

THE **S**OCIALIST
REVOLUTION
EAST and **W**EST



A Conspectus

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INTRODUCTION

The text which follows here is an internal discussion document written by a leading member of the International Marxist Group in Britain in the late 1970s. The document, in photocopied form, circulated among former members of the successor organisations to the IMG in the early 1990s. At the beginning of the 2000s, I decided to rekey the text in digital form, so as to increase its readability, and circulate it more widely.

The reason why the text is important is set out in the Presentation (written in 2001) below; I shall say no more about that here. At the same time as this Presentation, I also wrote a short political assessment of the text, of its strengths and weaknesses as I saw them then, and circulated it separately. This (“The Socialist Revolution East and West: A Critical Assessment”) is included here as an appendix to the main text.

Since the most recent publication of this text, it has come to light that the original document has been published on the [Red Mole Rising](#) website, where it is attributed to Dave Bailey, a leading member of the IMG in the 1970s. The original document can be accessed [here](#).

29 April, 2026

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PRESENTATION

The text which follows was written by a member of the International Marxist Group (the then British Section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International) during the winter of 1978-79 and circulated anonymously in that organisation and its successors. To the best of our knowledge, it is previously unpublished elsewhere.

The principal objective of the author is a refutation of the argument—found in its most developed form in the then contemporary Eurocommunist orbit, but also visible in the work of authors the author considers part of a “revolutionary” left, specifically Perry Anderson and, to a certain degree, Ernest Mandel—that in the “west” of Europe, a strategy for socialist revolution based on a Leninist conception of what some might call “insurrectionism” was inadequate to resolve the complexities of a bourgeois class rule founded upon the predominance of parliamentary institutions, structures and traditions. In order to refute this idea, the author, with verve and detail, presents a detailed survey of the twentieth-century European revolutionary experience, “east” and “west”, from the revolutionary wave following the First World War, through the Spanish revolution of the 1930s and the Communist Party-led uprisings during the later part of the Second World War, up to the French May 68 and the Portuguese revolution of 1974-75.

The text is a superb piece of historical writing. As a survey of the European working classes’ battles against the bourgeois states that have confronted them it is unmatched. But more than this: the fundamental reason we reproduce this text now is because its *arguments* seem to us as relevant as ever—while the Eurocommunist star may have faded in the intervening twenty years or so since its writing, the very terminal crisis of Stalinism itself in all its forms that we have recently witnessed prompts the necessity of a revindication of the *revolutionary* socialist heritage of the European working class even more pressingly.

Despite the fact that the essay today appears dated in certain respects (not least with respect to the very crisis of Stalinism just referred to) we feel that its overall conclusions have not been invalidated by the course of events of the last twenty years; we remain as convinced as the author that the next revolutionary wave of the European theatre of class struggle is germinating, even if we accept their counsel as to the need for revolutionary patience. Indeed, one of the strongest themes of the concluding part of the text is the necessity to take seriously the exigencies of constructing firmly-rooted revolutionary organisations especially during periods of relative class quiescence and, mindful of this, we suggest that a study of the historical lessons laid out by the author here would not be the worst way to begin to prepare ourselves for the inevitable battles of the future, whenever and however they may come.

Some technical points. What follows here is the text in its entirety: the version we worked with came with two concluding parts, the second perhaps a later and more-developed version of the first; both conclusions are included here. In addition, even though the original text is rather more blessed with references to cited works than is generally the custom on the revolutionary left, a considerable degree of double checking of citations has been necessary. Where appropriate, references of cited works have

been updated to editions other than those cited in the text, and we have also made the necessary textual changes to the citations to bring them into line with the citation system adopted here. On the few occasions where we have felt the need to add explanatory notes to the text, they appear in square brackets, the text being preceded by the label “*Ed.—*”; and where we have added our own footnotes to add additional information on persons and events mentioned, the footnote reference number appears in square brackets. Other than these two uses, any other text appearing in square brackets are the author’s own interpolations in quoted material.

All we would ask of you, then, the reader, is that you both read this text—although it is indeed substantial we feel that it greatly merits serious study—and that you also circulate it as widely as possible to others, and discuss the issues that it raises, issues that are still relevant and pertinent for those who still look forward to the movement from capitalism to socialism and who dedicate their efforts to bring this movement about.

1 May, 2001

THE

Socialist Revolution

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PREAMBLE: THE ABSENT REVOLUTION

It appears to be widely believed on the European left that the European working class has a very poor revolutionary record compared to its Russian counterpart of 1905-17. It is often said that the workers of modern Europe have either remained indifferent to revolution or at best have proved comparatively inept at making it. This notion of the European workers as the poor relation is a cause for celebration or regret depending on political alignment. It has of course been expressed most forcibly in the past by writers seeking to lay the spectre of Bolshevism in Europe, yet it also appears to enjoy growing popularity on the left today among socialist writers of every political camp, whether social-democratic, Stalinist, centrist, Eurocommunist or Trotskyist. The purpose of the present article is to challenge this view. We believe that the European working class movement has a revolutionary tradition no less rich than its Russian cousin, and that historical study shows that the contemporary left fundamentally under-estimates the revolutionary record of the European proletariat. The proletarian revolution has played an integral, indeed pivotal role in the history of modern Europe.

The classical charge against Bolshevism was always that it failed to recognise the peculiarities of European society. Leninist methods had evolved to suit the peculiar conditions of Tsarist dictatorship, conditions not present in the “west”. Lenin’s method of party organisation, for example, with its centralism and emphasis on the professional revolutionary, might be suitable for conditions of clandestinity but inapplicable in a parliamentary democracy. Similarly, the use of insurrection, armed struggle and the creation of a vigorous proletarian dictatorship might be excusable in the barbarous “east” but have no place in bourgeois democracies. For good reasons, societies with bourgeois-democratic traditions are far less conducive to these “classical” methods than Russia in 1917. These long-standing indictments of Leninism have recently seen a strong revival, for the Eurocommunists have resorted to them as part of a large-scale ideological spring-cleaning operation in which the Leninist heritage—the “dictatorship of the proletariat”, insurrection, the idea of a centralised international—have been thrown out. But they have also found an echo on the revolutionary left. The contrast between the political and cultural universe of “the east” and “the west” is now almost universally regarded as the philosophers’ stone in matters of proletarian strategy.

The impact of this revival on our already impoverished historiographical image of the European proletarian revolution can only be serious. The Eurocommunists must after all show that the historical record backs up their claims. History must be made to prove that Leninism worked in Russia ultimately because of the nature of ruling class political institutions, and, conversely, that the failure of the revolution in the “west”—or better still, its complete absence—are attributable to the inhibiting effects of bourgeois democracy. The Eurocommunists are not the first to seek to expunge the revolution from European history. They build their case on a large pre-existing accretion of misinformation, prejudice and ignorance, generated over several decades, not merely by the dominant classes—who naturally seek to conceal what they find unpleasant and dangerous—but also by working class parties seeking alibis for their failures or shameful deeds. History does not speak for itself. The proletarian revolution has to be re-excavated.

There is another obstacle. Discussion of historical matters is not fashionable among contemporary Marxists. This is a philosophical fashion. Considerable intellectual energy is devoted to the “economy” or the “state” as objects of theoretical study, but much less attention is paid to the study of the social movements that sought to overturn the state and the relations of production, at least those in the European theatre. It is tempting to think that such movements either have nothing to teach us or never took place. Present debate over strategy is a casualty of this attitude. Consequently, it suffers from

muddled thinking and a lack of secure historical foundations. No serious attempt is made to explain what a revolution is, how revolutions work, what their laws of motion are, or why they come about. Without answering such questions, no serious debate over strategy is possible, not even for those resolutely opposed to Leninism. Yet such questions can only be answered by historical study. A comparative study of the revolutionary movements in Russia and Europe is long overdue.

The attraction of the Cinderella theory of the European proletariat for the Eurocommunist school is obvious. If it can be shown that the labour movement in the west has, at all critical moments, pursued a road to socialism different to the one pursued by Lenin in 1917, then the current strategy of the Eurocommunists must command a good deal of respect. Let us briefly review the historical opinions of this school.

The most interesting thinker among the “right” Eurocommunists is Santiago Carrillo.^[1] For him, the hegemony enjoyed by parliamentary institutions in Western Europe is almost absolute. That is to say, both of the major social classes are in its grip. The possibility thus arises of a peaceful, parliamentary and constitutionalist formula for socialist strategy. A transfer of property and power may occur via the existing political institutions without provoking civil war or necessitating a resort to revolutionary methods. Carrillo expresses this in a striking way. The “ideological apparatuses” of the state can be “turned round”, as it were, to overwhelm and anaesthetise the “repressive apparatuses”. Since democratic ideology will then suffuse the entire social formation, the old classical Leninism is redundant. (Carrillo, 1977, 27-8.)

History must lend some support to this view: therefore, argues Carrillo, the methods of 1917—the seizure of power by revolutionary force, the establishment of an energetic revolutionary dictatorship—were forced upon the Bolsheviks largely because of the Tsarist state and the absence of alternative democratic institutions. The Constituent Assembly did not enjoy the authority over the classes it should have done. Fortunately, of course, such institutions are readily available in the west and, moreover, the proletariat constitutes a majority of the population, and therefore of the electorate. These conditions did not exist when Lenin practised the dictatorship of the proletariat or Marx formulated it in the nineteenth century. (Carrillo, 1977, 149, 151-2, 155.) It should follow from this that the European proletariat has found little time in our century for revolutionary dictatorship. Yet, we shall show that paradoxically the proletariat has in fact resorted to the methods of 1917 far more frequently in our century than when it was a minority of the population living under the autocracies and restricted franchise provisions characteristic of Europe in the nineteenth century. Of course, Carrillo is perfectly aware that the European proletariat has often been engaged in armed struggle and civil war—as for example in Spain in 1936-39, or occupied Europe in 1941-5. Yet, argues Carrillo, following traditional Stalinist historiography, the proletariat never fought on these occasions with proletarian dictatorship in mind. It fought, under the far-sighted leadership of the Communist Parties, merely to preserve or establish bourgeois democracy, thereby laying the historical foundations for travelling (at a later date) the road to socialism which the Communists have considered appropriate to the west since 1935.² We shall insist that this is a serious falsification of history.

For Carrillo, there have been one or two “exceptions” to the rule. Classical revolutionary methods were relevant on at least two occasions: in 1917 in Europe generally, and again in Eastern Europe in 1945-9. This must be so, otherwise Lenin’s original Comintern project, as well as the Communist regimes in

[1] Santiago Carrillo (1915-2012) was one of the central leaders of the Spanish social-democratic youth organisation *Juventudes Socialistas* responsible for its merger with the Communist Party youth organisation in 1936. From 1960 to 1982 (i.e. during the “transition” from Francoist dictatorship to bourgeois democracy in Spain) he occupied the position of General Secretary of the Spanish Communist Party.

² For Carrillo’s account of “democratic self-limitation” in Spain, see Carrillo (1977, 115-129).

Eastern Europe, would be hard to explain. In 1917, argues Carrillo, the European states were shattered by the war, thereby permitting classical techniques to be safely employed by the proletariat. (Carrillo, 1977, 9-10, 151-2.) In the 1940s, the bourgeois states of the eastern sector were more thoroughly smashed by the Nazis than in the western sector of occupied Europe. (Carrillo, 1977, 58.) Hence the appearance of proletarian dictatorships there in the late 1940s. These were exceptional instances, however, attributable to the exceptional circumstances of world war. Only in time of world war is the classical road conceivable. Such a position has many advantages. As a historical generalisation, it reduces the revolution in Europe to a rather rare phenomenon. It also appears to exclude it in future. For a third world war would be inconceivable under nuclear conditions, or so Carrillo tells us (Carrillo, 1977, 50-51), turning the theory of peaceful coexistence to good use in the polemic against the classical Leninists. (The view that revolution is a contingency of war, stated most dogmatically by Bukharin, will be a subsidiary target of the present article.)

Carrillo's historical follies are of a grand order. But those of the "left" Eurocommunists and associated thinkers—Claudín, Poulantzas, Hodgson, etc.—are no better. These thinkers also subscribe to the strategy of "democratic transformation". But they subscribe to it equivocally and, in classical terms, this is a centrist school. It doubts that the road to socialism can be wholly peaceful, but it refuses to have anything to do with classical insurrection. In the military analogies so fashionable in this quarter, insurrection would be a policy of "frontal assault"—a policy adopted by Lenin in 1917 but inappropriate to the west, where the struggle can "traverse" the state. (Poulantzas, 1978.) Neither constitutionalism, nor insurrection. Instead, something called "breaks and ruptures" in the state apparatus is anticipated. Inevitably, the masses must be expected to throw up new forms of mass organisation during the transition process, but the centrist school rejects the idea that such bodies should seek to concentrate sovereignty wholly into their own hands. Workers' councils must remain subordinate to a sovereign parliament and a reformed bureaucracy.

Such thinkers like to regard it as axiomatic that the proletariat in the west has by and large rejected insurrection and always treated the parliamentary state and its institutions with the greatest respect. Some writers give this out as historical fact without much further ado. Geoff Hodgson, for example, who calls his particular confection of soviets and parliament a "third road to socialism", tries to utilise the German revolution of 1918, the events of May 68 and the upsurge of June 1936 in support of his view. (Hodgson, 1977.) We shall show, however, that his knowledge of these instances is somewhat one-sided. Fernando Claudín,^[3] the only serious historian of this centrist school, is more promising. His book, *The Communist Movement* (Claudín, 1975), is, in some respects, one of the most brilliant historical works by any contemporary Marxist. In this book, Claudín shows convincingly that the Spanish Revolution and the resistance movements, contrary to Stalinist tradition, were indeed classical

^[3] Fernando Claudín (1930-1990) was a leader of the Spanish Communist Party until his expulsion—along with others—in 1964 for expressing disagreement with the line of the Carrillo leadership. That dispute has a relevance for the present text. Claudín and his supporters argued that Francoism was a political regime which represented the general interests of the dominant classes, and, since a part of these classes could support a democratic solution without affecting the capitalist character of the socio-economic structure, the fall of Francoism could give birth to a democratic regime similar to that found in the other western countries. As a consequence, a change of the political regime could not be confused with the social revolution. The leadership around Carrillo, on the other hand, insisted that the Franco regime only represented the interests of the big banks and the landowners: the defeat of Franco, which was seen as imminent, supposed the beginning of 'an antifeudal and antimonopolist democratic revolution' which would take on a series of measures such as the nationalisation of the banks and of large-scale industry, land reform, an anti-US foreign policy, etc. The fall of Francoism would thus suggest the beginning of the transition to socialism.

revolutionary movements seeking to establish popular revolutionary dictatorships.⁴ Despite this, however, Claudín takes the curious view that the period 1917-23 was *not* revolutionary.⁵ This is a curious inversion of the traditional Stalinist view and it leads to a rather inadequate view of the European experience. In a recent article, he stated: “We can say that the great majority of the European proletariat, and in particular the German, followed the tactic of Kautsky and not of Lenin. ... It followed the road which, forty years later, was to be called the democratic, parliamentary and peaceful road to socialism.” (Claudín, 1977, 64.) This is ironical, for it was above all in Germany that the essential similarities of the revolution east and west were convincingly demonstrated in 1918-19. The origins of Claudín’s peculiar view seem to be in his attack on the idea of a centralised international. Claudín, writing in the early 1960s, was an early pioneer of Communist independence of Moscow. His assault on Muscovite centralism took the form of arguing that Lenin’s original Comintern project was flawed from its very inception, notably because it sought mechanically to apply Russian methods inappropriate in a western climate. This is an abuse of historical fact; nevertheless, it is one which falls in neatly with the current fashion of treating the European workers as the Cinderella of the revolutionary socialist movement.

When we turn to the writers of the revolutionary left we find a more curious situation. These writers uphold a classical, Leninist strategy for Europe. The proletariat must set up a revolutionary dictatorship over the bourgeoisie, exercised through popular armed councils—a regime secured, in one way or another, by force, and one necessitating the break-up of parliamentary and bureaucratic institutions. One would imagine that these thinkers would be anxious to make out a strong case that such a strategy is not a Russian peculiarity, but is located in European experience. Yet we find them flirting with the Cinderella theory that the Eurocommunists have made popular. Perry Anderson, for example, has written an important article on Gramsci (Anderson, 1976), criticising the Communist effort to find some authority for their constitutional road in Gramsci’s writings on state and civil society and in his well-known military analogies. Yet Anderson clearly regards the Gramscian theme of “east” and “west” a fruitful and illuminating one. Thus he reproaches Lenin and Trotsky for failing in their day to take into account what he calls “the enormous historical divide within Europe traced by the presence—even if still fitful and incomplete in their time—of parliamentary democracy in the West, and its absence in the east”, and he goes on to berate Trotsky for failing to pose the problem of a “differential strategy” for making socialist revolution in the bourgeois democracies in the twenties and thirties. ((Anderson, 1976, 27, 58.) These statements echo the view that these revolutionary practitioners viewed the west through the inappropriate spectacles of 1917. Another revolutionary, and a close observer of Eurocommunism, Henri Weber,^[6] has gone even further. He wrote recently that the transition to socialism “has still largely to be invented in the advanced capitalist countries with a democratic tradition.” (Weber, 1978, 14.) Still to be invented! Obviously then there is not much to be learnt from studying the history of the European working class.

The most accomplished thinker on the revolutionary left is Ernest Mandel. His attacks on the theoretical positions and practical policies of Eurocommunism are unmatched. He argues strongly that the lessons of 1917 are universally applicable and indeed that the European proletariat has embarked

⁴ See especially Claudín (1975, vol. 1, 210-42; vol. 2, 307-454). Claudín’s more recent political statements are altogether less adventurous; his latest book, *Eurocommunism and Socialism* (Claudín, 1978) avoids the substantial issues and appears to signify a political retreat.

⁵ The “general crisis of capitalism had not yet arrived and the revolution had not matured.” (Claudín, 1975, vol. 1, 62.)

^[6] Henri Weber (1944-2020) was a leading member of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (French section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International) in the 1970s. In 1986 he joined the French Socialist Party, holding a position as a Senator, and later as a Member of the European Parliament.

on the revolutionary road many times in its recent history. Yet even Ernest Mandel believes some special allowances must be made for the European proletariat. Some special splints and crutches must be fashioned to help the proletariat overcome the infirmity induced by bourgeois democracy, a political system whose deleterious effects are especially virulent in the west. In a well-known interview with Henri Weber, Mandel argues that bourgeois democracy represents a special obstacle for Leninists, and elaborates a “differential strategy” for dealing with it. (Mandel, 1976.) According to Mandel, before the working class can develop a mass revolutionary consciousness, it must pass through a period of “dual power”. Although he nowhere defines the meaning of “dual power”, we are asked to imagine a situation like that which existed in Russia between February and October 1917, where the working class exercised, primarily through the soviets (elected councils of delegates from factories and barracks) considerable powers, especially in industry, the army and at the front, prior to the October assault itself. For Mandel, the chief feature of this period of dual power was that it permitted a practical demonstration of the superiority of soviet power over bourgeois democracy, and thus made possible the development of a revolutionary situation. “Unless the majority [of the working class] identifies with the new rising legitimacy, then a revolutionary development of the crisis is highly unlikely. [...] It is this politico-ideological dimension [of the dual power] which interests us most, because it has hitherto been so neglected.” (Mandel, 1976, 101.) But, concludes Mandel, whereas in Russia, where there was no history of bourgeois democracy, the workers required only six or seven months to free themselves from the influence of bourgeois democratic institutions, “the historical record forces us to consider the Russian experience as an exception. *A period of six or seven months is much too short for a proletariat like that of Western Europe to progressively abandon the legitimacy of bourgeois democracy. A longer period of dual power will probably be needed which may be partial and discontinuous and which may stretch over several years.*” (Mandel, 1976, 111, my emphasis.)

Ernest Mandel is the only Marxist thinker in Europe today who has written anything of value on the workings of the revolutionary process itself. If we spend some time in this article criticising his judgements, it is because we can usefully advance our understanding further by studying and criticising his work. Despite being in general political solidarity with Ernest Mandel, we nevertheless believe the “model” of the revolutionary process he adopts lacks historical foundation. Instead, it has evolved to meet the polemical pressures of the Eurocommunist onslaught and bears the marks of unconscious methodological adaptations which bar the way to a full critique of Eurocommunism.

Mandel misunderstands the function of interludes of dual power. Wherever these have appeared—for example, in February-October 1917, November 1918-April 1919 in Germany, July 1936-May 1937 in Spain, or in France, Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia following the liberation of 1945, or again in Portugal in the summer of 1975—their purpose has not been to free the working class from the influence of parliamentary or bourgeois-democratic institutions. On the contrary, on all these occasions the working class had *already* freed itself from their influence, and from the influence of the bourgeoisie more generally. The revolutionary consciousness of the masses did not arise from the dual power. It preceded it. In general, the lengthy periods of dual power Mandel has in mind are not the prologues to revolutions but the aftermath of aborted ones. The dual power most often arises because the attempt of the proletariat to seize power is ruined by inadequate or faulty leadership. Trotsky once called it the “miscarriage” of the revolution. (Trotsky, 1957, 191.) The historical function of dual power has been to permit the already revolutionary working class to transfer its allegiances to more adequate parties and leaders.

Mandel’s conception owes something to the Eurocommunist polemic. If the working class of the “west” is politically incorporated into the capitalist system by virtue of parliamentary democracy, if the locus of reformism is to be found in the influence of such institutions—just as the Bolsheviks owed their success to its absence under Tsarism—then the break with reformism and the emergence of a

mass revolutionary consciousness and a revolutionary situation must presuppose a trial run with workers' democracy. Hence, in Mandel's model, the working class extends its existing struggles to the level of dual power, during which they learn of the superiority of workers' democracy, reject parliamentary institutions, develop a revolutionary ideology and then proceed to insurrection. However, this stands everything on its head. For revolutionary insurrections occur not only at the end of dual power (as he states in his book *From Stalinism to Eurocommunism* (Mandel, 1978, 172-3)) but also at its beginning. Indeed, how otherwise is it possible to break the bourgeois monopoly of power—other than by an uprising? Mandel, on the contrary, believes that the state can “disintegrate” and permit the workers to set up a parallel power for several months, even years, before a frontal clash need occur. According to him, this “disintegration” may be due to “a war or to the disintegrating effects on important sections of the army of a *partially miscarried coup d'état*, as in Spain. Or it may be the result of a *general strike* or *workers' uprising* [...]” (Mandel, 1976, 100, my emphasis.) This is a false amalgam. Wars have demoralised armies, coups d'état have sometimes been badly planned, and general strikes have occurred from time to time. But the state has never “disintegrated” without a revolutionary uprising.

The historical facts assembled here point away from the Eurocommunist problematic. The European workers *have* often arrived at revolutionary consciousness despite bourgeois democracy and without special devices. Its revolutionary performance is exemplary. We conclude that revolutions have happened in much the same way—i.e. obeyed the same inner laws—“east” and “west”. Our model, however, will differ from Ernest Mandel's. His model is unacceptable to us, not merely because it is historically false but because it inevitably produces the same conservative historiographical image of the European proletariat as that of Claudín, Carrillo and their co-thinkers. For not merely is dual power typically briefer in Europe than in the Russia of 1917—on Mandel's logic the Eurocommunists could claim this as evidence of their claims concerning the backwardness of the European worker. Worse. If we place revolutionary situations only at the end of dual power then there are not many revolutionary situations in European history. And if dual power has arisen from conveniently disintegrating states our historical studies will inevitably overlook the *chief revolutionary uprisings of the European proletariat*. And this is indeed a feature of the historical map supplied in *New Left Review* 100. *The revolution is absent*.

THE FORGOTTEN FEBRUARY

The Russian Revolution is the fountainhead of revolutionary strategy and the cornerstone of all debate concerning the road to socialism. It is therefore vital to understand this experience thoroughly. For Leninists it truly is the “classical model”. Yet Mandel and Weber (Mandel, 1976) manage to discuss the Russian Revolution without mentioning the revolution of February 1917. Weber refers to the “classical model” as “breakdown of the state, rise of soviets, dual power, marginalisation of the reformists and development of the clash between soviet power and bourgeois power to the point of insurrection.” (Mandel, 1976, 97.) Mandel does not contradict this picture, but rather amplifies the vocabulary of breakdown, disintegration and decomposition. The February Revolution is simply forgotten. What is left of the revolutionary process is only a *half*-process. This half-process is then proposed by Mandel as a normative model of the revolution in Europe. The February Revolution is treated as an expendable preliminary which has no analogue in the western context. Yet there are no empirical, theoretical, or historical grounds for such a procedure. On the contrary, the whole of the Russian experience of 1917 is relevant to the western context—and supplies us with an alternative model of the revolutionary process to the one supplied by Mandel.

It would be a complete mystification to imagine that the state “broke down” in Russia in February 1917. The Russian army did not “disintegrate” or “decompose”. Of course, the Russian army was demoralised by the military setbacks of 1915 and 1916. It suffered an acute crisis of *morale*. Yet the *discipline* of the troops was intact. A vocabulary drawn from the science of machines and plants is not appropriate to social processes, and blurs this distinction. Despite the fact that the Russian army suffered a greater loss of morale than probably any other army of the First World War, the Russian workers could not avoid going through the purgatory of revolution before the barracks would join the street. What “disintegrated” the bourgeois army in 1917 was not the war but the revolution of 23-27 February.

The February overthrow of the Tsarist authorities was hardly a matter of kicking in an open door. It was a full-scale revolutionary uprising. As in every insurrection, the central problem is how to overcome the resistance of the armed forces that defend the authorities. Only then is it possible for the workers to go and disperse the old governmental personnel and install a new regime. To break the army, it is necessary to win over the mass of the soldiers. As Trotsky once said, an insurrection involves a struggle not against the army, but for it. In this sense, the revolution must “traverse” the state. But the rank and file soldiers can only be won over by the “frontal assault” of insurrection. It can never be done by propaganda alone, for what is involved here is nothing less than inducing the troops to mutiny against their officers, something soldiers do not do easily for the penalty for mutiny is death. This is why the insurrectionary crowd is the indispensable instrument for breaking down the discipline of the army, for it is only the prospect of a new government, a new legality, one that will bless their mutiny as a heroic act rather than a crime, that will induce the troops to take this fateful step. Trotsky explains this well. In his *History of the Russian Revolution* (Trotsky, 1937), Trotsky says that no political crisis can fail to affect the soldiers. A “revolutionary selection” takes place. However, unlike workers, the soldiers, whatever their individual sympathies, remain tied together by “a compulsory discipline whose threads are held, up to the last moment, in the officers fist. [...] The army is heterogeneous, and its antagonistic elements are held together by the terror of discipline.” (Trotsky, 1937, vol. 1, 120.) But the insurrectionary crowd can free the soldiers from the bondage of discipline:

[...] the more the soldiers in their mass are convinced that the rebels are really rebelling—that this is not a demonstration after which they (the soldiers) will have to go back to the barracks and report, that this is a struggle to the death, that the people may win it they join them, and that this winning will not only guarantee impunity [decisive condition—the author] but alleviate the lot of all—the more they realise this, the more willing they are to turn aside their bayonets, or go over with them to the people. In other words, the revolutionists can create a break in the soldier’s mood only if they themselves are actually ready to seize the victory at any price whatsoever, even the price of blood. (Trotsky, 1937, vol. 1, 121.)⁷

This captures perfectly the scenes that took place in the streets of Petrograd in February 1917. (Trotsky’s chapter “Five Days” (Trotsky, 1937, vol.1 101-35) is justly famous for its vivid account of these confrontations.) During those Five Days, the workers of the Vyborg marched repeatedly into the centre of Petrograd to confront the troops, urging them to disobey their officers and join the insurgents in the arrest and dispersal of the old regime. Many were killed in these attempts. Despite the demonstrators calling for peace and the overthrow of the Tsar—slogans to which the soldiers could not have been especially hostile—they met considerable resistance from the troops. The rising took the lives of over 1,400 people, a very high total for (successful) urban insurrection. Over 860 of these casualties were soldiers. (Trotsky, 1937, vol.1, 141.) Naturally, the garrison was not homogeneous. The workers anticipated and met resistance from the elites of the military academies. The 3,000 armed police—the first line of defence of the regime—had a hatred for the workers unaffected by the war,

⁷ See also Trotsky’s *1905* (Trotsky 1971a), 268-9.

and they were only dispersed after ferocious fighting, in which several police stations were burnt to the ground and many police officers killed. But the barrack conscripts who were the weakest link in the military chain were certainly not wild-eyed men reeling from defeats at the front. They were fresh troops, many of whom had not yet experienced the horrors of war nor learnt a soldier's hatred of the officers. It was several days before the first regiment mutinied and joined the workers in taking up arms against the more recalcitrant units. The February Revolution owes its success to the tenacity and determination of the insurrectionary crowd who refused to be deterred from their goal, whatever the sacrifice.

The winter of 1916-7 had seen no significant mutinies on the Russian front. It was not the front that inspired the revolution, but the revolution that inspired the front. It was the news of the Petrograd overturn which, when it reached the trenches, convinced the soldier that he could and should fight the tyranny of the officers and do something about the war. The February Revolution legislated council democracy for the front (the famous "Order Number One" drawn up by the soldiers' councils of the Petrograd garrison), and it was the promises of land reform made by the February regime that guaranteed that the peasant within the soldier would soon get the upper hand. It was the revolution which fatally impaired the tyranny of the Russian officer caste. And although the army consented to a new offensive against the Germans in June 1917, it was not by fiat of the government but under the influence of the "revolutionary" propaganda of Menshevik and Social-Revolutionary agitators whom the generals had to import to the front before the troops would agree to the attack.

To return to Petrograd. Having won over a goodly number of the soldiers, the insurrectionary crowd proceeded to carry out the customary tasks of insurrectionaries. They seized all the strategic installations, both military and civilian, arrested whatever members of the Tsar's government and other administrative officials who had not fled, put themselves in charge of all governmental buildings, and proceeded to create a new regime. There was no doubt in the minds of any contemporary observer that, at this moment, the insurgent workers held Petrograd wholly in their hands. But what was the aim of this uprising? Was it concerned simply with the removal of the political oppression represented by the Tsar? Or was it intended as a social revolution? Were the workers aiming to create a bourgeois democracy or a revolutionary dictatorship of the oppressed and exploited classes? Was February a "democratic" revolution as distinct from the "socialist" revolution of October?

The most authoritative account of the Russian Revolution is Trotsky's *History*. (Trotsky, 1937.) Trotsky partly intended this monumental work—probably the greatest book ever written on a revolution, and by one of its leading participants—as a polemic against the Stalinist "two stages" theory of revolution in countries outside the advanced capitalist world: a theory according to which the working class, in the first, "February", revolution, would not pursue its own class ambitions. Trotsky assembles a great deal of evidence to show that this was not the case in the Russian February.

When the freshly armed masses occupied the Tauride Palace,^[8] they might have been expected to call on the Duma to proclaim itself the new power and form a government from among the Duma parties. They did not do so. Trotsky cites Sukhanov,^[9] an independent socialist but supporter of the Menshevik position, to the effect that "the people did not gravitate towards the State Duma, they were not

[8] The Tauride Palace had been the home, from 1906, of the Russian parliament, the Imperial State Duma. Following February, it would house both the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet, in opposite wings.

[9] Nikolai Sukhanov (1882-1940) was a one-time member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, and in 1917 a member of the executive committee of the Petrograd Soviet. In 1931 he was, as one of the defendants of that year's "Menshevik Trial", exiled to Siberia. In 1940 he was convicted of trumped up charges of espionage and shot.

interested in it, and never thought of making it either politically or technically the centre of the movement.” (Trotsky, 1937, vol. 1, 165.) When the masses invaded the Duma they created the Soviet, demanding a government of the soviet parties—principally the Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries (the Bolshevik organisation had been reduced by war-time repression). The Duma liberals, far from greeting the crowds who came to the Tauride in the name of “democracy”, turned and fled from the building. Later, when the Menshevik and SR¹⁰ leaders approached the Kadets^[11] (behind closed doors) to propose that they, as parliamentary deputies and as members of the bourgeoisie, should form a government, the Kadets were utterly astonished. Rodzianko^[12] told them: “You have the power, you can arrest us all.” (Trotsky, 1937, vol. 1, 171.) This belief of the liberals that they were in danger of arrest nicely expresses the fact that the *masses* had already come prior to February to regard the bourgeoisie as a component part of the old order—jointly responsible, together with the Tsar, for the catastrophe that the war had heaped on the heads of the Russian people. Trotsky tells us that the February insurgents “did not distinguish” the bourgeoisie “from the nobility and the bureaucracy.” (Trotsky, 1937, vol.1, 168.) It was precisely because the insurgents were seeking, not merely a change in the *political* regime, but a *social revolution*, that the Duma was rejected in favour of the Soviet, and Trotsky leaves us in no doubt that the Soviet was regarded by the popular classes as the sovereign body from February onwards: “The people believe in the Soviet, the people are armed, therefore the Soviet is the sovereign power. That was the way they understood it. And were they not indeed right?” (Trotsky, 1937, vol. 1, 234.)

Trotsky repeated again and again that the Soviet enjoyed a greater authority than the Duma throughout the February-October interlude. “It would seem,” says Trotsky

as if these new dumas, which differed from the soviets by a broader representation, ought to have enjoyed great authority. Moreover, as socio-judicial institutions, the dumas had the immense advantage of official government support: the militia, the food supplies, the municipal transport, popular education, were officially in the hands of the Duma. The Soviet as a “private” institution had neither budget nor rights. Nevertheless the power remained with the soviets. (Trotsky, 1937, vol. 1, 369.)

The Duma suffered the fate of all parliamentary institutions caught in the middle of a social revolution. The soviets, into which the bourgeoisie did not dare to set foot, were preferred by the masses because it was the task of suppressing the propertied classes which was gripping the imagination of the masses. The dumas, like all parliamentary bodies, were deliberative assemblies resting on the old professional bureaucracy; the soviet assembly, by contrast, was elected through a network of committees by means of which the popular classes were able to mobilise for mass revolutionary action. The people were automatically attracted to the soviets not simply as the symbol of the February victory, but as the most dynamic centre of the unfolding revolution. It is only necessary to add the caveat that it took some months for the peasantry, suspicious as they were of all urban assemblies, formally to join the soviet system. During the first few months, the peasants created land committees, authorised by the

[10] The Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries based themselves on a programme agrarian socialism and had built themselves a mass base of support among the Russian peasantry. In the summer of 1917 they split into left and right factions; the former supported the revolutionary government formed in October while the latter opposed it.

[11] The Kadet (a Russian acronym for “Constitutional Democrat”) party was a party of bourgeois liberalism. It formed the core of the Provisional Government that emerged out of the February revolution.

[12] Mikhail Rodzianko (1859-1924) was the Chairman of the Imperial State Duma, and effectively Prime Minister in the brief interregnum between the dispersal of the Duma in February 1917 and the formation of the Provisional Government.

government, but set up by the peasants in the image of the *mir*.^[13] After first drawing up an inventory of rural property, the land committees, as the summer wore on and peasant patience wore out, seized the landlord's property, drove him out, burnt his house to the ground, and transferred all power and property into the hands of the assembled village. Needless to add, this had nothing to do with bourgeois democracy. The peasantry *formally* joined the soviet system only when they saw that the executives of the chief urban soviets were encouraging land seizures—which they did when the Bolsheviks acquired majorities in September. At the time of the October rising, the soviets embraced some 25 million people, and by the middle of 1918 virtually the entire adult population—worker, soldier and peasant—had joined the soviets, through which they were formally enfranchised in the constitution of 1919.

It is not surprising then that the composition of the government arranged by the Mensheviks and SRs, when it became known in Petrograd on 2 March, created an “immediate feeling of hostility, or at best a dumb bewilderment” among the workers and soldiers. “The name of Miliukov^[14] or Guchkov^[15] [two leading *duma* liberals] did not evoke one voice of greeting in either factory or barracks.” (Trotsky, 1937, vol. 1, 194.) Instead, Trotsky testifies, “meetings of soldiers and workers began to demand that the Soviet depose forthwith the Provisional Government of the liberal bourgeoisie, and take the power in its own hands.” (Trotsky, 1937, vol. 1, 219) In Petrograd, the district Vyborg Committee of the Bolsheviks “held meetings of thousands of workers and soldiers, which almost unanimously accepted resolutions on the necessity for a seizure of power by the soviets.” (Trotsky, 1937, vol. 1, 286.) Genius though he was, the slogan of all power to the soviets and the soviet parties did not arrive in Russia in Lenin's briefcase in April. The February masses had already anticipated him. That slogan described the intention behind the February uprising. Trotsky found it deeply paradoxical that the working class should have carried out a revolution which resulted in a bourgeois power—or rather the half-power possessed by the bourgeois government that emerged from the February Days. He found the explanation, not in a deficiency of consciousness among the working class, but in the actions of the petty-bourgeois radicals who led the socialist parties. Lenin made a prescient remark when he had written in his *Two Tactics* many years before 1917 that the Mensheviks would consent to lead an insurrection “only to turn all these fruits over *entirely to the bourgeoisie*.” (Lenin, 1977a, 75.) Acting independently of the soviet assembly, these forces confirmed Lenin's prediction. Speaking of Sukhanov (who would document his own activities during the February Days (Sukhanov (1955)), Trotsky stated that

The inspirer of this whole governmental mystification [it was Sukhanov more than any other socialist who was responsible for bringing the Kadets to power] thus openly acknowledges that, as early as the 2nd of March, the Petrograd Soviet was in a mood for the *formal* seizure of that power which had belonged to it *in fact* since the evening of February 27—that only behind the backs of the workers and soldiers, without their knowledge, and against their actual will, had the socialist leaders been able to expropriate this power for the benefit of the bourgeoisie. In Sukhanov's account this deal between the democrats and the liberals acquires all the necessary juridical marks of a crime against the revolution, a veritable secret conspiracy against the sovereignty and rights of the people. (Trotsky, 1937, vol. 1, 184-5.)

It was the *question of government* which would dominate the dual power interlude. For the dual power

[13] The *mir* (or *obshchina*) was the traditional Russian peasant commune, on which the great mass of pre-revolutionary Russian agriculture was based.

[14] Pavel Miliukov (or Milyukov) (1859-1943) was a Russian liberal and one of the founders of the Kadets. He was first Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Provisional Government.

[15] Alexander Guchkov (1862-1936), a member of the State Duma, was the first Minister of War in the Provisional Government.

took the form, not of a conflict between the soviets and the Duma, but a struggle between the soviets—which the masses regarded as sovereign—and the bourgeois government that the soviet leaders had put into power. Over this people fought and died in the summer of 1917. In a revolution, who forms what sort of government invariably becomes the central focus of the class struggle. In times of turmoil and upheaval, society always demands a concentration of sovereignty, and government becomes more not less important during revolutionary periods. A government is the co-ordinating body of power in any polity, including a revolutionary one, and no matter how independent in initiative the masses may be they cannot for long substitute themselves for the central directing role of government. The problem of finding an adequate government to head the revolution, organise it, and guide it was the major question that preoccupied people after February.

As is well known, the central tactical slogan of Bolshevism in 1917 was “all power to the soviets”. This slogan did not mean: “we should turn the soviets into organs of power.” The people already treated them as such. Trotsky could write that “the dictatorship of the workers and soldiers had already been a fact ever since the 27th of February.” (Trotsky, 1937, vol. 2, 312.) Lenin noted that the slogan “All power to the Soviets! was a slogan for the *peaceful* development of the revolution.” (Lenin, 1974d, 179, my emphasis.) Such statements would hardly be possible if the February insurrection had not already broken the backbone of bourgeois power. The immediate practical meaning of the slogan “all power to the soviets” related to the question of government. It meant that the soviet parties should take their rightful place at the head of the revolution. It meant “break the coalition” and “down with the ten capitalist ministers”. That this was its chief popular connotation is attested to by the fact that Lenin felt it necessary to write an article reminding people that the slogan did not refer *only* to government. (Lenin, 1974g, 371-2.) Nevertheless, the bourgeois government was the chief obstacle in the path of the revolution, and it was to its removal that the Bolsheviks devoted their efforts over these months. The Bolsheviks, at this time still a minority party in the soviets, demanded that the Mensheviks and SRs form a government—they could have done so without meeting any significant resistance. Almost certainly, this alone would not have fully secured proletarian power, for these two parties, even if they had broken their coalition with the bourgeois parties, would doubtless have found some other means of re-attaching themselves to the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, if they *had* taken power, “the struggle of classes and parties *within* the soviets could have assumed a most peaceful and painless form provided full state power had passed to the Soviets in good time.” (Lenin, 1974e, 186.¹⁶)

In February, the Compromise socialists had dragged the Kadets to power. In April they formally joined a coalition with them in an effort to shore them up with their own authority: a manoeuvre already deemed necessary in February when Kerensky¹⁷ joined the first February government. Coalitionism was not a minor issue. Writing five months after the February events, Lenin stated that “this policy of compromise with the bourgeoisie pursued by the Socialist-Revolutionary and Menshevik parties, who enjoyed the confidence of the majority of the people, is the main content of the entire course of development of the revolution.” (Lenin, 1974f, 234.) It must be remembered that, even in normal times, it is considered a betrayal of some enormity for a socialist party to join a coalition with a party of the bourgeoisie. Even workers not much interested in politics understand this. How much more so then is it considered a crime in the midst of a revolution, when class consciousness is at its peak? “Treachery”, “cowardice”: these are not epithets dreamt up after the event by analysts unable to penetrate the surface of events, but the cries that spontaneously greeted the Mensheviks and SRs, as they have greeted all their subsequent imitators in analogous situations. The workers hated the Kadets as the party of the capitalist and war-monger. The peasants voted for the SRs as the enemy of the

¹⁶ See also Trotsky’s *History*: Trotsky (1937, vol. 2, 312-13.)

¹⁷ Alexander Kerensky (1881-1970) was a leader of the SRs, member of the Provisional Government from its formation, and Prime Minister following the July Days until October 1917.

Kadets, the party of lawyers and landlords. Coalitionism rasped unbearably on the nerves of class hatred, already made raw by the war and the revolution. The coalition was a totally unexpected obstacle.

How then did the Compromisers seek to justify themselves? Certainly not by reference to the authority of the Duma or the duma liberals. Instead they practised a policy of deception. Historians seem reluctant to imagine that deception plays a significant role in history. But history has never been able to afford the honesty of the armchair historian. Contemporary Marxists may find it a little too “subjective”, nevertheless the fact remains that deception has always been a constituent ingredient of the revolutionary process, above all because it is a matter of trying to put back into their place untutored people who are awkwardly seeking to play an unaccustomed role in political life. The Compromisers used their authority with the people to try to persuade them to deny what their instincts told them about the liberals. The Compromisers deliberately kept silent about the actual role of the liberals during the February days. They said nothing of liberal schemes for a constitutional monarchy, and painted them up in heroic colours. Even Lenin, writing his *Letters From Afar* on the basis of newspaper reports, believed them to have played a more independent role than was actually the case. (Lenin, 1974b.) The Compromisers put all the popular measures originating from the Soviet into the months of the Kadet ministers. Decrees left Petrograd for the country stamped with the seal of the dual power. In all these ways the Compromisers prettied the liberals. At the same time they tried to minimise the importance of the coalition issue. Did the liberals actually oppose the land committees? Did they oppose Order Number One? Were they not, even now, drawing up schemes for controlling industry together with the socialists? Were they not working in harmony with the socialists to secure peace with Germany? In any case, by joining a coalition, the socialists would be able to keep an eye on the liberals. The chief justification however was not—and nor could it have been—drawn from the domestic scene where class lines were already too sharply drawn. It was based on the acuity of the *international* situation. It was claimed that the imperialist powers would not negotiate with an all-socialist government. The presence of the bourgeoisie would help to secure peace while doing no damage to the domestic revolution.

This was the direct opposite of the truth, as events were soon to prove. The Kadets in reality continued to carry on the same policies in coalition with the socialists as they had done in collaboration with the Tsarist regime, although the socialists concealed this fact. All the upheavals of the February-October period occurred around the repeated revelations that the Kadets were not pursuing the advertised policy. The major clashes between the masses and the government which took place in Petrograd, where the most politically advanced workers and soldiers were concentrated, were over the war. In April, when it suddenly became known in Petrograd that the Kadet Muliukov had reassured the Allies that the revolution would not take Russia out of the war, armed demonstrators marched on the centre of Petrograd calling for the Soviet to dismiss the government and take power. The Compromisers refused and sent more ministers into the coalition. But when this new government later announced plans for a renewed offensive against the Germans to open in June, the agitation broke out once more. In the first week of July, with the offensive already under way, half a million armed workers and soldiers took to the streets demanding their leaders stop dilly-dallying with the class enemy and take power. Trotsky characteristically catches the mood: “Let us have an end of this coalition rigmarole!” “All power to the soviets!” And waving their rifles under the noses of the Compromisers they demanded: “Take the power you son-of-a-bitch, when they give to you!” (Trotsky, 1937, vol. 2, 13, 21, 40.) At any moment between February and October it was of course physically possible for workers to arrest the government, but that was no use unless their own class parties would agree to take power.

This they resolutely refused to do. During the July Days,^[18] the Executive Committee of the Soviet called troops from the front to shoot down its own supporters (in the name of the soviets of course—only the Soviet was obeyed) as “spies” and “German agents”. It was after this traumatic experience that the angry and disillusioned workers and soldier masses turned to the *other* socialist party, the Bolsheviks: “*You* take power. *You* do what our so-called socialist leaders refused to do in February.”

Of course, the process did not develop everywhere at the same pace. The peasants and front soldiers did not have such an active distrust of the Compromisers as the inhabitants of Petrograd. It took them a little longer to free themselves from the “governmental mystification” emanating from Petrograd and reach the same conclusion as the workers and soldiers of the capital. News reached them slowly, often through the medium of officers or provincial petty bourgeois, who suitably embellished it. They could not observe the government at close quarters. It was on this uneven development of consciousness that the Compromisers relied, seeking to incite the country against the revolutionary capital. This they did in a hundred ways—over the eight-hour day (“do they count the hours in the trenches?”), the war (“Petrograd is refusing to support the front”) and land (“nothing will be left for the men at the front”). But it was over the June offensive^[19] that the divergence of capital and country reached its most dangerous point. The Compromisers gave it out that the German High Command was the obstacle to peace. It only remained to teach them a good lesson at the front to bring them round the table. The Germans had withdrawn many troops from the Eastern Front, or so it appeared, so that an offensive looked feasible to some of the troops. But the Petrograd workers and soldiers warned that it was not the Germans who were the obstacles to peace but the *Kadets*, who were still pursuing the war for the old treaties in collusion with the Entente. Accordingly, the garrison vowed take the offensive “only when the war shall have a revolutionary character”. (Trotsky, 1937, vol. 1, 384.²⁰) But the front soldier *was* successfully seduced into the offensive. Naturally, it was to be a “peace offensive”, an offensive to “defend the revolution”. Was not the revolution ninety-five per cent secure? Was not the presence of the Kadets in the government only a small detail? As Lenin so accurately put it, the Compromisers deceived the people “by working on their noble pride in the revolution.” (Lenin, 1974c, 65.) The failure of the June offensive, coupled with the scandal raised by the shooting of workers in the capital (workers and soldiers are shot by Cossacks in the revolutionary capital—how is that possible if the

[18] The “July Days” (16 to 20 July, 1917) was a period of spontaneous insurrectionary disturbances in Petrograd directed at the Provisional Government.

[19] The “June offensive” (or “Kerensky offensive”), the last offensive Russian action of the war, represented an attempt by the Provisional Government to continue to honour its international military treaty obligations. It was a disaster, and led directly to the July Days.

²⁰ By “revolutionary character” the soldiers meant that they would only take the offensive when there was a workers’ and peasants’ government in Russia. Only then could the war truly be in defence of the revolution. This is an important point. The national sections of the Second International are not to be condemned for voting war credits in 1914 but for voting credits to, and thereby putting confidence in, *bourgeois governments*. Only a revolutionary government can be trusted with the defence of a country’s self-determination, respecting the right of self-determination of others, and able to appeal to any invading troops with revolutionary arguments. If a country is invaded, or in fear of invasion, then the proletariat must take up arms, as it did in Europe in 1940-45. The subjection of a country destroys all democratic and political rights in that country, and makes the struggle for socialism more difficult. But the proletariat must fight for self-determination under its own class banner. An interesting discussion of this question is to be found in Trotsky’s *War and the International* [Ed.—otherwise known as *The Bolsheviks and World Peace* (Trotsky, 1918)]. The position of the soldiers in Russia between February and October 1917 was that they would defend their lines, make revolutionary propaganda to the German troops, but not adopt the offensive. Bolshevik troops played a heroic role for instance in the defence of Riga in the autumn, prior to the October rising. Contrary to popular prejudice, the Bolsheviks favoured democracy in the army but did not induce troops to desert their posts. Neither were they pacifists.

government is as revolutionary as it claims?) together with the continued failure of the coalition to take action to distribute land—all these things combined to convince the whole country that its suspicions had been correct. Its instincts were right, the coalition was a fraud. The Compromisers had been lying and the Petrograd Bolsheviks had been right. With this—a conclusion reinforced by the unexpected appearance of Kornilov²¹ in August—the whole country turned to the Bolshevik Party, the only party to have consistently opposed coalitionism. The anger at the deception and conspiracy of the coalition parties was so bitter that these two parties soon lost their former supporters. The two parties fell apart almost completely in the course of 1917 as the popularity of the Bolsheviks grew to immense proportions. The Bolshevik-Left SR government installed by the October insurrection achieved by simple decree what the Compromisers had spent eight frustrating months wringing their hands over. The roots of the one-party system lie not so much in Bolshevik repression over the course of 1918, as in the behaviour of these two parties in the dual power.

“It goes without saying,” said Lenin, “that the soviets could and should have taken over state power in full [in February].” (Lenin, 1974f, 233.) The dual power arose because the Compromisers ruined the revolution, not because the workers were reformist. Trotsky concluded that the Compromisers were able to do this—and then only for a short time—because of the exceptional circumstances imposed by the war. “After the October Revolution,” he wrote,

a good deal was written to the effect that the Bolsheviks owed their victory to the peasant army, tired of the war. That is a very superficial explanation. The exact opposite statement would be nearer the truth. If the Compromisers got a dominant position in the February revolution, it is thanks most of all to the unusual place occupied in the life of the country by a peasant army. [...] It was just this artificial social formation which so extraordinarily strengthened the hold of petty-bourgeois compromise policy, and made possible *an eight-month period of experiments, weakening to the country and the revolution.* (Trotsky, 1937, vol. 1, 417-18, my emphasis.)

During the war, the Bolshevik party had been suppressed, the proletariat of the capital diluted, and the garrison swollen by 150,000 peasants in uniform. The Soviet of February, which decided the fate of the country, was not the elected strike committee of 1905. It was this “artificial” state of affairs that permitted the Compromisers to practice their policy for the eight months of the dual power. Yet if the revolution had broken out in 1914, remarked Trotsky elsewhere, it “would probably have been Bolshevik from the outset, [...] the overthrow of the monarchy would, in all likelihood, have meant the immediate assumption of power by the revolutionary workers’ soviets, and the latter, through the medium of the left Narodniks (the SRs), would (from ‘the very outset!’) have drawn the peasant masses within their orbit.” (Trotsky, 1971b, 10.) Ironically, what Trotsky considered to be exceptional in Russia, turns out, in the light of subsequent European experience, to be the typical pattern of events.

Before leaving the Russian Revolution—we will deal with some of its post-October aspects below—it is worth noting that the question of the nature of the dual power is tied up with a deeper theoretical issue that divided the Russian revolutionary movement, namely what sort of revolution was appropriate to Russian society in the light of the stage of historical development it had reached at the turn of the century. Stalinism has made it a commonplace that February was a “bourgeois” revolution, and October a “proletarian-socialist” revolution. It is perhaps confusion over this issue which partly influences Mandel to subtract the February revolution from his model of the revolutionary process. A “bourgeois” revolution is, it seems, not applicable to Western Europe, and perhaps we begin with the dual power rather than the “February”. However, this notion of distinct and separable revolutions is quite misleading. Neither Lenin nor Trotsky ever believed that the Russian bourgeoisie could come to

²¹) Lavr Kornilov (1879-1918) was appointed commander-in-chief of the Russian army immediately after the July Days. Over August to September 1917 he attempted to organise a military coup to overthrow the Provisional Government and disperse the Soviet.

power in one revolution, to be followed by the proletariat in a second. Their pre-1917 disagreements were not over *who* should seize power at the moment of the Tsar's overthrow, but what *tasks* the new revolutionary power—a revolutionary government of workers and peasants—should have. Lenin believed that the revolution would have wholly bourgeois tasks, for Russia had to go through a further historical stage of capitalist development. He projected Russia as a small property owning democracy similar to America in the early nineteenth century. Trotsky, on the other hand, believed that it would be necessary to combine socialist with bourgeois tasks—that after the revolution there would be socialism, at least in industry, together with a redistribution of the land among the small property-owning peasantry. But both were in agreement that the workers and peasants should hold power and that the bourgeoisie could not carry through the revolution against Tsarism, even though this is not immediately clear owing to the terminology: Lenin's "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" versus Trotsky's "dictatorship of the proletariat".²² This is why both Lenin and Trotsky believed that the soviets could and should have taken power in February. What proved unforeseen was that the revolution would break out under such peculiar conditions as those in 1917, where the Mensheviks were to be found at the head of the revolution. It was because of this, and *only* because of this, that the revolution had to make the little detour of dual power, whose function was to resolve the party question and bring back to the head of the mass movement a leadership adequate to the aspirations of the February insurgents. It was this almost accidental circumstance that gave rise to two revolutions rather than one. The tasks of the Revolution were of course the same: the breakup of the Tsarist bureaucracy, land to the peasants, and peace. (Lenin often said in 1918 that, despite the intended move towards socialism in the industrial sector, the October revolution was a predominantly bourgeois revolution.)

What has created great confusion since 1917 is that the Mensheviks justified their February betrayal in terms of a theory of two distinct revolutions—that the bourgeoisie must first take power in one revolution, complete its historic role, and give way to the proletariat in a second, later, revolution. And what has compounded the confusion is that the Stalinists resurrected this Menshevik theory in the 1920s and passed it off as classical Leninism. Yet the Russian proletariat itself never followed such a schema, as our history has shown. Furthermore, the proletarian revolution in the West has typically been faced with a similar combination of "democratic" and "socialist" tasks as the one in Russia in 1917: the struggle for socialism has been integrally combined with the struggle for land, for peace (1917-18), for freedom from fascism (1934-36), for national liberation (1941-45), and so on. Yet the theory of two revolutions—in the sense that state power should change hands on two successive occasions, once to the bourgeoisie and once to the proletariat—is no more applicable in Europe than it was in Russia. The appearance of dual power and therefore two (or more) insurrections, on the other hand, is rooted solely in the betrayals of the mass workers' parties and not in the necessity of two revolutions. What is involved here, as in Russia, is not two revolutions, but *a single revolution in which the struggle for power has distinct moments*: insurrection, dual power, subsequent insurrection (which is either victorious or defeated).

²² For a full discussion see Lenin's *Two Tactics* (Lenin, 1977a); "Our Differences in Trotsky's 1905" (Trotsky, (1971a, 299-318); the appendix to Trotsky's *History* (Trotsky, 1937, vol. 3, 419-27); Trotsky's *Permanent Revolution* (Trotsky, 1965,); and chapter VI ("The Permanent Revolution") of Isaac Deutscher's *The Prophet Armed* (Deutscher, 1954, 145-74).

REVOLUTION, MUTINY AND WAR

Before we go on to demonstrate the homologous character of revolution “east” and “west”, let us make a small digression upon the topic of revolution and war. There is no doubt that during the first two decades of the century, revolution was closely bound up with war. This is why it appeared *everywhere* on the continent between 1914 and 1923, as we shall show in a moment. The sufferings brought about by war stirred up deep class hatreds and acted as a tremendous spur to the revolution. The war of 1914, for example, quickly wiped out virtually all of the economic and social gains made by the European labour movement over several decades. The war represented a gigantic material catastrophe, and seemed to contemporaries to mark a break between an epoch of largely “peaceful” social development and one of violent upheavals. Before long, every European country would experience the effects of war and blockade—semi-starvation, disease and exhaustion, not to mention the horrors of the front itself. But there are two points that must be stressed here.

Firstly, no army mutinied in the 1914-18 war without the presence or imminence of the proletarian revolution. Unless the soldiers believed there was the possibility that the workers would overthrow the regime and release them from the war—that a new legality would hail them as heroes rather than shoot them as mutineers, and free them from the grip of the punitive generals—they never mutinied in large numbers. The great mutiny which struck the French Army in April 1917 following the defeat of the Nivelle offensive owed a great deal to rumours reaching the front that a revolution had broken out in Paris, and it is known that at least two regiments set out for the capital on this assumption. (Wohl, 1966, 88.) Unfortunately, the rumours proved untrue. The April strikes against the war and in solidarity with the Russian Revolution had not been turned into an uprising by the French Socialist Party, and the rebellion in the army was defeated. Is it perhaps a general law that without a civilian uprising the discipline of the army is ultimately unbreakable? No doubt this is what the French mutineers concluded, for despite at least half the army joining the rebellion, the officers still found sufficient troops to put it down in the name of the government. A hundred thousand men were court-martialled and an unknown number shot. This was the largest mutiny of the war. The other major mutiny, also in 1917, took place in the Italian army during the retreat from Caporetto in November. This surely owed a great deal to the news of the October revolution reaching Italy at that moment, and perhaps an expectation among the troops that the Italian workers might repeat their heroic armed uprising of August 1917 in Turin. Indeed, if the Italian workers had synchronised that particular uprising with the Caporetto disaster, they might have carried through a successful revolution in Italy in 1917.²³ It is also not without interest that both mutinies occurred in 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution, which shone as a beacon of hope above the hell of the front.

But there is a broader question here to which we must pay some attention. It is true that World War One created fertile ground for the revolution. It is also true that a number of revolutionary outbreaks prior to World War One were closely tied up with local wars—the revolution of 1905 followed closely on the heels of Russia’s defeat at the hands of the Japanese in 1904, and the Italian revolution of 1914 was related to the struggle against Italy’s Libyan adventures. But it does not follow that *only* war stimulates revolution. Bukharin (1971) formulated this idea as a dogma. But history proved him wrong. In later decades, as we shall see, the revolution arose from sources other than war. Even in Bukharin’s own day, however, the proletariat had often been presented with the opportunity to take power in situations other than war—for example, during the French general strike of 1909, during the various nationalist risings in Poland before the turn of the century, during the republican rising in Portugal in 1910, the Milan uprising of 1898, and so on. Carrillo’s view that *only* war, and in particular *world* war, is

²³ For an account of this uprising see Williams (1975, 63-4).

a precondition for revolution, is not only historically false. It is exceptionally dangerous. This is not the place to pursue the question of whether nuclear technology rules out a third world war. Recent indications suggest that certain NATO chiefs do not share the theory of peaceful coexistence.²⁴ But 1914 contains a terrible lesson that Carrillo overlooks. War, like the political institutions of the bourgeoisie, is not a “given”. It is not just part of the landscape against which we can discuss the prospects for revolution. It is true that powerful economic forces were pushing Europe towards war in 1914. But war was not inevitable. Anyone who studies that fateful year cannot help being struck by the possibility that the calculus of war was suddenly tipped by fear of proletarian revolution. In other words, the leaders of Europe went to war in 1914, not merely to settle their economic differences, but to *avert revolution*. The failures to seize power prior to August 1914 were punished by the disaster of war. The same thing could happen today. Failure to take power in the Portugals and May 68s may decide imperialism to launch a pre-emptive global war—only this time, despite Hackett, there may be no 1917, or there may be one from which mankind will begin socialist reconstruction from among the ashes of industrial civilisation; and no doubt a new paradox will be added to those in the catalogue of the permanent revolution.

The Great Powers had not joined battle during the Balkan wars of 1911-13 despite having vital interests in that area. They did do so following the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand at Sarajevo by a Bosnian Serb. This struck contemporaries as curious. However, the Austro-Hungarian empire was composed of numerous oppressed nationalities and the rise of independent Serbia inspired them. The assassination produced an acute fear of revolution in Vienna. A war to crush Serbia might avert it. Meanwhile, by a curious coincidence, the revolution broke out in Italy. On 7 June, a socialist demonstration in Ancona was fired upon. This was the signal for an insurrection throughout northern Italy. Local leaders established the proletarian dictatorship. It was known as Red Week. It took 10,000 troops to reduce Ancona alone. This event frightened Italy’s rulers into neutrality, thereby freeing Austria—at the critical moment—from attack on its southern flank. Simultaneously, a new 1905 was beginning in Russia. Street fighting broke out in July in Petrograd. (Trotsky, 1971b, 10-11.) The Russian autocracy decided that by going to war “in defence of Serbia”, they might avert it. This in turn pleased the German government. By convincing German labour that they were fighting to defend freedom against the Tsarist autocracy, the *bête noir* of European socialism, they found the perfect formula for starting a war without provoking German social-democracy to revolution. Britain also had her reasons for going to war in 1914. The strike movement of 1910-13 was the worst it had ever seen. Troops and workers had fought in Liverpool and elsewhere. The suffragettes were a considerable threat to the political order. Above all, Ireland was on the brink of civil war. In July 1914, the Irish Volunteers took their first consignment of weapons and all attempts at conciliating Carson had broken down. War unblocked the impasse. When war was declared, the workers flocked to join Kitchener’s Army, the suffragettes split and half the Irish republicans volunteered for Flanders. In 1914, all the Great Powers sought to export the danger of revolution to their neighbour. It returned to plague them in 1917. Although driven underground at the outbreak it returned with redoubled strength. Without the revolutionary crisis of July 1914, however, Europe may not have gone to war in 1914. If it had gone to war, it might perhaps have been at a later date, and then perhaps with its new collective competitors, the United States and Japan—a better historical solution for the fratricidal ruling classes of Europe. Fratricide is a luxury permitted only to the secure, and Europe had been secure and hegemonic too long—a fatal case of the

²⁴ General Sir John Hackett has recently published a chilling scenario for a largely non-nuclear war in Europe during the mid-1980s (Hackett, 1978). The book reveals the meaning of the current US-China *détente* and Carter’s “human rights” orientation—namely, to open a war against the Soviet Union on two fronts, in the West by intervening in Eastern Europe in the event of a new Hungary or Czechoslovakia and in the East to incite China to attack the US. [Ed.—John Hackett was a British Army general and a senior NATO commanding officer up to his retirement in 1968.]

past weighing too heavily on the brains of the living.²⁵

To conclude our picture. Of the relationship between mutiny and dual power in the 1914-18 war, we must examine the armies of the Central Powers—Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Germany. These survived intact much longer than those of Russia, France or Italy. They did so for one reason: *the relative weakness of the revolutionary movement in these countries*. This is not to say that the Russian Revolution had no impact here, only that the proletariat took much longer to respond. The first critical moment for the Central Powers came only in January 1918 when, with the Kaiser's representatives negotiating with Trotsky at Brest-Litovsk,^[26] a huge strike movement demanding peace and the abdication of the monarchies broke out in Austria and Hungary, reaching Berlin at the end of the month when 30,000 workers in the Berlin factories, under the leadership of the anti-war party, the USPD,^[27] went on strike. But these strikes were crushed. The socialist parties of these countries attempted no uprisings. The failure of the revolution to materialise in the Central Powers had fateful consequences. The German government recovered its balance and launched the invasion of Russia in February 1918, territorially isolating Russia from every European power at the moment when the revolution in Germany finally did break out in the autumn of 1918. This fact cannot be without implications for the fate of the European revolution in 1918-19. It also freed German forces for a further round of war in the west. It is perhaps of some interest to note in passing that the revolutionary response to the Russian proletarian victories of 1917 occurred first not in the autocracies which so resembled the Russian state, but in the bourgeois democracies of Italy and France. (France had attained universal manhood suffrage earlier than any other European power, in 1884. Italy was a liberal state and acquired universal suffrage in 1912.) This would not have surprised the Marxists of this epoch who, in direct contrast to modern day Marxists, believed that bourgeois democracy created the best conditions for a proletarian revolution.

Nor did the armies of the Central Powers “disintegrate” in 1918. They awaited the proletarian revolution, despite it being overdue. It is true that the military denouement of the Central Powers was brought on by the grand mutiny of the Bulgarian army at the end of September—an event which, by opening up the south-eastern front to a French advance, represented a fatal rupture. But the Bulgarian soldiers left their trenches partly on an understanding previously reached with the Sofian proletariat, under the leadership of Dimitar Blagoev's “Narrow Socialists”,^[28] that they would rise in unison. In the event, the Radomir Rebellion,^[29] as it came to be called, was betrayed by the Narrows, thereby leaving the peasant soldiers to suffer heavy losses in the fighting outside the capital, an event creating permanent antagonism between worker and peasant militants, between the Red and Orange flags. (Rothschild, 1959, 74ff.) The Narrows had a sectarian attitude to the democratic demands of the petty bourgeois peasantry, exactly the opposite to that taken by the Bolsheviks—a tactical issue which undoubtedly lost the Bulgarian revolution, both in 1918 and in 1923. Left sectarianism was a feature, not of Russian Marxism, but of European Marxism at this time; for example, the attitude of

²⁵ A discussion of the domestic causes of the war is found in Meyer (1968).

^[26] Brest-Litovsk (in nowadays Byelorussia) was the site of the protracted peace negotiation process held between post-revolutionary Russia and the Central Powers from December 1917 to March 1918.

^[27] The Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) was established as a split by the anti-war faction of the SDP in 1917.

^[28] Dimitar Blagoev (1856-1924) was the founder (in 1894) of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party. In 1903, the Bulgarian Social Democratic movement split into two factions: the Marxists, known as the “Narrow” Socialists, and the reformists (the “Broad” Socialists). Under Blagoev's leadership, the former faction would eventually affiliate to the Third International and become the Communist Party of Bulgaria.

^[29] The Radomir Rebellion of September 1918 (Radomir is a town in the west of Bulgaria), in which several thousand mutinous soldiers, led by agrarian leaders (among them Aleksandar Stamboliyski, later the head of the post-World War One government) marched on Sofia, the Bulgarian capital.

Luxemburg, Radek and Dzerzhinsky^[30] to the national aspirations of the Polish people, which gave the leadership of the revolution in Poland in 1918 to petty-bourgeois nationalist forces under Pilsudski.³¹ King Ferdinand of Bulgaria survived Radomir, but not before signing a separate peace with the French. This sealed the military defeat of the Central Powers. However, their actual military capitulation was not secured without revolutions in which the proletariat played either a leading or major role—in Austria and Hungary in late October, where the revolutionary overthrow of the monarchist regime left behind it a dual power similar to the one that emerged in Russia in February 1917, and in Czechoslovakia and Poland where nationalist risings occurred.³²

THE GERMAN REVOLUTION: THE REVOLUTION EXPUNGED

The most important event amidst the gigantic revolutionary movement in Eastern and Central Europe in the autumn of 1918 was unquestionably the German Revolution of November 1918. We must devote considerable attention to this, for the German Revolution is at the centre of present-day debates on “east” and “west”.

Pre-1914 Germany was formally an autocratic power. Its parliament was impotent, for in Prussia, where four-sevenths of the population lived, a three-class electoral system kept the working class parties from power. Nevertheless, its labour movement had a long tradition of parliamentary struggle and its party and trade unions had operated legally, in contrast with Russia, for many years. The Prussian military were kept on reserve in the event of revolution by the orthodoxly Marxist SPD, but seldom intervened in labour disputes. It is quite usual to treat Germany as a paradigm case of a labour movement saturated in parliamentary and legalistic tradition, and to draw the conclusion that not only the capitulation of August 1914, but also the failure of the revolution of 1918, flowed directly from those traditions (overlooking the fact that even the Russian working class movement had its chauvinists in 1914). The German Revolution has suffered badly at the hands of modern Marxists. It is usual to cast pity on the revolutionary efforts of the German proletariat, and to ridicule the Spartacists,^[33] a small group heroically but mistakenly seeking to imitate the Russian model with a labour movement hopelessly wedded to bourgeois democracy. Poor Spartacists! And poor Bolsheviks with their delusive faith that the German Revolution was coming to save them! Poor Comintern and its white elephant of a European revolution! The German proletariat is the Cinderella of Cinderellas: a mere shadow of its Russian prototype. Here is to be found the historical proof that some “western” alternative to the

[30] Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Radek, and Feliz Dzerzhinsky were all at one time leaders of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania.

[31] Józef Pilsudski (1867-1935), a former member of the Polish Socialist Party, acted as head of state of the independent Polish state that as formed emerged at the end of World War One.

³² See Borkeu (1962, 57ff) for a general overview, although Borkeu is not a wholly reliable writer; Carsten (1972) contains a discussion of the Austrian and Hungarian events; for Czechoslovakia, see Mabey (1955); for Poland see Dziewanowski (1976).

[33] The Spartacist organisation was set up principally on the initiative of Rosa Luxemburg on 4 August 1914, in the evening of the very same day of the SPD's support in the Reichstag for the military budget. They initially called themselves the International Group, later informally to adopt the name Spartacus Group over the course of 1916. On 11 November 1918 they formally launched themselves as the Spartacus League (Spartacusbund). From 1917 they operated as the extreme left wing of the USPD.

Russian road must be found.

This is a totally false picture, and many forces have conspired to paint it. The Nazis attempted systematically to destroy the memory of the German Revolution, and their efforts have been supplemented by a school of Anglo-American liberal historians. Almost all the work on the German Revolution available in English falls into this latter category. The tendency of this historical school is to minimise the threat to capitalism posed by the revolution and the workers' councils of 1918 in order to prove that there was room for Ebert and the SPD to pursue a more conciliatory policy and in this way avert the development of fascism, to which the Freikorps^[34] undoubtedly contributed. The image of the German Revolution drawn by these historians fits in well with the prevailing Euromarxist fashions.³⁵ Thus the November events are treated as little more than a mutiny or at best a general strike. Journalistic mementoes of the Kiel^[36] mutiny are numerous, yet no full-length study of the USPD's November insurrection is available. The vocabulary of "collapse", "disintegration", and the other similar terms used to conceal a revolution, is customary. The workers may have set up councils, but these were not communist in aim. The workers were primarily republican and concerned with peace. Did not the Spartacists enjoy only minority support? Did not the First All-German Congress of Councils, which met in December, voluntarily cede sovereignty to a National Assembly, elected on universal suffrage—living proof of congenital attachment to bourgeois democracy? The Spartacus rising of January 1919 was remarkable for the tragic deaths of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht,^[37] but surely it amounted to little more than a futile putsch. The civil war of January to June 1919 is almost completely forgotten, as the Nazis intended. Only the tragi-comic tail of the revolution, the short lived Bavarian Soviet Republic of April 1919, attracts any attention. This comparatively minor episode in a colourful corner of southern Germany has become a great favourite with publishers, probably because Bavaria was the home of the early Hitler movement, a more popular subject than German revolutionaries. The element of the bizarre which surrounds the Republic also conceals the grim seriousness of the bloody upheavals that marked the mainstream of the civil war in the heavily proletarianised districts of Germany. All this is taken seriously by modern Euromarxists and passed off as proof that the political environment of the "west" is inconducive to the exotic eastern plant of proletarian revolution. A straightening of the record is long overdue.

Revolutions are always preceded by a process of deep politicisation in the working class, during which the project of setting up a revolutionary regime is conceived, and these revolutionary ambitions become focused around a particular working class party. The working class can only seize power through its parties. In Germany, the party which articulated this project was the USPD. In some revolutions, the process of politicisation may occur over several weeks, sometimes even a few days. In the case of Germany it unfolded over several months, and the history of the USPD in 1917-18 expresses its

^[34] The Freikorps were a set of loosely organised paramilitary organisations established at the end of World War One. Largely nationalist and conservative in outlook, they were mobilised by the Ebert government against socialist and communist mobilisations. The Freikorps were dissolved in 1921, on which many of their members joined the *Sturm Abteilung*, Adolf Hitler's private army.

³⁵ The chief works available in English are Haffner (1973); Coper (1955); Ryder (1967); and Lutz (1968). Watt (1968) is a hostile account. Carsten (1972) contains (selective) material on the local workers and soldiers councils. There is a good account of the revolution to be found in Broué (1971 [*Ed.*— subsequently republished as Broué (2005)]). German language sources consulted include Müller (2017) and the KPD history *Illustrierte Geschichte die November Revolution* (Hortzschansky, 1978).

^[36] The maritime city of Kiel was where the *Seekriegsleitung*, the naval military command, was based.

^[37] Karl Liebknecht (son of SPD founding member Wilhelm Liebknecht) and Rosa Luxemburg (both 1871-1919) were both prominent leaders of the Spartacus League. They were both murdered in January 1919 by the Freikorps, on the orders of SDP minister Gustav Noske.

development. It is customary to deride the USPD and overlook its achievements. It is true that Karl Kautsky, the bitter opponent of Bolshevik methods, was a prominent leader of the USPD at the time of the revolution. But as David Morgan, the historian of the USPD tells us, Kautsky was conscious of being in a small minority in the party. He was to play no significant role in the revolution, and only joined the USPD with reluctance when it emerged from the parent SPD in April 1917.³⁸ At the September Congress, Ryder (1967, 132) informs us, the majority of the delegates appear “to have been enthusiastic for Bolshevik methods.” At this time the USPD was undoubtedly the leading party of the German working class. It is true that the USPD attracted only a minority of the old SPD membership at the time of the split, and in November 1918 the USPD had 100,000 members as compared to the SPD’s 340,000. However, numbers give a false picture. In contrast with the patriotic SPD, which was tolerated by the authorities, membership of the USPD was an act of great political commitment, involving risks similar to those incurred by joining the Bolsheviks in 1915 or 1916. It involved the risk of forcible drafting to the front. It meant joining a party that contained the underground Spartacist group, whose leaders were either in prison (Luxemburg) or in penal battalions (Liebknecht). Only the best fighters joined the USPD, the bulk of which were later to join the German Communist Party. Nor were these people sociologically on the fringes of the labour movement. Although the USPD took a mere seven out of the thirty-seven district party organisations of the old SPD, these were the among the chief proletarian centres of Germany, and included Saxony, the lower Rhine and Greater Berlin. Its prestige at the time of the November revolution was such that even in areas where its party organisation was weak, such as Munich and Hamburg, it supplied the leading figures of the revolution. The USPD enjoyed the support of the most highly organised sections of the German working class, including the shop stewards movement in the critical metallurgical sector. (Morgan, 1975, 72-3.) The German working class entered their revolution much better endowed with revolutionary leadership than the Russian workers did in their February, and this was to be reflected in the more advanced outcome of the “German February”. In Russia, the Vyborg committee of the Bolsheviks organised the insurrection, but could not put themselves forward as candidates for power. In Germany, it was widely anticipated—including among the soviet leaders—that the USPD, with Liebknecht at its head, would seize power in the German “February”. There would be no need for an extended period of dual power to renovate the leadership.

The failure of the January strike led to a massive wave of repression. Perhaps as many as 60,000 militants were drafted to the front for participating in an illegal stoppage. This was a key moment in the appearance of a revolutionary situation, for it convinced the organising cadre of the working class movement that there was no other way to come to power and achieve their objectives other than by civil war. The repression of the January strike bears comparison to the January massacre of 1905 in this regard. A secret committee, organised by Emil Barth^[39] and the shop stewards movement, was formed to assemble arms. Over the summer, the revolution incubated in the minds of a few hundred thousand workers. But this vanguard had to wait for the right moment before millions would be moved to fight. They did not have to wait long. Faced with the Bulgarian collapse, Hindenburg, the commander-in-chief of the German armies, and his chief-of-staff Ludendorff—the two effective leaders of the government of Germany—suddenly announced a new government in late September headed by Max von Baden, the “Pacific Prince”.^[40] It was composed of all the major parties in the Reichstag, and mandated to secure an armistice from Woodrow Wilson, on whom it was hoped parliamentary

³⁸ For the state of mind of the party during the course of 1918 see. Morgan (1975, 80ff).

^[39] Emil Barth (1879-1941) was a leader of the USPD and a prominent figure in the revolutionary shop stewards movement.

^[40] Maximilian von Baden (1867-1929), aristocrat and military officer, functioned briefly as Chancellor of the German Empire from the beginning of October 1918 until the declaration of the republic on 8 November.

government would make a favourable impression. This was the first properly parliamentary government in German history. The SPD, in the person of Philipp Scheidemann^[41] joined it, for which the SPD was rightly condemned by the USPD as traitors and collaborators. The announcement of this new “peace” government transformed the situation in Germany. It was tantamount to an announcement that Germany had lost the war, and this released a wave of pent up class hatred: a deep, working class hatred for all those who had started the war, lied about its true purpose, grown fat on the profits of the slaughter, imposed near-starvation, destroyed all the gains the labour movement had accumulated over decades, and sent the strikers to the front to be martyred. Somebody would have to pay for all that! It is out of such a bitter class hatred that revolutions are born. If revolutions are the locomotive of history, class hatred is their essential fuel. The idea of a “Bolshevik revolution” now spread rapidly throughout Germany. The authorities were obsessed with fear of it; the USPD leaders propagated it openly. As the censorship relaxed in October, the USPD demanded a “socialist republic” and “world revolution”. In mid-October, Liebknecht was released from prison. Carried shoulder-high by soldiers, the anti-war veteran toured Berlin daily addressing thousands of workers on the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat. All the talk in the factories during these weeks was of revolution and a USPD government.

Even if the revolution had not occurred in early November, it would have happened soon after the armistice. A collision between the classes was unavoidable. But then something happened to turn the revolutionary situation into an immediately insurrectionary one—something that roused the very deepest masses to fury and created the right moment for a rebellion. During the October weeks, the masses believed that since the war was finally lost it should be ended as quickly as possible. It would be utterly criminal for the regime to bargain for crowns or annexations at this late hour. The masses scrutinised every word of the authorities for news of the armistice. As the longing for peace became excruciating, the whole country began to suspect that the generals were blocking the armistice to save the Kaiser, the fleet or the army from demobilisation. But what did these things matter now? On 24 October, a draft proclamation of Ludendorff to the army, urging it to fight on and not to accept the armistice on Wilson’s terms, was intercepted by a USPD soldier telegraphist. When read out in the Reichstag it created pandemonium. On 26 October, the Government was compelled to dismiss Ludendorff. On 31 October, the Kaiser left for Army HQ in Belgium. News immediately flew around Berlin that he was intending a march on the capital to carry out a coup d’état. One historian has compared this to the “flight to Varennes”. (Watt, 1968, 172.) It had the same effect. The country was now at absolute fever pitch. The stewards and the USPD met in Berlin on 2 November. There was only one item on the agenda: the launching of the insurrection.⁴²

The popular misconception that it was the Kiel mutiny that toppled the old regime partly arises from the curious *mis-en-scène* that occurred at this meeting on the 2nd. When they met, the revolutionaries had no idea of the events in the fleet off the Schillig Roadstead.^[43] (Haffner, 1973, 54.) Before the meeting, Barth, the co-ordinator of the secret committee, had sent out orders to his followers all over Germany to rise on the 4th. Although this was pre-empting the discussion, the situation was so obviously revolutionary to Barth that he anticipated no disagreement. (Coper, 1955, 72.) However, the USPD now experienced the sort of crisis which wracked the Bolsheviks on the eve of the October insurrection.⁴⁴

[41] Philipp Scheidemann (1865-1939) was a prominent leader of the SPD.

[42] For an eye witness account of the atmosphere in Berlin after the Kaiser’s “flight” and the “revolutionary excitement” generated see Wolff (1936); Wolff was editor of the Berliner *Tageblatt*.

[43] The Schillig Roadstead is the maritime approach to naval base of Wilhelmshaven. It was the order for the German fleet to set sail from Wilhelmshaven that sparked the Kiel mutiny.

[44] The idea that the Bolsheviks were solidly in favour of a rising in October is a Stalinist myth: see Daniels (1984, 81-106). For an account of the German crisis see Müller (2017).

Owing to the vacillation of Hugo Haase^[45] and others the uprising had to be postponed several days. The provinces now received countermanding orders from Barth and were completely at sixes and sevens. It was when the local USPD group in Kiel was in this confused state of mind that some sailors, whose comrades had been imprisoned in Kiel following mutiny at sea, came to ask for help. Unable to refuse, the USPD, on 3 November, organised a deputation of workers and sailors to see the military governor. When the deputation was shot at by troops, the Kiel USPD was left with no choice but to rise and seize the city. True, the Kiel mutiny was not an unimportant event. Nor was it simply a breakdown of discipline: the sailors' leaders mutinying against what they saw as a plot by the High Command to sabotage the peace negotiations. But the mutiny, which was defeated, would have remained a historical footnote but for the decision of the Kiel USPD to seize power and start the revolution. Somebody—was it Barth, frustrated by the vacillations at the centre?²—had the brilliant idea of sending small contingents of the sailors by train to all parts of Germany, as a way of giving the signal for the uprising. Local USPD groups rose the moment the sailors stepped off the trains. The Kiel sailors owe their fame to the role they played as a signalling device for the revolution.

The aim of the proletariat in November was the same as its Russian counterpart in February, indeed even more consciously so: a proletarian dictatorship, that is to say a revolutionary government accountable to assemblies of workers and soldiers. In every city and medium-sized town in Germany, the shop stewards and party leaders rose, arrested the local government, both civilian and military, and installed themselves in the town hall. Next day, the stewards returned to the factories to elect councils to function as revolutionary assemblies to support the activities of the new revolutionary governments. The soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies did not see themselves as a dual power. They were created everywhere as *the supreme organs of power*. The revolution rolled across Germany in this fashion until it reached the capital on 9 November—a paradoxical state of affairs brought about by the hesitation at the centre. Nevertheless, the events in Berlin show clearly the objectives of the revolution. On 10 November, the day after the complete victory of the uprising in Berlin, some 2,000 delegates, elected that morning from factories and barracks, assembled at the famous Busch Circus.⁴⁶ Here they created the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council. This body declared itself the supreme organ of power in the Reich. The Reichstag, a body which the German labour movement had sought for decades to elevate to power, had been dispersed by the shop stewards the evening before. Nobody mentioned it; the old Reichstag never met again. In the provinces, the new council authorities either dispersed the old civilian governments, along with their assemblies (which outside of Prussia were based on universal suffrage) or else allowed them to continue to deal with secondary matters under a council veto. In Berlin, the Busch Circus meeting ratified the new government created during the uprising. It was composed exclusively of the two socialist parties, and declared Germany to be a "socialist republic". The new government was mandated to conclude peace, socialise all major industry in Germany and establish relations with Bolshevik Russia. It was dubbed a Council of People's Commissars after the Russian style. All power was to be henceforth exercised by the workers' and soldiers' councils, which would also draft a constitution for Germany based on proletarian democracy. As Lutz says: "theoretically this conference established the dictatorship of the proletariat". (Lutz, 1922, 80.) Far from being backward in comparison to Russia, the German proletariat had achieved during its "February" what the Russian workers were still fighting for in the succeeding months: a government which, to all appearances at least, was a revolutionary workers' government accountable to a sovereign soviet democracy. All power to the soviets appeared secure.

At least, that was what many people thought at the time. But there was a canker in the new regime:

^[45] Hugo Haase (1863-1919) was, from April 1917, the chairman of the USPD.

⁴⁶ The following account is drawn from Coper (1955) and Haffner (1973).

Ebert.^[47] Owing directly to the vacillations of the USPD leaders in Berlin on 9 November, this wily old fox had, as Ledebour^[48] put it, “smuggled himself into the revolution in order to destroy it.” (Ryder, 1963, 215.) The most class conscious German workers, especially the Berlin proletariat, regarded Ebert as the class enemy, a German equivalent of Muliukov or Guchkov. But the USPD leaders now behaved like the Mensheviks. Trotsky often declared that history is sometimes decided in the course of two or three days. In the case of Germany it was decided in a single afternoon. On the morning of the 9th, Ebert, knowing that the insurgents were coming from the suburbs to install the USPD at the head of a Bolshevik dictatorship, broke with Maximilian von Baden and installed himself in the Reichstag building as Chancellor. When the USPD arrived, he offered them an “all-socialist coalition”. This was unexpected. The USPD leaders retired to discuss the offer. History never presents working class leaders with simple choices, and the USPD were to spend eighteen hours agonising over the coalition offer. *Ebert offered to accept ever single condition laid down by the USPD.* These conditions included all power to the councils, the socialisation of industry, and even a promise of refraining from campaigning for an early constituent assembly. With the war effectively over, and with power in the workers’ hands, surely the old schisms within the socialist movement were no longer relevant? The movement could be re-united, and on a revolutionary basis. At the same time, the less forthright no doubt reminded themselves of the comparative numerical weakness of the USPD, despite the fact that the SPD membership were the more inactive and provincial layers of the proletariat, and even non-proletarian, forces. On the other hand, could Ebert really be trusted? It was a difficult decision. In reality, they had two choices: either to refuse to join Ebert’s new government, denounce it, and organise its overthrow, or to form a government without Ebert, subsequently putting the question of who should lead the revolution to a sovereign national congress of councils, which a provisional revolutionary government of the USPD would convene. The longer they hesitated, the worse the position became. While the USPD leaders pondered, Ebert consolidated his position, issuing several decrees on his own initiative during the day. Then Scheidemann dramatically declared the republic for the SPD. The disarray in the USPD camp was complete. Haase was not even in Berlin. Liebknecht, effectively in charge—and the most popular of all the USPD leaders—failed to act decisively. As Coper angrily states:

Had he done what Scheidemann feared he would do, had he led the “Bolshies” from the Palace to the Reichstag, had he held up Ebert as the *Imperial* Chancellor he was, and above all had he formed a government of his own. [...] But he did not even mention a government, let alone call for one [...]. (Coper, 1955, 87-8.)

Next morning, having missed their opportunity, the USPD agreed, under Haase’s direction, to a coalition. This was the worst of all decisions. What a grotesquely paradoxical outcome. The USPD everywhere organised and led the revolution. The SPD, and not only the leadership in Berlin, opposed it to the last. Yet the USPD finished up as hostages in a ministry dominated by a party which, as Ebert had told Maximilian, “hated revolution like sin” (Watt, 1968, 183), and which had had ministers in the Kaiser’s government the USPD had just overthrown.

The USPD decision was fatal. To the workers and soldiers Ebert declared himself to be a revolutionary. Instead of alerting the workers of Germany to the fact that Ebert’s adhesion to the revolution was insincere—by demonstratively refusing coalition—they now covered Ebert with their own reflected glory. By entering a coalition, a very unpopular move as far as the USPD rank and file were concerned, the USPD gave revolutionary endorsement to what would later show itself to be a counter-revolutionary government. For Ebert was already engaged in a conspiracy with General Groener of the

^[47] Friedrich Ebert (1871-1925) was the most important leader of the SPD after the death of August Bebel and the figure most associated with the party’s support for the German war effort. He would become the first Chancellor of the new republic.

^[48] Georg Ledebour (1850-1947) was a leader of the USPD during the events of the German revolution.

German High Command to destroy the revolution (the famous telephone link between Ebert and Groener, established on the night of 9 November). Ebert was the Trojan Horse of counter-revolution. Nor did the USPD retire from the coalition when Ebert's intentions became clear over the following weeks; the USPD did not retire from the coalition until Christmas.

But it had only been by the slenderest of margins that the USPD joined the coalition. At the Busch Circus meeting, the stewards, furious with their political leaders, tried to compel them to take power alone. But they were defeated by the soldiers. Everywhere during the revolution the soldiers were the most trusting admirers of “comrade, commissar Ebert.”⁴⁹ When the question of government was raised in the Busch Circus, the soldiers, under the influence of Otto Wels,⁵⁰ chanted: “Unity! Unity!” and when the stewards, falling back to second base, proposed an Executive Committee to “control” the government, in the belief it would be an all-USPD body, the soldiers chanted “Parity! Parity!” The Executive Committee finished up being composed of fourteen soldiers and fourteen workers, with the workers' side being half SPD, half USPD. Thus, in the highest body of the revolution, not only was the Berlin proletariat put on a par with the garrison, but the leading party of the revolution was in a small minority. This is one of the penalties of making a revolution in wartime: Trotsky's “artificial social formation”, the garrison, came into full force. In fact, with a vengeance—for the Berlin garrison had only just been reinforced with the most reactionary troops. Soldiers had been brought to Berlin from the undefeated Eastern front, and included units who had crushed the Finnish Soviet Republic of January 1918 and who had recently seen action against the Bolsheviks.⁵¹ So it was that the most advanced workers and the most backward soldiers jointly determined the future of Germany on 10 November. So it was that the revolutionaries of the USPD found themselves in coalition with Ebert. The curious nature of the “governmental mystification” in the German revolution—the outcome of the “February” is usually that the bourgeois side of the dual power is represented by a coalition of bourgeois and workers' parties—reflects the very advanced character of the German revolution in comparison to its Russian forerunner. It also meant that the dual power was correspondingly more lethal for the revolution—in Russia, everybody knew what the Kadets stood for, but in Germany, the SPD represented a socialist tradition, at least for those millions of peoples only just roused by the revolution, who had never heard of the USPD and who saw the SPD as representing the most general expression of the revolution.

Coper tells us that all classes “knew, or thought they knew” in November “that they could not resist the councils. They resigned themselves to, or welcomed, the fact that Germany was to be socialist.” (Coper, 1955, 99.) But this was an illusion. In reality, the new government was in a state of paralysis. The Busch resolutions were not issued as governmental decrees, as everyone expected. The military and civilian bureaucracies were not dismantled or brought under proper supervision. The “People's Commissars” took no single step to reconstruct the country on socialist lines. By contrast, the local councils threw themselves into furious activity. It is not generally appreciated that these bodies, as the supreme public authorities, took very radical and far reaching measures.⁵² The country was in a state of total exhaustion owing to the war and the blockade. The councils immediately took charge of food requisitioning and rationing. They punished hoarders. They undertook the demilitarisation of industry.

⁴⁹ Berlau (1970, 220); Sender (1940, 92). The number of troops in the returning German armies is difficult to estimate; some estimates put it at eight and a half million.

⁵⁰ Otto Wels (1873-1939) was chairman of the SPD from 1919 to 1939.

⁵¹ For the story of the revolution in Finland, see Smith (1958).

⁵² See Carsten (1972); for a personal account see the remarkable book by Albert Grzesinski (Grzesinski, 1939): Grzesinski was a right-wing socialist, later chief of police in Berlin, and the measures he took while in charge included the most radical control over industry. He also describes telling members of the bourgeoisie they could, under no circumstances, join the councils.

Munitions factories employing thousands were closed down by order of the councils and the workers found alternative employment. Flexible hours were introduced to create jobs for the returning troops: the famous sliding scale of hours. In some places, a four-hour day was introduced. A joke doing the rounds of bourgeois circles in Berlin was that the socialists had found a new slogan, not the eight-hour day but the “no-hour” day. In December, many large factories in Berlin were forcibly socialised by their workers, and in January so were the Ruhr mines. In some places a workers’ militia was formally created, although elsewhere the soldiers opposed this; the workers, however, remained widely armed. The government endorsed none of this activity. Of course, revolutions release such gigantic organisational energies that the localities could make considerable progress in laying the foundations for the new socialist order independently of Berlin. But without a vigorous government, the revolution soon comes up against insurmountable obstacles; and the bourgeoisie begins to recover its confidence, exploiting the air of uncertainty created by the governmental paralysis. At first, the masses were not too alarmed. Ebert had a considerable fund of credibility, thanks to the USPD. He had, after all, dismissed the Kaiser, signed the armistice and agreed to be a “people’s commissar”. He talked of socialisation. In any case the USPD would keep him in line. But they grew more impatient as time went on. They would not wait forever. By Christmas they *were* alarmed. Ebert had to work rapidly to put together the elements of the counterrevolution.

THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY QUESTION

The chief issue to which Ebert devoted his energies in the first weeks of the revolution was the calling of a Constituent Assembly. In direct violation of his pact with the USPD, he immediately opened a campaign for this. It bore fruit in December, when the First National Congress of Councils, meeting in Berlin, endorsed SPD motions for an early Assembly. General elections were held for this on 19 January 1919, and the delegates to the new assembly took their seats in the physical safety of Weimar early in February. This question aroused great passion at the time, and causes great confusion among writers today. It is usually claimed that the vote at the Congress proved beyond doubt that the German working class was hopelessly non-revolutionary, legalistic, and anti-Leninist. As Geoff Hodgson puts it: “Due to the social and political traditions in stark contrast to Russia, the German working class inclined towards parliamentarism and rejected insurrection.” (Hodgson, 1977, 42.) Obscuring the November revolution (the “German war machine came to a halt” producing a “vacuum in government” (Hodgson, 1977, 35)), and ignoring completely the civil war of 1919, Hodgson singles out the vote at the Council Congress as the chief index of reformism. Let us look more closely at the whole question of constituent assemblies.

Almost everybody engaged in current controversies about strategy insists on treating the constituent assembly if it were nothing more than an instance of parliamentarism. This is quite misleading. The constituent assembly is not the same thing as the bourgeois republic, or bourgeois democracy. Lenin, for example, who nobody can accuse of favouring bourgeois democracy as an instrument of workers’ power, was strongly in favour of a constituent assembly, not merely *before* the October rising, *but also after it*. The “Decree on the Formation of a Workers’ and Peasants’ Government”, for example, approved the day after the assault on the Winter Palace, informed the country that the Bolsheviks had formed “for the administration of the country until the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, a provisional workers’ and peasants’ government.” (Daniels, 1984, 202.) This was not a sudden conversion to bourgeois democracy, still less some sort of crude deception practised by a budding dictator. Although elected by universal suffrage in the manner of a conventional parliament, the

constituent assembly is not the same thing as a conventional parliament. It has the power, not merely to form a government, as would a normal parliament operating under an existing constitution, but to decide the future of the state itself, that is to say, to give the country a constitution. That is why it is called a “constituent” assembly. A revolution seldom involves more than an active minority of a country’s people in the *direct* struggle for power. Many, if not most, remain as sympathetic observers. These passive masses do not spontaneously join the soviets. The victorious revolution must then consult these people, rouse them and draw them into the work of the council system. During the elections to the Constituent Assembly, in which the Bolsheviks participated fully, the revolutionary forces had an opportunity to explain the benefits of the council system to the more backward sectors. Provided they achieved a majority in the Constituent Assembly, the Assembly would then formally endorse a republic of workers’, soldiers’ and peasants’ councils as the basis for the new constitutional order. This would give the revolution the sanction of formal democracy, and universal suffrage would henceforth operate through the new councils.⁵³ To be in favour of a constituent assembly is not necessarily to favour a parliamentary type of state, bourgeois democracy.

The constituent assembly is a one-off exercise in a revolution. In principle, the assembly can decide to give a country any type of state whatsoever. The superiority of a council type of state over a parliamentary type for carrying through a social revolution has been well argued by Lenin. (Lenin, 1974g and 1974h.) In a parliamentary state, only the *legislature* is elected, whilst the administrative, judicial and repressive apparatuses are not. The exercise of power remains in the hands of these unelected bureaucracies tied to the ruling classes. In the council or “commune” type of state, by contrast, *all public officials are elected*. It is ironical that the Eurocommunists call their strategy one of “democratic transformation”, yet completely avoid this elementary democratic transformation. In the council type of state, judges, officials, army officers, indeed all administrative, legislative and executive posts are elective. The distinction between the different power functions remains, but the antagonism between them which is inscribed into a purely parliamentary democracy is eliminated. A completely elective political order is the most flexible and responsive instrument for carrying through revolutionary change. So, although the constituent assembly can vote for any type of state, the revolution clearly has a vital interest in ensuring that it votes for the council system. Whether the assembly does so or not depends on its composition. And its composition depends in turn on *timing*. When to call a constituent assembly is one of the most critical decisions revolutionaries have to make.

The debate among the Bolsheviks following the October rising was not about *whether* to hold a constituent assembly, but *when*. When the Bolsheviks came to power, they had to make a decision over the elections to the Constituent Assembly, which had been scheduled by the old government for a date which fell a fortnight after their overthrow at the hands of the Bolsheviks. The majority of the Central Committee was opposed to Lenin’s position that the elections should be postponed.⁵⁴ Lenin did not adopt this position because he felt his regime was unpopular. On the contrary, Lenin had many times laid it down as a rule that communists were never to seize power unless they felt reasonably sure they could carry the majority of the country with them. Of course, it would never be possible to gauge this accurately. The moment for revolution rarely coincides with an opportunity for formal voting. World historical events do not run according to the parliamentary calendar. But Lenin was sure the Bolsheviks had correctly judged the moment. Nevertheless, a general election held so soon after the rising would not necessarily reflect the extent of Bolshevik support. This was so for a variety of largely technical reasons. The SR party, which was the largest in the country, was still in the process of splitting.

⁵³ For the constitution eventually adopted in Russia in 1918, see Carr (1950, 124-50). The suffrage was almost universal, excluding a small number of exploiters, ex-Tsarist officials and clergy—an exclusion Lenin (1974i, 271-2) stated was not a matter of principle.

⁵⁴ See Carr (1950, 109n3).

Henceforth there would be two parties, Left and Right SRs (the Left SRs joined the Bolshevik government). However, the electoral lists drawn up by the old government did not yet reflect this fact. SR candidates, selected a long time before October, reflected the views of the leading apparatus of the SR party, which was rightist. The elections went ahead as scheduled. The country voted for a party that no longer existed. As result, the assembly artificially acquired a counter-revolutionary composition. In his *Theses on the Constituent Assembly* written in December 1918, before the assembly, Lenin outlined his proposal to put a motion to the Assembly demanding it recognise the soviet power, and dissolve itself as *unrepresentative of the people's will* in favour of *elections to a new assembly*. (Lenin, 1977b, 383.) If the Left SRs had had the candidates in the electoral lists that their support in the country justified, then there is no doubt that the Bolsheviks (who alone received twenty-five per cent of the vote) would, together with the Left SRs, have won a majority in the assembly. This would have deprived the counter-revolution of its hypocritical “democratic” banner, and it would have saved much confusion in the workers’ movement. In the event, the assembly was a counter-revolutionary body. It refused to recognise the legitimacy of the new government and to organise new elections. The Bolsheviks were compelled to dissolve it. Those who claim that Lenin was opposed to “representative democracy” do not appreciate the irony. This particular assembly was totally unrepresentative—unrepresentative of popular feeling. The majority of the Russian peasants, among whom the Constituent Assembly had the greatest authority, appreciated this point. As Radkey (1963, 440-51) points out, the Bolshevik-Left SR regime was extremely popular, and no single peasant rising or even serious protest greeted the dissolution, not even from among the “black earth” peasants. Those, like Carrillo, who claim that Lenin’s revolution was supported only by a minority are grossly misinformed. Radkey not only confirms the Bolshevik analysis, he also points out that the counter-revolution would probably have been unable in practice to muster an effective working majority. It is impossible to agree with Carr (1950, 113-5) that the Bolsheviks had a preconceived plan to disperse the assembly flowing from their class understanding of the revolution. Trotsky (1961, 42-5) was clear enough on the advantages of the constituent assembly exercise, and also replied effectively to those who argued that the Bolsheviks should have organised fresh elections to the assembly in the spring of 1918, when the country had been plunged into civil war.

If we return now to the German Revolution, we find an exactly similar debate reproduced there. November had formally placed all power in the hands of the revolution. The question immediately arose of when to hold a constituent assembly. It is true that a number of Spartacists were opposed altogether to a constituent assembly, but this was an ultra-left position only held by a small minority. The major debate between the USPD and SPD was over timing. (Sender, 1940, 113; Carsten, 1972; 134; Ryder, 1967, 158-9.) The original USPD-SPD pact had stated: “The question of the Constituent Assembly is not to be discussed until after the consolidation of the order created by the Revolution.” (Coper, 1955, 92.) This was clear enough. The revolution was primarily an urban event. The USPD wanted first to socialise major industry—the precondition for pulling the country out of its economic ruin and alleviating the lot of the non-proletarian sectors. Unless this was done prior to holding general elections, the chances were that the conservative German farmer, together with part of the newly enfranchised female population, would vote for the big bourgeois parties, who in turn would vote the revolution down in the Assembly. Of course, the November government had not *formally* consulted the country. But this was no argument for inaction. People do not indicate support or rejection for a regime solely through voting. They petition, strike, demonstrate, take up arms, make insurrections, revolutions and counter-revolutions. To decree nothing until an elected assembly could be arranged was parliamentary cretinism—fiddling with inessentials while the country starved. For their part, the peasants were not parliamentary cretins. They might be suspicious of the November government of socialists, but they would certainly condemn it, and socialism to boot, if it failed to take drastic immediate measures to reorganise a country that lay in ruins. The USPD were right. The November

regime, because it failed to decree the November demands, lost the support of the petty bourgeoisie, in direct contrast to Lenin's October regime which, for example, decreed the land without any constitutional formalities. When the elections took place in January 1919, the two socialist parties got less than forty per cent of the vote. This was a disaster. On the basis of this new assembly, Ebert proceeded to form a coalition government with the bourgeois parties. The Weimar Assembly began to elaborate a bourgeois constitution for Germany with the Freikorps' bayonets. The German Socialist Republic declared by the Workers' Councils, together with their Government of People's Commissars, were at an end. The counter-revolution had a well organised centre.

The USPD were advocating proletarian dictatorship. This is a big subject. However, modern day opponents of the dictatorship of the proletariat usually focus their attack on its representational aspect. The dictatorship is said to exclude universal suffrage, to disenfranchise the non-proletarian part of the population, and so on. This is a wholly one-sided polemic, dealing as it does with the question of representation while ignoring the more essential questions, such as which class is in possession of the means of coercion and the material levers of administration. A government accountable to workers' councils is not as representative as one based on universal suffrage. Of course, this is true. But it is not an indictment of the proletarian dictatorship in general. For these antagonists usually fail to distinguish the different *moments* or *forms* of the dictatorship, even in its purely representative aspects. The USPD were advocating proletarian dictatorship in its most direct and literal form. But that is not its only form, any more than the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie needs to be excised exclusively through an unelected military government or by means of a restricted suffrage. However, there are moments when this is necessary. Similarly, with the proletariat. The November councils, like the committees in Spain in July 1936, took the absolute right to decree any measure they saw fit, irrespective of the law, of voting, and so on. Sovereignty was concentrated to the very highest degree in the hands of the industrial workers, who instituted a kind of proletarian martial law. Yet states of emergency do not go on forever. When the bourgeoisie has been expropriated, when the counter-revolutionary forces are crushed, when the majority of the population have joined or are reconciled to the revolution, then the form of proletarian rule changes. For sure, the revolution will not tolerate the revival of parliamentary type bodies (legislative bodies with bourgeois bureaucracies), but it will practice universal suffrage. The councils will be turned into municipal bodies, as in Russia, for which the entire adult population are free to stand and be elected (including ex-members of the old administration and ex-members of the bourgeoisie, now reduced to wage labourers).⁵⁵

There is no doubt that Ebert knew what the outcome of an *early* constituent assembly would be. (Coper, 1955, 92.) But Ebert did not argue openly that council rule should end. In revolutions reformists are careful to declare themselves revolutionaries. The SPD reassured the workers' movement that the two socialist parties would win the election, thus making little practical difference to the status quo. This is what the delegates arriving in Berlin for the December Congress believed. (Ryder, 1963, 221.) The SPD did not frontally attack the rule of the councils but argued that unless some concessions to "democracy" were made, various disasters would befall the revolution, the chief among them being that the USA would cut off food supplies or delay the peace treaty. (Coper, 1955, 128-9.) Germany was starving at this time. Confronted with these arguments, together with reassurances that the revolution was secure, it was not impossible to win a vote for an early constituent assembly without arousing too

⁵⁵ Lenin himself was not sufficiently concrete on this matter. In *State and Revolution* (Lenin, 1974b) he speaks of the "Commune-type" of state. But the Commune of 1871 was the democratic municipality, and the proletarian dictatorship, in its most literal form, was exercised through the Central Committee of the National Guard which, prematurely in Marx's opinion, handed over power to the democratic Commune, in which even the Versailles were allowed to vote. See Trotsky (1977, 169). For the Eurocommunist polemic see Hodgson (1977), and Georges Marchais' speeches in Balibar (1977).

much suspicion, except among the more alert industrial proletarians who followed the USPD.

All the same, the Congress witnessed some furious scenes over the counter-revolutionary manoeuvres around an early constituent assembly. In 1925, General Groener testified that Ebert was so anxious about the outcome of the Congress that he had agreed to Groener's plan to pre-empt it with a presidential coup. (Haffner, 1973, 110ff.) A few units of the Berlin garrison did indeed momentarily arrest the EC of the Berlin councils. Nevertheless, at the Congress Ebert achieved a majority of over three to one on the question of the constituent assembly. It is fashionable to see this as representative of the German proletariat and to deride Luxemburg's claim that the Congress had been "packed with Ebert's Mamaluks". Yet historians seldom bother to investigate the way in which the Congress was elected. The Conference arrangements were made by the Berlin Executive Committee, where, as we have seen, the SPD had an artificial majority. The Congress was supposed to determine how the *proletarians and soldiers* felt. Yet the local councils, which jealously guarded their exclusiveness in local matters, were instructed to send delegates on the basis, not of their actual constituencies, but on a crude territorial basis, taking into account the population as a whole. The old Reichstag electoral districts together with the population census of 1910 were used as the basis upon which local councils were allotted numbers of delegates. (Burdick and Lutz, 1966, 61-2.) This automatically gave the SPD a majority, for, as we have seen, its apparatus was much more widely spread over Germany than that of the USPD, which was concentrated mainly in the centres of heavy industry. Not only did the rural districts often send more delegates to Berlin than an industrial centre, these delegates were SPD provincials who had received the revolution from Berlin and were uncritical supporters of the SPD chiefs.⁵⁶ The soldiers were also over-represented. Each 100,000 soldiers were entitled to one delegate, whereas civilian delegates were to represent 200,000 inhabitants. The number of army delegates attending the Congress indicate an army of eight million men, a purely notional figure at this stage of events. We also know that the chief proletarian districts of Germany were opposed to early convocation. On 20 November the councils of the lower Rhine declared that the "counter-revolutionary plan to save capitalist society by a national assembly before the aims of the revolution have been realised is totally rejected by the workers' and soldiers' councils of this district." The Saxon councils explicitly declared for proletarian dictatorship in November and refused to recognise the sovereignty of Weimar in January. (Ryder, 1967, 147.) Hamburg sent eleven delegates on USPD positions. The Berlin proletariat was strongly opposed but improperly represented by the Berlin EC. On *all other matters*, however, the Congress voted unambiguously revolutionary positions—on socialism and control of the army by soldiers' councils.

THE GERMAN CIVIL WAR

The thesis of the backward and moderate character of the German proletariat can only be sustained by resolutely ignoring the fact that soon after the December Congress there took place in Germany nothing less than a *civil war*—and this civil war was fought by the proletariat precisely in order *to defend the sovereignty of the workers' and soldiers' councils* against the claims of the new Weimar authorities. As one historian notes, the civil war has "disappeared from German history and German historiography." (Haffner, 1973, 153.) Yet it is a pivotal event in German, indeed world, history. The rise of Nazi barbarism in Germany was not accidental or due to some peculiarly acute conflict within the ruling bloc

⁵⁶ Rural Bavaria sent twice as many delegates to the "workers' congress" as proletarian Berlin: the breakdown of the delegates is given in *Allgemeiner Kongreß der Arbeiter und Soldatenrate* (1975, 198).

in 1930. Its peculiarly vicious cruelty was partly aimed at extirpating the memory of the most bitter, grim and determined manifestation of the revolutionary proletariat: the civil war of 1919.

The story begins in Berlin in late December. Ebert and Groener^[57] had marched the Western Front army to Berlin with the intention of using it to crush the Berlin vanguard. But it simply melted away into the revolutionary crowds on arrival, weapons and all. On Christmas Eve, however, an armed dispute was engineered between a small remnant of the old army and the People's Naval Division, a detachment of sailors who had installed themselves in Berlin to defend the revolution. Workers arrived to stop the fighting, but not before thirty sailors had been killed. Berlin was outraged. Sailors had been killed in the revolutionary capital! Here was conclusive proof of Ebert's treachery. The USPD demonstratively resigned from the coalition. Ebert was now in imminent danger of being arrested and lynched. Yet he and Noske^[58] turned this to good effect in early January. On 4 January, Ebert and Noske were shown the Freikorps that the High Command had secretly prepared. Encouraged, they returned to Berlin and sacked Emil Eichhorn, the USPD Berlin chief of police, who had turned Berlin's police into a kind of COPCON^[59] unit. This, they probably knew, would provoke an uprising. It did.

It is sometimes assumed that the so-called Spartacus rising, which opened the civil war, was a small putsch. This is untrue. The name was retrospectively applied to it to justify the murder of the Spartacist leaders, even though the Spartacists were opposed to the rising and, with the exception of Liebknecht, took no part in it. In reality, this was the revolution's "July Days". On 5 January, *three quarters of a million people*, many of them armed, demonstrated against the government. The psychological impact on the revolutionaries was fatal. They decided to seize power. A revolutionary committee was set up, arms were distributed, and a general strike called for the 6th. Luxemburg and Radek frantically tried to get the rising called off. An overthrow of Ebert would not be fully understood by the rest of the country, leading to the possible isolation of a USPD government in Berlin. (The Spartacists had left to form the KPD just before these events—an ill-timed decision which was, in any case, carried out in a bungled fashion, leaving the KPD with only the most ultra-left elements, essentially the Bremen radicals, who later were to split from the KPD itself to form the KAPD.^[60]) On the 7th, 20,000 armed insurgents put themselves in control of the city. Yet the Committee vacillated. Ebert and Noske escaped. They did not vacillate. They now unleashed the Freikorps on Berlin. If the revolutionaries had waited until the end of January, circumstances would have been more propitious for the overthrow of Ebert. The outcome of the elections would have clearly identified Ebert as the leader of the counter-revolution. But, in the January fighting, because of the fact that the capital had moved ahead much faster politically than the provinces, many hundreds of revolutionaries were killed, including the two best leaders, Luxemburg and Liebknecht. The Berlin workers had suffered a sharp setback, and although they were not completely defeated, the USPD apparatus was severely disorientated.⁶¹

News of events in Berlin shocked the whole of the labour movement in Germany. What had happened in Berlin was far worse than anything under the old regime. People calling themselves socialists were

[57] General Wilhelm Groener had succeeded Erich Ludendorff as chief of staff of the Imperial army in October 1918.

[58] Gustav Noske (1868-1946) was a prominent leader of the SPD, associated with the political grouping within the party that also included Ebert and Scheidemann. On the withdrawal of the USPD from the coalition he assumed control over the armed forces.

[59] COPCON (Comando Operacional do Continente) was the military command set up by the Armed Forces Movement in the Portuguese Revolution of 1974-5. (See the section "Europe Since 1945" below.)

[60] The Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (Communist Workers' Party of Germany) was a small left split away from the mainstream Communist Party, the KPD, founded in April 1920.

⁶¹ The story of Spartacus Week is told in Waldman (1958).

leading monarchist and proto-fascist troops to slaughter workers on a scale never before seen in Germany in order to settle what was seen as a factional struggle within the workers' movement. On top of this came the shock of the election results. Ebert and Noske now declared that the soviets were no longer sovereign, indeed that they would play no role at all in the future order. The whole working class now came to its feet, yet, owing to the January fiasco, in disorganised and uncoordinated fashion. The civil war erupted with tremendous violence. There had already been several uprisings in a number of cities (Bremen, Brunswick, Dortmund, Düsseldorf and Duisburg) during Spartacus Week itself. When Freikorps units were sent to suppress Bremen, the North Sea ports, including Hamburg, launched a general strike against the Government, closing the port. Some 40,000 armed insurgents took to the field against the Freikorps' campaign in the north during the latter part of January. Hundreds were killed. In mid February, the lower Rhineland and the Ruhr, already impatient with the government for its refusal to recognise council socialisation in the mines, also embarked on a general strike to defend the rights of the councils. This was followed by a much bigger strike at the end of March demanding the disbanding of the Freikorps, and recognition of the council system. (Morgan, 1975, 228.) These strikes were crushed by starvation and military intervention. They were rapidly followed by a similar movement in Saxony, centred on the industrial cities of Leipzig, Chemnitz and Dresden. Here also the strikers demanded recognition of the council system. (Morgan, 1975, 230.) The Freikorps reduced the area, the bloodiest battle being at Halle, the rail centre, on 5 March. The movement then culminated with a third great uprising in Berlin. On 4 March, the Berlin workers' councils launched a general strike on KPD slogans that included the dissolution of the Freikorps and Government submission to council control. (Watt, 1968, 305.) The USPD had tried to co-ordinate these three great strikes. (Morgan, 1975, 230.) But they paid the price for shooting their bolt in January, for the SPD bureaucrats were able to avert their synchronisation and deprive the USPD of an opportunity to launch a nationally co-ordinated insurrection for power, by creating confusion among workers over who had been responsible for the January fratricide. The failure to co-ordinate led the KPD to argue against turning the March strike into an uprising. Nevertheless, Berlin rose. The suppression of the rising was brutal. The fighting lasted ten days. Parts of the city were reduced to rubble by the use of heavy artillery and even aircraft. At least 1,500 revolutionaries were killed, including Leo Jogiches, chairperson of the KPD. Some 10,000 were injured. The March rising in Berlin represented the peak of the movement. The fighting continued into June, with sporadic uprisings in various parts of Germany. Among these was the Soviet Republic in Bavaria in April, the tail of the insurrectionary movement, sparked off by news of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and notable chiefly for some of the worst scenes of White terror seen during the civil war (but also for the remarkable leadership of Leviné.^[62] see Leviné-Meyer (1973).) The German proletariat was roundly defeated in this civil war. Some 20,000 workers were killed and an unknown number injured. The German Revolution was defeated by bullets: bullets are often needed to defeat revolutions, even in our western habitat.

There were important sequels to this defeat. The dual power was firmly liquidated by the summer of 1919, contrary to Mandel's suggestion that it went on for several years, even if discontinuously. The workers' councils continued to exist, but not as organs of power. Nevertheless, the revolution was not dead. It revived with the Kapp Putsch^[63] of 1920. A solid general strike confronted Kapp and forced him from power. But the KPD (which the majority of the USPD had now joined) was not about to accept the return of Ebert's government. They raised a Red Army of 50,000 in the Ruhr to fight Kapp

^[62] Eugen Leviné (1883-1919) was the central leader of the Bavarian Soviet Republic.

^[63] The Kapp Putsch was an attempted right-wing coup mounted in Berlin in March 1920; although led by a General von Lüttwitz, its aim was to install the right-wing journalist Wolfgang Kapp, from whom the event takes its name, as Chancellor.

and install a revolutionary government.⁶⁴ This had been the one area Noske had starved rather than crush entirely by force of arms in the holocaust of 1919. Evidently, one can recover more easily from starvation than bullets. After the fall of Kapp, the KPD negotiated a disbandment. The March Action⁶⁵ of 1921, by all accounts, was not a mass movement, but an irresponsible putsch.⁶⁶ Only in 1923, following the French occupation of the Ruhr and the astronomical inflation of that year, did the situation become fully revolutionary once again. The KPD, however, left their preparation for an uprising too late, and the uprising went off abortively in Hamburg under circumstances that are still not clarified.⁶⁷ The memories of 1919 and the defeat of the March Action had left their scars on the KPD leaders, and they let the opportunity pass. Proof of a revolutionary situation in 1923 was the way in which the KPD defeated the SPD at the polls in 1924. Trotsky, together with other Comintern leaders, denounced the Comintern and KPD leaders strongly for their error of timing.

To conclude. The German Revolution exhibits a very similar law of motion to that of the Russian Revolution a year before. It is impossible to accept Hodgson's view that the German workers "rejected insurrection". If anything they suffered from a surfeit of insurrectionary enthusiasm. It is difficult to see what "differential strategy" Anderson would have recommended. Claudin's view that the German workers followed Kautsky's tactic is obviously untrue. The benefits of the superior practical experience of the Bolsheviks and therefore of the validity of the Comintern project should be clear. Contrary to Mandel's expectation, the revolution moved at a much more rapid pace than its Russian counterpart. The dual power was shorter than in Russia, the mark of country with a more advanced social structure and a greater relative weight of the proletariat. Russia experienced her "July Days" five months after her "February", Germany two. It took Russian society eighteen months to rouse itself to civil war, Germany three. All in all, the German Revolution failed, not because of institutions or traditions, but because of the irreversible consequences of the serious misjudgements and errors of leadership, combined with the deception and outright class treachery of the SPD chiefs.

1914-1923: THE REVOLUTIONARY DECADE

1914 to 1923 could aptly be called the revolutionary decade. Through the Euro-Russian theatre, almost every single country was struck, at least once, and in some cases several times, by a revolutionary situation, a revolutionary uprising or a near-completed proletarian revolution. The itinerary of the revolution paid little regard to the topography of bourgeois institutions. The crisis of 1914, for example, was no respecter of customs and climate. The June revolution struck liberal Italy as powerfully as the July revolution struck autocratic Russia, if not more so. After the February Revolution of 1917, the spirit of rebellion passed through democratic France and Italy before it appeared in the fellow autocracies of Central Europe. In the winter of 1917, a workers' republic arose in Finland, a bourgeois

⁶⁴ See the accounts in Angress (1957) and also Waite (1952).

⁶⁵ The March Action was a failed uprising led by the KPD and KAPD.

⁶⁶ A detailed account is to be found in Angress (1963).

⁶⁷ See Angress (1963), and also Neuberg (1970). Larissa Reissner's *Hamburg at the Barricades* (Reissner, 1977) conveys a vivid impression of life in working class Germany at this time; Reissner is surely the most stunning prose writer of the revolution. [*Ed.*—Larissa Reissner (1895-1926) was a Russian-born writer and revolutionary. Active in the 1917 revolutions, she joined the Bolshevik Party in 1918, and served as a soldier and political commissar in the civil war. In 1923 she moved to Germany, to participate in the revolutionary events there, before returning to the Soviet Union. At the time of her death (from typhoid) she was married to Karl Radek.]

democracy captive to the Russian empire. As we have seen, the armistice was secured by revolutionary uprisings in the Central Powers in the autumn of 1918. But the revolutionary movement did not confine itself to these powers, nor thereafter subside. The Bavarian Soviet Republic and the Hungarian Soviet Republic are of course well known. But in April-June 1919, democratic France anticipated a revolutionary uprising during the great riots and strikes of those months, although the Socialist Party balked at the fence. (Wohl, 1966, 127ff.) Similarly, the Italian proletariat went through two “red years” of strikes and unrest until, in September 1920, the industrial workers seized the factories, armed themselves and demanded that the Socialist Party seize power. The PSI met to discuss the idea of an uprising, but narrowly voted it down—a move which demoralised the Italian workers and paved the way for Mussolini.⁶⁸ These years in Europe also saw revolutionary crises in countries which were not directly involved in the war itself. A revolutionary rising occurred in Spain in August 1917. Spain was a non-combatant country. (Serge, 2014.) Revolutionary situations similarly arose in Holland and Switzerland in 1918. (Borkenau, 1962, 67-70.) It appears that at this historical moment, the working class movement was willing to pose the question of power even in countries not suffering directly from the catastrophe of war (indeed Spain, for example, benefited economically from it). Nor was it sufficient defence against revolution to be a victor in the war, though no doubt it helped to offset the attractions of revolution. France was a victory country but suffered its trauma nonetheless. Britain experienced a revolutionary situation in Scotland in August 1917 and an uprising in Ireland at Easter 1916, but only Ireland continued the tradition following Britain’s victory. By 1921 the European revolutionary movement had reached its apex. The revolutionary crises in Germany and Bulgaria in 1923 were important opportunities to reverse the trend. They were however missed. In Germany this was due to the dalliance of the KPD, and in Bulgaria to the incorrigible left sectarianism of the Bulgarian revolutionaries who refused to join with the peasants in resisting Stamboliyski’s^[69] semi-fascist dictatorship. (Borkenau, 1962, 238ff.; Rothschild, 105ff.) The balance sheet is clear. The decade saw a demand throughout the European working class not merely for a political transformation but for a liquidation of the social order by every conceivable means, including revolution. The revolution struck everywhere, irrespective of political institutions, and with the same objectives: the destruction of the common class enemy.

Claudín’s view that the Comintern was an ill-timed or ill-constructed body cannot be accepted. The Comintern was not the creation of blinkered Russo-centrics seeking to impose their peculiar Russian methods on others. It was rather an extremely valuable attempt to generalise the practical revolutionary experience of *an entire continent*. It is also impossible to resist pointing out the irony in the argument that the Russians were naively projecting their own experience on the “western” labour movement. Far from the Russians imposing “leftist” tactics and methods on their European colleagues the boot was on the other foot. In the early years of the Comintern the Russians acted as a moderating influence on their headstrong European followers. It was the *Russians* who had to take up the cudgels at the Second and Third Congresses on behalf of communists working in parliament (!) and in trade unions dominated by right-wing leaderships. Bordigism was rife among the early adherents to the Comintern. It was Bordiga,^[70] the leader of the Italian communists, who originated the theory of “social fascism”—whereby social democratic parties were treated for practical purposes as the equivalent of the fascists—

⁶⁸ The story is told in Spriano (1975).

^[69] Aleksandar Stamboliyski (1879-1923) was one of the leaders of the Radomir Rebellion of September 1918. From 1919 until his overthrow in 1923 he was prime minister of Bulgaria.

^[70] Amadeo Bordiga (1889-1970) was a founder of the Communist Party of Italy and member until his expulsion (for “Trotskyism”) in 1930, prior to which he had led an ultra-leftist opposition within the Italian party and the Comintern founded on opposition to parliamentary work or cooperation with social-democratic parties.

in 1923. The re-imposition of this theory on the Comintern in 1928 (the Comintern had held it briefly in 1924), can be seen as very much a reversion to type among European communists. The Russians also had to wage an offensive in the early 1920s against other forms of ultra-leftism, particularly on the national question and the land question.

It is also difficult to agree with Anderson that Lenin and Trotsky overlooked some distinctive feature of the “west” that demanded a “differential strategy”, one that awaited discovery by more sophisticated minds than theirs. It did not escape Marxists of this period, least of all Lenin and Trotsky, that the revolution appeared first in the backward countries of the East rather than in the West as anticipated. That the proletariat could succeed in Russia and in other “eastern” countries (such as Hungary) before doing so in the “west” contradicted previous expectations. The most sustained reflection on this fact is to be found in Trotsky’s addresses to the first three congresses of the Comintern. (Trotsky, 1973a.) In a brilliant article (“En Route”: Trotsky, 1973a, 71-88) he traces the origins of the paradox of the fact that while the demands of modern warfare imposed themselves on all the combatants of 1914, these combatants were at different historical stages of development. Thus the social equilibrium, always more difficult to maintain in any case in the relatively more backward countries, was more easily disrupted in the “east” than in the more advanced countries of the “west”. Of course the social equilibrium has many components. Elements of conservatism existed in those labour movements which had grown up in the advanced countries, particularly those with lengthy democratic traditions. Nevertheless, these traditions in turn were premised on a social equilibrium achieved by material conditions which the war undermined. Above all we must not forget that the war had different material effects in the “east”. These countries could not support modern warfare—countries like Russia and Bulgaria experienced severe hardships much earlier than the other combatants. (Bulgaria, for example, lost one-third of its livestock and half its adult male population were casualties of war.) But while these factors might affect the timing and the itinerary of the revolution (which Trotsky rather over-schematises in any case), it did not affect the rules of revolutionary warfare. Revolutionary strategy east and west was considered broadly uniform. All those who extended the discussion about “east” and “west” from the plane of timing to the plane of strategy were invariably guilty either of opportunism or parochialism. Thus Kautsky spoke of east and west in his polemic against Lenin in 1918, but he doggedly ignored the fact that “eastern” methods had long been practised to his south and south-west. Similarly, when Gramsci, writing in the period of utter defeat in Italy during the early 1930s, spoke of east and west, he ignored the German experience of 1918-19, about which his writings contain virtually nothing. In these cases “west” was a synonym for Germany or Italy. Thus, while it was essential for the early Communist Parties to be able to judge accurately the pulse of the political situation, no special strategy was required for Eastern Europe. Nor is it true, as Anderson (1976, 55-9) misleadingly implies, that the tactical formulations of the Comintern were specially designed for the “west”. The tactics of the “united front”, for example, had been used to good effect by the Bolsheviks in 1917. Similarly, when the Comintern denounced the “theory of the offensive”, it was not because Lukács’ theory was inappropriate to the “west”, but because his theory led to putschism, and putschism is inappropriate anywhere.

THE REVOLUTIONARY WAVE OF THE 1930S

The period between 1923 and 1934 is one of relative quiescence in Europe. The epicentre of the world revolution temporarily shifted elsewhere, notably to China. However, the European working class had not been defeated. After so many setbacks in the 1914-23 period, the European workers lost faith in

the easy victory of the socialist revolution. But the idea of it remained alive. Occasionally during these years it erupted to the surface. The most remarkable incident was perhaps the one that took place in Austria in 1927. The Austrian workers had been angered by the failure of the government to prosecute two fascists for the murder of a youth and an ex-serviceman at a provincial working class gathering. They had also grown impatient with Otto Bauer's^[71] electoral strategy. In the April election the Social Democrats improved their vote but did not get a majority. In July, the Viennese workers, against the advice of their Socialist leaders (who believed in revolution only in the event of a fascist coup, which was not a danger at this time), struck the factories and marched on the parliament building demanding that their leaders take power and organise a proletarian dictatorship. The Socialist deputies were thrown into confusion, troops were called out by the government and the insurgent demonstrators dispersed, but not before a hundred people were killed. Workers took power in several provincial centres. At this time, Austria was a bourgeois democracy. Its labour movement was the pride of the Second International. Yet the workers, when roused, pursued the classical road. As usual, it was in the field of activity proper to leadership that the chief insufficiency was found.⁷² Revolutionary events also took place in Portugal where armed workers frequently took part in the leftist military uprisings, particularly against the rightist regime of Salazar^[73] installed in 1928.

The world recession of 1929 broke the stalemate between the classes in Europe. As it hit first one and then another country, the economic depression revived the perennial class hatreds of bourgeois society. Millions of workers once again turned to socialism as the answer to their problems. It was the only way out. In Germany, workers turned once again to the SPD and KPD. Spain, a country also hit exceptionally hard by the depression, witnessed the fall of de Rivera^[74] in 1931 and several years of bitter economic and social struggles under the Republic. The economic crisis hit France a little later. The revolutions of the mid 1930s have their roots in the material catastrophe of the slump. Yet an urgent faith in socialism is a necessary but insufficient condition of revolution. The situation becomes revolutionary when some event, some act of political oppression or the fear of it, convinces the working masses that socialism can only be achieved by revolution, that is, by a recourse to arms, to the methods of dictatorship and civil war. In the 1930s, that event was fascism.

Fascism was a counter-revolutionary movement in the sense that it represented a reaction among the propertied classes to the prospect of revolution. We can agree with Mandel that it corresponded to a deep "structural", that is to say economic, crisis of the bourgeoisie. (Mandel, 1971.) But its peculiar sociological materials derive from the fear of revolution, particularly among the petty-bourgeoisie. European fascism arose in response to the fear of "Bolshevism". This is not a "social democratic theory" (Mandel, 1971, 22-4) but a matter of historical fact. In the 1920s, it appeared most strongly in countries where an unsuccessful revolution had shaken bourgeois society to its roots, but where the proletariat retained its revolutionary rhetoric. We find elements of it in the military dictatorships that arose in Eastern Europe—Horthy^[75] in Hungary, Stamboliyski in Bulgaria, Pilsudski in Poland—soon

[71] Otto Bauer (1881-1938) was a leading member of the Austrian Social Democratic Workers' Party, and foreign minister in the government of Karl Renner over 1918 and 1919.

[72] The story is told in detail by Fischer (1974, 142ff.).

[73] António de Oliveira Salazar (1889-1970) ruled Portugal through the fascist *Estado Novo* dictatorship, which was established in 1933 and overthrown in the Portuguese revolution of 1974.

[74] In 1923 Miguel Primo de Rivera (1870-1930), a landowning aristocrat and senior military officer, had staged a coup and, with the support of the King, Alfonso XIII, established a military dictatorship, suspending the parliamentary *Cortes* and the Constitution. By 1930 his rule had effectively fizzled out and he was forced to resign. His son José Antonio Primo de Rivera would be one of the principle founders of the Falange Española in 1933.

[75] Miklós Horthy (1868-1957) was effectively head of state of Hungary from 1920 to 1944.

after the revolution had exhausted itself. It appeared in Italy soon after 1920 to erase the nightmare of eight years of revolution. After 1929 fascism had a slightly different *chronological* relationship to the revolution. Poulantzas (1979) points out there was no revolution in Germany just prior to Hitler's victory in 1933. This is true. However, the propertied classes lived in the intense *fear* of one breaking out. The depression revived the memories of 1918 among all the social classes. At the first serious talk of socialism, the petty-bourgeoisie recalled the civil war and went over to the fascists. Nor was the bourgeoisie prepared to passively suffer a repeat of 1914-23. Everywhere, and not merely in Germany, it turned to the fascists, this time to *pre-empt* rather than clear up the revolution. This in turn convinced the proletariat all the more of its necessity. The revolution now broke out in several countries, all of which were bourgeois democracies and none of which were at war: France, Portugal, Spain, Austria and Greece.

The depression hit Germany—a powerful industrial country without colonies and toiling under the fiscal oppression of Versailles—exceptionally hard. As the workers radicalised, the petty-bourgeoisie turned to the Nazis. Both sides prepared for civil war. Street fighting between the NSDAP and the unarmed militias of the SPD and KPD became widespread between 1930 and 1933. The KPD adopted a violent revolutionary rhetoric. Yet the revolution failed to materialise. The KPD and SPD were unable to unite and the signal for revolution never came, neither at the time of the von Papen coup in 1932 nor Hitler's bloodless take-over in March 1933. Fascism was also pre-emptive in a wider sense. Hitler's policy entailed a break with Versailles and a new war to the east. This was the perspective of big capital. However, a new war with Russia would be certain to ignite a revolution in Germany. Russia was now the “workers' fatherland”, not the Tsarist autocracy of 1914. The revolution would not wait four years this time. By destroying the labour movement first, Hitler's seizure of power made possible the Second World War. The war against Bolshevism in both its internal and external manifestations was a unified operation. (Incidentally, the German Nazis regarded both the KPD and the SPD as parties of revolution—1918 was after all led by both the SPD and USPD.)

The defeat of the most powerful workers' movement in Europe—and this without a fight—shook the European working class movement. Its best elements, particularly those in the Socialist Parties, concluded they had to fight. Following Hitler's victory, the Austrian bourgeoisie turned to the fascists of the Heimwehr,^[76] already a growing force after the abortive revolution of July 1927. The Austrian workers wanted to revolt the moment Hitler took power in neighbouring Germany but the Socialist leaders held them back, giving the enemy several months to organise their forces. Only at the very last moment did the leaders agree to rise. The rising of February 1934 was crushed. (Fischer, 1974, 223ff.) Simultaneously, in France, the fascists made an abortive coup d'état which opened up two years of revolutionary tension in French society, culminating in the great occupations of June 1936. In Portugal, following Salazar's declaration of the *Estado Novo* in September 1933, the proletariat rebelled in January 1934. A full scale general strike was accompanied by a nation-wide insurrection. A soviet regime was temporarily established in the manufacturing town of Marinha Grande.

The revolution in Spain had been incubating long before 1936; the idea of a socialist Spain had been growing rapidly from 1931. One section of the Spanish proletariat had brought a ready-made revolutionary tradition with them into the republican era: the anarcho-syndicalists of the CNT-FAI.^[77] They attempted two early seizures of power in Barcelona, one in January 1932 and another in December 1933. Simultaneously, Spain witnessed the development of a clerical fascism in the form of

⁷⁶ [The Heimwehr (Home Defence League) was an Austrian fascist paramilitary organisation led by monarchist officers, and financed by capitalists, bankers, and the Catholic church.]

⁷⁷ The CNT (Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores), founded in 1910, is the principal anarchist trade union organisation in Spain; the FAI (Federación Anarquista Ibérica) is an anarchist political organisation, set up in 1927 with the specific intention of maintaining the political integrity and independence of the CNT.

the CEDA, led by Gil Robles.^[78] The bulk of the proletariat followed the Socialist Party which, until 1934, propagated a peaceful parliamentary road and practised coalitionism with the Left Republicans. However, disillusionment with the meagre achievements of the Republic^[79] led to massive abstention at the polls in December 1933, where the Socialist Party lost half its seats. The bloody defeats in Vienna a few weeks later confirmed the lessons. Socialism required different methods. A revolutionary situation now rapidly matured in Spain, despite the continued existence of electoral opportunities. The left and centre of the Socialist Party now openly called for proletarian dictatorship, and preparations for revolution were set in train. The Socialist Youth, under the leadership of Santiago Carrillo, was instructed to set up paramilitary units. Arms were secretly smuggled into Spain through the northern ports. The Socialists pledged that should the CEDA, which had by means of pressure on the *Cortes*^[80] reversed most the legislative gains of the workers over the course of the summer, put ministers in the government, they would rise. (Payne, 1970, 130ff.)

Incidentally, It is interesting to note that a debate took place in the Spanish working class movement over the exact form of the proletarian dictatorship. This is an interesting reminder that the proletarian revolution can break out without the masses having any direct experience of soviets. As a revolutionary situation unfolds, class hatreds and class fears, sometimes reaching panic proportions, are focused on the need to overthrow the bourgeois government (or stop one of a particular type being formed) and to replace it with a government of workers parties that will use plebeian methods to suppress the bourgeoisie. The decisive question is the formation of such a government, and the workers focus their hopes and ambitions, during the preparatory period, above all on a particular workers' party. Of course, if revolution were nothing more than a change of government, then it is doubtful that there would ever be an insurrection in a bourgeois democracy. But what is at stake is the creation of a government that *acts in a revolutionary manner*, that is to say, mobilises the masses for a variety of specific repressive and reconstructive tasks, under the whip of emergency. Soviets cannot seize power. The *exact* form of the *non-party* links between such a revolutionary government and the broad masses might remain quite vague or indefinite for a working class government contemplating the seizure of power. Pre-1917 theorists of proletarian power, including Kautsky and Lenin, got along well enough without any specific concept of soviets. Claudín (1977, 72) has remarked that all Marxists prior to 1917 visualised the proletarian dictatorship in the form of a parliamentary republic. This is a half-truth. The sort of parliamentary republic they had in mind did not resemble a bourgeois democracy. Their concept of a proletarian dictatorship was similar to that the Jacobin dictatorship of 1793, in which the Jacobins, although formally of the Convention, rested in actuality on the armed action of the *sans-culotte* masses. (Trotsky, 1965, 77-82.) In fact the Jacobins were in a minority but the “Marsh”^[81] voted their measures for fear of the *sans-cullottes*. For Lenin, the “revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” was visualised as a government resting on an insurrectionary force that settled matters in a “Jacobin” or “plebeian” way. (Lenin, 1977a, 58ff., 120.) The concrete features of this power mentioned by Lenin include a workers' inspectorate, elected judges and peasant committees. (Lenin, 1977a, 81.) He also quotes Marx's concept of proletarian dictatorship as a revolutionary government acting dictatorially and speaks of a “revolutionary-active assembly”. (Lenin, 1977a, 132.) These classical Marxists did not see soviets as a precondition for revolutionary consciousness, although the experience with soviets in 1917 clarified the over-arching organisational form through which the government would relate to its

[78] The CEDA (Confederación Española de Derechas Autonomas) was a fascist-Catholic party founded in 1933 by José María Gil Robles.

[79] The Spanish Republic was proclaimed in 1931 and finally fell in 1939 with its defeat in the Spanish civil war.

[80] The Spanish parliament.

[81] The *Crapauds du Marais* (“the Toads of the Marsh”) were those centrist deputies—the majority—who sat in the flat middle area (the “marsh”) of the Convention.

revolutionary mass following. In Spain, a debate took place over the summer of 1934 over the exact nature of this organisational form. The Communists declared that a future revolutionary government should base itself on elected soviets. The Socialists, by contrast, said it should rest on the *Alianza Obrera*.^[82] This consisted of non-elected intra-party committees set up by the Socialists with the aim of drawing the Communists and others into a united front. Working-class through the form of the *Alianza Obrera* would have been a relatively bureaucratic form of proletarian power. The libertarian socialists and anarchists drew up detailed schemes for communes where the state as such would disappear. (Payne, 1970, 130ff.) However, these disagreements did not prevent the revolutionary radicalisation of the Spanish proletariat, although the Left Communists^[83] argued that the *Alianza Obrera* should have been built as elected soviets to prepare the revolution.

When in October the CEDA formally entered the government, this was the signal to rise. It is unclear whether the Socialist leadership called for a rising or merely a general strike. Some of the Socialists no doubt considered the agitation for proletarian dictatorship as merely a threat. The working class took it seriously. In the event, the Madrid workers, ill-led and with insufficient arms, failed to rise and only the Madrid Socialist Youth were engaged. In Barcelona, the movement foundered on the capitulation of the bourgeois *Esquerra*^[84] and the sectarian refusal of the CNT leaders to fight with the Socialists. It was only in Asturias that the rising was a success. On 5 October, the workers here struck and seized all the levers of power in the province, arresting the provincial authorities. For two weeks, Asturias was ruled by a Revolutionary Committee composed of a united front of anarchists, Socialists, Communists and Trotskyists. Three hundred thousand workers participated in the armed revolt. Yet the Asturian Commune was isolated. The Committee, realising its position, was compelled to negotiate. However, the government mercilessly crushed the rebellion. Some 1,500 people were killed by Franco's Moorish troops—although it was popularly believed at the time that 5,000 had perished. (Thomas, 1965, 123.) The repression that followed the Commune, with the imprisonment and torture of thousands of militants, made the revolution and civil war of 1936 virtually unavoidable. Interestingly enough, English historians and commentators, despite a huge literary output on the Spanish civil war, have totally ignored the Commune. No single study exists in English.^[85] Those who wrote about the Spanish civil war tended to adopt the Popular-Frontist position that the Republican side deserved to be supported because it was the legal government under attack from Franco. They conveniently forget that the left had tried to overthrow the “legal” Republic in 1934.⁸⁶

Franco's coup did not bring about the revolutionary radicalisation of 1936. His coup was designed to pre-empt what the bourgeoisie felt would soon be a repeat of the October rising of 1934. In the period between the electoral victory of the workers' parties and left republicans at the polls in February 1936 and the opening of the civil war in July, the bourgeoisie were in a state of mortal fear. These months

[82] The *Alianza Obrera* (Workers' Alliance) was a series of pacts between the principal working-class organisations (although the Communist Party entered into them only reluctantly and, outside of Asturias, the anarchists of the CNT not at all) from the end of 1933 to the end of 1934 with the aim of resisting the right-wing government that had emerged from the elections of November 1933.

[83] The *Izquierda Comunista de España* (Communist Left of Spain) was a semi-Trotskyist group (it was formally affiliated to the International Left Opposition) led by Andreu Nin. The group would later fuse with the *Bloque Obrero y Campesino* (Workers and Peasants' Bloc) of Joaquín Maurín at the end of 1935 to form the POUM.

[84] *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (Republican Left of Catalonia) was established on a left nationalist programme in Barcelona in 1931. Its most prominent in the 1930s leader was Lluís Companys

[85] Subsequent to the writing of this text, material on rising in Asturias in 1934 has appeared, for example Shubert (1987).

⁸⁶ For the scant material which does exist on the revolution of October 1934, see Payne (1970, 152ff), Thomas (1965, 118ff.), and Preston (1975).

represent one of the most acute revolutionary situations in European history. Claudín rightly compares it to the situation in Russia on the eve of the October revolution. As he puts it: “The proletariat had indeed gone over to extreme revolutionary positions. It could be said, without exaggeration that the Spanish workers’ ‘minimum programme’ was the social revolution.” (Claudín, 1975, vol. 1, 215.) A majority of workers in both the UGT^[87] and the Socialist Party supported Largo Caballero,^[88] who held meetings all over Spain of thousands of people who enthusiastically greeted his calls for the dictatorship of the proletariat. He was widely regarded as the “Spanish Lenin”, and specifically rejected the double revolution or two-stage theory of the revolution preached at this time by the Comintern, which, after 1935, moved sharply to the right in Europe. The CNT, during these months, even took the unprecedented step of discussing a united front with the Caballerist UGT on a revolutionary programme at their Zaragoza Congress in May. The strike movement of these months was the largest ever seen in Spain and many of the strikes were aimed at the reinstatement by the employers of those prosecuted or discharged for political offences since 1934 (including the offence of insurrection). In the countryside, land seizures began. On the great May Day rally of 1936, a thousand Socialist militia paraded in uniform. As the summer wore on, strikes became increasingly embittered with the Falange^[89] opening an assassination campaign against the leftist parties and union leaders. Defence squads of leftists began avenging the killings. For several months the revolution was imminent. Even the deputies to the *Cortes* were daily frisked for arms at the door. When leftist members of the political police assassinated Fascist leader José Calvo Sotelo, Franco decided to strike. The revolutionary situation was already over-ripe and in danger of turning into a counter-revolutionary one. (Claudín, 1975, vol. 1, 210, 222.)

It is quite wrong to say, as we have seen that Mandel has, that the dual power of July 1936 arose because of the “disintegrating effects on important sections of the army of a partially miscarried coup d’état”. (Mandel, 1976, 100.) Although, like many coups, Franco’s efforts ran into organisational difficulties, it was not these which made it “miscarry”. What made the coup miscarry was the armed uprising of the working class that met Franco’s *pronunciamiento* [Ed.—i.e. the Francoist military coup of July 1936] and crushed his government in the egg. In *From Stalinism to Eurocommunism*, Mandel gives a much better account of what happened:

[...] when the Spanish generals unleashed their coup d’état in July 36, the workers of Catalonia, and to a lesser extent of the Levante, Andalucia, Madrid, Asturias, Aragon and the Basque Country, responded not only by defeating and disarming the fascist insurgents in their regions militarily. They also armed themselves, formed workers’ militias, occupied factories, railway stations, and electrical and telephone installations—all the nerve centres of “real power”. They reinitiated production under their own leadership, covering the territory of the Republic with a multitude of committees that directed wide areas of economic and social life, at least for the first several months after their local victory over the generals. (Mandel, 1978, 173.)

Yes, indeed. The workers rose, arresting the military authorities (a detail omitted by Mandel) and putting themselves in power in large areas of Spain. In some places, such as at Sevilla, Zaragoza and Oviedo, capital of militant Asturias, the workers’ leaders foolishly accepted the deceptive reassurances of the military commanders with bloody consequences. It was only in this way that Franco made any progress on the mainland at all. Everywhere else the workers took over. In many places, the fighting

[87] Union General de Trabajadores, the trade union organisation historically aligned with the Socialist Party.

[88] Francisco Largo Caballero (1869-1946) was a historic leader of the Spanish Socialist Party and UGT, and was prime minister of the Republic during the civil war.

[89] Founded in 1933 by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, son of the former dictator, the Falange (“Phalanx”) Española merged with the Franco’s militia to form the Falange Española Tradicionalista, which was to become the official party of the fascist Spanish state.

was extremely bitter and reprisals were savage on both sides. In the navy, where the sailors rose on the eighteenth, some twenty per cent of the officers were executed by the ranks. In Barcelona, the workers threw themselves barehanded upon machine-gunners, suffering terrible losses, before being able to capture their first armament. It was working class heroism such as this that made Franco's coup miscarry, and led to his almost total defeat in mainland Spain.⁹⁰

There is absolutely no doubt among historians—except those adhering to Moscow—that the workers were consciously seeking to carry through a social revolution in July. (Claudín, 1975, vol. 1, 224.) Franco's rising triggered the revolution it was designed to avert. It was not the cause of the revolution but the occasion for it. The workers were not seeking to defend the bourgeois republic, but to establish a republic of workers and peasants. This is absolutely undeniable when one examines the measures taken in the Republican zones by the committees. These committees carried through the most profound social revolution in Europe since 1789, although it was subsequently defeated and reversed. The overwhelming bulk of industry was seized and placed under either workers' control or workers' management. The owners either fled or agreed to work at the average industrial wage under workers' supervision. Even small businesses, where the most down-trodden sections of the proletariat were concentrated, were socialised. Houses were requisitioned and land collectivised in many areas. The entire Spanish clergy—the church was the largest capitalist in Spain—were either killed or narrowly escaped with their lives. Churches and convents were burnt or turned into warehouses. The police stations and court houses, together with their records, were totally destroyed. Magistrates were often executed. In their place, a system of people's courts were arranged. During July and August, each union and party branch had its own court, place of imprisonment and place of execution. Perhaps as many as 50,000 people were liquidated in the “red terror”. Foreign embassies handled 20,000 refugees in a single month. This was proletarian dictatorship in its most naked and ferocious form. The bourgeois-democratic institutions themselves fell into disuse. The *Cortes* continued to meet, but could not take itself seriously. The PCE was unable to interest the other parties in holding new elections. Ironically, the workers' deputies had a majority in this body and many of the bourgeois deputies had joined Franco. In some revolutions, it seems, the old parliament falls into the hands of the bourgeoisie, and in some the workers have it in their pocket. It was of little practical use.⁹¹

The dual power arose in the manner to which we are now becoming accustomed. The workers leaders refused to form a workers' government at the critical hour. In Madrid, the capital, the workers lost no time when the *pronunciamiento* was announced on 18 July. The CNT and UGT declared a general strike, and armed patrols policed the streets. Demonstrators demanded arms from the beleaguered Republican government, despite repeated assurances that the Franco rising was not a “serious affair”. The Republican minister, Santiago Quiroga, announced that anyone giving arms to the workers would be shot. But, on 19 July, the old Republican government found itself in serious crisis. Early in the morning, Azaña,^[92] the President, called in Diego Martínez Barrio, a right wing Republican, to form a new Cabinet—one which would appease Franco. This cabinet even included Republicans who had refused to sign the Popular Front pact. When the workers heard the news, huge demonstrations took place against the government. Speakers cried: “Treason!” “They have sold us out!” “We must begin by shooting the Republicans first!” (Bolloton, 1968, 34.) Now was the moment for Caballero to find other revolutionaries to seize power, form a revolutionary workers' government, suspend the constitution, arm the workers, and centralise the new committees. He failed to do so. The Republicans staggered on

⁹⁰ Broué and Témime (2008, 93ff.). The best descriptive account of the rising is contained in Landis (1972).

⁹¹ For conditions in Spain, it is possible to consult a vast literature; see especially Broué and Témime (2008, 74-93-169), and Bolloten (1968, 35ff.)

^[92] Manuel Azaña (1880-1940) founded the bourgeois republican Acción Republicana party and was a prime minister during the Second Republic, before serving as the Republic's president during the civil war.

in crisis. They could find no one to form a cabinet. Only José Giral, the Minister of Marine, already a marked man for sanctioning the sailors' *fait accompli* in the navy the day before, would dare to do so.

As Claudín (1975, vol. 1, 220, 232) points out, it would have only been possible for the Caballerists and anarcho-syndicalists to forestall the military plot if they had removed the petty-bourgeois Republicans and taken power before July. But they certainly should have done so in July. Their failure to do so—opting instead for dual power—may have ultimately been responsible for the defeat of the Spanish proletariat. Until early September, the government remained composed exclusively of Republicans. As Morrow (1974, 50) explains, these Republicans were not interested in the decisive defeat of the generals, for that would only signal their own supersession by the revolution. As a bourgeois government, the Republicans were reluctant to appeal to the social base of Franco's forces by adopting revolutionary measures—such as independence for Morocco and land reform. A proletarian government would have had nothing to lose by such policies. Its military policy was likewise based on a political strategy of appeasing the generals. The conduct of war, as the Stalinist historians and apologists point out, necessarily entails a centralised leadership and command. But war is the handmaiden of politics. The Republicans, for political reasons, failed to launch an offensive against Franco. In July and August, his military position was hopeless. The rising had failed. The major industrial centres, most of the regional capitals, the munitions industries and the transportation facilities were in Republican hands. The Republic had three intact divisions plus numerous militia forces, whereas Franco had only one division on the mainland. Moreover, his forces were cut in two and were without naval or air support. (Broué and Témime (2008, 173.) During the month of August, Franco's small columns could have been smashed by an offensive by Madrid. (Hills, 1976, 50-1.) Instead, the Government drew in its forces for the “defence of Madrid”—whether from the social revolution or from Franco it did not say. These few weeks permitted Franco to arm and re-equip his forces with troops and supplies from Hitler and Mussolini. It was this outside intervention which, as most historians stress, tipped the military relation of forces against the Republic during the early days.

Meanwhile, the pressure on the workers' leaders to take power grew, particularly as the military incompetence of the government made itself plain. Towards the end of August, the Caballerists, anarcho-syndicalists and the POUM drew up, rather belatedly, a scheme for the formation of a government, or *junta*, of the workers' parties. According to Broué and Témime (2008, 200), this plan was foiled only by the intervention of the Soviet ambassador. Unless the Republicans were left in power, or at least involved in a coalition, it would be impossible for the Soviet Union or the “democracies” to supply arms. A red republic would be “illegal” and isolated militarily. The Socialist leaders, seeing the military situation growing worse—a product of their own earlier dalliance—decided to capitulate and joined a coalition with the Republicans on 4 September. Caballero himself had to enter it in order to give it credibility in the eyes of the masses.

Caballero turned out to be a Kerensky rather than a Lenin. Like Kerensky, he appealed not to the moral authority of the parliamentary republic, but based his apologies for coalition above all on the international situation. As somebody once said, those who fail to study history are compelled to repeat it. The history of revolutions is unfortunately excessively repetitive. The presence of bourgeois republicans in the coalition would, it was argued, do no harm to the revolution, but it would help secure guns from France, Britain and the Soviet Union by keeping up the pretence that there was no social revolution taking place in Spain. Bollothen aptly entitled his history of the revolution “*The Grand Camouflage*” (Bollothen, 1968), and Claudín (1975, vol. 1, 27) calls Caballero's line a “*ruse de guerre*”. But, of course, the camouflage and the ruse deceived no one, least of all the imperialists and Stalin. Claudín calls the revolution “untimely”. (Claudín, 1975, vol. 1, 210.) This is true, except for the fact that all revolutions are untimely. All revolutions experience a strong desire also to keep themselves secret, to keep their heads down. It is an illusory policy, as the subsequent course of events in Spain show. It

would not be enough merely to retain “republican forms”. The substance would have to be restored too if the demands of Stalin and the “democracies” were to be met. The coalition gradually disbanded the revolution, dispersing the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias,^[93] delaying the socialisation, refusing to endorse or organise adequate revolutionary measures, restoring the Republican police, sowing division, sapping the enthusiasm of the proletariat—which alone sustained the Republic against Franco. The government spread uncertainty over the future of the revolution, its composition re-infusing the bourgeoisie with a measure of confidence, and making it impossible to appeal to the revolutionary solidarity of the world proletariat on more than a limited basis. Amid growing demoralisation and mutual suspicion, the Stalinists and Republicans were eventually able to launch a counter-revolutionary assault on Barcelona in May 1937. The dual power was formally liquidated in favour of a bourgeois republic—a bourgeois republic without a future, for the bourgeoisie in the republican sector preferred Franco to the socialist revolution.

JUNE 1936: A REVOLUTIONARY SITUATION

Between February 1934 and June 1936, a pre-revolutionary situation developed in France.⁹⁴ The French workers grew increasingly alarmed over the international situation, the threat of a new European war, and the evolution of French government policy under the pressure of the fascists in France. The Communists grew massively in this period and the Socialists themselves shifted sharply to the left. The country appeared to be in danger of drifting towards civil war. (Claudín, 1975, vol. 1, 208.) Then, following the creation of a Popular Front, the Socialists and Communists (the leaders had secured it on the basis of the programme of the Radicals⁹⁵) won a resounding victory at the polls in May 1936. The working class, after two years of apprehensiveness and increasing political radicalisation, took this as the signal to make the socialist revolution. During the days immediately following the electoral victory, the workers, without party instructions, struck and occupied the factories. Claudín remarks that nearly everyone who has studied the event, or lived through it, agrees in their diagnosis. This was a revolutionary situation. The euphoria of the June Days was similar to that of May 68. On 7 June, the workers rejected the economic concessions contained in the Matignon agreement,^[96] as a subsequent generation would do in May 68. Following the rejection, Mauseau Pivert, leader of the revolutionary tendency in the Socialist Party, declared: “Now everything is possible for those who are bold enough.” On 10 June, the metal workers formally raised the question of nationalising the enterprises and running them under workers’ control. A march to the centre of Paris was planned. The country reached fever pitch. Clearly, with all this, the Socialists and the Communists had the opportunity to form a government that would transfer power and property to their followers and save France from fascism, linking up with the imminent revolution in Spain.

Mandel (1976, 101) tells us that the government expressed a “spontaneous rejection of the capitalist

^[93] The Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias was set up in Barcelona in July 1936 and operated as an effective alternative government to the Catalan Generalitat.

⁹⁴ The following account is based on Claudín (1975, vol.1, 199ff.) and Brower (1968).

^[95] The French Radical Party represented (and represents) the social centre-right of the French political spectrum.

^[96] The June 1936 agreements, signed between the Popular Front Blum government and the trade unions in the Hotel Matignon, Paris, were in response to the wave of class action, and asserted the principle of compulsory collective bargaining and sanctioned an average pay rise of 12%.

system". That it was spontaneous is not so sure, but that it rejected the capitalist system is beyond doubt. The question of power, he concludes, was objectively posed. But the movement was "easily overcome". The explanation, according to Mandel, must rest on the "parliamentary and electoralist illusions" of the working class. "The partial development of consciousness was not enough to lead them to question the legitimacy of the institutions of bourgeois democracy and oppose to them institutions created by the working class itself." (Mandel, 1976, 101-2.) In other words, soviets and dual power failed to emerge. But this is a formalistic objection. The defeat of the revolutionary possibilities contained within the June movement was more closely related to the behaviour of the workers' parties than from any residual illusions in parliamentary forms. Above all, the attitude of the PCF was the key to the situation. The PCF, widely regarded at this time as the party of revolution, reacted sharply against Pivert. "No, everything is not possible at present," declared Thorez^[97] at the height of the crisis. "The Peoples' Front is not the revolution," he declared to the puzzled crowds. This was a blow. At the same time, the Blum-Radical^[98] government sent in troops to occupy the workers' districts of the capital. It was only after these events, and not "after the Matignon agreements" (Mandel, 1976, 101), that the movement was broken and began to subside. The vanguard of the working class came up against an unexpected obstacle: the resistance of its own leaders.

If the PCF had said "Yes, the Peoples' Front victory *is* the signal for revolution," then the outcome of the movement would have been decisively different. Believing a fight for power to be possible, the workers, with or without instructions from the PCF, would have elected soviets in Paris and the other major centres within a few hours. The French workers were not unfamiliar with the idea of soviets, for the PCF had popularised them in connection with the revolution over a period of several years. The first task on the agenda would have been to decide the exact composition and programme of the government together with the other major issues of power. The governmental position at this time was anomalous. The Blum-Radical coalition (formed prior to May) was still in power, but the Radical Party had suffered a huge electoral defeat in May, while the Communists had experienced a tenfold increase in the number of their deputies. When Blum had first joined the coalition, Pivert and the PCF had denounced him as a "ministerialist", a term which stirred deep memories of the class betrayal of Millerand.^[99] The soviet, given the revolutionary fervour of the moment, would have demanded a break with the Radicals and the formation of a revolutionary workers' government. It is impossible to speculate on the outcome of such an event: whether the seizure of power by the revolutionary forces—assuming Pivert and the PCF to have been such—might have occurred either by a direct assault on the Blum-Radical government or in the course of overthrowing the embryonic government of some Franco-type general. What is certain is that the struggle for "soviets" was intimately bound up with the question of party and government in the eyes of the working class. It was the default of these parties and not "parliamentary illusions" that resulted in the non-appearance in France of soviets on this occasion, and indeed the breakup of the movement generally. When the PCF denied the revolution, the working class suffered a shock from which it did not recover and the masses as a whole sank bank into the apathy and scepticism that habitually mark the oppressed classes.

^[97] Maurice Thorez (1900-1964) was the most important leader of the French Communist Party from 1930 until his death.

^[98] The Popular Front government of 1936 led by the French Socialist leader Léon Blum.

^[99] A member of the chamber of deputies, Alexandre Millerand was, over 1899-1902, the first Socialist to serve in a bourgeois cabinet.

TROTSKY, THE COMINTERN AND DUAL POWER

It is interesting to note that neither the Comintern nor Leon Trotsky, its most brilliant strategist, ever had much use for the concept of “dual power”. For this reason there is no classical definition of the concept to which one can refer. Poulantzas (1978, 76-82) is quite misinformed when he states that the Comintern had a “strategy of dual power”. The norm of the Comintern-Trotsky model of strategy was that under the pressure of world events, of the class struggle, and of the political work of the revolutionary parties, the workers would become conscious of the necessity to set up a revolutionary dictatorship. The majority of the proletariat would then transfer its allegiance to the most revolutionary, conscious and intransigent socialist parties who would finally, at the appropriate moment, launch an uprising and seize power or organise their supporters to make an armed take-over of the administration should they form a government legally. There was no expectation that the bourgeoisie would permit the proletariat to exercise any substantial powers in society prior to insurrection. The idea that this would be possible for several months, let alone for several years, would have been treated as quite utopian. At the same time, the Comintern thinkers, heading parties of millions, did not integrate their own experience of betrayal (dual power) into their strategic model. When we argue today that dual power will (almost) certainly be necessary for a *successful* socialist revolution (though not a revolutionary situation nor a “February”), we are speaking in the light of more historical experience than was available in the 1920s and 1930s. It is because this is uppermost in Mandel’s mind that he is led into the error of reserving the term “revolutionary situation” for a point towards the end of the dual power.¹⁰⁰ History seems to have taught us a grim lesson: that even the best mass parties of the working class suffer fatal inadequacies, above all during a revolutionary crisis. A period of dual power may well be mandatory to permit the working class to overhaul its leadership—a frantic and dangerous race against time. Perhaps in future we will see the evolution of a mass party which breaks this fatal pattern. Let us hope so.

Trotsky used the concept of “dual power” a great deal as a historian, but very rarely as a strategist. It naturally appears frequently in his *History of the Russian Revolution*. But he seldom used it in his strategical writings. So, for example, it occurs on a few occasions in his writings on China (Trotsky, 1976), where Stalin was in effect pursuing a “strategy of dual power” in resurrecting the Menshevik policies of 1917. In his European writings it is equally rare. Thus, for example, in his collected writings on Spain (Trotsky, 1973c), it only appears once. This does not mean that Trotsky imagined that the proletariat would, on every single occasion, start the revolution without preparatory experience or partial assaults on the state power. We find these in various forms in his writings. In his letters to the German communists during the crisis of 1929-33, for example, he demanded that the KPD seek to implement workers’ control over production as a way of rousing the working class for revolution and cementing a united front with the social democrats. (Trotsky, 1971c, 77-87.) This, he explains, would be organised through the factory councils and would create a situation of dual power in industry. Nevertheless, such a policy of control over the bourgeoisie (which Trotsky distinguished from workers’ management)

¹⁰⁰ Incidentally, Mandel misrepresents Lenin’s definition of a revolutionary situation: when the lower classes no longer want to be ruled in the old way and the upper classes cannot carry on ruling in the old way. Mandel interprets this to mean that the ruling classes no longer have the “material possibility of exercising power”—an inference which cannot be drawn from Lenin’s definition. Lenin even rejects the idea that the state can “disintegrate” and states explicitly that the old government can carry on, even in a period of revolutionary crisis, unless it is “toppled over”. For Mandel’s gloss, see Mandel (1976, 99-102); for Lenin’s definition see Lenin (1974a, 213-4). Trotsky, writing many years later, did not deviate from Lenin’s account of a revolutionary situation in terms of the subjective consciousness of the classes and not the material breakdown of the state: see Trotsky (1973b).

could only be “imposed by force” upon the bourgeoisie, and consequently, though it may chronologically precede the insurrection, it is only conceivable in a revolutionary situation, in the “period of the convulsing of the bourgeois state, the proletarian offensive, and the falling back of the bourgeoisie, that is, to the period of the proletarian revolution in the fullest sense of the word.” (Trotsky, 1971c, 78.) This does not suggest that workers’ control could represent a lengthy, preparative period of dual power, but rather a short and feverish interlude, in which the head-on clash with the state power is almost upon the working class—indeed would be provoked all the more rapidly that the control was imposed. In his writings on France in the period 1934-36, Trotsky (1968, 33) called for the immediate creation of a workers’ army of 100,000 men to fight the fascists. This would certainly have constituted a situation of dual power. The monopoly of the bourgeoisie over the means of coercion—the essential nature of all state power—would have been broken. Yet, as with workers’ control, the government would surely have moved rapidly to arrest the leaders of such activities, compelling the labour movement to arrest the government in turn. That is why Trotsky combined his call for a citizen army with the demand addressed to the Socialists and Communists to seize power. (Trotsky, 1968, 44.) We can agree with Mandel and others that a general strike, especially one where workers’ councils or strike committees take over essential supplies, is also an instance of dual power. But, as Trotsky puts it: “The entire history of the working class movement proves that every general strike, whatever may be the slogans under which it occurs, has an internal tendency to transform itself into an open revolutionary clash, into a direct struggle for power.” (Trotsky, 1968, 79.)

Neither of Trotsky’s schemes for France and Germany were put into practice, so it is difficult to judge the issue fully. Nevertheless, there exists a valuable historical precedent: 1905. This was an experience in which Trotsky himself was intimately involved, and of which he left an invaluable record in his study *1905*. (Trotsky, 1971a.) The October strike against the Tsar was already turning into an uprising, for which the Soviet had prepared from its inception. (Trotsky, 1971a, 394.) Then, to everybody’s surprise, the Tsar issued a constitutional manifesto in an effort to buy time. There then ensued a period of some eight weeks during which the Soviet assembled its forces for the renewal of the uprising. It did this by creating a militia to defend the citizenry against the Black Hundred pogromists.^[101] Here was a situation of dual power. But it was a desperate race against time. In less than eight weeks, the government arrested the Soviet leaders—for the crime of planning an insurrection—before the Soviet was able to arrest the government. It is interesting to note not merely how rapidly the government pre-empted the dual power, but also how the Soviet was unable to press any of its major claims—for example the unsuccessful attempts to impose the eight-hour day. The Soviet voluntarily retreated on several key issues prior to its arrest. This is in marked contrast to the freedom with which soviets are able to act following the great insurrections we have studied in this article. The insurrection finally went off in Moscow in December.

Historical experience would therefore seem to indicate that it is impossible for the working class to exercise substantial power without first breaking the backbone of bourgeois power, notably its armed power, by an uprising. The history of dual power is the history of a strongly asymmetrical relationship. In post-insurrectional dual power, when the proletariat possesses the pseudo-totality of power, it permits, owing to the political hesitancy of its leaders, the bourgeoisie a fairly long lease of life. The converse however does not apply. The bourgeoisie always moves rapidly to crush in the egg the first challenge to *its* monopoly of power. This may not hold true for agrarian societies, where social processes are far less highly centralised. Here, sovereignty is decentralised, ill-organised or even formally parcellised. In the Chinese Revolution, it was possible to construct a dual power of many years duration by forming liberated red areas in certain sheltered provinces of the country. An extended

[101] The Black Hundreds were proto-fascist monarchist gangs in pre-revolutionary Russia. They assassinated revolutionaries, assaulted progressive intellectuals, and organised pogroms against Jews.

“people’s war” like that of Vietnam also involves many years of dual power. But it would be false to import such notions into advanced industrial societies—although we shall find that the resistance movements of 1941-45 in occupied Europe represent a partial exception. As Mandel wrote in 1968:

The events of May 68 show that the idea of a long period of dual power, the idea of a gradual conquest and institutionalisation of workers’ control or of any anti-capitalist structural reforms, depends on an illusory conception of the exacerbated class struggle in a pre-revolutionary or revolutionary period. [...] It is quite illusory to hope to “freeze” this extremely unstable equilibrium for several years. The bourgeoisie is obliged to try almost instantaneously to win back whatever the masses seize from it in the domain of power. The masses, if they do not give way to their adversary, are obliged almost instantaneously to enlarge their conquests. It has been this way in all revolutions; it will still be this way in the future. (Mandel, 1968, 16-17.)

The organisation of soviets is a distinct but related issue. On this question there is no real clarity in the Marxist classics. The classical Comintern view was that the election of workers’ councils was only feasible on the eve, or the morrow, of insurrection; Zinoviev, for example, was most emphatic on this. (“Theses on the conditions under which Workers’ Soviets may be formed”, 1977.) Trotsky also laid this down as a norm in his address to the Military Science Society in Moscow in 1924. (Trotsky, 1970, 14.) In his writings on France he derided the Stalinists for raising the slogan of “soviets everywhere” prior to the revolutionary situation of June 1936. (Trotsky, 1968, 80-81.) In these passages, the soviets appear as organs of power. Elsewhere, however, Trotsky expresses a different view. In his writings on Spain, he denounced the traditional view as a dogma, and urges the election of soviets which need not be created solely by the needs of an armed insurrection or only on the brink of one. (Trotsky, 1973c, 98-9.) This assertion seems to rest on a distinction between form and function. In Spain, he saw the soviets arising as general combat organisations rather than as organs of power (Trotsky, 1973c, 123), taking up all the political and economic struggles of the masses. This seemed especially relevant in Spain where the workers’ movement was divided between several unions and political parties. Considered simply as an organisational form, the elected soviet is the best organisational device for conducting *any* struggle, from strikes to the seizure of power. But, according to this approach, the election of soviets would not necessarily indicate a situation of dual power or that a struggle for power was under way.¹⁰² There is some historical support for this view. Thus, the German workers’ councils lasted for several years as factory councils following the civil war of 1919, even though they ceased to be organs of power (and the soldiers’ councils disappeared in 1919). It would be wrong to say that dual power existed for several years in Germany. In such a case, the councils would function as organs of a united front until the revolutionary forces won a majority and were able to turn them into bodies for power. In Italy, councils were enthusiastically elected in the Turin factories in 1919, lasting for as long as a year. But, although they symbolised the future proletarian order to those who set them up and staffed them, in practice they carried out almost purely trade union functions, rather like the English shop steward system on which they were modelled, (Williams, 1975, 141) at least until the general strike of September 1920 when, together with the older *Camera del Lavoro*,^[103] they were turned into organs of armed insurrection. Pursuing the distinction between form and function, Trotsky remarks in the *Transitional Programme* (Trotsky, 1977, 83) that where a factory has a closed shop, the factory committee (an organ of “dual power”) will formally coincide with the usual organ of the trade union. What makes the factory committee an organ of dual power is not some special quality inherent in the form of organisation, but the function performed—in this context the seizure of the factories in sit-down strikes (writing in 1938, Trotsky was thinking of the sit-down strikes in the USA in 1936). In Mandel’s work, by contrast,

¹⁰² Writing later, Trotsky appears to return to the more traditional stance, in which soviets are representative of a dual power, though he combines this with an “open door” conception of the soviet as a general combat organ of the broad masses: Trotsky (1977, 101).

[¹⁰³] The *Camera del Lavoro* was the official trade union organisation of Turin.

soviets are *always* treated as synonymous with power (organs of dual power), and dual power almost always defined in terms of soviets, thus creating the unfortunate impression that the mere election of soviets is equivalent to the possession of some power. It is almost at times as if Mandel has simply inverted the Eurocommunist position which treats the parliamentary chamber as the real locus of power—a rival workers assembly, no matter the concrete conditions or the actual relation of forces, automatically appears as an expression of power. (A revolutionary organisation basing itself on Mandel's vision would surely develop certain characteristic deformations: a fetish of organisational forms, since the break with reformism is located here; an insufficient emphasis on politico-ideological work among the mass of workers, in the struggle to develop organisational innovations; and a failure to fully appreciate the centrality of constructing a revolutionary party—which is de-emphasised since the mass revolutionary party is considered feasible only after the break of “dual power” and the question of government is not sufficiently placed at the centre of the problem of power.)

THE RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The Second World War represents the second great crisis of the capitalist system this century. It generated revolutionary movements throughout the globe, including in Europe. As far as Europe is concerned, it is a peculiar Anglo-Saxon myth that the Second World War was primarily a struggle between Nazism and the democratic powers. In reality, it was first and foremost a war between Nazism—acting to a considerable extent as the vanguard of imperialism as a whole—and the Soviet Union. Indeed, the inter-imperialist contradictions were sometimes suppressed during the war in favour of a tactical unity between Hitler and the “democracies” against the Soviet Union. During the 1930s, Britain in particular had connived at Hitler's eastward expansion in the hope that he would destroy the Soviet Union and communism, even though the British were uneasily aware that Hitler represented a threat to the British Empire. When the war broke out, the military engagements between the Allies and Nazi Germany were negligible. Churchill once said that the Allies spent most the war “playing about” with six German divisions, while the Russians faced over 200. This was primarily a Soviet-German war with British and US action on the periphery. The reasons for the sluggish rate of combat in the West were not solely military. The Allies pursued a deliberate policy of delaying the second front between 1941 and 1944 following Hitler's invasion of Russia. Truman expressed Allied impulses when he said in 1941: “If we see that Germany is winning we ought to help Russia, and if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany, and in that way let them kill as many as possible.” (Horowitz, 1967, 59n.) Yet, by 1944, it looked as though this policy might backfire. For by this time, far from suffering defeat Russia looked set to defeat Hitler single-handedly. Moreover, there was another danger. The Communists of Europe had built mass resistance movements against the German occupation which, together with the Red Army, threatened to liberate the whole of Europe (bar the Iberian peninsula and Britain) and introduce socialism. It is an Anglo-Saxon lie that Europe was liberated from Hitler by the Allied armies. In fact, all the capitals and major cities of occupied Europe were liberated either by the Red Army, or, more particularly, *by armed insurrections of the Communist-led resistance in 1944 and 1945*—including in France, where the main weight of the allied advance was made in 1944. Claudín has argued, using Russian documents, that it was precisely this spectre of communist revolution in Europe that induced the Allies to undertake the Normandy landings. (Claudín, 1975, vol. 2, 410-12.)

Prior to the 1940s, revolutions in Europe stemmed from war or economic ruin. Now Europe was to experience a fresh material catastrophe. The revolutionary crises of 1944-45 arose from the experience

of foreign occupation. Like the bourgeois regime of 1870, the pre-war capitalist order had failed to prevent Hitler's occupation. The armies of Europe had folded before the Nazi advance. The bourgeois leaders fled into exile, a privilege not permitted the masses. As in all occupied countries, the gulf between the classes widened dramatically. Under the occupation, the propertied classes everywhere showed signs of collaboration, with the possible exception of those in Poland. In some cases, the old politicians openly collaborated, as in Vichy France (Pétain). Employers would often assist the Gestapo to root out trade union militants and politically-minded workers. Nor were the propertied classes subject to the forced-labour system, whereby some ten million workers were forcibly compelled to go and work in Germany. They did not suffer the privations and hardships of occupation that confronted the working masses. Nor did they bear the same risks of resistance. The most traumatic disaster ever to strike modern Europe created among the broad masses a desire for new social order. It was to the Communists and the socialist revolution that they turned.

The Communists now experienced phenomenal growth, despite their absurd policies in 1939-41,^[104] emerging at the end of the war as the largest working class party in almost every country subjected to Nazi occupation. Following Stalin's instructions of July 1941, the Communists, drawing upon their experience of armed combat in Spain, organised armed resistance in a whole number of countries, including France, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Greece, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Poland. Among all the political forces who resisted the Nazis, it was the Communists who threw themselves most energetically into the armed struggle. Especially because for the Communists it was not solely a question of national liberation and socialism (the latter for their rank and file), but also one of defending the Soviet Union, and they followed a policy of "Action against action, always action". The Communists organised street demonstrations, strikes, sabotage and guerrilla warfare. Most of the bourgeois resistance groups—in Belgium, Norway, Czechoslovakia, the Gaullists in France—passively awaited the Allied forces. These would bring liberation—and of course the old governments-in-exile in their baggage train. In some countries—notably in Greece and Yugoslavia—bourgeois resistance forces colluded with the Nazis to fight the Communists. By 1944-45, the Communist Parties of Europe were the natural candidates for power, not merely as the heroic resisters but as the bearers of a new social order. The socialist radicalisation of the masses was assisted, not only by contact with the political ideas of the Communist militants—the CPs were still regarded as the party of socialist revolution—but also by the example of the Soviet Union itself. For three years, the Soviet Union had stood virtually alone against Hitler. The utterly heroic stand of the Soviet people against Hitler was living testimony to the superiority of a post-capitalist social system, and stood in sharp contrast to the corruption of the bourgeois order of the West. Socialism was once again the hope of the masses and revolution the natural method available to the armed resister. Under the sign of national liberation the working class would again pose the question of power.¹⁰⁵

In so far as the old bourgeois governments retained any authority during the occupation period it was solely by permission of the Communists. From 1942 Stalin instructed them to seek not merely a military but a *political* alliance with them. This meant respecting the legitimacy of the old authorities and refraining from their overthrow. In June 1943 the Comintern disbanded as part of this policy. But it

[104] The period between the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939, and the German invasion of the Soviet Union of 1941, during which Comintern policy was to treat the war as merely an inter-imperialist war, much as the First World War had been, with the main culprits for its taking place being Britain and France.

¹⁰⁵ No political history of the resistance exists in English, although there is extensive material available on individual countries. The only general history of the Resistance is Michel (1972). The sections of Claudín's book dealing with this period are outstanding; see Claudín (1975, vol. 2, 316ff.).

was difficult to impose. In Yugoslavia, for example, the Anti-Fascist Council^[106] deposed the old government in its absence as “traitors” in 1943, half-heartedly reversing this position later. Despite all attempts to prettify the absent governments as “leaders of the resistance”, the Communists found themselves, in Italy, France, Greece and Yugoslavia in particular, with overwhelming moral, political and armed superiority at the moment of liberation. Everywhere the CPs refused the power. But this was nowhere an easy decision. In France, for example, the inactive Gaullist militias, unable to prevent the insurrection of 19-26 August 1944, almost sabotaged it. This they did by arranging a cease-fire with the Germans designed to permit the Germans to evacuate heavy artillery which would otherwise have fallen to the FTP,^[107] the Communist militia that had launched the Paris insurrection without de Gaulle’s permission. Yet on 26 August, the CP leaders welcomed de Gaulle as head of government.¹⁰⁸ In Italy, general strikes led to the downfall of Mussolini in 1943. The Badoglio regime^[109] that succeeded it abandoned Rome to the Nazis, fleeing to the safety of the south where the workers despised it. The workers in the north (the Salò Republic^[110]) conducted a heroic struggle, with general strikes and armed resistance until, in April 1945, a successful armed uprising delivered the whole of the northern zone into the hands of the resistance council and workers’ parties. Not surprisingly, Togliatti’s “Salerno turn”^[111] towards coalition with Badoglio met with consternation and his disarmament of the resistance with bewilderment. In Greece, EAM^[112] was in control by October 1944, yet the CP refrained from marching its triumphant forces into Athens, permitting the British and the Royal Hellenic Army. to land in Athens. The war of liberation soon had to be resumed in December 1944.^[113] In Yugoslavia, Tito appears to have deceived Stalin, including royalist ministers in his government following the liberation in October 1944, yet making sure they had no armed or administrative forces at their disposal. Tito alone carried through a socialist revolution by means of the resistance.

As a result of Communist policies, the popular insurrections which liberated Europe produced a classical dual power, with the resistance councils de facto running the country, but with bourgeois representatives established at the governmental apex, shored up by the workers’ leaders joining them in coalition governments of “national unity”. Strangely, Mandel (1976, 107) believes that dual power did not emerge out of the resistance movements in the mid-forties. He berates the Communists for disarming the resistance and failing to build up the resistance councils after the liberation, but he prefers to seek revolutionary situations in later events such as the general strike in Italy in 1948, where

[106] The Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia was set up at the end of 1942 as an armed resistance movement led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.

[107] The Francs-Tireurs et Partisans (FTP) was the resistance organisation created at the instigation of the French Communist Party in 1942.

¹⁰⁸ A vivid reconstruction of the insurrection is contained in Collins and Lapierre (1965); see also Knight (1975).

[109] In July 1943 Mussolini was removed from power; in his place Pietro Badoglio (the Italian general who, amongst other things, was responsible for the slaughter of civilian populations in Libya and use of chemical weapons in the Italian invasion of Abyssinia) was named as prime minister. Badoglio immediately sued for peace.

[110] The Repubblica Sociale Italiana, more popularly known as the Repubblica di Salò, was the zone of the north of Italy run by Mussolini and propped up by the German occupying forces from 1943 until April 1945.

[111] The “Salerno Turn” (*Svolta di Salerno*) refers to the policy adopted by the Italian Communist Party in 1944 on the return of Palmiro Togliatti which saw the party renounce the armed struggle for socialism (a position which required the disarming of the Communist Party-led resistance groups. On the strength of this new policy, the Communist Party entered the Badoglio government, with Togliatti himself serving as deputy prime minister 1944 and 1945.

[112] EAM: the Communist Party-led National Liberation Front.

[113] In the events of December 1944 that are known as the *Dekemvriana* (see below).

the working class adopted more conventional forms of struggle. But this is a seriously misdrawn picture. It overlooks the core of the resistance experience as a revolutionary struggle. Ironically, it was during the resistance that the most prolonged period of dual power in Europe emerged. Between 1941 and 1945, entire governmental systems were created in the underground. In addition, the partisan warfare of the resistance culminated in classical urban insurrections, no different from the February, November or July revolutions, except perhaps for the ferocity of the fighting and the fact that the bourgeois authorities were those of an occupying power. The Nazi front did not “collapse”. (Mandel, 1976, 103.) It was destroyed by proletarian insurrections. These do not figure in Mandel’s itinerary, nor in his political lexicon. What is more, these insurrections were followed by a dual power—which arose in exactly the same way as in previous instances: by the betrayal of the working class parties in the critical moment. For, as result of the Communists’ coalitionism, the insurrections created a dual power—each country was torn, following the liberation, between the conflicting legitimacies of the insurgent resistance councils, through which the working class, fully armed, attempted to lay the foundations for a socialist reconstruction, and a popular front government of the bourgeoisie. The dual power worked out differently in each country. It was nowhere very long. In France it was liquidated by December 1944, following CP instructions to disarm and accept de Gaulle’s authority, which he established by having to tour the country personally and appoint local administrators loyal to him. In Italy, the dual power lasted only a few weeks after the April insurrection, following a similar policy pursued by the PCI. In Yugoslavia, the bourgeois ministers in the coalition were completely powerless, Tito strengthened the resistance councils, and, through general elections in 1945, formalised the seizure of power. In Greece, the CP, unable to support the repressive policies of the King and the British authorities, decided to rise in December 1944. (Kousoulas, 1965, 201ff.) Isolated by their European comrades, the Greek proletariat was defeated after a bloody struggle, in which some 13,000 people were killed in Athens alone. In 1946, the Communists rose a third time. The revolutionary civil war of 1946-48 in Greece must count as one of the most protracted revolutionary struggles in Europe, and it forms the immediate background to the opening of the Cold War in 1947. None of this figures in Mandel’s historical account.

The differential outcome of the resistance struggles are not attributable, as Carrillo believes, to the geography of Nazi atrocity. The old bourgeois armies had collapsed or fled just as completely in the western sector as in the east. In fact, in Poland, bourgeois forces continued to resist the Nazis strongly. Nor was it simply due the occupation of Eastern Europe by Stalin’s Red Army. There is no evidence one way or the other that Stalin intended to create workers’ states in Eastern Europe in 1945, and indeed he did not do so for several years, and only after the west had opened the Cold War. Nor are the differential outcomes in the four countries we have studied attributable to the influence of pre-war political institutions. Pre-war Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece had fascist or monarchical dictatorships. Yet in Italy, the revolution rapidly expired, in sharp contrast to the other two countries. Italy had suffered far worse pre-war fascist oppression than Greece or Yugoslavia. Even more startling is the comparison between Italy and France. These two countries had diametrically opposite pre-war regimes: the one fascist, the other democratic. Yet the revolution was defeated at about the same tempo in each. Above all, the contrast between Greece and Yugoslavia is instructive. The struggle in these two occupied countries was similar in almost every respect, both in terms of the social forces and the conditions under which they fought. Yet the Yugoslav revolution conquered, while that of the Greeks went down to bloody defeat, almost certainly because of the bureaucratic policy of the leadership. Nothing reveals more clearly than a comparative survey of the outcome of the resistance movements that it is the leadership and not the character of bourgeois political institutions that is decisive to the course and development of proletarian revolution.

The Communists did not justify their policies by anything less than an appeal to the deep concern of the European working class for the liberation of the Soviet Union. The resistance councils everywhere

enjoyed absolute authority. The old bourgeois parliaments, where they existed, had no authority. The councils were so authoritative that even the bedraggled remnants of bourgeois power were compelled to clothe themselves with their banner. And this they did only with the assistance of the Communists. The Communists argued for restraint in carrying through a social revolution in the interests of the Soviet Union. If the Communists had seized power, they argued, the Allies would carry out a “reversal of alliances”, joining with Hitler to attack the Soviet Union. (Claudín, 1975, vol. 2, 406.) The Communists must therefore wait, meanwhile practising a policy of “national unity” in the continuing war against Germany. The resistance must be liquidated into the regular armed forces which at this time were preparing for the all-out invasion of Germany, the final phase of the war. In the factories, the “battle for production” was proclaimed and strikers denounced. Nor did the Communist leaders allow the lesson of Greece to be lost on their followers. All of this meant that the Communists let the opportunity to seize power pass. The coalition governments demoralised the movement, lowered their sights and paved the way for the constituent assemblies of Europe to introduce bourgeois democracies. The masses, disarmed, lost confidence and joined the final phase of the war, or, as in the case of Greece, the armed intervention of imperialism broke up the force which could have seized power.

It has long been debated whether the Communists should have seized power in 1944-45 in the west. Mandel, for example, believes it would have been better to wait, providing the resistance councils were kept intact. However, it seems inconsistent to denounce the CPs for disarming the resistance and yet not support their taking power when they had the opportunity. Once the CPs had permitted the return of de Gaulle, Badoglio or Papandreou,^[114] they inevitably faced demands for disarmament. A direct clash of the opposing sovereignties could not be postponed for long, certainly not until 1947 or 1948. There are no secure half-way houses for the proletarian revolution, and second chances are rare. It is of course difficult not to judge the issue by analogy. Every situation has its unique features. Yet, we suspect Mandel’s position owes something to the way in which the course of events he favours would fit into his “model”.

Yet the power of precedent is, we feel, on our side. Let us not forget that a similar conflict arose in all the proletarian revolutions prior to 1945. In 1917, the Mensheviks argued that a soviet republic in February would provoke a German intervention. They were not necessarily wrong. Russia did indeed suffer a German, indeed US-European, intervention as a Soviet Republic in 1918. In Germany the SPD argued that the country would starve and suffer the same fate as the Soviet Union. In the event, however, putting off the revolution only contributed to Russia’s ills while doing nothing to save Germany from a fate worse than anything that could have been inflicted by the Entente in 1918. Caballero and the PCE argued that a red republic would lead to the democracies joining the international fascist alliance against Spain. They did so in any case, and Spain went down to defeat. When the proletarian revolution rears its head, then invasion, blockade and starvation will inevitably confront it. The only way to minimise the overheads of historical progress is to pursue a bold policy that can inspire the working class to overthrow the belligerents in their own countries. The CPs in 1944-45 were in a much better position. The workers were already in arms across *an entire continent*, the Red Army was on the march, and the peoples of occupied Europe had not fought the Nazis for four years only to give up their self-determination to the Allied armies who were (belatedly) coming to their aid and passing through their lands. The placatory policies of Stalin and the Communists in 1944-45 averted revolution, but they did not avert the destruction of the Greek people nor prevent the “betrayal” of the Soviet Union by the Western Allies. Nor did they prevent the subjection of Europe and Russia to the terrors of the Cold War, and nor, despite Carrillo’s illusions in peaceful co-existence under the nuclear umbrella, did they save the world from the threat of a new world war, presently being

[114] Georgios Papandreou was the prime minister of the Greek government-in-exile that entered Athens with the British in 1944.

planned by the Americans.

EUROPE SINCE 1945

Since 1945, Europe has proved much less fertile in revolutionary and pre-revolutionary situations. But such things have not been totally absent. The period has been punctuated by a number of important experiences, though none of them provoked a continental or semi-continental wide crisis. Those which merit study include the following. In 1960, the Belgian forces in the Congo were defeated, provoking a severe austerity policy at home. In the winter a general strike broke out which exhibited some of the features of May 68, with barricades at Hainaut and attacks on police stations. Not long after, France was also to be wracked by serious colonial trouble, one of the most important sources of class confrontations in the West since 1945. The rebellion of the OAS^[115] and a large part of the French army against de Gaulle's Algerian policy created deep fears in France of a fascist coup d'état led by the Algerian generals. In April 1961, following months of agitation against fascism, the Parisian workers took up arms (according to some accounts) and mobilised to meet the anticipated coup, which failed to materialise. (Henissart, 1970, 104-5.) In Greece, in 1965, a coup instigated by King Constantine II provoked an explosive mass movement in Athens in July and August that spilt over into an incipient popular uprising against the Monarchist regime, the first since the end of the civil war in 1949. This was followed by May 68 in France where the insurrection of the students, radicalised by the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, created an opening for the mass movement to pose the question of power. A deep-going social radicalisation passed through Italy in the autumn of 1969, the "creeping May" as it has been called. In September 1973, following the Chilean coup against the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende, the students of Athens rose against the CIA-backed military junta, and although the insurgents were defeated the junta fell the following year. Finally, we saw the Portuguese revolution of 1975. Following the defeat of the Portuguese armies in Africa and the overthrow of the fascist regime on 25 April 1974 by radical army officers there quickly opened the most mature revolutionary struggle in Europe since 1945. None of these struggles had the same intensity as those that took place prior to 1945. In every one, the social classes found ways of extricating themselves from really bloody life-and-death engagements. There have been no Asturian Communes, no German civil wars or Spanish red terrors, no protracted resistance. Nevertheless, the social revolution was placed on the agenda on these occasions and there seems no reason to think that the future will not witness even more bitter revolutionary combats arising from continental or semi-continental wide disasters.

In Lenin's day, the distinction between "east" and "west" had little meaning. Since 1945, however, Europe really *has* been divided between an "east" and a "west". We can drop the quotation marks. Two distinct social formations confront one another in a "cold war". In the east, we find a post-capitalist economy combined with a bureaucratic-totalitarian political system; in the west capitalist powers that advertise themselves as democracies. There can be no doubt that at least since 1945 socialist strategy really is distinct in the west as opposed to the east, and that the distinctive political institutions of the west constitute a special problem of some sort for socialists. What sort of problem we shall investigate in a moment. But to imagine that the entire proletarian movement of the past sixty or seventy years can be read off from the different political structures of "east" and "west" would be to succumb to the ideological effects of nothing other than the Cold War. Before we examine the crisis of post-war socialism, however, we should first ask whether the revolutions in Europe since 1945 have worked differently than in the past. Have they obeyed the same laws despite the special status of bourgeois

[115] The Organisation de l'Armée Secrète (OAS) was a far-right grouping which during 1960–61 carried out a systematic terrorist campaign in both Algeria and France.

political institutions? The answer is supplied by two experiences: May 68 in France and the Portuguese Revolution of 1975.

Most observers agree that the French working class wanted to overthrow de Gaulle and make a revolution in France in May 1968. In an article written soon after, Mandel (1968) makes this point very strongly. The workers in the factories, he tells us, were crying “Ten years (of Gaullism) is Enough!”, “The Factories to the Workers!”, “Workers’ Power!”, and “Power to the Working Class!” (Mandel, 1968, 22.) Mandel concludes that if a revolutionary party had been leading this movement, “a seizure of power [would have been] possible.” (Mandel, 1968, 27.)¹¹⁶ May 68 vindicated his view that the consent of the working class to the rule of capital was skin deep and that the liberal and Marcusean sceptics were wrong. In the 1976 interview with Henri Weber, however, Mandel (1976, 100) argues that May 68 was “not a really revolutionary situation” since there was no lengthy period of dual power and de Gaulle was therefore “not so paralysed that [he] could not go on ruling.” He then goes on to outline his dual power thesis.

But there is a contradiction here. For while Mandel is not specific as to tempo, it seems that, if the working class of the “west” does indeed require many months to attain a revolutionary consciousness, then May 68, over like any general strike in a matter of a fortnight or so, could hardly have witnessed it. In his 1968 article, however, Mandel believed that it was only the inaction of the PCF and not an insufficiency of mass consciousness in relation to the bourgeoisie that precluded the seizure of power. Bourgeois democracy did not seem to be an obstacle in those days. All the same, the 1968 article did contain a difficulty that crops up in his more recent positions: here, it is suggested that May 68 could and should have terminated in a dual power in order to lay the basis for winning the working class away from the PCF and building the revolutionary party. (Mandel, 1968, 27-8.) At the same time it appears to suggest that this was possible without the insurrectionary overthrow of de Gaulle. It attacks Waldeck Rochet, the general secretary of the PCF, for posing the alternatives facing the movement in those terms. Waldeck Rochet spoke of a choice between accepting political and economic concessions or provoking “a trial of strength, in other words a move towards an insurrection.” (Mandel, 1968, 17.) The CP made its choice. But Mandel proclaims this to have been a false choice (though obscuring the debate by putting the words “immediate insurrection” into Waldeck Rochet’s mouth), thereby creating the impression that a dual power of some length could have appeared without first removing the obstacle of de Gaulle. Of course much more could have been done during the strike to organise the strikers more effectively. But the masses could not have conquered real power for longer than a couple of weeks or achieved an *ongoing* duality of power, without first overthrowing de Gaulle. De Gaulle would surely never have stood aside for several months or even several weeks—and certainly not for several years—while the workers made themselves at home in the factories, experimented with soviet democracy and went about their preparations for “the” insurrection. De Gaulle did not wait long before mobilising his troops and his public support. The labour movement either had to overthrow him—the optimum moment being sometime between 27 and 30 May—or back down and settle for economic concessions together with the promise of elections. The movement could not stay at that high level without this question being settled. It would inevitably have sunk back, perhaps politically enriched for its experience and with some (doubtless temporary) workers’ control agreements in this or that factory, but quite unable to sustain the capture of any substantive positions of power. It is not that Waldeck Rochet posed the wrong problem, but gave the wrong answer.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ See also Evans (1968), a collection of articles from *Intercontinental Press* and *The Militant*. [Ed.—*Incontinental Press* and *The Militant* were publications of the Socialist Workers Party, then sympathising section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International in the United States.]

¹¹⁷ For the critical choices facing the movement see the discussion in Searle and McConville (1968, 189 ff.).

The PCF refused to overthrow de Gaulle in 1968 when, together with the left of the Socialist Party, they could and should have done so. We must indict them squarely for that. These forces should have arrested de Gaulle before his flight to Germany to assemble his troops (as de Gaulle inevitably accused them of plotting to do). Many new elected bodies of the masses—councils, committees—were formed in May 68, but it seems likely that these would only have been posed as organs of power if, as in the past, they had aimed to replace the authorities of the Fifth Republic, overthrown or about to be overthrown. Whether such an uprising would have succeeded is difficult to say. Bad preparation and lack of experience have always taken heavy toll of uprisings, even if we abstract from the aversions of the leaders. We do know that the troops stationed in France were not considered reliable by de Gaulle (Mandel, 1968, 20n.) Of course, the PCF and SP were reluctant to rise. They would have done so, and then with much equivocation by the leadership, if a section of their leading cadres had organised it and forced it upon them willy-nilly in an effort to elevate them to power. If de Gaulle had been overthrown in this way, there is no doubt that the PCF and SP leaders would have evaded their responsibilities, either by bringing in a bourgeois party to join a coalition or, if compelled to hold power themselves, hooking up in some other way with the bourgeoisie (perhaps by an Ebertian telephone link to a non-Gaullist general?) and aborting the revolution into dual power. This would have opened the way however for a revolutionary party. The strategic problem for revolutionaries in Europe today is to persuade the left-wing within the mass workers parties of the need to organise, in a revolutionary situation, the insurrectionary overthrow of the bourgeois regime, i.e. to begin the revolution.

On 25 April 1974, officers of the MFA^[118] overthrew the fascist regime in Portugal. This event followed the long death-agony of Portuguese colonialism in Africa. The facts concerning these wars and their economic, social and impact on Portugal during the 1960s and 1970s are well known. By 1974 Portugal was the poorest country in Europe. The overthrow opened up a period of political and economic struggles by the Portuguese workers. Portuguese workers had retained a strong faith in socialism throughout the long night of fascism and had had a heroic record of illegal strikes and other courageous activities. On 1 May, four days after the coup, the streets were filled with hundreds of thousands of people demanding a socialist Portugal. (Mailer, 1977, 61.) However, the Socialists and Communists pursued a purely democratic programme and the leaders of these parties joined Spínola's first two governments of "National Salvation".^[119] Over the summer, however, a huge strike movement developed. These strikes focused their demands on *saneamento* (purging of fascist managers and overseers), and a minimum monthly wage of 6,000 escudos and a forty-hour week. In May, Spínola conceded a minimum wage of 3,300 escudos. But strikes continued for more. These grew extremely bitter. The postal workers and bakers were denounced as trying to become a "privileged group" and even as "fascists" by the Portuguese Communist Party, the PCP. They would "provoke a return to fascism." Nevertheless, the strikes continued. In August, the second provisional government^[120] sought

[118] The Movimento das Forças Armadas (MFA) was an organisation set up in August 1973 by leftist military officers.

[119] General António de Spínola, second-in-command of the Portuguese armed forces up until just before 25 April, held the position of President of the Republic from April until September 1974.

[120] Six provisional governments were formed between 25 April 1974 and July 1976. The first three (May 1974 to March 1975) were liberal in character. In March 1975, far-right forces staged an unsuccessful coup against the third provisional government; a fourth provisional government was established on a much more radical basis. The fourth and fifth provisional governments, which lasted from March to September 1975, witnessed large-scale land seizures. The revolution continued under the sixth provisional government, despite the fact that the latter was a much more moderate regime, until April 1976, when the Socialist Party won elections and established a constitutional bourgeois government.

to impose an anti-strike law tougher than Britain's Industrial Relations Act,^[121] with PCP support. This was a critical month. Troops occupied the airport and broke up the strike of the TAP^[122] workers, putting them under military discipline. The TAP workers were symbols. In 1973, several of them had been shot by the fascist police during an illegal strike. This struggle coalesced with the refusal of the Lisnave shipyard workers to accept the new anti-strike law. On 12 September, 6,000 Lisnave^[123] workers illegally marched on Lisbon, daring the troop cordons to shoot them down, and calling for an end to capitalism and for "democracy for the workers, repression for the reactionaries". (Mailer, 1977, 115.) The troops gave way. The facade of "democracy" and "national unity" was quickly coming to an end. The bastions of working class strength jointly called a demonstration for 28 September (TAP, Lisnave, CTT,^[124] etc.). This is the day Spínola called his "march of the silent majority" and launched his first presidential coup.

On 28 September, the march of the silent majority was prevented by a quasi uprising of the Lisbon working class. The PCP and PRP-BR,^[125] without waiting for the MFA and COPCON^[126] leaders to cast their straws, mobilised their armed militias. The armed barricades convinced Spínola, within hours, to retreat before the working class leaders would be forced to break off their popular front pact. The CP and SP continued their coalitionism after 28 September, though the third provisional government was a government of paralysis. Over the winter, the bourgeoisie began to remove their capital from Portugal and sabotage the factories. Strikes against redundancies became widespread, accompanied on some occasions by factory occupations, though most of these were demonstrative at this stage. Demands for the nationalisation of the enterprises grew. In the Alentejo,^[127] armed agricultural workers began seizing land in January 1975, without opposition from local troops. Certain regiments, notably the Fifth Division, were heavily infiltrated by the workers' parties. Portuguese big capital now decided to pre-empt further developments by launching a second Spínola coup, this time by staging an army revolt, which opened on 11 March with the bombardment of RAL-1.^[128] Again the workers took to arms, this time on a much bigger scale. Armed roadblocks remained in force for up to a week, manned jointly by workers and troops. Troops opened up the arsenals. Quantities of arms were not recovered. Beginning with the bank workers, thousands of workers now occupied plants in every sector of industry. The workers' councils, which until now had largely been confined to trade union functions, began to run industry on a permanent basis and demanded its nationalisation. Individual bourgeois fled the country. As in July 1936, of which 11 March is strongly reminiscent, the socialist revolution was on the streets to stay. It remained armed, it seized the means of production, it cultivated its friends in the barracks. A classical situation of dual power now opened up in Portugal.

Mandel (1976, 107-8) has said that a dual power was not "generalised" in Portugal and therefore the situation was not revolutionary, but only pre-revolutionary. This cannot be accepted. It is true that the

[121] Passed by the Conservative Heath government in 1971, the Industrial Relations Act provoked widespread protests and was repealed by the incoming Labour government in 1974.

[122] Transportes Aéreos Portugueses (TAP): the Portuguese national airline.

[123] The Lisnave shipyards, based at the town of Setúbal, south of Lisbon.

[124] Correios, Telégrafos e Telecomunicações (CTT): the Portuguese postal service.

[125] Partido Revolucionário do Proletariado-Brigadas Revolucionárias: a leftist Maoist-Guevarist party born of splits in the Portuguese Communist Party in 1970.

[126] Comando Operacional do Continente (COPCON) was set up by MFA leader Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho in 1974 and effectively functioned as the armed wing of the MFA.

[127] The southern agricultural Portuguese region known as the "breadbasket" of Portugal.

[128] Regimento de Artilharia Ligeira no. 1, stationed next to Lisbon airport; RAL-1 was one of the most radical sections of the army, and a pillar of COPCON.

organs of popular power—workers’ councils, neighbourhood committees, land committees, soldiers’ commissions, ADUs,^[129] and later the Popular Assemblies and SUVs^[130]—were never centralised by the election of delegates to a National Popular Assembly, an idea widely canvassed over the summer. Nevertheless, these bodies were widespread. In the Russian revolution, it took five months to organise the first national congress of the soviets, yet dual power existed from February onwards. In any case, dual power has to be measured, not by the formal criterion of the number of committees, but by whether or not the bourgeoisie retains its monopoly of power, principally of course its means of coercion. It lost this monopoly after 11 March—as troops frequently defended strikes, land occupations and other actions against private property and marched on demonstrations calling for workers’ power.

Similarly, that the situation was revolutionary seems beyond doubt. Aside from the activities already mentioned, there are many indices of this. The election results of April 1975, for example, gave sixty per cent of the votes to parties professing socialism, the largest ever seen in Western Europe, with the Socialist Party, if anything standing to the left of the PCP at this time, but representing the socialist revolution in its most general form, taking the lion’s share. The demands of demonstrators also indicate it, with 40,000 workers and soldiers demonstrating in June for the dictatorship of the proletariat, the enormous demonstrations in July calling for implementation of the popular power system contained in the Guide document, the 50,000 in August supporting the COPCON document, and the gigantic demonstration of 27 August calling for a revolutionary workers’ government to replace the counter-revolutionary sixth provisional government.¹³¹ Cunhal^[132] was frequently to be heard in these months denouncing “bourgeois democracy”, and the working class paid little attention to the doings of the Constituent Assembly elected in April, particularly when the Socialists (after July) counterposed it to the fifth and sixth provisional governments. Above all, of course, it is in the programme of these two governments that the revolutionary aspirations of the proletariat find their most surprising expression. True to their popular frontist custom, the PCP and PSP had not broken the sacred pact of national unity on 11 March. The personnel of the fourth provisional government was not so dissimilar to that of the third. But its direction changed sharply under the impact of the revolution. The fourth and fifth provisional governments must be reckoned as among the most radical Kerensky-type governments ever seen. Kerensky, Ebert-Haase, Caballero, all refused to take measures to socialise industry and all attempted to roll back popular power. The fourth and fifth provisional governments in Portugal, however, not merely nationalised seventy per cent of Portuguese-owned industry, including the banks and insurance houses (imprisoning certain prominent capitalists such as Antonio Champalimaud^[133]), but actually promoted popular power. The Guide and COPCON documents spoke of making the

[129] The Assembleias de Delegados de Unidade (ADUs) were created by the MFA in 1974 as structures for rank-and-file organisation in the army.

[130] Soldados Unidos Vencerão (SUV) was a more “unofficial” rank-and-file soldiers’ organisation, which had links to the PCP and to other left groups.

¹³¹ The Guide and Copcon Documents are contained in Faye (1976). [*Ed.*—Over May to June 1975 a number of proposals relating to the question of “popular power” were debated within the MFA. One, proposed by Antonio Rosa Coutinho—a leftist naval captain and one of the leading lights of the MFA—and supported by the PCP, proposed the setting up of Committees for the Defence of the Revolution based on the old *Juntas de Freguesia* (Parish Juntas). Another—known as the “COPCON Document”—stressed the “organisation and exercise of power at the base”. The “COPCON Document” having been rejected by the MFA, another position, the “Guide Document”, was prepared, calling for a strong statified economy, agrarian reform, more *saneamento*, decentralisation of administration, and workers’ control.]

[132] Alvaro Cunhal: the general secretary of the PCP.

[133] Antonio Champalimaud, a banker and industrialist, was at the time reputed to be the richest man in Portugal; in 1975, his companies were nationalised, and he fled to Brazil.

“transition to socialism” and a “workers’ state” through a national popular assembly to be elected from zonal assemblies. These would be the basic organs of the future Portuguese state. These were remarkable governments.

Nevertheless, these were certainly not workers’ governments. Like their predecessors they were guilty of making the revolution half-way. There were no adverse international conditions, such as war or fascism, that could justify holding the revolution back, yet, the forces who were considered to be the leaders of the socialist revolution—the PCP, the SP, Gonçalves,^[134] Coutinho,^[135] Carvalho^[136]—did not break with the bourgeoisie. Of the forces within the fourth and fifth governments, the bourgeoisie were directly represented by Costa Gomes^[137] (imperialism) and the PPD^[138] (middling bourgeoisie and landowners). The MFA Assembly, prior to 11 March, had been dominated by a programme of bourgeois democracy. As late as February 1975, its programme, as announced by Melo Antunes,^[139] contained no socialist measures. Following March, however, the socialist opposition within the MFA had seized control, purged it, and adopted the most radical programme, later summarised in the Guide and COPCON documents and exemplified by its chief policy measures. The working class now regarded the MFA Assembly, as then constituted, as an ally in the fight for socialism and workers’ power. Nevertheless, the presence of Gomes and the PPD in the fourth provisional government (and Gomes in the fifth), signified the limitations of these governments. Gomes ensured that foreign-owned capital was left untouched. By deliberate over-pricing of imports and under-pricing of exports, and other measures of sabotage, the multi-nationals created 300,000 unemployed. In the north, the small peasants faced ruin. The price of fertiliser, for example, had doubled in a year. If the government had limited land holdings to five hectares, they would have unleashed a peasant struggle against the middle and large landowners in the north, but the PPD ensured that this did not occur. Only a comprehensive economic plan for the reconversion of industry could have averted the impending economic catastrophe. This implied, however, the nationalisation of foreign capital, or, at the least, a state monopoly of foreign trade. Again, Gomes opposed it. The colonial question remained unresolved, and the professional interests of the MFA officers stood in the way of full democracy in the army.

The “socialist” forces failed to break the coalition and take power. But the punishment for making a revolution half-way is well-known. The punishment came in July. Following the publication of the Guide document, the Socialists, led by Soares,^[140] left the fourth provisional government together with the PPD and launched an anti-communist campaign in July and August that left many labour movement buildings, especially in the north, in flames. This was the beginning of the counter-

[134] General Vasco Gonçalves was one of the leaders of the MFA, and prime minister in the second to the fifth provisional governments. He is considered to belong to the group of military officials who was politically close to the PCP.

[135] Antonio Rosa Coutinho was a leader of the MFA

[136] Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho was a key leader of the MFA, and responsible for the setting up of COPCON.

[137] Francisco da Costa Gomes was Commander-in-chief of the armed forces up to his removal in March 1974. On 25 April he became a member of the Junta of National Salvation and was reinstated as general chief of staff. Following Spínola’s resignation, he became President of the Republic, stepping down in 1976 following the elections.

[138] The Partido Popular Democrático was a right social-democratic party formed in 1974.

[139] Ernesto Melo Antunes was one of the main authors of the MFA programme and, after 25 April 1974, a member of the Movement’s coordinating committee.

[140] Mário Soares was the principal leader and founding member of the Socialist Party of Portugal (the original Portuguese Socialist Party had dissolved itself on being banned under the dictatorship in 1930), and prime minister from 1976.

revolution. Soares took up themes he thought would attract working-class support: the *República*^[141] shut down as a violation of workers' democracy, the communists using "private militias" to settle disputes within the working class, the Communists seeking a Stalinist-style socialism. Nevertheless, the Socialist Party rapidly lost its working class base, except in Oporto where the Socialist leadership opposed Soares. Like Ebert before him, Soares was now leading all the most reactionary forces in the country. The situation was not becoming more revolutionary, but more *counter*-revolutionary. The first fruit of counter-revolution was the Sixth Provisional Government of Pinheiro de Azevedo,^[142] formed in September. Azevedo promised to halt the nationalisations, reanimate the private sector, strengthen relations with the EEC and restore "law and order". His government strengthened the riot police, formed a new armed force outside COPCON (the AMI, composed of mercenaries), attacked strikers, destroyed Radio Renascença,^[143] imposed press censorship. Although presided over by Gomes and composed chiefly of the SP and PPD, together with an MFA Assembly whose leftist majority had been bureaucratically reversed, the government was joined by a PCP minister. This of course could not conceal its counter-revolutionary nature. A period of rapid re-groupment now followed leading to an inevitable collision, an "October".

It was under the sixth provisional government that the revolutionary left became critical actors. These revolutionary left groups deserve sharp criticism. The Portuguese working class was afflicted by a sectarian scourge. There were up to a dozen socialist parties of one sort or another. In all previous revolutions there have been no more than two or three workers' parties. In Portugal, in addition to the two reformist parties, the PCP and PSP, there were six or seven "mini" revolutionary parties. The tactical differences which existed between them could not possibly have justified this organisational disunity for they were no sharper than the differences that existed within democratic centralist parties in the past, such as the Comintern or the Bolshevik party of 1917. The criminal failure of the LCI, PRT, LUAR, MES^[144] and the others to build a single Marxist party must count as among the chief causes of the failure of the revolution. For the Portuguese workers could not take the revolutionary left as a serious alternative candidate for power when the other parties showed themselves unwilling to break with the bourgeoisie. This became a critical question in 1975, especially when faced with the sixth government. During the months of September and October, the masses opened an offensive against this government, culminating in early November with the famous siege of the government by the striking building workers. During these weeks, plans for leftist coups and insurrections were discussed all over the Lisbon garrison, and the CP's rhetoric in the Alentejo became openly insurrectionary. But what was to replace the sixth provisional government? The revolutionary left of the FUR^[145]—a belated united front of the left groups—was too weak to put itself forward as a governmental candidate owing to its previous disunity. On the other hand, it joined in promoting the general insurrectionary mood without putting demands on the CP-Carvalho axis that would create the proper conditions for an

[141] *República* was a newspaper that had functioned as an unofficial organ of the Socialist Party. In 1974, there had been a protracted but ultimately unsuccessful attempt by the paper's workforce to open its pages up to other points of view than those of the Socialist Party, after which the paper was closed down by the government.

[142] José Pinheiro de Azevedo was prime minister in the sixth provisional government, replacing Gonçalves.

[143] Rádio Renascença, originally the property of the Catholic Church, had been occupied by the workers in May 1975. After November 1975, it was returned to the Church.

[144] LCI: Liga Comunista Internacionalista, the Portuguese section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International); PRT: Partido Revolucionário dos Trabalhadores, a Trotskyist group associated with the international faction around Nahuel Moreno; LUAR: Liga de União e de Acção Revolucionária, a "Luxemburgist" group that had previously carried out a campaign of armed actions against the dictatorship; MES: Movimento de Esquerda Socialista, a left split from the Socialist Party.

[145] Frente de Unidade Revolucionária: a bloc of far left parties and groups.

insurrection, such as organising the National Popular Assembly to prepare the uprising or demanding that the CP-Carvalho-Gonçalves forces should be helped to power on condition that they publicly broke with their popular frontist practice of coalition with Gomes and other bourgeois representatives. The FUR even suggested it would join a CP government unconditionally. As a result of unclarity on these questions the movement could have no organised form. This laid the basis for the events of 5 November. What happened is still unclear, but the evidence seems to indicate that certain forces in and around the CP launched an action designed to pressure Gomes into dissolving the Sixth and calling Carvalho, Gonçalves and the CP to power following the dismissal of Carvalho as chief of the military regime on the morning of 5 November. Conceived in purely military terms and within the framework of an alliance with Gomes, it foundered on Gomes' refusal. The Amadora commandos^[146] were quickly sent in to crush the leftist units, and did so before the working class of Lisbon had the opportunity to mobilise. Where the workers took to arms, as at Setúbal, it was too late and quickly called off. The revolution was at an end. The dual power was liquidated, COPCON disbanded, the leftist officers purged. The Portuguese revolution was over.

CONCLUSION—I

The reformist currents in the labour movement place the locus of power in parliament. For them, the capture of a parliamentary majority will be equivalent to the seizure of power and sufficient to introduce socialism. History, however, shows this to be an illusion. The essentials of power lie elsewhere. No class surrenders its wealth and power without a fight. No social class has ever been eradicated without its antagonists having to resort to uprising and civil war. No revolution has been able to avoid creating a new administration and a new legality, using the sharpest possible methods. Power does not lie in the parliamentary chamber, its servants are not neutral, and capitalism will not wilt before the orator.

On the other hand, we should not make the inverse error. We should not exaggerate the prestige of the parliamentary system in the eyes of the masses. This would be to over-estimate their credulity. There seems to be an element of this in the work of Mandel and Anderson. Mandel tells us that the legitimacy of “parliamentary institutions” is the key obstacle to revolution. Yet the counter-institutions, the counter-power that he regards as a precondition for freeing the masses from their parliamentary illusions, have typically arisen after a revolution, or at least an aborted one. There seems to be a problem here. Similarly, Anderson seeks the locus of “consent” in the same area. He discovers (Anderson, 1976, 28) the “principal ideological lynchpin of Western capitalism” in the “general form of the representative state—bourgeois democracy”. Universal suffrage and juridical equality have the effect, it appears, of abstracting the citizens from their class locations so that the electoral moment “reflects the fictive unity of the nation back to the masses as if it were their own self-government.” ((Anderson, 1976, 28.) This ideological belief tends to give rise to “disbelief in the existence of any ruling class.” (Anderson, 1976, 30.) These claims seem exaggerated, and since Anderson falsely tries to read off the whole of European proletarian history from these assumptions, we feel justified in a certain scepticism.

It seems unlikely that the working masses of Europe give their consent to capitalism merely because of the structural characteristics of parliamentary democracy. They never did in the past. There was a time

^[146] Amadora, a neighbourhood of Lisbon, boasts a large military academy, where, amongst other things, commando training is held.

when socialism flourished under these particular political conditions and Marxists generally regarded them as the best conditions under which to prepare the proletariat for power. Nor is it true that the broad masses imagine that the ruling class ceases to *be* a ruling class, even where it permits elected government. The masses know perfectly well that their lives are ruled by judges, bankers and bureaucrats, even when they have no immediate project of overthrowing them. This is expressed in many ways, not least in widespread popular scepticism concerning the efficacy of modern parliaments and indeed parliamentary government in general. “What’s the use of elections, nothing ever changes,” they say. “All they (MPs) ever do is talk.” In former times, socialists in countries which witnessed the spectacle of parliamentary government over a long period articulated their feelings in the shape of revolutionary syndicalism (as in pre-war France and Italy) with its explicit rejection of parliamentary types of government, and the social democracy of central and eastern Europe and Russia were doctrinally clear on the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat. We should not be surprised if it is precisely in those countries with the strongest traditions of parliamentary government that the masses will most resolutely push it aside (as in Germany 1918) when they rise. The very antiquity of this type of government speaks against it, for if parliament really did have the power, the masses will ask, why did it prove unable to avert the catastrophes that now agitate us? Moreover, socialism has never been concerned simply with property forms, but with a more general problematic of freedom and human emancipation. It has always carried the implication that not merely property but also power should be transferred to the producers. This is a point we are strongly reminded of, for example, by the popularity of workers’ control ideas among even the most arcane social-democratic parties of present-day Europe. Among all socialists there remains an unassailable sense of the economic, military, cultural and political power of what in Britain is called “the Establishment” (a fine Poulantzian notion this). Rank and file socialists are not always surprised at the suggestion that the working class will not only have to seize the factories but may even have to arm itself (“defensively”, of course). In any case, revolutions do not always begin by dispersing parliament, but more usually by overthrowing a bourgeois government (or crushing a putative one) and smashing the state machine. Nor should we create the impression—which certainly arises from Anderson’s presentation—that the revolution will do away with universal suffrage or juridical equality. These will certainly be features of the dictatorship of the proletariat, without, we trust, having a destructive effect on class consciousness.

In what sense are “parliamentary institutions” or “bourgeois democracy” the problem? We must distinguish between at least two aspects of this problem, one perennial and the other historical. Anderson mentions the historical aspect but does not explore it. (Anderson, 1976, 30n.) A socialist revolution is impossible without the masses having burning faith that an alternative social system is feasible, desirable and necessary. Since 1945, there has been a deep sea-change here. The broad masses no longer have the faith in socialism they once did. The origins of this do not lie in the sudden intrusion of cleverly deceptive, forms of government. Class equilibrium is not the product of a particular form of government; rather the particular form of government is the product of the class equilibrium. The new equilibrium since 1945 lies not in the bourgeois democracy, but in the new historical fact that everyday life in the advanced capitalist countries, in almost every single respect, has proved superior, since 1945, to that in the “socialist” countries. Post-war capitalism has produced gigantic improvements in the living conditions of the people and appeared, at least for many years, to have left the 1930s behind. The “socialist” countries have not been able to compete with this. At the same time, the socialist world everywhere toils under a totalitarian political system which, by contrast, capitalism has not tried to impose on Western Europe (except in certain exceptional cases). Capitalism has re-appropriated its nineteenth-century slogans of freedom and prosperity. The historical impasse of socialism in the West is the fundamental meaning of the Cold War. Capitalism has succeeded, to some extent, in inducing a degree of identification between political freedom and enterprise on the one hand and planned economy and totalitarianism on the other. These are historically new equations, cold war

equations that form not only the substance of bourgeois political theory but the wisdom of the street. Socialism has to recover its credentials in the face of a historical revival of mass bourgeois reformism.

Mass bourgeois reformism is not new. It has always coexisted with socialist ideology among the masses. But the balance changes from one historical era to another, and, since 1945, mass bourgeois reformism has staged a partial recovery. Of course, this is not a uniform process. This is why, in the countries of Northern Europe, where socialism has historically been weak, the bourgeoisie permits the rotation of workers' and bourgeois parties in power, whereas in Italy or France it has contrived to keep the workers' parties out of power for thirty years (and in countries like Greece, where the memories of the socialist revolution are still strong, resorted periodically to fascism). However, it is a definable historical trend. In recent years, there, has been a perceptible decline in mass bourgeois reformism. No doubt this will be accelerated further as the current world recession deepens, with the appearance of revolutions in Eastern Europe, of the threat of wars, of revolutions in countries which have partially escaped the impact of the Cold War (such as Spain and Portugal), and so on, combined with the fruitful interplay of socialism with the mass struggles that replenish the springs of class solidarity and class hatred. This last point must not be overlooked. In human society, "catastrophes" are not "natural" events. The great cataclysms of the past were often invoked by the bourgeoisie, at least in part, to allay its fear of socialism, and, moreover, the masses of western Europe have often struggled for socialism, and indeed for revolutionary socialism, without catastrophes or disasters and against the backdrop of functioning parliamentary government. The question of working class leadership is crucial. If revolutions, once begun, usually fail because of the actions of the leaders, and if in this sense the crisis of mankind is a crisis of leadership, this is no less true of the pre-revolutionary period. How many workers' parties preach socialism? How many actively arouse the hopes of the oppressed and dispossessed? Perhaps the only recent example in Europe, outside of Portugal, is the Union of the Left in France.^[147] For the working class, socialism is not merely a matter of intellectual conviction. They know that huge obstacles would have to be overcome to establish socialism. But you cannot go into battles like that without good commanders, men and women who are serious and intend to carry the business through, people who will not yield at the first obstacle. This is why the construction of new mass parties cannot be postponed.

There remains of course the second and perennial aspect of the question. How do matters stand here? When the masses turn to the socialists in an effort to find a way out of their difficulties—which they sometimes do quickly and unexpectedly, for the thought of the masses is mercurial—they will not automatically embrace the road of revolution, even though they have the most ever so democratic vision of socialism and the superiority of workers' democracy, and even though the bourgeoisie resorts to considerable provocations. Revolution is seldom the first resort of a labour movement and usually the last. To break with the existing legality, to leave the streets and seize the levers of power, to create a workers' administration, involves a physical struggle with the forces of the state and heralds even greater physical struggles in future, even when the first engagements are successful. There do exist, to be sure, connoisseurs of insurrection and civil war but most people are not anxious to bathe in these waters. People make revolutions consciously but unwillingly. Unlike war in a foreign land, civil strife can hold few attractions for the oppressed classes. Civil war puts at stake family, home, labour organisations, and the future of one's children. The sharpest divisions of all within the labour movement arise over this question of whether it is possible to avoid a more or less bloody armed clash with the authorities and the forces of reaction. Trotsky once put this well:

[147] The Union of the Left was an electoral coalition in France which included the Communist and Socialist Parties, and which functioned over 1972 to 1977.

The struggle between the revolutionary and the pacific, legalistic, reformist direction within the labour movement does not at all begin from the moment of the institution of a republic or the introduction of universal electoral rights. In the period of Chartism and right down to 1868, the workers in Britain were completely devoid of electoral rights, in other words, the basic instruments of “peaceful” development. Yet the Chartist movement was broken between the partisans of physical force who had the masses behind them, and the partisans of moral force, preponderating in petty-bourgeois intellectuals and worker aristocrats. In Hohenzollern Germany, with an impotent parliament, a struggle went on within the ranks of social democracy between the partisans of parliamentary reform and the preachers of a revolutionary general strike. Finally, even in Tsarist Russia, under the regime of June 3rd, the Mensheviks liquidated the revolutionary methods of struggle under cover of the slogan of the struggle for legality. (Trotsky, 2012, 88.)

This perennial division is the mark of an oppressed class and indicates the root of that oppression.

It is for this reason that the working class movement, as a rule, seems to resort to legality or the defensive when it contemplates the problem of insurrection and civil war. This was the sense of Engels’ famous Preface to Marx’s *Class Struggles in France*.^[148] (Engels, 1990.) Engels was not suggesting that violence could be avoided, but advised his German followers to get all the advantages they could out of legality in order to create the best political conditions for the struggle when it did break out. By utilising the suffrage, for example, to form a government in a perfectly legal way, the ruling class would be compelled to abandon the banner of legality to the workers. He who holds the banner of legality has a distinct moral advantage and is often able to rally forces who would otherwise remain neutral or hostile. In such a case, the proletarian rising would take the form of a self-defensive measure in face of reactionary coup d’état (strangely enough, there has never yet been a government arriving in power in Western Europe with a socialist programme without it being put into office by an insurrection; which is not to say it will not happen in future). Revolutions do not dispense with prudence.

There is, however, a distinction to be made between prudence and unwarrantable evasion, even though they are rooted in the same fears. It is only in this light that we can interpret the behaviour of certain labour movement leaders in the course of revolutions, which would otherwise remain inexplicable. We have suggested that revolutions follow a pattern in which the leaders betray the aspirations of their followers, leaders who have to be followed by others more suited to the tasks in hand. It would be easy to reject this as superficial. Yet the recurrence of the “February paradox” demands sociological explanation. It is after all a fact that the Mensheviks and their imitators spent their entire lives fighting for governmental office. Yet they turned their backs upon it *when it was offered them by a revolution*. They were not acting out of corruption, graft, lack of socialist conviction or personal courage. Trotsky once remarked that the radicalism of revolution is caused by the deep conservatism of the human mind in normal times. For the leadership of the labour movement we can reverse this aphorism. That conservatism in time of revolution is paradoxically the product of their comparative militancy in peaceful times. Those who devote their lives to building political parties and trade unions, often a work involving much sacrifice and sometimes persecution, are not usually the first to rush to arms. On the contrary, these forces, who naturally find themselves at the head of a revolutionary movement (since the working class usually attempts to make a revolution with its existing parties), have learnt the value of caution. At the outbreak of the deluge, the masses, who, in peaceful times, hardly engaged actively in the dangerous or unrewarding business of politics and trade union organisation, leaving others to speak

[148] In which Engels would draw attention to the way the German SPD had turned their use of the electoral franchise to their political advantage, at the same time as noting how much more difficult it had become for revolutionaries to engage in street-fighting and insurrection.

in their name, rush headlong into the enemy's breach, careless, often blind, to the dangers that may await them. The leaders, on the other hand, knowing how terrible the vengeance of the ruling classes can be—a vengeance that will fall first upon their own heads—are thrown into panic. Where the masses see bright visions of a new life, the leaders see only the danger of counter-revolutionary hordes, famine, blockade, white terror, and the loss of all that has been patiently built up over decades (on which to be sure their own livelihood or social prestige depends). The same dialectic (which Mandel (1973, 4-5) has called the “dialectic of partial conquests”) is apparent in every strike as well as in the behaviour of every workers' state surrounded by imperialism's armoury. Here we find the root of the Kerensky phenomenon. When the PCF in May 68 claimed hysterically that the insurrectionary forces were agents provocateurs aiming to bring down a bloodbath on the French working class, they were responding to the same root fears that made the Mensheviks, the Haases, the Caballeros and the Thorezes of the past refuse to take office and accept responsibility for the revolution in the eyes of the bourgeoisie.

But there is no excuse for quietism here either. On the contrary, history may well be playing yet another of its impish tricks. The German workers prior to 1914 had a burning faith in the socialist future, but lived in fear of Prussian militarism. This threat weighed heavily on Engels' imagination for many years. The French working class suffered a terrible defeat in the Paris Commune and remained marked by this experience for several decades. We can see the same thing today in Spain, where the workers' movement, while convinced of socialism, is ultra-cautious in practice. It has been scarred, not by the Cold War, but by the memory of the civil war of 1936. But this is no longer true of the European working class in general. The guns of Europe point outward not inward. Several decades of benign forms of government, when combined with the spectacle of Stalinist degeneration, may have built a Maginot line against socialism. But it has also freed the oppressed classes from many of the worst fears of civil strife. One remembers the lack of fear in May 68, a revolution full of joy and hope and with few dark forebodings. Perhaps in the period we have dealt with in this article—the three great revolutionary waves—the material catastrophes we portrayed were indispensable in order to offset the fear of civil war, a fear never far from the surface of working class life. There were no catastrophes in May 68, and the one agitating Portuguese society in 1974-5 was comparatively mild. Revolution and civil war remain terrible to contemplate, that is true, but perhaps not half so terrible today as in the past. The old mole of history always works in mysterious and surprising ways. We may well be standing on the verge of a whole new historical cycle of socialist revolutions in western Europe—a cycle that will take our sceptics by surprise.

CONCLUSION—II

Before 1914 European generals were often heard to complain that they could not train good officers owing to the scarcity of wars. We can sympathise with their dilemma: the lack of revolutions makes it very difficult for the current generation to learn the arts of revolution. But the generals seldom neglected to train their officers in the arts of war, however adverse the historical circumstances. The Eurocommunists, on the other hand, exactly resemble generals who imagine that several decades of peace negate the necessity for war in the future and neglect to prepare their army for the inevitable, if distant, struggle. A country without an army would, to be sure, stand in no danger of opening hostilities, but it certainly stands in danger of annihilation when hostilities do break out.

Like generations of reformist leaders before them, the Eurocommunists take advantage of the present in order to avoid preparing for the future. They ridicule the revolution, paint it in caricatures, and hope

to excuse themselves from their responsibilities by spreading ignorance and misunderstanding about it. But the revolution can also suffer at the hands of its friends as well as at the hands of its enemies. Generals over-impatient for war are sometimes as dangerous as complacent colleagues, for they are just as likely to under-estimate the rigours of war, to simplify its mechanism, to cover everything in a reassuring haze, and put the science of war to one side. Unhappily, the result is liable to be the same as when those generals seize command who imagine that men have found some more efficient way of settling their differences than war.

It is foolish to shut one's eyes to the future. But it is also ill-advised to imagine that history can produce what it is not yet ready to bring forth. Unfortunately, this is liable to be one of the effects of Mandel's theoretical construction of the revolutionary process. His schema is apt to rationalise the impatience of a generation of young revolutionaries who imagined that reformism would evaporate before their counter-parliamentary blandishments together with the next wave of the mass strike. Equipped with a "strategy of dual power", it often seemed to the post-1968 generation that it was only necessary to agitate for bigger and longer strikes, general strikes and factory occupations in order to enter the kingdom of power, or rather its ante-chamber, the dual power. This was, and remains, an illusion. As we have seen, the state never "disintegrated" under the impact of external blows, nor fallen back under different and larger editions of conventional mass struggles. It has always had to be broken by a proletarian uprising, and this is exactly what is overlooked in Mandel's strategy. But insurrections are more difficult than general strikes and other mass actions, less frequent, and appear less imminent. An insurrection presupposes a proletariat that is psychologically, and to some extent organisationally, equipped for insurrection, prepared to embark, that is to say, on something little short of civil war. But society does not gird up its loins for civil war every day. Some exceptional circumstance is required. To believe that one can enter the kingdom of dual power without passing through the gate of insurrection is to underestimate the objective conditions required for revolution.

For thirty years, Europe has been free of major wars, slumps, foreign occupations, and like disasters; and generally free of the fear of them. How far off we may be from a repetition is a matter we cannot discuss here. Yet one cannot formulate strategy without a proper sense of historical proportion. To a single individual, thirty years is a long time. In the scales of history, it counts for little. A former generation of revolutionary Marxists, the one that lived between the Paris Commune of 1871 and the outbreak of war in 1914, had to wait five whole decades before deciding that the situation was ripe or near-ripe for revolution. Of course, this is not to say that the question of power was not posed from time to time in this or that country. One thinks of the Milanese uprising of 1898, "Tragic Week" in Barcelona in 1909, or general strikes in Belgium in 1886 and 1892. Yet, with the exception of 1905 in Russia, a crisis brought on by the defeat of Russia at the hands of Japan, it always proved exceedingly difficult for the movement to develop into organised rising and civil war, notwithstanding the street clashes, and not withstanding that this was an epoch better equipped than our own with revolutionary leaders. Even when all due allowances have been made for inadequacies of leadership, one suspects that in many, if not most, of these cases the social equilibrium had not been sufficiently shaken for the balance of forces between the two opposing classes to be tipped away from the camp of compromise—always powerful—to the camp of intransigence. However, few had any doubt that the 1914-18 war created these conditions in all their fullness.

By analogy, our own period of social peace has seen several revolutionary occasions, moments when the working class has been faced with the question of power. Yet there are only two occasions when the labour movement did not retreat before the prospect of civil war: April 1961 in France and Portugal 1974-75. On both occasions France and Portugal were passing through the most serious and protracted crisis of any post-war European countries, originating in the colonial defeats suffered in Africa. During the Algerian affair, where a large part of the French army was in revolt, the vanguard of

the French workers grew accustomed to the prospect of civil war in the event of a generals' coup d'état launched from Algeria. In Portugal, the history of fascist dictatorship, colonial war and proletarian armed struggle found the workers prepared, following 25 April, to fight for the hearts and minds of the soldiers; and, when confronted with Spínolist counter-revolution, to take up arms. By contrast, the movement of May 68 retreated before de Gaulle's threats of armed intervention. There were no groups of militants within the mass parties, let alone in the leaderships of these parties, willing to approach the barracks, bring out the soldiers, and arm the people in defiance of de Gaulle's German-based legions, let alone arrest him before his flight to Germany. If there were, they did not act. In Spain, following the death of Franco, the question of power was posed again, but none of the parties or their militants, aside from those in Euskadi, embarked on any serious work to prepare the insurrectionary overthrow of the military government, despite the tumultuous general strikes that shook the country. It may well be that the Spanish workers remain too deeply scarred by the memory of the civil war of 1936. The Union of the Left in France appeared to open up the possibility of a Chilean experience in Europe. In such a scenario, a government of workers' parties committed to a major take-over of private industry would reach office by the ballot box, and, after nationalising or expropriating several sectors of industry, would face, like Allende, the threat of a military coup. If the Union of the Left had been elected, no doubt something like this may have transpired. But how would the French workers have reacted? In Chile, many Socialists already talked of armed struggle even before Allende was elected, and the working class did in fact arm itself readily when the question of power was posed during the bosses' strike of 1972 (a springboard for a military coup, checked on this occasion by factory occupations combined with armed vigilance) and again at the time of the "mini-coup" of June 1973. This is why the Chilean generals trod cautiously and did not make noisy threats. One suspects, however, that in France, or another European country, the military might be less circumspect, and a more bellicose policy of verbal threats might well prove sufficient to push the movement back. Of course, we should beware of supplying the reformists with alibis, but the reformists are not completely independent of their times.

This aspect of things is never brought into sharp enough focus in a strategic debate that presents the first stage of the revolutionary process as a conflict between "parliamentary institutions" and "soviet organs of dual power". It is not surprising to find that discussion of this question has often appeared as a rather innocuous debate over alternative forms of political representation (cf. Hodgson, Poulantzas, and Weber). The real issue facing an insurgent class is whether, when and how, to make the transition to civil war. It is this problem, rather than the exact approach one should adopt towards parliamentary or soviet institutions, that has always been the root source of division in the working class movement, though this is usually concealed by euphemism—"democracy" versus "anarchy"—or hieroglyphic: the "parliamentary road" versus "proletarian dictatorship", "war of position" versus "frontal assault", and so on. The oppressed are more accustomed to calling things by their right names and we should not blame them if revolution is their last, not their first, resort. Even when the workers' movement becomes burningly convinced of the need for a socialist society—one of the essential preconditions for a revolution that appears from time to time—it will customarily first exhaust all other means before it will be persuaded of the wisdom of taking the revolutionary road, no matter how reassured it may be concerning the superiority of "workers' democracy" over "bourgeois democracy". To go beyond strikes, demonstrations and protests, to leave the streets and seize the levers of power, involves a fearful contest with the forces of the state, and one that presages a civil war in the fullest sense of that term. Revolutions are certainly made consciously, but they are made unwillingly and only when there is no other way out. Civil war in all its several forms is the worst scourge that can afflict any society, especially its oppressed and more immobile classes, for whom family, home and the future of one's children are immediately placed in jeopardy. The overheads of progress are high.

It is for this reason that an oppressed class will always do everything possible, if it is wise, to create the most favourable conditions for the transition to arms. Mandel's argument that revolution must first set

about creating an “alternative legitimacy” to that of parliament fails to appreciate this. “Legitimacy” is an imprecise word, and like all imprecision conceals confusion. If we were to translate the word “legitimacy” as “legality”, then one very dangerous conclusion materialises. It is that the proletarian revolution must always set out by conceding legality to the enemy, for in a parliamentary democracy parliament is the ultimate constitutional authority. Why should an oppressed class make such a concession? The Taborites^[149] overthrew the temporal and ecclesiastical authorities with fire and sword. They did not hesitate to appeal to biblical authority. The Levellers secured the overthrow of Charles I by insurrectional means, but were convinced that the king’s government was “illegal” (by virtue of the “Norman yoke” of 1066). The Jacobins did not disband the Convention, but took care to secure a majority for their measures by executing the leaders of the Gironde as conspirators against the legality of the Convention. The Spanish workers were not ashamed to crush the bourgeoisie in the name of the Republic. Ayatollah Khomeini’s followers branded the Shah’s government as “illegal” and arrested his generals in the name of “Islamic law”. Above all, of course, the Bolsheviks arrested the Provisional Government for plotting against the Second Congress of Soviets, the highest authority in Russia bar the Constituent Assembly. And towards the Constituent Assembly itself, we have already described Lenin’s scrupulous predisposition. He had hoped the young Soviet Republic might win impeccable credentials from the Constituent Assembly. It is not written in a sacred book that socialism and the soviet system can never receive the seal of parliamentary legality, only that it cannot do so *peacefully*. One must never *sacrifice* the revolution to legality, but there is no reason why the working class should hand over the banner of legality to the enemy without a fight. One can agree that the parliamentary type of state is not an adequate instrument for the proletarian revolution. Experience proves that. But the parliament and the legitimacy it can bestow are not to be forfeited lightly. Engels understood this well. Like Lenin, he was a practical politician. In his famous Preface to Marx’s *Class Struggles in France* (Engels, 1990), he advised his German followers to exploit the advantages of suffrage to the utmost, compelling the bourgeoisie to abandon the terrain of legality and thus yielding the proletariat an inestimable moral advantage in the armed struggle. It is difficult to agree that the formulations of the Comintern—to work in parliamentary-type bodies only to show why they have to be dispersed, to make propaganda but not legislative proposals, etc.—represent the last word on the subject. They do not correspond to Lenin’s practice during the Russian revolution, and may perhaps be understood as rather crude polemical devices designed to frustrate the sterile ultra-leftism that was rife in the Comintern. They are not an adequate guide for practical politics. Many decades after Engels, Allende showed the potentialities for making a legal transition in a parliamentary democracy. Allende’s fault was not that he failed to create an “alternative legitimacy” but that he restrained his followers from taking up arms to defend the existing one. One can of course agree that the revolution must terminate in a soviet type of state, but the relationship of parliament and soviet is a dialectical, not a mechanical one.

The question of civil war, howsoever it presents itself, is always the most serious decision that any labour movement has to face. This is why it will always have a sensitive attitude towards legality. By the same token, it is always the terrain upon which reformism finds its ultimate material and social support. One cannot, for example, fully understand the “Kerensky phenomenon” that we have met in our study without appreciating that revolution means above all to cross the chasm of civil war. We have argued that revolutions have tended to follow a pattern in which the leaders who find themselves at its head tend to betray the aspirations of their followers, thus creating the need for new leaders more suited to the tasks in hand, and we have seen how they are able to take advantage of the lack of sophistication and naive enthusiasm of the “February” masses. The reoccurrence of the “February paradox” requires

[149] The Taborites (named after the town of Tabor in the modern Czech Republic) were a faction within Hussite (proto-Protestant) movement in fifteenth-century Bohemia. They preached social and economic equality, and declared that there should be no more servants or masters and that all property should be held in common.

some single explanation. It is after all striking that the Mensheviks and their imitators spent their entire lives fighting for governmental office, yet turned their backs on it when it was offered them *by a revolution*. Martov, Dan,^[150] Haase, Caballero, Thorez and the others, despite the different practical and theoretical justifications offered or refusing to take power, were also acting not a little out of a common fear of the vengeance of the possessing classes, which they anticipated would fall above all on their own rather prominent heads. They had a mortal fear of taking responsibility of the revolution in the eyes of the bourgeoisie. This is not simply a matter of personal cowardice: it is one of the aspects of the more general problem of “bureaucracy”. Trotsky once observed that the radicalism of revolutions is caused by the deep conservatism of the human mind in normal times. For the leaders and officials of the oppressed class we can reverse this aphorism. Their conservatism in time of revolution is perhaps the product of their comparative militancy in peaceful times. Those who devote their lives to building up political parties and trade unions, often a work involving much sacrifice and sometimes persecution, are not usually the first to rush to arms. They have had plenty of opportunity to savour the vindictiveness of the class enemy and have learnt the habit of caution. The masses, who in peaceful times hardly engaged actively in the dangerous and unrewarding work of politics and trade unionism, leaving others to speak in their name, are apt to rush headlong into the enemy’s first breach, careless, and indeed often blind, to the full dangers that may await them. The leaders, on the other hand, knowing how terrible the vengeance of the ruling class can be, envisage not bright visions of a new life, but the dangers of counter-revolutionary hordes, famine, blockade, white terror, and the loss of all that has been patiently built up over decades (on which, we can agree with Mandel (1973), their livelihood and social prestige depends). What Mandel has called the “dialectic of partial conquests” (Mandel, 1973, 4-5) is apparent in every revolution, in every strike, and in the behaviour of every workers’ state surrounded by imperialism’s armoury. The most recent example is the claim of the leaders of the PCF in May 68 that the prospective civil war would bring nothing but a bloodbath upon the French working class, and even that the insurrectional left were agent provocateurs. Like their predecessors, they grasped the objective dynamic of the strike—towards civil war—but frightened themselves and others with it instead of preparing their forces for the confrontation.

The widespread tendency in contemporary debate to abstract out the nitty gritty of insurrection and civil war, hypostasising the parliament or the soviet and attributing magical powers to these political chambers, has not merely dominated debate concerning the mechanisms of transition. It has even been extended to discussions of the root causes of the current civil peace. True, capitalism will not wilt before the orator. But we should not make the parallel error of exaggerating the seductive potency of the parliamentary institutions over the masses. We should not make the mistake of believing that the masses thereby give their support to capitalism or will not adopt revolutionary methods when the time to do so is ripe. This is the direction in which Anderson’s essay moves. Anderson discovers the “principal ideological linchpin of Western capitalism” in the “general form of the representative State—bourgeois democracy.” (Anderson, 1976, 28.) Universal suffrage and juridical equality have the effect, it appears, of abstracting the citizens from their class locations so that the electoral moment “reflects the fictive unity of the nation back to the masses as if it were their own self-government.” (Anderson, 1976, 28.) This ideological belief tends to give rise to “disbelief in the existence of any ruling class.” (Anderson, 1976, 30.) These claims are exaggerated, and since, as we have seen, Anderson falsely tries to read off the history of the European proletariat from them, we feel they deserve criticism.

In general, it seems improbable that the working masses give, or ever gave, their consent to capitalism primarily or chiefly because of the structural characteristics of parliamentary forms of government. There was a time when socialism flourished under these particular conditions and Marxists regarded them as the best conditions in which to prepare for power. Nor is it clear that the broad masses

[150] Fyodor Dan (1871-1947) was a founding member of the Menshevik faction.

imagine that the ruling class ceases to *be* a ruling class, even where the rulers permit elected government. The masses know well that their lives are ruled by judges, bankers and bureaucrats, even when they have no immediate project of overthrowing them. This is expressed in many ways, not least in widespread scepticism over the efficacy of parliamentary governments. “What’s the use of elections, nothing ever changes,” they say. “All they (MPs) ever do is talk.” In former times, socialists in countries which witnessed the spectacle of fully parliamentary government over a long period frequently embraced revolutionary syndicalism (as in pre-war France and Italy) with its explicit rejection of the parliamentary system, and the social democracy that dominated in central and eastern Europe was doctrinally clear on the need for revolution and proletarian dictatorship. We have stated that opportunities are favourable in western Europe for legal, if not peaceful, transition, but we should not be surprised all the same if it is in precisely those countries with the strongest traditions of parliamentary government that the masses will prove the most lukewarm towards the parliament and parliamentary-type bodies in the revolution. The very antiquity of it speaks against it, for it proved unable, the masses will say, to prevent the disasters that are now agitating us.

Nor should we confuse the socialism of the masses with that of the parliamentary leaders. Socialism has always been concerned with the general problematic of emancipation, and has always carried the implication that not merely property but also power should be transferred to the producers. This is a point we are strongly reminded of by the popularity of workers’ control ideas among even the most well-behaved parties of present-day Europe. Among worker socialists there remains an unassailable sense of the economic, military, cultural and political power of what in Britain is called “The Establishment” (a fine Poulantzian notion this). Rank and file socialists are not always surprised at the suggestion that the working class will have to seize the factories and even arm itself (“defensively” of course). In any case, revolutions might not always begin by dispersing parliament, but by overthrowing a bourgeois government (or crushing a putative one) and smashing the state machine. Nor should we give the impression—which certainly arises from Anderson’s presentation—that the revolution will do away with universal suffrage or juridical equality as such. These must remain features of the soviet system without, we hope, having a destructive effect on class consciousness.

Anderson conflates two quite different aspects of the problem of “bourgeois democracy”. One is historical and the other perennial. His essay mentions the historical in passing but does not explore it. (Anderson, 1976, 30n.) A socialist revolution is not possible without the masses having a burning faith in the desirability of socialism, as an alternative social system. Since 1945, however, there has been a deep sea-change in this respect. The broad masses no longer have the faith in socialism that they once did. The origins of this do not lie in the sudden intrusion of cleverly deceptive forms of government. Class equilibrium is not the product of a particular form of government; rather the particular form of government is the product of the class equilibrium. The post-war equilibrium was not produced by the structural characteristics of bourgeois democracy or the system of suffrage, but in the new historical fact that everyday life in the advanced capitalist countries is, in almost every single respect and for most people, considerably superior since the late 1940s to that in the “socialist” countries. The gigantic improvements in living conditions have not been matched by the workers’ states. The 1930s appeared, for a long time, to be a feature of the past. At the same time, the “socialist” world everywhere toils beneath a totalitarian political system which, by contrast, capitalism has not tried to impose in western Europe (with some exceptional cases). Capitalism has not been entirely unsuccessful in re-appropriating its nineteenth-century slogans of freedom and prosperity. The historical impasse of socialism in the west is the fundamental meaning of the Cold War. The Cold War has succeeded, to some extent, in inducing a degree of identification between political freedom and *free enterprise*, that is to say the capitalist mode of production, and totalitarianism with *planned* economy, the key characteristic of socialist economy. These are historically novel equations—equations that not only form the substance

of post-war political theory but the wisdom of the street. Socialism has to recover its credentials in the face of a historical revival of mass bourgeois reformism.

Mass bourgeois reformism is not new. It has always coexisted with socialism in the masses. But the balance changes from one historical era to another, and, since 1945, mass bourgeois reformism has staged a remarkable recovery. Of course, this is not a uniform process. This is why, in the countries of northern Europe, where socialism and revolution have historically been weaker, the bourgeoisie permits the rotation of workers' and bourgeois parties in office, whereas in Italy or France it has contrived to keep the workers' parties out of power for thirty years (and in countries like Greece, where the memories of revolution remain strong, resorted to fascism). However, it is definable historical trend. In recent years there has been a perceptible decline in mass bourgeois reformism (literally: in the belief in the capitalist system and the struggle for reforms). No doubt this trend will accelerate further with the prospects for further world recession. Nevertheless, this may prove a protracted process. The impasse of socialism in the west cannot be broken overnight and may well require several decades before it is possible to make a real breakthrough—either by successful revolution in western Europe and/or political revolution in the east. (In that latter event we could probably anticipate war.)

On the other hand, there is the *perennial* aspect of the problem: the understandable reluctance of any labour movement to be precipitated into revolution and civil war. Even should the effects of the Cold War be overcome, these perennial difficulties will remain. This second aspect of the question of “bourgeois democracy” must not be conflated with the first. (Note: the term “reformism” is too often used to cover these two distinct problems.)

Trotsky once put this well:

The struggle between the revolutionary and the pacific, legalistic, reformist direction within the labour movement does not at all begin from the moment of the institution of a republic or the introduction of universal electoral rights. In the period of Chartism and right down to 1868, the workers in Britain were completely devoid of electoral rights, in other words, the basic instruments of “peaceful” development. Yet the Chartist movement was broken between the partisans of physical force who had the masses behind them, and the partisans of moral force, preponderating in petty-bourgeois intellectuals and worker aristocrats. In Hohenzollern Germany, with an impotent parliament, a struggle went on within the ranks of social democracy between the partisans of parliamentary reform and the preachers of a revolutionary general strike. Finally, even in Tsarist Russia, under the regime of June 3rd, the Mensheviks liquidated the revolutionary methods of struggle under cover of the slogan of the struggle for legality. (Trotsky, 2012, 88.)

When the time for revolution approaches, this perennial struggle within the oppressed class will no doubt be fought out, and the appropriate methods of transition rediscovered.

There is a final aspect of Mandel's schema about which something needs to be said. Just as a revolutionary uprising is the precondition of lengthy periods of dual power, so a successful armed uprising is inconceivable without the prior appearance of *parties of the revolution*. I put it in this way because whilst it may be true that a period of dual power will (almost certainly) be required for the construction of an *adequate* revolutionary party, the “February” cannot occur without the existence of parties which are seen by the masses as revolutionary, and are therefore already well on the way to becoming mass revolutionary parties. The Bolsheviks were already a majority in 1914. The USPD was the leading party prior to November 1918. The Spanish Socialist Party was taken over by revolutionaries considerably before the outbreak of hostilities in October 1934 or July 1936. The uprisings of 1944-45 were preceded by the phenomenal growth of the Communist Parties, treated at that time as revolutionary parties. These parties were the natural candidates that insurrectionaries anticipated would issue from their insurrection, and it was within these parties that the organising cadre of the insurrection were to be found planning for the great day. We are now a long way from seeing

such parties in Europe. The acceleration of the class struggle since 1968 no doubt makes it possible to envisage the growth of small revolutionary parties together with revolutionary currents in the mass parties. But this can only be done if the role of party construction prior to the revolution is properly understood, respected, and given its due. The belief that we can enter a lengthy period of dual power without a proletariat of some revolutionary maturity is an illusion that serves in practice to keep the left captive to a spontaneism that is hyperactive but never able to consolidate any forces. This is a general feature of the European left. The freneticism of the left; the refusal to consider the work of party building as perhaps the work of decades rather than years, of something that requires patient and careful work, rather than something that can be entrusted to the period of dual power which is always just around the corner, means that many of the revolutionary groups have exhausted the post-68 generation of revolutionary Marxists without making it possible to root these new parties in proletarian, as opposed to petty-bourgeois, strata of the population. At worst, many of these groups have abandoned the work of building parties for “movementism” or even terrorism. There is a strong sense of spontaneism—the belief that the next May 68 will be “more prolonged” and “open up a period of dual power”—underlying Mandel’s schema of the revolutionary process.

Above all, perhaps, it is the generalised under-estimation of the importance of constructing new Marxist parties prior to the “dual power” that inhibits the left from overcoming its chronic internal sectarianism. The dual power rationalises a hyperactivism that refuses to measure its own works with the yardstick of history. The belief that each group may be able to reap the whirlwind with its next campaign or strike intervention, the touting of formulae and prescriptions which lack any historical foundation, and the elevation of tactical differences and differences of emphasis into matters of deep principle, are closely related to the defective sense of historical proportion so often found among these tendencies. Tragically, the European revolutionary left missed the one real opportunity that presented itself in the 1970s to establish its authority in the international workers’ movement. The failure to build a single party of the revolutionary left in Portugal—and the absence of any serious campaign for it—undoubtedly cost the Portuguese revolution. No attempts were made at unification until the historical magnitude of the events belatedly dawned upon them. The European left is only just beginning to appreciate the difficulties of making a proletarian revolution. The task remains of seriously studying and recovering its history.

Winter, 1978-79

THE Socialist Revolution EAST and WEST

A Conspectus

A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

On its own merits we have to recognise that our author's text does us a great service. To use his own words, the task of "re-excavating" the historical record of the European socialist revolution has long been overdue. From the continental-wide revolutionary wave that broke out at the end of the First World War, through the Spanish Revolution and the crisis of the 1930s in France, by way of the uprisings in Nazi-occupied Europe, up to May 1968 and the Portuguese Revolution of 1974-5, our author offers us, with verve and with detail, a skilfully executed account of the European revolutionary experience, an experience that has largely been written out of the standard accounts of twentieth-century European history. For this reason alone he deserves our thanks.

But our author executes his task for a purpose, and that is to engage with a debate—already longstanding in the European workers' movement—which had broken out with new force in the mid-1970s: that concerning the view that the traditional Leninist "insurrectionist" strategy, an instrument sufficient to blast through the outworks of early twentieth-century Czarism, was a weapon too blunt and brutal to finish with the sophisticated and bedded-in bulwarks of bourgeois rule in the greatly more developed western European sector. Our author's explicit intention is to revoke this view, advocated in its most explicit form by writers of an overtly Eurocommunist stamp; his recourse to what Trotsky once called "the merciless laboratory of history" his weapon for doing so.

But there is more to this debate than at first meets the eye. For the writers to which he opposes himself cover a large segment of the political spectrum. By his own account, our author arraigns himself against "orthodox" Eurocommunists, Santiago Carrillo in the van; against what he himself dubs a "centrist" school, personified by Fernando Claudín and Henri Weber; and against those of what he calls the revolutionary left: namely Perry Anderson and Ernest Mandel. Our author's antagonists therefore form no homogeneous bloc, their heteroclitic arguments no single priority. To measure the substantive value of our author's polemic, then, it is necessary to look in more detail at the range of his own opponents' positions.

The argument with the Eurocommunist school proper need not detain us long. It is no accident that the central figure against which our author positions himself is Santiago Carrillo, the at the time General Secretary of the Spanish Communist Party and recent (1977) author of *Eurocommunism and the State*. The date should warn as to the real intentions of this school. The mid-1970s saw the terminal crises of the Mediterranean European dictatorships, within which the Communist Parties planted themselves as champions of bourgeois democracy against fascism, but in alliance with the bourgeois apologists and state functionaries of the latter against the prospect of socialist revolutionary upheaval. In this respect the Eurocommunist polemic is nothing more than an updated version of the classical Stalinist policy of the Popular Front—a strategic alliance between the workers' movement and an

imagined liberal, democratic, anti-oligopolist bourgeoisie, on the political terms of the latter. It was theorised in the 1970s, as it had been theorised in the 1930s, that the temporary subordination of socialist revolutionary aspirations to bourgeois democratic ones was a necessary precondition for the realisation of the former. Three-quarters of a century after the first manifestation of this policy, and a quarter of a century after that of the one under consideration, it is necessary to say once again that there is no automatic causal link between the winning of bourgeois democracy and the realisation of socialism, however desirable in itself democracy may be in the face of fascist reaction, and that the conscious subordination of socialism in order to achieve democratic advantage in fact presents deadly obstacles in the path of the working class and its allies. A simple glance at present-day Spain, Portugal and Greece confirms this: the proof of the pudding, as Engels was wont to say, lies in the eating. It is necessary to say here with clarity, therefore, shoulder to shoulder with our author, that the projection of an advance to socialism—“east” *or* “west”—that is not based on the insurrectionary overthrow and destruction of the apparatuses of the bourgeois state, be it a democratic state or no, and the material and political expropriation of the bourgeoisie, is a fiction: a fraudulent claim that stands opposed to the weight of a not inconsiderable quantity of—sadly all too often tragic—historical experience. All talk of “traversing” the state and “turning round” its “ideological apparatuses” is mere window dressing on this fundamentally flawed conception.

But of course the debate with the orthodox ideas of Eurocommunism is not the primary function of our author’s polemical intentions. Carrillo and Hodgson, Claudín and Weber, are, in truth, mere ghosts at our feast. The real target of our author’s preoccupations, as witnessed by not only the number of citations but also by the weight of his argumentation, is the “revolutionary socialist” camp; the central target of his arguments are in fact not the representatives of Eurocommunism but Ernest Mandel and Perry Anderson, the then most prominent leader of the Fourth International and the most outstanding spokesperson of the English-speaking New Left respectively. Let us deal with the arguments of each in turn.

The position of Mandel—expressed most clearly in an article in *New Left Review* 100 (Mandel 1976)—to which our author opposes himself most strongly is that which says that in western Europe, in countries that have an established system of bourgeois democracy, it will be necessary for the working class to prove to itself the superiority of proletarian over bourgeois democracy by means of an extended experience of dual power; an experience of dual power that may last years, and which will precede the actual overthrow of the bourgeois state. The framework within which such a dual power will arise will be one of an increasing incapacity of the ruling class to continue with its traditional methods of rule; as the mechanisms of bourgeois power disintegrate the institutions and practice of dual power spread to the point where the working class and its allies become convinced of the necessity of insurrection and the revolutionary overthrow of the state. Against this view our author advances two fundamental arguments. First, he points out that all the historical experiences of dual power, far from anticipating the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeois state in fact arise subsequent to an unsuccessful attempt to do so. Thus the historical “function” of dual power, our author argues, is not to teach the proletariat the superiority of forms of proletarian democracy but to allow it to resolve the problem of inadequate political leadership, to allow it to replace political leaders unwilling or unable to move decisively against the bastions of bourgeois power with a leadership adequate to the task. Second, our author points out that in countries with a greater proletarian social weight, dual power, rather than being extended in time, is typically shorter than it is in countries with a more belated economic and social development.

The position advanced by Anderson, again in an article in *New Left Review* 100 (Anderson 1976), is at its end essentially the same as that of Mandel. Anderson’s principal purpose is a reflection on the

contradictory legacy of Antonio Gramsci, a writer and a Communist leader who grappled for many years with the different problems posed for revolutionary strategy east and west. Anderson (following Gramsci) emphasises the central role of ideology and culture in the mechanisms of bourgeois rule within a bourgeois democratic structure, and insinuates the need on the part of the working class to counter these in the same coin. Although Anderson finally finds Gramsci's solutions to the problem inadequate, he, at the close of his article, points up the importance of an experience of dual power as an educative one for the proletariat.

Our author has little time for Anderson's prognostications regarding the ideological and cultural mainsprings of capitalist rule. Commenting on Anderson's reflection that the "representative state" represents the "principal ideological linchpin of Western capitalism", abstracting citizens from their class locations so that the electoral moment "reflects the fictive unity of the nation back to the masses as if it were their own self-government", obscuring the very existence of a "ruling" class, our author points to the masses' frequently expressed cynicism of the mechanisms of bourgeois democracy, and even points to the possibility that in countries with well-established bourgeois democratic systems this cynicism may even reach greater levels than in countries in which bourgeois democratic mechanisms are less well bedded in: that a weight of continued failure by bourgeois democracy to resolve the real problems of the day may in fact push the working classes of these countries closer to a rejection of bourgeois democracy.

It is at this point that we have to develop a critical assessment of our author's case. For on this last point there appears to be little evidence of a symmetry between cynicism towards bourgeois democracy and a conscious rejection of it. The most formally democratic country on earth is of course the United States. But it is not possible to equate the very deep level of working class bourgeois democratic cynicism in the United States—a cynicism so deep that the greater part of the working class do not even see the need to exercise the most elementary bourgeois democratic right of voting—with any rejection of the very system of bourgeois democracy itself in the United States; if anything, the reverse would seem to be true. Of course, material factors—relative standard of living, for example—come into play here, something that Anderson expressly underestimates in his *New Left Review* article, yet in the United States it appears as if disinterest in bourgeois democratic mechanisms goes hand in hand with an unprecedented level of bourgeois democratic ideological hegemony. For sure, the breaking of this blockage will require something more than a "strategy of dual power", with that we can agree.

Yet a consideration of the parameters of revolutionary strategy that underestimates the role of ideology and culture in societies under the rule of the bourgeoisie—in a bourgeois democratic system or otherwise, and let us remember that Russian absolutism did not suffer a lack of ideological devices with which to dazzle the proletariat and, especially, the peasantry—will fall short of the necessities of the socialist revolution.

But there is a wider problem in relation to the phenomenon of bourgeois democratic hegemony, for it is not just the case that the efficacy of bourgeois democracy effects a hypnotic attraction on the masses of the countries in which it is operative, but also evidently true that its attractive power also operates on an international level: few have been the countries in which the masses have recently lived under dictatorship of one form or another in which they have not looked with expectant hope and envious eyes towards the bourgeois democracies of the "west". The experience of the collapse of the "people's democracies" teaches us this, for example; as does the struggle against apartheid. Misleadership alone surely is not the problem here: while leaders willing to preach the efficacy of bourgeois democracy have not been wanting it is also clear that it has not been necessary to force feed the masses the idea. (Maybe

this is the real lesson of the failure to transform the collapse of the southern European dictatorships in the mid-1970s into consummated socialist revolutions.) In this respect, our author's comments regarding the role of universal suffrage and proletarian democracy are well made, but, by the same token, the problem of bourgeois democracy remains a central one for revolutionaries before the revolution. It should be noted here, however, that the very universal international ubiquity of the "bourgeois democracy problem" in itself mitigates against a conceptual division of the socialist revolution into eastern and western sectors.

But, of course, the mechanisms of ideology and culture are not the only underpinnings of bourgeois democracy. The United States, we have to admit, is something of a special case; elsewhere, in western Europe for example, what is central to the workings of bourgeois democratic systems is the existence of entrenched labour bureaucracies and social democratic parties. Whatever deficiencies bourgeois democracy has in the eyes of the masses, the existence of labour movements offers hope of amelioration of their concerns through recourse to the mechanisms of parliament. Conversely, of course, against whatever fear of the modern labour movements that the bourgeoisies hold, the structural existence of labour bureaucracy offers them hope of containing the demands arising from the working class within the framework of bourgeois rule.

But a treatment of the role and function of labour bureaucracy, and its place in the development of revolutionary strategy, is almost entirely absent from our debate. It is true that our author reflects on what he calls the "Kerensky phenomenon": the almost universal conservatism of the leadership of the working class movement in times of revolution, ascribing a psychological dialectic of uneven and combined development of political consciousness: that the conservatism of the established leaders in time of revolution "is perhaps the product of their comparative militancy in peaceful times." But surely the fundamental question is not the conservatism of traditional leadership in period of revolution compared to its relative militancy in times of political quiescence, but the natural conservatism of the traditional leadership of the workers' movement in non-revolutionary periods which is carried over into the revolutionary crisis itself. And here we are forced to acknowledge the qualitatively greater ideological and political weight of labour bureaucracy in countries which enjoy an established tradition of bourgeois democracy compared to those which do not. Pernicious though Menshevism may have been in pre-revolutionary and revolutionary Russia, it hardly compares to the brutal and cynically counter-revolutionary role played, for example, by the German SPD in 1918-9.

The absence of a treatment of the concrete problem of labour bureaucracy in the conceptions of the European sections of the Fourth International, of which Mandel was the chief and most public spokesman, is well known. Indeed, the "strategy of dual power" advanced in the 1970s by the sections of the International played the role of a substitute for an adequate strategic conception of building revolutionary parties capable of providing a counter-weight to the labour bureaucracies and the social democratic parties. Equally, the phenomenon of labour bureaucracy forms a central if curious ellipse in the work of Anderson in this period, whatever other merits (and they are indeed substantial) it contains. Whatever insights Mandel and Anderson offer us as to the need to take seriously the specificities of bourgeois rule in the west, their blindness to the phenomenon of labour bureaucracy can only invalidate the utility of their claims; by the same token, our author, as we have seen, is conscious of the problem; but he seriously underestimates it.

But there is yet another aspect to this issue, present in the work of all the authors referred to above, but strangely not commented upon. Each has a conception that periodically bourgeois rule does indeed break down, but none effects a sustained reflection on how this concretely comes about. For what is

striking about the myriad revolutionary experiences of the twentieth century is that each occurs not singly, country by country, but as a part of an *international wave of capitalist breakdown and revolutionary crisis*. Our author's vocabulary signals the fact: "the revolutionary wave of the 1930s", "1914-23: the revolutionary decade"—but it never enters the core of his argument. For the breakdown of capitalist rule, like the operation of capitalist economy, is nothing if not international. The core proof of his thesis that classical Leninist insurrectionism applies to the political structures of the west as much as to the east is the German Revolution of 1918-9. Yet the question as to whether the German Revolution would have occurred at all if the Russian Revolution had not preceded it is a moot one. The pattern is recurring in twentieth-century European history: 1914-23, the 1930s, the mid 1940s, 1968-9, the early to mid 1970s—each of these periods witnessed not single *national* revolutionary crises but a crisis of capitalist rule on an international scale. The categories of "east" and "west" can look a little artificial when set against this observation.

And here we find what is at the heart of the debate. Once a revolutionary crisis does arise, then we can agree with our author that, east and west, the necessary task is that of the old classical Leninist insurrection. But the key question is *not* the precise mechanism of revolution, but the precise mechanism of the *breakdown of bourgeois rule*; our differences with our author are not on the terrain of what is to be done once revolution breaks out but how the revolution will arrive: a question which has a significant import for what revolutionaries do in the interim.

Now the categories of "east" and "west" do indeed demonstrate a real utility in this area; but "east" and "west" need to be understood not as geographical zones within Europe, but as a metaphor for describing where bourgeois rule is at its weakest (maybe today we should be talking of "north" and "south"). For there is another striking and recurring feature of the twentieth-century European socialist revolution: the moment of revolutionary crisis within the international revolutionary wave tends to move from "east" to "west" in this metaphorical sense; that is to say, from periphery to centre. Bourgeois rule breaks at its weakest link.

But where is this periphery—our "east"—to be found? Bukharin once remarked that the socialist revolution broke out first in Russia because Russia was the poorest of the poor; Lenin rebuked him: the socialist revolution broke out in Russia because Russia was the poorest of the rich. Here we have our "east" and "west": the "east", the periphery of bourgeois rule, is not the geographical or economic periphery of capitalism but that geographical area, social sector or political region where the contradictions of bourgeois rule are posed most sharply. Generalised capitalist crisis is a necessary precondition for the outbreak of revolutionary crisis: this cannot be willed into being by subjective revolutionary optimism—capitalism will not, as our author reminds us, wilt before the orator. But when, under the whip of crisis, revolutionary crises do break out they tend to appear first at the weakest social, political or economic point of capitalist rule: in the revolutionary wave at the end of the First World War, from Russia, spreading west; in the mid 1930s, from backward Spain to metropolitan France; in May 1968, from the revolutionary students to the industrial working class; in 1974-5, impelled by the collapse of the remains of the Portuguese empire, from the junior officers of the MFA to the Portuguese peasants and workers. Here we have our east and west: not closed geographical (or national) areas but dialectically related sectors of the international socialist revolution.

How will our east and west in this sense play itself out in the next great revolutionary wave? The future is impossible to predict and difficult to forecast: when the next generalised crisis of bourgeois rule occurs will the spark, the first moment of a new international revolutionary wave, appear first in Latin America, or in the Pacific Rim, or will the dialectic of the permanent revolution play another of its

tricks and take us all by surprise once again? We will have to wait and see. We can be reasonably confident, however, that the spark will not flare initially in the core of international capitalism, in western Europe or northern America. But the bush fire of revolution will indeed spread in this direction, as it has done in *each and every one* of the revolutionary waves of the past, bourgeois democracy notwithstanding.

Mindful of the experiences of history, therefore, and of the exigencies of the present, what we do as revolutionaries in the interim—and what we do as revolutionaries in the interim is indeed in good part dependent on the existing variations in the modalities of bourgeois rule in the present—will determine whether or not the next spark of revolution breaks into a blazing conflagration, or whether it is extinguished for yet another time.

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