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THE DEVELOPMENT OF "LEFT COMMUNISM" UNTIL 1921:
SOVIET RUSSIA, POLAND, LATVIA AND LITHUANIA

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SUMMARY.

This thesis is concerned with the study of a relatively large lacuna in the history of Marxism in the Russian Empire. It analyses the evolution of one particular variant of Marxism, quite distinct from Leninism - a variant which has been termed "Left Communism" -, which existed in the Russian Empire before, and for a time after the October revolution. As well as such "leftists" within the Bolshevik party itself as the "Left Communists" of 1918, the Democratic Centralists and the Workers' Opposition, it has been demonstrated that the revolutionary Marxists of the Kingdom of Poland, Latvia and Lithuania also espoused what has been regarded as a typically "Left Communist" ideology.

In 1917 these revolutionaries and V. I. Lenin came to agree that socialist, rather than merely bourgeois-democratic revolution was possible in the Russian Empire. This position distinguished them from other, more moderate Marxists, such as the Mensheviks, who believed that the "objective prerequisites" for such a revolution had not yet matured in the Russian Empire - and whose evolution, furthermore, was dependent upon a lengthy period of capitalist development. Nevertheless, despite this consensus on the nature of the revolution, serious political differences continued to divide the "Left Communists" and Lenin.

The conflict between them focussed not so much on ends - in fact, it rather appears that they shared basically the same socialist objectives -, but more on the means to achieve their common goal, that is, they advocated contradictory policies which, in their respective opinions, were necessary to carry out socialist revolution itself and the subsequent construction of socialism. In particular, the "Left Communists" fundamentally disagreed with Lenin that the forces of oppressed nationalism could assist the proletariat in its struggle for socialism, and, accordingly, rejected any concessions designed to win over the national minorities to the side of the proletariat as fruitless. Similarly, they denied that any compromises with the individualist ambitions of the peasants would secure their lasting support for socialist revolution and the socialist transformation of society. Finally, they bitterly opposed the Leninist idea that the construction of socialism was to be the responsibility of the party, rather than of the majority of the proletariat, since it alone possessed the required knowledge and political

consciousness to accomplish this task successfully. They were convinced that Lenin's concessions to the aspirations of the minority nationalities and the peasants, as well as his refusal to entrust the building of socialism into the hands of the workers themselves would inevitably result in the degeneration of the revolution from its socialist path.

To explain their support of such divergent policies it has been necessary to re-examine the theories of imperialism to which the "Left Communists" and Lenin respectively subscribed. These theories related both to the question of the possibility of socialist revolution in the Russian Empire itself, as well as to the question of the projected international scale of the anticipated socialist revolution, an issue which in turn was to become a major determinant of their views on nationalism and national self-determination in the imperialist epoch. Moreover, in order to understand the different positions adopted by the "Left Communists" and Lenin towards the peasants, as well as their conflicting estimates of the spontaneous abilities of the workers to construct socialism on their own initiative, it was also essential to examine the evolution of Marxism in its specific, indigenous milieu, both in Russia itself and especially in Poland Latvia and Lithuania, where the development of Marxism has either been little or unsatisfactorily studied. This approach helped to elucidate those particular influences which disposed these Marxists to defend policies contradictory to those of Lenin.

"Left Communism", however, ultimately never came to fruition, and Marxism in its Leninist variant triumphed in Russia. Some attempt has been made to account for the eventual demise of "Left Communism". The idea has certainly been rejected that its downfall was simply and solely caused by political machinations on the part of Lenin and his associates. While this in part helps to explain the defeat of the "leftists" within the Bolshevik party itself, it still leaves unanswered the question why the revolutionary Marxists in Poland, Latvia and Lithuania were unsuccessful in carrying out lasting socialist revolutions in their respective countries. This fact in turn suggested that it was necessary to take into consideration more objective socio-economic factors that existed in the Russian Empire, with a view to ascertaining how far "Left Communism" failed because it neglected realistically to take account both of the aspirations, and the power of the nationalities and the peasants, and of the weakness and shortcomings of the proletariat itself.

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A Note on Transliteration.

Russian language sources have been transliterated in accordance with the system used by the Library of Congress. Exceptions have been made when other spellings have become more or less conventional, e.g., Trotsky instead of Trotskii, Osinsky instead of Osinskii, etc.

In the case of personal names which have differing forms in Russian and Latvian, the Russian form has been used, e.g., Stuchka instead of Stučka, Ianson instead of Jansons, Valeskaln instead of Valeskalns, etc.

Lithuanian names have been left in their original form, with the exception of Vincas Mickevičius-Kapsukas which is more familiar in its Russian form of Vintsas Mitskevich-Kapsukas.

INTRODUCTION.

In the first three decades of this century Marxism in the Russian Empire was far from being the sterile, monolithic dogma of "Marxism-Leninism" that it was later to become. On the contrary, one characteristic of Marxist thought at this time was its very diversity and heterogeneity. The spectrum of different political factions claiming allegiance to Marxism was certainly broad. It ranged, for example, from the deterministically-minded "legal Marxists", who believed that socialism was "not so much a 'negation' of capitalism but, rather, an inevitable result of the development of capitalism itself;"¹ to the Mensheviks, who in general still believed in the necessity of a revolution to overthrow capitalism before socialism could be established, but a revolution, in their opinion, which would be possible in the Russian Empire only after a lengthy period of capitalist development had prepared the "objective prerequisites" for socialism; and to more radical revolutionaries, such as the Bolsheviks and their fellow-thinkers, who came to believe that socialist revolution was even then, in the early twentieth century, possible in the Russian Empire. Indeed, when describing this last-named species of Russian Marxism, L. D. Trotsky was quite correct in maintaining that in 1917 "there were various conflicting currents in Bolshevism from the very first day [of the revolution]..."² - a conclusion, moreover, which justifiably could have been applied more generally to Marxism throughout the Russian Empire both before and for some years after 1917. However, the success and subsequent canonisation of Leninism have tended to overshadow the rival variants - especially the radical ones - of Marxist thought which existed and enjoyed considerable support in this period. This work will attempt to shed some light on one aspect of this relatively uncharted area.

In particular, this study will re-examine the principles defended by the foremost critics of Lenin within the Bolshevik party - the "Left Communists", the Democratic Centralists and the Workers' Opposition - in the years 1918 till 1921, that is, in the formative and still uncertain period of Soviet rule in Russia. The fact that these

oppositionists adopted positions which in essence were identical will be emphasised and it further will be demonstrated that their ideas synthetised coherently into what can be termed a "Left Communist" ideology, distinct from Leninism.

Moreover, it will also be shown that this variant of Marxism was not peculiar to Russia itself, but rather that it extended broadly throughout the peripheral areas of the Russian Empire. The present study will be limited to an examination of the principles espoused by the revolutionary Marxists of the Kingdom of Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, areas crucial to the spread of the revolution to the West, where the intransigent commitment of these revolutionaries to what they considered to be socialist principles in part explains the failure of socialist revolution there - and the subsequent confinement of it to Soviet Russia. Such an undertaking, which itself has been generally disregarded, reveals a hitherto overlooked phenomenon in the history of revolutionary Marxism in the Russian Empire, namely, that the particular combination of ideas which distinguished "Left Communism" as a separate variant of Russian Marxism was also found repeated in these Marxist parties in Poland, Latvia and Lithuania.

However, despite holding the same principles, there is no evidence to suggest that these Marxists consciously collaborated to produce an integrated "Left Communist" ideology - although it is certainly true that the "leftists" in the Bolshevik party and their Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian fellow-thinkers in fact coalesced in their opposition towards the peace of Brest-Litovsk. Nevertheless, it rather will be demonstrated that they arrived at the same ideological construct independently of each other, as the result of quite separate factors which influenced their thinking.

The distinction that separated "Left Communism" from Leninism did not hinge, it seems, on the question of different objectives. Indeed, both the "Left Communists" and Lenin were avowedly committed to the establishment of socialism. Moreover, they appear to have shared basically the same ideas on the feature that would characterise a socialist society. Like the majority of Marxists of their time they apparently conceived of socialism as the creation of a society, ultimately global in scale, in which all the class and national antagonisms

that divided and alienated men would be eliminated, and, consequently, in which men would be able to participate freely, equally and collectively, in consciously controlling and administering their social and economic life.

Rather, the essence of their conflict focussed on the issue of the means that were appropriate, and in fact necessary to realise this desired end. The "Left Communists" came to believe that many of the policies advocated and, after the October revolution, put into practice by Lenin and his associates - in particular, Lenin's defence of the right of self-determination for oppressed nationalities in the Russian Empire, and beyond; his readiness to make concessions to the Russian peasants' aspirations for their own land; and his refusal to entrust the economic and political administration of the revolutionary state in the period of the construction of socialism to the working class itself - were utterly inconsistent with what they considered to be the principles which must be incorporated in the building of a socialist society. Accordingly, they maintained vehemently that the implementation of such policies would endanger the socialist character of the revolution. Ultimately, they feared that any compromises with nationalists and peasants, whom they viewed as bourgeois and petty-bourgeois elements, as well as the retention of the old hierarchical, bureaucratic methods of administration and the employment of former bourgeois officials in positions of authority within this system, would only strengthen those forces that were opposed to the socialist transformation of the Russian Empire and, finally, would lead to the degeneration of the revolution.

It follows, therefore, that not only has this study attempted to examine "Left Communism" as a broader current in the geographic sense, by demonstrating the ideological affinity that existed between the "left" Bolsheviks and the revolutionary Marxists of Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, but it has also widened it conceptually, by stressing the separate strands of thought that distinguished this variant of Marxism. While "the general question of authority and discipline in a revolutionary society, particularly as applied to the organisation of industry",³ may have been the "most sensitive indicator" of the conflict between the "left" Bolsheviks and Lenin in the years immediately

following the October revolution, it appears that in general those Marxists who adopted a "leftist" position on this issue also opposed Lenin over the national and peasant policies that he defended. This phenomenon will also be outlined and examined in detail.

At the same time, however, the question of proletarian democracy itself has not been ignored. In fact, the position of the "Left Communists" on this issue has been re-examined. The available evidence suggests that there is a need to re-evaluate the sincerity of the "Left Communists'" commitment to this principle. For too long there has been the tendency to conclude that most of these Marxists were concerned only with the problems of inner-party democracy, and neglected to defend freedom for the working-class as a whole in the revolutionary state. It will be shown that this is an erroneous claim and that these Marxists indeed implacably opposed the Leninist notion that the proletarian vanguard, the party, alone possessed the acumen successfully to carry out the construction of socialism. On the contrary, they insisted that the workers could build a socialist society on their own initiative, and their entire stand on the question of proletarian democracy revolved around ensuring that the proletariat en masse was granted the opportunity to do so.

While in the course of this study it will be necessary to examine again the views of such prominent "left" Bolsheviks as N. I. Bukharin, A. M. Kollontai, G. L. Piatakov, E. A. Preobrazhensky, A. G. Shliapnikov and K. B. Radek, and also of R. Luxemburg, who was the theoretical mainspring of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (S.D.K.P.iL.), the bastion of revolutionary Polish Marxism, special attention will also be devoted to some lesser-known, yet unjustly neglected figures who played leading roles in these "Left Communist" groups. In particular, the ideas of N. Osinsky (V. V. Obolensky) and T. V. Sapronov, both of whom were in the vanguard of the first post-revolutionary "left" oppositions in the Bolshevik party, will be analysed in some depth and detail. Moreover, the positions defended by L. Tyszko (Jogiches) and J. Marchlewski, among the leaders of the S.D.K.P.iL. but overshadowed historically by Luxemburg, will also be examined. Finally, the principles espoused by P. I. Stuchka, the ideological leader of the revolutionary, Bolshevik-inclined wing of

the Social Democracy of Latvia (S.D.L.), and by V. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas and Z. I. Angarietis, who led the revolutionary Marxists of Lithuania will be subject to a similar analysis.

Last of all, there remains the problem of explaining the success of Leninism, and the failure of "Left Communism". Certainly, the defeat of the "left" Bolsheviks can be explained partly in terms of the skillful manipulation of the party and soviet apparatus by Lenin and his associates. Yet in itself this seems to be an insufficient answer. After all, the failure of the Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian Marxists to consolidate themselves in power suggests that there may have been other reasons for the lack of success of "Left Communism" than simply the manoeuvrings of Lenin. Their defeat indicates that it is also fruitful to consider additional, more objective factors operative in the Russian Empire, in order to account for the demise of "Left Communism". In particular, this will require an analysis of the socio-political structure of the Russian Empire, that is, of the relative strengths of the various classes and national groups within it, in order to ascertain whether the policies proposed by the "Left Communists" were realistic solutions to the problems that confronted revolutionary Marxists there.

Footnotes.

¹This definition has been culled by A. Walicki from his study of the ideas of P. B. Struve, who at the turn of the century was one of the most prominent "legal Marxist" theoreticians. A. Walicki, The Controversy over Capitalism: Studies in the Social Philosophy of the Russian Populists (Oxford, 1969), p.170.

²L. D. Trotsky, The History of the Russian Revolution, 1 (New York, 1936), p.287.

³R. V. Daniels, The Conscience of the Revolution (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p.81.

Chapter 1

THE BACKGROUND: THE ACTORS AND THEIR HISTORY

Before proceeding to an analysis of the ideas which the "leftists" within the Bolshevik party in the formative years of Soviet rule - the "Left Communists", the Democratic Centralists and the Workers' Opposition - and the revolutionary Marxists of the Kingdom of Poland, Latvia and Lithuania held in common, an account of the development of these respective groups is necessary to place them in their proper historical setting and to explain some of the factors which influenced them to defend principles contrary to those advocated and put into practice by V. I. Lenin. This also will aid in laying to rest some misconceptions which up till now have been perpetuated about some of these revolutionaries. In particular, this will involve a re-examination of the evolution of Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian Marxism which have suffered from an even more serious lack of critical attention than Russian Marxism.

The first opposition to arise within the Bolshevik party after its seizure of power in 1917 was the "Left ("proletarian") Communist" movement, which coalesced at the end of 1917 in protest against the negotiations which Lenin and his associates were conducting at Brest-Litovsk in order to conclude a separate peace treaty with imperial Germany. On December 28, 1917 the Moscow Oblast' Bureau of the party, in the future to prove a stronghold of "leftism", issued a resolution, drawn up by N. Osinsky, A. Lomov (G. I. Oppokov) and I. N. Stukov, in which it called for an end to these talks with Germany - and to all relations with the imperialist powers. Instead, it demanded that Soviet Russia declare a revolutionary war against world imperialism, in accord with the principles formulated and accepted by the party earlier in 1917 at its Sixth Congress.¹ On the same day the equally influential Petrograd Committee of the party declared its support of this position.² For the next two and a half months the dispute over the question of peace or revolutionary war was to cause a profound split in the ranks of the Bolsheviks.

Soon a large number of leading Bolsheviks had gathered in defence of this platform in favour of revolutionary war. Prominent among these were many renowned revolutionaries, including those Bolsheviks who had taken the lead earlier in opposing Lenin over his support of national self-determination for oppressed nations. Among these were N. I. Bukharin, a former émigré, in Lenin's opinion one of the most gifted Bolshevik theoreticians - he developed a coherent neo-Marxist theory of imperialism, that is, a theory avowedly based on Marxist principles which themselves had been updated and revised to take account of the developments within capitalism since Marx's death, which he expounded in Imperialism and World Economy - but, according to A. G. Shliapnikov, typical of the Russian intelligentsia in that he had no gift for handling practical matters;³ G. L. Piatakov, a close friend of and collaborator with Bukharin before 1917, who was to conduct a stubborn defence of "leftism" in his native Ukraine and who in 1919 was still the most dedicated opponent of any compromises with nationalism; and K. B. Radek, formerly a leading theoretician in the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (S.D.K.P.iL.) where he had defended views on the nature of imperialism and on the question of national self-determination similar to those of Bukharin and Piatakov. A number of other famous émigré revolutionaries with a record of opposition to Lenin before 1917, such as A. M. Kollontai, who had allied herself with the Mensheviks until 1915, and M. N. Pokrovsky, now probably best known as a historian but who had played a leading part in the "Vperedist" movement, also took part in the "Left Communist" movement.

However, many Bolsheviks who had devoted their lives before the revolution to underground work for the party in Russia also became leading "Left Communists".⁴ Included among these were E. A. Preobrazhensky, a party activist in the Urals and in the 1920's to become the originator of the theory of "primitive socialist accumulation"; and N. Osinsky and T. V. Sapronov, continually among the leaders of the early "leftist" oppositions and both of whom have received less than their due attention from history.

Born into a gentry family in 1887, V. V. Obolensky - he adopted the pseudonym of N. Osinsky - entered the revolutionary socialist

movement in 1905 while he was attending a gimnaziia in Moscow, where, by his own account, he "became convinced...that old Marx was obviously completely correct" in his theory of historical development. After spending most of 1906 in Germany, where he studied political economy at the universities of Munich and Berlin as well as becoming versed in the major works of K. Marx, G. V. Plekhanov and Lenin, he returned to Moscow. In 1907, together with a group of colleagues which included V. M. Smirnov, himself later to become a "Left Communist" and one of the most stalwart "left" oppositionists in the 1920's, he entered the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (R.S.D.W.P.). He worked in Moscow in Bolshevik propagandist circles, under the direction of Bukharin, till his arrest in 1910 when he was imprisoned together with Bukharin. In these years Osinsky, again by his own admission, was an "Otzovist", but never a "Bogdanovist" nor an empiriocritic. Exiled to Tver until 1913, during which time he wrote for the party press - his articles appeared in Zvezda, Pravda and Prosveshchenie -, he returned to Moscow where, in concert with N. N. Iakovlev and V. N. Maksimovskii among others, he played a leading role in the publication of a new Bolshevik paper, Nash Put'. Re-arrested and exiled once again, with Maksimovskii, to Khar'kov, he worked in party circles there during the war, with respect to which he adopted an anti-defensist position. After the February revolution he returned to Moscow where he helped publish Sotsial-demokrat, the paper of the Moscow Bolsheviks. After spells in Kamenets and Kiev he re-appeared in Moscow in July, where in the face of "considerable opposition from the larger part of the older generation of Moscow workers" he campaigned for an armed seizure of power by the Bolsheviks. Disillusioned by the opposition that he met, he again travelled to Khar'kov in early October where the local soviet had taken over the reins of government already. The news of the Bolshevik uprising in Moscow brought him immediately back there, yet too late to take part in the Bolsheviks' victory. Soon he was summoned, together with V. M. Smirnov, to Petrograd where he was instrumental in establishing the Vesenkha. He was a leader of the "Left Communist" movement in 1918 - he claimed that he was the author of their "Theses on the Current Situation", published in Kommunist in April, 1918 - till its dissolution in June, 1918, during which time

he wrote what justifiably can be considered his most important theoretical work, Stroitel'stvo sotsializma. In this he attempted to explain why a socialist revolution was possible in Russia, and also elaborated what he held to be the correct blueprint for the organisation of a socialist society. Later he was to become a founder and leader of the Democratic Centralist opposition, charging that it was his first-hand experiences of the practical problems involved in the construction of socialism which he gained from his organisational activities in Penza and Tula that led him to defend the extension of political and economic authority to the local organs undertaking this task.⁵

T. V. Saprionov was born in the late 1880's into an impoverished peasant family, where his first vivid memories were of the famine in the early 1890's. In his early teens he worked as a stevedore, a painter, a dvornik, and at a number of similar, manual tasks. He went to Moscow in 1905 where he spontaneously took part in the mass demonstrations of the time. He worked in Bolshevik circles in Moscow in 1906 - although he apparently did not officially join the R.S.D.W.P. until 1912 -, from which time he tried, vainly as it proved, to organise the then politically backward construction workers. With the resurgence of the strike movement in 1912 he again attempted to organise these workers, eventually with more success this time - a union of builders was legalised in 1914 in which a Bolshevik cell soon was formed. Adopting an anti-defensist position during the war, Saprionov worked illegally in Russia, chiefly in Moscow, Petrograd and Saratov, where he became a prominent figure in the leading circles of the Bolshevik organisations. He spent most of 1917 in the Moscow region, where, according to Victor Serge, he had been the chief organiser of the rising in October. After the revolution he became president of the Moscow Executive Committee of the party. A "Left Communist" in 1918, he later protested against "the negative aspects of glavkizm" and, in his own estimation, was "one of the first... to begin the struggle against the glavkist bureaucracy", consistently defending the powers of the local soviets and sovnarkhozy from pre-emption by the central state and party apparatus. He was a founder and one of the mainsprings of the Democratic Centralist opposition and in the 1920's was to become a continual opponent of the intensifying bureaucratisation

of all aspects of state and party life. However, the strain of continual opposition apparently took its toll on him, to the extent that when he was just forty he had, again by Serge's account, "an aged, emaciated face surrounded by a mane of bristling white." Indeed, he was a very sick man even before his expulsion from the party in 1927 and his subsequent exile to the Crimea. He was imprisoned in 1935 and died four years later, in 1939.⁶

While there were, admittedly, a large number of theoreticians, such as those mentioned or described above, among the "Left Communist" leadership, this should not lead to the false conclusion that "Left Communism" was nothing but an intellectual current, cut off from and misrepresentative of the views of the rank and file Bolsheviks. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that substantial support for the "Left Communist" position existed in the lower reaches of the Bolshevik party. While the Central Committee, including a number of prominent "Left Communist" leaders, procrastinated over the decision either to accept peace or to wage a revolutionary war, in favour of prolonging the negotiations with Germany in the hope that revolution would spread rapidly to the rest of Europe and so resolve this problem,⁷ there was no such vacillation among many of the local party organisations. Both the powerful Moscow and Petrograd Committees firmly opposed the continuation of the peace negotiations with Germany and intransigently defended the accepted principle of revolutionary war.⁸ A number of other strong party organisations, in the northern towns of Murmansk, Vologda and Novgorod, in the Urals and in the Ukraine, followed the lead given by Moscow and Petrograd.⁹

Moreover, in February a referendum of the views of 200 soviets on the question of peace or war was held. By a small majority these local soviets supported a revolutionary war against imperial Germany. Yet a closer analysis of these results reveals that of the industrial city soviets an overwhelming majority were in favour of war, which would seem to indicate substantial proletarian support for the "Left Communists'" position - and in part also to lend credence to their contention that to a large extent peasant, not proletarian pressure had impelled the party to sue for peace.¹⁰

Despite this grass-roots sentiment for revolutionary war indecision continued to reign within the Central Committee. Even in the face of Russia's stark military exhaustion - the army, largely composed of peasants in uniform, refused to fight¹¹ - the "Left Communists" in the party leadership could not steel themselves sufficiently to compromise their principles and accept what was daily appearing more inevitable, a separate peace with imperial Germany.

Yet the renewed German offensive on February 18 meant that a decision could be put off no longer. As the shattering news of a rapid, largely unopposed German advance reached the Central Committee, L. D. Trotsky reconsidered his position - and his vote to sue for peace gave Lenin and his faction in the leadership a majority.¹²

However, the "Left Communists" continued to press for the unleashing of a revolutionary war, in the hope of igniting a proletarian revolution in Germany and in this way halting the German advance. Indeed once the new, much harsher German peace terms were delivered, the "Left Communists" intensified their campaign of opposition. They openly revolted against the policy of the majority, and Bukharin, Lomov, M. S. Uritsky and A. S. Bubnov resigned all their party and governmental positions in protest against accepting the draconic peace now proposed by the Germans.¹³

Notwithstanding the crushing military reverses which Soviet Russia was then experiencing, the "Left Communists" still enjoyed a broad measure of support in the lower party ranks. On February 24 the Moscow Oblast' Bureau, 'the organisational centre of the 'Left Communists' throughout Russia',¹⁴ issued a resolution in which it expressed its dissatisfaction with the policy of the Central Committee and condemned any notions of accepting peace with Germany.¹⁵ It was later supported in this action by the Petrograd City Conference and the Urals Oblast' Committee and many party organisations in the Ukraine, especially in the industrial centres of Khar'kov and the Donets basin in general, likewise remained solid in their defence of the "Left Communist" stand.¹⁶

Before the Extraordinary Seventh Congress of the party, due to meet on March 6 to discuss the issue of peace or war, the "Left Communist" leadership stepped up its protests, in vain as it proved,

against the acceptance of peace. It even went to the lengths of issuing its own factional newspaper, Kommunist, under the auspices of the Petrograd Committee. Edited by Bukharin, Radek and Uritsky, the sole aim of this paper was to preach against any peace with Germany, irrespective of the terms, and to arouse support for a revolutionary war. However, the life of this Kommunist was brief and it ceased to appear after March 19 once the "Left Communists" had lost their influence in the Petrograd party organisations to the "Leninists".¹⁷

In retrospect, it appears that from the time of the renewed German advance in February the "Left Communists" had been fighting a losing battle. Soviet Russia's patent inability to defend itself against the might of German imperialism, coupled with the intense campaign of agitation and persuasion conducted within the party ranks by Lenin and his fellow-thinkers, caused the rank and file support for the "Left Communists" to wane.

Even before the decisive defeat which the "Left Communists" suffered at the Seventh Congress,¹⁸ there had been clear signs that the lower levels of the party were deserting to the side of Lenin. The Moscow City Conference, held on March 4 and 5, overwhelmingly endorsed the acceptance of peace. Speaking for the "Left Communists", Osinsky and Pokrovsky, who himself later maintained that the Moscow proletariat, if not its leaders, was unenthusiastic about a revolutionary war,¹⁹ could muster only 5 votes in support of their position.²⁰ In Petrograd too, another former bastion of "Left Communism", rank and file sympathy began to diminish at the beginning of March when a meeting of Bolsheviks from the Vyborg, Vasilevskii ostrov and other regions of the city voted in favour of peace.²¹

The Fourth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, held in Moscow on March 15 and 16, put the final seal on this phase of the "Left Communist" opposition. The meeting of the Bolshevik caucus which took place just prior to this congress clearly revealed the rapidly dwindling support for the "Left Communists'" defence of revolutionary war. Of the Bolsheviks who participated in this caucus 453 delegates voted in favour of peace, while only 38 aligned themselves with the "Left Communist" position, a pattern which was to be repeated at the Congress itself.²²

The "Left Communists" believed that the development of imperialism had created an inter-related world, or at least European economy in which the pre-requisites for an international socialist revolution had matured.²³ From this they argued that the October revolution in Russia could not be regarded as an isolated phenomenon but rather that it must be seen as the spark which would ignite a rapidly expanding revolutionary conflagration in the rest of Europe²⁴ - unlike Lenin, who although agreeing that in the long term socialist revolution inevitably must become international initially was prepared to accept a revolution more limited in scope. This "different evaluation of the international situation"²⁵ underlay much of the conflict between the "Left Communists" and Lenin on the question of peace or revolutionary war with imperial Germany.

In fact, the "Left Communists" believed, falsely as the future was soon to show, that the widespread strikes which were breaking out in Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in January, 1918 were confirmation of their prognosis that socialist revolution quickly would sweep across Europe - indeed, Lenin was one of the few exceptions among the leading Bolsheviks, maintaining that it was impossible to determine whether a general European, and especially a German revolution would break out in "some such brief period" as the next six months.²⁶ Consequently, they argued that it would be superfluous to conclude what soon would prove to be an unnecessary peace with moribund German imperialism, a peace, moreover, which could prove harmful to the development of revolution in Germany, presumably since it would permit the German government better to concentrate its forces on quelling the rising workers' movement. Instead, it was the revolutionary duty of Soviet Russia to declare war in order to help their German comrades raise the banner of socialism in Central Europe.²⁷

Furthermore, the "Left Communists" were convinced that there could be no permanent security for Soviet Russia unless socialist revolution spread into the rest of Europe, especially into Germany. They contended that if this were delayed the warring imperialist camps would have the time and opportunity to reconcile their own differences in order to crush the common danger which the very example of a socialist Russia presented to them. In their eyes, the existing

split in the ranks of world imperialism on which Lenin relied to give Soviet Russia a breathing-space (peredyshka) in which to reorganise its ruined economy and disintegrated army was a mere illusion, a fear clearly expressed by Bukharin when he declared that "many facts indicate that this agreement between the two hostile coalitions already has occurred."²⁸ In this case any separate peace with Germany would be worthless since it provided no guarantee against an attack by the forces of world imperialism.

However, even in the what they considered to be highly improbable situation that the split in the ranks of the imperialist powers continued to exist, the "Left Communists" believed that this in itself was insufficient to prevent separate imperialist attacks on Soviet Russia. In particular, they continued to regard imperial Germany as the major threat. They were convinced that Germany, regardless of any peace treaty that it signed, would be compelled to exploit Russia's economic wealth, especially its grain resources in the south, if it were to continue its war on the western front.²⁹ Indeed the subsequent German invasion of south Russia in May, two months after the conclusion of peace, in order to secure the grain reserves existing there was seized upon by the "Left Communists" as striking confirmation of their prediction that irrespective of any division between the imperialist powers and of any formal peace treaties there would be no security for Soviet Russia until socialist revolution advanced into the rest of Europe. Reacting to this invasion, Stukov condemned any peace with world imperialism as futile:

The illusion collapsed that we can engage in a peaceful policy of [socialist] construction, as did the estimate, which we always considered to be built on sand, that the struggle continuing in the West gives us the opportunity of a "breathing-space".³⁰

Certain, therefore, that renewed imperialist attacks on Soviet Russia were both inevitable and imminent, the "Left Communists" rejected Lenin's notion that a unilateral peace with Germany would buy the time necessary to restore the Russian economy and military capacity. At best, they considered that peace with Germany would provide a respite of weeks, a time patently too brief in which to rebuild Russia's devastated railways, transfer its industrial centres to safety beyond the Urals

and in general restore its production capabilities. Such a programme of recovery would require months of peace - and with some justification they denied that German, much less world imperialism would allow Soviet Russia such a prolonged respite.³¹

Moreover, they asserted that the economic losses which revolutionary Russia would suffer if it accepted the onerous German peace terms in themselves would preclude any possibility of economic reconstruction. Russia would forfeit one quarter of its territory, inclusive of one third of its grain-producing areas in the south and west and three quarters of its heavy industry, especially its vital coal and iron industries in the Donets basin.³² Consequently, it would be impossible to raise industrial production, initially for the immediate military purposes of defence and thereafter to the level necessary if there was to be any development towards socialism - and the limitations on the nationalisation of German-owned industry also included in the peace terms would undermine the socialist character of the economic policies of the Soviet government. The "Left Communists" feared that the economic emasculation of Russia which would follow the acceptance of peace would leave it at the mercy of world imperialism, and also highly vulnerable to the internal forces which favoured the restoration of capitalism.³³

It was from this perspective that the "Left Communists" defended the policy of revolutionary war as vital if the socialist character of the revolution were to be preserved. Peace at best might guarantee the territorial integrity of a truncated Soviet state, but this would cease to be a socialist state. Therefore, revolutionary war, despite the risks involved, was the only means which offered some possibility for the survival of socialism in Russia. At worst, the "Left Communists" believed that even if this failed to set in motion proletarian revolution in the rest of Europe, then this defeat would only hasten the eventual, yet, in their eyes, inevitable downfall of socialism in Russia.³⁴

Curiously enough, the "Left Communists" agreed with Lenin in his analysis of the reasons why the Bolshevik government refused to implement the accepted socialist policy of revolutionary war. Lenin argued that the peasantry, and even substantial sections of the

industrial proletariat, exhausted by the preceding three and a half years of war, simply desired peace and would refuse to fight. In particular, he held that this was true of the peasantry, the vast majority of Russia's population, who just wanted the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of the October revolution - their newly won, but long-cherished land.³⁵ The conduct of the army overwhelmingly peasant in its composition, was considered indicative of this. Demoralised by a series of shattering defeats in the war, in part caused by insufficient materials and equipment and latterly by the Bolsheviks' own propaganda for peace, the army was disintegrating rapidly and was no longer an effective fighting force capable of defending itself, much less of waging a revolutionary war. Its impotence was recognised by the Bolsheviks themselves when they proceeded to demobilise a greater part of it after their seizure of power.³⁶

Moreover, Lenin was aware that Soviet Russia did not possess the economic strength sufficient to sustain a revolutionary war at the beginning of 1918. Russia's resources had been dissipated in the imperialist war, a dissipation compounded by the effective blockade of most of its foreign aid. In addition, the revolution itself had intensified the existing economic dislocation, in large part the consequence of the anarchic disruptions in production which followed from the rapid extension of workers' control in industry.³⁷

In these circumstances, Lenin and his associates very much feared that if the war with Germany was not ended quickly, then the peasantry, whose support or at least tolerance was vital for the continued existence of the Bolsheviks in power, would turn against the revolutionary government and give power instead to a government which finally would conclude peace. In Lenin's mind, therefore, peace was necessary to consolidate the alliance between the Bolsheviks and the peasants and so to guarantee the survival of the revolutionary regime.³⁸

The "Left Communists" themselves emphasised that the acceptance of peace was a concession to the pressure of the peasantry and of the "declassed" sections of the proletariat.³⁹ However, they feared that after the conclusion of peace this same petty-bourgeois pressure would compel the Bolshevik government to abandon its policy for socialist reconstruction in Soviet Russia - and, consequently, that the revolution

would degenerate.⁴⁰ Again, this time looking through the prism of internal politics, the "Left Communists" maintained that a revolutionary war was vital for the preservation of socialism in Russia. This alone could hasten the outbreak of revolution in the remainder of Europe, after which the Russian proletariat could call on its proletarian allies there in its struggle against the reactionary influence of its native peasantry.⁴¹

Nevertheless, even after the peace with Germany had been accepted by the majority of the party and itself had become a dead issue, the "Left Communists" still refused to disband. Despite its defeat on this question, and its noticeably declining support, the opposition remained very much alive in order to defend the accepted principles of socialist construction in face of what it considered to be an inevitable tendency of the party to compromise these in order to appease the peasantry. In fact, the fear of peasant influence forcing the party from the path of socialism was to become a leitmotif of the "Left Communists'" criticism of the internal developments in Soviet Russia in the months after the treaty of Brest-Litovsk was concluded, a fear which future "leftist" groups in the party re-echoed.⁴²

In the spring of 1918 the "Left Communists" repeatedly claimed that the revolution was degenerating, just as they had predicted. Not only was the majority in the party continuing to pander to the peasants' lust for private property, but even in industry Lenin was ready to sacrifice workers' control, which the "Left Communists" held to be an irreplaceable part of a genuine socialist administration, to state capitalist methods of organisation. In response to the calamitous fall in industrial production, which Lenin largely attributed to the anarchic rule of the workers themselves, he insisted on the need to re-introduce strict central control of industry, the system of one-man management, usually of former bourgeois specialists (spetsy), and the hierarchical forms of labour discipline, as well as the material incentives associated with capitalism. These pragmatic measures roused the "Left Communists" to the defence of the egalitarian principles which the Bolsheviks had endorsed in 1917.⁴³

The first major manifestation of "Left Communist" opposition to these breaches of socialist principle took place on April 4, 1918, at

a meeting between the leading "Left Communists" and Lenin and his major associates. On this occasion Osinsky presented, on behalf of the "Left Communists", his "Theses on the Current Situation", in which he summarised the reasons behind their opposition to peace and set out their critique of the general development in internal policy which had ensued from this. These "Theses" subsequently were published in Kommunist, a new opposition journal published by the "Left Communists" under the aegis of the Moscow Oblast' Bureau, one of their most enduring strongholds. Edited by Bukharin, Osinsky, Radek and V. M. Smirnov, this journal was of a much broader, theoretical nature than the now-defunct Petrograd Kommunist and largely was devoted to a comprehensive discussion and defence of the principles which the "Left Communists" believed must be incorporated into the Bolshevik government's policies if the socialist character of these was to be preserved. Only four issues of this journal appeared, the first three as the official organ of the Moscow Oblast' Bureau and the last, in June, 1918, as a private factional journal after the "Left Communists" had lost their majority in this organisation to Lenin.

However, even in this second phase of their opposition after the peace of Brest-Litovsk the "Left Communists" still managed to find substantial support among the rank and file of the party, albeit not as widespread as it had been in January and February. Apparently "Left Communism" even then remained representative of broad strata of party opinion in the heavily industrial Moscow region, in the Urals and in the Ukraine.⁴⁴

Yet by the end of May the "Left Communists" had relinquished these areas to advocates of the policies implemented by Lenin and the party majority. Their final stand as a separate faction came at the First Congress of sovnarkhozy, held in Moscow in late May and early June, 1918, where their defence of the rights of the local sovnarkhozy against the increasing powers assigned to the central bureaucracy was defeated. After this they dissolved themselves as an united opposition.

The factors behind the disintegration of the "Left Communist" movement need to be stated only briefly at this point. The basic reason for the loss of support which they suffered was the apparent hopelessness of the policies that they espoused. Just as their defence

of revolutionary war seemed impractical in the face of the might of German imperialism, so too their insistence on the democratic administration of the state and industry by the various local political and economic bodies elected by and composed of the workers themselves seemed an unrealistic solution to the chaos then endemic in Soviet Russia. Workers' control apparently was no answer to this and in fact in the eyes of many Bolsheviks was a contributory cause of the current disorder. Lenin himself was convinced that workers' control had to be restricted if industrial production, the life blood of Soviet Russia, were to be revived. His practical arguments in favour of the return of administrative power to the central economic organs and of the re-introduction of strict discipline over the workers already were winning converts even before the outbreak of Civil War in May, when the very survival of Soviet Russia seemed to demand the restoration of order in industry in order to increase the output of vital military goods. At this turn in events even the "Left Communists" decided to bury their differences with Lenin over the correct methods of socialist construction in order to concentrate on saving the gravely threatened revolutionary state.

Nevertheless, as the future was soon to reveal a number of Bolsheviks remained unconvinced by Lenin's arguments that the measures which he had introduced in the interests of the immediate survival of Soviet Russia were consistent with the principles of socialism. In the ensuing years the issues first raised by the "Left Communists" concerning the role of the workers in the administration of the state and the economy, as well as their fear of the consequences of any compromises with the petty-bourgeois aspirations of the peasant majority, again became the foci around which critics of the party's policies gathered.

By the time that the Ninth Party Congress was held, in March and April of 1920, a new "leftist" opposition had crystallised within the Bolshevik party - the group of Democratic Centralists, or, as they were termed in party ranks, "liberal communists".⁴⁵ Even before this, however, there had been clear signs of the growth of opposition in the party, directed against the developing bureaucratisation in the administration of the state, the party and the economy which was

preventing the establishment of an effective workers' democracy. Moreover, at the heart of this movement were a number of former "Left Communists", among whom were Osinsky, his old colleagues from his days in the Moscow underground, Maksimovskii and V. M. Smirnov, and Sapronov.⁴⁶

The first significant sign of rising discontent surfaced in December, 1918, when the Moscow District Committee and the Moscow Guberniia Executive Committee, then chaired by Sapronov, issued a joint resolution in protest against the centralisation of all authority in party and soviet affairs at the expense of the powers of the local party and soviet organisations. This was followed closely by an article written by Osinsky, in Pravda, January 25, 1919, in which he criticised the increasing curtailment of democratic principles in the daily functioning of the soviet and party apparatus. He called for an end to the practice of appointing officials in these bodies and instead demanded that the principle of the election of officials by the workers should be re-established.⁴⁷

At the Eighth Party Congress, in March, 1919, the Democratic Centralists developed this initial attack, declaring that it was necessary "to fight the growing bureaucratism"⁴⁸ both within the party and administration of Soviet Russia in general. Osinsky in particular singled out for criticism the "degeneration" that had taken place within the party. He maintained that at the highest level all democratic practices were moribund. Not only had the Central Committee ceased to hold conferences, but also the meetings that it had previously held with local party workers and which had provided an effective link between the leadership and the rank and file, had died out. All power within the party had been transferred to the Central Committee, which itself no longer actually made any decisions since de facto Lenin and Ia. M. Sverdlov had abrogated the right to formulate policy. Osinsky continued that the same phenomenon could be observed at lower levels of party life, where power also had become concentrated in the hands of the local committees.⁴⁹

Sapronov spoke of similar developments that could be seen in the structure of political and economic administration. He argued that centrally appointed commissars were interfering in the affairs

of the local soviets and in fact were pre-empting their authority by taking decisions on their own initiative. In particular, the organs of the Cheka and the military committees, established after the Civil War had broken out, rode roughshod over the rights of these soviets, to the extent of capriciously transferring to other posts any members of the executive committees of the soviets who opposed them. In addition, they refused to take any cognisance of the directives of the local soviets, only obeying orders emanating from the central government.⁵⁰

Sapronov also pointed out that the Vesenkha analogously was restricting the power of these soviets in the administration of the economy by in fact refusing to allow them any control over the actions of the local sovnarkhozy. It appointed all the officials to these bodies, rather than permit their election locally. At the same time, it also established independent departments to run industry in the localities, subordinated directly to the glavki, defending such a centralised system of economic administration in the name of efficiency.⁵¹

At the Eighth Party Conference, in December, 1919, Sapronov renewed his protests against the continuing centralisation of political and economic power. He maintained that the central organs of the party and state apparatus were increasingly unable to deal effectively with the problems involved in the construction of socialism since they were isolated from all experience of the difficulties involved in this process at the local level. To cure this harmful situation he insisted that the necessary first step was to change the composition of all these bodies, especially that of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (V.Ts.I.K.), to include a majority of delegates elected by the workers in the localities.⁵²

Furthermore, he maintained that effective authority must be restored to the local soviets. Increasingly, all soviet officials had been centrally appointed and had claimed that they were subordinate to the central commissariats alone, and not to the local soviets as well. The same phenomenon was evident in the sovnarkhozy, and even the sovkhozy, where the administrators too were chosen from above, regardless of the opinions of the local soviets, and in turn asserted their independence of all local control. Sapronov opposed this

development as contrary to the democratic principles of socialism. To put an end to it, he declared that all officials, whether in the sovnarkhozy, the sovkhozy, or the soviet structure itself, must be elected by the local congresses of soviets; that the local economic organs must be subordinate to the local soviets, to prevent them degenerating into independent bureaucracies; and that kollegii should in principle be established at the head of every administration.⁵³

Several months later, at the Ninth Party Congress, in March, 1920, the Democratic Centralists presented a set of theses - "Tezisy o kollegial'nosti i edinolichii" - which can be regarded as their programme for the redemocratisation of the soviet state in general, and the administration of industry in particular. They unequivocally called for the re-establishment of kollegii, elected by the workers themselves, in all political and economic organs which possessed decision-making powers. Such a system, in their opinion, would constitute a "higher school of state administration", that is, it would allow the workers to participate in the broad work of administration and at the same time would accustom the bourgeois spetsy to proletarian "comradely" methods of work, while providing a direct means of controlling them. Moreover, even individual factories and plants were not to be exempt from this principle, since collegial administration at this level was the only means by which the majority of the workers could learn the skills required to run a modern economy and industrial state.⁵⁴

Moreover, the Moscow Guberniia Committee, again a bastion of "leftism", put forward its own theses at this Congress. In these it defended the resolution of the Seventh Congress of Soviets, drawn up by Sapronov, which criticised the over-centralisation of economic control in the hands of the glavki and advocated the devolution of this power to the local soviet and party organisations.⁵⁵

This Congress can be regarded as the zenith of the Democratic Centralists' movement. They had won the support of M. P. Tomsy, the leader of the trade union movement, for their demands for the restoration of collegial administration and, according to Sapronov, the party centre had recognised their strength by approving his resolution that had been adopted earlier by the Seventh Congress of Soviets.⁵⁶ Yet

Sapronov's optimism was to prove premature, as it was soon to become evident from the measures taken by Lenin and his associates against the Democratic Centralists.

At the beginning of 1920 the Ukraine, where Sapronov had been sent on party work, was a stronghold of Democratic Centralism. Led by Sapronov, A. S. Bubnov, an old Bolshevik who had worked in Moscow before his arrest in 1910 and also a former "Left Communist", and M. Rafail (Farbman), the Democratic Centralists had won the support of the Khar'kov and Poltava guberniia party conferences for their theses on the need to restore democracy in Soviet Russia, especially in the organisation of industry. Later they had consolidated their position in the Ukraine when the Fourth Conference of the Communist Party of the Ukraine (C.P.U.) upheld the Democratic Centralists' platform and rejected that which had been proposed by J. V. Stalin, in the name of the party centre.⁵⁷ At this reverse, Lenin and his majority in the party, despite the verbal concessions which had been made to the Democratic Centralists at the Ninth Congress, proceeded to remove the oppositionists from all positions of power in the Ukraine and to replace them with their own apparatchiki.⁵⁸

Throughout 1920 the Democratic Centralists continued to object to the dictatorial and bureaucratic policies which the party was implementing, bitterly complaining that the promises of democratic reform that had been given at the Ninth Congress had remained on paper and had not been put into practice. At the Ninth Party Conference, held in September, 1920, Sapronov again vehemently insisted that one-man management in industry and the endemic bureaucratic centralisation be dismantled in favour of a decentralised, democratic system. In addition, he maintained that the failure of the party to carry out the reforms consistent with a genuine socialist administrative policy had been caused by the influx of bourgeois and peasant elements into the party. Their influence had prevented the leadership from conducting a firm, class policy in the interests of the proletariat.⁵⁹

Despite continued support for the Democratic Centralists in the Moscow region and in the Ukraine, they were unable to get their proposals accepted by the party. Moreover, in early 1921 they were clearly on the decline, as became evident during the debates which then took place on the role of the trade unions in the administration of a socialist

society. In these debates, the Democratic Centralists issued their own platform, O profsoiuzakh, closely followed by a supplementary set of theses, Ob ocherednikh zadachakh partii. In essence, they argued that a general crisis was infecting Soviet Russia, especially noticeable in the bureaucratisation of the party itself, and that the only solution to this malaise was the effective redemocratisation of the party, and of the state and economic apparatus, which must be accompanied by a "purge" of all the non-proletarian classes in these organisations in order to guarantee that this democratisation would be conducted effectively.⁶⁰

However, their proposals failed to win many converts, in part since the Workers' Opposition, the other "leftist" opposition at that time, had captured the support of many discontented Bolsheviks - and also because Lenin and his supporters were manipulating the party machine to ensure their own victory, a factor which will be discussed more fully later. The Democratic Centralists lost their backing in the Moscow region, winning only two votes in favour of their demands at a meeting of the raion committees of the party in early February. This pattern was repeated at the Moscow Guberniia Party Conference, held on February 19, 1921, when their programme received less than 10 per cent of the delegates' votes, and also in the Ukraine.⁶¹

Aware of their weakness, the Democratic Centralists withdrew their theses on the trade union question at the Tenth Party Congress, which took place in March, 1921. Nevertheless, they did not halt their criticism of the development towards dictatorship in the party and opposed that part of the resolution on party unity adopted by this Congress which permitted the expulsion of factions.⁶²

Despite much-thinned ranks after this Congress, a number of recalcitrant leaders of the Democratic Centralist movement, prominent among whom were Osinsky, Sapronov, V. M. Smirnov and Bubnov, continued to protest against the dictatorial measures taken by the party majority regardless of the ban on factions. At the Eleventh Party Congress, in March and April, 1922, Osinsky again demanded the re-introduction of collegial administration in industry and the restoration of workers' democracy in party and soviet affairs.⁶³ In the following year, he, together with Sapronov, V. M. Smirnov, Bubnov, Ia. N. Drobnis, Rafail

and other unrepentant Democratic Centralists, supported the "Platform of the Forty-Six", presented to the Central Committee in October. The signatories of this document criticised both the economic and political courses pursued by the party hierarchy. They attributed the current stagnation of industry and agriculture to the deficiencies in the economic policy of the leadership, which by imposing high prices on industrial goods and low prices for grain was causing a sales crisis and a consequent, ominous fall in production in both sectors. Moreover, reiterating the same complaints as the previous left oppositionists, they called for an end to the existing dictatorship of the party bureaucracy which was restricting freedom of discussion and the participation of the workers in the construction of socialism. However, in this document they offered no panacea to cure the ills afflicting Soviet Russia and threatening the future of socialism there, but rather were content to ask for the summoning of a conference of party activists at which different diagnoses of these ills, and various solutions to them, could be freely discussed in order to reach an acceptable and workable programme of socialist reform.⁶⁴

The ranks of the former Democratic Centralists, however, continued to diminish. First, Bubnov deserted the opposition, after he had been appointed to head the Political Control of the Red Army.⁶⁵ Osinsky and Maksimovskii soon followed him, which left Sapronov, V. M. Smirnov, Rafail and Drobnis as the only leading Democratic Centralists still in opposition to the party bureaucracy.⁶⁶ They remained unreconciled to the leadership until they were "purged" from the party by the Fifteenth Congress in December, 1927. In these years Sapronov and V. M. Smirnov - the "two irreconcilables", as Serge described them - were the most radical of all the oppositionists, maintaining that the programme of reforms proposed by the group led by Trotsky was insufficiently radical to solve the problems of Soviet Russia. Rejecting completely the idea of socialism in one country, severely critical of the continuation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) on the grounds that it was benefiting only the kulaks, not the proletariat, and demanding the forcible extraction of any capital surpluses which the peasants had amassed in order to finance rapid industrialisation, as well as the creation of socialist collective farms in the countryside to thwart

any petty-bourgeois peasant resurgence in the countryside, they insisted that the first yet vital step to ensure the execution of a genuine and effective proletarian socialist policy was the restoration of democracy and factional freedom within the party, which alone could protect it from further ossification into a bureaucratic élite. Sadly, their opposition was to no avail. At the Fifteenth Congress the opposition programme attracted the support of less than 1 per cent of the party membership - and the future of the party and the Soviet state was at the mercy of Stalin and his apparatchiki.⁶⁷

About the same time as the Democratic Centralist movement emerged as a distinct faction, with its own platform of reforms, another group of "leftists" in the Bolshevik party also coalesced to establish a separate faction - the Workers' Opposition, which first consciously spoke under this name at the Ninth Party Conference.⁶⁸ In general, the Workers' Opposition shared the same fears as the Democratic Centralists regarding the effects of the increasing bureaucratisation and centralisation of authority in Soviet Russia, and of the restrictions on workers' democracy which was accompanying this, on the socialist character of the revolution. Yet the Workers' Opposition distinguished itself from the Democratic Centralists in several respects. First, it was composed overwhelmingly of workers and was distrustful of the more intelligentsia-dominated oppositions. In fact, in the 1920's Shliapnikov - "a former metalworker, one of the very few Bolsheviks who had taken part in the Petrograd revolution of February-March, 1917 [who] kept about him, even when in power, the mentality, the prejudices, and even the old clothes he had possessed as a worker"⁶⁹ - and S. V. Medvedev, a Bolshevik since 1900 and the chairman of the Union of Metal-Workers in 1920, the leaders of this opposition group, refused to support the "leftists" then led by Trotsky, since they believed that both the party hierarchy and its opponents shared a common contempt for the proletariat and had no genuine concern in defending its interests.⁷⁰ Second, the Workers' Opposition believed that the problems then evident in Soviet Russia were not caused just by an over-centralisation of power and authority, but rather were symptomatic of the alien influence of the old bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeois peasants on the policy of the party and the Soviet

government.⁷¹ Finally, much more insistently than the Democratic Centralists, the Workers' Opposition demanded the "reproletarianisation" (orabochenie) of the party, state and economic apparatus as the sole means to prevent any further degeneration of the revolution.⁷²

While the Workers' Opposition may have acted in concert only from September, 1920, there had been earlier indications of its existence. In the autumn of 1919 Shliapnikov, supported by Iu. K. Lutovinov, the leader of the Mine-Workers' Union, had called for the party and the soviets to leave the administration of industry solely to the workers, organised in their trade unions. He repeated this demand in a set of theses which he drew up before the Ninth Party Congress, in which he again urged that the organisation of the economy should be entrusted to the trade unions, in diametrical opposition to the plans of Trotsky who proposed to militarise the trade unions and manage industry on the principles of strict hierarchical discipline.⁷³

As the central party and state organs increasingly interfered in the work of the trade unions during 1920, the Workers' Opposition formally united in defence of the libertarian principles of socialism, protesting particularly against the central appointment of industrial managers, usually from the ranks of the spetsy, and of the Central Committee's intolerable control over the trade unions, and the workers' local soviets. The issues raised by the Workers' Opposition found a response among certain sections of the proletariat, themselves suffering under the rule of the spetsy and disgruntled at the material rewards received by them and other bureaucrats, especially in the industrial region of Moscow, in Samara and the Ukraine, and among the miners and metalworkers.⁷⁴

The high point of the Workers' Opposition, however, was still to come. Its zenith occurred during the trade union debate which preceded the Tenth Party Congress. In this period, too, the Workers' Opposition found a surprising spokeswoman, a fiery and articulate theoretician, Alexandra Kollontai, who had been Shliapnikov's lover for a number of years.

The lives of these two leaders of the Workers' Opposition present a striking contrast. Born into a landed family in 1872, Kollontai entered the ranks of the Marxist revolutionaries in the 1890's after

an early attraction to Populism.⁷⁵ Thereafter, she had a chequered career as a revolutionary. She claimed that she refused to align herself with either the Mensheviks or Bolsheviks before 1905, when she cooperated with the latter - she is said to have argued that she had "a greater affinity for Bolshevism, with its intransigence."⁷⁶ In emigration after the failure of this revolution, she often found herself in opposition to Lenin. She supported the Otzovists' demand that revolutionary Marxists should boycott the elections to the Duma, and later she allied with the internationalist wing of the Mensheviks, during which time she became a leading figure in the "August Bloc" which formed in 1912 in order to oppose Lenin's attempt at the Prague Conference to establish the Bolshevik faction as the only legitimate representative of the R.S.D.W.P. In 1915 she returned to the Bolshevik fold, largely in support of Lenin's revolutionary defeatist position in the imperialist war. In 1917, according to N. Sukhanov,⁷⁷ she had been the only leading Russian Bolshevik in Petrograd to support Lenin's "April Theses", in which he called for an end to all support of the Provisional Government and the immediate establishment of a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry - although even earlier, in March, the Bolshevik wing of the Latvian Social Democrats had also called for the continuation of the revolution, in order to establish a genuinely democratic republic of workers.⁷⁸ In 1918, however, she had opposed Lenin once again over the question of peace with Germany and had joined the "Left Communist" movement. Moreover, A. Balabanoff, then a member of the party too, claimed that in these years Kollontai was "a frequent source of both personal and political annoyance to the Party leaders,"⁷⁹ although the reasons for this conclusion remain obscure. In 1920, she joined the Workers' Opposition, a move which puzzled A. Rosmer, who, like V. Serge, was a sympathetic yet critical observer of the young Soviet republic, since he could "find nothing in her origins and previous activity to have prepared her for this semi-syndicalist position"⁸⁰ - and, if Rosmer is correct, Kollontai refused to answer his questions on this subject. Later, she was to become a Soviet diplomat, a position often reserved as punishment for oppositionists in the 1920's. She survived the purges of the 1930's, apparently the only prominent oppositionist to do so,

and died peacefully in 1952. Now she is probably best known for her views on women's liberation and sexuality - she was an advocate of "an oversimplified theory of free love,"⁸¹ of which, being a good Leninist, she combined the theory with practice.

Unlike Kollontai, Shliapnikov was an exception among the Bolshevik leaders in that he was a true proletarian, with little education, rather than an intellectual. Born into a family of "old Believers", Shliapnikov worked as a fitter in a St. Petersburg shipyard, where he took part in the strike movement in 1901.⁸² It is from this time that he dated his affiliation to the revolutionary socialist movement. He continued to play a leading part in this movement, first in his native Murom when he joined the R.S.D.W.P., and later in Moscow and St. Petersburg. After being arrested several times he went abroad in 1908, and until 1914 he worked in shipyards in France, Germany and Great Britain. During the war he played a prominent role in the Petrograd organisation of the party as well as being largely instrumental in re-establishing a Central Committee on Russian soil in 1915,⁸³ although several times he again went abroad to help maintain contacts between émigré Central Committee and the party workers in Russia. He was a good organiser and practical politician, in Sukhanov's estimation, but rather deficient in the ability to think independently and critically.⁸⁴ In February, 1917 he found himself in the capital during the revolution, where he helped to establish the Petrograd Soviet and in fact became a member of its Executive Committee. In July he became the president of the Mine-Workers' Union, in which there was strong support for the Bolsheviks. After the October revolution, about which he had remained ambivalent, neither wholeheartedly supporting nor opposing it, he was appointed Commissar of Labour. He now found himself on the "right" of the party which favoured a coalition government, to include both Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, rather than a solely Bolshevik dictatorship which he felt could survive only by the ruthless repression of all opposition, even that of other socialists. In fact, he resigned his position in November, 1917, when the Left Social Revolutionaries deserted the Bolsheviks after they had placed limitations on the freedom of the press, but soon submitted to party discipline and returned to the government.⁸⁵ In

1919 he first put forward the ideas which were later to form the nucleus of the ideology of the Workers' Opposition. He remained in opposition in the first half of the 1920's and as a result of this he was removed to Paris to work in the Soviet legation in 1924. During this period he continued to write his history of the revolutionary movement, a history based on his own experiences, which was published under the titles Kanun semnadsogo goda and Semnadsaty god. Despite his renunciation of his opposition and his return to the "general line" of the party in 1926, he became a victim of the "purges" in the 1930's.

In her polemical pamphlet, The Workers' Opposition, circulated to the Bolshevik delegates at the Tenth Congress, Kollontai presented what can be justifiably considered to be the credo of this movement. She gave a compelling account of the evils of bureaucratic administration then pervading the state, the economy and the party itself; she provided an explanation of the source of these, accusing the spetsy and peasantry of selfishly influencing the party to implement policies which ran contrary to the principles of socialist construction; and, finally, she offered a simple solution to these ills - eliminate all non-proletarian influences from the administration of the party, the state and the economy, and entrust the future of socialist construction into the hands of its rightful builders, the workers, who alone could return Soviet Russia to the path of proletarian purity and prevent the degeneration of the revolution.⁸⁶

However, the same fate befell the Workers' Opposition as the Democratic Centralists. The Tenth Congress decisively rejected the proposals that it made. In January, 1921, Lenin had argued that the Russian workers were still too backward and inexperienced to administer successfully a modern industrial state, with some justification in view of the chaos that had emerged from the system of workers' control that had existed in 1917 and 1918.⁸⁷ Moreover, the threat posed to the survival of the Bolshevik regime by the numerous peasant revolts, especially severe in Tambov, a threat which was exacerbated by the Kronstadt revolt in the midst of the Tenth Congress, also helped Lenin to suppress the opposition in the party by calling for unity in face of this common danger.⁸⁸ Yet there was more behind the defeat of the Workers' Opposition, and of the Democratic Centralists too, than

Lenin's appeal to reason and the instinct for self-preservation. He was not hesitant to utilise his control of the party organisation to ensure that the opposition was crushed. Victor Serge, a sympathetic but still critical observer of party life in these years, emphasised this factor in Lenin's success:

The Party steamroller was at work. I took part in the discussion [on the role of the trade unions] in one of the districts of Petrograd and was horrified to see the voting rigged for Lenin's and Zinoviev's 'majority'.⁸⁹

Balabanoff in essence agreed that Lenin and his apparatchiki were unwilling to tolerate any opposition then. Referring to the preparatory period leading up to the Tenth Congress, she clearly described the lack of opportunities for any critics of the party's policies to express their views. She unequivocally declared that "there was no possibility, even at that time, of publicly criticising the Central Committee or of placing an unofficial opinion before the party rank and file...."⁹⁰ The dice were heavily loaded against the oppositionists.

The nucleus of the Workers' Opposition, Shliapnikov, Medvedev and Kollontai, who despite the ban on factions within the party imposed by the Tenth Congress refused to halt their opposition, soon was to raise this very question of the suppression of all opinions that conflicted with those of the leadership. In February, 1922, they sent a petition to the Comintern - the "Declaration of the Twenty-Two" -, claiming that this was the only recourse left open to them by the actions of the Central Committee. In this document, they bitterly protested against the continuing increase in the autocratic powers of the party hierarchy, which was not hesitant to use its authority to stifle all criticism in the party.⁹¹

Moreover, these oppositionists remained unreconciled to the NEP. In 1924, Shliapnikov unleashed a bitter attack on the policy. He believed that it had been designed to satisfy the desires of the petty-bourgeois peasants and, therefore, detrimental to any progress towards socialism. Yet he was not surprised at this development, regarding it merely as the reflection of the influence of petty-bourgeois elements in the party which, he claimed, contained less than 20 per cent genuine proletarians after 1922.⁹²

However, the final remnants of the Workers' Opposition remained ineffectual, and slowly but inexorably disintegrated. Its final demise came in 1926, when Shliapnikov and Medvedev, the last surviving leaders of this group, recanted under pressure from the party hierarchy.

This survey of the rise and fall of the left oppositions in the early years of Soviet Russia serves to demonstrate that at time "leftism" was a current within Bolshevism which enjoyed the sympathy and support of a substantial segment of the party. In essence, this strand of Bolshevism intransigently upheld what it considered to be the accepted principles and ideals of socialism in face of the compromises which Lenin and his associates made in order to resolve a number of immediate and vital problems then confronting the revolutionary state, compromises which inevitably entailed deviations from these principles. As such, "leftism" was able to tap a reservoir of idealism which existed among many Bolsheviks, and non-party workers too, who during the revolutionary fervour of 1917 had come to believe that the socialist millenium was realisable on the morrow of the revolution.

Moreover, an analysis of the origins and experiences of the prominent personalities in these movements fails to reveal any common denominator, except an uncompromising devotion to received ideals, which helps to explain their opposition. Intellectuals and proletarians, émigrés and Bolsheviks who had lived and worked in Russia before 1917, pre-revolutionary opponents of Lenin and Bolsheviks loyal to him - they all were to be found in the ranks of the "leftists" after 1917.

The history of the group of Polish revolutionary Marxists who defended beliefs very similar to those of the "left" Bolsheviks dates back to 1893, when a deep and lasting split occurred within the Polish Socialist movement. In that year a small number of Polish émigré socialists, led by Rosa Luxemburg, L. Jogiches (Tyszko), J. Marchlewski and A. Warszawski (Warski), deserted the newly formed Polish Socialist Party (P.P.S.). Luxemburg and her fellow-thinkers refused to accept the national policy adopted by the P.P.S. which claimed that the restoration of an independent Polish state was a pre-requisite of the eventual success of socialist revolution in Poland. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of Proletariat,⁹³ the first revolutionary socialist party in Russian Poland,⁹⁴ Luxemburg and her supporters

maintained that the struggle for Polish independence would do nothing to foster the development of socialism in Poland, but in fact any support for narrow national objectives would endanger the success of the latter. To defend their own beliefs they established their own journal, Sprawa Robotnicza, in 1893 and in 1894 formed a separate party, the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland (S.D.K.P.), later to become the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (S.D.K.P.iL), when a group of like-minded Lithuanian Marxists, led by F. Dzierżyński, united with it in 1899. For the next twenty years this party firmly rejected any compromises with the forces of nationalism but rather emphasised the international character of the revolutionary socialist movement, maintaining that this was the only policy consistent with the principles of Marxism.

This division in the ranks of Polish socialists, however, created a historical problem since both factions claimed to be the true heirs to the principles of Marxism - indeed, the P.P.S. was not hesitant to utilise Marx's own pronouncements in favour of the restoration of an independent Poland to justify their own pretensions to his heritage.⁹⁵ Consequently, the paradox that demands explanation is that, on the one hand, Luxemburg and her associates in the S.D.K.P. denied Marx's own teachings on Poland, while, on the other hand, they insisted that they were the only Polish revolutionaries who were the true successors of Marx. However, to understand this situation it will be necessary to re-examine the roots of Polish Marxism, especially the factors which helped fashion the ideology of Proletariat, the predecessor of the S.D.K.P.

The origins of Proletariat can be traced back to the 1870's, when the dominant intellectual current throughout Poland was positivism. While this has provoked the contention that "in the ideology of the first Polish socialists one can easily trace the influence of the [positivist] trends prevailing in the entire society, [positivist] in the sense that their programme was both divorced from romanticism and sought inspiration in scientific theory...",⁹⁶ there has been a failure to examine in greater depth the imprint of Polish positivism on the thinking of the first Polish Marxists.

After 1864 positivism, or realism as it sometimes was termed, grew to become the major ideological current in Russian Poland. Essentially, the dominance of positivism can be explained in terms of a reaction to the failure of the national revolt of the romantically-minded Polish gentry who had sought to restore a Polish state independent of Russia. Borrowing from the latest developments in West European social, political and philosophical thought, especially from the positivist philosophy of August Comte, the majority of the Polish intelligentsia, led by Alexander Świętochowski, asserted that the romantic tradition, which had dreamed of Polish independence and had dominated Polish political thought since the Partitions, must be discarded. What was now required was a "scientific" analysis of the problems and weaknesses then existing in Polish society, from which a programme of practical reforms to resolve these could be derived.⁹⁷

The Positivists argued that the crushing of the rising of the gentry in 1863 had shown conclusively the futility of all ideas of re-conquering Poland's lost statehood by a heroic rebellion against the dominion of the partitioning powers. They believed that the future survival of Polish society and culture depended on a programme of "organic work", designed to promote Poland's economic development and improve the education of its people which, it was hoped, ultimately would be to the benefit of all the people, rather than on insurrection which would weaken the nation only further.⁹⁸

Additional justification for the Positivists' approach apparently was provided by the studies of the causes of the Partitions then being undertaken by some notable Polish historians in Cracow, the most prominent of whom were J. Szujski and M. Bobrzynski. These historians concluded that the basic sources of the disintegration of the old Polish commonwealth had to be sought within Polish society itself, rather than in its geographic position between Russia and Prussia, since for centuries this Polish state had survived despite its vulnerability to pressures from both east and west. They maintained that the Partitions had overtaken Poland because of its own economic backwardness and its anarchic political system, the most famous example of which was the liberum veto which allowed the gentry, in defence of their narrow self-interests, to forestall any attempts of the central

government to carry out reforms to modernise and strengthen the country.⁹⁹ It was a logical step from this analysis of the factors underlying Poland's decline to the Positivists' programme, with its emphasis on internal modernisation as the sole basis of the future of Polish society, whatever political form this would take.

The Positivists themselves were resigned to the fact that the future for the Kingdom of Poland lay within the bounds of the Russian Empire. Moreover, they believed that the Kingdom had much to gain from this union since they felt that its prosperity now was dependent on its economic integration with Russia. The removal of the tariffs on Polish goods in 1851 and the subsequent expansion of the railway system into the interior of Russia had opened up a potentially vast market to Polish industry and had provided a great stimulus to it.¹⁰⁰

Therefore, considering any national insurrection to be doomed from the outset and underlining the economic benefits from integration, they advocated a policy of loyalty to Russia - and of the other partitioned areas of Poland to Prussia and the Hapsburg Empire. They hoped that this abnegation of politics would bring the Russian government to grant some measures of autonomy to the Kingdom of Poland - in fact, the policy of Russification was intensified after the abortive rising of 1863-1864 - and at the same time allow the Poles themselves to concentrate their energies on the economic development and cultural regeneration of their nation. Moreover, they accepted that it would take time before any tangible benefits emerged from their programme. J. Kraszewski, of the romantic school before 1863, openly admitted this:

We believe neither in revolution nor in radical utopias which profess to change society overnight and to cure all its social ills by means of some panacea.... We believe in slow and gradual progress which through reforming individuals, increasing enlightenment, encouraging work, order and moderation should accomplish the most salutary revolution, or rather evolution in the social system.¹⁰¹

However, in the 1870's great changes were taking place in the Kingdom of Poland. Industrialisation, stimulated by the opening of the Russian market and later by the surplus of labour available after the Polish peasants had been emancipated in 1864, and in part by the emphasis of the Positivists themselves on economic modernisation, was

progressing rapidly. While this appeared to be a vindication of the Positivists' theory of "organic work", this success also had its negative aspects. Industry was prospering but the rapidly growing working class which was being created in the process was suffering grievous deprivations in the first rigours of industrial revolution. Reacting against the failure of the Positivists' programme to deal with the social ills accompanying this economic growth, socialists began to appear in Poland to champion the rights of the workers.¹⁰²

Much has been written about the influence of Marxism on the formation of the ideas of these early Polish socialists, particularly of those who formed Proletariat. It generally is argued that the leaders of this party, the majority of whom came from the intelligentsia, such as L. Waryński and S. Mendelson, became indoctrinated with Marxism when they were students in St. Petersburg and brought it back with them to Poland.¹⁰³ Admittedly, there is no reason to doubt that Waryński and his colleagues did receive an introduction to Marx's basic ideas at that time, but in itself this is insufficient to prove that they derived their programme solely from Marx. On the contrary, they stubbornly opposed Marx's own pronouncements in favour of a restored Polish state and revised his ideas on this question to suit what they considered to be the only method to achieve socialism in Poland. Indeed, an analysis of their programme points to the conclusion that this was a hybrid, in part drawn from Marx and in part from the conclusions of the Positivists.¹⁰⁴

In keeping with the spirit of the time, they did not deny that a scientific approach to analysing and understanding the problems of Polish society was methodologically correct. What they did object to, however, was the acceptance of the existing socio-economic system implicit in the Positivists' theory of "organic work", and of the economic and social oppression which this perpetuated. Apparently, what the first Polish Marxists accepted from Marx was his notion of "scientific socialism", which combined idealism with an empirical analysis of societies, and their ills, on the basis of which the sources of, and solutions to these could be sought. They did not apply dogmatically his prescriptions regarding Polish society but rather conducted their own investigation of Poland's problems from

which they derived their own set of measures to resolve these.¹⁰⁵

Proletariat admittedly was consistent with Marxist doctrine in that it believed that the fundamental source of the injustices in Polish society was to be found in the existing economic system which, it claimed, had reached the stage of capitalist development in the Kingdom of Poland. The answer to this, in their minds, was simple - the destruction of capitalism and the creation of a society based on economic equality would resolve all these problems.¹⁰⁶

However, developing their prognosis of how this social revolution must occur, these Polish Marxists scorned any notions that it could take place in combination with a national rising for Polish independence. Not only would national independence fail to solve the problems of economic and social oppression, caused by capitalism rather than national subjugation, but also any concern with nationalism would help to conceal the real essence of this oppression from the workers, dull their class consciousness and divert them into a struggle for national, not class aims, and, ultimately, hinder the development of socialist revolution.¹⁰⁷

Furthermore, they, like the Positivists, were convinced that the success of any social revolution in the Kingdom of Poland depended on the victory of a similar revolution throughout the Russian Empire, arguing with great justification, given the experiences of the nineteenth century, that any attempt at revolution on a Polish scale would prove fruitless as long as the power of the Russian autocracy remained intact. This impelled them to union with the Russian populists of the Narodnaia Volia, with the aim of creating the combined revolutionary movement which they felt to be essential if the autocracy was to be overthrown and the way cleared for radical social and economic changes in the Kingdom of Poland itself.¹⁰⁸

Moreover, their analysis of the class structure then existing in the Kingdom of Poland confirmed them in their rejection of national revolution. The power of the gentry, the social base of the independence movement, had been destroyed in the rising of 1863 and its aftermath, when the autocracy had emancipated the Polish peasants and generously endowed them with land taken from the gentry in order to punish and weaken the latter and secure the support of the former.

After this the gentry had become a reactionary class, solely intent on preserving the vestiges of its power and privileges. They also claimed that the bourgeoisie, itself as much Jewish as Polish, had no desire to become separated from Russia since its prosperity was based both on its access to Russia's market and on the guarantee of social peace and stability which the power of the autocracy could provide it.¹⁰⁹ Besides, as the Positivists had done before them, they dismissed the peasants as a potential force for national revolution, arguing that they "with very rare and insignificant exceptions have always acted in a hostile manner against uprisings for national independence."¹¹⁰ Consequently, Proletariat considered the exploited and impoverished workers to be the only revolutionary class in Russian Poland, and believed that once they had freed themselves of all remaining nationalist influences they would become conscious that their own interests would be best served by a united revolutionary struggle with the exploited classes in the remainder of the Russian Empire, in order to establish the pre-condition for any future social revolution, the destruction of the autocracy.¹¹¹

Accordingly, contrary to Marx's own views, Proletariat asserted that revolutionary socialists in Russian Poland had no choice but to reject any policy in favour of national independence and to support the struggle for an international, or at least a general Russian revolution. They believed that Marx's defence of Polish independence was founded on an incorrect analysis of Polish and, especially, of Russian society, particularly since the strong revolutionary movements, such as the Populists, then emerging in Russia itself had invalidated his justification for the re-creation of a Polish state as a barrier to the extension of Russian despotism into Central Europe. In their minds, the old Russia itself was doomed.¹¹²

In one sense, it is possible to argue what these Polish Marxists had done had been to accept much of the Positivists' analysis, while injecting a revolutionary twist into it. They agreed with the Positivists that the future of the Kingdom of Poland was linked with that of Russia. They rejected, however, the concept of "organic work" which they considered to benefit only the Polish bourgeoisie and rather foresaw the future freedom of the Polish people from economic, social

and even national oppression as contingent upon the transformation of the Russian Empire into a democratic, and ultimately socialist republic.¹¹³

Although Proletariat was unable to survive the repressive measures taken against it by the tsarist regime in the 1880's, it did leave a legacy for the Polish socialist movement, as the future was soon to show. The S.D.K.P. rallied under the same banner of uncompromising revolutionary internationalism, initially developing and justifying their refusal to make any compromises with nationalism in the narrow context of the question of Polish independence.

The S.D.K.P., particularly Luxemburg, warmly praised the anti-national position adopted by Proletariat.¹¹⁴ Convinced that the pursuit of national aims had nothing in common with the struggle for socialism and fearful that any concentration on these would distract the Polish proletariat from pursuing its class objectives, in the years after 1893 she expanded the ideas first espoused by Proletariat into a coherent theory which purported to substantiate the S.D.K.P.'s opposition to national self-determination for Poland. She accepted much of Proletariat's analysis of Polish society in the late nineteenth century, agreeing that the power of the gentry, the class which had been the driving force of the national movement, had been destroyed by its defeat in 1864, and that the bourgeoisie, the traditional champions of nationalism, had refused to support independence for the Kingdom of Poland since its material interests were best served by union with the Russian Empire.¹¹⁵

Moreover, she argued that capitalism had developed in Russian Poland largely as the result of the abolition of the customs barrier with the Russian Empire in 1851, which in turn had led to the increasing economic integration of these two countries. To destroy this integration by the creation of an independent Polish state would slow down the growth of capitalism and, consequently, delay the establishment of the pre-requisites of socialism and the intensification of the class struggle in Russian Poland itself.¹¹⁶

Relying on this theory of the "organic incorporation" of the Kingdom of Poland into the Russian Empire, which she developed most fully in her doctoral dissertation, The Industrial Development of

Poland, presented in 1897, Luxemburg explained the apparently paradoxical resurgence of national movements in Russian Poland in the 1890's. She asserted that although the Polish bourgeoisie had prospered from economic union with the Russian Empire, this union was now posing a serious threat to its interests. Admittedly, this had stimulated the growth of capitalism in Russian Poland but at the same time it had created a revolutionary Polish proletariat, the appointed "grave-digger" of capitalism itself. As a result of this she contended that the Polish bourgeoisie, and its reactionary allies, the gentry and the petty-bourgeoisie, had gathered under the flag of national independence in order to separate Russian Poland from Russia and so to retard the development of capitalism and the subsequent class struggle there.¹¹⁷

She concluded from this analysis that it was essential to oppose this revival of Polish nationalism in order to avert the possibility that the Polish workers might be deluded into supporting a movement which in fact was directed against their own class interests. She insisted that the interests of the Polish proletariat demanded that it unite with the Russian proletariat in a common struggle to overthrow the autocracy and establish a democratic Russian republic, of which the Kingdom of Poland would be an autonomous part, as the first step on the path towards a future socialist Russia.

Luxemburg herself was aware that the position that she and her colleagues adopted with respect to self-determination for Poland contradicted that of Marx and Engels. Yet she still claimed in all honesty that the S.D.K.P. was the only revolutionary socialist Polish party which truly adhered to Marxism since she was convinced that the essence of this was not the unreflective and dogmatic reiteration of the pronouncements of Marx and Engels on particular questions, but rather the application of its method of historical analysis to concrete social situations - and she later asserted that her party had pursued just this course:

The S.D.K.P.iL., in justifying its programme of autonomy proceeds not from the metaphysical right of nations to self-determination... but from the social development of Poland and Russia and the realisation of the consequences of this development in the spirit of the revolutionary policy of the working class.¹¹⁸

While the opposition of these Polish Marxists to national self-determination at first was applied only to the case of Poland, in later years they expanded this into a general policy. They readily embraced the developing neo-Marxist theories of imperialism which, among other things, provided a universal justification of their own rejection of Polish independence. By emphasising the trend in capitalist development towards ever greater economic integration, these theories attempted to demonstrate that in the contemporary epoch of finance capitalism, or imperialism, a united international economic system had been created in which the prerequisites for socialist revolution on a global, or at least European scale had matured. One inference drawn from these theories was the conclusion that nation states were now obsolete, both in the restricted sense that they were considered too small to foster further economic growth and, more generally, because the predicted socialist revolution would establish an international workers' republic in which they would become unnecessary. Primed by their own analysis of the progressive effects of the integration of the Kingdom of Poland into the Russian Empire, it seems plausible to contend that these Polish Marxists were prepared mentally to accept these theories of imperialism which both confirmed and were confirmed by their views on the development of Poland.¹¹⁹

However, largely as a result of its national policy, the S.D.K.P. in the early years of its existence was unable to build up a strong indigenous base of support in the Kingdom of Poland itself. S. Pestkovskii, himself a party member, agreed that this failure was caused by the rigid internationalist outlook of the party which, he claimed, alienated the majority of Polish workers "among whom patriotic traditions still were very much alive."¹²⁰ In the 1890's, therefore, the S.D.K.P. remained basically an organisation of émigrés, a leadership of intelligentsia lacking a mass following.

At last, during the revolution of 1905, this party - now transformed into the S.D.K.P.iL. - did succeed in winning the support of substantial sections of the Polish proletariat. The outburst of strikes by the St. Petersburg workers, in protest against the massacre on "Bloody Sunday", as well as against the continuation of the war with Japan, provoked solidarity strikes in the Kingdom of Poland. Taking

advantage of this spontaneous revolutionary action of the Polish proletariat, the S.D.K.P.iL. came forward to put itself at the head of this movement, defending the immediate economic demands of the workers while at the same time insisting that they should fight in concert with their Russian brothers for a democratic republic in the Russian Empire at large, a republic in which autonomy for the minority nationalities would be guaranteed. By all accounts, this programme was accepted by many of the Polish workers and they certainly exerted no strong pressure for independence, possibly since the S.D.K.P.iL.'s claim that they would advance their interests best in alliance with the Russian proletariat seemed to be confirmed by the revolutionary upheaval in Russia itself.¹²¹

Yet the success of the S.D.K.P.iL was to prove short-lived. In the period of reaction which followed the crushing of this revolution the rank and file support which it had gained in the Kingdom dwindled and the party again was reduced largely to a handful of intelligentsia living abroad.¹²²

The events of 1905, however, did leave their mark on the thinking and actions of the S.D.K.P.iL. Convinced that the failure of the revolution had underscored the need for united action of the part on the proletariat of the Russian Empire as a whole if the autocracy was to be overthrown, in 1906 the party, while still rejecting the point in favour of national self-determination in the programme of the R.S.D.W.P. - the principal reason for its refusal to join this party in 1903 -, agreed to unite with the Russian party, as an autonomous member of it.

Moreover, despite continuing differences of opinion with Lenin, the S.D.K.P.iL. moved closer to Bolshevism in the years after 1905. At the party's Sixth Congress Tyszko openly declared that "Bolshevism, freed from the negative features which it acquired in its peculiarly Russian setting," was the only bulwark of revolutionary Marxism in Russia and accused the Mensheviks of opportunism because of their conciliatory attitude towards the "vacillating and fainthearted" Russian liberals.¹²³

The differences which did remain between the leaders of the S.D.K.P.iL. and Lenin - on the issues of national self-determination,

the organisation of the party and the proletarian movement in general, and the role of the peasants in the revolution - can be understood only in the context of the former's own experiences and their "peculiarly Polish setting". Regarding the first issue, the very existence of the S.D.K.P.iL. was founded on its opposition to self-determination for Poland. Consequently, Lenin's support for this concept, regardless of his motivation, was totally unacceptable to the S.D.K.P.iL. and even after union with the R.S.D.W.P. it continued to adhere to its original position.

On the question of organisation, the views of these Polish Marxists were coloured by their negative appraisal of the tactics of the P.P.S., as well as by their understanding of the German Social Democratic Party (G.S.D.P.), in which Luxemburg, Tyszko and Marchlewski had participated since the mid-1890's. Luxemburg, in particular, sharply attacked the Blanquist ideas held by the P.P.S., arguing that the struggle for socialism rests on

the objective development of bourgeois society... the source of which in the final analysis is economic development.... Socialist aspirations and the workers' movement... ever more coalesce and simultaneously become a historical force which is conscious of its aims and which progresses with the fatalism of the laws of nature. In its clearest form the example of this is the almost mathematical growth of German Social Democracy.¹²⁴

Yet at the same time they considered the leadership of the G.S.D.P. itself to be a reactionary body, isolated from and dampening the revolutionary enthusiasm of the otherwise radical mass workers' movement. Therefore, when Tyszko declared that the aim of the S.D.K.P.iL. after its union with the R.S.D.W.P. was to try to incorporate into the Russian party "the general line of West European social democracy, adapted to Russian conditions,"¹²⁵ he presumably meant that the revolutionary Marxists in the Russian Empire should base their tactics on the mass workers' movement, both in opposition to the Blanquist trend in Lenin's concept of a disciplined, conspiratorial party as the driving force of socialist revolution, and also as a guarantee that the revolutionary leadership would not become detached from the revolutionary proletariat and act as a brake on its development, as had occurred in Germany.

On the peasant question, they agreed that the agrarian conditions in Russia itself were such that the peasantry could become an important revolutionary force which, as Lenin proposed, the Russian proletariat could utilise as an ally in its struggle against the autocracy and the bourgeoisie, with the added caveat that the revolutionary proletariat must not make any concessions to the petty-bourgeois aspirations of the peasantry for its own land.¹²⁶ In Poland, however, they argued that the agrarian situation was different, with the consequence that the smychka, the revolutionary alliance of the proletariat and the peasantry, was an impossible tactic there. They maintained that capitalism in agriculture in Poland had developed faster than in Russia, so that class differentiation in the Polish countryside had proceeded much further. As a result of this a large body of peasant proprietors had been created who, like their counterparts in West Europe, were regarded as bulwarks of reaction - Marchlewski scathingly called them "fanatics for private property"¹²⁷ - and also a large rural proletariat on whom alone the workers could rely for consistent support in their struggle for socialism. By their own admission, it was fear of strengthening the existing "kulak" elements that led them to reject any alliance with the Polish peasants.¹²⁸

Already seriously weakened in the Kingdom of Poland after 1905, the S.D.K.P.iL. was to suffer a still worse blow. A split occurred in the party, between its émigré centre and its members still active in the Kingdom, largely in Warsaw and Lodz. The issues at stake were tactical, but the conflict was intensified by the dogmatic refusal of the leadership to enter into any discussion of them. The party activists in the Kingdom desired to use the newly-legalised trade unions as part of the revolutionary movement and also to unite with the P.P.S.-Left (Levitsa), now that this faction had abandoned its support of Polish independence. Finally, in 1911, as a result of the leadership's failure even to consider these proposals, the members of the party organisations in Warsaw and Lodz set up their own central committee in Cracow, the Regional Committee (Zarząd Krajowy), led by J. Hanecki, L. Domski and J. Leszczynski-Lenski, and later supplemented by Radek, in opposition to the Main Committee (Zarząd Główny) in Berlin.¹²⁹

This faction of the S.D.K.P.iL., known as the Rozłamowcy (the "splitters"), was also distinguished from the old leaders of the party by the fact that it stood closer to Lenin on the question of party organisation - even the tsarist authorities believed that it "[bore] a clearly Bolshevik character."¹³⁰ Yet the Rozłamowcy adamantly opposed national self-determination, supporting the traditional position of the S.D.K.P.iL. In fact, it was in the name of the Regional Committee that Radek in 1915 published his famous set of theses, in which he presented his neo-Marxist analysis of the imperialist epoch in justification of the contention that revolutionary Marxists could not make any concessions to narrow national demands.¹³¹

However, after the outbreak of war in 1914 the two factions of the S.D.K.P.iL. began to merge, largely since their previous differences seemed unimportant in view of their common stand towards the war. The Main and Regional Committees subscribed to the same resolution presented to the Zimmerwald Conference in September, 1915, in which they condemned the war as a struggle between the rival imperialisms of the German and British alliances and demanded that revolutionary socialists convert this into an international civil war for socialism.¹³² In 1916 they formally re-united and it was as a unified party that the S.D.K.P.iL. was to face the revolutionary upheaval in the Russian Empire in the following years.

This revolution in Russia nevertheless brought with it the very possibility that these Polish Marxists had dreaded - the restoration of the Polish state - when both the Provisional Government and even the Petrograd Soviet issued declarations in support of independence for Poland. The Polish Social Democrats bitterly opposed this, arguing that it would be a reactionary policy which would result in separating the Polish workers from their revolutionary Russian comrades and leaving them at the mercy of their native bourgeoisie. In fact, they even pleaded, unsuccessfully, with the Bolsheviks to resist this.¹³³ Instead, when the Bolsheviks themselves seized power in October, they granted the right of self-determination to all the national minorities in the former Russian Empire.

Throughout 1918 the S.D.K.P.iL. continued stubbornly to struggle against the very idea of an independent Poland, but to no avail. In

November, after the collapse of the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires which brought an end to their military occupation of Poland, a new government, headed by I. Daszyński, a Galician socialist, was set up in Lublin and declared Poland an independent national state, an action supported even by many of the Polish workers.¹³⁴ The worst nightmare of the S.D.K.P.iL. finally had been realised.

The last act in the life of the S.D.K.P.iL. was its transformation into the Communist Workers' Party of Poland (C.W.P.P.), in union with the P.P.S.-Left, in December, 1918. Yet the programme of this new party was distinctly that of the S.D.K.P.iL. It proclaimed that its immediate aim was the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat in Poland which, however, would not remain independent but would become part of an international socialist republic; and it dismissed the peasantry as a potential ally of the proletariat in this revolution, typified by its refusal to consider any division of the land in Poland to secure the support of the peasants.¹³⁵

In the next two years the C.W.P.P. made little progress towards realising its aims. The revolutionary workers' councils which had formed spontaneously at the end of 1918 and in which the Polish Communists had found some solid support, especially in Warsaw and the Dąbrowa industrial basin, had disintegrated during 1919. Moreover, the government of the new Polish state clearly was consolidating itself, although the C.W.P.P. still refused to accept the fact that an independent Poland in fact did exist. Nevertheless, a final opportunity was provided for the C.W.P.P. to take power in Poland when the Red Army invaded in 1920. A Provisional Revolutionary Committee for Poland, consisting of Marchlewski, Dzierżyński, F. Kon and J. Unszlicht was established in Białystok in August, 1920, but only for a short time. As a result of their refusal to make any compromises with national sentiment and of their rejection of the peasants' aspirations for the land, the Polish Communists failed to secure any strong indigenous support - and the victory of the Polish legions over the Red Army finally crushed their hopes of a speedy proletarian revolution in Poland. Thereafter, the C.W.P.P. began to reflect on the lessons of its defeat - and eventually to reject the programme that it had inherited from the S.D.K.P.iL.¹³⁶

In Latvia, too, there appeared a group of revolutionary Marxists who held beliefs similar to those of the "left" Bolsheviks and the S.D.K.P.iL. They emerged from the Latvian Social Democratic Labour Party (L.S.D.L.P.), the first socialist party in Latvia, which was formed in June, 1904, when a Congress was held in Riga to unite a number of socialist circles which had arisen in the late 1890's, mainly to defend the economic interests of the workers. This new party also included a number of Latvian émigrés, former members of the "New Current" (Jauna Strava), a movement of Latvian intelligentsia, embracing both revolutionary democrats and socialists, which had been active during the 1890's.¹³⁷

In certain respects the history of the L.S.D.L.P. is akin to that of the S.D.K.P.iL. While the L.S.D.L.P. favoured union with the R.S.D.W.P. to promote a common revolutionary struggle against the autocracy, it refused to do so if such a merger would force it to accept the programme of the Russian party in its entirety. Therefore, in order to ensure its right to formulate its independent policies, especially with respect to party organisation and to agriculture, the L.S.D.L.P. demanded that any united party of Social Democrats in the Russian Empire must be organised on a federative basis, a position at that time defended even by P. I. Stuchka, soon to become the leader and principal theoretician of the Bolshevik wing of the Latvian party and a dedicated advocate of proletarian internationalism.¹³⁸

Stuchka was born of a peasant family in 1865. After studying law at St. Petersburg university, he returned to Latvia where he took a leading part in the "New Current". As editor of its paper, Dienas Lapas (Daily News), he imparted a socialist colouration to it. Arrested in 1897 and later exiled to Vitebsk, he only returned to Riga in 1904 when he participated in the founding of the L.S.D.L.P. Elected to the Central Committee in 1906, he soon left the party in opposition to its Menshevik-oriented leadership and because of its failure to discipline the anarchic tendencies of some of its members. In St. Petersburg from 1907, he continued to oppose the Mensheviks in the Latvian party and in fact became the ideological leader of the Latvian Bolsheviks. In these years too, he developed, independently of Lenin, what was to become the programme of the Latvian Bolsheviks on the

agrarian and national questions, refusing any concessions to the peasants' aspirations for land and firmly rejecting any compromises with the growing forces of Latvian nationalism which he condemned as a reactionary, bourgeois movement. After the October revolution he became Commissar of Justice for the new Soviet Russian republic. In December, 1918, he returned to Latvia to become the president of the newly-formed Provisional Soviet Government there, until its collapse in May, 1919. He returned to Moscow in 1920, where he lived until his death in 1932. During this period he was appointed President of the Supreme Court of the U.S.S.R., while continuing to lead the now illegal Communist Party of Latvia and to represent it in the Comintern. He also produced a number of works on the constitutional law of the Soviet Union in the 1920's, most notably The Revolutionary Role of Law and the State and A Course of Soviet Civil Law.¹³⁹

The L.S.D.L.P. soon had the opportunity to show its mettle. In 1905 it led and directed mass strikes of the Latvian workers in protest against the slaughter of the St. Petersburg demonstrators on "Bloody Sunday". Throughout 1905 the party continued to control the escalating strike movement and the increasing revolutionary activities of the Latvian proletariat. Yet the Latvian Social Democrats still had no immediate intention of exploiting this turmoil in order to establish a proletarian dictatorship in Latvia, but rather called for the creation of a democratic Russian republic in which autonomy, not independence, would be granted to all the minority nationalities in its confines.¹⁴⁰ In fact, the Second Congress of the L.S.D.L.P., in June, 1905, rejected the demand for an armed uprising in Latvia, on the grounds that since the Russian proletariat itself was "insufficiently organised and prepared" to carry this out successfully, any rising of the Latvian workers, in isolation from similar happenings in the rest of the Russian Empire, would be doomed to failure in face of the continued power of the tsarist regime.¹⁴¹

This Congress also adopted a programme for the young party, in large part drawn from the Erfurt Programme of the G.S.D.P. In itself, this influence of German Marxism on the ideology of the Latvian Social Democrats is quite understandable, since in the 1890's, when the Russian socialist movement was still in an embryonic form, it was to the

German Social Democrats that the intellectuals of the "New Current" turned for Marxist literature, and an example.¹⁴² Moreover, the application of German rather than Russian Marxist principles in Latvia did not seem far-fetched to the Latvian socialists, since they considered Latvia, with a higher level of capitalist development and of education than Russia, to be more like the West than Russia. In particular, they believed that the existence of a sizeable and educated working-class in Latvia, created by this greater development of capitalism, would make it possible to organise a party more on the lines of the G.S.D.P. than on the lines of the small, conspiratorial R.S.D.W.P. Furthermore, they maintained also that capitalism in Latvian agriculture had progressed more than in Russia itself, with the consequence that in the Latvian countryside a greater differentiation of classes, into large landowners and prosperous peasants on the one hand, and landless peasants and batraki on the other, had taken place. Accordingly, they concluded that the agrarian programme of the G.S.D.P.,¹⁴³ or rather its failure to formulate any specific policy to win the support of the peasants for the proletarian revolution, was more suited to Latvian agrarian conditions than the policy of Lenin, who favoured a division of the pomeshchiks' estates among the peasants to gain them as allies - and at the same time to destroy the remaining feudal latifundia in Russia, in order to accelerate capitalist development in agriculture and hence intensify the class struggle in the countryside. The Latvian Social Democrats argued that to apply Lenin's policy in Latvia would reverse the capitalist concentration that already had occurred, which in turn would convert the proletarianised peasants back into petty-bourgeois proprietors and so ultimately delay the development of socialist revolution in the countryside.¹⁴⁴

Yet the failure of the 1905 revolution had shown clearly to the Latvian Social Democrats that union with the Russian socialists in a unified struggle against the autocracy was essential, since there could be no hope of a successful revolution in Latvia while its power remained unshaken in the rest of the Empire.¹⁴⁵ Consequently, at its Third Congress in 1906, the L.S.D.L.P. - now renamed the Social Democracy of Latvia (S.D.L.)¹⁴⁶ - voted in favour of joining the R.S.D.W.P., insisting, however, that it retain its status as an autonomous

territorial organisation of the latter, much like the S.D.K.P.i.L., and the right to reject the policies of the latter that it considered inappropriate for Latvia, especially its agrarian programme.¹⁴⁷

Therefore, it was as a member of a united Russian Social Democratic party that the S.D.L. faced the harrowing years after 1905 when it was to suffer both from the repressive actions taken against it by the tsarist authorities and from an ever-widening split in its own ranks.

In the reaction that followed 1905 the strength of the party declined sharply. The membership of the S.D.L. fell from a peak of 15,000 in 1905 to about 2,000 in 1910.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, it still remained numerically the strongest proletarian party in the Russian Empire, with a basis of popular support, albeit reduced, among the workers, unlike the R.S.D.W.P. itself which remained largely a body, or perhaps "head" is a more apt coinage, of revolutionary intelligentsia.

In these years the S.D.L. also became divided into two rival factions, one of which, including the Central Committee, was sympathetic to the Mensheviks, while the other was a pro-Bolshevik splinter. Their dispute did not essentially involve the party's programme - the Latvian Bolsheviks did not attempt to remodel the agrarian and national policies on Leninist lines. Rather, the fundamental disagreement between them appears to have centred on the Latvian Bolsheviks' objection to the Central Committee's emphasis on the use of legal means to advance the workers' cause, to the detriment of the illegal revolutionary struggle, as well as the former's desire for a closer union with the Russian Bolsheviks.¹⁴⁹

Despite the increasing formation of Bolshevik cells in the S.D.L. from 1912, the Menshevik-dominated Central Committee remained in control of the party until 1914. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks had been gaining ground among the local party organisations before 1914, particularly in Riga, while the Menshevik leadership itself was emasculated by a number of arrests carried out by the Okhrana, which purposely was helping the Bolsheviks win control of the Social Democratic parties in the Empire in the hope this would provoke a split in and so weaken the revolutionary movement in general. As a result of these respective changes in strength, an equal number of Menshevik and Bolshevik

delegates was to be found at the Fourth Congress of the S.D.L., held in Brussels in January, 1914.¹⁵⁰

However, thanks to the defection of a police agent from the Mensheviks to the Bolsheviks, the latter were able to take control of the Central Committee at this Congress and subsequently to utilise their newly-won power to "purge" the party of Menshevik sympathisers. Yet the Latvian Bolsheviks were not Lenin's puppets and while generally pursuing Bolshevik policies they declined to merge formally with Lenin's party, in the fear that this would lead to a final split in party unity, a much cherished tradition within the S.D.L.¹⁵¹ Indeed, in the previous year the Latvian Bolsheviks had rejected Lenin's proposal that they include a demand for national self-determination in their platform, and in May, 1914, Janis Berzins, a leader of the Latvian Bolsheviks, again emphasised their independence of Lenin when he bluntly told him that they would "hardly support [him] everywhere and in everything...."¹⁵²

The final split in the S.D.L. was delayed by the outbreak of the war. The majority of Latvian Social Democrats, Bolsheviks and Mensheviks alike, with the exception of a group led by A. Pekmanis and J. Grasis, adopted a defeatist position with respect to the war, in the belief that the Latvian people had nothing to gain from a victory of the Russian autocracy. International social revolution was seen as the only way to end the war to the advantage of the Latvians.¹⁵³

After the February revolution the strength of the Bolshevik-dominated S.D.L. rose spectacularly. Putting forward increasingly radical demands, the S.D.L. refused to support the Provisional Government - in its eyes, "a government of the pomeshchiks and the bourgeoisie"¹⁵⁴ -, calling instead for the transfer of all power to the soviets, which had formed spontaneously in Latvia, and the creation of a socialist Latvian republic, as an autonomous part of a future Russian socialist republic. The support which the S.D.L. won for its programme was nothing short of spectacular, as was evident from the dazzling victories that it achieved in the elections to both the city and rural dumas and soviets. The pinnacle of its success came when it received 72 per cent of the votes cast in the elections to the all-Russian Constituent Assembly. Yet the hopes of the

Latvian Bolsheviks for a parliamentary seizure of power soon were to be frustrated by the German occupation of Latvia.¹⁵⁵

The last chapter in the life of the S.D.L. occurred in May, 1918. The Latvian Mensheviks, opposed to the Bolshevik dictatorship in Russia, finally broke with tradition and demanded the creation of an independent, democratic Latvian state, for which act they were expelled from the S.D.L.¹⁵⁶ Defending their revolutionary internationalism to the end, the Bolsheviks of the S.D.L., who by then had formed the Communist Party of Latvia (C.P.L.), seized power in the confusion which followed the collapse of the German Empire at the end of 1918 and established a dictatorship of the proletariat in Latvia. During the few months in which it held power, this revolutionary Communist government, led by Stuchka, attempted to carry out the complete socialist transformation of Latvia, at the same time declaring that the future of socialist Latvia lay in union with Soviet Russia. However, by the summer of 1919 the dreams of the Latvian Communists had vanished, shattered by the Allied intervention and their own failure to win a solid base of support among the Latvian population, and an independent Latvian state, led by the bourgeois government of K. Ulmanis, had been created. The Latvian Communists again went underground, to tend their wounds and analyse the reasons for their defeat.

Finally, one aspect of the ideology of the Latvian Bolsheviks merits some brief attention in this chronicle of their emergence as a separate faction in the S.D.L., namely their unbending international outlook which even led them to oppose Lenin's support for national self-determination. In this case, the rationale behind their position is similar to that of the S.D.K.P.iL.

It appears that the Latvian Bolsheviks believed that the legitimate national grievances of the Latvian people against the German nobility and bourgeoisie and the Russian bureaucracy were being exploited by the rising Latvian bourgeoisie to further their own class objectives. They felt that their own bourgeoisie aspired to capture the political and economic power of the German and Russian ruling classes for itself and that it was camouflaging its true aims under the nationalist flag, in the hope of winning the support of the Latvian workers in its struggle. Stuchka in particular dismissed

the idea that the Latvian bourgeoisie had any genuine interest in national goals, but rather was certain that it was influenced solely by the pursuit of its class interests, to which it readily would sacrifice the Latvian national cause. He justified this claim by indicating that in 1905 the Latvian bourgeoisie was reluctant to support autonomy, much less independence for a Latvia in which the tide of social revolution was high, preferring instead to remain within the bosom of the Russian Empire whose power it saw as a shield for its threatened economic interests, while in 1917 it had become the ardent champion of Latvian independence only when it came to fear that continued union with revolutionary Russia would pose a greater danger to its existence.¹⁵⁷ Apparently afraid that the Latvian proletariat might be deceived into supporting national aims which at best would fail to foster its class interests and at worst would thwart these by giving power to the bourgeoisie, he insisted that the Latvian workers dissociate themselves completely from the national movement and focus their energies on the battle for socialism, in union with their only true allies, the proletariat of the remainder of the Russian Empire.

Moreover, in Latvia itself the pursuit of national goals was to prove an obstacle to the development of a strong, united proletarian movement. The working class there was nationally heterogeneous, with large percentages of German, Russian, Jewish, Polish and Lithuanian as well as Latvian workers.¹⁵⁸ Consequently, it would appear reasonable to speculate that the creation of a socialist party which supported Latvian nationalism would alienate the non-Latvian workers and so weaken the proletarian movement. Possibly this factor also played a role in the Latvian Bolsheviks' condemnation of nationalism.

The emergence of the revolutionary neo-Marxist theories of imperialism, which explained the outbreak of war in 1914 in terms of the contradictions inherent in the world capitalist system and postulated that international socialist revolution, now objectively ripe, was the only solution to this, provided a comprehensive theoretical basis for the Latvian Bolsheviks' rejection of nationalism. They took these theories as confirmation of their opposition to self-determination for Latvia and their defence of the primacy of the

international unity of the workers.

The history of the Lithuanian Social Democratic movement, and of the appearance of a "leftist", international wing within it, has many parallels with that of the socialist movements of Poland and Latvia. This movement dates back to 1896, when the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (L.S.D.P.) was founded in May of that year. This new party was composed of a number of small socialist groups which in the previous few years had represented the interests of the numerically weak, yet nationally diverse working class of Lithuania, including also a group of Lithuanian intellectuals who had deserted the liberal-democratic movement then united around the positivist oriented journal, Varpas (The Bell), and who ideologically were "closer to the Polish Social Democrats [i.e. the S.D.K.P.iL.] than to the P.P.S."¹⁵⁹

However, from the very beginning of this party's existence the split which was to plague it for the next twenty-two years was clearly in evidence. A group of Lithuanian socialists, led by S. Trusevicius (Zalewski) and F. Dzierżyński, opposed that part of the proposed party programme which advocated that Lithuania should separate itself from Russia. E. Domaševičius, the author of this programme, justified this on the grounds that since the Russian proletariat and peasantry had shown no revolutionary zeal to overthrow the autocracy, revolutionary change in Lithuania depended on its liberation from the reactionary power of the stagnant Russian Empire.¹⁶⁰ Admittedly, at that time Domaševičius did not foresee an independent Lithuanian state as a stepping-stone to socialism, but rather he felt that the revolutionary struggle would prosper best in a federal republic, embracing Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, Belorussia and the Ukraine.¹⁶¹

On the other hand, Trusevicius, Dzierżyński and their fellow-thinkers in the Lithuanian socialist movement maintained that the success of the proletarian revolution demanded the unity of all similar movements in the Russian Empire, including that of the oppressed Russian workers, against their common foe, the autocracy, reiterating, albeit in more radical terms, the idea earlier defended by the Lithuanian liberals that even the struggle for a democratised Lithuania required union with the progressive liberal opposition in Russia

against the reactionary tsarist government.¹⁶² Consequently, Trusevicius and his followers refused to join the L.S.D.P. because of its separatist aspirations and established their own party, the Union of Lithuanian Workers (U.L.W.), which advocated that the struggle for socialism in Lithuania must be conducted in alliance with the revolutionary workers' movement which it felt was emerging in Russia. However, Dzierżyński and the remaining "internationalists", including V. Perazich and M. and L. Goldman, entered the L.S.D.P. where they continued to defend the policy of unity with the workers in Russia.¹⁶³

Yet the internationalist faction in the L.S.D.P. proved to be in a minority.¹⁶⁴ The First Congress in 1896 approved the programme drawn up by Domaševičius which had as its immediate goal the creation of a democratic federal republic, excluding Russia. As Domaševičius later admitted, the main influences on the formation of this programme were the Erfurt Programme of the G.S.D.P., which divided the political struggle for socialism into two distinct stages - in the first stage, the goal of the workers was a general democratic reform of society in order to create the conditions in which a mass movement for socialism could develop freely -, and the platform of the P.P.S., which maintained that independence from the reactionary influence of Russia was a pre-requisite for the victory of socialism.¹⁶⁵

Although the internationalist wing of the L.S.D.P., which found strong support in the party organisations in Vilnius, succeeded at the Second Congress in 1897 in pressuring the separatist leadership to amend its national programme in such a way that it would be possible to include Russia as a member of the socialist federation of the future, the separatists and their policy remained dominant until 1905.¹⁶⁶ In particular, the internationalists were weakened by the defection of Dzierżyński to the S.D.K.P. in 1899, where he was the driving force behind the union of this party with the U.L.W. to form the S.D.K.P.iL.¹⁶⁷

The 1905 revolution justifiably can be regarded as a turning-point in the history of the L.S.D.P., when it started to evolve towards an internationalist position.¹⁶⁸ 1905 had provided solid reasons for a re-evaluation of the party's policy by some of its leaders. In the first place, it was clear that Russia no longer could

be looked upon as a bastion of reaction from which Lithuania had to separate if it was to make any progress towards democracy, and even socialism. Moreover, the failure of the revolution in Lithuania, as in the other borderlands of the Russian Empire, could be attributed to the survival of the autocracy which, after it had suppressed the revolutionary upheaval at the very heart of the Empire, turned its still mighty power to crush the budding revolutions on its periphery. The logic of the situation underlined the need to unite with the workers' movement in Russia in a concerted struggle to destroy the old regime, after which Lithuania would become an autonomous part of a democratised Russian republic in which the fight for socialism could continue more openly and freely.

In fact, it was only after 1905 that V. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas, the future leader of the Communist Party of Lithuania, decisively broke with the idea of a national socialist movement in Lithuania separate from that in Russia.¹⁶⁹ Born into a prosperous peasant family in 1880, his revolutionary career dates from 1898 when he was expelled from a Catholic seminary for his participation in the activities of the left-wing, revolutionary democratic group associated with Varpas, that is, the group which had affinities towards Social Democracy, to which he was converted finally in 1903. Driven by the threat of arrest to emigrate to Switzerland in 1902, where he became familiar with the teachings of revolutionary Marxism, he returned to Lithuania in 1905 when he led a strike of agricultural workers in the north. Arrested in 1907, he was in prison and exile in Russia until 1913, where he became acquainted with such prominent Bolsheviks as Ia. M. Sverdlov, M. Frunze and I. Kozlov. By then he was a committed internationalist, insisting that the future revolutionary activity of the L.S.D.P. must be bound up "inseparably" with that of the R.S.D.W.P. He escaped to Cracow in the spring of 1914, from where he went first to Britain and then to the United States. In emigration during the war he adopted a revolutionary internationalist position - "I, together with the Polish Social Democrats, defended the Luxemburgist point of view on the national question"¹⁷⁰ - and attacked any compromises by socialists with chauvinism. Returning to Russia

in June, 1917, he opposed the Provisional Government and entered the ranks of the Bolsheviks in Petrograd. An advocate of the Bolshevik seizure of power from September, 1917, he led the Lithuanian section of the Bolshevik party in the October revolution. Later he was to become the first president of the ill-fated Soviet republic in Lithuania and Belorussia. After the collapse of this regime in 1919 he continued to play a prominent part in the work of the again illegal Lithuanian Communist Party, and, after his return to Soviet Russia in 1921, he represented this party in the Executive Committee of the Comintern until his death in 1935.¹⁷¹

After 1905 too, Zigmās Aleksa-Angarietis, with Kapsukas one of the future leaders of the Lithuanian Communist Party, himself became one of the mainsprings of the revolutionary internationalist wing of the L.S.D.P. Also of peasant origins, his revolutionary activity was noticed first in 1904 when he was expelled from the Warsaw veterinary institute for his part in a demonstration against the continuing war with Japan. Soon released, he returned to Lithuania and entered the L.S.D.P. in 1906, immediately joining the "Vilnius Opposition" which attacked the party leadership for its support of Lithuanian nationalism and its compromises with the Lithuanian liberal movement. At the Seventh Congress of the L.S.D.P., where he advocated the union of all revolutionary socialist parties in the Russian Empire in the struggle to overthrow the autocracy, he was elected a member of the Central Committee. Arrested in 1909, he was in prison and exile in Russia until he was freed by the February revolution. During the war he entered the Bolshevik party, sharing its defeatist policy with respect to the war - and its call to transform the imperialist war into an international civil war for socialism. Commissar for Lithuanian Affairs in Soviet Russia after the October revolution, he became a member of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party in November, 1918, and Commissar for Internal Affairs in the short-lived Lithuanian Soviet Republic. After this, he remained in the leadership of the party which was established then in Soviet Russia, during which time he, like Kapsukas, was a Lithuanian representative on the Executive Committee of the Comintern. He died in 1940, apparently a victim of the "purges" of the 1930's.¹⁷²

In the years following the 1905 revolution the internationalist, or "autonomist" faction in the L.S.D.P., which supported the creation of an autonomous Lithuania in a democratised Russia, grew stronger. In June, 1906, the Vilnius organisation of the party came out strongly in favour of this policy. This was approved by the party conference in September, 1906, despite the opposition of the "federalists" who continued to hold the view that Lithuania should be separated from Russia. At the Seventh Congress, the "autonomists" again were victorious and the party programme was revised to include their demand for an autonomous Lithuania within a Russian republic, and for union with the R.S.D.W.P.¹⁷³

Moreover, this division in the L.S.D.P. on the national question began to widen. In general, the "autonomists", led by Kapsukas, Angarietis and P. Eidukevičius, defended more radical policies, opposing the attempts of the "federalists" in the upper echelons of the party to liquidate illegal revolutionary work, while the "federalists" themselves, still led by Domaševičius, increasingly deserted to the camp of the Lithuanian bourgeoisie, in support of national rather than purely class aims.¹⁷⁴

Kapsukas later explained the motivation behind the "autonomists'" refusal to make any compromises with the forces of nationalism in terms which are quite understandable if viewed from the perspective of a revolutionary socialist of an oppressed nation. He maintained that in Lithuania support for national objectives would not benefit the workers but only the rising Lithuanian bourgeoisie. Independence from Russia would separate the admittedly weak proletarian movement in Lithuania from its strongest ally, the rapidly growing revolutionary working class of Russia, and leave it at the mercy of its own bourgeoisie.¹⁷⁵ Yet underlying this there also seems to be the fear that the Lithuanian proletariat, suffering from national as well as class oppression, would fall prey to the appeal of nationalism, in which case the "autonomists'" inflexible defence of the international solidarity of the socialist movement can be regarded as an attempt to ensure that the Lithuanian workers were not attracted by the false claims of the nationalists into supporting aspirations which only could harm the realisation of their own objectively-determined class interests.

In addition, the national composition of the proletariat in Lithuania - the majority of workers were Polish or Jewish, rather than Lithuanian¹⁷⁶ - appeared to make any concessions to Lithuanian national demands fraught with dangers of division for the socialist movement. Consequently, the "autonomists'" emphasis on class, rather than national interests was a realistic response to this situation, since this would prevent the fragmentation of the proletariat into even smaller, more vulnerable organisations established according to nationality.

In light of the tradition of hostility to nationalism displayed by the "autonomists" in the L.S.D.P., their acceptance in later years of the neo-Marxist theories of imperialism is quite reasonable. By claiming to prove that socialist revolution must develop on an international scale and, consequently, condemning national movements as reactionary and contrary to the interests of the proletariat, these theories proffered a general substantiation of the "autonomists'" opposition to Lithuanian independence which, it seems plausible to contend, also helps to explain their adherence to these.

The final split in the L.S.D.P. was delayed by the repressive measures taken against the party by the tsarist authorities in 1908, which affected the Bolshevik-inclined internationalists more severely than the more moderate nationalist faction.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, during the war many of the internationalists found themselves in Russia, either in exile or as the result of the evacuation of industry from Lithuania, when a large number of them joined the Bolsheviks, the only revolutionary party which refused to support the idea of a Russian victory.¹⁷⁸

In 1918, however, with the revival of the activity of the L.S.D.P. following the revolutionary upheaval in the Russian Empire in 1917, and also the return of many workers to Lithuania after the peace of Brest-Litovsk, the party at last was divided. In March, 1918, the proletarian majority of the party left its ranks because of the nationalist and Germanophile orientation of the leadership which hoped to utilise German support to establish an independent Lithuanian republic, separated from Soviet Russia. Like the Lithuanian Bolsheviks, who had opposed Brest-Litovsk on the grounds that this would allow German imperialism to crush the social revolution developing in Lithuania,

they opposed the policy of the leadership because instead of providing freedom for Lithuania this would deliver it into the hands of German reaction.¹⁷⁹

This splinter group planned to form a new internationalist party in Lithuania, the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania and Belorussia, which would include also the Russian Social Democrats in Lithuania and the P.P.S.-Left. However, in June, this embryonic party again was cut in two over the question of whether a Soviet republic should be established in Lithuania or a Constituent Assembly called to decide the country's future. Eidukevicius, supported by a minority of this emerging party, demanded the immediate creation of a soviet regime in Lithuania which was to become an autonomous part of Soviet Russia and when this was rejected refused to participate further in the party's activities.¹⁸⁰ This group became the nucleus of the Communist Party of Lithuania, founded in October, 1918, which, after it had been strengthened by the influx of Lithuanian Bolsheviks from Russia, seized power in December, 1918.¹⁸¹ Yet the Lithuanian Communists were unable to consolidate their rule and, in the face of mounting internal hostility, especially from the peasants, and foreign intervention, Soviet Lithuania collapsed. Then, like their counterparts in Poland and Latvia, they began to ponder over the causes of their defeat - and later revised their programme in the light of the conclusions that they drew from this appraisal.

The following study will examine the principles which the "left" Bolsheviks, the S.D.K.P.iL. and the revolutionary internationalist factions of the S.D.L. and the L.S.D.P. held in common. However, before proceeding to analyse these it will prove useful to consider the ideas which both Lenin and these groups shared, in order better to understand the nature of their disagreements on the particular applications of them. This task also will involve a re-examination of their views concerning the nature of the revolution which they anticipated would take place in the Russian Empire since the policies which revolutionary Marxists would defend would depend on the stage of development which they believed that this country had attained.

Footnotes.

¹Protokoly Tsentral'nogo Komiteta R.S.D.R.P.(b.), avgust 1917-mart 1918 goda (Moscow, 1958), pp.184-185.

²Istoriia K.P.S.S., 3 (Moscow, 1967), p. 520.

³A. G. Shliapnikov, Kanun semnadsatogo goda (Moscow, Petrograd, 1923), p. 217.

⁴For an extensive list of many of the leading Bolsheviks who adhered to the "Left Communist" movement, see Kommunist, No. 1, 1918, p. 1.

⁵N. Osinsky, "Avtobiografiia," Deiateli S.S.S.R. i Oktiabr'skoi Revoliutsii, published as a supplement to Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar' Russkogo Bibliograficheskogo Instituta Granat (Moscow, 1927-1929), volume 2, columns 89-98.

⁶This brief account of Saprionov's career has been culled from several sources. See T. V. Saprionov, "Avtobiografiia," ibid., columns 9-13; V. Serge, Memoirs of a Revolutionary (London, 1963), pp. 230, 234, 254; and T. Saprionov, Iz istorii rabocheho dvizheniya (po lichnym vospomenaniyam) (Newtonville, 1976; reprint of Moscow-Leningrad, 1925 edition), with an informative introduction by V. Bonnell.

⁷Protokoly, pp. 167-173.

⁸Ibid., pp. 183-186.

⁹Consult R. I. Markova, "Bor'ba V. I. Lenina s trotskistami i 'levymi kommunistami' v period Bresta," Voprosy Istorii K.P.S.S., No. 5, 1959, pp. 56, 65; Z. I. Berlina, N. T. Gorbunova, "Brestskii mir i mestnye partiinnye organizatsii," Voprosy Istorii, No. 9, 1963, pp. 40-43; and Istoriia K.P.S.S., 3, p. 528. These regions were to be centres of "leftism" in the succeeding years.

¹⁰For the results of the referendum, see Leninskii sbornik, XI (Moscow, Leningrad, 1929), pp. 59-60. Analysing the social forces which they believed had compelled the revolutionary government to accept peace with Germany, the "Left Communists" declared: "Representatives of various elements made up this majority in favour of peace. There were first the weary and déclassé soldier masses largely composed of peasants. Second, there were some workers of Russia's Northern industrial region, where separation from southern sources of raw materials such as coal and iron had combined with general agricultural disruption to produce starvation, an increased decline in industry, unemployment and disruption of the normal course of productive work. This had led to the undermining of the proletariat's class character... or at any rate to a reduction in its militancy as a class. Finally, there

were represented peasants of the northern and central industrial region, exhausted by the war, the bad harvest, supply difficulties and the disruption of urban industry." "Theses on the Current Situation," Kommunist, No. 1, 1918 (Moscow), pp. 4-9, thesis 2. A translation of these "Theses" prepared for publication in Critique has been used throughout.

¹¹L. Stupochenko, "V 'Brestskie dni'," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 4, 1923, pp. 102-103, where he argues that N. V. Krylenko, a leading Bolshevik commissar in the army, had informed the Central Committee of this fact.

¹²Protokoly, p. 200.

¹³Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁴Z. L. Serebriakova, Oblastnye ob"edineniia Sovetov Rossii, mart 1917-dekabr' 1918 (Moscow, 1977), p. 91.

¹⁵Protokoly, p. 187

¹⁶Berlina, Gorbunova, Brestskii mir, pp. 41-42.

¹⁷For an account of this aspect of the "Left Communists'" activities, consult L. Schapiro, The Origins of the Communist Autocracy. Political Opposition in the Soviet State. First Phase: 1917-1922 (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), pp. 134-135.

¹⁸At the Congress, 30 of the delegates voted for Lenin's resolution in favour of peace, 12 opposed this, while 4 abstained. For these figures, consult Sed'moi Ekstrennyi S"ezd R.K.P.(b.), mart 1918 goda (Moscow, 1962), p. 175.

¹⁹M. N. Pokrovskii, Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia (Moscow, 1929), p. 17.

²⁰Ocherki istorii moskovskoi organizatsii K.P.S.S. (Moscow, 1966), p. 305.

²¹Berlina, Gorbunova, Brestskii mir, p. 41. Consult also Markova, Bor'ba, p. 66, for a list of the other areas then deserting the "Left Communists".

²²Schapiro, Communist Autocracy, p. 135. For the voting figures at the Congress itself, see Sed'moi S"ezd, p. 228.

²³For a more extensive analysis of the theories of imperialism which Marxists in general, European as well as Russian, had developed in the early twentieth century, see chapter three of the present work.

²⁴V. G. Sorin, *Partiia i oppositsiia: Fraktsiia levyykh kommunistov* (Moscow, 1925), p. 41. Sorin himself was a prominent "Left Communist" in 1918.

²⁵See the speech of Bukharin, *Sed'moi S"ezd*, p. 37.

²⁶V. I. Lenin, "Theses on the Question of the Immediate Conclusion of a Separate and Annexationist Peace," *Collected Works*, 26 (Moscow, 1964), p. 444; and "The Revolutionary Phrase," *Collected Works*, 27 (Moscow, 1965), p. 23.

²⁷A. S. Bubnov argued in this manner at the Seventh Congress: "So we can say that if in October... we could talk of the threshold of revolution in West Europe and in Germany, then now we can say that the revolution is approaching a more critical phase, that it is on the eve of revealing itself in the form of the acutest class conflicts, that is, in the form of open civil war. And if this is actually the case - and we are convinced that this is so - then now, in a situation when the revolutionary crisis in West Europe not only is maturing, but already has matured, when we have such a situation that the international revolution is on the point of breaking out in the fiercest, widest form of civil war - the argument to conclude peace in this situation strikes a blow to the cause of the international proletariat." *Sed'moi S"ezd*, p. 50.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 27. E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, 3 (London, 1953), pp. 23ff. presents an account of the tentative schemes in Allied circles, especially in Britain, to reach a "negotiated peace with Germany at Russia's expense." While these never came to fruition, he believes that it was possible that some of the Bolshevik leaders had heard rumours about them and that this may have influenced their defence of revolutionary war.

²⁹"Viator", "Vneshniaia politika sovetskoi respubliki," *Kommunist*, No. 3, 1918 (Moscow), p. 3.

³⁰I. T. S. (Stukov), "V bor'be s kontr-revoliutsiei," *Kommunist*, No. 4, 1918 (Moscow), p. 2.

³¹See the speech of Bukharin, *Sed'moi S"ezd*, p. 30.

³²For a detailed analysis of the economic losses imposed on Soviet Russia by the Brest-Litovsk treaty, consult A. Lomov, "Mirnyi dogovor i narodnoe khoziaistvo Rossii," *Biulleteni V.S.N.Kh.*, No. 1, 1918, pp.3-13.

³³See the speech of Osinsky, Sed'moi S'ezd, pp. 83-84.

³⁴V. G. Sorin, "K voprosu o sovetskoii vlasti," Kommunist, No. 4, 1918 (Moscow), pp. 7-8.

³⁵V. I. Lenin, "Report at the meeting of the All-Russia C.E.G., February 24, 1918," Collected Works, 27, pp. 44-45.

³⁶V. I. Lenin, Revolutionary Phrase, pp. 20-21. Consult also Sorin, Partiia, p. 48.

³⁷Lenin, Revolutionary Phrase, pp. 21-22.

³⁸Sorin, Partiia, pp. 81-82.

³⁹Theses, thesis 2.

⁴⁰Ibid., thesis 9.

⁴¹K. B. Radek, "Posle piati mesiatsev," Kommunist, No. 1, 1918 (Moscow), p.3.

⁴²While the Russian Marxists certainly shared Marx's fear of the peasants, it is possible that this was intensified by the distrust that many of the Russian intelligentsia had of the reactionary nature of the "chernye liudi", particularly after the peasants' hostility to the narodniki.

⁴³Theses, 10 and 11.

⁴⁴D. V. Oznobishin, "K voprosu o bor'be s fraktsiei 'levykh kommunistov'," Voprosy Istorii, No. 9, 1971, pp. 70-73

⁴⁵Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia, 21 (Moscow, 1931), column 242.

⁴⁶A. G. Titov, "Razgrom antipartiinnoi gruppy 'demokraticheskogo tsentralizma'," Voprosy Istorii K.P.S.S., No. 6, 1970, p. 85. Titov presents a clear chronological account of the various stages of the rise and fall of the Democratic Centralist movement, but his analysis of the motivation of this opposition group and the causes of its failure is fallacious.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 85.

⁴⁸Vos'moi S"ezd R.K.P.(b.), mart 1919 goda (Moscow, 1959). See the speech of Osinsky, p. 164.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 164-167.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 201-203, for Sapronov's speech on this issue

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 203-204.

⁵²Vos'maia Konferentsiia R.K.P.(b.), dekabr' 1919 goda (Moscow, 1961). See the speech of Sapronov, pp. 64-65.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 67-68.

⁵⁴Deviatyi S"ezd R.K.P.(b.), mart-aprel' 1920 goda (Moscow, 1960), "Tezisy o kollegial'nosti i edinolichii," pp. 565-567. These theses were drafted and signed by Osinsky, Sapronov and Maksimovskii.

⁵⁵Sapronov, Avtobiografiia, column 12.

⁵⁶Ibid., column 12. For Tomsy's defence of collegial administration, see his speech, Deviatyi S"ezd, pp. 159-164.

⁵⁷Institut Istorii Partii Ts. K. K.P.Ukrainy - Filial Instituta Marksizma-Leninizma pri Ts. K. K.P.S.S., Kommunisticheskaia partiia Ukrainy v rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh s"ezdov i konferentsii, 1918-1956 (Kiev, 1958), pp. 69-71.

⁵⁸Titov, Razgrom, p. 88.

⁵⁹Deviataia Konferentsiia R.K.P.(b.), sentiabr' 1920 goda (Moscow, 1972). See the speech of Sapronov, especially pp. 156-159.

⁶⁰"Ocherednye zadachi partii," Pravda, January 22, 1921. This platform was presented by Bubnov, M. S. Boguslavskii, A. N. Kamenskii, Maksimovskii, Osinsky, Rafail (M. Farbman) and Sapronov.

⁶¹Titov, Razgrom, pp. 89-90.

⁶²Ibid., p. 90.

⁶³Odinadtsatyi S"ezd R.K.P.(b.), mart-aprel' 1922 goda (Moscow, 1961), pp. 86-89.

⁶⁴A translation of this platform, including a list of those who subscribed to it, can be found in E. H. Carr, The Interregnum (London, 1954) pp. 367-373.

⁶⁵G. Haupt, J.-J. Marie, "A. S. Bubnov," Makers of the Russian Revolution (Ithaca, 1974), p. 113.

⁶⁶Titov, Razgrom, p. 93.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 93-95, for a brief account of the decline of the "Sapronovite" opposition.

⁶⁸M. S. Zorkii, Rabochaia Oppozitsiia (Leningrad, Moscow, 1926), pp. 16-17.

⁶⁹V. Serge, Memoirs p. 123.

⁷⁰A. G. Shliapnikov, "Nashi raznoglasii," Pravda, January 18, 1924.

⁷¹Desiatyi S"ezd R.K.P.(b), mart 1921 goda (Moscow, 1963). Among the numerous Workers' Oppositionists who argued in this vein, see especially the speeches of E. N. Ignatov, p. 318; A. S. Kiselev, p. 281; and Shliapnikov, p. 74.

⁷²Zorkii, Rabochaia Oppozitsiia, pp. 24-27.

⁷³Ibid., pp. 16-17. Also consult E. H. Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution, 2 (London, 1952), p. 213.

⁷⁴For the bases of support for the Workers' Opposition, consult Zorkii, Rabochaia Oppozitsiia, p. 50; and Marcel Liebman, Lenin and Leninism (London, 1975), p. 213.

⁷⁵A. M. Kollontai, "Avtobiografiia," Deiateli, 1, columns 194-211, for her own account of her career.

⁷⁶Cited in A. I. Solzhenitsyn, Lenin In Zurich (New York, 1976), p. 279.

⁷⁷N. N. Sukhanov, The Russian Revolution, 1 (New York, 1962), p. 288.

⁷⁸For an account of the position adopted by the Latvian Bolsheviks in March, 1917, consult A. Ezergailis, The 1917 Revolution in Latvia (New York, 1974), pp. 41, 51.

⁷⁹A. Balabanoff, My Life As A Rebel (New York, 1938), p. 251.

⁸⁰A. Rosmer, Moscow Under Lenin (London, 1971), p. 168.

⁸¹This description was coined by Serge, Memoirs, p. 205.

⁸²Consult A. G. Shliapnikov, "Avtobiografiia," Deiateli, 3, columns 244-251, for his own account of his revolutionary career.

⁸³Shliapnikov, Kanun, pp. 182-183. Solzhenitsyn has even described Shliapnikov as the actual leader of the Bolshevik party in Russia in the war years. See his Lenin, p. 293.

⁸⁴Sukhanov, Revolution, 1, pp. 43-44.

⁸⁵J. Reed, Ten Days That Shook The World (New York, 1967), pp. 271-273.

⁸⁶A. M. Kollontai, The Workers' Opposition (London, 1968), *passim*.

⁸⁷V. I. Lenin, "The Second All-Russia Congress of Miners," Collected Works, 32 (Moscow, 1965), pp. 60-62.

⁸⁸V. I. Lenin, "Summing-up Speech on the Report of the Central Committee of the R.C.P.(b.)." ibid., especially pp. 192-200.

⁸⁹Serge, Memoirs, p. 123.

⁹⁰Balabanoff, Rebel, p. 252.

⁹¹This declaration can be found in Zorkii, Rabochaia Oppozitsiia, pp. 60ff. For the Workers' Oppositionists' defence of their action, see the speech of Shliapnikov, Odinadtsatyi S"ezd, pp. 186-189.

⁹²Shliapnikov, Nashi raznoglasiiia.

⁹³Rosa Luxemburg, The National Question, edited by H. Davis (New York, 1976), pp. 70 and 78 admits that the S.D.K.P. had laid claim to the mantle of Proletariat.

⁹⁴In 1795 the Russian Empire, the Hapsburg Empire and Prussia had completed the final division of the former Polish state among themselves. After these Partitions the respective areas of Poland became known as the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, Austrian Poland and Prussian Poland. In 1815 a new redivision took place when the Grand Duchy was renamed the Kingdom of Poland, or Russian Poland. This study deals with the revolutionary Marxists of this part of Poland.

⁹⁵Luxemburg, National Question, p. 69.

⁹⁶A. Bromke, Poland's Politics: Idealism vs Realism (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 20-21, where he cites from the Polish historian, H. Wereszycki. Also consult A. L. Pogodin, Glavnye techeniia pol'skoi politicheskoi mysli, 1863-1907 (St. Petersburg, 1908), p. 157.

⁹⁷Pogodin, Mysli, pp. 137-139. Admittedly, there had been advocates of positivism even in Russian Poland even before 1863, notably A. Zamoyski and A. Wielopolski, but they had remained largely prophets in the wilderness before the ignominious defeat of the 1863 revolt. For an account of the early origins of positivism in this part of Poland, consult S. Blejwas, "The Origins and Practice of 'Organic Work' in Poland: 1795-1863," Polish Review, No. 4, 1970, especially pp. 45-53.

⁹⁸For a brief, yet clear account of the main ideas of the Positivists, consult Bromke, Poland's Politics, pp. 12-13.

⁹⁹W. Lednicki, Life and Culture of Poland (New York, 1944), pp. 22-26.

¹⁰⁰Swiętochowski in particular believed that the Kingdom of Poland had gained great economic advantages from union with the Russian Empire. See Bromke, Poland's Politics, p. 22.

¹⁰¹Cited in ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰²J. Marchlewski, Sotsial'nye otnosheniia v Pol'she (Moscow, 1920), p. 13.

¹⁰³L. Blit, The Origins of Polish Socialism: The History and Ideas of the First Polish Socialist Party, 1872-1886 (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 16-22.

¹⁰⁴The fact that Marxists easily could adapt to and apply certain ideas of the Positivists is not surprising when one considers the remarkable similarities in the methodology and sociology of Marxism and Positivism. Both viewed society as a historically developing "organism", subject to "scientific" analysis, and both claimed that social conditions determined man's consciousness and ways of thinking. For a fascinating analysis of the convergence of Marxism and Positivism in these respects, consult M. Mandelbaum, History, Man, & Reason: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought (Baltimore, 1971), pp. 163-191.

¹⁰⁵Luxemburg, National Question, pp. 77-80.

¹⁰⁶R. Arskii, "Iz istorii sotsial'no-revoliutsionnoi partii 'Proletariat'," Krasnaia Letopis', No. 3, 1923, pp. 46-47, where he quotes extensively from the "Brussels Programme" issued by this party in 1882.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., pp. 55-56.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 53. The Polish Marxists in general neglected any analysis of the national composition of the bourgeoisie in the Kingdom of Poland and did not question whether the negative attitude of this class towards Polish independence was at least in part caused by the fact that itself it was far from being homogeneously Polish. R. Mellor, Eastern Europe: A Geography of the Comecon Countries (London, 1975), p. 70, maintains that "in 1895, in Russian Poland, Jews formed 14 per cent of the total population but comprised 84 per cent of the merchants"

¹¹⁰Cited in Blit, Polish Socialism, p. 49. After 1864 K. Krzywicki, a leading Positivist, had condemned the Polish peasants as at best passive and at worst reactionary. Ibid., p. 8. In fact, in the nineteenth century the peasantry consistently opposed every revolt of the gentry and it is quite possible that this left a legacy of distrust of the peasants among the Polish intelligentsia.

¹¹¹Arskii, Proletariat, pp. 47, 53.

¹¹²Waryński in particular believed that social revolution was brewing in the Russian Empire in the 1870's and 1880's. For his defence of this, see Blit, Polish Socialism, pp. 44-45.

¹¹³Arskii, Proletariat, p. 56.

¹¹⁴Luxemburg, National Question, pp. 63-64.

¹¹⁵Ibid., pp. 177-178.

¹¹⁶Ibid., pp. 179-180.

¹¹⁷Ibid., pp. 180-182.

¹¹⁸V. Leder, "Natsional'nyi vopros v pol'skoi i russkoi Sotsial-demokratii," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, Nos. 2-3, 1927, p. 184. He quotes from the resolution on the question of autonomy for the Kingdom of Poland, composed by Rosa Luxemburg and adopted by the Sixth Congress of the S.D.K.PiL. in 1908. See also Luxemburg, National Question, pp. 77-80, where she defended the view that the essence of Marxism was "the dialectical method of historical analysis", rather than the mechanical repetition of specific statements on certain questions made by Marx.

¹¹⁹K. B. Radek, "Theses and Resolution of the Editorial Board of Gazeta Robotnicza, Organ of the Regional Presidium of the S.D.K.P.i.L.," in O. Gankin, H. Fisher, The Bolsheviks and the World War (Stanford, 1940), pp. 507-518. In these, Radek in essence subscribed to the same theory of imperialism as Bukharin and Piatakov, but he in particular emphasised the implications of this theory for nation states, condemning them as reactionary.

¹²⁰S. Pestkovskii, "1905 god v Pol'she," Krasnaia Letonis', No. 5, 1922, p. 245. Also consult Pogodin, Mysli, p. 104, where he agreed that the Polish workers were firm patriots.

¹²¹Ibid., pp. 248-249. Also consult: I. Krasnyi, "F. E. Dzerzhinskii. (Materialy o zhizni i podpol'noi deiatel'nosti)," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 9, 1926, pp. 35-36; Luxemburg, National Question, p. 152; and H. Davis, "Introduction," National Question, p. 13.

¹²²Krasnyi, Dzerzhinskii, p. 46.

¹²³Cited in A. Kraevskii, "K kharakteristike ideologii Sotsial-Demokratii Pol'shi i Litvy," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 6, 1931, p. 27.

¹²⁴Cited in ibid., p. 18.

¹²⁵Cited in ibid., p. 28.

¹²⁶See the speech of Tyszko at the Sixth Congress of the S.D.K.P.i.L., cited in ibid., pp. 43-45; for Luxemburg's evaluation of the revolutionary potential of the Russian peasants, refer to ibid., pp. 45-46.

¹²⁷J. Marchlewski, Voina i mir mezhduburzhnaznoi Pol'shei i proletarskoi Rossiei (Moscow, 1921), p. 36. Marchlewski was one of the few leaders of the S.D.K.P.i.L. to analyse the problems of the countryside, yet he still denied that it was necessary for the Polish Marxists to formulate a separate agrarian programme designed to meet the needs of the peasants in Poland. See A. Kochanski, S.D.K.P.i.L. w latach 1907-1910 (Warsaw, 1971), pp. 208-209.

¹²⁸K. B. Radek, "Avtobiografiia," Deiateli, 2, column 147. Radek was a member of the S.D.K.P.i.L. until 1917, when he joined the Bolshevik party.

¹²⁹For a thorough account of "one of the most obscure and difficult episodes in the history of Polish socialism," consult J. P. Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg (Abridged edition, Oxford, 1969), pp. 344-361.

¹³⁰ Cited in B. Ia. Shabachnikov, "V I. Lenin i 'Rozlamovskaia' oppositsiia v S.D.K.P.iL.," Lenin i Pol'sha: Problemy, kontakty, otkliki (Moscow, 1970), pp. 188-189. Also refer to Leder, Natsional'nyi vopros, pp. 187-188.

¹³¹ Radek, Theses and Resolution, pp. 507-518.

¹³² "Declaration of the Polish Delegations," in Gankin, Fisher, The Bolsheviks, pp. 335-337. This declaration was signed by both factions of the S.D.K.P.iL., as well as by the P.P.S.-Left.

¹³³ Sed'maia (Aprel'skaia) Vserossiiskaia Konferentsiia R.S.D.R.P.(b.), (Moscow, 1958). See the speech of Dzierzyński, pp. 214ff.

¹³⁴ M. K. Dziewanowski, The Communist Party of Poland: An Outline History (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), p. 71. Marchlewski, Voia, p. 4, admitted that the workers in Poland had supported national independence in 1918, but he argued that they had been deceived into this by the prospect of a socialist Poland, under Daszyński's government, when in fact Poland soon became a "reactionary bourgeois" state.

¹³⁵ For a brief, but clear account of the formation of the C.W.P.P., see Dziewanowski, Communist Party, pp. 75-79.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 80-95.

¹³⁷ For a detailed, yet readable account of the emergence of the L.S.D.L.P. as a united party, consult V. E. Johnson, Social Democracy and the Latvian Revolutionary Movement, 1900-1914 (Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Washington, 1974), pp. 15-23.

¹³⁸ Bruno Kalniņš, "The Social Democratic Movement in Latvia," in Revolution and Politics in Russia: Essays in Memory of B. I. Nicolaevsky, edited by Alex. and Janet Rabinowitch (Bloomington, 1972), pp. 136-137. For Stuchka's position on federation from 1904 until 1906, consult I. Apine, "Vzgliady Stuchki na natsional'nyi vopros (po rabotam do-oktiabr'skogo perioda)," in P. Stuchka: revoliutsioner, myslitel', i gosudarstvennyi deiatel', edited by G. I. Kurpnek (Riga, 1965), pp. 23-24.

¹³⁹ Consult P. I. Stuchka, "Avtobiografiia," Deiateli, 3, columns 128-129; and S. V. Ziemelis, "Petr Ivanovich Stuchka," Voprosy Istorii K.P.S.S., No. 7, 1965, pp. 89-92.

¹⁴⁰ E. A. Ames, The Revolution in the Baltic Provinces of Russia (London, 1907), p. 12.

¹⁴¹ I. Ianson (Braun), "Latviia v pervoi polovine 1905 goda," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 12, 1922, p. 33, where he cites from the resolution adopted by the Second Congress.

¹⁴²For an account of the contacts between the Latvian socialists and the G.S.D.P. in the 1890's, consult Kalniņš, Social Democratic Movement, pp. 134-135. Also refer to P. L. Valeskaļn, "Razvitiie marksistko-leninskoi filosofii v Latvii," Voprosy Filosofii, No. 7, 1967, p. 3.

¹⁴³At the Eighth Congress of the Communist Party of Latvia Stuchka admitted that the Latvian Social Democrats had adopted the agrarian programme of the G.S.D.P. Consult I. Krastyn', "K voprosu ob agrarnoi politike Kommunisticheskoi partii Latvii," Voprosy Istorii K.P.S.S., No. 4, 1959, p. 78.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 77-78. Also consult Ianson, Latviia, p. 14, where he stresses the irreconcilable hostility of the Latvian Social Democrats to any policy that would "foster... the interests of the petty-bourgeois (petty-proprietor) class and strengthen their property [rights] at the expense of the interests... of the working class."

¹⁴⁵Ziemelis, Stuchka, pp. 89-90.

¹⁴⁶P. I. Stuchka, "Iz proshlogo Kommunisticheskoi partii Latvii," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 12, 1922, p. 56.

¹⁴⁷Chetvertyi (Ob"edinitel'nyi) S'ezd R.S.D.R.P., aprel' 1906 goda (Moscow, 1959), pp. 413. For the final terms of this union, see "Proekt uslovii ob"edineniia L.S.D.R.P. s R.S.D.R.P.," ibid., pp. 530-531, especially part 7, which concerns agrarian policy.

¹⁴⁸K. Pechak, "Sotsial-demokratiia Latviia (Kommunisticheskaiia partiia Latvii) v period s 1909 po 1915gg.," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 12, 1922, p. 63. Kalniņš, Social Democratic Movement, pp. 142, 145, presents very similar figures.

¹⁴⁹Pechak, Sotsial-demokratiia, pp. 69-70.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 73-75. Also consult Kalniņš, Social Democratic Movement, pp. 150-151.

¹⁵¹Pechak, Sotsial-demokratiia, pp. 75-77; and also p. 67, where he mentions the "characteristic" unity of the S.D.L. For a contemporary account which substantially confirms Pechak's analysis, consult A. Ezergailis, "The Bolshevisation of the Latvian Social Democratic Party," Canadian Slavic Studies, No. 2, 1967, pp. 242-253.

¹⁵²Cited in Kalniņš, Social Democratic Movement, p. 153. For Lenin's proposal, see V. I. Lenin, "Draft Platform for the Fourth Congress of the Social Democrats of the Latvian Area," Collected Works, 19 (Moscow, 1963), especially pp. 115-118.

¹⁵³Pechak, Sotsial-demokratiia, pp. 80-81.

¹⁵⁴p. I. Stuchka, "Koalitsionnoe ili demokraticeskoe pravitel'stvo," V bor'be za Oktiabr' (Riga, 1960), pp. 44-45.

¹⁵⁵V. Mishke, "Podgotovka oktiabria v Latvii," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 1, 1928, pp. 39-40, where he presents the statistics of the S.D.L.'s electoral successes in 1917.

¹⁵⁶Kalnins, Social Democratic Movement, p. 155.

¹⁵⁷p. I. Stuchka, "Demokraticeskii tsentralizm," V bor'be, pp. 132-133. Also consult Apine, Vzgliady Stuchki, pp. 25, 33.

¹⁵⁸For the national stratification in the Latvian towns, consult Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis' naseleniia rossiiskoi imperii, 1897g. Nalichnoe naseleniia oboego pola po uezdams, s ukazaniem chisla lits preobladaiushchikh rodnykh iazykov (St. Petersburg, 1905), p. 3.

¹⁵⁹Ocherki istorii Kommunisticheskoi partii Litvy, I (Vilnius, 1973), p. 72. For a detailed account of the composition of the L.S.D.P., consult L. Sabalinunas, "Social Democracy in Tsarist Lithuania, 1893-1904," American Slavic and East European Review, No. 2, 1972, pp. 330-332. For the position of the "Varpininkasy", consult A. L. Pogodin, "Litovskoe natsional'noe vozrozhdenie v kontse XIX veka," Russkaia Mysl', January, 1909, p. 138.

¹⁶⁰Ocherki, p. 71.

¹⁶¹Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁶²Ibid., pp. 71-73. For the position of the Liberals, consult Pogodin, Vozrozhdenie, p. 141.

¹⁶³Ocherki, pp. 71-72.

¹⁶⁴Tomash, himself a supporter of the internationalist wing, agreed that this was the case. Tomash (E. Sokolovskii), "Vospominaniia o Felikse Dzerzhinskom," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 9, 1926, p. 68.

¹⁶⁵Ocherki, pp. 69-70.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 86-87. See also Sabaliunas, Social Democracy, p. 340.

¹⁶⁷Krasnyi, Dzerzhinskii, pp. 26-27.

¹⁶⁸Shestoi S"ezd R.S.D.R.P.(b.), avgust 1917 goda (Moscow, 1958). See the speech of Kapsukas, pp. 91-92.

¹⁶⁹Ocherki, p. 236. Consult also Z. Angarietis, "Iz deiatel'nosti Sotsial-Demokraticheskoi Partii Litvy v gody reaktsii (Vospominania byvshego chlena Ts.K. S.-D.P.L.)," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 11, 1922, p. 77, where he claims that in 1905 Kapsukas had remained part of the old "patriotic" leadership which had advocated separation from Russia; and V. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas, "Avtobiografiia," Deiateli, 2, column 43, where he admitted this himself.

¹⁷⁰V. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas, "Istoki i zarozhdenie Kommunisticheskoi partii Litvy," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 1, 1921, p. 164.

¹⁷¹Mitskevich-Kapsukas, Avtobiografiia, columns 42-43; R. I. Maliukiavichius, "Vintsas Mitskiavichius," Istoriia S.S.S.R., No. 2, 1968, pp. 62-67; and R. I. Maliukiavichius, "Revoliutsioner leninskoi zakalki," Istoriia S.S.S.R., No. 4, 1970, pp. 113-116.

¹⁷²E. V. Grishkunaite, "Zigmas Angaretis," Istoriia S.S.S.R., No. 5, 1967, pp. 138-144.

¹⁷³Angarietis, Iz deiatel'nosti, pp. 78-79. Also consult V. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas "1905g. v Litve," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 12, 1922, pp. 71-72.

¹⁷⁴Ocherki, p. 235; and Angarietis, Iz deiatel'nosti, pp. 83-90.

¹⁷⁵V. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas, "Bor'ba za sovetskuiu vlast' v Litve i zapadnoi Belorussii (konets 1918g. i nachalo 1919g.)," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 1, 1931, p. 78.

¹⁷⁶Angarietis, Iz deiatel'nosti, p. 74.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 88-90.

¹⁷⁸Kapsukas, Shestoi S"ezd, p. 92.

¹⁷⁹S. Girinis, "Kanun i sumerki sovetskoi vlasti na Litve," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 8, 1922, pp. 75-76. For the attitude of the Lithuanian Bolsheviks towards the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, see the declaration of the Lithuanian section of the Bolshevik Party, Pravda, February 3/16, 1918.

¹⁸⁰Girinis, Kanun, p. 76.

¹⁸¹While the Lithuanian Communist Party may have grown quickly at the end of 1918, as Kapsukas claimed, it still was a very small organisation, with only 1290 members throughout Lithuania. V. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas, "Revoliutsiia v Litve (1918g.) i sozdanie vremennogo revoliutsionnogo raboche-krest'ianskogo pravitel'stvo," Istorik Marksist, Nos. 2-3, 1935, p. 44.

Chapter 2.

THE "LEFT COMMUNISTS" AND LENIN: THE DEFENDERS OF REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVISM.

Although the "Left Communists" and V. I. Lenin were to come into conflict over the policies which they considered to be appropriate for the construction of socialism in the Russian Empire, they were united in the pursuit of common goals. They believed that the creation of a socialist society, ultimately embracing the whole world, would usher in a new realm in human history, a "kingdom of freedom", justice and equality. To achieve this end, however, they were convinced that capitalism first had to be destroyed. Only when this system had been overthrown, and the economic exploitation that was characteristic of it eliminated, would the class and national antagonisms which divided and alienated men be overcome. Then men would become free consciously and collectively to organise and plan their social life, and, consequently, to attain mastery over nature and control of their own destiny.

Yet other self-professed Marxists in the Russian Empire, such as the Mensheviks, shared this vision. Nevertheless, they disagreed with their more revolutionary-minded colleagues that socialist revolution could be successful in a relatively backward country, like the Empire. They maintained that socialism could be constructed only in mature bourgeois societies where the "full development" of capitalism had created the "objective prerequisites" for its establishment. It was the gradualism implicit in this argument that the "Left Communists" and Lenin refused to accept. While they too accepted that the growth of capitalism was the ultimately determining factor that was impelling society in the direction of socialism, they also held that men, in this case, the revolutionary proletariat, need not remain passive but consciously could intervene to accelerate the march of history towards its appointed socialist end. In 1917, they acted on this belief and seized power in the Russian Empire with the avowed intent of building socialism there.

This split in the Marxist movement in the Russian Empire into an economic deterministic wing, which believed that the victory of

socialism depended upon the presence of certain economic, social and political preconditions which would be the product of the gradual growth of capitalism - traditionally, these "objective prerequisites" were considered to be the domination in the economy of highly concentrated and centralised industries which the revolutionary proletariat, itself a majority, could utilise as the basis for an organisation of production, planned to meet the needs of society -, and a revolutionary activist wing, which claimed that the proletariat need not await such a maturation of capitalism before it could proceed to the construction of a socialist society, can be related to a similar dualism in K. Marx's and F. Engels' theory of history. As an explanation of the course of historical development, this theory has been described aptly as "a peculiar amalgam of deterministic and activistic elements."¹ The existence of these two strands in Marx's and Engels' thought later allowed their successors to emphasise either determinism or activism, while defending their interpretation as consistent with the principles of Marxism.

To be sure, there is a distinct determinist thread running through Marx's and Engels' philosophy of history. In general, they contended that the system of production was the foundation on which the political, social and intellectual structure of society was based. In a preface to The Communist Manifesto, written in 1888, Engels unequivocally defended this belief:

The Manifesto being our joint production, I consider myself bound to state that the fundamental proposition, which forms its nucleus, belongs to Marx. That proposition is: in every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organisation necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch....²

However, they stressed that the "mode of production" did not remain static and unchanging. They believed that as the productive forces of a society grew, they eventually came into conflict with the existing "relations of production", that is, the organisation of production and exchange, which then became an obstacle to their further growth. They maintained that when this stage of development had been reached, a revolution was necessary in order to free these forces from

their existing confines and restructure the economy in such a manner that their continued expansion was guaranteed. Moreover, this revolutionary change in the economic substructure of society also would entail a similar transformation in its superstructure, that is, in its political, social and intellectual framework.³

A concrete example of how they conceived this process will help in understanding this feature of their theory. Analysing the emergence of capitalism, they argued that the expansion of demand, largely caused by the opening up of vast overseas territories, doomed the old feudal guild system of production since this was unable to produce sufficient goods to satisfy the new demands placed upon it. First, the manufacturing system had replaced feudalism, only to be superseded itself by the system of mechanised industrial production as markets continued to grow. Consequent upon this economic revolution there had taken place a political revolution in which the rising capitalist bourgeoisie had seized political power and used this to remove all remaining feudal barriers to the free development of capitalism.⁴ Marx and Engels succinctly described this development:

... the means of production and of exchange, on whose foundation the bourgeoisie built itself up, were generated in feudal society. At a certain stage in the development of these means of production and of exchange, the conditions under which feudal society produced and exchanged, the feudal organisation of agriculture and manufacturing industry, in one word, became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had to be burst asunder; they were burst asunder.

Into their place stepped free competition, accompanied by a social and political constitution adapted to it, and by the economical and political sway of the bourgeois class.⁵

Furthermore, Marx and Engels asserted that the continuing growth of capitalism would lead to a similar situation. The existing bourgeois relations of production no longer would foster, but rather would impede economic development. When this situation had evolved, so Marx and Engels claimed, the "objective prerequisites" for the socialist transformation of society would be mature.⁶

Marx and Engels believed that the concentration and centralisation of production in large enterprises - in part, the result of technological progress and the use of machinery in industry in order to raise output

to meet increased demands, and a process which in turn continually was destroying the possibility of profitable production in smaller, less technically advanced businesses - had created the economic basis for the establishment of socialism. This feature of capitalist expansion had led to a dramatic rise in the quantity of goods produced, which they considered to be a necessary prerequisite of socialism. They believed that a socialist society could not be constructed if the economic needs of the people could not be satisfied. They declared that "slavery cannot be abolished without the steam engine and the mule and spinning jenny... and that, in general, people cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quality and quantity."⁷ Apparently, they were of the opinion that mechanised industry, the product of capitalism, had provided the wealth sufficient to guarantee such a provision of goods, and that after capitalism itself had been overthrown, the industrial system brought into existence by it would become the foundation of an organised system of production, controlled by the workers themselves and planned to meet the material requirements of society.

At the same time, the concentration of the means of production in the hands of an ever-diminishing number of capitalist magnates was swelling the ranks of the proletariat, seen by Marx and Engels as the "gravedigger of capitalism." Under capitalism, the proletariat was forced to live in the most miserable, poverty-stricken conditions. As a consequence of this deprivation, Marx and Engels were convinced that the workers quite naturally would acquire a revolutionary consciousness, that is, the realisation that capitalism was the cause of its sufferings, and the resulting will to overthrow it. Moreover, they also argued that the continuing centralisation of production in large factories was welding the workers into a unified class, aware both of its common interests and increasingly of its strength to destroy capitalism.⁸

However, the question which remains unanswered in this broad outline of the economic determinist element in Marx's and Engels' thought is how they established the level to which capitalism must develop before it could be replaced by socialism, that is, how they

defined when the "objective prerequisites" for socialist revolution had ripened. In what often is taken as Marx's quintessential exposition of his theory of history - his preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy - he implied that capitalism would have to be developed "fully" before the transition to socialism could be accomplished successfully. He clearly stated:

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.⁹

On other occasions, Marx and Engels again alluded to the fact that the construction of socialism must be preceded by the extensive growth of capitalism. They asserted that this alone would create the required high "development of productive forces... because without it want is merely made general, and the struggle for necessities and all the old filthy business would necessarily be reproduced."¹⁰ Indeed, Marx clearly warned against premature attempts at socialist revolution, arguing that these were bound to fail "as long as in the course of history in its 'movement', the material conditions, which necessitate the abolition of the bourgeois mode of production, and, thus, the final overthrow of bourgeois political authority are not as yet created."¹¹

In fact, the conclusion which emerges from this examination of Marx's and Engels' definition of the "objective prerequisites" of socialism is that they failed to produce any precise criteria which could be applied concretely to predict when the economic preconditions for a successful socialist revolution had become sufficiently mature. They never quantified the absolute level of production or the degree of industrial concentration which they considered to be necessary before socialism could be established.

Yet while Marx and Engels believed that economic development was the basis of historical evolution, they certainly rejected the implication that progress would be the automatic consequence of the impersonal workings of economic forces. They were adamant that although economic growth created the potential for the advance of society to higher levels, conscious human activity was vital if this potential

was to be realised. Emphasising the role of the actions of men in the onward march of history, Marx declared:

History does nothing; it 'does not possess immense riches', it 'does not fight battles'. It is men, real, living men, who do all this, who possess things and fight battles. It is not 'history' which uses men as a means of achieving its own ends. History is nothing but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends.¹²

In their explanation of the transition of society to succeeding stages of development, Marx and Engels clearly assigned an important role to willed and conscious human action. In his account of the emergence of capitalist society, Marx argued that the rising bourgeoisie had fought consciously to win the economic and political supremacy for which, admittedly, the material preconditions had matured. He stressed the part played by the bourgeoisie in this process:

they [the bourgeoisie]... employ the power of the State, the concentrated and organised force of society, to hasten, hothouse fashion, the process of transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode, and to shorten the transition. Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic power.¹³

Similarly, in the future transition from capitalism to socialism, they again insisted that men, in this case, the revolutionary workers, must act if this was to come to fruition. While they held that the preceding development of capitalism had made socialism economically possible, they denied that socialism would emerge as the result of the operation of supra-human economic forces. On the contrary, they maintained that the proletariat had to destroy the old bourgeois system and then to proceed wittingly to the socialist transformation of society. In The Communist Manifesto they affirmed this belief:

... the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy.

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all institutions of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as a ruling class.¹⁴

Consequently, it should be clear that a dualism, that is, an interaction between determinism and activism, exists within Marx's and Engels' theory of history. Although they postulated that economic

development was the ultimate determinant of historical progress, at the same time they asseverated that it was also necessary for men to act if the evolution of society from a lower to an economically potential higher stage in fact was to be accomplished. In his discussion of the prerequisites for socialist revolution, Herbert Marcuse admirably captured this characteristic of Marx's and Engels' thought:

[these objective conditions for socialism]... become revolutionary conditions... only if seized upon and directed by a conscious activity that has in mind the socialist goal. Not the slightest natural necessity or automatic activity inevitably guarantees the transition from capitalism to socialism.... The realisation of freedom and reason requires the free rationality of those who achieve it.¹⁵

Moreover, on occasion Marx and Engels, contrary to their more deterministic contention that socialist revolution could occur only in mature capitalist societies, adopted a more optimistic assessment of the prospects for this in countries that were economically relatively backward. In The German Ideology, they quite specifically denied that a country had to possess a highly developed capitalist economy before such a revolution was possible. Referring to Germany, they argued:

Thus all collisions in history have their origin, according to our view, in the contradiction between the productive forces and the form of intercourse. Incidentally, to lead to collisions in a country, this contradiction need not necessarily have reached its extreme limit in this particular country. The competition with industrially more advanced countries, brought about by the expansion of international intercourse, is quite sufficient to produce a similar contradiction in countries with backward industry (e.g. the latent proletariat in Germany brought into view by the competition of English industry).¹⁶

Later, in The Communist Manifesto, they again re-iterated the belief that the first battleground of socialist revolution would be in Germany, despite the fact that this country was less advanced economically than either Great Britain or France. In fact, it appears as if they felt that this revolution was imminent:

The Communists turn their attention chiefly to Germany, because that country is on the eve of a bourgeois revolution that is bound to be carried out under much more advanced conditions of European civilisation, and with a much more developed proletariat, than that of England was in the seventeenth, and of France in the eighteenth century, and because the bourgeois revolution in Germany will be but a prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution.¹⁷

In these instances, Marx and Engels implicitly were stressing the activist strand in their theory of history. They believed, or at least hoped, that the German proletariat could overthrow the bourgeoisie and destroy capitalism before all the "objective prerequisites" for socialist revolution had matured. Apparently, they also supposed that in the very process of constructing socialism the German workers could use their newly won political power to create the appropriate economic foundations.

In fact, in discussing the prospects for socialist revolution in the Russian Empire Marx and Engels carried this line of argument further. In this case, they denied that capitalism was a necessary prerequisite for the establishment of socialism. Reflecting on his theory of the stages of historical development, from feudalism through capitalism to socialism, Marx himself declared that this need not become a universal pattern. In elaborating this theory he claimed that he had "only... traced the path by which the capitalist order in Western Europe developed out of the feudal economic order."¹⁸

Indeed, Marx continued that the capitalist stage of development could be avoided, and socialism directly established in the Russian Empire itself, a view which the Russian Populists shared. He considered the commune to be the potential basis for the new socialist order. However, he also held that capitalism had been developing in the Russian Empire since the Emancipation of 1861, and that it was slowly but surely eroding the rural community. Nevertheless, he still believed that a political revolution, if it came in time, could act to preserve the commune and so provide for Russia "the finest occasion that history has ever offered a people not to undergo all the sudden turns of fortune of the capitalist system."¹⁹ In effect, he was arguing that men, in this instance the revolutionary Russian Populists, consciously could intervene in the march of history and act to alter decisively the course of the evolution of society that otherwise would be fundamentally determined by the workings of economic forces. He proclaimed:

Only a Russian Revolution can save the Russian village community. The men who hold positions of social and political power, moreover, do their best to prepare the masses for such a cataclysm. If such a revolution takes place in

time, if it concentrates all its forces to assure the free development of the rural community, this latter will soon become the regenerating element of Russian society, and the factor giving it superiority over the countries enslaved by the capitalist system.²⁰

Engels too agreed that there existed "the possibility of transforming this social organisation (communal property) into a higher form in the event it persists until the time when circumstances are ripe for such a change...."²¹ Yet by the 1890's he began to have grave doubts that the commune would survive so long. He felt that communal cultivation was rapidly disintegrating as a result of the growth of capitalism and that individual peasant farming was in fact replacing it. Accordingly, even if proletarian revolution in West Europe, which he apparently more than Marx stressed as a "necessary precondition for raising the Russian village community" to the level of socialism - although they both believed that a revolution in Russia could act as the spark for socialist revolution in the West -, was victorious, he feared that it would be too late to save the commune as a basis for socialism, since the Russian peasants had "already forgotten how to cultivate their lands for their common good."²²

Indeed, Marx also presented what can be considered to be a more general justification of this position. Defining the prerequisites for socialism, he maintained that "the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class. The organisation of revolutionary elements as a class supposes the existence of all the productive forces which could be engendered in the bosom of the old society."²³ While it would be an exaggeration to conclude from this statement that Marx denied that some degree of capitalist development must precede socialist revolution, since the "revolutionary class", the proletariat, was the child of capitalism itself, it is possible to infer that he regarded socialism as realisable simply when the workers had acquired the consciousness and unity necessary to overthrow the bourgeoisie and use the political power which it consequently would gain to reconstruct society according to socialist principles. In other words, it seems that Marx considered the maturity of the proletariat itself to be the ultimate criterion by which to judge when the "objective prerequisites" for socialism had ripened within capitalist society, rather than attempting to determine these in terms of some quantitative measure of capitalist development.

The purpose of outlining these two strands, the determinist and the activist, in Marx's and Engels' thought is not simply to defend them from the unjust accusation that they had reduced the entire course of historical development to dependence solely on the action of economic forces. Certainly, there had been a growing tendency by Marxists, especially in West Europe, in the last decades of the nineteenth century to regard Marxism as a narrow economic deterministic doctrine. In 1890, Engels himself tacitly admitted that such a development had taken place. Yet, while explaining why he believed that this had occurred, he took pains to deny that this interpretation was correct:

Marx and I ourselves are partly to blame for the fact that younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasise the main principle vis-à-vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to allow the other elements involved in the interaction [i.e., the political and social superstructure, the action of men] to come into their rights.²⁴

This discussion is also pertinent because the strand which is emphasised often depends on the socio-economic environment into which Marxism is transferred. Generally, in the expansion of Marxism from the advanced capitalist societies of West Europe to the industrially, and politically, less developed countries of East Europe and Asia it was a more activist interpretation of this ideology that eventually was to become dominant - evident in the triumph of Bolshevism in Russia and of Maoism in China, in particular. The fact that revolutionary Marxists in such countries should emphasise the activist element in Marxism is quite understandable. Since their native societies were economically backward in comparison with the West, an acceptance of the determinist interpretation of Marxism - this variant of Marxism postulated that socialism could be established only after the "full development" of capitalism had created the "objective prerequisites" for this -, which had become the "orthodoxy" of Marxist movements in the late nineteenth century, especially in Germany, would have forced them to consign socialist revolution in their own countries to the distant future, when gradual capitalist growth would have created the necessary economic preconditions.

Nevertheless, Marxism in the Russian Empire in the last decades of the nineteenth century also appears to have been equated largely with economic determinism.²⁵ This phenomenon is not surprising, however, when one considers the historical context in which this doctrine evolved. The rise of Marxism was basically a reaction to the preceding failure of Populism, whose adherents aspired to establish a democratic socialist republic in the Russian Empire based on the mir, so by-passing the capitalist stage of development. The first Marxists in the Empire, many of whom, such as G. V. Plekhanov and P. B. Akselrod, themselves were former Populists, explained this failure in terms of a fundamental deficiency in Populist ideology. They argued that capitalism already existed in the Russian Empire and inexorably was destroying the mir. Hence it was futile to rest any hopes of founding a new socialist order on this structure. Yet, in their desire to refute the claims of the Populists, it seems that these revolutionaries tended to over-emphasise the determinist strand in Marxism.²⁶ They maintained that while the growth of capitalism in the Empire was inevitable, this process also would be slow. Consequently, they believed that a lengthy period of capitalist expansion would be necessary before all the vestiges of the old feudal, or, as some Russian Marxists believed, Asiatic Russian order were eliminated, and the prerequisites for socialism created.

In particular, it appears that Plekhanov especially, unlike M. N. Pokrovskii, who categorically maintained that the Russian Empire had a feudal past,²⁷ was of the opinion that it was not so much a feudal society as a form of "Asiatic despotism", a factor which he considered to be the greatest obstacle to the future development of capitalism, and eventually of socialism there. Certainly, in this respect Plakhanov was perfectly loyal to his professed masters, Marx and Engels, who themselves had often maintained that the Russian Empire was a semi-Asiatic society.

The basis of Asiatic society, in Marx's and Engels' opinion, was climatic and geographical. It emerged in primarily agricultural countries which were dependent upon extensive irrigation works for their continued existence. Strong states had emerged in order to ensure that these works were provided. The basic units in such

societies were self-sufficient village communes, independent of each other, but in common dependent upon the state, which owned the land, and the vital irrigation works. This socio-economic basis permitted the state to have unlimited political power over its members, and for its ruler, and the state bureaucracy, to exploit the populace, by means of taxation and rent.²⁸ While the Russian Empire itself lacked the massive waterworks that were a criterion of Asiatic societies, Marx and Engels nevertheless classified it as such, since it did possess the same socio-economic structure as these societies, that is, a multitude of atomised communes and a strong, centralised, despotic state. Engels declared:

Such a complete isolation of the individual [village] communities from each other, which in the whole country creates identical, but the exact opposite of common, interests is the natural foundation of Oriental despotism, and from India to Russia this societal form, wherever it prevailed, has always produced despotism and has always found therein its supplement. Not only the Russian state in general, but even in its specific form, the despotism of the Tsar, far from being suspended in mid-air, is the necessary and logical product of the Russian social conditions.²⁹

Moreover, it seems that Marx and Engels considered that such societies were remarkably resistant to internal change and development, but rather would continue to perpetuate themselves unless some external impetus upset their equilibrium. The challenge posed to them by the penetration of West European capitalist powers was seen by them as one such possible impulse. Particularly, they regarded British expansion into India as the cause of the dissolution of the old Asiatic order that had existed there - and the stimulus to the growth of capitalism.³⁰

Plekhanov accepted much of Marx's and Engels' analysis of "Oriental despotism" as it applied to the Russian Empire. He too believed that it had possessed the communal organisation of society typical of Asiatic societies and that it would continue to function as such but for the impact, or rather fear of the West, provoked especially by the Crimean War. The challenge which the West posed alone, in his view, had compelled the autocracy to reform and modernise Russian society and so open the way for the gradual development of capitalism.³¹

However, he maintained that the old order was dying but slowly. "Oriental despotism", though moribund, was still far from dead in the Russian Empire. Indeed he was particularly afraid of its resurgence. His fear was especially evident in 1906, when he opposed Lenin's policy to nationalise the land and give it to the peasants in order to win their support for a socialist seizure of power. He argued that such a policy, by restoring the state to its former position as the sole owner of the land, would create the basis for the re-establishment of the old Asiatic system once the revolution degenerated, as, in his opinion, it inevitably must in a Russia that was still in the initial stages of capitalist development.³² In a sense, therefore, his rejection of an early socialist revolution in the Russian Empire seems to have been based on the belief that a long period of capitalist development was necessary not just to create the positive prerequisites of socialism, but also to "westernise" the Empire thoroughly and so destroy finally all the foundations for any restoration of the old "semi-Asiatic order" there.

Indeed, Lenin too often referred to the Russian Empire as a "semi-Asiatic" rather than a feudal state, in which the ruling class was the government bureaucracy, both before and after, but not during the revolution of 1917. Despite agreeing with Plekhanov on this interpretation, he rejected his caveat that a premature socialist revolution in the Empire, lacking the support of a similar revolution in West Europe, could lead to the resurgence of an "Oriental despotism" - and, when the chance to capture power and establish a minority revolutionary socialist government offered itself in 1917, he seized the opportunity.³³

For whatever reason, whether they regarded the Russian Empire as a feudal or an Asiatic society, the interpretation of Marxism which posited that a lengthy period of capitalist expansion was the necessary precondition for socialism remained dominant into the twentieth century. In particular, the Mensheviks subscribed to the view that socialism could be established only in advanced bourgeois societies, where the prolonged development of capitalism had produced a broad industrial base, composed of large-scale enterprises, and also a numerous, educated and organised working class. They denied that

socialist revolution could be victorious in semi-developed countries, such as the Russian Empire, where these "objective prerequisites" were not yet present. Plekhanov, the "father of Russian Marxism", adopted a rigid determinist view of historical progress, arguing that "the political development of a country proceeds apace with its economic development."³⁴ Outlining the implications of this approach for the prospects of socialism in the Russian Empire, Akselrod declared:

At the present level of Russia's development the Russian proletariat cannot go farther than radical democratic liberalism in its direct practical strivings. At the present time, there cannot be any talk of conquest by the proletariat of political power for itself or [even] of reforms of bourgeois society under the socialist banner.³⁵

In fact, in the early years of the twentieth century the majority of Marxists in the Russian Empire - L.D. Trotsky was an exception - agreed that only a bourgeois-democratic revolution was possible, although they also accepted the argument, originally put forward by Plekhanov, that this revolution must be carried out by the proletariat, since they believed that the bourgeoisie itself was too weak and apathetic to accomplish this task.³⁶ Yet by 1917 a number of "left" Bolsheviks, and Lenin himself, together with the factions of revolutionary Marxists in Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, had come to reject this prognosis of the character of the coming revolution in the Russian Empire. Acting in the spirit that "above all else, a Marxist should avoid historical fatalism,"³⁷ an attitude which an emphasis on the determinist element in Marx's doctrines tended to nurture, they denied that socialist revolution must be postponed until the further growth of capitalism had prepared more fully the economic, and political preconditions for this. However, at the same time they still defended the premise that society necessarily progressed through succeeding stages of development, insisting that sufficient prerequisites for the establishment of socialism did exist in the Russian Empire.

In 1918, in his defence of the legitimacy of socialist revolution in Russia, N. Osinsky rejected the contention of the deterministic-minded Mensheviks that "socialism [could] replace only a very highly flourishing capitalist society and [could] be constructed only by a strong and highly developed proletariat."³⁸ He did not deny that Marx

and Engels in general terms had defined the trends of capitalist development which were creating the material foundations for socialism. In particular, he accepted that the centralisation of industry, the technological change which accompanied this, and the resulting growth in production was one precondition for the construction of a planned socialist economy. He also agreed that the concentration of capital in the hands of an ever-decreasing number of large entrepreneurs was strengthening the ranks of the proletariat. Moreover, the proletariat, which itself was becoming increasingly united and organised as a consequence of the collective, large-scale nature of capitalist production, would be subjected to growing exploitation and impoverishment as capitalism developed, which in turn would arouse in it the consciousness to revolt and overthrow the bourgeoisie. While Osinsky agreed that these inter-related developments ultimately were caused by the expansion of capitalism, he correctly emphasised that Marx and Engels had given no precise criterion of the stage to which capitalism must advance before socialism became objectively possible. He argued in the following manner:

Marx speaks... only about the forces which lead towards socialist revolution and socialism. He does not say what degree of development they must reach for the tendencies... which are preparing the revolution to become the immediate prerequisites, the moving forces of the revolution. He also does not refer to the question of how these contradictory - positive and negative - tendencies are combined in historical development on the path to the final [revolutionary] explosion and how they will be combined at the moment of this explosion. In other words, he does not indicate the signs by which it is possible to say that a country has become ripe for socialist revolution.³⁹

By refuting the "orthodox" economic determinist interpretation of Marxism, espoused by the Mensheviks and the majority of Social Democrats in West Europe, that socialist revolution could be victorious only in highly advanced capitalist societies, Osinsky de facto subscribed to a more activist variant of Marxism. Implicit in his argument was the conviction that even in relatively backward capitalist countries, such as the Russian Empire, the proletariat could seize power successfully and proceed to build socialism.

Later, during the period of "War Communism", N. I. Bukharin also presented a critique of the economic determinists' definition

of the "objective prerequisites" of socialism, presumably to defend the Bolsheviks from the accusation then being hurled at them by the German Social Democrats that they had seized power prematurely. He dismissed the view that socialism could be established only in mature capitalist societies, which possessed a structure of large-scale, centralised industry and various organisations of economic regulation. To justify this argument he asserted that since the immediate factor which would cause the proletariat to revolt would be the destruction of the productive forces within capitalist society itself, the result either of a recurrent crisis of over-production, or, more likely in the imperialist epoch, of a war, then the workers could not expect to lay hold of an economic system in which these "objective prerequisites" had been preserved intact. He continued, moreover, that this system would be destroyed even further in the very course of the revolution. Consequently, he claimed that since the proletariat itself would have to re-construct the very economic basis of society after its revolution, the relative under-development of capitalism was no obstacle to socialist revolution.⁴⁰

Rather, Bukharin stressed that the most important prerequisite for socialism was the existence of a "revolutionary class". He clearly implied that if capitalism had developed sufficiently to produce such a class, then socialist revolution was objectively possible. He wrote:

The 'maturing' of communist relations of production within capitalism is that system of cooperation which is embodied in the production relations of the workers and which simultaneously welds the human atoms together into the revolutionary class, the proletariat.⁴¹

In the 1920's, G. L. Piatakov, a "left" Bolshevik since World War I, retrospectively defended the Bolsheviks' activist approach to socialist revolution in the Russian Empire. In a conversation with N. Valentinov, he argued that the premise that the proletariat could seize power successfully only after the extensive development of capitalism had created "the so-called objective prerequisites for socialist revolution" had been disproved by the Russian experience itself. He now frankly admitted that, in his opinion, these preconditions had been absent in Russia in 1917. He maintained, however,

that this had been unimportant, since the proletariat, after it had established its revolutionary dictatorship, had been able to use its political supremacy to construct "the necessary [economic] base for socialism."⁴² In a sense, this belief in the ability of the revolutionary class to act to impose its will on historical development can be regarded as an unspoken assumption of many of the Bolsheviks during 1917, an assumption, nevertheless, which was less clear to them in this period since many of them assiduously attempted to prove that the economic foundations for socialism had matured in the Russian Empire.

The revolutionary Marxists of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (S.D.K.P.i.L.), under the ideological leadership of Rosa Luxemburg, also refused to remain hidebound by the dictates of the "orthodox" economic deterministic interpretation of Marxism. Like the "left" Bolsheviks, they construed Marxism in a more activist fashion, although they too subscribed to the belief that history necessarily progressed through definite, economically determined stages. Accordingly, Luxemburg maintained that some degree of capitalist development was the essential precondition of socialism. Yet she also insisted that this premise must not lead revolutionary socialists fatalistically to anticipate the victory of socialism as the inevitable outcome of the action of impersonal, economic forces which would evolve as capitalism expanded to a bursting-point. She argued that such a conclusion would prove disastrous, since socialism would not appear simply "as manna from heaven." On the contrary, she emphasised that a vital part of Marx's teaching was the conviction that the proletariat consciously must strive to establish socialism, in the process of which it would become "instead of the powerless victim of history, its conscious guide."⁴³ She continued, moreover, that by its revolutionary action the proletariat in fact could hasten the victory of socialism. Explaining her philosophy of history, she declared:

Scientific socialism has taught us to recognise the objective laws of historical development. Man does not make history of his own volition, but he makes history nevertheless. The proletariat is dependent in its actions upon the degree of righteousness to which social evolution has advanced. But again, social evolution is not a thing apart from the proletariat; it is in the same measure its driving

force and its cause as well as its product and effect. And though we can no more skip a period in our historical development than a man can jump over his shadow, it lies within our power to accelerate or to retard it.⁴⁴

The pro-Bolshevik wing of the Social Democracy of Latvia (S.D.L.) also adopted an activist interpretation of Marxism. In 1918, P. I. Stuchka, the leading theoretician of these Latvian Bolsheviks, rejected the deterministic argument of K. Kautsky and similar Marxists who, on the grounds that the level of its capitalist development was too low, "declared that socialist revolution in Russia [was] premature."⁴⁵ Furthermore, in refuting the opinions of the Latvian Mensheviks, Stuchka denied that "socialism in Latvia [would] become possible only when it [became] a fact in the economies of the industrial countries [of the West], on which we are dependent."⁴⁶ He was adamant that the Latvian proletariat need not remain passive until socialist revolution was victorious in West Europe, but rather that it must struggle for socialism in Latvia itself, notwithstanding the fact that this country was not at the same height of capitalist development as the West. Moreover, Stuchka clearly implied that this relative backwardness would not pose an insuperable obstacle to the success of the Latvian workers in constructing socialism.⁴⁷

However, it must be admitted that there were some grounds for Stuchka to advocate socialist revolution in Latvia. While still underdeveloped in comparison to the West, Latvia was one of the most advanced areas of the Russian Empire, possessing a relatively large industrial base and a strong, organised and politically conscious proletariat.⁴⁸ In fact, even earlier Stuchka had reached the conclusion that the seizure of power by the proletariat was possible in Latvia. Analysing the "moving forces" of the 1905 revolution, Stuchka concluded that the proletariat, rather than the bourgeoisie was the mainspring of the movement to overthrow the feudal autocracy and, consequently, to give free rein to the development of capitalism in the Russian Empire. Yet from this analysis Stuchka additionally had inferred that it would be possible for the proletariat to advance quickly beyond the bourgeois-democratic stage of the revolution and to use the political power which it had conquered to institute socialist policies. He speculated in the following manner:

Having overthrown the existing autocracy, we will destroy the obstacles which are impeding the full flowering of the rule of the bourgeoisie, but at the same time we also destroy the obstacles in the way of the conquest of power by the working class. Can we really say that we are participating in the revolution only with the aim of transferring the reins of government into the hands of the now oppressed bourgeoisie? Of course not. This then means that the aims of the revolution also are not bourgeois....⁴⁹

The revolutionary Lithuanian Marxists, the internationalist wing of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (L.S.D.P.) and those who had joined the ranks of the Bolshevik party before or during 1917, also claimed that socialist, rather than bourgeois-democratic revolution was realisable in Lithuania in 1917 and 1918. They tacitly admitted that their policy was contradictory to that which the dictates of economic determinism would demand when they frankly accepted that what traditionally were considered to be the prerequisites of socialism - a highly developed industry and a strong revolutionary proletariat - were absent in Lithuania. Despite these deficiencies, they maintained that the Lithuanian workers should seize power and, with the aid of their Russian and German brothers, could build socialism.⁵⁰

It appears that Lenin himself rejected the idea that economic backwardness inevitably destined socialist revolution in the Russian Empire to failure, in favour of adopting a clearly more activist - and optimistic - assessment of the prospects for the success of socialism there. Recounting a conversation which he claimed to have had with Lenin in Geneva in 1904, N. Valentinov, at that time a Bolshevik but soon to become a convert to Menshevism, maintained that Lenin had minimised the emphasis which should be placed on the economic prerequisites necessary for the establishment of socialism. Instead, Lenin underlined the importance of the organisation and revolutionary enthusiasm of the proletariat in carrying out socialist revolution. In fact, Valentinov stated that Lenin categorically denied that it was possible abstractly to predict the level to which capitalism must develop before socialism became objectively possible. He summarised Lenin's argument:

There is no absolute and formal yardstick for a country's economic preparedness for socialism. It cannot be said that a certain country is ready for socialism, once, say '60 per cent' of its population is working class. 'Truth is always

concrete: everything depends on the circumstances of time and place'. A country may have only fifty very large factories among its tens of thousands of miscellaneous enterprises. From a formalistic point of view, such a country has at that stage no socialist prospects whatsoever. The number of large enterprises is ridiculously small and the number of workers employed in them is insignificant compared with the total numbers of the working masses. Yet, if the most vital part of the country's production (coal, iron, steel, etc.) is concentrated in these fifty concerns, and if all their workers are superbly organised in a revolutionary socialist party, if their combative spirit is at a high level, then the problem of that country's socialist prospects and of the importance of a 'handful' of workers will not look at all the way it does to the 'vulgarisers of Marxism'. Struve was such a 'vulgariser'. In the days when Struve was a 'legal Marxist', he had once argued, in a private conversation, after referring to all the laws about the pre-conditions for the victory of socialism, that it was out of the question even to think of socialism in Russia as something possible within the next hundred years.⁵¹

There seems no reason to dispute the accuracy of this report since it is quite consistent with Lenin's own, explicitly stated beliefs. Earlier, in What Is To Be Done, he had revealed clearly his faith in the power of human action to make a revolution when he declared: "Give us an organisation of revolutionaries and we will overturn Russia!"⁵² During the revolutionary turmoil in the Russian Empire in 1917, he derisively called the argument of A. I. Rykov, that "socialism must come from other countries with a more developed industry...", "a parody of Marxism."⁵³ Again, in 1921, Lenin attacked the view that Marxism could be equated with a rigid economic determinism. He regarded such an interpretation as alien to the spirit of Marxism and even argued that "politics must take precedence over economics. To argue otherwise is to forget the ABC of Marxism."⁵⁴

While both the determinist and activist interpretations of Marxism have claims to legitimacy, it still remains to explain why many Marxists in the Russian Empire, contrary to the prevailing determinist orthodoxy, should adopt the activist variant. One part of the answer to this question seems to lie in the realm of human aspirations. It is quite possible that these revolutionaries, having given their lives to the elimination of social oppression, injustice and inequality, should desire to taste the fruits of their efforts in their lifetimes. However,

if they were to embrace the determinist strand in Marx's and Engels' theory of history, logically they would be compelled to accept that the establishment of socialism in the still-backward Russian Empire must wait the creation of the necessary economic prerequisites which would be the result of the slow, albeit inexorable growth of capitalism. Accordingly, it would fall to the lot of their children, or their grandchildren, to consummate their ideals. Consequently, their emphasis on political action as a means to speed up the unfolding of history becomes understandable.

Nevertheless, this appears to be only part of the explanation. It is also reasonable to consider the influence that native traditions had on their political philosophy, particularly since revolutionary activism had been a leitmotif of indigenous social thought in the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century. Among others, N. G. Chernyshevskii particularly emphasised the power of human action in bringing about the revolutionary transformation of society. The sources of his thought were disparate. Apparently, he borrowed from G. Hegel the idea that history was moving towards a predetermined, rational end, yet at the same time he rejected Hegel's idealism. For this he substituted a materialism, taken especially from L. Feuerbach and also from the positivists, such as A. Comte, that is, the belief that socio-economic forces were the factors leading to the creation of a just, ordered society. Yet while he believed that society was evolving in this direction, he also insisted that the actions of men, in his opinion, of a self-conscious revolutionary intelligentsia, could accelerate the achievement of this end. Chernyshevskii extolled the role of this revolutionary élite, of "strong personalities, who [would] impose their character on the pattern of events, and hurry their course, who [would] give a direction to the chaotic upheaval of forces [already] taking place in the movement of the masses."⁵⁵ In fact, this belief, that men had the power consciously to fashion history, was a fundamental feature of Populist ideology, which for much of the second half of the nineteenth century was the dominant revolutionary current in the Russian Empire.

It is credible, at least, to postulate that this tradition was a source of the activism displayed by the revolutionary Marxists in the

Russian Empire. Certainly, it is possible to detect the marks of native revolutionary thought in Lenin's interpretation of Marxism. In particular, Chernyshevskii has been singled out as a major influence on the formation of his ideas. Lenin himself admitted that he had gained his baptism as a revolutionary from a study of the writings of Chernyshevskii, from which he gained a rudimentary knowledge of philosophical materialism and Hegel's dialectic, as well as a deep and lasting distrust of liberalism. Apparently, he also took from Chernyshevskii his belief in the power of committed revolutionaries to move history in the direction of their goals.⁵⁶

Admittedly, it is possible to trace other indigenous influences on Lenin's thought. For example, the ideas of P. N. Tkachëv, who believed that a political revolution, carried out by a small, yet tightly disciplined and organised minority, would clear the way for a following socio-economic revolution, bear a striking resemblance to the views later expressed by Lenin, most notably in What Is To Be Done.⁵⁷ Yet the purpose of this discussion is not to present an exhaustive account of the elements of continuity between native revolutionary theories or, more precisely, Western socialist theories that were embraced and adapted to Russian conditions by the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia from the middle of the nineteenth century, and the variants of revolutionary Marxism that evolved in the Russian Empire. Rather, the intent is simply to point out that the revolutionary activism characteristic of the revolutionary Marxists in the Empire should not be seen simply as an intellectual deduction which they derived from their reading of Marx and Engels, but that autochthonous traditions also impelled them in this direction. While this appears to be true particularly of Lenin himself, it is also plausible to hazard that his fellow revolutionaries, wittingly or unwittingly, were subject to the same influences in the shaping of their thought.

However, one question still remains to be answered. In 1905, these revolutionary Marxists maintained that only bourgeois-democratic revolution was possible in the Russian Empire, yet in 1917 they boldly contended that socialist revolution now was a realistic prospect. It seems that some explanation is needed to account for this development in their thinking.

In addressing this question, it becomes clear that a dualism, a blend of activism and determinism, also characterised their thought. While they legitimately stressed the activist strand in Marxism, that men, in the process of making their own history, could speed up social development, they also believed that men could not make their history just to satisfy their aspirations and ideals, irrespective of the socio-economic context in which they had to operate. Rather, it appears that their acceptance of Marxism also bound them to the premise that history progressed through economically determined stages, which meant that capitalism must precede socialism. Consequently, the very inner logic of their ideology compelled them to establish that capitalism in the Russian Empire had developed sufficiently to create the "objective prerequisites" which would make the socialist revolution for which they strove realisable. The judgement of a leading Soviet historian provides a good insight into the more determinist strand in the thinking of these revolutionary Marxists. Describing the attitudes of the Bolsheviks in 1917, he stated:

Proletarian revolution is not just the good intention of the ideological leaders of the proletariat, but rather it is an objective phenomenon that is in conformity with the laws of historical development [*zakonomernost'*]. This conclusion of the Bolshevik-Leninists was the result of their analysis of imperialism. Relying on this, the comrades of V. I. Lenin, under the direction of their leader, consciously prepared to assault tsarism and the bourgeoisie. Their theoretical investigations served their revolutionary practice.⁵⁸

However, this statement is doubly significant. It alludes to some link between imperialism and the legitimacy of socialist revolution and thus indicates one avenue to pursue to discover how these Marxists came to justify their contention that the Russian Empire was economically ripe for socialist revolution.

Nevertheless, it would be naive to imagine that these Marxists studied the characteristics of imperialism with the sole aim of proving that the "objective prerequisites" for socialist revolution had matured in the Russian Empire. Rather, it seems that the motivation of their researches was the desire to explain the expansionist policies by the major capitalist powers of the world, a subject which seemed particularly

relevant after the outbreak of war between rival imperialist powers in 1914.

Moreover, from their analyses they were able to draw a number of conclusions. First, they attributed the continuing survival of capitalism to its ability to expand into and exploit the non-capitalist areas of the world. This expansion had helped maintain the profitability of capital and at the same time had allowed the bourgeoisie in the advanced capitalist countries to "bribe" their own workers into political passivity by granting them higher wages, which ultimately were wrung out of the wretched, exploited masses in the colonies. Yet they were sure that this stage had now come to an end. They argued that in the twentieth century the world had become completely divided among the rival capitalist powers, so that no longer could the problem of securing a profitable outlet for the investment of growing accumulations of capital within these countries be solved by the peaceful acquisition of colonies. Any attempts by these powers to expand now would bring them into mutual conflict - the outbreak of war in 1914 was regarded by them as striking confirmation of the validity of their theories - and the crisis which would be caused by this would spark off a whole series of revolutions by the proletariat to put an end to the carnage and destruction of war and to destroy the source of this, capitalism itself. Furthermore, they also contended that the economic developments which had taken place within the imperialist states had established the necessary prerequisites for the construction of socialism. In the present context it is this conclusion that is particularly relevant and hence the following discussion of their theories of imperialism will be limited largely to this issue.

Initially, it is necessary to remember that to the majority of these Marxists the word "imperialism" was not simply an all-encompassing term to describe any policy of territorial aggrandisement carried out by large powers at the expense of smaller and weaker rivals. Certainly, they recognised that such expansion was a feature of the modern imperialism that they were studying. Yet they insisted that this phenomenon could be explained satisfactorily only in terms of the internal economic changes undergone by the countries that were pursuing imperialist policies.⁵⁹

In general, they began their studies of imperialism by analysing these internal developments.⁶⁰ They maintained that as capitalism had continued to grow, production increasingly had become centralised in ever larger enterprises, basically as the result of the destruction of smaller, less efficient rivals which occurred during the periodic crises of over-production that were typical of capitalism. This process eventually had led to the formation of monopolies in individual industries, by the amalgamation of the few remaining large firms into trusts, syndicates or cartels, which were established to eliminate competition in their own branches of production, regulate output, and, consequently, prices, and in this way to preserve profitability.⁶¹

The same concentration of capital had taken place in banking. This had resulted in the formation of a few banks of great wealth and power in each capitalist country. Moreover, these banks had become the chief investors in industry, so that in effect a merger (şrăshchivanie) between banking and industrial capital - termed finance capital by Bukharin,⁶² who apparently borrowed this name from R. Hilferding - had been established. In turn, this union had led to an even greater regulation of each national economy since it was evidently in the interests of the banks to limit the competition among the various monopolised industries in which they had invested their capital in order to maintain their profitability.⁶³

However, they argued that the centralisation of production in huge, technologically advanced enterprises, typical of capitalism in this stage of development, had caused such a dramatic increase in output that it could not be sold profitably on the home market. This deficiency in internal demand had driven the national monopolies to a policy of territorial expansion in order to secure the outlets for their goods sufficient to guarantee their profit levels.⁶⁴

Moreover, just as production had expanded markedly, so too the accumulation of capital had increased at a breath-taking rate. This rapid accumulation had the same effects on the policies of the national monopolies as the rise in production. They were forced to seek new areas for exploitation in which their capital could be invested profitably since the opportunities for this had been exhausted domestically.⁶⁵

One conclusion that these Marxists drew from their analysis of the recent developments in capitalist economies was obvious. They claimed that countries in which finance capital was becoming dominant had been compelled, by the need to protect the profits of capital, to adopt policies of territorial expansion into weak and backward areas of the world. In other words, they regarded imperialism as the inevitable product of finance capitalism, or, as Bukharin unequivocally declared, "imperialism [is] the policy of finance capital...."⁶⁶

Yet their study of the evolution of imperialism led them to another important discovery. They argued that the expansion achieved by the major capitalist powers had been largely peaceful in its initial phases, primarily since there had been an abundance of areas still unoccupied by any of them. However, they believed that by about 1900 there was no free territory remaining in which new empires could be established.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the growth of capitalism continued, so that the driving force of this expansion, the necessary search for ever larger areas of exploitation, was still operating. Accordingly, they postulated that any further territorial aggrandisement by these imperialist countries inevitably would lead them into conflict with each other.

However, the question which still remains unresolved is the manner in which these Marxists argued that imperialism had created the prerequisites for socialist revolution. The answer falls into two related parts, connected with the economic structure that was characteristic of imperialist countries, and the alignment of classes, and the class tensions, that would be produced within them.

First of all, they maintained that the organisation of production which had been achieved in finance capitalist states provided the necessary economic basis for socialism. In particular, the syndicates and trusts and their entire administrative apparatus, as well as the state institutions which the "magnates of capital" had created to regulate the economy in their interests, were considered to be the building blocks with which to construct a planned economy. They then believed that the proletariat, after it had overthrown the bourgeoisie, could take over intact this economic structure and adapt it readily in the reconstruction of industry according to socialist principles.⁶⁸

Moreover, they asserted that the evolution of industrial capitalism into finance capitalism inevitably would result in increased exploitation of the proletariat and, consequently, the intensification of class antagonisms. Specifically, they argued that the increase in prices which the monopolies would implement to maintain their profits would worsen the economic position of the workers, who would be burdened even more by the effects of protective tariffs, and also by the increased taxes which would be levied as the imperialist powers built up their military forces to safeguard their existing status. In addition, they pointed out that the workers' situation had deteriorated even further during the imperialist war when they had suffered not only heightened economic deprivation and political oppression, such as the ban on strikes and the introduction of labour conscription, but also actual physical destruction on the battlefields themselves. They were convinced that these sufferings and hardships would engender in the proletariat the necessary consciousness and will to rise and seize power from its capitalist oppressors.⁶⁹

Certainly, there is no doubt that the majority of revolutionary Marxists in the Russian Empire believed that capitalism in its imperialist stage of development had created the "objective prerequisites" for socialism. Bukharin, one of the first Bolsheviks to analyse in depth the characteristics of imperialism, boldly declared that "imperialism is the policy of finance capitalism, i.e., a highly developed capitalism implying a considerable ripeness of the organisation of production; in other words, imperialist policies by their very existence bespeak the ripeness of the objective conditions for a new socio-economic form...."⁷⁰

The revolutionary Polish Marxists essentially agreed with Bukharin's conclusion. In 1915, speaking for the Regional Presidium of the S.D.K.P.iL., K. B. Radek, after emphasising that the concentration of capital had made "socialism... already possible economically," averred that "imperialism is a policy of capitalism in that stage of development which makes a socialist organisation of production possible."⁷¹ Luxemburg, for once found herself in agreement with Radek. In 1915, she too declared that the "capitalist desire for imperialist expansion [was] the expression of its highest maturity in the last period of its

life," at which stage it had "created the objective premises for its own final overthrow."⁷² Later, the revolutionary Latvian and Lithuanian Marxists also subscribed to this theory, declaring that imperialism had produced the socio-economic preconditions for socialism.⁷³

Before 1917 there was a consensus among these Marxists that the "objective prerequisites" for socialist revolution existed in the advanced imperialist countries of West Europe. Nevertheless, it appears that they were less than unanimous that such a revolution was possible in the Russian Empire on account of its relative economic backwardness - until 1917 Lenin himself repeatedly denied that the coming revolution in Russia would be socialist. Yet in 1917 they openly proclaimed that socialism was objectively possible in the Empire.

However, it appears that even before 1917 Bukharin had considered socialist revolution to be a realisable prospect in the Russian Empire. In Imperialism and World Economy, the core of which was written in 1915, he categorised Russia as one of the leading imperialist powers, in particular stressing its expansion into Central Asia, Manchuria and Mongolia in the late nineteenth century.⁷⁴ Although he accepted that the economic structure of the Empire was less developed than that of France, Germany, Britain and the United States, at the same time he hastened to add that it would be mistaken to conclude from this qualification that it was not one of the "foremost countries", in which the "objective prerequisites" for the social organisation of production" had matured.⁷⁵

Moreover, during the war a number of other Bolsheviks, such as N. M. Lukin, G. I. Safarov and especially G. I. Oppokov (Lomov), reached the same conclusion as Bukharin that socialist revolution was possible in the Russian Empire.⁷⁶ A leading "Left Communist" in 1918, Lomov maintained that finance capitalism existed in the Empire. He pointed to the increased centralisation of production, the strengthening of monopolies, particularly in the cotton, metallurgical and machine-building industries, and the concentration in banking in support of his claim. He continued that this centralisation and the regulation of production which had accompanied it, a process which had been intensified by the open intervention of the tsarist state in controlling the economy during the war, had created the "objective

prerequisites" for socialism.⁷⁷

In 1917 itself, many Bolsheviks, prominent among whom were many future "leftists", argued that since finance capitalism had developed in the Russian Empire, then sufficient economic prerequisites for socialist construction were present. Bukharin himself was to maintain repeatedly that finance capitalism, similar to that in West Europe, had existed in Russia before 1917.⁷⁸ He continued that the centralisation of production in trusts and syndicates, controlled and organised by the banks, had created the economic structure which the proletariat, after it had seized political power, could utilise as the foundation for regulated, socialist industry.⁷⁹ V. M. Smirnov agreed with Bukharin's analysis. He asserted that in the Russian Empire the concentration of industry and the growth of a system of economic regulatory organs, processes which had been accelerated by the bourgeoisie and its state during the war, had proceeded sufficiently far that the successful transition to socialism was now possible.⁸⁰ Safarov too was convinced that the supremacy of finance capitalism in Russian industry was unquestionable, insisting that the exigencies of the war had compelled the bourgeoisie to use the power of the state to centralise and organise production in order to guarantee the output of the military goods on which its survival depended. He claimed that this development clearly proved that "the social-democratic regulation... of the economy was possible,"⁸¹ once the proletariat had overthrown the ruling capitalist oligarchy and taken over the economic apparatus which it had built.

Later, in 1918, Osinsky declared that the economic preconditions for socialist revolution had existed in the Russian Empire. In his justification of this contention, he presented one of the clearest accounts of what he, and presumably his fellow Bolsheviks, considered to be the "objective prerequisites" that were sufficient for the construction of socialism.

At first, he argued in a rather abstract manner, maintaining that if socialist revolution was to be successful there must be present "a considerable accumulation, both of productive power and of socialised labour (connected with the concentration and centralisation of capital), and also of the social power of the working class - 'the gravedigger of

capitalism'."⁸² He continued, however, that these "positive prerequisites" by themselves were no guarantee of a revolutionary upheaval. In addition, a crisis in the capitalist system was necessary, caused either by the recurrent problem of over-production or by war. In either case, the productive forces of society would decline - factories would close, and existing machinery and goods would be destroyed -, the petty-bourgeoisie would be ruined economically and swell the ranks of the proletariat, and the means of production would become even more concentrated in the hands of the magnates who alone had the wealth and power to survive such periods. Moreover, the proletariat would be subjected to even harsher exploitation and deprivation, which would spur it to revolt and destroy the existing capitalist system.⁸³

In explaining why socialist revolution had been possible in the Russian Empire, Osinsky gave a detailed definition of the "positive prerequisites" of socialism. He maintained that Russia had possessed a highly developed industrial structure, in which large-scale enterprises were dominant - he cited the mining, metallurgical, machine-building, transport, chemical and sugar industries as examples -, which could "serve as the technical basis for the organisation of large-scale socialist industry."⁸⁴ Moreover, these industries had been trustified or syndicalised, a process which had been encouraged by the intervention of the banks, and, consequently, the framework for a centrally planned regulation of production had been created. Furthermore, the syndicates and trusts, together with the distributive organisations set up by the state during the war, and with the existing consumer and cooperative societies, provided the necessary network for controlling the distribution and consumption of goods and materials.⁸⁵

In fact, Osinsky was arguing that finance capitalism was the necessary pre-condition of socialism. The organisations which he claimed would provide the foundations for a socialist economy were typically those which, according to Marxists, had developed as capitalism had evolved into imperialism.

The revolutionary Polish Marxists did not discuss so extensively whether the "objective prerequisites" for socialist revolution existed in the Russian Empire. The fact that this revolution was not consolidated in Poland probably minimised the need for them to prove that the

economic bases for the construction of socialism were present both in Poland itself and in Russia in general. Yet it is possible to deduce that they would have agreed with the Bolsheviks that Russia was mature enough economically for socialist revolution. Indeed, Luxemburg, while she had little to say directly on this issue, certainly rejected the idea that socialism in Russia was doomed to failure on the grounds that capitalism in it was insufficiently developed. She wrote in this vein to Luise Kautsky at the end of 1917:

Are you happy about the Russians? (i.e. post October). Of course they will not be able to maintain themselves in this witches' sabbath, - not because statistics show that economic development in Russia is too backward, as your clever husband [Karl Kautsky] has figured out, but because the social democracy in the highly developed west consists of pitifully wretched cowards, who, looking quietly on, will let the Russians bleed themselves to death. But such a collapse is better than to 'remain alive for the fatherland'. It is an historical deed, the traces of which will not disappear in eons of time.⁸⁶

It is possible to infer from this statement, especially when it is taken in conjunction with Luxemburg's self-professed belief that history necessarily developed through succeeding stages, that she considered that capitalism in Russia had advanced to a level that would have permitted the successful construction of socialism.

However, in 1918, Radek, in the leading circles of the S.D.K.P.i.L. till 1917 when he joined the Bolshevik party, presented his theory to justify the possibility of socialist revolution in relatively backward capitalist countries. He denied that the "full development" of capitalism must precede the construction of socialism. Rather, he argued that once the main branches of industry and transport had become centralised, then what can be regarded as the minimum economic prerequisites for a successful socialist revolution had been established. At that stage, he continued, the proletariat, even if it still was a minority, could overthrow the bourgeoisie and use the existing large-scale industrial structure as the foundation on which to build a socialist economy, after which it gradually could proceed to socialise the remaining backward sectors of the economy, especially agriculture. All that the proletariat needed to carry out such a revolution was the political will, which, in his opinion, it was bound to acquire as the

result of the exploitation and misery that it must continue to suffer as long as capitalism survived.⁸⁷

Radek applied this theory to the Russian Empire in order to legitimise the socialist character of the October revolution. He insisted that the "commanding heights" of the Russian economy - the coal, metallurgical, oil, transport and banking industries - had reached that level of concentration and centralisation at which they could be transformed into the first links in a slowly growing chain of socialist production.⁸⁸

In 1917, Stuchka, the pre-eminent theoretician among the Latvian Bolsheviks, also inferred that Russia was economically ripe for socialist revolution. He denied the claims, apparently advanced by the Latvian liberals and Mensheviks, that since Latvia was more developed than Great Russia itself it would be in the interests of social progress if it became independent. On the contrary, he maintained that Russia, whose industry recently had undergone a process of concentration and centralisation unparalleled anywhere, except in the United States, itself had now outstripped Latvia in terms of capitalist development.⁸⁹ Two implications can be made from this argument. First, it seems that Stuchka believed that the "objective prerequisites" for socialism - a modern, large-scale industrial base - existed in Russia. He suggested, moreover, that the victory of socialism in Latvia would be facilitated if it remained united with this fast-growing, and potentially revolutionary Russia.

The revolutionary Marxists of Lithuania openly admitted that Lithuania alone did not possess sufficient economic prerequisites for the construction of socialism. Yet they refused to concede that this ruled out the possibility of socialist revolution there. They defended this position by arguing that since Russia itself after 1917 had become a socialist state and since Germany, where all the preconditions for socialism had matured, was on the verge of revolution, then it was possible for the proletariat to seize power in Lithuania, despite its backwardness, and thereafter to seek the political support and material aid of its Russian and German comrades in building socialism.⁹⁰

Lenin himself agreed that the characteristics that capitalism had acquired as it had evolved into its imperialist form had "created

all the objective premises for the realisation of socialism."⁹¹ Yet before 1917 he had argued that socialist revolution would be limited to West Europe and the United States, repeatedly denying that such a revolution was possible in the Russian Empire.

In October, 1915, Lenin insisted that only a bourgeois-democratic revolution could take place in the Russian Empire, even though this would be carried out by the proletariat in alliance with the peasantry.⁹² Later, in November of the same year, he admitted that while "the objective conditions in Western Europe [were] ripe for socialist revolution," such a revolution was still premature in the Russian Empire. The task which remained to be accomplished there was the destruction of the autocracy, and of the vestiges of feudalism. To achieve these aims, the proletariat, in alliance with the peasantry, must fight to establish a democratic republic and then to confiscate the pomeshchiks' estates. In effect, Lenin categorised the coming revolution in the Russian Empire as bourgeois-democratic because of the nature of its objectives.⁹³ Furthermore, in February, 1916, he again adamantly rejected the idea that socialist revolution was realisable in the Empire. He continued to argue that the proletariat first must participate in the struggle to ensure that the bourgeois revolution was victorious, after which, presumably, the preconditions for socialism would mature.⁹⁴

Moreover, there is nothing specific in Lenin's major study of imperialism, Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism, to warrant the contention that before 1917 he regarded socialist revolution as an imminent prospect in the Russian Empire. Certainly, he conceded that finance capitalism, typified by the formation of monopolies and the merger of banking and industrial capital, had "made enormous strides in Russia."⁹⁵ Nevertheless, he also pointed out that the Russian Empire was still economically backward, a country "where modern capitalist imperialism is enmeshed, so to speak, in a particularly close network of pre-capitalist relations,"⁹⁶ that is, feudalism. It is plausible to conclude from this qualification that Lenin even then believed that the Russian Empire first must pass through the bourgeois-democratic stage of development before there could be any thought of socialist revolution.

Yet less than a year later, in March, 1917, as soon as he had received news that the autocracy had been overthrown and a republic established in the Russian Empire, it appears that Lenin began to revise his strategy. In his Draft Theses, written two days after the report of the February revolution reached him in Switzerland, he argued that the Russian proletariat should continue "the fight for a democratic republic and socialism."⁹⁷ In the first of his Letters from Afar, issued a few days later, he again urged that the Russian workers, in alliance only with the proletarianised and poor peasants, not the peasantry as a whole, and, subsequently, with the proletariat of the remainder of Europe, must struggle to transform the revolution from the bourgeois-democratic to the socialist stage. He argued:

With these two allies, the proletariat, utilising the peculiarities of the present situation, can and will proceed, first, to the achievement of a democratic republic and complete victory over the landlords, instead of the Guchkov-Milyukov semi-monarchy, and then to socialism, which alone can give the war weary people peace, bread and freedom.⁹⁸

In the last of these Letters from Afar, Lenin outlined the political measures which had to be implemented to guarantee this transformation in the nature of the revolution. First, and most important, the workers and peasants must destroy the old state, and its organs of coercion - the army, police and bureaucracy -, and convert their own soviets into the real sources of political power. However, the success of this step demanded that the proletariat secure the support of the entire peasantry, then solely interested in the confiscation and division of the land. Thereafter, the workers, now allied only with the poor peasants, must proceed to "control... production and distribution of basic products and establish 'universal labour service'." Lenin was quick to add the caveat, nevertheless, that these policies alone would not signify the victory of socialism, rather only "the transition to socialism which cannot be achieved in Russia directly, at one stroke, without transitional measures, but is quite achievable and urgently necessary as the result of such transitional measures."⁹⁹

It was a programme based on these prescriptions that Lenin, on his return to Russia in April, 1917, advocated that the Bolsheviks should pursue. To the consternation of the majority of the party, then led by J. V. Stalin and L. B. Kamenev, who believed that the

bourgeois-democratic regime which had replaced the autocracy would continue to exist for a prolonged period, Lenin argued that the situation in which to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia was at hand. To achieve this end, he demanded that all power be transferred to the soviets - which, in his eyes, was equivalent to the "smashing" of the bourgeois state. Once this new government had been set up, it was to carry out the nationalisation of the land and the banks. Yet Lenin again hastened to warn that the Russian proletariat should not imagine that it was possible immediately "to 'introduce' socialism;" rather it was possible "only to bring social production and the distribution of products at once under the control of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies."¹⁰⁰

However, there was an internal contradiction in the position that Lenin had adopted. In April, 1917 he de facto espoused a political programme - the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat - that was appropriate for a socialist revolution, while at the same time he refused to admit that such a revolution was objectively possible in the Russian Empire. Certainly, later in 1917, he contended that the economic prerequisites for socialism had matured in Russia. In The Impending Catastrophe And How To Combat It, written in September, he defended his policy during 1917 on these grounds. He proceeded by arguing that imperialism, which "is merely monopoly capitalism," existed in Russia - he cited Produgol, Prodamet and the sugar syndicate as a few examples of this phenomenon. He continued, moreover, that during the imperialist war the ruling capitalists had converted their monopolies into state monopolies, in order to use the powers of the state to protect their profits. This development, Lenin claimed, had made socialism objectively possible, since "socialism is merely the next step forward from state-capitalist monopoly" - and this was present in Russia. He wrote in more detail:

Imperialist war is the eve of socialist revolution. And this not only because the horrors of the war give rise to proletarian revolt - no revolt can bring socialism unless the economic conditions for socialism are ripe - but because state-monopoly capitalism is a complete material preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism there are no intermediate rungs.¹⁰¹

In October, he again insisted that sufficient "objective

prerequisites" for successful socialist revolution were to be found in Russia. On this occasion, he stressed the high levels of capitalist development in banking and other major industries, which had become increasingly centralised and organised during the war. He maintained that the revolutionary state must take over these industries intact, after which it could use the institutions for controlling production that they had created as the skeleton for the construction of a regulated socialist economy. Without these basic prerequisites, there would have been no realistic prospects for socialist revolution in Russia. He declared:

Capitalism has created an accounting apparatus in the shape of the banks, syndicates, postal service, consumers' societies, and office employees unions. Without big banks socialism would be impossible.

The big banks are the 'state apparatus' which we need to bring about socialism, and which we take ready-made from capitalism....¹⁰²

Nevertheless, this smacks of a post facto justification of the programme that Lenin advanced in April. It is more credible to seek an explanation of his policies in his estimate of the political opportunities that the February revolution had opened up, an approach, moreover, which has the merit of consistency with the activist attitude towards revolution that he previously had defended. The destruction of the autocracy had left a political vacuum, which had been filled by a system of dual power - the Provisional Government and the soviets. Apparently, Lenin believed that the former would be unable to consolidate itself in power since it would lose its popular support by its refusal to take Russia out of the war and to give the land to the peasants. Consequently, it seems that he felt that the Bolshevik party, by exploiting the revolutionary enthusiasm that the February revolution had unleashed and by promising to meet the unsatisfied demands of the workers and peasants - for peace, bread and land -, could win over the masses to back its seizure of power. Once the dictatorship of the proletariat had been established, presumably the Bolsheviks would use the authority of this state to carry out measures that would hasten the transition to socialism in Russia.

However, it still remains that by October, 1917, the majority of revolutionary Marxists in the Russian Empire had come to agree that the

conditions for socialist revolution had matured there. Yet one problem persisted. They had to explain why this revolution first had broken out in a relatively backward country, such as the Russian Empire, rather than in one of the advanced capitalist societies of West Europe.

In 1918, Radek presented retrospectively a theoretical justification for this phenomenon. He maintained that in highly developed capitalist countries the ruling bourgeoisie possessed very strong weapons of coercion - the army and the police - which it could use to suppress successfully any risings by the impoverished workers. Therefore, it was quite understandable that socialist revolution would occur first in more backward capitalist countries where the bourgeoisie as yet were less organised to crush the revolution of the proletariat. He argued:

The strongest capitalist organisation cannot protect the masses from the singularly excruciating agonies which are created by capitalist anarchy; nevertheless, it can hold these masses in obedience much more readily than the younger capitalist countries can.

The socialist revolution begins first of all in those countries where the capitalist organisation is weakest. The capitalist countries with the least organised institutions of coercion are the targets for the socialist breakthrough....¹⁰³

In essence, Bukharin defended the same hypothesis as Radek, developing his previous ideas about the power of mature capitalist societies to prevent proletarian revolution. Before 1917 he had postulated that as finance capitalism had grown the role of the state had changed. As the concentration of industry and banking had increased, the collective ownership of capital - in the form of trusts, syndicates and cartels - had become "characteristic". Bukharin contended that this development had continued until, during the war, one gigantic economic organisation, embracing all the bourgeoisie, had been created. Moreover, this organisation had taken over, or more precisely, merged with the existing state apparatus, with the consequence that the state, formerly the impartial arbiter between competing capitalists, had become the naked weapon of the now-unified bourgeoisie. He attributed to this "imperialist pirate state, [this] omnipotent organisation of bourgeois dominance... gigantic power, spiritual (various methods of obscurantism: the church, the press, the school, etc.) as well as material methods (police, soldiery)...,"¹⁰⁴ which it could use to quell any revolts by

oppressed and exploited workers.

After the October revolution Bukharin expanded this argument to account for the outbreak of socialist revolution in a backward country, such as Russia. He claimed that in these countries the direct fusion of the economic and political power of the bourgeoisie had progressed least. Consequently, he asserted that it was precisely in these countries, the weakest "links" in the "chain" of world imperialism, that the proletariat had the best opportunity to overthrow capitalism. In the Economics of the Transformation Period he concluded:

The concentration of the social strength of the bourgeoisie in state power, which had intergrown with the economic organisations of capital, created an enormous resistance to the workers' movement. Therefore, the collapse of the capitalist world began with the weakest systems in terms of political economy, with the least developed state capitalist organisations.¹⁰⁵

Lenin himself apparently had adopted the same explanation. In early 1918 he justified the outbreak of socialist revolution in Russia on the grounds of the relative economic and political backwardness of that country. Yet he added that while this factor had made it "immeasurably more easy for us [the Russians] to start" this revolution, at the same time it would make it equally difficult for them to bring it to a successful conclusion.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, despite the agreement between the "Left Communists" and Lenin on the nature of the revolution in the Russian Empire in 1917, policy differences continued to divide them. In particular, the "Left Communists" attacked the national and agrarian policies advocated by Lenin, in the belief that the implementation of these would present grave dangers to the consolidation of the socialist revolution. Moreover, they also became highly critical of the restricted role that he allowed the proletariat in the administration of the revolutionary state and in the construction of socialism generally, arguing that this curtailment of proletarian democracy would frustrate the achievement of socialism.

The aim of the remainder of this study is to focus attention on the contradictory policies on these issues espoused by the "Left Communists" and Lenin, and also to attempt to discover the causes of their disagreements. The next logical step seems to be an examination of

their respective national policies, since this too will involve a deeper analysis of their theories of imperialism, the differences in which apparently lie at the roots of their conflict on this question.

Footnotes.

¹M. Meisner, Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), p. 128.

²K. Marx, F. Engels, The Communist Manifesto (Moscow, 1966). Consult Engels' preface to the English edition of 1888, p. 20.

³K. Marx, "Author's Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," in E. Burns, A Handbook of Marxism (New York, 1970), pp. 371-372.

⁴For a succinct account of their analysis of the rise of capitalism, consult Marx, Engels, Manifesto, pp. 41-47.

⁵Ibid., pp. 47-48.

⁶Ibid., pp. 48-49.

⁷K. Marx, F. Engels, The German Ideology (Moscow, 1964), p. 56.

⁸Marx, Engels, Manifesto, pp. 51-55.

⁹Marx, Author's Preface, p. 372.

¹⁰Marx, Engels, Ideology, p. 46.

¹¹K. Marx, "Moralising Critique and Criticising Morality. A Contribution to the German Cultural History. Against Carl Herzen," in Z. A. Jordan, Karl Marx: Economy, Class and Social Revolution (New York, 1971), p. 286.

¹²K. Marx, "The Holy Family," in T. B. Bottomore, M. Rubel, Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy (London, 1961), p. 63.

¹³K. Marx, "Capital, I," in Jordan, Karl Marx, p. 293.

¹⁴Marx, Engels, Manifesto, p. 73.

¹⁵H. Marcuse, Reason and Revolution (New York, 1954), p. 319.

¹⁶Marx, Engels, Ideology, pp. 90-91

¹⁷Marx, Engels, Manifesto, pp. 93-94.

¹⁸K. Marx, "Letter on the Economic Development of Russia (1877)," K. Marx, F. Engels, The Russian Menace to Europe, edited by P. W. Blackstock, B. F. Hoselitz (Glencoe, 1952), p. 217.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 217.

²⁰K. Marx, "Letter on the Russian Village Community (1881)," Russian Menace, p. 213.

²¹F. Engels, "Russia and the Social Revolution (1873)," Russian Menace, p. 213.

²²F. Engels, "Russia and the Social Revolution Reconsidered," Russian Menace, p. 233.

²³K. Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy," in F. L. Bender, Karl Marx: Essential Writings (New York, 1972), p. 236.

²⁴F. Engels, "To Joseph Bloch," in R. V. Tucker, Selected Writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (New York, 1967), p. 640.

²⁵For a fuller analysis of the origins of this phenomenon, consult J. D. White, "The First Pravda and the Russian Marxist Tradition," Soviet Studies, No. 2, 1974, pp. 185-188.

²⁶Discussing the evolution of Russian Marxism in this period, L. D. Trotsky perceptively argued that "in its struggle with Populism, Russian Marxism, demonstrating the identity of the laws of development for all countries, not infrequently fell into a dogmatic [determinist] mechanisation...." L. D. Trotsky, The History of the Russian Revolution, 1 (New York, 1936), p. 471.

²⁷S. Baron, "Feudalism or the Asiatic Mode of Production: Alternative Interpretations of Russian History," Windows on the Past, edited by S. Baron (Bloomington, 1976), p. 27.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 25-26. Also consult K. Wittfogel, Oriental Despotism (New Haven, 1957), chapter 9, especially pp. 372-374.

²⁹Cited in Wittfogel, Despotism, pp. 375-376.

³⁰Ibid., p. 375. Baron, Feudalism, p. 27.

³¹Baron, Feudalism, pp. 26-27.

³²Wittfogel, Despotism, pp. 391-392.

³³For a discussion of Lenin's position on this question, consult ibid., pp. 378-380, 389-400.

³⁴"Beseda s Plekhanovym," Nashe Slovo, No. 22, 1915.

³⁵Cited in L. Haimson, The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism (Cambridge, 1955), p. 110.

³⁶In his speech at the International Workers' Congress (the Second International), held in Paris in July, 1889, Plekhanov sternly concluded that "the revolutionary movement in Russia will triumph only as a working-class movement or else it will never triumph!" G. V. Plekhanov, Selected Philosophical Works, 1 (London, 1961), p. 454.

³⁷M. N. Pokrovskii, Sem' let proletarskoi diktatury (Moscow, 1924), p. 27.

³⁸N. Osinsky, Stroitel'stvo sotsializma (Moscow, 1918), p. 5.

³⁹Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁰N. I. Bukharin, Economics of the Transformation Period (New York, 1971), pp. 53-57.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 64.

⁴²N. Valentinov, "Sut' bol'shevizma v izobrazhenii Iu. Piatakova," Novyi Zhurnal, LII, 1958, p. 149.

⁴³R. Luxemburg, "The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in German Social Democracy," in Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, edited by Mary-Alice Waters (New York, 1970), p. 269.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 268-269.

⁴⁵V. A. Shteinberg, "P. Stuchka i ego rol' v bor'be za torzhestvo leninskoi natsional'noi politiki," Filosofskie nuaki. Nauchnye doklady vysshei shkoly, No. 2, 1964, p. 87.

⁴⁶P. I. Stuchka, K kharakteristike latyshchikh sotsial-demokratov - "Men'shevikov" (Moscow, 1920), p. 3.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁸Iu. Krumin, "Za bol'shevistskuiu istoriiu Sovetskoi Latvii," *Istoriik Marksist*, Nos. 2-3, 1935, p. 26. Also consult V. Mishke, "Podgotovka oktiabria v Latvii," *Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia*, No. 1, 1928, p. 38, where he claimed that "the economic development and class relationships in Latvia were more ripe for the 'growing over' (*pererastanie*) of the February bourgeois-democratic revolution into socialist revolution than in backward Russia."

⁴⁹Cited in E. Ripa, "P. Stuchka o revoliutsii 1905-1907 godov v Latvii," in P. Stuchka: *revoliutsioner, myslitel', i gosudarstvennyi deiatel'*, edited by G. I. Kurpnek (Riga, 1965), p. 81.

⁵⁰"Konferentsiia kommunisticheskikh organizatsii okkupirovannykh oblastei," *Pravda*, November 21, 1918. See the speech of the representative of the newly formed Communist Party of Lithuania.

⁵¹N. Valentinov, *Encounters with Lenin* (Oxford, 1962), p. 100. L. D. Trotsky also denied that the success of socialist revolution "automatically [depended] on the technical development and resources of a country." In fact, he argued, in much the same vein as Lenin, that "the attempt to define in advance what proportion of the whole population must be proletarian at the moment of the conquest of political power [was] a fruitless task." He maintained that the scale of industry, as well as its concentration and that of the proletariat too, was an equally vital factor which had to be taken into consideration in estimating the potential of a country for socialist revolution: the larger the scale and the greater the concentration of its industry, the greater its prospects for socialist revolution. Building on this premise, he concluded that "the political role of the proletariat is the more important in proportion as large-scale production dominates small production, industry dominates agriculture and the town dominates the country...." L. D. Trotsky, "Results and Prospects," *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects* (London, 1962), p. 195; pp. 226-227. Moreover, as early as 1905 he contended that in the Russian Empire, despite its relative backwardness, there existed a concentrated, large-scale industrial base and, the product of this, an equally concentrated, politically conscious proletariat, sufficient for socialist revolution. Indeed, he insisted that any revolutionary struggle against tsardom would develop into such a revolution. He believed that the Russian middle class itself was either too weak, or too dependent on the autocracy, to fight and successfully to overthrow the Romanovs and subsequently to set up its own bourgeois-democratic state. The proletariat, in his opinion, was the only class which could lead the revolution. Once it had conquered power, he continued, it would find itself unable to limit its actions to bourgeois reforms, but would be compelled to introduce socialist measures. *Ibid.*, pp. 180-183; 191-193; 195-200. For a lengthy, detailed, yet clear account of Trotsky's theory - of "permanent revolution" - that relative economic backwardness made socialist revolution inevitable in countries such as the Russian Empire, which had just started on the path of industrialisation and modernisation, consult B. Knei-Paz, *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky* (Oxford, 1978), especially chapters 2-4.

⁵²V. I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done," Collected Works, 5 (Moscow, 1961), p. 467.

⁵³Sed'maia (aprel'skaia) vserossiiskaia konferentsiia R.S.D.R.P.(b.), april' 1917 goda, Protokoly (Moscow, 1958), p. 112.

⁵⁴V. I. Lenin, "Once Again on the Trade Unions," Collected Works, 32 (Moscow, 1965), p. 83.

⁵⁵Cited in Haimson, Origins, p. 10. For a more detailed account of Chernyshevskii's thought, and the sources of his inspiration, among other works consult: ibid., especially pp. 97-104; and N. Valentinov, The Early Years of Lenin (Ann Arbor, 1969), pp. 122-138 and pp. 266-267.

⁵⁶For Lenin's acknowledgement of his debt to Chernyshevskii, see Valentinov, Early Years, pp. 194-196.

⁵⁷G. Wetter, Dialectical Materialism (New York, 1963), p. 67.

⁵⁸V. V. Oreshkin, Voprosy imperializma v rabotakh bol'shevikov-lenintsev: dooktiabr'skii period (Moscow, 1968), p. 165.

⁵⁹M. N. Pokrovskii appears to have been one exception. Until the early 1930's he did not consider imperialism to be related necessarily to the economic developments which had occurred within capitalist countries. He defined the characteristics of imperialism in the following manner: "... high tariff barriers, which make the territory of a country the monopoly property of native industry, whether it is syndicalised or not, and, on the other hand - the desire to extend these tariff barriers as far as possible, the desire to incorporate within these boundaries as much territory as possible." Cited in K. N. Tarnovskii, Sovetskaia istoriografiia rossiiskogo imperializma (Moscow, 1964), p. 14.

⁶⁰Both Bukharin and Lenin based their theories of imperialism on an analysis of capitalism in its "latest phase of... development." See V. I. Lenin, "Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism," Collected Works, 22 (Moscow, 1964), p. 195. Other leading Bolshevik theoreticians, such as I. I. Skvortsov-Stepanov, N. M. Lukin, Ia. M. Sverdlov, V. P. Nogin and G. I. Oppokov (Lomov), proceeded in the same manner. For a competent discussion of their studies of imperialism, consult Oreshkin, Imperializma, especially pp. 95-145.

⁶¹N. I. Bukharin, Imperialism and World Economy (New York, 1929; reprinted in London, 1972), pp. 64-65. Most of the following account of the internal economic sources of imperialism has been taken from the analysis presented by Bukharin, who, in common with most of his fellow Marxists - Luxemburg was to prove an exception -, developed his theory

on the basis of ideas first expounded by R. Hilferding in Finance Capital, published in 1910. Lenin certainly disagreed with a number of the conclusions which Bukharin drew from his researches, yet he largely accepted Bukharin's explanation of the causes of imperialism. In 1917, Lenin declared: "In my draft [of a revised party programme] five basic distinguishing features of imperialism are presented: (1) capitalist monopoly associations; (2) the fusion of banking and industrial capital; (3) the export of capital to foreign countries; (4) the territorial partition of the globe, already completed; (5) the partition of the globe among international economic trusts.... In Comrade Sokol'nikov's draft we actually find the same five basic features, so that on the question of imperialism there is apparently complete agreement within our Party - as was to be expected, for the practical propaganda of our Party on this question, both oral and printed, has long since, from the very beginning of the revolution, shown the complete unanimity of all the Bolsheviks on this fundamental question." V. I. Lenin, "Revision of the Party Programme," Collected Works, 26 (Moscow, 1964), pp. 163-164. The analysis of the Bolsheviks' theories of imperialism to be presented in the next chapter will prove that there was no such "complete unanimity".

⁶²Bukharin, Imperialism, p. 71.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 70-74.

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 81-82.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 96-97. See too Lenin, Imperialism, pp. 240-245.

⁶⁶Bukharin, Imperialism, p. 114.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 84-87. See too Lenin, Imperialism, pp. 258-259.

⁶⁸Bukharin, Imperialism, p. 133. See too Lenin, Imperialism, p. 205.

⁶⁹Bukharin, Imperialism, pp. 159-160.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 133.

⁷¹K. B. Radek, "Theses and Resolution of the Editorial Board of Gazeta Robotnicza, Organ of the Regional Presidium of the Social Democracy of Poland and Lithuania," in O. Gankin, H. Fisher, The Bolsheviks and the World War (Stanford, 1940), p. 517.

⁷²Luxemburg, Junius Pamphlet, p. 325.

⁷³"Konferentsiia kommunistov okkupirovannykh oblastei: Rezoliutsiia po natsional'nomu voprosu," Zhizn' Natsional'nostei, No. 1, 1918, p. 4.

⁷⁴Bukharin, Imperialism, p. 86.

⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 137-138.

⁷⁶For an account of the views of Lomov and Lukin, consult Oreshkin, Imperializma, pp. 137-148. Regarding Safarov, see G. I. Safarov, Natsional'nyi vopros i proletariat (Petrograd, 1922), p. 138, where he argued that the centralisation and regulation of the economy that had developed in the Russian Empire during the war had made a socialist, rather than a bourgeois-democratic revolution possible.

⁷⁷Consult Oreshkin, Imperializma, especially pp. 139-143.

⁷⁸N. I. Bukharin, "Russkaia revoliutsiia i ee sud'ba," Spartak No. 1, 1917, p. 9.

⁷⁹N. I. Bukharin, "Gosudarstvennyi kapitalizm i sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia," Spartak, No. 2, 1917, p. 11; and "Ekonomicheskii razval i voina," Spartak, No. 3, 1917, pp. 5-6.

⁸⁰V. M. Smirnov, "Regulirovanie proizvodstva i kontr-revoliutsiia," Spartak, No. 5, 1917, pp. 16-17.

⁸¹G. I. Safarov, "Dve diktatury," Spartak, No. 10, 1917, p. 27.

⁸²Osinsky, Stroitel'stvo, pp. 6-7.

⁸³Ibid., p. 7.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 19.

⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 19-20.

⁸⁶R. Luxemburg, Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky from 1896 to 1918, edited by Luise Kautsky (New York, 1925), letter 91, p. 207.

⁸⁷K. B. Radek, Piat' let Kominterna (Moscow, 1924), pp. 25-30.

⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 25-26.

⁸⁹P. I. Stuchka, "Demokraticheskii tsentralizm," V bor'be za oktiabr' (Riga, 1960), pp. 135-136.

⁹⁰V. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas, "Bor'ba za sovetskuiu vlast' v Litve i zapadnoi Belorussii (konets 1918g. i nachalo 1919g.)," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 1, 1931, p. 72.

⁹¹V. I. Lenin, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-determination," Collected Works, 22 (Moscow, 1964), p. 143.

⁹²V. I. Lenin, "Several Theses," Collected Works, 21 (Moscow, 1964), p. 402.

⁹³V. I. Lenin, "On the Two Lines in the Revolution," ibid., pp. 419-420.

⁹⁴Lenin, Self-determination, p. 151.

⁹⁵Lenin, Imperialism, p. 232.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 259.

⁹⁷V. I. Lenin, "Draft Theses, March 4 (17), 1917," Collected Works, 23 (Moscow, 1964), p. 290.

⁹⁸V. I. Lenin, "Letters from Afar. First Letter. The First Stage of the Revolution," ibid., p. 308.

⁹⁹V. I. Lenin, "Letters from Afar. Fifth Letter. The Tasks Involved in the Building of the Revolutionary Proletarian State," ibid., p. 341.

¹⁰⁰V. I. Lenin, "The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution," Collected Works, 24 (Moscow, 1964), p. 24

¹⁰¹Cited in N. Maiorskii, N. El'vov, "K voprosu o kharaktere i dvizhu-shchikh silakh Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 11, 1927, p. 37. These historians argued that Lenin justified socialist revolution in Russia on the grounds that once a certain "minimum level of capitalist development" had been attained the transition to socialism was possible. See pp. 34-35.

¹⁰²V. I. Lenin, "Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power," Collected Works, 26 (Moscow, 1964), p. 106.

¹⁰³Radek, Piat' let, p. 26.

¹⁰⁴N. I. Bukharin, "The Imperialist Pirate State," in Gankin, Fisher, The Bolsheviks, p. 238.

¹⁰⁵Bukharin, Economics, pp. 165-166. He apparently first mentioned this theory directly in "Struktura mirovogo kapitalizma," Narodnoe Khoziaistvo, No. 10, 1918, p. 5. For a similar explanation of the reason for the outbreak of socialist revolution in Russia, consult A. Lomov (G. I. Oppokov), Razlozhenie kapitalizma i organizatsiia kommunizma (Moscow, 1918), p. 65.

¹⁰⁶V. I. Lenin, Sed'moi Ekstrennyi S'ezd R.K.P.(b.), mart 1918
goda, Stenograficheskii otchet (Moscow, 1962), p. 12.

Chapter 3.

IMPERIALISM AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION.

The conflict over the divergent national policies which the "left" Bolsheviks and the revolutionary Marxists of Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, on the one hand, and V. I. Lenin, on the other, advocated that revolutionary Marxists should follow was not based on any fundamental difference of opinion on the ultimate position which nations would occupy in the socialist society of the future. On the contrary, both parties envisioned socialist society in its final form as a supra-national, global system in which nations would become assimilated. Rather the debate which took place between them was of a tactical order, focussing on the respective national policies which they believed that revolutionary Marxists should pursue in the epoch of imperialism. Defending a national policy which they claimed to be consistent with the spirit, if not the letter of Marx's and Engels' teachings, the "left" Bolsheviks and their Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian co-thinkers opposed any deviation from a strict, class internationalist policy in the direction of concessions to narrowly nationalist aspirations. They considered that such concessions were redundant in the imperialist epoch, when socialist revolution had become ripe on an international scale. At the same time, moreover, they feared that any support for, or even toleration of nationalism would so confuse the workers that they would fail to realise where their true interests lay and, consequently, that the international socialist movement would be divided and weakened. Lenin, however, came to perceive the powerful revolutionary potential of national movements, particularly in the Russian Empire,¹ and the possibility that the Bolsheviks could capture them as allies in their own struggle to overthrow the autocracy, and later the Provisional Government. Therefore, he was prepared in the short run to make concessions to national movements, which, paradoxically, he too argued were true to the spirit of Marxism, in order to secure their support for the Bolsheviks' seizure of power. At the same time, he never lost sight of his own long term socialist objectives which by their

cosmopolitan character were ultimately contradictory to nationalism. The purpose of this chapter will be to analyse the divergent national policies defended by these Marxists, particularly as they related to their theories of imperialism.

It will prove to be instructive first to examine briefly K. Marx's and F. Engels' own views on the question of nationality. An analysis of their theory of nationality, as far as they elaborated one - it appears that they never constructed a comprehensive and definitive theory on this subject ² - will aid in discovering the roots of their self-avowed internationalism, a step which will later be of use in understanding that the internationalism manifested by the "left" Bolsheviks and their Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian comrades was not derived directly from the "founding fathers", but from their own studies of imperialism. Moreover, this analysis will also reveal certain seemingly divergent strands in Marx's and Engels' approach to the national question, which later helped permit their self-professed followers to espouse contradictory national policies, while at the same time attempting to justify them by appeals to what they claimed would have been the "founding fathers'" position in their circumstances.

Marx's and Engels' approach to the whole question of nationality was basically a derivative of their theory of the evolution of capitalism. They regarded nations as historical phenomena which had developed only with the growth of capitalism; they had not existed since the dawn of human history. While a common language, common territory and common tradition may have been necessary conditions for nationhood, in themselves they were insufficient to account for the formation of nations. After all, peoples who shared these common characteristics had existed for centuries before emerging as an integrated nation which aspired to establish its own independent state, separate from other nations. Lacking in this combination of factors was the dynamic element which Marx and Engels isolated as essential for the creation of a nation. This motive force, in their opinion, was capitalism, which overcame the feudal barriers and particularist loyalties separating related national groups. They emphasised that the economic cohesion which resulted from capitalist development was the fundamental cause of the integration of nations into functioning entities.

According to Marx and Engels, the growth of capitalism had led to the concentration and centralisation of the means of production, and of population, in large industrial centres, and to the expansion of commodity production. This increasing production and exchange of commodities, typical of the capitalist mode of production, required the formation of large, united markets, freed from provincial separatism, internal taxes and tariffs. These demands of trade, and the improved communications which were consequently required, overcame the disunity of nationally akin groups which had existed under feudalism and became the catalyst of their integration into active and conscious nations.

Marx and Engels described this process:

The bourgeoisie keeps more and more doing away with the scattered state of the population, of the means of production, and of property. It has agglomerated population, centralised means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary consequence of this was political centralisation. Independent, or but loosely connected, provinces with separate interests, laws, governments and systems of taxation became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class-interest, one frontier and one customs-tariff.³

Parenthetically, this statement highlights another fundamental feature of Marx's and Engels' theory of nationality. While recognising that a nation was composed of a number of classes, they emphasised the leading role of the bourgeoisie in its formation. They believed that the bourgeoisie was the class which was interested in the creation of large, united territories for the sale of its commodities and, therefore, that it was the political force behind the establishment of national markets to satisfy its needs. Moreover, to maintain the inviolability of the national market which it had formed and thus to secure its own future development, the bourgeoisie set up its own independent political and economic unit, the nation state, separate and protected from competing nations organised in their own states.⁴

Marx and Engels, however, did not regard this stage in historical development as final. Just as capitalism and its attendant nation states had replaced feudalism and the narrow provincialism characteristic of it, so too capitalism and its nation states were destined to be replaced by a higher form of society. They maintained that as

capitalism continued its inexorable growth it would require ever-expanding markets for the sale of the commodities that it produced. Hence the nation states formed in the first flush of capitalist development would after a time become too small to meet the demands of continuing capitalist expansion. To satisfy these growing needs these states would have to expand too - either by acquiring colonies, or by absorbing smaller nations. Marx and Engels welcomed this trend of capitalist development towards greater economic centralisation as progressive, for they considered that it was laying the foundations both for the creation of an international proletarian movement and for the eventual organisation of an international socialist economy.⁵

Marx and Engels gave a clear explanation of what they anticipated that the ultimate outcome of this process of capitalist expansion would be. Apparently, they saw the growth of capitalism as a means of uniting men, who would have become almost wholly proletarianised, on a global scale. Then they believed that the conditions would be ripe for the proletariat to carry out a world revolution and establish a universal communist society. Consequently, nations in Marx's and Engels' theory of history were just building-blocks on the path to this final end, admittedly a stage above feudal separatism yet themselves limited and doomed. They outlined their prognosis in The German Ideology:

... only with this universal development of the productive forces is a universal intercourse between men established, which produces in all nations simultaneously the phenomenon of the "propertyless" mass (universal competition), makes each nation dependent on the revolutions of the others, and finally has put world-historical, empirically universal individuals in the place of local ones. Without this, (1) communism could only exist as a local event; (2) the forces of intercourse themselves could not have developed as universal, hence intolerable powers: they would have remained home bred conditions, surrounded by superstition; and (3) each extension of intercourse would abolish local communism. Empirically, communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples "all at once" and simultaneously, which presupposes the universal development of productive forces and the world intercourse bound up with communism....⁶

Therefore, while their theory of capitalist growth strongly influenced their position on the national question, it is always necessary to bear in mind that they were basically concerned with the integration

of men, that is, of the international proletariat, which would result from this process. In general, their position on the national question was an offshoot of their desire to further this integration, as a prerequisite for the eventual establishment of socialism on a global scale.

Nevertheless, it is quite clear that this economic determinist strand in Marx's and Engels' theory of history was a fundamental determinant of their national policy. By the middle of the nineteenth century capitalism had grown to such a degree that they doubted the economic viability of the independent states which the small nations of Europe aspired to set up. They feared that such small nation states would be unable to provide a sufficiently broad territorial foundation to satisfy the appetite of capitalism for ever larger markets. Moreover, they believed that to destroy the existing multi-national states in order to grant self-determination to nations irrespective of their size - they scathingly titled this proposition "the principle of nationalities" - would be reactionary. By reversing the centralising tendencies of capitalist development such a policy would destroy the existing large-scale economic units, and, by implication, the integration of the proletariat which had resulted from this, which they considered to be an advance on the path towards socialism. Accordingly, they limited their support of self-determination to the large "historic nations" of Europe, notably the Italians, the Poles, the Germans and the Hungarians, which would be able to promote the further development of capitalism, and the growth and unity of the proletariat, which in turn would foster the eventual victory of socialism. In fact, Marx and Engels were quite prepared to ignore the demands of small nations for self-determination where they believed that this would endanger their vision of historical development.⁷

While this discussion of Marx's and Engels' theory of nationality has emphasised that much of it was founded on their views of economic development, it would be mistaken to conclude that their own position on the question of which nations should be granted self-determination was in every instance based solely on narrowly economic determinist criteria. Ceteris paribus, they did favour the creation of ever larger economic units, which they saw as progressive towards the

creation of an ultimately united world economy. Yet the "other things" were not always "equal" in their eyes. On occasion, political considerations led them to support the division of existing, large multinational states when they believed that such a course of action would ultimately redound to the advantage of the socialist cause.⁸

The best illustration of the political criteria that Marx and Engels applied in justification of the division of such states was revealed in their defence of national self-determination for the Poles. The position that they adopted on the Polish question clearly demonstrates that in specific circumstances the "founding fathers" were prepared to sacrifice the immediate advantages of economic unification - the three sectors of the former Polish state had by then become incorporated, economically and politically, into the three partitioning powers - if this sacrifice would otherwise further the cause of revolution. At the same time, an analysis of their views on this issue will also focus on an additional factor which they considered to be a basic and inalienable precondition for the successful development of the international proletarian movement.

There were a number of tactical reasons why Marx and Engels consistently supported the restoration of an independent Polish state. First, they maintained that the Germans were bound to the arch reactionary Holy Alliance - in their eyes this was an invention of tsarist Russia - by the partition of Poland. While the Germans helped suppress the Polish revolutionary movement and retained part of Polish territory, then they would remain bound to Russia and the defence of reactionary Russian policy and, consequently, they would be unable to destroy completely the patriarchal feudal absolutism which existed in their own country. They were convinced that "the restoration of a democratic Poland [was] the first condition for the restoration of a democratic Germany,"⁹ which was one of their primary aims. Second, they saw a re-established Polish state as a barrier against reactionary Russian intervention in West and Central Europe to suppress revolutionary movements there.¹⁰ Third, they believed that independence was a prerequisite of any revolutionary social change in Poland itself. They argued that the Polish aristocracy had used the Partitions to prevent social revolution in Poland; therefore, they saw an inseparable

connection between Polish independence, the overthrow of the reactionary aristocracy, and agrarian revolution.¹¹ Finally, they feared that the continuing partition of Poland was an obstacle to the development of the international revolutionary movement. They argued that this was effectively dividing the proletariat of the partitioning powers from their Polish brothers, for the Polish workers would not distinguish between the different classes of their oppressor nations and, consequently, they would support their own bourgeoisie in a national rather than a class struggle. Therefore, in order to unite the proletariat internationally and to allow the development of a genuine socialist movement in "Poland" it was vital to re-establish an independent Polish state.¹²

This last factor is worthy of some expansion for it reveals a cardinal belief of Marx and Engels regarding proletarian internationalism. While they always remained staunch internationalists, committed to the promotion of international socialism, at the same time they were firmly convinced that a true international revolutionary movement of the proletariat was "possible only among [free and] independent nations."¹³ They were afraid that national oppression, and the national antagonisms arising from this, would so blind the proletariat of an oppressed nation to its basic class interests, which Marx and Engels maintained were fundamentally the same as those of its fellow proletarians elsewhere, that is, they were supra-national, that it would follow its national bourgeoisie along the path of chauvinism. In such situations Marx and Engels believed that the proletariat of the oppressor nation had to support the right of the oppressed nation to self-determination, for only such a policy would free it of all charges of chauvinism and therefore permit it to win the confidence of the nationally oppressed proletariat and so ensure the solidarity of the international socialist movement.¹⁴ In a very real sense, it is possible to interpret this dictate as a necessary means, in Marx's and Engels' opinion, to guarantee the international unity of the proletariat, which they considered to be being prepared objectively by the economic expansion of capitalism.

Although Marx and Engels took such political considerations into account when framing their policy on any particular national question,

there is little doubt of the ultimate fate of nations which was predicted by their theory of historical evolution. Capitalism, which had given birth to integrated nations, as it continued to grow led to an increasing internationalisation of economic life which was inexorably breaking down national barriers and integrating the proletariat into one united world class. This same capitalist development was at the same time creating the prerequisites for socialist revolution, which, in turn, would intensify this trend to the internationalisation of society. Moreover, this revolution would destroy all economic exploitation which Marx and Engels saw as the source of all national oppression and antagonisms. As a result of this, the international proletariat, which itself had no interest in defending national distinctions, would be free to establish a cosmopolitan society consistent with its presumed supra-national class interests. In The Communist Manifesto they unequivocally outlined this vision:

The Communists are further reproached with desiring to abolish countries and nationality.

The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got....

National differences and antagonisms between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto.

The supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster. United action, of the leading civilised countries at least, is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat.

In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put to an end, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put to an end. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end.¹⁵

At first sight, an analysis of the arguments presented by the "left" Bolsheviks and the revolutionary Marxists of Poland, Latvia and Lithuania against granting self-determination to oppressed nations can lead to the simple conclusion that their national policy was heavily influenced by the determinist strand in Marx's and Engels' own theory of nationality. They too came to believe that the development of capitalism had rendered nation states obsolescent, and that to bow to the nationalist demands of the bourgeoisie and break up existing

large multi-national states to satisfy them would be reactionary - although it should be borne in mind that from their origins, before any coherent and general theories about the obsolescence of nation states had been fully developed, these Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian Marxists had opposed nationalism as reactionary on political grounds, fearing that it would distract the proletariat from the pursuit of its true international class interests.¹⁶ Preservation of existing large capitalist states intact as the bases for the transition to the united international socialist society of the future and rejection of any concessions to national prejudice - such were to become the planks of the platform of these Marxists on the national question.

While this national programme does bear a striking resemblance to that of Marx and Engels themselves, these Marxists never claimed that they had derived it directly from the teachings of the "founding fathers". In fact, they had no hesitation in dismissing as no longer valid a number of the Marx's and Engels' own prescriptions on the national question, most notably the latter's defence of self-determination for Poland. They insisted, however, that their own policies were consistent with the spirit and principles of Marxism, as applied to the radically changed conditions that existed in their own epoch. They contended that with the evolution of industrial capitalism into finance capitalism, or imperialism, it had become necessary to revise policies appropriate for the earlier epoch but now anachronistic, including Marx's and Engels' own national policies. In 1915, N. I. Bukharin, then a leading "leftist" theoretician in the Bolshevik party, based his criticism of Lenin's support for self-determination for oppressed nationalities on this very argument:

What? The Sixties of the last century are "instructive" for the twentieth century? But this precisely is the root of our logical disagreements with Kautsky, that they (sic) "instruct" us with examples for the pre-imperialist epoch. Thus you advocate a dualistic conception: in regard to the defence of the fatherland you stand on the basis of the present day, while in regard to the slogan of self-determination you stand on the position of the past century.¹⁷

This same argument was to become a common theme of these Bolsheviks in their opposition to Lenin's national policy. Another leading "left" Bolshevik, G. L. Piatakov, a close associate of Bukharin, argued in

early 1917 that "the demand for [national] independence has been taken from another historical epoch [and] it is reactionary, for it wants to turn history back."¹⁸ In 1915, K. B. Radek, then a leading member of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, justified the national policy pursued by his fellow Polish Marxists in much the same vein, insisting that "any references to Marx's position with regard to national questions in the period 1848-1871 have not the slightest value." Economic, social and political conditions had changed since then and it was not in the spirit of Marxism "to formulate an attitude towards concrete questions in terms of 'abstract rights'."¹⁹ R. Luxemburg agreed with Radek's judgement, asserting that "in the era of unchained imperialism there can be no more national wars. [The defence of] national interests serve only as a means of deception, to make the labouring masses of people subservient to their deadly enemy, imperialism."²⁰ The Latvian and Lithuanian Marxists adopted basically the same defence of their position on the national question, subscribing to the premise that "the period of national wars and the formation of national states ended with the Franco-Prussian war in the period of the 1870's."²¹

On the basis of these claims it appears that a closer examination of the views of these Marxists on the nature of the imperialist epoch is necessary in order to understand their opposition to national self-determination. This task, however, will first of all require a digression into the evolution of neo-Marxist theories of imperialism in the twentieth century, since a number of the conclusions drawn from these theories were assimilated by the revolutionary Marxists under discussion here.

Neo-Marxist theories of imperialism, that is, theories that purportedly were based on Marxist principles, which themselves had been revised and brought up to date to take into account developments within capitalism since Marx's death - there is no comprehensive theory of modern imperialism in Marx's own writings -, first appeared in the first decade of the twentieth century. Initially, they were the product largely of the Austrian and German Marxists, such as R. Hilferding, K. Kautsky and O. Bauer. It seems, however, that the original intent of these Marxists, especially of Hilferding, was not deliberately to

produce a theory of imperialism, but rather to explain in Marxist terms the recent growth of national monopolies, the role of the banks in the formation of cartels, trusts, syndicates and other monopolistic organisations, and the relationship between these developments and the growth of protectionism and the export of capital.²²

Hilferding was among the first Marxists to provide a comprehensive theoretical analysis of modern imperialism, an analysis which was important not only for its originality but also because much of it was accepted and incorporated into the theories of imperialism produced by such eminent revolutionary Marxists as Bukharin and Lenin. Hilferding's own theory of imperialism was in large part the offshoot of his efforts to revise Marx's analysis of capitalism to account for the developments in the system mentioned above. His explanation of imperialism was based on his theory of finance capital, the fundamental features of which have already been discussed in the preceding chapter. In fact, Hilferding had been the first leading Marxist theoretician to provide a coherent theory of contemporary capitalism, as it had grown and evolved since Marx first analysed it. He was the author of the very concept of finance capital, which most Marxists of that time, both the revolutionaries and the revisionists, assimilated into their own thinking. While Hilferding was most concerned to explain the changes which had occurred in the structure of national capitalism, his studies quite naturally led him to offer an account of imperialism.

In essence, Hilferding considered imperialism to be the logical outcome of the emergence of finance capital itself, that is, the combination of banking and industrial capital in the shape of huge trusts, cartels or syndicates. He contended that the cartelisation of industry had limited the investment opportunities in them, since the regulation of production to maintain prices and, consequently, profits made extra capacity unnecessary. At the same time, investment in the remaining uncartelised industries had also become unprofitable, since the rate of profit in them was considerably lower than in the cartelised industries. Yet while domestic investment opportunities had diminished radically, capital had continued to accumulate. He maintained that this development, taken in its entirety, had if not caused then made much more

urgent the export of capital overseas, to less developed countries where it could be profitably invested since the rate of profit was higher there.²³

Moreover, he believed that the increasing trend to protectionism, designed to protect the home market for the national monopolies, was an additional stimulus to the export of capital. Tariff barriers provided a barrier to the export of goods by the cartels, which was essential if the latter were to keep their production costs down, and profits up, by maintaining their scale of production now that this had been curtailed domestically by the increase in prices associated with cartel policy. The investment of capital overseas meant that the cartels could avoid the obstacle of tariffs by producing within the overseas country itself - and so preserve their levels of production, and their profits.²⁴

However, the export of capital itself, according to Hilferding, also had political effects. The overseas territories in which capital had been invested had become annexed by the metropolitan finance capitalist state. He argued that the cartels were driven to annexation in order to maintain their monopoly in these foreign markets by erecting tariff barriers to keep their rivals out, to secure the raw materials that existed there, and also to protect their investments. He was convinced that the magnates of finance capital had sufficient power within their own state to compel it to pursue such a predatory policy of expansion.²⁵

Hilferding pointed out yet one more consequence of the export of capital. He believed that capitalism itself was becoming internationalised in the process, by stimulating capitalist development in the backward countries in which capital was invested. Moreover, he maintained that the very export of capital, while initially provoked by the prospect of higher profits overseas, was leading to the equalisation of the profit rates among countries, or, as he stated, it "was instrumental in levelling out national profit rates." By implication, this meant that capitalism in the previously under-developed areas of the world was advancing to catch up with that in the leading finance capitalist states, since according to the economic theory of Marxism the rate of profit "depends on the organic components of the capital,

that is, on the level which capitalist development has reached."²⁶

Consequently, it appears that Hilferding regarded imperialism itself as tending to create a global capitalist system, at a relatively equal level of development - and relatively equally prepared for socialism, since he regarded finance capitalism itself as a system which had led to an increasing regulation of the economy, and the elimination of much of the previous anarchy of production associated with industrial capitalism. The cartels, controlled by the banks, had been the means of achieving such an organisation within a national capitalist system, an organisation which was but a short step from socialism.²⁷ However, if imperialism, the policy of finance capitalism, was creating a similar system throughout the world, by equalising the differences between existing national economies, it seems plausible to posit that implicit in Hilferding's analysis was the belief that the preconditions for socialism were slowly but inexorably being established on an international scale.

Nevertheless, Hilferding and like-minded Marxists in Germany and Austria did not subscribe to the view that imperialism, and the rivalries among the leading capitalist powers that it produced, would inevitably lead to such an intensification of the contradictions of capitalism that a revolutionary upheaval, in which the proletariat would seize power and proceed to construct socialism, could not be avoided. Rather, it appears that they believed that the proletariat could accomplish the transition to socialism "relatively painlessly", that is, without the need for a violent revolution. Hilferding, in particular, considered that all the proletariat had to do was to take over the six largest banks in a country and then it would be in control of the economy, which it could reorganise on socialist principles²⁸ - a very different notion from that of the revolutionaries, such as Bukharin and Lenin, who called for the revolutionary destruction of the existing finance capitalist states as a necessary prelude to socialism.

K. Kautsky, who agreed with much of Hilferding's analysis of imperialism - while himself additionally emphasising that imperialist expansion was concerned mainly to secure the agricultural zones needed to provide the food and raw materials required by a rapidly expanding industrial society - maintained that imperialist rivalries need not

lead inevitably to an armed conflagration, which would produce the crisis that would provoke a proletarian revolution. On the contrary, he believed that it was quite possible that the imperialist powers would realise the "economic bankruptcy" of their continuing rivalries and conflict and, consequently, would agree to form some sort of "ultra-imperialist" federation to eliminate them. He clearly stated:

What Marx said of capitalism can also be applied to imperialism: monopoly creates competition and competition monopoly. The frantic competition of giant firms, giant banks and multi-millionaires obliged the great financial groups, who were absorbing the small ones, to think up the notion of a cartel. In the same way, the result of the World War between the great imperialist powers may be a federation of the strongest, who renounce their arms race.

Hence from a purely economic standpoint it is not impossible that capitalism may still live through another phase, the translation of cartellisation into foreign policy: a phase of ultra-imperialism, which of course we must struggle against as energetically as we do against imperialism, but whose perils lie in another direction, not in that of the arms race and the threat to world power.²⁹

Once this "ultra-imperialist" state, a sort of United States of Europe, had been established, a state, moreover, in which the prerequisites for socialism were mature as a result of the high degree of organisation and planning of the economy produced by finance capitalism, it appears that Kautsky believed that the proletariat could take it over peacefully, presumably by parliamentary means.³⁰

Many of the ideas elaborated by Hilferding and Kautsky were incorporated by the majority of revolutionary Marxists into their theories of imperialism. Nevertheless, while the revolutionaries agreed with certain of the conclusions of these revisionists on the nature of imperialism and its implications for the emergence of socialism, they rejected their prognosis that a peaceful path to socialism existed. On the contrary, they insisted that the contradictions within capitalism, particularly in its imperialist form, must lead to a revolutionary upheaval, in which it would be overthrown by the proletariat.

It is reasonable to start with a discussion of Bukharin's analysis of imperialism, since he was among the first of the revolutionary Marxists to produce a coherent theory to explain this phenomenon. He accepted much of Hilferding's analysis of imperialism,³¹ and agreed

that the basic source of imperialist expansion was the fact that capitalism, when it had evolved into finance capitalism, could no longer continue to function within the confines of existing national boundaries. Consequently, the search for profits had driven finance capitalist states to expand overseas in order to secure new territories in which to market their goods, find profitable investment outlets for the capital that was accumulating rapidly at home, and to guarantee the sources of raw materials required by their growing industries. In his opinion, the continuing development of capitalism required the creation of increasingly large, integrated economic units.³²

Moreover, he maintained that imperialism had accelerated dramatically the internationalisation of the world economy, a view which is at least consistent with, if not directly derived from Marx's and Engels' own thoughts on the effects of the growth of capitalism. In fact, he believed that in the imperialist epoch this process had reached that stage at which the world had become so economically united that it was no longer possible to consider events on a narrowly national scale. At the same time, he emphasised, as Hilferding before him had done, the trend towards the levelling of economic differences in the various capitalist countries of the world which accompanied the expansion of capitalism. He described this process:

The tendencies of modern development [imperialism] are highly conducive to the growth of international relations of exchange..., in that the industrialisation of the agrarian and semi-agrarian countries proceeds at an unbelievably quick tempo, a demand for foreign agricultural products is created in those countries, and the dumping policy of the cartels is given unusual impetus. The growth of the world market connections proceeds apace, tying up various sections of the world economy into one strong knot, bringing ever closer to each other hitherto "nationally" and economically secluded regions, creating an ever larger basis for world production in its new, higher, non-capitalist form....³³

Indeed, as earlier discussed, in 1915 Bukharin declared that these economic developments associated with the imperialist stage of capitalism had brought the leading capitalist powers to the level where "as far as the possibility of social production is concerned, the foremost countries are all on a comparatively equal level,"³⁴ that is, that the prerequisites for socialism were equally mature in them. Later, on the eve of the Bolshevik coup in 1917, he repeated that in the capitalist countries

of the world "the conditions for the struggle [for socialism] to a significant degree have been equalised by the levelling influence of imperialism and the world war,"³⁵ from which he concluded that the coming proletarian revolution could not but take place on an international scale.

In March, 1919, at the Eighth Party Congress, he expanded somewhat on this argument. Adding some detail to his analysis of the imperialist world, he postulated that it could be divided into two, and only two, main categories: the first embracing those countries which possessed a capitalist socio-economic structure, and the second including the colonies, where capitalism was still to develop and feudalism remained dominant. He continued that within the group of capitalist countries were included North America and Europe, including the Russian Empire, and that in these countries the preconditions for socialism had been created as a result of the preceding development of finance capitalism.³⁶

So far, however, there appears to be little difference between the views on imperialism defended by Bukharin, on the one hand, and Hilferding, and Kautsky, on the other. They generally agreed that the growth of finance capitalism had established the prerequisites for socialism, and on an international scale. Nevertheless, Bukharin took violent exception to the notion held by these revisionists that socialism could peacefully emerge from finance capitalism. He believed that once the world had been carved up by the major imperialist powers the rivalries between them would reach a crisis, in the shape of a war. The sufferings which this would impose on the proletariat would rouse it to overthrow the capitalist system before it could coalesce into a single united world, or even European trust, which the proletariat then could peacefully take over and transform into a planned socialist economy. He attacked Kautsky's theory in the following manner:

But is not the epoch of "ultra-imperialism" a real possibility after all, can it not be effected by the centralisation process? Will not the state capitalist trusts devour one another gradually until there comes into existence an all-embracing power which has conquered all the others? This possibility would be thinkable if we were to look at the social process as a purely mechanical one, without counting the forces that are hostile to the policy of imperialism. In reality, however, the wars that will follow each other on an ever larger scale must inevitably

result in a shifting of social forces. The centralisation process, looked at from the capitalist angle, will inevitably clash with a socio-political tendency that is antagonistic to the former. Therefore, it can by no means reach its logical end; it suffers collapse and achieves completion only in a new, purified, non-capitalist form. It is for this reason that Kautsky's theory is by no means realisable. It looks upon imperialism not as an inevitable accompaniment of capitalist development, but as upon one of the "dark sides" of capitalist development His concept implies a slurring over of the gigantic contradictions which rend asunder modern society, and in this respect it is a reformist concept.... The future of the world economy, as far as it is a capitalist economy, will not overcome its inherent lack of adaptation; on the contrary, it will keep on reproducing this lack of adaptation on an ever wider scale. These contradictions are actually harmonised in another production structure of the social organism - through a well planned socialist organisation of economic activities.³⁷

While denying Kautsky's vision of a united, ultra-imperialist European state, Bukharin did not reject out of hand his notion of the creation of a "United States of Europe" in some form. Apparently, he believed that the economic integration that was typically produced by imperialism was leading in this direction. However, he insisted that it was the task of the proletariat to complete this process in a revolutionary manner. At the Berne Conference of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party in February, 1915, he declared that "in reply to the imperialist unification of the countries from above, the proletariat must advance the slogan of socialist unification of countries from below - republican socialist states of Europe - as a political-juridical form of the socialist overturn."³⁸

On the basis of his analysis of the imperialist epoch, Bukharin developed a prognosis of the nature of the expected socialist revolution. He was convinced that this revolution, when it did break out, would spread quickly on an international scale. The workers, revolutionised by the miseries inflicted upon them in an imperialist war, would rise, destroy their finance capitalist states and establish an international socialist society, for which the prerequisites had matured. At the end of Imperialism and World Economy, his major theoretical treatise on this subject, he clearly outlined his vision of the scope of the coming socialist revolution:

The war severs the last chain that binds the workers to the masters, their slavish submission to the imperialist state. The last limitation of the proletariat's philosophy is being overcome: its clinging to the narrowness of the national state, its patriotism. The interests of the moment, the temporary advantage accruing to it from the imperialist robberies and from its connections with the imperialist state, become of secondary importance compared with the lasting and general interests of the class as a whole, with the idea of social revolution of the international proletariat which overthrows the dictatorship of finance capital with an armed hand, destroys its state apparatus and builds up a new power, a power of the workers against the bourgeoisie. In place of the idea of defending or extending the boundaries of the bourgeois state that bind the productive forces of world economy hand and foot, this power advances the slogan of abolishing state boundaries and merging all peoples into one socialist family.³⁹

Bukharin's theory of imperialism, and the vision which he derived from it of the eagerly anticipated socialist revolution as an international phenomenon sweeping across Europe, was widely accepted by many of his fellow Bolsheviks.⁴⁰ Piatakov, his old ally in the campaign against Lenin's support for national self-determination during the war years, was prominent among them. Piatakov too defended the view that the prerequisites for socialist revolution had matured on an international scale as a result of the developments of capitalism in its imperialist phase. He foresaw the creation of an international socialist society in the wake of this revolution.⁴¹ Indeed, during the war he had openly predicted, in a manner very similar to that of Bukharin, that socialism would conquer internationally:

We picture this process as the united action of proletarians of all countries, who break down the frontiers of the bourgeois state, who remove the frontier posts, who blow up national unity and establish class unity.⁴²

The revolutionary Polish Marxists' analysis of the characteristics of the imperialist world led them to basically the same conclusions as the "left" Bolsheviks regarding the nature of the anticipated socialist revolution - although Rosa Luxemburg's own particular theory of imperialism was rather different from that of Bukharin, and of most other revolutionary Marxists. Speaking for many of his fellow Poles, Radek, whose own views on imperialism were much the same as those of the "left" Bolsheviks, maintained that in Europe socialist revolution, "for which the economic conditions... [were] already ripe," would

break out on an international scale under the slogan, "away with frontiers," which had already been transcended by the consequences of imperialist developments - the colonies, however, were excluded from the orbit of immediate socialist revolution. Thereafter, an international socialist society and economy would be established, which would eliminate the contradictions of capitalism and open the way to further harmonious economic progress.⁴³

In retrospect, F. E. Dzierżyński implicitly confirmed that the S.D.K.P.iL had acted on this belief. He asserted that he and his comrades had been certain that socialist revolution would sweep across Europe in a mighty wave, with no protracted period of transition between the fall of capitalism and the successful establishment of an international socialist society. In 1925, he argued to this effect:

We believed that there could be no transitional period between capitalism and socialism and, consequently, that there was no need of independent states, since there would be no state organisation under socialism. We did not understand that there would be a rather long transitional period between capitalism and socialism, during which, under the dictatorship of the proletariat, classes and a proletarian state supported by the peasantry will exist side by side....⁴⁴

Luxemburg's theory of imperialism, as presented in her The Accumulation of Capital, was quite different from that generally subscribed to by her fellow revolutionaries, in that she did not consider the transformation of industrial capitalism into finance capitalism - marked by the growth of cartels, trusts and other monopolistic organisations - to be the source of imperialism.⁴⁵ Moreover, she did not dwell on the need to export capital as a stimulus to expansion. Rather, she insisted that imperialism was a phenomenon rooted in the very nature of capitalism itself.

At the basis of her theory was the postulate that capitalism could continue to grow only if there existed additional markets outside the capitalist system in which the capitalists could sell their commodities and so realise their surplus value. Without the availability of such markets the process of extended reproduction could not take place, since the demand for the goods of the capitalists would be insufficient. She declared that "the immediate and vital conditions for capital and its

accumulation is the existence of non-capitalist buyers of surplus value, which is decisive to this extent for the problem of capitalist accumulation."⁴⁶

She continued, however, that such markets could, and had been found. She considered the peasantry within a capitalist country, whom she regarded as petty commodity producers still not encompassed within the capitalist system, to be one potential market. The alternative market was, in her opinion, the exploitation of foreign countries which had not yet reached the capitalist stage of development. Capitalism, for the sake of its survival, was compelled to expand overseas. She argued:

Capital needs the means of production and the labour power of the whole globe for untrammelled accumulation; it cannot manage without the natural resources and the labour power of all territories. Seeing that the overwhelming majority of resources and labour power is in fact still in the orbit of pre-capitalist production - this being the historical milieu of accumulation - capital must go all out to obtain ascendancy over these territories and social organisations Capital will endeavour to establish dominance over these countries and societies.⁴⁷

Accordingly, she concluded that "imperialism is the political expression of the accumulation of capital in its competitive struggle for what remains still open of the non-capitalist environment."⁴⁸

Developing her argument, she maintained that as capitalism necessarily expanded into pre-capitalist economies it "assimilated" them, that is, they continuously and progressively were transformed into actual capitalist economies themselves.⁴⁹ Ultimately, she foresaw the creation of a united world capitalist economy, at which point capitalism, having exhausted the sources for the realisation of surplus value, could no longer continue.⁵⁰

She hastened to add, however, that capitalism would collapse before it had in fact established this single world economy. As imperialism developed, it would lead to increased tensions and rivalries among the leading capitalist powers as they frantically tried to absorb the remaining, yet rapidly diminishing non-capitalist areas of the world. The rise of militarism and the wars which would ensue from these rivalries would impose additional sufferings on the already exploited workers, sufferings which would impel them to "revolt

against the rule of capital" and create an international socialist society.⁵¹

Despite the differences between the theories of imperialism produced by Luxemburg and her comrades-in-arms, their conclusions were remarkably similar. She too believed that imperialism was that stage of capitalism at which the preconditions for socialist revolution were ripe. Moreover, she foresaw the coming socialist revolution as inevitably occurring on an international scale, since the preceding evolution of capitalism had laid the basis for "an harmonious and universal system of economy."⁵² In The Junius Pamphlet she stirringly proclaimed:

[The] brutal triumphant procession of capitalism through the world, accompanied by all means of force, of robbery, and of infamy, has one bright phase: it has created the premises for its own final overthrow, it has established the capitalist world rule upon which, alone, the socialist world revolution can follow.⁵³

The conclusions that the revolutionary Marxists of Latvia and Lithuania reached from their own studies of imperialism were the same as those of the "left" Bolsheviks and S.D.K.P.i.L. At the Conference of the Communist Organisations of the Occupied Territories, held in Moscow in October, 1918, they presented a brief account of their thinking on imperialism, and of its implications for socialist revolution. They too accepted that imperialism was the inevitable product of the need of capitalism to expand as it evolved into finance capitalism. This expansion had led, in their minds, to the internationalisation of the economy, and in fact had created in Europe a closely integrated socio-economic structure - just as they believed that Latvia and Lithuania themselves had earlier become "organically" integrated into the Russian Empire as a result of the development of capitalism there. They continued, moreover, that within Europe as a whole the prerequisites for socialism had matured. Consequently, they anticipated that socialist revolution, when it did occur, would inexorably develop on an international scale, embracing all Europe, not as an isolated national event. The promotion of this international revolution was, in their opinion, the present duty of the proletariat, regardless of nationality.⁵⁴

The question which remains to be answered concerns the relationship between these theories of imperialism and the problem of national self-determination. The answer, in fact, is relatively straightforward.

These revolutionary Marxists believed, as Marx and Engels themselves had, that the source of national oppression and antagonisms was rooted in the contradictions inherent within the capitalist system itself and could not be eliminated until capitalism was destroyed. However, their analysis of the imperialist epoch had led them to the conclusion that socialist revolution, which would sweep away capitalism internationally, was imminent. Accordingly, any specific policies with respect to the problems of national oppression were redundant, since in the near future the international victory of socialism would automatically solve all such questions.

Certainly, this line of reasoning appears to have been the basic motivation underpinning the rejection by the "left" Bolsheviks - the initial cause of the anti-nationalism manifested by the Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian Marxists was, as discussed above, different - of any compromises with the forces of nationalism. During World War I Bukharin and Piatakov had categorically denied that there could be any solution to the "enslavement of nations" until capitalism was overthrown, since the "'self-determination of nations'... cannot be realised within the limits of capitalism."⁵⁵ Indeed, Bukharin firmly believed that the establishment of small nation states in the imperialist epoch would be "utopian", since they would be too weak, economically and politically, to compete with the existing large imperialist powers, and, consequently, would soon be annexed by their more powerful rivals.⁵⁶ Accordingly, he and Piatakov considered that the only genuine answer to the problem of national oppression would be provided by social revolution, which their theory of imperialism predicted was no longer merely "a theoretical prognosis... [but] on the order of the day of the proletariat's concerted action."⁵⁷

The Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian Marxists also asserted that one implication of their theories of imperialism was the redundancy of the need to support self-determination for oppressed nationalities, since the widely anticipated international socialist revolution would automatically solve this problem. However, it would be mistaken to consider that their opposition to national self-determination was just a corollary of their analyses of imperialism. Their hostility to nationalism had a different dynamic than that of their Russian comrades,

in that it was at first founded on their fear that resurgent Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian nationalism would prove appealing to the workers and distract them from the pursuit of what they held to be their true class interests.

Nevertheless, while bearing in mind the original impetus to their anti-nationalism, it still remains true that their theories of imperialism provided an additional, and more comprehensive justification for their denial of any support for narrow nationalist objectives. The Polish Marxists, like the "left" Bolsheviks, believed that as long as capitalism existed "there could be no 'national self-determination' either in war or peace."⁵⁸ They maintained that the creation of an international socialist society, for which imperialist developments had established the foundations, would provide the only real answer to existing problems of national oppression. In an official statement of the position of the Regional Presidium of the S.D.K.P.i.L. on this question in 1915, Radek unequivocally defended the view that national antagonisms were merely a symptom of "capitalist private property... [and] class dominance:"

... Social Democracy has to educate the masses of the people of the oppressed as well as of the oppressing nations for a united struggle, which alone is capable of abolishing national oppression and economic exploitation, by leading mankind beyond imperialism towards socialism.⁵⁹

The revolutionary Marxists of Latvia and Lithuania also saw no solution to problems of national oppression short of the establishment of socialism. Till then, they believed that any genuine national self-determination would be unrealisable, since the capitalist system, with its attendant class exploitation, was considered by them to be the basic cause of "national enslavement." However, once proletarian revolution, now imminent internationally, had destroyed capitalism, at the same time it would have destroyed "all the sources and causes of national enslavement." Consequently, all national problems would disappear as a matter of course and there would be freedom for all peoples.⁶⁰

Moreover, the Latvian and Lithuanian Marxists, aware that the smallness of their countries would imperil any independence that might be granted to them, emphasised one specific economic factor against

the viability of self-determination in the epoch of imperialism. P. I. Stuchka, the leading theoretician of the revolutionary Latvian Marxists on the national question, affirmed that it would be "impossible to form an independent economy"⁶¹ in Latvia itself, since it was so tiny. However, he generalised that the economic developments of capitalism in the imperialist epoch had undermined the bases of state independence for small nations, which, as a result of economic weakness caused by their size, would find themselves at the mercy of their large imperialist neighbours.⁶² The Lithuanian Marxists similarly doubted that Lithuania, situated between two imperialist giants, the German and Russian Empires, could survive as an independent state. They too extended this conclusion to apply to all small nations in the imperialist world. V. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas bluntly argued that there could be no independence for little states while imperialism remained dominant; thus to advocate self-determination for such states would be deceitful, for true independence could not be realised.⁶³

The "left" Bolsheviks themselves, as indicated above, agreed with this conclusion, as did the Polish Marxists. Luxemburg, in particular, was convinced that the small nations then demanding self-determination lacked the size and resources required to create economies which could compete successfully with those of the large imperialist powers. Consequently, to grant such nations independence would prove to be futile, for since they could not survive economically as independent units they would inevitably become dependent, both economically and politically, on one of the great powers.⁶⁴

While the theories of imperialism held by these Marxists, theories which they considered to be a legitimate extension of the economic principles to be found within Marxism, was a very major cause of their opposition to independent statehood for small nations, they also attacked the concept of self-determination on political grounds - the original basis of the anti-nationalist position adopted by the Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian Marxists. They contended that if revolutionary Marxists supported the claims of nations for self-determination this would sow such confusion among the proletariat, particularly of oppressed nations, that it would find itself pursuing national revolution at the expense of its interests in class international revolution. Hence they

feared that the proletariat would be split on national lines and that the international class solidarity, considered vital in the struggle for socialism, would be destroyed. In 1915 the "left" Bolsheviks clearly expressed their fear of nationalism as a rival to socialism for the loyalty of the proletariat. Bukharin and Piatakov declared:

... the attention of the masses is transferred to a different level, the international character of their activities is lost, the forces of the proletariat are split, the entire line of tactics proceeds in the direction of national struggle and not class struggle.⁶⁵

Piatakov enlarged on this fear of the "left" Bolsheviks both during and after 1917. At the April Conference in 1917 he asserted that the continued support of Lenin and his associates for national self-determination was strengthening the separatist movements in the borderlands of the Russian Empire. These movements, he claimed, were led by the reactionary nationalist bourgeoisie who urgently desired to set up their own independent states in order to isolate themselves from the imminent socialist revolution in Great Russia. He maintained that future acceptance by the Bolsheviks of the right of the minority nations of the Empire to secession would be the betrayal of the proletariat of these nations, who would be delivered into the hands of their own bourgeoisie.⁶⁶ Returning to this theme at the 8th Party Congress in 1919, Piatakov affirmed that the experience of the previous 2 years had confirmed his warning that national self-determination would become the symbol under which all counter-revolutionary forces would rally.⁶⁷

Piatakov found strong support for this contention at the April Conference from Dzierżyński. Convinced that the situation in Poland was characteristic of what was occurring in the other border regions of the Russian Empire, Dzierżyński argued that it was the landlords and petty-bourgeoisie of the minority nations who desired independence in order to safeguard their own property interests from the contagion of socialist revolution then anticipated in the heart of the Empire. He pointed out that in these circumstances revolutionary socialists could not condone self-determination, for this would cut off the proletariat of these national regions from the revolution in Russia and from its comrades-in-arms, the revolutionary Russian proletariat. He too considered that this would be a betrayal of the proletariat, which would find

itself at the mercy of strengthened anti-socialist, national forces.⁶⁸

Subsequently, in 1918, Rosa Luxemburg, who had shared Dzierżyński's negative appraisal of the potential effects of supporting a policy of national self-determination, presented a comprehensive and impassioned account of what she considered to be the politically reactionary consequences which had resulted from Lenin's advocacy of the right of secession for the minority nations in the Russian Empire. This was not a new critique of national self-determination but rather a comprehensive restatement of the political arguments which she had originally put forward in the 1890's as reasons why revolutionary Marxists must oppose national independence movements.⁶⁹

She opened her case by arguing that during the peace negotiations with Germany at Brest-Litovsk Lenin and his supporters among the Bolsheviks had granted the right of self-determination, including the right to separation, to the minority nations of the old Russian Empire, in the hope that such a magnanimous policy would win over these nations to a voluntary union with Soviet Russia in defence of the gains of the revolution within the old territorial framework. The outcome of this policy, however, had turned out to be the opposite of what Lenin had desired. With the aid of German imperialism the bourgeoisie of these nations, especially in Poland, the Ukraine, the Baltic states and Finland, had taken advantage of this right to set up their own independent national states. She continued that by this act they had created a ring of counter-revolutionary states surrounding the socialist heart of Russia. Moreover, she asserted that the very fact that Lenin and his associates had proclaimed the right to self-determination had caused such confusion among the proletariat of these nations that they had been unsure of the correct revolutionary class attitude to adopt towards national independence. Consequently, they had abandoned the opposition to this which their class international interests demanded and had followed their national bourgeoisie. At the same time the very secession of these nations from the old state had separated the proletariat of them from the Great Russian proletariat, with the effect of so weakening them that they had been "crippled... and delivered into the hands of the bourgeoisie of the border countries."⁷⁰ In conclusion, Rosa Luxemburg was convinced that these results had sufficiently

demonstrated the counter-revolutionary nature of a policy of support for national self-determination, while at the same time proving the hollowness of self-determination for nations, rather than for the bourgeoisie of nations, while the capitalist system survived.⁷¹

The Latvian Bolsheviks shared the same pessimistic prognosis of the politically reactionary nature of granting the right of self-determination to minority nations. Stuchka had consistently feared that any acceptance of national self-determination by revolutionary socialists would confuse the proletariat of such nations about the primacy of the class struggle and make it susceptible to the insidious appeals of bourgeois nationalism. In particular he was afraid that the Latvian proletariat would succumb to the Latvian bourgeoisie's newly-found desire for independence in 1917.⁷² The very fact that before 1917 this bourgeoisie had not claimed the right to self-determination Stuchka regarded as additional confirmation of his thesis of the counter-revolutionary nature of national movements. He argued that the Latvian bourgeoisie had demanded secession from the Russian Empire only after it had first begun to fear, in the course of 1917, that socialist revolution might spread outwards from Great Russia into Latvia and consequently threaten its own position of dominance there.⁷³

The internationalist wing of the S.D.P.L. also considered any support for national self-determination to be a threat to the class interests of the proletariat. Kapsukas condemned the slogan of national independence as a device of the bourgeoisie which was only interested in setting up its own class state. Moreover, he felt that in the framework of the Russian Empire the application of this policy would be highly reactionary, for it would cut off the minority nations from the proletarian revolution in Great Russia itself.⁷⁴ Angarietis fully supported Kapsukas' analysis, claiming that after the October revolution the bourgeoisie had used the right to self-determination in its own counter-revolutionary interests to set up an independent bourgeois Lithuanian state.⁷⁵

However, not only did these "leftists" oppose self-determination for nations as contrary to the class demands of socialist revolution but they also rejected the concept of self-determination for the proletariat of nations. This proposal had been put forward by Bukharin at

the 8th Party Congress in the attempt to reconcile the contradiction facing Marxists between support of self-determination for nations, which were multi-class by nature, and their advocacy of socialist revolution, which they were convinced could be achieved by the international class action of the proletariat alone. Bukharin maintained that at the level of historical development when the preconditions for socialist revolution had matured in the depths of capitalist society it would be anachronistic for revolutionary socialists to countenance self-determination for oppressed nations. Rather they should defend the policy of self-determination for the workers of oppressed nations since, with socialism imminent, the proletariat alone, even if a minority, could legitimately "express the will of a nation."⁷⁶

The other "left" Bolsheviks, however, did not accept Bukharin's proposed reconciliation of nationalism with socialism. Piatakov scathingly rejected the very notion of self-determination for the workers of a nation. He held that the international proletariat in its entirety, not just the proletariat of a given nation, would have a direct interest in the fate of that nation once socialist revolution had been victorious. In the event of a conflict arising between the desire of the proletariat of any nation for independent statehood and the interests of the international proletariat in the broadest possible economic and political unity, then precedence must be given to the latter. He clarified his position with reference to the Ukraine. He argued that not only the Ukrainian workers but also the proletariat of Great Russia and of other potential Soviet republics, such as Latvia, Byelorussia, and similar regions, would be concerned with the fate of the Ukraine, rich in the material resources vital for the economy of the remainder of the new Soviet federation. In these circumstances the Ukrainian proletariat could not be allowed to determine independently the form of the Ukraine's future existence but must bow to the decision of the international proletariat on this issue.⁷⁷ Refusing categorically to support any policy of "self-determination for the toiling masses of each nation," Piatakov defended the path of "strict proletarian centralisation and proletarian union"⁷⁸ as the only admissible programme for revolutionary socialists.

The S.D.K.P.i.L. likewise had rigidly upheld the centralist position propounded by Piatakov. This party consistently denied that revolutionary Marxists could tolerate a policy which permitted the proletariat of any nation to determine its fate irrespective of the wishes and needs of the international proletarian movement. Speaking for this party of "Left Communists," Radek maintained that "in a socialist society it is impossible for an isolated national group to exercise the right of self-determination on questions which concern all citizens."⁷⁹ On the contrary, he insisted that the resolution of the position of any nation after the coming socialist revolution must take place on an international scale:

... instead of individual nations having to decide separately about subdivision on the basis of their own supremacy... all citizens concerned would participate in that decision.⁸⁰

The revolutionary Marxists in Latvia and Lithuania adopted the same stand on this question. They too considered a policy which granted the right of "self-determination to the proletariat of a given nation" to be theoretically untenable from the point of view of revolutionary socialism. They believed that the only method by which the proletariat could gain real freedom was by cooperation on an international scale through which alone they could achieve socialism, not by any policy of national isolation, either with or without the national bourgeoisie. They declared:

Therefore the opposition to the utopian and non-class slogan of "self-determination of nations" of the slogan "self-determination for the proletariat" of a given nation is incorrect both theoretically and practically, for the proletariat can win self-determination only on an international scale.⁸¹

The preceding account sets forth the economic and political arguments which these revolutionary Marxists shared in their opposition to national self-determination. Although they recognised that their own national programme differed in many particular respects from that elaborated by the "founding fathers," they nevertheless honestly claimed that their policy was a legitimate interpretation of Marxist principles, adapted to take account of the changed conditions of the imperialist epoch. Convinced that their analyses of imperialism had shown that an international socialist revolution was imminent, they

maintained that national independence was no longer a progressive solution to the problems of national oppression, since the establishment of a supra-national socialist society would automatically eliminate all the causes of national antagonism. In addition, the creation of new nation states, itself no real solution to national problems as long as capitalism existed, would run counter to the integration of the world economy already realised and would merely attempt to thrust capitalism back within boundaries that it had already transcended. Moreover, they were certain that any support of national self-determination would be a political threat to the cause of revolutionary socialism, for such a policy, by permitting the proletariat to fight for national objectives, would divert its attention from the pursuit of the international class struggle, where they believed its true interests lay. Finally, they considered a policy restricting self-determination to the workers of a nation to be a vain attempt to reconcile the contradiction between the international class demands of socialist revolution and the claims of oppressed nations for independence. They asserted that the interests of the international proletariat, rather than those of the proletariat of any one nation must take precedence in determining the place of nations in socialist society.

In contrast, an analysis of Lenin's position on the problem of national oppression clearly demonstrates that he adopted a more flexible, pragmatic national policy which promised to win the support of the oppressed minorities of the Russian Empire for the Bolsheviks. Despite their obvious differences in policy, however, Lenin also shared many of the basic premises on which his protagonists founded their attack on self-determination. He too subscribed to the belief, common to many Marxists, that nations and nation states were historical categories, the products of the development of capitalism, and, as such, destined to perish with the advent of socialism and the cosmopolitan society which would accompany it. Accordingly, any support that he gave to national movements was of a limited, short-term character, for in his vision of future society they had no place. He declared:

... [there is] a universal historical tendency to break down national barriers, to wipe out national differences, a tendency toward the assimilation of nations, which with each decade becomes all the more powerful, and which presents one of the greatest moving forces transforming capitalism into socialism.⁸²

Moreover, Lenin did not deny a number of conclusions which his fellow revolutionaries held regarding the nature of the imperialist epoch. He too agreed that with the development of imperialism "the productive forces of world capitalism have outgrown the limited boundaries of national state divisions."⁸³ Furthermore, he also was of the opinion that the evolution of capitalism into imperialism had laid the material foundations for socialism. During World War I he openly asserted:

Capital in the advanced countries outgrew the limits of national states, established monopoly in the place of competition and thus created all the revolutionary premises for the realisation of socialism.⁸⁴

However, there exists a paradox which demands explanation. Despite their apparently common analyses of imperialism, Lenin proposed a national policy contradictory to that which the "left" Bolsheviks, as well as their Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian fellow thinkers espoused. Unlike them, he refused to accept that self-determination for oppressed nations was a totally redundant policy in the epoch of imperialism. In his opinion, it was still perfectly legitimate, in certain cases, for revolutionary Marxists to support independence for oppressed nations, a tactic which he applied within the Russian Empire with the intention of securing the support of the oppressed minorities in the the Bolshevik's struggle for power.

The solution to this apparent contradiction can be found by a closer examination of Lenin's own particular theory of imperialism, in order to ascertain how it differed from the theories to which his fellow revolutionaries subscribed. The distinctive feature of Lenin's analysis was his emphasis on the "law of the uneven development of capitalism." He postulated that as capitalism developed it did so at different speeds in different countries. Therefore, rather than raising all capitalist countries to the same economic level - and integrating them into a united world economy at a relatively similar level of development -, the growth of capitalism led to an increasing economic inequality among them.⁸⁵ Indeed, in his major theoretical work on imperialism, Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism, Lenin categorically rejected Kautsky's theory that an "ultra-imperialist" stage of development was possible: the law of the uneven development ruled

this possibility out. He stated:

... the only conceivable basis under capitalism for the division of spheres of influence, interests, colonies, etc., is a calculation of the strength of those participating: their general economic, financial, military strength, etc. And the strength of those participants in the division does not change to an equal degree, for the even development of different undertakings, trusts, branches of industry, or countries is impossible. Half a century ago Germany was a miserable, insignificant country, if her capitalist strength is compared with that of Britain of that time; Japan compared with Russia in the same way. Is it "conceivable" that in ten or twenty years' time their relative strength of the imperialist powers will remain unchanged? It is out of the question.⁸⁶

One conclusion which Lenin drew from this theory of capitalist development was that while in general the prerequisites for socialism had been prepared by preceding capitalist growth, they had not been prepared equally in all countries. Although he agreed that "the fundamental distinguishing features"⁸⁷ of the epoch were imperialist, he continued that there still existed countries where early capitalist, and even feudal characteristics remained dominant. From this Lenin predicted that socialist revolution would not sweep across the world in one mighty wave, but that it would proceed more fitfully: it was possible that initially this revolution would be confined to "a few capitalist countries, even [to] one country taken separately."⁸⁸ In fact, in the war years he unequivocally asserted that "since the development of capitalism proceeds extremely unevenly in different countries..., from this it follows irrefutably that socialism cannot achieve victory simultaneously in all countries. It will achieve victory first in one or several countries, while the others will remain for some time bourgeois or pre-bourgeois."⁸⁹ He envisioned the course of socialist revolution as a more complex, protracted process than his rivals:

A socialist revolution is not only a single act, not only a single battle on a single front, but a whole epoch of accentuated class conflicts, a long series of battles on all fronts, i.e., on all questions of economics and politics....⁹⁰

In early 1916, Lenin, on the basis of his analysis of the consequences of the uneven development of capitalism, proceeded to classify

the countries of the imperialist world according to three main categories. Into the first category, where he maintained that the prerequisites for socialism had matured, he assigned "the advanced capitalist countries of West Europe and the United States, [where] progressive national movements came to an end long ago." In the second category he included "East Europe: Austria, the Balkans and particularly Russia." Before 1917 he denied that socialist revolution was possible in these countries, averring rather that there "it was the twentieth century that particularly witnessed the development of bourgeois-democratic national movements and intensified the national struggle." Accordingly, in Lenin's opinion, the democratic revolution, which would clear the way for the free development of capitalism, and subsequently lay the foundations for socialism, had still to be completed. In the final category were "the semi-colonial countries... and all the colonies. In these bourgeois-democratic movements either have hardly begun, or still have a long way to go."⁹¹

In his debate with his more internationalist-minded colleagues over self-determination Lenin was to use this theory of imperialism, and the three-fold classification derived from it, to justify his contention that his national policy was in fact consistent with the spirit and principles of revolutionary Marxism. He agreed, however, with his adversaries that they were correct to reject any claims for national self-determination in West Europe and North America, where as a direct result of the war socialist revolution had become the imminent stage in historical development.⁹² Revolutionary Marxists, therefore, could not countenance any support for the establishment of new, independent states there, since the tolerance of narrow national demands in this situation would divert the proletariat from the pursuit of its revolutionary socialist tasks. Furthermore, he and the "leftists" shared the same attitude towards the colonial world. Since there was no immediate possibility of socialism there, it was consistent revolutionary policy for Marxists to support national movements which not only aspired to liberate the colonies from feudalism but would also oppose the common enemy of the advanced proletariat, world imperialism.⁹³

The dispute between Lenin and the "leftists", therefore, occurred over the national policy which revolutionary Marxists should adopt

in multi-national states like the Russian Empire, which Lenin claimed were neither fully capitalist nor colonial, that is, in states where the bourgeois-democratic revolution had not yet been finally concluded. Accordingly, in one sense, their debate over national self-determination can be seen as a corollary of their differing assessments of the ripeness of the Russian Empire for socialism before 1917, an interpretation given some justification by Lenin's subsequent reversal of his national policy after 1917 when he had come to believe that the Russian revolution was in fact socialist. Before then, Lenin had argued that the correct revolutionary policy was one of support for national movements aspiring to independence, since this would hasten the destruction of all remnants of feudal absolutism and consequently permit the accelerated development of capitalism, which in turn would lay the material foundations for socialism.⁹⁴

Nevertheless, while Lenin's analysis of imperialism could serve as a theoretical justification, arguably loyal to the spirit of Marxism, for the role which he gave to revolutionary national movements in the struggle of international socialists against imperialism in such countries as the Russian Empire, it would be rather naive to imagine that he derived his national policy from this theory. This was certainly not the case, as an examination of the evolution of his national policy will reveal.

Initially, in 1903, Lenin had subscribed to the view that revolutionary Marxists must restrict the right of self-determination to the proletariat of a nation.⁹⁵ However, the first Russian revolution of 1905, which had reached its highest pitch in the non-Russian border regions of the Empire, opened his eyes to the revolutionary potential which the suppressed nationalism of these minority nationalities offered. Eventually, by 1913, Lenin had come to revise his national policy to that of unqualified support for the self-determination of such nations.⁹⁶ He hoped that this programme would enable the Bolsheviks to exploit this pent up revolutionary energy for their own ends.

Yet Lenin did not rest his defence for self-determination just on the experience of the Russian Empire. He proceeded to justify his national policy in broader, more general grounds. He contended that one notable feature of the contemporary epoch had been the accelerated

growth of the backward countries of the world caused by imperialist expansion. However, at the same time this expansion had led to the "progressing oppression of the nations of the world by a handful of great powers,"⁹⁷ which in turn had roused the former to resist this subjugation. Moreover, he asserted that this process was not only confined to the colonial and semi-colonial world of Africa and Asia, but was also evident in Europe - and especially in the Russian Empire.⁹⁸ Accordingly, he criticised the "leftists" for their neglect of the movements of the oppressed national minorities in this empire, for as much as the nascent colonial nations they were fighting against great power imperialism and thus were potential allies of the proletariat in its own struggle against imperialism.⁹⁹

At the same time Lenin affirmed that his national programme incorporated a principle which Marx and Engels themselves had emphasised as vital for revolutionary socialists to consider in elaborating their national policy. He maintained that the "leftists'" insensitivity to the plight of subjugated nations could cripple the international unity of the proletariat. He argued that if the proletariat of a dominant nation de facto supported its own bourgeoisie by denying the right of self-determination to an oppressed minority nation, then the proletariat of the latter would come to distrust the sincerity of the former's commitment to international socialism. As a consequence of this, Lenin feared that the proletariat of the oppressed nation would fall under the influence of the chauvinism espoused by its own bourgeoisie and proceed to pursue national rather than socialist objectives. To avert this danger he believed that revolutionary Marxists must urge the proletariat of the dominant nation to support granting the right of self-determination to its national minorities. In the long run this policy alone would guarantee the international proletarian unity essential for socialist revolution, whereas the "leftists'" policy, although strictly anti-national in form, would in fact create national divisions in the international proletarian movement. However, Lenin also stressed that the proletariat of the oppressed nations had the right to reject the self-determination offered to it and in the interests of the future international socialist society voluntarily to choose to remain united with the majority nation.¹⁰⁰

The ambivalence in Lenin's attitude to self-determination revealed in the last statement, the ambivalence between his support of national movements on tactical grounds and his commitment to international socialism, is a motif of his policy. While he recognised the need to defend a policy of self-determination for national minorities, it would be mistaken to conclude from this that he unconditionally backed the claims of every minority that demanded independence. On the contrary, he consistently maintained that wherever the aspirations of national movements threatened the development of socialist revolution, then these national interests had to be sacrificed; national self-determination was deserving of support only where this promised to be ultimately beneficial to the progress of the socialist cause.¹⁰¹ In particular, in the context of the Russian Empire Lenin did not desire that his advocacy of self-determination should lead to the secession of the non-Russian nations. Rather he hoped that the mere fact of granting this right would prove to the minority nations that their interests would be safeguarded within the present territorial framework and that, consequently, they would agree voluntarily to maintain the existing state.¹⁰²

In fact, after the October revolution Lenin was to revert to his original national policy, on the grounds that national self-determination was now harmful to the progress of socialism. By the time of the Eighth Party Congress it had become clear that the policy of granting the right of secession to the minority nationalities of the old Tsarist Empire had failed to win them over to voluntary union with the new Soviet Russian state. Strong separatist movements had arisen among them, particularly in Finland, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and the Ukraine. Fully aware that the loss of these important areas of industry and raw materials would gravely weaken Soviet Russia itself, Lenin abandoned his former position of blanket support for national self-determination. Now he distinguished between nations "on the way from the Middle Ages to bourgeois-democracy, or from bourgeois to Soviet or proletarian democracy."¹⁰³ On the basis of this distinction he argued that for nations in the latter category the proletariat alone was the legitimate representative of the will of the nation. Consequently, at this stage of development the right of self-determination should be limited to the proletariat of a nation which, according to the tenets of revolutionary

Marxism, would not be interested in utilising this right to set up its own independent nation state but would adopt an anti-nationalist policy consistent with its presumed class interests in the establishment of international socialism.¹⁰⁴

The adoption of this theory was significant in the context of the Russian revolution. Since Lenin had deemed that the October revolution was socialist, then the appropriate national policy for the Bolsheviks now to pursue was one that restricted the right of self-determination to the proletariat of oppressed nations in the old Empire. This argument also provided a theoretical justification for Bolshevik intervention in the borderlands of the old Empire to maintain them within the boundaries of the new Soviet state. If a minority nation demanded secession, then the Bolsheviks could argue that this was a counter-revolutionary policy imposed on the nation by the bourgeoisie, since the proletariat, now the true representative of the nation, would refuse to exercise its right of independence in favour of a "voluntary" union with Soviet Russia. Soviet intervention, therefore, could be defended as the protection of the rights of nations, while at the same time this fortunately would coincide with the furthering of the Bolshevik revolution.¹⁰⁵

From the preceding analysis of the national policies respectively advocated by Lenin and his protagonists on this issue it is possible to postulate that the latter's attitude to the question of self-determination was more generally subscribed to than previous studies have indicated. Not only was there a strong "leftist" opposition to Lenin within the Bolshevik party itself but a number of other revolutionary Marxist parties in the Russian Empire which were affiliated to the Bolsheviks also defended the same views.¹⁰⁶ In fact, it can even be argued that the devotion to the principles of internationalism and the rejection of all national aspirations which were characteristic of the "leftists" found wider ideological acceptance among revolutionary Marxists there than the more pragmatic path pursued by Lenin.

Furthermore, this account, taken in conjunction with the analysis presented in the opening chapter, also serves to refute the notion that the opposition of the revolutionary Marxists of Poland, Latvia and Lithuania to national independence was "blind subservience"¹⁰⁷ to the

dictates of Lenin, who, despite his avowed support of self-determination, in fact desired to preserve the existing Russian state intact as a territorial basis for socialist revolution. It is clear that the stand taken against national self-determination by these Marxists was the result of an independently and indigenously developed policy, based on their interpretation of the correct national policy prescribed by the principles of Marxist theory. In no way was their policy influenced by Lenin, who had urged that in the interests of the international socialist revolution it was the duty of the proletariat of minority nations to reject applying the right to secession granted to them.

Although the national programme advocated by the "leftists", and the analysis of the imperialist epoch on which this was grounded, found broad support among revolutionary Marxists in the Russian Empire, the mere fact of such acceptance in itself is no criterion by which to judge the realism of their views. In the first place, it is apparent with the benefit of hindsight that their prognosis that socialist revolution would sweep victoriously across Europe was mistaken. Lenin's vision of this revolution as a more protracted process, initially limited in scale, proved more correct. Nevertheless, all these Marxists, Lenin included, were mistaken in their belief that imperialism had made an international socialist revolution inevitable in the near or more distant future. In fact, again retrospectively, Kautsky, the butt of many of their attacks, appears to have been more prescient, in that an organisation akin to his vision of an ultra-imperialist confederation, the European Economic Community, has emerged - even though it is admittedly bedevilled by internal tensions.

Moreover, surveying the history of the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, it becomes evident that the movements of the non-Russian minorities, opposed to the centralisation and Russian domination of the state under tsarism and the Provisional Government, were powerful disruptive forces.¹⁰⁸ The consequences of the "leftists'" failure to tap this revolutionary potential by their neglect of national aspirations for independence are, at best, matters of conjecture.¹⁰⁹ However, an examination of the abortive Soviet revolutions in Poland, Latvia and Lithuania gives some credence to the conclusion that one cause of the weakness and eventual failure of the revolutionary governments there

was this typical "leftist" refusal to bow to national sentiment in the slightest degree.

The available evidence suggests that the S.D.K.P.iL. underestimated the force of nationalism. It seems that there were strong currents in favour of Polish independence, even among many of the workers, particularly in 1918.¹¹⁰ Apparently, the S.D.K.P.iL.'s rejection of any concessions to such widespread national sentiment severely weakened it during the years of revolutionary turmoil and left it with "no influence in the mainstream of Polish political life."¹¹¹ Later, the Polish Marxists in fact admitted that their uncompromising anti-nationalism had been a contributory factor in their failure to seize power when, in 1923, at the Second Congress of the Communist Workers' Party of Poland, they abandoned their former unflinching opposition to national self-determination - and accepted that an independent Poland did, and would continue to exist.¹¹²

Much the same pattern existed in Lithuania and Latvia. Kapsukas himself admitted that one reason why the rigidly internationalist Union of Lithuanian Workers had failed to win support among the workers in the 1890's was its refusal to accept that national oppression was still a bone of contention for the workers.¹¹³ He could well have added that the intransigence of his own colleagues on this question also cost them support in later years and was one of the factors which helped explain their defeat in 1919. Subsequently, like their Polish comrades, the Lithuanian Communist Party tacitly accepted that its failure to take into account the desire for independence that had become widespread in its own nation was a contributory cause of the lack of success of the revolution in Lithuania - and revised their programme accordingly.¹¹⁴ The Latvian Marxists underwent the same reappraisal of their own national policy, and in the 1920's were prepared to make concessions to the tide of Latvian nationalism.¹¹⁵

While this would seem to suggest that Lenin's national policy was more successful in achieving its ends, a closer examination of the results of this policy reveals that this was not the case. It is true that Lenin was more aware of the revolutionary potential which the national minorities in the Russian Empire represented and accordingly was prepared to make concessions, of a short-term and ultimately limited

character, to their aspirations in order to win their support for the Bolsheviks' own seizure of power. With this in mind he advocated granting them the right to self-determination. However, his policy was not an unequivocal success; while it may have encouraged national revolts first against the autocracy and then against the Provisional Government, it proved unsuccessful, as the "leftists" had feared, in securing the voluntary union of the national minorities to the new Soviet Russian state. Ultimately, once the Bolsheviks had sufficiently consolidated their power, coercion was used to bind these nations again to "Mother Russia."¹¹⁶

Footnotes.

¹V. I. Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination," Collected Works, 20 (Moscow, 1964), p. 408, where he emphasises that the domination of the Great Russians had resulted in the growth of national movements among the other nations of the Empire. See too R. Pipes, The Formation of the Soviet Union (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), pp. 2-3, for an account of the national composition of the Russian Empire in the years immediately preceding 1917. He points out that the Great Russian population did not even make up a majority in the Empire, although they continued to dominate the state.

²M. Velikovskii, I. Levin, Natsional'nyi vopros: Khrestomatiia, 1 (Moscow, 1931), pp. 86-87.

³K. Marx, F. Engels, The Communist Manifesto (Moscow, 1966), pp. 46-47. Modern political geographers subscribe to an explanation of the rise of nations similar to that of Marx. They too discount language, territory and tradition, as well as race, as the determining factors in the emergence of nations. They emphasise the role of these factors only in the context of a modernisation process, equated with industrialisation and urbanisation, which overcomes the disunity of groups possessing common national characteristics and leads to their integration into conscious nations. If this modernisation is equated with the rise of capitalism, legitimate in as far as both these processes embrace industrialisation, urbanisation and an improved communications network resulting from this, then a similar theory of the growth of nations emerges from both the political-geographical and Marxist approaches. For a discussion of the former approach, consult G. E. Smith, "The Raison d'être of the Latvian Nation - A Political Geographical Approach," Fourth Conference on Baltic Studies in Scandinavia, Vol. 3, 1977, passim, especially pp. 1-5.

⁴Engels himself described nation states in the following manner: "Such states alone represent the state structure which is normal for the ruling bourgeoisie of Europe...." F. Engels, "Predposylki obrazovaniia natsional'nykh gosudarstv," in Velikovskii, Lenin, Natsional'nyi vopros, p. 54. For a more detailed analysis of this issue, consult G. I. Safarov, Natsional'nyi vopros i proletariat (Petrograd, 1922), pp. 20-31.

⁵Engels, Predposylki, p. 54.

⁶K. Marx, F. Engels, The German Ideology (Moscow, 1964), pp. 46-47. Engels also wrote: "Large-scale industry, by creating the world market, has established so close a connection among all the peoples of the globe, especially in the case of the civilised peoples, that each of them depends on what happens to the other. Then, too; large-scale industry has so levelled the social development in all civilised countries that everywhere the bourgeoisie and the proletariat have become the two determining social classes, and the struggle between them is

the chief struggle of our time. The Communist revolution, therefore, will not be merely national, but will take place simultaneously in all civilised countries; that is, at least in England, America, France and Germany. It will also exercise a considerable influence upon the other countries of the world and will completely change and much accelerate their former course of development. It is a world revolution and will, therefore, have the whole world as its arena." Cited in E. H. Goodman, The Soviet Design for a World State (London, 1960), p. 3. For a brief, yet stimulating account of Marx's and Engels' views on nationalism as a temporary phenomenon, destined to be overcome once capitalism had united mankind universally, as befitted his "human essence" consult M. Meisner, Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 176-177.

⁷K. Marx, F. Engels, The Russian Menace to Europe, edited by P. W. Blackstock, B. F. Hoselitz (Glencoe, 1952), p. 98.

⁸For a discussion of the political criteria on occasion applied by Marx and Engels, consult E. H. Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution, 1 (London, 1966), pp. 417-420; and J. P. Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg (Abridged edition, Oxford, 1969), p. 500.

⁹Marx, Engels, Russian Menace, p. 93.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 104-106. They maintained that the Polish insurrection of 1830 had been the major factor preventing Russian intervention to quell the revolution then taking place in France; and that later, in the initial stages of the revolutions of 1848, fear of another Polish rising alone had kept Russia from immediate counter-revolutionary intervention.

¹¹Ibid., p. 92.

¹²Ibid., p. 117.

¹³Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁴Marx and Engels developed this argument largely in their discussion of the effects of the domination of Ireland by England on the relationship between the proletariats of these nations. For a good analysis of their views on this prerequisite of international proletarian unity, consult M. Ravich-Cherkasskii, Lenin i natsional'nyi vopros (Khar'kov, 1924), pp. 15-19; and also Carr, Revolution, 1, pp. 421-422.

¹⁵Marx, Engels, Manifesto, pp. 70-71. There is a continuing debate among scholars whether this is an accurate interpretation of the role which Marx and Engels allotted to nations in the socialist society of the future. One school of thought contends that Marx and Engels were "assimilationists" who foresaw the creation of an integrated,

cosmopolitan society, in which national differences would cease to exist, after socialist revolution had destroyed all economic exploitation and accelerated the homogenisation of the economic bases of nations. Consult Goodman, Soviet Design, p. 6, and especially pp. 20-24. A rival school of thought denies that it is valid to attribute such a crude economic determinist theory of assimilation to Marx and Engels. One defender of this proposition maintains that Marx himself was not a crude economic determinist who believed that political, legal and cultural phenomena were rigidly defined by the economic base. He points out that Marx was aware that non-economic factors could account for political and social differences between nations with essentially the same economic system. Accordingly, he concludes that Marx was prepared to accept that such differences would continue to exist even when national economies had become homogeneous under socialism. There would be no rigid correlation between "economic assimilation" and the assimilation of nations. He holds that such reasoning led Marx to look towards a future socialist society which would not be "global and amorphous", but rather which would be composed of a limited number of advanced nations capable of cooperation in the administration of this world society. Consult S. Bloom, The World of Nations: a Study of the National Implications in the Work of Karl Marx (New York, 1967), pp. 30-32, 207.

¹⁶Consult chapter 1 of the present work, pp. 40-41; 53-54; 59-60.

¹⁷Cited in D. A. Baevskii, "Bol'sheviki v bor'be za III International," Istorik Marksist, No. 11, 1929, p. 27.

¹⁸See the speech of Piatakov, Sed'maia Konferentsiia R.S.D.R.P. (Bol'shevikov), April' 1917 goda (Moscow, 1958), p. 213.

¹⁹K. B. Radek, "Theses and Resolution of the Editorial Board of Gazeta Robotnicza, Organ of the Regional Presidium of the Social Democracy of Poland and Lithuania," in O. Gankin, H. Fisher, The Bolsheviks and the World War (Stanford, 1940), p. 513.

²⁰R. Luxemburg, "Theses submitted to the International Socialist Committee by the German Internationale Group," in ibid., p. 395.

²¹"Konferentsiia kommunisticheskikh organizatsii okkupirovannykh oblastei: Rezoliutsiia po natsional'nomu voprosu," Zhizn' Natsional'nostei, No. 1, 1918, p. 4. P. I. Stuchka wrote in 1918 that "the slogan [of support for national self-determination] is senseless, for in the epoch of imperialism the independence of small states is nothing but a diplomatic fraud...." P. I. Stuchka, "Samoopredelenie," Za sovetskuiu vlast' (Riga, 1964), p. 389. V. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas agreed with this view, arguing that "the independence of little states in the epoch of imperialist supremacy is only a deception of the toilers and means for the working class its even greater enslavement." V. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas, "Bor'ba za sovetskuiu vlast' v Litve i zapadnoi Belorussii (konets 1918g. i nachalo 1919g.)," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 1, 1931, p. 78.

²²E. M. Winslow, The Pattern of Imperialism (New York, 1948), p. 159.

²³R. Hilferding, Finance Capital. Translation of chapters 7-8, 11-15, 18-20 of Das Finanzkapital: eine Studie über die jüngste Entwicklung des Kapitalismus (Wien, 1923), located in the Suzzallo Library of the University of Washington, Seattle. Chapter XV, p. 100.

²⁴Hilferding, "Finance Capital," in D. K. Fieldhouse, The Theory of Capitalist Imperialism (London, 1967), pp. 76-79.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 83-84.

²⁶Ibid., p. 80.

²⁷Hilferding, Finance Capital, chapter XV, pp. 101-103. Here Hilferding described how he saw a socialist economy emerging from the trend of finance capitalism increasingly to organise economic life: "[under finance capitalism] there is a tendency for the constant extension of the pooling process. The independent industries... become more and more dependent upon the pooled industries until they eventually join them. The result of this process ought to be a universal pool. Here all of capitalist production would be consciously regulated by one centre determining the volume of the output in every field. The price fixing would then become purely nominal and actually equivalent to a mere distribution of the output among the pool magnates on the one hand, and the other members of the pool, on the other. The price would not be the result of commodity relations established between people, but a sort of subsidiary book-keeping operation in the transfer of the things from one group of persons to another. Money would play no role. It could disappear entirely, for the operation would consist of a mere transfer of things rather than values. With the anarchy of production there would disappear the appearance of things, the commodity as a materialised value and therefore also money. The pool would distribute the product. The material elements of production would be reproduced and would enter in the new process of production. From the new product a certain share would go to the working class and intellectuals, the rest would remain with the pool, to be used at its own discretion. Such a society would be an intelligently regulated society in an antagonistic form. But this antagonism is an antagonism of distribution. The distribution itself is intelligently regulated, so that the need for money disappears. Finance capital at its culmination finds itself broken away from the soil upon which it was nurtured the tireless circulation of money finds its end in a regulated society....

The tendency to create such a universal pool coincides with the tendency to establish a central bank, and their combination gives rise to the great concentrated power of finance capital. In finance capital all the partial forms of capital are united in a single whole. Finance capital is money capital... it represents money which yields money, the most general and irrational form of the movement of capital. A money capital is advanced to the industrial capitalists in a dual form,

as loan capital and fictitious capital. In this the mediators are the banks which are trying at the same time to transform an ever-growing part of the money capital into their own capital and thus give finance capital the forms of banking capital. This banking capital is becoming increasingly transformed into a mere form, into a money form of the really functioning capital, that is, of industrial capital. At the same time the independence of commercial capital is becoming more and more abolished, while the division of banking capital and industrial capital is eliminated in finance capital. As regards the field of industrial capital itself, here the boundaries between the various spheres become more and more abolished through the progressive fusion of the previously distinct and independent industries, and the social division of labour, that is, the division between the various fields of production tied up as parts of the social organism merely by the exchange process, disappears; on the contrary, the technical division of labour within the amalgamated industry steadily progresses.

Thus the specific, concrete character of capital disappears in finance capital. Capital is a single force ruling supreme over the process of social life, a force arising directly out of the private ownership of the means of production, of the natural wealth and of the entire accumulated labour of the past.... At the same time property, concentrated and centralised in the hands of a few big capitalist associations, acts in direct contrast to the mass of those who have no capital. Thus does the question of the property relations appear in a clear, unambiguous sharp light, while the question of organising the social economy finds a more than perfect solution thanks to the development of finance capital itself." Consult also S. J. Cohen, Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution (New York, 1973), p. 26.

²⁸For a brief discussion of this point, consult Cohen, Bukharin, p. 39.

²⁹K. Kautsky, "Der Imperialismus," Die Neue Zeit, Jahrgang XXXII (1914), Band II, No. 21, pp. 921-922. A section of this article has been translated as K. Kautsky, "Ultra-Imperialism," New Left Review, January-February, 1970, pp. 41-46.

³⁰Winslow, Imperialism, pp. 156-157.

³¹For Bukharin's analysis of finance capitalism, see chapter 2 of this work, pp. 101ff.

³²N. I. Bukharin, Imperialism and World Economy (New York, 1929), pp. 104-106.

³³Ibid., p. 39.

³⁴Ibid., p. 138.

³⁵N. I. Bukharin, "K peresmotru partiinoi programmy," Spartak, No. 4, 1917, p. 7.

³⁶Vos'moi S'ezd R.K.P. (Bol'shevikov), Mart 1919 goda (Moscow, 1959), pp. 111-112.

³⁷Bukharin, Imperialism, pp. 142-143.

³⁸N. I. Bukharin, "Theses on the Tasks and Tactics of the Proletariat," in Gankin, Fisher, The Bolsheviks, p. 188.

³⁹Bukharin, Imperialism, p. 167.

⁴⁰E. H. Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution, 3 (London, 1971), p. 18. Also consult K. I. Varlamov, N. A. Slamichin, Razoblachenie V. I. Leninyam teorii i taktiki "levykh kommunistov" (Moscow, 1964), chapter 1, where they contend, with justification, that the "Left Communists" in general subscribed to this vision of socialist revolution.

⁴¹Sed'maia Konferentsiia, pp. 213-215.

⁴²Cited in V. I. Lenin, "A Caricature of Marxism," Collected Works, 23 (Moscow, 1964), p. 23.

⁴³Radek, Theses, p. 508.

⁴⁴Cited Gankin, Fisher, The Bolsheviks, p. 506.

⁴⁵R. Luxemburg, The Accumulation of Capital (New Haven, 1951), p. 457.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 366.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 365.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 446.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 416.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 467.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 467.

⁵²Ibid., p. 467.

⁵³R. Luxemburg, "The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in the German Social Democracy," Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, edited by M. Waters (New York, 1970), p. 325.

⁵⁴Rezoliutsiia po natsional'nomu voprosu, p. 4. The Conference of Communist Organisations of the Occupied Territories was held in Moscow from October 19 till 24, 1918. Among the participants were the revolutionary Marxist parties of Poland, Latvia and Lithuania. Among the issues discussed were the correct revolutionary Marxist positions on agrarian and national policy. The resolutions which the conference adopted on these questions displayed a typically "leftist" character, that is, they were marked by uncompromising hostility to the peasants and the nationalities. Consult Pravda, November 20, 21, 22, 1918; and Zhizn' Natsional'nostei, Nos. 1, 2, 1918.

⁵⁵"Theses and Programme of the Bukharin-Piatakov Group, November 1915," in Gankin, Fisher, The Bolsheviks, p. 219.

⁵⁶Bukharin, Imperialism, pp. 144-145. Also consult his Economics of the Transformation Period (New York, 1971), chapter 1; and "Struktura mirovogo kapitalizma," Narodnoe Khoziaistvo, No. 10, 1918, pp. 4-5. Piatakov and E. Bosh agreed with Bukharin on this point: see Theses and Programme, p. 219.

⁵⁷N. I. Bukharin, Iu. Piatakov, "Platforma," in M. N. Pokrovskii, Ocherki po istorii oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii, 1 (Moscow, Leningrad, 1927), p. 515.

⁵⁸R. Luxemburg, Junius Pamphlet, p. 305.

⁵⁹Radek, Theses, p. 509.

⁶⁰Rezoliutsiia po natsional'nomu voprosu, p. 4.

⁶¹P. I. Stuchka, "Trudovaia kommuna Latvii," Zhizn' Natsional'nostei, No. 7, 1918, p. 3.

⁶²P. I. Stuchka, "Nashi zadachi v otnoshenii Latvii," Za sovetskuiu vlast', pp. 47-48.

⁶³Kapsukas, Bor'ba, p. 79. Also consult Z. I. Angarietis, "Litva i oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia," Zhizn' Natsional'nostei, No. 1, 1923, p. 219.

⁶⁴R. Luxemburg, The National Question: Selected Writings, edited by H. B. Davis (New York, London, 1976), pp. 129-130.

⁶⁵Theses and Programme, p. 220.

⁶⁶Sed'maia Konferentsiia, p. 214.

⁶⁷Vos'moi S"ezd, p. 73.

⁶⁸Sed'maia Konferentsiia, pp. 291-222.

⁶⁹For her position in the 1890's, consult R. Luxemburg, "The Polish Question at the International Congress in London," National Question, p. 58.

⁷⁰R. Luxemburg, "The Russian Revolution," Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p. 382.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 378-383.

⁷²I. Apine, "Vzgliady Stuchki na national'nyi vopros (po rabotam dooktiabr'skogo perioda)," P. Stuchka: revoliutsioner, myslitel', i gosudarstvennyi deiatel' (Riga, 1965), p. 25. Also consult V. A. Shteinberg, "P. Stuchka i ego rol' v bor'be za torzhestvo leninskoi natsional'noi politiki," Filosofskie nauki: nauchnye doklady vysshei shkoly, No. 2, 1964, pp. 88-89.

⁷³Shteinberg, Stuchka, pp. 90-91. He cites what Janis Čakste, later to be the first President of independent Latvia, said in March, 1917, of the attitude of the bourgeoisie towards independence: "We were never enemies of Russia and we never thought of separation from it. We do not demand for ourselves a separate parliament; we want our people... only to receive the common rights of self-government. The current revolution [February revolution] strengthens our union with liberated Russia...."

⁷⁴Kapsukas, Bor'ba, pp. 74-78.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 74 for Angarietis' statement.

⁷⁶Vos'moi S"ezd, pp. 47-48.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 78-80.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 81.

⁷⁹Radek, Theses, p. 513.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 512.

⁸¹Rezoliutsiia po natsional'nomu voprosu, p. 4. Consult also Stuchka, Nashi zadachi, pp. 44-45.

⁸²Cited in Goodman, Soviet Design, p. 210. For his views on the relationship between capitalism and nation states, consult Lenin, Right of Nations, p. 396.

⁸³V. I. Lenin, "Rezoliutsiia konferentsii zagranichnykh seksii R.S.D.R.P.," in Gankin, Fisher, The Bolsheviks, p. 182.

⁸⁴V. I. Lenin, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination," Collected Works, 22 (Moscow, 1964), p. 143.

⁸⁵V. I. Lenin, "The United States of Europe Slogan," The Imperialist War (London, 1930), pp. 271-272.

⁸⁶V. I. Lenin, "Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism," Collected Works, 22, p. 295.

⁸⁷V. I. Lenin, "Under a Stolen Flag," Imperialist War, p. 125.

⁸⁸Lenin, Slogan, p. 272.

⁸⁹V. I. Lenin, "The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution," Collected Works, 23 (Moscow, 1964), p. 79.

⁹⁰V. I. Lenin, "The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination," Imperialist War, p. 368.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 376-377.

⁹²Ibid., p. 376.

⁹³V. I. Lenin, "Revision of the Party Programme," Collected Works, 26 (Moscow, 1964), p. 154. See too his "Socialism and War," Imperialist War, p. 224.

⁹⁴V. I. Lenin, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination," Collected Works, 22, p. 151. For an earlier statement of the same argument, consult Lenin, Right of Nations, p. 405.

⁹⁵V. I. Lenin, "The National Question in Our Programme," Collected Works, 6 (Moscow, 1961), p. 452.

⁹⁶In 1913 Lenin himself stated that it was only the events of 1905 that had opened his eyes to the revolutionary potential of nationalism in the Russian Empire. See his Right of Nations, pp. 452-453.

⁹⁷Lenin, Revolutionary Proletariat, p. 368.

⁹⁸Lenin, Right of Nations, pp. 407-408.

⁹⁹Lenin, Socialism and War, p. 224. See too his Party Programme, p. 161. For a more detailed analysis of this argument, consult Safarov, Natsional'nyi vopros, pp. 57-61, 116-117.

¹⁰⁰Lenin, Right of Nations, pp. 424-425.

¹⁰¹V. I. Lenin, "The Revolutionary Phrase," Collected Works, 27 (Moscow, 1965), pp. 27-28.

¹⁰²S. Page, The Formation of the Baltic States (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), pp. 58-60. See too Goodman, Soviet Design, pp. 203-205.

¹⁰³V. I. Lenin, "Insertion for the Final Draft of the Programme Section of the National Question," Collected Works, 29 (Moscow, 1965), p. 128.

¹⁰⁴V. I. Lenin, "Report on the Party Programme," Collected Works, 29, pp. 172-175. Lenin's shift to a more class-based national policy, in addition to the fact that the clause granting the right of self-determination to nations was removed from the party programme at this Congress, in effect eliminated the national question from the issues at stake between Lenin and the later left oppositions in the Bolshevik party.

¹⁰⁵H. B. Davis, "Introduction," National Question, p. 31. See also Goodman, Soviet Design, p. 229, for a brief, yet clear account of this issue.

¹⁰⁶Even such a standard work as Pipes, Formation, fails to offer any detailed analysis of the position adopted by the revolutionary Marxist parties in Poland, Latvia and Lithuania on the question of national self-determination.

¹⁰⁷A. N. Tarulis, Soviet Policy toward the Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, 1918-1940 (Notre Dame, 1959), p. 40.

¹⁰⁸H. Kohn, Nationalism in the Soviet Union (London, 1933), pp. 48ff.

¹⁰⁹Pipes, Formation, p. 23, argues that the "leftist" approach to the national question was impractical in East Europe. Davis, Introduction, pp. 32-33, questions, however, whether support for or rejection of the theory of self-determination was a real factor in the success or failure of the Soviet revolution in the border regions of the Empire.

"The issue was settled finally... by force of arms.... The idea that the theory of self-determination was responsible for the breakup of the Russian Empire was just as badly overdrawn as the opposite proposition, that the adherence of the border republics to the Bolsheviks was due to the same theory. Concrete evidence is lacking that the theory of self-determination had much to do with the outcome one way or the other."

¹¹⁰See chapter 1 of this work, pp. 42, 47.

¹¹¹M. K. Dziewanowski, "World War 1 and the Marxist Movement of Poland," American Slavic and East European Review, February, 1953, p. 91.

¹¹²M. K. Dziewanowski, The Communist Party of Poland: An Outline of History (Cambridge, 1959), pp. 104-105.

¹¹³V. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas, "Istoki i zarozhdenie Kommunisticheskoi partii Litvy," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 1, 1929, p. 155.

¹¹⁴V. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas, "Revoliutsiia v Litve (1918g.) i sozdanie vremennogo revoliutsionnogo raboche-krest'ianskogo pravitel'stva," Istorik Marsist, Nos. 2-3, 1935, p. 47.

¹¹⁵Ocherki istorii kommunisticheskoi partii Latvii, II (1920-1940) (Riga, 1966), pp. 64-65.

¹¹⁶Davis, Introduction, pp. 32-33.

Chapter 4.

THE PEASANTRY AND THE AGRARIAN QUESTION.

The different agrarian programmes which the "left" Bolsheviks and the revolutionary Marxists of the Kingdom of Poland, Latvia and Lithuania and V. I. Lenin considered necessary for the revolutionary government to pursue were not based on any disagreement on the appropriate structure of socialist agriculture. In fact, both parties shared the vision which had become a Marxist orthodoxy in the late nineteenth century, namely that a system of socially owned large-scale farms, collectively cultivated by a then proletarianised peasantry, was the only form which socialist agriculture could assume. Rather the conflict between them was of a tactical nature, centring on the policies which they held to be essential to realise this common aim. On the one hand, it is plausible to postulate that the "Left Communists" formulated their agrarian programme strictly on the principles elaborated by K. Marx and F. Engels, mindful of their caveat that any deviation from these principles would have consequences threatening further progress towards the socialist transformation of agriculture, and of society generally. Lenin, on the other hand, realistic as ever, came to recognise that in the Russian Empire rigid application of the traditional Marxist agrarian programme would alienate the peasantry, the bulk of the population, from the Bolshevik revolution. Once he became aware of the need to capture the support of this majority if the Bolshevik party were to overthrow the Provisional Government and consolidate its seizure of power Lenin was prepared in the short run to sacrifice long-accepted Marxist doctrines to the expediency of securing this support. Only after the revolutionary government had become firmly established would it be possible to revert to the traditional Marxist programme for the reorganisation of agriculture on socialist lines.

It is first necessary, therefore, to examine the legacy of ideas on the agrarian question which Marx and Engels bestowed on their successors. An understanding of the "Left Communists'" criticism of Lenin's pragmatic approach to agrarian policy only makes sense in this context.

Marx and Engels themselves were convinced that small peasant farming was historically doomed since in capitalist society this would become an increasingly uneconomic mode of production. At the root of this conviction was their belief in the superiority of large-scale capitalist production. They supposed that progress in agriculture would occur in the same manner as in industry: production would become increasingly concentrated in ever larger, more efficient capitalist enterprises.¹ From this they concluded that small peasant farming would be unable to continue to exist in the face of growing competition from large-scale capitalist agriculture, particularly since the growth of industrial capitalism had also deprived the peasant of his handicraft industry which in the past had been vital for his independent survival. In The Peasant Question in France and Germany Engels argued that "the development of the capitalist form of production has cut the life-strings of small production in agriculture; small production is irretrievably going to rack and ruin."² He later continued:

... it is the duty of our Party to make clear to the peasants again and again that their position is absolutely hopeless as long as capitalism holds sway, that it is absolutely impossible to preserve their small holdings for them as such, that capitalist large-scale production is absolutely sure to run over their impotent antiquated system of small production as a train runs over a push-cart. If we do this we shall act in conformity with the inevitable trend of economic development, and this development will not fail to bring our words home to the small peasants.³

As a natural consequence of this development of large-scale capitalist agriculture Marx and Engels also foresaw the inevitable transformation of the independent peasant into a wage-earning proletarian. However they not only regarded the extinction of the peasantry as economically preordained but they also welcomed this. To them the peasantry was a backward, ignorant, and reactionary class, both economically and politically. They believed that the only motivation of the peasantry was the desire to protect its property, and so its independent existence, against the encroachment of capitalism into agriculture. They described this in The Communist Manifesto

Of the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry; the proletariat is its special and

essential product.

The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history.⁴

Furthermore, the "founding fathers" not only despised the peasantry as a feudal remnant, sunk in the "idiocy of rural life", and incapable of organising politically in defence of its own interests, but they also feared it as a potential bulwark of counter-revolution. They were afraid that the landlords and the bourgeoisie would be able to manipulate the peasantry by playing on its property instinct and so turn it against the revolutionary proletariat, whose pursuit of socialism would entail the abolition of all private property. They expressed this belief in the counter-revolutionary nature of the peasantry, which became a leitmotif of their political outlook, in the following manner:

The "dangerous class", the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.⁵

Their analysis of the "laws" of agricultural development and of the class psychology of the peasantry led Marx and Engels to formulate an agrarian programme which they demanded revolutionary socialists should pursue. The implications of their economic analysis formed one basis for their proposal that the large capitalist estates, once expropriated by the revolution, should be preserved intact and handed over to the rural proletariat for communal cultivation. To bow to peasant prejudices in favour of the division of these estates into small-holdings would destroy the progress that had been made towards a more efficient and productive form of agriculture. They firmly believed that large-scale agriculture was a prerequisite of socialism. Moreover, the political consequences which they anticipated would result from such a division confirmed them in their belief that large-scale capitalist agriculture must be defended against attempts to break it up. Land division would only strengthen the class of peasant

proprietors who were innately counter-revolutionary and antagonistic to socialism. Hence Marx and Engels considered it senseless for the revolutionary proletariat to carry out such a measure which could only increase the opposition that it would have to overcome in creating a socialist society. However, they made the proviso that the peasants were not to be coerced into collective agriculture for this would certainly turn them against the revolution; rather they were to be guided along this path by persuasion and the force of example. In the interim period they were to be left in possession of their land.⁶

An examination of the agrarian policies advocated by the "left" Bolsheviks during and after 1917, as well as by the revolutionary Marxist factions in Poland, Latvia and Lithuania certainly appears to support the contention that they derived their agrarian programmes from the basic teachings of Marx and Engels. These Marxists too were certain of the superiority of large-scale agriculture over peasant farming, confident that economic development was leading to the inevitable demise of the latter. Moreover, they also regarded the peasantry with a deep-seated fear, considering it to be a reactionary, petty-bourgeois class which would oppose any attempts to carry out a socialist revolution. Acting on these premises they bitterly criticised any breaking-up of large-scale agriculture, in the belief that the economic and political results of such a measure would be harmful to the development of socialism. Preservation of large-scale agriculture as the basis for socialist farming and the firm refusal to make any concessions to peasant prejudices - these are the characteristics of the agrarian policy defended by these revolutionaries.

However, these Marxists had not blindly adopted Marx's and Engels' prescriptions on agriculture and unquestioningly applied them to their own societies. On the contrary, they had their own specific reasons for espousing such an agrarian programme. In particular, in the case of the "left" Bolsheviks, in order to understand their position on the agrarian question it is first necessary to consider the evolution of Russian Social Democratic thought on this issue. Consequently, an account of the developing attitudes of this movement towards agriculture and the peasantry is necessary. Such a discussion will place the ideas held by these Marxists in their native historical context and, at the

same time, will be of assistance in highlighting the innovations made by Lenin in his own agrarian policy.

The acceptance of Marxism in the Russian Empire can be traced back initially to the 1880's. In this decade it emerged as a new revolutionary credo largely in reaction to the failure in the 1870's of the Populist movement, which had aspired to transform the Russian Empire into a socialist republic, based on the peasant mir. Unfortunately for the Populists, they had found the peasants themselves apathetic, if not openly hostile to their cause.

As a result of this failure, in the early 1880's G. V. Plekhanov, together with his old colleagues, P. B. Akselrod and V. I. Zasulich, forsook his commitment to Populism. The disheartening experiences of the 1870's had led him to disdain the peasants as a reactionary mass, from whom, he now firmly maintained, it was impossible to hope for any support in a revolution to overthrow the autocracy.⁷

Moreover, Plekhanov also came to believe that the mir, the socio-economic structure on which Populist dreams of establishing socialism directly in the Russian Empire were founded, was disintegrating. He argued that since the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 capitalism had been developing in the Empire, both in industry and agriculture. He continued that this process was eroding the egalitarianism and collectivism that had been characteristic of the mir and gradually was differentiating the peasantry into a class of independent capitalist farmers, on the one hand, and a class of rural proletarians, on the other.⁸

Plekhanov now rested his hopes for socialist revolution in the Russian Empire on the nascent industrial proletariat. However, he asserted that before such a revolution could occur it was necessary to encourage the development of capitalism itself. The growth of capitalism would strengthen the ranks of the proletariat, which as a result of this same growth eventually would, in Plekhanov's opinion, acquire the political consciousness and organisational experience necessary to carry out its appointed task of overthrowing capitalism itself and constructing socialism. Consequently, he insisted that it was the duty of Social Democrats in the Empire to support any measures which would promote the advance of capitalism - and to oppose any policies which would hinder such progress.

Of course, the adoption of this position had quite definite ramifications for the attitude that Russian Marxists should take towards the question of agrarian policy. Plekhanov himself, and later, in the 1890's, the "Legal Marxists", such as P. B. Struve and N. I. Ziber, insisted that the destruction of the mir was vital if capitalism was to develop freely. Consequently, the division of the existing communal lands among the peasants should be sanctioned. This measure would remove the remaining obstacles to the growth of capitalism in the countryside and would lead to the increasing concentration of agricultural production in the hands of a class of prosperous farmers (kulaks), who also would provide an expanding market for capitalist industry. At the same time, the remainder of the peasantry would become proletarianised, and either flee the land to join the ranks of the urban workers or form a new and growing class of agricultural labourers.⁹

Nevertheless, these Marxists had no intention of destroying the large capitalist estates that already existed in the Russian Empire. It seems that they considered such a policy to be reactionary, both in the economic sense - common to Marxists of their age, they regarded large-scale agriculture as more efficient than peasant farming - as well as politically, since this would only swell the ranks of the peasants whom they believed to be innately counter-revolutionary. Indeed, they considered that the quiescence that the peasantry displayed during the famine of 1891 to be a further indication of its political apathy.

In fact, the majority of Russian Marxists continued to ignore the peasants as a potential revolutionary force until the revolution of 1905. Admittedly, in 1903 the newly founded Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (R.S.D.W.P.) had adopted a special agrarian programme, although it appears to have taken this step largely as the result of Lenin's initiative. This programme advocated the return of the otrezki to the peasants, that is, the strips of land taken from them by the pomeshchiki at the time of the emancipation. Certainly, it seems that Lenin formulated this policy with the aim of attracting the peasants to support the proletariat in a revolution against the autocracy, yet he also hastened to claim that such a measure would be

economically progressive. He argued that the return of these otrezki to the peasants would cause the dissolution of the estates of the pomeshchiki, which he categorised as feudal latifundia rather than capitalist farms, and at the same time would make independent peasant farming a viable proposition, which in turn would accelerate the development of capitalism in the countryside.¹⁰

However, the events of 1905 compelled the Russian Social Democrats, both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, to revise their traditional neglect of the peasants, since in the revolutionary upheaval against the autocracy in that year the peasants in fact had played a prominent part. In general, the Social Democrats agreed that substantial concessions to the peasants' desire for land should be made, in order to secure their support for a revolutionary overthrow of the autocracy. They concurred that the lands belonging to the church, the state and the pomeshchiki should be confiscated, yet they were divided about what should be done with this land thereafter.

Eventually, this division was reduced to one between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. At the Fourth (Unity) Congress of the R.S.D.W.P., held in Stockholm in 1906, the Mensheviks successfully proposed that the confiscated lands should be "municipalised", that is, they should be put under the control of "democratic organs of local self-government." Subsequently, these lands, or those "on which petty farming was being conducted", a reservation which implied that existing large capitalist farms should be preserved intact, were to be divided for use among the peasants. The advocates of this policy argued that this would be a progressive measure, since by destroying the remnants of feudalism in the countryside it would foster the growth of capitalism in agriculture - and, accordingly, the intensification of the class struggle there.¹¹

The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, were prepared to go even farther to satisfy the peasants' demands. While Lenin himself came out in favour of the nationalisation of the land in 1906, he accepted the agrarian policy proposed by S. I. Borisov (Suvorov) and supported by the majority of the Bolsheviks.¹² Borisov advocated that the land which had been confiscated, with the exclusion of those "properties on which communal agriculture [could] be conducted," immediately should

be partitioned among the peasants, that is, the peasants should be granted the ownership, not just the use of the land.¹³ Lenin himself provided the theoretical justification for such action. Insisting that the large estates in Russia were largely feudal rather than capitalist, he maintained that the division of the land among the peasants in fact would "clear the ground for... and provide a more general, extensive and firm basis for capitalism's further development" in agriculture.¹⁴ Essentially, this was the stage to which the Russian Marxists had developed their views on the agrarian question before 1917. Consequently, the question which must be answered is why the "left" Bolsheviks believed that this programme was no longer applicable after the October revolution - and instead defended an agricultural policy that hearkened back to that espoused by Marx and Engels.

The solution to this problem rests on their interpretation of the nature of the revolution in 1917. Certainly, in the revolution of 1905, which the overwhelming majority of Russian Marxists considered to be bourgeois-democratic, it seems that the future "leftists" did not oppose some concessions to the peasants' desire for land, since at that time, by further destroying the remnants of feudalism in the countryside, such measures would foster the development of capitalism. However, by 1917 these Bolsheviks had come to believe that the Russian Empire was ripe for socialist, not simply bourgeois-democratic revolution. Admittedly, they justified this claim by arguing that the recent developments in Russian industry had created the necessary prerequisites for socialism - they tended to ignore agriculture, although N. I. Bukharin did maintain in 1917 that capitalism in Russian agriculture had developed significantly after 1905.¹⁵ Nevertheless, despite their neglect of agriculture, they still insisted that the agrarian programme which had been appropriate in 1905, at the stage of bourgeois revolution, now had to be revised.

I. I. Skvortsov-Stepanov, a prominent Bolshevik theoretician - with V. A. Bazarov he had translated Capital into Russian, he was the co-author, with A. A. Bogdanov, of A Course of Political Economy, which became a standard Bolshevik textbook, and in 1917 he had been editor of Sotsial-Demokrat and Izvestiia, Bolshevik papers published

in Moscow¹⁶ - and a leading member of the "Left Communist" movement in 1918, clearly explained why the old Bolshevik agrarian programme was no longer applicable. At first, he accepted that in the 1905 revolution it had been justifiable for Social Democrats to agree to a division of the land among the peasants. On the one hand, such a measure would have resulted in the "destruction of pomeshchik landownership, the support of the old political order,... and [in] the elimination of one of the most serious obstacles to capitalist development...." He continued that this policy would also have led to the "formation of such farms [large capitalist farms] which would guarantee the rapid development of agriculture through capitalism to socialism." However, he insisted that after the October revolution this programme was no longer suitable. The Bolsheviks were now facing a totally different situation than that in 1905. Since the party was now implementing a policy designed at the "proletarian organisation of industry," he declared that it would be inconsistent if it surrendered "agriculture into the power of petty-bourgeois illusions."¹⁷ In effect, Stepanov was arguing that since the October revolution was socialist, then the party had to carry out a socialist agrarian policy. An examination of the agrarian programme defended by Stepanov and his fellow thinkers in 1918, and later, will reveal what these Bolsheviks considered to be the characteristics of such a policy.

Analysis of the "Left Communists'" criticisms of the land socialisation law¹⁸ of February, 1918, supported by Lenin and passed into law by the Third Congress of Soviets, proves that they were convinced of the superiority of large-scale agriculture and strove to maintain this. A pro-Leninist participant in the debates on this law in early 1918 justly summarised the arguments of the "Left Communists" in the following statement:

The new land law is characterised by the majority of its critics as a reactionary act. Its reactionary character is seen chiefly in that it opens the way to a small-scale economy, that it creates and strengthens the number of "petty farms", that it causes an inevitable shift of all agriculture towards a natural economy, with the inevitable consequence of this, the fall in its productivity.¹⁹

The "Left Communists'" own arguments against land socialisation merely confirm the fairness of the preceding account. In a series of

discussion articles on the question of land socialisation which appeared in Izvestiia and Pravda in January and February, 1918, E. A. Preobrazhensky, a leading "leftist" in the Bolshevik party, defended typical "Left Communist" premises. He attacked the land socialisation law on the grounds that it did not say a word about the reconstruction of agriculture on socialist foundations. This required the preservation of the large estates for collective cultivation and also the encouragement of the small peasants to establish communal forms of farming.²⁰ Instead this law sanctioned the division of the existing large estates among the peasants. Part of Preobrazhensky's critique reads:

The protection of the capitalist farms from disintegration and the transfer of them entirely into the hands of the Soviets has not been envisaged. On the contrary, there is a point about rewarding the batraki with land... which proposes the breaking up of such farms into small allotments and which is both deeply reactionary from the economic point of view and deeply unjust to the agricultural proletariat.²¹

Preobrazhensky developed his critique of land division in the particular case of Russia after three years of war. He asserted that since the majority of the poorer peasants had insufficient stocks of seed, tools and especially draught power to work any allotments given to them production would fall disastrously as a result of land division. He was convinced that "we [the Bolshevik government] cannot allow ourselves the luxury of an uncontrolled small-scale economy in such difficult conditions."²²

Stepanov outlined in greater detail the "Left Communist" criticisms of the economic consequences of land socialisation. Resting his case on the familiar Marxist assumption that large-scale agriculture was more efficient and productive than peasant farming, he argued that an equalising division of the land among the peasantry, which land socialisation in fact meant, would hamper the technical and economic development of agriculture. Productivity would not only fall as a direct result of division but progress towards the superior system of large-scale socialist agriculture would also be delayed. First, the economies of scale which would result from the application of modern machinery in agriculture could only be obtained on large farms, not within a system of peasant small-holdings. Moreover the modern

equipment which already existed in Russia for the extensive cultivation of the large estates could not be optimally used if these were broken up into a myriad of small peasant farms. Hence Stepanov saw land socialisation as an economically retrogressive measure, re-establishing in the countryside a less efficient mode of production and at the same time destroying the prerequisites of the socialist agriculture of the future.²³

In the following year, 1919, a new left opposition, the Democratic Centralist movement, emerged within the Bolshevik party. This group, however, offered no essential criticism of the agrarian programme then supported by Lenin and his associates. One plausible explanation of this absence of criticism is that from the summer of 1918 Lenin had in effect commenced a campaign to reverse the effects of the land socialisation. In face of peasant resistance to give up grain to feed the towns and the Red Army Lenin proposed the requisitioning of the peasants' surpluses - committees of poor peasants (*kombedy*) were formed to assist in extracting these surpluses from the kulaks and middle peasants - and also encouraged the establishment of large-scale collective forms of agriculture. As early as July, 1918, the Moscow Congress of Soviets had urged a change of policy in this direction; in November, 1918, the Commissariat of Agriculture set aside subsidies to promote the transition from individual to collective farming; and in December, 1918 a resolution much in the same spirit was passed by the Second Congress of the Councils of the National Economy. The culmination of this change in policy was the new land law of February, 1919, which contrary to condoning individual peasant farming stressed the urgency of creating a system of large-scale communal agriculture; no longer would the division of the land be given priority.²⁴ Unlike the land socialisation law which had emphasised the satisfaction of the peasants' desire for their own individual holdings, this law relegated such satisfaction to last; land was to be used primarily for the needs of collective farming, admittedly of various forms.²⁵

Therefore in 1919 the Democratic Centralists had no cause to criticise the party's agrarian policy. Lenin and the majority had reverted, albeit temporarily, as the future was soon to show, to the traditional Marxist programme of supporting large-scale collective

agriculture, as the "Left Communists" of 1918 had sought.

The next swing of the pendulum in Bolshevik agrarian policy, however, provoked stormy criticism from a new left opposition in the party, the Workers' Opposition. After Lenin had introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP), which made concessions to individual peasant farming, the Workers' Opposition came forward with a defence of the old and familiar Marxist premise of the superiority of large-scale agriculture. Like the preceding oppositions they too had no concern for the peasantry,²⁶ whom they considered doomed by the development of capitalism. They criticised the NEP on the grounds that it was an economically reactionary measure which was artificially delaying the transition to new socialist collective farming by its efforts to prop up the individual peasant producer. S. P. Medvedev, one of the leaders of this movement, repudiated these efforts in the following words:

We [the Workers' Opposition] consider... that small production in the conditions of the NEP... is doomed.... All attempts to save it, to help it to survive and even to develop are reactionary, Utopian efforts....²⁷

These "left" Bolsheviks were not alone in the belief that large-scale agriculture was a progressive form of farming, necessary in socialist society. The Marxist revolutionaries in Russian Poland, the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (S.D.K.P.iL) based their agrarian programme on the same premises. They too appeared to be of the traditional Marxist persuasion that large-scale capitalist agriculture was economically superior to peasant farming. J. Marchlewski, their authority on agrarian matters, maintained that "... [large-scale farming] leads to a higher stage of development than peasant agriculture ... as a result of its better technique...."²⁸ Therefore to break up the large estates by an equalising division of the land among the poor and landless peasants would cast agriculture back to a less efficient state, with the inevitable consequence of this, a fall in production.²⁹ At the same time the destruction of large-scale agriculture would demolish one of the prerequisites for the socialist organisation of economic life. Rosa Luxemburg summarised the position of the S.D.K.P.iL. on this question in these words:

In the first place, only the nationalisation of the large landed estates, as the technically most advanced and concentrated means and methods of agrarian production, can serve

as the point of departure for the socialist mode of production on the land... for it is this alone which affords the possibility of organising agricultural production in accord with the requirements of interrelated, large-scale socialist production.³⁰

The pro-Bolshevik Marxists in Latvia, the revolutionary wing of the Social Democracy of Latvia (S.D.L.), also fully shared the theory of agricultural development formulated by Marx and Engels and framed their policy in accord with this. From the origins of their party in 1904 these Latvian revolutionaries consistently manifested their belief in the superiority of large-scale capitalist agriculture, whose growth would lead, on the one hand, to the elimination of small peasant farming and, on the other hand, to the creation of the foundations for a socialist system of agriculture. A leading Soviet historian of the S.D.L. has succinctly described its outlook on this question:

The law of the concentration of capital both in the town and in the countryside must lead to the triumph of the large enterprise, to the destruction of the small backward peasant farm. The more large farms there are, the more the "prerequisites" for socialism. The Latvian Social Democrats argued in approximately this manner.³¹

Given these theoretical premises it was perfectly logical for the S.D.L. to oppose the breaking-up of the large estates. Division of these among the peasantry was considered an economically regressive measure, contrary to the course of economic development. It would re-establish a less productive form of farming in the countryside, simultaneously destroying the material basis for the socialist transformation of agriculture. In 1906 the S.D.L. outlined the attitude to agriculture which it stubbornly defended until 1923:

Social Democrats can neither sympathise with the expropriation of large peasant farms nor with the division of large estates into small allotments. To expropriate now compulsorily the land from the large landowners in order to create three or four times as many small farms would be stupidity of the most extreme kind. This would mean delaying capitalist development, obstructing the concentration of capital and the differentiation of the rural population into a proletariat and bourgeoisie where this has already begun.³²

Belief in the economic superiority of large-scale farming similarly was a fundamental determinant of the attitude which the Marxist revolutionaries of Lithuania, the internationalist wing of the Social Democratic

Party of Lithuania (S.D.P.L.), adopted towards agriculture. Any division of the large estates, apart from destroying the foundations for the large-scale agriculture deemed appropriate for a socialist economy, would greatly increase the numbers of less efficient peasant small-holdings, which would inevitably produce less. They imagined that the country would suffer disastrously from this fall in production, arguing that "the division and parcelling out of the estates and khutors will lead only to economic confusion and hunger."³³

However, to be fair to the revolutionary Marxists in Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, it must be admitted that they had their own particular reasons for subscribing to Marxist orthodoxy regarding their agrarian policies. Basically, they argued, with some measure of justice, that the development of capitalism in agriculture had advanced further in these regions than in Great Russia itself, which meant that agrarian programme that Marx and Engels had formulated as appropriate for revolutionary socialists was applicable.

The clearest example of this situation was Latvia, which had a radically different agrarian history from Russia itself. Here the peasants had been emancipated, admittedly without land, before 1820 and had been transformed into tenant farmers. However, peasant land hunger continued to exist, a fact which impelled the tsarist government in the 1840's to pass measures enabling the peasants both to buy their land and also to increase their holdings, largely to avert the danger of future agrarian unrest. This policy stimulated the growth of a class of peasant farmers. Furthermore, the Latvian peasants, unlike their Russian counter-parts who were still united in the mir, where agriculture continued to be practised according to the old feudal strip system, independently owned their land in consolidated plots.³⁴

Moreover, after the emancipation of 1861, when capitalism began to expand generally in the Russian Empire, it appears that the growth of capitalist agriculture in Latvia accelerated. By the turn of the century this development had led to a clear class differentiation in the Latvian countryside. On the one hand, there existed a small number of large estate owners, usually Baltic Germans, and of wealthy Latvian farmers - often referred to as the "grey barons" -, who together owned more than 70 per cent of the land, and a numerous landless peasantry

and rural proletariat. Indeed, the Latvian Social Democrats emphasised that 70 per cent of those engaged in agriculture in Latvia were batraki, while in Russia itself agricultural labourers only amounted to 20 per cent of the rural population.³⁵

The Latvian Social Democrats in general inferred from their analysis that capitalism in agriculture had become firmly established in Latvia. Agricultural production had become increasingly concentrated in large-scale enterprises, and the majority of the rural population had become proletarianised. Accordingly, they maintained, especially the pro-Bolshevik wing, that the conditions in the Latvian countryside were ripe for the direct socialist transformation of agriculture, even if this was not so in Russia itself. In 1917, P. I. Stuchka strongly defended this position. He accepted that in Russia, where cultivation of the land within the mir on the old strip system, an exceedingly primitive form of agriculture, was still prevalent, the division of the land, by stimulating the formation of private landed property, and, consequently, the development of capitalist agriculture, would be a progressive measure.³⁶ Yet such a division of the land into smallholdings in Latvia itself would be a reactionary policy, since this would destroy the existing large capitalist estates, the basis for future socialist agriculture. Stuchka unequivocally declared:

... if we admit that for Russia the division of the large estates and the ensuing painful process of capitalist concentration of the land does not contradict progress, we consider that for us this would be a step back. Even the Latvian Social Revolutionaries... demand cooperative cultivation of the land, and not the aforementioned [demand for] "equalising use"... that arose in the conditions of the backward countryside of autocratic Russia.... If the path of the Russian Social Revolutionaries leads through socialisation to capitalism which has still not been attained there, then we must boldly transform the capitalism that exists in our agriculture into socialism.³⁷

Agrarian conditions in the Kingdom of Poland also were different from those in Russia itself, in that capitalist agriculture there too had developed more extensively. Certainly, the S.D.K.P.iL itself was convinced that this was the case. Like their Latvian comrades, they believed that the land had become concentrated in the hands of capitalist producers. In turn, this had led to the radical class differentiation of the Polish countryside, so that in the first decade

of the twentieth century a small number of landed magnates, who owned huge estates, as well as an increasing class of prosperous, independent peasant farmers stood opposed to a growing mass of landless peasants and agricultural labourers who worked on the lands of the former. In fact, by 1910 this rural proletariat numbered about two million, while there existed only one million peasant farmers, the overwhelming majority of whom, moreover, were exceedingly small.³⁸

Consequently, given this growth of capitalism in agriculture, it seems that these Polish Marxists concluded that any policy which would reverse this would be reactionary, and thus impermissible. They considered any division of the land to be such a measure. Not only would this destroy the existing large capitalist estates, but at the same time would strengthen that class which they had come to regard as a dangerous opponent of socialism, namely, the independent farmers (kulaks).

The revolutionary Lithuanian Marxists also maintained that capitalism in agriculture in Lithuania was considerably more advanced than in Russia itself. They claimed that before 1914 the majority of pomeshchiks had transformed their estates into large capitalist farms. Moreover, they continued that the remaining land had become concentrated in the hands of the middle and large peasants, who also conducted capitalist agriculture, with the help of the hired labour of the landless peasants and rural proletariat, on their already consolidated farms (khutory) - as S. Girinis, himself a member of the S.D.P.L., argued, for a lengthy time there had been no obshchina, or mir, in Lithuania.³⁴ Furthermore, they insisted that this process of capitalist growth in agriculture had been intensified by the Stolypin reform, so that after 1905 the concentration of production and the differentiation of classes in the countryside had become even more pronounced.⁴⁰

Accordingly, it appears that their opposition to any division of the land in Lithuania was also based on their assessment of the peculiarities of their native agrarian structure. Presumably, they believed that the re-partitioning of the land, while perhaps progressive in Russia, would negate the developments already made by capitalism in Lithuanian agriculture, destroy the prerequisites of socialism in the countryside, that is, the large capitalist estates, and in the very process increase the ranks of the propertied, whom they too feared would be bitterly opposed to any socialist reforms.

The preceding account clearly establishes one major influence on the approach of these Marxists to the agrarian question. Applying the teachings of Marx and Engels, they unreservedly accepted the "founding fathers'" conviction of the economic superiority of large-scale agriculture.⁴¹ They regarded this as a progressive feature on the inexorable onward march of history towards the Nirvana of socialism and as such requiring preservation. However it would be erroneous to assume that their defence of large-scale agriculture was determined solely by some crude determinist belief in its superiority to peasant farming. On the contrary, they also had strong political reservations about the consequences of any division of large-scale agriculture. As heirs to the virulent anti-peasantism of traditional Russian and East European Marxism they too feared and mistrusted the influence of the peasantry, whom they regarded as inalienably hostile to socialism. Accepting this premise they claimed that any revolutionary agrarian policy, such as land division, which promised to increase the strength and numbers of the peasantry, must be rejected since this would swell the ranks of those opposed to the development of socialism.

The reactionary political consequences of any division of the land was certainly an important factor in the formation of the "left" Bolsheviks' views on the agrarian question. Bukharin, a leading "Left Communist" until 1921, was undoubtedly influenced by this fear of peasant opposition to socialist revolution. At the Sixth Congress of the Bolshevik party in the summer of 1917 he issued a warning, later developed by the "Left Communist" movement of 1918, that support of the peasants' seizure of the pomeshchiks' land would prove to be a double-edged sword for the Bolsheviks. While admitting that this tactical line could secure the support of the peasants for a coup against the Provisional Government, he was wary of the longer term consequences of this. He was afraid that this policy would result in the creation of a numerous "satiated peasantry" who, once it had secured the land, would desert the revolution and join the anti-socialist forces in Russia in defence of its property.⁴²

Later, in his major treatise on sociology, Historical Materialism, Bukharin presented what can be interpreted as a general theoretical justification for the distrust which he, and presumably many of his

fellow Bolsheviks, manifested towards the peasantry. In essence, he maintained that by virtue of their socio-economic position as private producers the peasants must be considered to be innately hostile to socialism. He defended this view in the following manner:

In other words, the peasantry - for instance - lack several of the elements necessary to make them a communist class: they are bound down by property, and it will take many years to train them a new view, which can only be done by having the state power in the hands of the proletariat; also, the peasantry are not held together in production, in social labour and common action; on the contrary, the peasant's entire joy is in his own bit of land; he is accustomed to individual management, not to cooperation with others.⁴³

Fear of peasant reaction is cited by M. D-skii as a fundamental source of "Left Communist" opposition to the land socialisation law of February, 1918. Summarising the "Left Communists'" critique he argued that they essentially objected to this law because by approving the division of the large estates it would swell the ranks of the counter-revolution. He described the "Left Communists'" reaction in the following manner:

... the new law, impregnated as it is with an individualistic tendency, disunites the labouring peasant masses, atomises them and opens the doors wide for the creation of a rural petty-bourgeoisie, which, economically backward and feeble, is a very reactionary class everywhere, always and in all respects.⁴⁴

Fear of the peasantry as a restraining, even corruptive influence on the socialist character of the Bolshevik government's policies without doubt was a leitmotif of the "Left Communists'" polemics against Lenin in 1918. In their Theses and Kommunist, their theoretical journal, the "Left Communists" bitterly criticised Lenin for jettisoning the principles accepted by the party in 1917 in order to appease peasant pressure and prejudices. Apart from land socialisation they saw the spectre of peasant pressure on other actions taken by the revolutionary government. They took the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk as an example of this. They considered that the failure to wage a revolutionary war against the forces of world imperialism, accepted party policy in the pre-October period, in favour of a heinous peace with Germany was caused by Lenin's desire to placate the peasantry.⁴⁵ Generalising from this they feared that the party would bow further to peasant

pressure and fail to carry out the policies which alone could guarantee the further development of Russia towards socialism. The proclaimed this in their Theses:

But as a result of the immediate, direct consequences of the peace, the reduction in class activity and the increased declassing of the proletariat in the main revolutionary centres, as a result of the increased class rapprochement between the proletariat and the poor peasants (who after the signing of peace under the pressure of their demands and influence must become a bulwark of Soviet power), there arises the strong possibility of a tendency towards deviation on the part of the majority of the communist party and Soviet power led by it into the channel of petty-bourgeois politics of a new type.

In the event that such a tendency should materialise, the working class will cease to be the leader and guide of the socialist revolution inspiring the poor peasantry to destroy the rule of finance capital and the landowners. It will become a force which is dissipated in the ranks of the semi-proletarian petty-bourgeois masses, which see as their task not proletarian struggle in alliance with the West European proletariat for the overthrow of the imperialist system, but the defence of the petty proprietor fatherland from the pressure of imperialism. This aim is also attainable through compromise with the latter. In the event of a rejection of active proletarian politics, the conquests of the workers' and peasants' revolution will start to coagulate into a system of state capitalism and petty-bourgeois economic relations. "The defence of the socialist fatherland" will then prove in fact to be the defence of a petty-bourgeois motherland subject to the influence of international capital.⁴⁶

This foreboding of the consequences of peasant influence helps explain the "Left Communists'" opposition to any land division. They believed that by strengthening the peasantry such a measure would obstruct the development of the revolution towards socialism.

Moreover the "Left Communists" were convinced that an equal division of land among the peasants would only create the conditions for the restoration of capitalism in the countryside. Stepanov clearly outlined the "Left Communist" case. He contended that any policy of land equalisation would prove to be impractical and Utopian, for not every peasant family owned the cattle, seed and equipment necessary to cultivate the allotment given to them. Consequently this land would become reconcentrated in the hands of the prosperous peasants who had the means to work it. Thus land division would re-sow the

seeds of capitalism in the country and in the long run the poor and exploited peasants would gain nothing.⁴⁷

In essence the Workers' Opposition shared the same belief that any concessions to the peasants would prevent the growth of socialism. They vehemently criticised the NEP, which permitted the peasants to farm individually and freely market the surpluses left to them after the government had deducted its tax in kind, as a return to petty-bourgeois capitalism. They also saw NEP as precluding the rapid development of industry which was vital if the proletariat, the class basis of socialism, was to be preserved and strengthened. They feared that this concern to placate the peasantry and total disregard of the proletariat could only result in even greater peasant influence on party policy which would lead to the degeneration of the revolution.⁴⁸

The S.D.K.P.i.L. shared similar anti-peasant views, a fact which placed it squarely in the tradition of orthodox Marxism - although one must also remember that in general the revolutionary gentry and intelligentsia in the Kingdom of Poland had become disillusioned earlier in the nineteenth century by the political anarchy typically manifested by the Polish peasants. From its origin this party had regarded the peasantry as an innately reactionary class, hostile to socialist and even bourgeois-democratic revolution. At the Sixth Congress of the S.D.K.P.i.L. L. Tyszko, one of the party's leaders, scathingly rejected the peasantry as a revolutionary force:

The action of the proletariat, striving to shake the very foundation of the contemporary economy... is in the given revolution a historically necessary factor of primary importance, without which it is completely impossible to visualise the revolution.... But in this struggle the proletariat will be opposed by every social class, often including the peasantry. And therefore to strive towards a dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry means the same as aspiring to arm with a dictatorship that class which at a certain stage in the revolution will turn its power and all the weapons it has conquered against the proletariat and certain results of the revolution. The Bolsheviks' mistake is that they have gazed into the revolutionary face of the peasantry but they forget about its other reactionary face which is a more permanent one, more linked with the conditions of its existence.⁴⁹

This antipathy of the S.D.K.P.i.L. towards the peasantry was forcefully expressed by Rosa Luxemburg in her seminal pamphlet, The

Russian Revolution, where she bitterly criticised Lenin's agrarian policy after the Bolshevik seizure of power. She objected to Lenin's acquiescence to a division of the land of the large estates among the peasants on the grounds that this had created a numerous class of propertied peasants who would defend their newly acquired land against future efforts of the revolutionary government to carry out a socialist reconstruction of agriculture:

The Leninist agrarian reform has created a new and more powerful layer of popular enemies of socialism in the countryside, enemies whose resistance will be much more dangerous and stubborn than that of the noble large landowners.⁵⁰

However Rosa did admit that it would have been unfair to expect Lenin to socialise agriculture immediately, to solve "the most difficult task of the socialist transformation of society."⁵¹ Yet she still contended that Lenin should at least have kept intact the large estates and in this way avoided adding a new class of landed peasants to the forces of counter-revolution. She saw concessions to the peasants as incompatible with the development of socialism.⁵²

The Latvian Social Democrats also were afraid of the peasantry, which they held to be a petty-bourgeois class with interests little different from those of other larger landowners.⁵³ Therefore they regarded any compromises with the peasantry as anathema, for attempts to satisfy peasant prejudices would be detrimental to the proletariat and harmful to the growth of socialism. They defended this premise in the following manner:

The Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party, while opposing any sort of exploitation and oppression, in the meantime limits its work to the direct defence of proletarian interests and therefore does not undertake to present demands which would exclusively benefit the peasants. The Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party opposes the inclusion of demands in its programme which only benefit the peasants and promote the strengthening of their property at the expense of society and the workers (the Iskraist "otrezki").....⁵⁴

This was another basis for the continued rejection, in 1919, of any division of the pomeshchiks' estates by the revolutionary wing of the S.D.L. This would convert the batraki back into peasant smallholders who would be hostile to socialist revolution, which promised to destroy individual property.⁵⁵

The revolutionary Marxists of the S.D.P.L. also based their agrarian policy on the premise that concessions to the peasantry and progress towards socialism were contradictory. They too considered the peasantry to be an innately anti-socialist class, interested solely in the preservation and extension of its own property. Z. I. Angarietis, the Commissar of Agriculture in the first, short-lived Communist government of Lithuania in 1918-1919, revealed perfectly clearly the distrust that he and his comrades had of the peasants. In 1918, outlining his attitude towards the peasants, in particular the middle peasants, he declared:

They, together with the proprietors who own 20-30 desyatinas, make up those "working-men" who support all kinds of social movements, the populists and the clerical parties. They are perpetually wavering, inconsistent elements. Since this stratum wants only to own more and more land, in revolutionary times it will support the revolution only in so far as this will bring it some land.

These farmers (10-20 desyatinas) are numerous. The workers will have to take them into account and act very cautiously. It will not be necessary to take away their land, since we will have sufficient already. Nor will it be necessary to give them any of the confiscated land, since they possess enough land. Nor can we win them round with promises that when the revolution is victorious they will be enriched with the landlord estates. It would be a great blow to the Lithuanian revolution to give them the lands from the big estates. They would then form a numerous army of middle proprietors in the countryside, sufficiently strong economically to oust the agrarian proletariat and to take all agricultural affairs into their own hands. As the urban workers in Lithuania are few in number they could also be a great threat to the towns. Suitably organised they could become the real masters of Lithuania.⁵⁶

Accordingly, they rejected any compromises with the peasants since they feared that this tactic would strengthen the latter and, consequently, jeopardise any steps that the proletariat might take towards socialism. Indeed, explaining retrospectively the rationale behind their agrarian policy V. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas essentially confirmed Angarietis' analysis. Discussing the origins of this policy he stated:

... at the Eighth Congress of the S.D.P.L., at the beginning of 1909, the demand for the confiscation of pomeshchik land and for a separate agrarian programme was eliminated on the grounds that the destruction of the large estates and the conversion of the agricultural proletariat into petty proprietors (by means of the division of the land) was harmful to the working class.⁵⁷

The preceding account serves to demonstrate that these Marxists, quite independently and for their own reasons, had come to defend a basically identical agrarian programme, one, moreover, which typically was advocated by the radical "leftists" in the Bolshevik party until 1929. Furthermore, the basic principles that were emphasised in this programme - the belief that large-scale agriculture was necessarily more efficient than peasant farming, and the categorisation of the peasantry as a virulently reactionary class - harken back to those espoused by Marx and Engels themselves.

These "Left Communists" too demanded the preservation of large-scale agriculture as the economically necessary foundation for the future system of socialist agriculture; the breaking-up of this would also strengthen the peasantry, a counter-revolutionary class. Moreover they accepted the proviso of the "founding fathers" against the use of force to coerce the peasants into a collective system of agriculture; rather they were to be left in possession of the land which they farmed and persuaded, hopefully by the example of the more productive communes set up on the large estates, voluntarily to relinquish independent farming and establish their own cooperative forms of agriculture.

On the other hand, an analysis of Lenin's approach to the agrarian question convincingly proves that he was prepared to jettison the prescriptions of orthodox Marxism whenever he felt that such action was required to secure the support of the peasant majority behind the revolutionary Russian proletariat, or its state.

It is important, however, to realise that Lenin too accepted the traditional doctrine that small peasant farming was destined to be replaced by the superior large-scale mode of agriculture which would become the basis for socialist collective farming.⁵⁸ In the early summer of 1917, less than half a year before he agreed to the division of the large estates among the peasantry, he maintained that "the party of the proletariat must make it clear that small scale farming under commodity production cannot save mankind from poverty and oppression."⁵⁹ Moreover Lenin also had no illusions about the class nature of the peasantry and their attitude towards socialism. In the middle of 1918 Lenin defended the classical Marxist categorisation of the peasantry, arguing that "they [the peasants] are guided by no other ideals than their own

narrow interests," that "they are against us. They do not believe in the new order."⁶⁰

However Lenin did not carry out the agrarian programme consonant with these traditional Marxist premises. In 1917 he supported the division of the land among the peasants; subsequently in 1921, in response to peasant opposition to the forcible extraction of their grain and to the state monopoly in trade, as well as their reluctance to participate in collective forms of agriculture, Lenin introduced the NEP which placated the peasants by replacing the prodrazverstka by a limited tax in kind, by allowing the free marketing of any surpluses left after this tax, and by giving them the right to farm individually if they so desired.

At the basis of Lenin's refusal to adhere to the classical Marxist agrarian programme was a realistic evaluation of the consequences which would flow from implementing it. He came to understand that strict enforcement of this programme in the Russian Empire would so alienate the peasant majority that the chances of the Bolsheviks' successfully seizing and consolidating political power would be gravely jeopardised.

Since the early 1900's, and particularly since the revolution of 1905, Lenin had become very aware of the revolutionary potential of the peasants in the struggle against the autocracy. To win them to the side of revolution he was prepared to modify the accepted Marxist agrarian programme, even up to the point of acquiescing in the peasants' confiscation and division of the pomeshchiks' lands.⁶¹ In 1917 he adopted a similar strategy to secure peasant support for the Bolsheviks' overthrow of the Provisional Government. Growing realisation of the peasants' and agricultural labourers' "land hunger" which was evident in their "spontaneous" seizure of the pomeshchiks' estates during 1917 led him pragmatically to abandon his proposal to establish collective farms on these lands after the revolution. Instead he agreed to the division of these estates among the peasants, in the belief that only this policy could assure the Bolsheviks of the peasants' support and prevent their desertion to the side of counter-revolution. Lenin defended himself by arguing that the primary objective of the Bolsheviks in 1917 should be the seizure of political power. If concessions to

the peasantry, such as land division, were required to ensure the success of this action, then such a move was tactically permissible - and, moreover, perfectly consistent with Marxism, which in his opinion was just a "guide to action, not a dogma" -, since after the revolution it would be possible to convince the peasants of the advantages of large-scale, "mechanised socialist agriculture". He summarised his position as follows:

The peasants want to preserve their small farms, to distribute the land on an equal basis, and periodically to equalise their holdings.... Let them do so. No sensible socialist will part from the poor peasantry because of this... provided political power has been transferred to the proletariat, the rest [the formation of socialist agriculture] will come quite naturally, as the result of "force of example", prompted by experience itself.

The transfer of political power to the proletariat - this is the essential thing....⁶²

Lenin, of course, offered a theoretical justification of this policy. Unlike his "leftist" protagonists he argued that the large estates in the Russian Empire were feudal latifundia, not capitalist farms. Therefore he contended that it was in fact a progressive policy to divide these estates among the peasants for this would allow the rapid development of capitalist agriculture, with the consequent differentiation of the rural population into a prosperous peasantry and an agricultural proletariat. The latter would then become the ally of the industrial proletariat in its struggle for socialism.⁶³

All theorising about the defensibility of land division from the viewpoint of Marxist doctrine apart, there is no doubt that this policy was a realistic response to the attitudes and aspirations of the peasants and agricultural labourers. Many contemporary accounts demonstrate that conventional Marxist agrarian policy, directed towards the establishment of socialist agriculture, had no appeal for the rural poor. On the contrary, they reveal the desire of this stratum to divide the large pomeshchik estates and to conduct individual farming on these lands.

Lenin was not the only Bolshevik to perceive that these aspirations existed among the rural poor. An unsigned editorial in Izvestiia in January, 1918 stated that the land socialisation law was just a de facto ratification of the egalitarian land division which the

peasants had been independently carrying out since the collapse of the autocracy in February, 1917.⁶⁴ Klementii, who defended the Leninist approach to land socialisation, also contended that an egalitarian land division was the only practical response to peasant aspirations. He shared Lenin's opinion that no subjective basis for a socialist reorganisation of agriculture existed since the peasants longed to divide the pomeshchiks' land; therefore he accepted that the land socialisation law was a necessary measure at that time.⁶⁵ V. Meshcheriakov, also a supporter of Lenin's agrarian policy, in view of the peasants' psychology questioned the viability of a socialist transformation of agriculture in the immediate post-revolutionary period:

But was it really possible to undertake in November, as an immediate task, the bringing about of socialism - the system of socialised labour on socialised land? Everybody can understand that this was not possible.... The peasant masses have no idea what socialism means and want only a free additional allotment of land on egalitarian principles. We had to accept that programme as it was.... Though the law is a considerable improvement on the old order there is not a grain of socialism in it....⁶⁶

Despite the different agrarian conditions in Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland, where there were more individual peasant small-holdings and a larger rural proletariat than in Great Russia, the aspirations of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers there corresponded to those of their Russian counterparts. They too were interested in acquiring their own piece of land, not in the reorganisation of agriculture into the collective farms that were regarded as appropriate for socialism.

S. Pestkovskii, an astute Bolshevik observer of the Soviet revolution in Lithuania, maintained that the Lithuanian peasants sought the division of the pomeshchiks' estates among themselves, not the establishment of communes on these lands as the revolutionary government proposed.⁶⁷ Even Angarietis, the Commissar of Agriculture who drew up this government's agrarian programme, admitted that the peasants were only interested in the division of the land, although at the same time he argued that this was an unacceptable policy for Marxist revolutionaries.⁶⁸

The situation in Latvia proved to be the same. Krastyn has gathered much evidence in support of the contention that the small and

and landless peasants there also wanted an egalitarian division of the land rather than the creation of communes on the large estates.⁶⁹ He cites the statement of a Latvian peasant, Sobolev, made at a conference of non-party workers and peasants of the Rezhitskii uezd in 1919, as representative of the attitude of the peasants. Sobolev declared that "the peasants who sent him [to the conference] asked him to say that the land should be the people's, that a peasant should have as much land as he could work without hired labour."⁷⁰ The attitudes of the small peasants and agricultural labourers in Poland turned out to be no exception to this pattern. Certainly, Marchlewski claimed that the rural proletariat in Poland did not want any division of the land since they realised that because of the land shortage in Poland such a measure would only result in the creation of a series of unviable dwarf farms.⁷¹ Yet, in retrospect, it appears that Marchlewski's assessment was mistaken. Subsequent studies indicate that the proletariat and semi-proletariat in the Polish countryside in fact were bent on the division of the existing large estates into individual small-holdings rather than on the communal cultivation of these that the S.D.K.P.iL. advocated.⁷² Moreover, there are grounds for accepting this latter conclusion. At its Second Congress, in 1923, the Communist Party of Poland, the successor of the S.D.K.P.iL., abandoned the agrarian programme traditionally defended by revolutionary Marxists in Poland. It now declared that the victory of socialist revolution in Poland depended on the alliance (smychka) between the proletariat and the peasants, to guarantee which it renounced its former insistence that the large estates should be preserved intact as the foundation for collective socialist agriculture in favour of a policy of "land to the peasants".⁷³ It is plausible to regard this reversal of policy by the Polish Marxists as tacit admission that their previous estimate of the aspirations of the rural poor had been incorrect, and also as an indication that they had come to understand that concessions to the peasants' hunger for land was vital if their support was to be won.

The preceding description of the "Left Communist" and Leninist agrarian policies raises a number of questions. First, there is the problem which the word "Left" itself connotes. In this case the word "Left" is a misnomer for the "Left Communists" were in the mainstream

of orthodox Marxist thought, strictly following the teachings laid down by Marx and Engels themselves. Lenin and his associates were the "deviants", pragmatically abandoning accepted doctrine when this threatened to thwart the conquest and consolidation of power.

At the same time, while the agrarian programme of the "Left Communists" may have been more orthodox than that of Lenin and his associates, it cannot be considered to have been democratic, in the sense that it was designed to satisfy the demands of the people as a whole. On the contrary, the "Left Communists" were quite prepared to disregard totally the desire for the land of the greater part of the peasantry, the majority of the population in the Russian Empire, on the grounds that any concessions to the individualist aspirations of the peasants would endanger the avowedly socialist character of the revolution.

Second, so-called "Left Communism" proves to be a more widespread ideology than previous studies have indicated. The dominance of Leninism in the post-revolutionary period, as well as a concentration on analysing the rival tendencies strictly within the Bolshevik party itself, have tended to relegate "Left Communism" to a place on the periphery of the revolutionary Marxist movement in the Russian Empire. On the basis of the above study it is plausible to postulate that the doctrinaire "Left Communist" approach to the agrarian question was more typical of revolutionary Marxists than the path of expediency followed by Lenin.

Finally, there is the fundamental question of the viability of the "Left Communist" ideology. The claim that implementation of the "Left Communist" agrarian programme alienated the peasantry from the revolutionary regimes is credible. The peasants simply wanted land, irrespective of whether Marxist theory regarded this as reactionary or not. A proletarian dictatorship which failed to satisfy this demand would be faced by a recalcitrant peasantry and its prospects for survival in a peasant dominated country can justifiably be doubted. An examination of the abortive Soviet revolutions in Lithuania, Latvia and Poland gives much credence to this argument for the failure of the revolutionary governments there to secure peasant support was a principal cause of their downfall.

In Lithuania the refusal of the Soviet government to satisfy peasant "land hunger" by a division of the large pomeshchik estates - and the stripping from the small peasant proprietors of all their political rights - disillusioned the peasants and caused them to desert the revolution. Hence they were left prey to the influence of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie which was quick to seize on this peasant disaffection in its struggle to overthrow the revolutionary regime.⁷⁴ The Lithuanian bourgeoisie won the support of the peasants by promising an allotment of land to every one of them who voluntarily joined the White Army.⁷⁵

The same phenomenon occurred in Latvia. The revolutionary government's rejection of land division - and its conversion of existing peasant property into public land to be rented from the state - alienated the peasantry and rural proletariat and laid them open to suasion by forces of counter-revolution. As one Soviet commentator on the abortive revolution in Latvia has remarked:

But for the counter-revolution this "destruction of the property of the peasants" created a great opportunity for speculation on the private property instincts of the peasants. At the same time the broad masses of the landless peasantry who were the real support for Soviet power, practically, for the realisation of their dream about land, received nothing. Before them, as far as they did not become lessees or polovniki, was open only one perspective; work in socialist large-scale enterprises where by law they did not even have the right to own their own cattle.⁷⁶

Likewise in Poland the agrarian programme advocated by the S.D.K.P.iL failed to attract the small and landless peasants to the side of the revolution. Preservation of the large estates intact for communal socialist farming had no appeal for them. They too wanted their own individual plot of land and the peasant parties which promised this to them easily outbid the S.D.K.P.iL. for the loyalty and support of this majority of the Polish population.⁷⁷

Indeed, it appears that the revolutionary Marxists in Poland, Latvia and Lithuania themselves came to realise that their failure to win the support of the peasantry was an important contributory factor in their failure to win power. In the early 1920's they independently revised their agrarian programmes, abandoning their earlier calls for the preservation of the large estates intact. Now they adopted policies

that were clearly Leninist in spirit. They conceded that it was necessary to satisfy the aspirations of the poor peasants and landless labourers by dividing the land amongst them if they were to be attracted into the revolutionary struggle to overthrow the existing bourgeois regime.

The revolution only survived in Russia itself, albeit at the cost of temporary concessions to the peasants. In 1921 amidst a sea of peasant insurrections the vulnerability of the revolutionary regime to peasant opposition was clearly evident. Then Lenin recognised that the transition to the NEP was vital in order to appease the insurgent peasants. He realised that it was necessary to bend to peasant pressure if the Bolsheviks were to stay in power - and in the long run construct a socialist society in Russia.

One conclusion is obvious from this account. Although the "Left Communists" correctly evaluated the peasants as an anti-socialist class, that is, one that was intent on defending its individual property against the collectivism that was an integral principle of socialism, everytime their interests were ignored the revolution was either threatened or destroyed. Strict adherence to orthodox Marxist doctrines and the seizure and consolidation of political power apparently were mutually incompatible in the Russian Empire. Lenin was very aware of this potential power of the peasants to overthrow the dictatorship of the proletariat and accordingly made concessions to them in the interests of preserving the then fragile Bolshevik government. Only in 1929 when the Bolsheviks had become more secure and possessed ample means of coercion did they act to remove once and for all this class, which as long as it existed would threaten the security of the Soviet regime. On Stalin's initiative agriculture was forcibly collectivised - and the peasantry eliminated as an independent political force in Soviet Russia.

Footnotes.

¹K. Marx, "The Nationalisation of the Land," Selected Works (Moscow, 1962), pp. 288-289. See also D. Mitrany, Marx Against The Peasant (London, 1951), pp. 24-25, where he points out that until the 1870's the experience of Britain, the United States, and even Germany apparently confirmed Marx's thesis that large estates were becoming the dominant form of agriculture.

²F. Engels, The Peasant Question in France and Germany (Moscow, 1955), p. 6.

³Ibid., p. 33.

⁴K. Marx, F. Engels, The Communist Manifesto (Moscow, 1966), pp. 55-56.

⁵Ibid., p. 56. For a concise discussion of the anti-peasantism of Marx and Engels, see Mitrany, Marx Against, pp. 20-22.

⁶The main source for this statement of classical Marxist agrarian policy was Engels, Peasant Question, *passim*. Also used were Marx, Nationalisation; and K. Marx, "From Comments on Bakunin's Book," Selected Works (Moscow, 1962), pp. 411-412. For brief but precise summaries of this, consult the following works: Mitrany, Marx Against, pp. 36-37; E. H. Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution, 2 (London, 1971), pp. 389-390.

⁷For a clear account of the early Russian Marxists' assessment of the peasantry as the "chief support of absolutism", consult F. Bystrykh, "Razvitie vzgliadov Lenina po agrarnomu voprosu," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 1, 1928, pp. 3-4. See too J. Keep, The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia (Oxford, 1963), pp. 20-21.

⁸S. Baron, "Plekhanov on Russian Capitalism and the Peasant Commune, 1883-1885," American Slavic and East European Review, No. 4, 1953, p. 468. Also consult A. Mendel, Dilemmas of Progress in Tsarist Russia: Legal Marxism and Legal Populism (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), pp. 108-109.

⁹Baron, Plekhanov, p. 473. For the position of the "Legal Marxists", consult A. Walicki, The Controversy over Capitalism: Studies in the Social Philosophy of the Russian Populists (Oxford, 1969), pp. 165-174.

¹⁰Bystrykh, Razvitie, pp. 12-13. Also consult Keep, Social Democracy, pp. 81-84.

¹¹For the Menshevik position on the agrarian programme in 1906, consult Chetvertyi (Ob"edinitel'nyi) S'ezd R.S.D.R.P., april' (aprel'-mai) 1906 goda (Moscow, 1959), pp. 522-523.

¹²See Lenin's speech in ibid., p. 132.

¹³For Borisov's programme, see ibid., pp. 491-492.

¹⁴V. I. Lenin, "Revision of the Agrarian Programme of the Workers' Party," Collected Works, 10 (Moscow, 1962), p. 172.

¹⁵N. I. Bukharin, "Russkaia revoliutsiia i ee sud'ba," Spartak, No. 1, 1917, p. 9.

¹⁶For these details, consult Deiateli S.S.S.R. i Oktiabr'skoi Revoliutsii, published as a supplement to Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar' Russkogo Bibliograficheskogo Instituta Granat (Moscow, 1927-1929), volume 3, columns 44-45.

¹⁷I. I. Skvortsov-Stepanov, Ot rabocheho kontroliia k rabochemu upravleniiu (Moscow, 1918), pp. 107-108. E. A. Preobrazhensky, also a leading "Left Communist", argued too that division of the land among the peasants was no longer appropriate since the October revolution had been socialist. See his "Rabochii i bedneishii krest'ianin v russkoi revoliutsii," Pravda, January 13, 1918.

¹⁸Lenin "stole" this programme from the Socialist Revolutionaries. For this argument, among numerous other works refer to J. Bunyan, H. H. Fisher, The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1918: Documents and Materials (Stanford, 1961), p. 669.

¹⁹M. D-skii, "Novyi zakon o zemlenol'zovanie s točki zreniia khoziaistvenno-ekonomicheskoi," Izvestiia, No. 29, February 20, 1918. Accounts of the debates mentioned in the text are to be found in numerous issues of Pravda and Izvestiia for January and February, 1918. V. Meshcheriakov, "Marksizm i sotsializatsiia zemli," Pravda, No. 18, February 6, 1918, makes the interesting observation that before 1917 all shades of Marxists, not only the "Left Communists", had criticised land socialisation on the same grounds presented here.

²⁰Klementii, "Agrarnye programmy i agrarnaia revoliutsiia," Izvestiia, No. 25, February 14, 1918, emphasises that Preobrazhensky regarded collective production as the essence of socialism and therefore that he criticised the land socialisation law for destroying the foundations of this in agriculture.

²¹E. A. Preobrazhensky, "Krest'ianskoe khoziaistvo Rossii i sotsializm," Izvestiia, No. 20, February 9, 1918.

²²Ibid. A later Western study supports Preobrazhensky's prognosis of the consequences of the division of the land: "Conditions on the land after the Revolution were bound to lead to a decline in agriculture. The peasants had got practically all the land, but each had only a little. It meant a great increase in the number of small peasants who had no animals or implements, who were neither helped economically nor allowed to part with their land - the encouragement, as has been said, of 'village poverty' and the continued tolerance of backward methods of cultivation, as described by Sir John Maynard." Mitrany, Marx Against, pp. 82-83.

²³Stepanov, Ot rabocheho kontroliia, pp. 80-82, 87-88.

²⁴A translation of this law can be found in J. Bunyan, "Regulations Concerning the Socialist Organisation of the Land and Measures for Facilitating the Introduction of the Socialist System of Agriculture," Intervention, Civil War, and Communism in Russia, April-December, 1918: Documents and Materials (New York, 1976), pp. 492-497. For the other resolutions referred to here, see ibid., pp. 485-491.

²⁵Regulations Concerning, especially articles 3 and 8.

²⁶L. Schapiro, The Origin of the Communist Autocracy, Political Opposition in the Soviet State: First Phase 1917-1922 (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), p. 218. Schapiro argued here: "No influential opposition group within the communist party sponsored any policy for improving the lot of the peasantry and the advocacy of their interests was left mainly to the stifled voices of the Mensheviks and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries."

²⁷Cited in M. Zorkii, Rabochaia Oppozitsiia (Leningrad, Moscow, 1926), p. 161. A. G. Shliapnikov, a leading member of the Workers' Opposition, supported Medvedev's contention that independent peasant farming was doomed. Ibid., p. 179.

²⁸J. Marchlewski, Sotsial'nye otnosheniia v Pol'she (Moscow, 1920), p. 4.

²⁹Marchlewski defended the preservation of large-scale agriculture as the only viable system for Poland. He argued that since there was a land shortage in Poland any equalising division of the land among the small and landless peasants would result in them receiving an allotment on which they could scarcely subsist. Agricultural production would then fall drastically, with the consequent danger that there would be insufficient surpluses to feed the towns. Ibid., pp. 9-10. Boleslaw Limanowski, a member of the Polish Socialist Party (P.P.S.), also postulated that there was not enough land available in Poland for distribution to every peasant family. K. J. Cottam, "Boleslaw Limanowski, a Polish Theoretician of Agrarian Socialism," Slavonic and East European Review, LI (January, 1973), p. 71.

³⁰M. Waters (editor), "The Russian Revolution," Rosa Luxemburg Speaks (New York, 1970), pp. 375-376. At the same time Rosa Luxemburg believed that the obvious advantages of large-scale social production would be sufficient to win over the peasantry of its own accord to collective cultivation. Ibid., p. 375.

³¹Cited in Ia. Krumin, "Za bol'shevistskuiu istoriiu Sovetskoi Latvii," Istorik Marksist, No. 2-3 (42-43), 1935, p. 31.

³²Cited in Ia. Krastyn, "K voprosu ob agrarnoi politike Kommunisticheskoi partii Latvii," Voprosy Istorii K.P.S.S., No. 4, 1959, p. 77. Commenting retrospectively on S.D.L.'s agrarian programme, P. I. Stuchka argued that the Latvian Social Democrats had considered it necessary to propagate Marx's teaching about the superiority of large-scale agriculture. Ibid., p. 77.

³³"Rezoliutsii i s"ezda bezzemel'nykh i malozemel'nykh krest'ian i sel'skikh rabochikh Litvy," Bor'ba za sovetskuiu vlast' v Litve v 1918-1920gg. (Vilnius, 1967), pp. 160-161. The S.D.P.L. felt that the effects of breaking up the large estates would be compounded by the fact that the poor and landless peasants had neither the cattle, nor the tools, nor the seed to cultivate any land allotted to them individually. "Vozzvanie Mariampol'sko-Birbal'skogo raionnogo komiteta KPLiB k sel'skim rabochim s pryzvom zakhvatyvat' imeniia i peredavat' ikh v ruki mestnykh organov Sovetskoi vlasti," ibid., p. 218.

³⁴For a brief account of the evolution of Latvian agriculture in the nineteenth century, consult A. Bilmanis, A History of Latvia (Princeton, 1951), pp. 225-229.

³⁵This was the figure cited by J. Jansons, a leading member of the S.D.L., in his history of the 1905 revolution in Latvia. See P. I. Stuchka's review of "J. Jansons (Brauns). Kopoti vaksti. I sehjuni. Baltijos rewoluzya. I daba. Riga 1921 g.," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 12, 1922, p. 290. Also consult Ia. Krastyn, K voprosu, pp. 74-75.

³⁶P. I. Stuchka, "Chto delat' s natsionalizovannoi zemlei?," V bor'be za oktiabr' (Riga, 1960), p. 85.

³⁷P. I. Stuchka, "Sotsial-demokratiia latyshchogo kraia i agrarnyi vopros," V bor'be, pp. 125-126.

³⁸For the views of the S.D.K.P.i.L. on this question, consult A. Kraevskii, "K kharakteristike ideologii Sotsial-demokratii Pol'shi i Litvy," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 6, 1931, pp. 43-45. For general confirmation of this party's analysis, consult S. Kieniewicz, The Emancipation of the Polish Peasantry (Chicago, 1969), especially pp. 182-183, pp. 224-226; and P. Wandycz, The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918 (Seattle, 1974), pp. 197-200.

³⁹S. Girinis, "Kanun i sumerki sovetskoi vlasti na Litve," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 8, 1922, p. 87.

⁴⁰V. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas, "Bor'ba za sovetskuiu vlast' v Litve i zapadnoi Belorussii (konets 1918 g. i nachalo 1919 g.)," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 1, 1931, pp. 68-71, where he presents a comprehensive account of the analysis of Lithuanian agriculture made by the revolutionary wing of the S.D.P.L. before 1917.

⁴¹Modern studies have indicated that large-scale agriculture is not necessarily the most efficient. In this case "bigness" does not lead to increased productivity. "A large unit in agriculture - if defined as in industry in terms of investment of capital and use of labour - is not identical with a farm of large size; it is on the contrary relatively small in acreage." Mitrany, Marx Against, pp. 299-300. A very recent study made by the Exploratory Project for Economic Alternatives has also concluded that large farms are not the most productive and calls for a move back to family-sized farms. Seattle Post-Intelligencer, February 14, 1977.

⁴²Shestoi S'ezd RSDRP (Bol'shevikov), Avgust 1917 goda (Moscow, 1958), p. 138. For a discussion of Bukharin's position at this congress, consult: Schapiro, Communist Autocracy, pp. 44-45; S. F. Cohen, Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution (London, 1974), pp. 56-57.

⁴³N. I. Bukharin, Historical Materialism (Ann Arbor, 1969), p. 289.

⁴⁴M. D-skii, Novyi zakon.

⁴⁵"Theses on the Current Situation," Kommunist, No. 1, 1918 (Moscow), pp. 4-9, especially thesis 2. A translation of these "Theses" prepared for publication in Critique has been used throughout.

⁴⁶"Theses," 9. K. B. Radek, then a leading "Left Communist", expressed the same anxiety: "... and the victory of the proletarian revolution in Europe may allow the proletarian minority in Russia to place the peasantry on socialist rails. The absence of this revolution can cast the proletariat from power. If the Soviet government, standing on the point of view of a dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry... takes into account the numerical and social preponderance of the peasantry, then it will proceed to a compromise with capital, a compromise acceptable from the point of view of the peasantry, but one which destroys the socialist character of the revolution, and therefore one unacceptable to the proletariat." "Posle piati mesiatsev," Kommunist, No. 1, p. 3.

⁴⁷Stepanov, Ot rabochego kontroliia, pp. 100-101. The Polish Marxists of the S.D.K.P.i.L. also held this belief: see Rosa Luxemburg, Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p. 377. The same is true of the revolutionary

wings of the S.D.L. and the S.D.P.L. For the former, consult: Stuchka, Sotsial-demokratiia Latyshskoqo kraia i agrarnyi vopros, p. 123; for the latter, refer to: Vozzvanie, p. 218.

⁴⁸Zorkii, Rabochaia Oppozitsiia, p. 160. This argument was also expressed by the Workers' Opposition in their resolution to the 11th Party Congress. Odinnadtsatyi S"ezd RKP(b), Mart-April' 1922 goda (Moscow, 1961), p. 161.

⁴⁹Cited in Kraevskii, K kharakteristike, p. 44. Marchlewski compared the Polish peasantry to that of Western Europe, classifying both as reactionary by nature. Sotsial'nye otnosheniia, p. 9.

⁵⁰Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p. 378.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 376.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 375-378.

⁵³Krumin, Za bol'shevistskuiu istoriiu, p. 31.

⁵⁴Cited in Krastyn, K voprosu, p. 73. This confirms a contemporary explanation of the attitude of the S.D.L. towards the peasantry given by I. Janson, "Latviia v pervoi polovine 1905 goda," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 12, 1922, p. 14.

⁵⁵P. I. Stuchka, "Nasha agrarnaia programma," Za Sovetskuiu Vlast' v Latvii (Riga, 1964), p. 439.

⁵⁶Cited in J. D. White, "The Revolution in Lithuania, 1918-1919," Soviet Studies, No. 2, 1971, p. 195. For a further account of Angarietis' hostility towards the peasantry, consult Mitskevich-Kapsukas, Bor'ba, pp. 72-73.

⁵⁷V. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas, "Istoki i zarozhdenie kommunisticheskoi partii Litvy," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 1 (84), 1929, p. 158.

⁵⁸In 1906, Lenin had warned the rural proletariat "against being tempted by small-scale ownership, which cannot, so long as commodity production exists, abolish poverty among the masses...." Lenin, Agrarian Programme, p. 195.

⁵⁹V. I. Lenin, "A 'Voluntary Agreement' between Landowners and Peasants?" Collected Works, 24 (Moscow, 1964), p. 72.

⁶⁰Bunyan, Intervention, p. 465. Also consult Bunyan and Fisher, The Bolshevik Revolution, p. 685.

⁶¹V. Stepanov, "Lenin i agrarnaia programma v 1905g.," Krasnaia Letopis', No. 1 (10), 1924, p. 35.

⁶²V. I. Lenin, "Krest'iane i rabochie," Sochineniia, XXI (Moscow, Leningrad, 1931), pp. 112-113.

⁶³V. I. Lenin, "An Open Letter to the Delegates to the All-Russian Congress of Peasants' Deputies," Collected Works, 24 (Moscow, 1964), pp. 290-291. For a Soviet analysis of Lenin's justification of his agrarian policy, consult: Bystrikh, Razvitie, pp. 28-29. Western interpreters also accept this opinion; Mitrany, Marx Against, pp. 63-64; A. Rochester, Lenin on the Agrarian Question (New York, 1942), pp. 51-52.

⁶⁴"Agrarnye programmy i agrarnaia revoliutsiia," Izvestiia, No. 19, February 8, 1918.

⁶⁵Klementii, "Agrarnaia programma i agrarnaia revoliutsiia: Sotsialisticheskoe sel'skoe khoziaistvo," Izvestiia, No. 23, February 12, 1918.

⁶⁶Cited in Bunyan and Fisher, The Bolshevik Revolution, p. 684. Meshcheriakov drew essentially the same conclusions in "Marksizm i sotsializatsiia zemli," Pravda, No. 21, February 9, 1918.

⁶⁷S. Pestkovskii, "Sovremennaia Litva," Zhizn' Natsional'nostei, No. 11 (19), March 30, 1919, p. 1. In a later article analysing the brief existence of Soviet power in Lithuania S. Girinis also confirms that the Lithuanian peasants aspired to own their own land. Girinis, Kanun i sumerki, p. 87.

⁶⁸Mitskevich-Kapsukas, Bor'ba, pp. 72-73, cites Angarietis' argument.

⁶⁹Krastyn, K voprosu, pp. 83-85.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 84.

⁷¹Marchlewski, Sotsial'nye otnosheniia, pp. 9-10.

⁷²For this argument, consult M. K. Dziewanowski, The Communist Party of Poland: An Outline History (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), pp. 73-74.

⁷³For this rejection of the traditional agrarian programme of the S.D.K.P.i.L., consult N. Kolomeichikh, "V bor'be za interesy trudiashchikhsia Pol'shi," Voprosy Istorii K.P.S.S., No. 12, 1968, p. 48.

⁷⁴Girinis, Kanun i sumerki, pp. 86-87. This is an insider's account for Girinis was a member of the S.D.P.L., which was the precursor of the Communist Party of Lithuania.

⁷⁵Mitskevich-Kapsukas, Bor'ba, p. 104. Western historians accept that the alienation of the peasantry was an important reason for the downfall of the Soviet regime in Lithuania: E. Senn, The Emergence of Modern Lithuania (New York, 1959), pp. 79-81; A. N. Tarulis, Soviet Policy toward the Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, 1918-1920 (Notre Dame, 1959), p. 52.

⁷⁶Cited in Krumin, Za bol'shevistskuiu istoriiu, p. 32. An anti-Bolshevik observer of the revolution in Latvia in 1919 described the attitude of the peasants to the Soviet government: "It was the same with the peasants. They hated the Bolsheviks perhaps even more than the townspeople. The Red Commissars who went about the country searching for corn and food supplies everywhere met with the stubborn resistance of the Lettish peasants." G. Popoff, The City of the Red Plague: Soviet Rule in a Baltic Town (New York, 1932), p. 243. For a widely held Western interpretation of this question, consult: S. W. Page, The Formation of the Baltic States (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), pp. 63-69.

⁷⁷M. K. Dziewanowski, "World War I and the Marxist Movement of Poland," American Slavic and East European Review, XII (February, 1953), p. 91.

Chapter 5.

THE ORGANISATION OF THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT.

After devoting the preceding two chapters to an examination of the "Left Communists'" attitude towards the role of two of the important segments of imperial Russian society, the national minorities and the peasantry, in the anticipated socialist revolution, it is now a logical step to proceed to an examination of the attitude of these Marxists towards the role which they assigned to the proletariat in the revolutionary transition to socialism. As has already been shown, they, unlike V. I. Lenin, denied that the peasantry or nationalities could act as allies of the proletariat in this revolution. At the same time, they defended the belief that once the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism had been accomplished the consolidation of the socialist system necessarily required that the proletariat as a whole be allowed to actively participate in its construction. At the root of this stand was the conviction, however illusory it might seem in retrospect, that the proletariat had the natural abilities successfully to complete this task - in fact, the "Left Communist" movement of 1918 even took pride in calling itself a "proletarian communist" movement.¹ Lenin, on the other hand, adopted a less optimistic view of the capabilities of the proletariat "spontaneously" to bring about the revolutionary transition to socialism. He believed that the proletariat was incapable of acquiring the level of political consciousness necessary for this in the course of its routine struggle to extract economic concessions from the capitalist system - at best, it would achieve a "trade union consciousness"² - and, therefore, that an outside agent would be essential to lead the proletariat into the "kingdom of freedom." From this premise he developed the theory that the formation of a party of self-conscious professional revolutionaries usually from the intelligentsia, was vital in order that this vanguard could instil into the otherwise backward proletariat the requisite socialist consciousness. In fact, numerous of his declarations to the contrary, Lenin refused to entrust the development and successful completion

of the socialist transformation of society to the independent actions of the workers but rather assigned this task to the party.

In order to understand more clearly these differing views on the role of the proletariat in the building of socialism held by the "Left Communists" and Lenin, a difference reflected in their divergent opinions on the proper methods of organising the post-revolutionary state, it is first essential to place their ideas in the context of Marxist thought on this subject. As a preliminary, therefore, a brief analysis of Marx's and Engels' own teachings will be instructive. In this case, it will be pertinent to focus attention, first, on their own theory of the origins of a revolutionary socialist consciousness and, related to this, their views on the natural capacities of the proletariat to achieve this, and, second, on their own prescription of the principles and measures which should characterise the revolutionary state.

In broad, schematic terms, Marx and Engels formulated a philosophy of history in which history is seen as a process wherein man, as a consequence of the economic developments that had been the product of his own actions, had gained an increased mastery over nature.³ Yet, despite this progress, they maintained that man still was alienated and oppressed and would remain so until society was reorganised on a communal and collective basis. They believed that this continuing estrangement of man was the result of the same economic developments which had led, on the one hand, to an increasing division of labour and, on the other, to the growth of private property, capital, in the means of production, which had alienated man from the products of his labour. They were convinced, however, this oppression and alienation had culminated at the stage of bourgeois society, in which the capitalist mode of production had become extensively developed. They contended that the flowering of capitalism had created both the objective economic preconditions - basically a high level of material wealth, the product of industrial growth - necessary for its overthrow and at the same time had created the class, the proletariat, which would be its "gravedigger." They predicted that the proletariat would rise and destroy the existing bourgeois order of state and society and replace this system by its own revolutionary dictatorship, which would usher

in a new dawn in human history in which man for the first time would be free to control his own destiny.

At first glance, the impression received from this schema of Marx's and Engels' theory of history is fatalistic. It appears that they regarded the revolutionary destruction of capitalism by the proletariat and the advent of socialism as inevitably determined by the objective process of economic, and, determined by this, political and social development. However, a closer, more accurate examination of their thought reveals that this narrow, determinist interpretation of their historical philosophy is one-sided and wrong. While it is undeniable that their philosophy does possess a strong strand of determinism - in general, they did believe that economic development was the ultimate cause of all movement in history and, more specifically, that the emergence of the capitalist mode of production had created the objective prerequisites, somehow defined, for the transition to socialism⁴ -, at the same time they insisted that it was impossible to consider this transformation to be in any way automatically assured. On the contrary, they asserted that it still remained the task of men, in this case of the proletariat, to utilise these economically determined conditions to overthrow capitalism and reconstruct society on socialist foundations.⁵

This activist contention, that "men make their own history," albeit under given objective conditions,⁶ played a fundamental part in Marx's and Engels' thinking about the manner in which socialism would be realised. For them, socialism was not simply the destruction of capitalism and the system of private property which characterised it. Although they considered this destruction to be an essential stage, they believed the quintessential aim of socialism to be the creation of a society in which man for the first time would be free to control his own destiny and, consequently, by overcoming his alienation be able to realise his "truly human potentialities."⁷ Marx described the kernel of socialism as "the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; ... therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e. human) being...."⁸

However, Marx and Engels denied that this change in man, the fundamental objective of socialism, could await the changed material conditions of life which would emerge in the socialist society of the

future. They emphatically believed that this "change in consciousness" could not occur merely as a consequence of a "change in circumstances", but that these changes must take place in conjuncture since, in their minds, this "change in consciousness" was vital for the successful establishment of socialism itself. Marx defended revolution as the only means to ensure this:

Both for the production on a mass scale of this Communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement a revolution: this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.⁹

At this juncture, however, the determinist strand in Marx's and Engels' thought re-appears. They held firm to the belief that the development of capitalist society itself would automatically ensure this necessary change of consciousness within the proletariat, which had been thoroughly impoverished and dehumanised by this. Marx unequivocally asserted that the "very living conditions of the proletariat under capitalism would bring it to a consciousness of its own inhumane situation and hence aware of the need to liberate itself."¹⁰ Capitalism had unwittingly created this class in opposition to itself which in its struggle for the overthrow of bourgeois society would become not only a "class in itself" - a class as a result of its objective position under capitalism - but a "class for itself" - a class both conscious of its common bonds and of the need to change its inhumane existence.¹¹

Convinced, therefore, that the proletariat would acquire a revolutionary socialist consciousness as the natural consequence of its misery under capitalism and of its struggles against this system, they categorically rejected the notion that an external elite leadership was needed in order to bring to the workers the consciousness necessary for their revolt against the bourgeois order and the creation of a socialist society. Marx bluntly attacked this concept:

The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself. We cannot, therefore, cooperate with people who openly state that the workers are too

uneducated to emancipate themselves and must first be freed from above by philanthropic big bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie.¹²

From this it is clear that Marx and Engels had no truck with Blanquism, the basic postulate of which was that a strictly organised and disciplined party of self-conscious revolutionaries could substitute itself for the masses in the overthrow of capitalism and maintain itself in power by dictatorial measures until mass support could be mobilised.¹³ In fact, there is little in their thought which points to a role for an organised party of Communists, separate from and standing above the mass of the workers. They regarded Communists chiefly as "the most advanced and resolute section of the working class parties of every country... which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement."¹⁴

Apart from this firm conviction that the proletariat would consciously secure its own liberation from the miseries of capitalism, Marx and Engels also bequeathed to their successors a programme, admittedly rudimentary and incomplete - they left behind no definitive blueprint for the construction of socialist society¹⁵ -, of practical measures which they considered to be essential in the transition to socialism. Moreover, an examination of their proposals makes it plausible to postulate that these were designed to ensure that the workers remained in control of their revolutionary state, which would consequently allow them to take an active part in the building of socialism.

A great part of Marx's and Engels' thinking about the institutional structure appropriate for the revolutionary workers' state was inspired by the spectacular but brief victory of the workers of the Paris Commune, which was regarded, particularly by Engels, as an embryonic dictatorship of the proletariat. Therefore, an examination of their reflections on the experiences of the Commune will provide some insight into their vision of the structure which the post-revolutionary state should acquire.

In broad terms, Marx and Engels asserted that the first, yet

vital step towards the socialist transformation of society was the destruction of the existing bourgeois state. The Commune confirmed, they declared, that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready made [bourgeois] State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes;"¹⁶ in other words, the proletariat could not build socialism with the institutions of the bourgeois state. On the contrary, it had to replace this with its own revolutionary state - the dictatorship of the proletariat - which, after an undefined period of transition from capitalism to socialism had been accomplished under its auspices, itself would "wither away."

In particular, Marx and Engels welcomed the assault made by the Communards on the bureaucratic, hierarchic and centralised character of the institutions of the bourgeois state. They praised the establishment of the principle of the election of all officials, who could be removed at will by the workers, as an effective attack on bureaucracy, an attack which they felt was reinforced by the payment to all such officials of the average worker's wages.¹⁷ Moreover, they also approved of the radical decentralisation of power and authority to local Communes proposed by the Parisian Communards, although at the same time they, distinct from the anarchists, insisted on the need to maintain some form of central government, again to be elected by and responsible to the workers, to exercise the few, but important national functions which they argued would remain after the revolution. Further, they especially endorsed the abolition of the regular army, standing above the populace, in favour of a militia of armed workers under the leadership of elected officers; the other coercive arm which the bourgeois state possessed, the police, was also to become responsible to and revocable by the elected representatives of the people. They claimed that such a programme of measures would guarantee "the self-government of the producers."¹⁸ Summarising his interpretation of the significance of the Commune, Marx declared that it was "essentially a working-class government.... the political form at last discovered to work out the economic emancipation of labour."¹⁹

While defending the political programme implemented by the Commune, Marx also firmly supported its plans for the expropriation of private property. He feared that if the "economic foundations" of

the old order were not destroyed, if control over production was left in the hands of the bourgeoisie, then the political rule of the workers was doomed.²⁰ To prevent this defeat, it was vital that the workers themselves take over the ownership and administration of production. In retrospect, Engels even held that the single most important decree of the Commune was that which established the principle of the workers' control of industry.²¹

Finally, apart from their commendation of the particular political and economic measures enacted by the Commune, Marx and Engels also considered it to be living proof of their basic premise that the workers would independently find their own path to salvation. Marx proclaimed that the Communards, even in the most arduous of circumstances, had demonstrated the spontaneous capabilities of the proletariat to destroy the bourgeois order and organise their own revolutionary state, a major step in the transition to socialism. Marx extolled this facet of the Communards' experiment:

Whatever the merits of the single measures of the Commune, its greatest measure was its own organisation, extemporised with the Foreign Enemy at one door and the class enemy at the other, proving by its life its vitality, confirming its thesis by its action.²²

Before analysing the different positions which the "Left Communists" and Lenin adopted on the question of proletarian democracy, a brief digression into the realm of nineteenth century Russian revolutionary thought is necessary, in order to resolve one problem that will arise in the ensuing discussion. This problem focusses on the divergent interpretations of Marxism held by the "Left Communists" and Lenin. They both claimed to be the heirs to the teachings of Marx and Engels, yet paradoxically their ideas on the construction of socialism, more specifically, on the role which must be allocated to the workers themselves in this process, were quite contradictory.

However, the difference between them on this point was certainly not a new phenomenon in the history of the revolutionary movement in the Russian Empire. Similar disputes on the part that the masses must play in the socialist transformation of society had been evident in the ranks of the Populists in the later nineteenth century. The major issue which had divided these revolutionaries revolved around this

same question and in many respects foreshadowed the divergent stands that the "Left Communists" and Lenin took regarding proletarian democracy.

The positions adopted in the 1870's by P. N. Tkachev, on the one hand, and by the members of Zemlia i Volia, then the dominant strand of revolutionary Populism, on the other, clearly revealed what the essential differences of opinion were on this issue. A follower of P. G. Zaichnevskii, one of the first Russian revolutionaries to espouse "Jacobin" ideas, Tkachev insistently denied that the masses "on their own initiative [would] begin to fight against the misery that surrounds them."²³ In other words, he gravely doubted the spontaneous abilities of the peasantry to rise and overthrow the autocracy. On the contrary, he maintained that it was necessary to establish a self-conscious vanguard, which, given the political repression that was present in tsarist Russia, had to take the form of a highly centralised, disciplined and conspiratorial party of professional revolutionaries, which then could exploit the existing grievances of the people and channel them into a revolt directed against absolutism.²⁴

Tkachev continued, moreover, that even after the oppressive state machine had been destroyed, state power itself would not immediately "wither away." Instead, he believed that the revolutionary vanguard must preserve the state, now transformed into a revolutionary dictatorship, and use its power to establish a new social order, based on the principles of freedom and equality, since he feared that left to their own devices the masses would be equally unable to complete the work of social reconstruction successfully.²⁵

Yet Tkachev was not in the mainstream of revolutionary thought during the 1870's. In fact, it appears that the majority of Populists, defending the rectitude of the principle of "the hegemony of the masses over the educated élite,"²⁶ violently objected to Tkachev's ideas. Basically, they feared that after the overthrow of the autocracy in the fashion that Tkachev proposed the revolutionary vanguard would perpetuate itself in power and forgo the radical transformation of society, in the name of which it had seized power.²⁷

Admittedly, in the late 1870's a substantial segment of Zemlia i Volia in part adopted Tkachev's programme, in the belief that the

success of their "to the people" movement depended upon the conquest of political freedom. This group was to form the nucleus of Narodnaia Volia, which emphasised that the autocracy had to be overthrown, by conspiratorial and terrorist methods if necessary, in order that the struggle for social revolution could be continued successfully. Indeed, they were quite prepared to accept that a revolutionary vanguard could carry out the initial political revolution, but once this had been accomplished they insisted that power should be transferred immediately into the hands of the masses, whom they assumed would rise spontaneously in response to the actions of the vanguard.²⁸

Even then, however, many revolutionaries refused to have any truck with such notions of conspiratorial revolution and remained true to their democratic principles. For example, G. V. Plekhanov, both as a Populist and then as a Marxist, remained convinced that a social revolution could only be achieved by the action of the masses themselves, that "the emancipation of the workers should be accomplished by the workers themselves." Indeed, it often appears that he consistently defended the proposition that the successful socialist transformation of society depended vitally on the "self-propelled activity of the masses" in carrying it out.²⁹

Nevertheless, a certain dichotomy was also evident in Plekhanov's position on this question. He too appears to have doubted the ability of the mass of the workers spontaneously, in the course of their daily economic struggles, to acquire the level of political consciousness that he considered to be necessary if they were successfully to carry out a revolutionary socialist overthrow of capitalism. Consequently, he assigned a special role to the socialist intelligentsia, who alone could "bring [this necessary] consciousness into the working class."³⁰ Yet at the same time he put careful limits on the part that this intelligentsia was to play. He did not contend, apparently, that an élite organisation of intellectuals could substitute themselves for the masses as the sole conscious driving force of the revolution. Indeed, while he believed that the intelligentsia must "elucidate for them [the mass of the workers] the principal points" of their programme, he still insisted that the workers too had an important, independent role to perform in this process, namely, that the "detailed elaboration

of [their] programme must, of course, be left to the workers themselves...."³¹

Accordingly, there are grounds for questioning whether Plekhanov's commitment to the principle of a democratic revolution, made solely and independently by the workers, was as unambivalent as some commentators have suggested.³² However, the opposite point of view, that Lenin alone, by subscribing to and developing the idea that a strictly organised élite party of intellectuals was absolutely vital in order to guide, even cajole the otherwise politically backward proletariat into carrying out the socialist revolution, since independently it would not, and could not attain the required revolutionary consciousness in its day to day confrontations with capitalism, was in fact the rightful heir of Plekhanov is itself a one-sided conclusion.³³

Rather, it seems correct to contend that Plekhanov's Marxism was open to two divergent, yet legitimate interpretations - the democratic and the dictatorial, or Jacobin.³⁴ While Lenin emphasised and elaborated upon the latter strand in Plekhanov's thought, the democratic strand also found its disciples. In the 1890's a number of Russian Marxists, notably represented by S. N. Prokopovich and E. D. Kuskova among others, were highly critical of the almost Blanquist notion inherent in the Marxist "orthodoxy" bequeathed to them by Plekhanov that the success of socialist revolution was more dependent on the actions of the intellectual leadership than of the mass of the workers themselves. Stressing the importance of the independent role of the workers in the struggle for, and eventual victory of socialism, they insisted that every possible encouragement should be given to them to organise themselves as a means whereby they could achieve the necessary political consciousness to fulfil their historical mission.³⁵

In fact, the Russian Marxist movement, as the Populist movement before it, was almost continually plagued by a similar division into "Jacobin" and "democratic" wings. One obvious manifestation of this characteristic was the split of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (R.S.D.W.P.) into a "democratic" Menshevik and a "Jacobin" Bolshevik faction after 1903 - although before 1905 the Mensheviks themselves were not noteworthy for the democratic organisation of the party committees that they controlled.³⁶ Later, however, and much more

pertinent to the following analysis, the Bolsheviks themselves were to be separated on the same broad lines. On the one hand, the "left" Bolsheviks defended the democratic principles within Marxism - and indigenous Russian revolutionary thought. Lenin's interpretation of Marxism, on the other hand, continued to be characterised by elements if not directly derived from, at least consistent with the ideas espoused by Tkachev and the Russian "Jacobins". Just as before 1917 he had insisted that an organised and disciplined party of revolutionaries alone could hope to overthrow the autocracy, so after the October revolution he clung to the belief that such a party was still necessary to direct the workers, themselves lacking the necessary political consciousness, in the construction of socialism.

Certainly, an examination of the thought of the various "Left Communist" groups on the role which the proletariat should play in the construction of socialism makes it plausible to postulate that, as adherents of the teachings of Marx and Engels, they shared the latter's belief that the lasting victory of socialism required that the proletariat take a conscious and independent part in this task. At the same time, they also defended as vital a number of principles which Marx and Engels held to be inalienable features of the organisational structure of the revolutionary state, in the fear that any abandonment of these principles would threaten the workers' control of the revolution and their creative participation in building of socialism. If this happened, they warned that the revolution would degenerate.

Despite the occasional variations in the arguments presented by the various groups of "Left Communist" in defence of proletarian democracy, the contention still remains that they all were essentially defending the freedom for the workers themselves to actively participate in the task of socialist construction. However, given these disparities, in the interests of clarity it is expedient to examine the positions adopted by these groups in turn. Therefore, the ideas of the three major oppositions to Lenin within the Bolshevik party in the period 1918 till 1921 - the "Left Communist" movement of 1918, the Democratic Centralists and the Workers' Opposition - on what they held to be the correct methods of socialist construction will be analysed first. Subsequently, once the essence of their thought has been

divined, an analysis of the views of the revolutionary Marxist wings in Poland, Latvia and Lithuania on the part of the proletariat in the achievement of socialism will be given. However, since in these regions the revolutions failed to survive for any length of time, the debates on the proper methods of organising the revolutionary state did not have time to develop as they did within the ranks of the Bolsheviks in Russia. Yet some indication of the thinking of these Marxists on this issue can be obtained by an examination of their words and deeds, where appropriate, both in the pre-revolutionary years and during their brief spells in power.

Before proceeding to examine the conflict between the aforementioned left oppositions to Lenin over the question of the organisation of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Soviet Russia, it will prove useful to look at the contention that in 1917 the Bolsheviks as a whole, including Lenin, held in common a set of premises on which they believed that the revolutionary state should be founded. While a number of critics in retrospect have argued that the principles espoused by the Bolsheviks in 1917 did not form a comprehensive and coherent political and economic programme for the construction of socialism in Russia and, consequently, that this lack of a practical "orthodox Bolshevism"³⁷ left the door open for future doctrinal debates on this question, this does not mean that at the time the Bolsheviks did not believe that these principles had to be incorporated in the organisation of the revolutionary state. Indeed, the Bolsheviks themselves readily admitted that in 1917 they had not sufficiently thought out beforehand the measures which would ensure the implementation of their ideals.³⁸ However, this does not remove the need to understand that in 1917 there did exist an orthodox "Bolshevism", albeit in the form of a set of general principles which future experience proved to be unrealistic, and that the ensuing debates among the Bolsheviks revolved around the question of the means by which to realise these principles

An examination of the views held by the Bolsheviks in 1917 on the structure of the dictatorship of the proletariat and on the methods of socialist construction serves to justify the contention that in large part these were inherited from Marx's and Engels' own reflections.³⁹

The Bolsheviks too accepted that first of all the existing bourgeois state would have to be smashed. By the beginning of 1917 Lenin himself had come to agree that N. I. Bukharin had been correct when he had earlier advocated such action.⁴⁰ Later, after his return to Russia in April, he found it necessary to convert his fellow Bolsheviks there to this point of view, since under the leadership of L. B. Kamenev and J. V. Stalin, they had become reconciled to the fact that it would be necessary to support the Provisional Government for an undetermined, yet apparently lengthy period, until the prerequisites for socialist revolution had matured. Lenin would have none of this, on the contrary insisting that this bourgeois regime must be overthrown. He argued that this must be done in such a way that would involve the destruction of the existing bureaucratic and centralised system of government, which would be replaced by a decentralised administration of soviets, elected by the workers locally.⁴¹ Wide powers of autonomy were to be granted to these soviets, although a central government, also elected by and responsible to the workers, would be established too in order to carry out functions of a national character. Furthermore, the standing army, as well as the police, was to be abolished, in favour of a workers' militia in which the officers too would be elected from the ranks. Moreover, in order to destroy the economic power of the bourgeoisie, the basis of its political supremacy, land, the banks and large-scale industry were to be nationalised and the administration of these was to be placed under the strict control of the local organs of the workers.⁴² As Lenin was to repeatedly claim in 1917, such a state, in which all power resided in the hands of the workers' soviets, could be equated with Marx's and Engels' own ideas on the Paris Commune.⁴³

Yet while these measures were perfectly consistent with Marx's and Engels' own prescriptions, the Bolsheviks developed in more detail their own distinct ideas on the structure of the revolutionary state. The notion of the soviets as the organs of the revolutionary rule of the workers was a peculiarly Russian concept, which presumably was based on the experiences of the 1905 revolution when these bodies spontaneously arose to become the representative institutions of the revolutionary proletariat. In addition, the Bolsheviks, perhaps influenced by the anarcho-syndicalist views which were then quite widespread

in the ranks of European socialists, emphasised that factory-plant committees (fabzavkomy) were to be the primary units of industrial administration, at the enterprise level.⁴⁴ Further, they allocated a specific role to the old bourgeois managers and technicians - the later much maligned spetsy - in the new administration of industry, yet they were to be under the direct control of and strictly accountable to the elected organs of the workers.⁴⁵ Moreover, to ensure further against the evils of bureaucratic self-seeking, the Bolsheviks insisted, as Marx and Engels had done, that these spetsy, like all other officials in the proletarian state, were only to be paid an average worker's wage.

The goal to which the Bolsheviks aspired, as far as it can be deduced from the principles that they espoused throughout 1917, can be described succinctly. It is perfectly justifiable to accept the conclusion that at that time they envisaged post-revolutionary Russia to be an egalitarian commune state administered from below by the workers themselves.⁴⁶

In the spring of 1918, however, about six months after the seizure of power, a split developed within the Bolsheviks, between the "Left Communists" and Lenin and his associates, over the issue of whether an administrative structure based on the principles espoused in 1917 would be able to effectively restore Soviet Russia's economy, ravaged by the costs and dislocations of the war and revolution, as well as by the disruptions caused by the spontaneous establishment of workers' control itself,⁴⁷ to the level from which the transition to socialism would be possible. In the face of stark experiences which cast doubt on the effectiveness of workers' control as a means to economic recovery, Lenin pragmatically jettisoned the "utopian" programme of 1917 - a programme of which he had at times been a passionate advocate - in favour of an alternative policy of industrial administration, also discernible in his thinking of 1917.⁴⁸

In glaring contradiction to the vision of the post-revolutionary dictatorship as "a stateless society administered spontaneously and democratically by the working class,"⁴⁹ Lenin proposed that the Soviet government should establish an economic order modelled on the system of state capitalism in order to revive Russia's fast failing economy.

He declared that the use of state capitalism would be both to the immediate material benefit of the workers as well as a great leap forward in the transition to socialism, provided that the proletariat, in the form of its revolutionary state, remained in control of this system.⁵⁰ Reiterating a number of ideas on methods of organisation which he had previously expressed in the late summer of 1917,⁵¹ Lenin maintained that to achieve a successful transition to socialism it was vital to preserve and strengthen the most advanced and progressive features of capitalist economic organisation. The banks, trusts, syndicates and other large-scale, centralised organisations, such as the postal service and the consumer societies, which even under capitalism were bringing about increasing control and planning of the economy, were to be retained and further developed by the revolutionary state as the prerequisites of the future socialist organisation of production. However, in order that the utmost advantage be taken of this economic apparatus, Lenin argued that it would also be essential to utilise the services of the spetsy who had the experience to administer this system - by breaching the principle of egalitarianism and paying them higher salaries if necessary - since he believed that the workers themselves would be unable to immediately operate this system.⁵² Moreover, he also feared that decentralisation, the granting of widespread powers of administration in the economy to the fabzavkomy or the trade unions, and even to the local soviets, would reduce the efficiency of the methods of economic organisation that he was proposing and hence impede economic recovery. In effect, Lenin was advocating the preservation of a strictly centralised, bureaucratic system of economic management, attendant upon which was the retention of one-man management by appointed spetsy, rigid and uncompromising labour discipline and the use of material incentives. He defended this programme as essential if increased production, the basis for the socialist transformation of society, was to be realised, apparently acting on the conviction that if the power to run industry was bestowed upon "an unskilled labourer or a cook," that is, upon the proletariat itself, economic anarchy would result and the factories would grind to a standstill.⁵³

At the same time, the "Left Communists" agreed that measures had to be taken in order to overcome the economic chaos endemic in

Soviet Russia. However, they saw Lenin's programme, which aimed at restoring the ailing economy by state capitalist methods, as a frightful deviation from the proper path of socialist reconstruction. They believed that the revolution had been fought to destroy capitalism and liberate the proletariat from its capitalist chains. Now Lenin was proposing to re-establish a system in which the spetsy continued to rule over the workers, in which the old harsh forms of labour discipline over the workers were restored, together with material incentives which they considered to be divisive of proletarian unity, and in which workers' control was effectively rendered powerless. This just would not do! They categorically refused to accept the solution to the problem of post-revolutionary economic ruin offered by Lenin, firmly defending the programme for an egalitarian, democratic organisation of the economy by the proletariat itself.

At the very heart of the "Left Communists'" criticisms of Lenin's economic proposals and of their own policies for the restoration of industry it is possible to discern a fundamental belief which harks back to what they thought the teachings of Marx and Engels were. They insisted that the proletariat, by its own class self-creativity [samodeiate] 'nost',⁵⁴ alone could successfully accomplish the transition to socialism. If the proletariat itself was denied the opportunity to discover the correct "transitional organisational forms"⁵⁵ for the consolidation of socialism, then no other class or group, neither the old capitalist administrators nor even the party, could substitute itself for the proletariat in the achievement of this. N. Osinsky, a major "Left Communist" theoretician, defended this principle without qualification:

We stand for the construction of proletarian society by the class creativity of the workers themselves, not by ukaze of the 'captains of industry'.... We proceed from trust in the class instinct, to the active class initiative of the proletariat. It cannot be otherwise. If the proletariat does not know how to create the necessary prerequisites for the socialist organisation of labour, no one can do this for it and no one can compel it to do this.... Socialism and the socialist organisation of labour must be constructed by the proletariat itself, or not at all,⁵⁶ and something else will be constructed - state capitalism.

In the light of this credo it is wholly plausible to interpret the "Left Communists'" opposition to Lenin's economic measures and their

own policy proposals as means to ensure this vital freedom of action for the workers.

In detail, the "Left Communists" objected that the use of state capitalist methods to revive the economy must entail the restoration of a hierarchical industrial administration, in which the managers of enterprises, appointed by the central government regardless of the wishes of the workers, would be granted dictatorial powers over the workers. Other features associated with the old exploiting capitalist system, such as authoritarian discipline over the workers and material incentives, would also have to be re-imposed. The consequences of all this, they argued, would be the diminution of the role of all the organs of workers' control, whether the fabzavkomy at the plant level or, at the broader local level, the soviets of workers' deputies and the sovnarkhozy, in the administration of industry. Thus the active participation of the proletariat, this sine qua non of genuine socialist construction, would be stifled.⁵⁷

Moreover, the "Left Communists" especially condemned the role allocated to the spetsy in the economic administration. Although they conceded reluctantly that even after the proletarian revolution it would still be necessary to utilise the knowledge and skills of the spetsy in the organisation of large-scale industry, a knowledge which the proletariat would initially lack, they adamantly opposed granting them any position of authority in the economy.⁵⁸ Defending the organisational principles which they believed to have been agreed upon in 1917, they maintained that the spetsy were to be given purely technical administrative tasks, under the strictest supervision of the organs of workers' control. They bitterly objected to the increased authority in the direction of the economy which Lenin proposed to grant to them, remonstrating that they would not allow themselves to be used by the proletariat but rather would take advantage of their positions to carry out a policy in the interests of their own class. Osinsky, in the belief that the spetsy were so indelibly stained with the mores of capitalism that they would be psychologically unable to implement a genuine socialist programme, emphasised the danger that "our teachers (i.e. the spetsy) will not help us build socialism but on the sly they will prepare a real capitalist trust, they will conduct their own

class policy."⁵⁹ In the "Left Communists'" minds, the proletariat alone could perform the duties of the "gravedigger" of capitalism and they found it incomprehensible to expect that the spetsy would help to dig their own graves.

In his history of the Russian revolution, held in esteem by M. N. Pokrovsky as one of the seminal works of Bolshevik scholarship,⁶⁰ L. N. Kritsman, himself a prominent figure in the "Left Communist" movement, amassed evidence which confirmed this fear. From a series of questionnaires completed by the spetsy he concluded that the overwhelming majority of them were still hidebound by their old capitalist ideology. Moreover, they also hankered after the restoration of capitalism and were implacably hostile to the rule of the proletariat. Consequently, he believed that at best their service in the interests of the revolutionary state would be performed badly and reluctantly and that often they would deliberately sabotage the work of socialist construction.⁶¹

The "Left Communists", however, perceived another profound danger in Lenin's plans for the economic reconstruction of Soviet Russia. They bitterly criticised his scheme to leave large-scale industry in the hands of its owners who in return would manage this and, it was hoped, increase production. Contrary to Lenin's claim that this would not constitute a threat to the survival of the revolution since the proletarian state would have ultimate control over industry, the "Left Communists" believed that this would prove to be an extremely perilous course to follow. Defending a deep-rooted Marxist premise, that "politics is built ultimately on economics,"⁶² a number of leading "Left Communist" theoreticians, notable among whom were N. I. Bukharin, Osinsky and Kritsman, charged that Lenin's concept of state capitalism - "state regulation of private capital and modern economic management"⁶³ - was incompatible with the survival of the proletarian dictatorship. They were convinced that the maintenance of capitalist power in the economy would preclude the continued existence of the political power of the proletariat. Bukharin painted a despairing picture of what he foresaw as the inevitable outcome of such a policy:

We [the "Left Communists"] picture the matter concretely: let us suppose that Soviet power (the dictatorship of the proletariat, supported by the poor peasants), while

organising nominally, in words, state regulation, in fact transfers the business of administration to the 'organisers of trusts' (i.e. to the capitalists). What transpires in that case? In the economy there grows and is strengthened the real power of capital. And the political casing either little by little degenerates beyond recognition, or at a certain point 'bursts', because the protracted 'command power' of capital in the economy is incompatible with the 'command power' of the proletariat in politics.⁶⁴

As an alternative to Lenin's plans for economic reconstruction, the "Left Communists" put forward their own set of policies which was essentially a restatement of the Bolshevik "programme" of 1917. To prevent the restoration of capitalism they first demanded the immediate socialisation of the "commanding heights" of the economy, that is, of the banks and large industry. They were certain that nationalisation alone was not sufficient to ensure the development of the revolution towards socialism, arguing that nationalised industries existed in capitalist countries like Germany and the United States. Socialisation necessarily involved the destruction of the power of capital and the capitalists in the economy, which meant that there would be no place for the preservation of private trusts even under state control, as Lenin proposed, and that the spetsy would not be employed in positions of authority in the administration of industry lest they utilise their power in their own class interests.⁶⁵

Furthermore, they insisted on the establishment of a system of local control for the socialised economy, by kollegia of workers at the plant level and by local sovnarkhozy elected by the workers at the oblast' level. In addition, the local soviets of workers' deputies were to be granted wide powers of autonomous action and freed from the hierarchical control of centrally appointed political commissars. They believed that this programme alone, by guaranteeing the consistent devolution of economic and political power to the local level, could effectively check the increasing bureaucratisation in Soviet Russia. Moreover, this would also give the mass of workers the opportunity to actively take part in the construction of the new socialist society which could "be accomplished only by the efforts of the whole proletariat...."⁶⁶ Shortly after the Bolsheviks' successful coup, Bukharin had stressed the importance of this principle, declaring that the mass participation of the workers in this socialist transformation

was vital if the objectives of the revolution were to be consolidated:

... without the greatest self-activity of the masses themselves there will be no victory. And just as the proletariat in its armed struggle produced a Red Guard, so it must form a guard of organisers in the factories, the plants, the mines... and the offices. If it does this, then the victory of socialism will be assured.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, while advocating the decentralisation of economic and political power within the new Soviet state to bodies elected locally by the workers, such as the soviets, sovnarkhozy and even the fabzavkomy, at the same time the "Left Communists" insisted, as the Democratic Centralists and the Workers' Opposition were also later to do, that it was not their intention to reduce Soviet Russia to a series of unconnected, self-governing, anarcho-syndicalist communes.⁶⁸ On the contrary, they believed that the construction of socialism required that Russia's polity and in particular its economy should be administered according to a central plan, aimed to serve the needs of the working class community as a whole, rather than the establishment of a myriad of artels which would satisfy only the parochial aspirations of the workers included within each of them separately.⁶⁹

Certainly, the goal of these "leftists" to establish a politico-economic structure in which central regulation in the general interests of society was balanced by an effective devolution of power to the local organs of the workers was consistent with Marxist orthodoxy on the question of the organisation of the revolutionary state. Yet conformity with theory was in itself no guarantee of the workability of such a system. For example, while Osinsky, ostensibly to guard against the bureaucratic degeneration of the young workers' state, stressed the pressing need for "a precise definition of the powers of the subordinate [i.e. local] organs in order to protect their self-creativity, and, at the same time, to prevent their arbitrary actions,"⁷⁰ he nevertheless failed to elaborate a framework in which this desired division of powers between the centre and localities could be practically realised. Admittedly, he did propose that the central administration, to be elected by the workers, or, more probably, by their various representative bodies, was to be responsible for the formulation, and financing of the overall economic plan, and was to have general supervisory powers to

ensure that it was carried out. The detailed administration of the plan, however, was to be left to the locally elected organs of the workers, such as the sovnarkhozy, and at an even lower, purely "executive-technical" level, the fabzavkomy.⁷¹ Yet Osinsky, characteristic of his fellow "leftists", was unable to provide a satisfactory method of resolving potential conflicts between the central administration, concerned with the framing and implementation of policies in the interests of the community at large, and these local bodies, by their very nature less capable of perceiving broader social interests and more concerned with the pursuit of their narrower, sectional interests. In such cases where conferences between representatives of the centre and the localities were unsuccessful in resolving the differences between them, as Osinsky, perhaps rather naively, hoped that they would, for all their defence of workers' initiative at the local level, Osinsky and his fellow-thinkers assigned the ultimate power of decision-making to the centre, as their theory of socialism demanded, which could override any protestations from the localities.⁷²

However, the "leftists" now found themselves in a rather ironical position. Having accepted the principle that in a socialist society ultimate power must reside with the central administration, they still attacked this administration for over-reaching its competences by contravening the rights of the localities - although they themselves were unable to define in any precise functional or practical sense what these were! - and thus fostering the growth of bureaucratism. Nevertheless, despite the criticism that can be levelled against the "leftists" for the imprecisions and contradictions within the administrative framework that they envisaged as appropriate for a socialist Russia, it is only fair to add that the issue of the proper relationship between central control and local initiative in modern industrial democracies remains a question which socialists have yet to resolve.

By the summer of 1918, however, after most of its support had melted away, the "Left Communist" opposition dissolved itself. Since March the "Left Communists" had gradually lost their following among the rank and file. Defections from their camp initially had begun then, in response to the apparent unreality of their continued opposition to peace with Germany. After the treaty of Brest-Litovsk had

been concluded, the "Left Communists'" support dwindled further, this time in reaction to the failure of their programme for the administration of industry by the workers themselves to restore production. In fact, it appears that the majority of Bolsheviks believed that the system of workers' control itself had contributed to the calamitous fall in output. Ironically, even A. G. Shliapnikov, then the Commissar of Labour, but in the future to become a leader of the Workers' Opposition and an impassioned defender of workers' control, then agreed with this conclusion.⁷³

The outbreak of Civil War, in May and June, hammered the final nail in the coffin of "Left Communism." Lenin's policy of industrial administration, which reimposed the bureaucratic central control and strict labour discipline that he considered to be necessary if the spontaneously anarchic, and economically disastrous actions of the workers themselves were to be curbed, was accepted since this series of measures alone promised a rapid increase in production, now immediately necessary if Soviet Russia's failing economy were to be revived sufficiently to meet the sharply increased demands place upon it by the growing military struggle.⁷⁴ Moreover, at the same time Lenin's negotiations with the capitalists had broken down and, consequently, he was forced to abandon the policy that he preferred - to preserve a state capitalist system in the first stage of the transition period to socialism -, in favour of the rapid nationalisation of the "commanding heights" of the economy.⁷⁵ In part, this action also satisfied the demands of the surviving "Left Communists" and any remaining grievances over the trend to bureaucratisation and centralisation then evident in the revolutionary state were shelved in face of the grave crisis presented by the outbreak of Civil War. This threat impelled the Bolsheviks to sink their differences and to unite in the interests of survival against the common foe.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, the demise of the "Left Communist" movement should not be taken as an indication that the issues which it had raised had been finally resolved. While Lenin's pragmatic approach to overcoming the economic ruin in Soviet Russia may have been justified in the interests of the immediate survival of the revolutionary state, his theoretical justifications of the socialist character of the policies

that he introduced to achieve this did not satisfy a number of his fellow Bolsheviks, as the future was soon to reveal. Questions focusing on the proper role of workers' control, on the place and power of the spetsy in economic administration, and on the respective functions and authority of central and local organs, both political and economic, in a genuine revolutionary socialist state were repeatedly raised by "leftists" in the party in the ensuing years.⁷⁷

From 1919, when the fear of the military overthrow of the Bolshevik regime was beginning to wane, voices were again raised in the ranks of the Bolsheviks by the opposition which became known as the Democratic Centralist movement. These oppositionists, in whose ranks Osinsky and T. V. Sapronov, also a former "Left Communist" were prominent, too defended the democratic programme espoused by the party in 1917, in protest against the intensifying bureaucratisation, centralisation and militarisation then growing within the revolutionary state.⁷⁸ At the basis of their critique it is also possible to detect the fear that this trend was stifling the active participation of the workers in the tasks of economic and political organisation, a participation which they considered to be a vital element in the socialist transformation of society.

In 1920 these Democratic Centralists presented a platform, drawn up by Osinsky, Sapronov and V. N. Maksimovskii, in which they outlined the principles on which they essentially based their rejection of the party's current policies. Specifically, they opposed the hierarchical re-organisation of the administration of industry, in which all enterprises of a given branch of industry were directly subordinated to the authority of central organs, the glavki, rather than to local bodies, such as the sovnarkhozy. Moreover, they violently objected to the re-introduction within each enterprise of one-man management. What infuriated them even more about this development was that almost invariably the single director of the enterprise, appointed from the centre instead of being elected by the workers themselves, turned out to be one of the odious spetsy, whom they believed still to be ingrained with the old mentality of capitalism and, therefore, incapable of honestly carrying out any policies consistent with socialist principles⁷⁹ - Sapronov had no doubts that "the specialist... [would] work not for

the revolution, but for the counter-revolution."⁸⁰ They held that if industry were organised on such lines this could not but result in the restoration of an authoritarian, bureaucratised administration typical of capitalism, the antithesis of all that the revolution had fought to destroy.

Moreover, they also were highly critical of the similar tendencies towards the re-emergence of centralisation and authoritarianism in the political structure of the Soviet state. Sapronov was their leading spokesman on this issue, bitterly protesting against the attack on the powers of the local soviets by the party centre which was effectively stripping them of any autonomous authority and subordinating them to centrally appointed political commissars. They insisted that the re-imposition of a hierarchical system of government would further accelerate the growth of bureaucratism which, to their dismay, was already rife.⁸¹

In opposition to this dangerous drift towards the re-establishment of a bureaucratic, authoritarian system which they feared would constrict, in Sapronov's words, "the self-activity of the masses,"⁸² the Democratic Centralists called for the radical and widespread restoration of workers' democracy in the organisational structure of the Soviet state. They believed that the first step needed to ensure this was the real devolution of effective economic and political authority to the local representative organs of the workers. Concretely, they demanded the cessation of all interference in the work of the local soviets by the party centre, in the person of its appointed commissars. In the economy, they argued for the return of a large measure of administrative power to the local organs of workers' control, both to the fabzavkomy at the enterprise level and to the sovnarkhozy at the regional level. Moreover, in the place of one-man management in industry, administration by kollegia, elected by the workers, was to be universally restored. Emphasising a principle which he had espoused earlier as a member of the "Left Communist" movement, Osinsky again maintained that administration by kollegia alone would allow the workers to "learn the art of administration," and at the same time enable them to supervise the activities of the spetsy whose organisational skills, they grudgingly admitted, were still necessary.⁸³ They felt that only by giving back

political and economic power to these bodies, which would be guaranteed the autonomy to independently fulfil the directives emanating from the central authorities, could the revolutionary state be protected from the bureaucratic dangers of over-centralisation. Furthermore, this thorough democratisation and decentralisation of power within the Soviet apparatus alone could ensure that the workers would have the freedom and opportunity actively to participate in the construction of socialism. Following in the footsteps of the "Left Communists", the Democratic Centralists held this to be an inalienable component of the successful building of a socialist society, since if this "[was] not supported by the proletariat in the provinces, then it [would] inevitably collapse."⁸⁴

A little later than the Democratic Centralists, in late 1919 and early 1920, another group of "leftists", composed largely of workers rather than of intellectuals, appeared in the now re-named Communist Party. This Workers' Opposition also coalesced in defence of the democratic principles promulgated by the Bolsheviks in 1917, since by 1920 both trade union independence and workers' control in industry had all but vanished. These had been superseded by a hierarchical system in which industry was run by centrally appointed spetsy - and in which centrally appointed commissars ruled over the trade unions and the workers' soviets.⁸⁵ While the Workers' Oppositionists agreed with the Democratic Centralists' critique of the bureaucratic and authoritarian development of the Soviet state and shared their fears that the subversion of proletarian democracy resulting from this would lead to the perversion of the ideals of the revolution,⁸⁶ they did not accept their analysis of the roots of this phenomenon. The Workers' Opposition denied that the source of these evils lay simply in the over-centralisation of political and economic power in the state, and even in the party apparatus and, therefore, could be easily rectified by the effective devolution of power to the various local political and economic authorities elected by and responsible to the workers. Rather, they saw the power and influence of non-proletarian elements, the peasantry, the bourgeoisie and the spetsy, to be at the root of the bureaucratisation then infecting the whole political and economic organisation of the state and party. In order to check and reverse

this dangerous cancer and so return to a course of genuine socialist construction they maintained that it was vital to have faith in the abilities of the workers and restore real workers' administration in all state and party bodies. This alone, which would involve purging the elements alien to the proletariat from all positions of power and authority, could guarantee the transition to a society based on true socialist principles.⁸⁷

The protests which the Workers' Opposition levelled against the authoritarian policies of industrial and political organisation then being pursued by Lenin and his supporters in the party clearly show that these "leftists" were again raising the issues first voiced by the "Left Communists" in the spring of 1918, issues which they considered to still remain unresolved. At the same time, at the very heart of their critique it is also possible to perceive a staunch commitment to the principle of proletarian democracy, that is, to the principle that if socialist society was to be built on solid foundations, then the working class as a whole must be actively involved in its construction.

The Workers' Oppositionists attacked Lenin's policies on a number of issues previously broached by the "Left Communists" and Democratic Centralists. They unremittingly opposed the system of the appointment of all plenipotentiaries, whether in administration of industry, the trade unions, the soviets or the party itself, instead of their election by the rank and file of the proletariat. They asserted that the consequent concentration of power in the hands of the party hierarchy was inevitably leading to the bureaucratisation of Soviet life and undermining the independent role which the workers had to play in this.⁸⁸

Furthermore, they were particularly critical of the regression to a hierarchical organisation of the economy. They objected that the workers' control of industry, as exercised through their elected kollegia, had been universally replaced by the system of one-man management by a central nominee. Moreover, what horrified them even more was that these restored industrial "autocrats" had almost all been recruited from the ranks of the spetsy whom they regarded as so indoctrinated by their old capitalist mores that they would by nature be

incapable of effectively carrying out socialist principles in the operation of industry.⁸⁹

As an alternative to Lenin's policies, the Workers' Opposition presented its own set of measures for the economic and political administration of the revolutionary state, a programme which it defended as alone consistent with the principle of the collective administration of society by the mass of the workers themselves, which in their eyes was the hallmark of socialism. They contended that the first, yet vital step to stem the onrushing tide of bureaucratism in all its shapes and forms was the re-introduction of the election of all officials, in industry, the trade unions, the soviets and the party, by the workers. In particular, to check the bureaucratisation prevalent in the organisation of industry, which the Workers' Oppositionists considered to be of primary importance, since in their minds the organisation of production by the workers themselves was the sine qua non of socialism,⁹⁰ they demanded the restoration of an effective system of workers' control. To ensure this, they proposed that the proletariat itself, united in its trade unions, should be given the right and responsibility to run industry, as the programme adopted at the Eighth Party Congress in March 1919 had envisaged.⁹¹ In detail, they demanded that at the grass roots level all industrial enterprises should be administered by elected collegia of workers and, at a higher level of economic administration, all candidates for positions of authority in the economy nominated by the workers through their trade unions should be mandatorily binding on the Supreme Council of the National Economy (Vesenkha).⁹²

Certainly, these policies were attractive, at least theoretically, and also laudable in their intention of devolving effective political and economic power into the hands of the workers themselves. Indeed, there is little reason to doubt that Lenin himself agreed that measures based on such principles ultimately were required if socialism was to be built. Yet he refused to implement such measures at that time. To attribute this action, or rather inaction just to selfish machinations on Lenin's part to restrict power and privilege to his own entourage would be unjust. The ensuing discussion of the validity of the "Left Communists'" assessment of abilities of the workers themselves successfully to administer the revolutionary state and economy will demonstrate

that there were good reasons why Lenin refused to entrust this administration into the hands of the workers.

Regardless, the Workers' Oppositionists remained convinced that their programme for the restoration of proletarian democracy would guarantee the creative participation of the workers in the socialist transformation. They were certain that this was the sole safeguard against the bureaucratisation and degeneration of the workers' state. They argued that it was folly to try, as they thought Lenin was doing, to build socialism by the decrees of the party centre and by the employment of the spetsy to execute these.⁹³ Standing firmly in defence of the teachings of the "founding fathers", they too assigned the task of socialist construction to the proletariat itself. A. M. Kollontai, earlier a "Left Communist" and now their leading and most articulate theoretician, unequivocally declared:

The Workers' Opposition has said what has long ago been printed in the Communist Manifesto by Marx and Engels: the building of Communism can and must be the work of the toiling masses themselves. The building of Communism belongs to the workers.⁹⁴

Moreover, Kollontai even went so far as to deny that the party, the vanguard of the proletariat, could substitute itself for the mass of workers in the successful completion of socialist construction. She repeatedly argued to the effect that while the vanguard "can create the revolution, ... only the whole class can develop through its everyday experience the practical work of the basic class collectives."⁹⁵ In fact, in the revolutionary state she assigned to the party no more than the role of guaranteeing to the workers the freedom which they needed in order to enable them to accomplish this transformation on their own initiative. In her mind, the proletariat was now to take the control of its own destiny out of the hands of the party.⁹⁶

This interpretation of the views of the Workers' Opposition on the role which the proletariat should fulfil in the Soviet state, an interpretation which can also be justifiably applied to the views of the "Left Communists" and the Democratic Centralists, contradicts that offered by scholars of differing political persuasions, who claim that these "leftists" were just concerned with a defence of democracy within the ranks of the Bolshevik party.⁹⁷ A more sympathetic, yet wholly credible reading of their views suggests that they in fact were committed

to a broader defence of proletarian democracy for the working class as a whole. Despite at times confusing references to the status of the party, the outcome of their pleas for an effective system of workers' administration in the revolutionary state, if successful, would have been to reduce the role of the party vis à vis that of the class itself. Their attachment to proletarian democracy, furthermore, appears to have been founded on a deeply rooted conviction that this was an integral part of the successful socialist transformation of society which, if frustrated, could not but lead to the degeneration of Soviet Russia away from socialism. Much more literally than Lenin, they accepted Marx's and Engels' precept that the workers themselves could and must build the new socialist society on their own native abilities which would be raised in this very process as they learned from the mistakes which would inevitably be made. In their minds, therefore, the means were very much an inextricable part of the end that they sought. Moreover, this trust in the capacity of the masses to achieve their own liberation and spontaneously to organise their own just and egalitarian society was not an alien phenomenon in Russian history. The Narodniki, particularly when they went "to the people", displayed an analogous faith, however unrealistic it proved to be, in the innate abilities of the peasantry to overthrow the autocracy and preserve the mir as the foundation of a newly freed, humane social order; the "Left Communists" had the same "populist" trust in the Russian proletariat, although the tasks which confronted it were far greater, since it would have to build a totally new society, rather than simply to maintain existing institutions as the basis of socialism.

Later, Kritsman offered what can be termed a theoretical justification for the participation of workers en masse in the building of socialism, which it is plausible to argue was an unspoken assumption of the "leftists" in the ranks of the Bolsheviks. In language reminiscent of the young Marx, he maintained that the fundamental objective of socialism, "the further conquest and transformation of nature (the progress of technology)... and the further conquest and transformation of the nature of man himself..." was a "creative task."⁹⁸ However, in order to achieve this final goal it was essential that the working masses themselves consciously take part in the socialist transformation

of society, a task which they could successfully accomplish only if they were given the freedom to exercise their latent creative abilities and learn in the very process doing this. He concluded by arguing that this "mass creativity is the basic characteristic of Communism."⁹⁹

However, the defence of proletarian democracy by the Democratic Centralists and the Workers' Opposition, like that of the "Left Communists" before them, disintegrated when the very survival of the Bolshevik regime was threatened. In 1921, in face of widespread peasant revolts against the exactions of "War Communism" and the Kronstadt rebellion, compounded by the decimation of the Bolsheviks' proletarian support in the Civil War, Lenin successfully demanded the cessation of all opposition and the restoration of unity in the ranks of the party in order to overcome this crisis.¹⁰⁰ His ruthless logic that the situation was too dangerous for the "utopian" policies proposed by the "leftists" won him majority support for the condemnation of all factions, except his own, in the party. Loyalty to the party, and fear that the very existence of the revolutionary state was at stake, compelled the majority of the oppositionists to bow to the will of the majority, although a hard core of Democratic Centralists and of the Workers' Opposition continued to criticise the tenor of Lenin's policies.¹⁰¹

It is necessary to preface an examination of the views of the revolutionary Marxists of Poland, Latvia and Lithuania on the question of proletarian democracy and the part which they believed that the proletariat must play in the socialist transformation with two qualifications. First, the heritage and influences which acted on these Marxists were different from the Bolsheviks. Second, unlike the Bolsheviks in Soviet Russia, these revolutionaries failed to consolidate themselves in power for any length of time. Consequently, evidence of their thought and actions while holding the reins of power on the methods of organising the revolutionary dictatorship in the transition period is considerably more limited than in the case of the Bolshevik "leftists" who were continually at loggerheads with Lenin on this issue. Nevertheless, a judicious examination of their views does permit some conclusions to be drawn about their thinking on this issue.

Any discussion of the attitude of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (S.D.K.P.iL.) towards the role of the

workers in the building of socialism must focus attention on the thought of Rosa Luxemburg, whose ideas were essentially at the heart of this party's position on this question. Throughout her illustrious revolutionary career, prematurely cut short by her brutal murder in 1919, she displayed a devotion to the defence of the principles of proletarian democracy unsurpassed among the advocates of revolutionary Marxism.

The tasks which Rosa Luxemburg believed that the proletariat would fulfil in the revolutionary transformation of society place her firmly in the libertarian wing of the revolutionary socialist movement, where she defended basically the same principles of workers' democracy as Marx and Engels had previously done. Even more consistently and explicitly than the "leftists" in the Bolshevik party, she contended that the workers would "spontaneously" acquire the consciousness and abilities necessary for the establishment of socialism in the course of their daily struggles for economic improvement within the capitalist system. She categorically denied the need for, and efficacy of a dictatorially organised, conspiratorial party which would substitute itself for the proletariat as the builder of socialism. This belief was to become the accepted doctrine of the S.D.K.P.i.L., endorsed by L. Jogiches, the party's nominal leader, at the Sixth Party Congress in December, 1908.

We are a mass party, we try to increase the proletariat's consciousness of its role, we can lead it but we cannot - and in no sense must we try - to be a substitute for it in the class struggle.... (On the other hand, we must equally not obliterate the distinction between the party organisation and the politically shapeless mass - like the opportunist wing of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party suggests.)¹⁰²

The practice of the S.D.K.P.i.L., however, did not live up to its words. In fact, Jogiches organised the party much in the "Leninist" spirit, as a highly centralised, authoritarian body with little in the way of an independent role in the shaping of its activities granted to the rank and file, let alone the workers as a class.¹⁰³

However, Rosa Luxemburg herself, since the early years of the twentieth century, had determinedly defended her philosophy of "non-organisation" in opposition to Lenin, whose own ideas on the respective roles of the party and the working class in the revolutionary

transition to socialism were anathema to her. She rejected Lenin's contention that the proletariat could independently attain nothing more than a "trade union consciousness" - that it would be interested only in immediate economic gains and amelioration within the existing capitalist structure - and that, consequently, the establishment of an élite party of professional revolutionaries, usually drawn from the ranks of the intelligentsia, was vital in order to inculcate into this otherwise backward class the revolutionary socialist consciousness necessary for the overthrow of capitalism and the construction of socialism.¹⁰⁴

Moreover, she saw no panacea for the evils of opportunism within the Social Democratic movement in Lenin's organisational scheme. In her opinion, the only certain safeguard against this reactionary tendency was an educated and politically conscious proletariat, strong enough to absorb any declassed petty-bourgeois elements which joined the ranks of Social Democracy. She feared that Lenin's plan of organisation, with its strong emphasis on centralism and hierarchical discipline, together with its élitist exclusiveness, would in fact stifle the development of a mass proletarian movement and so would make Social Democracy even more susceptible to opportunist influences.¹⁰⁵

This critique of Lenin's methods, however, did not appear out of thin air, but was heavily coloured by her experiences in the German Social Democratic movement. These had instilled in her the conviction that the conservative leadership of German Social Democracy was itself a factor inhibiting the "spontaneous" revolutionary energies of the rank and file of the proletariat. From this flowed much of her distrust of any attempts to set up a hierarchic organisation over the revolutionary movement of the workers, and also much of her faith in the actions of the masses themselves as the only weapon against these potentially reactionary bodies. Luxemburg defended her position on this issue quite unambiguously:

The tendency is for the directing organs of a social-democratic party to play a conservative role. As experience shows, every time they conquer new ground... they develop it to the utmost, but at the same time soon transform it into a bulwark against further innovations on a wider scale.

Everyone is surprised at the remarkable diversity

and flexibility, yet at the same time firmness of the contemporary tactics of German Social Democracy. Yet this only means that our party in its daily struggle, down to the smallest details, has adapted itself admirably to the present conditions existing in a parliamentary régime, that it has been able to use all these conditions... while remaining true to its principles.... However, this very adaptation of its tactics is closing wider horizons, so that there is an inclination to regard parliamentary tactics as immutable....

To grant to the leading organ absolute powers..., as Lenin proposes, means artificially to strengthen to a very dangerous degree the conservatism which inevitably is inherent [in such a body] even without this. If social-democratic tactics are not to become the creation of the central committee, but of the party as a whole - or, even better, of the whole movement -, then the separate party organisations, obviously, must necessarily have that freedom of action, which alone will give them the opportunity to use all the means for the intensification of the struggle that a given situation presents, and equally to develop their revolutionary initiative....¹⁰⁶

The events of the first Russian revolution of 1905 apparently strengthened her convictions. She considered that the actions of the Russian proletariat had confirmed her belief that the workers themselves could develop their own organisation in the very heat of revolution. Her letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky in this period are striking testimony of her faith in the masses. In one of them, written in early 1906 from Saint Petersburg, she lauded the spontaneous organisational achievements of the workers:

To pick up the thread again: the unemployment - voilà la place de la révolution - and no means of curbing it. But in connection therewith there is developing a quiet heroism and a class consciousness of the masses that I would very much like to show to the dear Germans. Everywhere the workers of their own accord make such arrangements as, for instance, having the employed give a day's wages each week to the unemployed.... And here is an interesting result of the revolution: in all factories, committees elected by the workers have come to life "all by themselves," which decide about conditions of work, employment and dismissals of workers, etc....

People think that the struggle has been abandoned, but it has only gone down into the depths. And at the same time the organisation progresses untiringly....¹⁰⁷

At the same time, these letters also reveal her doubts that a leadership standing above the workers would prove able to conduct a consistently revolutionary policy. She expressed her scorn for the

reactionary attitudes of the workers' leaders to the Kautskys:

From the situation as a whole one can gather that in Russia too the 'elections' are going by the board. Against nine-tenths of the elections the workers have declared a boycott and that, too, contrary to the directions of one-half of the Social Democracy! The masses here have once again proven wiser than their 'leaders'.¹⁰⁸

The same belief in the spontaneous revolutionary capacities of the workers and of the necessity to permit them free expression formed the foundation of her subsequent critique of the dictatorial methods of organising the revolutionary dictatorship which were being implemented by Lenin and his followers in 1918 after the Bolshevik seizure of power. Her defence of proletarian democracy not only has a superficial resemblance to the ideals upheld by the various factions of "leftists" in the Bolshevik party itself, but a deeper analysis also reveals the same kernel of thought at the basis of this, namely the commitment to mass proletarian creativity as a factor itself essential for the socialist transformation of society.

Rosa Luxemburg was deeply afraid that the authoritarian policies pursued by Lenin from the spring of 1918 would inevitably frustrate the establishment of a genuine socialist society. Like Marx and Engels before her, she believed that the participation of the workers themselves was vital for the success of the socialist cause, since through this action alone could they revolutionise their consciousness as well as the social, political and economic structure of society. She attacked Lenin's policies on the grounds that they were subverting any independent creative action by the proletariat, averring that "socialist democracy [is] not something which begins only in the promised land after the foundations of the socialist economy are created."¹⁰⁹ On the contrary, she defended proletarian democracy as an inalienable part of the very construction of socialism, succinctly stating her case so:

Public control is indispensably necessary. Otherwise the exchange of experiences remains only with the closed circle of the officials of the new régime.... Socialism in life demands a complete spiritual transformation in the masses degraded by centuries of bourgeois class rule. Social instincts in the place of egotistical ones, mass initiative in the place of inertia, idealism.... Decree, dictatorial force of the factory overseer, Draconic penalties, rule by terror - all these things are but palliatives. The only way to a rebirth is the school of public life itself, the most unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion.¹¹⁰

While she accepted the revolutionary destruction of the old bourgeois state and the establishment of a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat as necessary stages in the transition to socialism, she insisted that this dictatorship had to be of the proletariat as a class over the bourgeoisie and other non-proletarian elements, not a dictatorship of the élite party over the mass of the proletariat. She feared that the coercion and repression of the workers which would result from the authoritarian measures being taken by Lenin and his supporters in the Bolshevik party would lead to the degeneration of the revolutionary state into just such a bureaucratic dictatorship of the few leaders over the many workers. To her, this would be a perversion of the humanitarian ideals for which the revolution had been fought. In order to thwart this danger, she pleaded that the dictatorship of the proletariat must be synonymous with the widest democracy for the workers themselves:

Yes, dictatorship. But this dictatorship consists in the manner of applying democracy, not in its elimination, in resolute, energetic attacks upon the well-entrenched rights and economic relationships of bourgeois society, without which a socialist transformation cannot be accomplished. But this dictatorship must be the work of the class, and not of a little leading minority in the name of the class - that is, it must proceed step by step out of the active participation of the masses; it must be under the control of complete public activity; it must arise out of the ¹¹¹growing political training of the mass of the people.

Unfortunately, Rosa Luxemburg had little to say about the measures which she thought would ensure the creation of such a socialist democracy. While she openly supported the implementation of the programme outlined by Marx and Engels in The Communist Manifesto which was designed to destroy the bourgeois order,¹¹² she was singularly vague about the institutions which would take its place. She justified this on the grounds that socialism could only be "a historical product, born out of the school of its own experiences, born in the course of its realisation, as the results of living history, which... has the fine habit of always producing along with any real social need the means to its satisfaction, along with the task simultaneously its solution."¹¹³ However, in her very final speech, made to the founding Congress of the German Communist Party in January, 1919, she indicated in broad terms

that she felt that the revolutionary state should be constructed, like the Paris Commune, on a system of locally elected workers' councils which should be assigned legislative and executive authority in both political and economic affairs.¹¹⁴

Turning to an analysis of the thought and actions of the revolutionary Marxists in Latvia, particularly of their leader and ablest theoretician, P. I. Stuchka - "a great figure now forgotten, [who] instituted a strictly egalitarian regime in his Sovietised Latvia"¹¹⁵ -, this serves to reveal that they too defended the principle of proletarian democracy and even tried to implement it in 1919 when they briefly held power from January till May. Moreover, it turns out that they also adhered to the premise that without the active participation of the workers from the outset the construction of socialism would rest on rocky foundations.

From its birth in 1904, the Social Democracy of Latvia (S.D.L.) took pride in the fact that it was more of a mass party, composed largely of workers, than the Bolshevik party, which was then essentially an élite organisation of revolutionary intelligentsia. Moreover, the S.D.L. also possessed a tradition of democratic organisation - in 1906, when it joined the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party on a federative basis, it insisted on its freedom to deal with its organisational problems independently of the Bolsheviks, with their "omniscient and all-seeing central committee."¹¹⁶ Moreover, after 1906 the S.D.L. was largely "purged" of intelligentsia, to become almost exclusively a party of workers who proved sufficiently conscious to lead the proletarian movement themselves.¹¹⁷ It apparently had little sympathy with the Leninist notion of the need for the intelligentsia as the medium through which alone the workers could attain a revolutionary socialist consciousness. While it may well be true that the issues of party democracy and "spontaneity" were not matters of theoretical discussion in the S.D.L. in the pre-revolutionary period, it would appear that in its practice the party operated in accord with these principles.¹¹⁸

The principles and policies adopted by Stuchka during the period of revolutionary ebb and flow in Latvia from 1917 till 1919 reveal a continued attachment to the tradition of proletarian democracy. Moreover, it is also possible to discern a clear commitment to the prescriptions

of Marx and Engels, both with respect to the specific measures necessary to establish a genuine and effective dictatorship of the proletariat and also to the underlying belief that if the workers did not actively manage the transition to socialism, then it was doomed to failure.

In January, 1919 Stuchka declared that the revolutionary wing of the S.D.L. - now renamed the Communist Party of Latvia - would put into effect a programme whose direct objective was the establishment of socialism. He had no truck with the idea of state capitalism as a means which the revolutionary state could profit by in this transition and categorically rejected any policies which would leave the capitalists in any position of authority, either economic or political.¹¹⁹

In common with all revolutionary Marxists, Stuchka defended the need to destroy the bourgeois state apparatus - the standing army, the police and the bureaucracy - and to replace it with a dictatorship of the proletariat as the basic prerequisite of any policies of socialist transformation.¹²⁰ Positively, he proposed a number of measures which he considered had to be introduced in order to guarantee the proletarian character of a revolutionary state. First of all, he advocated the expropriation of the "commanding heights" of the economy, of large-scale capital, in order to destroy the material foundation on which the political power of the bourgeoisie was based.¹²¹ Further, in order to ensure the real control of the state and economic apparatus by the proletariat, and to thwart the re-appearance of a bureaucratic system of administration, all officials were to be elected by and responsible to the workers in the regions in which they served; the central authorities had the right only to protest against the election of these officials but could not remove them without the consent of the regions.¹²² Moreover, Stuchka vigorously defended the belief that egalitarianism was a powerful weapon in the struggle to combat the growth of bureaucratic careerists in the new order.¹²³ He also supported the establishment of an universal system of workers' control, implemented through the trade unions, at the enterprise level.¹²⁴ The engineers (spetsy) too, although it would remain necessary to use their skills, were to be treated with the utmost circumspection and subjected to the strictest control of the workers; unlike Soviet Russia, where there was "an unshakable trust

in the engineer," in Soviet Latvia there was "a trust in the workers."¹²⁵ However, while he favoured the widespread devolution of power and authority to the grass roots, Stuchka also insisted on the preservation of a strong degree of centralisation in the overall political and economic administration of Soviet Latvia. Yet this centralisation, he argued, would not breach the principles of socialist democracy since every central authority, including the Central Committee of the party, would be elected by the workers through their local organs.¹²⁶ He even instituted regular bi-monthly meetings of the central and local authorities - impossible in Soviet Russia because of its vast size - in order to ensure the effectiveness of local influence on national policy.¹²⁷

Beyond these specific measures, however, Stuchka was adamant that it was vital that the mass of workers "consciously put [this programme] into practice."¹²⁸ Otherwise, these policies, which can be interpreted as a means to guarantee the freedom for workers' participation, would remain lifeless decrees unless they were implemented by the workers themselves. Standing squarely in defence of Marx's and Engels' assertion that the liberation of the working class and the creation of socialism could only come from its own actions, Stuchka declared:

The construction of socialism - this is the task of the proletariat itself and, if we say that the liberation of the working class can only be the work of the working class itself, then this applies equally to the process of socialist construction.¹²⁹

The revolutionary wing of the Lithuanian Social Democratic movement (S.D.P.L.) too advocated what in essence was a "leftist" programme for the organisation of the revolutionary state. Despite the absence of a solid revolutionary proletarian base, the consequence of the paucity of developed industrial centres in Lithuania,¹³⁰ these revolutionary Marxists - who had by then formed themselves into the Communist Party of Lithuania - proclaimed the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship in Lithuania in December, 1919, in whose organisation they assigned a large role to the workers themselves.

Like their comrades elsewhere, the Lithuanian Marxists demanded the destruction of the bourgeois order, especially the army and the bureaucracy, as a necessary preliminary to any constructive socialist measures. Then, high in their list of policies to transform society,

they called for the rapid nationalisation of all large industrial and commercial enterprises. Moreover, in these enterprises a system of workers' control, implemented through the trade unions, was to be instituted.¹³¹ Furthermore, wary of the example of Soviet Russia where after the revolution a highly bureaucratised and centralised administrative structure had emerged, a structure which itself had led both "to a bottleneck of paper work and also of localism," they insisted that the principles on which the proletarian dictatorship in Lithuania was to be built must ensure an effective democratic centralist system in which there was a real devolution of authority to the proletariat. They pictured this as a system in which the local workers' soviets and revolutionary committees had autonomous powers to carry out the decrees of the central authorities - and also to delay the implementation of measures which they felt to be unacceptable in view of local conditions. At the same time, these local organs were guaranteed the right to participate in the formation of national policy.¹³²

Underpinning their ideas on the correct methods to structure the revolutionary state was the belief that the proper organisation of this was vital if the workers were to be allowed to take an active part in its political and economic administration. They considered this to be a fundamental condition for the survival of soviet power in Lithuania and for the consequent socialist transformation. The First Congress of Soviets, held in February, 1919, stressed the importance of workers' participation:

The self-activity of the toiling masses in all affairs in their localities is the best condition for the flourishing of soviet power. Every worker, every landless or land-starved peasant must firmly remember that now he is not only a citizen of a soviet country, but also a real builder of soviet life in the country.¹³³

The views of these different groups of revolutionary Marxists on the role which the proletariat would be able to play in the construction of socialism makes plausible the contention that, despite their different backgrounds and the different influences acting on them, they believed, as Marx and Engels did, that the workers themselves were capable of reshaping society on socialist principles. Moreover, they shared the common fear that if the workers were denied the opportunity to exercise their creative talents in building this new society, then

the sought after goal of socialism would itself be frustrated by the attempt to achieve it by incorrect means. Therefore, they demanded the implementation of a programme, much of which had been previously defended by Marx and Engels as an insurance of proletarian democracy, which would ensure that the workers were guaranteed the necessary freedom to take part in and control the building of socialism.

Before attempting to assess if there was any basis in fact for these Marxists to entrust socialist construction to the proletariat in the Russian Empire, it will be pertinent to this question first to examine Lenin's ideas on the role which the proletariat would be able to play in this transition. At the same time, this will aid in further delineating what distinguished this strand of "leftist" ideology.

From his early days in the revolutionary Marxist movement Lenin had scorned the idea that the proletariat would be able spontaneously to acquire in its day to day economic struggle the degree of revolutionary consciousness necessary to overthrow capitalism. On the contrary, as he repeatedly emphasised in What Is To Be Done, his first and most important work on the question of the role of the revolutionary party, he was convinced that an élite of revolutionary intelligentsia alone could attain this level of consciousness. In his mind, it was the task of this vanguard to inculcate the required revolutionary socialist will into the mass of the workers, who would otherwise only seek immediate economic gains and amelioration within the existing capitalist system, rather than the destruction of this system itself. Moreover, in order successfully to accomplish this task he argued that the revolutionary intelligentsia must organise itself into a centralised, disciplined, conspiratorial party, both to protect themselves from the attempts of the autocracy to suppress them and to ensure that they were able to maintain their revolutionary consciousness in face of the overwhelming spontaneous trend of the workers to conduct "trade unionist" politics.¹³⁴

Almost two decades later, after the successful seizure of power by the Bolshevik party and the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship, it is still possible to see this same leitmotif - this disdain of the abilities and political consciousness of the workers - at the basis of Lenin's ideas on the methods of socialist construction. He

was convinced that the workers, left to their own devices, would inevitably fail to move towards the creation of socialist society and that their feeble, fumbling spontaneous efforts to do so would threaten the security of the revolutionary dictatorship in Soviet Russia - and the disruptive consequences of workers' control in industry seemed to him abundant proof of this. On occasion he openly stated that the right to exercise this dictatorship could not be safely left in the hands of the still backward proletariat, but must be entrusted to the vanguard - in Lenin's mind, this was synonymous with the party - which alone possessed the knowledge and skills necessary to administer this and lead the masses in the socialist transformation. At the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party, which took place in March, 1919, he declared:

... so far we have not reached the stage at which the working people could participate in government. Apart from the law, there is still the level of culture, which you cannot subject to any law. The result of this low cultural level is that the Soviets, which by virtue of their programme are organs of government by the working people, are in fact organs of government for the working people by the advanced section of the proletariat, but not by the working people as a whole.¹³⁵

Later, in 1921, in the course of the debate on the role of the trade unions in the administration of industry, Lenin again chided the spontaneous abilities of the workers to administer the revolutionary state themselves. This role he reserved for the party, arguing:

Does every worker know how to run the state? People working in the practical sphere know that this is not true, that millions of our organised workers are going through what we always said that the trade unions were, namely a school of Communism and administration. When they have attended this school for a number of years they will have learned to administer, but the going is slow. We have not even abolished illiteracy. We know that the workers in touch with peasants are liable to fall for non-proletarian slogans. How many of the workers have been engaged in government? A few thousand throughout Russia and no more. If we say that it is not the Party but the trade unions that put up the candidates and administer, it may sound very democratic and might help us catch a few votes, but not for long. It will be fatal for the dictatorship of the proletariat.¹³⁶

Some commentators, however, notably Marcel Liebman, deny that Lenin subscribed to such élitist views regarding the capacities of the

workers. He even argues that Lenin, as Marx and Engels before him, had a "profoundly revolutionary belief in the people as the agents of their own liberation."¹³⁷ Admittedly, in a brief millennial phase largely inspired by the revolutionary upsurge of 1917, Lenin made many declarations to this effect, culminating in his prophetic work, State and Revolution, in which he envisioned the proletarian dictatorship as a genuinely democratic state in whose administration all the workers would participate.¹³⁸ Yet Lenin's rhetoric was not vindicated by his actions after the Bolsheviks came to power. A penetrating critic, familiar with Lenin and his thought and actions, Rosa Luxemburg, praised his defence of proletarian democracy as a prerequisite of the survival and purity of the revolution. Nevertheless, while she championed his verbal support for the administration of the revolutionary state by the mass of the workers, she castigated him for carrying out policies which in fact were subverting this very principle. She sadly wrote of his actions:

No one knows this [the need for proletarian democracy] better, describes it more penetratingly; repeats it more stubbornly than Lenin. But he is completely wrong in the means he employs. Decree, dictatorial force of the factory overseer, Draconic penalties, rule by terror....¹³⁹

Having now examined the different views of Lenin and the "leftists" on the role of the workers in the construction of socialism, it still remains to try to assess the viability of their ideas in the light of revolutionary reality. Most evidence of the results of the workers' participation in the administration of the revolutionary state comes from Soviet Russia itself, where the revolution was able to maintain itself in power.

First, there is one general observation worthy of note. Even by 1917 the Russian Empire, a relatively late starter in the industrial revolution, was still a backward, comparatively unindustrialised country. Consequently, the proletariat was weak both numerically - the peasantry composed the overwhelming majority of the population - and also largely uneducated, with little experience of the organisation and administration of a modern state and industrial economy. Indeed, this latter shortcoming was compounded by the fact that workers' organisations, like trade unions, had been illegal till the early 1900's. It was into this social milieu that the "leftists" defended the application of the

principles of proletarian democracy, first elaborated by Marx and Engels in the light of West European experience where there had existed relatively strong, educated and organised working-class movements.

The weight of evidence concerning the effects of workers' control on the functioning of Russian industry during the revolutionary frenzy of 1917 and early 1918 makes sad reading. Predictably, the "Left Communists" denied that workers' control was disrupting the economy. Osinsky, for one, argued that the workers had sufficient acumen to take over and administer industry in the interests of the revolutionary state. He justified this contention by pointing to the events in the Don Basin where he argued that the miners had spontaneously taken over the pits, had declared them to be state property and had even succeeded in operating them on their own initiative.¹⁴⁰ A. Lomov (G. I. Oppokov), another enthusiastic "Left Communist", asserted that production in the enterprises of the Central Region of Russia had risen after January, 1918, largely as a result of the workers independently taking over their plants and running them on their own. He blamed any fall in production on the effects of insufficient materials, lack of money to pay the workers and lack of provisions to feed them.¹⁴¹

However, the observations of other contemporary observers cast grave doubts on the validity of the "Left Communists'" idyllic assessment of the abilities of the Russian workers to organise and operate industry. L. B. Krasin, who before 1917 had lived a double life, combining a career as a leading revolutionary Social Democrat, at least until 1910, with one as a highly respected engineer, and who after the October revolution agreed to put his skills at the service of the young Bolshevik government, painted a generally grim picture of the effects of workers' control on the level of industrial production. In a letter to his wife, written in May 1918, he declared:

The prospects for some categories of the urban proletariat are absolutely hopeless. The illusion of becoming masters where they formerly were slaves has demoralised the so-called working class. Nobody is getting any work done, and the railways and all productive machinery are rapidly falling into decay....¹⁴²

A more damning condemnation came from Shliapnikov, more damning since he himself was one of the few workers in the leading echelons of the Bolsheviks and later was himself to become a convinced "leftist"

in the ranks of the Workers' Opposition. In 1918, however, he was so utterly shocked by the chaos and disruptions on the railway system which resulted from workers' control that he sternly supported the restoration of one-man management, strict labour discipline and material incentives, all of which were later to be anathemas to him, in order to ensure the operation of this vital lifeline. His account of the attitudes of the workers belies all the rousing declarations of the "Left Communists" about the capacities of the workers to build and administer the revolutionary state on their own initiative:

The picture which presented itself to me as a result of these reports is a very sad one. It brings us face to face with the necessity of taking the most rigorous measures for the re-establishment of labour discipline on the railways at any cost and before all else.... Moreover, the railway crews, being not at all interested in the exploitation of the railways, sometimes refuse to man the trains... they either pretend illness or else simply refuse to go....

The disorganisation and demoralisation that prevail in the railway shops defy description.... In a word, from the moment the railway employees were guaranteed a minimum wage they ceased to display any minimum degree of efficiency... we hear from all the class conscious elements... the same complaint: we must at any price get our railwaymen interested in the exploitation of the roads. This may be done by introducing piecework... and payment per verst. This is the only painless method to raise the efficiency of the railway employees....¹⁴³

Therefore, workers' control must have come to a very dubious pedigree in the eyes of many Bolsheviks, who would be hesitant, consequently, to place the very fate of the revolution into the hands of the apparently anarchic workers. Moreover, this attitude could have only been reinforced by the Civil War, in which many of the most advanced and conscious members of the proletariat were sacrificed in the military struggle - and others were driven back to the countryside by hunger in the towns. So, it is not surprising that in 1921 Lenin and his followers in the party were reluctant to entrust the future development of the revolution towards socialism to a decimated, still disintegrating and largely backward working class.¹⁴⁴

Furthermore, it is also possible to question whether the left Bolsheviks' assessment of the attitudes and aspirations of the workers was consistent with the tasks that they assigned to them. While it is now widely accepted that much of the impetus for the establishment of

workers' control came from the workers themselves, organised in their factory committees,¹⁴⁵ this in itself is not sufficient to prove that the workers' goal was the same as that of the left Bolsheviks. In fact, there is much evidence to the contrary. I. M. Maiskii, still a Menshevik in 1917, described the objective of the workers in anarcho-syndicalist terms - they wanted to take the ownership of their enterprises into their own hands -, asserting that "in my observation it is not some of the proletariat but most of the proletariat, especially in Petrograd, who look upon workers' control as if it were actually the emergence of the kingdom of socialism."¹⁴⁶ More significantly, Shliapnikov again agreed that anarcho-syndicalist ideas were widely influential among the workers, who failed to realise that in socialist society industry should belong to the state and the working class as a whole, rather than to the individual factory committees.¹⁴⁷ The "Left Communists" themselves were aware of these anarchic tendencies among the workers and opposed them. Osinsky vehemently denied that "the workers of any given enterprise should be the sole masters of this enterprise," arguing that such a role was inconsistent with the construction of a socialist society which demanded that the centrally planned economy be administered by the workers for the benefit of their class as a whole.¹⁴⁸ Bukharin too was afraid that the workers of any given enterprise would take possession of it into their own hands. He maintained that any establishment in which this took place would inevitably degenerate back into an enterprise run on the old capitalist lines.¹⁴⁹ However, what is significant about all this is the inconsistency in the "Left Communists'" attitude towards the workers. On the one hand, they called for the workers themselves to build socialism and fought to ensure them the freedom to do this, while on the other hand they feared that if the workers were in fact free to organise the economy after their own desires they would tend to pursue anarcho-syndicalist rather than socialist objectives. The sense of their defence of proletarian democracy is again thrown into doubt.

In Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, where the revolutionary Marxist parties failed to consolidate themselves in power, there is a lack of evidence regarding both the aspirations of the workers and of their abilities to administer the state and economy. Admittedly, before the

outbreak of war in 1914, Poland and Latvia had been among the most industrialised and advanced regions of the Russian Empire, with a relatively strong and organised working class. However, the war altered this situation. Industry was either destroyed, or evacuated to Russia or Germany to save it from the ravages of the battleground. This, combined with the mobilisation of the workers for military service, had decimated the proletarian base in these countries.¹⁵⁰ Hence, in the years of revolutionary flux when the Polish and Latvian revolutionaries proposed to entrust the construction of socialist society to the workers, they were placing its fate in the hands of a small and by then demoralised section of the population.

The situation in Lithuania was equally, if not more dismal. Historically, it had lacked a numerous working class, a fact which became particularly obvious when the revolutionary Marxists there attempted to set up a Soviet republic in 1919. There was such a shortage of capable workers that they were compelled, to a far greater extent than the Russians, to employ non-communists in the government.¹⁵¹ Therefore, their attempts to create a workers' state, administered by the workers themselves, seem ludicrous in retrospect. Yet at the same time these Lithuanian Marxists believed that revolution was imminent in the rest of Europe - Kapsukas declared that "if one takes it [Lithuania] isolated from other countries, then in it there can be no talk of socialist revolution"¹⁵² -, so it is plausible to imagine that they expected to receive help from the advanced West European workers in setting up their proletarian dictatorship.

It is tempting to conclude from this that Lenin's position was vindicated after all. Believing that the Russian proletariat was weak and backward and thus incapable of carrying out the socialist transformation of society of its own accord, he rejected Marx's and Engels' teachings on the role of the workers in the transition to socialism. However, in keeping with the Marxist method of social analysis, he adapted theory to what he perceived practice and experience to be and assigned the leading part in the socialist revolution, in both its destructive and constructive stages, to the vanguard of the proletariat, the party, until such time as the working class as a whole became sufficiently conscious to take this task into its own hands. However,

this raises a problem which revolutionary socialists then and since have debated, without reaching any definitive answer. The question is whether the concept of a vanguard party, leading the revolution and governing the proletarian dictatorship in the name and supposed interests of the workers, is consistent with the traditional socialist premise that the workers themselves must actively take part in the building of socialism.¹⁵³ The Russian experiment offers no clear cut answer.

The failure of the revolution to spread to the rest of Europe and the losses suffered in the Civil War certainly helped postpone any attempts that might have been made towards devolving more power to the workers themselves. Yet even without these complications there still seems to be no guarantee that the party, once it has consolidated itself in power, will in the future divest itself of authority and hand it over to the workers. This seems to depend on the attitude of the party, especially of its leaders, who may be reluctant to carry this act out, not necessarily just out of a selfish greed for power and the privileges that rule conveys, but also since they may genuinely believe that they alone possess the knowledge and talents necessary to keep society moving towards socialism. For whatever reason, a dictatorship over, not of the proletariat would be created and the ultimate purpose of socialism - the establishment of a society in which man would be the conscious master of his material and social life - would be frustrated.

It was this Blanquist tendency in Lenin's thought and actions that troubled a number of the "leftists". They feared that the authoritarianism and implicit élitism in Lenin's methods would be incompatible with the achievement of the freedom for which they had fought. Moreover, however much they now appear as starry-eyed romantics who idealised the proletariat, their warnings against the ossification of Soviet Russia into a bureaucratic tyranny as the result of the use of Leninist policies now seem almost uncanny. It is fitting to end with the words of a prominent "Left Communist" on the dangers which he saw in Lenin's use of authoritarian means to construct a socialist society. E. A. Preobrazhensky, criticising the suppression of workers' control in the administration of the railways, predicted:

The party apparently will soon have to decide the question, to what degree the dictatorships of individuals will be extended from the railroads and other branches of the economy to the Russian Communist Party....¹⁵⁴

Footnotes.

¹"Theses on the Current Situation," Kommunist, No. 1, 1918 (Moscow), pp. 4-9. A translation of these "Theses" prepared for publication in Critique has been used throughout.

²V. I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done," Collected Works, 5 (Moscow, 1961), p. 375.

³The following discussion of Marx's and Engels' theory of historical materialism owes much to the analysis presented by M. Meisner, Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), chapters VI and VII, especially pp. 128-129; pp. 156-157. Also helpful to the author in achieving a better understanding of Marx's and Engels' thought were: G. Lichtheim, Marxism: An Historical and Critical Study (New York, 1961), especially part 5, chapter 4; and D. McLellan, Marx Before Marxism (London, 1970), especially chapter 7.

⁴Engels defended the belief that the ultimately determining element in history was economic progress. See his Letter "To Joseph Bloch," in R. V. Tucker, Selected Writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (New York, 1967), pp. 640-642. While Marx and Engels never formulated definitive criteria of what the sufficient economic preconditions for the establishment of socialism were, they nevertheless often implied that socialism could not be built on "want", but required an extensive development of the productive forces of society. K. Marx, F. Engels, "The German Ideology," in Tucker, Writings, p. 125; p. 133; pp. 153-154; and K. Marx, "Moralising Critique and Criticising Morality. A Contribution to the German Cultural History. Against Carl Herzen," in Z. A. Jordan, Karl Marx: Economy, Class and Social Revolution (New York, 1971), pp. 286-287. For a contemporary discussion of this latter issue, consult I. Fetscher, Marx and Marxism (New York, 1971), pp. 302-306. For a fuller analysis of the "amalgam" of determinist and activist elements in Marx's and Engels' philosophy of history, and also of their efforts to define just what the "objective prerequisites" for socialism were, see chapter 2 of the present work, pp. 77-86.

⁵For a lucid discussion of this, consult Meisner, Chinese Marxism, especially pp. 156-157.

⁶Marx wrote: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living." "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in F. L. Bender, Karl Marx: Essential Writings (New York, 1972), pp. 227-228.

⁷Meisner, Chinese Marxism, p. 156.

⁸K. Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 (Moscow, 1961), p. 102.

⁹Marx, Engels, German Ideology, p. 157. In his "Theses on Feuerback", Marx defended the proposition that only in a revolution would men be able to simultaneously change their circumstances and themselves: "The materialist doctrine that men are the products of circumstances and upbringing and that, therefore, changed men are the products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that circumstances are changed precisely by men and that the educator must himself be educated. Hence this doctrine necessarily arrives at dividing society into two parts, of which one towers above society (in Robert Owen, for example). The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can only be conceived and rationally understood as revolutionising practice." In E. Burns, A Handbook of Marxism (New York, 1970), p. 229.

¹⁰K. Marx, "Alienation and Social Classes," in Tucker, Writings, p. 154. See too his letter to F. Bolte of November 23, 1871, in Jordan, Karl Marx, pp. 298-299.

¹¹Marx wrote: "Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests...." From "The Poverty of Philosophy," in N. I. Bukharin, Historical Materialism (Ann Arbor, 1969), p. 293. Bukharin also presents his own brief, yet clear discussion of this difference.

¹²K. Marx, "Circular Letter to Bebel, Liebknecht, Bracke and Others," in Tucker, Writings, pp. 400-405, especially p. 405.

¹³F. Engels, "The Civil War in France. Introduction," in Tucker, Writings, p. 535.

¹⁴K. Marx, F. Engels, The Communist Manifesto (Moscow, 1965), pp. 60-61.

¹⁵Marx himself, speaking of the Commune, declared: "The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They have no ready-made utopias to introduce par decret du peuple. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realise, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant...." K. Marx, "The Civil War in France," in Bender, Essential Writings, p. 298.

¹⁶K. Marx, F. Engels, "Introduction to the 1872 German edition," The Communist Manifesto, p. 8.

¹⁷Marx, Civil War, p. 292. Engels later emphasised egalitarianism as a weapon against bureaucratism. See Introduction, p. 536. However, Marx did accept that universal equality of wages could not be established immediately the dictatorship was set up. This would have to wait until the transition to the final stage of Communist society had been accomplished. See K. Marx, "The Critique of the Gotha Programme," in Jordan, Karl Marx, p. 278.

¹⁸Marx, Civil War, p. 293.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 296-297. For Marx's analysis of the structure of the Commune, consult this work, especially pp. 291-297.

²⁰Ibid., p. 297.

²¹Engels, Introduction, p. 531 and especially p. 534.

²²Marx, Civil War, p. 294. He had earlier, in evaluating the significance of the co-operative movement, extolled the abilities of the workers to independently operate modern industry: "The value of these great social experiments cannot be over-rated. By deed, instead of by argument, they have shown that production on a large scale and in accord with the behests of modern science, may be carried on without the existence of a class of masters employing a class of hands; that to bear fruit, the means of labour need not be monopolised as a means of domination over, and of extortion against, the labouring man himself...." K. Marx, "Address of the Working Men's International," in Tucker, Writings, p. 380.

²³Cited in F. Venturi, Roots of Revolution. A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia (New York, 1960), p. 402.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 413-414.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 420-423. Also consult A. Walicki, The Controversy over Capitalism. Studies in the Social Philosophy of the Russian Populists (Oxford, 1969), pp. 98-99.

²⁶Walicki, Controversy, p. 3. Walicki is quoting Richard Pipes, who apparently tries to define Populism in terms of adherence to this principle.

²⁷Ibid., p. 102. Also consult Venturi, Roots, p. 426.

²⁸Walicki, Controversy, pp. 99-106.

²⁹Ibid., p. 154. Also consult A. Mendel, Dilemmas of Progress in Tsarist Russia. Legal Marxism and Legal Populism (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), p. 106.

³⁰G. V. Plekhanov, "Our Differences," Selected Philosophical Works, 1 (London, 1961), p. 377.

³¹G. V. Plekhanov, "Socialism and the Political Struggle," ibid., p. 118.

³²Walicki, Controversy, and Mendel, Dilemmas, emphasise this aspect of Plekhanov's political credo.

³³For this contention, see N. Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, 1 (London, 1977), p. 58; and especially chapter 7, pp. 163-195.

³⁴J. Frankel, "The Polarisation of Russian Marxism (1883-1903): Plekhanov, Lenin and Akimov." This is the long introductory essay in J. Frankel (editor), Vladimir Akimov on the Dilemmas of Russian Marxism, 1895-1903 (Cambridge, 1969), n. 39; p. 74.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 32-35.

³⁶Writing of the Menshevik organisation in Moscow in 1905, P. A. Garvi, himself a leading member of the Menshevik wing of Russian Social Democracy, declared: "We, Mensheviks, were at that time the principal proponents of democratic foundations in the construction of the party. But, often as a result of inertia, ... our organisation was built from top to bottom on the principle of cooption. In fact, immediately upon my arrival I was coopted directly into the City Committee of the Moscow Group...." P. A. Garvi, Vospominaniia sotsialdemokrata. Stat'i o zhizni i deiatel'nosti P. A. Garvi (New York, 1946), p. 520.

³⁷S. F. Cohen, Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution (London, 1974), p. 129. For the contention that the Bolsheviks had no prepared programme for the construction of socialism in 1917, among other works consult: M. Liebman, Lenin and Leninism (London, 1975), p. 213; P. Sedgwick's introduction to V. Serge, Year One of the Russian Revolution (London, 1972), p. 13; and P. C. Roberts, "War Communism: A Re-examination," American Slavic and East European Studies, June, 1970, p. 8.

³⁸N. Osinsky, Stroitel'stvo sotsializma (Moscow, 1918), p. 34. Also consult: V. I. Lenin, "Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies," Collected Works, 26 (Moscow, 1964), p. 459; and Rosa Luxemburg, "The Russian Revolution," Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, edited by Mary-Alice Waters (New York, 1970), p. 390.

³⁹ Lenin himself often argued in this vein. See V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, 24 (Moscow, 1964), passim, especially "Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution," pp. 68-69; and "State and Revolution," Collected Works, 25 (Moscow, 1964), especially pp. 413-432.

⁴⁰ For Lenin's admission of his conversion to this point of view, see his letter of February 17, 1917 to A. M. Kollontai in V. I. Lenin, Sochineniia, XXIX (Moscow, 1932), pp. 290-291.

⁴¹ V. I. Lenin, "Letters from Afar. Third Letter. Concerning a Proletarian Militia," Collected Works 23 (Moscow, 1964), p. 324. He emphasised the role of the soviets in his "April Theses": V. I. Lenin, "The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution," Collected Works, 24, p. 23. The "left" Bolsheviks readily agreed with Lenin on this issue: consult N. I. Bukharin, "Sovety prezhe i teper'," Spartak, No. 9, 1917, pp. 6-8; and V. M. Smirnov, "Demokraticeskoe soveshchanie," ibid., pp. 2-4.

⁴² Lenin was to advocate repeatedly such measures in 1917. Among the myriad of his works, consult: Our Revolution, pp. 67-74; "Inevitable Catastrophe and Extravagant Promises," Collected Works, 24, pp. 426-429; and State and Revolution, especially pp. 464-474. Bukharin especially stressed the importance of nationalisation and the creation of a decentralised system of workers' control: see his "Ekonomicheskii razval i voina," Spartak, No. 3, 1917, pp. 5-6. Later, in early 1918, he was to laud the vision of the "commune state" presented by Lenin in State and Revolution: consult Kommunist, No. 1, p. 13. Smirnov essentially shared Bukharin's ideas: see his "O vse-rossiiskoi konferentsii," Spartak, No. 2, 1917, where he insisted on the nationalisation of land and industry, and his "Regulirovanie proizvodstv," Spartak, No. 4, 1917, pp. 6 and 11.

⁴³ Lenin, Our Revolution, pp. 68-69. He unequivocally declared that "the full power of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies... is the commune in Marx's sense, in the sense of the experience of 1871." V. I. Lenin, "Notes for an Article or Speech in Defence of the 'April Theses'," Collected Works, 24, pp. 32-33.

⁴⁴ Bukharin, Razval, p. 6, was a leading proponent of this system. Lenin apparently shared this conviction: see his Catastrophe, p. 426.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 429.

⁴⁶ R. V. Daniels, The Conscience of the Revolution (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p. 87.

⁴⁷ J. Bunyan, "Conditions on the Railroads," Intervention, Civil War and Communism in Russia, April-December, 1918: Documents and Materials (New York, 1976), p. 378.

⁴⁸V. I. Lenin, "Report on the Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government," Collected Works, 27 (Moscow, 1965), pp. 294-295. Here Lenin referred directly to his pre-revolutionary defence of the state capitalist methods which he was then advocating as the solution to Russia's economic ruin.

⁴⁹Daniels, Conscience, p. 81.

⁵⁰Lenin, Report, pp. 293-297; also consult his "'Left-Wing' Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality," Collected Works, 27, pp. 334-339; pp. 341-342.

⁵¹V. I. Lenin, "Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?," Collected Works, 26, especially pp. 104-115. See also his "The Impending Catastrophe and How To Combat It," Collected Works, 25, pp. 357-358.

⁵²Lenin, State Power, p. 113. For the need to use the organisational skills of the bourgeois "rascals", also consult: Report, pp. 296-297; and 'Left-Wing' Childishness, pp. 349-351.

⁵³Lenin, State Power, p. 113; Report, especially p. 297.

⁵⁴N. Osinsky, "O stroitel'stve sotsializma, I," Kommunist, No. 1, p. 13.

⁵⁵L. N. Kraitsman, "Ob organizatsionnykh putiakh stroitel'stva khoziaistvennoi zhizni," Kommunist, No. 2, 1918 (Moscow), p. 12.

⁵⁶N. Osinsky, "O stroitel'stve sotsializma, II," Kommunist, No. 2, p. 6.

⁵⁷Theses, 11.

⁵⁸Osinsky, O stroitel'stve, I, p. 6.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 15. Just as they objected to the spetsy's being given positions of authority in the economy, the "Left Communists" also opposed the use of military spetsy, former officers in the tsarist army, as commanders in the Red Army, newly established to defend the revolution from anticipated counter-revolutionary attacks. They argued that the Red Army must not be organised as a conventional, centrally organised, hierarchically disciplined body, since it would then be vulnerable to degeneration into a supra-class caste which could be turned against the revolutionary state by the old tsarist officers. True to their revolutionary heritage, they called for the creation of a strictly class-based militia composed solely of workers and poor peasants. For their position on this issue, consult: Theses, 11 and 12; and K. B. Radek, "Krasnaia armia," Kommunist, No. 2, pp. 15-16.

Later, at the Eighth Party Congress in 1919, a number of former "Left Communists", including V. M. Smirnov, G. L. Piatakov, A. S. Bubnov and G. I. Safarov, coalesced into a Military Opposition in order to defend the principle of an army constructed in accord with revolutionary socialist prescriptions. While they accepted that it was still necessary to use the old tsarist officers, they distrusted them strongly as non-recalcitrant White Guardists and insisted that the political commissars in the army strictly control their activities, as well as participate in military decisions. They also demanded the election of officers, together with the abolition of the old hierarchical forms of military discipline. For this, see Smirnov's speech, Vos'moi s'ezd R.K.P.(b.), mart 1919 goda: Protokoly (Moscow, 1959), pp. 153-159; and M. G. Gaisinskiĭ, Bor'ba s ukloami ot general'noi linii partii. Istoricheskii otchet vnutripartiinoi bor'by posle oktiabr'skogo perevorota (Moscow, 1931), pp. 51-52.

⁶⁰S. F. Cohen, "In Praise of War Communism: Bukharin's 'The Economics of the Transition Period'," in Revolution and Politics in Russia: Essays in Memory of B. I. Nicolaevsky, edited by A. and J. Rabinowitch (Bloomington, 1972), p. 192.

⁶¹L. N. Kritsman, Geroicheskii period russkoi revoliutsii (Moscow, 1924), p. 93, and especially pp. 144ff. N. Valentinov, Novaia ekonomicheskaiia politika i krizis partii posle smerti Lenina (Stanford, 1971), pp. 21-27, indirectly confirmed many of Kritsman's findings. He agreed that during the period of "War Communism" the spetsy served the Soviet government reluctantly and badly. However, he argued that this had happened because the spetsy considered the policies then being pursued by the Bolsheviks to be irrational and harmful to Russia's economic recovery, not because they all were inalienably anti-Soviet. He continued, moreover, that after the transition to the NEP a substantial number of the formerly recalcitrant spetsy, himself included, were prepared to and in fact did serve Soviet Russia well, largely since they then believed that they could contribute in a realistic way to the recovery of Russia.

⁶²Osinsky, Stroitel'stvo, p. 32.

⁶³This apt description of Lenin's ideas on state capitalism in Soviet Russia was coined by Cohen, Bukharin, p. 76.

⁶⁴N. I. Bukharin, "Nekotorye osnovnye poniatia sovremennoi ekonomiki," Kommunist, No. 3, 1918 (Moscow), p. 10. Also consult Osinsky, Stroitel'stvo, p. 32; p. 53. For a retrospective condemnation of the use of state capitalist methods in the transition to socialism by a former "Left Communist", see Kritsman, Geroicheskii period, p. 59.

⁶⁵Osinsky, O stroitel'stve, I, p. 15. See too N. I. Bukharin, "Gosudarstvennyi kapitalizm," Spartak, No. 2, p. 9, where he also argued that simple nationalisation, or, as he termed it, "statisation", of the

economy had nothing in common with socialism which additionally required the abolition of class rule, both in politics and the economy.

⁶⁶Theses, 13. The "Left Communists'" own proposals are contained in this thesis.

⁶⁷N. I. Bukharin, Sotsial-demokrat, No. 234, December 15/28, 1917.

⁶⁸N. I. Bukharin, "Anarkhizm i nauchnyi kommunizm," Kommunist, No. 2, 1918 (Moscow), p. 12.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 12. See too I. I. Skvortsov-Stepanov, Ot rabocheho kontrolia k rabochemu upravleniiu (Moscow, 1918), pp. 5-6; and Osinsky, Stroitel'stvo, p. 94, where he argued that each factory-plant administration "must not convert its factory into an artel [artel'noe predpriatie], but should be guided by the general interests of society"

⁷⁰Osinsky, Stroitel'stvo, p. 74.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 81.;

⁷²Ibid., pp. 72-74; 81.

⁷³Bunyan, Conditions on the Railroads, pp. 377-378, in which about half of the disruption on the railroads is attributed to the dislocating effects of the war and revolution and the other half to the anarchic consequences of workers' control. See too A. G. Shliapnikov's report to the "Congress of Commissars of Labour," ibid., pp. 383-384 for a negative appraisal of the effects of workers' control on labour discipline.

⁷⁴E. H. Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution, 2 (New York, 1952), p. 98; pp. 172ff.

⁷⁵R. B. Day, Leon Trotsky and the Politics of Economic Isolation (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), p. 18. N. Osinsky, "Pis'mo v redaktsiiu," Narodnoe Khoziaistvo, No. 3, 1918, argues that Lenin's negotiations with the capitalists failed as a result of the excessive demands made by the latter.

⁷⁶Daniels, Conscience, p. 93.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 91. See too L. Schapiro, The Origins of the Communist Autocracy. Political Opposition in the Soviet State. First Phase: 1917-1922 (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), p. 145; and A. Nove, An Economic History of the U.S.S.R. (London, 1970), p. 58.

⁷⁸Deviatyi s"ezd R.K.P.(b.), mart-aprel' 1920 goda: Protokoly. See the speeches of T. V. Sapronov, pp. 50-53, and of N. Osinsky, pp. 115ff., two of the leading Democratic Centralists. Also consult Gaisinskii, Bor'ba, pp. 55-59.

⁷⁹N. Osinsky, T. V. Sapronov, V. N. Maksimovsky, "Tezisy o kollegial'nosti i edinolichii," Deviatyi s"ezd, p. 566.

⁸⁰Sed'moi Vserossiiskii S"ezd Sovetov Rabochikh Krest'ianskikh, Krasnoarmeiskikh i Kazach'ikh Deputatov, Stenograficheskii Otchet (Moscow, 1921), p. 201.

⁸¹Vos'maia konferentsiia R.K.P.(b.), dekabr' 1919 goda: Protokoly. See the speech of Sapronov, pp. 129-130.

⁸²Sapronov, Deviatyi s"ezd, p. 51.

⁸³Osinsky, ibid., p. 118. Kritsman, Geroicheskii period, p. 81, defended collegial administration as "the specific distinctive feature of the proletariat, which separates it from all other classes...."

⁸⁴Sapronov, Vos'maia konferentsiia, p. 130. Also consult Osinsky, Deviatyi s"ezd, pp. 118-120. For a concise examination of the Democratic Centralist programme, refer to Gaisinskii, Bor'ba, pp. 58-59.

⁸⁵A. Balabanoff, My Life as a Rebel (Indiana, 1973), pp. 251-252.

⁸⁶R. V. Daniels, "The Kronstadt Revolt of 1921: A Study in the Dynamics of Revolution," American Slavic and East European Review, December, 1951, pp. 294ff.

⁸⁷A. M. Kollontai, The Workers' Opposition (London, 1968), passim, especially pp. 6-7; pp. 36-37. See also the speech of E. N. Ignatov, a prominent figure in the Workers' Opposition. Deviatyi s"ezd R.K.P.(b.), mart 1921 goda: Protokoly, especially p. 320. Also consult the speech of Shliapnikov, ibid., p. 74. For the "Left Communists'" fear of the perverse influence of the peasants on the policy of the revolutionary government, see chapter 4.

⁸⁸Kollontai, Workers' Opposition, p. 42. Also consult: Shliapnikov, Deviatyi s"ezd, p. 75; and M. S. Zorkii, Rabochaia oppositsiia (Moscow, Leningrad, 1926), p. 60.

⁸⁹Kollontai, Workers' Opposition, p. 32.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 8.

⁹¹A. S. Kiselev, a leading Workers' Oppositionist, Deviatyi s'ezd, p. 61, objected that any attempts by the trade unions to carry out this part of the programme were implacably rejected by the party leadership.

⁹²A. G. Shliapnikov, "Organizatsiia narodnogo khoziaistva i zadachi soiuzov," Desiatyi s'ezd, p. 821. See too Kollontai, Workers' Opposition, p. 35.

⁹³Kollontai, Workers' Opposition, pp. 32-33.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 47.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 33.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 26; p. 30.

⁹⁷Schapiro, Communist Autocracy, p. 223; Daniels, Conscience, p. 195; and Liebman, Leninism, p. 290.

⁹⁸Kritsman, Geroicheskii period, p. 86.

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 86-87.

¹⁰⁰V. I. Lenin, "Summing-up Speech on the Report of the C.C. of the R.C.P.(B.)," Collected Works, 32 (Moscow, 1965), especially pp. 194-200.

¹⁰¹For a discussion of this, consult Daniels, Conscience, chapter 6, especially pp. 148-149.

¹⁰²Cited in J. P. Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg (Oxford, 1969), p. 340.

¹⁰³Ibid., pp. 341-342. See too A. Kraevskii, "K kharakteristike ideologii Sotsial-Demokratii Pol'shi i Litvy," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 6 (113), 1931, p. 20.

¹⁰⁴Rosa Luxemburg, "Organizatsionnye voprosy russkoi sotsial'-demokratii," Iskra, No. 69, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., pp. 5-7.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 4. On this issue, also consult: Kraevskii, K kharakteristike, p. 21; and L. D. Trotsky, "Luxemburg and the Fourth International," Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, pp. 451-453.

¹⁰⁷Rosa Luxemburg, Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky from 1896 to 1918, edited by Luise Kautsky (New York, 1925), letter 37, pp. 110-111.

- ¹⁰⁸Ibid., letter 41, p. 121.
- ¹⁰⁹Luxemburg, Russian Revolution, pp. 393-394.
- ¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 391.
- ¹¹¹Ibid., p. 394.
- ¹¹²Rosa Luxemburg, "Speech to the Founding Convention of the German Communist Party," Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, pp. 406-408.
- ¹¹³Luxemburg, Russian Revolution, p. 390.
- ¹¹⁴Luxemburg, Speech, pp. 425-427.
- ¹¹⁵V. Serge, Memoirs of a Revolutionary (London, 1963), p. 79.
- ¹¹⁶B. Kalniņš, "The Social Democratic Movement in Latvia," Revolution and Politics in Russia, pp. 136-141.
- ¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 146. For a similar account by an "insider", consult K. Pechak, "Sotsial-demokratiia Latvii (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Latvii) v period s 1909 po 1915 gg.," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 12, 1922, especially pp. 64-71.
- ¹¹⁸For this contention, see A. Ezergailis, "The Bolshevisation of the Latvian Social Democratic Party," Canadian Slavic Studies, No. 2, 1967, pp. 241-242.
- ¹¹⁹P. I. Stuchka, "Nasha programma," Za sovetskuiu vlast' v Latvii (Riga, 1964), p. 85. See too his "Privetstvie pervoi konferentsii proizvodstvennykh soiuзов Latvii," ibid., pp. 183-184.
- ¹²⁰Stuchka, Nasha Programma, p. 84.
- ¹²¹Ibid., p. 90. See too his "Tol'ko ekspropriatsiia ekspropriatorov," Za sovetskuiu vlast', p. 339.
- ¹²²P. I. Stuchka, "Mestnyi i vedomstvennyi 'separatizm'," Za sovetskuiu vlast', pp. 272-274.
- ¹²³P. I. Stuchka, "Sovetskoe 'chinovnichestvo'," Za sovetskuiu vlast', pp. 59-60. See too his Nasha programma, p. 92.
- ¹²⁴P. I. Stuchka, "Vosstanovlenie promyshlennosti," Za sovetskuiu

vlast', pp. 434-435. See too the resolution of the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Latvia, cited in Ia. Krumin, "Za bol'shevistskuiu istoriiu Sovetskoi Latvii," Istorik Marksist, Nos. 2-3 (42-43), 1935, p. 37.

¹²⁵Stuchka, Vosstanovlenie, p. 435.

¹²⁶Stuchka, Separatizm, p. 273.

¹²⁷Stuchka, Nasha programma, p. 115.

¹²⁸Stuchka, Nasha programma, pp. 96-97.

¹²⁹P. I. Stuchka, "Provozglashenie Latvii Sovetskoi Respublikoi," Za sovetskuiu vlast', p. 70.

¹³⁰Pravda, November 21, 1918, pp. 2-3. See too "Obrashchenie Samarskoi Litovskoi sekti Rossiskoi kommunisticheskoi partii bol'shevikov," Krasnyi Arkhiv, No. 5 (102), 1940, p. 13.

¹³¹"Nakaz deputatam v Vilenskii sovet rabochikh i krasnoarmeiskikh deputatov, predlozhennyi Kommunisticheskoi partiei Litvy i Belorussii," Krasnyi Arkhiv, No. 4 (102), p. 27.

¹³²"Rezoliutsiia pervogo s"ezda sovetov rabochikh, krest'ianskikh i krasnoarmeiskikh deputatov Litvy," Bor'ba za sovetskuiu vlast' v Litve v 1918-1920gg.: Sbornik dokumentov (Vilnius, 1967), pp. 173-174.

¹³³Ibid., p. 173.

¹³⁴Lenin, What Is To Be Done, passim, especially pp. 369-375; pp. 412-422; and pp. 459-464. For an account of the background of the evolution of Lenin's thinking regarding the role of the vanguard party, consult R. Pipes, "The Origins of Bolshevism: the Intellectual Evolution of the Young Lenin," Revolutionary Russia (Oxford, 1968), especially pp. 49-51.

¹³⁵V. I. Lenin, "Report on the Party Programme," Collected Works, 29 (Moscow, 1965), p. 183.

¹³⁶V. I. Lenin, "The Second All-Russia Congress of Miners," Collected Works, 32, pp. 61-62.

¹³⁷Liebman, Leninism, p. 84.

¹³⁸Lenin, State and Revolution, especially pp. 472-474.

- ¹³⁹ Luxemburg, Russian Revolution, p. 391
- ¹⁴⁰ V. V. Obolenskii (N. Osinsky), "Polozhenie Donetskoi kamennougol'noi promyshlennosti i nashi zadachi," Biulleteni Vysshogo Soveta Narodnogo Khoziaistvo, No. 5, 1918, pp. 17-18.
- ¹⁴¹ A. Lomov, "Ch'e bankrotstvo? (K voprosu o padenii proizvoditel'nosti truda)," Narodnoe Khoziaistvo, No. 5, 1918, pp. 17-18.
- ¹⁴² Cited in Lubov Krassin, Leonid Krassin: His Life and Work (London, 1929), p. 26.
- ¹⁴³ A. G. Shliapnikov, "Conditions of the Railways under Workers' Control," in J. Bunyan, H. H. Fisher, The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1918: Documents and Materials (Stanford, 1965), pp. 654-655.
- ¹⁴⁴ Serge, Year One, pp. 242-246 and pp. 366-367 reluctantly agreed that the dictatorship of the party was the unfortunate result of this.
- ¹⁴⁵ Among numerous works, consult: Liebman, Leninism, pp. 334-335; and R. Pethybrige, The Social Prelude to Stalinism (London, 1974), pp. 59-60. The "Left Communists" themselves agreed that the establishment of workers' control was largely a spontaneous phenomenon: consult Lomov, Ch'e bankrotstvo, p. 18; and Osinsky, Polozhenie, p. 38.
- ¹⁴⁶ I. M. Maiskii, cited in F. I. Kaplan, Bolshevik Ideology and the Ethics of Soviet Labour. 1917-1920: The Formative Years (New York, 1968), p. 127.
- ¹⁴⁷ Shliapnikov's report is given in Bunyan, Conditions on the Railroads, p. 384.
- ¹⁴⁸ Osinsky, O stroitel'stve, II, p. 6.
- ¹⁴⁹ Bukharin, Osnovnye poniatia, p. 11.
- ¹⁵⁰ J. B. Marchlewski, Voina i mir mezhduburzhuaznoi Pol'shei i proletarskoi Rossiei (Moscow, 1921), p. 4, emphasises that by 1918 the previously strong Polish working class had been reduced to very small numbers. P. I. Stuchka also agreed that the most conscious workers had been evacuated from Latvia during the war. See his "Pis'mo iz Rigi," V bor'be za oktiabr' (Riga, 1960), pp. 67-68. Also consult Kalniņš, Movement, p. 154, for the extent of this evacuation.
- ¹⁵¹ V. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas, Izvestia, May 8, 1919. See too A. E. Senn, The Emergence of Modern Lithuania (New York, 1959), p. 79.

¹⁵²Y. S. Mitskevich-Kapsukas, "Bor'ba za sovetskuiu vlast' v Litve i zapadnoi Belorussii (konets 1918g. i nachalo 1919g.)," Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia, No. 1 (108), 1931, p. 72.

¹⁵³K. Korsch, Marxism and Philosophy (New York, 1970), p. 11. R. Miliband, "The State and Revolution," Lenin Today: Eight Essays on the Hundredth Anniversary of Lenin's Birth, edited by P. Sweezy and H. Magdoff (New York, 1970), pp. 78-89, gives a detailed discussion of the problems of the proper relationship between the proletariat and the party, but offers nothing in the way of a resolution.

¹⁵⁴E. A. Preobrazhensky, "S"ezd neobkhodim," Kommunist, No. 4, 1918 (Moscow), p. 13.

Conclusion.

The preceding study has served to demonstrate that the positions defended by the various "left" oppositionists within the Bolshevik party in the early years of Soviet rule in Russia and by the revolutionary Marxists of the Kingdom of Poland, Latvia and Lithuania with respect to the problems of nationalism, agriculture and the peasants, and proletarian democracy were essentially the same, and quite distinct from the views of Lenin and his associates on these very issues.

At first sight, moreover, the particular policies adopted by these Marxists seem to be more consistent with the principles and doctrines espoused by Marx and Engels themselves than were the policies advocated by Lenin. This fact can lead quite easily to the conclusion that these Marxists simply assimilated the doctrines first developed by the "founding fathers" and dogmatically attempted to apply them. While they did come to subscribe to similar prescriptions as Marx and Engels more often than Lenin did, their policies were formulated on the basis of an independent application of Marxist methods and principles to the analysis of the particular economic, social and political conditions of their own epoch and native societies - and, accordingly, should not be regarded as the blind acceptance of dogma.

In fact, this study has been concerned to examine in depth and detail the very factors which impelled these Marxists to arrive at what in the end turned out to be a common set of principles. It has shown that the influences which were behind their adoption of the same programme were quite specific to each different group - with the admitted exception of a commonly held theory of imperialism, which led them to the same views regarding the imminence and scope of socialist revolution. In turn, this conclusion itself raises the question whether given the different tendencies that affected these Marxists it is legitimate to treat the common theoretical construct that they elaborated as a coherent "Left Communist" ideology. Certainly, in understanding the evolution of the thought of these various Marxists it is essential to take cognisance of the diverse influences on the formation of their ideas. Yet this admitted diversity need not negate the existence of a doctrine that with justification can be termed "Left

Communism." Irrespective of the particular influences that did lead these Marxists to espouse the same policies, there was a common premise at the basis of their actions. They were convinced that the alternative policies which Lenin advocated as necessary if the proletariat and its vanguard, the party, were to seize and maintain themselves in power were such that in themselves they would frustrate the achievement of the end to which they and Lenin both aspired, namely, the construction of socialism.

This conclusion itself leads quite logically to another broad, yet important question. This involves both the validity of their critique of the policies of Lenin and his associates as incompatible with the realisation of socialism, and also the viability of the measures that they themselves proposed. To be sure, any attempt to answer these questions necessarily involves some degree of speculation, but nevertheless some conjectures can be made.

The second part of this question is easier to answer. The available evidence suggests that the possibility of success for the "Left Communists'" programme was slight. In Soviet Russia itself, their advocacy of the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat based on "orthodox" Marxist principles, that is, one democratically governed by the workers themselves, appears to have been founded on an unrealistic estimate of the abilities of the workers to administer, independently and successfully, a modern polity and economy. Moreover, "leftist" policies in agriculture, such as were implemented briefly during the period of "War Communism", by their total disregard of the aspirations of the peasant majority only succeeded in embittering this class and so much alienating it from the government that in the interests of preserving Communist power Lenin and his associates were forced to make concessions to the peasants, whose demands in large measure were satisfied by the introduction of the NEP.

Furthermore, the failure of the Marxist revolutions in Poland, Latvia and Lithuania can be seen as additional confirmation of the political unreality of the "Left Communists'" views. Certainly, the national and agrarian policies defended by the revolutionary Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian Marxists - their rejection of any concessions to the national sentiment that was strong among all strata of their own

societies, including the workers, and their refusal to make any compromises with the peasants' widespread desire for their own land - were at least contributory factors in the failure of these Marxists to consolidate themselves in power. However, it must be admitted that foreign intervention also played a crucial role in their defeat, although the interventionists themselves and their allies, the Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian gentry and bourgeoisie, were able to exploit the underlying nationalism in these societies at large, as well as the unsatisfied land hunger of the peasantry, to win broad indigenous support in their counter-revolutionary campaigns.

Implicit in this conclusion is an apparent vindication of the policies that Lenin advocated and put into practice. Realising and accepting the force of oppressed nationalism, the strength of the peasantry and its aspirations for land, and the numerical weakness and the immature socialist consciousness of the working class itself, he was readily prepared to revise orthodox Marxist doctrine in order to adapt it better to the social and political conditions that existed in the Russian Empire - an action which is perfectly consistent with the methodological principles of Marxism itself, which prides itself on its praxis, that is, the amendment of its theory if practice proves it to be mistaken. Moreover, it has to be admitted that it was in great part as a result of Lenin's political perspicacity and the ensuing tactical innovations that he made in Marxist revolutionary theory that the Bolsheviks were able to seize power and successfully to retain it in the following period of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary turmoil.

Nevertheless, this success in itself is no answer to the validity or otherwise of the "Left Communists'" critique of Lenin's policies. They had never denied that they could maintain themselves in power if they were willing to make the compromises with what they considered to be the true principles of socialism that Lenin proposed. They insisted, however, that such compromises inevitably would result in the degeneration of the revolution, since they believed that the successful realisation of socialism depended on the means employed to achieve this end.

The only test of their claim is the experience of Soviet Russia itself, where alone the revolution survived. The failure of the

revolutions in Poland, Latvia and Lithuania excludes them from purview in any attempt to answer this question. Nevertheless, even in the case of Soviet Russia it is necessary to exercise a great deal of caution in assessing the correctness of the "Left Communists'" predictions.

This problem initially requires some opinion as to whether the Soviet Russia that was born of the revolution has remained a genuine workers' state. Certainly, it appears that however Soviet Russia is defined - and there have been a number of definitions presented -, it would be most perverse to term it a workers' state, in the sense that the power to administer and govern it lies in the hands of the working class itself. Rather, it has become much more of a dictatorship over the proletariat, with power de facto residing in the hands of the party, supported by the military, a secret police and a "new class" of privileged bureaucrats and technocrats.

Accordingly, it would be easy to conclude that the degeneration which the "Left Communists" considered to be the inevitable result of the policies of socialist construction proposed by Lenin, particularly his reliance on authoritarian administrative measures at the expense of proletarian democracy, has in fact come about. Certainly, they must be given credit for perceiving one very possible development which would ensue from such methods. Yet the question still remains whether this evolution was the terrible outcome of Leninist procedures, that is, whether the roots of the bureaucratic ossification of Soviet Russia can be attributed solely and simply to Leninism, or whether additional, more specific and objective social, economic and political factors must be introduced to explain satisfactorily why this strand within Leninism was nurtured. Indeed, one can justifiably question if the "Left Communists" themselves, despite their genuine and deep-rooted commitment to the principles of proletarian democracy, would have been more successful in establishing a socialist workers' state if they had replaced the Leninists at the helm of the Soviet state in 1918, or in the immediately following years. Undoubtedly, they would have been faced with exactly the same pressing problems as Lenin and his associates were, namely, the task of building socialism in an economically backward country, with a largely destroyed industrial base and with a rapidly disintegrating working class which itself was prone to anarchist tendencies, a

country, moreover, which was dominated by a peasantry recalcitrant to their notions of socialism, and which, after the failure of the revolution to spread to the industrially advanced states of West Europe, was externally threatened by a combination of far stronger, hostile powers. In these circumstances, it is legitimate to ask if Leninist ideology is even required to explain the measures taken by the Bolshevik government in the interests of its survival.

Such questions cannot be definitively answered, since great historical experiments, such as the Russian revolution was, cannot be repeated, with certain key variables altered, as in the natural sciences, and the results compared. Yet judicious speculation tends towards the conclusion that many of the measures that the young Bolshevik government introduced in the early years of its existence were in large part pragmatic responses to objective circumstances, and necessary if the regime were to maintain itself. Consequently, while the "Left Communists" may have been correct that the means used in the construction of socialism would determine the outcome of this process, it is plausible to venture that they too, provided they desired to maintain the revolution in power, would have had to adapt their firmly held principles to a harsher reality that they could not control - or perish, a fate which many of them avowedly preferred to the risk of tarnishing the name of the revolution by compromises to preserve it in power at the cost of sacrificing its proclaimed goal, socialism itself.

A final question which often arises in studies of this nature is whether the Russian revolution, and the different variants of Marxism espoused by the "Left Communists" and Lenin, can be used as evidence to confirm or deny the viability of Marxism in general. The apparent dilemma that presents itself is that the consistency to principles displayed by the "Left Communists" seems to be unrealistic and dooms Marxism to political impotence, while the pragmatic policies employed by Lenin inevitably lead to the perversion of the Marxist vision of socialism. The author is of the opinion that any attempts to generalise about the validity of Marxism from the particular experiences of the Russian revolution is a perilous task, and one which remains without the scope of the historian qua historian.

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