

SPARTABASE



The digital nervous system of the independent movement of the working class

In our current century of information war, a universal public database of articles, comments, tables and tags, accessible by all using democratic algorithms, will bring transparency, class consciousness and self-organization to the working class, assist in the liberation of Palestine, and lead to the overthrow of the rule of capital

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-- Chapter 1 --

The French Revolution creates the modern world

Something new under the ancient sun

This essay will describe the **most important database in the world**. This database will likely be created in the decades ahead, and will become a **weapon of unimaginable power** in the hands of activists.

To understand what this database will be (and will do) we need to step into a **time machine**--and set the dial back to **1789**--when Louis 16th--the king of **France**, ran out of money. To get more money--Louis called all of the important people of France together for a big meeting. To make a long story short--things got out of control--and Louis got himself fed to the **guillotine**.

Bourgeois revolutions cut off heads

The **French Revolution** gave birth to our modern world. The ancient **feudal system**, and the divine right of kings, was **swept away** and replaced by the **modern capitalist nation-state**.

The French Revolution is called a **bourgeois revolution** because it brought to power the **rising capitalist class** (ie: the merchants and entrepreneurs--also known as the **bourgeoisie**). The French Revolution was not the first bourgeois revolution--but it was the biggest and the brightest. The revolt of the **American colonies** against British colonial rule, just a few years earlier, was another example of a bourgeois revolution. So was the earlier lengthy revolt of **Dutch** merchants against Spanish colonial rule. And so also was the rebellion, in the 1640's, of the rising capitalist class in **Britain**--which got fed up with the **restrictions** on growth created by King Charles--and cut off his head.

Bourgeois revolutions were inevitable

The French revolution happened when it did--because a **volcano** erupted in Iceland. Particulates injected high into the stratosphere blocked sunlight and lowered crop yields across Europe--leading to starvation and economic crisis. The French economy was hit particularly hard because decades of war had left the country deeply in debt.

Would the French revolution have been avoided if there was no volcano? No. It would have happened anyway--maybe 10 or 20 years later--because of the **inability** of the ancient feudal system (**relative** to the ability of a modern capitalist nation state) to harness the potential of the growing **productive forces**.

Industrial revolution had created productive forces

The term "productive forces" is used by students of **Marx** to describe all the machines, infrastructure and institutions that humans use to create and distribute things. Productive forces include things like factories, roads, electricity, robots and scientific knowledge. Revolutionary France did not, of course, have electricity or robots--but the **industrial revolution** had already begun--and the ability of humans to create "stuff" was increasing. And the ancient feudal system was **standing in the way of progress**.

Progress needs to overcome friction

Prior to the revolution in France, a merchant in Paris selling a **boatload of wine and wool** would have to move it through the river system where it would be taxed at the borders of each of the internal provinces. This might happen **17 times** as the wine and wool moved along the river. Each province might have its own separate system of **weights, measures, currency and taxation**. This was an awkward system. A simplified and more efficient system of commerce was needed. But each province might be ruled by a local lord who benefited (and derived his income) from this awkward and clumsy system. When informed

of the need to replace this system, the attitude of such a lord would be: "over my dead body". Enter the guillotine.

We can consider the awkward and inefficient system of taxation in pre-revolutionary France as being a kind of unnecessary **friction** that **obstructed** the development of **industry** and **commerce**.

Today, **another kind** of friction exists--which slows down the ability of **information** to **flow** to where it is **needed**. We will get to that later in this essay--when we get to our current century of information war.

Those who stand in the way of humans creating stuff -- eventually get run over

Human history is full of examples of social and political systems which **stood in the way** of the expansion of the ability of humans to create stuff. Basically--what happens--is an **irresistible force** has a **collision** with an **immovable object**--and, one way or another, the force eventually wins.

Bourgeois revolutions gave us democratic rights

The French revolution gave us the metric system--but it also did something more important: it popularized the idea that **ordinary people** had **democratic rights**--such as liberty, freedom of speech and (sometimes) the right to vote. Ordinary people gained these rights because the rising bourgeoisie **needed their help** (as foot soldiers) in overthrowing the rule and privileges of the ancient feudal, clerical and landlord classes.

Note: Because bourgeois revolutions usually resulted in **democratic rights**, as well as modern **nation-states**, they are also sometimes called *national* revolutions, or *democratic* revolutions.

The workers and small farmers got fucked

The workers and small farmers--who fought and died in the English and French revolutions so that the rising merchant class could cut off royal heads--made gains in their material conditions of life with the overthrow of the feudal system. But overall--they got the fucked. Beforehand--they got oppressed by the feudal class. Afterward--they got oppressed by the **capitalist class**--which now **ruled society**.

The main reason that the workers and small farmers got fucked over was because (unlike the capitalist class) they **lacked the ability to organize** and take action in their own class interest. The small farmers were numerous--but were **isolated** from one another--while the working class was quite **small**.

Gradual growth leads to sudden change

Change (in nature as well as in human affairs) can be either **gradual** or **sudden**. Usually, what happens is that a period of gradual change (where there is a change in **quantity**) leads to a period of sudden change (where there is a change in **quality**). Here are some examples:

- **Molting** -- a growing lobster must molt, and discard its old shell, in order to have room for a larger body
- **Melting** -- molecules must break their bonds with one another so that they can absorb energy by moving at greater speed
- **Earthquakes** -- surface features of crustal plates must suddenly move, in relation to one another, in order to keep up with the more gradual movements deep beneath the surface
- **Bourgeois revolution** -- the feudal system must give way to the modern nation state to unleash the potential of the growing productive forces. (Bourgeois revolutions--which include anti-colonial revolutions--have taken place nearly everywhere.)

- **Proletarian revolution** -- as the size, historical experience, and organization of the working class increases--and the limitations on the growth of productive forces under capitalism become more obvious--the rule of capital must give way to the rule of the working class. (No successful proletarian revolution has yet taken place.)

The French Revolution left us "unfinished business" to complete

As I write these words today--Trump's goons are beating, and sometimes shooting, people in cities such as Minneapolis--because the bourgeois revolutions which created the modern world also, so to speak, left behind "unfinished business". We need to--in a calm, sober and determined way--look at what was left undone.

We need to understand the big picture of how we got to where we are--and the **path forward** for humanity. We are living in the **century of information war**. Everything we need for victory is **waiting** for us--at our fingertips.

-- Chapter 2 --

Marx and Engels light the path forward

At the time of the French Revolution, the **working class** was quite small. In the decades that followed however, as the industrial revolution created steam engines, railroads, and factories, the working class grew. The first worker's organizations were founded, mainly in secret, based on vague notions of a future utopia in which all men would be brothers. The secrecy was necessary, initially, because **trade unions** were **illegal**, and even when **democratic rights** (such as speech and free association) existed--these rights were often ignored by ruling classes.

However, over the course of the 1800's, the working class grew in size, confidence, and organizing ability. This is where Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels enter the picture. Marx and Engels were **theoreticians** (ie: people who study, think, write and figure out what the big picture of events looks like). But they were also **political activists** who helped the growing working class learn how to organize itself to defend its class interests.

Marx and Engels were born in 1818 and 1820. They died in 1883 and 1895. Their work covered the period in which the industrial revolution (ie: coal, steel, steam and factories) led to the explosive growth of the working class, and shaped nearly everything we know today.

Karl Marx first captured public attention at the end of 1842, as a **fearless journalist** and the crusading editor of "Rhineland News" (ie: *Rheinische Zeitung*) based in Cologne, Germany--which quickly became the most quoted paper in Germany. Marx wrote the truth at a time when it was **dangerous** to do so. By the beginning of 1843, the German government shut down the paper. Marx helped start a new journal in Paris and, due to his writing and

organizing work, was banished from France, from Belgium, and from Germany, before finally settling in London in 1849.

The theoretical work of Marx and Engels

As a theoretician, Marx concluded that the **working class** was **destined to overthrow the rule of the capitalist class**--and to rule society itself, ushering in a **vast increase** in productive forces as it did so, and eventually creating a world of **peace, abundance** and **genuine community** for everyone. This was a rather amazing and far-sighted insight and--on this basis alone--Marx secured his place in history. But Marx was only getting started.

Below are what, in my personal opinion, may be the 3 books for which Marx is best known:

- *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) -- one of the most widely read books of all time, is where Marx, for the first time in history, lays out the **historical mission** and **destiny** of the working class.
- *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) --

Marx wrote this to show how the seemingly random struggles that shape history can be understood using the **materialist** method and **class politics**.

Louis Bonaparte was a Trump-like buffoon who became emperor of France following a dizzying sequence of events. But Marx was able to untangle these threads, and show how they reflected **struggles** between different **economic classes** (and the ideologies and/or illusions which rested on the material interests of those classes). Marx showed, for example, how the struggle between the competing **material** and **economic interests** of (1) the big landlords, (2) industrialists, (3) finance capitalists, (4) small farmers, and (5) workers--resulted in the elevation of an idiot to absolute power.

The **1848** revolution in France aimed to repeat the success of the French Revolution of **1789**, and to

complete the tasks which the earlier revolution had left undone. Marx was able to show why this did not work: the **class struggle** between the **workers** and **capitalists** was now at much **more advanced stage** than it had been more than 50 years earlier, and the **bourgeoisie** (which was now the ruling class--and obedient to its own economic and material interest) had become less **revolutionary** and more **conservative**.

- *Capital* (1867-1894) -- Nowadays, students of Marx often say that the **bourgeoisie** (ie: the class which owns and controls **capital**) rules the world. But this idea may be easier to understand if we think about it the other way around. *Capital rules the world*. It is not the bourgeoisie which owns capital--but capital which owns the bourgeoisie. Capital may not be conscious--but it does not need to be conscious--because it makes use of the consciousness of the humans who supposedly own it. Capital is a mathematical object (representing obligations based on dead labor) that **only wants to grow**--like a cancer. And its human owners only want it to grow--because their **social status** and their **entire social existence** is **inseparable** from the size of the **pile of money** on which they stand.

Marx analyzed, in great detail, the history, growth and movement of capital. We cannot understand the modern world if we do not understand capital because--underneath all the noise of the humans of who act as its **puppets** and mouthpieces--*capital is calling the shots*.

For example, whether Trump is claiming Somali immigrants would "blow up our shopping centers, blow up our farms, kill people." or US weapons are used to carry out a genocide in Gaza--we can know that somewhere, in the background, this is being done so that **bags of money** can become **bigger**.

The organizational work of Marx and Engels

Marx and Engels were central figures in the three most well-known waves of working class upheaval and political organization in the 1800's, as the workers' movement grew from small clandestine groups into large national parties:

- (a) The **1848 revolutions** -- which broke out in France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Austria, Hungary, and dozens of other countries -- represented the entrance, on the stage of history, of the **working class** as a **force independent of all other classes**. These struggles were eventually suppressed, with tens of thousands killed, but they accelerated the downfall of the reactionary aristocracies. During this wave of struggle, Marx and Engels played a key role in transforming the "*League of the Just*" into the "*Communist League*", and wrote the "*Communist Manifesto*".
- (b) From 1864 to 1872 -- This begins with the formation of the **First International** (ie: "International Working Men's Association") and ends after workers in Paris seized control of the city, creating the **Paris Commune**, which was crushed in **1871**. The Paris Commune is regarded as the **first attempt** by the working class to **overthrow bourgeois rule** and run society directly.
- (c) From the 1870's -- **mass workers parties** grew in Germany, Britain, Italy and other countries and, together, formed the **Second International**. The most well-known of these was the *Socialist Workers Party of Germany* which (in spite of being illegal) grew to be the largest and most popular party in the country--with dozens of different newspapers. This party was created as the result of an ill-fated merger, in **1875**, between two rival trends: the *Lassalleans* and the *Eisenachers*. The Eisenachers had been inspired directly by Marx and Engels. The Lassalleans, on the other hand, were guided by illusions about cooperation with the German ruler Bismark. As became clear much later, in **1914**, this would not be a marriage made in heaven.

Some historical perspective

This chapter covers the period during which Marx and Engels were active--during which the working class became large and well-organized, with organizations that grew from tiny clandestine cells into mass socialist parties with millions of followers. Before moving to the next chapter--let's step back and look at the bigger picture.

The historical period during which the **rising capitalist class** (also known as the *bourgeoisie*) **overthrew feudal rule** and became the **ruling class** covers approximately **five centuries**. This period begins (more or less) with (1) the explosion of scientific, historical and cultural knowledge known as the **Renaissance** and (2) the discovery of maritime routes across the Atlantic to the new world, and around Africa to India and East Asia. This period concludes (more or less) with the wave of **national liberation struggles** and decolonisation after the end of the second world war.

The **rising working class** (also known as the *proletariat*) began to flex its muscles and assert itself as an independent force on the world stage with the **1848 revolutions**--and first directly challenged the ruling bourgeoisie in **1871**, by seizing the capital of France and establishing the **Paris Commune**.

We have not yet discussed the **second attempt** by the working class to seize control of society from feudal and bourgeois rulers in **1917**. We can note for now, however, that it was **suffocated** within a few years. And, while the century that followed witnessed the second world war, struggles against fascism and reaction, and a wave of **national liberation wars**--the independent workers' movements (with some exceptions) have been largely **leaderless** and **quiet**, if not non-existent.

Some questions

This raises the question of *why*?

- Was Marx *wrong* about the working class being destined to overthrow the rule of capital?

- *What* has been holding things back?
- *What* is the material basis (beyond the usual platitudes) for optimism today?
- *What* is different today than in the past?
- And (more to the point) *how long*--if ever--will it be before the proletariat is successful in bringing an end to **imperialist war, genocide, poverty** and **alienation**--and bringing instead peace, abundance and community to everyone?

And some answers

My conclusion is that Marx was not wrong. The victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie is **inevitable** for the reasons that Marx predicted: only the proletariat will be able to unleash the potential of the **productive forces** that humanity desperately needs.

My own estimate is that the rule of capital is unlikely to survive our current **century of information war**.

The truth will out

The revolution in digital communications--which began (more or less) with the popularization of the internet and web three decades ago--is still gathering steam. It will usher in an epoch of **transparency**--in which the truth about everything important will increasingly be revealed to everyone who wants it. From Minneapolis to Gaza--**the truth will out**.

The impact of transparency on the **class consciousness** and **ability to organize** of the working class--will be immense beyond imagination.

But--what do I know? I am hardly infallible. What I can do however--is lay out my arguments in this essay. And you, dear reader, can make up your own mind.

What can we learn from these first great waves of workers' struggles?

We will find, if we look at the three great waves of workers' struggles in the time of Marx and Engels, that certain key patterns, themes, or contradictions emerge again and again. We will see these same themes also in the following chapters, where we will review the events of the 20th century.

What are these contradictions?

- The distinction between periods of **upsurge** in the movement and periods of **lull**
- The contradiction between **TASK # 1** (completing the unfinished tasks of the **bourgeois revolution**) and **TASK # 2** (the tasks of the **proletarian revolution**)
- The contradiction between **independent class politics** and a host of **illusions** which are either **freely floating** around in society or are **directly promoted** by the ruling bourgeoisie
- The distinction between **mass democratic organizations** (in which existing trends in the movement compete for support and influence) and organizations of **like-minded activists** (working for **theoretical clarity** or to demonstrate the effectiveness of some particular approach)
- The distinction between the struggle against **repression** and the struggle against **co-option**
- Many more things might be mentioned, but I will end this list with the contradiction between **confusion** and **clarity**. We will discuss this in the next chapter where, in the aftermath of the suffocation of Lenin's revolution--the workers' movement experienced a century of what is called the **crisis of theory**--where no clear path forward was apparent.

An endorsement of "The Young Karl Marx"

I should note (for any readers who have not seen it) that the movie "**The Young Karl Marx**" (2017) is an excellent introduction to the work of Marx and Engels in the period leading to the writing of the *Communist Manifesto*.

This film is structured around a series of necessary (and historically accurate--because they are based on the Marx-Engels correspondence) confrontations over the nature of the working class movement and the ideas which must guide it.

The personalities and politics of movement leaders and activists who were well-known at the time (such as the Bauer brothers, Proudhon, Bakunin, and Weitling) are brought to life in living color--and culminate in the collision which gave birth to the "*Communist League*".

This is the kind of movie which gains depth each time you watch it. The director, Raoul Peck, respects the intelligence of viewers, and refuses to "dumb down" Marx. If you want pabulum--watch *Fox News*. You can watch this, for free, here:

<https://watch.plex.tv/movie/the-young-karl-marx>

Let's take a closer look and see what we can learn from so much pain and blood:

Waves of struggle have a period of upsurge followed by a period of passivity or lull

The most obvious pattern we will observe is that each of the waves of workers' struggle consisted of a phase of **upsurge**, peak or expansion (during which the number of workers involved in struggle increased by hundreds or thousands of times) followed by a phase of relative **passivity** or lull.

In the first two waves (ie: the *1848 revolutions* and the *1871 Paris Commune*) the periods of passivity were caused by **repression**: tens of thousands of militant workers were slaughtered and many times more driven into exile. We have not yet discussed what

happened with the third wave (ie: the **mass socialist parties** which emerged in the last decades of the 1800's) because this is more complicated--we will get to that in the next chapter.

During periods of **upsurge**--the movement has a **mass character**. Militancy, courage and consciousness are contagious. Everything feels **connected** and **alive**. *Anything seems possible*. Many kinds of groups or organizations spring up--like dandelions after a rain.

Periods of **passivity**, on the other hand, are more like **winter**. Organizations lose support, and those that survive often do so in a **spore-like** state--as tiny, self-contained, feuding bundles of theory, often unconnected to any kind of practice. *Nothing seems possible*. During periods of lull, circumstances often lead to organizations having an isolated, sectarian or even **cult-like** character.

Let's move now from what is most **obvious**--to what is most **important**:

The distinction between tasks # 1 and # 2

One principle, above all others, stands out as the key to understanding everything else. This is the contradiction between the two great tasks of the independent movement of the working class:

- (1) **TASK # 1** -- Completing the **unfinished democratic tasks** of the **bourgeois revolution**, and
- (2) **TASK # 2** -- The working class **overthrows the rule of capital** and the bourgeoisie--and **runs everything itself**

As we will see--the first task involves what is familiar to everyone: **fighting back** when we are fucked with. But the first task has limits. Completing this task, **by itself**, is like finding the end of a rainbow. This task--by itself--can never be completed. As long as we **confine** ourselves to this task--humanity will experience intermittent (or continuous) **imperialism, fascism, war, genocide, poverty, instability** and **alienation** from one another.

Only when the working class completes the second task will there be **peace, abundance** and **genuine community** for everyone. This will be possible for two reasons:

- (1) There will no longer be an **irreconcilable conflict** of **material interest** between the rulers of society and everyone else--in which the ruling class (as part of the tactic of **divide-and-rule**) forces on us a mass culture aimed at keeping everyone **ignorant** and fighting one another
- (2) There will be a **vast expansion** of the **ability** to **create everything** that humans want and need

As the working class grew in size and organization, and its movement gained experience and self-confidence--the **relative weight** of these two tasks increasingly shifted from Task # 1 to Task # 2. Corresponding to this--the attitude of the bourgeoisie also shifted--to becoming increasingly **afraid** of the power of the working class--and increasingly preoccupied with avoiding the inevitable victory of the workers.

Let's look at each of these two great tasks:

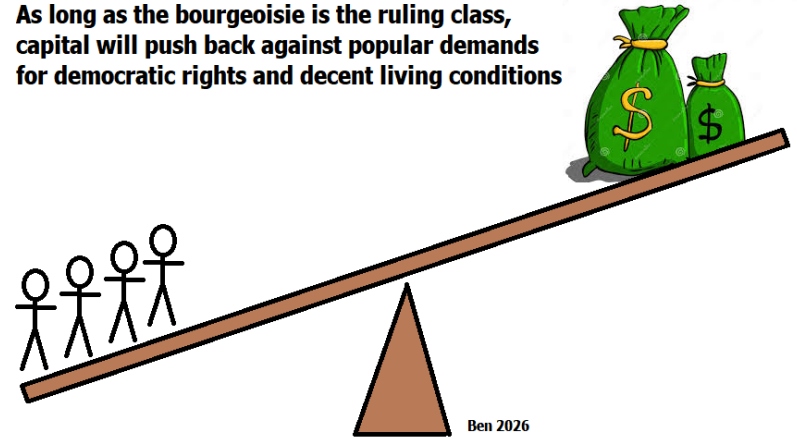
TASK # 1 **Completing the democratic tasks**

The bourgeois revolution is often referred to as the "democratic revolution" because the bourgeoisie--in order to get help from the working class in the overthrow of the reactionary feudal ruling class--gave to workers (or at least promised to give) all kinds of democratic rights. But the tasks of delivering these rights was **never completed**--because the bourgeoisie--once it was in power--recognized that democratic rights were being used to **limit** its ability to make money.

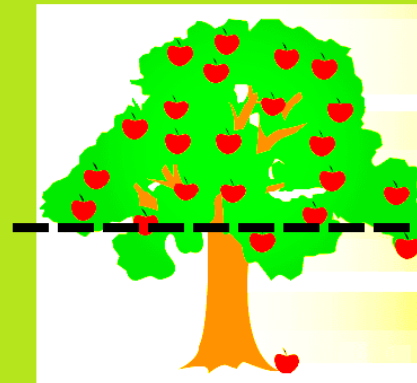
On the one hand--the ruling bourgeoisie needed to allow democratic rights--in order to **gain** and **maintain legitimacy** in the eyes of the working class--and appear as a **responsible steward** of the interests of society as a whole. On the other hand--more democratic rights also meant **fewer profits** for the bourgeoisie.

The eternal see-saw

As long as the bourgeoisie is the ruling class, capital will push back against popular demands for democratic rights and decent living conditions



Low hanging fruit is only the beginning



Task # 2

- ▶ Overthrow of the rule of bourgeoisie/capital
- ▶ Working class becomes ruling class

Task # 1

- ▶ Democratic rights
- ▶ Partial demands -- decent conditions of life
- ▶ Anti-colonial struggles

Imagining the end of the world is easier than imagining the end of capitalism because our ruling ideas are the ideas of our ruling class

Hence the **eternal see-saw**: allow only enough democratic rights to **maintain the appearance** of legitimacy--but no more. But the **level** of democratic rights necessary to maintain legitimacy--**goes up or down** as the masses **demand** these rights and **fight** for them.

The bourgeois revolution that ended British colonial rule and created the United States was only a **halfway** measure--and required a **civil war** (1861-65) to liberate 3 million enslaved people in the South. Even today--democratic rights are partial.

Here in the U.S., for example, our "**two-party system**" allows us to choose which gang of imperialist thieves will **fool us and rule us**--on the basis of elections dominated by wealthy donors and media coverage (and social media restrictions) controlled by billionaires.

For example today, in **Minneapolis**, people are fighting for the right to walk down the street without being terrorized by Trump's thugs because of their skin color or accent--or shot down in broad daylight for standing up for their right to protest.

No matter what gains or improvements are won by protest, struggle or voting--**real power** will always be in the hands of **capital**--until the power of capital, and its institutions and flunkies is **decisively broken**.

This means that the independent movement of the working class must fight to protect and expand the gains of the bourgeois revolution--as **training** and **preparation** for **task # 2**.

We should also note that, in the time of Marx and Engels, the **bourgeois revolutions** were breaking out mainly in **Europe**. But, as we will see in the following chapters, they later broke out worldwide in a wave of anti-colonial struggles and **wars of national liberation**.

TASK # 2

The working class must run everything

The second task involves **breaking up** the entire system of bourgeois rule (where **one percent** of the population **runs**

everything on the basis of what will increase the size of the pile of money on which they stand) and replacing it with an economic and political system **run by the people who** actually **do the work** that creates everything--the **working class**.

This will mean also that **all** of the corrupt institutions which now exist--will need to be **dismantled** and **replaced** with institutions that have a genuinely popular and transparent character.

Capital--as a form of wealth that can be measured and **represented** by a **number**--and which determines the social status, power and "worth" of individuals--will eventually be replaced with things which cannot be measured or reduced to a number--the same way as human character cannot be reduced to a number.

There are important theoretical questions that come up at this point because this will eventually require creating an entire economy that is not based on **commodity production** (ie: where things are created for the purpose of being exchanged for money) and is based instead on **free, direct distribution** (ie: without money being involved). This economy will also need to run without a huge centralized bureaucracy to coordinate everything. And this economy will need to be based entirely on **volunteer labor** (ie: similar to the free software movement) where actions are based on the self-organization and initiative of teams of workers.

Such an economy will likely require a century or so to create (at least that is my best guess) and the working class will **initiate** and **guide** this lengthy period of transition (ie: from a *commodity economy* to a *gift economy*) after it overthrows the rule of capital.

These kinds of things are often difficult to think about. That is because *it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism*. This is because the ruling ideas in society will always be the ideas of the ruling class. And our present ruling class imagines that life is impossible without capitalism.

We need to finish this chapter. Let's move on.

Resisting co-option becomes more important than resisting repression

As the workers' movement matures and becomes more powerful, the risk of repression is reduced, but the risk of co-option increases. The *German Socialist Workers Party* is the **poster child** for how this can work. It was created from the merger of two trends, both of which had wide influence. On the surface, these two trends appeared quite similar in their radicalism.

Under the surface however, they could hardly have been more different. One trend was directly inspired by the ideas of Marx and Engels. The other trend was radical only in appearance, and aspired to become the respectable poodle of Germany's reactionary leader, Bismark.

The contrasting nature of these two trends, however, was not clear to German workers at the time--who wanted to see these two trends merge. They finally did merge, in 1875, so that the merged party would attract these workers and grow more rapidly. And it did. In spite of Bismark's repressive laws, which outlawed the party for the next 15 years, it grew like a weed anyway, becoming the largest political party in Germany during the time it was outlawed.

The eventual result, however, was tragedy and betrayal of epic proportion (as we will see in the next chapter) when the faction within the party which aspired to bourgeois respectability--sided with the German ruling class in launching the first world war and murdering the leaders of the revolutionary faction.

That kind of outcome was hardly unique. There are similar stories of opportunism and betrayal--in struggles large and small--in every country on every continent. Every circumstance is unique, of course, but class politics work in a remarkably similar way everywhere.

Organization, class independence and the war of ideas

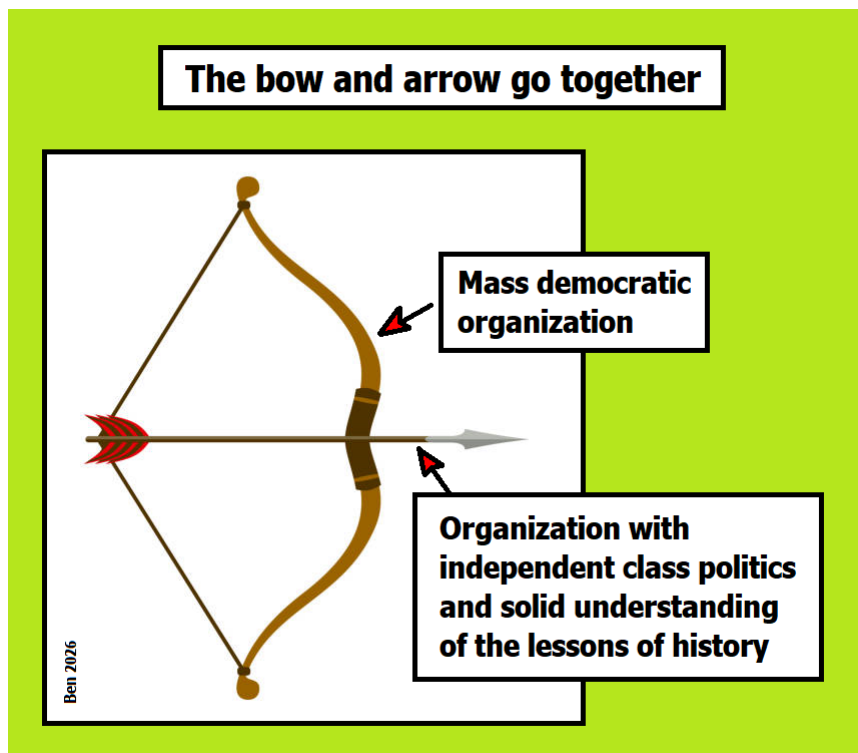
"proletarian revolutions, like those of the nineteenth century, constantly criticize themselves, constantly interrupt themselves in their own course, return to the apparently accomplished, in order to begin anew; they deride with cruel thoroughness the half-measures, weaknesses, and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their opponents only so the latter may draw new strength from the earth and rise before them again more gigantic than ever; recoil constantly from the indefinite colossalness of their own goals -- until a situation is created which makes all turning back impossible"

-- Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

Nothing happens without organization. The French Revolution was launched by an organization. How was this organization created? It was originally created by the king, Louis 16th, when in order to raise new taxes, he summoned together all the important people of France. Then things got out of control. Once a critical mass of active people with a common purpose are brought into proximity to one another--shit can happen. Louis lost his head. The rising bourgeoisie became the ruling class. Growing productive forces were unleashed. The modern world was born.

The proletariat, in order to become the ruling class, also needs organization. We have already discussed the two principle tasks of this organization (ie: Task # 1 and Task # 2). But how will this organization, so to speak, be organized to accomplish these tasks?

(continued next page)



Proletarian organization needs to execute two distinct functions:

- (1) Draw the **largest possible number** of workers into the **political life, activity and struggles** of the organization
- (2) **Guide** the workers' movement as a whole with **independent class politics**, and maintain and apply knowledge of the lessons of the historical experience of workers' struggles

Generally, these two (quite distinct) functions are accomplished with two (quite distinct) kinds of organizations:

- (1) A **democratic mass organization** in which opposing political trends which have influence within the ranks of politically active and class conscious workers can openly **debate their ideas** and **compete** with one another for support from larger sections of workers

- (2) An organization which (a) stands on a firm foundation of **independent class politics**, and (b) is capable of understanding the path forward and effectively waging the **war of ideas** necessary to gain support for this path.

So we have discussed, at this point, two distinct tasks, and two distinct kinds of organizations with different (but necessary) functions.

How are these things best combined? What is the historical experience of the workers' movements?

As we have seen, the German party, which was formed from the merger of two competing trends within the working class, appeared (for a few decades) to have solved this problem. There was a single mass party that contained, within itself, various factions (ie: left, right and center). But this did not end well.

It was left to Lenin to improve on this solution. That will be the topic for the next chapter. ■

More to explore (for chapter 2)

Useful articles

- **Marx and Engels - on revolutionary organization**
(This is the article that inspired me to write this essay)
<https://mlrg.online/history/views-of-marx-and-engels-on-revolutionary-organisations/>
- **Summary of Marx's 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte**
Interest in the *18th Brumaire* is soaring right now because of the many uncanny similarities between Louis Bonaparte and Trump. However, it remains famously difficult to read because it is saturated with references to people and events which were well-known at the time but are not today. While writing this essay however, I found this quite readable, useful and concise (12 page) overview:
<https://isreview.org/issue/74/eighteenth-brumaire-louis-bonaparte/index.html>

Wikipedia -- Events

- Bourgeois revolution -- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bourgeois_revolution
- Revolutions of 1848 -- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutions_of_1848
- Paris Commune -- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_Commune

Wikipedia -- Revolutionary Organizations

- Communist League -- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist_League
- First International (IWMA) -- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_International
- Second International -- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_International

Wikipedia -- works by Marx

- Karl Marx -- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Marx
- Communist Manifesto -- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Communist_Manifesto
- 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte -- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Eighteenth_Brumaire_of_Louis_Bonaparte
- Capital -- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Das_Kapital

Works by Marx and Engels at the Marxist Internet Archive

- Communist Manifesto -- <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/index.htm>
- 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte -- <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/>
- Capital -- <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/index.htm>

-- Chapter 3 --

Lenin captures state power with a disciplined organization

Lenin was born in 1870. He came to the attention of the world, of course, in **1917**, when the disciplined organization he built seized state power in Russia, and took Russia out of the first world war. Lenin's political work is best known for the period from **1902** (when he wrote "*What is to be done?*") to when he was incapacitated by a series of strokes, in **1922-23**. It is safe to say that no person did more to shape the events of the 20th century.

Why did Lenin succeed when others failed?

Lenin's party was part of the 2nd International--and yet it was unlike any of the other parties in that grouping. Instead of **degenerating** into **class collaborationism**--and siding with their ruling governments when the first world war broke out in **1914**--Lenin's party went on to **overthrow** the Russian government.

Why was Lenin's organization successful when all the other parties of the 2nd International **betrayed** the working class? The three most well-known differences between Lenin's party and all the others are as follows:

- ▶ **Active, disciplined membership** -- to be a member one had to agree to be active--to become part of a party cell and to do regular work under the discipline of that cell
- ▶ **Illegality** -- Lenin's party was outlawed--and learned to function in clandestine conditions--and to skillfully combine legal and illegal work
- ▶ The **ideological** and **organizational struggle** against class collaboration was better organized and more transparent

While all of these reasons were important--the focus of this essay will be the third. Other parties in the 2nd International were divided between **revolutionary** and **class collaborationist** wings, which openly opposed one another. But the **confrontation** between the revolutionary and class collaborationist path in Russia was unique in being:

- ▶ **Better organized**
- ▶ **More protracted**
- ▶ **More transparent**

In all the other parties of the 2nd international, the class collaborationist wing ended up **dominating** the party. But not in Russia. The struggle in the Russian party was **better organized**, more **protracted** and **vastly more transparent**. This, in my view, made all the difference in the world. This is of particular significance to us **today**--in our current century of **information war**.

Lenin's plan aimed for transparency

Many students of Lenin today make a huge **fetish** out of how Lenin's organization was **disciplined**--and imagine that creating such an organization needs to be the **primary focus** of activists today. At the same time--these same people often completely overlook the significance of the **political transparency** that was not less important.

Consciousness is built from **transparency** (ie: being able to *see* and *understand* what is happening) in the same way that molecules are built out of atoms, or sentences are built out of words.

Let's look at how Lenin's organization was built, from the very beginning, on the principle of transparency.

In "*What Is To Be Done?*" Lenin outlined a simple but effective plan by which all the local revolutionary organizations in Russia would publicly report on their experience and learn from one another. Each local group would write a report, suitable for public distribution, describing their experience (for example: best

practices, lessons learned--what worked and what did not--as far as how they created and distributed agitation for workers, how they minimized arrests, etc). These reports would be smuggled out of Russia and make their way to editors (working under legal conditions in places like Switzerland) where they would be summarized, compiled together and printed up in a publication called *Iskra* (ie: the Spark). These printed summaries and compilations would then be smuggled back into Russia and given to activists via underground distribution networks.

In this way, the local revolutionary organizations in Russia could carry out **public work** in conditions that required **secrecy**.

Competing poles of attraction grow inside a big transparent tent

We saw, in the previous chapter, how in **Germany**, there were two organizations that claimed to represent and fight for the interests of the workers. One of these organizations was guided by **independent class politics**. The other organization was guided by the opposite of independent politics--a philosophy called **class collaborationism**--where they imagined that they were very clever--and would be able to use the reactionary Bismark as a tool. The reality, of course--is that Bismark would use them as a tool.

In Germany, the workers were **not able to understand** the difference between the independent and class collaborationist trends (because, on the surface, they **looked very similar**) -- and for this reason **demand**ed that the two trends **unite** into a **single organization**.

What did such a demand by workers mean, in **practical terms**? These organizations were asking the workers to make **sacrifices** to help build these organizations (in conditions where assisting an illegal organization might risk prison). Making such sacrifices required that the workers had **confidence** in the organization. And giving the workers confidence meant that it would be necessary for the competing organizations to find **visible** and **practical** ways to **combine** their efforts. This way the combined organization would be able to get the **support** it needed and **grow**.

But combining into a single organization is not without its own problems--because uniting into a single organization carried the risk of the **entire organization** being **captured** by class collaborationist traitors to the working class (as happened to nearly all the parties of the 2nd international).

Lenin's **solution** to this dilemma--would combine the **best of both worlds**: a system of organizations inside a larger (ie: "big tent") organization. The Russian Social Democratic Labor Party contained, within itself, two smaller organizations (ie: the *Bolsheviks* and *Mensheviks*) as well as independent-minded activists. Each of these two sub-organizations had its own headquarters, staff, publications, issues where they would encourage struggle, and bases of support.

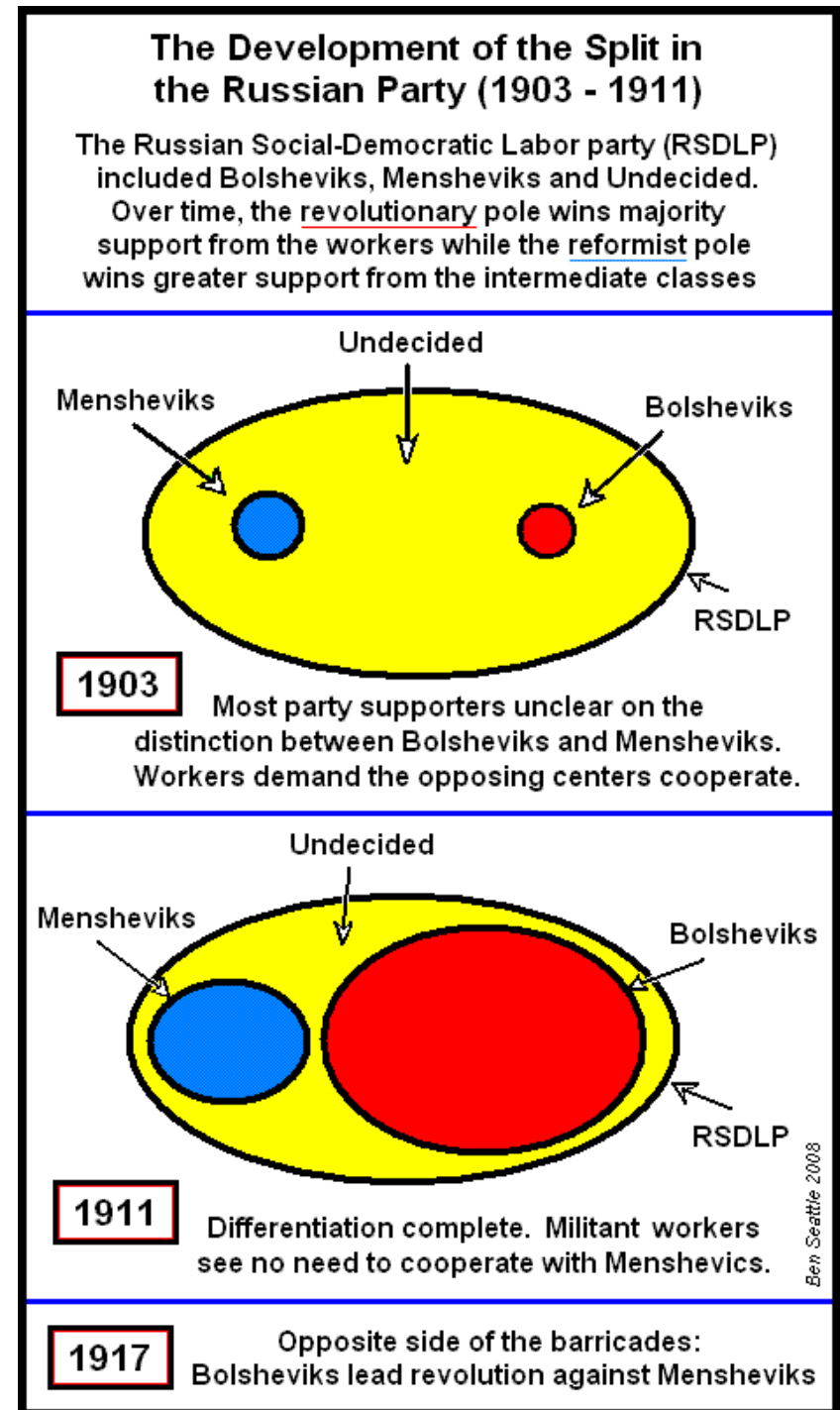
This worked quite well. Workers, for example, would be able to donate money to the combined big tent organization, and then this money would then be divided between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in agreed-upon ratios (ie: such as, for example, 60 percent to 40 percent) that corresponded to the support each sub-organization had in each local area.

The **Bolsheviks** gained the most support among the industrial workers in the big cities, while the **Mensheviks** tended to get more support from intellectuals and the sections of society that were intermediate between the workers and the ruling class. But it was possible to support the big tent without having to understand and choose between the **two competing poles of attraction** within it.

That was how things stood in the period between approximately **1903** and **1911**. By 1911 however, development had taken place--and things had changed. Quantity had turned into quality.

Eventually -- it becomes time to split

By 1911, workers in Russia had a **much better understanding** of the differences between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. **Nearly ten years of open, protracted public struggle between the two trends** had made things clear. The great majority of workers understood that the Bolsheviks represented the path of **independent class politics**, while the Mensheviks represented the



path of compromise and **class collaboration**--and most workers supported the first path--and rejected the second.

Meanwhile, people who favored **simply replacing the Tzar** with an **ordinary capitalist government** (ie: like was common in Europe) supported the Mensheviks.

(To understand the severity of the differences between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks--it is helpful to consider that just a few years later, in **1917**--when the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government in Russia--many of the key people in the Provisional Government were Mensheviks.)

But to return to our story--by 1911, the workers in Russia were no longer demanding that the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks unite in a common "big tent" organization. The need for such a big tent had **evaporated**--and the Mensheviks were **discarded** like a used condom.

Bourgeois revolution in Russia long overdue

But we have covered only **half the story** of why Lenin was successful, when all the other parties of the 2nd International accomplished little other than to betray the workers.

The other half of the story was that the bourgeois democratic revolution had **already happened** in all the other countries of Europe and the U.S., while in Russia, on the other hand, it was **long overdue**. This meant, as far as the prospects for a revolution in Russia--that there was both **good news** and **bad news**.

- ▶ The **good news**--was that a **bourgeois revolution** would be **easy to get started**, as there was a huge demand for it.
- ▶ The **bad news**--was that a **proletarian revolution**, on the other hand, **might not be possible**--because the mass of the population might be inclined to support the idea of simply following the "path of least resistance" -- and allowing the bourgeois revolution to take its natural course--and to give it time and see what it might be able to accomplish.

Contrary to how "revolution" is often depicted in a lot of bourgeois culture, if such a revolution does not enjoy **broad, deep** and **sustained** support from the **majority of the population**--as reflected in their willingness to make real **sacrifices**, year after year, on its behalf--the revolution will either not happen or--if it happens--will not be successful.

**We need to keep the above in mind
in light of everything that followed.
A proletarian revolution will be tested by
the forces of the entire capitalist world.**

October Revolution became the pivot of the 20th century

In **February 1917**, a bourgeois revolution in Russia overthrew the Tzar and created a provisional government. But the provisional government had **refused to take Russia out of the first world war** (which had gone badly for Russia and become extremely unpopular) and no one was happy with the provisional government. This gave Lenin and his organization an opening to overthrow the provisional government--and launch a **proletarian revolution** a few months later.

Lenin's revolution became known as the **October revolution**. It acted like the cue ball break in a game of billiards--releasing and setting into motion pent-up energy from millions of oppressed people in Russia--and the rest of the world.

The **capitalist world responded** by invading, in 1918, with the armies of more than a dozen countries. When that failed to crush the revolution--it doubled down--responding with fascism and a much bigger invasion--by Nazi Germany--in 1941. That did not work either.

The October revolution set off a wave of **anti-colonial struggles** and **national liberation wars** which eventually resulted in bourgeois revolutions (of one sort or another) throughout Asia,

Africa and Latin America. In this way, Lenin's revolution became the pivot of world politics in the 20th century.

October had been a gamble on a revolution breaking out in Germany

Lenin's revolution had been a gamble--a calculated risk. It was launched in the expectation that revolutions were likely to break out in the European countries--most notably, **Germany**.

A somewhat peculiar strategic situation existed at the time--in which proletarian revolutions in Russia and Germany--would be likely to succeed--if and only if they both broke out more-or-less at the same time--as they would need to be able to **support one another** (with industrial products from Germany, and agricultural products from Russia) against the expected onslaught of the capitalist world.

On the other hand--if a revolution only broke out in either Russia or Germany alone--it would likely be **isolated** and **defeated**.

Hence the gamble. If a revolution broke out in Germany--then it would be necessary for the Russian revolution to have already started--and to be ready to support the German effort. Otherwise the German revolution would be doomed. On the other hand--if the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government--but the German revolution failed to break out--then the Russian effort would be doomed.

There were many indications that a German revolution was imminent. Millions of Germans had died in a senseless war between imperialist powers that benefited no one, and countless more were dying every day. Mutiny was in the air. In war, however, little can be known with certainty. Lenin weighed the odds. The Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government, quickly and easily. Now there was no going back.

Revolutions did eventually break out--in both Germany and Hungary--but, unfortunately, they were both defeated. Lenin realized that his revolution was probably **doomed**--at least as a proletarian revolution--for a considerable period of time [1].

Invasion, civil war and famine

The reaction of the capitalist rulers of the world to the Russian revolution--was to regard it as a **fire** that needed to be **extinguished** immediately--before it **spread**. In **1918**, Britain, France, the U.S., Canada, Australia, Italy, Japan, Poland and several other countries sent armies to invade and destroy the workers' revolution in Russia. The country was plunged into a brutal **civil war**. The **economy** was **shattered**. Rail transport was no longer functional. **Factories** were shut down as workers were mobilized for fighting. **Farms** were abandoned or in disrepair. **Famine** and **disease** became widespread.

The Bolsheviks won the war--but it would be an understatement to say that, by the time the fighting was over at the end of **1920**--there was **intense dissatisfaction** with the Bolshevik government. Probably 90 percent of the population (mainly small farmers whose crops had been seized by Bolshevik militias at gunpoint) would have been happy to see Lenin's head on a pike.

As conditions became increasing grim in Russia--the **democratic rights of workers** were throttled down to essentially zero. For example, **public criticism** of bureaucratic incompetence or corruption was not permitted. Any small spark of public discontent threatened to ignite an explosion.

Dissatisfaction with the Bolsheviks **peaked** as soon as the civil war ended. During the civil war itself--most small farmers had sided with the Bolsheviks--for the simple reason that they hated the reactionary whiteguard forces and **needed** the Bolsheviks to defeat them. But as soon as the war was over--so was their tolerance for Bolshevik rule. A major revolt against the Bolsheviks broke out at the naval base in **Kronstadt** in the spring of **1921**. It was harshly suppressed and, even within the Bolshevik party itself, democratic rights were **shut down**.

Revolutionary hopes for a democratic and equal society were replaced by the necessity of **martial law**.

What did Lenin say about all this?

All kinds of **mythology** has emerged concerning the period between the Kronstadt revolt and Lenin's death. For example, in my early years as a revolutionary activist, I was **unaware** of the extent of the popular dissatisfaction with Lenin's government following the end of the civil war.

Instead of explaining that **democratic rights** were permanently suspended because most of the population wanted to get rid of Bolshevik rule, the **Stalinist/Maoist tradition** that I had become involved with promoted **bullshit excuses** and **doubletalk** to deny that democratic rights had been replaced with **martial law**.

Eventually, I studied some of Lenin's writing from this period. I wanted to understand how Lenin himself (who wrote with remarkable precision) had viewed matters. Three things were particularly helpful to me:

- ▶ In his letter to **Myasnikov** [2] (a Bolshevik party member who had called for **freedom of speech** and **freedom of organization**) Lenin replied that--in the existing circumstances--this would simply lead to the overthrow of Bolshevik rule and the restoration of capitalist rule--which would be worse.
- ▶ In "**The Tax in Kind**" [3] (April 1921) Lenin explained that, although democratic rights were necessary for workers to run society--that until a **functioning economy** could be **rebuilt** (so that, for example, factories could produce tractors which could then be traded to the small farmers for their crops--rather than militias simply seizing farmers' grain) democratic rights would need to remain suspended. Lenin estimated that this would take **at least 10 to 20 years**. In the meantime--workers would not be able to run society.
- ▶ In Lenin's last major speech, at the **11th Congress** [4] (March 1922) Lenin outlined how "**history knows all sorts of metamorphoses**" and explained that Soviet Russia was on the path of becoming an ordinary capitalist state with lots of red banners flying everywhere.

Soon after, Lenin was incapacitated by a series of strokes and died. For a century now--fools, villains and despots alike have been free to speak in his name.

A retreat from proletarian to bourgeois revolution

It appears to me that what all this means is that Lenin was **executing a retreat** (ie: a lengthy, **10 or 20 year detour**) from the goals of a **proletarian** revolution--to something resembling a more ordinary **bourgeois** revolution--except that his organization would remain in charge. The goal of the working class running society--would be **postponed**--and remain mainly as an **aspiration** for the **future**.

The **problem** with this solution, however, is that Lenin would not be around much longer--and without **democratic rights** (ie: freedom of speech and freedom of organization) in the hands of workers--there would be no force sufficient to **resist the spontaneous internal pressure** created by commodity production which, along with the force of habit, "*engenders capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously, and on a mass scale.*" [5] These pressures, during this lengthy period, would lead to the **degeneration** of the organization Lenin had built, and the emergence of a **new ruling class**.

Soon after, **Stalin** took power--and a new **feudal religion** (called "*Marxism-Leninism*") was created which declared that all of the temporary emergency measures, suppression of rights, and martial law--were not what they looked like--but rather were necessary features of "*the dictatorship of the proletariat*" or "*socialism*".

As we will see in the next chapter--the trajectory of the October revolution **greatly accelerated** the **anti-colonial struggle** and related **bourgeois revolutions** worldwide--but it also led to a **century of confusion**.

My assessment of the October revolution

Even today, more than a hundred years after Lenin's death, it would be an understatement to say that (even among progressive activists) there is little consensus regarding October. What was necessary? What was accomplished? What went wrong? Instead, there is a lot of disagreement and confusion.

My perspective, after studying this story for more than 50 years, is that the October revolution probably accomplished about as much as may have been possible at the time. Would the world have witnessed the first successful proletarian revolution if Lenin had lived to age 73, as many people do, instead of dying at the relatively young age of 53? Maybe. But that is speculation.

► As a **bourgeois** revolution -- October was a **huge success**.

The Bolshevik government did ten times more--ten times faster--to **modernize and industrialize Russia**--than the Provisional Government would or could have ever done. Within 20 years, for example, Russia had industrialized and was able to defeat the Nazi army that had conquered France in four weeks.

More than this--the October revolution **greatly accelerated the smashing up of the world colonial system**, resulting in the liberation of China, independence for India, and sweeping changes throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America.

► As a **proletarian** revolution -- October **failed**.

The working class never actually ruled the country (except in name). Instead, a new kind of **state capitalist regime emerged** (run by a new ruling class) that was closer to "scientific feudalism" than "scientific socialism". Moreover--because of the way that workers' democratic rights and ability to self-organize was slowly suffocated amidst a sea of waving red flags--an **immense amount of confusion** was created.

Before Lenin, there was Robespierre

Karl Marx, in 1847, the year before he wrote the *Communist Manifesto*, had written [6] about a similar situation as that in which Lenin found himself--as the head of a revolution which has **exhausted its resources** and lacked sufficient popular support to both defeat its **external enemies** and resist the **internal pressure** to surrender to the **spontaneous forces** pushing toward the formation of a new ruling class:

If therefore the proletariat overthrows the political rule of the bourgeoisie, its victory will only be temporary, only an element in the service of the bourgeois revolution itself, as in the year 1794, as long as in the course of history, in its "movement", the material conditions have not yet been created which make necessary the abolition of the bourgeois mode of production and therefore also the definitive overthrow of the political rule of the bourgeoisie.

Marx wrote the above after studying the French revolution, where **Robespierre** (who had been serious about creating a society with equality and justice for all) was sent to the guillotine in 1794 after the rising class of merchants and manufacturers (ie: the early **bourgeoisie**) concluded the time was ripe to **get rid of him**.

Some people imagine that a dictatorship--with the power to cut off people's heads--can do anything it wants--forever. It doesn't work that way. Without sufficient popular support--the ability to punish opponents eventually counts for little--as you end up **surrounded by an ocean of enemies**. Robespierre ended up cutting off the heads of 25 thousand people (most of whom had done little more than complain to the wrong person about the hardships created by his revolutionary government) during "the terror". This only slightly postponed the **inevitable**.

Robespierre was replaced, ultimately by **Napoleon**--who stood ready to accommodate and serve the rising French bourgeoisie. Lenin was replaced by **Stalin**, who ended up being the **gravedigger** of the October revolution and the **architect** of a new ruling class.

What did Marx say about all this?

Karl Marx was the guy who first recognized that the working class was destined to overthrow the rule of the capitalist class--and liberate not only itself--but also the rest of humanity. This was not just a good idea. This was necessary--and **inevitable**.

Marx was born three years after the final defeat of Napoleon in **1815**. Marx had participated in the **1848 revolutions**, and wrote the book on the aftermath of their defeat in France. Marx understood the **consequences** of defeat. Marx always insisted on **sober** and **realistic** thinking concerning the conditions under which the victory of the working class would take place.

What did Marx say about the conditions necessary for a successful revolution of the working class? I have found myself returning, again and again, to these two sentences, from 1859 [7]:

No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society.

Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the process of formation.

Marx helps us understand why the **French Revolution**, the **1848 revolutions**, the **Paris Commune**, and the **1917 revolution** all failed to reach their objectives. Basically--if **material conditions** are not **sufficiently mature**--the working class will not be able to win against the **ruling bourgeoisie**--which has immense political, economic and military resources--as well as the force of habit of millions--and the operation of commodity production--which

spontaneously creates, reproduces and reinforces bourgeois thinking and practices and the bourgeoisie itself.

We might ask ourselves, in light of all this, how could it be possible that the working class will ever be able to overcome all of this--and win?

Marx gives us the answer: the development of the **productive forces** that has been steadily taking place.

In the following chapters--we will take a look at how, in particular, the revolution in **digital communications** which has been unfolding over the last three decades--has brought humanity into **the century of information war**--and appears poised to put into the hands of the working class--**power beyond imagination**. ■

Notes (for chapter 3)

[1] Lenin: "we are doomed if the German revolution does not break out" (March 1918)

<https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/government/foreign-relations/1917-1918/1918/March/7.htm>

"In any case, and in whatever conceivable circumstances, we are doomed if the German revolution does not break out. Nevertheless, that does not in the slightest degree weaken our duty to know how to endure the most difficult situation without blustering.

The revolution will not come as quickly as we expected. History has shown this. We have to accept it as a fact. We have to recognize that the world socialist revolution in the most advanced countries cannot start as easily as in Russia . . .

We must be prepared for extraordinary difficulties, for extraordinarily heavy defeats, which are inevitable, because the revolution has not yet begun in Europe . . ."

[2] Lenin's letter To Myasnikov -- 5 August, 1921

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/aug/05.htm>

[3] "The Tax in Kind" (April 1921)

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/apr/21.htm>

[4] Opening speech at the 11th Congress (March 1922)

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1922/mar/27.htm>

[5] From "Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder"

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch02.htm>

The dictatorship of the proletariat means a most determined and most ruthless war waged by the new class against a more powerful enemy, the bourgeoisie, whose resistance is increased tenfold by their overthrow (even if only in a single country), and whose power lies, not only in the strength of international capital, the strength and durability of their international connections, but also in the force of habit, in the strength of small-scale production. Unfortunately, small-scale production is still widespread in the world, and small-scale production engenders capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously, and on a mass scale. All these reasons make the dictatorship of the proletariat necessary, and victory over the bourgeoisie is impossible without a long, stubborn and desperate life-and-death struggle which calls for tenacity, discipline, and a single and inflexible will.

[6] This quote is from a recent essay by Hari Kumar:

"Marx and Engels on Revolutionary Organizations" --

<https://mlrg.online/history/views-of-marx-and-engels-on-revolutionary-organisations/> -- where a link is given to Marx's "Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality: A Contribution to German Cultural History; contra Karl Heinzen"; 1847; CW Vol 6 London 1976; p.312-40; also at Architexturez.net
<https://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/marx/works/1847/10/31.htm>

The "injustice in property relations" which is determined by the modern division of labour, the modern form of exchange, competition, concentration, etc., by no means arises from the

political rule of the bourgeois class, but vice versa, the political rule of the bourgeois class arises from these modern relations of production which bourgeois economists proclaim to be necessary and eternal laws. If therefore the proletariat overthrows the political rule of the bourgeoisie, its victory will only be temporary, only an element in the service of the bourgeois revolution itself, as in the year 1794, as long as in the course of history, in its "movement", the material conditions have not yet been created which make necessary the abolition of the bourgeois mode of production and therefore also the definitive overthrow of the political rule of the bourgeoisie.

[7] Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy"

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>

Below are the three principle paragraphs from the above which (in my opinion) best summarize Marx's thinking:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then

begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.

In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production. No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society.

Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation. In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress in the economic development of society. The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production – antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism but of an antagonism that emanates from the individuals' social conditions of existence – but the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation.

-- Appendix --

Productive forces want to be free

The mathematics of conscious forces and the urge to merge

-- 1 --

Copper and **tin** are metals, and have no special gravitational attraction to one another, beyond the normal. And, of course, they have no consciousness of their own. And yet, five thousand years ago, some clever person might have said that the goddess of copper and the god of tin had an irresistible desire (backed by a **supernatural force**, capable of overcoming all obstacles) to be combined--because it was happening.

As materialists, however, we know that there is no "supernatural". Nature creates everything.

The **force** that fulfilled this **desire** of copper and tin to be combined--is a **conscious force** that comes from the brains of humans. Humans mined, refined and transported copper and tin across thousands of miles to combine them into durable bronze tools and weapons.

The principle here is simple. Copper and tin are examples of "productive forces". **Productive forces want to be free**--free to **combine** with other productive forces--and free to **create** things that humans want or need.

-- 2 --

There is a deeper principle at play here--a principle that does not require human consciousness--or any kind of consciousness at all. We can observe this principle in **nature**--where it has been **driving evolution** for two billion years.

The most **efficient** way for nature to **search** and **discover** which **combinations** of genetic blueprints best fit a chaotic environment--

is a process of **random shuffling** and **recombination** known as **sexual reproduction**. Our genetic cards want to be shuffled and dealt. This process drove the evolution of life for more than a billion years before the first brains evolved. And yet, with our modern minds, we can feel, directly, the **transcendent power** of this urge to merge.

-- 3 --

Similar also, is the principle that communications systems (and **social media databases**) are more useful and valuable when they are **connected** and **combined**. *Metcalf's Law* applies math to this: a phone network of 30,000 people is a **thousand** times bigger than a network of 30 people--but will be **million** times more useful--because it will enable a million times more **connections** between any two people. *Leibniz*, who invented calculus, said "everything possible has an urge to exist". A similar principle is used to calculate the probabilities of poker hands--and of the virtual particles of quantum mechanics.

Ultimately, the **mathematics** driving combination are related to **entropy**, which has long fascinated the best minds in science--because entropy appears as the inescapable "exhaust" of a phenomenon called **self-organization**--which exists everywhere in nature--and acts as if it were the **life force** of the universe. Self-organization, in recent years, is being called **emergent complexity**. Marx called it development on the basis of internal contradictions, or--in simpler terms--**materialism**.

-- 4 --

The **algorithms** (ie: the **little software robots** that deliver information to our screens) can be effectively **alive**--if they are **obedient** to our will--because they can function as **extensions** of ourselves. They can be a part of ourselves in the same way as our **eyes**, **ears**, and **hands**. But if--instead--these algorithms are controlled by an **external** entity (such as **capital**, or our **ruling class**) then they will be **alien** to ourselves--a **tool** of oppression in the hands of our enemies--engineered to **control our minds** and keep us **ignorant**, passive--or **fighting one another**.

-- 5 --

Stewart Brand coined the slogan: "**information wants to be free**"--which **breathes life** into inanimate bits and bytes--and upsets nitpickers--who spout off about teleological anthropomorphism and insist that information cannot "want" anything. Activists laugh at this however, because this slogan celebrates the **ability** of information to slip **out of the control** of those who attempt to **own** it--and to evade and route around every kind of **censorship**. Information wants to be free--in the same way that horny teenagers want to have sex. Blame entropy.

-- 6 --

The slogan "information wants to be free" can best be understood as an expression of the more general and universal principle that **productive forces want to be free**. Information "wants" to be free because humans **need** information to be free.

Humans will liberate information because information will liberate humans.

Humans, for example, need **unrestricted** and **frictionless** access to information about all the real news of a world rushing headfirst into civil war, fascism and genocide. Humans need this information so that they can **assemble together** all the **parts** of the **puzzle**--and understand the **big picture**--of their place in society--and what they must do to defend and advance their interests against the **rule of capital** and those who would burn the world.

And humans will only have this ability to **understand the world**--when the **algorithms** which deliver information are themselves **unchained**--and free to bring **consciousness** to the working class--and to light our way to a brilliant future. ■