

SOME NOTES ON MAN'S SOCIAL NATURE

AND

THE CAPITALIST ROLE OF BOLSHEVISM

The Socialist Party of Great Britain, Education Committee

SOME NOTES ON MAN'S SOCIAL NATURE

Bourgeois Prejudices about Man's Nature

In Socialism free men and women will hold the means of production in common and will organise production to serve the needs of the community on the basis of equality and co-operation. Socialism will at once provide a basis for solving present-day social problems and, in solving them, will create a society in which men will best fulfil their social nature.

With such a view Socialists inevitably become drawn into arguments about "human nature", partly because we ourselves are propounding a theory of man in society. Those whose ideas about man are circumscribed by the prejudices of capitalist society have difficulty in envisaging a system of production in which the coercive economic pressures of an exploitative society will not operate. Their thinking is limited by their misconceptions about what they feel is "human nature" The vulgar argument of the apologist for capitalism is familiar, though no more valid for being so. It is argued that men are greedy, individualistic, competitive, lazy, violent, etc. and that such behaviour expresses unalterable characteristics of "human nature". This being so, it is argued, Socialism is impossible. One obvious contradiction in this argument is that some of these prejudices cancel each other out. It is not possible to argue, for example, that man is "naturally competitive" and at the same time "naturally lazy". This contradiction underlines the superficiality of the argument. It is also significant that opponents of Socialism always cite the worst aspects of human behaviour. They stress the greediness and competitiveness of man under capitalism, but obviously ignore the fact that even within a society where the social and economic forces are almost universally divisive there are many examples of co-operation, generosity and mutual concern. In times of difficulty, politicians and others are very ready to make spurious appeals to the interests of "the community" and "the nation" as an emotional lever in attempting to get their way. Indeed it can be argued that if bourgeois prejudices about

“human nature” were in fact true, even capitalism could not function.

The idea that man is naturally competitive and selfish is itself a socially-determined prejudice, which seeks to rationalize economic privilege in propertied society. The prejudice stems from class interests. As well as this, it is part of man’s ignorant evaluation of himself in a society which prevents him from bringing into fruition all the best potentialities of his social nature.

However, the fundamental theoretical objection to the bourgeois prejudice is that it assumes that society is the result or product of a pre-existing human nature. The Socialist argument is that human behaviour is the result of society and that society is the product of men’s history. It therefore follows that in order to understand human behaviour we must understand society. We must understand how the pattern of individual lives is enacted against a background of social and economic forces in actual historical situations.

Even a quick view of man in history shows that he is a complex being capable of a wide range of behaviour and emotions. This extends from cruelty and greed to generosity and even self-sacrifice, not only within a society but in different situations within the same individual. Significantly, opponents of Socialism always depict the worst and most destructive examples of behaviour as expressing what they think is the “essence” of “human nature”. We would not expect an ill-considered prejudice to take into account the more hopeful aspects of human behaviour conducive to co-operation, but nevertheless such aspects exist. Most of the time, in fact, men are going about the day-to-day course of their lives in a stable well-ordered manner without recourse to any extremes of behaviour.

General assertions, from whatever source, that forms of human behaviour such as greed or generosity express innate characteristics of the human make-up, have no scientific basis and are of no value in understanding man or dealing with the problems of improving society. What can be said about man that is invariable in all forms of society throughout the world and in history is that he is a *social animal*. This is to say that man functions physically and emotionally about the practical problems of survival and in his personal relationships as a *social being*.

The Social Origin of Man

Anthropological knowledge is now sufficiently advanced for us to trace the general pattern of the biological-social evolution of homo sapiens during the very long development of stone cultures in the Palaeolithic period. The story that emerges from that period is not only the biological evolution of homo sapiens from a variety of near hominid species, but a simultaneous development of flint-working techniques from the crude and primitive to the more complex and sophisticated.

The time scale of pre-history is still somewhat obscure, and a close correlation between various types of fossil man and stone-working cultures has not yet been established. What is known, however, is that between at least 500,000 years B.C. and 20,000 years B.C. there took place a gradually developing ability to fashion tools, by a succession of different types of hominids which resulted ultimately in homo sapiens

and then the Neolithic revolution, that is to say, the practice by which man came to understand agriculture and the domestication of wild animals for farming, which became the basis of civilisation.

So far as is known, pre-history begins with such stone cultures as the Clactonian, which consisted of crude flakes, choppers and pebble tools, and ended with the sophisticated techniques of the Upper Palaeolithic when such cultures as the Magdalenian and Solutrean produced exquisitely fashioned laurel leaf blades, arrowheads and chisels. These improved techniques were accomplished by an animal finally identifiable as homo sapiens which had acquired one crucially important advantage over and distinction from all animals – the ability to accumulate his experience socially. This was the ability of one generation, in terms of knowledge and techniques, to improve the productivity of its collective labour and then to pass on this experience socially to the next generation.

Anthropologists have described a number of different behaviour patterns as characteristically human: using tools; speaking, thinking abstractly and being aware of being a distinct living organism; learning and teaching the body of skills, thoughts and behaviour patterns which, together with man-made tools and buildings, constitute “culture”. All these are interconnected and depend on man’s biological nature and, equally, on the fact that men live in societies. A tool-making, speaking, culture-bearing outside society is just inconceivable.

Men are biologically suited to make and use tools because their upright stance frees their hands and their binocular colour vision gives them clear three-dimensional sight. They are biologically suited to speak and think because of their speech organs and highly developed brain, but speech could not have developed in man had men not also been social animals. It has been plausibly suggested that men’s awareness of themselves as separate living beings arose out of the work of making tools; in tool-making a man has to concentrate his attention very carefully on the material he is fashioning and the distinction between “subject” and “object”, between “me” and “not me” could well, in the course of biological evolution, have arisen from his. Speech, too, probably arose out of another primitive work-process: hunting. Man’s brain and nervous system, together with the prolonged dependence of children on adults, also makes men biologically suited for learning and culture-bearing. So the very physical equipment of homo sapiens are physical attributes in the individual which evolved as part of the mechanics of *social* existence.

The Social Nature of Man

Social organisation is the means of human existence, because society organises human labour about the practical tasks of material survival. Within this pattern of social activity the individual is involved, not as a self-elected member enjoying a free choice as to whether or not to take part, but as a being dependent on human social relationships for acceptance and survival. The individual cannot opt in or out of society since he only exists in and through society.

Society, then, is the organisation of labour. Culture, through the development of knowledge and the refinement of techniques, is the accumulation of social labour. Each succeeding generation, in the practical activity of its own time, is able to encompass the achievements of all its predecessors, and, on this basis of cumulative social interaction, take itself forward. Thus do men make history and, in changing their culture and society, change themselves.

It can be assumed that the life of Palaeolithic man was circumscribed by the struggle for existence by small groups inhabiting local areas. Tools were primitive and the opportunities for individuals to engage in specialised activities probably did not exist. Nevertheless he drew strength from the cooperation of his small numbers about the practical tasks of hunting and gathering. At this level the interdependence of the group also provides succour and an emotional haven from the insecurities and bewilderment that must have been present in the primitive mind.

During the Palaeolithic period the gradual refinement of flint-working occurred over at least 500,000 years and culminated in homo sapiens and later the Neolithic revolution. Since that time the accumulation of techniques and the means of production have accelerated in pace through successive systems of propertied class society. But culture could only have developed on the enormous scale it has since the Stone Age because men are social animals whose behaviour is learned and so socially determined.

Today, the social nature of man, expressed in the production of wealth is organised and spread over the entire planet. In modern capitalism the production of raw materials, transport, communication, agriculture, engineering, building, etc is elaborately integrated. Even an average standard of living in a developed society is consumed against a world background. To account for every productive process involved in the production of a single commodity would eventually embrace the organisation of labour at a world level. In the modern world the social existence of every individual is enmeshed in a technical division of labour which is global in its scope.

The Social Individual

That Man, the social animal, must enter into productive relationships in order to live is as true now as it ever has been in history. More complex modern society still arises from this basic condition of social existence. Even in the modern world man does not exist socially just in order to survive materially. As well as this, the acceptance of the individual into a set of satisfactory personal relationships is necessary to sustain personal stability and mental health. Within this framework of practical social activity the individual finds his place and gives to his life all the meaning that it requires. Because feeling is personal, we are apt to think that existence is independent, but feeling is the emotional language by which men communicate their social interdependence.

Societies achieve conformity to their purpose and general standards not only by laying down formal rules but by reinforcing these rules with the alternative pressures of individual acceptance or rejection. Friends who fall out, withdraw and reject by not

speaking to each other. Larger groups may sanction a member by expulsion or sending to Coventry. A society punishes its members with banishment or imprisonment. In all these cases it is accepted that imposed isolation from the group is painful and therefore salutary. .

Through learning and imitation, through the habit of conformity, through the interactive process or living within a group, the social character of the individual is built up. Habits of speech, dress, manners, attitudes and values are absorbed by the growing individual through his experience of his immediate social environment and society at large. Individuals can, through their own actions, change their attitudes and values, and alter the material conditions of their life. They can do this from the basis of their initial experiences and in response to stimuli present in the general social environment. Through men and their social environment acting and reacting on each other is how social evolution occurs.

It is a basic need of the individual, in order to sustain healthy stable existence, to be supported in his life by the acceptance and approval of those with whom he has entered into a relationship, or those with whom he has found a personal identity. In any culture at any time in history, the life of the individual is indissolubly wrought into a pattern of *social* existence. .

The Socialist argument is that, at this stage in social evolution, only a social system based on world-wide common ownership and co-operation can cater for man's material needs, together with his needs as a social animal in the quality of human relationships.

Further Reading

“Human Nature” is an immense subject which can perhaps be divided into the following sub-groups:

- (a) The emergence of Man.
- (b) Early societies.
- (c) Early settled communities.
- (d) Early civilizations.
- (e) Communities in the Modern Era, reports of which substantiate friendly and co-operative behaviour, non-competitive values, etc.
- (f) Modern works on individual and social behaviour.
- (g) General and theoretical works.

The list below, in which the books are marked according as how they fit into the above sub-divisions, is a preliminary list. The Party would not necessarily agree with all the remarks made in these publications but Socialists will find them very Useful. Note also the date of publication, especially of works on early Man, since new archaeological discoveries mean that hypotheses are subject to frequent revision. The dates in the list are for the latest, revised editions of the works in question.

- J. A. C. Brown, *The Social Psychology of Industry* (1954) (f)
V. Gordon Childe, *Prehistory of European Society* (1958) (g)
V. Gordon Childe, *Social Evolution* (Fontana, 1963) (g)
V. Gordon Childe, *What Happened in History* (Penguin, 1964) (g)

V. Gordon Childe, *Man Makes Himself* (Fontana, 1966) (g)
 Grahame Clark, *World Prehistory. A General Outline* (1969) (g)
 Grahame Clark and Stuart Piggott, *Prehistoric Societies* (Penguin, 1970) (c)
 W. le Gros Clark, *The Antecedents of Man, An Introduction to the Evolution of Primates* (1971) (a)
 Sonia Cole, *The Neolithic Revolution* (1970) (c)
 Glyn Daniel, *The First Civilisations* (Penguin, 1971) (c)(d)
 F. Engels, *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man* (1876) (a)
 Per Høst, *Children of the Jungle* (1956) (a)
 Jack Lindsay, *A Short History of Culture* (1962) (g)
 R. Marshall, *Arctic Village* (1940) (e)
 M.F.A. Montagu, *The Biosocial Nature of Man* (1956) (g)
 M.F.A. Montagu, *On Being Human* (1957) (g)
 M.F.A. Montagu, *Man in Process* (1962) (g)
 M.F.A. Montagu, *Anthropology and Human Nature* (1963) (g)
 M.F.A. Montagu (ed.), *Culture and the Evolution of Man* (1962) (a)
 M.F.A. Montagu (ed.), *Culture: Man's Adaptive Dimension* (1968) (b)
 M.F.A. Montagu (ed.), *The Concept of the Primitive* (1958) (b)
 M.F.A. Montagu (ed.), *Man and Aggression* (1973) (g)
 L. H. Morgan, *Ancient Society* (Meridian Paperback reprint of Kerr edition, 1963) (g)
 F. Mowatt, *People of the Deer* (1952) (e)
 Scientific American, September 1960. Reprinted, with other articles, in *Readings in the Social Sciences* (offprints 601-637), Volume I (Library of Congress: 78:87222), 1969
 D. Sahlins and E.R. Service (ed.), *Primitive Social Organisation: An Evolutionary Perspective* (1962) (g)
 Vernon Venable, *Human Nature: the Marxian View* (1946) (g)
 L.A. White, *The Evolution of Culture* (1959) (g)

For criticisms of such books as Konrad Lorenz *On Aggression*, Robert Ardrey *Territorial Imperative* and Desmond Morris *The Naked Ape*:

“The Myth of Man as a Killer”, *Socialist Standard*, June 1969.

“Man: Ape in Wolf's Clothing?”, *Socialist Standard*, September, 1969.

“The New Litany of ‘Innate Depravity’ or Original Sin Revisited”, M.F. Ashley Montagu, in *Man and Aggression*.

(If any members, particularly those with specialist knowledge of the subject, would like to suggest additions or point out any errors which may have crept in we would be grateful to hear from them).

THE CAPITALIST ROLE OF BOLSHEVISM

I. Tsarist Russia

Bolshevism, in theory and practice, was a capitalist-revolutionary movement rising out of the peculiar social and historical conditions of Tsarist Russia. In the absence of

a strong and independent capitalist class the task of leading the popular struggle against Absolutism fell to another group, the intelligentsia.

In mid-nineteenth century Russia there was no constitution, the Tsar being the sole ruler. The Russian scene had certain feudal aspects notably the division of society into legal estates (nobles, clergy, merchants, serfs). On the other hand there were aspects of oriental despotism. The Tsar was the sole ruler and “father of the people”; the bureaucrats who manned the state machine from Ministers downward were *his* servants. A vast and centralised bureaucratic machine had been at the disposal of the Tsars since the time of Peter the Great, who ruled from 1689 to 1725. This tsar had pursued a policy of modernisation, that is, of taking what was useful for western Europe to bolster up the autocracy. He established a standing army, a regular system of taxation and a civil service open to all. This latter led to the creation of a new “estate” in the official hierarchy, the state officials. When, in later times, the autocratic state interested itself in education, health and other technical matters to these were added a group of people officially designated as the “intelligentsia of diverse ranks” — professional people of non-noble origin working for the central or local government. These, together with writers, journalists and impoverished nobles (and the sons of the lesser clergy), provided the basis of that peculiar but important group, the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia.

Intelligentsia, now part of most languages, is a Russian word. In other languages as well as in Russian it refers to the same sort of people — teachers, social workers, doctors, lawyers. But while in capitalist Britain or Germany such people are mostly members of the working class, in mid-nineteenth century Russia there was as yet no working class. But the intelligentsia were still a distinct social group.

Thus at this time Russia was a powerful Absolutist state and was regarded as the main threat to “Liberty” by the European liberals, and also by Marx. But Russia was not unaffected by the events that had taken or were taking place in Europe. The philosophers of the French Enlightenment were read by educated Russians and the French Revolution itself had a deep effect. Even in the eighteenth century people had called for an end to the autocracy and for the liberation of the serfs. The first action took place in December 1825 when a group of revolutionaries — officers from the noble class — tried to seize power. The plotters came to be known as the Decembrists and can be said to be the beginning of the Russian revolutionary tradition.

Secret revolutionary groups continued to exist for the next three decades. In the eighteen-fifties, a poet and collaborator of Alexander Herzen suggested a plan for revolutionary organisation and for the strategy it should pursue. Of particular relevance for tracing the origins of Bolshevism is Ogarev’s theory of how a revolutionary group should be organised. It should, he said, be a secret society under the control of a self-appointed and full-time centre which would give all the orders. In other words, the insurrection should be led by professional revolutionaries. An organisation called Land and Liberty was formed in 1861 and 1862 on these lines by people around Chernyshevsky.

Ogarev got his ideas from a reading of Buonarrotti’s *Conspiracy of the Equals*, the

account of the plot associated with Babeuf in the French Revolution, in which Bounarotti took part. This book was widely read by revolutionaries all over Europe and the secret society was a common organisational form used by revolutionary democrats and nationalists. After the advent of scientific socialism the remaining Utopian Communists who adhered to secret societies were known as Blanquists, after Auguste Blanqui.

The Russian revolutionary movement had a “socialist” tinge from the start and the slogans of bourgeois liberalism had no attraction for it. *Narodniki*, which these revolutionaries were called, is the Russian for “populist”. A second Land and Liberty, formed in 1876, later split in two. One part, the People’s Will, under Tkachev, organised as a body of professional revolutionaries aiming at a coup and using terror as a weapon. The other part, the Black Partition, influenced by Bakunin saw the end of Tsarism coming through the peasants rising and seizing and dividing up the land. This split in the Narodniks was thus between those who favoured a party of professional revolutionaries with a political aim and those who favoured a broad-based popular movement with a social aim.

The assassination of the Tsar in 1881 led to the break-up of the revolutionary groups by the police. As a result there was a turning-away in Narodnik circles from secret societies and professional revolutionaries. But a few still supported the Ogarev-Tkachev theory.

Meanwhile, the Tsarist government had been pursuing a “liberal” policy. The serfs were nominally freed in 1861. Local government and the judiciary were reorganised. But the policy that was to have the most significance was that of industrialisation. The state played an important part in this together with foreign capital. Capitalism was another of those useful devices, introduced after Peter the Great, to increase the power of the autocracy. Actually, of course, it undermined it. It led to the creation of a new class for Russia, the propertyless wag-worker. The revolutionaries began to turn their attention from the peasantry to this new working class. Many became Social Democrats and Marxists.

That capitalism was introduced into Russia from above by the Tsarist state working with Russian and foreign bankers is very important. Modern large-scale industry was thus imported and was not the result, as in the rest of Europe, of a process of evolution from petty industry (as traced by Marx in *Capital*). This meant that Russian industry was highly concentrated. In fact in 1913 there was a higher proportion of large-scale enterprises in Russian industry than anywhere else in Europe.

The social and political results of this concentration were the dependence of the capitalist class on Tsarism and foreign capital and its extreme isolation from the working class. Consider the working class support given to the Liberals in Britain and the Radicals in France up until the first world war. This was not to be repeated in Russia. When the first real show-down with Tsarism came in 1905 the workers turned not to their employers but to the revolutionary intelligentsia for leadership .

This isolation and weakness of the Russian capitalist class and its consequent inability to lead a mass popular movement against Tsarism, is a very important point to grasp.

For it meant that the traditional bourgeois task of clearing away the relics of feudalism had to be carried out in Russia by another group.

The Russian working class was recruited from the peasantry and legally was not distinguished from them. In fact, at first they were almost industrial serfs. There was no protective legislation; they often lived in barracks near the factor, and went back to the country for part of the year and when unemployed. In these circumstances the workers did not see themselves as a class separate from the peasantry with separate interests. On the other hand, the concentration of industry meant the concentration of the workers too: in the metal industry of St. Petersburg, the textile mills in and around Moscow, the coal mines of the Donets basin and the oil wells of Baku. The working class first made its presence felt in a series of strikes in the 1890's but its political significance did not become clear till the 1905 Revolution.

The bulk of the population were peasants. Before 1861 they were legally obliged to work on the nobles' estates. After 1861 their poverty forced them to. In other words, only the legal form had changed. The peasants continued to work the nobles' land as well as their own. Most of the peasants were organised in *mir*, or communes, within which the land was periodically re-shared. Individual ownership of the land was rare. One of the policies of the Stolypin government after 1905 was to encourage peasant proprietorship and the break-up of the *mir*. To a certain extent this succeeded but only in the areas producing products for the world market or for Russian industry. Here a group of propertied peasants, or *kulaks*, appeared. Amongst these grew up co-operatives and a nation-wide co-operative bank. All the same, the bulk of the peasants remained virtually landless or members of *mir*.

II. Russian Social Democracy

Those Russian revolutionaries who turned away from the peasantry to the working class for the mass basis for the anti-Tsarist movement took up Marxism and became the Social Democrat of Russia.

Marxist ideas first came to Russia in the eighteen-eighties. In 1883 a group of Russian exiles, former members of Black Partition (that is, Bakuninist anarchists) formed a Marxist group. The man behind this was G. V. Plekhanov. At this time, Marxism was merely a theoretical weapon aimed against the Narodniks. The Narodniks looked to the peasantry and hoped to stir them up with a policy of assassination of Tsarist officials (Plekhanov's famous pamphlet on anarchism is directed mainly against the idea of political assassination). However, the Narodniks went further. They argued that Russia could avoid the capitalist stage through which the rest of Europe was passing and proceed directly to Socialism, using the peasant commune as a basis. Plekhanov's polemics were directed against this theory in particular. He proclaimed the necessity of capitalism in Russia and that it would be the capitalist class, aided by the working class, that would overthrow Tsarism.

A theory which proclaimed the necessity of capitalism in Russia had obvious attractions for the capitalist class and a few of its thinkers spoke the language of Marxism, using the materialist conception of history to further the interests of the Russian capitalist class. These were known as "legal Marxists" but never attracted

mass support.

The congress which founded the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party met in Minsk, in Belorussia, in March 1898. The founders came from two groups. One consisting of ex-members of the People's Will party and associates (including Lenin) who still adhered to the Ogarev-Tkachev principles of organisation. The other of former followers of Bakunin and Lavrov who rejected these principles. Thus the Social Democrats were split on the same lines as had been the Narodnik revolutionaries. When the famous Bolshevnik/Menshevnik split came in 1903 it was on just these lines.

In any event, the congress was broken up by the police. A process of thinking about organisation began amongst Social Democrats. Some in Russia, including Lenin and Martov, stressed the necessity of a centre to be organised around a journal. After consultations with the Plekhanov group in Geneva this journal, *Iskra*, appeared for the first time on December 1st, 1900. Plekhanov, Axelrod, Lenin and Martov were among the six on the editorial board.

The *Iskra* group directed its attention against the "legal Marxists" and against what was called "economism". These argued that as the workers were not concerned with politics but were only interested in economic matters, the Social Democrats should also ignore politics. This, in effect, amounted to abdicating the political struggle against Tsarism to the capitalists. The same conclusion, though by a different route, as the "legal Marxists".

A very important pamphlet for an understanding of Bolshevism written by Lenin was directed mainly against the Economists. The title *What Is To Be Done?* was significant in that it was taken from the title of a novel by Chernyshevsky, who had similar views on organisation to those of Lenin. Briefly, Lenin argued that Tsarism would only be overthrown by a party of professional revolutionaries leading the working class. The working class were not capable, said Lenin, of reaching socialist understanding by themselves (as the Economists claimed), so this would have to be brought to them by the intelligentsia. Lenin's organisation theory provided for extreme centralism and submission by subordinate organs to the will of a central committee, composed of course of professional revolutionaries.

These theories (whatever their merit as a means of overthrowing Tsarism and, remember, there were no western-type political parties in Russia at this time) were so out of keeping with the democratic traditions of European Social Democracy that they caused a split in the *Iskra* group. Lenin was called a Blanquist. The split came to the surface at the second congress of the RSDWP which was held in Brussels and London in July and August 1903. When the question came up, thanks to the walk-out of some delegates previously over another issue, Lenin's supporters emerged as the majority and hence were known as "the majority men" or Bolsheviks. The others, headed by Martov, were "the minority men" or Mensheviks.

1905 saw the outbreak of the first Russian revolution. Russia had been defeated in the Far East by Japan and discontent was widespread. The whole thing was sparked off when police opened fire on an unarmed crowd, bearing ikons and pictures of the Tsar

and led by a priest. This was bloody Sunday, January 9. As a result there was a wave of political strikes throughout Russia and peasant uprisings in the countryside. In St. Petersburg and elsewhere were formed spontaneous workers' councils or *soviets* (which is the Russian word for council). In the absence of trade unions and political parties the working class expressed itself through these soviets. Under pressure, the Tsar granted a constitution and a *duma* (roughly a deliberative council) was set up. Western-type political parties, including a liberal party, the Constitutional Democrats (or Kadets) appeared.

The 1905 revolution made two things clear: the bankruptcy of the Russian capitalist class as a revolutionary force and the significance of the working class, and perhaps even the peasantry, as such a force.

When the revolution had died down the Russian Social Democrats began to assess the situation: All agreed that the coming revolution in Russia could only be a bourgeois revolution. But if the capitalist class was too weak and cowardly, who was to carry out this revolution?

To Lenin the answer was clear: the working class leading the peasants. The RSDWP, thus, should aim at capturing political power not for Socialism but for democracy. This Lenin summed up in the phrase "the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry". This became the perspective of the Bolshevik wing and when they met, on their own, in Prague in 1912 they adopted as their three aims: Democratic Republic, Eight-Hour-Day and Confiscation of the Land of the Landowners.

The Mensheviks, though agreeing that the Russian capitalist class was weak, did not come to the same conclusion. They argued that it was not the task of a socialist party to aim at political power for anything less than Socialism; the workers should push the capitalists to take power and so retain its own independence to struggle for Socialism (and reforms) within the democratic state. Social Democrats, they said, should not be organising themselves into a secret party of professional revolutionaries but should be organising a mass workers' party through which the working class could learn independence and self-confidence. The main Menshevik thinkers were Axelrod and Martov.

Thus the Bolsheviks aimed at political power, to be achieved by insurrection, to introduce democracy. The Mensheviks, while not opposed to insurrection, aimed at developing working class consciousness. It is all too easily assumed that the difference between Menshevism and Bolshevism was that between the reformist and the revolutionary position. Though those who were Revisionists and reformists were to be found amongst the Mensheviks, the disagreement was about the bourgeois not the socialist revolution.

As far as the socialist revolution was concerned there was no difference between the two wings. Up till 1917 the Bolsheviks were orthodox Social Democrats. They were members of the Second International. They accepted that Socialism could only be international, the materialist conception of history and Marxian economics. Like the Mensheviks they had a reform programme.

A third view was that of Trotsky, which though not all that important at the time, later became so as part of Bolshevik theory when accepted by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1917. Trotsky in fact only joined the Bolsheviks in August of that year.

Trotsky accepted the Bolshevik view that the only revolutionary class in Russia were the working class. But he argued that if, in the course of the bourgeois revolution, the workers were to get power they would not stop at introducing democracy but would begin to make inroads into capitalism. The revolution would begin as a bourgeois one and finish up socialist. This was what Trotsky meant by “permanent revolution” (a phrase borrowed from Marx). Trotsky did not think that Socialism could be established in Russia alone. The success of the socialist revolution in Russia would depend, he said, on that of the socialist revolution in Europe.

To complete the picture of Russian revolutionary politics at this time, a word about the Social Revolutionaries. These were descendants of the Narodniks, and opponents of Marxism, who had organised themselves in 1902 into the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries. They claimed Socialism as their aim, but their view of “socialism” was unscientific and utopian, based on co-operatives and the peasant commune. Their main plank was their land programme (to be stolen and implemented by the Bolsheviks in 1917): confiscation of the land of the landlords and its division amongst the peasantry. They carried out assassinations and saw the revolution as the work of “the toilers” (all those who worked, peasants and workers) led by the revolutionary intelligentsia. Nor were they against the idea of a Jacobin-style dictatorship to destroy the old order. The left-wing of the Social Revolutionaries in fact supported the overthrow of the Provisional Government in October 1917 and for a few months shared power with the Bolsheviks.

Conclusion

We see, then, the theoretical problems that the weakness of the Russian capitalist class caused for the Social Democrats there. Out of their discussion one very useful suggestion emerged: that a bourgeois revolution could be carried out without the capitalist class and even against them. Some, like Plekhanov, denied this but the idea got around and was, as we have seen, a cornerstone of Bolshevik theory and practice.

A further article will recount here the events of 1917. Suffice it to say that the Russian revolution was carried out against the capitalist and landlord class by a party of professional revolutionaries leading the working class and peasantry.

The Bolsheviks claimed that this was a socialist revolution since it overthrew the rule of the capitalist and landlord classes and replaced it by that of the working class (and poor peasants). This whole claim is based on one assumption: that the Bolshevik party represented the working class. But, as we have seen, Bolshevism in preaching minority action by professional revolutionaries was in a tradition going back to the great French bourgeois revolution. The Bolsheviks represented not the workers but the intelligentsia to whom had fallen the task of sweeping away the barriers to capitalist development in Russia..

Further Reading

Leopold H. Haimson, *The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism*
Bertram D. Wolfe, *Three Men Who Made a Revolution*
R. Sprenger, *Bolshevism*
Theodore Dan, *The Origins of Bolshevism*
W. J. Fishman, *The Insurrectionists* (see Socialist Standard, November 1970)
M. E. Falkus, *The Industrialization of Russia, 1700-1914*
V. I. Lenin, *What Is To Be Done* (reviewed Socialist Standard, July 1970)

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