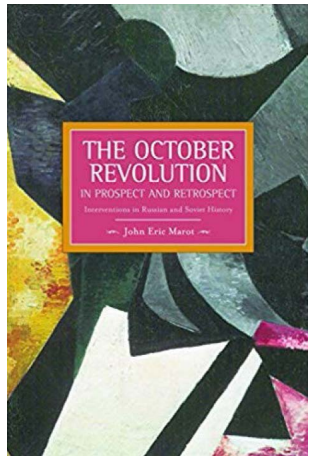
The October Revolution
in Prospect and Retrospect
John Eric Marot, 2012



Chapter One

The Peasant-Question and the Origins of Stalinism: Rethinking the Destruction of the October Revolution

Without correct theory, there cannot be correct politics

Trotsky

Introduction: The problem and the argument

The self-movement of the peasantry in Russia in the late 1920s created a crisis of production in agriculture that led to chronic shortfalls in the supply of food to the cities and towns, threatening the urban citizenry with malnutrition, if not famine. The cause of this major economic contraction lay in millions of peasant-households freely deciding to safeguard their material well-being; decisions the Bolsheviks were quite powerless to influence in any meaningful way so long as they chose to respect peasant self-determination, the *sine qua non* of the New Economic Policy. For this socio-economic crisis signalled the presence of a barrier to the development of the forces of production built into peasant-proprietorship. No wing of the leadership, Trotskyist 'Left', Bukharinist 'Right' and Stalinist 'Centre', could overcome that barrier and go on developing the economy collectively and democratically – build socialism – without forcibly destroying the peasant-way of life.[1] In December 1929,

1. Bukharin, Trotsky and, until 1929, Stalin, represented emerging eponymous policy-trends that were not fully homogenous. Nevertheless, there was sufficient accord on

Stalin began to do just that. He imposed collectivisation on the peasantry, breaking their most desperate resistance. In the cities, Stalin gutted democratically-elected factory-committees, last redoubts of workers' power at the point of production, and embarked on a crash-course of forced industrialisation. On the ruins of the October Revolution, Stalin re-established a class-divided, exploitative society very much akin to the late tsarist order with respect to class- and property-relations but substituting the ideology and iconography of 'Marxism-Leninism' for that of Russian Orthodoxy, the hammer and sickle for the double-headed tsarist Imperial Eagle.[2]

This sombre outcome was not foreordained. But its theoretical possibility had been negatively inscribed in Marx's precept that socialism required definite material premises: minimally, a capitalist economy that had moved beyond the stage of primitive-capitalist accumulation and, therefore, could reproduce itself on bases continually posited by its own existence, manifested by the rapid formation of a proletariat, the sole agent of socialism. Without those premises, socialism became a utopian project, all efforts to develop it doomed to fail. This chapter revalorises Marx's precept *without* arguing that Stalinism became inevitable simply because those premises were absent in Russia. The alternative to Stalinism, however, was not Trotskyism or Bukharinism taken as *viable* programmes for economic development. In this regard, both Trotskyism and Bukharinism were variants of NEP-premised programmes of economic advance. As such, they proved to be utter failures, not because of the particular characteristics of either, but because both chose to operate within the framework of the NEP. That framework mandated no use of coercion against the immediate producers, peasants and workers alike,

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fundamental issues relevant to this paper that differences between individuals within these trends were not crucial: they may be ignored without prejudice.

2. Parenthetically, unlike developments in coastal China, the disaggregation of the USSR in 1991 marked less a transition to capitalism than preservation of existing class- and property-relations at a lower level of political aggregation, based on the revival of long-repressed national, ethnic and/or religious ties. Demagogic ex-CP leaders become born-again 'democrats' derailed the working-class response to the crisis taking embryonic shape in the great coal-strikes of 1989, strikes which were cross-national, inter-ethnic and supra-religious, consistent with nature of the economic crisis itself. In lieu of the suppressed democratic-socialist alternative blackjack-democracy now dominates in Russia, where the leadership has disestablished the *ersatz* religion of 'Marxism-Leninism' to make room for the triumphant return of the genuine article, Russian Orthodoxy. Meanwhile, the tsarist coat of arms, symbol of Russian imperialism, again adorns the corridors and banquet halls of the Kremlin, displacing the hammer and sickle. While oligarchs flaunt their wealth, wages, hours and working conditions for the vast majority have collapsed, expressed in the stunning fall of life-expectancy. The Bourbon Restoration did not undo the French Revolution, and this Restoration did not undo the Russian Revolution either, because Stalin had undone it long before. See Kotz 2001 for the facts.

to advance the forces of production. However, so long as the party-leadership operated within the limits set by the NEP, no significant development of the forces of production could take place. Ergo, the development of the forces of production within the geographical confines of the Soviet Union could occur only by destroying the NEP, by flouting the self-determination of the immediate producers at the point of production so that they could be exploited. That is what Stalin did.

From this perspective, the alternative to Stalinism was, first and foremost, a largely negative one: opposition to Stalin and to policies that irremediably undermined the NEP. In 1928 and 1929, only Bukharin and the Right Opposition opposed Stalin's polices which, they thought, presaged the end of the NEP and the peasant-worker alliance. Thus, 'Bukharinism' was the only alternative to Stalinism not, again, because it promised a competing programme of successful economic development, but because Bukharin and the Right Opposition were prepared to subordinate the development of the forces of production to the more important goal of preserving the NEP, preserving the *smychka*, respecting the self-determination of the immediate producers at the point of production, *even* if this meant *not* developing the forces of production *at all*. In contrast, the Left Opposition was not prepared to sacrifice economic development to the political necessities of maintaining the NEP, and ended up, willy-nilly, 'critically' supporting what it characterised as Stalin's 'left' turn.[3]

The crisis of under-production in agriculture in NEP – Russia – a crisis that immediately conditioned but did not directly determine the victory of Stalinism – sheds retrospective light on the highly peculiar, perhaps unique, nature of tsarist industrialisation, whose results the Bolsheviks inherited: the last tsars initiated a state-sponsored and state-led industrial revolution in Russia's cities without a previous revolutionary transformation of peasant-proprietorship in a capitalist direction, a 'primitive-capitalist accumulation' ultimately divorcing peasants from possession of the land and creating an agricultural proletariat; Lenin's contrary view in *The Development of Capitalism in Agriculture* notwithstanding.[4] The peasantry retained sufficient land to remain self-sufficient throughout late-Imperial Russia's economic advance.

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3. See Chapter Two below.

4. Lenin 1956. See also Perry Anderson's discussion of Lenin in Anderson 1975, pp. 348–60. Anderson concludes, in agreement with Lenin and most Marxists, that the Russian '*social formation* was dominated by the capitalist mode of production' (p. 353). However, Anderson also writes: 'The predominant sector of Russian agriculture in 1917 was…characterized by feudal relations of production' and the 'Russian *State* remained a feudal Absolutism' (pp. 352, 353). I agree. Anderson's handling of the category capitalist 'social formation' in the Russian case apparently leaves out the character of the state and property-relations in agriculture. Unfortunately, Anderson

As subsistence-producers providing for their needs largely through their own labour, the peasants understandably had no compelling need to sell on the market or to purchase their necessities on the market. This shielded them from competitive market-pressures to innovate, engage in larger-scale farming, raise productivity and lower costs; in sum, to develop the forces of production. Drawing on the work of E.H. Carr, R.W. Davies, Teodor Shanin, Moshe Lewin, Victor Danilov and Robert Brenner especially,[5] I shall try to show the non-capitalist peasant-strategy of production for subsistence led to the pulverisation of peasant-holdings, stagnant productivity-growth, and the preservation of the self-sufficiency of the diminutive individual peasant-household through diversification; a triptych of trends built into the property-relations of the peasantry, trends that no wing of the party-leadership was prepared to recognise. These trends manifested themselves under the tsars, in the war-communist period, as well as in the period of the NEP from 1921 to 1929. So conceptualised, the self-movement of one hundred million communally-organised peasants could not open the way to economic development under the NEP simply because agriculture could not supply adequate food and raw materials to grow industry, along with a growing proletariat, let alone leave a surplus to import advanced means of production from the capitalist West.

In fact, the situation facing the Bolsheviks was direr than they imagined. Little did they suspect that the basic problem confronting them at home was not so much how to assure expanded reproduction of industry as how to forestall contracted reproduction in agriculture. Indeed, viewed in the very long run, the failure of the peasantry to significantly develop the forces of production on the land or, more accurately, their success in redirecting those forces in their interests under the NEP, had the potential to blur the town-country division of labour itself in Russia, triggering a process of de-industrialisation and dissolution of the working class into the peasantry. Astonishingly, A.V. Chayanov, the great student of the Russian peasantry, foresaw this very possibility, in his own way, and welcomed it, in his futuristic novel *The Journey of My Brother Alexei to the Land of Peasant-Utopia*, published in 1920, at the height of war-communism and the struggle of the Communist Party and Red Army to forcibly appropriate the peasants' grain. In his novel Chayanov envisions peasants organising in 1932 to obtain in the soviets 'parity of voting

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offers no justification for omitting these crucial social dimensions. Without them, does not Anderson jeopardise the analytical usefulness of this category, at least in this instance?

5. Carr & Davies 1950–89, Shanin 1970, Lewin 1968, Danilov 1988, Brenner 1976, 1985, 1989, 1993, 2007.

power with townspeople'. Then, peasants use their 'permanent majority' in the soviets to advance their interests. In 1934, the working class revolts. The peasants defeat the workers' uprising and decree the dissolution of towns and cities.[6] Chayanov's bucolic utopia never materialised; but Stalin's feral dystopia did.

I have divided this chapter into five sections. In Section One, I try to lay the basis for a paradigm-shift in the field by closely interrogating certain aspects of Trotsky's world-historical outlook. For the past 70 years, Trotsky has set the parameters of politico-scientific debate among serious scholars and socialist activists concerning 'alternatives' to Stalinism.[7] This is not surprising. The victory of Stalinism apparently vindicated Trotsky's critique of socialism in one country and his theory of permanent revolution.[8] On closer inspection, Trotsky's prescience is not so clear-cut, in two key respects.

First, the economic difficulties on the road to socialist construction were not those forecast by Trotsky; nor were they foreseen by Bukharin or by Stalin. Specifically, the *kulaks* were not specifically responsible for the critical shortfalls in grain-marketings in 1927 and 1928, as was universally held then. Nor were the shortfalls the result of mistaken policies adopted by Stalin, as Bukharin implicitly[9] and Trotsky explicitly[10] held, shortfalls that could be redressed by conjunctural measures.[11] Instead, chronic food-shortages in the cities were the aggregate result of agricultural involution built into peasant free-holding, whether 'kulak' or non-'kulak', whether 'poor' 'middle' or 'rich' peasant.

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6. Chayanov 1976, p. 87.

7. Even this chapter is subject to some of those parameters. I adopt the tripartite division of party-trends with the corresponding labels of Right, Left and Centre from Trotsky much as I would prefer to rearrange matters and, at least in domestic affairs, affix the label 'Left' to Bukharin because he would oppose Stalin's turn toward forced collectivisation and forced industrialisation, 'Right' to Trotsky because he falsely characterised Stalin's turn as 'left' and supported it, with Stalin belonging elsewhere than anywhere on the spectrum between Left and Right: Stalin, more precisely, Stalin*ism*, needs its own spectrum. If I stick to Trotsky's nomenclature it is only because it represents familiar and commonly accepted categorial landmarks around which readers may find their bearings. Re-labelling the signposts any time soon is unlikely though, even if the thesis defended here meets with favour, because Trotsky's conceptual roadmap is so firmly embedded in the minds of so many.

8. Mandel 1995, Callinicos 1990.

9. 'Notes of an Economist', April 1928, in Bukharin 1982, pp. 301–30.

10. 'At a New Stage', December 1927, in Trotsky 1980, pp. 488–509.

11. Not only by latter-day Trotskyists and Bukharinists, but the (now defunct) Maoist school shares this view as well: '[T]he procurement crisis of 1927–1928 thus appears as not at all the result of an "inevitable economic crisis" but as the outcome of *political mistakes*'. Bettelheim 1978, Volume 2, p. 107.

Second, Trotsky never thought it likely that Stalin, of all people, should ultimately respond to this agrarian crisis by taking the most decisive, resolute and barbaric action imaginable – imposing collectivisation and industrialisation on peasants and workers – even if this meant destroying the lives of millions through shootings, mass-deportations and starvation. Only Bukharin had a premonition of this nightmarish scenario. Trotsky's erroneous appraisal of Stalin's orientation lay in his theory that Stalin was the embodiment of 'centrism', a man forever tossed to and fro by the pressures of class-interests alien to the 'centrist' bureaucracy Stalin led: the proletarian on Stalin's left, whose interests the Left Opposition defended against the agrarian capitalist; the 'kulak' backed by world-capitalism on Stalin's right, represented by the Right Opposition. Though Stalin's faction had come to represent the bureaucracy within the Party by the mid-twenties, Trotsky rejected the view that Stalin could ever strike out on his own and transform the bureaucracy itself into a ruling class based on state-ownership of property.[12] This colossal error entailed catastrophic political consequences. Thinking there could be either capitalist restoration or progress toward socialism, Trotsky critically supported Stalin's 'left' turn, rejecting Bukharin's overtures to form a political bloc linking the 'Right Opposition' and Trotsky's followers to battle furiously against the Stalinist 'Centre'. Trotsky feared that unity with the Right potentially opened the way to the greater evil of capitalist restoration.

'Without correct theory, there cannot be correct politics'. I take Trotsky at his word. Trotsky's incorrect politics toward Stalin, which contributed to the victory of Stalinism, speaks to the incorrect theory underlying them. Specifically, I examine Trotsky's questionable theorisation of the relationship between the Soviet economy and the capitalist world-market by investigating the historical origins of that relationship in the economic development of late-Imperial Russia, within the broader context of classical-Marxist theory concerning the material premises of socialism.

In Section Two, I track the evolution of the Bolshevik understanding of the peasant-question between 1917 and 1921. The Bolsheviks, along with the Mensheviks and all European Social Democrats, had long believed that capitalism was developing in Russia and that a bourgeois-democratic revolution would help it develop fully, eventually establishing the material premises of

12. See Shachtman 1962 for the 'bureaucratic-collectivist' critique of Trotsky's 'degenerated workers' state' position, and Cliff 1974 for the 'state-capitalist' variant of that critique. Since this chapter is concerned first and foremost with the emplacement of the Stalinist mode of production, the question of how, once in place, this mode reproduced itself – whether in a bureaucratic-collectivist, state-capitalist or degenerated workers' state fashion – is secondary.

socialism. The October Revolution altered this scenario. The Bolsheviks came around to the view that the domestic economic policies of a workers' state under the NEP could substitute themselves for the action of the capitalist mode of production, particularly in agriculture, to begin to create, if still not fully realise, the premises of socialism. To be more precise, they thought that putatively capitalist development among the peasantry could be turned into socialist-economic development via what Preobrazhensky called 'primitive-socialist accumulation', or the transfer of surpluses generated by 'private', 'individualised', 'small-scale' production – what the Bolsheviks thought was capitalism – to state-run, socialised, large-scale production, leading to the dominance of the latter in the economy while diminishing the importance of the former.[13]

In Section Three, I provide a detailed narrative of the period 1921–9, when the Bolsheviks thought they could move toward large-scale agriculture by accumulating surpluses via unequal exchange with the peasantry, on the basis of the voluntary principle, through economic incentives, by manipulating prices on the grain-market. The state would then export these surpluses for advanced means of production from the capitalist West, helping speed the industrialisation of the country. However, the leadership's manifest failure to reorient the peasant-strategy of production for subsistence toward that of production for exchange, expressed in the grain-marketing crises of 1927 and 1928, confronted the Bolsheviks with a stark choice. They had two options.

One option: preserve the remaining conquests of the October Revolution – a free peasantry and workers' control at the point of production – by giving up on economic development for the duration and working for the internationalisation of workers' rule to establish the material premises of socialism on a world-scale. The other option: force economic development within the national borders of the Soviet Union, forsake any serious effort to spread revolution abroad; and destroy what was left of the October Revolution. The grain-crises of the late 1920s forced them to choose one or the other. Confronted with this imperative choice, the Bolsheviks split.

Stalin opted to resolve the agrarian crisis in a way that would consolidate the bureaucracy he led into a full-fledged ruling class, Stalin's paramount if unspoken goal. At this juncture, developing the forces of production in city and country though extra-economic measures proved to be the only way to secure adequate surpluses from peasants and workers to realise Stalin's ultimate objective. The means – industrialisation and collectivisation – if not the end – a new exploitative society – earned Stalin the support of the Left

13. Preobrazhensky 1926.

Opposition. In this process, Stalin defeated the Right Opposition, which, instead, moved to defend the existing, NEP-relations of production in industry and agriculture.

In Section Four, the empirical heart of this chapter and its claim to analytical novelty in the Russian context, I show how the NEP could never provide a basis for economic development. Drawing on the work of Robert Brenner, I demonstrate how the peasantry would invest the surpluses generated by the peasant-mode of production to perpetuate that mode. To do so, peasant-relations of production would assure the development of the forces of production only within limits compatible with those relations, the peasants resisting tooth and nail any attempt, whether of the Trotskyist or Bukharinist variety, to transform those relations through 'primitive-socialist accumulation'.

In Section Five, I briefly discuss why resistance to Stalinism failed.

I European Social Democracy and the material premises of socialism

In the quarter-century preceding the October Revolution, virtually all Second-International Social Democrats thought Russia was scheduled for a 'bourgeois-democratic' revolution that would sweep away the tsarist-feudal order and establish in its place the necessary conditions for the untrammelled development of capitalism: capitalist relations of property and class. Socialism would then become an objectively realisable project in proportion as capitalism created in Russia that project's material premises: the socialisation of production. These premises would not be an empirical given, an actually existing point of departure, but a theoretical terminus to be reached, at some point in the future, through the anti-democratic development to maturity of the capitalist mode of production. All Social Democrats, European and Russian, were in accord on this elementary point of Marxist sociology, including Trotsky, of course.

If, theory notwithstanding, workers chose to make a socialist revolution in the course of overthrowing tsarism before Russia had completed the phase of primitive accumulation, they would soon enough openly clash with the peasantry, whose massive presence testified both to the woefully incomplete development of capitalism, and whose class-interests – defence of their Lilliputian-sized property – presented a politically intractable obstacle to the construction of a democratic socialism based on large-scale, cooperative property. As all Social Democrats took it for granted that the development of socialism was inseparable from the development of democracy – not for nothing did they call themselves 'Social Democrats' – any attempt by a minority working

class to build socialism would necessarily clash with the interests of the peasant-majority, and would therefore be anti-democratic and anti-socialist. Lenin summed up the views of nearly all members of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour-Party, in the midst of the 1905 Revolution: There 'is not, nor can there be, any other path to real [socialist] freedom than the path of bourgeois freedom, bourgeois progress,' no 'other means of bringing socialism nearer than complete political liberty' he wrote in *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution.*[14] Consequently, both Menshevik and Bolshevik wings of the RSDLP, in consonance with Second-International Marxism, drew the appropriate political/economic conclusion: capitalism needed room to grow, and a 'bourgeois-democratic' revolution would create such room. This revolution would destroy the feudal-tsarist state and set up, ideally, a republic, the most democratic form of the capitalist state, a superior political order allowing freedom of speech, assembly and press. These freedoms would be indispensable to the workers' movement in its struggle for better wages, hours and working conditions. The RSDLP, too, would greatly benefit from these freedoms: they would allow the Party to struggle for socialism openly and democratically, just like its German counterpart, the SPD.[15]

In the cities, the revolution would consolidate capitalist proprietorship of industry, while, in the countryside, it would free the peasantry to market its surpluses as it saw fit, speeding the development of capitalism in agriculture by shunting it onto the smooth, feudal-free 'American' path rather than have it continue to develop in fits and starts along the rough, feudal-ridden 'Prussian' path, as Lenin put it.[16] Of course, Trotsky dissented from the prediction that a bourgeois-democratic revolution alone was next on the agenda. Workers would not overthrow the autocracy only to hand over power to a feckless and impotent bourgeoisie, though he did agree with Lenin that the proletariat would play a hegemonic role in the struggle against tsarism. The revolution, Trotsky predicted, would be proletarian, socialist and international, accomplishing the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution along the way.[17] Still, Trotsky recognised, with every other Marxist, that either imperialist intervention or peasant-opposition, or both, would prevent a lone workers' state from building socialism in Russia.[18]

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14. Lenin 1962c, p. 112.
15. Lih 2006.
16. Lenin 1962f, p. 356. For a more detailed consideration of Lenin's views, see Harding 1977, Volume 1, Chapter 4.
17. Trotsky 1971.
18. Trotsky 1972.

It is on the point of Marxist sociology regarding the premises of socialism that not just Trotsky, but Lenin, Stalin, Bukharin and all the Bolsheviks changed their minds, as expressed in the implementation of the NEP in 1921. What changed their minds was precisely the historically unprecedented 'collective experience' assimilated by the Party since October 1917, Trotsky noted.[19] Despite the delay in socialist revolution abroad, Trotsky, Stalin, Bukharin and Lenin all agreed that building socialism in Russia – *stroit' sotsializm* – was what they were already doing under the NEP and would continue to do for the foreseeable future. Shortly after Lenin's death, Stalin and Bukharin went further and declared that *postroit' sotsializm* – building socialism to *completion* – was feasible as well. Here, Trotsky eventually parted ways with Stalin and Bukharin. But, at no point, did Trotsky affirm that socialist construction could no longer proceed, as Stalin and Bukharin insisted in their polemics against Trotsky, just because it could not be completed in Russia alone.

In *The Third International after Lenin*, written in June 1928, Trotsky submitted to searching analysis Stalin-Bukharin's Draft Programme for the upcoming Sixth Congress of the Third International. As part of his analysis, Trotsky fully developed his internationalist critique of building socialism in one country. Fundamentally in question is not Trotsky's conclusion that building socialism to completion in Russia alone was utopian, but the questionable arguments Trotsky deployed to arrive at this correct conclusion. What I argue to be his faulty understanding of the actual relationship between the Soviet economy and the capitalist world led Trotsky to a dubious appraisal of the material basis – the rational core – of the doctrine of socialism in one country, and how to fight it politically at home. Let us follow this strand – and only this strand – in Trotsky's reasoning.

Peculiarities of Tsarist economic development and the world-economy: A discussion with Trotsky

Trotsky's point of departure in *The Third International after Lenin* was this:

> World economy has become a mighty reality, which holds sway over the economic life of individual countries and continents. This basic fact alone invests the idea of a world communist party with supreme reality.... Without grasping the meaning of this proposition, which was vividly revealed to mankind during the last imperialist war, we cannot take a single

19. Trotsky 1975a, p. 298.

> step towards the solution of the major problems of world politics and revolutionary struggle.[20]

The world-market subordinated individual countries to itself at an uneven pace owing to the different levels of economic development of each country. Trotsky drew attention to the unevenness of historical development between America and Europe, for example.[21] But the scale of unevenness could never be so uneven as to permit any one country to 'develop independently' of all the others. Trotsky drew out one necessary implication if one challenged his thinking on this point:

> If the historical process were such that some countries developed not only unevenly but even *independently of each other*, isolated from each other, then from the law of uneven development would indubitably follow the possibility of building socialism in one capitalist country – at first in the most advanced country and then as they mature in the more backward ones.[22]

Here is the crux of the difference in perspective between Trotsky and myself. I shall argue that, for *Western* Europe and America, there was indeed one scale of unevenness, yet, for Russia, there was another, because that unevenness *was* an expression of tsarist Russia's independent, *non-capitalist* economic development; independent, that is, of world-capitalism, though not in isolation from it. This is doubtless a highly controversial proposition, at odds with Trotsky's thinking, and not his alone, of course. It will require careful attention to matters of fact and theory to persuade the un-persuaded that the Russian economy as a whole, though *involved* on the capitalist world-market, was not *dependent* on it as were other national economies in Western Europe.[23] The distinction is vital and will have to be borne in mind at all times to avoid misunderstandings. In the perspective adopted in this essay, then, tsarist Russia was not on the last rung of the ladder of world-capitalist development, as Trotsky and all Social Democrats thought. Rather, it was on the latest rung of an altogether different, incommensurable ladder of non-capitalist development.

To be sure, Trotsky noted many peculiarities of tsarist economic development, which he tried to grasp through his general theory of 'combined and uneven development' whereby a 'backward' country can leap over organic

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20. Trotsky 1970, p. 5.
21. Trotsky 1970, p. 19.
22. Trotsky 1970, p. 21.
23. The United States may be the exception. Its continental-sized economy constituted an exceptionally large segment of the world-market, perhaps a world-market unto itself.

stages of development in certain respects but not in others, generating a unique combination of 'archaic' precapitalist social forms with 'modern' capitalist ones. However, Trotsky did not adequately evaluate one peculiarity of that 'combination' in the tsarist case, namely, the precise nature of the tsarist economy's participation in the emerging capitalist world-market of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I leave Trotsky now to examine this peculiarity.

The export of an agrarian surplus, produced largely under non-capitalist conditions and appropriated from a landowning peasantry by the tsarist state through essentially extra-economic, non-market mechanisms, founded Russia's participation in the world-market. In exchange, the tsarist state imported advanced means of production from the capitalist West, which were deployed in Russia to further build up the politico-military capacity of the tsarist state directly, subordinating capital-accumulation to that end. In the precapitalist epoch, of course, such 'political accumulation' had also characterised every other European state, and, as long as this had been the case, the Russian state could successfully compete on the geopolitical arena, and did so right through the Napoleonic era.

By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the development of capitalism in Western Europe and America had so progressed that successful political/military competition for *all* states became increasingly tied to and dependent on capital-accumulation. Russia's failure to compete successfully on the battlefield, in the Crimean War (1853–6), along with peasant-resistance to lordly imposition of labour-dues and dues in kind, did lead the landed aristocracy to abolish serfdom in 1861. Yet, this marked no transformation of feudal class- and property-relations, no transition toward capitalism and a free labour-market to better compete. Instead, the gentry strengthened political controls over the peasantry at the national level to secure surpluses from the peasantry via increasingly generalised taxation without representation. Other 'counter-reforms' implemented by Alexander III (1881–94) worked to assure the same end, particularly the formation of Land Captains in 1889, drawn exclusively from the gentry and endowed with great and arbitrary police-authority over the rural population.[24]

Meanwhile, the state imported great quantities of technologically-advanced means of production from the West. Nevertheless, capitalist relations of production did not accompany the new technology. Once up and running in Russia, there was little further technological transformation of these imported means of production because state-purchases guaranteed a market for the output of these industries, virtually extinguishing all pressures to fur-

24. Pipes 1974, pp. 311, 166.

ther innovate and lower costs to stay in business. 'Examples of indigenous technical developments are the exception rather than the rule'.[25] Subordinating Russia's industrialisation to political requirements of self-preservation, the tsarist state had no choice but to adopt economic polices inimical to systematic, productive investment of surpluses, thorough specialisation of productive techniques, and regular technical innovation characteristic of a capitalist economy. Ultimately constrained by feudal relations of production underlying their state, the last tsars continued, as before, to subordinate capital-accumulation to the imperative of political accumulation. Strengthening the state – the police in relation to the immediate producers and the army in relation to other states – was the prime mover of industrial development and agricultural under-development in tsarist Russia.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the capitalist West could now clearly out-produce Russia with respect to both guns and butter, and Russia's relative military strength declined because there was no powerful capitalist economy to support it.[26] The disastrous consequences in the international arena became manifest in 1905, when Japan defeated Russia, and especially during World-War One, when Russia could not hold off the Kaiser's armies. 'In 1913, national income per head of population in Russia was two-fifths of the French national income, one-third of the German, one-fifth of the British, and only one-eighth of the United States'.[27] Russia had become 'backward' in terms of per capita output of both armaments and consumer-goods, and was not catching up.[28]

Meanwhile, the landed aristocracy kept on flexibly innovating, reforming and developing the political institutions of its feudal state. In the 1905 Revolution, a mobilised working class and peasantry forced the gentry to establish a Duma, a parliamentary form. Yet, even after the defeat of the 1905 Revolution, when the gentry could have abolished this institution, it chose not to do so. Instead, it kept the parliamentary form but invested it with a non-capitalist and non-democratic class-content thanks to Prime Minister Stolypin's *coup*

25. J.M. Cooper and R.A. Lewis, Chapter 10, 'Research and Technology', p. 191 in Davies (ed.) 1990.

26. In 1900, Russian oil-production contributed 50 per cent to world-production. By 1913, it had fallen to 20 per cent. 'Technological change in the industry was virtually non-existent.' The coal-industry was technically backward as well, relying on the 'physical strength and abundance of manual labour'. Peter Gatrell and R.W. Davies, Chapter 7, 'The Industrial Economy', p. 132 in Davies (ed.) 1990.

27. Davies, 'Introduction: From Tsarism to NEP', p. 10 in Davies (ed.) 1990.

28. The theory that capitalist development beyond England arose from the competitive pressure of the British state on other, non-capitalist states, compelling the latter to induce, from above, state-led capitalist transformations of the economy below, has an inadequate factual basis in the case of Russia. For the theory's latest and most ambitious exponent, see Teschke 2003.

of June 1907, which guaranteed landlords a permanent majority there. With this daring, innovative and highly astute political manoeuvre, the landed aristocracy had moved swiftly to assist its chief-executive officer Tsar Nicholas II to represent and defend the gentry's collective interests over and against those of workers and peasants.[29] None of this political 'modernisation' had anything to do with a capitalist transformation of the feudal state, a transition toward a *Rechtstaat* or 'constitutional' state on the Western model.

The October Revolution overturned the tsarist state through which the surplus had been exchanged with capitalist states, severing the pre-eminently *political* link that had connected the Russian economy to the world-market. Whereas trade-relations quickly rebounded in the post-World-War-One capitalist world,[30] in Russia the 'fundamental mechanism of the tsarist foreign sector, and hence of Russian industrial growth, could not be put back together'.[31] The statistics on grain-exports are devastatingly revelatory:

Table One: Grain-exports, 1913 and 1921/22–1929 (thousands of tons)[32]

1913	9182
1921/22	0
1922/23	729
1923/24	2576
1924/25	569
1925/26	2016
1926/27	2099
1927/28	289
1929	178

Clearly, the collapse of grain-exports at the outbreak of World-War One persisted throughout the NEP and cut off the possibility of significant trade-relations with the West, as the tsarist state had once enjoyed; trade-relations that had provided late-Imperial Russia the economic wherewithal to industrialise and to enhance its military power. The loss of the Russian market caused barely a ripple in the capitalist economies of Western Europe, let alone America.

Stalin and Bukharin's acceptance of the fact of Russia's autarchy – the singular fact that grounded the doctrine of socialism in one country – was no

29. Manning 1982. Unfortunately, Manning's book is conceptually weak.
30. Mitchell 1998, pp. 576–80.
31. M.R. Dohan 'Foreign Trade', p. 233 in Davies (ed.) 1990.
32. Davies, Harrison, Wheatcroft 1994, Table 48, p. 316.

'act of faith…dispensing with the need for proof'.[33] No. The doctrine had a purchase on a significant chunk of reality. I return now to Trotsky.

According to Trotsky, Stalin and Bukharin were mistaken to assert Russia's self-sufficiency. To deny, as they did, the 'close organic bond'[34] between Russia and Europe on the world-market had dangerous political implications for the communist movement abroad: it made it appear that the victory of workers' revolution internationally was no longer such a pressing matter after all, or, at least, far less pressing than it had been in Lenin's time. But, Trotsky insisted, the revolutionary epoch would not last forever and time was of the essence. Only internationalisation of workers' rule could open the way for the first workers' state to build socialism to completion, in cooperation with other workers' states.

What was the fundamental threat coming from abroad? In Trotsky's view, the danger in delaying socialist revolution abroad owing to faulty leadership resided not so much in the threat of military intervention from without, as Bukharin and Stalin thought, as from the Soviet Union's domestic economic backwardness, which founded Russia's military weakness. For Stalin and Bukharin had completely overlooked what Trotsky deemed was a fact of decisive, paramount, all-embracing importance: the Soviet economy's dependence on the world-market. At stake on a world-historical scale 'was a life and death struggle between two social systems' joined on the capitalist world-market on which the Soviet economy was '*directly dependent*'. 'To the extent that productivity of labour and the productivity of a social system as a whole are measured on the market by the correlation of prices,' Trotsky wrote, 'it is not so much military intervention as the intervention of cheaper capitalist commodities that constitutes perhaps the greatest immediate menace to Soviet economy.'[35]

> [A] Ford tractor is just as dangerous as a Creusot gun, with the sole difference that while a gun can function only from time to time, the tractor brings its pressure to bear upon us constantly. Besides, the tractor knows that a gun stands behind it as a last resort.[36]

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33. Lewin 1968, p. 162. Here, Lewin reproduces Trotsky's dismissive stance toward the theory. Despite Lewin's marked intellectual and moral sympathies for Bukharin, his analytical frame of reference is often closer to Trotsky's than to Bukharin's. Indeed, Trotsky has strongly influenced most analysts, regardless of their sympathies, more than they care to admit.

34. Trotsky 1970, p. 15.

35. Trotsky 1970, p. 47.

36. Trotsky 1970, p. 48. Addressing Bukharin, Stalin and the party-leadership in 1926, Preobrazhensky wrote along similarly alarming lines: 'Not to see…the huge and threatening shadow of the world market; not to see the thinness of the wall which

Contra Trotsky, the 'greatest immediate menace' facing the first workers' state lay more in the self-movement of the peasantry and less in the movement of the capitalist world-market armed with its cheaper commodities. The latter represented the lesser threat because, as I have shown, the October Revolution destroyed the tsarist economy's connection to the world-market by destroying the tsarist state.

Specifically, a massive peasantry producing mainly for subsistence, not for exchange on the market, whether domestic or foreign, shielded the Soviet economy from the pressure of 'cheaper commodity-prices' to transform property-relations in capitalist direction and subject it to the logic of capitalist profit-making. The structure of peasant-possession placed the output of the peasantry beyond the reach of capitalists through investment and/or trade, affording far greater 'protection' to Soviet rule than the Soviet state-monopoly on the negligible foreign trade of the NEP-era.

But peasant-possession was double-edged: a virtually indestructible shield against the pressures of foreign competition, it would prove to be a dangerous obstacle in relation to developing the forces of production at home. The harvest-failures of 1927 and 1928 menaced socialist construction and the workers' state far more seriously than any foreign threat. Their depth, breath and persistence caught not just Trotsky but the entire leadership flatfooted. Stalin especially re-broadcast Trotsky and the Left's diagnosis of the crisis in grain-marketings by blaming the *kulaks* or better-off 'capitalist' elements of the peasantry for organising a 'grain-strike' against the Soviet state, in the vague hope of overthrowing it and linking up with capitalists abroad. This diagnosis was way off the mark. In Section Four, I shall show how the crisis of under-production in agriculture, so typical of non-capitalist economic formations, was the spontaneous result of the peasantry's self-movement in its entirety, not the movement of a small *kulak*-minority consciously aiming to tear down the broader worker-peasant alliance and capsize the Soviet state.

For now, I point out that the non-capitalist character of Russia's economy both in tsarist times and under the NEP equally characterised that economy's relationship to the capitalist world-market. The Bolsheviks could not decree a fundamental change to that autarchic, non-capitalist relationship. The economic crises that would convulse the capitalist world in the interwar-period,

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separates this from the hundred-million-headed mass of our peasant population; not to see…the ceaseless struggle of one system against another is to keep [the working class] in the dark about the dangers which threaten it, and to weaken its will…in this period when it needs to continue to wage the heroic struggle of October – only now against the whole world economy, on the economic front, under the slogan of industrialising the country'. Preobrazhensky 1965, p. 39.

especially in the 1930s, were largely a consequence of the Western-European and American economies seizing up, not building 'socialism' in Russia. Economic development in Russia thus had far less significance, its economic consequences minimal for the rest of the European continent precisely because of its closed, non-capitalist character. What political consequences for the international workers' movement followed from this fact?

Counterfactually, had Russian workers seized power in an advanced capitalist Russia, not only would the peasant-question never have appeared and this chapter never have been written, but an 'organic bond' would *truly* have existed on the world-market between the Soviet Union and the rest of the world, removing any material basis for building socialism autarchically, in one country. The economic policies of the Soviet Union would then have had mighty economic consequences for its Western-European neighbours and this would *actually* have invested the 'idea of a world communist party with supreme reality'[37] by affording such a party a 'natural' economic basis for the closest political cooperation between the revolutionary representatives of the working class from each capitalist country, on the one hand, and representatives from the one economically-advanced socialist country, on the other. Here, the economic interdependence of these countries would have buttressed the political internationalism of the worker's movement.

Unfortunately, and factually, the Third International lacked this natural economic basis, making it far easier – though not inevitable – for Stalin to substitute for it an ever-increasingly bureaucratic, mechanical subordination of Communist parties abroad to the political dictates of the Kremlin inspired by building 'socialism' at home. These dictates did not require paying the closest attention to the working-class movement in Western Europe and America to help it develop fruitfully precisely because the fate of the Soviet economy was not directly intertwined with that of the capitalist economies abroad.

The Russian Revolution thus had direct significance for Western Europe less, I would suggest, because of Russia's 'organic' ties through the world-market to the advanced capitalist countries, as Trotsky held, but more, I think, because the Bolsheviks themselves, for a moment, in Lenin's time especially, strove mightily to create, virtually from scratch, an 'organic bond' on another plane – the plane of world-politics – by reaching out to Western Europe's revolutionaries through the Third International; an effort reciprocated by emerging communist parties in the West in the immediate postwar-period. This early attempted political unification of the revolutionary workers' movement remained analytically distinct from the all-round economic

37. Trotsky 1970, p. 5.

interdependence of national economies enmeshed in the world-market. The former was not grounded in the latter. This proved to be the Third International's Achilles heel.

Trotsky no doubt interpreted Lenin's writings correctly regarding the issue of building socialism to completion in one country. But the issue could not and was not decided by appeal to Lenin's texts because Bukharin and Stalin could and did make a defensible argument in favour of constructing 'socialism' in Russia (whether to completion or not) independently of Lenin's thinking, by appeal to Russia's real insubordination to the world-market. At stake was much more than Stalin and Bukharin's mere 'sophistic interpretations of several lines from Lenin on the one hand, and to a scholastic interpretation of the "law of uneven development" on the other', nourished by 'metaphysical methodology,' as Trotsky superficially held in 1928.[38] The doctrine of building 'socialism' in a closed economy had a weightier material basis than Trotsky allowed because the doctrine reflected the very real insulation of the Soviet economy from the vagaries of world-capitalist accumulation, in the 1920s and beyond. Trotsky's grave underestimation of the rational core at the heart of the theory of an autarchic economy left him ill-prepared to deal with the real problems of building socialism in Russia, problems far more intimately connected to the peasant-question than to Russia's meagre economic relations with the capitalist world.

Nevertheless, on the argument mounted here, Trotsky was still right to work with might and main for the internationalisation of workers' rule. In the long run, if building socialism in Russia meant transforming the peasants' way of life through 'primitive accumulation' then this accumulation would be socialist only if the peasantry saw material benefits accruing to it at the *beginning* of this process, not at its *conclusion*, because only in this way could the peasantry's *consent* to initiate this process be obtained. In turn, Russia could reap such benefits only if it could immediately draw on the resources of advanced-socialist economies in the formerly capitalist heartlands, as the Bolsheviks had held from April 1917 and through the Civil War. In the short run, socialist economies abroad could easily have sent grain to the Soviet Union to help it weather the agrarian crisis of the late 1920s. These hypothetical scenarii aside, by 1921 the ebb-tide of revolution convinced the Bolsheviks to defer their expectations of an imminent socialist transformation. At the same time, the actual experience of the post-1921 NEP-period would show that, without social revolution abroad, no such aid would be forthcoming. Thus, the overthrow of world-capitalism was still necessary in the near future; again, not

38. Trotsky 1970, p. 43.

so much to put an end to the putatively menacing competitive pressures of this unprecedentedly dynamic economic system, as Trotsky believed, as to provide a permanent democratic solution to the ever-more pressing peasant-question in Russia, as I hope to demonstrate.

It follows that Trotsky's criticisms of the policies of the Sixth Congress of the Third International from 1928 on still retain their full value, notably the pernicious, criminal 'theory' that fascism and Social Democracy were 'twins'. These Comintern policies, adopted at Stalin's behest, facilitated the victory of Nazism in Germany, equally prolonging world-capitalism and 'socialism' in one country for an entire epoch, and then some. The resulting defeat of workers' struggles in the West short-circuited a democratic-socialist solution to the peasant-question in Russia, helping clear the way for an undemocratic, Stalinist one. However, here is the obverse of the medal: Trotsky's inability fully to fathom the peasantry's capacity to reproduce itself in a non-capitalist and non-socialist manner left him ill-prepared to deal with Stalinism, a class-system of surplus-extraction that was also neither capitalist nor socialist. With no class to target, Trotsky could not systematically target Stalin's politics. And so, in supporting Stalin's 'left' turn in 1929, Trotsky contributed not just to the victory of Stalinism in the Soviet Union, but also to the epochal defeat of the workers' movement in Western Europe: a victorious Stalin in Russia was in a position to dictate the policies adopted by the leaderships of the Communist parties elsewhere, particularly in Germany, France and Spain. Had Stalin been toppled in Russia, on the eve of the Great Depression, the chances of stopping the ascent of the Nazis in Germany would have been that much greater. Such is the reciprocal action of the dialectic: what goes around comes around.

I do not wish to be misinterpreted. Trotsky was not the demiurge of the twentieth century, channelling the course of the workers' movement by what he did or did not do, say or did not say. Yet, historically, he did voluntarily assume a great duty towards the workers' movement, and shouldered correspondingly great responsibilities, and, here, it may be well and truly said: To whom much has been given, much is demanded.

Turning briefly to the theory of permanent revolution, it is customary in the literature to consider it a critique of socialism in one country in positive form. In fact, the two theories were asymmetrical because they dealt with historically interrelated but analytically distinct matters.

Throughout the 1920s, Trotsky simply denied the relevance of the permanent revolution to the problem of socialist construction in the Soviet Union,[39]

39. Day 1973 is one of the very few (the only one?) to rightly bring out this important and rarely noticed point.

asserting its significance only with respect to the dynamic of social transformation in the Third World, where workers' revolutions solve 'bourgeois-democratic' tasks such as agrarian reform, political freedom, etc. The Russian context was altogether different: the workers' revolution had actualised the theory of permanent revolution. Permanent revolution had 'reflected a stage in our development that we have long since passed through', Trotsky explained in 1924. 'Theoretical reflections about how, in such and such a year, I expected the Russian revolution to develop' were not germane in presently determining Trotsky's (or anybody else's) current prescriptive policies toward the peasantry and economic development.[40]

In any event, Trotsky favourably assessed the prospects for peaceful socialist construction under the NEP from the vantage-point of an extant workers' state, a state whose isolated existence Trotsky's permanent revolution theory had not foreseen when he had first elaborated it. The Party would confidently go on building socialism subject only to its leadership adopting correct policies toward the peasantry in good time, policies whose success did not directly depend on the success of workers' revolution abroad. Trotsky flatly rejected Stalin and Bukharin's charge that he relied on international revolution alone and 'underestimated' peasant-support for socialist-economic development. Speaking at the 15th Party-Conference in November 1926, Trotsky declared that the newly formed United Opposition was 'working toward the socialist state of society . . . with all possible energy'.

> [I]f we did not believe that our development was socialist; if we did not believe that our country possesses adequate means for the furtherance of socialist economics; if we were not convinced of our complete and final victory; then, it need not be said, our place would not be in the ranks of the Communist Party.[41]

To sum up: Trotsky thought Russia could overcome the barrier to the complete realisation of socialism only on a world-scale. He excoriated Stalin and Bukharin for holding otherwise. He forecast dire economic difficulties on the road to socialist construction owing to its overly gradual pace and needlessly isolated character, under Stalin and Bukharin's direction. This analysis, I have stated, was faulty on a capital-point. Scanning the far horizons, Trotsky overlooked or seriously underestimated domestic limits to on-going socialist-economic development in the Soviet Union placed by a massive peasantry producing for subsistence; limits no leadership could transcend

40. Trotsky 1975a, p. 298.
41. Trotsky 1980, pp. 162–3.

without breaking the NEP and breaking apart the worker-peasant alliance. As between world-capitalism abroad and the peasantry at home, the peasantry presented the greater and more immediate danger to the existence of an isolated workers' state and the construction of socialism in Russia, owing to the potential for massive agricultural crisis built into peasant-proprietorship, a potential realised in the late 1920s, while world-capitalism represented the lesser and more distant danger. My argument, in effect, inverts Trotsky's hierarchy of dangers besetting the socio-political order issuing from the October Revolution. I hope to lend further substance to this admittedly somewhat abstract argument in the pages that follow.

II From the February Revolution of 1917 to the New Economic Policy of 1921

In 1917, independent working-class activity not only overthrew tsarism but also formed the material basis for the Bolsheviks to go beyond the bourgeois-democratic revolution and win the proletariat over to socialist revolution and socialism that very year. 'All Power to the Soviets' proved the only way to secure land for the peasantry, bread for the working class, and peace for both, vindicating Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, and brilliantly confirming Marx's sociological dictum that 'the emancipation of the working class must be the task of the working class itself'; a dictum that Lenin's Bolsheviks masterfully converted into the language of politics. But Soviet power raised a huge problem: the proletarian-socialist October Revolution overtook the bourgeois-democratic February Revolution with such alacrity that capitalism never had the chance to posit itself as a self-sustaining mode of production long enough to transform the bulk of the property-owning peasantry into a property-less working class engaged in socialised production, thereby establishing the material premises of socialism.

The Bolsheviks' long-standing orthodox-Marxist thinking about the material premises to building socialism did not change in 1917; that would come only in 1921. However, the self-movement of the peasantry, from February on, did teach the Bolsheviks something new because they were willing to learn from the peasantry: it taught the Bolsheviks to jettison their agrarian programme of the nationalisation of the land.

The Bolsheviks had originally predicted that, once the bourgeois-democratic revolution had destroyed the (quasi)-feudal political constraints on peasants' productive activity, the peasants would be free to respond to market-opportunities. They would do so by moving swiftly to dismantle their age-old institution of self-rule, the *mir*, privatise the land, consolidate their scattered

holdings into a single contiguous block of land, and begin to compete in earnest on the market as owner-operators by specialising output, introducing new techniques and accumulating land, thereby fostering the rapid growth of capitalist agriculture. To facilitate this prospective capitalist-economic development, the Bolsheviks had called for nationalisation of the land to divert absolute ground-rent from idle landlords to an enterprising bourgeois state. 'In the Russian revolution the struggle for the land is nothing else than a struggle for the renovated path of capitalist development. The consistent slogan of such renovation is – nationalisation of the land.'[42] The course of events in 1917 utterly spoiled Lenin and the Bolsheviks' prognoses.

When the February–October 'bourgeois-democratic' phase of the 1917 Revolution came around and put the Bolshevik theory to the test of practice, the peasantry showed no sign of even beginning to behave as predicted by Lenin's theory. Far from dismantling the *mir*, the peasants used it to independently seize the landed aristocracy's property, and bring it under full, peasant-communal possession, rounding out their self-sufficient holdings.[43] Belatedly acknowledging this fact, the Bolsheviks gave up on land-nationalisation in 1917 and made the Socialist-Revolutionary programme their own: all land to the peasants. The SR agrarian programme faithfully reflected what the peasants were doing in practice: dividing the land. The peasants disregarded Lenin's view that the 'division of the land is an entirely wrong expression of the aims of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia…'.[44] Indeed, the aims of Lenin's bourgeois-democratic revolution were never realised in the countryside. Instead, dividing the land turned out to be the correct expression of the 'aims' of a '*peasant*-democratic' revolution in 1917–18.[45]

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42. For Lenin's theoretical treatment of absolute and differential ground-rent, drawn from Marx, see Lenin 1962g, pp. 294–323. The theory's applicability to Russian conditions presupposed the development of capitalism in the Russian countryside. This is where Lenin went astray.

43. Figes 1990, provides an excellent summary.

44. Lenin 1962g, p. 293.

45. The category of peasant-democratic revolution did not exist in the Bolshevik lexicon. This is largely because they believed that, while the peasantry could be self-acting, it could never be self-leading. The 'city' would have to lead the countryside. The 'colossal peasant movements of past ages', wrote Trotsky, 'did not lead to the democratisation of social relations in Russia – without cities to lead them, that was unattainable!' Trotsky 1980, p. 408. Here, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks never quite gasped the importance of the distinction between the 'city' destroying the coordinating centres of the feudal state, nationally, on the one hand, and the peasants leading the struggle locally, in the village. Only the city can do the first, but once accomplished, the peasants are free to organise and lead the struggle against the local feudal lord since the latter can no longer call on their just-destroyed feudal state to defend them. This is what happened in France in 1789 and in Russia in 1917–18. In contrast, an intact

What the peasants achieved under the protective umbrella of Soviet power was no bourgeois revolution in the English manner, where an epochal capitalist transformation of property- and class-relations in the sixteenth century led to the dispossession of the peasantry, the formation of an agricultural proletariat, an uninterrupted rise in the productivity of labour in agriculture, paving the way for the Industrial Revolution.[46] Rather, it was a bourgeois revolution in the opposite, French, manner, when peasants consolidated their possession of land and control of production, slowing the development of capitalism there to a crawl.[47] The October Revolution preserved the peasant-mode of production upon which the feudal mode had rested; a material inheritance that would severely constrain the range of economic policies available to the leadership.

Peasant-validation of the SR agrarian platform still did not prompt the Bolsheviks to question, let alone disavow, their long-held conception of the *dynamic* of peasant-development. *In time*, the Bolsheviks thought, the peasants would finally begin to behave as a proto-capitalist class, begin to do all the things it had failed to do in 1917–18, and therefore present a growing internal 'capitalist' threat to the workers' state and its socialist orientation.[48] Driven by this conception of the peasantry, the Bolsheviks organised committees of landless and poor peasants [*kombedy*] soon after the outbreak of civil war in June 1918 to carry forward the 'class-struggle' against the wealthy

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feudal state defeated the great servile insurrections in Russia's past, notably Razin's in 1670–1 and Pugachev's in 1773–4.

46. Brenner 1993.

47. Comninel 1987. Of course, to use the concept 'bourgeois revolution' to cover opposite processes is to create confusion, calling into question the concept's analytical usefulness. Brenner 1989 has called the practical value of the concept into question on this and other grounds as well.

48. The Bolsheviks never forsook this view of the peasant-economic dynamic. As Trotsky expressed it: 'The fact that the peasantry as a whole found it possible once more – for the last time in their history – to act as a revolutionary factor in 1917 testifies at once to the weakness of capitalist relations in the country and to their strength', because the Revolution revealed 'for a brief moment but with extraordinary force, the superiority of caste ties of the peasantry over the capitalistic antagonisms'. But 'the most audacious of agrarian revolutions has never yet by itself overstepped the bounds of the bourgeois regime'. The SR-programme 'which was to guarantee to each toiler his "right to the land," was with the preservation of unrestricted market relations, an utter utopia!' Trotsky 1980, pp. 407–8. *Pace* Trotsky, the practical realisation of this utopia in post-revolutionary NEP-Russia, which guaranteed the peasants' 'right to the land', *also* upheld 'restrictions' on the development of market-relations, particularly with respect to the purchase and sale of land, revealing the superiority of 'caste ties' over 'capitalist antagonisms' well beyond the 'brief' moment of revolution. The peasant-agrarian revolution of 1917–18 most definitely never 'overstepped the bounds' of a bourgeois régime because it never stepped inside those bounds in the first place.

agrarian 'petty bourgeoisie' from which twentieth-century Cavaignacs could draw support. At the same time, the *kombedy* would thwart the evolution of putatively capitalist relations of production responsible for generating this counter-revolutionary petty bourgeoisie in the first place.

Promoting class-struggle in the countryside was but part of the Bolsheviks' programme at this time. Far more importantly, the Bolsheviks pressed very hard for the internationalisation of workers' power by founding the Third International to prompt revolutionary currents then emerging inside and outside the reformist Social-Democratic parties in the West to quickly unite and form independent, revolutionary-communist parties. Two considerations motivated the Bolsheviks to pursue this internationalist policy.

First, only workers' power in the capitalist world would allow backward Russia (and countries like it) to skip the process of 'primitive accumulation' by drawing on the already-accumulated wealth of the West instead. This would obviate the peasantry's ostensible tendency to appropriate the agricultural surplus in its own, capitalist-interests-to-be and, collaterally, permit democratic, civilised development of the forces of production, to wit: the enlarged reproduction of the working class itself.

Second, in the short run, immediate socialist revolution abroad would pre-empt the threat of military intervention by economically more powerful capitalist states, or make their defeat more likely should intervention nonetheless occur, in the Bolshevik view. The latter scenario, which actually did materialise, unexpectedly required the Bolsheviks to adopt a supplementary, non-programmatic, empirically-driven emergency-measure, grandly but confusingly called war-'communism': forcibly appropriating grain from the peasantry to feed the cities and the Red Army in its struggle against the Whites.[49]

The policies of war-communism at the same time quashed what little intra-peasant class-struggle the Bolsheviks had artificially fostered through the *kombedy*. The committees of poor peasants disappeared as soon as the Bolsheviks stopped sponsoring them, in November 1918; proof positive that the *kombedy* had no organic links to any actually existing segment of the peasantry.[50]

> Contrary to Bolshevik expectations…the ties between fellow villagers of unequal economic status proved stronger than the general, class ties between poor peasants in opposition to their 'kulak masters.' It was for this reason

49. Incidentally, Lih 1997 shows that most Bolsheviks never thought the war-communist measures they took represented the fulfilment of the communist utopia as Isaac Deutscher, E.H. Carr, Martin Malia, Sheila Fitzpatrick and many others have argued.

50. Moon 1999, p. 356.

> that the *kombedy* failed to develop a 'proletarian' consciousness… The smallholding peasantry did not welcome the idea of a separate organization for the village poor. The land commune…reflected the general interests of the peasant farmers, who saw no need to add superfluous political forms that would only encourage social and institutional dissension.[51]

As one SR later expressed it: 'There was no class war.… The peasantry acted as one…'.[52] The real struggle of the peasantry as a whole against the war-communist predations of the workers' state soon supplanted the illusory 'class'-struggle between 'rich' and 'poor' peasants.

Under Trotsky's masterful generalship, the Red Army gained victory in the Civil War, though at the cost of alienating the peasantry through the emergency-policy of war-communism, the price the Bolsheviks paid for the untimely failure of workers' revolutions abroad, in Germany notably. The unexpected delay of socialist revolutions in the capitalist world forced the Bolsheviks more or less consciously to reconsider, in the interim, the problem of building socialism in a country where the material preconditions for it were lacking.

Peasant-success in strengthening their social position *as peasants* soon posed a supremely challenging political problem for the Bolsheviks. How to square the socialist rule of three million workers with the rule of the majority when the majority consisted of peasants with little or no interest in socialism, and little or no interest in the collective organisation of production and distribution beyond the confines of the village? Clearly, only by transforming peasants into workers via industrialisation could peasant-democracy, organised in thousands of *miry* dotting the countryside, transition to workers' democracy, organised in soviets and factory-committees in the cities and towns. Only then could formal democracy – the rule of the majority – and socialism – workers' rule – actively and durably coexist, like two peas in a pod. Yet this transformation posed an equally challenging economic problem. How could scattered small-peasant property be the basis for developing social labour on a national and, eventually, international scale; manifested in the development of industry and industrialised agriculture?

As we have seen, the Bolsheviks never thought they would have to face this double-barrelled challenge by themselves for any significant length of

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51. Figes 1990, p. 249. Trotsky admitted as much in his *History of the Russian Revolution*. 'The soviets of farm-hand deputies attained significance only in a few localities, chiefly the Baltic provinces. The land committees, on the contrary, became the instruments of the whole peasantry…weapons of agrarian revolution.' Trotsky 1980b p. 407.

52. Cited in White 2005, p. 54.

time once Soviet power was in the saddle. They looked to the coming outbreak of world-socialist revolution to establish the proper material basis to socialism internationally. However, the temporary reflux of revolution in the West coupled with growing peasant-resistance to war-communism caused the Bolsheviks to defer their expectations of an imminent worldwide advance toward socialism, forcing them, instead, to find virtue in the necessity of a potentially long-lived worker-peasant alliance on the home-front. The New Economic Policy, announced in 1921, envisioned a series of measures to begin the transition toward socialism. Central to the NEP was the abolition of forced grain-requisitions in favour of a fixed tax on the peasantry. After payment, the peasants were free to dispose of their surpluses as they saw fit.

The Bolsheviks now tacitly rejected the view they and all Social Democrats had espoused for so long that only the free development of capitalism, made possible by a bourgeois-democratic revolution, could resolve the peasantry/proletariat antagonism in Russia. Having won the Civil War and jumped over an entire epoch of capitalist development – but not succoured by workers' revolution elsewhere – Lenin and the Bolsheviks now concluded that the proletariat/peasantry antagonism *was* solvable along democratic and socialist lines, subject only to keeping the external capitalist threat at bay. The Bolsheviks now thought they could design and implement politically democratic, non-coercive means to resolve, more or less indefinitely, the conflict of interests that the Bolsheviks had hitherto highlighted between peasants and proletarians, within the context of a developing economy, in transit toward socialism, while steadfastly working for the cause of world-socialism.

Speaking to the 10th Congress of the Communist Party in March 1921, Lenin said, 'We know that so long as there is no revolution in other countries only agreement with the peasantry can save the socialist revolution in Russia'. Only 'in highly developed capitalist countries where wage workers in industry and agriculture make up the vast majority…is it possible to pass directly from capitalism to socialism, without any country-wide transitional measures'. However, in a country 'where the overwhelming majority of the population consists of small agricultural producers' such transitional measures were indispensable. In Russia

> The socialist revolution…can triumph only on two conditions: first, if it is given timely support by a socialist revolution in one or several advanced countries.…The second condition is agreement between the proletariat…and the majority of the peasant population.[53]

53. Lenin 1965a, p. 215.

Helping to fulfil the first condition was the job of the Third International, fulfilling the second, that of the NEP. Marxists have tended to focus on the first virtually to the exclusion of the second; a grave imbalance this intervention seeks to redress.

Lenin had occasion to blurt out his and the Bolsheviks' new, broader understanding of the material premises of socialist construction by explicitly contrasting it to the old, narrower 'orthodox'-Marxist view they had previously held. In an exasperated 1923 review of the Menshevik N. Sukhanov's book, *Notes on the Revolution*, Lenin chided its author, and all the 'heroes' of the Second International, for 'harping' on the old 'incontrovertible proposition' that the '"development of the productive forces of Russia has not attained the level that makes socialism possible"'. Before 1917, this had been the 'decisive criterion' for thinking that the coming revolution in Russia would be a bourgeois-democratic one. Lenin presently affirmed that this old proposition, previously 'incontrovertible', was now controvertible, indeed, controverted by history. The workers' seizure of power in Russia had opened up new, hitherto-concealed, perspectives of historical advance. The fresh experience of the NEP was showing to all who would but open their eyes that socialist construction in one country was feasible after all.[54] To be sure, Lenin and Trotsky always understood that only future generations would complete socialist construction, and only on a global scale, as subsequent generations of Marxists have insistently reminded us. Until that blessed day however, Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Stalin and every party-leader of note in the 1920s believed that correct relations between the working class and the peasantry could assure steady economic development and successful socialist construction in Russia, within the context of the NEP. As long as 'agreement with the peasantry' could be secured, the socialist revolution at home could be 'saved', even in the absence of socialist revolution abroad. A temporally indefinite reprieve was at hand.

Preserving a democratic workers' state now meant, at the very least, preserving peasant-support. For the question of democracy in the very broadest, 'popular' sense of the term – support of the majority for the gains of the October Revolution – came down, in the final analysis, to retaining the support of the peasant-majority. Speaking to delegates meeting in July 1921 for the Third Congress of the Third International, Lenin reiterated this cardinal point before an internationalist audience: 'We are helping the peasants because without an alliance with them the political power of the proletariat is impossible, its preservation is inconceivable'.[55] The NEP was a calculated bid to renew

54. Lenin 1965c, pp. 476–79.
55. Lenin 1965b, p. 490.

the working class's alliance with the peasantry, originally forged in a common struggle against tsarism but progressively undermined and ultimately shattered by the Civil War, and designed to move forward the process of socialist construction.

III Preserving the worker-peasant alliance and promoting economic advance, 1921–9: a labour of Sisyphus

Having achieved economic recovery by 1925, the Bolsheviks henceforth thought they faced, for some undetermined period, the difficult but not impossible task of industrialising the country further, beyond the level attained under the tsars. Of course, they disagreed about tempos of economic development and the kind of economic and political relations the Soviet Union should have with the capitalist world in this period. By the late 1920s, however, the surprising and highly dismaying domestic reality concentrating the minds of all Bolsheviks was a severe crisis in grain-marketing to the towns and cities that threatened to stall, even reverse, the industrial progress hitherto made. The peasants were reneging on their 'agreement' to ally with the workers' state, threatening 'the political power of the proletariat', and conceivably making it 'impossible' to sustain it, as Lenin had warned.[56]

In the conventional view, Marxist and non-Marxist, the faulty application of the NEP triggered the grain-marketing shortfalls of 1927 and, again, in large part, those of 1928. Analysts have focused on the unequal terms of trade between agriculture and industry, graphically represented by the two divergent blades – 'scissors' – of low and falling grain-prices and high and rising prices of manufactured goods. They object that state-set grain-prices were not high enough to attract large holders of grain, the '*kulaks*', to market their surpluses.[57]

No doubt, higher prices would have encouraged additional marketings. In fact, the grain-shortage itself would eventually generate higher food-prices relative to manufactures.[58] Yet, increasingly favourable terms of trade between town and country did little reverse the decline in marketings. This is because the traditional focus on disturbances in the sphere of circulation fails to bring out enough disturbing production-shortages lying behind marketing shortfalls in the first place. The 'scissors-crisis' of the late 1920s was quite different from the scissors-crises of 1923 and 1925.

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56. Lenin 1965b, p. 490.
57. For example Lewin 1968, Nove 1992, pp. 137, 147.
58. See Table 3, below, p. 65.

The scissors-crisis of 1923 had been 'due primarily not to a failure to produce, but a failure to establish terms of trade to bring about a flow of goods from factory-worker to peasant and vice versa'.[59] Then, the industrial trusts had used their monopoly-position to hold on to their goods until the owners of expected substantial surpluses of agricultural products appeared on the market to purchase higher-priced but still market-clearing quantities of manufactured goods on sale. The Supreme Council of the Economy, Vesenkha, which retained control of industry, had made this speculative strategy possible by the according easy credits to keep production rolling, despite the lack of sales. Soon, Gosbank intervened to put an end to this practice and the scissors closed quickly. From now on, the state, not factory-managers, set prices.[60]

The scissors-crisis of 1925 also related to terms of trade, not production-shortfalls. 1925 saw a bumper-harvest, the peasants cleaned out store-shelves, creating a 'goods-famine' because the state had fixed prices of consumer-goods too low, allowing better-off peasants – the '*kulaks*' – to engage in speculative operations with grain still in their possession.[61] In 1923 and 1925, factory-managers and enterprising peasants respectively were redistributing the pie of goodies by gaming the market. No increase or decrease in the size of the pie resulted in either case. In 1927, however, the pie was shrinking; a far-more serious matter. The decline in marketed production reflected a decline in un-marketed production. The resulting scissors-crisis thus fundamentally differed from previous scissors-crises, a difference that the literature does not adequately register.

Bad weather caused total grain-production to fall 6 per cent for 1927. Poor harvests were the largest single contributor to a catastrophic 30 per cent reduction in grain-marketings for the last three months of 1927 compared to the same period the year before.[62] Worse was yet to come. The winter of 1927–8 destroyed much of the wheat in the Ukraine and the Northern Caucasus, making re-sowing necessary, and by a belated spring, which increased the demand for fodder. Poor harvests continued into the fall of 1928. Harvests were either late or failed in new areas, the Central Black-Earth, North-Caucasian and Middle- and Lower-Volga regions, and failed again in the critically important steppe-regions of the Ukraine, the breadbasket of the Soviet

59. Carr 1954, p. 87.
60. Carr 1954, pp. 91, 98–9.
61. Carr 1970, Volume 2, pp. 315–19.
62. Atkinson 1983, p. 316.

Union.[63] Poor harvests two years in a row could easily lead to famine because peasants would draw on grain-reserves to cover shortfalls in the first year, shredding the safety-net for the second. This had been the case under the tsars, and it threatened to be so again under the NEP.[64]

In the wake of the grain-procurement crisis in late 1927, the state took a series of steps to appease the majority of the peasantry and keep alive the worker-peasant alliance; even if this meant diverting resources from industrial development. In December 1927, the Politburo ordered industrial goods 'strip[ped] from cities and non-grain growing areas' and dispatched to grain-growing areas.[65] To coax the peasantry to sell on the market, the state raised official purchasing prices for grain by approximately 20 per cent,[66] though state-procurement prices in the localities were in practice quite often higher in a bid to compete with still higher prices on private markets. Further, the state shifted investment and current resources towards the consumer-goods industry, increasing the supply of cotton notably.[67] It also applied the just-recently enacted three seven-hour shift-system in industry most fully to the textile-sector, concentrated in the Ivanovo Industrial Region, the Russian 'Manchester', to promote the supply of textiles to the peasantry at a more advantageous price.[68] Ominously, textile-workers there responded to these peasant-friendly measures by protesting, through strikes and mass-demonstrations, the elevated workloads and sharp deterioration in working and living standards they entailed, threatening to unravel the worker-peasant alliance from the opposite, workers' end.[69] If ever there was a catch-22 situation, maintaining the worker-peasant alliance was it.

Carr and Davies summed up the continuing efforts to appease the peasantry at the start of 1928, when the leadership launched a campaign to

> Increase the production of industrial consumer goods and their delivery to agricultural areas. The campaign prevented the seasonal decline in production that had occurred in the previous two years. In January 1928 the production of industrial consumer goods, measured in pre-war prices, was

63. Carr and Davies 1969, p. 63. A delegate from the region reported 'peasants tearing down straw from the roofs of their houses to feed cattle dying of hunger in the severe spring frosts', pp. 63–4.

64. Moon 1999, p. 28. Storage-facilities for longer-term protection were too costly for peasants to maintain. Besides, had these reserves existed in tsarist times, the tsarist state would have been sorely tempted to get its hands on them for its own purposes.

65. Viola 2005, p. 32.

66. Carr and Davies 1969, p. 695.

67. Carr and Davies 1969, p. 49.

68. Carr and Davies 1969, p. 500.

69. Rossman 2005.

> 26 percent greater than in the corresponding month of the previous year, as compared with a corresponding increase of 14 percent in December 1927.[70]

These efforts persisted all the way into the second half 1929, when supplies of cotton- and woollen fabrics, leather-goods, leather-footwear, finished clothing, metals and window-glass were more than 40 per cent above the 1928 level, while supplies of these scarce commodities to the towns fell in absolute terms.[71] Yet grain-procurements kept falling short. The important increase in the supply of industrial consumer-goods to the peasants could not make up for the sharp decline in the supply of food in peasant-households. As between exchanging the products of their labour to install window-glass to improve their humble dwellings, or using their labour directly to produce wheat and put bread on their tables, the peasants chose the latter.

By markedly shifting policy in early 1928 toward that of Trotsky and the Left Opposition, a shift characterised as such by the latter, Stalin intended to shore up the peasant's end of the worker-peasant alliance. Stalin tried to isolate the source of the problem by isolating the wealthy *kulak*-minority and assorted speculators and bagmen from the rest of the less well-off peasant-majority. He charged that the grasping *kulaks* were engaged in a 'grain-strike': withholding grain until the state caved in and raised grain-prices further, a theme sounded by the Left Opposition (though Stalin would never admit his debt) and often repeated in the scholarly literature as if it were a self-evident proposition.[72] The notion of an offensive 'strike' presupposed a nationwide level of conscious organisation that Marxists had hitherto thought was possible only for the working class, not the peasantry. Rather than acknowledging that the 'strike' was but the aggregated result of millions of peasants – *kulaks* and non-*kulaks* – acting in their self-interest, the *kulaks* became the sole culprits, a politically more manageable quantity for the Stalinist leadership; or so the leadership thought.[73]

Stalin began forcibly to requisition grain from the '*kulaks*' – dubbed the 'Ural-Siberian' method – much to the growing discomfort of Bukharin and the emerging 'Right Opposition', which feared that attacking the '*kulaks*' could

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70. Carr and Davies 1969, Volume 1, p. 308.

71. Davies 1980, pp. 78–9.

72. Writers as diverse as Bettelheim 1976, Mandel 1995 and Cliff 1974 take the growth of the *kulaks*' influence for granted, again explaining the cause of this growth much as Bukharin and Trotsky did, as a result of 'mistakes' made by the Party in its peasant-policy, only differing about the kind of mistake made. Stalin was closer to the truth for once when he stated the policy of the Central Committee had 'nothing to do' with promoting this influence, citing weather induced harvest failure instead as the root cause of the grain procurement crisis. Stalin 1954a p. 53.

73. This is not to deny that once the state attacked the peasantry, the peasants did organise locally to resist, a resistance that was often planned and 'conscious'.

easily spill over into an attack on their neighbours, eventually escalating into an all-out war with the entire peasantry. Stalin denounced this alarmist forecast as the 'most rotten idea of all the rotten ideas that exist in the minds of some communists'.[74]

Stalin prominently associated himself with the Ural-Siberian method. He went to Siberia to spur-on local party-officials of agricultural 'soviets'. These officials had been markedly reluctant to expropriate surplus-grain, owing to ties of comity with influential peasant-leaders acting through the *mir*, the real power in the countryside.[75] A conciliatory approach recommended itself to them, 'objectively' making them Bukharin supporters, as Stalin would later accurately insist. However, Stalin's smash-and-grab method worked there, in January–February 1928, only because there was no harvest-failure and, therefore, surpluses were at hand to seize. Elsewhere, in regions affected by the poor harvests, armed shakedown-operations yielded little because there was little or no surplus-grain to steal: bureaucratic plenipotentiaries sent to the Ukraine and the Caucasus came back to Moscow empty handed.[76]

Trotsky, whom Stalin and Bukharin derided as a 'superindustrialiser', especially welcomed Stalin's manoeuvres to rally the 'middle' and 'poor' peasant-majority against the wealthy *kulak*-minority as a very first, small step toward collectivisation and accelerated economic development, complaining only of 'bureaucratic methods'. However, Stalin could not get much beyond the ABCs of Trotsky's programme. As urban party-workers fanned out into the countryside on search-and-seizure missions against *kulaks*, the peasantry as a whole quickly closed ranks behind their better-off neighbours. Class-solidarity founded on common possession of land kept overriding quantitative differences in income-levels permitted by relatively minor variations in the quantities of land, animals and tools owned by individual peasant-households. Nor were methods other than 'bureaucratic' – i.e., at gunpoint – available because Stalin could not obtain the peasants' consent to part with their surpluses without payment.

As noted, Trotsky critically endorsed Stalin's short-term strategy to rally the peasant-majority against the *kulak*-minority. But even if Stalin had pursued this course in the medium- and long term, neither he nor, by implication, Trotsky, could have offered a medium- or long-term solution to grain-marketing shortfalls, since the latter were merely symptomatic of a deeper problem: declining total grain-production and marketings affecting, to varying degrees, all categories of peasant-households. Fanning 'class-struggle'

74. Cited in Viola 2005, p. 55.
75. Lewin 1968, pp. 85–3.
76. Lewin 1968, p. 240.

in the countryside could and did exacerbate this problem because it deprived all peasants of security in their ownership of surpluses. Such well-founded fears naturally caused them to minimise their exposure to a marauding state simply by minimising the production of surpluses, indeed, by reducing total production. Taking precautionary measures in anticipation of a second edition of war-communism, peasants sowed 4.5 per cent less land in the fall of 1928, prolonging and exacerbating the crisis.[77]

1928, then, was truly a 'Year of Drift'.[78] Stalin repeatedly tacked and veered, pursuing a delicate balancing act by intermittently maintaining some kind of pressure on the *kulak*-minority while striving mightily to avoid a showdown with the peasantry as a whole. The pronouncements of the leadership at this time

> were the utterances, not of men who had made a calculated move to the Right, and still less of men who believed that the mass collectivisation of the peasantry was a practical policy for the near future, but of men hesitant and bewildered in face of an intractable problem and still hoping to muddle through.[79]

Trotsky agreed. Surveying the scene from his exile in Alma-Ata, Trotsky kept up a barrage of criticism against these vacillating, 'centrist' policies. He mocked the Stalinists' insufficient hardness on the *kulaks*, ruefully noting how, in the summer of 1928, the Right Opposition had buried the Stalinist Centre's 'left' turn by annulling the 'extraordinary measures' taken against

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77. Lewin 1968, p. 286.

78. The title of Lewin's chapter on the year 1928.

79. Carr and Davies 1969, p. 85. It is worth emphasising here that Carr and Davies failed to reconcile this summary, and others like it, with teleological generalisations, scattered throughout their work, about the intent of the leadership to get on with industrialisation come hell or high water. Thus Carr: 'In the years after 1925 socialism in one country…came to mean the opposite of NEP. Nor was this illogical; for it was the recovery and the growing strength of the Soviet economy in the middle nineteen-twenties, which pointed the way both to the superseding of NEP and to socialism in one country. What was now at stake was not appeasement of the peasant, but the drive for industrialisation'. Carr 1970, p. 59. Hindsight warps Carr's perspective. Carr himself details how, in 1926 and again in 1927 and once more in 1928, Stalin and Bukharin repeatedly invoked the doctrine to defend the worker-peasant alliance – the essence of the NEP – by 'appeasing' the bulk of the peasantry and proceeding slowly with economic development. Everything in those years was 'logically' 'pointing the way to socialism in one country' alright, as Trotsky well understood; but definitely not the supersession of the NEP, as Carr over-generalised. The differences of interpretation and perspective between myself and the sources cited are major and founded on making necessary, vital, factually-based distinctions, distinctions that tend to be smudged over or erased entirely by teleological perspectives that plague summaries and conclusions of so many works in the field but whose detailed contents afford little factual basis for them.

the *kulak* the previous winter. Caving in once more to the Right simply proved the political spinelessness of Stalin and his centrist followers.[80] Trotsky counselled the Left Opposition not to be taken in by Stalin's right 'zigzag' because Stalin would immediately follow it by a left 'zigzag'; counsel the oppositionists were ever less inclined to heed as Stalin unexpectedly renewed his offensive against Bukharin and the Right in the fall of 1928 against a background of continuing procurement-shortfalls. Despite Trotsky's warnings, the number of Left-Oppositionists applauding Stalin's 'Leninist' turn soon began to swell because the turn was promising to become permanent and irrevocable.

Meanwhile, in the cities, bread-lines began to form at the beginning of 1929, compelling the leadership to ration bread to workers. Trotsky, for his part, witnessed a 300 per cent increase in the free-market price of bread in Alma-Ata.[81] By summer, the leadership was rationing tea and sugar as well, adding meat later in the year.[82] These were the delayed results of another weather-induced harvest-failure for November and December 1928, which further reduced total grain-marketing from an already paltry 10.3 million tons the year before down to 8.3 million tons.[83] Exports of grain, already extremely low, fell even further. Incredibly, the state *imported* 250,000 tons 1928 to offset a similar amount exported that year because of previously executed grain-contracts.[84] Ominously, in the summer and autumn of 1928, real wages of workers began to fall significantly for the first time since the end of war-communism; the price workers paid for the rising cost of bread. With state-granaries emptying and no end in sight to the perils of famine looming over the cities and towns of Russia, the strategy of periodically squeezing the *kulak*-minority, conciliating the peasant-majority, and maintaining the worker-peasant alliance bore all the earmarks of an on-going failure.

Meanwhile, the state restores industry but fails to develop it much further

The on-going agrarian crisis stymied the development of industry much beyond economic restoration because food-reserves to feed the existing labour-force, let alone a significantly expanded one, were stagnant or declin-

80. Carr and Davies 1969, p. 81, and especially note 3.
81. Deutscher 1959, p. 397.
82. Atkinson 1983, p. 350.
83. Carr and Davies 1969, p. 103.
84. Lewin 1968, p. 242. How striking a contrast with the policies of the tsarist state! When famine stalked the countryside in 1891, the portly minister of finance, Vyshnegradsky, declared, 'We shall starve but we shall export'. The contrast speaks volumes about the pro-peasant, pro-worker orientation of the workers' state – even in this late 'degenerative' phase of its existence, the penultimate one before it went under, with condign finality, in 1929–33.

ing. Further, low productivity-levels in industry generated minimal surpluses, severely limiting investment in new plant and equipment to preserve workers' living standards, still less to raise them, or, in the alternative, to provide peasants with supplementary and better tools and machines without simultaneously lowering workers' living standards. In 1926/27, the average industrial worker produced only one-half as much as a British worker, and only one-seventh as much as an American worker.[85]

Throughout the NEP, raising the productivity of labour in industry came to mean 'primarily or exclusively' raising the 'intensity of individual effort. The capital element of productivity, greatly limited by scarce resources, was treated as a constant; the variable was the intensity of labour'.[86] In other words, NEP-industrial expansion, at least in its initial, pump-priming period, would be financed by larger surpluses generated by expanding what Marx called absolute surplus-labour – adding workers, extending the working day, accelerating the pace of work – as opposed to expanding relative surplus-labour – equipping workers with better tools and machines to raise their productivity and generate larger surpluses without cutting workers' living standards by reducing, through improved technique, the socially-necessary labour-time required to reproduce that standard.

However, no significant development of industry could take place either through the expansion of absolute or relative surplus-labour in the cities as long as the political and economic constraints of the NEP remained in effect. In the next section, I shall try to show how the structure of the peasant-mode of production ruled out systematic gains in the productivity of agricultural labour, thus systematically ruling out regularly transferring labour from agriculture to industry – adding workers – undermining the growth of the urban economy. For the moment, the political conditions under which state-industry operated ruled out systematically increasing the intensity of work and/or the length of the working day with the existing labour-force because of the opposition of the working class. Under the NEP, the workers' state, though 'bureaucratically deformed' remained, all the same, a workers' state precisely because the latter largely abided by the working class's refusal to sacrifice its present-day, actually-existing material interests for the sake of potential material benefits arising from future economic development. Indeed, wages rose faster than productivity in 1924–5 and 1926–7[87] and the average number of hours per day worked in industry fell slightly, from 7.6 to 7.4 between

85. Davies (ed.) 1990, p. 155.
86. Carr 1969, pp. 485–6.
87. Carr and Davies 1969, p. 507.

1925 and 1928.[88] Virtually all campaigns to increase production and to lower costs in industry by introducing piece-rate norms, encouraging workers to participate in production-conferences, tightening labour-discipline, promoting economical use of fuel and raw materials (the 'régime of economy') ran aground owing to worker-resistance, organised by their factory-committees and trade-unions.[89] Workers' opposition was itself a serious and dangerous sign of the working class's growing alienation from its own state.

Even if factory-management had overcome worker-resistance, the measures of economy proposed were little more than cheese-paring exercises and would not have significantly raised productivity-levels. Only substantial investments in new plant and equipment would have done the job.[90] Finally, factory-managers had little incentive to overcome worker-opposition and forcefully impose sacrifices, since there was no requirement to maximise profits in the face of external competitive pressures. The property-relations of NEP-industry were not organised along capitalist lines. No firm produced for an unknown market and subject to competitive pressures to raise productivity, cut costs and stay in business. Rather, the state's planning-organisms mediated the relationship of each firm to all the others. The state set prices and wages, allocating the resulting 'profit' to certain sectors of the economy, according to politically determined criteria. The state maintained economically bankrupt but politically vital enterprises through 'direct subvention', allowing no politically important firm to live or die by the market.[91]

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88. Carr and Davies 1969, p. 495n. citing Strumilin.

89. See Murphy 2005. A case in point is the Guzhon Factory, the largest metalworks-factory in Moscow. In 1929, production was a paltry 8 per cent above 1914 levels, despite a stupendous 60 per cent rise in the number or workers, from 3,000 to 5,000. Murphy, 2005, p. 83. Samuel Farber has argued that the 'NEP approach combining economic concessions' with political repression 'made it very difficult' for workers and peasants to 'organize and defend themselves against…exploitative and oppressive activities of both bureaucrats and born again capitalists'. Farber 1990, p. 208. Farber offers no evidence to back up this assertion.

90. Visiting the fabled Putilov Steel-Works in 1929, the head of the Ford Motor Delegation, Charles E. Sorenson remarked, 'They had no modern equipment such as open hearths or Bessemer plants.…The rolling mills would have been fine specimens for a museum. I was amazed at the manual labour carried on in these operations.' Sorensen, 1956, p. 201. Sorenson unwittingly highlights the *artisanal* character of much of tsarist and Soviet industry. (Engineers in Britain invented Bessemer steel-converter in 1854, followed by the Siemens-Martin open-hearth method of steel-production, invented in Germany in 1864. Both revolutionised steel-production processes and had become standard in the industry well before the turn of the twentieth century).

91. Filtzer 1986, p. 16.

If NEP-industry worked according to 'market-principles' then these principles did not reflect a clearly capitalist structure.[92]

Stalin destroys the smychka

By the late 1920s, Bukharin had lost his 'wager' to let the wealthier, 'capitalist' layer of the peasantry lead the rest of the peasantry to accumulate and promote economic development in the countryside. The peasantry's self-movement, ever-vulnerable to inclement weather, had generated harvest-failure and a drastic fall in the supply of grain to the towns and cities.

This economic crisis detonated, in turn, a political crisis of the worker-peasant alliance itself, the linchpin of the NEP. The Left Opposition thought it could reap political benefits from this crisis because it appeared to have forecast its nature, if not its timing or its intensity. In fact, it had not understood its nature because it had not understood its deeper causes. I shall examine these causes in the following section. In any event, had Stalin heeded the Left Opposition's faulty solution to the problem of marketing shortfalls – Trotsky's call to interfere with the peasantry's self-movement earlier by bringing greater administrative/economic pressure to bear on *kulaks* earlier – the peasant-worker alliance would have unravelled that much earlier, creating a political crisis followed by an economic crisis, i.e. reversing their actual historical sequence. Thus, like its Bukharinist predecessor of 1921–7, the Trotskyist variant of the NEP, adopted in 1927–9, ran into grave political/economic difficulties. Since the notion that Stalin attempted to implement Trotsky's programme in this period and not a bloody version of it after 1929 is jarring in the extreme, running, as it does, counter to what everyone believes, it bears briefly recalling the facts once more, repetition being the mother of learning.

Between late 1927 and late 1929, Stalin sought to resolve or at least minimise the economic crisis within the context of the NEP by adopting the indispensable minimum of the Left Opposition's programme. He unabashedly repeated Preobrazhensky's views without mentioning their paternity. 'There were two sources of accumulation, the working class and the peasantry', Stalin declared in July 1928. He went on:

92. For state-capitalist theorists, the absence of competition between 'capitals' or firms on the market is irrelevant because their definition of 'state-capitalism' inflates the notion of competition beyond measure to include political/military competition between states in the geo-political arena, a *passe-partout* notion if there ever was one because such competition can be tracked to the time of the Pharaohs and beyond, long before there was any state-capitalism and any accumulation of capital.

> The way matters stand with the peasantry in this respect is as follows: it not only pays the state the usual taxes, direct and indirect; it also *overpays* in the relatively high prices for manufactured goods – that is in the first place, and it is more or less *underpaid* in the prices for agricultural produce – that is in the second place.
>
> This is an additional tax levied on the peasantry for the sake of promoting industry, which caters for the whole country, the peasantry included. It is something in the nature of a 'tribute,' of a supertax, which we are compelled to levy for the time being…It is an unpalatable business, there is no denying.[93]

Stalin's unpalatable move to the 'left' in this period uncovered the presence of a 'Right' Opposition led by Bukharin. Bukharin had not moved Right but had remained in a fixed position. It was Stalin who was moving to the left, which the Left Opposition welcomed. Joining Bukharin was trade-union chief Tomsky and his comrades who, in the name of maintaining the NEP, also opposed Stalin's new slogan for the trade-unions – 'Face to Production!' – the associated preparations for an accelerated development of industry within the context of the NEP and the 'heighten[ed] pressure it would place on workers' material well-being'.[94]

In the countryside, Stalin followed Trotsky's prescriptions. He squeezed the *kulaks* and tried to cajole the 'middle'- and 'poor' peasantry to develop the forces of production in cooperation with the working class. This turned out to be a fiasco: the peasantry – 'rich', 'middle'- and 'poor' – rallied to form a united front against forced grain-requisitions, demolishing the strategy of the Left Opposition. The peasant-response instead vindicated the 'rotten communists' of the Right Opposition, who were warning that the peasantry was closing ranks against the state's predations, just as it had under war-communism.

To sum up: having given up on the Bukharinist variant of the NEP by the winter of 1927–8, Stalin for the next 24 months turned to the Trotskyist variant of the NEP, or at least a reasonable facsimile of it, to overcome the crisis. By the winter of 1929–30, however, Stalin gave up on Trotsky's variant as well because, by then, Stalin had given up on the NEP *altogether* in favour of an entirely *new* programme: *forced* collectivisation and *forced* industrialisation.

Stalin's new programme annulled the last remaining achievement of the October Revolution in the countryside, a free peasantry, and ushered the final metamorphosis of the Bolshevik Party into a new dictatorial ruling class based on state-ownership of property. Over sixty years later, in 1993, Stalin's satrap,

93. Stalin 1954a, p. 167.
94. Filtzer 1986, p. 24.

Molotov, explained the cause of this 'Great Turn' very simply and very truly: 'To survive, the [Stalinist] state needed the grain. Otherwise, it would crack up.…So we pumped away…from everyone who had grain'.[95]

Before providing a theory-sensitive explanation of economic developments in the 1920s in the next section, it might be useful at this stage to bring out how the foregoing narrative lays the basis, I think, to respond to commonly raised objections by many, more conventional accounts.

Did the Bolsheviks prematurely take power?

Crystal-ball gazers and teleologues 'argue' that, because Stalinism was victorious in 1929, the Bolsheviks should not have taken power in 1917. But there is no documentary evidence that the Bolsheviks had this outcome in mind. What are the facts? A majority of workers in Russia supported 'All Power to the Soviets' in 1917 because the Bolsheviks convinced them that the Provisional Government would not bring an end to a senseless war, would not support the peasants' seizure of land, and would not uphold the rights of factory-committees at the expense of management. 'Peace, Land and Bread': these were immediate and pressing demands, the Bolsheviks reasoned, and there was nothing 'premature' about satisfying them. Rosa Luxemburg adopted the proper approach to the question of prematurity. Her reasoning in defence of the October Revolution is as valid now as it was when Luxemburg first deployed it. Indeed, I write this essay in its spirit.

Luxemburg wrote her essay on the Russian Revolution from the perspective of a fundamental solidarity with the Bolsheviks.[96] That solidarity, though critical, was absolute and irrevocable. In sharp contrast, Luxemburg unconditionally condemned the leadership of Second-International Social Democracy. This side of her essay is less well known. It should be better known – rebroadcast *urbi et orbi* – because she wrote her essay principally to advance the political education of revolutionary socialists in the West, not those in Russia.

What socialist militants in the West needed to understand was that the 'freeing of Russia had its roots deep in the soil of its own land and was fully matured internally'; a 'decisive refutation of the doctrinaire theory', upheld by Kautsky and others, according to which Russia 'was supposed not to be ripe for social revolution and proletarian dictatorship'.[97]

'Practically' – and this political dimension was absolutely crucial for Luxemburg, far surpassing any other consideration – 'this same doctrine

95. Cited in Viola 2005, p. 22.
96. Luxemburg 1970, pp. 367–95.
97. Luxemburg 1970, p. 367.

represents an attempt' by Kautsky and other unthinking observers [and their latter-day imitators – J.M.]

> to get rid of any responsibility for the course of the Russian Revolution, so far as that responsibility concerns the international, and especially the German, proletariat, and to deny the international connections of this revolution. It is not Russia's un-ripeness that has been proved by the events of the war and the Russian Revolution, but the un-ripeness of the German proletariat for the fulfilment of its historic tasks.[98]

The German proletariat's un-ripeness was not its fault. Responsibility for this shocking state of affairs lay squarely with German Social Democracy, whose leadership had for decades 'systematically killed' the masses' 'capacity for critical judgment', preventing them from maturing politically. In contrast, the Bolsheviks had done their utmost to help the masses mature politically because the Bolsheviks embodied such political maturity in action, by 'basing their policy entirely upon the world proletarian revolution', and this was the 'clearest proof of their political farsightedness and firmness of principle and of the bold scope of their policies'.[99] Every revolutionary Marxist was duty-bound to help workers develop their class-consciousness, to foster in them a 'genuine capacity for historical action' and thus prepare the 'German and the international working class for the tasks which confront them'. As part of their political maturation, workers needed to achieve a 'critical analysis of the Russian Revolution in all its connections'.[100]

Did Stalin steal the Left Opposition's banner, bathing it in blood?

Trotsky was not the 'authentic inspirer and prompter'[101] of Stalinist industrialisation because he never called for an end to the NEP and the voluntary principle. This point cannot be emphasised enough. Historians tend to identify the NEP with particular economic policies – taxation-rates, banking measures, a certain mix of the 'market' and 'planning', policies associated with this or that party-leader, etc. – instead of the more general or abstract background political condition of peasant and worker self-determination under which economic policies, whatever they may have been, were to have been implemented. Had the Five-Year Plan and collectivisation proceeded under the voluntary principle, the NEP would still have been in effect.

98. Luxemburg 1970, p. 368.
99. Ibid.
100. Luxemburg 1970, pp. 369–70.
101. Deutscher 1965, p. 158.

Still, the view that Stalin somehow carried out the Left Opposition's programme after 1929 dies hard. In *The Revolution Betrayed*, published in 1937, Trotsky ambiguously laid the basis for this view with his theory of the degenerated workers' state which still owned of the means of production, preserving what he thought was the core-conquest of the October Revolution, even if workers did not own (run) the state. Less ambiguously, the view that Stalin followed in Trotsky's footsteps telescopes two, politically and economically very different periods. To be precise: when the 'rightist' Bukharin began to protest at Stalin's 'left' attacks on the *kulaks* in the winter and spring of 1928, the Left Opposition at once took notice and started to align itself with Stalin. By the summer of 1929, *after* Stalin had routed the Right Opposition the Left, minus a few holdouts, including Trotsky, had completed its realignment with Stalin. But this realignment came roughly six months *before* Stalin issued marching orders to collectivise agriculture, in December 1929.

Now, Stalin's previous defeat of Bukharin and the Right Opposition had never been a matter of controversy among Left Oppositionists. They had welcomed it. That is why most justified their initial embrace of Stalin's 'Leninist course' with a clear conscience. Trotsky's repeated admonitions that rallying to Stalin at this point removed the only force pressuring Stalin to the left carried ever-diminishing weight among Trotsky's erstwhile followers because the course of events was refuting it. However, destroying the NEP and the voluntary principle was an altogether different matter from routing the Bukharinists. In the winter of 1929–30 and beyond, the quondam Left now had to make *another* decision on this *separate* question: whether to support Stalin's destruction of the NEP, which is what forced collectivisation and forced industrialisation amounted to. To make a long story short, the quondam left oppositionists overcame whatever misgivings they may have had on this cardinal issue and tacitly endorsed Stalin's destruction of the NEP, whistling in the dark that forcible collectivisation and industrialisation – the bird in the hand – was worth the two in the bush: party-democracy and internationalism. Indeed, the latter two, somehow, would ultimately beckon from the bush because Stalin was establishing the material premises of socialism in Russia, as Trotsky himself would later argue.[102]

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102. What finally condemned Stalin forever in Trotsky's eyes was Stalin's role in helping organise the defeat of the working class in Germany, paving the way for Hitler's victory in 1933, not Stalin's domestic economic policies, which still 'objectively' marked progress, however blood-soaked, toward socialism. For more on the character of the Left's 'opposition' to Stalin in this period see Chapter Two of this work.

Was Stalin necessary?

Was Stalin necessary for industrialisation and collectivisation? Many ask.[103] And they give an answer. However, they rarely, if ever, clearly pose the antecedent, threshold-question: for whom was Stalin necessary? Clearly, collectivisation was not necessary for the peasantry and that is why they put up the most desperate, the most fearful resistance to it. The same is true, by and large, of the working class, 'revisionist' social historians of Stalinism notwithstanding.[104] Workers did not see the necessity of industrialising because they did not see it in their interests to do so.[105] But Stalin and the emergent ruling class behind him did see it in their interests to resolve the agrarian crisis via forced collectivisation and forced industrialisation because only in this way could Stalin foist the costs of this resolution on workers and peasants exclusively, while consolidating his position as head of a new ruling class. The Great Turn was an evil, but the Stalinists would be running the evil and reaping benefits from it in their role as taskmasters and slave-drivers.

Because materialist historians and Marxists in particular should – but do not – adopt the foregoing what-is-in-it-for-whom approach sharply enough, they end up discussing *how* the development of the forces of production

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103. Nove 1964.

104. Fitzpatrick 1998 is the standard-bearer of this regressive trend in the historiography. As between this trend, emerging in the eighties, and the 'unrevised' Cold-War accounts of Stalinism, originally published in the fifties and sixties, the latter are to be preferred hands down because they grasped the essentially coercive character of Stalin's murderous régime, or the manner in which Stalinism *reproduced* itself. Where the cold warriors and their revisionist successors fall woefully short is accounting for the *initial production* of that system. Here, both schools become indistinguishable because both recruit the usual suspects to explain the rise of Stalinism: 'modernising' Marxist ideology, apparently correctly understood by Stalin alone, not his opponents, and/or Lenin's ostensibly Nietzschean, beer-hall conception of an all-powerful party that can will 'modernisation' into existence.

105. Rossman 2005. This noteworthy work unearths how workers in the textile-industry mobilised repeatedly to oppose the first Five-Year Plan, from 1929 on. Its findings and conclusions seriously undermine those of the revisionist 'social' historians of Stalinism, for whom Stalin's policies represented 'upward social mobility' for the working class, supported by the latter. This work also deals a blow to Trotsky's notorious assertion, accepted by many historians of the totalitarian school as well as most Trotskyists, that workers were uniformly atomised, demoralised, apathetic and helpless before the Stalinist onslaught. Actually, if there was demoralisation among those workers looking to the Left Opposition for leadership then it came from workers seeing the leaders of the Left Opposition not just jump on Stalin's bandwagon, but turn against those among the *rank and file* of their *own tendency* who *opposed* the support their leaders were giving to Stalin. See Gusev 2005 for this episode, which makes a mockery of the widespread notion that the leadership of the Left mounted 'opposition' to Stalin in this period. I used an earlier, Russian-language version of Gusev's article in Marot 2006.

could have taken place (the Bukharinist way, the Trotskyist way, etc.) not *whether* the support of the direct producers to develop those forces could have been obtained in the first place. Thus, Lewin's belief that the history of the Soviet Union 'would have, or might well have, taken a different course',[106] had Bukharin and Trotsky put into practice their theories of industrial and agricultural development, is puzzling in the extreme. This is not just because both approaches were tested in practice, as I have shown, but also because Lewin's own analysis largely undermined the idea that the agrarian theory of the two men grasped the basic dynamics of peasant-life.[107] Equally puzzling is Cohen's assertion that official party-policy in 1929 jettisoned Bukharin's 'reasoning', which remained by and large 'unrefuted and untried'; an assertion that is difficult to reconcile with Cohen's view that 'Bukharinism' was tried and tested for much of the NEP.[108]

Was Stalin an agent of the development of the forces of production?

The answer to this question should be apparent by now. The forces of production did not seize Stalin by the scruff of the neck and compel him to develop these forces by coercively transforming the relations of production. Rather, the NEP-relations of production were transformed as a non-predetermined result of class-conflict between the direct producers, peasants and workers, on the one hand, for whom such transformation was not in their interests, and the bureaucracy, on the other hand, for whom such transformation was in its interests because only in this way could it consolidate its position as a ruling class. The development of the forces of production was an *indirect consequence* of the bureaucracy transforming the relations of production; the bureaucracy did not arise *for the purpose* of transforming those relations in order to accumulate.

Nor is there any compelling factual basis for asserting that the military-political pressures of the advanced-capitalist West caused a social transformation in order to competitively accumulate 'capital', build industry and defend the country.[109] No one in the leadership responded to this long-standing and on-going threat by advocating an end to the NEP. The consensus, regardless of tendency, was that a rupture with the peasantry would cause such grave instability, a veritable upheaval, as to render the Soviet Union even more

106. Lewin p. 159.
107. Lewin 1975.
108. Cohen 1974, p. 318.
109. In the Marxist camp, the 'state-capitalist' interpretation of Soviet history, inspired by Tony Cliff, is especially keen to advance and defend this position.

vulnerable to outside pressures. Certainly, Trotsky denounced the majority-leadership not because it envisaged abolishing the NEP but because it wanted to broaden the NEP thereby, Trotsky thought, undermining the foundation of Soviet power by placing the economic development of the country at the mercy of international capital.[110]

In any event, the grain-crisis *overrode* the foreign threat, which, moreover, had considerably diminished by 1929.[111] Even then, there was no unanimity of opinion that destroying the NEP was the way to solve this crisis. Had the bureaucracy and its chief, Stalin, been able to consolidate itself as a ruling class based on the existing relations of production, circumscribing the development the forces of production within limits set by those relations, it would have done so. And that, indeed, was what the tsarist ruling class had been able to do right down to 1917; and it is what Stalin tried to do until 1929. The conflict between classes, not between states, drove social transformation.

Only *post festum*, once collectivisation and industrialisation were in full swing, did Stalin justify his course in terms of the foreign threat: 'We are fifty or a hundred years behind' warning that Russia had to catch up otherwise the advanced countries will 'crush us', he declared in an oft-noted February, 1931 speech.[112] It was Stalin's good fortune – incredible good luck really – that the capitalist West was then entering a period of profound economic crisis and social upheaval, which concentrated the minds of the ruling bourgeoisies, particularly in Germany, to work on restoring order at home rather than engage in military adventures abroad. But, for the Great Depression, the likelihood of military attack on the Soviet Union in its moment of supreme vulnerability would have been that much greater.[113]

Summing up, the Stalinist state managed to industrialise the country to a qualitatively higher degree than its agrarian-based tsarist predecessor did by once again politically subjugating the direct producers and enforcing their 'military-feudal exploitation', as Bukharin had feared. Stalin bound the ex-peasant to the *kolkhoz*, the collective farm, and he linked the collective farm sufficiently tightly to the state to allow the bureaucracy to take a surplus on a regular basis. Similarly, Stalin destroyed the factory-committees and trade-unions, which, under the NEP, had remained largely effective instruments of

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110. Trotsky 1980, p. 379.

111. In 1927, a crisis in diplomatic relations broke out with the West, notably with England and its conservative Baldwin government. By 1929, the crisis had long passed, with a friendly Labour government taking up residence at 10 Downing Street.

112. Cited in Deutscher 1966, p. 328.

113. Stalin acknowledged as much. Churchill asked him to compare collectivisation with the Nazi invasion. There was no comparison, Stalin exclaimed. In the 1930s, the enemy was everywhere and there was no front. Churchill 1950, p. 498.

workers' defence, and bound workers to their factories, unable to leave unless given permission by management.[114] Here, too, Stalin welded the factory to the state to extract a surplus on a regular basis.

How and why during the NEP Stalin successfully constructed a political apparatus *outside* the immediate sphere of production sufficiently powerful to destroy workers' and peasants' power *inside* the sphere of production is beyond the scope of this chapter. Suffice to say for the moment that, as an urban-anchored version of the agrarian-rooted tsarist state, the Stalinist state necessarily rested on a surplus-extraction or property-relationship common to both, indeed, to all non-capitalist modes of production: where the direct producers are merged, in some form or another, with the means of production, the relationship between a class of surplus-appropriators, where and when the latter exists in opposition to a class of producers, 'must appear at the same time as a direct relationship of domination and servitude, and the direct producer therefore as an unfree person'.[115]

Where had the Bolsheviks gone wrong?

IV How the Bolsheviks understood the peasant-question in NEP-Russia

By the twentieth century, the transformation of peasants into workers in Western Europe was largely complete, while it was still in its very earliest stages in Russia, where 90 per cent of the population retained possession of the land, producing primarily for subsistence and only secondarily for the market. In England, the homeland of capitalism, the landed aristocracy had used what had remained of its feudal powers to short-circuit the peasants' drive to retain ownership of the land by reducing them, at first, to lease-holders, then rent-paying tenants, then to a class of landless producers, proletarians, a process Marx memorialised in his chapter 'On the So-called Primitive Accumulation' in *Capital*. In Russia, at the conclusion of the Civil War, the Bolsheviks thought they, too, at the very least, could pick up where the tsarist state had left off and go on transforming peasants into workers by adopting the New Economic Policy in 1921 to promote economic development and 'primitive-socialist accumulation'. Unlike the English or tsarist precedents however, the Bolsheviks thought they could effect this transformation with

114. In the spring of 1930, Stalinist 'shockworkers' seized control of 80 per cent of the factory-committees, transforming them into tools of management, and completing the rout of the Right Opposition at the rank-and-file level. Murphy 2005, p. 194.

115. Marx 1981, p. 926.

the support of the peasantry, never dreaming – as long as they remained Bolsheviks – that they could ever execute this transformation, or any phase of it, over and against the interests of the peasantry, as Stalin was ultimately to do. Thus, Bukharin and Trotsky thought a democratic road to socialism in NEP-Russia existed, and they identified that road with their policies.

Lenin and all the Bolsheviks had long agreed that 'small scale production' characteristic of the peasantry 'continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously, and on a mass scale *engenders* capitalism and the bourgeoisie'.[116] Lenin had developed this view at great length in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, published in 1899. He continued to adhere to this view under the NEP as well. Under the NEP, however, the dictatorship of the proletariat could turn putatively capitalist-agrarian economic development around to serve socialism. Two inter-connected assumptions founded the view that the workers' state could direct or influence the peasantry's self-movement 'from the outside'.

All Bolsheviks thought that market-exchange was an integral part or moment of the peasants' system of production. As Bukharin expressed it: 'In the connection' between the state-sector and the 'small scale peasant sector' 'market relations are decisive', the 'price category is decisive' and price is a 'regulator of production'.[117] Peasants would purchase the means of production and consumer-goods from state-run industry because 'large-scale production' there assured low prices, driving out higher-cost 'small-scale production'. Just as under capitalism, the 'market struggle causes the number of competitors to fall and production in be concentrated into ever fewer hands'. Under socialism, however, the working class holds the commanding heights of industry, not the 'great kings of industry and bankers'. 'On the soil of these market relations…state industry and the cooperatives will gradually prevail over all other forms of economy and squeeze them out entirely.'[118]

Bukharin, like the Left (or 'petty-bourgeois' opposition, in the eyes of the leadership), looked to unequal exchange – socialist accumulation – to grow large-scale production at the expense of small-scale production. The question of how much should be pumped from the peasantry divided them. Bukharin stated:

> It would be wrong to argue that industry should grow only on what is produced within the limits of this industry. But the whole question involves how much we can take from the peasantry.…Here is the difference between us and the opposition. Comrades of the opposition stand for pumping

116. Lenin 1966, p. 24.
117. Cited in Viola 2005, p. 109.
118. Ibid.

> excessively…Our position in no way renounces this pumping over; but we calculate much more soberly.[119]

As the 1920s progressed, the Bolsheviks did come to disagree with respect to the provenance of the initial demand-stimulus for enhanced production. The policy followed by the leadership until 1927, theorised most fully by Bukharin, looked to the development of agriculture first. Bukharin relied on the prosperous elements of the peasantry – *kulaks* in the eyes of Bukharin's opponents – to accumulate surpluses generating from them greater demand for industrial products, tools and implements, spurring the production of the latter. Accumulation in the peasant-economy 'constitutes the *market* for industry and represents an aggregate of economic units, waiting to be attracted into the state economy and gradually transformed'.[120] When 'peasant farms have great weight', accumulation in socialist industry is a 'function of accumulation in the peasant economy'.[121]

The Left Opposition, in contrast, insisted that the initial demand-stimulus should come from the industrial sector. They stressed that monopolistic pricing of industrial goods, a hidden form of taxation, would render unequal exchange even more unequal and accelerate the shift to socialised production by siphoning the wealth of the richer peasants more quickly than the normal processes of socialist accumulation would allow. Preobrazhensky, Trotsky's ally, vigorously touted this measure. Such pricing would decline *pari passu* with the growth of the socialist sector at the expense of the private. Once the transition was accomplished, accumulation based on the socialist sector alone would drive the economy forward. The net transfer of resources from agriculture to industry through unequal exchange would subsequently redound to agriculture's benefit by a substantial flow of consumer-goods and agricultural tools produced by state-industry.[122]

The Bolsheviks further premised the political-economic success of the NEP on the ostensibly growing differentiation of the peasantry owing to the effect of capitalist competition among them. Under capitalism and a capitalist state, producers with more advanced techniques and lower costs would cause producers with more backward techniques and higher costs to lose their land and become exploited wage-workers. However, a *workers'* state could channel these capitalist tendencies in a pro-socialist direction by taking advantage

119. Cited in Cohen 1973, p. 174.
120. Bukharin 1982, p. 168.
121. Bukharin 1982, p. 169.
122. Trotsky 1980, pp. 49–55.

of its benefits while shifting its costs onto the private sector. Bukharin, for his part, thought the richer peasants would accumulate and invest in means of production, providing a market for socialist industry and helping the working class grow. Within the peasant-economy, Bukharin continued, we 'prefer to allow the bourgeois peasant to develop his farm' but, (and echoing Trotsky), 'taking from him *considerably more* than from the middle peasant. The resources acquired in this way we shall then give in the form of credits to middle-peasant organizations, or in some other form to the poor peasants and farm labourers' to help finance a cooperative movement among them.[123] Pooling the resources of 'middle'- and 'poor' peasants in this manner would stunt the formation of a large agricultural proletariat exploited by richer peasants, yet help improve their productivity and standard of living in competition with them. Whoever saw in this policy the '"unleashing of the *kulak*"', as the Left Opposition did, was woefully mistaken. The 'struggle against the *kulak* farm' could not take an administrative form, as under war-communism, only an economic one. The 'struggle must *not* be a wager on the *kulak*', Bukharin insisted.[124]

Here, again, the Left Opposition's programme was not very different. Trotsky conveniently summarised it:

> *The growth of private proprietorship in the village must be offset by a more rapid development of collective farming*. It is necessary systematically and from year to year to subsidize the efforts of the poor peasants to organize in collectives…. A much larger sum ought to be appropriated for the creation of Soviet and collective farms. Maximum advantages must be offered to the newly organised collective farms and other forms of collectivism. People deprived of elective rights must not be allowed to be members of the collective farms. All the work of the cooperatives ought to be inspired by the aim of transforming small-scale production into large-scale collective production.…Careful attention must be paid to land distribution; above all, land must be allotted to the collective farms and the farms of the poor, with a maximum protection of their interests.[125]

To further level the competitive playing field, the Left urged greater taxation of the *kulaks*, maintaining existing tax-rates for the middle-peasants, and freeing the poor peasants from all taxation. In April 1928, the Politburo followed suit: it raised the tax-rate on well-to-do elements of the peasantry from 25 to 30 per cent, supplemented by individually assessed surcharges on the

123. Bukharin 1982, pp. 199, 194, 205 (emphasis added).
124. Bukharin 1982, p. 197 (emphasis added).
125. Trotsky 1980, pp. 326–8.

very top strata of the peasantry, nearly doubling their taxes, while raising the percentage of peasants exempt from all taxes from 25 to 30 per cent, and lowering somewhat the tax-rates for the middle-peasantry.[126] Trotsky, like Bukharin, also supported the agricultural proletariat in the task of building cooperatives.[127]

To sum up: Bukharin, Trotsky, Stalin and the Bolsheviks sharply debated how fast to promote pro-socialist economic development in the countryside, how much emphasis to give to one or another element of their common, NEP-premised programmes. The differences between them were of degree, not kind, around secondary, not fundamental matters, because they all agreed that: 1) peasants were compelled to trade on the market to purchase a portion of their means of subsistence (consumer-goods) and means of production (producer-goods) and 2) state-policies could channel the capitalist self-differentiation of the peasantry in a socialist direction. Finally, and most importantly, all participants presupposed that peasants, by and large, would always be free to act in their interests. Such freedom constituted the general background political condition of the NEP.[128]

Introduction to a critique of the Bolshevik understanding of the peasant-question under the NEP

The point of departure of this chapter for understanding the peasantry in Russia is the radically different notion that the peasantry 'continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously, and on a mass scale engenders' – not capitalism, as Lenin and the Bolsheviks believed – but *itself*, and little else. Its individual members seek to realise their interests *as peasants*, as who they are. As Marx adumbrated it:

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126. Carr & Davies 1969, pp. 756–7.

127. Trotsky 1980, p. 329.

128. 'The ideas of the Left…differed fundamentally from those of the Right', declares Moshe Lewin (p. 142), apparently in direct opposition to my claim that no differences on fundamentals existed between the two. I believe the contrast can be reconciled. Lewin writes: 'On the problem of social structures in the countryside, the attitudes of Trotsky and Bukharin were not fundamentally very different…', p. 148. 'The margin of disagreement between Left and Right over the question of peasant cooperation and collectivisation was…fairly small, and was to become even smaller in the course of' 1926 and 1927, p. 154. 'Above all, the Left had as little thought as Bukharin himself of using force to change the way of life and socio-economic structure of the peasantry. This emerges clearly from the analysis of the Left's ideas on collectivisation', p. 147. There was clearly agreement on these questions. But perhaps these questions were not fundamental, only secondary? Which question was fundamental then? It turns out that the Left and the Right woke up 'too late' to recognise that their 'true adversary' was…Stalin, from 1929 onwards. On this fundamental question, the only one relevant to this chapter, Lewin and I join hands.

> The individual [peasant] is placed in such conditions as to make not the acquiring of wealth his object, but self-sustenance, his own reproduction as a member of the community; the reproduction of himself as proprietor of the parcel of ground, and, in that quality, as a member of the commune. The survival of the commune is the reproduction of all its members as self-sustaining peasants…[129]

Contrary to the Bolsheviks' first assumption, the peasants could secure their existence independently of exchange on the market because they were in *full* – not partial – possession of the means of subsistence and production: land, animals, and tools. This does not mean the peasants were not *involved* in the market for, of course, they were, some, the *kulaks* especially, extensively so. The point is that, whether the peasant's participation in the market was large or small, no significant numbers of them *depended* on it for the purchase of essentials. Peasants did not depend on workers' labour to survive, but workers' survival did depend on the peasantry's labour.

The fall of the Bolsheviks' first assumption entails the fall of the second. Because no significant numbers of peasants were economically compelled to sell their output to each other or to the state at *competitive* prices, no capitalist self-differentiation, realised through cost-cutting measures of accumulation, specialisation and innovation, sifting out productive and unproductive peasants and creating capitalists and proletarians, could be expected to take place. And none did take place, cutting off the very possibility of socialised industry to take advantage of this (non-existent) process.

Peasant-rules for reproduction

The peasantry's reproduction, which was based on possession of the means of subsistence, compelled the great majority of peasant-households to adopt definite forms of rational economic behaviour which, taken together, led to a very constricted pattern of economic growth, even economic involution, expressed by declining labour-productivity and deteriorating terms of trade between industry and agriculture. Peasants found in their interest to follow these 'rules of reproduction', which I draw verbatim from Brenner:

> A) Production for subsistence
>
> Because…food markets were highly uncertain, peasants found it the better part of valour to adopt the rule for reproduction 'safety first' or 'produce for subsistence', diversifying to make sure they secured what they needed

129. Marx 1973, p. 476.

> to survive and marketing only physical surpluses, rather than specializing to maximize exchange value. Subsistence crises were thus common but unpredictable.…
>
> B) Many children
>
> Peasants had to provide for their own social insurance against old age and ill health and for the amplification of the family labour force. They therefore had little choice but to have as many children as possible, especially to make sure that their offspring survived into adulthood. Their doing so was, however, was incompatible with the requirements for profit maximization that went with specialisation, because children tended, for much of their lives, to cost more to support than they could contribute to the family economy.
>
> C) Sub-dividing holdings
>
> Peasants also had to respond to their (male) children's demands for the material basis to form a family, and their own interest in seeing to the continuation of the line. They were therefore obligated to subdivide. Nevertheless, doing so was again incompatible with the requirement of profit maximization that went with specialisation, because sub-division obviously undermined the productive effectiveness of the resulting productive units.
>
> Simply put, peasants traded off some of the gains from trade they could have secured from specialisation in order to ensure their maintenance in infirmity and old age, as well as to provide for their children (sons) a base for family formation and to secure the continuation of the line. Had they chosen instead to specialize, they would automatically have become dependent on the market, subject to the competitive constraint, and have no choice but to maximize their exchange value…in which case they could not sensibly have chosen as rules of for reproduction having large families and subdividing their holdings.[130]

The peasantries of tsarist and NEP-Russia empirically replicated the foregoing rules of reproduction. However, the operation of these rules under the NEP impacted the urban population very differently than when they operated under the tsars.

130. Brenner 2001, pp. 281–2.

The export-collapse continues under the NEP

As noted, the spectacular failure of grain-exports under the NEP to spring back to their pre-NEP levels strikingly confirms the peasant-drive to produce for subsistence and, correlatively, the Russian economy's relative isolation from the world-market.[131]

On-going peasant-possession of the means of subsistence meant that peasants could produce their necessary product without having to market their surplus-product, which the tsarist state had hitherto extorted from them for export-purposes through a combination of rents, taxes and, until 1906, redemption-payments. In exchange, the tsarist state imported means of production that were principally destined for armament and cognate industries, railroads notably, and luxury consumer-goods for the landed aristocracy. Neither workers nor peasants benefited much, as little of what was imported met their consumer-needs or, as far as peasants were concerned, ploughed back into means of production for agriculture. As a result, the peasants recovered from the depredations of the Civil War and restored their livelihoods without requiring a similar recovery in grain-exports. Lewin summed up:

> By about 1928…the export of grain had practically ceased. The population was short of bread, and their numbers increasing. Since the annual rate of growth of the population was between 2 and 3 percent, an extra 4 million tons of grain was needed to feed them. In these circumstances, there was no grain for export…[132]

Once peasants destroyed the surplus-extraction relationship by which the tsarist state had appropriated an unpaid-for part of the product from them, peasants came to control not only their necessary product, as before (within limits), but their surplus-product as well. Under the NEP, peasants could now decide what part of their total product was 'necessary' and what was

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131. See Table One above p. 24. Day's failure to incorporate foreign trade statistics – Table One or a facsimile thereof is nowhere to be found in his book – renders problematic his entire discussion about the potential of economic gains inherent in foreign trade as a realistic policy-option for the Soviet leadership. Specifically, Day appears to consider the putative 'economic dichotomy' between Stalin's chosen policy of 'isolationism' and Trotsky's rejected policy of 'integrationism' in relation to the world-market under the NEP to be a matter of choosing one or the other on ideological grounds. Table One indicates it was not a matter of ideological choice. The Russian economy's exile from the world-market was an objective reality. That reality conditioned all policy-choices. No policy-choice determined that reality. Finally, the wild gyrations in the quantities of grain exported would appear to speak to the inability or unwillingness of the party-leadership consistently to implement a policy of 'isolationism', an inconsistency for which Day offers no explanation. Day 1973.

132. Lewin 1968, p. 177.

'surplus'. And they decided to keep in their hands much of the surplus formerly exported, converting it into extra meat, a few more eggs, more milk, larger reserves of grain in case of drought or flood, better footwear, sturdier housing, more free time, etc.

Between 1924 and 1928 the number of livestock rose both more quickly and more regularly than in the prewar years and cattle were heavier and better fed.[133] Peasants ate better, and, to round out the picture, so did workers. Workers' height, weight and chest-measurements substantially improved.[134] Because the direct producers, workers and peasant alike, enjoyed a higher standard of living and improved health, they were less subject to disease, a little publicised point that the following table brings into stark relief:

Table Two: Incidence of disease in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, 1913, 1929, 1930–4 (thousands).[135]

Year	Smallpox	Typhus	Malaria	Typhoid Fever	Relapsing Fever
1913	120	424	30	67	3600
1929	40	170	6	8	3000
1930–4 (5-year average)	314	232	9	35	5295

The NEP-years were the healthiest; better than in tsarist times, and better than in the period of forced collectivisation and forced industrialisation under Stalin. The bottom-line: it paid (and pays) not to be exploited.

The Bolsheviks had at one time sharply debated the value of preserving a state-monopoly on foreign trade as a means to regulate politically their economic relations with the capitalist world. The export-collapse indicates the issue was rather moot. The Bolsheviks did not get to choose whether to have trade-relations with the capitalist world on the basis on some ideological preference for autarchy or integration into the world-market. Twenty-five million peasant-households made that decision for them and they chose autarchy. Before the War, 26 per cent of the agricultural production had gone to the domestic market; in the NEP-period, it fell by half, to 13 per cent.[136] For the monopoly in foreign trade to have meant something other than threshing a (relatively) empty straw, as it were, the Bolsheviks needed to override

133. Davies 1980, p. 4.
134. Carr and Davies 1969, Volume 1, pt. 2, pp. 697–8.
135. This is a modified version of Table Forty-Nine in Davies & Wheatcroft, 2004, p. 512. For the sake of concision, it omits the anomalous because catastrophic years 1918–22, as well as data for individual years between 1930 and 1936.
136. Lewin 1968, p. 176.

peasant self-determination and seize control of grain-production itself. Since they did not take this course throughout the twenties, grain-exports remained abysmally low, assuring only minimal economic relations with the capitalist world.

In sum, peasants could get along quite nicely without exporting abroad and, as we shall see, could even do without the output of domestic industrial labour if circumstances warranted, undermining the Bolshevik view that peasants needed workers to survive. Well into the twenties, the peasants enjoyed the fruits of their labour on their household-plots, making the NEP, all proportions maintained, a golden era for them. Peasants supported the NEP because it eliminated the arbitrary grain-confiscations characteristic of war-'communism' – and so reminiscent of tsarist times – and allowed them freely to market their physical surpluses subject to payment of a fixed tax.

The peasants' tendency to market – or not to market – their agricultural surpluses to the cities and town, according to their self-understood material interests, soon intersected with the issue of maintaining the worker–peasant alliance. If peasants chose not to market their surpluses, they placed in jeopardy the interests of the urban citizenry, workers and (emerging) bureaucrats alike, because both were dependent for their daily bread on the peasantry.

The grain-crises of 1927 and 1928: a closer look

Uncertain harvests pressured peasants not to further risk their relatively marginal livelihoods by marketing their necessary product and becoming dependent on the vagaries of price-movements on the market as well.[137] Thus, the harvest-failures of 1927 and 1928 drove peasants in the affected areas to compensate for the decline in their total product by converting all or part of the surplus-product into the necessary product. It also led them to change the mix of their necessary product as they cut back on raising crops to feed animals and ramped up those destined to feed people: peasants prepared to eat less meat and more bread and potatoes. From the summer of 1928 to the summer of 1929, the number of pigs and cattle declined substantially, the number of sheep and goats stagnated, while the number of horses grew far less quickly.[138] The lack of adequate fodder paradoxically created a temporary glut of meat on the market, pushing 'free' market-prices in some areas below already low official prices. Peasants sold their animals right away

137. Shanin notes that annual variations in yields in Russia were three times greater than those observed in Germany and the UK. Shanin, 1972, pp. 20–1.

138. Davies 1980, p. 44.

and at fire-sale prices before starvation and disease rendered them unfit for human consumption.[139]

The crisis of 1927–8 also created a glut of non-food, manufactured items on the market; the opposite of a 'goods-famine'. To contemporary observers, state-set industrial prices appeared 'too high' in relation to demand, unaffordable to both urban and rural consumers, an apparent throwback to the scissors-crises of 1923 and 1925. The Left Opposition energetically recommended lowering production-costs by implementing a 'régime of economy'. However, the problem went much deeper than lowering prices of manufactured goods to market-clearing levels, a solution that had quickly resolved previous scissors-crises: it was a matter of *raising consumer-demand for them.* And *this*, in turn, was connected to increasing the supply of affordable food. As Brenner remarks:

> Subsistence crises not only brought extremely high food prices over several years; but also because of the high food prices, they brought reduced discretionary spending for most of the population and thus *unusually low* [i.e. *market clearing* – J.M.] prices for non-essential, non-food items (emphasis added).[140]

Thus, owing to food-shortages, the terms of trade for agricultural goods improved considerably and the blades of the scissors closed rapidly to the detriment of industrial goods. The blades joined in September 1928; and they then opened in the opposite direction, as the table below indicates:

Table Three: Ratio of prices of industrial goods to agricultural products[141]
(1913 = 100)

1 October 1926	1.18
1 April 1927	1.12
1 October 1927	1.07
1 April 1928	1.04
1 July 1928	0.97
1 July 1929	0.85
1 October 1929	0.88

Despite industrial prices falling below parity by the summer of 1928, the grain-crises continued unabated. Critically, since peasants could freely reallocate their diminishing surpluses in their favour, the working class bore

139. Carr and Davies 1969, p. 100.
140. Brenner 2007, p. 68.
141. Davies 1989, pp. 72–3, & footnote 60.

the brunt of the grain-crises of 1927–28. In tsarist times, grain-crises spared workers while peasants took it on the chin.

Peasants increase production by applying more labour

Peasants in tsarist Russia had achieved increases in grain-production by ploughing up grazing land reserved for livestock and engaging in more labour-intensive agrarian practices. This led to a shortage of fodder and decreased livestock-production per capita.[142] Population-growth and the extension of production to less fertile land also led to smaller per capita holdings as peasants subdivided their lands. Between 1877 and 1905, the average size of household-allotments fell from 36 acres to 28.[143]

The peasantry temporarily reversed the deteriorating peasant/land ratio in the great sharing out of gentry-land in 1917–18. The average size of the household-allotment rebounded to 33 acres; still below what it had been 40 years earlier. The number of households also rose by 20 per cent, from 21 million in the pre-Revolutionary era to 25 million after 1917. The demographic losses owing to World-War One, Civil War and famine had the unintended but salutary effect of removing production from the least-fertile land. Since the average land-fertility was now greater, along with its availability, it was now easier for the young to leave the parental nest earlier to set up their own households. Crucially, the starting size of the family-household declined, from 5.67 members in 1916 to 5.11 in 1927. Thus, the amount of land held per capita rose from 4.91 acres in 1916 to 6.47 acres in 1927, a spectacular jump of 31.7 per cent, despite the partitioning of 1917–18.[144]

Because the gentry had previously rented much of the redistributed land in 1917–18 to peasants,[145] and since the peasants now paid no rent – performed no surplus-labour for the gentry – peasants could freely reallocate their surplus-labour to refurbish their holdings, raising land-productivity along with population-density at which demographic growth generated overpopulation relative to resources, as Table Four indicates.

142. Shanin 1972, p. 13.
143. Robinson 1960, p. 94. All units of land-measurement converted to acres.
144. Danilov 1988, pp. 214–15. Danilov and Shanin draw on statistics published in the 1920s.
145. Shanin 1972, p. 153.

Table Four: Peasant harvest-yields before and after 1917[146]

Year	Yield (centner/hectare)	per cent increase since previous period
1861 to 1870	4.4	–
1871 to 1880	4.7	7
1881 to 1890	5.1	8
1891 to 1900	5.9	15
1901 to 1910	6.3	7
1922 to 1927	7.4	17

Table Five: Grain-harvests and yields, USSR (boundaries of 17 September 1939), 1909 to 1913 and 1917 to 1929[147]

Year	Yield (centner/hectare)	Gross harvest (million centner)	per cent increase since previous period
1909 to 1913 (annual average)	6.9	651.8	–
1917	6.4	545.6	–
1918	6.0	495.3	−9.3
1919	6.2	504.5	2.0
1920	5.7	451.9	−10.5
1921	5.0	362.6	−19.7
1922	7.6	543.1	38.6
1923	7.2	565.9	12.5
1924	6.2	514.0	−9.2
1925	8.3	724.6	41
1926	8.2	768.3	6.3
1927	7.6	723.0	−5.9
1928	7.9	733.2	1.4
1929	7.5	717.4	−2.2
1924 to 1928 (annual average)	7.6	692.6	–
1925 to 1929 (annual average)	7.9	733.3	–

Table Five gives yearly trends in land-productivity for the post-October period.

Though the time-horizon is quite short for the NEP-period, the 1925–9 average of 7.9 centners/hectare, achieved after agriculture had fully recovered from the lingering effects of the Civil War and famine, compares very favourably to the 5.3 centner/average for the tsarist period 1861–1910, though

146. Danilov 1988, p. 275.
147. Danilov 1988, p. 276.

the improvement is less dramatic when compared to the immediate prewar years, when the harvest of 1913 proved to be exceptionally bountiful. Still, peasants raised land-yields under the NEP not by applying more advanced means of production but in much the same way that they had under the tsars: by raising the amount of labour that they applied to the land. In 1926, only 1.7 per cent of motive power was mechanical in NEP-agriculture, rising to an unprepossessing 2.8 per cent in 1929. In 1928, 10 per cent of the land was ploughed with wooden ploughs; 75 per cent was sown by hand; 50 per cent was harvested with scythe and sickle and 40 per cent threshed by hand.[148]

In his novel, Chayanov reproduced – and magnified – the labour-intensive aspect of peasant-production: peasants achieved astounding increases in grain-output in their utopia because they are 'practically looking after each ear of grain individually'.[149]

In the absence of significant capital-investment and innovation, peasants could not regularly raise labour-productivity, as the following table indicates:

Table Six: Production of grain, centners/person[150]

1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
3.74	5.16	5.35	4.92	4.88	4.68

Using different figures, Lewin arrived at the same conclusion: 'In 1914 grain production per head of the population had been 584 kg. In 1928–1929, it was only 484.4 kg'.[151]

Population-growth and declining per capita production jointly lay the basis for generalised demographic crisis in the very long run. Earlier, in tsarist times, famine had last hit the peasantry in the Volga region in 1911.[152] Harvest failures recurred under the NEP in 1927 and 1928 but did not lead to famine among peasants, at least not in that period, because peasants reallocated their surpluses away from the towns and cities, shifting the food-crisis onto workers' shoulders.

148. Carr and Davies 1969, p. 218.
149. Chayanov 1976, p. 84.
150. I generated this table by dividing the annual population, given by Danilov on page 40, by the gross harvest for the period 1924–9.
151. Lewin 1975, p. 174.
152. Robinson 1960, p. 245.

Peasants do not specialise

The peasants did respond, within limits consonant with production for subsistence, to favourable state-set prices for technical crops. The area sown with vegetable and melons in 1925 was 156.6 per cent greater than in 1916. The sown area of cotton- and tobacco-crops grew by 53.2 and 44.1 per cent respectively from 1913 to 1929, with similar increases in total harvests.[153] Peasants devoted far more land to potato-cultivation, the acreage rising over 80 per cent between 1913 and 1929. There was also a rapid increase in the cultivation of oil-yielding crops. The area sown with sunflower rose four-fold between 1913 and 1928. The average sunflower-harvest between 1924 and 128 stood at 18.7 million centners compared to 7.4 million in 1913. Fibre-crop cultivation, hemp for example, increased by 25 per cent. Finally, sugar-beet production most clearly demonstrated what Danilov called the 'peasantisation' of technical crop-production. In tsarist times, the gentry cultivated 80 per cent of sugar-beet production on its estates, 20 per cent on peasant-lands. In 1927, peasant-households sowed 68 per cent of the area under sugar-beet, overshadowing the 32 per cent sowed in large-scale units run on state-farms by the Sugar-Trust, though sugar-beet production as a whole fluctuated very sharply. Only flax-production showed no appreciable increase from tsarist times.

Danilov summarised: 'The increasing cultivation of intensive crops by peasant-household was one of the most important agricultural developments of the 1920s…enabling peasants to enlarge their holding of cattle and tools and providing employment for surplus household labour'.[154] However, at no point did peasants *specialise* and become *dependent* on the sale of their outputs to purchase their inputs because this went against the peasantry's strategy of 'safety first'. This strategy ensured, in Danilov's words, the

> extensive nature of the small-holding peasant economy with its backward material-technical base and low technological level. The problems of intensive cultivation heralded a general decline in the pace of agricultural development, since agricultural production remained parcellized in millions of tiny units and continued to be based upon peasant manual labour.[155]

153. Danilov 1988, p. 286.
154. Danilov 1988, p. 284.
155. Danilov 1988, pp. 286–7.

Class-differentiation of the peasantry?

Of the misconceptions held about the peasantry by the Bolsheviks, the most egregious was the idea that, but for the NEP, the mass of the peasantry would slowly but surely have polarised into a rich, landed minority and a poor, landless majority. The facts show otherwise.

The peasantry was indeed differentiated. However, there was no growing self-differentiation such that, if left unchecked by state-policies, the peasantry would have cleaved into landed capitalists and landless proletarians. In fact, the peasants themselves were checking this (apparent) process and could do so because there was no capitalist competition among them. Peasants, 'rich' 'middle-' and 'poor' subordinated all of their productive activities to secure an adequate supply of food on their household-plots, not to maximise profit by maximising price/cost ratios. This strategic choice barred the development of more advanced productive techniques requiring more cooperative, less individualised forms of labour, i.e. large-scale agriculture. Moreover, the extant form of peasant-cooperation, via the *mir*, functioned to reproduce the extant relations of property, essentially by assuring a distribution of land proportional to the size of the peasant-household and regulating access to common lands. 'The long range prospect for Russian peasant-society therefore was the preservation of traditional patterns of landholding and wealth and distribution of wealth, rather than capitalist differentiation'.[156] Nor did the *mir* function to develop the forces of production.[157] This is why the Bolsheviks, especially Bukharin, thought they had to teach peasants another kind of cooperation in grain-production and livestock-raising, importuning them with their own state-sponsored schemes of cooperation. The peasants ignored Bukharin's cooperative nostrums because they were an illusory substitute for the real peasant-cooperative movement that was institutionally expressed by the *mir*.

From a straightforwardly empirical standpoint, Teodor Shanin has said all that needs to be said on the question of differentiation. In the *Awkward Class*, Shanin demonstrated, ample facts and figures to hand, that 'differentiation' was a strictly circumscribed, purely quantitative differentiation of productive powers within the peasantry, not the qualitative dissolution of the peasantry into two antagonistic classes. This basic truth caused endless headaches for the 'agrarian Marxists' of the Communist Academy, who

156. Lowe 1990, p. 191.

157. For the role of the *mir* in late-Imperial and NEP-Russia, see Mironov 1985, Lewin 1985, Confino 1985.

burned the midnight-oil throughout the 20s in a fruitless search for agrarian capitalism. Shanin's remarks on this score are worth citing at length:

> The presupposition of polarization of the peasantry into capitalist entrepreneurs and proletarians made the presence or absence of wage-labour an ideal indicator of differentiation in Marxist terms. However, the relatively small amount of wage-labour reported among the Russian peasantry (and its further decline reported during the revolution) made this an inadequate index for scholars who presupposed considerable differentiation among the peasantry and were searching of signs of its increase. The majority of Marxists tended to rely on indices of wealth used by their ideological foes [the Neo-Populists or Organization and Production School led by A.V. Chayanov – J.M.] In these terms, peasant households were ranked by their holdings, using a scale relating to some major index of peasant wealth (land held, land sown, horses, estimated capital, manpower etc.) and then *arbitrarily divided by points along the scale into 'strata'*.[158]

The Russians called these strata, from poor to rich, *batrak, bednyak, serednyak*, and *kulak. Batraks* constituted between 1 per cent and 3 per cent of the rural population in Russia, and were represented to be proletarians. However, these were strange proletarians. Most worked for wages because they did not have enough land to live on and had to supplement their income, not because they were landless. Even when they did work for wages, they did so periodically, not permanently. Moreover, when they periodically worked for wages, they never worked for capitalists: 25 per cent worked on a miniscule number of state-farms, *sovkhozy*, 35 per cent worked as shepherds for the peasant-commune, and the rest worked for *other peasants*. Stranger still, most *batraks* worked for poor and middle-peasants who were short of labour rather than the bigger and richer households, the *kulaks* or misnamed 'rural bourgeoisie': the *bête noir* of the Marxists.[159]

Kulak-holdings, for their part, did not operate on a capitalist basis, subject to the cost-cutting imperatives of capitalist competition. Rather, they were distinguished by being 'bigger and more intensive in terms of capital per unit of land and per worker, by higher productivity and income per capita in money terms, rather than being based on capitalist farming and the exploitation of

158. Shanin 1972, p. 132. (emphasis added) Of course, the same chopping and mincing exercise could readily be done on the working class in a modern capitalist country. It, too, has strata – low, middle, high-income – workers who rent vs. those who own, workers with three, two, one, or no cars, workers with large families or small families, workers with toasters vs. those without, and so one, ad infinitum. But to conclude that one is dealing with different classes, or classes-in-formation, should give pause.

159. Lewin 1975, p. 50.

wage-workers'.[160] The *kulaks* were but an 'enlarged' version of the *serednyak* or middle-peasant.[161] To be sure, these better-off peasants supplied proportionately more grain on the market than their less fortunate brethren. Very broadly speaking, *kulaks*, 5 per cent of peasant-households, could place 20 per cent of their production on the market, the average or 'middle'-peasant, 70 per cent of peasant-households, sold 12 per cent of their grain-production, and the 'poor' peasants 25 per cent of peasant-households, placed only 6 per cent of their grain-production on the market.[162] Still, this did not make the well-to-do peasants into capitalists. As Brenner notes, in

> the presence of peasant possession, larger, more efficient peasants can, by virtue of their greater productiveness, take a greater share of the market at the expense of their less-well-off counterparts, but they cannot put them out of business, appropriating their assets, and reducing them to the ranks of the proletariat. This is, again, because the latter are shielded from competition by their direct, non-market access to all the inputs they need to reproduce their families. As a result, wide swathes of the economy are impenetrable by the standard processes of capitalist natural selection, and potentially capitalist peasants can find only a limited market at best for proletarians to hire and/or commercial tenants to lease their land to.[163]

In the spring of 1925, the leadership tweaked the NEP by lifting restrictions on the leasing of land and the hiring of labour by well-to-do peasants, with protections accorded to those hired as agricultural workers.[164] The Left Opposition viewed this measure with great alarm, as proof-positive that the leadership was capitulating to ever more powerful, anti-proletarian, *kulak*-led capitalist forces in the countryside. In light of the foregoing discussion, this could hardly have been the case. As we have seen, proletarians in the countryside enjoyed a largely spectral existence, not because the state had placed legal constraints on hiring prior to 1925, but because peasants would do whatever was necessary to maintain possession of the land as the foundation of their livelihood – a far weightier constraint. Correlatively, lifting restrictions on the hiring of labour would still not facilitate the formation of a landless proletariat after 1925, since peasants would not willingly give up possession of the land, the basis of peasant-reproduction. Thus, lifting

160. Shanin 1972, p. 173.
161. Lewin 1975, p. 77.
162. Carr 1969, Volume 1, p, 3 note 3, Lewin, p. 176. The placement of dividing lines precisely demarcating 'kulak', middle-, poor peasant from each other is inevitably arbitrary but the cross-sectional pattern of grain-marketings is not.
163. Brenner 2007, p. 87.
164. Carr 1970, pp. 276–7.

or retaining these restrictions, even if enforceable, could hardly have made much difference either way.

Resiliency of the 'middle'-peasantry

According to Danilov, there was a statistically measurable process of merger and partitioning of households among the mass of the peasantry. He concluded that 'mergers continued to be most common in poor peasant groups, which contributed to the growing influence of the middle peasants by way of upward mobility of poor peasants. Mergers also reduced the number of peasant households'. On the other hand, 'the proportion of households undergoing partition was higher among rich peasants'. Thus, poorer and richer peasants constantly replenished the ranks of the middle-peasantry, while the middle-peasantry constantly generated poorer and richer peasants:

> The interrelation of these two contrary processes explains the levelling that took place in the Soviet countryside before collectivisation. The increasing number of peasant households during the NEP was connected to the fall in the number of rich and poor peasant households, together with a corresponding growth in the number of middle peasant households. The increasing influence of the middle peasantry was a manifestation of the quantitative growth in peasant households generally, during the transitional period of the NEP.[165]

This levelling process enhanced peasant-power by perennially aligning ever more closely the peasant's individual interests with those of their class. This process was at work in tsarist times as well, stymieing the development of capitalist relations in agriculture then too. This process merits a closer look.

In the 1905 Revolution, the peasants put their solidarity, generated by their *collective* and egalitarian access to the land, organised through the *mir*, to good use by forcing the tsarist state to abolish redemption-payments. The tsarist state pushed backed in the wake of the defeat of the 1905 Revolution with the Stolypin reforms 1906–11, named after the Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, notorious for repressing the peasant-movement with the liberal use of the hangman's noose – Stolypin's 'neckties' dotted the countryside – and other means of repression.

Looking ahead, Stolypin encouraged the 'strong and sober' peasants to withdraw from the *mir* and set up their own, consolidated farms, using

165. Danilov 1988, pp. 257–8.

intimidation and force against peasants who had other ideas.[166] Stolypin aimed above all to undermine peasant-solidarity and peasant-power by individualising peasant-access to the land.[167] As Stolypin himself put it, providing the 'diligent farmer with a separate plot of land' would eventually lead to the development of an 'independent, prosperous husbandman, a stable citizen of the land'.[168] However, Stolypin's reforms made little headway because they came up against the peasantry's primary line of defence – the *mir* – the very institution Stolypin intended to destroy.[169]

Beyond trying to achieve the direct goal of undermining peasant-solidarity and fostering 'stable citizens' loyal to the tsarist state – the chief function of the Ministry of the Interior – Stolypin may also have read Adam Smith and identified 'privatised' access to the land with private property, prosperous husbandry, and development of capitalism, laying the basis for tsarist Russia to catch up to Western-European powers. 'What if not the individualism of small farm ownership, so quickly brought America to the fore' Stolypin affirmed.[170] Certainly, Lenin looked upon the reforms in this 'modernising' light and many historians have followed Lenin's lead. This is wildly misleading.

The Stolypin reforms were not about *divorcing* the peasants from their means of subsistence and making them dependent on the market for the purchase of their necessities, leading to the formation of a market in land and labour, as happened in England. Stolypin sought only to *individualise* peasant-access to the land; a crucial distinction overlooked by many Marxists, starting with Lenin, and non-Marxists, notably Gerschenkron.[171] Understood as such, the reforms could not introduce capitalism in agriculture.

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166. Pallot 1999, pp. 143–6.

167. Brenner 1985 has shown how the peasantry overcame lordly opposition and destroyed serfdom in fourteenth century Western Europe in part because more collaborative agricultural practices there fostered greater peasant class-power. In contrast, the Eastern-European peasantry succumbed to the Second Serfdom in part because the 'communal aspects' of the village-economy there were less developed, as expressed, inter alia, by the tendency of peasants 'to lay out holdings within the fields in rather large, relatively consolidated strips', generating 'more of a tendency to individualistic farming' and erecting 'major barriers to the way of the emergence of peasant power and peasant self-government', pp. 42–3. Stolypin the gentry-politician and Brenner the Marxist historian see eye to eye in respect to the sources of peasant-power.

168. Cited in Pallot 1999, p. 1.

169. Pallot 1999, pp. 171–80.

170. Cited in Mosse 1965, p. 260. For a discussion of the American road to capitalism, see Post 1995.

171. Gerschenkron 1962. For Gerschenkron, retention of the communal form of peasant-property after the abolition of serfdom stymied the development of capitalism in the countryside. He looked to the Stolypin reforms as the magic bullet to remedy this defect. The reforms were succeeding, he thought, until the *diabolus ex machina*

The reforms would not have altered the peasant-mode of production even if they had been successful on their own terms. Stolypin's enclosed holdings, roughly 10 per cent of all holdings by 1914, only 'magnified' the 'dominant trends' toward soil-exhaustion and declining returns exhibited by non-enclosed, communally-run holdings.[172] Further, in Siberia and other areas of the tsarist Empire, communal ownership of land was non-existent and privatised access to the land prevailed. Yet these significant differences of land-tenure determined no significant differences in productive powers.[173] That is why, under the Tsars, there was little sign of the competitive consolidation of agricultural production into ever fewer and larger units of production run by capitalist tenants – *kulaks* – leasing land from capitalist landlords and worked by wage-labour recruited from peasants who had lost or were about to lose their land. The same was true under the NEP.[174]

In *Toward Socialism or Capitalism*, Trotsky admitted he had no data to back up his thesis of class-differentiation:

> I do not provide statistical data about differentiation in the village because no figures have been collected which would make a general estimate of this process possible. This absence must be explained not so much by the defects of our statistics as by the peculiarities of the social process itself, which embraces the 'molecular' alterations of 22 million peasant establishments.[175]

Pace Trotsky, the process was invisible to the naked eye, not because it was 'molecular', but because it was not actually happening. Trotsky took no stock of the statistical evidence marshalled by government-agencies, notably the Commissariat of Agriculture, which did 'make a general estimate of trends' in the peasant-economy 'possible'. Those trends confounded Trotsky and Bukharin's analysis of class-differentiation in the countryside.

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of World-War One destroyed Stolypin's reforms by destroying the tsarist state, its chief sponsor.

172. Pallot 1999, p. 241.

173. Lewin 1990, remarks that the Polish peasantry at the turn of the century exhibited an 'astonishing number of traits in common with Russians, even if they did not know the Russian-style partitioning commune. Private ownership of land was the rule [in Poland]…', p. 25.

174. For a reform that really delivered the *coup de grâce* to a non-capitalist mode of production, look no further than the Dawes Severalty Act, passed by the US Congress in 1887. This act individualised access to land of certain North-American Indian tribes by limiting each tribal member to a fixed, contiguous 160 acres. Unlike the Stolypin reforms, this *did* separate the North-American Indians from their means of subsistence because their largely nomadic way of life mandated collective, tribal access to vast expanses of land. Ultimately, (white) capitalist farmers forced the Indians to sell these plots, the more or less conscious aim of Dawes's swindle.

175. Trotsky 1975a, p. 323.

Trotsky, for his part, invalidated these results on the specious grounds that the Commissariat's agrarian specialists had massaged the evidence from a '*kulak* point of view'.[176]

Facts notwithstanding, Left and Right premised their agrarian programmes on the class-differentiation of the peasantry. In Bukharin's view, the formation of *kulak*-farms worked with wage-labour would spur peasants still in possession of their land to form cooperatives to compete successfully, producing more grain.[177] However, as marketing-shortfalls became evident in the winter of 1927, even he began to have misgivings on this score. The Left harboured little confidence that peasant-cooperatives could withstand competition from capitalist farmers without additional state-intervention. The Platform of the Left Opposition, circulated in September 1927, warned the growth of the *kulak*-stratum at the expense of the majority of the peasantry would jeopardise the *smychka*. To respond to this putative danger, the Left called on the state to force the wealthiest 10 per cent of the peasantry to loan 2.7 million tons of grain to finance industrialisation, 'the most sweeping administrative measure that the Left ever called for'.[178] Ironically, Stalin would obtain precisely this sum a few months later, but only through the massive use of coercion – the 'Ural-Siberian' method – and in response to grain-procurement shortfalls due to poor harvests affecting all strata of the peasantry, *kulak* and non-*kulak*.[179] Both the Left and the Right Oppositions were responding to the illusory *kulak*-danger while offering no solution to the real one.

The data presented in this section largely confirm the peasant 'rules of reproduction' laid bare by Brenner:

> [W]here labour is organised by the direct producers on the basis of their property in the means of production, as exemplified in peasant freeholder production, the tendency (general among all peasant producers) to relate their individual development of the productive forces to the goal of maintaining their family and keeping their property tends to fetter the development of cooperative labour, by keeping labour individuated and preventing the accumulation and concentration in one place of labour, land

176. Cited in Heinzen 2004, p. 155.
177. Lewin 1975, p. 139.
178. Lewin 1975, p. 148.
179. Lewin 1975, p. 251. Lewin remarks: 'It will be recalled that the Left suggested mobilizing this quantity as a compulsory loan. For this reason the figure was not made public at the time.' Lewin 1975, p. 265.

> and means of production. Small property tends to dictate individualized and unspecialized production.[180]

Transforming peasants into workers via 'primitive-socialist accumulation'?

Bolshevik economic theory ultimately could not adequately account for the difficulties that Bolshevik economic practice encountered with the peasantry in the late twenties, because their theory did not correctly reflect key aspects of peasant political economy. The Bolsheviks lacked the requisite categories of analysis to grasp these aspects. The fundamental conceptual problems can be best brought out by looking very closely at certain aspects of E.V. Preobrazhensky's contribution to the economic debates in this period, notably his famous law of 'primitive-socialist accumulation' and the problem of non-equivalent exchange between the peasant and state sectors of the Soviet economy.

Preobrazhensky developed his views most fully in the *New Economics*, published in 1926. He explained what non-equivalent exchange was to critics who objected to so characterising the exchange-relationship between 'private' agriculture and socialised industry in Russia. He made the following analogy to capitalism:

> Under capitalism non-equivalent exchange between large-scale and small-scale production, in particular between capitalist industry and peasant agriculture, though forced to a certain extent to adjust itself in the price field to the value-relations of large-scale agriculture, is, in the sphere of purely economic relations and causes, a simple expression of the higher productivity of labour in large-scale as compared to small.[181]

Preobrazhensky ran a number of red lights in this paragraph. The first red light: there is no direct relationship between the 'scale' of the enterprise and

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180. Brenner 1977, p. 16. For Day, Trotsky's programme to import the major share of industrial machinery 'would have avoided the complications which were destined to grow out of Stalin's programme for self-sufficiency'. Day 1973, p. 150. Day begs this question: what if there is little to export to pay for these imports? Day spares only a few cursory lines to the peasantry in connection to this key question, these: 'By comparison with the pre-war period Russia was experiencing a considerably higher rate of rural consumption of agricultural products. Poor peasants, who consumed the major share of their output…had increased substantially in number, creating a barrier to expansion of the marketed grain surplus.…Consequently the market alone would not suffice both to place adequate food at the disposal of industry and the cities and to leave a surplus for export as well', pp. 151–2. This was precisely the problem. Trotsky did not address it and neither does Day.

181. Preobrazhensky 1965, p. 5.

its productivity. A firm, no matter what its size, producing at lower cost, will force into bankruptcy a firm, no matter what *its* size, producing at higher cost. General Motors was not always large. It started out small and became large because it produced low-cost automobiles that drove its larger, higher-cost competitors out of business. General Motors declared bankruptcy at one point because originally small Japanese automobile firms, producing cars more cheaply, captured an ever-larger share of the market and became large (though still in trouble today for other reasons). This is because – and here Preobrazhensky is correct – under capitalism, the socially-necessary labour-time to produce a commodity will be a moving average of firms producing below, at and above the socially-necessary rate. Those firms that expend more labour than is socially necessary, i.e. produce at higher cost, will suffer a below average rate of return, those that expend less labour than necessary, i.e., produce at lower cost, will enjoy an above average rate of return. Since total returns at any given moment are fixed, the effect of competition will be to redistribute labour and means of production from high-cost to low-cost firms. As between these two sets of firms, the result is non-equivalent exchange, as Preobrazhensky rightly said.[182]

Now, the strictly *political* element to the non-equivalent exchange between town and country, the element that *did* depend on the state-policies and was not a simple expression of higher productivity, was this, according to Preobrazhensky: thanks to the state's political monopoly on industrial production, the state could optionally raise prices of industrial goods above their value – a form of taxation – and so by political means not *create* the subsidy peasants yielded to large-scale industry owing to the lower productivity of small-scale agriculture, but *redistribute* to industry an enhanced *amount*; just as a capitalist monopoly, through politically organised price-fixing, could raise prices above otherwise competitively determined (non-political) market-prices, rea-

182. It appears that the physical dimensions of the unit of production mesmerised the Russian Marxists into thinking that it alone was an accurate measure of a firm's productive technique. In his *History of the Russian Revolution*, Trotsky highlighted the fact that, in tsarist Russia, 41.4 per cent of workers worked in enterprises employing over 1,000 whereas only 17.8 per cent did so in the United States, thereby putatively proving that 'Russian industry in its technique and capitalist structure stood at the level of the advanced countries'. Trotsky 1980, p. 10. Unfortunately, this reasoning breaks down, if only because Stalin also built gargantuan factories, larger even than under the tsars, yet none of their output could be sold on the world-market at a competitive price because they were so inefficient. 'Made in the USSR' never became a selling point, apart from armaments, and even there only the AK-47 Kalashnikov became a best seller in the post-World-War Two era. The Kalashnikov, an assault-rifle, was simple to produce, simpler to maintain and operate, extremely reliable and virtually indestructible.

lise a higher-than-average rate of profit, and force other, non-monopolised segments of the economy to suffer from below-average rates of profit. This 'primitive', strictly politically-conditioned phase of accelerated accumulation would vanish *pari-passu* with the rise of the productivity of labour in agriculture to the level existing in industry. In other words, the industrialisation of agriculture would mean the disappearance of the antitheses between town and country, proletarian and peasant; in short, the advent of communism.

Here, again, the question is posed: can non-equivalent exchange, *on the basis of which* Preobrazhensky argues for political price-fixing, characterise the relationship between (large-scale) 'capitalist industry' and (small-scale) 'peasant-agriculture'? Only on condition that peasant-freeholders operate in the same manner as capitalist firms. Only on condition that they must produce at the socially-necessary rate or go out of business. This chapter has tried to show that neither condition obtains. Preobrazhensky has run another red light in thinking these conditions *are* present.

The peasant family-holding is incomprehensible in terms of market-forces alone because it is market-independent. Peasant-freeholders are in possession of the land and produce for subsistence, not for exchange on the market. They are not compelled to purchase their inputs by selling their output at competitive prices by specialising, accumulating surpluses and adopting lowest-cost techniques. Fellow peasants cannot put them out of business, no matter how productive these competitors may be. Nor can agricultural estates, whether large or small, whether worked by free labour, free wage-labour, serfs or slaves, undercut peasant-possession of the land through purely economic means.

Indeed, Preobrazhensky himself recognised, in theory, the peculiarities of a 'natural economy':

> Capitalist production is not dangerous to natural economy when this has no points of contact with it, when the two systems constitute two completely non-communicating vessels. Natural economy simply does not accept battle.…Capitalism then resembles an athlete who vainly calls on a weak opponent to fight while the latter remains silent and does not answer.[183]

But Preobrazhensky forgot, ignored, or contradicted this crucial but isolated insight, bedevilling all of his subsequent conceptual operations: a claw ensnared and the bird is lost. Let us follow Preobrazhensky's reasoning to the next red light.

183. Preobrazhensky 1965, p. 126.

The inevitable development of 'points of contact' between capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production, it turns out, is *not* a vain capitalist call on a weak non-capitalist opponent to fight, Preobrazhensky went on. On the contrary, this call will inevitably 'drag' the 'weaker' opponent 'into the capitalist arena, *where it gets thrown on its back in the process of free competitive struggle*[184] (emphasis added). In Preobrazhensky's universe of competition, abstracted from any mode of production, indeed, from any *history*, the capitalist mode ultimately prevails. 'Capitalism conquers in open order, in conditions of free competition with pre-capitalist economic forms'.[185] The 'triumph' Preobrazhensky wrote, 'of the capitalist mode of production' over other, non-capitalist modes, such as the 'primitive natural economy or petty-bourgeois economy, could be brought about simply by those economic advantages which every capitalist enterprise, even in the manufacturing stage of capitalism, possesses over more primitive forms of economy. Force played, in the main, an auxiliary role'.[186]

Universal competition ultimately generated the rise of 'monopoly capitalism' that abolished competition on a national scale, Preobrazhensky continued, and set the stage for planning production as a whole, socialism, the most productive system of all. Our 'state economy is historically the continuation and deepening of the monopoly tendencies of capitalism'.[187] But where, as in Russia, socialism had seized only that part of production fully transformed by capitalism, only industry and not agriculture, socialism 'possesses *its own particular form of relations with pre-capitalist forms*' in agriculture.[188] Here, non-equivalent exchange between socialist and non-socialist forms would take place as well. Bukharin also accepted that 'pumping over' from the peasantry would take place and through the same mechanisms that Preobrazhensky had laid out. The only difference is that Bukharin thought less, not more, should be taken from the peasantry.[189]

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184. Preobrazhensky 1965, p. 126. Similarly, Lenin's 'Marxism teaches us that at a certain stage of its development a society which is based on commodity production and has commercial intercourse with civilised capitalist nations must inevitably take the road of capitalism'. Lenin, 1962a p. 49.
185. Preobrazhensky 1965, p. 131.
186. Preobrazhensky 1965, p. 126.
187. Preobrazhensky 1965, p. 141.
188. Preobrazhensky 1965, p. 131.
189. Cited in Cohen 1973, p. 184.

Among the various sources of capitalist accumulation, Preobrazhensky again mentioned the one we have already highlighted with respect to socialist accumulation. The extraction of surpluses from the peasantry was

> masked by a system of market exchange of quasi-equivalents, behind which was hidden the exchange of a smaller for a higher quantity of labour. In this case the peasant and the craftsmen are exploited by capital partly in the same way as the workers who receive wages, in the form of the market price of their labour-power, only part of their newly created product of their labour.[190]

Bukharin accused Preobrazhensky of rooting for the military-feudal exploitation of the peasantry. To refute this baseless charge – and it was baseless – Preobrazhensky ran this red light. He again made a questionable analogy between NEP-industry and NEP-agriculture, on the one hand, and between capital and labour in a capitalist economy, on the other. In the latter relation, the worker could only realise the value of his labour-power, not the greater value of the product of his labour.[191] Here, clearly, was a case of non-equivalent exchange yet *no politically coercive* or 'military/feudal' methods were necessary to transfer the surplus from labour to capital, Preobrazhensky correctly pointed out. Strictly economic means, via exchanges on the market between labour and capital through contractual agreements free of all political coercion, achieved this transfer. Analogously, according to Preobrazhensky, the same held true for the transfer of surpluses from the private, peasant-organised petty-production to worker-organised large-scale production characteristic of the industrialised sector of the economy. This was the law of socialist accumulation.

Once more, Preobrazhensky's analogy raises doubts. The correct counter-position is not individually vs. cooperatively organised production, small-scale vs. large-scale production, but production for exchange resting on capitalist social-property relations vs. production for use resting on non-capitalist social-property relations. Only capitalist relations of class and property permit the realisation of surplus-value via 'free' exchange on the market because workers, divorced from the means of production, cannot realise their own labour-power directly as labour to make commodities and, by selling these commodities themselves, realise the full value of their labour. Their only alternative is to sell their capacity to labour to capitalists who use it to produce commodities. The use of that capacity in the sphere of production

190. Preobrazhensky 1965, p. 94.
191. Ibid.

creates more value than it consumes, a surplus-value in the form of profit, rent and interest. This is not the case with peasants.

The October Revolution freed peasants from any direct relation of domination. However, and in fundamental continuity with tsarist times, the Revolution preserved peasant-possession of the means of subsistence and production. Unlike proletarians, peasants can realise their labour directly in the sphere of production in the form of needed products for consumption. To the extent that peasants did place part of their surpluses for sale on the market, (with the other parts set aside for reserves, or appropriated free of charge through taxation) they did so only to obtain additional use-values such as textiles, nails, kerosene, matches and the like. This reflects the 'simple circulation of commodities' – C-M-C – selling in order buy. It 'is a means to a final goal which lies outside of circulation, namely the appropriation of use values, the satisfaction of needs'.[192]

Finally, unlike workers, peasants are not subject to the economic necessity of performing surplus-labour for someone else in the sphere of production as a *precondition* for performing necessary labour. It is only in the sphere of circulation that non-capitalist appropriators can transfer to themselves a part of production from economically self-sufficient producers. Contrary to Preobrazhensky, such would-be appropriators can only do so by political means: force. Thus did the tsarist landed aristocracy have politically to disenfranchise the direct producers – serfdom being but one form of rightlessness – to maintain their position as a ruling class. The disenfranchisement continued in another form after the abolition of serfdom in 1861. Stalin would assume the role of his tsarist predecessors in this regard: collectivisation may rightly be regarded as a second serfdom.

V No way out?

Stalin, Trotsky and Bukharin declined to track the economic impasse of the late 1920s to the fundamentals of peasant-economy. Bukharin was explicit on this score. In July 1928, Bukharin raised, and answered, a seemingly 'too academic or almost superfluous' question before the by this time rough-mannered and tough-talking ('don't taunt me please') people of a Central Committee plenum:

> Aren't these difficulties a general law of our development in the period of reconstruction? Isn't this something imposed on us by the very course of

192. Marx 1976, p. 253.

> events, which we cannot escape under any circumstances? I must say that I personally answer this in the negative.[193]

Bukharin distinguished two sets of causes, general and specific:

> The big set of causes or, if you like the conditions for the appearance of difficulties: our economic backwardness, the fragmented state of agriculture, its small peasant character, etc.… These general causes realise the possibilities of the difficulties.[194]

The leadership could do nothing to 'change the conditions for the appearance of possible difficulties'. They were 'objective in the sense of being independent of our policy'. Fortunately, specific causes were not independent of policy but arose precisely from policy. Only specific policies could transform 'possible difficulties' into 'actual ones'. Among these specific policies, Bukharin mentioned 'mistakes in planning leadership', 'shortcomings of procurement party, and soviet organization (the lack of common front, the lack of active work, a willingness to let events take their own course') which, combined, had allowed 'capitalist elements' in the city and the countryside to 'undermine grain procurements'. 'Hence', Bukharin concluded,

> With more skilful economic leadership, since the specific causes of the difficulties depend on these factors, we will clearly obtain a different specific result and will not allow the insolent and growing *'kulaks'*, who are the organizing source of the forces that oppose us, to manoeuvre the way they have manoeuvred during the period of time we are going through.[195]

There is no need to belabour the point. Negatively, Bukharin's line of reasoning was at one with Stalin and Trotsky with respect to the 'objective' or 'general causes' of the crisis: all refused to *link* the crisis, the form of appearance, to the economic realities of peasant-production, realities lying beyond the reach of *any* policy resting on recognition of peasant self-determination as a supreme political value. Instead, Bukharin, Stalin and Trotsky engaged in exposing the other's lack of 'skilful leadership.'

Owing to his erroneous theorisation of the peasantry, Trotsky still believed a systematically and consistently 'left' course within the NEP, instead of Stalin's errant 'centrist' wavering, was still possible at the end of the 1920s. Trotsky insisted the Left Opposition's agrarian strategy would have permitted un-coerced collectivisation and industrialisation to begin, and to proceed promisingly along for some undetermined period even without the assistance

193. Cited in Viola 2005, p. 104.
194. Viola 2005, p. 106.
195. Viola 2005, p. 107.

of workers' revolution abroad. Bukharin also thought the same for his approach, only he urged that Stalin halt his periodic attacks on the peasantry and return to a systematically and consistently 'right' course of maintaining the worker-peasant alliance at all costs. Both men blamed Stalinist policy-errors for driving the economy into a ditch, errors they could correct by the timely implementation of an alternative political-economic programme toward the peasantry. Neither man recognized that Stalin's destruction of the *smychka* between 1929 and 1933 was the historically concrete expression of the *objective impossibility* of *democratically* responding to the interests of peasants and workers within an on-going process of economic development. This is the earthly meaning of Marx's dictum that socialism requires definite material premises. These premises must be created by a mode of production other than the socialist one, as, otherwise, they would not be premises but rather extant conditions, created along with socialist construction; construction that could, conceivably, take place anywhere and anytime: if there is a will, there is a way.

Nevertheless, Trotsky and Bukharin's perspectives embodied a critical, all-important political difference. As early as June 1928 Bukharin made overtures to Zinoviev and Kamenev and, through them, to Trotsky, for a political alliance against 'madmen' like Stalin. Bukharin confided to Kamenev that his current disagreements with Stalin on the peasant-question 'were many times more serious than were our disagreements' with the United Opposition in 1926–7. How right he was! Already, Bukharin understood, better than anyone else in the leadership (perhaps because he was part of that leadership), that the *substance* of Stalin's 'left' turn, *if it persisted*, would demolish the NEP, forever doom the worker-peasant alliance, 'destroy the Soviet Republic',[196] and go far beyond anything Trotsky and the Left Opposition were advocating (though Bukharin would not take the full measure of the barbarism that was to come until it had arrived). This stance – a saving grace – placed Bukharin politically heads and shoulders above Trotsky, who insisted only that the *form* of Stalin's policies were coercive, their implementation marred by 'bureaucratic methods'. Owing to this disastrous position, Trotsky rejected Bukharin's diffident overtures in the summer of 1928 to launch a common struggle against Stalin and forestall, or try to forestall, the emplacement of a new set of exploitative class and property-relations. Trotsky's slogan of 1928 admitted no ambiguity: 'With Stalin against Bukharin? – Yes. With Bukharin against Stalin? – Never'.[197] Thus, Trotsky steadfastly believed throughout the

196. Cohen 1973, p. 303.

197 Deutscher 1959, p. 314; Cohen 1973, p. 290. In March 1929, Trotsky wrote 'Against the Right Opposition'. 'Our struggle against centrism derives from the fact that centrism is semi-opportunist and covers up full-blown opportunism, despite temporary

period 1929–33 that Stalin's murderous programme 'objectively' meant socialist development, requiring all party-members to remain in the ranks of the Communist Party and loyally carry out its policies.

Nevertheless, the leadership of the Right Opposition, though opposed to Stalin, still neglected to make their opposition materially effective by mobilising the party and non-party trade-union rank and file. Trade-union leader Tomsky did little to encourage the 'workers' ability to act collectively as a combative force to defend their class position' against Stalin's onslaught.[198] They did not do so because a mobilised rank and file would tend to enforce democratic norms on its leadership, jeopardising, 'from below', the trade-union bureaucracy's privileged position, a risk the Tomsky leadership was not prepared to take, but which it just might have, had it known to what lengths the Stalinists were prepared to go to build 'socialism'. Indeed, Stalin had to sack Tomsky and his associates because they proved insufficiently servile when it came to implementing the Five-Year Plan in industry and exploiting the direct producers ruthlessly. The paradox, overlooked by many, is that, in discouraging worker-militancy, the Tomskyist trade-union bureaucracy found itself unable to hang on to its *own* relatively cushy positions against Stalin's all-encompassing assault.

Unlike the Right Opposition, the Left Opposition was far from the centres of power or apparent power. Stalin had exiled the bulk of its leadership in late 1927. Marxist theory motivated its chiefs Trotsky, Radek, Preobrazhensky and Rakovsky. But it was a mistaken theory. Since Trotsky especially would not allow any variety of empiricism to guide the Left Opposition, it seems not unreasonable to conclude that its leadership would change course only if in possession of a proper theory of the peasantry, a class with its own distinctive patterns of development and specific material interests. Only with such a theory could the Left Opposition have foreseen the futility of trying to develop the forces of production in conjunction with any significant segment of the peasantry. Only then, it seems, would it have been in a position to form a united front with the 'Right' opposition to resist Stalin – not letting disagreement on what policies should guide the Third International abroad stand in the way of a joint effort at home to save the worker-peasant alliance and postpone industrialisation and collectivisation for the duration – the only alternative to Stalinism.

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and sharp disagreement with the latter. For this reason there cannot even be talk of a bloc between the Left Opposition and the Right Opposition. This requires no commentary'. Trotsky 1975b, p. 86.

198. Filtzer 1986, p. 23.

Epilogue

The Bolshevik-influenced and led class-struggles in 1917 had emplaced relatively free social relations: the same struggles would have been required to prevent their complete displacement a decade later. Only an active, mobilised working class with a very high level of political awareness, on a par with the working class of 1917, could have developed the potential to halt Stalin's incipient counter-revolution. To realise this potential, revolutionary Marxists would have raised workers and peasants' awareness through their struggle to expose the anti-worker and anti-peasant orientation of Stalin's 'party'. The support of the masses could be counted on in light of Stalin's objectively anti-popular policies. However, only in and through the struggle could the breadth and depth of that support have been ascertained, and victory or defeat determined. But such a struggle inevitably meant a readiness to break with the monopoly on political power exercised by the Communist Party; a towering order for Bukharin and Trotsky, for whom that monopoly was sacrosanct.[199]

Had the Right Opposition been prepared to foster working-class activity independent of the Communist Party, with the Left Opposition making an about face and joining it, the worker-peasant alliance, upon which the workers' state own existence was predicated, as Lenin had rightly held, might have been preserved. Its preservation would have been quite difficult to sustain since it also meant preparing workers to ride out the crisis by accepting a potentially much lower standard of living. Yet, had not the working class made much greater sacrifices earlier, during the Civil War, and done so willingly because it had understood what it was fighting for? Besides, events were quickly to show that Stalin's hideous alternative made for a far lower, indeed, catastrophic fall in living standards for both workers and peasants.

Could this strategy have been successful? However long the odds of success, the strategy limned out above was the only one that might have spared the international working-class movement the world-historic disaster of Stalinism.

199. Cohen 1975, p. 322.