which Lenin himself had professed in 1917. In spirit, it was a throwback to October, evoking the old Leninist watchword of 'All power to the soviets.'"*[49]

Little wonder Harman distorts its demands.

The German Revolution

Harman quotes Lenin from 7th March 1918: *"The absolute truth is that without a revolution in Germany we shall perish."* The idea that "isolation" was the root of Russia's problems is com-

[47] Paul Avrich, **Kronstadt 1921** (W.W. Norton and Company Inc., New York, 1970), p. 181

[48] Unlike Lenin's capitalist NEP, the Kronstadt rebels demanded no market for labour in agriculture and so their vision for agriculture was socialist in nature.

[49] Avrich, pp. 75–6

that the Bolsheviks generally blamed strikes and other forms of workers protest on opposition parties. Nor does he mention that the Bolsheviks refused to "give up power" before the start of the Civil War when they lost soviet elections. Simply put, opposition ideas had to be suppressed because the workers ***were*** capable of collectively determining its own interests and taking collective action to realise them. The general strike in Petrograd which inspired the Kronstadt revolt is proof enough of that.

Kronstadt

Turning to that revolt, Harman argues that *"Kronstadt in 1920 was not Kronstadt of 1917. The class composition of its sailors had changed. The best socialist elements had long ago gone off to fight in the army in the front line. They were replaced in the main by peasants whose devotion to the revolution was that of their class."* This popular assertion of Leninists has been refuted. Israel Getzler has demonstrated that of those serving in the Baltic fleet on 1st January 1921 at least 75.5% were drafted before 1918 and so the *"veteran politicised Red sailor still predominated in Kronstadt at the end of 1920."* Further, he investigated the crews of the two major battleships which were the focus of the rising (and renown for their revolutionary zeal in 1917). His findings are conclusive, showing that of the 2,028 sailors where years of enlistment are known, 93.9% were recruited into the navy before and during the 1917 revolution (the largest group, 1,195, joined in the years 1914–16). Only 6.8% of the sailors were recruited in the years 1918–21 (including three who were conscripted in 1921) and they were the only ones who had not been there during the 1917 revolution.[46]

Harman argues that this change in *"class composition"* was *"reflected in the demands of the uprising: Soviets without Bol-*

[46] Getzler, **Kronstadt 1917–1921: The Fate of a Soviet Democracy** (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983), pp. 207–8

is hardly an environment for collective self-government and so it is little wonder he does not mention this.

Unsurprisingly, Samuel Farber notes that *"there is no evidence indicating that Lenin or any of the mainstream Bolshevik leaders lamented the loss of workers' control or of democracy in the soviets, or at least referred to these losses as a retreat, as Lenin declared with the replacement of War Communism by NEP in 1921."*[28]

Top-down democracy is no democracy

Another problem was the Bolshevik vision of (centralised) democracy. Trotsky is typical. In April 1918 he argued that the key factor in democracy was that the central power was elected by the masses, meaning that functional democracy from below could be replaced by decisions and appointments from above as the government was *"better able to judge in the matter than"* the masses. The sovereign people were expected to simply obey their public servants until such time as they could *"dismiss that government and appoint another."* Trotsky raised the question of whether it was possible for the government to act *"against the interests of the labouring and peasant masses?"* He answered no! Yet it is obvious that Trotsky's claim that *"there can be no antagonism between the government and the mass of the workers, just as there is no antagonism between the administration of the union and the general assembly of its members"* is just nonsense.[29] The history of trade unionism is full of examples of committees betraying their membership. The subsequent history Lenin's government shows that there can be *"antagonism"* between rulers and ruled and that appointments are always a key way to further elite interests.

[28] Farber, p. 44

[29] **Leon Trotsky Speaks** (Pathfinder, New York, 1972), p. 113

This vision of top-down "democracy" can, of course, be traced back to Marx's arguments of 1850 and Lenin's comments that the *"organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy"* was *"to proceed from the top downward."*[30] By equating centralised, top-down decision making by an elected government with "democracy," the Bolsheviks had the ideological justification to eliminate the functional democracy associated with the soviets, factory committees and soldiers committees. The Bolshevik vision of democracy became the means by which real democracy was eliminated in area after area of Russian working class life. Needless to say, a state which eliminates functional democracy in the grassroots will not stay democratic in any meaningful sense for long.

Nor does it come as too great a surprise to discover that a government which considers itself as *"better able to judge"* things than the people finally decides to annul any election results it dislikes. This perspective is at the heart of vanguardism, for in Bolshevik ideology the party, not the class, is in the final analysis the repository of class consciousness. This means that once in power it has a built-in tendency to override the decisions of the masses it claimed to represent and justify this in terms of the advanced position of the party. Combine this with a vision of "democracy" which is highly centralised and which undermines local participation then we have the necessary foundations for the turning of party power into party dictatorship.

[30] For those, like the SWP, who maintain that Leninism is "socialism from below" Lenin explicitly denied this: "*Bureaucracy **versus** democracy is in fact centralism **versus** autonomism; it is the organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy as opposed to the organisational principle of opportunist Social-Democracy. The latter strives to proceed from the bottom upward, and, therefore, wherever possible ... upholds autonomism and 'democracy,' carried (by the overzealous) to the point of anarchism. The former strives to proceed from the top downward.*" [**Collected Works**, vol. 7, pp. 396–7]

mittee member went *"without its knowledge"* to Samara). The Volga Mensheviks were *"sharply reproved by Martov and the Menshevik Central Committee and instructed that neither party organisations nor members could take part in ... such adventures."* These quotes, it should be stressed, are on the same page as the one Harman references! Moreover, in October 1918, *"the party dropped, temporarily at least, its demand for a Constituent Assembly."*[44] It would be harder to justify the suppression of the Mensheviks if these facts were mentioned. Little wonder he distorts the source material for his own ends.

The official Menshevik position was one of legal opposition to the Bolsheviks as *"any armed struggle against the Bolshevik state power ... can be of benefit only to counter-revolution"* and any member who ignored this was expelled.[45] They developed a policy of "legal opposition party" which was, as noted above, successful in period running up to June 1918. Harman argues that *"the response of the Bolsheviks was to allow the party's members their freedom (at least, most of the time), but to prevent them acting as an effective political force."* In other words, even those who legally opposed the Bolsheviks were crushed. Little wonder working class collective power in the soviets evaporated.

Harman produces an impressive piece of doublethink to justify all this. He argues that *"in all this the Bolsheviks had no choice. They could not give up power just because the class they represented had dissolved itself while fighting to defend that power. Nor could they tolerate the propagation of ideas that undermined the basis of its power – precisely because the working class itself no longer existed as an agency collectively organised so as to be able to determine its own interests."* If the working class did not exist, nor could express itself collectively, then why would Menshevik propaganda be harmful? And, of course, Harman does not mention the fact

[44] Getzler, p. 185

[45] quoted by Getzler, p. 183

tive self-activity of the people was replaced by the bureaucratic machinery of the state. The Bolshevik onslaught on workers' control, like their attacks on soviet democracy and workers' protest, undoubtedly engendered apathy and cynicism in the workforce, alienating even more the positive participation required for building socialism which the Bolshevik mania for centralism had already marginalised.

The pre-revolution Bolshevik vision of a socialist system was fundamentally centralised and, consequently, top-down. This was what was implemented post-October, with disastrous results. At each turning point, the Bolsheviks implemented policies which reflected their prejudices in favour of centralism, nationalisation and party power. Unsurprisingly, this also undermined the genuine socialist tendencies which existed at the time. Therefore, the Leninist idea that the politics of the Bolsheviks had no influence on the outcome of the revolution, that their policies during the revolution were a product purely of objective forces, is unconvincing.

The Opposition

As Harman recounts, the Bolsheviks suppressed the opposition (in the case of the anarchists, ***before*** the start of the civil war although he does not mention this). As regards the Mensheviks, he argues that *"their policy was one of support of the Bolsheviks against the counter-revolution, with the demand that the latter hand over power to the Constituent Assembly ... In practice this meant that the party contained both supporters and opponents of the Soviet power. Many of its members went over to the side of the Whites (e.g. Menshevik organisations in the Volga area were sympathetic to the counter-revolutionary Samara government, and one member of the Menshevik central committee ... joined it)."* He quotes from Israel Getzler's book **Martov** (page 183) as evidence. What he fails to mention is that these people were *"expelled from the party"* (and the Central Com-

And it must be stressed that in the Bolshevik ideal was that the party should seize power, not the working class as a whole. Lenin in 1917 continually repeating the basic idea that the Bolsheviks *"can and must take state power into their own hands."*[31] He equated party power with popular power and argued that Russia would be governed by the Bolshevik party. The question instantly arises of what happens if the masses turn against the party? The destruction of soviet democracy in the spring and summer of 1918 answers that question. In a clash between soviet democracy and party power, the Bolsheviks consistently favoured the latter — as would be expected given their ideology and so it is not a great step to party dictatorship given the premises of Bolshevism.

Centralisation empowers the few, not the many

Long before the revolution, Lenin had argued that within the party it was a case of *"the transformation of the power of ideas into the power of authority, the subordination of lower Party bodies to higher ones."*[32] Such visions of centralised organisation were the model for the revolutionary state. Yet by its very nature centralism places power into a few hands and effectively eliminates the popular participation required for any successful revolution to develop. The power placed into the hands of the nineteen members of the Bolshevik party's central committee was automatically no longer in the hands of the working class.

As such, when Leninists argue that "objective" circumstances forced the Bolsheviks to substitute their power for that of the masses, anarchists reply that this substitution had occurred the movement the Bolsheviks centralised power and placed it into their own hands. As a result, popular participation and institutions had to wither and die. Moreover,

[31] **Selected Works**, vol. 2, p. 329
[32] **Collected Works**, vol. 7, p. 367

once in power, the Bolsheviks were shaped by their new position and the social relationships it created and, consequently, implemented policies influenced and constrained by the hierarchical and centralised structures they had created.

This was not the only negative impact of Bolshevik centralism. It also spawned a bureaucracy. Instead of the state starting to wither away *"a new bureaucratic and centralised system emerged with extraordinary rapidity ... As the functions of the state expanded so did the bureaucracy."*[33] This was a striking confirmation of the anarchist analysis, which argues that a new bureaucratic class develops around the centralised bodies. This body would soon become riddled with personal influences and favours, so ensuring that members could be sheltered from popular control while, at the same time, exploiting its power to feather its own nest.

Part II

War! What is it good for?

The Bolshevik tradition has found a use for war, namely as justification for the degeneration of Bolshevik policies. Harman argues that *"the tasks at hand in Russia were determined, not by the Bolshevik leaders, but by the international imperialist powers. These had begun a 'crusade' against the Soviet Republic. White and foreign armies had to be driven back before any other questions could be considered."* It is easy to refute this claim by noting that fundamental decisions on important "questions" had already been formulated before this "crusade" took place. As well as the gerrymandering and disbanding of soviets, the Bolsheviks had already presented economic visions. Lenin, in April 1918, was arguing for one-man management

[33] Richard Sakwa, *"The Commune State in Moscow in 1918,"* pp. 429–449, **Slavic Review**, vol. 46, no. 3/4, pp. 437–8

transport network, this was a doubly inefficient). The inefficiency of central financing seriously jeopardised local activity and the centre had displayed a great deal of conservatism and routine thinking. In spite of the complaints from below, the Communist leadership continued on its policy of centralisation (in fact, the ideology of centralisation was reinforced).[42]

A clearer example of the impact of Bolshevik ideology on the fate of the revolution would be hard to find. Simply put, while the situation was pretty chaotic in early 1918, this does not prove that the factory committee's socialism was not the most efficient way of running things under the (difficult) circumstances. After all, rates of *"output and productivity began to climb steadily after"* January 1918 and *"[i]n some factories, production doubled or tripled in the early months of 1918 ... Many of the reports explicitly credited the factory committees for these increases."*[43]

Needless to say, Lenin never wavered in his support for one-man management nor in his belief in the efficiency of centralism to solve all problems, particularly the problems it itself created in abundance. Nor did his explicit call to reproduce capitalist social relations in production cause him any concern for, in Lenin's eyes, if the primary issue was property and not who **manages** the means of production, then factory committees are irrelevant in determining the socialist nature of the economy.

Post-October Bolshevik policy is a striking confirmation of the anarchist argument that a centralised structure would stifle the initiative of the masses and their own organs of self-management. Not only was it disastrous from a revolutionary perspective, it was hopelessly inefficient. The construc-

[42] Silvana Malle, **The Economic Organisation of War Communism, 1918–1921** (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985), p. 232–3 and pp. 269–75

[43] Carmen Sirianni, **Workers' Control and Socialist Democracy** (Verso/NLB, London, 1982), p. 109

than improving things, Lenin's one-man management did the opposite, *"leading in many places ... to a greater degree of confusion and indecision"* and *"this problem of contradictory authorities clearly intensified, rather than lessened."* Indeed, the *"result of replacing workers' committees with one man rule ... on the railways ... was not directiveness, but distance, and increasing inability to make decisions appropriate to local conditions. Despite coercion, orders on the railroads were often ignored as unworkable."* It got so bad that *"a number of local Bolshevik officials ... began in the fall of 1918 to call for the restoration of workers' control, not for ideological reasons, but because workers themselves knew best how to run the line efficiently, and might obey their own central committee's directives if they were not being constantly countermanded."*[41]

That it was Bolshevik policies and not workers' control which was to blame for the state of the railways can be seen from what happened **after** Lenin's one-man management was imposed.

The same terrible results reappeared as Bolshevik policy was imposed in other industries. The centralised Bolshevik economic system quickly demonstrated how to **really** mismanage an economy. The Bolshevik onslaught against workers' control in favour of a centralised, top-down economic regime ensured that the economy was handicapped by an unresponsive system which wasted the local knowledge in the grassroots in favour of orders from above which were issued in ignorance of local conditions. This lead to unused stock coexisting with acute scarcity and the centre unable to determine the correct proportions required at the base. Unfinished products were transferred to other regions while local factories were shut down, wasted both time and resources (and given the state of the

[41] William G. Rosenberg, *"Workers' Control on the Railroads and Some Suggestions Concerning Social Aspects of Labour Politics in the Russian Revolution"*, pp. D1181-D1219, **The Journal of Modern History**, vol. 49, no. 2, p. D1208, p. D1207, p. D1213 and pp. D1208-9

and *"[o]bedience, and unquestioning obedience at that, during work to the one-man decisions of Soviet directors, of the dictators elected or appointed by Soviet institutions, vested with dictatorial powers."*[34] The first group of workers subjected to this policy were the railway workers. As such, "the tasks at hand" were determined by the Bolshevik leaders, who had answered numerous "questions" before the White and foreign armies appeared (which, according to Lenin, was inevitable anyway).

This makes Harman's comment that after 1921 *"the 'red industrialists' began to emerge as a privileged group, with high salaries, and through 'one-man management' in the factories, able to hire and fire at will"* seem inadequate. If, as Harman implies, this was a key factor in the rise of Stalinism and state-capitalism, then, clearly, Lenin's input in these developments cannot be ignored. After advocating "one-man management" and "state capitalism" in early 1918, he remained a firm supporter of them. In early 1920 *"the Communist Party leadership was no longer distracted by the Civil War from concentrating its thoughts and efforts on the formulation and implementation of its labour policies ... The apogee of the War Communism economy occurred after the Civil War was effectively over."* Indeed, one-man management only became commonplace in 1920.[35]

Clearly, you cannot blame an event (the civil war) for policies advocated and implemented before it took place. Indeed, the policies pursued before, during and after the Civil War were identical, suggesting that Bolshevik policy was determined independently of any "crusade."

[34] **Six Theses on the Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, contained in **The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1970), p. 44

[35] Aves, p. 17 and p. 30

Socialism as State Capitalism

Then there is the Bolshevik vision of socialism. The Bolsheviks saw the socialist economy as being built upon the centralised organisations created by capitalism. They confused state capitalism with socialism. *"State capitalism,"* Lenin wrote in May 1917, *"is a complete* ***material*** *preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism"* and so socialism *"is nothing but the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly."* It is *"merely state capitalist monopoly* ***made to benefit the whole people****; by this token it* ***ceases*** *to be capitalist monopoly."*[36] A few months later, he was talking about how the institutions of state capitalism could be taken over and used to create socialism. Unsurprisingly, when defending the need for state capitalism in the spring of 1918 against the "Left Communists," Lenin stressed that he gave his *"'high' appreciation of state capitalism" "****before*** *the Bolsheviks seized power."*[37] And, as Lenin noted, his praise for state capitalism can be found in his **State and Revolution**.

Given this perspective, it is unsurprising that workers' control was not given a high priority once the Bolsheviks seized power. While in order to gain support the Bolsheviks **had** paid lip-service to the idea of workers' control, the party had always given that slogan a radically different interpretation than the factory committees had. While the factory committees had seen workers' control as being exercised directly by the workers and their class organisations, the Bolshevik leadership saw it in terms of state control in which the factory committees would play, at best, a minor role. It is unsurprising to discover which vision of socialism was actually introduced: *"On three occasions in the first months of Soviet power, the [factory] committee leaders sought to bring their model into being. At each point the party leadership overruled them. The result was to vest both managerial* ***and*** *control powers in organs of the state which were subordinate to the central authorities, and formed by them."*[38]

Given his vision of socialism, Lenin's rejection of the factory committees and their vision of socialism comes as no surprise. The Bolsheviks, as Lenin had promised, built from the top-down their system of unified administration based on the Tsarist system of central bodies which governed and regulated certain industries during the war (and, moreover, systematically stopped the factory committee organising together).[39] This was very centralised and very inefficient:

"it seems apparent that many workers themselves ... had now come to believe ... that confusion and anarchy [sic!] ***at the top*** *were the major causes of their difficulties, and with some justification. The fact was that Bolshevik administration was chaotic ... Scores of competitive and conflicting Bolshevik and Soviet authorities issued contradictory orders, often brought to factories by armed Chekists. The Supreme Economic Council... issu[ed] dozens of orders and pass[ed] countless directives with virtually no real knowledge of affairs."*[40]

Faced with the chaos that their own politics, in part, had created, the Bolsheviks (like all bosses) blamed the workers for the failings of their own policies and turned to one-management in April, 1918. This was applied first on the railway workers. The abolishing the workers' committees, however, resulted in *"a terrifying proliferation of competitive and contradictory Bolshevik authorities, each with a claim of life or death importance ... Railroad journals argued plaintively about the correlation between failing labour productivity and the proliferation of competing Bolshevik authorities."* Rather

[36] **The Threatening Catastrophe and how to avoid it** (Martin Lawrence Ltd., undated), p. 38 and p. 37

[37] **Selected Works**, vol. 2, p. 636

[38] Thomas F. Remington, **Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia: Ideology and Industrial Organisation 1917–1921** (University of Pittsburgh Press, London, 1984), p. 38

[39] Brinton, p. 36 and pp. 18–9

[40] William G. Rosenberg, **Russian Labour and Bolshevik Power**, p. 116