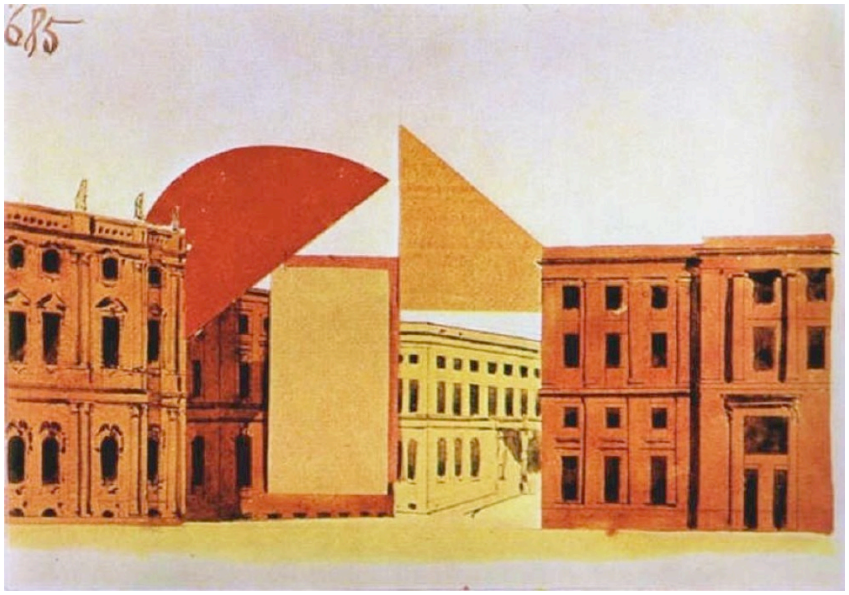
October 1917

An Intoxication with the Future

By Don Milligan



The future for which the Marxists yearn, communism, is as absurd to their detractors as any peasant's [mythological land of plenty]. It is rarely distinctly outlined, but they know it beckons beyond private property and its violence, beyond exploitation and alienation, to a world where technology reduces labour, the better for humanity to flourish. 'The true realm of freedom', Marx's words: 'the development of human powers as an end in itself'. This is what they want.

China Miéville
October: The story of the Russian Revolution
London: Verso, 2017,

The October Revolution is the name given to the moment in which the Bolsheviks seized control of the Russian Revolution, which had broken out some months earlier on 28th February 1917, when waves of demonstrations, strikes, and mutinies, led to the abdication

of the emperor, Tsar Nicolas II.[1] Grand Duke Michael, the Tsar's brother, refused to assume the throne, and a *de facto* republic, known as the Provisional Government came into being, led briefly by Nikolai Golitsyn, and then by Prince Georgy Yevgenyevich Lvov, a leading member of the Constitutional Democrats (Kadets). Lvov's government was, however, not in control of events as his Minister of War explained early in March:

> The Provisional Government does not possess any real power; and its directives are carried out only to the extent that it is permitted by the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which enjoys all the essential elements of real power, since the troops, the railroads, the post and telegraph are all in its hands. One can say flatly that the Provisional Government exists only as long as it is permitted by the Soviet.[2]

This shaky arrangement lasted until the first week in July when Prince Lvov and his Kadet ministers resigned *en masse* and Alexander Kerensky of the Trudovik group[3] assumed the leadership of the Provisional Government.

Prince Lvov's departure was prompted by the continuing stand-off between the Petrograd[4] Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, and its network of local factory committees, and government ministers. The tensions between the rival centres of power represented by the Provisional Government on the one hand and the Soviets on the other, created an inherently unstable situation in which

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[1] Nicholas Alexandrovich Romanov was, until his abdication in March 1917, *His Imperial Majesty The Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias*, in sole command of the Russian state and army. A large hereditary aristocracy controlled most agricultural land and all the major offices of state, providing the principal support for the emperors' autocratic rule. This social edifice rapidly collapsed following Nicholas's abdication. He was shot along with his wife, his five children, his doctor, and three servants on 17 July 1918 at Yekaterinburg on the orders of the Ural Soviet of Workers' Deputies.

[2] War Minister, Alexander Guchkov, cited in Allan Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980, p.260.

[3] Known as The Labour Group, the Trudovik party was founded during the Russian Revolution of 1905 by a small group of Social Revolutionaries led by Alexis Theodorovich Aladin.

[4] The capital of Imperial Russia was St Petersburg until it was renamed Petrograd in 1914. In March 1918 the city ceased to be the capital when the Bolshevik's moved the government to Moscow. On Lenin's death, in 1924, Petrograd was renamed Leningrad, and that remained the city's name until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, when it once again became St Petersburg.

Kerensky, while attempting to continue fighting the war against Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey, sought to keep the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet on side.

For a while Kerensky succeeded. Despite the growing militancy of the rank and file in the spring and summer of 1917 many on the Executive of the Petrograd Soviet opted for cooperation with the Provisional Government. Nikolai Sukhanov, explained the Menshevik[5] orientation of the Executive's attitude in the following manner:

> The Soviet democracy had to entrust the power to the propertied elements, its class enemy, without whose participation it could not now master the technique of administration in the desperate conditions of disintegration, nor deal with the forces of Tsarism and the bourgeoisie, united against it. But the *condition* of this transfer had to assure the democracy of a complete victory over the class enemy in the near future.[6]

Kerensky's balancing act came to an end in late August with the failure of General Lavr Konilov's march on Petrograd.[7] In response, Kerensky took full control of the Provisional Government with the establishment of his Revolutionary Directory. This act had the effect of revealing exactly how weak and isolated he was. Meanwhile the Bolsheviks won control of the Petrograd Soviet, achieving a majority on 31st August – and in the Moscow Soviet on 5th September. Events were moving inexorably towards a decisive collision between the Soviets and the Government.

This came to a head on the 24th, 25th, and 26th October 1917[8] when some three hundred thousand members[9] of the

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[5] The Mensheviks were Marxists who believed that capitalism and bourgeois democracy would have to develop in Russia before there could be any thought of an explicitly socialist revolution.

[6] N. N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917-1918*, New York: 1962, pp.105-4, cited by Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 1982, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, p.48.

[7] Kornilov was the Commander-In-Chief of the Russian army at the time and, following the fall of Riga to the Germans, decided to march on Petrograd to restore order in the army and the state by ensuring that the Provisional Government could rule without disruption or interference by the workers' and soldiers' soviets.

[8] 7th November in the Gregorian calendar now in use internationally – the Russians did not adopt this calendar until the end of January 1918.

Bolshevik party assisted by anarchists and the left wing of the main peasants' party, the Socialist Revolutionaries, led industrial workers, mutinous soldiers, sailors, students, and liberal intellectuals, to overthrow Kerensky's Revolutionary Directory.

They did this in the face of considerable opposition from Russia's vast and variegated revolutionary movement, which at the time encompassed everyone from Marxist militants, revolutionary peasants, socialists, anarchists, liberal aristocrats, and even constitutional monarchists, who had welcomed the end of Nicholas II's autocracy. In removing the revolutionary government of Alexander Kerensky, by popular armed force the Bolsheviks acted on their own initiative without sanction from any other political party or grouping.

Contemporaries, and some historians have called this act of the Bolsheviks a "*coup d'état*". In doing so, they have run the risk of caricature. Because, although the Bolsheviks at Lenin's tireless urging (throughout September and October), plotted the overthrow of Alexander Kerensky's government, they did so, not with some small group of army officers, or a coterie of well-placed political fixers, but with the overwhelming support of hundreds of thousands of soldiers, sailors, industrial workers, and peasants. By the middle of October the discussion and arguments for and against an armed insurrection to topple the Provisional Government began to be discussed openly and eventually found their way into the columns of revolutionary newspapers. There was nothing secret about Lenin's 'conspiracy'.

Already, by the end of August, in response to Kornilov's march on Petrograd, local district soviets established and had mobilized workers' militias; railwaymen diverted Kornilov's troop trains, and factory committees sent delegates to remonstrate with the soldiers and bring them over to the side of workers' power. In the face of massive proletarian resistance Kornilov's army and 'party of order' rapidly disintegrated. Neither Lenin, nor his Party, had

[9] By late October 1917 the Bolsheviks had 60,000 members in and around Petrograd and 70,000 concentrated in the Moscow area. The rest of their members were to be found in other urban centres and in the army, and navy. Cited in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 1982, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, p.53. See also T. H. Rigby, *Communist Party Membership in the USSR, 1917-1967*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968.

directed this struggle against Kornilov's attempt at counter-revolution – although the Bolshevik rank and file was, no doubt, active in the midst of this popular action.

So, when the Bolsheviks finally seized control of events several weeks later, on the 24th, 25th, and 26th October, thousands of workers, soldiers, and sailors, took over battle cruisers, artillery batteries, barracks, telegraph offices, and telephone exchanges, attempting to bring order from the chaos by forming impromptu committees, patrolling the streets, arresting ministers, officials, and senior police officers. Tens of thousands of working people played an active part in motivating and instigating the Bolshevik's seizure of power, thronging the streets and squares of Petrograd and Moscow, crowding into packed congresses and meetings in commandeered palaces and mansions, on warships, and in vast gatherings of soldiers embattled at the front in the war with Germany and Austria-Hungary. This, together with the peasants' revolt, that from May 1917 swept away Russia's rural landlords, was a revolutionary movement of millions.

Consequently, the expression *coup d'état* is often not seen to be adequate to the task of describing these tumultuous events. And yet, John Reed, who was there had this to report:

> It was exactly 5.17 a.m. [October 26th] when Krylenko, staggering with fatigue, climbed to the tribune with a telegram in his hand.
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> "Comrades! From the Northern Front. The Twelth Army sends greetings to the Congress of Soviets, announcing the formation of a Military Revolutionary Committee which has taken over the command of the Northern Front!"
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> Pandemonium, men weeping, embracing each other.
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> "General Chermissov has recognised the Committee – Commissar of the Provisional Government Voitinsky has resigned!"

So. Lenin and the Petrograd workers had decided on insurrection, the Petrograd Soviet had overthrown the Provisional Government, and thrust the *coup d'état*

> upon the Congress of Soviets. Now there was all great Russia to win – and then the world! Would Russia follow and rise? And the world – what of it? Would the peoples answer and rise, a red world-tide?
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> Although it was six in the morning, night was yet heavy and chill. There was only a faint unearthly pallor stealing over the silent streets, dimming the watch-fires, the shadow of a terrible dawn grey-rising over Russia. . . .[10]

The Bolsheviks took over because they feared that if the Provisional Government was not thrown out, the soviets – the popular assemblies of workers, soldiers, and sailors – would be dissolved or rendered toothless by Alexander Kerensky, or some successor administration put together by industrialists and army officers. This they described as the threat of "counter-revolution". This is why Lenin, together with the Bolshevik Central Committee, replaced the dictatorship of Alexander Kerensky's Directory with one of their own in which they continued his practice of ruling by decree.[11]

Initially, it didn't seem like a dictatorship, the Petrograd Municipal Duma, packed with opponents of the new regime, openly met and debated the need to remove the Bolsheviks. The Committee for Salvation of Country and Revolution issued its proclamations in Petrograd denouncing the Bolsheviks as criminals who were threatening the country with civil war and counter-revolution. Newspapers described them as traitors to the working class, and so on. Meanwhile the Provisional Government's political prisoners were rapidly freed, and replaced in the prisons with those arrested by the Bolshevik's red militia. "Commissars", ministers of the new government styled as "The Council of Commissars", were appointed, as the Bolsheviks raced to establish some semblance of order.[12] Soviets in smaller towns and cities

[10] John Reed, *Ten Days That Shook the World*, 1919, London: Penguin Books, 1977, p.116.

[11] Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Joseph Stalin, Lev Kamenev, Nikolay Krestinsky, Grigori Sokolnikov, and Andrei Bubnov, were the seven-man team charged with steering the Bolsheviks through the insurrection and its aftermath.

[12] Chaired by Lenin, the new commissars were, Nikolai Gorbunov ('Cabinet'

continued to be dominated by Mensheviks, anarchists, Socialist Revolutionaries, or nationalists of various stripes – this complex array of circumstances and plethora of different arrangements was not planned as a challenge to the Bolshevik seizure of power, but simply represented the reality on the ground across the vast territories of the old Russian Empire. Meanwhile preparations went ahead for multi-party elections to the Constituent Assembly, which in theory was to draft a constitution and determine the final shape of the country's government.[13]

This wasn't to be, because Lenin's 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' proved to be neither democratic nor a 'dictatorship of workers or peasants', but one of his own devising (but not in circumstances he would have chosen). Opposition newspapers continued to appear for nine or ten months after the establishment of the red dictatorship as the activities of, Teffi,[14] the anti-Bolshevik socialist writer, show.

> In their effort to solidify their position, the Bolsheviks quickly acted to stifle the opposition press, shutting down *Russkoe slovo* and other unfriendly periodicals in late November 1917. The staff writers, including Teffi, did not succumb easily, however, for in January 1918, they opened another newspaper, which they called *Novoe slovo* (New Word). When it was closed on April 2, the determined journalists opened yet another newspaper *Nashe slovo* (Our Word) on April 11, which lasted until July 6. *Satirikon* (now *Novyi Satirikon*, *New Satirikon*) eked out its existence until August 1918, with Teffi's works appearing to the very end.[15]

Secretary), Vladimir Milyutin (Agriculture), Nikolai Kryleno (War), Pavel Dybenko (Navy), Viktor Nogin (Trade and Industry), Anatoly Lunacharsky (Education), Ivan Teodorovich (Food), Leon Trotsky (Foreign Affairs), Alexei Rykov ('Home' Secretary), Georgy Oppokov (Justice) Alexander Shlyapnikov (Labour), Joseph Stalin (Nationalities), Nikolai Glebov-Avilov (Posts and Telegraphs), Ivan Skvortsov-Stepanov (Finance), Alexandra Kollontai (Welfare). Eight of these comrades were subsequently executed and one was assassinated, all on Stalin's orders, one died in prison, and six died of natural causes.

[13] The Constituent Assembly was closed down, during its first sitting, by Bolshevik troops in January 1918.

[14] Nadezhda Alexandrovna Lokhvitskaya, wrote and published under the name "Teffi".

[15] Edythe Haber, 'Introduction', in Teffi, *Memories: From Moscow to the Black Sea,* 1928-1930, London: Pushkin Press, 2016, p.14.

Evidently, the life of the dictatorship, and the construction of the new government and state were haphazard and piecemeal.

> Authority at the centre was confusingly divided between the government (Council of People's Commissars), and soviets' Central Executive Committee, and the Bolshevik Party's Central Committee, with its Secretariat and bureau for organizational and political affairs, the Orgburo and the Politburo.[16]

In practice the Bolshevik Party's leading bodies sat atop this structure. The Bolshevik state was formed during the height of the Civil War between the middle of 1918 and the end of 1920. Consequently, its apparatus, its personnel, and its political culture, was saturated with military language and manners in which rule by fiat was *de rigueur*. This was a direct consequence of the insurrection and the manner in which the Party first took, then and began immediately to exercise power. Famously, Lenin lamented the institutional tone of bullying within the bureaucracy, which he and his comrades had created by their own voluntarism.

The Bolsheviks not only ruled by decree, but also defied any attempt to establish the 'rule of law' by conferring plenipotentiary powers on commissars and police to act exactly as they saw fit. And, by acting in a feudal manner, determining rights on the basis of birth and social origin. Consequently, courts functioned simply as arms of Bolshevik power, where the class origins of those involved took precedence over any deeper conception of justice:

> In the old law-courts, the class minority of exploiters passed judgement upon the working majority. The law-courts of the proletarian dictatorship are places where the working majority passes judgement upon the exploiting minority. They are specifically

[16] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 1982, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, p.89.

> constructed for the purpose. The judges are elected by the workers alone. The judges are elected solely from among the workers. For the exploiters, the only right that remains is the right of being judged.[17]

These were the 'popular courts' for ordinary criminal or civil matters, for directly political cases there were Revolutionary Tribunals.

> These popular courts - to which the judges are elected, from which the judges can be recalled, and in which every worker must fulfil his judicial duty when his turn comes - are looked upon by the Communist Party as the normal law-courts of the proletarian State. But in the epoch of the [most] extreme intensification of the civil war, it has been found necessary to supplement the popular courts by the appointment of revolutionary tribunals. The function of the revolutionary tribunals is to deal speedily and mercilessly with the enemies of the proletarian revolution. Such courts are among the weapons for the crushing of the exploiters, and from this point of view they are just as much the instruments of proletarian offence and defence as the Red Guard, the Red Army, and the Extraordinary Commissions. [The political police agencies.] Consequently, the revolutionary tribunals are organized on less democratic lines than the popular courts. They are appointed by the soviets, and are not directly elected by the workers.[18]

Instead of revolutionary tribunals held in public, which would have permitted argument, explanation, the testing of evidence, and the articulation of a defence by the accused, the Bolsheviks opted for the establishment of a Revolutionary Inquisition whose decisions could not be appealed. Public trials were only permitted for exemplary purposes in which the relevant Party authorities determined the outcome in advance.

The tragedy of the October Revolution is that it was

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[17] Nikolai Bukharin and Evgenii Preobrazhensky *The ABC of Communism*, 1920, London: Penguin Books, 1969, §71.
[18] Ibid., §73.

ostensibly embarked upon on the initiative and at the instigation of the majority of workers and soldiers in Petrograd, and Moscow in order to defend the popular democracy of the soviet councils of workers, soldiers, and peasants, and yet resulted in their abolition as independent active elements within the revolutionary process. Bolshevik leaders, within three months, reduced the soviets to a mere cypher of their party's dictatorship.

It is, of course, difficult to see what Lenin and his comrades at the head of the party could have done differently. Having once seized control of events, they were drawn inexorably, into the defence of their own power, and of their own understanding of the tasks facing the revolution. They knew full well that any wavering or indecisiveness on the part of the dictatorship they had established would result in the bloody annihilation of their party and the restoration of the propertied classes in some form or another.

This is why within a month of seizing power, early in December 1917, they opted for the imposition of social control by the police.[19] Felix Dzerzhinsky, was instructed to found the Cheka, the new political police, which he led until his death in 1926.[20] Nikolai Bukharin's obituary made it clear that 'Iron Felix' was no simple cop or spook, but a man of great moral courage and fortitude who led an organization that imprisoned, tortured, and murdered at will – all in the service of the emancipation of the working class:

> It is through the boiling lava of revolution, and not simple human blood, flowed and seethed in his veins.[21]

Formed to defend Bolshevik rule, Felix Dzerzhinsky's special political police force, was charged with suppressing crime, strikes, riots, rebellions, currency speculation, and

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[19] The The All-Russian Emergency Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage or Cheka was a political police force with plenipotentiary powers, which enabled it to imprison, torture, and kill, without regard to due process or law of any kind.

[20] During Dzerzhinsky's leadership the special police functioned under different names: Cheka 1917-22; GPU 1922-23; OGPU 1923-1934; NKVD 1934-1941; NKGB 1941; NKVD 1941-43; NKGB 1943-46; MGB 1946-1954; KGB 1954-1991.

[21] Nikolai Bukharin, 'Feliks Dzerzhinskii umer', *Pravda*, no. 165, 21 July 1926, p.1. Julie Fedor, *Russia and the Cult of State Security: The Chekist Tradition from Lenin to Putin*, London: Routledge, 2011.

political opposition; it also became responsible for spying on the population at large, the maintenance of labour discipline, and the founding of an extensive network of prisons and forced labour camps, later known by the acronym, Gulag.[22]

Repression in revolutionary Russia was not meant as punishment, but as an expression of "militant humanism", which was distinguished from "bourgeois humanism" by its militant desire to crush all those who profited and benefitted in any way from the exploitation and oppression of mankind. This sort of reasoning led Clara Zetkin to say of Felix Dzerzhinsky that:

> For him . . . convictions were a sacred object, something untouchable, an obligation. In their name he, kind and sympathetic by nature, could and even had to be strict, cruel and implacable with regard to others, for . . . he was incomparably stricter, crueler and more implacable with regard to himself.[23]

So, the sacrifices made by Chekists while carrying out their arrests, tortures, and extra-judicial killings heightened their moral standing as fearless defenders of the proletarian dictatorship.

The bare bones of this account are not controversial. Tsarist ministers, officials of the Provisional Government, army officers, aristocrats, and priests, were thrown into the burgeoning network of prisons and camps scattered across the country, they were shot, hundreds at a time, individually, or in small random batches. It was a disorderly process; survivors were released, rearrested, and freed again, only to flee into exile via Black Sea ports, or routes through to the Baltic and even in long treks through Siberia to China and beyond.[24] We need feel no sympathy for the summary 'dispatch' of the members of the *ancien regime*, but the

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[22] See Michael Jakobson, *Origins of the Gulag: The Soviet Prison Camp System, 1917-1934*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993.

[23] Cited in Kutuzov et al., *Chekisty Petrograda*, p.58. See: 'Dzerzhinsky's Commandments', FN 92, in Julie Fedor, *Russia and the Cult of State Security: The Chekist Tradition from Lenin to Putin*, London: Routledge, 2011.

[24] Those people from privileged or well-to-do social groups from the *ancien regime* who remained living under the Bolsheviks were designated 'former people', and were subject to continuous close supervision by the police, and by political commissars. They remained more vulnerable than the population at large to arbitrary imprisonment, internal deportation, and execution, as enemies and saboteurs.

removal of all legal protections applied to workers and peasants too, indeed to anybody whose political or social background seemed suspect.

A revanchist spirit gripped the masses and this underpinned the mayhem, which the Bolsheviks were unable, and it must be said were unwilling to dampen down – as the notion of class war in both town and country was key to the political outlook they were attempting to popularize. It didn't always work, of course, as three servants demonstrated by volunteering to continue to take care of the Tsar, Tsarina, and their children after the collapse of the monarchy; these working people went to their deaths along with the imperial family, shot down by Bolsheviks at the crack of dawn.[25]

Yet, the bitterness of oppression saturated all relations between the masses of ordinary folk and their landlords and army officers who abided by tradition with the use of corporal punishment, beating, slapping, and humiliating their subordinates as a matter of routine. In the Revolution the downtrodden demanded dignity, if nothing else, as one of the soldiers' trench song makes plain:

Sure we'd like some tea
But give us with our tea
Some polite respect
And please have officers
Not slap us in the face.[26]

Princess Catherine Sayn-Wittgenstein had it about right when she alluded to Bolshevik agitators bad-mouthing landlords, "a class that so many obliging people have been encouraging them [the peasants] to hate more than anything." The Princess was clear-eyed about the fate of her class:

> Can we say that everyone but us was guilty, that we suffer innocently? Of course not. We, the noble estate,

[25] The royal servants, Anna Demidora, Ivan Kharitonov, Alexei Trupp, were shot along with Dr Eugene Botkin and the seven members of the imperial family on 17 July 1918 at Yekaterinburg on the orders of the Ural Soviet of Workers' Deputies.
[26] Cited by China Miéville in his *October: The story of the Russian Revolution*, London: Verso, 2017, p.26.

> that is, have been guilty before all the other estates for centuries. We do not care to recall this, however, it is only natural that this hatred for us, for our estate, hatred based on envy, would have to explode sooner or later. Now they hate us, and seeing only a class of "lords", "*burzhui*," "landowners," and "masters," a class that so many obliging people have been encouraging them to hate more than anything. It is understandable and it is *forgivable* that they hate us, for we in fact hate them, we hate them with the same unyielding malice and, what is more we despise them. (…) We accuse them of stupidity, of cupidity, of brutish rudeness and filthiness, we accuse them of a lack of patriotism and of all humanity, save selfishness. That they are dark and backward, this is true, but are they to blame for this? (…) Who taught them to love the Motherland? Cupidity, rudeness, impudence, and stupidity – these are their noted traits, but can one really expect better of a people who only recently were slaves?[27] (…) Both sides have always thought in terms of "us" and "them," and we now see that therein lay our ancestral error. Both sides desire not to understand each other, not to come together, not to forgive, rather to vanquish the other.[28]

Princess Catherine Sayn-Wittgenstein's account of class relations in the countryside describe how the collapse of almost feudal relations between "estates" unleashed a torrent of violent hatred that the Bolsheviks traded upon, and hoped to be able to ride, but certainly could not control. Manor houses went up in flames, sometimes with the landlord and his family inside, but more often simply looted by tumultuous crowds of victorious peasants, after the aristocrats had fled for the relative safety of the nearest city.

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[27] Here the Princess is referring to serfdom in which until 1861 peasants in the southern and central parts of the Russian Empire were bought and sold with the land upon which they lived and worked. The institution of serfdom had been declining throughout the first part of the nineteenth century, but this form of servitude continued to be a visceral and lively memory among the peasant masses of Russia well into the twentieth century. See particularly Nikolai Gogol's novel *Dead Souls*, 1842, London: Wordsworth, 1987, to gain some sense of the Russian world in which serfdom survived.

[28] Princess Catherine Sayn-Wittgenstein cited in Douglas Smith, *Former People: The Last Days of the Russian Aristocracy*, 2012, London: Pan Books, 2013, pp.108-109.

The Russian world really was 'turned upside down':

> I remember how, on the eve of our departure [from Moscow in 1918], I had gone to say goodbye to a former baroness and found her stooping to a rather lowly task – cleaning the floor. Lanky and sallow, with the face of a thoroughbred horse, she was squatting down and examining the floorboards with distaste through a turquoise lorgnette. Between two fingers of her other hand she gingerly held a scrap of wet lace, using it to flick water about.
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> "I'll mop it up later, when my *Valenciennes* has dried out."[29]

There is an enormous literature, encompassing eye-witness accounts, academic histories, novels, short stories, movies and poetry, in which the progress, scope, and fate of the revolution, is described, argued, and catalogued in great detail. It is clear that the exhilaration of these momentous events continue to exert a powerful influence on political thought, despite the bloody tyranny of Bolshevism and its aftermath. This exhilaration refuses the reduction of the Revolution to its undoubted horror . . .

> On the train there [to Yekaterinodar] she shared a car with "haggard" and "worn-out" soldiers and officers, who – in stark contrast to the jolly officers on the *Shilka* [the boat from Odessa to Novorossiisk] – bared the true, horrifying face of war. One of them told the story of a colonel who, after witnessing the torture of his wife and children, wreaked revenge on captured Bolsheviks time and again: "He would sit on the porch drinking tea and have the prisoners strung up in front of him, first one, then the another, then another. While he carried on drinking tea."[30]

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[29] Teffi, [Nadezhda Alexandrovia Lohvitskaya] *Memories: From Moscow to the Black Sea,* 1928-1930, London: Pushkin Press, 2016, pp.19-20.

[30] Edythe Haber, 'Introduction', in Teffi, [Nadezhda Alexandrovia Lohvitskaya] *Memories: From Moscow to the Black Sea,* 1928-1930, London: Pushkin Press, 2016, pp.19-20.

. . . but the enthusiasts for Bolshevism cleave fast to assumptions about its ambition and its potential. Victor Serge expressed this view most deeply on the eve of the Second World War when he wrote in *New International*:

> It is often said that "the germ of all Stalinism was in Bolshevism at its beginning". Well, I have no objection. Only, Bolshevism also contained many other germs, a mass of other germs, and those who lived through the enthusiasm of the first years of the first victorious socialist revolution ought not to forget it.[31]

The attempt to establish, for the first time in history, a whole society run and ruled by working people was inspiring, and there are numerous accounts, which adopt this broadly affirmative view of the October Revolution and the communist state it created. Great lengths are gone to in order to big up the achievements of the Bolshevik Revolution, particularly in the field of the arts as if the Russian intelligentsia before 1917 had not engaged creatively with artistic movements in Western Europe. One need go no further than the work of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes (founded 1909), of Anna Pavlova, or Vaslav Nijinsky, Igor Stravinsky, and the first performance of the *Rite of Spring* in Paris in 1913, or the work of Vladimir Tatlin, in the period 1913-1915 (which pre-date the naming of "Constructivism" by some years), in order to grasp the radical capacities of Russian artists in the opening decades of the twentieth century. Yet it remains true today that Russian graphic art, dance, music, and architectural plans of the early 1920s are often talked about as if they were the signal achievements of the October Revolution.

There continues to be much admiration for the radical and revolutionary character of Soviet culture during the opening phases of the Revolution extending into the nineteen twenties. Zamyatin, Mayerhold, Tatlin, Mayakovsky, Mandelstam, Bulgakov, Lissitsky, Rodchenko, Popova,[32]

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[31] Victor Serge, 'Reply to Ciliga', in *New International*, Vol. V, No. 2, February 1939, pp. 53–55.

[32] Yevgeny Zamyatin (1884-1937) exiled 1931; Vsevolod Mayerhold (1874- 1940) executed; Vladimir Tatlin (1885-1953); Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893- 1930) suicide;

and a host of other innovative and revolutionary writers, poets, dramatists, filmmakers, architects, graphic designers, and painters, continue to grip the imagination of many with the potential once offered by the Russian Revolution.

Most notably, futurism and contructivism are the artistic movements, which grab the attention of Bolshevik enthusiasts, perhaps because they are thought to be the mode of expression in lock step with October. The question posed by Natan Al'tman's in 1918 gives some indication of why so many people now celebrate the artistic achievements of the revolutionary years:

> Why did it need a whole year of proletarian government and a revolution that encompassed half the world for the "silent to speak up"?
>
> Why did only revolutionary futurism march in step with the October Revolution?
>
> Is it just a question of outward revolutionary fervor, just a mutual aversion to the old forms, that joins futurism with the proletariat?
>
> Not even they [their critics] deny that futurism is a revolutionary art that is breaking all the old bonds and in this sense is bringing art closer to the proletariat.[33]

The main focus here is on the inseparable relationship between art and politics; art is to be engaged in revealing the fate of the individual irretrievably bound up with the fate of society, through the development of an intrinsically collective art . . . collective in its conception:

> Just like anything the proletariat creates, proletarian art will be collective:
>
> The principle that distinguishes the proletariat as a

Osip Mandelstam (1891-1938) died in a transit camp on his way to Siberia; Mikhail Bulgakov (1891-1940); Lazar Lissitsky (1890-1941) tuberculosis; Alexander Rodchenko (1891-1956); Lyubov Popova (1898- 1924) scarlet fever.

[33] Natan Al'tman, *Iskusstvo kommuny*, October 1918, in Charnel House, 23 January 2015. https://thecharnelhouse.org/2015/01/23/natan-altmans-proletarian-futurism/

> class from all other classes.
>
> We understand this, not in the sense that one work of art will be made by many artists, but in the sense that while executed by one creator, the work itself will be constructed on collectivist bases.[34]

It could be "collectivist bases" or "basis". Whichever it is, whether or not it is produced by an individual, revolutionary futurists produced work which was intended as an expression of the collective: making it, essentially, proletarian.

> A futurist picture lives a *collective life*:
>
> By the same principle on which the proletariat's whole creation is constructed.
>
> Try to distinguish an individual face in a proletarian procession.
>
> Try to understand it as individual persons — absurd.
>
> Only in conjunction do they acquire all their strength, all their meaning.
>
> How is a work of the old art constructed — the art depicting reality around us?
>
> Does every object exist in its own right? They are united only by extrinsic literary content or some other such content. And so cut out any part of an old picture, and it won't change at all as a result. A cup remains the same cup, a figure will be dancing or sitting pensively, just as it was doing before it was cut out.
>
> The link between the individual parts of a work of the old art is the same as between people on Nevsky Prospekt. They have come together by chance, prompted by an external cause, only to go their own

[34] *Ibid.* Natan Al'tman, October 1918.

> ways as soon as possible. Each one for himself, each one wants to be distinguished.
>
> Like the old world, the capitalist world, works of the old art live an individualistic life.
>
> Only futurist art is constructed on collective bases.
>
> Only futurist art is right now the art of the proletariat.[35]

One is reminded here of the Marx's idea that human essence is in reality "an ensemble of social relations" not something inherent in the individual.[36] These artists were striving to marry their conception of their task as artists with both Marxism and Leninism within the vast upheaval of the Revolution, and this drew extremely tight boundaries around what they were able to do, well before any Party censor got around to paying attention. Despite the vast formal gulf between the work produced by Futurists in the tumult of the revolution and civil war and the Socialist Realism endorsed by Andrei Zhdanov[37] in the thirties, the conceptions in play are remarkably similar. The only art worthy of the name is proletarian art, which expresses the collective life of the revolutionary proletariat as it strives and struggles to create the future.

Enthusiasm for the "Art of October', and the often ironic love of Stalinist iconography, is of a piece in refusing recognition of the full breadth of innovative art in Russia in the years between 1917 and the late twenties, and the terrible fate of a great many artists whose work was banned, or who

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[35] *Ibid.* Natan Al'tman, October 1918.

[36] Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', §VI. "Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations. Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence, is consequently compelled: 1.To abstract from the historical process and to fix the religious sentiment as something by itself and to presuppose an abstract – isolated – human individual. 2. Essence, therefore, can be comprehended only as "genus", as an internal, dumb generality which naturally unites the many individuals."

[37] Andrei Zdhanov joined the Bolsheviks in 1915 at the age of 19, and rose through the ranks of the Party and the State after 1917. See A. A. Zdhanov, 'Soviet Literature - The Richest in Ideas, the Most Advanced Literature' in Gorky, Radek, Bukharin, Zhdanov and others, *Soviet Writers' Congress 1934*: *The Debate on Socialist Realism and Modernism,* London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977, pp.15-26.

were killed, imprisoned, or driven into exile during these and subsequent years. This happens because it is often thought that the cultural ferment of the years 1917-1924 was uniquely the product of Bolshevism and the Revolution when in reality the relationship between the Soviet *avant garde*, their pre-revolutionary milieu, and wider European artistic activity under capitalism was as complicated as it was intimate.

The bitter truth is, of course, that innovative modern art and architecture, music and dance, literature, painting and sculpture, flourished much more successfully beyond the borders of Revolutionary Russia than within them.

Soviet revolutionary culture was sunk quite decisively by the twin evils of poverty and dictatorship, and within a few short years drowned by the imposition of a novel orthodoxy thought necessary to the survival of the revolution and the evocation of the communist future. The artists who did not die of disease or despair, those not exiled or murdered by the political police – the survivors – worked at tasks in the style approved by the dictatorship, or like Zamyatin and Bulgakov, produced work that was banned or simply never published. In architecture, in painting, as in much else the communist authorities resorted to the formal resources of the past.[38] Modern dance, modern architecture, graphic design, flat-pack furniture, off-the-peg clothing, fitted kitchens,[39] and the popular arts of the cinema, the comic book, and musical innovation from jazz to Arnold Schoenberg, from Kurt Weill to the Velvet Underground, are products of bourgeois democratic societies.

The bizarre claims of many on the contemporary left regarding the triumphs of October 1917 extend as far as assertions that the working class controlled the Soviet government, and had ushered in workers control of industry and society; these proletarian fantasies are even overtopped by wildly anachronistic ideas, for example, that

[38] By the early thirties the pictorial style favoured by the authorities was one which harked back to the Wanderers and Nazarenes of the nineteenth century, and in architecture and sculpture, to the bombast and gigantism of what might be called Stalino-Classicism – the cultural ethos that put chandeliers in the subway and a pharaoh's tomb on Red Square complete with the mummified body of a ruler.

[39] Austrian architect, Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, designed the first fitted kitchen in 1926 for a working class housing project in Frankfurt.

Bolshevik rule ushered in "gay liberation".

The reality for workers was that within a matter of months the Bolsheviks took full control of all workplaces, of all trade unions, and sole control of all other representative and administrative institutions.[40] It is certainly true that the owners of factories and other businesses were dispossessed, but it is not true at all that their workers were able to retain control of their workplaces or to establish working class control of the wider economy.

Regarding the regulation of homosexuality a more complicated situation arose as Bolsheviks built on the work done by liberal jurists over the fourteen years prior to 1917 and by Socialist Revolutionaries up to March 1918.

Under the new civil criminal code of 1922 homosexuals could be, and were, arrested and prosecuted for hooliganism, brothel keeping, and transvestism, as a result of continuing ambiguity regarding the implementation of laws relating to same sex relations. However, Soviet jurists were clear "that the commission of the act of sodomy with adults infringed no rights whatsoever, and that [adults] were free to express their sexual feeling in any form, and that the intrusion of the law into this field is a holdover of church teachings and of the ideology of sinfulness."[41] At the same time V. P. Protopopov of Petrograd argued that:

> Doctors look upon homosexuals as unfortunate stepchildren of fate. They are like cripples, similar to the blind, deaf-mutes, et cetera, who own their defect only to a physiological deformation; but they can in no way be considered ill-intentioned, debauched people offending public morality and therefore the term *perversion* [*izvrashchenie*] (inversion), and not *perversity* [*izrashchennost*] or even less so, *debauchery* [*razvrashchennost*], is used to designate

[40] In this, just as in the state administration of food supply, the Bolsheviks emulated the Tsarist government by exerting police control over the trade unions – China Miéville, without a hint of irony, notes that the Tsarist state pursued "ham-fisted strategies" against labour unrest with the creation of "'police unions', workers' societies organized and overseen by the authorities themselves." However, the state control of trade unions by the Bolsheviks was, unlike the Tsar's, rather more effective. See China Miéville, October: The story of the Russian Revolution, London: Verso, 2017, p.16.

[41] Cited in Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of sexual and gender dissent*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001, p.129.

this pathological condition.[42]

Here, we are in the world of "catamite prostitutes" and "sexual hygiene", not 'gay liberation' or anything approaching it.

The perhaps surprising truth is that men engaging in same sexuality in Russia, even before the Revolution, were probably better off than homosexuals in France, Germany, or Britain. And, for the first ten years after the Revolution, homosexuals undoubtedly benefitted from legal changes that were confirmed by the penal code of 1922.[43] So, there was a mixed picture regarding social practice in revolutionary Russia; the intention of many Bolsheviks was undoubtedly democratic and progressive regarding the rights of workers, the situation of women, of homosexuals, or the circumstances of those from non-Russian nationalities, like Ukrainians.

However, the behavior of the dictatorship, as all independent working class organization was suppressed, national minorities ruthlessly crushed,[44] and the rights and freedoms of women and homosexuals, often uncertain, and frequently violated, made it clear that Soviet rule was not to be democratic in any sense. Despite the decisive role played by women in triggering the February Revolution, the influence of Bolsheviks like Elena Stasova, and Alexandra Kollontai, and the passage of positive laws asserting the equal status of women with men, women rarely, if ever, achieved leading positions of authority in the Soviet life.[45] Some on today's left like to cite the influence of Friedrich Engels and August Babel in raising the importance of the struggle for the emancipation of women – some even mention Charles Fourier's 1808 essay, 'Degradation of

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[42] Cited in Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of sexual and gender dissent*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001, p.126.

[43] Homosexuality became a crime once again in the Soviet Union in 1933 and 1934 with waves of arrests and the wholesale imprisonment of "pederasts", "sodomites", and "anti-social elements", carried out by the political police.

[44] See 'The Ukrainian Revolution, 1917' and 'Rebellion, 1919', in Ann Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine*, London: Allen Lane, 2017, pp.11-56.

[45] Elena Stasova, a close comrade of Lenin, Party Secretary in Petrograd during the Revolution, subsequently an official of Comintern – the Third Communist International. Alexandra Kollontai was appointed temporary Commissar for Public Welfare on the 8th November (26th October). In 1923 she became the Soviet ambassador to Norway. Subsequently, she went on to represent the Soviet Union in Mexico, and Sweden.

Women in Civilization'.[46] Tariq Ali recently assured us that:

> Lenin had imbibed all these texts and in his speeches would often repeat Fourier's litmus test for the evaluation of a society. [By a single criterion: how it treated women.][47]

Here Tariq Ali is doing no more than recognise that the Bolshevik leadership like, all radical and liberal Russians since the 1860s, whether or not they were socialists, had believed in the emancipation of women. But then in claiming priority for socialists in the struggle for the emancipation of women a number of pioneers appear to have slipped Tariq's mind.[48]

The October Revolution ushered in free, no-fault, divorce, and made it lawful for women to choose whether or not to terminate a pregnancy. To be sure the achievements of women were advertised as triumphs of the new society, from women train drivers, engineers, to pilots, soldiers and snipers, but apart from their role as stenographers, typists, cleaners, and waiters, they were rarely seen in the leading councils of the Party or the State. The attitudes and practice of Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin, was from the first day of their rule in October 1917 radically different from the positions canvassed before their seizure of state power, or the party's rhetoric after it.

Until October 1917 Lenin had been a severe critic of police power deployed by any state and a firm advocate of popular democracy. What is more he believed in relentless open discussion, and a spirit of withering criticism of all positions and policies advocated by all comers, both within

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[46] Charles Fourier, 'Degradation of Women in Civilisation', in *Theorie des Quatre Mouvements et des Destininées Générales*, Paris, 1808. [1841-1848] Republished in *Oeuvres Complètes*, I (Paris, 1966), pp. 131-33, 145-50. Reprinted in Susan Groag Bell and Karen M. Offen, eds., Karen M. Offen, trans., *Women, the Family, and Freedom: The Debate in Documents, Volume One, 1750-1880* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1983), pp. 40-41.

[47] Tariq Ali, *The Dilemmas of Lenin: Terrorism, War, Empire, Love, Revolution*, London: Verso, 2017, pp.243-244.

[48] Judith Sargent Murray, 'On the Equality of the Sexes', 1779; Marquis de Condorcet, *On the Admission of Women to the Rights of Citizenship* 1790; Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects, 1792,* etc. etc. etc.

the party, and across the broader revolutionary movement. Once in power, however, this democratic commitment was sacrificed to the defence of the Revolution, which was, from the night that Red Guards arrested the ministers of the Provisional Government, synonymous with the dictatorship of the Bolshevik Central Committee.

Their lawless terror, it is argued, was the inevitable consequence of circumstance. The defenders of Bolshevism ask rhetorically, what revolutionaries worth their salt would shrink from stern dictatorship, mass killing and violent retribution in defence of the revolution and the progress of all mankind? "None" comes their answer.

It is often claimed that the Bolsheviks predicated their seizure of power on the expectation of the 'world revolution', specifically the rise to power of the working class in Western Europe, which it was hoped would rescue them and their own revolution from the bloody mess into which it had fallen. John Reed remembered the reaction of a trade union leader to the decision of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies to seize power:

> On the landing I met Riazanov, vice-president of the Trade Unions, looking black and biting his grey beard, "It's insane! Insane!" he shouted. "The European working class won't move! All Russia –" He waved his hand distractedly and ran off.[49]

Riazanov, angry and dismayed as he evidently was, had an important point – to root the prospects of the Russian Revolution in the actions of the working class of Central and Western Europe, which was exhausted and demoralized by the World War, was foolhardy in the extreme, particularly given the evidence to hand that the German troops on the Eastern Front remained steadfastly loyal to their officers, and showed no sign at all of fraternizing with Russia's rebellious soldiers. Quite apart from this exhaustion, political and social arrangements in Russia had no parallel or cognates in Germany, Austria-Hungary, France, or Britain.

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[49] John Reed, *Ten Days That Shook the World*, 1919, London: Penguin Books, 1977, p.97.

Any Bolshevik idea that the Western states would collapse before the maelstrom of events, and so allow the working class to take over was certainly not based on a thorough analysis of the real prospects of the labour movement in any European country. Even when the German Empire actually did collapse, and Austria-Hungary was dismantled by the victorious powers, during the course of 1918 and 1919, the propertied classes were able to fend off all comers without much difficulty.

After all, the working class movement had throughout the continent lent their support in 1914 to their respective national governments, and there was no sign in late 1917, after three years of bloodshed on an industrial scale, that international class solidarity had significantly strengthened. In any event it was known that the grip of the capitalist class in Britain, France, Germany, and Austria-Hungary, despite mutinies on the Western Front, revolts, and mass strikes, was extremely strong, even in the face of the Irish Rebellion and other insurrectionary movements, like the short-lived soviets established in numerous German towns in November 1918, or the Soviet government set up by Bella Kun in Budapest in March 1919, which collapsed six months later, in August 1919, as peasants in league with bourgeois interests routed the Hungarian Soviet's collectivization of agriculture.

The Revolution in Russia, the abdication of the Kaiser in Berlin, and the disintegration of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, created considerable confusion in Eastern Europe as successor states fought to establish themselves and their new frontiers.[50] This was the context in 1919 in which the Red Army marched against Symon Petliura of the Ukrainian People's Republic, and Józef Piłsudsky's Second Polish Republic. The Russian communists regarded their march westwards as an act of proletarian solidarity. However, the reaction of workers and peasants in Ukraine and Poland

[50] After the withdrawal of German forces from Ukraine the Polish-Ukrainian War of 1918-1919 broke out between the forces of the Second Polish Republic, and the West Ukrainian People's Republic and the Ukrainian People's Republic (who were also at war with each other). Polish successes resulted in the collapse of the West Ukrainian People's Republic in July 1919 – their government and army fled across the new Czechoslovak border into exile. In late 1919 Petliura's Ukrainian People's Republic responded to the advance of the Red Army with a *volte-face* by forging an anti-Russian alliance with the Poles.

was, despite extensive Russian military successes, unpromising. These armed struggles had little or nothing to do with class politics, driven as they were by national, religious, and linguistic rivalries, together with widespread anti-Semitism and bloody pogroms. The Red Army had some support in largely Russianized towns and cities in Ukraine, but very little in the countryside, and none at all in Poland. Indeed during the Battle for Warsaw in 1920 the Polish working class rallied to the cause of national defence against the 'Russian invasion'. The Red Army failed to take the city and Lenin's government sued for peace in October 1920, signing the peace treaty with Poland at the conference in Riga in March 1921. Bolshevik thoughts about the 'World Revolution' proved to be entirely fanciful.

The international impact of the October Revolution was quite different from that yearned for by the Bolsheviks. Events in Petrograd and Moscow scared the *bejesus* out of the capitalist class everywhere. As a result, fascist, clerical-fascist, and authoritarian regimes, of one kind or another, arose in order to suppress the labour movement wherever the commercial and professional classes felt threatened by the Third International and communist agitation. These were yet more of the unintended consequences of the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917.

It is sometimes said the Bolshevik Revolution opened up the anti-colonial struggle – and it is true that Bolshevism might have had some effect in colonial territories, other than the iron grip it extended over much of Tsarist Russia's imperial possessions. However, the founding of the Indian National Congress (1885), South Africa's African National Congress (1912), and Ireland's Easter Rebellion (1916) owed nothing to Bolshevism. And, the enormous, if fleeting conquests, of the Empire of Japan, along with the role of the United States in the Pacific during the 1940s, probably had as much, if not more influence on the disintegration of Europe's colonial empires than Bolshevism ever did.

Yet, it remains true that revolution is intrinsically a violent business in which an *ancien regime* is overturned, but the defenders of Bolshevism are in some difficulty when it comes to explaining why all communist revolutions since October 1917 have retained

dictatorship, and repression, as a permanent *modus operandi*; long after the initial revolutionary crisis has subsided arbitrary rule by party functionaries and elites is maintained. Dictatorship is absolute. All the regimes springing from this tradition have assumed this form.

Here again, the bare bones of this account are not controversial. Contingency is adduced to explain the necessity of the tyranny of those parties claiming apostolic succession from Lenin and October. Imperialism, American or otherwise, and the hostility of surrounding capitalist states are said to have cornered the embattled 'people's democracies' in circumstances in which free trade unions, and freedom of speech, publication, and political organization are suppressed in favour of highly mediated consultative procedures and institutions that are managed, without exception, by a governing communist party.

The enthusiasts of October have long defended dictatorship and the management of society by the political police. Achievements are noted from the breakneck industrialization of Russia in the 1930s, the defeat of Friedrich Paulus at Stalingrad in 1943 and Adolf Hitler at Berlin in 1945, the launching of Sputnik in 1957, through the years to the wonders of the German Democratic Republic's maternity leave and kindergartens in the sixties and seventies, to the excellence of Cuban healthcare today. All these good things and many more are adduced as shining examples of the superiority of what used to be called "actually existing socialism" to that offered by capitalism and the tyranny of the bourgeoisie.

Even when the Bolsheviks opted for retreat from their policy of state control of literally all economic activity, even when they decided in 1921 to loosen up in the field of commerce, they immediately banned all discussion of the leadership's plans throughout society, including within the ranks of the Communist Party.[51] To this day, the opening up

[51] During the period of what came to be known as 'War Communism' between 1918 and the spring of 1921 all private trades, including strikes by workers, were declared illegal, and agricultural surpluses were simply requisitioned by Bolshevik *force majeure* from the farms and villages. As a result food production and distribution, mining, rail transport, and industrial manufacturing collapsed. Vast famines ensued and large numbers of people left the cities in order to barter for food in the countryside. Petrograd is said to have lost around two-thirds of its population, and more than half of Moscow's residents fled into the surrounding countryside. In response there were literally score

of statified economies to market forces does not foreshadow a weakening of communist dictatorships in China, Vietnam, North Korea, or Cuba. This year a Chinese court sentenced Wang Jiangfeng to two years in prison for referring to President Xi Jinping as "steamed bun Xi" in private messages he sent to friends on chat lines. Wang's joke referred to President Xi Jinping's attempts to present himself as 'a man of the people' by eating cheap street food. Consequently, he was found guilty of spreading:

> "[N]egative thoughts about the Chinese Communist Party, the socialist system and the people's democratic dictatorship, causing psychological confusion and public disorder of a serious nature and particularly egregious kind."[52]

Following his sentencing Wang's defence lawyer was barred from future legal practice.

From 1917 to 1921, right up until today, dictatorship is insisted upon even when the state economy is opened up to private trading and personal initiative.

At no time since the October Revolution have communists in power ever risked open elections in which people with anti-communist opinions and programmes might be elected to government. This tradition was initiated in January 1918 when the Constituent Assembly in Petrograd in which the Socialist Revolutionaries commanded an overwhelming majority, was violently suppressed. In the months following this event all other political parties and groups, including the Left SRs[53] and the anarchists were suppressed as their members and supporters were imprisoned, exiled, or killed, by the Bolsheviks.

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upon score of peasant jacquerie and mutinies, as country folk, soldiers, sailors and workers rose in numerous rebellions against Bolshevik rule, rebellions which were put down with extrajudicial killings and ruthless violence by the communists. The period was brought to an end in March 1921 with the New Economic Policy, which relaxed restrictions on commercial activities. However, open debate, even within the Party was henceforward banned, and the political dictatorship survived the Revolutionary Civil War, not merely intact, but greatly enhanced. See Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, 1987, Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2008.

[52] Jamil Anderlini, 'Under Xi Jingping, China is turning back to dictatorship', London: *Financial Times*, 11/10/2017.

[53] Left SRs were the left wing of the Socialist Revolutionaries who initially participated in the Bolshevik rule.

The apparent oxymoron, "democratic dictatorship" first realised by the Bolsheviks is rooted in the idea that bourgeois dominated states are "dictatorships" irrespective of the nature of their political institutions or formal freedoms, because the rule of the capitalist class of businessmen and shareholders is guaranteed by the powers that be, and is not ever open to fundamental question or challenge. Conceived, as something of a mirror image of the domination insisted upon by their class enemies, the determination of the rulers of communist states like, those established in Hanoi, Havana, or Beijing, is not to permit anybody to rule other than the communist party. These states are dictatorships because they do not permit the rule by anybody other than those who purport to be representatives of the working class, and are "democratic" because their elites rule in 'consultation' with the mass of the people.

The dictatorship inaugurated in October and November 1917 was founded upon the realization that the vast majority of the population could not be trusted for long. Perhaps most importantly Bolshevik leaders and intellectuals did not believe in the capacity of the working class to rise above the level of what Lenin called "trade union consciousness". From a Bolshevik point of view this was borne out, even within the context of Russia's insurgent, and revolutionary working class, when most trade unions and factory committees opted for what they called "workers' control" which they thought of in terms of what might be called syndicalism, and did not think that they were fighting for state or centralized control of production. Consequently, in October and in the immediate aftermath of the seizure of power the Bolsheviks put up with the syndicalist or anarchist outlook of industrial workers, soldiers, and sailors, but as the Bolsheviks consolidated their hold on power, embattled as they were with the unfolding catastrophe of the Civil War, their commitment to the central control of production and supply, and one-man management, came more to the fore.

However, this grave problem was small when compared to the problem posed to Bolshevism by the outlook of the peasantry. After all industrial workers represented only some three million people (about 2 per cent) whereas more

than four fifths of the population – eighty per cent – were peasants, and after they had burned down the manor houses of their aristocratic landlords, and taken control of the land, the peasantry had little interest in Bolshevik plans for socialism. This was because most Russian peasants dreamed of being independent farmers on their own land; and they did not relish the idea of communism or of becoming state employees, working for the greater good in a glorious future.

The Bolsheviks were keenly aware of this problem and sought to stir up conflict within Russia's ancestral villages by setting the peasants at each other's throats. They attempted to promote 'class war' between the poorer peasants and the well-to-do when they knew full well that there was no robust or definable class difference between richer or poorer peasants who lived and worked together in village communes where disputes were adjudicated and settled by village patriarchs in gatherings, often unruly, in which the weight of the well-to-do families in a village would prevail. To be sure, capitalism had entered the Russian countryside in the form of merchant capital and the extensive farming of cash crops, the consolidation of small farms into larger ones, and the consequent proliferation of landless labourers, but for the most part Russia's peasants were not workers and did not aspire to proletarian status.

This presented the Bolsheviks with their biggest problem – at the very least eighty per cent of the population – were opposed to their way of thinking and to their aspirations for an economy controlled and regulated in every detail by the state. The spontaneous revolutionary consciousness of the peasant masses led them to the simple and direct view that those who tilled and worked the land should own it. As far as peasants and their representatives were concerned this did not include monasteries, aristocrats, Tsars, or the new communist state. Consequently, from day one of Bolshevik rule the peasants reacted forcefully in defence of their seizure of aristocratic estates and church lands in the eight months following the fall of the Tsar in February and March 1917, and in defence of their own, village by village, parceling up of the land into small holdings farmed by individual families.

Bolshevik state control of prices, resulted in peasants refusing to sell at the prices dictated by the authorities. This

in turn resulted in the arrival of special police and Chekist 'internal troops' in the villages, searching for, and seizing all manner of stocks and supplies, stored in peasant households and barns – shooting, deporting, or imprisoning, anybody who resisted. The result was literally hundreds of armed revolts and peasant jacqueries against Bolshevik power. Repression during the Russian Civil War between 1918 and 1922 is often depicted as the result of the inevitable strife caused by 'White' armies warring with the 'Reds' when the truth is far more complicated. On top of fighting with large, frankly counter revolutionary forces, the Russian Civil War involved extremely bloody fighting between Bolshevik forces and those of other revolutionary elements like Mensheviks, liberal constitutionalists, anarchists, nationalists, and by mutinous soldiers, sailors, and peasants, dismayed by the nature of the dictatorship put in place by Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin.

This policy of forcible requisition of crops at fixed prices had begun in 1916 as the Tsarist government struggled to control the food supply. It was followed in March 1917 by a decree of the Provisional Government that peasants should sell all surplus grain at prices fixed by the state. Then in May 1918 the Council of People's Commissars established a 'food supply dictatorship' – the Commissariat of Food Supply created a 'food supply army' to be deployed on the 'food supply front'.[54] In practice this meant that, quite apart from alienating the peasant masses, almost everybody in revolutionary Russia depended upon the black market for access to food and many other goods.

The revolution fought for the popular democracy of soviet rule had not only resulted in the inauguration of a rapacious 'proletarian' dictatorship, but also in the continuation and intensification of Tsarist and Provisional Government policies of repression aimed specifically at the economic activity of the peasant majority.

The Bolsheviks explained their conduct not merely as the result of exigency, but by the vital need which the revolutionary forces had to confront, head on, the antique

[54] Ann Appledbaum, 'The Ukrainian Revolution 1917' in *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine*, London: Allen Lane, 2017, pp.29-30. See also, Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

consciousness of the peasant masses, sunk as they were, not simply in age-old backwardness and ignorance, but by their saturation with petty bourgeois aspirations to own and control their own land and farms. This, Lenin referred to as "patriarchal agriculture'.[55] The mass consciousness of the peasantry was, according to the Bolsheviks, reactionary and, from any objective standpoint, counter revolutionary.

This point of view was not something simply produced by the resistance of the peasant masses to Bolshevik rule, but had its roots deep in Marxist thinking. In the middle of the nineteenth century Marx, writing of the peasantry in France, had this to say:

> The small-holding peasants form an enormous mass whose members live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with each other. Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. The isolation is furthered by France's poor means of communication and the poverty of the peasants. Their field of production, the small holding, permits no division of labor in its cultivation, no application of science, and therefore no multifariousness of development, no diversity of talent, no wealth of social relationships. Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient, directly produces most of its consumer needs, and thus acquires its means of life more through an exchange with nature than in intercourse with society. A small holding, the peasant and his family; beside it another small holding, another peasant and another family. A few score of these constitute a village, and a few score villages constitute a department. Thus the great mass of the French nation is formed by the simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes. Insofar as millions of families live under conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of the other

[55] 'Five Years of the Russian Revolution and the Prospects of the World Revolution', Report to the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, November 13, 1922, in V. I. Lenin, *Problems of Building Socialism and Communism in the USSR*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964, p.6.

> classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. Insofar as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests forms no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not constitute a class. They are therefore incapable of asserting their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them, an unlimited governmental power which protects them from the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above. The political influence of the small-holding peasants, therefore, finds its final expression in the executive power which subordinates society to itself.[56]

"They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented" is the significant thought here. From the point of view of Bolshevik intellectuals and leaders, the consciousness of the great mass of peasants, arising as it did out of the circumstances of village life and petty proprietorship, was an obstacle to progress, that had to be dealt with ruthlessly. It involved their party of 300,000 militants claiming to represent three million workers, taking control, root and branch, of the lives of 160 million peasants.

The Bolshevik's had come to power, ratifying and confirming the land seizures and land redistribution, which the peasants had been carrying out themselves since May 1917 without any central or political direction. Peasant control of the land at the beginning of 1918 was a *fait accompli*, which the Bolsheviks dare not disturb during the Civil War because their support for the land redistribution carried out by traditional peasant communes was their trump card over the White armies – the leaders of these large counter- revolutionary military formations, particularly those of Admiral Kolchak and Generals Yudenich and Denikin,

[56] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1851-1852, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1937. This text was first published in 1852, then in 1869 and again in 1885.

typically believed in recognizing the rights of the pre-revolutionary landowners. So, although the peasants may not have liked Bolshevik interference in their affairs, it was at the time infinitely preferable to those counter revolutionaries who promised to give the peasants' land back to their former landlords.

This limited advantage notwithstanding, the peasants presented Soviet authorities with the intractable problem of their resistance to the injunctions, and objectives of the revolutionary state, well into the 1920s. Apart from the violent seizure of grain and livestock during the Civil War, the Communists also deployed identity cards, and later internal passports, to control a peasant's movement and place of residence. They sought to master the overwhelming majority of Russia's population, first by police and military repression, then by cajoling, persuasion, and manipulation, with the establishment during NEP[57] of model state farms, and model collective farms. In response to the failure of peasants to give up their smallholdings by entering collective farms on a voluntary basis the Communist Party collectivized agriculture at gunpoint – families who resisted were killed, imprisoned, or deported in railway wagons to Siberia or Central Asia. Henceforward, local officials in association with regional and national directives would make all planting and livestock decisions, and determine the yields the state expected to be delivered season-by-season and year-by-year. The aim of this policy was to deprive peasants of their ownership and control of their own means of production - land, animals, seeds, and tools – and so, by rendering them propertyless – declaring them to be workers – simply employees of the collective farms into which they had been driven.

[57] The New Economic Policy was the decision of the Central Committee and the Council of Commissars to permit capitalist commercial and manufacturing activity within revolutionary Russia in an effort to rebuild the economy after the ravages imposed by central government control of all economic activity during the Civil War. NEP lasted for seven years from 1921 to 1928, when the policy of suppressing all capitalist activity by universal nationalization was once again embarked upon. The forced collectivization of agriculture formed part of this plan, and largely took place between 1928 and 1933, but was not completed until the end of the 'thirties.

Trotskyists [58] often attributed this bureaucratic voluntarism to Stalin, but the truth is, it always lay at the heart of Bolshevik thinking. Indeed, the seizure of control of the Russian Revolution by the Bolsheviks in October 1917 was the signal or foundational act of their voluntarism. They clearly believed, and many communists and left-socialists to this day continue to believe, that the revolutionary transformation of society is an act of will by those with the stomach, determination, and ruthlessness, to do what needs to be done. The leading organs of the Party frame policies and objectives, after exhaustive research, consultation and discussion with the people. These policies are then implemented by fiat as if the process of simply dreaming them up made them possible.

Neither Lenin nor anybody else in the leadership of the Bolshevik Party had any experience of governing or of the administration of anything very much. Consequently, their understanding of the relationship between society and the dominant social relationships and the arrangement of the state and other institutions was at best naïve, or at worst, simply primitive and intrinsically authoritarian.

Lenin was certainly familiar with the idea that all specific state forms arise on the basis of existing social relations. In his *State and Revolution* he quotes Friedrich Engels at some length in a polemical discussion of the errors of everybody else other than his own or those of his immediate comrades. However, this formal acknowledgement and the lessons of the Paris Commune of 1871 did nothing to conceal his voluntarism regarding the establishment of the revolutionary state on the model of the post office:

[58] From Leon Trotsky's expulsion from the Communist Party and his exile from the Soviet Union in 1927 until his assassination by an agent sent by the Soviet People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) in 1940, he became a leading critic of Soviet policy and practice. Trotskyists, to this day, attempt to establish a sharp dividing line between his and Lenin's political practice on the one hand, and that of Joseph Stalin on the other. The truth is that Lenin's political practice did not "inevitably" lead to Stalin's tyranny as Sheila Fitzpatrick suggests in her book, *Russian Revolution*, because it was in all essentials, indistinguishable from Stalin's. To be sure the Red Terror inherent in 'War Communism' which came to an end in 1921 was not marked by the fratricidal paranoia of Stalin's Great Terror, and this has always led to the suggestion that if Trotsky, rather than Stalin, had assumed the leadership of the Soviet Union things would have been radically different. However, the real conduct of the life of the Party, of the dictatorship and its police apparatus, by Felix Dzerzhinsky, Leon Trotsky, Vladimir Lenin, and Joseph Stalin, from 1917 until Lenin's death in 1924 provide little support to this view.

> To organize the whole economy on the lines of the postal service so that the technicians, foremen and accountants, as well as all officials, shall receive salaries no higher than "a workman's wage", all under the control and leadership of the armed proletariat that is our immediate aim. This is what will bring about the abolition of parliamentarism and the preservation of representative institutions. This is what will rid the labouring classes of the bourgeoisie's prostitution of these institutions.[59]

Clearly, he didn't fully grasp or anticipate the way in which the state he constructed would irretrievably reflect the prevailing social relations of Russian society in the early twenties. He frequently, lamented the way his state actually functioned, and he may have understood that it was indeed, like the state that preceded it, a product of existing class and social antagonism, but not quite in the manner he'd hoped. Yet, still, the Bolsheviks could not shake off the idea that the construction of the state was simply a matter of intention followed by implementation. Evidently, their utopianism knew no bounds, because when the state withers away in maybe 'two or three generations', we will be ruled in accordance with the instructions of the 'statistical bureau', as *The ABC of Communism* predicted in 1920:

> It is not difficult to answer these questions. The main direction will be entrusted to various kinds of book-keeping offices or statistical bureaux. There, from day to day, account will be kept of production and all its needs; there also it will be decided whither workers must be sent, whence they must be taken, and how much work there is to be done. And inasmuch as, from childhood onwards, all will have been accustomed to social labour, and since all will understand that this work is necessary and that life goes easier when everything is done according to a prearranged plan and when the social order is like a well-oiled machine, all will work in accordance with the indications of these

[59] V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State & the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution*, 1917, 1918, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014, Chapter III, §3.

> statistical bureaux. There will be no need for special ministers of State, for police and prisons, for laws and decrees - nothing of the sort. Just as in an orchestra all the performers watch the conductor's baton and act accordingly, so here all will consult the statistical reports and will direct their work accordingly.[60]

So, in the fullness of time, transition from the model of the post office to the model of the orchestra is what was envisaged – from the proletarian state to the stateless administration of things and labour by the rational interpretation of statistics. The key to understanding this revolutionary voluntarism is to scent the Bolshevik's intoxication with the future. Many years after the October Revolution in the Spring of 1945 a German woman in Berlin recounts a discussion with some of her Soviet rapists:

> We talk about how the war started; they see the root cause in Fascism, in a system driven towards conquest. Shaking their heads, they explain that there was absolutely no reason for Germany to go to war at all – such a wealthy country, so cultured, so well tended, even now, despite the destruction. For a while the discussion turns to the stunted form of early capitalism that was inherited by the October Revolution, and to the later stage that is evident in Germany – where capitalist society is more advanced, in wealth as well as decadence. Suddenly cautious, they put forward tentative arguments for why their country is on the verge of a great development, and therefore should be considered, critiqued and compared only from the perspective of the future.[61]

The young soldiers are cautiously articulating the conception of futurity encompassed by 'socialist realism', formally unveiled by A. A. Zdhanov in his speech to the Soviet Writers' Congress, 1934. A heroic commitment to the future

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[60] Nikolai Bukharin and Evgenii Preobrazhensky *The ABC of Communism*, 1920, London: Penguin Books, 1969, §21.
[61] Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin* (*20 April - 22 June, 1945*), 1954, London: Virago, 2004, p.102.

– the very antithesis of conservatism – this commitment to the future is what matters above all, "because the future is what we are engaged in building right now."

> To be an engineer of human souls means standing with both feet firmly planted on the basis of real life. And this in its turn denotes a rupture with romanticism of the old type, which depicted a non-existent life and non-existent heroes, leading the reader away from the antagonisms and oppression of real life into a world of the impossible, into a world of utopian dreams. Our literature, which stands with both feet firmly planted on a materialist basis, cannot be hostile to romanticism, but it must be a romanticism of a new type, revolutionary romanticism. We say that socialist realism is the basic method of Soviet belles lettres and literary criticism, and this presupposes that revolutionary romanticism should enter into literary creation as a component part, for the whole life of our Party, the whole life of the working class and its struggle consist in a combination of the most stern and sober practical work with a supreme spirit of heroic deeds and magnificent future prospects. Our Party has always been strong by virtue of the fact that it has united and continues to unite a thoroughly business-like and practical spirit with broad vision, with a constant urge forward, with a struggle for the building of communist society. Soviet literature should be able to portray our heroes; it should be able to glimpse our tomorrow. This will be no utopian dream, for our tomorrow is already being prepared for today by dint of conscious planned work.[62]

This commitment to the future, enunciated, in Stalin and Zdhanov's cultural pronouncements in the thirties and forties, was expressed from the first days of the October Revolution. Despite the formal contrast between the work of

[62] Andrei Zdhanov joined the Bolsheviks in 1915 at the age of 19, and rose through the ranks of the Party and the State after 1917. A. A. Zdhanov, 'Soviet Literature - The Richest in Ideas, the Most Advanced Literature' in Gorky, Radek, Bukharin, Zhdanov and others, *Soviet Writers' Congress 1934*: *The Debate on Socialist Realism and Modernism,* London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977, pp.15-26.

El Lissitsky or Vladimir Tatlin, the theatre of Vsevolod Meyerhold, or the poetry of Vladimir Mayakovsky in the 1920s, and the formal qualities of 'socialist realism' during Stalin's supremacy. The Soviet approach to cultural production remained the same from decade to decade. Revolutionary Russia, and the Soviet Union from its inception, were founded on the certainty, expressed by the Party and its leaders, that all the struggles and sacrifices of the present would be redeemed in (what proved to be an ever receding) future. It was this intoxication with the future, which fuelled the idealism and voluntarism of Bolshevism from the first days to the last. Its temporal conception is almost Biblical.

It is certainly true that human beings cannot do anything at all without the future – from the simplest intention to the most complex plan some anticipation of the probable result or outcome is necessary. All ideas are, of course, immaterial or metaphysical, and the future is an idea essential to human existence. However, the problem comes, as it did with the Bolsheviks, when an entire set of social and material relationships is imagined and a 'plan' is embarked upon which involves shoehorning the entire existing reality – the entire society – into some predetermined set of imagined social relationships foretold by one's theory of how things should be. Lenin, Trotsky, Dzerzhinsky, and Stalin believed in hammering the state, society, and social relationships, into the required shape. The 'plan' was always a plan for the future into which the present had to be rammed at gunpoint.[63]

Today's apologists for Bolshevism tell us that because nobody was killed during the entry of the Red Guards into the Winter Palace, and only two of its women defenders were raped, that the Revolution was non violent – indeed only a few bystanders were shot when the Bolsheviks dissolved the Constituent Assembly three months later. They argue that the civil war, 1917-1922, was fought against anti-Semitic generals, leaving the Menshevik, anarchist, and

[63] This approach can be seen time and time again, most notably in Nicolae Ceaușescu attempt to modernize Romania's peasants by demolishing their villages and housing them in tower blocks. Then there were the vast tragedies of Mao Zedong's *Great Leap Forward*, or Pol Pot's *Year Zero*, in which the voluntarism of communist leaders resulted in many millions of deaths as they attempted to remodel their respective societies entirely by fiat.

various nationalist forces – Poles, Ukrainians, Georgians, and several others, including vast anti-Bolshevik peasant jacqueries, and workers' riots, quietly to one side. Most peculiar of all the modern defenders of Bolshevism who are all, to a radical man and woman, defenders of free speech, free trade unions, and human rights, give Lenin and Trotsky and Stalin a free pass in the months of the Red Terror, September and October 1918, and during the years of War Communism 1917-1921.

These apologists often talk about the "eventual defeat of the Revolution" so that they can talk of the enthusiasm, the creativity, the audacity, and idealism of Bolshevism, and in so doing can glide gracefully over the fact that the October Revolution did not produce the emancipation of the workers and peasants on the conquest of state power, or at any point in the revolutionary struggle even *tend* towards such an glorious outcome, but rather the reverse – it produced the absolute dispossession of Russia's labouring classes. But, from the point of view of the future, it was all bloody marvelous! They can do this because, like Zhdanov, they believe in criticizing Bolshevism from the perspective of its future. Today, a hundred years after the event and 26 years after the disappearance of the Soviet Union they are compelled to do this from Bolshevism's *inspiring potential*, rather than its actual future – which is now known to all. This can only be explained by the peculiarity of the conception of futurity employed by the Bolsheviks and formalized by Zhdanov – the criticism of literature, artworks, political practice and society, not from the materials, practice, or society that we have in front of us, but from the point of view of future works, future practice, and future social relations.

This reminds me of the syndicalists of the Industrial Workers of the World, in the United States, who a few years before the October Revolution used to sing with proletarian irony about Christian futurity, without anticipating that the Bolsheviks would very shortly throw up an unnervingly similar but thoroughly materialist promise.

> Long-haired preachers come out every night,
> Try to tell you what's wrong and what's right;
> But when asked how 'bout something to eat

They will answer with voices so sweet:

You will eat, bye and bye,
In that glorious land above the sky;
Work and pray, live on hay,
You'll get pie in the sky when you die.[64]

This was certainly the predicament of millions of Soviet peasants and urban workers from October 1917 onwards. There will be freedom and abundance in the future comrades, but for now, during the epoch of socialist construction, police supervision, obedience, fourteen-hour shifts, the execution of twelve-year-olds, labour camps, rags and short rations, will suffice.

This is the reason that when the socialist future was delayed, the explanation for the delay was always found in causes other than communist commitments or practice. The criminality, riots, rebellions, massacres, famines, bread queues, summary executions, labour camps, dictatorship, corruption or other institutional disorders, which have always accompanied communist rule since October 1917 are never the result of revolutionary policy or decisions, but are, on the contrary, always the result of sabotage by spies or *agent provocateurs*, unpropitious material circumstances, low levels of consciousness among the masses, the machinations of capitalist foes, or are simply untrue – lies or grotesque exaggerations spread about by our enemies.

The legacy of Bolshevism is this voluntarism – the belief that simply by determining a line of march and then, with the support of the class conscious minority, dragooning the entire population, along the route prescribed by the Party, a new and better society can be realised. The very simplicity of this idea is the source of its abiding appeal – it is the product of a mode of idealism in which what is thought can be realised simply because it can be thought.

There is no point at all in counter factual histories or in considering what the Bolsheviks might have done differently. The Russian Revolution and the communist takeover of the Revolution are for good or ill what actually

[64] 'Long Haired Preachers' by F. B. Brechler, subsequently credited to Joe Hill, from the *Little Red Songbook* of 1911, in Edith Fowke and Joe Glazer, eds, Songs of Work and Protest, New York, NY, 1973, p. 157.

happened. A century on from these events, however, the vital lesson of Bolshevik experience is that the arbitrary decision to assert their mastery over the situation, did not put them in control of events. The Jacobinism of Lenin and Trotsky's political practice was not a product of either man's character. It was not a personal foible – or a desire for the hiss of the guillotine or the rattle of firing squads, nor of their predilection for tyranny. On the contrary, their decisive actions, their voluntarism, was inspired by their attempt to grasp hold of events and lead society towards the emancipation of the working class.

It led them, instead, through a whirlwind of bloodshed and terror, down a path none of the participants anticipated, or ever wanted to go. War and famines swallowed up millions leaving the revolutionary streets and railway stations of Russia, and it's dependant territories, haunted by literally millions of orphaned children. Called the 'unattended' (*besprizorniki*) by the Bolshevik authorities these kids, boys and girls, were driven into stealing, begging, and prostitution, throughout Soviet territory – a social catastrophe perpetuated by upheaval and chaos well into the nineteen twenties and thirties.

Hillel Ticktin, writing of the shocking aftermath of the October Revolution pondered the Bolshevik's predicament when he asked rhetorically in 2001:

> Were Lenin and Trotsky correct to take power then? Undoubtedly, in my view, but it was a much bigger gamble than they expected, in every way. Would anyone go for a revolution knowing that seven million would die as a result in civil war, and millions more later?[65]

It's an interesting question, which I suspect many Bolsheviks would have answered robustly in favour of not putting a price on "the liberation of mankind". Indeed, Lenin put it this way:

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[65] Hillel Ticktin, 'Lessons of the Russian Revolution', *Weekly Worker*, 30th August, 2001.

> The cruelty of our life, necessitated by conditions, will be understood and justified. Everything will be understood.[66]

It seems that Lenin believed that the shootings, the famines, and the terror, were a price worth paying. It also seems that Lenin's prediction regarding being "understood" by posterity was borne out, at least in Ticktin's case. Because despite Hillel's concern over the dead millions, in common with many other apologists for Bolshevism (and their silence about the predicament of the orphaned multitude), he believes that the seizure of power by a tiny fraction of the population was justified by exigency, and by what this embattled minority might have delivered in the future.

The October Revolution and the political traditions emanating from it have made it clear that for communist revolutions to achieve what they set out to do, ways must be found to ensure that the overwhelming majority of the population is on board with the programme – in our case, the many hundreds of thousands of petit bourgeois proprietors, along with the millions of people in the middle classes, and the great majority of the working class. The extension of democracy to the workplace and the management of the economy as a whole – communism – is only possible and practicable with the full engagement and active participation of the population in general, and no amount of voluntarism on the part of even hundreds and thousands of revolutionary enthusiasts can compensate for that deficit.

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