

weekly **worker**



Lars T Lih uses eyewitness account to dispose of some old myths about Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1917

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No 1450 July 6 2023

Towards a mass Communist Party

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After 75 years: NHS driven into permanent crisis



LETTERS



Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed

Record straight?

I can't argue with Carla Roberts' assessment of Chris Reeves' film on Corbyn, because I haven't seen it ('Putting the record straight', June 29). But I do take issue with the view that Labour's demand for another European Union referendum and a rejoining policy wasn't responsible for his defeat.

All major political parties in the UK supported 'remain', as did the ruling class, state institutions and industry, etc. This caused a rapid fall from grace among traditional, industrial working class voters for Labour. It led to a general cry of either 'A plague on all their houses' or a lean towards the UK Independence Party (Ukip, in case you've forgotten!).

With 64% of all parliamentary constituencies voting to leave in the referendum, Corbyn pledged he would honour the decision. His many national TV appearances at this time saw him resolve that we were out and that was it, and now was the time to start taking on the challenge of government. There was a groundswell of support going back to Labour under Corbyn and an optimism that the divisive EU issue was now over and we were moving forward. There was every reason to believe, judging from the mass rallies and confidence and the feeling that Labour was coming back to its roots, that there would be a landslide.

Roberts quotes the BBC as a source when saying "70% of Labour voters ticked 'remain'". I don't know how that was arrived at, since something like eight out of 10 labour constituencies voted leave. So a recognition of the vote to leave was going to be a minimum requirement on the doorstep if you wanted their vote in the ballot box.

There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that the uncoordinated pincer movement between the Blairites and the mainly London liberal-lefty remainers trapped Corbyn's political bollocks in a nutcracker. The change to demand another referendum so soon after the first. Promising to campaign for rejoin was a calculated kick in the teeth not only for the punters in the 64% of parliamentary seats who had voted 'leave', but also in the majority of Labour-held seats who had voted 'leave' in particular. Any fool could see this was a huge sign on Corbyn's back saying 'Shoot me'. I believe it was meant to derail his election and that's exactly what it did.

Starmer and the liberal left had convinced themselves that the generally northern and industrial working class had been painted into a corner, couldn't possibly vote Tory and, no matter what Labour said, they would hold their noses and vote for them. This time they had been pushed too far and, with piss dripping from their backs, they said, 'Not this time'. Most abstained, while some were so furious they even voted Tory. What they didn't do was vote Labour.

David John Douglass
South Shields

Too much nonsense

I was a bit surprised by John Smithee's letter in last week's *Weekly Worker* (June 29). Apparently, there are "too many people" in the world, which has resulted in climate change!

I recall, from a few years ago, George Monbiot giving a relative figure for the carbon emissions (or some such) from North America compared to Africa - around 27:1. True, the global population is growing

but it is predicted to taper off. The reason? Poor families - eg, peasants in poor countries - tend to have a lot of children because many of them die young and their parents also need offspring to look after them in their old age. With some, at least, improvements in healthcare this need for large families is reduced.

I recall another article I read a while back, which pointed to the failure of Indian policies. The commentator suggested that the only really successful policy to reduce family sizes was the education of women. In most cases, if an educated woman wants to limit the number of her children, then she will find the means to do so.

Just a little conclusion from the above: if there are too many people in the world then why is it? The world could, I'm sure, fit in a few more of us, but what is causing the climate change that Smithee is keen to fight?

One answer is, of course, capitalism. A look at the policies of the UK government, along with those of the US and other countries, makes this pretty clear. It has been pointed out by many that the UK government is, for instance, keen to expand road transport, while reducing - through confusion and bankruptcy - that of rail. A BBC programme not long ago added a lot of detail to what many of us already knew: that the fossil fuel companies were aware of global warming coming along, due to their own efforts, several decades ago.

Just an aside - Smithee says: "There are too many people in the world, and a shortage of workers - all other things being equal - should lead to a rise in wages." I assume that he's looking to the indefinite continuation of capitalist rule. Even so, a shortage of workers might also mean a shortage of customers - oh dear.

But my main fear with "too many people" is Smithee's advocacy of a policy (advocated by the Greens apparently) for "the population of the UK to be reduced to just 25 million and of the world to just three billion by the year 2100". That is, very roughly, that each population should be reduced by about two thirds in just under a lifetime.

We'd better start soon then. Is John Smithee volunteering to get this reduction under way? How is it to be done? A voluntary (or compulsory) one-child policy that he so admired in China? That would seem to be a bit chancy. More effective might be mass vasectomies (or just mass murder). Closing down the entire world's health services - public and private - might accomplish this even more quickly than Smithee and the Greens envisage. We may go further and return to a much smaller medieval level - short lives but a bit of folk dancing.

No, comrade, the world population isn't the problem. Capitalism is the problem and things are getting worse by the day. We need a mass communist party to lead this growing population in the struggle to get rid of that problem.

Jim Nelson
email

Apologetic

I have been away for a few weeks, so I missed the letter where Frank Kavanagh claims that Arthur Bough has gone beyond Marx (June 15). Given the significance that Frank pays Bough, he may wonder why Bough's work is not more highly considered within the field!

Seriously though, if you want to read someone who has actually taken Marx forward then look at someone like Samir Amin, who incorporated imperialism and the world market into his analysis of value and surplus value, etc. Then compare

that groundbreaking work with the sycophantic and apologetic insult to Marxism that Bough presents. He hasn't gone beyond Marx, but has instead attempted to rescue Marx for polite bourgeois society!

Frank's description of a decline from a productive to a service form of capitalism is actually the sort of thinking I would expect of someone who regards Bough as some sort of advance on Marx. Why? Because anyone who thinks this must have no conception of imperialism or that we even have a world market.

Bough's description of the service economy ironically reinforces Frank's misconceptions by completely disregarding the huge amount of manufacturing employment taking place outside the imperialist core. A huge operation, currently facilitating the service economy of the core, which vampire-like sucks all the wealth from the periphery. Maybe Frank hasn't noticed that the world is currently in a very dangerous conflict around the future of this very construct. But, if you regard Bough as an advance, these developments must be pretty mystifying.

If Frank is interested in going beyond Bough, I would recommend John Smith's 'Imperialism in a coffee cup' (*Open Democracy* July 16 2019) as a good place to start.

Bough's interpretation of the civilising mission of capitalism appears to me to be his typical neoliberal apologetic, and he seems to imply Marx had a definition of civilisation which is equated to privatisation. Man becomes civilised by aggressive advertising, while consumerism is equated with civilising!

My reading of the civilising mission is more to do with a development in the ways humans relate to the world around them and how they think about the world. Humanity goes from religious idolatry, seeing nature in fear and wonder (god, sacrifice, etc) to a materialistic conception (mastery of nature, etc).

Of course, Bough takes Marx's concept, distorts it for his own servile ends and leaves out all of Marx's bitter irony. He then leaves the entire proletariat out of his Shangri-La version of the civilising mission - imagining a world free of industrial labour, leaving only him and his neighbours? Who knows. His description also paints a rather rosy picture of the gig economy, the precariat and zero-hour contracts as freeing the industrial worker!

Steve Cousins
email

True democracy

I have to disagree with comrade Tony Clark (Letters, June 15) that Marx was in some way "led astray" by Blanqui and that somehow the concept of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" is antithetical to the Marxism in the *Communist manifesto* - and indeed to democratic socialism, as Marx and Engels would have defined it.

Incidentally, I would strongly recommend the two excellent articles by Marc Mulholland on both the dictatorship of the proletariat and the permanent revolution (*Weekly Worker* March 9 and March 16), which considerably toughens up the latter-day interpretation given to it by Hal Draper and apparently adopted by the *Weekly Worker* group.

However, Tony is simply wrong about what Marx and Engels actually said, including in the *Communist manifesto*. In it, they state: "the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat" and that "the first task of the working class in the revolution, to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of

democracy".

There are two key points here. The proletariat must become the new "ruling class". What can this mean other than the working class ruling *using its own state power* over the whole of society, including the overthrown bourgeoisie and supporters of the old order in other classes? What is this if not "the dictatorship of the proletariat"?

The other point is the order in which Marx and Engels place the tasks of the proletariat in the revolution. In order "to win the battle of democracy", they must *first* overthrow the bourgeoisie and establish themselves as the new ruling class, in order for true democracy to be established. In that way democracy can have its full meaning: ie, rule by the majority, in the interests of the majority.

It should be clear that 'dictatorship', or rule, by a majority class is of a qualitatively different nature than previous rules by minority classes. Sheer weight of numbers and the organisations and structures of the working class in power should mean its will can be made to prevail. But that doesn't mean the 'dictatorship' - or forceful or coercive side - disappears altogether. The overthrown classes and their supporters among the middle strata and even within the working class will remain strong and dangerous, and will need to be dealt with through a combination of methods.

Tony is right to strongly and consistently advocate "democratic socialism", I do too. But you can't abstract, as he does, democracy from its class content or completely separate off the coercive aspect of class rule from the consensual.

Yes, one would hope the rule of the majority working class would obtain 'loser's consent' from the overthrown classes and their supporters. But I wouldn't bet any money on it - certainly not the 'socialist farm'.

Surely, if recalcitrant minorities engage in undemocratic and illegal activities to undermine the rule of the majority working class - ie, democracy and democratic socialism - the working class state would be fully justified in employing force and other measures against such? What is this but the "dictatorship of the proletariat"? It is force to defend true democracy.

Andrew Northall

Kettering

Economism

I attended the annual Socialist Workers Party Marxism school at the

weekend - it was noticeably busier than previous years, with many young people eager to learn about Marxism. There were some faces I vaguely recognised and many new ones.

Two meetings of note: the first I attended was '50 years since the coup in Chile 1973', where Mario Nain was the opening speaker. The comrade briefly recounted the history and told us that the coalition government of Popular Unity was supported by socialists and communists. President Salvador Allende was compared with Corbyn as being principled and heading a radical government. The mistakes, apparently were that the revolution was only half-hearted.

In my contribution I pointed out that we shouldn't look to 'heroes' that save the day - a man on a white horse like the picture of Bonaparte. I suggested that the coalition government was part of the problem, since there wasn't a full majority of the left. Secondly rank and file members of the military were not won over, so they could pass arms to workers to defend themselves in a popular militia; and, thirdly, it was necessary not just to smash the constitutional state order (judiciary, military, etc), but also to do what Lenin suggested as part of a minimum programme, as "there was no division between legislative and executive power": to get rid of one-man management, to get rid of the presidential monarchy. I ended by pointing out that Corbyn needed to be criticised too, and no need to applaud me (which everyone insists on doing after anyone contributes - I'm personally not a good speaker anyway). Not that comrade Nain reflected or commented on what I said in his closing remarks - only those who are members of the SWP who contributed had their points answered.

In Charlie Kimber's 'Corbyn to Mélenchon: can left reformism bring change?', this was a bigger hall, so the dreaded speaker slip system was used (I didn't get called, despite filling one in). Anyway, essentially comrade Kimber favoured getting out on the streets above using parliament (as if you cannot do both), with demos and strikes, and praised the riots in France (which I think are likely to be more useful for the right). This was, more or less, economism. He also mentioned the BDS campaign against Israel, and said that it was likely the SWP would support and call for a vote for Corbyn if he stands as an independent.

Jack Cooper
Cambridge

Fighting fund

Bend over backwards

I'm disappointed to have to report that, once again, we failed to meet our £2,250 fighting fund target for June. Mind you, it was a pretty close call, with the £145 we received in the last two days of the month taking us up to £2,167 - in other words, a shortfall of £83.

But there were some excellent last-minute donations - thanks in particular to comrade BK for his £50, received on June 30! There were also bank transfers or standing orders from MR (£20), VP and JD (a tenner each), while comrade JM added an extra £50 to his subscription cheque! Finally there was the usual banknote from comrade Hassan - this time £5.

So will we actually reach that target in July? I hope so, as things can't go on like this, with the deficit continuing to mount.

And the good news is that, with just five days gone, as I write, we already have £428 in the kitty for this month. Of course, most of that results from all those start-of-the-month standing orders/bank transfers. Thank you, AC (£60), FK (£37), CG (£30), BK, DL, II and JD (£20 each), MD (£18), BG, MT and RG (£15 each), BH and TM (£12), GB and MM (£11), AN, YM, CP and DI (£10 each), plus DC and JD (£6).

And there was also TB's brilliant £60 PayPal transfer. As I say, £428 isn't bad after just five days, but we really do need to make that target this month. Please bend over backwards to play your part in making sure we do! ●

Robbie Rix

Fill in a standing order form (back page), donate via our website, or send cheques, payable to *Weekly Worker*

MIGRATION

Enemies of the people

Kevin Bean asks why delays, objections and challenges to the Illegal Migration Bill are far from unwelcome to the Tories

As the general election nears, migration and asylum policy are being relentlessly pushed up the political agenda by the Tories and the rightwing media. ‘Stopping the boats’ and ‘cracking down on illegal migration’ is one of Rishi Sunak’s ‘five pledges’, trumpeted as “the people’s priorities” at every available opportunity - in TV interviews and at PMQs in the House of Commons.

It is clear that migration will be a central election issue for the Tories and that it is one they think will win them support amongst key groups of voters. So it is these electoral imperatives which underlie the Illegal Migration Bill, currently making its way through parliament, and which frame the political rhetoric. Tory politicians are trying to justify the policy of sending asylum-seekers to Rwanda to have their claims processed, but getting the legislation through parliament has not been plain sailing for Sunak’s government.

The bill has been subject to legal challenges in the courts - last week’s appeal court ruling that the policy was unlawful, because Rwanda is not a “safe third country” for those seeking asylum, will almost certainly be taken on appeal by the government to the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, the House of Lords has put down so many amendments to the bill that it will doubtless dominate much of this parliamentary session.

These challenges and delays are not unwelcome to the Tories. They can be turned to political advantage. Expect more ‘Enemies of the people’ type headlines in the yellow press - failure to reduce migration down to the “tens of thousands” being blamed on lefty lawyers, privileged judges and unelected peers. Better still if *bien pensant* religious leaders and other members of ‘the great and the good’ join in the criticism of a morally unacceptable and inhumane policy - what better opportunity to show that it really is the Tories who are on the side of common sense and ‘the people’ against the liberal elite? Although the Illegal Migration Bill largely has these political and performative functions, we should not overlook the harshness and cruelty of its proposals as so much rhetoric or headline-grabbing spin.

Outsourcing of asylum claims to an unsafe third country and the risk that unsuccessful claimants could be returned to the very countries from which they are fleeing has gathered the most criticism, but the detention provisions and the wider implications of the undermining of legal and human rights contained in the legislation should not be downplayed either. Critics in the Lords - including Tories - have pointed out how the bill is contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights and other international treaty obligations, and so runs counter to the position that the British state has adopted since the late 1940s.

One bright idea of the Tory right is to include a pledge to hold a referendum about leaving the ECHR in the general election manifesto. If that happens, and if the Tories win, and if the referendum happens, and if the referendum goes against the ECHR, and if parliament votes through the necessary legislation, then the UK would join Russia and Belarus as the only non-ECHR signatories. At lot of ifs, but it does explain why there is such disquiet about the Tories amongst the top ranks of the civil service. Leaving



Desperate, but determined

the ECHR is just not British.

Although there is a certain amount of self-congratulatory, patriotic blather about Winston Churchill and the role of British jurists in framing the ECHR after the horrors of Hitler Germany, the fact remains that the ECHR is an integral part of capitalism’s post-World War II international architecture. Leaving would doubtless complement Brexit, but amount to yet another self-inflicted wound by an out-of-control political class.

If Rishi Sunak is using tough action against ‘illegal migration’ as a political rallying cry, other sections of the Tory Party are attempting to widen the attack and focus on migration more generally.

Although they pledge loyalty to Sunak and claim they are committed to his campaign to win the general election, the New Conservatives, who launched their own 12-point plan on migration this week, are applying none-too-subtle pressure on the prime minister to move even further to the right. Pointing to the rise in non-European Union immigration following Brexit, they called for drastic reduction in all migration, the ending of temporary work visas, a sharp cut in the numbers of overseas students and their dependents, and a cap on council housing for non-British citizens.

In reality this group of far-right Tory MPs are actually looking beyond a probable election defeat and thinking more about future direction than the party’s immediate prospects. Liberal media commentators had a lot of fun reporting the launch of the plan, highlighting the inconsistencies in its proposals to cut migration and encourage ‘British jobs for British workers’, especially in social care and the health service. The half-baked prescriptions of evangelical, nativist natalist and Tory MP for Penistone and Stocksbridge, Miriam Cates, on raising low wages in the care sector, came in for particular ridicule, as did her “deep concerns about national and cultural security”.

Although Sunak rejected the New Conservative proposals for a more general blanket-ban on migration, both his Illegal Migration Bill and the ideas of Cates *et al* have a number of underlying political assumptions in common - despite the nativist overtones of much of the New Conservative rhetoric. Moreover, these assumptions are widely shared even by liberal critics of the harsher aspects of Tory government policy, who also frame their arguments around deserving (‘genuine’) and undeserving (‘bogus’) asylum-seekers and mere economic migrants.

Even the rather skewed and unreliable figures of the home office

show that a majority of the asylum claims made by those people who ‘illegally’ arrive in small boats are upheld and that these ‘irregular’ arrivals come from countries such as Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. The political, economic and social push factors in those countries resulting from imperialist intervention and wars, combined with the impact of climate change and economic crisis in other areas of the so-called global south, have produced the recent waves of migration - by which we mean human beings who risk their lives to find a better life than what capitalism and imperialism makes available to them at home.

The real dangers and the desperate circumstances they face in crossing the English Channel and/or the Mediterranean in such flimsy craft only serve to undermine the hysteria and chauvinism whipped up by the disgusting, cynical campaigns of home secretary Suella Braverman, failed politician Nigel Farage, and the editors of the *Mail*, *Express* and *Telegraph*. The language of invasion and Cates’ fears of the threat to “cultural security” posed by migration has a long history in bourgeois politics and is, of course, by no means confined to contemporary British Tories. Similar language and policies can be found in Meloni’s Italy, Orbán’s Hungary and in a host of other European countries where the politics of the far right have been adopted by ‘mainstream’ conservatives and capitalist parties.

The recent National Conservative conference in London and the developing links between sections of the Tories and these far-right currents show the potential for this type of politics to become significant within the Tories after an electoral defeat. But there is no need for the Tories to seek out the exotic politics of the European far right or borrow from the American Christian right. They have a rich heritage of chauvinism and the politics of prejudice directed against foreigners and alien elements going back to the late 17th century Church and King mobs and their anti-Catholic hysteria.

The modern form of anti-migration legislation, the 1905 Aliens Act, was introduced by the Tories and directed against migration from Russia and eastern Europe - much of it poor Jewish people fleeing pogroms and tsarist persecution. Truly a despicable lineage, but one that the likes of Braverman and Farage (not to mention Johnson lying about the completely fictional dangers of Turkish migration during the Brexit campaign) are quite happy to draw upon. However, whatever the form - whether chauvinist Tories trying to stop the boats or concerned liberals arguing for ‘non-racist’ migration controls - these politics are rooted in a bourgeois political economy, which claims that scarce housing, hospital beds, school places and other social resources mean that capitalist Britain is somehow ‘full up’ and cannot admit any more people.

Labour leaders and even some who claim to be on the left parrot this line and accept the logic of capitalism, arguing that voters will not tolerate further immigration. As with other aspects of politics and society, the task of Marxists is to challenge those reformists and Labour bureaucrats who surrender to the limitations and the restrictions of the status quo, and advance instead an alternative political economy of the working class ●

ACTION

Support striking NEU teachers

Friday July 7, 12 noon: Rally, St Peters Square, Manchester M2. Demand a fully-funded, above-inflation pay rise. Striking teachers will be joined by striking Unison members from Manchester Metropolitan University and striking Unite members from First Bus. Promoted by The People’s Assembly - Manchester: www.facebook.com/ManchesterPAAA.

Durham Miners Gala

Saturday July 8, 8am to 4pm: Rally and labour movement festival, The Racecourse, Green Lane, Old Elvet, Durham DH1. Organised by Durham Miners Association: www.facebook.com/events/1548202148922684.

Housing for need, not greed

Saturday July 8: Day of action, with events nationwide. Challenge the madness and unfairness of the housing market. Stop the demolition of social housing, provide affordable housing now. Organised by Housing Rebellion: linktr.ee/housingrebellion.

Ukraine: peace talks now!

Saturday July 8: Day of action. Nationwide protests just days before the Vilnius Nato conference promotes further escalation. Bath 11.30am: Outside Bath Abbey, York Street, Bath BA1.

Bristol 1pm: Cascade Steps, Bristol BS1.

Bromley 2.30pm: Market Square, Bromley BR1.

Canterbury 12 noon: High Street, Canterbury CT1.

Colchester 11am: outside Town Hall, High Street, Colchester CO1.

Dorchester 11am: The Town Pump, Cornhill, Dorchester, DT1.

Ealing 12 noon: near Lloyds Bank, Ealing Broadway, London W5.

Exeter 12 noon: Bedford Square, Exeter EX1.

Falmouth 11.45am: Market Street, Falmouth TR11.

Glasgow 2.30pm: in front of M&S, Argyle Street, Glasgow G2.

Hackney 11am: Narrow Way, Mare Street, London E8.

Lewisham 3pm: Deptford High Street/Douglas Way, London SE8.

Leytonstone 2.30pm: Leytonstone Tube, Church Lane, London E11.

Liverpool 11am: outside Primark, Church Street, Liverpool L1.

Newport, IoW 12 noon: St Thomas Square, Newport PO30.

Preston 2pm: Flag Market, Preston PR1.

Rochdale 12 noon: Yorkshire Street, Rochdale, OL16.

Sheffield 1pm: Town Hall, Pinstone Street, Sheffield S1.

Southampton 12 noon: Bargate, Southampton SO14.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: stopwar.org.uk/events/peace-talks-now-day-of-action-sat-8-july.

Socialists and the Labour Party

Thursday July 13, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Indian YMCA, 41 Fitzroy Square, London W1. The drastic rightward shift of Starmer’s Labour after the left-leaning Corbyn years opens up questions of how socialists should relate to the Labour Party. Speakers include Emma Dent Coad and Lindsey German. Registration £5 (free). Organised by Counterfire: www.facebook.com/events/607752401334314.

Tolpuddle Martyrs festival

Friday July 14 to Sunday July 16: Annual commemoration festival, Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum, Dorchester Road, Tolpuddle DT2. Tickets £22.50 to £55. Organised by Tolpuddle Martyrs: www.facebook.com/events/184599977675068.

Say no to Yorkshire Patriots

Saturday July 15, 12.30pm: Counter-protest outside Brunswick shopping centre, Westborough, Scarborough YO11. Yorkshire Patriots is a fascist group that whips up hatred and intolerance, deflecting anger at the cost of living onto refugees and migrants. Organised by Stand up to Racism Scarborough: www.facebook.com/events/774490770814131.

Ukraine - how do we get peace?

Wednesday July 19, 7pm: Public meeting, Central United Reformed Church, 60 Norfolk Street, Sheffield S1. Peace talks now; Russian troops out; no Nato expansion; welfare, not warfare. Organised by Sheffield Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/STWSheffield.

Marx on India, Bonapartism and imperialism

Thursday July 20, 7pm: Online and onsite lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speaker Spencer A Leonard focuses on Marx’s journalism for the *New York Tribune* in 1853, where he developed his emerging understanding of the British state as imperialist or Bonapartist. Tickets £5 (£3). Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/434.

Troublemakers at work

Saturday July 29, 9.30am to 5pm: Conference, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. Bringing together workers who have won improvements at work, taken strike action, and transformed weak unions into a strong voice for workers. Also those who want to win a pay rise, start a union or mobilise an existing union at work. Workshops and plenary sessions. Registration £10 (£5). Organised by Troublemakers At Work: troublemakersatwork.conference-2023.

Chopped liver and unions

August 4 to 26 (not Sundays), times vary: The Space on the Mile, 80 High Street, Edinburgh EH1. *Chopped liver and unions* tells the story of Sara Wesker, who organised many strikes by garment workers in the East End of London in the 1920s. Tickets £10 (£8). Performed by Lottie Walker. Part of the Edinburgh fringe festival: tickets.edfringe.com/whats-on/chopped-liver-and-unions.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party’s name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

NHS

Road leading nowhere

After 75 years the NHS has been driven into permanent crisis. The government's 'comprehensive workforce plan' is no solution, it is mere electioneering, writes **Ian Spencer**

On June 30 the government published the "first comprehensive workforce plan for the NHS, putting staffing on a sustainable footing and improving patient care".¹ Looking very much like the first salvo in an upcoming general election, the 'NHS long-term workforce plan' aims to increase recruitment by loads and retention by loads more.

This is remarkable, considering that workers are leaving the NHS in droves for more lucrative or less stressful work, or retiring at the earliest opportunity - 170,000 left in England last year.² Between 2018 and 2022 nearly 43,000 people aged 21 to 50 quit the Nursing and Midwifery Council register.³ This is compounded by the fact that nursing is also an aging population, with many due for retirement during the period covered by the plan.⁴

The aims are of Bojo proportions: medical school places are to double to 15,000 a year; GP training places are to increase by 50% to 6,000; adult nursing places are to rise by 92% to nearly 38,000 - all of this by 2031-32. The plan estimates that more than 204,000 new support workers will be required to meet demand over the next 15 years. Phew! Most of the targets are to be achieved by the mid-2030s, by which time the present Tory government will be a distant memory. As with all such plans, it is 'ambitious', 'bold' and not before time, as NHS vacancies currently total 112,000 and, without it, the staff shortfall will be "between 260,000 and 360,000" by 2036-37.

As always in contemporary political rhetoric, we see the 'rule of three': train, retain and reform. Training does not just focus on numbers. Pharmacists are to eventually be allowed to prescribe, for example, and there are plans to increase the number of "physician and nursing associates". In other words, the increased supply of healthworkers will be facilitated by shortening the training of doctors and nurses, among others, and the creation of subordinate, lesser-trained staff grades. The amount of time nurses spend in clinical placements will drop from 2,300 hours in three years to 1,800 hours. There seems to be a studied insomnia in the plan. Prior to 1990 almost all nurses were trained as NHS employees - apprentices, if you will - who were paid a wage while they studied.

Medical schools are to move from five- or six-year degrees to four years: "In future students undertaking shorter medical degrees will make up a substantial proportion of the overall number of medical students." If you are concerned about the quality of care that you are likely to receive, then rest assured that "Doctors and nurses would still have to meet the high standards and outcomes defined by the regulator." So regulation will take the place of training and staff experience.

The plan for retention is also bold, aiming to "ensure up to 130,000 fewer staff leave the NHS over the next 15 years". This will be achieved by "improving culture, leadership and wellbeing". At no point is there a suggestion that pay rates are an important part in recruitment and retention.

Many of the supposedly innovative ideas, such as apprentices, nursing and physician associates, have already been in place for



Aneurin Bevan: Labour minister of health on first day of NHS, July 5 1948

some time, but to a limited extent. There have been advanced nurse practitioners with limited prescribing powers for some time, undertaking some of the more mundane duties carried out by GPs. However, "By 2036-37, there will be over 64,000 nursing associates working in the NHS, compared to 4,600 today." There will be 10,000 physician associates by 2036-37.

Professions

The history of healthcare is the history of class struggle. Historically, the professions have represented a conservative group. At the foundation of the NHS, Aneurin Bevan famously attributed the acquiescence of the medical profession to their mouths being "stuffed with gold". In other words, concessions were made, so that consultants were still going to be able to serve their private patients. GPs would have the status of independent contractors to the NHS and the British Medical Association became one of the most powerful unions in the country - in no small part due to the legal monopoly they had over the prescription of medication and referral for treatment.

The *BMJ* (originally *British Medical Journal*) in its response to the plan is in no doubt that "Delivering the NHS workforce plan depends on implementing major reforms, which will challenge professional organisation and power."⁵

The plan is taking place at a time when all professions allied to medicine are in an unprecedented struggle with the government over pay. The reserve army of labour is not exerting much influence in forcing down workers' pay in health and social care. At the same time, anti-union legislation has weakened action by nurses, who did not vote in sufficient numbers to continue their pay struggle. However, workers resist in other ways. They leave healthcare and get a better-paid job elsewhere or else move between employers, looking for higher pay or to get off the shop floor. One way around this is to break up the occupational cohesion of the professions or buy off one section against another.

The history of nursing is instructive in this. In 1919, during the House of Lords debate on the Nurse

Registration Act, Lord Amptill said: "... if we don't give [nurses] what they want [nurse registration] we will drive them into the arms of the Labour Party."⁶ Naturally, this would not worry the ruling class today, but two years after the Russian Revolution, one year after the Labour Party adopted clause four of its constitution and in a year that saw the police on strike in London and Liverpool, it caused the noble Lords some disquiet.

In the years of defeat for trade unions that followed the 1984-85 miners' strike, steady inroads have been made into the concessions to the professions previously made. The 'state-enrolled nurse' has been recreated, with the development of nurse associates, and in the social care sector 'senior carers', with the authority to dispense medication, have been introduced. Nursing degrees, whose courses were over four years in the-1980s, were reduced to three and the proportion of time spent in clinical placement was increased at the expense of formal study. Currently, student nurses have no choice but to take out the same student loan as any other student - which can mean a £45,000 debt in order to start a job paying £28,000. Debt bondage, from education and housing, seems to be a growing feature of declining capitalism.

Future

Politicians, such as Sajid Javid and Tony Blair, are now talking openly about the "unsustainability" of the NHS. However, while piecemeal privatisation will continue under whichever party wins the next election, the plan aims to give a clear impression that there will be increased investment in the NHS for the time being.

There is already a steady drift towards private healthcare, which quite a sizeable minority now use.⁷ And, if, as seems likely, the next government will be a rightwing Labour one, Keir Starmer has given every indication that he will not change the current trajectory of piecemeal healthcare privatisation, just like Tony Blair when he led the Labour Party.

In the meantime, investment in healthcare provision both from within

the UK and abroad continues apace. Bupa, Four Seasons Healthcare, Cygnet and many more besides offer healthcare but also some, such as Cygnet, take NHS patients and can be 'branded' as NHS as part of the 'mixed economy of care' that was instituted by the New Labour government.

One of the main arguments put forward for the need for change is the "ageing population": "Over the next 15 years, the population of England is projected to increase by 4.2%, but the number of people aged over 85 will grow by 55%." There has been widespread discussion, even in the mainstream media, about the need to integrate social care in some way, otherwise it is difficult to discharge in particular elderly people from acute care in hospitals. Yet the plan refers to the social-care sector, where there are 165,000 vacancies for jobs - less well paid and with worse terms and conditions than for NHS staff. In fact, one of the frequent complaints by the private-care sector is that they cannot compete with NHS pay and still make a profit. In 2021-22 no fewer than 44% of nurses in adult social care left - most of the care is now provided by 'support workers' on minimum wage levels.

The government is clearly investing in research to bring about a US-style 'minimum data set', which would allow the routine reassessment of those receiving NHS care while being lodged in care homes.⁸ For example, the National Institute for Health Research is currently funding the testing systems which are used in the US and Canada to assess eligibility for state funding. In fact, subscribing to a minimum data set is a pre-condition for funding from Medicare/Medicaid in the US. As things currently stand in the UK, someone can be resident in a private care home but funded by the NHS, if their needs are primarily medical. But that does not include dementia, which is regarded as falling within the ambit of social care. This has led to a *de facto* 'dementia tax', in which almost one's entire estate with a value over £14,500 will be used to finance the necessary care.

Free health and social care must be a central demand of any socialist movement. The NHS, founded

in 1948, saw the rationalisation and nationalisation of an existing hotchpotch of Poor Law, voluntary and private provision. It was nationalised in large part because it was not working. But it has never been subject to democratic control by its workers or wider society. While we cannot and should not pretend that it is an island of socialism in the way that John McDonnell has, it is imperative that we defend the NHS as a free service that also embodies another important future aspect of socialism - distribution according to need. However ill or disabled one is, the care is free. Private insurance seldom, if ever, will cover existing long-term conditions. Free social care needs to be again extended to those living with dementia.

The last 40 years have seen the underfunding and gradual dismantling of a service which was affordable in the context of post-war reconstruction and the need to make concessions to the working class. The cold war was a pressing priority for the ruling class. We only need to look at societies where the market is given free rein. The USA spends more on healthcare than any other country in the world, but achieves worse health outcomes for the working class than many poorer countries.

Inequalities are widening worldwide. The most basic of human needs, such as water, food, housing and healthcare, are now once again central to class struggle in the wealthiest countries. In the context of Nato's proxy war against Russia this will only get worse ●

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CLIMATE

Point of no return

Temperature records fall one after the other. Things are on course to get worse, not better. Clearly stunts are not enough, we need to get serious about system change, writes **Eddie Ford**

Grimly, all reports are still pointing in the same direction: we are approaching a tipping point - a critical threshold that, if and when crossed, will lead to massive and often irreversible changes in the climate system. A point of no return.

The latest report comes from the Met Office: the UK recorded the highest June temperature since records began in the 1880s. We are going in the "wrong direction", it declares with typical understatement. Then there is the European Union-funded Copernicus Climate Change Service. It comprehensively shows record-breaking heat on land and sea. Particularly alarming - average global surface temperatures were more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels for several days. Yes, mean temperatures have temporarily breached the 1.5°C Paris 2015 threshold before, but this was the first time they had done so in the northern-hemisphere summer that starts on June 1.

According to the data, the daily global average temperature was at or above the 1.5°C threshold between June 7-11, reaching a maximum of 1.69°C above it on June 9. CCCS said that on June 8 and 9 this year, the global average daily temperature was about 0.4°C warmer than previous records for the same days. Therefore, for example, temperatures in Beijing broke records for that month. Parts of North America have experienced extreme heatwaves - especially in the United States - some places reaching 10°C above the seasonal average for last month. Smoke from forest fires blanketed Canada and the US east coast in a hazardous haze, with carbon emissions estimated at a record 160 million tonnes. In India - one of the most climate-vulnerable regions - deaths spiked as a result of sustained high temperatures. Furthermore, extreme heat has been recorded in Spain, Iran and Vietnam, raising fears that last year's deadly summer could become routine.

High land temperatures have been matched by those on the sea, with warming intensified by an El Niño event - when weak winds allow ocean-water temperatures to rise - which occurs on average every two to seven years and can last nine to 12 months. Therefore, global average sea surface temperatures hit 21°C in late March and have remained at record levels for the time of year throughout April and May. There are two other factors at play: the decline in Saharan dust blowing over the ocean; and the use of low-sulphur shipping fuels. This is why climate scientists are saying that the oceans are being hit by a 'quadruple whammy' and is an ominous sign of things to come. As a consequence, thousands of dead fish have been washed up on Texan beaches and heat-induced, toxic algal blooms have also been blamed for killing sea lions and dolphins in California. The expectation is that 2024 will be even warmer than 2023.

Of course, this report follows February's final part, or 'synthesis', of the sixth assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - intended to be the scientific 'gold standard' of advice for this decade, given that the next IPCC report is not due to be published before 2030. They concluded that to maintain a "50:50 chance" of warming not exceeding 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, CO₂ emissions



Madame Tussauds stunt: why stop at a waxwork?

must be cut to net-zero by the "early 2050s". Of course, as many critics immediately pointed out - including in the *Weekly Worker* - this was nonsense on stilts. Even on the most basic level, taking into account projected CO₂ emissions, it is clear that the 1.5°C limit will be surpassed in the early 2030s. In reality, as opposed to fantasy, the new limit from the IPCC is not 1.5°C any more. Thus it imagined an "early 2070s" timeline for limiting global heating to 2°C, after which you somehow manage - as if by magic - some sort of slow decline of the temperature rise. By that time, however, there will be all manner of horrific consequences, including rising sea levels, floods, fires, the collapse of the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets, the abrupt melting of permafrost, animal and plant extinctions, etc.

The World Meteorological Organisation has predicted that there is a 66% likelihood that the annual mean will cross the 1.5°C threshold for at least one whole year between now and 2027 - upping the figure from 33%. In fact, 1.5°C plus could be the new norm. António Guterres,

the UN general secretary, has said that current climate policies will lead to average temperatures of 2.8°C above pre-industrial times by the end of the century - nearly twice the 1.5°C target!

The problem is that you simply cannot turn this round by flicking a switch or turning a dial - no technical innovation or quack pseudo-solution will miraculously transform the situation. Global warming is built into the capitalist system - it is not going to just stop. Even if governments fulfilled all their 2015 pledges *now* - admittedly a fantastical notion - the chances are that we still have many decades of global warming to come.

U-turns

Therefore it is adding insult to injury that the next UN climate summit, Cop28, will be hosted by the United Arab Emirates petrostate of Dubai (November 30-December 12). And the official chosen to preside over the summit - Sultan Al Jaber - is the chief executive of the country's national oil company, Adnoc, which - no surprise - is planning a big expansion of production capacity.

You could hardly make it up. Its near perfect symbolism shows that the ruling class is not serious about tackling the climate crisis.

Jaber has been savagely criticised by former UN climate chief Christiana Figueres, one of the architects of the Paris agreement. In her 'Outrage and Optimism' podcast, she accused him of "imperilling" Cop28 by appearing to favour the entirely unfeasible, not least because of cost, carbon capture and storage technology as a way of enabling fossil fuel use to continue at current levels. Also, since his appointment, Jaber has hired David Canzini - a former Downing Street operator who helped to kibosh renewable energy plans when advising Boris Johnson and fanned Liz Truss's enthusiasm for fossil fuels.

Talking of Britain, Rishi Sunak's green credentials (if he ever had any) have been well and truly shredded - something confirmed by the resignation of Zac Goldsmith, the minister for energy, climate and environment. In his long resignation letter, Goldsmith said that the government showed "apathy" towards environmental questions and that Sunak was "simply uninterested" in the whole issue - not even paying lip service to the environment. He added that Britain was keeping up with hardly any of its pledges on global warming. No10 has claimed that he quit after being asked to apologise over his criticism of the parliamentary privileges committee investigation into Boris Johnson. This may have an element of truth to it, but it is still hard to disagree with Goldsmith's comments. Indeed, he is obviously right about Rishi Sunak, who has backtracked on and dumped just about every green commitment he has made.

Confirmation came with the leak revealed by *The Guardian* that the government is considering dropping its 'flagship' £11.6 billion contribution towards combatting the effects of climate change in so-called developing counties. Just the latest U-turn. What leadership! There are distinct signs of Conservative Party splits over green policy. Lord Deben, the former environment secretary and outgoing chair of the independent Climate Change Committee, has said it is absurd that the government was still discussing whether it was in favour of onshore wind or not, when it was an established scientific and economic fact that it is one of the cheapest forms of energy generation you could possibly have.

In the opinion of Lord Deben, the UK has done "a number of things" that are "utterly unacceptable" - like greenlighting a new coal mine in Cumbria, and new oil and gas fields in the North Sea, with Rishi Sunak insisting surreally that this was all

part of the transition to a carbon-neutral economy!

Highlighting the government's dismal record, Ukraine has built more onshore wind turbines than England since it was invaded by Russia. Only two onshore wind turbines have been installed in England since February last year, generating one megawatt (MW) of electricity in the Staffordshire village of Keele. Meanwhile, Ukraine's Tyligul'ska wind power plant has already begun to generate enough clean electricity to power about 200,000 homes - just 60 miles from the front line in the southern region of Mykolaiv, with 19 turbines providing an installed capacity of 114MW.

Failure

Given the lamentable policies of the British government, which are exacerbating the climate crisis, not ameliorating it, inevitably we have protest groups like Just Stop Oil. Their latest action was to disrupt the Wimbledon tennis. This stunt follows a series of others - London Gay Pride parade at the weekend, with several arrests in front of a large Coca-Cola float - which tells you all you need to know about how the whole jamboree has been taken over by corporates and the establishment.

Before that Lords' cricket, Glyndebourn and World Snooker got the orange treatment. Interestingly enough, this coincides with the first tranche of evidence about the scandal over 'spy cops' (who do not exist any more, of course!). It has to be said, without casting any aspersions, that if 'spy cops' were sent into Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain or Just Stop Oil, they would be doing exactly what the JSO activists are doing - pissing people off. This suits Rishi Sunak perfectly: all the stuff about climate crisis is doom mongering by eco-fanatics. If only that was the case. But the science could not be clearer.

However, the danger with the sort of protest politics we have seen by JSO is that it will go from nuisance terrorism to ever more desperate acts - because protests by tiny minorities will not bring about the system change that is so obviously needed.

For communists, JSO activists have taken a wrong road. But you can totally understand why these protestors - looking at the weakness of the left and the absence of a viable counterpower within capitalism - turn to 'The whole world is watching' stuntism.

At the end of the day, it is the failure of the revolutionary left to build a party worthy of the name that is to blame - something for which we need to be hugely self-critical ●

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IRAN



MEK's strange journey

Nowadays they are the darlings of the neocon right, but most consider them a loony cult. Yasmine Mather traces the evolution of the 'holy war' fighters

Last Saturday, two political has-beens attended the annual gathering of Iran's Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) in Paris: Britain's former prime minister Liz Truss and former US vice-president Mike Pence. Both are hoping for a future return to frontline politics. The MEK rally had initially been banned by the police, but that was overturned by the Paris administrative court. Speaking at the rally, Britain's 45-day premier, referring to Russia, China and Iran, said:

These regimes have been emboldened, as the free world has not done enough. I will never give up hope for a free and democratic Iran. Democracy is under threat around the world. Now is the time to turn our backs on accommodation and appeasement.

In addition to Pence, Trump's former secretary of state, Mike Pompeo appeared by video link, warning against any nuclear deal with Iran.

Of course, all three no longer hold office. However, even in the case of such has-beens, it is bizarre that they stoop so low as to attend the annual rally of a loony cult that can only be compared to some of the most weird mad religious groups of our time (more on the bizarre history of the MEK later).

Nevertheless, one would have thought that even a second-rate American or British politician would have noticed the irony of supporting an organisation led by Maryam Rajavi - a woman who wears a full hijab, while claiming to support protests in Iran that started after the death of a young woman who had refused to adhere to the full Islamic dress code for women (Mahsa Amini

died while still in custody). True, the majority of young protesters in Iran might have different opinions about the political and economic issues facing the country, but they all seem united in defending the right of women to show their hair if they choose.

In the last couple of weeks the Mojahedin have said they are victims of western "appeasement" towards Iran. On June 20, a block of flats in Tirana, Albania, which is used as a compound to house several hundred MEK members, was raided by police. One person died and dozens were injured - leading to claims and counterclaims, as well as conspiracy theories, about why it happened. According to the Albanian authorities, the police were concerned about reports that the premises were being used in cyberattacks against Albania and other countries, not to mention criminal "acts of larger dimensions".

On Friday June 30, speaking to *Der Spiegel*, Albania's prime minister said that the Mujahideen cannot use the country to fight the Iranian regime. Albania had given refuge to MEK members who were forced to leave Iraq (where they had camps since the 1980s, when Iraq was under US 'protection' following the 2003 occupation by US/UK forces). The exodus to Albania was overseen by the Obama administration.

Then, to add insult to injury, on July 3 Sepehr Khalji, who heads the Information Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran, wrote in a tweet that "hard drives and cases have arrived ... we are working on data recovery" - all this without naming the Mojahedin. But it seemed clear he was

Armed leftwing fighters in 1979 helped overthrow the shah ... but what came after was in many ways worse

Maryam Rajavi: hijab-wearing Islamic opponent of Iranian regime and friend of the neocon far right



referring to recent events in Albania and the confiscation of computers in MEK residences.

Split

So who are the Mojahedin-e Khalq? The MEK was founded in September 1965 by Mohammad Hanifnejad, Saeid Mohsen Ali-Asghar Badizadegan and Ahmad Rezaei - all left-leaning Islamic students who had some affiliation with Nehzat Azadi (Freedom Movement), which opposed the then shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. In the late 1960s and 70s the group waged guerrilla attacks against the regime and its US backers.

In May 1972, soon after the imprisonment and execution of its leaders and shortly before president Richard Nixon's state visit to Iran, it was reported:

... the MEK launched a wave of bomb attacks which targeted the Iran-American Society, the US Information Office, the Hotel International, Pepsi Cola, General Motors and the Marine Oil Company. They failed to assassinate general Harold Price, head of the US Military Mission in Iran. Less than three months later, they bombed the Jordanian embassy to revenge King Hussein's September 1970 crackdown on their PLO patrons.

In 1973, the MEK bombed the Pan-American Airlines building, Shell Oil, and Radio City Cinema in Tehran, and assassinated colonel Lewis Hawkins, the deputy chief of the US Military Mission. They did not only target foreigners. In a wave of bombings that continued into 1975, the MEK group attacked clubs, stores,

police facilities, minority-owned businesses, factories it accused of having "Israeli connections" and symbols of the state and capitalism.¹

However, in 1975, the group experienced a bitter and bloody split. Sections of the leadership - probably disillusioned with Islam and eager to gain more support amongst secular students, who were often attracted to the Marxist Fedayeen organisation - declared they were no longer Islamist and called themselves Mojahedin Khalq Marxist-Leninist, later renamed Peykar (Organisation of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class). Clearly the name itself was an oxymoron, as 'Mojahedin' derives from the Arabic word, 'Jahed' ('holy war') and 'Mojahedin' means 'holy war fighters'.

Taghi Shahram, a leading figure of the organisation who had escaped from Sari prison (along with several others, including guerrilla leader Bahram Aram), published a declaration called 'Changing the organisation's ideology', which declared that they had become communist and had abandoned their religious beliefs. The declaration added: "They had reached the conclusion that Marxism, not Islam, was the true revolutionary philosophy."

One leading member of the original Mojahedin, Majid Sharif-Vaghefi, refused to join and led the opposing Muslim faction, claiming that only 20% of the organisation's membership had sided with the Marxist faction. All this led to a bitter infighting and Sharif-Vaghefi and his main ally were allegedly killed by the Marxist faction. The Islamic faction, headed by Maryam

What we fight for

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question—ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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Rajavi - at the time detained in Qasr prison - accused the Marxists of being unscrupulous entryists. There are contradictory reports about the split, with both sides accusing each other of cooperating with Savak, the shah's notorious secret police.

Inevitably the 'Muslim' faction started to move in a rightwing Islamist direction - a process that has continued relentlessly. Before the February uprising the group allied itself with ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani, who was marginally to the left of the Ruhollah Khomeini (soon to become Iran's supreme leader), and gave critical support to the Islamic regime from the day it came to power - until Iran's first presidential elections in 1980, that is, when Massoud Rajavi (later to marry Maryam) nominated himself as a candidate and was disqualified by ayatollah Khomeini.

By 1981 Mojahedin had joined the ranks of the opposition. In June of that year, a bomb destroyed the headquarters of the ruling Islamic Republic Party, killing over 70 government officials, including the head of the Iranian judicial system, ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti. A couple of months later another powerful bomb exploded in the offices of prime minister Mohammad Javad Bahonar - killing him, along with president Mohammad-Ali Rajai. The Islamic Republic regime blamed the Mojahedin-e Khalq for these acts and, as far as I know, the organisation has never denied them (although in the last couple of decades the MEK has issued statements saying it has renounced violence as a means to advance its goals in Iran).

Rajavi had replaced Abolhassan Banisadr, who was the Islamic Republic's first president and had been impeached by the Islamic parliament, the Majles, and dismissed by Khomeini. It was in 1981 that Banisadr and Rajavi formed an alliance and jointly fled to Paris. But, once they were in exile, they fell out, with Banisadr later claiming he opposed Rajavi's insistence on continued armed struggle.

Rajavi's first wife, Ashraf Rabiei, who had stayed inside Iran, was

killed in an armed attack by the regime's security forces in 1982. The same year Rajavi married Firouzeh Bani-Sadr, the daughter of the ex-president in exile. He subsequently divorced Firouzeh and married Maryam Ozdanlou, who until then was married to Rajavi's second-in-command, Mehdi Abrishmachi. This was no ordinary wedding, in that the MEK had previously declared an 'ideological revolution' - followed by an organisational dictat that all married members should divorce their spouses, while marriage was prohibited for single members of the organisation.

But later the MEK staged a number of mass weddings between divorced members and new spouses. It is assumed that this whole ideological event was to justify Massoud Rajavi's own third wedding to the wife of his second-in-command. However, it created resentment and much dissatisfaction amongst members and supporters who were practising Muslims. Many of them tried to escape, often unsuccessfully, from camps in France and later in Iraq. The well publicised videos and images of the mass wedding showed that they were very similar to ceremonies held by the Christian cult, the Moonies. It is from that period that many Iranians started to use the word 'cult' when referring to the MEK.

MEK and Iraq

In 1986, eager to renew relations with Iran's Islamic Republic, French president Jacques Chirac forced the MEK out of France. Rajavi and a few thousand members went to Iraq as guests of Iran's arch-enemy, Saddam Hussein. It should be noted that this exile in Iraq coincided with the bitter Iran-Iraq war that lasted from September 1980 to August 1988. At least half a million died - the majority being Iranians.

One of the most deplorable episodes of the MEK association with Saddam Hussein came at the end of the war. In July 1988, the Mojahedin started 'Operation Forough Javidan' (Eternal Light) with the support of Iraqi military, including its airforce. The MEK

launched an armed incursion into western Iran that had initial success. However the combined forces of the Iranian army and the revolutionary guards defeated the Mojahedin. It was this adventure, soon after the 'ideological revolution', that led to the disillusionment of the overwhelming majority of MEK supporters inside Iran.

In the organisation's camps in Iraq, dissidents claimed they were arrested and held against their will. The Mojahedin relied for support and protection on Hussein's security and military forces until 2003, when, following the invasion of Iraq, US forces attacked MEK military targets. According to Jonathan Masters, writing on the Council For Foreign Relations website,

The two sides eventually negotiated a ceasefire that disarmed MEK members and confined them to Camp Ashraf - a 14-square-mile former Iraqi military base in the country's northeast. In 2004, US secretary of defence Donald Rumsfeld designated the group as civilian "protected persons" under the Geneva convention - a designation that ran against the recommendations of the US department of state, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the International Committee of the Red Cross.²

Although the group claims to be led by the husband-and-wife Rajavi team, there has been no word from Massoud Rajavi since 2003. There are unconfirmed reports that he either died or was severely injured some time after the US invasion of Iraq.

In recent years leading Saudi Arabian officials have made comments implying Massoud Rajavi is dead. This is significant because Saudi Arabia is (or until recently was) one of the major financial backers of the Mojahedin. For example, we can refer to comments made by prince Turki Al Faisal (former head of the Saudi Arabian intelligence organisation), when he addressed an annual gathering of the Mojahedin, which made headlines. He referred to Maryam Rajavi as a widow and twice referred to Massoud Rajavi as "deceased". However, there is no official confirmation of his death.

It was inevitable that, once the US withdrew from Iraq, violence would break out between pro-Iran Shia Iraqi forces and the MEK. They were forced out of their camp in 2011 and moved to what the Americans called Camp Liberty. From the onset this was designated as a "temporary transit" camp, while the organisation waited for another country to accept members of the MEK as refugees. According to a report from the UN Human Rights Council in 2017, "A total of 1,900 Iranians in need of international protection were relocated from Iraq to Albania in the course of 2016, bringing to an end years of efforts by many stakeholders to find solutions."³

In reality the Obama administration had persuaded Albania to accept MEK members - most of them by now in their 60s or 70s, and some allegedly spending their time hacking websites and initiating bots on social media.

It should also be noted that the current US administration has distanced itself from neoconservative Republican positions regarding the MEK. In November 2022, the state department, replying to an accusation by the Iranian government, issued an official statement reiterating that it does not provide any form of assistance to the People's Mojahedin, adding that it does not see it as "a

democratic movement against the government that represents the people of Iran and has a chance of success" (my emphasis).

However, it is clear that a large section of Republican Party, including former Trump appointees, not only favour 'regime change from above' in Iran: they think the Mojahedin-e Khalq are the alternative - and even in opposition they are doing their best to make sure there is no 'verbal' or unofficial nuclear deal with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Dangerous

All this might be related to recent accusations against Robert Malley, who was in charge of the Iran desk in the state department until last week. On June 29, US media reported that Malley had been 'placed on leave' and that his security clearance had been suspended.

There are contradictory reports about Malley's absence. According to his opponents, he is too sympathetic to the Islamic government in Iran, while his supporters say that his comments opposing recent protests in Iran have been taken out of context and he has repeatedly condemned the Islamic Republic's repression. Neocon Republicans have also referred to Malley as a 'new MacFarlane' of the infamous Irangate era. In June 1985, Robert McFarlane wrote a National Security Decision Directive, which called for the United States to begin a rapprochement with Iran, which he later visited.⁴

All this shows the influence of Republican legislators on foreign policy and what we can expect if Trump or another Republican wins the next US presidential elections. There was widespread speculation in Tehran and Washington that the suspension will lead to delays or cancellations of any unofficial Iran nuclear deal.

John Kirby, who is the White House national security spokesperson, was keen to emphasise that Malley's possible departure "will not affect" the Joe Biden administration's Iran policy.

But Michael McCaul, a Texas Republican congressman, said in a letter to secretary of state Antony Blinken that the Biden administration owed Congress a full explanation for

the suspension of envoy Rob Malley's clearance and his being placed on unpaid leave ... These reports raise serious concerns, both regarding Malley's conduct and whether the state department misled Congress and the American public ... While the suspension of special envoy Malley's clearance is independently troubling, our concern is compounded by the state department's failure to respond to the committee's efforts to conduct oversight of its negotiations with and policy toward Iran.⁵

In the midst of an extremely dangerous situation in the Middle East, with Iran and Israel continuing their cold war, in my opinion the MEK event in Paris with Pence and Truss had more significance than newspaper headlines implied ●

Notes

1. www.meforum.org/888/monsters-of-the-left-the-mujahedin-al-khalq.
2. www.cfr.org/background/mujahadeen-e-khalq-mek.
3. reporting.unhcr.org/regional-office-south-eastern-europe-former-ashraf-residents-relocated-albania.
4. See P Kombuloh and M Byrne *The Iran-contra scandal: the declassified history* New York 1993.
5. apnews.com/article/us-iran-biden-blinken-malley-e7192eb7cc32af7a54f30dbffaa2ecec1.

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weekly worker

More than
just a free-
market guru

A man much misunderstood

He helped develop the labour theory of value, he influenced Marx and he never worshipped greed. Despite that he is lauded by the 'small state', 'let the market rule' right. **Michael Roberts** assesses Adam Smith

It was the tercentenary of the birth of Adam Smith this month. Nobody is quite sure on what day Smith was born in June 1723, but economists at the University of Glasgow organised a series of events and debates on Smith's ideas throughout the month.

Adam Smith has become the guru of *laissez faire*, free-market economics - the man that Chicago University economists like George Stigler and Milton Friedman turned to as their theoretical mentor. He was lauded by rightwing free-market politicians like Margaret Thatcher as inspiring them to adopt policies to reduce the size of government and state and 'let the market rule' in all aspects of social organisation. And the global free-market economists like Friedrich Hayek and the Austrian school looked to Smith for their basic approach. There is even a 'think tank' based in the UK that claims to develop economic policy based on such 'principles': the slogan of the Adam Smith Institute is: "Using free markets to create a richer, freer, happier world."¹

Smith wrote two great books. The first was *The theory of moral sentiments* in 1759 and his second, the most famous, was *The wealth of nations*, published in 1776. This made his name as the 'father of economics'. And yet anybody who reads both these books closely will find that Smith was not some raging free-market evangelist who denied the role of government - or for that matter considered that human behaviour was driven by material self-interest and nothing else.

His most famous statement was about the so-called "invisible hand of the market" from *The wealth of nations*:

[Each individual] generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it ... He intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was not part of his intention.

Smith is arguing here that, as each individual pursues his or her own economic activity, they are unaware that the combination of all these individual actions produces a market for production and consumption that is not under his or her control, but leads 'invisibly' to a better outcome for all.

Behind this was Smith's great insight that modern industry is based on a division of labour: when the production of a commodity is broken down into discrete parts, where human labour specialises instead of workers doing every part of the process, productivity rises and costs and prices fall. Marx tells us the dark side of the division of labour:



Adam Smith: portrait by John Kay (1790)

the alienation of humanity turning creative work into toil and drudgery.

Similarly, for Smith, individuals competing on a market will deliver an outcome beneficial to all. And from this flowed the view that "Consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production; and the interest of the producer ought to be attended to, only so far as it may be

necessary for promoting that of the consumer." This is the classic basis of modern neoclassical economics - based on the myth that the consumer is 'sovereign'.

Smith was strongly opposed to monopoly, of which there were many in his time - often controlled by a corrupt, monarchical state. These monopolies ruined industry

and reduced entrepreneurial initiative and thus productivity and prosperity. He was in particular opposed to mercantilism: the doctrine of international trade where nations protected their industries and built up surpluses rather than expand trade. He explained why protectionism is always self-defeating:

By means of glasses, hotbeds and hotwalls, very good grapes can be raised in Scotland, and very good wine too can be made of them at about 30 times the expense for which at least equally good can be brought from foreign countries. Would it be a reasonable law to prohibit the importation of all foreign wines, merely to encourage the making of claret and burgundy in Scotland?

Myth

But it is a myth created by today's free marketeers that Smith was opposed to government and to moral behaviour over material interest. On the contrary. Chicago economist Jacob Viner of the 1920s summed it up:

Adam Smith was not a doctrinaire advocate of *laissez faire*. He saw a wide and elastic range of activity for government, and he was prepared to extend it even farther if government, by improving its standards of competence, honesty and public spirit, showed itself enticed to wider responsibilities ... He devoted more effort to the presentation of his case for individual freedom than to exploring the possibilities of service through government ... [but] Smith saw that self-interest and competition were sometimes treacherous to the public interest they were supposed to serve, and he was prepared ... to rely upon government for the performance of many tasks which individuals as such would not do, or could not do, or could do only badly. He did not believe that *laissez faire* was always good, or always bad. It depended on circumstances; and, as best he could, Adam Smith took into account all of the circumstances he could find.²

He was strongly opposed to slavery:

There is not a negro from the coast of Africa who does not possess a degree of magnanimity, which the soul of his sordid master is scarce capable of conceiving. Fortune never exerted more cruelly her empire over mankind than when she subjected those nations of heroes to the refuse of the jails of Europe.

Marx was a close reader of *The wealth of nations*. He recognised Smith's contribution in attempting to develop a theory of value based on labour. As Smith said,

Labour alone, therefore, never varying in its own value, is alone the ultimate and real standard by which the value of all commodities can at all times and places be estimated and compared. It is their real price; money is their nominal price.

But Marx went on to criticise Smith for inconsistency in his labour theory of value, as Smith reverted to a theory of value based on 'factors of production' - ie, rent from landlords, profits from capitalists and wages from labour - rather than all value being created by labour and then appropriated by landlords and capitalists.

Adam Smith was also not a hard-line supporter of free trade. His position was nuanced by the state of the British economy at the time. He supported the Navigation Acts - which regulated trade and shipping between England, its colonies and other countries - despite the fact that they mandated that goods be transported on British ships, even if other options were cheaper. "Defence," he wrote in *The wealth of nations*, "is of much more importance than opulence".

Denouncing desirable security policies as 'protectionist' was beside the point then and now. After all, security of the capitalist state was more important than the free market in international trade. And the 'free market' is only lauded as long as it does not reduce the profitability of enterprise ●

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.com

Notes

1. See www.adamsmith.org.
2. J Viner, 'Adam Smith and *laissez faire*' *Journal of Political Economy* April 1927.

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SUPPLEMENT

Back to Nevsky!

Lars T Lih uses an eyewitness account to dispose of some old myths and to show how, if they were to rewin their majority, the Bolsheviks had to adjust to the shock of finding themselves in a minority

In 1925, Vladimir Nevsky published *History of the RKP(B)*, one of the first extensive and academically respectable histories of the Bolshevik Party.¹

Nevsky was not just a researcher, but a long-time Bolshevik activist, who had played a prominent role in 1917 as a leader of the Military Organisation - the party's outreach to the soldiers of the Petrograd garrison. His book appeared just as various processes of politicisation of party history were picking up speed. As a result, some of his interpretations and conclusions are startlingly unfamiliar. One such case is his final chapter on the 1917 revolution. Nevsky himself seems unaware that he was writing anything controversial - yet his chapter issues one fundamental challenge after another to today's reigning consensus about the Bolsheviks in 1917.

The present essay is for the most part a straightforward presentation of Nevsky's 1917 chapter. Before proceeding, let us delve a little further into his credentials. He was "an extraordinary historian, a professional revolutionary, mathematician and chemist, and a romantic by nature", in the words of MV Zelenov, a prominent Russian specialist on Soviet historiography.²

Nevsky was born in 1876, and he was therefore not too much younger than Lenin (born 1870). Already in the 1890s he had become a Social Democratic activist and he joined the Bolshevik team from its very beginnings. He was an editor of the then underground newspaper *Pravda* in 1912-13 and became a candidate member of the central committee in 1913.³ In 1917, as one of the leaders of the Military Organisation, he was reportedly the 'idol of the soldiers'. In 1920-21, he flirted with the Workers' Opposition, but left it quickly and seems never to have joined forces again with party opposition groups.

Nevsky's formal education was in the natural sciences and so he was self-taught as a historian. Nevertheless, his dedication to professionalism in the writing of history was profound. According to Zelenov, he was the only Bolshevik historian to do real archival work. He was also energetically dedicated to publishing a wide range of documents from across the political spectrum. This professionalism got him into much more political trouble than any record of open opposition activity.⁴

In the early 1920s, Nevsky made the extremely important archival discovery of Lenin's early work, 'What the "friends of the people" are' (see my *Lenin rediscovered* for a detailed discussion of this⁵). His two areas of special expertise were the origins of the Social Democratic underground in the 1890s and the role of the soviets in the 1905 revolution; in each case, he stressed the role of independent worker activity.⁶ The revolution in 1917 was not a particular area of his academic expertise. As he admitted in the preface to the second edition of his book, his discussion of the February revolution was added at the last minute, and not meant to be exhaustive. His chapter on 1917 is therefore best seen not as a specialised study, but rather as a memoir account by a participant who happened to be a professional historian.

Of course, all histories of 1917 (and certainly all Bolshevik histories) are highly politicised. But, starting in the mid-1920s, several topics of party history in 1917 in particular became subject to severe distorting pressures that did permanent damage to our understanding. Among these pressures:

- Trotsky's 1924 bid to discredit the Bolshevik leadership in 1917 and the furious response by his former comrades;
- Kamenev's and Zinoviev's move into anti-Stalin opposition in 1925;
- the Lenin cult.

These are just to name a few. Although Nevsky's book appeared in 1925, his text does not reveal any imprint of these incipient pressures.

While the preface to the second edition in 1926 responds to various criticisms, no-one seems to have found anything controversial in Nevsky's account of 1917. His account also chimes in with a variety of other pre-1925 retrospective looks at 1917 - and indeed he directly incorporates

valuable material from other eye-witness participants. Certainly, his discussion does not demonise Trotsky nor glorify Stalin.⁷ Later on, in 1936, one of the charges against Nevsky (as Stalinist historian Emelyan Yaroslavsky wrote in *Istoriik-marksist*) was that he and his pupils "made a special effort to slur over or to silence comrade Stalin's outstanding role as the brilliant [genial'nyi] continuer of Lenin's cause".

My focus in presenting Nevsky's chapter is to bring out the central points, where his account challenges prevailing orthodoxies. Since clearing up confusion over the April theses provides an excellent *entrée* into our discussion of Bolshevism in 1917 overall, we will start in *media res* with Nevsky's account of the theses and their reception. For the same reason, I have translated a substantial excerpt from Nevsky's account of the theses as an appendix to this essay. I then proceed in proper chronological order, starting with Bolshevism immediately after the February revolution and then moving on to the party conferences in April and August, and finally discussing the never-ending *krizis vlasti* ('crisis of power') that formed the crucial backdrop to Bolshevik success.

Responses

In most accounts today of the Russian Revolution, Lenin's April theses serve as the very icon of the party's 'rearming', because they allegedly caused severe conflict and deep reorientation among the Bolsheviks. But, as we shall see, the actual content of the theses and the ensuing discussion they sparked off among Bolsheviks fatally undermine this 'rearming' narrative.

The first assertion by Nevsky that leaps to our attention is an out-and-out denial that the April theses represented a dramatic rupture with earlier Bolshevism. On the contrary, they represented the "natural development" of Lenin's long-held position, as expressed in the 1905 slogan, the "dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry". According to Nevsky, this slogan from 1905 already contained "all the implications, all the measures that inevitably had to be accepted [in 1917], once the party was convinced of the necessity and inevitability of a proletarian-peasant dictatorship".⁸ As we shall see, Nevsky considers that the heart of Lenin's earlier slogan was the imperative of capturing the loyalty of the revolutionary peasantry.

Of course, Nevsky does not deny that many party members reacted with suspicion when they first encountered Lenin's theses. What caused these suspicions? Let us first take note of the parts of the theses that Nevsky does *not* include in his discussion of Bolshevik misgivings, for the simple reason that these parts were *not* controversial among Bolsheviks. These non-controversial items include the core issues of the time: the war (opposition to the imperialist war, hostility to 'revolutionary defencism') and the attitude toward the government (hostility to the "bourgeois" Provisional Government, plus a drive to establish an exclusive worker-peasant *vlast* - power). I have elsewhere documented what Nevsky takes for granted, although controversial today: Bolshevik leaders such as Kamenev and Stalin had no problem with these core positions, since they had strongly advocated them prior to Lenin's arrival.

What, then, *did* cause worries in some Bolshevik circles about the theses? According to Nevsky, they *misunderstood* some of Lenin's positions. And, when you think about it, misunderstandings of this type must have been inevitable, unless we make the rather implausible assumption that everybody instantly understood perfectly Lenin's argument and all its implications. As a central example of such misunderstandings, Nevsky points to a famous remark made by Lev Kamenev (see the appendix for a full discussion). Kamenev's remark was not the fruit of long thought: they appeared the day after Lenin's theses were first published in *Pravda!* Nevsky describes these hasty misgivings:

[Lenin's theses] horrified some, aroused joy and sympathy in others, caused an outburst of fury in the camp of the bourgeoisie and

extraordinary enthusiasm in the ranks of the proletariat.

It is necessary, however, to emphasise that in the ranks of our party there were people who at first misunderstood these theses and saw them, despite categorical explanations, as a call for the immediate implementation of socialism ...

In what way were the disagreements that arose in our party in connection with the publication of Lenin's theses expressed? They were best expressed by comrade Kamenev and came down to the fact that, according to Kamenev, Lenin considered the bourgeois-democratic revolution finished, while in reality it was far from over, and therefore one could not speak of the growing-over of this revolution into a socialist one. Lenin dwelt on these disagreements in detail in his *Letters on tactics*, to which we refer our readers.

As it happens, Kamenev's hasty reading of the theses constitutes without a doubt the most influential comment ever made about them. And yet, as Nevsky correctly points out, Lenin *explicitly rejected this reading*. Here is his comment, to which Nevsky referred:

Comrade Kamenev criticises me, saying that my scheme "depends" on "the immediate transformation of this bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution".

This is incorrect. I not only do not "depend" on the "immediate transformation" of our revolution into a socialist one, but I actually warn against it, since in number eight of my theses I state: "It is not our immediate task to 'introduce' socialism ..."

Is it not clear that anyone who depends on the immediate transformation of our revolution into a socialist revolution [as Kamenev describes me] would not protest [as I did] against the immediate task of introducing socialism?

In account after account of 1917, you will read that Lenin's theses called for 'bourgeois revolution' to be replaced by 'socialist revolution'. These terms are very often festooned with quote marks.⁹ And yet neither these words nor any equivalent appear in Lenin's text! They appear, however, in *Kamenev's* text. In response, Lenin loudly proclaimed (to paraphrase J Alfred Prufrock) that "This is not what I meant. This is not what I meant at all". Nevertheless, Kamenev's hasty reading is accepted as gospel. Go figure.

Lenin did put forth some new ideas in the April theses, and a full discussion (which I have provided elsewhere) would list these. Here I will simply say that, once Lenin explained what he meant, these new ideas were not particularly controversial and certainly far from scandalous. But the April theses did contain an urgent message and warning to Lenin's fellow Bolsheviks. This warning arose from what Lenin called the 'original' or 'peculiar' nature (*svoeobrazie*) of the post-February situation. As Lenin himself stated more than once, he became aware of this *svoeobrazie* only *after* he arrived in Petrograd in early April.

I call the tactic suggested by Lenin's warning the 'Bolshevik adjustment'. When Lenin first arrived in early April, he expected the Bolsheviks to be the accepted leaders of the Petrograd proletariat. He found to his shock that instead they were only a small minority in the Petrograd Soviet: in other words, the despised defencists enjoyed a solid majority. After coming to terms with this depressing reality, Lenin arrived at two conclusions.

■ First, a warning to fellow Bolsheviks: do *not* even think about installing a 'provisional revolutionary government' under present circumstances.

■ Second, a tactic: put all forces into *winning over* a majority in the soviets.

Despite his disappointment, Lenin had very little doubt that the Bolsheviks would achieve - or, in Bolshevik eyes, recapture - majority status in the not-too-distant future. He was confident (and I believe he had good reason to be confident)

that the political 'agreement' between the socialist defencists and the Provisional Government was unworkable and doomed to failure and rejection.

Nevsky carefully sets out the reasoning behind the Bolshevik adjustment (see the appendix for full discussion). First, the unexpected features of the post-February situation:

The class origin of this double *vlast* lies in the fact that the Russian Revolution - while it destroyed the monarchy and transferred the *vlast* to the bourgeoisie, and it came very close at the same time to implementing the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry - the Petrograd Soviet *voluntarily* [my emphasis] transferred the *vlast* to the bourgeoisie and its Provisional Government.¹⁰

Next, the tactical implication:

Hence the original nature [*svoeobrazie*] of the tactic arising from such a unique feature of the Russian Revolution: winning over the proletarian masses who had been persuaded by revolutionary defencism and by this very fact were now giving support to the imperialist bourgeoisie holding the *vlast*. These masses had to be won over by patient and tireless propaganda and by criticism of the tactic advocated by the petty-bourgeois parties - Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries - that the masses were now following.

Lenin's insistence on slowing down the revolution to allow for 'patient explanation' is not some casual 'oh, by the way' comment: it lies at the heart of the April theses. Nevsky understood this, which is why the relevant second and fourth theses are the only ones he sets forth in any detail in his discussion (see the appendix for Nevsky's paraphrase of these two theses). Therefore, when Lenin talks in the theses about moving from the first to the second 'stage' of the revolution, he is certainly not talking about a transition from 'bourgeois-democratic revolution' to 'socialist revolution'. Rather, the first stage - the *svoeobrazie* that Lenin confronted on his return - is characterised by what Lenin felt was the ill-informed support of the soviet constituency for the 'agreementising' tactic.¹¹ Accordingly, the second stage comes about when the soviet constituency had shed this illusion, and therefore was ready to exclude the elite classes from any sort of political influence.

Several years later, when Lenin had occasion to recall the April theses, it was precisely this aspect - 'slow down' rather than 'speed up' - that he presented as the heart of the matter: "... on April 7, I published my theses, in which I called for caution and patience." He goes on to tell his 1921 audience that in April 1917, a "left tendency demanded the immediate overthrow of the government", but that he, Lenin,

proceeded from the assumption that the masses had to be won over. [The government] cannot be overthrown just now for it holds the *vlast* due to support from the worker soviets; to date, the government enjoys the confidence of the workers. We are not Blanquists: we do not want to rule with a minority of the working class against the majority.¹²

What do we learn from Nevsky's account of the April theses?

■ First, continuity with pre-war Bolshevism: the theses set forth the implications of earlier Bolshevik slogans for the new post-February situation.

■ Second, Bolshevik consensus on the core issues of the war and the nature of the *vlast*.

■ Third, the role of misunderstanding: the main objection to the theses from fellow Bolsheviks was based on a *misreading* of the theses - a misreading that Lenin himself instantly tried to correct.

■ Fourth, a warning: the heart of Lenin's message to his fellow Bolsheviks is his anathema *against* taking power while still in a minority, followed by his urgent advocacy of 'patient explanation' in order to attain the requisite majority.

SUPPLEMENT

Having examined Lenin's theses from early April 1917, we will now tell the story in a more chronological fashion. Nevsky has one big point to make when describing the period prior to Lenin's return: the inescapable *demarcation line* between two 'tendencies' - two overall definitions of the situation - in Russian life and consequently among Russian socialists:

Everywhere [in wartime Russia] two basic and foundational tendencies of Russian life stood out - a revolutionary one that spread the slogan among the masses of civil war instead of imperialist war versus the opposing tendency: one that splintered into thousands of nuances, but which united all classes and social groups (except the proletariat), from the big bourgeoisie down to and including the [Menshevik] liquidators, around this slogan: 'War to a victorious conclusion' ...

The period defined by the February revolution now commenced, and the two tendencies of Russian Social Democracy definitively diverged: the one that threw itself into the embrace of the bourgeoisie; and the other that chose the high road to socialism.

Two tendencies

These two tendencies already existed in international Social Democracy before the war, when they were known as 'revolutionary Social Democracy', as against 'opportunism'.¹³ According to Nevsky, the war only deepened this split, thus making any effort to unite across the demarcation line utterly futile. In Russia, the local Bolshevik party organisations had always been the leaders of the 'revolutionary' tendency and as such they had essentially attained a leadership position among politically active workers. The campaign of the Petrograd Bolsheviks against the so-called Worker Group, which collaborated with the war effort, ended in Bolshevik victory (which helps account for the shock and surprise in the aftermath of the February revolution). The pre-February clash with the Worker Group foreshadowed the fight against Menshevik and SR 'agreementising' after February.

When the Bolsheviks emerged from the underground after the overthrow of the tsar, they found themselves in a much broader political environment than the relatively small world of 'advanced workers'. They now faced the challenge of winning over politically naive workers and even more naive peasant soldiers. Their work was certainly cut out for them:

As can be seen from the make-up of its executive committee, the soviet was defencist, so that the Bolsheviks found themselves drowning in the mass of defencist delegates. And for this reason, from the very first steps of its existence, the soviet was the arena of a struggle between two currents: the defencist line versus the revolutionary Bolshevik line.

Nevsky's account of the early days of the revolution is especially valuable, because he relies on the testimony of mid-level Bolshevik activists, such as himself - all of them writing prior to the politicisation of this episode in the mid-20s: Aleksandr Shliapnikov, VN Zalezhsy, Rosa Zemliachka. Nevsky also calls upon another informative witness from February/March: the bourgeois and 'agreementising' press of the period. Let us hear what these witnesses have to say.

Shliapnikov, writing in 1923, flatly states that during the first days of the revolution the Bolsheviks envisioned a "provisional revolutionary government" based on a coalition of the parties represented in the soviet; they were not (Shliapnikov stresses) "maximalists": that is, they did not insist on an immediate socialist revolution. The demarcation line between the Bolsheviks and the other parties lay elsewhere. Even if Russia was undergoing a 'bourgeois' revolution, this certainly did not mean that the workers could trust the liberals to carry out the necessary democratic transformation of Russia:

We [Bolsheviks] refused to understand the bourgeois character of our revolution in the vulgarised and simplified way desired by others.

The Mensheviks and the majority of the Socialist Revolutionaries hoped to carry out the revolutionary demands of the workers and peasants via the hands of the bourgeoisie, but we considered any such hopes harmful. The extent to which the revolutionary break-up of feudal relations took place in practice was not a matter of indifference to the development of

the proletarian movement.

The right wing of the socialist parties hoped at that time to achieve the maximum scope (within the limits of 'bourgeois' relations) for this revolutionary break-up by "constant and unswerving pressure on the bourgeoisie and pushing it to the left". We considered this tactic to be erroneous. Using examples even from our own country's meagre historical experience, we pointed out and tried to demonstrate how deceptive were the hopes for obtaining real achievements by "pushing" the bourgeoisie.

Note that Shliapnikov backs up his argument not by abstract Marxist doctrine, but by pointing to the concrete course of Russian politics during the past decade.

Nevsky goes on to expand Shliapnikov's reasoning in order to drive home the fact that the demarcation line was defined by *agreementising versus hegemony*:

We have seen the parties represented in the first soviet of 1917: the soviet included - in addition to non-party workers and peasant-soldiers - Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, Trudoviki, Bundists, internationalists, Mezhrainy and Latvian Social Democrats.

Therefore, when we advocated [in early March] that the [proposed] Provisional Revolutionary Government be composed of representatives of those parties that were then present in the soviet, our party organisation stood for a coalition of revolutionary Social Democracy with the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie ...

Since we were aware that the implementation of socialism was not the immediate task of the moment, we were not distinguished from the other parties on this issue either.

What really distinguished the Bolsheviks from other socialist parties came down to the agreementising tactic of the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries: that is, their readiness to cede the role of hegemon of the revolution to the bourgeoisie. This readiness was shown by the way the defencists agreed to give their sanction to a Provisional Government that corresponded to the desires of the Octobrists and Kadets [elite political parties].

As we have seen, the Bolsheviks were shocked to realise that after the overthrow of the tsar the despised 'agreementisers' could rely on solid majority support. This situation presented a challenge to Bolshevik sloganeering: how could you call for the soviets to replace the Provisional Government if the soviets themselves still supported it? One effort to square this circle was a resolution issued by the Petrograd party committee in the first days of the revolution in March:

The Petersburg committee of the RSDWP, taking into account the resolution on the Provisional Government adopted by the Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies, declares that it does not work against the *vlast* of the Provisional Government insofar as its actions are in the interests of the proletariat and the broad democratic masses of the *narod*, [but] announces its intention to conduct ruthless war against any attempts of the Provisional Government to restore a monarchical form of government in any form.

This resolution is sometimes quoted to claim that the Bolsheviks themselves were 'agreementisers', who offered 'critical support' to the government. But Nevsky usefully gives us the rationale behind this resolution, as set forth in 1923 by VN Zalezhsy, a member of the Petersburg committee (PK). Zalezhsy sets out the committee's priorities (my emphasis):

- for the time being, do not call for *immediate* street action against the Provisional Government, [since it is] supported by the soviet;
- as a first priority, focus attention on *winning over* the worker and soldier masses;
- immediately organise and strengthen the worker militia [= Red Guard];
- work for immediate economic improvements in the position of the worker masses;
- broadcast the slogan of forming peasant committees that will move immediately to confiscate the land.

The Provisional Government certainly did not welcome 'support' such as this, whether 'critical' or otherwise. And, if the Bolsheviks in March actually were playing nice (as we so often read), the 'bourgeois' press failed to get the memo. Nevsky cites the voice of the hostile press:

The bourgeoisie well understood the true significance of [this tactic of the Petrograd Bolsheviks]: from the very first days of the revolution, slander against the Bolsheviks and against the PK in particular appeared on the pages of the bourgeois press, at rallies, in military units and in factories. The Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries aided the bourgeoisie ... But the PK did not fold its hands in despondency: it threw all its forces into the thick of the masses - into the factories, workshops and barracks.

As we have seen, Lenin later *de facto* endorsed the political calculation that gave rise to the PK's admittedly clumsy formulation: we Bolsheviks should not try to overthrow the government right now, but instead we must turn our attention to creating the necessary and sufficient condition for an overthrow later. This necessary condition was, of course, majority support from the soviet constituency. Admittedly, Lenin brought more clarity (not reorientation!) to the packaging of the anti-agreementising message (although, please note, the Bolsheviks did not hit upon the canonical slogan, 'All power to the soviets!', until a month *after* Lenin's return. And even that slogan came with a condition: 'All power to the soviets [when we're good and ready]!').

Nevsky also surveys Bolshevik organisations throughout the country. We will restrict ourselves here to the other capital city, Moscow. At the party conference in April, long-time Bolshevik activist Rosa Zemliachka gave a report on the activities of the Moscow party organisation during the previous month. Please note that she was addressing an audience of well-informed party activists about events fresh in everybody's mind. Zemliachka first pointed to the need for Bolsheviks to adjust their agitation methods to the new situation:

In the early days of the revolution, the Moscow organisation went through a period of the same confusion that could be seen in other places. It was not at all adapted to the broad political work that was now possible to carry out. The old methods and skills turned out to be completely unsuitable for the new conditions.

But, as Zemliachka goes on to say, this reorientation in campaign methods did not signal a reorientation on basic political issues. She told the April conference that "in [our] resolution on the attitude towards the Provisional Government, the point of view of revolutionary Social Democracy is strictly followed: no trust and no support for a clearly counterrevolutionary government". Nevsky confirms Zemliachka's point:

In the case of the Bolshevik party organisation in Moscow, its tactics were orthodox-revolutionary in the same way [as Petrograd], as shown by its stand on all the most important issues of the moment: the question of the war, the Provisional Government, the eight-hour working day, and so on.

Nevsky's account of the opening weeks of the revolution is based heavily on the testimonial of mid-level *praktiki* like himself. We draw from these witnesses the following important moral: whether the revolution was defined as 'bourgeois-democratic' or whether it was defined as 'socialist', the goal of an *exclusive worker-peasant vlast* based on the soviets remained the same from the very beginning of the revolution.

This goal *united* the Bolsheviks and *distinguished* them from all other parties (not, of course, from all other political groupings).

Conferences

Like other Russian parties, the newly above-ground Bolshevik Party plunged into a round of conferences to re-establish both personal and organisational ties, as well as to decide on 'tactics' (the term used by Nevsky to indicate basic policy choices). At the end of March there was a national Bolshevik gathering (*soveshchanie*) in concert with an All-Russia soviet conference; in early April there were preparatory conferences in Petrograd and in the Moscow region; in mid-April there was an all-Russia party conference. Nevsky sums up:

The overall basic line of the party was set out already in these [preparatory] conferences of the strongest and most important Bolshevik organisations, [so that] the opinion of the entire party was set out clearly and precisely in the resolutions adopted on April 24-29 [at the all-Russia party conference] ...

According to Nevsky, the party gave "clear and precise" answers to the issues of the day. Was this clarity and precision muddled somewhat by passionate disagreements among the delegates? Let us take a look at Nevsky's survey of the debates and the general atmosphere of the all-Russia conference in mid-April (hereafter simply 'April conference'). Keep in mind that Nevsky himself was a delegate at both the preparatory conference in Petrograd and the full April conference (NB: I have read the records of these conferences with care and fully endorse Nevsky's portrait).

On the central issues that faced the country - the issues that defined what Bolshevism stood for during 1917 - there was no sign of disagreement. The core Bolshevik consensus was in place on the following issues [quoted words are from Nevsky]:

■ The war: a rejection of "revolutionary defencism", because the war was "imperialist and annexationist".

■ The nature of the *vlast*: the Provisional Government was "imperialist-bourgeois and counterrevolutionary".

■ The demarcation line at home and abroad: meaningful party unity was possible only if restricted to one side of the demarcation line - coupled with vociferous rejection of the "agreementising, anti-proletariat, opportunist politics" on the other side of the line.

■ The land: peasants should take the land by "revolutionary methods" without waiting for the Constituent Assembly, since "the outcome of the Russian Revolution depended on whom the revolutionary peasantry would choose to follow".

There was also no controversy over a more ideological question with less immediate and direct impact on day-to-day political agitation: namely, the role of socialism as such. Nevsky well sums up the 'on the one hand, yet on the other hand' approach to this question common to Bolsheviks (including Lenin):

The [conference] resolution on the current situation - proceeding on the basis that the preconditions for a socialist revolution continued to mature in the capitalist countries of Europe and that the transfer of the *vlast* into the hands of the [Russian] proletariat would further strengthen the favourable conditions for such a revolution - set forth the position that "the proletariat of Russia, acting in one of the most backward countries in Europe, alongside the mass of the small-peasant population, cannot set itself the goal of immediate implementation of a socialist transformation".

But, even while asserting this position, the conference decisively dissociated itself from those socialists who drew the conclusion that measures of a transitional character to socialism already in the present epoch were impossible.

According to a very influential assertion by Trotsky, "the whole of the April party conference was devoted to the following fundamental question: Are we heading toward the conquest of the *vlast* in the name of the socialist revolution or are we helping (somebody or other) complete the democratic revolution?"¹⁴ With all due respect to the eloquent party leader, he is flat-out wrong and the mid-level *praktik*, Vladimir Nevsky, is correct. The issue of socialist revolution vs bourgeois-democratic revolution did not even arise at the conference. Everyone assumed that the party aimed at the conquest of the *vlast*, no matter what label was affixed to the revolution.

According to Nevsky, only one issue led to a serious clash at the conference: the national question, including the status of the right of national self-determination. On this issue alone was there an alternate resolution defended in a counter-report, and on this issue alone was there a seriously split vote.

(I cannot forbear to point out some ironies. According to song and story, the April conference was dominated by passionate disagreements that were sparked off by the allegedly scandalous April theses. Yet the national question is not even mentioned in the theses. And, when Lenin intervened to support Stalin's resolution, he spoke *against* the position that a "democratic" goal such as national self-determination was irrelevant "in

the era of proletarian revolution”).)

Nevsky gives the following overall description of the April conference. Although today Nevsky's words will strike most specialists as wildly off-base, his position was hardly controversial when he wrote it just a few years after the event:

Unanimity reigned at the conference as a whole, and the different shades of opinion that emerged on the most important questions of the current moment did not present such discordant positions that they could not be put into a general formulation acceptable to the whole party...

The April conference touched upon all the most important issues of the moment and in many respects determined the tactics of our party for a long time to come, so that in essence this conference could rightfully play the role of a full party congress.

An official full congress was in fact convened in early August, but the standing of this Sixth Congress was damaged by the semi-underground status of the party after the July Days. The top leaders - Lenin, Zinoviev, Kamenev - were under arrest or in hiding. (Nevsky does not mention the party leader who was given the job of guiding the proceedings: Joseph Stalin. Nevsky's somewhat defensive account of the Sixth Congress might in fact be interpreted as throwing shade on Stalin.)

One vexed question was the role of the slogan, 'All power to the soviets!', under the new, repressive conditions, and perhaps Nevsky is a little evasive here. He first notes the new official definition of the situation: the peaceful period of the revolution is over and therefore "the revolution had now entered a new and more stormy stage of development. Now the toiling workers¹⁵ could achieve the transfer of the *vlast* only under the leadership of revolutionary Social Democracy [ie, the Bolsheviks and other anti-agreement groups]." But he quickly affirms that the essential tactic implied by the Bolshevik adjustment still held:

This, of course, did not mean that the Bolsheviks were shouting: 'Down with the soviets - they have disintegrated for good'. Rather, it meant this: an even more intense struggle within the soviets for influence in order to win them over.

In his account of Bolshevik party conferences, Nevsky duly notes disagreement over issues such as the national question and the implications of the post-July repression. Nevertheless, as a participant and a historian, Nevsky's bottom line is the "clear and precise" stand taken by Lenin and the Bolsheviks on the core issues. The Bolsheviks were able to position themselves firmly on one side of the fundamental demarcation line; they exuded a confident commitment to the tactic of winning majority status from the soviet constituency.

Krizis vlasti

Nevsky's record of events peters out after the July days and the party congress in early August, and his chapter has little to add to debates about the run-up to October. So it is time to take a step back and present Nevsky's overall view of revolutionary dynamics in 1917. Nevsky's interpretation zeroes in on several key factors in constant interaction, creating what we might rather portentously call the dialectic of revolution in 1917.

Let us start with the Bolshevik crusade against 'agreementising' (*soglashatelstvo*). Every time Nevsky outlines the profound clash defined by the demarcation line, he always includes agreementising as a central epithet for the bad side of this line. Although this theme was already prominent in Bolshevik polemics prior to the revolution, it really came into its own after February. In the weeks following the overthrow of the tsar, the "path of agreement" (Tsereteli's phrase) enjoyed strong majority support from the soviet constituency.

The agreement in question was as follows: the Provisional Government will sincerely carry out basic revolutionary goals, and in return the soviet will provide the government with the legitimacy it needed to survive. An unstressed, but explicit, corollary: if the government betrayed its unwillingness or incapacity to work for revolutionary goals, the soviet system had the right and even the duty to replace it with a revolutionary *vlast* (authoritative government) that rescinded the agreement by excluding 'bourgeois' influence.

As we have seen, on the morrow of the February revolution, the Bolsheviks had to adjust

their practice to the inescapable fact of majority support for the 'path of agreement'. Their adjustment included: a drive to win over majority support for a *rejection* of 'agreementising'; a commitment to establish a 'soviet *vlast*' only after this majority support was secured; an almost serene confidence that the agreement would not and could not work. Not only would 'the path of agreement' fail to achieve the promised revolutionary goals, but it guaranteed continual governmental crises: ie, *krizis vlasti*: a central term in the discourse of 1917, ranging in meaning from cabinet shuffles to the overall failure to create a viable replacement after the utter collapse of the 'historical *vlast*' of tsarism.

As the Bolsheviks saw things, the agreement guaranteed governmental crises (because of the clashing interests of the parties to the agreement), these crises further weakened the agreement, and the manifest failure of 'agreementising' helped win over the requisite majority support for soviet power. Acquiring the needed anti-agreementising support from the workers themselves was relatively easy: according to Nevsky, this had happened in the capital city of Petrograd already in May/June. More challenging was winning over the peasants (and other 'intermediate classes'): in particular, the peasant-soldier garrison in Petrograd. This was the task assigned to the Military Organisation, a party-established group that Nevsky himself helped to found. Nevsky portrays the Military Organisation as the embodiment of the ur-Bolshevik tactic of 'hegemony': the peasant was the swing class, whose support or hostility would make or break the revolution.

Agreementising, adjustment, *krizis vlasti*, hegemony: according to Nevsky, these are the dynamic factors, whose accelerating interaction led to October. Most of Nevsky's analysis of these factors has been already been presented to the reader. We will complete our summary of this extraordinary chapter by looking at a couple of points not yet elaborated.

Let us skip over the political infighting connected to the series of political crises that punctuated the short, unhappy life of the Provisional Government and concentrate on the way these crises themselves helped make the case against 'agreementising'. Nevsky boiled down the meaning of the April crisis to the fact that "even though the masses were inclined toward defencism, they instinctively protested, realising that the essence of the policy of the Provisional Government was simply continuation of the imperialist war". Lenin's reaction (as quoted by Nevsky) was to insist on the "patient explanation" demanded by the Bolshevik adjustment:

The lesson is clear, worker comrades! Time is running out. This first crisis will be followed by others. Give all your strength to the enlightenment of the backward - to mass, comradesly, direct (and not only at rallies) contact with every regiment, with every stratum of toilers who have not yet seen the light... Rally round your soviets and, within them, aim at rallying a majority around you by comradesly persuasiveness and by re-electing individual members!

Nevsky asserts that this Lenin text from April 23 "undisputedly expressed the opinion of the whole party". A Bolshevik demonstration planned for June 10 (called off at the behest of the soviet) was described by Tsereteli as a conspiracy "for overthrowing the government and seizing power". Nevsky comments: "Of course, this description was false - the time had not yet arrived - but it was clear to all that the time was approaching."

The next big *krizis vlasti* was the July Days, when a huge demonstration seemed so threatening that the Bolsheviks were semi-outlawed. Nevsky drew what was for the Bolsheviks the moral of the story:

The masses reacted to the new *krizis vlasti* with an even more grandiose street manifestation than in April. A straightforward demonstration of soldiers and workers on July 3 in Petersburg and in some other places had turned into real military clashes between the masses led by Bolsheviks versus troops still loyal to the government.

Without the slightest doubt, it was possible even then for the Bolsheviks to take the *vlast* into their own hands, but they did not pose the question that way. As was evident from the resolutions of the April conference, they envisioned the transfer of the *vlast* to the soviets - not as a matter of the *vlast* being seized by a handful of individuals ready for

desperate self-sacrifice, but rather as the result of a firm decision by the overwhelming majority of the toilers to take the *vlast*.

But this awareness did not yet exist in July 1917.

In vain did the Bolsheviks demonstrate that their calculations did not yet [sic] include the overthrow of the government: the rancour of their class enemies had no end. All available forces were thrown against the masses who had gone out on the street.

By this time, despite the ensuing repression, Nevsky affirmed that the path of agreement was already living on borrowed time. A solid majority of the workers had been won over and the peasants were not far behind. Since Nevsky (along with NI Podvoisky) was one of the leaders of the Bolshevik Military Organisation, he presents events through the prism of party work among peasant soldiers. He naturally stresses that setting up the Military Organization in March was a crucial step: "It was clear that the outcome of the revolution depended on whom the many millions of the peasant masses would follow. The work of the Petersburg Committee in this area was a model for all of Russia behind the front as well as at the front."

This work started "from the very first days of the revolution", although, owing to practical difficulties, it was officially inaugurated a couple of weeks later, on March 22. (This activity by the Petrograd party should be kept in mind by those who attribute a soft-core 'revolutionary defencism' to the Bolsheviks in March.)

Since the mass of workers were already quickly disillusioned by the 'path of agreement', the underlying fact behind the events taking place from the April crisis to the July days was "the struggle for the army, for the peasantry". The Military Organisation and similar party groups elsewhere created a living link with the villages, so that a suspicious attitude toward 'agreementising' was spreading in the villages by the end of June:

If the peasants still believed in the defencists, nevertheless, the stories they heard from family and friends awakened their thinking and compelled them to wonder whether all the speeches they were hearing from the village elite - who were followers of the [liberal] Kadets and the Socialist Revolutionaries - were perhaps only a fraud.

As Nevsky reminds us, the Bolsheviks were denounced as 'traitors' (*izmenniki*), who were directly responsible for the disintegration of the army and for military defeat. Naturally, Nevsky and his comrades felt called upon to combat this label. A continuing theme throughout his chapter is to exculpate the Bolsheviks from the charge of accelerating the collapse of the army. On the contrary (so Nevsky assures us), the Bolsheviks helped the army retain some basic elements of discipline:

The merit of the Bolsheviks was this: even in this elemental destructive process, they were able to bring in elements of organisation that later helped to build a new and battle-worthy army on the ruins of the old tsarist army. The elemental process of collapse proceeded more swiftly in the army than anywhere else: the Bolsheviks, to the extent of their forces, brought in organisation. Undoubtedly, the indignation of the aggrieved mass of soldiers that expressed itself in the murder of officers rapidly calmed down only as a result of Bolshevik influence.

Similarly, the cause for the failure of the June military offensive was *not* Bolshevik agitation, but "the lack of ammunition, of food supply, of uniforms, of trust in the officers, and, most of all, the soldier mass's growing awareness of the needlessness and criminality of the senseless slaughter". All in all, the Bolshevik presence at the front was the *good fortune* of the revolution: "... if they had not been there, the civil war that Kerensky began by shooting soldiers unwilling to attack would have claimed vastly more victims".

Nevsky's arguments on this point are a good illustration of what can be called 'anti-agreement defencism'. Despite the efforts of opponents in 1917 (and many later historians and activists) to label the Bolsheviks in 1917 as 'defeatist', the Bolsheviks argued that the agreement tactic endangered not only revolutionary goals, but also such basic state functions as defence of the country.

Personal comment

I have portrayed events from Nevsky's point of view, and only rarely have I interjected an editorial comment. But now I will conclude by briefly outlining my own perspective, although framed in ways that arose from putting together this presentation of Nevsky - without, of course, making any claim that Nevsky himself would endorse my version in any way.

We often speak of the radicalisation of the masses in 1917. But in essence there was no radicalisation at all. The workers, soldiers and peasants started off at the beginning of the revolution with some traditional and yet very radical goals: to create a democratic republic more far-reaching than anything seen in Europe; to liquidate the gentry-landowners as a class; to democratise the army (in essence, to make it impossible to fight a war without clear aims accepted by the people); and a rapid conclusion of the war. To minimise this radical reshaping of the country as merely 'democratic reforms' is bizarre. These goals did not change over the months in 1917 - rather they were supplemented by even more basic and widely shared goals (preventing total economic collapse and establishing a *verdaia vlast*: that is, a tough-minded, governmental authority).

What did change in the outlook of the soviet constituency? Answer: the best means for achieving revolutionary goals. At the beginning of the revolution, the soviet constituency was passionately assured by people with impeccable credentials as fighters for the popular cause that *revolutionary goals could be achieved by 'the path of agreement'* - in other words, the Provisional Government and the elite forces behind it accepted the necessity of sincerely working in this direction. And despite talk of 'petty bourgeois' backwardness, we should realise that, given the information available, *support for the agreement tactic was rational*. (Here I am following out a line of thought suggested by Viktor Miller - a historian of Menshevism in the late Soviet period.) The soviet constituency was promised a relatively quick and painless path that would "carry out the revolution to the end".

From the very beginning, the Bolsheviks accepted the existing goals of the soviet constituency, but they also insisted that *the agreement tactic simply would not work*. They predicted that the agreement between the Soviet and the Provisional Government would lead to disaster - and disaster arrived promptly on cue. The Kornilov adventure dotted the 'i' and crossed the 't': the elite classes were utterly insincere about achieving revolutionary goals. The standard story about Bolshevik cluelessness in March 1917 and subsequent rearming in April completely obscures this underlying process. The Bolsheviks did not advocate new and more radical goals. Rather, they gained credibility, because they never wavered in their anti-agreement message from the beginning of the revolution in February till the end. As Kamenev put it at the All-Russia Conference of Soviets at the end of March (and so prior to Lenin's return),

Our attitude toward the Provisional Government at the present moment can be expressed this way: we foresee inevitable clashes, not between individuals, not between official bodies, not between groups, but between the classes of our Russian Revolution. We therefore should direct all our forces toward supporting - *not* the Provisional Government, but - the embryo of a revolutionary *vlast*, as embodied by the Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies, which sits here in our person...

This needs to be said in any resolution in which we state our attitude to the Provisional Government: yes, we breathe an atmosphere of counterrevolution.¹⁶

Even those who despise the Bolsheviks should realise that, just as it was rational to *support* 'the path of agreement' in March, it was rational to *reject* 'agreementising' in October. Of course, this proposition is *not* the same as saying the workers and soldiers who gave the Second Congress an anti-agreement majority chose the best possible course of action: we can argue about this question. But, given the alternatives presented to them by all reputable spokesmen - *both* pro-agreement and anti-agreement - the events taking place before their eyes made the case for rejecting the agreement much more persuasively than the Bolsheviks as such did.

And there were only two realistic alternatives to the 'path of agreement': a (temporary?)

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military dictatorship or a *vlast* based exclusively on the soviets. In October, only one party supported the second alternative.

Take-home points

Central to Nevsky's account is what I call *the Bolshevik adjustment* - or, to use Lenin's term, Bolshevik recognition of the *svoeobrazie* (the unexpected and original nature of the post-February situation). When Lenin arrived in Petrograd, he was surprised and shocked to realise that the Bolsheviks were *not* the leaders of the Petrograd proletariat, but, instead, only a small minority in the soviet.

His response was to rebuke any Bolshevik who was *too impatient*, *too hasty*, *too insistent* on establishing a revolutionary government *right now*. No (said Lenin), we must first roll up our sleeves and strive to *win over* a majority in the soviets by "patient explanation" (in real life, by noisy agitation campaigns). Until then, any attempt at taking power immediately was strictly *illegitimate*. This argument on Lenin's part was not some side note, some 'by the way' qualification: it was *the centre of gravity* of Lenin's April theses and other writings from 1917. Nevsky's history takes this thrust for granted and makes it the driving force of his own account.

Although Nevsky does not stress the point, we need to recognise that Bolshevik leaders such as Kamenev and Stalin had set forth the logic of the Bolshevik adjustment prior to Lenin's return. In these informal remarks to fellow Bolsheviks on March 18, Kamenev prefigures Lenin:

It is surprising that the Bolsheviks are not occupying a dominant position in the Petrograd Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies - and why do they allow into the soviet the liquidators, who do not express the outlook of the Petrograd workers? *We* are the representatives of the revolutionary element in Petrograd - but, in the meantime, it seems that the wide masses do not understand us. Evidently, since we are essentially correct, we are formulating our resolutions and decisions in a way that the masses do not understand.

The Bolshevik adjustment must be understood within the context of the *demarcation line* so heavily stressed by Nevsky. The demarcation line made itself known on many levels. Within the international Social Democratic movement, it was known as 'revolutionary Social Democracy' versus 'opportunism'; within Russian Social Democracy, it was known as 'Bolshevik hegemony' versus 'Menshevik fear of proletarian isolation'. After the outbreak of war in 1914, it became known as 'internationalism' versus 'defencism'. After February, the demarcation line was expressed as 'anti-agreement' versus 'pro-agreement'.

To the Bolshevik way of thinking, the demarcation line was essentially the same in all

these cases. The Bolsheviks had always strongly self-identified as the Russian representative of revolutionary Social Democracy. Their experiences on the eve of the war and during the war convinced them, rightly or wrongly, that a majority of the 'advanced workers' in Petrograd were firmly on the correct side of the demarcation line - whence their shock and dismay to find themselves in a small minority.

Recognising the existence of the demarcation line leads us on to the specific content of the Bolshevik message and tactic: the *hegemony scenario* of proletarian leadership of the revolutionary peasantry. As a key leader in the party's Military Organisation and its political work among the soldiers of the Petrograd garrison and elsewhere, Nevsky treats the soldiers stationed in Petrograd as a stand-in for the peasant populace of Russia as a whole, and so he presents his own political work in the capital as a reflection of the political dynamics of 1917 throughout the country. For Nevsky, the key question of the revolution was: whom would the peasants support - the proletariat or the elite reformers and their 'agreementising' hangers-on? His answer was that the proletariat - armed (not rearmed!) with the Bolshevik message - successfully won over peasant support and thus were in a position to achieve the central goal of the revolution: the establishment of a worker-peasant *vlast*.

In this way, Nevsky presents Bolshevik victory in 1917 as a vindication of the Bolshevik hegemony scenario. His argument to this effect depends on replacing the "land-hungry village peasants" of the original scenario with the "war-weary peasant soldiers" of the Petrograd garrison - a not inconsequential shift! In Bolshevik eyes, however, the course of the ensuing civil war did indeed vindicate the hegemony scenario in its original form.

Once we are fully aware of the centrality of the demarcation line, we can begin to understand Nevsky's insistence - so surprising to most of us - on *continuity and consensus* in the Bolshevik outlook. The standard account of Bolshevism in 1917 stresses rupture, discontinuity, conflict and a far-from-complete rearming of the party - all to such an extent that 'Bolshevism' ceases to have concrete meaning. In contrast, Nevsky heavily stresses *continuity* between pre-war Bolshevism and Bolshevism after February. He also brings out the essential continuity in the core Bolshevik message before and after Lenin's arrival in early April.

The existence of a *consensus* among Bolshevik leaders and activists is confirmed in negative terms by the instant and unrelenting hostility of everyone else toward the Bolsheviks and other 'internationalists'. Nevsky is thus blissfully unaware of any 'sharp turn to the right' after the arrival of Kamenev and Stalin in mid-March. The Bolshevik consensus could also be observed among veteran Bolshevik activists across the country, although in many

places this consensus struggled to express itself in strict organisational separation.

Consensus also characterised the stand on the core issues facing the revolution, since Bolshevik activists were all firmly on one side of the demarcation line. On one side of this line, support for the war; on the other side, opposition. On one side, support for the Provisional Government and hostility toward a *vlast* based exclusively on the soviets; on the other side, hostility toward the Provisional Government and support for a *vlast* based exclusively on the soviets. On the one side, a wager on 'the path of agreement' (*soglashenie*) between the Soviet and the Provisional Government; on the other side, a sustained polemic against 'agreementising' (*soglashatelstvo*) as an unworkable dead end. These are the core issues, but a similar contrast holds good on a multitude of ancillary topics.

The standard 'rearming' narrative essentially denies the existence of any demarcation line prior to Lenin's arrival, since (so we are told) Bolshevik leaders in March were barely distinguishable from 'revolutionary defencists', insofar as they had any coherent line at all. The standard narrative, deriving ultimately from Trotsky's 1924 account, recognises a demarcation line only after Lenin's arrival in early April. According to this version of events, not only was Lenin the first Bolshevik to insist on opposition to the war and on hostility to the Provisional Government, but he also imposed a new demarcation line around the issue of *socialist revolution* versus *bourgeois revolution*. And, we are further told, this insistence on *socialist* revolution in Russia was a necessary logical basis for the slogan, 'All power to the soviets!' Nevsky's account challenges this entire interpretation in a radical way.

The Bolsheviks were not the ones who coined terms such as *krizis vlasti* or *dvoevlastie* ('double *vlast*'). These ubiquitous and unavoidable realities were the focus of everyone's attention throughout 1917. Nevertheless, the Bolshevik critique of 'agreementising', although rooted in the Bolshevik past, provided a plausible explanation of the never-ending *krizis vlasti*, as well as a plausible solution: the *krizis* was the inevitable result of the clashing group interests of the soviet constituency, as opposed to the 'bourgeois' elite, and the solution was therefore to establish a *vlast* that was 'homogeneous' in class terms. (In September and October, 'homogeneous' became a popular word for making this point.)

The pre-revolutionary 'Plan A' of the Bolsheviks, then, was to establish a "provisional revolutionary government" based on the workers and peasants, and led by Russian "revolutionary Social Democracy" (that is, themselves). The painful post-February adjustment forced them to adopt 'Plan B': *first* win over majority support for their side of the demarcation line and *then* establish a revolutionary government. Plan B was thus

always meant to be temporary. Later in this series, we will examine what happened when the Bolsheviks decided that the time had come to return to Plan A.

Nevsky himself does not describe events after the Bolsheviks decided that the adjustment had accomplished its assigned task of garnering majority support against agreementising, but his insightful participant account nevertheless gives us essential background for understanding the October revolution. Back to Nevsky! ●

Notes

1. The full title: *Istoriia RKP (B): Kratkii ocherk* (the subtitle, meaning 'Short sketch', is misleading, as the book is over 450 pages). The second edition from 1926 is available online. I have used the republication of the second edition (Moscow 2009) that contains much useful supplementary material.
2. MV Zelenov, 'Vladimir Ivanovich Nevsky (1876-1937)': (opentextn.ru/old/history/historiografy/historians/ros/index.html?id=2103). My biographical remarks are based mainly on Zelenov's detailed account.
3. See L Holmes *Revising the revolution: the unmaking of Russia's official history of 1917* (Bloomington IN 2021), p21.
4. For a characteristic episode from the early 1920s, see *Revising the revolution* (note 3), pp20-27.
5. LT Lih *Lenin rediscovered: 'What is to be done?' in context* (Chicago 2008).
6. The conception of 'democratic centralism' set forth in Nevsky's history fits this emphasis on independent activity at the base. See my discussion at johnriddell.wordpress.com/2013/04/14/fortunes-of-a-formula-from-democratic-centralism-to-democratic-centralism.
7. In a popular pamphlet issued in 1924, Nevsky refers to Trotsky as the "creator and designer" of the Red Army (*Sem let pobedi porazhenii* p37); no other party member except Lenin is mentioned.
8. Unless otherwise stated, all Nevsky quotes are from the 2009 edition of *History of the RKP (B)*.
9. Orlando Figes tells us: "Lenin had turned the party programme on its head. Instead of accepting the need for a 'bourgeois stage' of the revolution, he was calling for a 'proletarian revolution' in one step" (www.orlandofiges.info/section5_TheFebruaryRevolution1917/LeninandTheAprilTheses.php). Note the quote marks, as if he were giving us Lenin's actual words. In fact it is Figes who turns Lenin "on his head".
10. *Vlast* is variously translated as 'power', 'authority', 'government', 'regime'... 'Double *vlast*' (or *dvoevlastie*) is usually translated as 'dual power'.
11. 'Agreementising' (*soglashatelstvo*) was the sarcastic Bolshevik label for the agreement tactic.
12. Source: Riddell, Third Comintern Congress, pp1170-71; VI Lenin PSS, Vol 44, pp57-59; *ECW* Vol 42, pp324-28.
13. For a sense of the long-term clash of these two wings of social democracy, see Mike Taber's invaluable recent edition of crucial debates at congresses of the Second International: *Reform, revolution and opportunism: debates in the Second International, 1900-1910* (Chicago 2023).
14. L Trotsky, *Lessons of October* (1924). NB: At the time of the April conference, Trotsky had not yet returned to Russia and so, unlike Kamenev, he is not an eyewitness of Bolshevik debates during this period. The quoted assertion from 1924 also directly contradicts what he himself said on the issue in 1917 - see my essay at johnriddell.wordpress.com/2017/10/25/the-character-of-the-russian-revolution-trotsky-1917-vs-trotsky-1924.
15. 'Toiling workers' is a technical term in Bolshevik discourse, meaning *all* working people - the *narod* - and therefore not just the proletariat.
16. I am confident that even well-informed readers will be unfamiliar with this unambiguous assertion by Kamenev. This lacuna is not their fault, but rather the fault of those who have undertaken to inform them.

Appendix

In Vladimir Nevsky's direct paraphrase of Lenin's theses below, he gives special weight to the second and fourth theses, since these two set out the logic of the Bolshevik adjustment. I have therefore directly translated his presentation of only those two theses. What follows is Nevsky's discussion of the immediate Bolshevik response to the theses, which is translated in its entirety.

These passages all come from the chapter on the events of 1917 in Nevsky's *History of the RKP(B)* (originally published in 1925), which I have translated.

Patient and tireless

Lenin's second thesis was formulated in this way:

... the original nature [*svoeobrazie*] of the present moment in Russia consists of *the transition* from the first stage of the revolution (the one that gave the *vlast* [power] to the bourgeoisie due to the insufficient awareness and organisation of the proletariat) to its *second* stage (the one that must place the *vlast* into the hands of the proletariat and the

poorest strata of the peasantry).

This transition is characterised, on the one hand, by a maximum of legality (Russia *right now* is the freest of all the warring countries in the world); and, on the other hand, by the lack of coercion applied to the masses, and finally, by their trusting and unaware attitude toward the government of the capitalists - the worst enemies of peace and socialism.

This original nature demands from us the ability to adapt to these *special* conditions of party work among the unbelievably wide proletarian masses, who are just now awakening to political life ...

In the fourth thesis, recognising the fact that the Bolsheviks in the soviets were in the minority and that the masses followed the defencists, Lenin went on to say:

We must explain to the masses that the Soviet of Worker Deputies is the only possible form of a revolutionary government and that therefore our task, as long as this [potential] government succumbs to the influence of the bourgeoisie, can only be patient, systematic, persistent explanation of mistakes and tactics - an explanation conducted in a manner that is

especially adapted to the practical needs of the masses.

As long as we are in the minority, we carry on the work of criticism and clarification of mistakes, while at the same time preaching the need for the transfer of the whole *vlast* of the state to the Soviets of Worker Deputies, so that the masses shake off their mistakes by experience.

Misreading

Such is the essence of these famous theses, which horrified some, aroused joy and sympathy in others, caused an outburst of fury in the camp of the bourgeoisie and extraordinary enthusiasm in the ranks of the proletariat.

It is necessary, however, to emphasise that in the ranks of our party there were people who at first misunderstood these theses and saw them, despite categorical explanations, as a call for the immediate implementation of socialism.

In point of fact, Lenin's position was a natural development of the doctrine that was worked out by him long ago, in the earlier periods of the history of our party. One of the basic tenets of Bolshevism, based on the experience of the first Russian Revolution, was the idea of the

dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. Contained in this idea were all the implications, all the measures that inevitably had to be accepted [in 1917], once the party was convinced of the necessity and inevitability of a proletarian-peasant dictatorship.

In what way were the disagreements that arose in our party in connection with the publication of Lenin's theses expressed? They were best expressed by comrade Kamenev and came down to the fact that, according to Kamenev, Lenin considered the bourgeois-democratic revolution finished, while in reality it was far from over, and therefore one could not speak of the growing-over of this revolution into a socialist one. Lenin dwelt on these disagreements in detail in his *Letters on tactics*, to which we refer our readers. [In this pamphlet, Lenin explicitly rejects Kamenev's claim that he, Lenin, advocated immediate socialist revolution in Russia.]

According to Lenin, the unique feature of the moment that our country was experiencing at that moment consisted of the double *vlast*. This double *vlast* manifested itself in the existence of two governments: one was bourgeois, possessing the entire apparatus of the *vlast*, and the other was the Soviet, the majority of the *narod* [people]: that is, workers and peasants.

The class origin of this double *vlast* lies in the fact that the Russian Revolution, having destroyed the monarchy and transferred the *vlast* to the bourgeoisie, at the same time came very close to the implementation of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry - but then the Petrograd Soviet voluntarily transferred the *vlast* to the bourgeoisie and its Provisional Government.

Hence the original nature [*svoeobrazie*] of the tactic arising from such a unique feature of the Russian Revolution: winning over the proletarian masses who had been persuaded by revolutionary defencism and by this very fact were now giving support to the imperialist bourgeoisie holding the *vlast*. These masses had to be won over by patient and tireless propaganda and by criticism of the tactic of the petty bourgeois parties - Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries - that the masses were now following.

The slogan, 'Down with the war', is in itself correct, but the war cannot be ended [simply] by the decision of one side, nor by 'sticking a bayonet in the ground', nor by an agreement [*soglashenie*] of the socialists of all countries. The only way to end the war is the transfer of the state *vlast* to the proletariat ●