FROM THE ARCHEOLOGY OF MARXISM AND COMMUNISM

(15,950 words, 2009-15)

Part 1. *Phases and Characteristics of Marxism/s*[*/]

Y croaban las estrellas tiernas.
(And the tender stars croaked.)
Federico García Lorca, *A Poet in New York*

On Marx, "Marxism," and History

For the last quarter of a century we have been witnessing an understandable, although unsavoury, spectacle that can be called "poisoning the wells." Wells are poisoned in war so that no one should drink from them, and the victorious turbo-capitalism fears that Marxism might nonetheless raise one of its nine hydra heads again and obstruct the profitable democide and ecocide. That is why, to the reasonable contradictions that can (and must) be articulated within Marxism, tons of garbage are added in order to poison it. This article is, therefore, a minor act of hygiene.

Our primary concern must be the fact that Marx's historical expectations, sometimes even prophecies, not only failed to come true in 125 years since he died, but also seem to be farther away from being fulfilled in these last decades than ever before. We could answer, with Badiou, that no scientific hypothesis can be definitely rejected until such a successor appears who would encompass and surpass it (like Einstein did with Newton). This hasn't happened with Marxism, so it remains, as Sartre already put it back in the 1950s and Jameson has been repeating up to the present, the farthest horizon of every liberatory thought on social justice. I agree with Badiou, Sartre, and Jameson, but here I would like to touch upon those characteristics of either Marx's system or Marxism (or Marxisms!) that have so far been proven wrong.

The first is the excessive optimism that a combination of scientific-cum-critical philosophy and proletarian revolt would relatively quickly succeed in demolishing the production relations based on exploiting living labour – nowadays we could say: not only of the industrial proletariat, but of all who live from their work or work to live, as opposed to those living on capital invested or on salaries earned from serving capital (for instance, politicians and other supervising personnel). Apart from some glorious but relatively short-lived exceptions, the proletariat (and especially the peasantry, the main protagonist of all the communist revolutions in the 20th century in terms of numbers) has mostly worried about secure and well-paid city work. Critical science and philosophy, on the other hand, were founded on the "unhappy consciousness" in the only class that massively produced them, namely in the classical *citoyen* intellectuals defecting to the proletariat — such as not only Marx and Engels, but also Lenin, Trotsky or Luxemburg. This includes all the testimonies of that consciousness in art (say, in prose literature from Balzac and Stendhal, via the great 19th-century Russians from Tolstoy to Chekhov, and all the way to Proust, Dos Passos, Kafka, Joyce, and Brecht). It is precisely art in which this kind of consciousness still survives to some extent, whereas the bourgeois has declined from the *citoyen* into pure positivism and economism of victorious capitalism. The new global ruling class no longer acknowledges any kind of value

beside success measured in terms of profit. Its nihilism is governed only by the law of the infinite accumulation of capital, it is deaf and blind to the raging human and ecological costs it brings.

The second failure, not in Marx but in various Marxist movements, is a decisive shift in the main historical emphasis from his humanism, aiming at the liberation of labour, to the tendency toward a maximum of maximally cheap production – thus, toward "productivism" and "economism." This was greatly influenced by the fact that Marxist ideas came to power in the countries in which industrialization was just beginning, from the USSR and Eastern Europe (including Yugoslavia) to China and Vietnam, where it was certainly a precondition of any further development. But this shift was also exclusive, and coupled with the lack of deeper working-class roots made for a privatization of everyday life as the last haven, including frantic consumerism. Its historical perspective was a faith in ongoing and inevitable social progress. These three factors, namely productivism with economism, privatization with consumerism, and faith in automatic progress (that only needed the rule of the communist party), were all of bourgeois origin, and opened the door to the capitalist way of life.

A brief critical approach to the history of Marxism is therefore in order, one which would, as Karl Korsch and his German colleagues Brecht and Benjamin first realized it, apply Marx's slogan of "the ruthless critique of everything existing" to Marxism itself.

Marxism can be understood as a field of theoretical and practical forces that follow some variant of what they consider to be the main conceptions of Karl Marx's. Marx died in 1883 and left to future generations the only categorical apparatus for interpreting human society and its history that can seriously be taken into consideration. Which among Marx's categories are of central importance is still an unresolved question, but I dare say they can be divided into horizons and notions. His constant *horizons* are primarily the absolute immanence (this-worldliness) of human duration as *history* and the absolute necessity of the *liberation* of every individual, which in turn depends on the collective freedom of all people. The later *notions*, developed bit by bit, are: *the alienation of the creative possibilities* of the genus Homo present in the individual, *the mode of production* centered on the *dialectics of the production forces with the production relations*, and capitalism as a mode of production based on *the exploitation of the surplus labour* of the workers. A structuralist before structuralism, Marx dealt with the deep structure of human community in general and of capitalism in particular. His system was left unfinished, but it possessed two features of modern epistemological systems – open-endedness and contradictory, dialectical "thickness." Marx's opus demands a completion in the eye of a critical reader because every key process in it both is and is not the way it appears to be at first sight. Instead of being a monumental building, his great insights look more like a big and busy construction site – very promising if a reader-Marxist is willing to work on it himself.

Therefore, any ONE AND ONLY, DEFINITE AND FINAL MARXISM IS A MYTH: there are as many forms of Marxism as there are (for instance) forms of Christianity and Buddhism. Or, if we speak about science, there are as many Marxisms as theories of physics and animal evolution. Nevertheless, all the Marxisms are more or less successful members of a family that evolved from his open system (as is the case in the families of Christ, Gautama Buddha, Newton or Darwin). Thus, every phase of the Marxist movements found in the rich original epistemological (cognitive) model what the central interest and expectation, the "social mandate," of those classes--and eventually States--that adopted or could adopt Marxism, was looking for. On the other hand, Marx's model was, in my opinion, essentially straightforward (although quite elaborate) and consistent: its core discusses the alienation of human

possibilities, of the needs that had, after the Industrial Revolution, all become quite realisable, but were in capitalism blocked by its exploitation of living labour and by commodity fetishism. Therefore, Marx's core could act as an inspiration in the long duration and in different historical periods.

On this basis, and following in the footsteps of some other philosophers, I shall roughly divide Marxism into three spatiotemporal phases:

1) Early Marxism, approximately from 1878 to 1917: its site is Europe; the main force or leading institution is the German Social Democratic Party; the main events are the depression from 1873 to 1896, the rise of imperialism and party bureaucracy, World War 1.
2) Middle Marxism, from 1917 to 1956 or 1968: site: the whole world; main force or leading institution: Leninism and the Communist Party of the USSR; main events: the October Revolution and the inception of the USSR, the Great Depression of 1929, the rise of Stalinist counter-revolution and fascism, World War 2, the Chinese Revolution, the rise of the US empire.
3) Late Marxism, approximately from 1956 or 1968 to 1991: site: the whole world; main force: lacking; main events: the Cold War, the degeneration of the ruling communist parties, dissident attempts to reform it, the return of an utterly shameless form of capitalism and imperialism.

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Early Marxism

This period begins with the first partial systematization of Marx's system by his friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels in *Anti-Dühring*, published in 1878. Soon afterwards, in 1882, the first "Marxist" journal appeared, *Neue Zeit*, with Kautsky as its editor. In that phase was born "Marxism," namely a codification of Marx's opus in the form of a canonized "-ism" – which had great successes of mass penetration, but later on petrified in the USSR and in most of the communist parties of the second phase, and was questioned in the third (as is well-known, Marx himself stated that he was not a Marxist).

If we are to look for the basic characteristic of the incipient social democracy, we might find it in its social model of reductive economism and the *positivist* philosophy of progress. This was in line with "the social mandate" (a very mediated one, of course) of a politically organized working class and dissident bourgeois intellectuals at the time of the second Industrial Revolution, which historians also call "the nationalization of the masses." That historical block found in the Social Democratic Party the right machinery for the integration and identification of each member as well as for their collective and active membership. Its pillar was the type of "conscious worker," that is, an educated member of the political party and trade union that went along with it, and a disciplined follower of the newly-created party and trade union bureaucracy. The production forces therefore became "the basis" of society and of actions aiming at its change, and the production relations a sort of tethered balloon that moved along with the shifts in the basis. The project of emancipation largely lost Marx's anthropological horizons, founded in the nature of human possibilities, and turned into a mixture of economic and political factors predestined to lead to "socialism": the activists needed an economy and faith in victory, not a philosophy. Marx however had claimed the opposite, that "*history does nothing*; ... it is the

result of human praxis" -- for example of revolutionary praxis. By the way, except for half a dozen historical and militant writings and *Capital I,* Marx's works began to be reprinted only toward the end of this phase, after half a century of the "rodent critique of rats" (Marx's quip taken from Juvenal).

The intellectuals nevertheless needed a philosophy, and they got it in Engels's stark opposition between materialism, which was scientific and revolutionary, and idealism, which was neither; Plekhanov then simplified this opposition into "monism" (drawing on popular Darwinism). It should be noted that Engels, although he realistically and respectfully considered himself just a co-fighter of the great Marx, was an authentic genius, and – unlike Marx – he wrote clearly and comprehensibly. Thus, much the greater part of the "Marxism" in that first, as well as in the second, phase actually was "Engelsism." However, this type of doctrine lent itself to closed and over-simplified systematization, soon afterwards named "historical materialism" and "dialectical materialism." Since Engels was, quite rightly, eager to proselytize among the scientific intelligentsia, and considered them optimistically as the second pillar of the revolutionary party, the lure of scientism (thence "scientific socialism") and its firm "laws" also grew in his work and then in social-democratic — and later in communist — parties. Thence also his much too premature invention of a meta-philosophy connecting the whole nature to Marx's insights.

Engels died in 1895, one year before the economic depression of that whole generation ended and capitalism rapidly expanded, supported by, among other things, the great technological inventions at the beginning of 20th century: automobile, airplane, electrification. It is important to note that this whole first phase (and prior to it Marx himself) confined itself to Europe, with only marginal influence on the U.S.A., whereas the colonies were considered, until Marx's studies of Ireland and Russia and the works of Rosa Luxemburg, perhaps a dirty but necessary "civilizing job" of the bourgeoisie. The bureaucratized social democracy and its Second International got quite big crumbs from the table of that expansion, which they perceived as being much safer than the revolutionary adventures they still kept talking about. Therefore, in 1914 they did not oppose the outbreak of the World War, which would turn into a horrible slaughter (primarily of the proletariat). The marginal exceptions were extremely interesting, for they opened up the second era of Marxism: they were the Bolsheviks of V. I. Lenin, the Serbian socialists, and Luxemburg...

Middle Marxism

It has been correctly observed that Lenin's seminal organizational work *What Is To Be Done?* was published in 1903 and Einstein's *Special Theory of Relativity* in 1905, and that this comparison may appear odd only to the staunch followers of vulgar Marxism and staunch enemies of any Marxism. Lenin's relationship to Marx was very similar to the one between Einstein and Newton (and Badiou also adds the one between Saul of Tarsus and Rabbi Yehoshua, or St. Paul and Jesus, if you like). Einstein, of course, didn't abolish Newton, but his theory (to which he added *General Theory of Relativity* in 1916, just as Lenin added *Imperialism* and *State and Revolution* in 1916-1917) put into radical doubt some basic tenets of Newton's physics. Lenin's spacetime was no longer merely capitalism but the super-destructive imperialism, an epoch in which industrial progress brings at least as much mutilation as advancement of life (and this proportion has since World War 2, after a dip into the Welfare

State brought about by fear of communism, gotten much worse in today's Permanent Holy War). In Leninism, the colonized peoples were a kind of global proletariat, at least as important for a victorious revolution as the metropolitan (Euro-American) workers, who themselves drew some small profit from colonialism.

Furthermore, Lenin's realistic thesis that the industrial workers of Russia could at best arrive at the trade-union consciousness of a fight for wages unless socialist ideas were implanted into them from the outside, by an activist party, radically changed Marx's and Engels's optimism about the predestination of the proletariat for the "universal," that is, the emancipatory class. Lenin posed the question of the relationship between an organized avant-garde and the proletariat (in a broad sense), which runs through all the subsequent forms of Marxism until the present day and has in my opinion remained quite unsolved; he himself changed his views in periods of revolutionary upsurge, in 1905 and 1917. Lenin's Marxism is "Fordist," that is constructivist, on the model of a huge factory or construction site in which only the supervisory engineer can run the show. However, his "democratic centralism" does add a plan, brought about by means of an open debate from below and changeable through that debate, to the capitalistic self-will of a monarchic genius entrepreneur. As for the epistemological aspect, having gone through an early phase of rigid positivism, Lenin revisited Hegel's and Marx's dialectics during World War 1 and came to the conclusion that "an intelligent idealist critic is closer to an intelligent materialist one than a stupid materialist." This deviating disclaimer was accompanied by heretical theories on the possibility and necessity of a proletarian revolution in Russia, and thus with a praxis that dissociated itself from the social-democratic positivism of early Marxism.

Soon after the renamed "communist party" came to power in Russia and weathered the terrible civil war, Lenin died, and the construction turned into "the building of socialism," which characterized that phase from then onwards (and is nowhere to be found in Marx's works). The excommunicated theologian Loisy once observed that "Jesus was prophesying the coming of Heavenly Kingdom, and what came was the Church": Marx and Lenin were prophesying the liberation of labour, and what came was the dictatorship of the Party... I certainly don't mean to say that the result was black and white; on the contrary, in my opinion, the October Revolution was a necessary and, if you will, sacred liberating break, just as was the revolutionary war in Yugoslavia and in China**,** and then in Cuba and Vietnam. In the USSR from 1917 to 1929, and in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1941 to sometime in the 1970s, as well as in key periods of other revolutions, the Party was a two-headed Janus, who performed some important acts of emancipation and some significant acts of enslavement.[1] In brief, "middle Marxism" can best be understood as oscillating between the deeply democratic impulses of original plebeian Leninism and the harsh realities of keeping power which culminated in the Stalinist politocratic oppression of the people, resulted in arrested development, and eventually in an either controlled or uncontrolled return to capitalism.

The black face of Janus is mostly represented by Stalin, whose absolute power can be traced back to 1928/29. Under his rule, "histmat" and "diamat" led straight to his question in 1944, "How many divisions has the Pope?" which – when the production relations took their vengeance on the production forces – found its answer in the Solidarity movement: "more >divisions< than you." It was a pseudo-scientific positivism (therefore materialism) that wanted to leave some free space for a momentous change from and at the top (therefore history and dialectics). Contrary to this, Marx's epistemologically much more fruitful position was that "theory [or an idea, D.S.] becomes a material force when it grips the consciousness of the

masses"... Stalin's theory of history was an orgy of complete predetermination, supported by harsh tactical maneuvers devoid of any principle (what Marx called *begriffslos*) except keeping power. Essentially, this was a phase of a pseudo-scientific, atheistic faith, in the neutral sense of a belief in something that didn't exist but still led to enormous practical consequences (for example, enthusiastic sacrifice). By the way, some of Marx's main works (as the *1844 MS.* and *Grundrisse)* were only now rescued from the dusty critique of antiquarian bookshelves.

However, it should be stressed that Tsar Koba the Terrible managed to build, if not socialism, then at least a collectivist industrialism within the confines of one huge country, owing to which the West and the USSR succeeded in defeating Hitler – no small accomplishment. What kind of social system was actually formed under his rule isn't yet clear, although it is quite clear it was based on a violent primitive accumulation of capital at the expense of the working population and especially of the peasantry. Suffice it to say that those rigid forms of production relations could not compete with the development of the production forces in capitalism, especially after the 1950s, and that they perished in that duel. "The social mandate" was (just as in SFRY and China) the guarantee of a secure working place and overall social services (including education as the main road to social progress) that, regardless of how primitive they may have been in some countries, provided for the masses of peasants who swarmed into the cities.

On the whole, "middle Marxism" played the leading role in the greatest social advancement of the lower classes in the history of humanity. At the top, however, a new ruling class, a politocracy, got firmly established. Further, it was inextricably tied to low-productivity Stalinist economics, which ceased to be workable after a middle phase of industrialization, so that the rulers eventually came to the conclusion they would be much safer as a capitalist bourgeoisie – even as a comprador one, that is, a servant to metropolitan goverenments and corporations, as in Eastern Europe.

Late Marxism, and a Retrospective as a Perspective

It is still not clear whether the end of the "Leninist" phase should be situated in the year 1956 or 1968. Historical periods don't end on a particular day, so we could compromise by saying that in different countries this phase ended at different times. However, in a rather united world, where Khrushchev's abjuration of Stalin in 1956 didn't break the stasis in USSR society, perhaps a more suitable turning point are the years around 1966 to 1968: the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in China, of the student rebellions culminating in 1968 (the first world-wide, at least apparently anti-capitalist movement after anarchism opposed to the communist parties and to the official Marxism of the first two phases), the suppression of Dubček's reform in Czechoslovakia and the stall of Yugoslav self-management as an expansive system, and so on. The final nail in the coffin of this rich and contradictory interregnum was the Oil Crisis in 1973, and then the victory of the oligarchy in P.R. China.

The basic question of Late Marxism was how to unblock the frozen and hateful model of Stalin's counter-revolution, which had nullified Lenin's glorious beginnings. The search for a new "subject of revolution" that would stand in place of, or at least next to, the unsuccessful industrial proletariat was frantic: the proletariat in the sense of all the working and/or poor people; technicians and intellectuals; Mao's "planetary village;" women (in the variant provided by socialist feminism); the "coloured" peoples or ethnic groups; even Marcuse's students or

sexual minorities (which was a bit desperate). Since all that failed, it turns out that the problem might have been deeper, and perhaps didn't lie in the Subject but in the Manner. Perhaps the bottleneck determining the mode of social production – or the production of society – is no longer the Production Forces, which in a developed capitalism already potentially surpass the needs of humanity, but its co-equal, the Production Relations, namely the relationships among people that are specific of a particular phase of the production possibilities?

Taking production in the broadest sense of "the production of human life," that Marx and Engels were fond of, I understand it in two different ways. The ***first,*** narrower and direct, type of production relations central to Marx's thought is collective ***self-governing*** from bottom up and all the way up to the pinnacle of power, which he enthusiastically hailed in the Paris Commune, and Lenin fully accepted (until he sank into the mire and blood of the struggle for survival). This idea soon became a taboo in the USSR and further, except in the dissident little group of "council communists" (Pannekoek, Gorter, Mattick). Since Kidrič[2] – and later on Kardelj – reinstated it in 1950, supported by Tito, I shall from here on take the example of SFR Yugoslavia as illustrative for all the "socialist" countries (although the Chinese Cultural Revolution deserves a meticulous analysis too). In the SFRY, enormous resistances within the politocracy froze self-government mostly on the factory level, where it couldn't have a decisive influence. This, in my opinion, points to the ***second***, indirect and neglected, field of the production relations, that is, to a plain deficit within "socialism" of plebeian democracy from bottom up within the necessarily conflictual decision-making of society as a whole: in the commune, in the mass media, in the political organizations, in the parliament, and on all the mediating levels, crucially including its leading institution of the allegedly avant-garde and actually ruling communist party. Emancipated relationships within industrial and other direct production cannot properly develop without such societal discussion, which would be at least as free as in parliamentary capitalism (or in USSR 1921-26, or in Cuba 1961-64).

By the way, Marx's other main works managed only in this phase to slip through the meshes of hatred and obscurantism and to be published.

Why did the freezing of integral self-government succeed in Yugoslavia? Because the forces in the League of Communists that were in favour of it (a minority group of people often identified as close to Kardelj and Bakarić) couldn't manage, or so they claimed, to break a stubborn resistance from the greater part of the leadership right below the Executive Committee of the LCY. How could they have broken it? Well, as in any effective strategy, by finding allies. Who could have been those allies, besides the advanced workers, already committed and neutralized? Obviously only two: the working peasants and the intelligentsia. How could they have been activated? By granting them freedom of active participation in policy-making within the boundaries of the SFRY Constitution (which, as in any other country, should be safeguarded and defended). This meant not only the freedom of expressing opinion, which did exist in the SFRY to a fair extent – certainly to a greater extent than in any other "socialism" except perhaps Cuban (although the offensive legal paragraph on thought crime should have been abolished). It meant further the formulation of rules for organizing lobbies, small groups capable of exerting pressure on the government to implement certain measures, together with rules governing their access to the mass media. Such lively democratization could have overcome the historical difficulty that has always dogged factory workers, their inability to move alone, without a strong ally, from strikes in factories to power in the State. The development of each "socialist" State, from the USSR to China and Cuba, can be seen as a race between the two poles of an ***integral self-government with efficient planning*** (in production and civil society) and the spontaneous

tendencies toward capitalism inherent in rightly repudiating Stalinist terror in favour of a consumers' market on a capitalist globe.

Yet within a Party State, all would have eventually come to nothing if such discussions couldn't have been transferred into the Party (LCY). It would have been necessary to repristinate the freedom of organizing factions and wide debates that was the norm in the Marxist movement, not only during the lives of Marx and Engels, but also throughout its history until the year 1921, for example before each (frequent!) party congress. In that year, faced with huge economic chaos and the decision to allow capitalist trade and economy below the "commanding heights" of State power, Lenin believed the Party should deny itself the luxury of factions for ONE YEAR, and had a one-year ban voted by the congress of the Russian Communist Party. Stalin surreptitiously grinned and made sure it would never be removed: this became his watchword of "monolithism." Unfortunately, Tito was a staunch proponent of this principle, understandable and useful in Yugoslavia until 1945, and perhaps as late as 1950, but utterly counterproductive afterwards.

Therefore, the breakdown around 1990 – and here I go back to the whole of late Marxism – was twofold, and thus very deep. First, it was a politico-economical breakdown, fairly obvious in the enthusiasm of people from the relatively successful GDR when the Berlin wall was dismantled. In addition, it was an ideologico-philosophical breakdown: the entire "scientific paradigm" of Marxism from all its three phases crumbled, I think forever.

If I may get somewhat autobiographical: when I learned in 1989, as a Canadian visiting professor in Germany, that Tudjman had won the elections in the then federal unit of Croatia, I wrote the poem "Apparitions" (it can be found at the end of my book of verse *Armirana Arkadija*, Zagreb 1989). As its epigraph, I put a quotation from the Croatian 19th-century poet Kranjčević, in which the Lord says to Moses:

> Perish you shall when you begin
> Yourself in your ideals to disbelieve.

Let me translate this into prose: Marx and Lenin experienced a number of bitter political and economical defeats, for instance, in the years 1848, 1871 and 1905; so did the communist party of Yugoslavia from 1921 to the mid-1930s. However, the horizon for further efforts remained untouched, only some paths leading to it were in need of reformulation. Now the horizon too needs reformulation.

This can be done under two conditions. First, we must relinquish neither Marx nor the lessons – for better or worse – from the history of Marxism, especially the one concerning the role and profile of the avant-garde party.

Example: What were Marx's most important sources? According to Engels, those were German philosophy, French political thought, and English political economy (as if at a Congress of the Second International); Lenin repeated this in one of his famous articles that served in "middle Marxism" as an introduction to every Marx anthology. Yet many scholars have shown, in my opinion convincingly, that the deepest politico-philosophical influences on young Marx, the ones that stuck with him throughout his life and that can be detected in his early studies and writings (only recently published in their entirety) are the following: Aristotle, especially his category of Possibility (*dynamei on*); Epicurus, especially his cosmological explanation of freedom as a deviation or deflection from a straight line (Lucretius translated it as *clinamen*, an inclination or swerve); Spinoza, especially his emphatic negation of the religious justification

for social contract; and, of course, his principal Great Ancestor Hegel, especially his dialectical method as an inextricable synthesis of logic, ontology, and axiology (in which no meaningful discussion on Being is possible without a discussion on Value). No doubt, Marx upgraded all that through his studies of the French revolutionary tradition, from Rousseau to Babeuf, and of the "utopian socialists"; and when he devoted himself to the study of capitalism, he turned to Ricardo and Smith. Judging by all these sources, the worst of all the possible worlds for Marx would be one in which there would be no possibility of liberation from the corruption of Value caused by Alienation; therefore, he devoted all his adult life to studying the mysteries of capitalism! We must follow him in that endeavour – and complement him. Let us rephrase his famous (perhaps somewhat too famous) *11th Thesis on Feuerbach* as "the Marxists have interpreted Marx; the point is to change him" – while preserving his constant emancipatory and epistemological horizon. For what Freud so elegantly called *Trauerarbeit* -- a psychological working-through and working-out of the mourning after the death of a person important and dear to us, so that we could bear the loss -- the time is over.

Second, we must complement our epistemology (philosophy of cognition) with insights that are not only adequate to the age of the theory of relativity and cybernetics, internet and genetic manipulation, but also adequate to the dying, and extremely dangerous, beast of financial capitalism, of its global terrorism and warfare. Marx's constitutive epistemological rule may be phrased as: the object of knowledge is judged by looking backward from the future possibilities, which in feedback with the object provide the normative criteria for judgment.

Politically, this means insisting on a full and mainly direct organized democracy -- not at all forgetting class interests, but integrating them with all the other (gender, ethnic, etc.) interests of individual self-determination and living labour. As Kouvelakis concludes his book: "communism [is] the never-ending, self-critical return of the democratic revolution."

However, this requires a separate study. A remark: probably not much time is left.

Yet should we succeed, we could verify two of the best classical insights into true Marxism. The first is from Labriola: "Marx's writings are fragments of a science and a politics which is in constant becoming; and which others—and not the first best—should and could continue" (*On Socialism and Philosophy*). The second is Sartre's optimistic view in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*: "far from being exhausted, Marxism is still very young, almost in its infancy; it has scarcely begun to develop."

By the way, of the new and finally (one hopes) properly edited *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe (Complete Works*) being published by the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, foreseen for 114 volumes, 58 have been published so far.

Notes

*/ I don't wish to burden this brief essay with footnoting except where I must, but I have profited much (even where I disagreed) by many old works, and not a few recent ones, in particular by Alain Badiou, Daniel Bensaïd, Charles Bettelheim, Jacques Derrida, Stathis Kouvelakis, Lars Lih, and David F. Noble. My immediate biggest debt is to the hugely catalytic Costanzo Preve, whose tripartite historical scheme and many particular observations I follow, while disagreeing with his overall conclusion. The citation from Kouvelakis is from his *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx,* transl. G.M. Goshgarian, London: Verso, 2003.

1/ I have expatiated upon this with reference to Yugoslavia in "15 Theses about Communism and Yugoslavia, or The Two-Headed Janus of Emancipation through the State." *Critical Q* 57.2 (2015): 90-110.

2/ See my article "Ekonomsko-političke perspektive Borisa Kidriča" ["The Economico-Political Perspectives of Kidrič"], *Zarez* [Zagreb], 28/4/2011, pp. 10-11, now part of my book *Splendour, Misery, and Potentialities: An X-ray of Socialist Yugoslavia* (now at Brill, 2016, and Haymarket P, 2017).. For the above approach, see also the essays "Living Labour and the Labour of Living" in my book *Defined by a Hollow,* P. Lang, 2010; "Communism and Yugoslavia" in my book *Darko Suvin: A Life in Letters*, ed. P.E. Wegner, Paradoxa, 2011; and "From Death into Life: For a Poetics of Anti-Capitalist Alternative" and „Brecht and Communism" in my book *In Leviathan's Belly: Essays for a Counter-Revolutionary Time.* Wildside P for Borgo P, 2012.

Part 2. *On the Concept and Role of the Communist Party: Prehistory and the Epoch of October Revolution*[*/]

> Multum mihi negotii concinnabis et… magnam me litem ac molestiam impinges, qui mihi tales quaestiunculas ponis, in quibus ego nec dissentire a nostris salva gratia nec consentire salva conscientia possim…. [N]ostros iudico in hoc descendent quia iam primo vinculo tenentur et mutare illis formulam non licet.
>
> *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*
>
> [With the queries you put to me, you involve me in a serious difficulty and… in a huge and noxious dispute: for I cannot dissent from my teachers while remaining in their graces nor can I agree with them while following my conscience…. I hold they arrive at such a position because they are stuck with their beginnings and do not feel they can change that formula.
>
> Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*, ca. 65 C.E.]

1. On Marx's Communism and on Parties

> From Marx, we are now returning to Marx.
> R. Rossanda, 1969

Marx's cognitions and stance are central to this section both as subject and object.

1.1. The idea of *communism* has a history at least as long as class society. Defined as common property of means for life in the name of natural justice, it was a chthonic yearning and a permanent tendency in sects and revolts, and in writings such as those of Plato, Seneca, and *Acts of the Apostles* speaking of early Christian communities (cf. the classical Beer, and Draper 59-62) its latency was transmitted to the Middle Ages and later. Virgil put it most pithily:

> ne signare quidem aut partiri limiti campum
> fas erat: in medium querebant, ipsaque tellus
> omnia liberius nullo poscente ferebat.
> [neither was it proper to designate or divide the ground with borders; the yield was held in common, and earth itself offered all products spontaneously, without any effort — *Georgics* I: 126-28]

This tradition was taken up around the time of the French Revolution, most lastingly by Rousseau and Babeuf. When Marx was immersed in the radical workers' and intellectuals' groups and circles of early 1840s' Paris, he took the name of "communist" from those who preferred it to the lukewarm views of "socialists" (cf. Kouvelakis and Grandjonc). He then went on to systematize it by breaking, as these groups did, with the old organic metaphor of a body politic of which all people were members, and by postulating a radical conflict: first in opposition to class power in politics and then to the whole capitalist system of human relationships. This grounded communism not only in common property of means and fruits of labour but also in the overthrow of workers' alienation and exploitation. It meant that "a critical communism… from being a hope, aspiration, remembrance, conjecture or expedience, for the first time [became] the consciousness of being the end and solution of current class struggles" (Labriola 7-8). The bottleneck and narrow gate of history was to be a movement toward a sweeping *social revolution* to end the capitalist mode of living (and all class rule) and make for a reign of justice. Its possibilities were triangulated between the depth class confrontations, the consciousness the working classes acquired about it, and their translation into contingent politics.

I shall not deal here with the history of the many workers' and socialist (soon to be called social-democratic) parties in the 1871-1914 period, when the revolution was postponed to St. Nevercome's Day. I wish to focus on the *central split* between "the two souls of socialism -- socialism from above and socialism from below" (Draper). "The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves" (MEW 16: 14) is the first sentence of Marx's *Rules* for the First International, and embodies his life-long stance that socialism shall be brought about through the activity of large plebeian groups from below. The needs and interests of the large social majority will, by means of people's creativity, finally lead them to overthrow the class system.

The dilemma is clearest when put into the terms of relation between *collective equality* and *personal freedom*. Marx started out from the axiom of emancipating human personalities, which could only be done by collective action. His was the decisive turning point towards a balance between these two ideals, in which communism would be permanently wed to freedom, and the freedom of each person in feedback with the freedom of all. After the Paris Commune, he believed the return of productive surplus value into the hands of the direct producers should be based on a direct and associational democracy exercised by them (and the Lenin of *State and Revolution* agreed).

1.2. *Parties*: a letter by Marx to Freiligrath of Feb. 29, 1860, distinguishes between a "party" in the ephemeral sense of the 1847-52 League of Communists -- for which he wrote the *Manifesto* -- and to which he won't belong again (though he was to be active in The Workers' International Association from 1864 on), and "the party in the broad historical sense" of people on one side of an ongoing central social conflict, to which he does not cease to belong (MEW 30: 488-95, cf. Hobsbawm, *How* 60, and García Linera 82). Marx held to this constantly, thus in the letters to Lassalle and Weydemeyer in roughly the same years; from that broad sense the German *Partei ergreifen* and the French *prendre parti* (taking a committed or partisan stand) arose. In Engels's letter to Marx of Feb. 13, 1851, the reasons for their ironic stance toward "ephemeral" parties are explained: "How could people like us, who shun official situations like the plague, belong to a party?" (MEW 27: 189-91). At the time, they saw no necessity to theorize further about parties. However, when a new tide arose, Marx persuaded a conference of the International in 1871 to adopt the statement: "the working class cannot act, as a class, except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes; … [this] is indispensable to ensure the triumph of the social revolution and its ultimate end -- the abolition of classes" (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/09/politics-resolution.htm); and in 1895 Engels defined parties as "the more or less adequate political expression of [existing social] classes and fractions of classes" (*Marx-Engels* 407, MEW 22: 510; cf. also Johnstone "Marx," and Molyneux 21-22 and 26-27).

Nonetheless, everybody in the workers' movement knew that the only way to emancipation lies through their ***associating***. Thus organisations remained inevitable, even when the restricted sense of political parties was becoming dominant, and then almost exclusive, with the rise of more or less bourgeois parliamentary governments.

A communist or socialist party was supposed to be the tool to help the revolution by streamlining and reinforcing the activity of the working classes, but it often became a tug-of-war between this aim and a temptation to have a conscious and organized elite hand down socialism/communism from above to the neither equally conscious nor equally active masses. In utopias this split can be seen in the antithesis between William Morris's and Edward Bellamy's writing (see on them, and other utopians from More to Fourier, Suvin *Metamorphoses*). In this permanent tension, since the German Social-democracy and Lenin's Bolsheviks, not to speak of the utter Stalinist degeneration, as a rule the pull toward more or less authoritarian organization won out. It was based equally in the libido of power and privilege by the parties' leadership and in the millennial expectation of the plebeian masses for a Saviour from on high that Lukács later rightly repudiated as "messianic utopianism". Gramsci also noted that "the determinist, fatalist, mechanist element has been an immediate ideological >aroma< of [Marxism], a form of religion and a stimulant (but like a drug) necessitated and historically justified by the >subaltern< character of certain social strata" (*Q* 1387-88, *Modern* 691 — see on both 3.2).

Weber's disenchanted look then defined parties as voluntary associations within an organisation (usually a national society) whose aim is "to secure power… for its leaders in order to attain ideal or material advantages for its members" (*Economy* 284, and the rest of discussion in this paragraph is from his section "Parties," 284-88; cf. also 984-85). Thus all parties are "patronage" ones, but some -- that mainly "act in the interests of a status group or a class" -- are also "ideological." They exist because of a struggle for control of the societal organisation according to group or class interests. In all parties, there is "a central group of individuals who

assume the active direction of party affairs, including the formulation of program and the selection of candidates [for election]. There is, secondly, a group of >members< whose role is notably more passive, and finally, the great mass of citizens whose role is only that of objects of solicitation…." To bear the considerable election expenses, there arises a ">machine<, in which case the candidates become dependent on the party organisation." The orientation to power and the fierce struggle for it means that parties are usually organised in a chain of command, often a very tight one. His approach was exacerbated by the influential work of Michels in the 1920s, who factored in the bureaucratisation of the German Social-democracy, and to whom I shall return.

2. Lenin's Formulas for a Revolutionary Party

> [N]o one nowadays wishes to raise the unmentionable term "party": ….in a period whose political atmosphere is largely anarchistic (in the technical sense of the term), it is unpleasant to think about organization, let alone institutions.
>
> F. Jameson, 2007

2.1. Marx's optimistic assumption of a soon forthcoming fusion between the plebeians' social being and their consciousness was prevented by the new circumstances of massified imperialism with technologically upgraded armed forces, capillary cultural brainwashing, and a sweeping rise in social complexity (size and organization). A key organized mediation was becoming indispensable for a plebeian victory; this was most clearly the case in rotten empires such as the Russian one, ruled more by coercion than active consent, where a sweeping revolution was the only plebeian and democratic alternative. It was powerfully presented in theories of a revolutionary party by the genius of V.I. Ulyanov-Lenin. *What Is To Be Done* of 1902 began his lifelong wrestle with the crucial mechanism of organizing a vanguard party (cf. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered* 207-08, 473, 556, and passim; also Molyneux 36-71 and 83-95, Johnstone, "Strumento"); in this first variant it was to be an iron-clad organization of professional illegal "cadres" to steer worker rebellion. However**,** as of 1905 he changed his early opinion of worker subalternity in admiration of their 1905 (and then 1917) insurrectionary eagerness, the cadre variant was considered by him out of date for times when the party became legal, and he warmly advocated a democratic open structure, with election of all organs from below upward and proportional representation at yearly congresses (see for ex. his "The Reorganization of the Party," CW 10: 29-39). Lenin's central Novum of an activist party as the operative lever to prepare and direct the revolution, and then to defend and develop it, radically changed Marx's and Engels's optimism that industrial workers were the predestined emancipatory class. It heavily underscored the question of the relationship between an organized avant-garde and the proletariat (in a broad sense), that still remains quite unsolved in the Marxist tradition.

The culmination of political blueprint utopianism in the 20th century was Lenin's 1917 (uncompleted) booklet *The State and Revolution*, written under the twin impact of, on the one hand, barbarous World War and its annihilation of peaceful emancipatory horizons and, on the other, of his qualitative leap in understanding Hegel's dialectics, whence he heretically

concluded that a revolution in Russia was a possibility and a necessity. It posits, in strict accordance with the Marx after 1871, a full structuration from below upwards -- for ex. a republic of federated *soviets* (councils) and a universal civic militia instead of the army and police (cf. CW**)** of the future proletarian society when a giant development of productivity and "an enormous abundance and variety of political forms" will flower, with a State which is not a dominant apparatus and, importantly, the subordination of the party as educator to such historical class aims. It remained an "untried communism" (Cortesi 224-25 and 227, and cf. the whole section 224-35), "envisaging not only the liberation of the worker from the boss and of the subaltern from the system's fetishes, but the liberation of people from the State" (ibidem 235). This was torpedoed by savage warfare and economic chaos.

2.2. With the advent of horrific mass slaughter -- mainly of proletarians -- in the (First) World War the security some social-democratic parties had in the 1871-1914 period of European peace got for a higher stratum of industrial workers and their own apparatus dwindled in importance. The Bolsheviks and many others concluded that if all "civilised" governments and rulers could exterminate millions and mutilate many more in pursuit of power and profits, then socialists (oon to be called communists) could not retreat from any sacrifice to free humanity from such folly through a violence to end all violence. Marx's canonic "dictatorship of the proletariat," with the term from Latin history meaning power for a limited period, meant for Lenin unlimited power based as usual on the final threat of violence -- and Weber agreed, see *Politik* 8-9 and 55-57 -- but strictly exercised by the great majority against the oppressors (Balibar 250-53). "The components of modern political life," noted dispassionately Michels, "are in a latent state of warfare. The modern party is… *an organisation for struggle*." Therefore it had to be quick, disciplined, and hierarchic, in brief: centralised and up to a point bound to clear leaders or *Cäsarismus* (38-39). It necessarily secretes an elite, which however needs a broad basis for safety, binding to itself as many people as possible ideologically and even financially. Just as in the State and in the armed forces, the mediation between rank and file in political parties inevitably begets an administration or bureaucracy of lower officers and NCOs (164); Michels pointed to the European social-democracy and its paragon, the German party after 1872, as embodying an "iron law" of oligarchy in spite of its sincere original emancipatory roots. In fact, "any effective organization in modern industrial society tends to be bureaucratized in some degree": it oscillates between ineffective unlimited freedom and ossification (Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries* 54-55). Lenin's party was the only one trained for revolutionary power, and it became a beacon for much of the world's radicals (see Lukács, *Lenin* 26-32, 86-87, and passim).

After the Civil War in Russia 1918-21, enabled by massive US, French, and British financing of the Whites, "Not only was the country's economy in chaos but the cities were depopulated, the bourgeoisie destroyed,… while death and declassing had destroyed almost half of the qualified working force"; to the ca. 2.7 million dead in the World War an equal number of dead in the Civil War, plus a huge swath of material destruction, was added (Cortesi 771-72). The original utopian communism of Lenin's *State and Revolution* and the whole horizon of proletarian democracy had perforce paled for the exhausted victors. True, the Bolshevik Party grew from 250.000 members immediately after October 1917, and 620.000 in March 1920, to 1 million in 1927, but this also meant "the invasion of a politically illiterate mass, and the politically and ideologically expert elite… was being submerged by the mass roughness" (Lewin, "Alle prese" 18, and see Bettelheim 1: 292-328). The gap between up and down, the rulers and the proletarians, began yawning, violence and corruption became normal in the

growing bureaucracy against which Lenin fought a losing battle (cf. Suvin "Bureaucracy"). The party became fully enmeshed with the State, governing from the top downward.

2.3. In sum, Lenin held obstinately on to the binary concept of soviets plus the party, democracy plus firm dictatorial power in an emergency -- which for him dominated from 1918 to the end of his life; when Lenin was stymied by the conservatism of party professionals, as in mid-1917, he went over their head to the workers. However, in the emergency he was, like all great organizers, forced to stress the command aspect. One pole of Lenin's Marxism is "Fordist," that is constructivist, indeed productivist (cf. Sirianni 245ff.), tending to the model of a huge factory or construction site in which the supervisory engineer must run the show. However, his "democratic centralism" does add to the collective will of an elective elite also a plan, brought about by means of an open debate from below and changeable through that debate (cf. Bourdet 78-123, Harding 186-89). One of the sacrifices in and to the Iron Age was that Lenin's original, sincerely democratic centralism became in practice more and more simply centralism — first of the Communist Party as a whole, then after 1921 increasingly of its Central Committee and bureaucratic Secretariat, and finally issuing after 1927 in a full autocracy of Stalin, Tsar Koba the Terrible, a permanent if hypocritically undeclared martial law.

I cannot give here a full view of Lenin's stance. One not too Marxist Harvard professor has called the Leninist party form "a crucial world-historical >breakthrough<," comparable to the Industrial Revolution (Skocpol 24). It may be enough to mention that one, and possibly ***the***, major failing of Leninist practice (with some roots in Marxist triumphalism shared by him) was his lack of articulation what happens in the years and decades *after* the seizure of power — a long-duration "theory of revolution" having for its subject the class rather than the political vanguard (Rossanda 226). This led to the undialectical denial of the need for any society to openly manifest and resolve its inevitable conflicts, which is usually called politics and involves a plurality of collective subjects with due guarantees for a level playing field within the bounds of a constitutional project. This denial was quite at odds with the splendid horizon in *State and Revolution*, Lenin's bold and radical arrow of power going from the working masses upwards and dispensing with the State apparatus. However, the struggle for naked survival forced him to insist on building up a strong State apparatus, so that his furthest horizon of an ideal communist politics of *direct* democracy is usually forgotten (Russia had little tradition of associational democracy beyond the peasant *mir,* and Lenin underestimated it).

Raymond Williams once wrote a tragedy about Stalin. Its proper subject would be Lenin.

3. Around Lenin: Three Protagonists

> Every "theoretical" trend or difference of opinion must immediately fold back into organizational matters unless it is to remain mere abstract opinion….
>
> G. Lukács, 1922

3.1. The clearest alternative to Lenin on the radical Left seemed to be ***Rosa Luxemburg***, who judged his early projects in the light of the ossified bureaucracy of German social-democracy, thus favouring the spontaneous mass movement from below that would culminate in a general strike and foregrounding the dangers of centralism. However, finally their trajectories came rather near, for ex. in Lenin's slogan "All power to the Soviets!" (Rossanda 225, Frölich 220).

Luxemburg's alternative of independent and spontaneous mass actions was as one-sided as the worst bureaucratic centralism and was practically falsified in the fate of her communist group of 1918-19, which resulted in her defeat and assassination. Nonetheless, her vantage point enabled her to point out that a blind, boot-camp style obedience leads nowhere either. Early on, she pinpointed (cf. 89-93 and 103) Lenin's erecting in 1901-04 tactical considerations inside his party into an improvised theory, and he later came to agree with this. Quite rightly, she saw this can only be checked by nurturing critical Marxist forces inside the party and securing effective control of higher party organs from below (Frölich 100). While enthusiastically praising the October revolution as path-breaking and an enduring example for the world, and arguing for a new and united International, she went on to criticize "the Lenin-Trotsky notion of proletarian dictatorship" (131), and especially their limitation of free discussion: "Freedom is always only the freedom of those thinking differently… because this entails all that is educational, healing, and cleansing [for the most intense political education of the masses]" (134). The point was, alas, rendered moot by the fierce Civil War and economic collapse in Russia, and never picked up after Lenin's illness. For many reasons, Luxemburg's very early diagnosis therefore was correct: "In Russia the problem [of settling the score between capital and labour in the entire world] could only be posed. It could not be solved in Russia." (cited in Molyneux 105, and see his whole section 97-116) Her stance is therefore an excellent critique of all party and State bureaucracies, but it is not a realistic alternative to Lenin as far as organizing for power is concerned (cf. Cortesi 484-86).

However, her pitiless diagnosis of what might happen without civic freedom is indispensable for discussing power with freedom:

> Dictatorship of the *class*, not of a party or a clique. Dictatorship of the class, i.e. with the widest public opinion, with a most active and unimpeded participation of the popular masses, in limitless democracy…. Yes: dictatorship! But this dictatorship consists *in the way democracy is used*, not in its *elimination*…. (Luxemburg 138-39, and see 136)

Here could be placed a discussion of *Leon Trotsky*, a major revolutionary figure and prolific writer of great interest about Russia, communism, and politics; but in matters of party he did not add much to what he took to be Lenin's Bolshevism. When in power he stressed the dictatorship over the democracy, while in his struggle against Stalin he called for a return to factions and parties within the Soviets and the working class (cf. for the latter Molyneux 117-25).

3.2. *Georg Lukács* was a prominent cultural and political theoretician and a leader of the failed Hungarian revolution 1919; sidelined by the factional fight in exile, he devoted his major theoretical powers to literary history and criticism, re-emerging with political philosophy after 1956. His views about class and party were published in *History and Class Consciousness*, written 1919-22, which had a strong influence on German-speaking intellectuals, for ex. Benjamin, and half a century later the author contributed an excellent self-criticism to its re-edition ("Vorwort"). Most relevant for our theme are his epistemological insistence, against economism and social-democratic (and later Stalinist) "positive science," that "orthodoxy in Marxism relates exclusively to the *method…,*" that is, a proper use of dialectics (*Geschichte* 59), with a stress on the full impact of commodity economy and its reifying powers on all social

classes, including the proletariat—quite a pioneering feat. However, the proletariat, if helped to clarify its standpoint, can according to its deepest class interests best understand the necessities of societal development (267-68). Such a "messianic utopianism" ("Vorwort" 11 and passim) pushes to the extreme and thus reveals clearly the aporia of Bolshevism, whose exceptional encounter with the concentrated proletariat of a few big Russian cities in 1905 and then 1917-18 gave rise to this confidence, only to have the party and the Government nucleus retreat, after the exhaustion and declassing of the 1918-21 warfare, to the "strategic heights" strictly controlled by themselves. Thus Lukàcs's horizon proved mistaken, but his book was a precious indication of creative possibilities during and after Lenin, and was a sensation n when rediscovered in the early 1960s.

Lukàcs revered Lenin and Luxemburg as his two unforgettable contemporary teachers. He agreed with the latter that the party should be "the bearer of the proletariat's class consciousness, the conscience of its historical mission" (114), but found that her exclusively ideological stance bypasses the role of organization in the revolution and after it (425, 428-31, 440-42, 445). His take on Lenin's fusion of uncommon theoretical and practical capabilities was developed in a brief booklet on his thought (*Lenin*), which was much the best early introduction and remains indispensable.

3.3. *Antonio Gramsci* also adopted a dual stress on workers' councils from below and a party as a permanent persuader to coordinate their struggles, similar to the middle Lenin, and was judged by him in 1920 as nearest in Italy to his ideas on revolution. He eventually became a leader of the Italian Communist Party and remains its most prominent theoretician. Writing in Mussolini's prison, he managed to wittily fuse the "national-popular" urgency of Machiavelli's reliance on an armed citizenry as well as on a unifying "Prince" with the urgencies of plebeian revolution in his time, oriented towards economics -- for "the programme of [a radical, DS] economic reform is precisely the concrete way in which every intellectual and moral reform is presented" (*S* 133, *Q* 1561, translations in places modified) -- and towards the inevitable mediation of the revolutionary party.

Gramsci's rich observations on parties in general and a revolutionary vanguard in particular are embedded in an understanding of the complexity in modern capitalist society. It culminates in his theory of a ***hegemony*** that includes both cultural consent through civil society (*società civile*) and State coercion. This improved on Marx's and Lenin's model of proletarian dictatorship by richly articulating just what were its functions, between the poles of leading (*dirigere*) and commanding. The "virtuous relationship" between party and class means that the former leads by following depth movements delineated, if perhaps barely, in the latter and "ensures continuity and the regular accumulation of experiences" to the movement (*S* 189, *Q* 1634, cf. Tronti, col. 2 and 5). His civil society comprises not only the educational system and the communications media but also those social norms that embed production relations (his model is the Catholic Church in feudalism). In the wake of Marx's *18th Brumaire* and some indications of Lenin, Gramsci is thus the true ancestor of the important new theme of civil society, perverted in the 1980s by the "free marketeers." In such a vision, intellectuals -- not a free-floating social class but "organic" technical educators, recruited from all classes -- become the key factor, and the communist party functions as a collective intellectual in the axiological sense. It is, as Tronti cites him (col. 1, quote from *S* 146), ">a party that wants to found a State<…not to make itself the State." This penetrating lucidity, discarding (as did Luxemburg) the usual communist party distrust of intellectuals, also enabled Gramsci to become the first

Marxist thinker to discuss in "Americanism and Fordism" key strategic shifts in the capitalist organization of labour. His analysis is based **on** his familiarity with the Italian workers' movement, especially in Turin, and the fact that when the CP of Italy was formed with 40.000 members, 98% were workers and 0.5% -- only 245 people -- were intellectuals (Molyneux 161).

Much concerned with the degeneration of the III International and the Soviet State, Gramsci noted that "the way in which the party functions provides discriminating criteria" for clearly judging it: "When the party is progressive it functions >democratically< (democratic centralism): when the party is regressive it functions >bureaucratically< (bureaucratic centralism)" (*S* 155, *Q* 1691-92); and he asked pithily: "In the formation of [party] leaders… is it the intention that there should always be rulers and ruled, or is the object to create the conditions in which this division is no longer necessary?" (*S* 144, *Q* 1732) He pleaded for a "centralism in movement", that is, a dynamically adaptive one (*S* 189, *Q* 1634). In the contrary case of an ensconced compact bureaucracy reigning from above, the party becomes a deracinated executive -- that is, a policing—institution, and "its name of a political party is a pure mythological metaphor" (*S* 155, *Q* 1691-92, cf. Molyneux 157-59)

In sum, Gramsci managed to incorporate the useful points from both Luxemburg and Lenin into a synthesis which, though sketchy, has remained the best trampoline for thinking further.

3.4. Looking back at this sub-section, all three of its protagonists oscillated between a strong minority organization and a broad mass movement; the latter was always indispensable but proved by itself insufficient for coming to power when faced with Tsarist police repression, or in all revolutions and civil wars. Their embattled humanist historicism and plebeian faith is perhaps best articulated in Gramsci.

4. Stalinism

> The economic and social role of the Soviet bureaucratic caste is quite analogous to the role of the capitalist class, unless it is worse because of its omnipotence.
>
> Boris Kidrič, radical Yugoslav CP leader, 1952

4.1. The rise of Yossif V. Stalin (Djugashvili) to the undisputed master of the USSR in the 1920s happened in a situation of international failure of the first Leninist wave after 1918. Rebellions were put down in blood before they could become revolutions, and European capitalism was stabilized by US loans. The isolated USSR could look only to its own forces, but it was faced with the dilemma of an economically poorly developed country wishing to keep inner cohesion and independence: how to supply its growing population with goods and simultaneously accumulate enough capital for the rapid industrialization needed—not least for armed defence. Who was to pay for the hugely growing State apparatus and the heavy industry? After 1927, Stalin decided it should be the peasants, and mobilized the Party/State apparatus to take their raw materials without paying the normally requested price (cf. Nove 25).

Stalin's *Questions of Leninism* (in good part cribbed from a worker-writer shot in 1937, see Medvedev 820-23) posed in mid-'20s the bases of a practical doctrine in a repetitive party language that appealed to a wide structure of feeling in the enlarged, poorly educated party membership innocent of direct democracy, philosophy or a truly experimental approach. "Stalin's prose, interwoven with lists of apodictic affirmations and rhetorical questions answered by rigid assertions, lent itself extraordinarily well to the catechistic function assigned to it in all the parties of the III International;" concurrently, the horizon of utopian emancipation constant from Marx through Lenin was reduced to the bald statement "All depends on preserving and consolidating power" (Cortesi 581-82). This prose generalised the military metaphorics inherited from earlier Marxism, eventually bolstered by paleotechnics (as in "engineers of human souls" for writers), amid many religious reminiscences, including the insistent formulaic repetitions and sanctions by quotation from Holy Writ. Stalin also inherited from his schooling in the Tiflis Orthodox seminary, in whose upper classes the most important lectures were in "Dogmatic and Orthodox Theology," "Homiletics" (preaching rhetorics), and "Accusatory Theology and Russian Schismatics" (Ilizarov 206), a clinging to an elementary historicism and reduction of the controversial questions of a mass movement to a black-and-white orthodoxy of either-or, without mentioning opposing arguments (cf. Marek 72-73 and passim), often with much falsification. The success of the October Revolution and the confirmation of the USSR were taken as proof of the party's (practically, the leading nucleus's and Stalin's) correct understanding of history, and soon of infallibility.

As Lukàcs noted, Stalin abhorred mediations and yoked the crudest factual data to a propensity of inventing *ad hoc* "fundamental laws" -- of capitalism, or of socialism — or "iron laws" to clinch an argument: a reductive pastiche of Lenin's careful articulation of levels. In another involuntary parody of Lenin's slogan of "Soviet power plus electrification," the achievement of "socialism in one country" meant to him Party/State power plus industrialization. Logically, he claimed in his crowning *Short Course of the History of CPSU(b)* that social history is a science as exact as biology (cf. Marek 74-76). Brecht ironised the "spurious simplicity and lucidity" (Deutscher 271) of this style, in the safety of his diary:

> The author… is so to speak clear and vague, he hews his sentences with the axe…. Everything tends upwards, it is "a passage from an old qualitative state to a new qualitative state." The new one is of course of a better quality….

To the contrary, Brecht was led to reflect on true dialectics:

> Dialectical thinking corresponds to a differentiated society with strong productive forces which develop quickly in catastrophic form, amid wars and revolutions…. It is high time to deduce dialectics from reality instead of from history of ideas while picking out from reality only examples for the laws. (26: 358-19)

However, it ought to be acknowledged that Stalin did face, in a rough and ready way, and with a tactical guile his opponents lacked, central political knots of a country in upheaval of a "socialist primitive accumulation" -- often appropriating previously poor-mouthed general positions of Bukharin or the Trotskyists, but always with a maximum of violence. And there is no doubt that he was an impressive populariser and great communicator of a dogmatic kind**,** "a master at making platitudes seem important" (Medvedev 822).

This scientism-as-adhoc-improvisation hewed up reality to correspond to theory, and theory was in turn purged of all contradictions (cf. Bettelheim 2: 508-13 and 572-75). Stalinist wilful scientism created its own category system consisting exclusively of fetishised older terms, violently uprooted from Marxian soil: law, nature, society, productive forces, fact, development, progress... (see Kofler 72-74). This paradoxically resulted in increasing self-deception bordering on the one hand with abstract utopianism and on the other with most brutal terrorism (idem 90-91). No doubt, industrialization, including military production, and a cooperative-cum-technical upgrading of agriculture were absolutely essential, but the moral and material cost of the disastrous collectivization as well as of the demoralizing of urban society was way too high. It meant the rise of a very crude ruling oligarchy, and eventually a consolidated class of bureaucrats, technocrats, and police, deeply hostile to the plebeian-democratic horizon of the October Revolution but engaged in preserving some collateral effects: the rise of a strong USSR, industrialization, and a low quality but real Welfare State — as well as pseudo-Leninist rhetoric abroad. From the late 1920s to 1936 the urban population grew from 16 to 33%, the number of workers and employees from 11.5 to 40 millions (of which industrial workers rose from 3.8 to over 10 million — Wood 9), the clerical workers or professionals employed by the State, including families, from 4 to 14 millions (McNeal 59-60); in 1939 35.5 million people went to school. Yet the overall result can properly be called counter-revolutionary: as different from the French Revolution's "Thermidor" coup, this was a creeping process from the top beginning in 1921 and culminating in 1927 (Cortesi 700).

The best contemporary document about it is Rakovsky's letter from internal exile, which stresses the terrible decline in "the working masses'" militancy and a deep-rooted corruption as its effect. This meant that "the part of the working class which acceded to power became an agent of that power" instead of having it exercised by the class as a whole. The *nomenklatura* grew into a bureaucracy that enjoyed an official car, a good apartment, luxurious holidays, and a high salary (Bettelheim 2: 249 calculates the maximum spread in 1926 between the highest and lowest of the 18 categories already at ca. 1:15, while in 1950 it was 1:40 -- Ossowski 130). The class in power accordingly changed its mentality and mutated into "a new sociological category," servile toward above and dictatorial toward below, "which does not hesitate to use anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and hatred toward intellectuals." As opposed to Trotsky's illusions, Rakovsky concluded no political reform of that group was possible: at least ¾ would have to be fired and the powers of the rest strictly limited. Two years later, he memorably added: "From >a proletarian State with bureaucratic deformations< -- as Lenin defined our political form -- we are developing into a bureaucratic State with proletarian communist survivals" (cited in Sensini XLII; I have argued in "Bureaucracy" a new term should be found for this class of collective rulers).

Thus communism was falsified into "the mirage of a collective abundance, reached by a freezing of social rights won by the revolutionary movement,… including a *sine die* confiscation of the elementary freedoms of political expression, association, knowledge, and travel, of a free existential adventure" (Cortesi 725). Such economic reductionism was unable to cope with the problems of productivity and politics once a middle level of affluence was reached. It was exported into all components of the III International; and after 1945 into the "People's Democracies," with baneful effects most quickly visible in the Soviet empire's western reaches.

4.2. Stalin's autocracy can be dated 1928-53, but the Stalinist system, characterized by the pair "autocracy and industrialization" (Cortesi 709 and 719) plus systematic mass repression, survived purged of its mass-murder trait up to the insufficient attempt by Gorbachev to reform it. While doubts are allowable about the Bolshevik transition phase of 1921-27, I concur with Lewin that "Stalinism… was a phenomenon independent from and parallel to Bolshevism, which was simultaneously its grave-digger: Stalinism was a fully formed [different] system" (11; cf. Timpanaro 221 and Cortesi below) -- to which, one should add, a certain pragmatic originality of a gruesome kind cannot be denied. Under Stalin, up to 1941 one million Old Bolsheviks were "liquidated" (shot or put into concentration camps); while in the "People's Democracies" between 1949 and 1953 the Stalinists in power imprisoned and liquidated more communists than all the previous bourgeois regimes (Fejtö 1: 364).

Stalin's course was not without mass support in the USSR CP and the country, including the reconstituted industrial workers (of whom 8% were CP members, see Bettelheim 2: 338-40). He brought at least to the urban population a modest but clear rise of the overall living standard in comparison to the years of collapse, also reassurance through the theory of "socialism in one country" (see Deutscher 282-93), and initially he brought stability. The social system of ripe Stalinism from the 1930s on was "a hierarchy, but with ample opportunities of upward mobility" (McNeal 57). It was an "ideological formation" whose main theses were two. First, the disappearance of exploiting classes in the USSR in favour of workers, peasants, and the "layer" of intelligentsia (which presupposes national harmony and soon Russian chauvinism, so that any opposition could only be class enemies as foreign spies). Second, understandable as it was in a destroyed country, the primacy of the development of productive forces -- that is, economism and productivism with a strong scientifico-technical idolatry (Bettelheim 1: 23-26, 2: 508-26) and a corresponding ideological exaltation of the industrial proletariat at the expense of the peasantry, over 120 million people of whom the rulers knew little.

What was the communist party in this "Marxism-Leninism" (cf. Part 1)? All the raging discussions about its relations to the working class of the preceding quarter century were tabooed; indeed, class struggle was invoked only to be bid up or down as Stalin needed enemies. The party's totemic keyword was "monolithic": a stone forming a single block without fault-lines, differences or contradictions. It was a militarized hierarchy from top down, an executive watchdog, an organiser of production, a pillar of the system, and a mirage with a few remnants of Leninist communism. Its membership rose from 860.000 in 1924 to almost 3.5 millions; in 1940 this included 3-4 thousand "superior" leaders or executives, 30-40 thousand middle ones, and 100-150 thousand members of "the lower party leadership" (McNeal 46). The percentage of workers in the party -- which often meant "people who used to be workers" -- was already in 1927 smaller than that of "office workers" (who were over half of membership, of which 2/5 were of worker origin), while the regional and federal committees had ca. 1/10 of factory workers; in spite of campaigns for worker enrolment, this did not change substantially (cf. somewhat differing data in Rosenberg 216-17, Bettelheim 1: 312-25, 2: 332-39, 350, 508-13, and Rigby; on the contrary, though data are scarce, in the German, French and British CP the proportion of workers vs. others seems to have been ca. 70:30, see Agosti 425-29). What is clear is that the CP of the Soviet Union was predominantly and increasingly white-collar; it was a passport to any career, but it remained subordinate to the political police and the ideological apparatus (cf. Lewin 326).

A depth question remains: does Stalinism inevitably result from Lenin's concept of the communist party? It clearly has nothing to do with Marx's concept, and I would deny it for Lenin too -- though Stalin set into granite some violently repressive traits the latter resorted to in emergencies. After the "deep fracture" (Cortesi 737) with Lenin's struggle for an emancipatory communism, Stalinism was an instrument functioning with a maximum of violence and improvisation, though with some clear if too costly successes in 1927-47. In the long run, even a moderate Stalinism was not a fit instrument for a modern complex society. It became, at best, "a collectivist welfare society in which most forms of economic and political alienation would survive" (Marković 300): ironically, Stalinism was the perfectly alienated form of Marxism in the 20th Century (see Petrović 159).

One consequence of Stalinism was that neither the parties inside the III International nor their enemies -- from Trotsky to the social-democrats -- developed an organizational theory. Gramsci's prison notes remained unknown until well into the 1950s, and A. A. Bogdanov's "tectology," written before Stalin, an interesting but eccentric exception, even longer.

5. Mao's >Cultural Revolution<

The major twist to Lenin's theory of rule and party -- besides the Yugoslav Communist Party's theories and practice about a system of self-government centred on workers' councils, which is dealt with in a separate work, and possibly some post-revolutionary developments in other countries (Czechoslovakia in Dubček's day, Vietnam??) with which I'm not well acquainted -- was given after 1945 by the Chinese leader and theoretician ***Mao Zedong*** in the years after 1966. He had produced important theoretical and practical novums from 1927 on, not least in his consideration of the dialectics and a "popular democratic dictatorship" (see Bernal 1000-03).

Without referring to the critiques of Bordiga, Trotsky or the Yugoslavs, which he probably had not read and certainly execrated, Mao repristinated their political gist into forceful and radical action. That is, given the way the communist party was (in part and reluctantly) co-shaped by Lenin in the dire necessities of 1918-24 and congealed by Stalin into a fully repressive form, the principal contradiction of post-revolutionary life finally resided in the communist party's monolithic, opaque, and undemocratic mode of ruling -- if not the rise of an arrogant ruling class, high above the masses. True, the Chinese "Cultural revolution" after 1966 was deeply infected and marred by traits Mao had in common with Stalinism, such as a hatred toward non-conformist intellectuals and a readiness to take on board major destruction of lives and values for his goal. "Nonetheless, it must be stated clearly this was not the most important aspect of the >cultural revolution< 1966-69, only the most repugnant and disgusting one. The most important aspect…was the scenario of a rebellion of masses… directly against the >Party<." (Preve 230) The danger to the revolutionary goal of emancipation, usually called "capitalist restoration," arose from inside the only social class factually in power, the executive nuclei of the communist party; and economic development only aggravated it. Having divined this, Mao went about dismantling it in what I would agree was the wrong way, allowing a charismatic cult of the leader and "unleashing a mass [of fanatic youngsters] against archeological monuments and humiliating old professors dragged through the mud…" (idem 231) -- that is, denying in action the horizon in view of which he was supposedly acting. Thus, millions were mobilised politically, "but in the form of an uncritical, idealist, and quasi-religious tension" (Magri, "Für" 77).

However, having once let the youngsters' and workers' genie out of the bottle, unforeseen factors came to the fore. One was the claim of the most conscious workers -- those of Shanghai -- for a direct rule over the means of production; another one was their attack on "the theory of productive forces," that is, Stalin's primacy of industrialisation over a conscious class struggle for emancipation of workers. The latter meant returning, over a century of misunderstanding and misdirection, to Marx's idea that a social formation depends not on technology but on its use, on the nature of current *social relationships of production*. What counted for Marx was not primarily the legal form of property but the gap in power, knowledge, and privilege between the rulers (inside and out of direct production) and the ruled, the exploiters and the labouring plebeians. In that optic, it might be speculated that what Mao wanted to prevent was exactly what has happened in these last decades, that is putting the whole burden of the "primitive accumulation of capital" on the peasants (cf. Magri, *Il sarto* 205) and the workers.

In brief, the Cultural Revolution was a pincer movement, with the leaders (a dozen in all) keeping the strategic support of the army and some main means of communication to activate the plebeian city masses against the party apparatus in the middle. It had thus two souls: the plebeian anti-oligarchic one, and the leaders' desire to take back command. This was different from Stalinist terrorist purges from above; but Mao's aim was not to replace, or even enduringly supplement, the communist party but to change its leadership. Thus when the army itself began to be rent by violent conflicts in 1967, Mao started restraining the revolt of youth and workers (cf. Badiou 95-98, and see his critical history 99-126; also Russo, and Ali 150-51), and had it repressed in 1968. It must be underlined that even going this far without resulting in an open civil war was only to be envisaged in a very few huge States, semi-continents such as China.

So it became evident that the post-revolutionary assumption of workers and peasants into a dominant class, within a world still dominated by capitalism and war, "will not signify the disappearance of classes, and will not coincide with the rapid extinction of State,… [but] a very difficult struggle… >between the capitalist orientation and the socialist orientation<, even inside the Communist Party itself," that may become "dominated by the will to restore capitalism. Transforming the party by placing it under the political control of the masses -- students, workers, peasants -- was the means by which Mao sought to resist this." (Balso 20-21) The Shanghai Commune at the end of 1966 went even further, creating independent workers' organisations and attacking the blind productivism which enslaved them. In other words, even the most radical political revolution by a Leninist vanguard party based largely on peasant masses (whose ideal is the white collar) does not necessarily lead to a disappearance of classes but to their profound reorganisation.

For all their ridiculous and sectarian aspects, some "Maoist" currents in the West understood that inside the Stalinist communist parties a new exploiting class of manipulators was being shaped, ready to become direct, compradorial hirelings of international capital. As we saw confirmed after 1989 in the obscene rush for profitable accommodations among party officials from ex-Yugoslavia to Mongolia.

6. A Look Backward

> Communism wasn't born with the Paris Commune or with the taking of the Winter Palace, nor has it died with the Berlin Wall.

Luigi Cortesi, 2010

A quick look backward at this essay on the concept and role of the communist party from Marx to Mao cannot here come to a wide-ranging conclusion. It simply wants to foreground three epistemic points which seem evident 40 years after the abandonment of the theory built by Lenin upon his application of Marx to the age of World Wars and Russia, and 25 years after the full collapse of its practice.

The first problem, not only for the social class of intellectuals but for all creative people, which was quite clear already to Marx, arises from *the clash between creativity and modern mass politics* steeped in alienation (if at times combating it), "the communist party being merely the most logical… expression of a general 20th-century trend." The active member has in fact only "a single or infrequent choice between packages, in which we buy the disagreeable part of the contents because there is no other way of getting the rest" (Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries* 30). By a kind of Gresham's Law -- where bad money drives out the good one -- people thinking ahead and aloud will be disadvantaged in a clash with wily tacticians: in the October Revolution, this was to be the fate of Trotsky and Bukharin faced with Stalin, after the unique synthesis of both qualities in Lenin. The creative people will jump out or be thrown off the carriage at some turning; mass politics has become an intellectually (and morally) shoddy business.

The second problem can be called *the ossified vanguard*. It begins with Gramsci's dictum that "to conquer democracy in the State a strongly centralized Party may be necessary -- indeed, it is almost always necessary" (Q 236). Badiou remarks that Mao's Cultural Revolution (together with, secondarily, the youth revolts around 1968) marks the end of a long sequence whose central theme is the communist party and major political concept the proletariat (*Siècle* 93). I am not so sure what has finally ended and what has to be reinvented in a 2.0 form, but there was a dangerous inbuilt contradiction in a deeply emancipatory mass drive that needs for its victory -- necessarily, it seems -- leadership by a conscious, elite group. As Badiou puts it: a revolutionary party is formed by personal adhesions, it is a political organ exterior to the State apparatus, it is committed to destroying the capitalist State in favour of a non-State State, locus of transition towards a Stateless and classless society; thus an emancipatory revolutionary party exists in a central and permanent tension between the non-State character of radical emancipation and the State character of its revolutionary victory and aftermath (*Hypothèse* 145-46). Yet, bolstered by an undialectical faith in historical necessity, this tended to issue in a permanent appropriation of State power by such a communist party, even when 10 or 20 years after the revolution this monolithic type of power no longer fit the society's necessities. The danger could theoretically be avoided by a Gramscian hegemony in permanent cultural and pragmatic osmosis with the classes in whose interest it was supposed to rule, but we have no historical example of such a solution. Possibly this was because of the adverse environment of permanent threatening war as well as of economic and cultural backwardness for the successful revolutions. All of them were faced with Trotsky's "law of combined development" (27) according to which the anti-bourgeois revolutions in backward countries had to foreground the tasks a weak and/or reactionary bourgeoisie had left unfinished, such as industrialisation, literacy, public health, and so forth in a long list. It is not by chance that Gramsci worked in Italy (and that the most "organic" communist party flourished there for 30 years).

Nonetheless the concept of a party arrogating to itself freedom from alienation and reification, while its political basis was supposed to be strongly permeated by them and needing the "pure" leadership, was in the long run unworkable, for it led to a Church. The richer a

society is articulated, the more self-defeating this arrogation became (cf. Stame 63-66). All depended on how quickly a true democratic centralism -- that is, forms of efficient democratic feedback between basis and leadership -- could be arrived at, before demoralisation and corruption, and a recourse to simple repression or police, set in. Optimally, the only way to avert such dangers would be to have the historically meritorious party become the catalyser, steward, and administrator of autonomously formed plebeian political projects, in other words to shift its action more and more from *a priori* to *a posteriori* syntheses of popular will. This would have to start with the admission, which no ruling communist party has so far as I know made, that revolutionary theory can be elaborated wherever the spirit chooses to manifest itself, inside the party leadership (as with Lenin, Mao or Gramsci) or outside of it (as with Marx, Engels, and Lukàcs), resolutely abandoning the papist pretensions of a direct line to the Holy Ghost. The alternative is fulfilling Trotsky's (originally, in 1904, rather bilious) and later Luxemburg's thesis of "substitutionism": "The organisation of the party substitutes itself for the party as a whole; then the Central Committee substitutes itself for the organisation; and finally the >dictator< substitutes itself for the Central Committee" (cited in Cliff 27). This happened with Stalin, though the variant of a "hereditary" collective leadership restricted to a dozen persons, or a few dozens, may also function.

The probably gravest question is then: "was there in Bolshevism [or generally, in Lenin's invention of the vanguard Party, note DS] as such a deficient basis for transforming itself from revolutionary agent into an instrument for governing" (Cortesi 662)? The answer to this is not yet clear; my hypothesis is that after large-scale refurbishing and democratisation, a Gramscian variant of a vanguard force could still be a needed instrument for governing. The precondition for this is that it remain in most intimate feedback with a self-activity of revolutionary masses; both seem indispensable.

We might of course conclude, with the myopic arrogance of people who have thus far not been thrown into dire necessity, that Lenin's whole kit-and-caboodle or *organon* is hopelessly outdated in the world of computers and stock-markets. So much the worse then for us all. But if, as I believe, the computer and creative production in general could be used against the stock-market, then we'd have to start discussing ***models of an updated party***, whatever might its name be. Let me end by discussing a few, just for a start.

The first would be Trotsky's model of the revolutionary party as ***a piston in the steam-engine cylinder***: it draws wondrous results from concentrating mass energies otherwise vainly dispersed, "but nevertheless, what moves things is not the piston or the cylinder but the steam" (19). I rather like the image and the moral, but it is by now too rigidly confining and technocratic. We'd need to transfer it to something like the crucial software in an operating system.

Second come the various possibilities enumerated by Cliff: the party as foreman, as teacher, or companion in struggle (41-42). The foreman or more usually the officer vs. the soldier model – Eagleton provides the variant of a rescue team in a mining disaster (Budgen et al. eds. 48) -- is a strategy to be strictly reserved for actions in an immediate life-or-death situation; as a whole it is to be rejected. *The* ***teacher*** is a needful aspect: we must suppose, as in Plato's *Meno*, that every slave has an inbuilt capacity for rudiments of geometry, if only they are properly drawn out of her. But this model is acceptable only if it simultaneously comprises (as in every good teacher) the learner from his pupils; and it is not exhaustive. The companion/s in struggle entrusted at the moment with coordinating and executive functions, such as ***a strike***

committee or shop steward, who must maintain a constant dialogue with his *worker-strikers* classmates or fail, is a very good initial model.

But my favourite is Brecht's model (18: 76), which I shall retell in an abbreviated way:

> Two men lived together. One slept in a comfortable bed, the younger one on a leather mattress. The elder roused the younger one very early, even when he was sleepy. Often he forbade the youngster the most appetizing food; for drink the young man was given only water or milk, and when he secretly got some alcohol, he was sharply and publicly rebuked. Last morning I saw the elder one on a horse driving the younger one forward. So I asked him about his servant. "He's not my servant," he answered, startled. "He's a sports champion whom I'm training for his greatest match. He hired me to make him fit. I am the servant."

Brecht's moral is: When judging who's the master and who the servant, look at who profits most from the relationship. Thus, the *trainer model* seems to me so far the most persuasive: more active than the shop steward, he can also be fired; his role is a limited one for an overriding purpose. Just like the Roman *dictator*.

Note

*/ My thanks go to Rich Erlich for comments leading to improvements.

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Part 2. *On the Concept and Role of the Communist Party: Prehistory and the Epoch of October Revolution* (10,450 words)[*/]

> Multum mihi negotii concinnabis et… magnam me litem ac molestiam impinges, qui mihi tales quaestiunculas ponis, in quibus ego nec dissentire a nostris salva gratia nec consentire salva conscientia possim…. [N]ostros iudico in hoc descendent quia iam primo vinculo tenentur et mutare illis formulam non licet.
>
> *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*
>
> [With the queries you put to me, you involve me in a serious difficulty and… in a huge and noxious dispute: for I cannot dissent from my teachers while remaining in their graces nor can I agree with them while following my conscience…. I hold they arrive at such a position because they are stuck with their beginnings and do not feel they can change that formula.
>
> Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*, ca. 65 C.E.]

1. On Marx's Communism and on Parties

> From Marx, we are now returning to Marx.
> R. Rossanda, 1969

Marx's cognitions and stance are central to this section both as subject and object.

1.1. The idea of ***communism*** has a history at least as long as class society. Defined as common property of means for life in the name of natural justice, it was a chthonic yearning and a permanent tendency in sects and revolts, and in writings such as those of Plato, Seneca, and *Acts of the Apostles* speaking of early Christian communities (cf. the classical Beer, and Draper 59-62) its latency was transmitted to the Middle Ages and later. Virgil put it most pithily:

> ne signare quidem aut partiri limiti campum
> fas erat: in medium querebant, ipsaque tellus
> omnia liberius nullo poscente ferebat.
> [neither was it proper to designate or divide the ground with borders; the yield was held in common, and earth itself offered all products spontaneously, without any effort—*Georgics* I: 126-28]

This tradition was taken up around the time of the French Revolution, most lastingly by Rousseau and Babeuf. When Marx was immersed in the radical workers' and intellectuals' groups and circles of early 1840s' Paris, he took the name of "communist" from those who preferred it to the lukewarm views of "socialists" (cf. Kouvelakis and Grandjonc). He then went on to systematize it by breaking, as these groups did, with the old organic metaphor of a body politic of which all people were members, and by postulating a radical conflict: first in opposition to class power in politics and then to the whole capitalist system of human relationships. This grounded communism not only in common property of means and fruits of labour but also in the overthrow of workers' alienation and exploitation. It meant that "a critical communism… from being a hope, aspiration, remembrance, conjecture or expedience, for the first time [became] the consciousness of being the end and solution of current class struggles" (Labriola 7-8). The bottleneck and narrow gate of history was to be a movement toward a sweeping *social revolution* to end the capitalist mode of living (and all class rule) and make for a reign of justice. Its possibilities were triangulated between the depth class confrontations, the consciousness the working classes acquired about it, and their translation into contingent politics.

I shall not deal here with the history of the many workers' and socialist (soon to be called social-democratic) parties in the 1871-1914 period, when the revolution was postponed to St. Nevercome's Day. I wish to focus on the *central split* between "the two souls of socialism -- socialism from above and socialism from below" (Draper). "The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves" (MEW 16: 14) is the first sentence of Marx's *Rules* for the First International, and embodies his life-long stance that socialism shall be brought about through the activity of large plebeian groups from below. The needs and interests of the large social majority will, by means of people's creativity, finally lead them to overthrow the class system.

The dilemma is clearest when put into the terms of relation between *collective equality* and *personal freedom*. Marx started out from the axiom of emancipating human personalities, which could only be done by collective action. His was the decisive turning point towards a balance between these two ideals, in which communism would be permanently wed to freedom, and the freedom of each person in feedback with the freedom of all. After the Paris Commune, he believed the return of productive surplus value into the hands of the direct producers should be based on a direct and associational democracy exercised by them (and the Lenin of *State and Revolution* agreed).

1.2. *Parties*: a letter by Marx to Freiligrath of Feb. 29, 1860, distinguishes between a "party" in the ephemeral sense of the 1847-52 League of Communists -- for which he wrote the *Manifesto* -- and to which he won't belong again (though he was to be active in The Workers' International Association from 1864 on), and "the party in the broad historical sense" of people on one side of an ongoing central social conflict, to which he does not cease to belong (MEW 30: 488-95, cf. Hobsbawm, *How* 60, and García Linera 82). Marx held to this constantly, thus in the letters to Lassalle and Weydemeyer in roughly the same years; from that broad sense the German *Partei ergreifen* and the French *prendre parti* (taking a committed or partisan stand) arose. In Engels's letter to Marx of Feb. 13, 1851, the reasons for their ironic stance toward "ephemeral" parties are

explained: "How could people like us, who shun official situations like the plague, belong to a party?" (MEW 27: 189-91). At the time, they saw no necessity to theorize further about parties. However, when a new tide arose, Marx persuaded a conference of the International in 1871 to adopt the statement: "the working class cannot act, as a class, except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes; … [this] is indispensable to ensure the triumph of the social revolution and its ultimate end -- the abolition of classes" (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/09/politics-resolution.htm); and in 1895 Engels defined parties as "the more or less adequate political expression of [existing social] classes and fractions of classes" (*Marx-Engels* 407, MEW 22: 510; cf. also Johnstone "Marx," and Molyneux 21-22 and 26-27).

Nonetheless, everybody in the workers' movement knew that the only way to emancipation lies through their ***associating.*** Thus organisations remained inevitable, even when the restricted sense of political parties was becoming dominant, and then almost exclusive, with the rise of more or less bourgeois parliamentary governments.

A communist or socialist party was supposed to be the tool to help the revolution by streamlining and reinforcing the activity of the working classes, but it often became a tug-of-war between this aim and a temptation to have a conscious and organized elite hand down socialism/communism from above to the neither equally conscious nor equally active masses. In utopias this split can be seen in the antithesis between William Morris's and Edward Bellamy's writing (see on them, and other utopians from More to Fourier, Suvin *Metamorphoses*). In this permanent tension, since the German Social-democracy and Lenin's Bolsheviks, not to speak of the utter Stalinist degeneration, as a rule the pull toward more or less authoritarian organization won out. It was based equally in the libido of power and privilege by the parties' leadership and in the millennial expectation of the plebeian masses for a Saviour from on high that Lukács later rightly repudiated as "messianic utopianism". Gramsci also noted that "the determinist, fatalist, mechanist element has been an immediate ideological >aroma< of [Marxism], a form of religion and a stimulant (but like a drug) necessitated and historically justified by the >subaltern< character of certain social strata" (*Q* 1387-88, *Modern* 691 — see on both 3.2).

Weber's disenchanted look then defined parties as voluntary associations within an organisation (usually a national society) whose aim is "to secure power… for its leaders in order to attain ideal or material advantages for its members" (*Economy* 284, and the rest of discussion in this paragraph is from his section "Parties," 284-88; cf. also 984-85). Thus all parties are "patronage" ones, but some -- that mainly "act in the interests of a status group or a class" -- are also "ideological." They exist because of a struggle for control of the societal organisation according to group or class interests. In all parties, there is "a central group of individuals who assume the active direction of party affairs, including the formulation of program and the selection of candidates [for election]. There is, secondly, a group of >members< whose role is notably more passive, and finally, the great mass of citizens whose role is only that of objects of solicitation…." To bear the considerable election expenses, there arises a ">machine<, in which case the candidates become dependent on the party organisation." The orientation to power and the fierce struggle for it means that parties are usually organised in a chain of command, often a very tight one. His approach was exacerbated by the influential work of Michels in the

1920s, who factored in the bureaucratisation of the German Social-democracy, and to whom I shall return.

2. Lenin's Formulas for a Revolutionary Party

> [N]o one nowadays wishes to raise the unmentionable term "party": ….in a period whose political atmosphere is largely anarchistic (in the technical sense of the term), it is unpleasant to think about organization, let alone institutions.
>
> F. Jameson, 2007

2.1. Marx's optimistic assumption of a soon forthcoming fusion between the plebeians' social being and their consciousness was prevented by the new circumstances of massified imperialism with technologically upgraded armed forces, capillary cultural brainwashing, and a sweeping rise in social complexity (size and organization). A key organized mediation was becoming indispensable for a plebeian victory; this was most clearly the case in rotten empires such as the Russian one, ruled more by coercion than active consent, where a sweeping revolution was the only plebeian and democratic alternative. It was powerfully presented in theories of a revolutionary party by the genius of V.I. Ulyanov-Lenin. *What Is To Be Done* of 1902 began his lifelong wrestle with the crucial mechanism of organizing a vanguard party (cf. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered* 207-08, 473, 556, and passim; also Molyneux 36-71 and 83-95, Johnstone, "Strumento"); in this first variant it was to be an iron-clad organization of professional illegal "cadres" to steer worker rebellion. However**,** as of 1905 he changed his early opinion of worker subalternity in admiration of their 1905 (and then 1917) insurrectionary eagerness, the cadre variant was considered by him out of date for times when the party became legal, and he warmly advocated a democratic open structure, with election of all organs from below upward and proportional representation at yearly congresses (see for ex. his "The Reorganization of the Party," CW 10: 29-39). Lenin's central Novum of an activist party as the operative lever to prepare and direct the revolution, and then to defend and develop it, radically changed Marx's and Engels's optimism that industrial workers were the predestined emancipatory class. It heavily underscored the question of the relationship between an organized avant-garde and the proletariat (in a broad sense), that still remains quite unsolved in the Marxist tradition.

The culmination of political blueprint utopianism in the 20th century was Lenin's 1917 (uncompleted) booklet *The State and Revolution*, written under the twin impact of, on the one hand, barbarous World War and its annihilation of peaceful emancipatory horizons and, on the other, of his qualitative leap in understanding Hegel's dialectics, whence he heretically concluded that a revolution in Russia was a possibility and a necessity. It posits, in strict accordance with the Marx after 1871, a full structuration from below upwards -- for ex. a republic of federated *soviets* (councils) and a universal civic militia instead of the army and police (cf. CW**)** of the future proletarian society when a giant development of productivity and "an enormous abundance and variety of political forms" will flower, with a State which is not a dominant apparatus and, importantly, the

subordination of the party as educator to such historical class aims. It remained an "untried communism" (Cortesi 224-25 and 227, and cf. the whole section 224-35), "envisaging not only the liberation of the worker from the boss and of the subaltern from the system's fetishes, but the liberation of people from the State" (ibidem 235). This was torpedoed by savage warfare and economic chaos.

2.2. With the advent of horrific mass slaughter -- mainly of proletarians -- in the (First) World War the security some social-democratic parties had in the 1871-1914 period of European peace got for a higher stratum of industrial workers and their own apparatus dwindled in importance. The Bolsheviks and many others concluded that if all "civilised" governments and rulers could exterminate millions and mutilate many more in pursuit of power and profits, then socialists (oon to be called communists) could not retreat from any sacrifice to free humanity from such folly through a violence to end all violence. Marx's canonic "dictatorship of the proletariat," with the term from Latin history meaning power for a limited period, meant for Lenin unlimited power based as usual on the final threat of violence -- and Weber agreed, see *Politik* 8-9 and 55-57 -- but strictly exercised by the great majority against the oppressors (Balibar 250-53). "The components of modern political life," noted dispassionately Michels, "are in a latent state of warfare. The modern party is… *an organisation for struggle*." Therefore it had to be quick, disciplined, and hierarchic, in brief: centralised and up to a point bound to clear leaders or *Cäsarismus* (38-39). It necessarily secretes an elite, which however needs a broad basis for safety, binding to itself as many people as possible ideologically and even financially. Just as in the State and in the armed forces, the mediation between rank and file in political parties inevitably begets an administration or bureaucracy of lower officers and NCOs (164); Michels pointed to the European social-democracy and its paragon, the German party after 1872, as embodying an "iron law" of oligarchy in spite of its sincere original emancipatory roots. In fact, "any effective organization in modern industrial society tends to be bureaucratized in some degree": it oscillates between ineffective unlimited freedom and ossification (Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries* 54-55). Lenin's party was the only one trained for revolutionary power, and it became a beacon for much of the world's radicals (see Lukács, *Lenin* 26-32, 86-87, and passim).

After the Civil War in Russia 1918-21, enabled by massive US, French, and British financing of the Whites, "Not only was the country's economy in chaos but the cities were depopulated, the bourgeoisie destroyed,… while death and declassing had destroyed almost half of the qualified working force"; to the ca. 2.7 million dead in the World War an equal number of dead in the Civil War, plus a huge swath of material destruction, was added (Cortesi 771-72). The original utopian communism of Lenin's *State and Revolution* and the whole horizon of proletarian democracy had perforce paled for the exhausted victors. True, the Bolshevik Party grew from 250.000 members immediately after October 1917, and 620.000 in March 1920, to 1 million in 1927, but this also meant "the invasion of a politically illiterate mass, and the politically and ideologically expert elite… was being submerged by the mass roughness" (Lewin, "Alle prese" 18, and see Bettelheim 1: 292-328). The gap between up and down, the rulers and the proletarians, began yawning, violence and corruption became normal in the growing bureaucracy against which Lenin fought a losing battle (cf. Suvin "Bureaucracy"). The party became fully enmeshed with the State, governing from the top downward.

2.3. In sum, Lenin held obstinately on to the binary concept of soviets plus the party, democracy plus firm dictatorial power in an emergency -- which for him dominated from 1918 to the end of his life; when Lenin was stymied by the conservatism of party professionals, as in mid-1917, he went over their head to the workers. However, in the emergency he was, like all great organizers, forced to stress the command aspect. One pole of Lenin's Marxism is "Fordist," that is constructivist, indeed productivist (cf. Sirianni 245ff.), tending to the model of a huge factory or construction site in which the supervisory engineer must run the show. However, his "democratic centralism" does add to the collective will of an elective elite also a plan, brought about by means of an open debate from below and changeable through that debate (cf. Bourdet 78-123, Harding 186-89). One of the sacrifices in and to the Iron Age was that Lenin's original, sincerely democratic centralism became in practice more and more simply centralism — first of the Communist Party as a whole, then after 1921 increasingly of its Central Committee and bureaucratic Secretariat, and finally issuing after 1927 in a full autocracy of Stalin, Tsar Koba the Terrible, a permanent if hypocritically undeclared martial law.

I cannot give here a full view of Lenin's stance. One not too Marxist Harvard professor has called the Leninist party form "a crucial world-historical >breakthrough<," comparable to the Industrial Revolution (Skocpol 24). It may be enough to mention that one, and possibly *the*, major failing of Leninist practice (with some roots in Marxist triumphalism shared by him) was his lack of articulation what happens in the years and decades *after* the seizure of power — a long-duration "theory of revolution" having for its subject the class rather than the political vanguard (Rossanda 226). This led to the undialectical denial of the need for any society to openly manifest and resolve its inevitable conflicts, which is usually called politics and involves a plurality of collective subjects with due guarantees for a level playing field within the bounds of a constitutional project. This denial was quite at odds with the splendid horizon in *State and Revolution*, Lenin's bold and radical arrow of power going from the working masses upwards and dispensing with the State apparatus. However, the struggle for naked survival forced him to insist on building up a strong State apparatus, so that his furthest horizon of an ideal communist politics of *direct* democracy is usually forgotten (Russia had little tradition of associational democracy beyond the peasant *mir*, and Lenin underestimated it).

Raymond Williams once wrote a tragedy about Stalin. Its proper subject would be Lenin.

3. Around Lenin: Three Protagonists

> Every "theoretical" trend or difference of opinion must immediately fold back into organizational matters unless it is to remain mere abstract opinion….
>
> G. Lukács, 1922

3.1. The clearest alternative to Lenin on the radical Left seemed to be *Rosa Luxemburg*, who judged his early projects in the light of the ossified bureaucracy of German social-democracy, thus favouring the spontaneous mass movement from below that would

culminate in a general strike and foregrounding the dangers of centralism. However, finally their trajectories came rather near, for ex. in Lenin's slogan "All power to the Soviets!" (Rossanda 225, Frölich 220).

Luxemburg's alternative of independent and spontaneous mass actions was as one-sided as the worst bureaucratic centralism and was practically falsified in the fate of her communist group of 1918-19, which resulted in her defeat and assassination. Nonetheless, her vantage point enabled her to point out that a blind, boot-camp style obedience leads nowhere either. Early on, she pinpointed (cf. 89-93 and 103) Lenin's erecting in 1901-04 tactical considerations inside his party into an improvised theory, and he later came to agree with this. Quite rightly, she saw this can only be checked by nurturing critical Marxist forces inside the party and securing effective control of higher party organs from below (Frölich 100). While enthusiastically praising the October revolution as path-breaking and an enduring example for the world, and arguing for a new and united International, she went on to criticize "the Lenin-Trotsky notion of proletarian dictatorship" (131), and especially their limitation of free discussion: "Freedom is always only the freedom of those thinking differently… because this entails all that is educational, healing, and cleansing [for the most intense political education of the masses]" (134). The point was, alas, rendered moot by the fierce Civil War and economic collapse in Russia, and never picked up after Lenin's illness. For many reasons, Luxemburg's very early diagnosis therefore was correct: "In Russia the problem [of settling the score between capital and labour in the entire world] could only be posed. It could not be solved in Russia." (cited in Molyneux 105, and see his whole section 97-116) Her stance is therefore an excellent critique of all party and State bureaucracies, but it is not a realistic alternative to Lenin as far as organizing for power is concerned (cf. Cortesi 484-86).

However, her pitiless diagnosis of what might happen without civic freedom is indispensable for discussing power with freedom:

> Dictatorship of the *class*, not of a party or a clique. Dictatorship of the class, i.e. with the widest public opinion, with a most active and unimpeded participation of the popular masses, in limitless democracy…. Yes: dictatorship! But this dictatorship consists *in the way democracy is used*, not in its *elimination*…. (Luxemburg 138-39, and see 136)

Here could be placed a discussion of *Leon Trotsky*, a major revolutionary figure and prolific writer of great interest about Russia, communism, and politics; but in matters of party he did not add much to what he took to be Lenin's Bolshevism. When in power he stressed the dictatorship over the democracy, while in his struggle against Stalin he called for a return to factions and parties within the Soviets and the working class (cf. for the latter Molyneux 117-25).

3.2. *Georg Lukács* was a prominent cultural and political theoretician and a leader of the failed Hungarian revolution 1919; sidelined by the factional fight in exile, he devoted his major theoretical powers to literary history and criticism, re-emerging with political philosophy after 1956. His views about class and party were published in *History and Class Consciousness*, written 1919-22, which had a strong influence on German-speaking intellectuals, for ex. Benjamin, and half a century later the author contributed an excellent self-criticism to its re-edition ("Vorwort"). Most relevant for our theme are his

epistemological insistence, against economism and social-democratic (and later Stalinist) "positive science," that "orthodoxy in Marxism relates exclusively to the *method…,*" that is, a proper use of dialectics (*Geschichte* 59), with a stress on the full impact of commodity economy and its reifying powers on all social classes, including the proletariat—quite a pioneering feat. However, the proletariat, if helped to clarify its standpoint, can according to its deepest class interests best understand the necessities of societal development (267-68). Such a "messianic utopianism" ("Vorwort" 11 and passim) pushes to the extreme and thus reveals clearly the aporia of Bolshevism, whose exceptional encounter with the concentrated proletariat of a few big Russian cities in 1905 and then 1917-18 gave rise to this confidence, only to have the party and the Government nucleus retreat, after the exhaustion and declassing of the 1918-21 warfare, to the "strategic heights" strictly controlled by themselves. Thus Lukàcs's horizon proved mistaken, but his book was a precious indication of creative possibilities during and after Lenin, and was a sensation n when rediscovered in the early 1960s.

Lukàcs revered Lenin and Luxemburg as his two unforgettable contemporary teachers. He agreed with the latter that the party should be "the bearer of the proletariat's class consciousness, the conscience of its historical mission" (114), but found that her exclusively ideological stance bypasses the role of organization in the revolution and after it (425, 428-31, 440-42, 445). His take on Lenin's fusion of uncommon theoretical and practical capabilities was developed in a brief booklet on his thought (*Lenin*), which was much the best early introduction and remains indispensable.

3.3. *Antonio Gramsci* also adopted a dual stress on workers' councils from below and a party as a permanent persuader to coordinate their struggles, similar to the middle Lenin, and was judged by him in 1920 as nearest in Italy to his ideas on revolution. He eventually became a leader of the Italian Communist Party and remains its most prominent theoretician. Writing in Mussolini's prison, he managed to wittily fuse the "national-popular" urgency of Machiavelli's reliance on an armed citizenry as well as on a unifying "Prince" with the urgencies of plebeian revolution in his time, oriented towards economics -- for "the programme of [a radical, DS] economic reform is precisely the concrete way in which every intellectual and moral reform is presented" (*S* 133, *Q* 1561, translations in places modified) -- and towards the inevitable mediation of the revolutionary party.

Gramsci's rich observations on parties in general and a revolutionary vanguard in particular are embedded in an understanding of the complexity in modern capitalist society. It culminates in his theory of a ***hegemony*** that includes both cultural consent through civil society (*società civile*) and State coercion. This improved on Marx's and Lenin's model of proletarian dictatorship by richly articulating just what were its functions, between the poles of leading (*dirigere*) and commanding. The "virtuous relationship" between party and class means that the former leads by following depth movements delineated, if perhaps barely, in the latter and "ensures continuity and the regular accumulation of experiences" to the movement (*S* 189, *Q* 1634, cf. Tronti, col. 2 and 5). His civil society comprises not only the educational system and the communications media but also those social norms that embed production relations (his model is the Catholic Church in feudalism). In the wake of Marx's *18th Brumaire* and some indications of Lenin, Gramsci is thus the true ancestor of the important new theme of civil society, perverted in the 1980s by the "free marketeers." In such a vision,

intellectuals -- not a free-floating social class but "organic" technical educators, recruited from all classes -- become the key factor, and the communist party functions as a collective intellectual in the axiological sense. It is, as Tronti cites him (col. 1, quote from *S* 146), ">a party that wants to found a State<…not to make itself the State." This penetrating lucidity, discarding (as did Luxemburg) the usual communist party distrust of intellectuals, also enabled Gramsci to become the first Marxist thinker to discuss in "Americanism and Fordism" key strategic shifts in the capitalist organization of labour. His analysis is based **on** his familiarity with the Italian workers' movement, especially in Turin, and the fact that when the CP of Italy was formed with 40.000 members, 98% were workers and 0.5% -- only 245 people -- were intellectuals (Molyneux 161).

Much concerned with the degeneration of the III International and the Soviet State, Gramsci noted that "the way in which the party functions provides discriminating criteria" for clearly judging it: "When the party is progressive it functions >democratically< (democratic centralism): when the party is regressive it functions >bureaucratically< (bureaucratic centralism)" (*S* 155, *Q* 1691-92); and he asked pithily: "In the formation of [party] leaders… is it the intention that there should always be rulers and ruled, or is the object to create the conditions in which this division is no longer necessary?" (*S* 144, *Q* 1732) He pleaded for a "centralism in movement", that is, a dynamically adaptive one (*S* 189, *Q* 1634). In the contrary case of an ensconced compact bureaucracy reigning from above, the party becomes a deracinated executive -- that is, a policing—institution, and "its name of a political party is a pure mythological metaphor" (*S* 155, *Q* 1691-92, cf. Molyneux 157-59)

In sum, Gramsci managed to incorporate the useful points from both Luxemburg and Lenin into a synthesis which, though sketchy, has remained the best trampoline for thinking further.

3.4. Looking back at this sub-section, all three of its protagonists oscillated between a strong minority organization and a broad mass movement; the latter was always indispensable but proved by itself insufficient for coming to power when faced with Tsarist police repression, or in all revolutions and civil wars. Their embattled humanist historicism and plebeian faith is perhaps best articulated in Gramsci.

4. Stalinism

> The economic and social role of the Soviet bureaucratic caste is quite analogous to the role of the capitalist class, unless it is worse because of its omnipotence.
>
> Boris Kidrič, radical Yugoslav CP leader, 1952

4.1. The rise of Yossif V. Stalin (Djugashvili) to the undisputed master of the USSR in the 1920s happened in a situation of international failure of the first Leninist wave after 1918. Rebellions were put down in blood before they could become revolutions, and European capitalism was stabilized by US loans. The isolated USSR could look only to

its own forces, but it was faced with the dilemma of an economically poorly developed country wishing to keep inner cohesion and independence: how to supply its growing population with goods and simultaneously accumulate enough capital for the rapid industrialization needed—not least for armed defence. Who was to pay for the hugely growing State apparatus and the heavy industry? After 1927, Stalin decided it should be the peasants, and mobilized the Party/State apparatus to take their raw materials without paying the normally requested price (cf. Nove 25).

Stalin's *Questions of Leninism* (in good part cribbed from a worker-writer shot in 1937, see Medvedev 820-23) posed in mid-'20s the bases of a practical doctrine in a repetitive party language that appealed to a wide structure of feeling in the enlarged, poorly educated party membership innocent of direct democracy, philosophy or a truly experimental approach. "Stalin's prose, interwoven with lists of apodictic affirmations and rhetorical questions answered by rigid assertions, lent itself extraordinarily well to the catechistic function assigned to it in all the parties of the III International;" concurrently, the horizon of utopian emancipation constant from Marx through Lenin was reduced to the bald statement "All depends on preserving and consolidating power" (Cortesi 581-82). This prose generalised the military metaphorics inherited from earlier Marxism, eventually bolstered by paleotechnics (as in "engineers of human souls" for writers), amid many religious reminiscences, including the insistent formulaic repetitions and sanctions by quotation from Holy Writ. Stalin also inherited from his schooling in the Tiflis Orthodox seminary, in whose upper classes the most important lectures were in "Dogmatic and Orthodox Theology," "Homiletics" (preaching rhetorics), and "Accusatory Theology and Russian Schismatics" (Ilizarov 206), a clinging to an elementary historicism and reduction of the controversial questions of a mass movement to a black-and-white orthodoxy of either-or, without mentioning opposing arguments (cf. Marek 72-73 and passim), often with much falsification. The success of the October Revolution and the confirmation of the USSR were taken as proof of the party's (practically, the leading nucleus's and Stalin's) correct understanding of history, and soon of infallibility.

As Lukàcs noted, Stalin abhorred mediations and yoked the crudest factual data to a propensity of inventing *ad hoc* "fundamental laws" -- of capitalism, or of socialism — or "iron laws" to clinch an argument: a reductive pastiche of Lenin's careful articulation of levels. In another involuntary parody of Lenin's slogan of "Soviet power plus electrification," the achievement of "socialism in one country" meant to him Party/State power plus industrialization. Logically, he claimed in his crowning *Short Course of the History of CPSU(b)* that social history is a science as exact as biology (cf. Marek 74-76). Brecht ironised the "spurious simplicity and lucidity" (Deutscher 271) of this style, in the safety of his diary:

> The author… is so to speak clear and vague, he hews his sentences with the axe…. Everything tends upwards, it is "a passage from an old qualitative state to a new qualitative state." The new one is of course of a better quality….

To the contrary, Brecht was led to reflect on true dialectics:

> Dialectical thinking corresponds to a differentiated society with strong productive forces which develop quickly in catastrophic form, amid wars and revolutions…. It is high time to deduce dialectics from reality instead of

> from history of ideas while picking out from reality only examples for the laws. (26: 358-19)

However, it ought to be acknowledged that Stalin did face, in a rough and ready way, and with a tactical guile his opponents lacked, central political knots of a country in upheaval such as "socialist primitive accumulation" -- often appropriating previously poor-mouthed general positions of Bukharin or the Trotskyists, but always with a maximum of violence. And there is no doubt that he was an impressive populariser and great communicator of a dogmatic kind**,** "a master at making platitudes seem important" (Medvedev 822).

This scientism-as-adhoc-improvisation hewed up reality to correspond to theory, and theory was in turn purged of all contradictions (cf. Bettelheim 2: 508-13 and 572-75). Stalinist wilful scientism created its own cate**gory** system consisting exclusively of fetishised older terms, violently uprooted from Marxian soil: law, nature, society, productive forces, fact, development, progress... (see Kofler 72-74). This paradoxically resulted in increasing self-deception bordering on the one hand with abstract utopianism and on the other with most brutal terrorism (idem 90-91). No doubt, industrialization, including military production, and a cooperative-cum-technical upgrading of agriculture were absolutely essential, but the moral and material cost of the disastrous collectivization as well as of the demoralizing of urban society was way too high. It meant the rise of a very crude ruling oligarchy, and eventually a consolidated class of bureaucrats, technocrats, and police, deeply hostile to the plebeian-democratic horizon of the October Revolution but engaged in preserving some collateral effects: the rise of a strong USSR, industrialization, and a low quality but real Welfare State — as well as pseudo-Leninist rhetoric abroad. From the late 1920s to 1936 the urban population grew from 16 to 33%, the number of workers and employees from 11.5 to 40 millions (of which industrial workers rose from 3.8 to over 10 million — Wood 9), the clerical workers or professionals employed by the State, including families, from 4 to 14 millions (McNeal 59-60); in 1939 35.5 million people went to school. Yet the overall result can properly be called counter-revolutionary: as different from the French Revolution's "Thermidor" coup, this was a creeping process from the top beginning in 1921 and culminating in 1927 (Cortesi 700).

The best contemporary document about it is Rakovsky's letter from internal exile, which stresses the terrible decline in "the working masses'" militancy and a deep-rooted corruption as its effect. This meant that "the part of the working class which acceded to power became an agent of that power" instead of having it exercised by the class as a whole. The *nomenklatura* grew into a bureaucracy that enjoyed an official car, a good apartment, luxurious holidays, and a high salary (Bettelheim 2: 249 calculates the maximum spread in 1926 between the highest and lowest of the 18 categories already at ca. 1:15, while in 1950 it was 1:40 -- Ossowski 130). The class in power accordingly changed its mentality and mutated into "a new sociological category," servile toward above and dictatorial toward below, "which does not hesitate to use anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and hatred toward intellectuals." As opposed to Trotsky's illusions, Rakovsky concluded no political reform of that group was possible: at least ¾ would have to be fired and the powers of the rest strictly limited. Two years later, he memorably added: "From >a proletarian State with bureaucratic deformations< -- as Lenin defined our political form -- we are developing into a bureaucratic State with proletarian communist survivals" (cited in Sensini XLII; I have argued in "Bureaucracy" a new term should be found for this class of collective rulers).

Thus communism was falsified into "the mirage of a collective abundance, reached by a freezing of social rights won by the revolutionary movement,… including a *sine die* confiscation of the elementary freedoms of political expression, association, knowledge, and travel, of a free existential adventure" (Cortesi 725). Such economic reductionism was unable to cope with the problems of productivity and politics once a middle level of affluence was reached. It was exported into all components of the III International; and after 1945 into the "People's Democracies," with baneful effects most quickly visible in the Soviet empire's western reaches.

4.2. Stalin's autocracy can be dated 1927-53, but the Stalinist system, characterized by the pair "autocracy and industrialization" (Cortesi 709 and 719) plus systematic mass repression, survived purged of its mass-murder trait up to the insufficient attempt by Gorbachev to reform it. While doubts are allowable about the Bolshevik transition phase of 1921-27, I concur with Lewin that "Stalinism… was a phenomenon independent from and parallel to Bolshevism, which was simultaneously its grave-digger: Stalinism was a fully formed [different] system" (11; cf. Timpanaro 221 and Cortesi below) -- to which, one should add, a certain pragmatic originality of a gruesome kind cannot be denied. Under Stalin, up to 1941 one million Old Bolsheviks were "liquidated" (shot or put into concentration camps); while in the "People's Democracies" between 1949 and 1953 the Stalinists in power imprisoned and liquidated more communists than all the previous bourgeois regimes (Fejtö 1: 364).

Stalin's course was not without mass support in the USSR CP and the country, including the reconstituted industrial workers (of whom 8% were CP members, see Bettelheim 2: 338-40). He brought at least to the urban population a modest but clear rise of the overall living standard in comparison to the years of collapse, also reassurance through the theory of "socialism in one country" (see Deutscher 282-93), and initially he brought stability. The social system of ripe Stalinism from the 1930s on was "a hierarchy, but with ample opportunities of upward mobility" (McNeal 57). It was an "ideological formation" whose main theses were two. First, the disappearance of exploiting classes in the USSR in favour of workers, peasants, and the "layer" of intelligentsia (which presupposes national harmony and soon Russian chauvinism, so that any opposition could only be class enemies as foreign spies). Second, understandable as it was in a destroyed country, the primacy of the development of productive forces -- that is, economism and productivism with a strong scientifico-technical idolatry (Bettelheim 1: 23-26, 2: 508-26) and a corresponding ideological exaltation of the industrial proletariat at the expense of the peasantry, over 120 million people of whom the rulers knew little.

What was the communist party in this "Marxism-Leninism" (cf. Suvin "Phases")? All the raging discussions about its relations to the working class of the preceding quarter century were tabooed; indeed, class struggle was invoked only to be bid up or down as Stalin needed enemies. The party's totemic keyword was "monolithic": a stone forming a single block without fault-lines, differences or contradictions. It was a militarized hierarchy from top down, an executive watchdog, an organiser of production, a pillar of the system, and a mirage with a few remnants of Leninist communism. Its membership rose from 860.000 in 1924 to almost 3.5 millions; in 1940 this included 3-4 thousand "superior" leaders or executives, 30-40 thousand middle ones, and 100-150 thousand members of "the lower party leadership" (McNeal 46). The percentage of workers in the

party -- which often meant "people who used to be workers" -- was already in 1927 smaller than that of "office workers" (who were over half of membership, of which 2/5 were of worker origin), while the regional and federal committees had ca. 1/10 of factory workers; in spite of campaigns for worker enrolment, this did not change substantially (cf. somewhat differing data in Rosenberg 216-17, Bettelheim 1: 312-25, 2: 332-39, 350, 508-13, and Rigby; on the contrary, though data are scarce, in the German, French and British CP the proportion of workers vs. others seems to have been ca. 70:30, see Agosti 425-29). What is clear is that the CP of the Soviet Union was predominantly and increasingly white-collar; it was a passport to any career, but it remained subordinate to the political police and the ideological apparatus (cf. Lewin 326).

A depth question remains: does Stalinism inevitably result from Lenin's concept of the communist party? It clearly has nothing to do with Marx's concept, and I would deny it for Lenin too -- though Stalin set into granite some violently repressive traits the latter resorted to in emergencies. After the "deep fracture" (Cortesi 737) with Lenin's struggle for an emancipatory communism, Stalinism was an instrument functioning with a maximum of violence and improvisation, though with some clear if too costly successes in 1927-47. In the long run, even a moderate Stalinism was not a fit instrument for a modern complex society. It became, at best, "a collectivist welfare society in which most forms of economic and political alienation would survive" (Marković 300): ironically, Stalinism was the perfectly alienated form of Marxism in the 20th Century (see Petrović 159).

One consequence of Stalinism was that neither the parties inside the III International nor their enemies -- from Trotsky to the social-democrats -- developed an organizational theory. Gramsci's prison notes remained unknown until well into the 1950s, and A. A. Bogdanov's "tectology," written before Stalin, an interesting but eccentric exception, even longer.

5. Mao's >Cultural Revolution<

The major twist to Lenin's theory of rule and party -- besides the Yugoslav Communist Party's theories and practice about a system of self-government centred on workers' councils, which will be dealt with separately, and possibly some post-revolutionary developments in other countries (Czechoslovakia in Dubček's day, Vietnam??) with which I'm not well acquainted -- was given after 1945 by the Chinese leader and theoretician ***Mao Zedong*** in the years after 1966. (He had produced important theoretical and practical novums from 1927 on, not least in his consideration of the dialectics and a "popular democratic dictatorship," see Bernal 1000-03.)

Without referring to the critiques of Bordiga, Trotsky or the Yugoslavs, which he probably had not read and certainly execrated, Mao repristinated their political gist into forceful and radical action. That is, given the way the communist party was (in part and reluctantly) co-shaped by Lenin in the dire necessities of 1918-24 and congealed by Stalin into a fully repressive form, the principal contradiction of post-revolutionary life finally resided in the communist party's monolithic, opaque, and undemocratic mode of ruling -- if not the rise of an arrogant ruling class, high above the masses. True, the Chinese "Cultural revolution" after 1966 was deeply infected and marred by traits Mao had in

common with Stalinism, such as a hatred toward non-conformist intellectuals and a readiness to take on board major destruction of lives and values for his goal. "Nonetheless, it must be stated clearly this was not the most important aspect of the >cultural revolution< 1966-69, only the most repugnant and disgusting one. The most important aspect…was the scenario of a rebellion of masses… directly against the >Party<." (Preve 230) The danger to the revolutionary goal of emancipation, usually called "capitalist restoration," arose from inside the only social class factually in power, the executive nuclei of the communist party; and economic development only aggravated it. Having divined this, Mao went about dismantling it in what I would agree was the wrong way, allowing a charismatic cult of the leader and "unleashing a mass [of fanatic youngsters] against archeological monuments and humiliating old professors dragged through the mud…" (idem 231) -- that is, denying in action the horizon in view of which he was supposedly acting. Thus, millions were mobilised politically, "but in the form of an uncritical, idealist, and quasi-religious tension" (Magri "Für" 77).

However, having once let the youngsters' and workers' genie out of the bottle, unforeseen factors came to the fore. One was the claim of the most conscious workers -- those of Shanghai -- for a direct rule over the means of production; another one was their attack on "the theory of productive forces," that is, Stalin's primacy of industrialisation over a conscious class struggle for emancipation of workers. The latter meant returning, over a century of misunderstanding and misdirection, to Marx's idea that a social formation depends not on technology but on its use, on the nature of current ***social relationships of production***. What counted for Marx was not primarily the legal form of property but the gap in power, knowledge, and privilege between the rulers (inside and out of direct production) and the ruled, the exploiters and the labouring plebeians. In that optic, it might be speculated that what Mao wanted to prevent was exactly what has happened in these last decades, that is putting the whole burden of the "primitive accumulation of capital" on the peasants (cf. Magri, *Il sarto* 205) and the workers.

In brief, the Cultural Revolution was a pincer movement, with the leaders (a dozen in all) keeping the strategic support of the army and some main means of communication to activate the plebeian city masses against the party apparatus in the middle. It had thus two souls: the plebeian anti-oligarchic one, and the leaders' desire to take back command. This was different from Stalinist terrorist purges from above; but Mao's aim was not to replace, or even enduringly supplement, the communist party but to change its leadership. Thus when the army itself began to be rent by violent conflicts in 1967, Mao started restraining the revolt of youth and workers (cf. Badiou 95-98, and see his critical history 99-126; also Russo, and Ali 150-51), and had it repressed in 1968. It must be underlined that even going this far without resulting in an open civil war was only to be envisaged in a very few huge States, semi-continents such as China.

So it became evident that the post-revolutionary assumption of workers and peasants into a dominant class, within a world still dominated by capitalism and war, "will not signify the disappearance of classes, and will not coincide with the rapid extinction of State,… [but] a very difficult struggle… >between the capitalist orientation and the socialist orientation<, even inside the Communist Party itself," that may become "dominated by the will to restore capitalism. Transforming the party by placing it under the political control of the masses -- students, workers, peasants -- was the means by which Mao sought to resist this." (Balso 20-21) The Shanghai Commune at the end of 1966

went even further, creating independent workers' organisations and attacking the blind productivism which enslaved them. In other words, even the most radical political revolution by a Leninist vanguard party based largely on peasant masses (whose ideal is the white collar) does not necessarily lead to a disappearance of classes but to their profound reorganisation.

For all their ridiculous and sectarian aspects, some "Maoist" currents in the West understood that inside the Stalinist communist parties a new exploiting class of manipulators was being shaped, ready to become direct, compradorial hirelings of international capital. As we saw confirmed after 1989 in the obscene rush for profitable accommodations among party officials from ex-Yugoslavia to Mongolia.

6. A Look Backward

> Communism wasn't born with the Paris Commune or with the taking of the Winter Palace, nor has it died with the Berlin Wall.
>
> Luigi Cortesi, 2010

A quick look backward at this essay on the concept and role of the communist party from Marx to Mao cannot here come to a wide-ranging conclusion. It simply wants to foreground three epistemic points which seem evident 40 years after the abandonment of the theory built by Lenin upon his application of Marx to the age of World Wars and Russia, and 25 years after the full collapse of its practice.

The first problem, not only for the social class of intellectuals but for all creative people, which was quite clear already to Marx, arises from ***the clash between creativity and modern mass politics*** steeped in alienation (if at times combating it), "the communist party being merely the most logical… expression of a general 20th-century trend." The active member has in fact only "a single or infrequent choice between packages, in which we buy the disagreeable part of the contents because there is no other way of getting the rest" (Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries* 30). By a kind of Gresham's Law -- where bad money drives out the good one -- people thinking ahead and aloud will be disadvantaged in a clash with wily tacticians: in the October Revolution, this was to be the fate of Trotsky and Bukharin faced with Stalin, after the unique synthesis of both qualities in Lenin. The creative people will jump out or be thrown off the carriage at some turning; mass politics has become an intellectually (and morally) shoddy business.

The second problem can be called ***the ossified vanguard***. It begins with Gramsci's dictum that "to conquer democracy in the State a strongly centralized Party may be necessary -- indeed, it is almost always necessary" (Q 236). Badiou remarks that Mao's Cultural Revolution (together with, secondarily, the youth revolts around 1968) marks the end of a long sequence whose central theme is the communist party and major political concept the proletariat (*Siècle* 93). I am not so sure what has finally ended and what has to be reinvented in a 2.0 form, but there was a dangerous inbuilt contradiction in a deeply emancipatory mass drive that needs for its victory -- necessarily, it seems -- leadership by a conscious, elite group. As Badiou puts it: a revolutionary party is formed by personal adhesions, it is a political organ exterior to the State apparatus, it is committed to destroying the capitalist State in favour of a non-State State, locus of transition towards a

Stateless and classless society; thus an emancipatory revolutionary party exists in a central and permanent tension between the non-State character of radical emancipation and the State character of its revolutionary victory and aftermath (*Hypothèse* 145-46). Yet, bolstered by an undialectical faith in historical necessity, this tended to issue in a permanent appropriation of State power by such a communist party, even when 10 or 20 years after the revolution this monolithic type of power no longer fit the society's necessities. The danger could theoretically be avoided by a Gramscian hegemony in permanent cultural and pragmatic osmosis with the classes in whose interest it was supposed to rule, but we have no historical example of such a solution. Possibly this was because of the adverse environment of permanent threatening war as well as of economic and cultural backwardness for the successful revolutions. All of them were faced with Trotsky's "law of combined development" (27) according to which the anti-bourgeois revolutions in backward countries had to foreground the tasks a weak and/or reactionary bourgeoisie had left unfinished, such as industrialisation, literacy, public health, and so forth in a long list. It is not by chance that Gramsci worked in Italy (and that the most "organic" communist party flourished there for 30 years).

Nonetheless the concept of a party arrogating to itself freedom from alienation and reification, while its political basis was supposed to be strongly permeated by them and needing the "pure" leadership, was in the long run unworkable, for it led to a Church. The richer a society is articulated, the more self-defeating this arrogation became (cf. Stame 63-66). All depended on how quickly a true democratic centralism -- that is, forms of efficient democratic feedback between basis and leadership -- could be arrived at, before demoralisation and corruption, and a recourse to simple repression or police, set in. Optimally, the only way to avert such dangers would be to have the historically meritorious party become the catalyser, steward, and administrator of autonomously formed plebeian political projects, in other words to shift its action more and more from *a priori* to *a posteriori* syntheses of popular will. This would have to start with the admission, which no ruling communist party has so far as I know made, that revolutionary theory can be elaborated wherever the spirit chooses to manifest itself, inside the party leadership (as with Lenin, Mao or Gramsci) or outside of it (as with Marx, Engels, and Lukàcs), resolutely abandoning the papist pretensions of a direct line to the Holy Ghost. The alternative is fulfilling Trotsky's (originally, in 1904, rather bilious) and later Luxemburg's thesis of "substitutionism": "The organisation of the party substitutes itself for the party as a whole; then the Central Committee substitutes itself for the organisation; and finally the >dictator< substitutes itself for the Central Committee" (cited in Cliff 27). This happened with Stalin, though the variant of a "hereditary" collective leadership restricted to a dozen persons, or a few dozens, may also function.

The probably gravest question is then: "was there in Bolshevism [or generally, in Lenin's invention of the vanguard Party, note DS] as such a deficient basis for transforming itself from revolutionary agent into an instrument for governing" (Cortesi 662)? The answer to this is not yet clear; my hypothesis is that after large-scale refurbishing and democratisation, a Gramscian variant of a vanguard force could still be an instrument for governing. The precondition for this is that it remain in most intimate feedback with a self-activity of revolutionary masses; both seem indispensable.

We might of course conclude, with the myopic arrogance of people who have thus far not been thrown into dire necessity, that Lenin's whole kit-and-caboodle or *organon*

is hopelessly outdated in the world of computers and stock-markets. So much the worse then for us all. But if, as I believe, the computer and creative production in general could be used against the stock-market, then we'd have to start discussing *models of an updated party*, whatever might its name be. Let me end by discussing a few, just for a start.

The first would be Trotsky's model of the revolutionary party as *a piston in the steam-engine cylinder*: it draws wondrous results from concentrating mass energies otherwise vainly dispersed, "but nevertheless, what moves things is not the piston or the cylinder but the steam" (19). I rather like the image and the moral, but it is by now too rigidly confining and technocratic. We'd need to transfer it to something like the crucial software in an operating system.

Second come the various possibilities enumerated by Cliff: the party as foreman, as teacher, or companion in struggle (41-42). The foreman or more usually the officer vs. the soldier model – Eagleton provides the variant of a rescue team in a mining disaster (Budgen et al. eds. 48) -- is a strategy to be strictly reserved for actions in an immediate life-or-death situation; as a whole it is to be rejected. *The teacher* is a needful aspect: we must suppose, as in Plato's *Meno*, that every slave has an inbuilt capacity for rudiments of geometry, if only they are properly drawn out of her. But this model is acceptable only if it simultaneously comprises (as in every good teacher) the learner from his pupils; and it is not exhaustive. The companion/s in struggle entrusted at the moment with coordinating and executive functions, such as *a strike committee or shop steward*, who must maintain a constant dialogue with his *worker-strikers* classmates or fail, is a very good initial model.

But my favourite is Brecht's model (18: 76), which I shall retell in an abbreviated way:

> Two men lived together. One slept in a comfortable bed, the younger one on a leather mattress. The elder roused the younger one very early, even when he was sleepy. Often he forbade the youngster the most appetizing food; for drink the young man was given only water or milk, and when he secretly got some alcohol, he was sharply and publicly rebuked. Last morning I saw the elder one on a horse driving the younger one forward. So I asked him about his servant. "He's not my servant," he answered, startled. "He's a sports champion whom I'm training for his greatest match. He hired me to make him fit. I am the servant."

Brecht's moral is: When judging who's the master and who the servant, look at who profits most from the relationship. Thus, the *trainer model* seems to me so far the most persuasive: more active than the shop steward, he can also be fired; his role is a limited one for an overriding purpose. Just like the Roman *dictator*.

Note

*/ My thanks go to Rich Erlich for comments leading to improvements.

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