

# Leadership, Democracy and Transitions

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# Outline

Ideas of  
Leadership and  
Democracy

Ideas in Manifesto of the Communist Party.

Social Democracy

The impact of the first world war and Russian revolution

Formation of a revolutionary aristocracy

Ideas of  
Transition

Where do we go now?

Political change

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# Manifesto

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- *The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working-class parties.*
- *They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.*
- *They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.*

## Also avant-guard concept

*The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup>Communist Manifesto

## Immediate Aim Democracy

- *The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.*
- *We have seen above, that the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy.*

The proletariat was not yet a class. It was to be formed as a distinct class in society by the process of political struggle. It was political struggle that would make a mass of individuals act in a collective way for their common interest. The proletariat must conquer political power, it must become the ruling class. The raising of the proletariat to the position of ruling class is identified with *the winning of democracy*.

## What was meant by democracy

The language of the Communist Manifesto was based on ancient political philosophy, words like Proletariat, and Democracy came from Rome and Greece.

- Today's we see democracy as being very different from proletarian rule.
- 160 years ago words had a rather different meaning.
- To the upper classes, democracy and mob rule were synonymous. What educated people then thought of democracy was still heavily influenced by the ancient Greek authors. Aristotle had said that democracy did not mean majority rule.
- Instead it meant *rule by the poor*

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## Russian Social Democracy

In their 1903 programme the RSDLP led by Lenin followed the model of the Erfurt Programme, without the radical commitment to direct legislation by the people and to annual direct voting of taxes by the people. Their objectives were the establishment of what they called a 'democratic republic':

- 1 *The sovereignty of the people, i.e., the concentration of supreme state power entirely in the hands of a legislative assembly, consisting of the representatives of the people and constituting a single chamber.*
- 2 *Universal, equal, and direct suffrage for all citizens, men and women, who have reached the age of twenty, in the elections to the legislative assembly and to the various bodies of local self-government; secret ballot; the right of every voter to be elected to any representative institution; biennial parliaments; salaries to be paid to the people's representatives*

It is very questionable whether a constitution of this sort is really democratic in the sense used by Aristotle and Marx.

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## 1917 Russian Social Democrats new aims

*The party fights for a more democratic workers' and peasants' republic, in which the police and the standing army will be abolished and replaced by the universally armed people, by a people's militia; all officials will be not only elective, but also subject to recall at any time upon the demand of a majority of the electors; all officials, without exception, will be paid at a rate not exceeding the average wage of a competent worker; parliamentary representative institutions will be gradually replaced by Soviets of people's representatives (from various classes and professions, or from various localities), functioning as both legislative and executive bodies.*

There are three key ideas being put forward here:

- 1 That parliamentary representative institutions will be replaced by Soviet representative institutions.
- 2 That all representatives must be subject to recall.
- 3 That representatives will be paid no more than an average worker.

## Recall

- This principle, derived from the Commune, was incorporated in the constitution of the USSR ( see further discussion later ), and in the constitution of Arizona.
- In the 2010 election in the UK all the main parties were in favour of introducing the right of recall to the UK constitution.
- It is mainly of use in dealing with manifest corruption, and perhaps for dealing with manifestly broken election promises.
- It is a mechanism with a great deal of inertia since it requires a significant fraction of the constituents to sign a demand for recall, and then requires a ballot.

## Soviets or Peoples Councils

- Bodies with mass participation
- These occur spontaneously when a military crisis occurs in an autocracy : Paris 1871, Petrograd 1917, Munich 1919, Lisbon 1975.
- They can lead to the overthrow of the existing state if the army and navy mutiny and come under the command of the new councils.
- Only effective if determined insurrectionists lead them: Blanquists in Paris, Leninists in Petrograd.

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- Take a polystyrene coffee cup of cold water and place it in a microwave oven. Turn the oven on for about 60 seconds. Carefully tip into this a teaspoon of instant coffee, the whole cup will violently boil over.
- The microwave has super-heated the water to just above 100 degrees. The entry of the coffee granules *nucleates* the formation of bubbles of steam, and the whole mass boils over: a phase change.
- Revolutions involve similar phase changes
- External events, for example the privations of war, raise the emotional energy of the population until it is superheated.
- Then some apparently minor event will cause a sudden and turbulent outburst. The stored emotional energy is then put to work breaking down old bounds on behaviour.
- This means that the whole process is at once deterministic and chaotic. The deterministic component is the slow buildup of energy but the point of nucleation is unpredictable.

## The workers' General Staff

- A social group or class can only act coherently in a chaotic situation if it has a coordinating mechanism.
- No battle plan survives contact with the enemy.
- No political party following a single fixed programme can succeed in such chaos.
- Bolsheviks succeeded because they had concrete economic answers to the problems the people faced.
- They also understood what the Imperial General Staffs of Europe took 4 years to learn: the need for initiative and flexibility in a changing situation.



# The trajectory of Russia

Czarist Monarchy

⇒ Soviet Democracy (Oct 1917)

⇒ Bolshevik Aristocracy (from 1918) due to concentration of power

⇒ Revolutionary Monarchy ( Stalin, Kruschov)

⇒ Bureaucratic oligarchy ( 1965 - 1990)

⇒ Plutocratic oligarchy (1991 till now )

# Why do revolutionary republics become Monarchies?

Cromwell, Napoleon, Stalin, Mao, Kim il Sung

- 1 For the plebian viewpoint, only a strong man, with dictatorial power can hope to advance their interests against a powerfully entrenched upper class.
- 2 External enemies, mobilisation for defence favours the development of a supreme national commander: Napoleon I, Fidel Castro or Kim Il Sung.
- 3 States with cabinet of ministers (or commissars) require a Prime Minister ( First Secretary ?), to break deadlocks when powerful ministers argue.

## Russian case

All of these factors played their roles as the USSR went into the Stalin monarchy

- Given the revolutionary aristocratic character of the soviet state, with a cabinet government populated by very able, determined and intelligent men, disputes and alliances arose, which could only be stabilised by the rise of a single leader.
- Next, external threat from imperialism demanded mobilisation of the economy for defence, which again favoured a single leader. This, and the need to broaden the proletarian basis of support for the Communist Party, impelled the policy of extraordinarily rapid industrialisation.
- In the widespread plebian nostalgia for Stalin in modern Russia, we see a longing by impoverished masses for a strong leader who can tame the oligarchs.

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## Need for the Long View of History

- The bourgeois revolutions in England and France were false starts that failed to develop a stable constitution. In the end the bourgeoisie found a formula that worked.
- In the future we may look back on the Russian and Chinese revolutions in the same way.
- The key, is to develop a form of participatory democracy that provides the sort of stable platform for socialism that parliamentary government provides for capitalism.
- To find these forms we have to look beyond the immediate historical experience of the last two centuries.

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## EU crisis

- 1 Monetary union deprives nation states of economic control.
- 2 But the EU lacks the democratic control and tax raising power to be a focus for progressive politics.
- 3 Inequalities between net exporters like Germany and net importers like Greece and Portugal lead to unsustainable financial tensions.
- 4 The social provisions and welfare state of the whole continent are held ransom to the rentier classes of the creditor states.

## Constitutional front

- No movement that accepts the existing political constitution is revolutionary.
- Any revolution in economic circumstances requires a revolutionary transformation of the political constitution too
- I suggest that the basis of European left unity should be a front for the establishment of a radically democratic constitution.
- Support for radical democracy can go beyond those who support socialism.
- Socialism can only win support as the tribune of democracy
- Only a radical constitution can allow the people to assert their interests against the banks and big companies.

## International rather than national

Classical social democracy was organised around the nation state. But we need to look beyond that:

- 1 The EU means the nation state is no longer economically self governing.
- 2 The scale of modern production means it can not be planned on anything less than a continental level.

## A European Democratic Revolution

*Any people anywhere, being inclined and having the power, have the right to rise up, and shake off the existing government, and form a new one that suits them better. This is a most valuable - a most sacred right - a right, which we hope and believe, is to liberate the world. (Abraham Lincoln)*

- Sovereign EU peoples assembly selected by lot from the EU population
- Much harder for the propertied classes to dominate a genuinely representative assembly whose class composition would reflect the population.
- The assembly to have full tax raising powers provided that any tax approved by EU wide plebiscite.
- Right of initiative and legislation by the people at EU level = original demand of Social Democracy

## Constituent assembly

European treaties negotiated between nation states and the commission can never establish democracy.

- Instead we need a people's constituent assembly - drawn by lot from the people as a whole
  - not based on existing elected representatives
- Existing left parties should call for the establishment of such a constituent assembly
- They should denounce the whole existing political constitution as a corrupt mechanism to exclude the people from power.
- In every partial struggle, whether over austerity, tax, employment rights, they should emphasize that the people's just demands can only be met by the overthrow of existing constitutional structures.

# Military question

Non national armed forces

Conscription

Militia with elected officers

## For Further Reading I



Cockshott, Cottrell.

*Planhushållning och direktdemokrati.*

Manifest,.



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Clarte. 2010-07-31



Kourkoulakos.

FOR A NEW ATHENS Lessons for communists from the 'Old' (Classical) Athens ,

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