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A STUDY OF MARX'S METHOD IN THE WORK OF
V. I. LENIN AND ROSA LUXEMBURG

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Doctor of Philosophy
University of Kent
October 1980

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ABSTRACT

This theis is a study of the Marxism of V. I. Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, in the context of the intellectual currents of Second International Marxism. A central argument is that the work of Lenin and Luxemburg contains evidence of a mode of thought which distinguished them from their contemporaries.

The object of this thesis is to define and explore the methodology underpinning Marx's work, and to indicate the affinities between Marx's methodology and that of Lenin and Luxemburg. Whilst the work of neither Lenin nor Luxemburg was entirely free of the positivism which is often found in the Second International, an appreciation of the methodology underlying certain concepts in Marx's economic and political theory is evident in their work.

The abstractions which Marx employed in his economic work, and the nature of the laws which his findings indicated, were often misconstrued and deformed by the Marxists of the Second International, who lacked the broad vision to confront the object of their enquiry in its wider significance - to grasp the broad canvas of events as they unfolded. The subjective aspects of Marx's thought were almost completely neglected by Marxists in this period, obscured by the militant, undeviating materialism which dominated their thought.

In Part I of this thesis, the construction of Marx's work, the evolution of his thought and the methodological precepts which govern it are examined. Parts II and III trace the themes of Marx's method in the contributions which Lenin and Luxemburg made to debates on the questions which moved Marxists in the period.

It is argued that Lenin and Luxemburg set themselves apart from their peers by their ability to excavate beneath the surface of Marx's work, to grasp the methodological nuances which it contained, and to replicate these in their own work. In short, it is argued that their mode of thought was sympathetic to Marx's own.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>		p.1
<u>PART I</u>	<u>MARX'S METHOD</u>	
<u>SECTION i</u>	<u>The Mode of Procedure</u>	
Production as starting point		p.35
The method of abstraction		p.43
Levels of abstraction - <u>Capital</u>		p.56
Implications for Marxist theory and practice		p.65
<u>SECTION ii</u>	<u>The Historical Method</u>	
Marx's statement of the method		p.70
History and contemporary forms		p.77
Marx as historian		p.91
<u>SECTION iii</u>	<u>The Concept of Methodological Totality</u>	
The unity of the economic system		p.107
Production and circulation		p.117
Mode of production as social totality		p.127

SECTION ivMarxism as Science and the Working Class

A standpoint entirely alien to bourgeois society	p.136
The theory of commodity fetishism	p.148
Marx and proletarian science	p.159

PART IIMARX'S METHOD IN THE WORK OF
V.I. LENINSECTION iLenin's Mode of Thought and the Role
of Abstraction

Lenin's epistemological sophification	p.164
The concept of the social formation	p.177
Lenin's contribution to the question of capital accumulation	p.192

SECTION iiThe Historical Method

Lenin's historical acuity	p.208
The historical schema; <u>The Development of Capitalism in Russia</u>	p.216
The agrarian question and bourgeois revolution	p.231
The emergence of a new historical schema	p.251

SECTION iiiStructural Interconnectedness in
Lenin's Work

Capital and capitalism	p.264
Imperialism	p.278
The question of nationalities	p.292

SECTION ivEmpiricism and Dialectics

Lenin's empiricism	p.303
The scientific conception of Marxism	p.315
Class consciousness	p.327
The organisational question	p.340

PART IIIMARX'S METHOD IN THE WORK OF
ROSA LUXEMBURGSECTION iThe Accumulation of Capital

Luxemburg as economist	p.349
The question of accumulation - Luxemburg's formulation	p.360
The reproduction schema - abstraction and the palpable form	p.368
Imperialism and the laws of accumulation	p.376

SECTION iiLuxemburg's Historical Method

The Marxist's sense of history	p.384
The historical method articulated against revisionism	p.391
Historical milieu and periodisation	p.404

SECTION iiiLuxemburg's Global Perspective

Luxemburg's standpoint on totality	p.416
Imperialism and the world economy	p.428
The political strategy against imperialism	p.438

SECTION ivThe Proletariat and Class Consciousness

Luxemburg, Lenin and Bernstein	p.447
The mass strike	p.466
Class consciousness and Luxemburg's sociology of knowledge	p.473
CONCLUSION	p.487

BIBLIOGRAPHY

p.502

INTRODUCTION

What theoreticians like Rosa Luxemburg in Germany and Lenin in Russia have done, and are doing, in the field of Marxist theory is to liberate it from the inhibiting traditions of...Social Democracy.

K. Korsch, Marxism and Philosophy, (London, 1970), p.60.

In the late nineteenth century, Marxism took root in European Social Democracy as the dominant intellectual creed. Its canons of belief were articulated by more or less authoritative figures, who were held by their contemporaries to be representative of Marxist orthodoxy.

In Russia, orthodoxy was epitomised by Plekhanov,¹ who was later superceded by Lenin.² In Germany, Kautsky was Papal

¹c.f., S. H. Baron, Plekhanov, the Father of Russian Marxism, (London, 1963), p.vii; "He laid the theoretical foundations of Russian Marxism...and, according to Lenin...'reared a whole generation of Russian Marxists'...almost all the leading personalities in the movement, including Lenin, began as his disciples".

²c.f., N. Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, Theory and Practice in the Democratic Revolution, (London, 1977), p.63; "That Lenin had emerged as the leading theorist of the group is further confirmed by the fact that early in 1894 the St Petersburg Marxists nominated him to deliver the counterblows to Mikhailovsky's critical articles on Marxism. This Lenin did in his What the Friends of the People Are...a lengthy pamphlet which...confirmed Lenin's pre-eminence; he had established himself...as a competitor in prestige to Plekhanov himself".

authority.³ Rosa Luxemburg was never able to establish herself even as a contender for his mantle, since Kautsky was attuned to the ethos of the German party, whilst she was isolated on the left.⁴

It has been argued that the period between 1890 and 1923 was one in which "nearly all the important theorists of Marxism took up a positivist position parallel to that of academic science".⁵ The movement towards positivism was a function of the retrenchment of the liberal bourgeoisie after the 1848 revolutions. This bourgeoisie became the dominant class within a consolidated liberal capitalist society in which "idealist, neo-Kantian and positivist modes of thought" flourished. The working class movement took on the organisational form of Social Democracy, which rapidly became integrated into the existing order, with a concomitant assimilation of its modes of thought into the dominant

³ C.F., C.E. Schorske, German Social Democracy, 1905-1917: the Development of the Great Schism, (New York, 1955), pp.4-5; Schorske describes Kautsky as "...the Party's quasi-official leader, a position for which the universality of interests, his mastery of dialectical thinking, and his cautious deliberative temperament admirably suited him".

⁴ J.P. Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, (two vols.), (London, 1966), p.474; "Important as they were to her, the 'politics' which she pursued were of marginal importance to the party as a whole...".

⁵ L. Goldmann, 'History and Class Consciousness', I. Mészáros, ed., Aspects of History and Class Consciousness, (London, 1971), p.66.

bourgeois modes - especially the positivist.⁶ This persuasive argument is echoed elsewhere.⁷

Kautsky personified the positivist and neo-Kantian modes of thought which dominated the Second International. For him, Marxism represented a set of positive laws analogous to those of the natural sciences. He held to a rectilinear conception of history which bore Darwin's influence,⁸ and suffered from an intellectual form of tunnel vision - an incapacity to grasp the broad canvas of events as they

⁶ Ibid., p.66; "The formerly revolutionary - or...progressive - bourgeoisie becomes the dominant class, increasingly conservative and more or less sharply threatened by the new forces of opposition, while concurrently the working class revolutionary movement championed by Marx and Engels begins to be replaced by syndicalism and a social democratic movement which still pays lip service to Marxism, but are in fact increasingly integrated into the existing order. It is evident that this integration of the socialist movement into the social order of Western capitalism was bound to influence the structure of thought of this movement, even though it continued to proclaim its allegiance to the theoretical and political work of Marx".

⁷ c.f., R. Rosdolsky, The Making of Marx's 'Capital', (London, 1977), p.569; Rosdolsky refers to "...theoreticians of the Second International, who for the most part were oriented towards Neo-Kantianism and positivism".

⁸ c.f., Goldmann, 'History and Class Consciousness', Mészáros, ed., Aspects of History and Class Consciousness, p.66; "For Kautsky, who was almost universally regarded as the foremost Marxist theorist of his day, Marx's thought was most nearly akin to that of Darwin". L. Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin, Studies in Ideology and Society, (London, 1972), p.72; "Whilst Plekhanov reduced Marx to Spinoza, Kautsky reduced him to Darwin".

unfolded.⁹ His thought was marked by a crude determinism, the corollary of which was a sentimental moralism which postulated socialism as an ethical ideal.¹⁰

The Second International Marxists simply did not regard Marxist methodology as a problem.¹¹ They blandly equated Marx's method with materialism. Plekhanov, for instance wrote that "in Marx's Theses on Feuerbach...none of the fundamental ideas of Feuerbach's philosophy are refuted; they merely amend them...the materialist views of Marx and Engels have been elaborated in the direction indicated by the inner logic of Feuerbach's philosophy".¹²

⁹ In his critique of Kautsky's position on the war, Lenin characterised Kautsky's mentality as narrow and one sided; C.W., 21, p.236; "...a certain narrowness, a one sidedness of human cognition, which cannot embrace an object in all its totality and complexity".

¹⁰ c.f., Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin, p.73; "...in Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History, Kautsky imperiously denounces the ethical socialism of the Neo-Kantians...and then unexpectedly concludes by appealing to a 'moral Idea' which even the class struggle cannot do without".

¹¹ c.f., Rosdolsky, The Making of Marx's 'Capital', p.568; "At that time the attention of Marxist theoreticians was so totally absorbed with the material, with the concrete content of Marx's work that even the most important of them (with the exception of Lenin, Luxemburg and the young Hilferding) scarcely gave any attention to the unique method of Marx's economic work...".

¹² G. Plekhanov, Fundamental Problems of Marxism, cited M. Lowy, 'From the "Logic" of Hegel to the Finland Station in Petrograd', Critique, No.6, 1976, p.9.

Lenin and Luxemburg alone were inclined to be attentive to methodological nuance. They are generally excepted from the ascriptions of positivism which are attached to Second International Marxism. Rosdolsky excepts Lenin, Luxemburg and the young Hilferding from his charges of positivism, Goldmann excepts Luxemburg, Frolich asserts that Luxemburg was a "decided opponent of all empiricism", ¹³ and Lukács in his seminal essays published in 1922, under the title History and Class Consciousness, uses her thought to exemplify the dialectical mode of thought, in contrast to the positivist and empirical. ¹⁴

There is less of a consensus regarding Lenin. He was author to a profoundly empiricist work, Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, which has cast doubt on his philosophical and epistemological credentials. Amongst Lenin's most trenchant critics were the anti-materialists Anton Pannekoek, Paul Mattick and Karl Korsch. Sharing a common perspective - libertarian ultra-leftism, and drawn from a common milieu - exile in the U.S.A., these "great defeated men of revolutionary Western Marxism" ¹⁵ developed in the nineteen twenties

¹³ P. Frolich, Rosa Luxemburg, Ideas in Action, (London, 1972), p.49.

¹⁴ G. Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, (London, 1971), pp.27-45, *passim*.

¹⁵ S. Timpanaro, On Materialism, (London, 1975), p.223.

and thirties a critique of Leninism central to which was a view of Materialism as representative of radical, bourgeois philosophy. Korsch was more sympathetic to Lenin than the others - The State and Revolution redeemed him in Korsch's view.¹⁶ But the pronounced materialist perspective evident throughout Lenin's work has provoked criticism from those of different philosophical persuasions, and the critique which Pannekoek, Mattick and Korsch levelled against Lenin is reflected in more recent literature.¹⁷

In spite of his tendency towards the crude materialism of the Second International Marxists, Lenin's work demonstrates a mode of thought markedly more subtle and dialectical than that of his contemporaries, and this fact is recognised in the literature. Liebman, in his accomplished and sympathetic study, looks beyond Materialism and the Philosophical Notebooks for the underlying philosophical and methodological themes in Lenin's work. In Liebman's view "it is at the

¹⁶ c.f., K. Korsch, Marxism and Philosophy, (London, 1970), p.61; "Events themselves placed the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat on the agenda as a practical problem. When Lenin placed the same question theoretically on the agenda at a decisive moment, this was an early indication that the internal connection of theory and practice within revolutionary Marxism had been consciously re-established".

¹⁷ c.f. G. Lichtheim, Marxism, a Historical and Critical Study, (London, 1964), p.331; Lenin's philosophy is "not such as to invite prolonged consideration". Lichtheim's summary conclusion is that "Lenin's naively realistic theory of knowledge is incompatible with the dialectic".

level of Lenin's political activity that we must look for evidence of his sharpened awareness and understanding of dialectics".¹⁸ Materialism is a work which "smells of its author's mainly pragmatic and polemical intentions", and "holds an isolated position among his many works".¹⁹ As will be argued below, this last assertion overlooks the fact that a materialist ethos permeated Lenin's work, but there is a great deal of evidence to support Liebman's view that Lenin's political formulations were the product of a dialectical cast of mind. Moreover, recent scholarship has exposed a dialectical methodology in Lenin's The Development of Capitalism in Russia.²⁰

A substantial body of opinion, then, can be brought to bear in support of the view that there exists in the political and economic writings of Lenin and Luxemburg methodological principles and epistemological themes which set them apart from the empiricism and positivism which permeated the Second International. This is not to say that either were entirely free from the positivist taint. Both maintained with the utmost vigour in their various polemics that Marxism was endowed with scientific properties.

¹⁸ M. Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, (London, 1973), p.444.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.442-3

²⁰ Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, p.80; "...the key element in his thought was a dialectical teleology".

Both employed the vocabulary of scientific disciplines. On the surface they conformed to their age. It was their mode of thought which distinguished them from their contemporaries.

The prevailing conceptions concerning Marx's economic theory were of a body of positive laws which laid bare the inner workings of the capitalist economy and which governed its historical development with causal finality.²¹ It must be borne in mind that the Grundrisse, in which Marx set out the principles of his method, was not available to the Second International Marxists. Capital was their textbook, and few of them excavated beneath its surface. Lenin alone showed any interest in, or comprehension of, the inner construction of Marx's economics. In the Philosophical Notebooks, he observed that Marx's economic analysis had begun with the commodity, which was the simplest and most common relation in capitalist economic life. In the commodity relation, he went on, were contained all the fundamental contradictions of modern society.²² In this

²¹ c.f., Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin, pp.229-30.

²² C.W., 38, p.36.

comment Lenin demonstrated an appreciation of the method of working employed by Marx in writing Capital, and of the nature of the work.

Marx had outlined his method of procedure in the Grundrisse in the course of a critique of political economy. In the introduction to his economic notebooks he provided the fullest explicit statement of his method to be found in his work. The statement was not entirely new, since he had introduced the rudiments of his method of procedure and analysis in his earlier works - the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, (1844), The Holy Family, (1844), The German Ideology, (1846), and The Poverty of Philosophy, (1847) - in the course of his criticisms of political economy, speculative German philosophy and Proudhon. Moreover, it was not the definitive statement of his method, since Marx developed his methodological conceptions further in his Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, (1859) and, of course, in Capital. Nevertheless, the introduction to the Grundrisse can be regarded as a crystallisation of Marx's thinking and writing on method, and as the foundation for his mature economic work.

The most far reaching of Marx's criticisms of political economy concerned its point of departure. The political economists took as their starting point 'population' - the 'chaotic whole' - and proceeded to break it down into simpler categories in what Marx regarded as an anarchic, arbitrary and despotic fashion. Marx accepted that population was

the general object of enquiry, but regarded it as too complex to approach directly. Instead he formulated 'abstractions' via which to approach it. In Wage Labour and Capital, (1847), and Wages, Prices and Profit, (1849), he had criticised the arbitrary abstractions into which the political economists had broken down the object of their enquiry. In the introduction to the Grundrisse he presented his own - class, wage labour, capital. Marx described these as 'simple categories'. Their simplicity lay in the fact that they expressed the nodal points of social and economic relations - in their relative theoretical simplicity. In no sense did they designate as simple the social and economic relations which they represented.²³

In the Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, Marx arrived at the commodity as the simplest and most fundamental category of capitalist economic relations. This category was his starting point in Capital.

It has been observed that Marx remained silent concerning precisely how he arrived at his initial abstractions,²⁴ and about their theoretical status. He did, however, assert in the introduction to the Grundrisse that his abstractions were the modes of thought through which "thought

²³ c.f., T. Carver, ed., Karl Marx: Texts on Method, (Oxford, 1975), pp.134-5.

²⁴ c.f., L. Althusser and E. Balibar, Reading Capital, (London, 1970), pp.88-9.

appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind".²⁵ The idea that the relation between thought and reality was problematical, requiring a definite strategy, that thought had to struggle to comprehend reality, would have been quite foreign to minds imbued with the ethos of positivism.

The three volumes of Capital represented Marx's theoretical journey from simple abstract categories towards the real, actual, social and economic relations which it was his intention to depict in their full complexity. It is well known that he never arrived at his intended destination. Capital broke off before Marx could enter into a discussion of actual economic and social relations; the wider implications of the abstract formulations which he had set out. Social classes, international trade and the world economy were casualties of the premature attenuation of the project. Consequently, the legacy which Capital represented was a series of abstract formulations, approaching the actual, palpable world of social and economic relations, but not embracing them.

Only Lenin realised the implications of the unfinished nature of Marx's project. Although there are references in Lenin's work to the 'scientific laws' contained in

²⁵ Grundrisse, (Harmondsworth, 1973), p.101.

Capital, he resisted the temptation to apply these laws directly to the economic and social world. Unlike Luxemburg, Lenin was appreciative of the mediations between theoretical constructions and the reality which they depicted. One of the deformities in Luxemburg's grasp of the underlying method in Capital was her failure to perceive the various layers of abstraction in Marx's economic work. She was therefore unable to reconcile the schema for capital reproduction contained in Capital, II, with the theory of crises which Marx outlined in Capital, III. She simply juxtaposed Marx's highly abstract mathematical schema, which apparently demonstrated the ability of capital to reproduce indefinitely, with the palpable reality of periodic economic crisis and the scramble for colonial markets which characterised the years immediately prior to the outbreak of war, and which appeared to her as conclusive 'proof' that Marx's schema were flawed. She failed, that is, to appreciate the complexity of the relation between abstraction and the reality of which it was a mental representation.

The Second International Marxist conceived of Marxism as a body of scientific thought, and concomitantly, of historical materialism as the science of history. In spite of the fact that Marx wrote little that could, in the conventional

sense of the term, be described as history - his studies on the class struggles in nineteenth century France, along with several journalistic vignettes, were his only excursions into conventional history - his epigoni were drawn magnetically towards history. Their work was punctuated by historical diversions, and peppered with references to historical laws. The work of the Marxists of the Second International conveys a sense of history in which capitalism was merely a phase in the irresistible movement of society towards a definite goal - socialism.

The historical tendencies which Marx pointed out to his German readers in his preface to the first edition of Capital, "tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results",²⁶ dominated the general conception of history in the Second International. Encouraged by Engels, Marxists in this period transposed these elliptical utterances into hard and fast principles. Historical materialism became historical determinism.²⁷

Furthermore, the causal primacy of the economic base of society - the denial of any independence or autonomy to politics, or the realm of ideas - became holy writ, despite

²⁶ Capital, I, (London, 1974), p.19.

²⁷ E. Hobsbawm, 'Karl Marx's Contribution to Historiography', R. Blackburn, ed., Ideology in Social Science, Readings in Critical Theory, (Fontana, 1972), p.269; "Historical materialism was habitually described - sometimes even by Marxists - as 'economic determinism'".

rather halfhearted warnings by Engels.²⁸ All the Marxists of the period subscribed to this canon of belief. Lenin regarded politics as reflective of economic development, drawing quite detailed analogies between economic development and the growth to maturity of the party.²⁹

There was a tendency for historical materialism to become economic determinism, for Marx's conceptions to be assimilated into, or conflated with, the ethos of positivism.³⁰ In this respect too, Lenin and Luxemburg were children of their age. But they both possessed an acute sense of history, which freed them from the suffocating intellectual influences of cruder forms of economic determinism. Lenin's awareness of the differential pace of historical development in different countries, or even in different industries or

²⁸ Letter from Engels to J. Bloch, September 21, 1890, Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence, (Moscow, 1963), p.498; "Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasise the main principle vis a vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to give their due to the other elements involved in the interaction".

²⁹ c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, pp.136-8.

³⁰ c.f., Hobsbawm, 'Karl Marx's Contribution to Historiography', Blackburn, ed., Ideology in Social Science, p.271; the Second International conception of history represented "at best, a selection from Marx's views about history and at worst (as quite often with Kautsky) an assimilation of them to contemporary non-Marxist - e.g. evolutionist and positivistic - views".

regions in one country, redeemed him to some extent. Furthermore, both he and Luxemburg possessed a sharp sense of historical development within the bourgeois era. This perception afforded them a more nuanced perspective than that of their contemporaries.

It has been suggested that The State and Revolution was an 'inner history' of the European revolutions of the nineteenth century.³¹ In a similar sense, The Development of Capitalism in Russia might be said to be an inner history of capital. Lenin understood the sense in which "Capital... is a work which explains and elucidates the history of capitalism... by means of the concepts which sum up its history".³² In The Development of Capitalism in Russia, Lenin replicated Marx's method.

In the introduction to the Grundrisse, Marx criticised the political economists for regarding the economic categories into which they had broken down the object of their enquiry, as universal and eternal. The physiocrats, for example, tended to regard agricultural production as the general form of production. For Marx, production was always a

³¹ Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness, p.35; "Reviving the literary and methodological traditions of Marx and Hegel, Lenin converts the history of his problem to an inner history of the European revolutions of the nineteenth century".

³² C.W., 38, p.320.

definite form of production. Economic forms were specific to a particular historical epoch, which stamped them with their characteristics. The economic form, money, for instance, had existed in the most primitive of social milieus, but it changed in form as it developed further. "By no means does it wade its way through all economic relations".³³ The same was true for all the economic forms of capitalist society - they existed in earlier historical periods, but only in capitalist society do they assume a dominant role.

In capitalist society, money, capital, wage labour, the commodity, assume positions of dominance in economic relations, which they had not previously held. As capitalism emerges, capitalist economic forms coexist with the pre-capitalist. In The Development of Capitalism in Russia, Lenin documented the struggle for dominance between the two. His assertion that Russia was a predominantly capitalist country rested on a demonstration that capitalist forms had achieved dominance over the pre-capitalist. Lenin showed how capitalist forms emerged out of the pre-capitalist, whilst Plekhanov, in his studies on the Russian economy, showed how capitalism, once developed in the urban

³³ Grundrisse, p.103.

centres under Western influence, encroached into the hinterland. Here was the superiority of Lenin's work.³⁴

Marx maintained, in the introduction to the Grundrisse, that bourgeois society, the most highly developed social form, presented insights into the structure of pre-existing societies.³⁵ In some respects it was even true that history was acted out daily in capitalist society, since the process by which money was transformed into capital in the course of the daily life of capitalism, replicated the historical process by which money became capital. It was in this sense that the concepts which Marx explored in Capital summed up the history of capitalism. Occasionally, in Capital Marx followed up the insight afforded by the concept he was discussing, tracing the history of capitalist economic forms into the pre-capitalist era.

Marx described how economic forms evolved into capitalist forms, and in this sense there were parallels with Darwin's work, which Marx admired. In a period when Darwin's work was highly influential in the social as well as the natural

³⁴ c.f., M. Tanaka, 'The Controversies Concerning Russian Capitalism, an Analysis of the Views of Plekhanov and Lenin', Kyoto University Economic Review, Vol. XXXVI, No.2, October, 1966, pp.40-1.

³⁵ Grundrisse, p.105; "Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape", and similarly, "The bourgeois economy...supplies the key to the ancient".

sciences, the idea of economic evolution quickly took root in the Marxist tradition.

Marx had indicated in Capital that the inner structure of capital contained certain contradictions which ultimately entailed that capitalism would be beset by deepening economic crises. These contradictions carried affidavits to the finite capacity of capital to reproduce itself, and consequently to the historically transient character of that form of society of which capital was the foundation. One such contradiction was between the limitless drive of production towards expansion and the limited capacity of society to consume its product. Thus, the 'laws of motion' of society entailed its historically transient character.

This idea was highly persuasive in the 1890s, a period of capitalist crises, but after the turn of the century, in a period of relative economic stability, it appeared to be incompatible with the evident vitality of the capitalist economy. A growing body of opinion held that there had evolved economic forms - notably credit and cartels - which were capable of exerting a stabilising and regulatory influence on that economy - capable, in short, of resolving its inner contradictions. Eduard Bernstein was publicist to this belief.

In her polemic against Bernstein, Luxemburg deployed her acute sense of history. She possessed a clear appreciation of the capitalist epoch, in which capital set its stamp upon, and subjected to its domination, all other social and economic relations. Where economic forms necessary to capital's continued accumulation did not exist, capital simply 'created' them. In this characteristic, capital demonstrated its ubiquity.

Credit and cartels, she argued, had been thrown up by capital in response to its requirements - as a means of overcoming, temporarily, its deformities. These forms, however, were characteristics of capitalism in the last stages of its life span. They were simultaneously means of overcoming crises, and agents of further dislocation. In this respect, Luxemburg's formulations went beyond the general conceptions of contradiction and crisis to which the Marxists of the International held. The ultimate inevitability of capitalist collapse was the cornerstone of Luxemburg's political orientation. But in the place of the unilinear trajectory towards collapse which prevailed amongst Second International Marxists, she conceived of history as characterised by inflection.

The successive schema in which Marx set out his plans for the economic work which appeared as Capital provide insights into the internal structure of that work. Before 1857 he had taken wage labour as the starting point for economic analysis. In the introduction to the Grundrisse he began with money. In two letters written early in 1858 he declared the intention of opening his economic work with a chapter on capital. In another letter, written later that year, he announced that his starting point had become the commodity. It was the commodity that he took as his point of departure in Capital.

His choice reflected the fact that for Marx, by the time he started work on Capital, the commodity was the nexus of economic relations in capitalist society. From the commodity he planned to extend his analysis through landed property, wage labour, the state, international trade, to the world market. It is well known that Marx never progressed beyond wage labour. Nevertheless his plans show that it was his ambitious project to encompass in his economics the "rich totality of many definitions and relations" which comprised the capitalist economy in its entirety.³⁶ It was left to his epigoni to complete the project. But the plan for Capital might be said to have established the category of totality at the heart of Marxist methodology.³⁷

³⁶ Marx and Engels, Correspondence, 1846-1895, (London, 1934), pp.105-9.

³⁷ c.f., Rosdolsky, The Making of Marx's 'Capital', pp.26-8.

The imperative that analysis should encompass, or at least be apprised of, the sum total of economic and social relations has other origins. In the Introduction to the Grundrisse, Marx argued that production, distribution, circulation and exchange - in short, all the moments of economic life - were elements of a single process. One of his criticisms of political economy was that it imposed an artificial separation on the various economic spheres, ascribing to each an illusory autonomy. Deploying a vocabulary imbued with Hegelianism,³⁸ Marx postulated that there existed an identity between the different elements of economic activity. He ascribed primacy to production as the "transcending moment" in the economic process.³⁹

These passages, and others in the body of the Grundrisse text, possessed significance for the exchanges which took place amongst European Marxists around the turn of the century over capital accumulation and the ability of capital to reproduce itself. The core of the underconsumptionist argument was that whilst capital exhibited an insatiable drive towards expansion, entailing a concomitant expansion in production, the consumptive capacity of society remained limited. Consumption, concluded Luxemburg, amongst others,

³⁸ c.f., M. Nicolaus, trans., Grundrisse, (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp.35-6.

³⁹ Grundrisse, p.94.

represented a restraint on production, an absolute barrier to the cumulative reproduction of capital.

In the Grundrisse, Marx addressed the question of consumption and its relation to production. He concluded that consumption did represent a barrier to the expansiveness of production, but that it was a barrier to be overcome. Since Marx denied the autonomy of the commercial spheres, and since for him the economic process represented a unity governed by capital, he could not accept that a barrier arising in consumption and the circulation of capital could stand as an absolute barrier to production and the accumulation of capital. The commercial sphere was a mere moment of the productive process. Commerce appeared to Marx as a "presupposition and moment of production itself".⁴⁰ The response of capital to the barrier presented by the limited nature of consumption was simply to 'call up' new points of consumption.

The subsequent exposition provided an insight into the nature of those contradictions within capitalism which Marx's analysis indicated, and which were much vaunted in Second International Marxism. In Marx's account, whilst capital regards the barrier placed in its path, as a barrier to be overcome "it does not by any means follow that it has really overcome it" since "capital moves in contradictions which are constantly overcome, but just as constantly posited".⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.408.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.410.

The solution of the question of the reproduction of capital, of the relation between production and consumption, was contingent upon the recognition of the integral unity of an economic sphere dominated by capital. Capital was ubiquitous, everywhere able to assert its dominance. There were two dimensions to its ubiquity. One is that described above. Within the configuration of economic forms and relations, capital was capable of exerting whatever sway was immediately necessary for its continued accumulation. The other aspect of the ubiquity of capital was its capacity for making inroads into the non-capitalist world. Marx never addressed the inherently imperialist nature of capital beyond a few journalistic pieces he wrote in the New York Daily Tribune.

Of the Second International Marxists, Hilferding, and following his lead, Lenin, gave the fullest theoretical account of imperialism. Luxemburg's account was more vivid, but had a less substantial theoretical foundation. The Second International Marxists in general had no spontaneous inclination towards the global perspective. They were trapped in the positivist mode of thought in

which the empirically given was 'deconstructed' into discrete elements for purposes of analysis.⁴²

Luxemburg's acute and early awareness of the imperialist tendencies inherent in a combination of Prussian militarism and German finance capital awakened in her a global perspective. Her 'physiognomy' of imperialism can be traced back to 1900, when she criticised the S.P.D. in its complicit stance towards German participation in the Chinese wars.⁴³ It received the full force of its expression after 1910.

That Lenin possessed an appreciation of the ubiquitous nature of capital, its ability to subject all capitalist relations to itself and to infiltrate the non-capitalist, is evident from The Development of Capitalism in Russia. However, he did not extend his insight beyond Russia until after 1914, when events - to say nothing of his reading of Hegel's Logic - compelled him so to do.

⁴² c.f., J. Merrington, 'Theory and Practice in Gramsci's Marxism', Western Marxism, a Critical Reader, (London, 1977), p.143. Merrington contrasts Gramsci's mode of thought to that of the majority of Second International Marxists who fell prey to "the positivist tendency to objectify the discrete atomistic data of immediate actuality, dissolving the totality of social processes into the fragmentary 'facts' of contingent reality".

⁴³ Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.522-3.

The depiction of imperialism to be found in the work of Lenin and Luxemburg differs from that of Hilferding in one important respect. Whilst Hilferding regarded imperialism as an aberrant phenomenon, a deviation from the 'normal' course of capitalist development, Lenin and Luxemburg, in different ways, shared a commitment to the view that imperialism was simply a phase - the final one - in the development of capitalism. For each of them it was entailed in the internal structure of capital. In this respect they both demonstrated a fidelity to Marx's method in which it was implicit that the internal logic of capital was the key to the global economy.

The corpus of writings of which the Marxist legacy consisted represented more than merely the articulation of a system of thought. It was Marx's conviction, categorically stated in the eleventh of the Theses on Feuerbach, that the role of philosophy was not simply contemplative, but was to "change the world".⁴⁴ However, he left no unambiguous strategem for achieving this end. Moreover, his writings often appeared to contain themes which although they were not incompatible with each other, were still not entirely complementary.

⁴⁴ Theses on Feuerbach, MECW.,5, (London, 1976), p.8; "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it".

Concerning the proletariat and its historical role, the ambiguities of the Marxist legacy were particularly pronounced. In some of his earlier works - notably, The Holy Family - Marx appeared to be suggesting that the proletariat 'arose' out of the material conditions of its existence, its character and destiny prefigured in those conditions. Class consciousness was not therefore, problematical. It was merely a function of economic development. This conception, nurtured by Engels,⁴⁵ Marx's chief executor, held the socialist parties of the Second International in thrall. It engendered a passive, fatalistic immobilism in politics, and a dogged rigidity and fixity in intellectual perspective.

Writing in a period characterised by proletarian mobilisation and punctuated by revolutionary upheaval, it might be argued that Marx could not have anticipated the period of political stability and capitalist vitality after his death. Capitalism had apparently evolved out of itself

⁴⁵ c.f., F. Engels, Introduction to Karl Marx's Work 'The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850', MESW,, (London, 1970), p.646; "History has proved...that the state of economic development on the Continent at that time was not ...ripe for the elimination of capitalist production; it has proved this by the economic revolution which since 1848, has seized the whole of the Continent and has caused big industry to take root...on a capitalist basis...But it is just this industrial revolution which has everywhere produced clarity in class relations...has created a genuine bourgeoisie and a genuine...proletariat, and has pushed them into the foreground of social development".

regulatory mechanisms capable of resolving its periodic crises, and the bourgeois state demonstrated an ability to integrate large sections of the working class into the existing framework of society. Under these conditions, minds dominated by the positivist mode of thought either concluded that there was no longer any correspondence between the Marxist doctrine and the socio-economic world, and that the doctrine was therefore in need of revision, or they adhered to the socialist certainties which Marx's writings seemed to underwrite, whilst exhibiting an infinitely accomodating plasticity in their political practice.

Lenin and Luxemburg distinguished themselves from both positions. Lenin, of course, did not labour under the same conditions as the German Marxists. With the exception of the period 1907-1911, revolutionary tremors were never far beneath the surface. Moreover, the Russian party was not burdened with the stultifying bureaucratic ethos of the S.P.D. Nevertheless, Lenin distinguished himself in the R.S.D.L.P. by his willingness to recognise the revolutionary potential in any given situation, by the dialectical subtlety of his political formulations, and by his single minded commitment to the idea of the revolutionary party. These characteristics marked Lenin off sharply from Plekhanov who was incapable of freeing himself from the letter of the formulæ of Marxist

orthodoxy, and who vacillated between the Leninist and the Menshevik position in politics.⁴⁶

Lenin's formulation of the role of the revolutionary party was intended to overcome the inability independently to arrive at a socialist class consciousness, which he imputed to the working class. In spite of his insistence on restricted entry to the party, and strict doctrinal discipline within the party, Lenin did not by any means advocate a party of professional revolutionaries hermetically sealed from the working class,⁴⁷ nor that the party's propagandist role should be didactic in the formal sense.⁴⁸

Lenin did, however, believe that there was a distinction between scientific Marxist theory - which he equated with socialist class consciousness - and the political awareness at which the working class arrived in the course of strikes and the daily economic confrontation with capital. In periods of revolutionary upheaval he conceded that the instinctive political movement of the masses did possess

⁴⁶ c.f., S. Baron, 'Between Marx and Lenin: George Plekhanov', L. Labedz, ed., Revisionism, Essays on the History of Marxist Ideas, (London, 1962), pp.45-9; A. P. Mendel, 'Dilemmas of Progress in Tsarist Russia: Legal Populism and Legal Marxism', (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), p.117.

⁴⁷ c.f., N. Geras, 'Althusser's Marxism: an Assessment', Western Marxism, a Critical Reader, (London, 1977), pp.268-9.

⁴⁸ c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, pp.172-3.

the potential for initiating the working class politically, even to the extent that their militancy surpassed that of the party, but there is no suggestion that he equated the political awareness that the working class acquired in the course of revolution with a thoroughgoing consciousness of itself as a class.

Lenin's formulations lacked entirely a dimension which Luxemburg's possessed. Her writings on the proletariat and the party convey the sense that she believed in the 'self-activity' of the working class, and in its ability to generate its own socialist class consciousness. In the course of its daily confrontation with capital and the bourgeoisie, she postulated that the proletariat was capable of arriving at a standpoint entirely foreign to commodity production.⁴⁹

What this standpoint entailed, for Luxemburg, was that the proletariat should liberate itself from the manner of thought engendered in the workplace by hierarchical discipline and the power of capital embodied in the worker's subservience to the machine. The S.P.D. and the German trade union movement simply replicated the forms of workplace discipline in its own organisational forms. Luxemburg saw the mass strike as that form of working class activity in which the proletariat adopted a standpoint wholly antagonistic to

⁴⁹ c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.226, 537-8.

capital and the bourgeois state.

There is a basis for this view in Marx's economic theory, though Luxemburg never systematically articulated her perspective on the creative function of class conflict, and certainly never traced the idea back to Marx. Endemic to Marx's theories of alienation and commodity fetishism was the notion that capitalist economic forms were illusory. The illusions had two sources. One was a mythology which grew up around the forms of the capitalist economy. That the wage relation was a free and equal exchange between capital and labour, for instance, was a myth endowed with extensive credibility by the apologists and ideologues of capital. The other source of illusions was that most basic of economic forms, the commodity. The commodity presented itself in capitalist society as something other than it actually was. That which was no more than an artifact of human labour took on an animated form, and through the mechanisms of the market, extended a universal sway over its producers. This theme runs through Marx's work from the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts to Capital.

Capitalist economic forms, in Marx's account, were opaque and mystificatory. They evolved in camera, behind the closed gates of the factory. Although Marx did indicate that it was behind the closed gates of the factory, in production,

that political economy must look for the secrets of the capitalist economy, he did no more than hint that the working class might find enlightenment here too. The conclusions, however, were there to be drawn, and Luxemburg, tentatively and instinctively, drew them. Lenin never did. To him the idea would have been too close to economism for him to countenance. Moreover the focus of the class struggle in Russia was primarily political, not economic. Lenin's focus, frequently reiterated, was autocracy in all its forms and manifestations.

What, more than anything else, prevented Lenin from appreciating a creative function in the daily confrontation between capital and labour in the workplace, however, was his theory of knowledge, which reflected his militant, undeviating and limited conception of Marxist materialism. For Lenin, scientific knowledge alone was capable of laying bare the inner structure of social and economic relations, and that knowledge, for him, was a product of theoretical activity. Practical knowledge was of quite a different order. Ultimately it remained subservient to the ideological presentation of economic and political forms. In philosophical terms Lenin demonstrated a lack of subtlety and imagination which reflected the influence of positivism. It was in his political formulations, in his analysis of the unfolding of economic and social forms and his acute

sense of history that Lenin differentiated himself from his contemporaries.

The present work will attempt to substantiate the argument that Lenin and Luxemburg liberated themselves from the straightjacket of positivism which confined Second International Marxism through a grasp of the methodological nuances in Marx's writings which eluded their contemporaries. That grasp was often only partial and instinctive. Neither Lenin nor Luxemburg expressly repudiated the positivist ethos before 1914, and Lenin's denunciation of "stupid materialism"⁵⁰ - which might be taken as a repudiation of positivism - was never systematically articulated. It was in their political practice that Lenin and Luxemburg distinguished themselves from the dominant mode in European Social Democracy most obviously.

However their responses to those theoretical issues which moved Marxists in the period exhibit a mode of thought markedly more subtle than that of their contemporaries. This subtlety of thought alerted Lenin and Luxemburg to the methodological nuances of Marx's theory and prevented the

⁵⁰ C.W., 38, p.276; "Intelligent idealism is closer to intelligent materialism than stupid materialism".

canons of Marxist orthodoxy from turning, in their hands, into a dead letter.

Part I of the present work will consist of an exposition of Marx's own articulation of the principles of his method of working and epistemology. There is a sense in which the rubrics under which it is presented are arbitrary and schematic. The categories which they contain border closely on each other and sometimes overlap, but it was necessary to isolate, for purposes of exposition, themes which, especially in the Grundrisse and Capital, are interwoven.

Parts II and III trace the themes of Marx's method in the work of Lenin and Luxemburg. It is the intention here to illustrate that they possessed a common ability to grasp the subtleties of the method underlying Marx's theory, and to replicate those subtleties in their own formulations.

PART I

MARX'S METHOD

SECTION i

The Mode of Procedure

Production as starting point

It is assumed in the argument under this rubric, as it is in the whole of Part I, that Marx took production to be the fundamental form of human activity, and the dominant moment in the economic process. The ascription of primacy to production has a number of dimensions. The first might be termed the philosophical dimension. Man is a species being whose 'life activity' is labour. "In the mode of life activity lies the entire character of a species, its species character". Hence the notion of man as producer. In modern bourgeois society the fruits of man's labour stand in opposition to him, and further, his 'life activity', production, appears as nothing other than a means of life; therefore he is alienated.¹ Here is the initial statement of Marx's materialism, uttered in criticism of Hegel in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts.

¹ Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, MECW.3, (London, 1975), pp.293-6.

Secondly there is the philosophical social dimension, which emerges in its full force in The German Ideology,² and is crystallised in the famous passage from the Preface to the 1859 Critique.

In the social production of their lives, men enter involuntarily into definite relations, relations of production which correspond to the development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations constitutes the economic structure of society, on which a politico-legal and ideological superstructure rises.³

This dimension emanates from Marx's philosophical reflections on the nature of social life, and from his embryonic studies of political economy, and constitutes the foundation of his mature economic works.

Contingent on the above there is a third, methodological dimension, which emerges in 1857. The correct starting point for political economy is the sphere of production. Amongst the whole range of economic activity and phenomena, consumption, distribution, exchange, pro-

² The German Ideology, MECW., 5, (London, 1976), pp.42-3; "The production of life...now appears as a twofold relation: on the one hand as a natural, on the other as a social relation - social in the sense that it denotes the co-operation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end. It follows from this that a certain mode of production, or industrial stage, is always combined with a certain mode of co-operation or social stage, and this mode of co-operation is itself a 'productive force'".

³ A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, (London, 1971), p.20.

duction, it is the latter which imparts moment to the rest. There is a mediated identity between production and consumption. "The important thing to emphasise here is only that they appear...as moments of one process in which production is the real point of departure, and hence also the predominant moment".⁴ Furthermore, distribution, (under which rubric is subsumed exchange), is also a moment of production. The distribution of products is distinguished from, and contingent upon the distribution of means of production, which is determined historically by the development of the productive process.

The questions...(of the relation between production-determining-distribution and production) all reduce themselves in the last instance to the role played by general historical relations in production, and their relation to the movement of history generally. The question evidently belongs within the treatment and investigation of production itself.⁵

Moreover, Marx's formulation of the general historical relations in production, conditions his mode of procedure. Production is the correct starting point, but it is too complex a phenomenon to address as such, (in the same way that population is too complex). Hence it must be broken down into its simpler constituents, (capital, class, labour),

⁴ Grundrisse, p.94.

⁵ Ibid., p.97

which must themselves be broken down into their simpler constituents. Only then can the totality of relations be constructed in its full complexity by means of a synthetic method.

Further, although 'production in general' is a term which describes a fundamental human and social activity, it is incapable of conveying meaning beyond this overarching philosophical level unless it is historically specified. Production is always a particular type of production, at a definite stage of social development.⁶ Some of its determinations are common to all epochs, (no production is possible, for instance, without instruments of production, or past, accumulated labour), but the specific form which these determinations take is contingent upon the relations of production, which turn instruments of production and past accumulated labour into capital. It is therefore essential to distinguish what is common to all epochs of production from what is historically specific.

The fundamental question to which the Introduction to the Grundrisse is addressed concerns the correct approach to political economy, once it has been established that

⁶ Ibid., p.85; "Whenever we speak of production...what is meant is always production at a definite stage of social development".

the correct object of enquiry is production. There are three approaches available: to give a genetic account of its historical development; to restrict the account to production under one set of historical conditions, or to render an account of production in general. Marx's economic works are a critical account of bourgeois conditions of production, presented as a political polemic against classical political economy, "the system of bourgeois political economy critically presented...the presentation of the system, and at the same time, through the presentation, its critique".⁷

There was, however, another reason why a critique specifically addressed to bourgeois production occupied Marx in his mature economic works, a dictate of the historical development of economic categories themselves. The three approaches set out above are by no means mutually exclusive, since "all epochs of production have certain common traits, common characteristics".⁸ Capital exists in all forms of production as instruments of production, past accumulated labour, and might therefore be represented

⁷ Letter from Marx to Lassalle, February 22, 1858, MEW., 29, (Berlin, 1963), p.550; "Die Arbeit, um die es sich zunächst handelt, ist Kritik der ökonomischen Kategorien oder, if you like, das System der bürgerlichen Ökonomie kritisch dargestellt. Es ist zugleich Darstellung des Systems und durch die Darstellung Kritik desselben".

⁸ Grundrisse, p.85.

as an eternal, universal category of production. In bourgeois society, however, capital takes on a specific form which differentiates it from the instruments of production, past accumulated labour, in pre-capitalist economies. Hence capital can only be understood in the full intensity of its development, with reference to its role in the relations of modern bourgeois production.

Later in the Introduction to the Grundrisse Marx generalises this point. The categories of political economy, in spite of their validity for all epochs, (which validity depends on their being abstractions), are the product of historical relations and possess their full validity for those relations alone. Bourgeois society being the most highly developed and complex form of production, its economic categories are concomitantly the most highly developed and complex. They allow insights into preceding social and economic formations, out of which bourgeois society emerged.⁹ The key to an understanding of ancient social and economic forms, therefore, lies in an understanding of the modern. Hence an account of bourgeois production as the correct starting point of political economy, rather than a genetic historical account.

⁹ Ibid., p.105; "Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organisation of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allow insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations...".

The third approach, production in general, is the traditional starting point of political economy. There follows an exegetical account of those conditions without which production is not possible, ("a few simple characteristics, which are hammered out into flat tautologies"),¹⁰ and the conditions which promote production to a greater or lesser extent, which again amount to the tautology that wealth is created when the conditions are favourable. Political economy takes production in general as a starting point in order to present production as though it were encased in natural laws, whereupon bourgeois relations can be represented as the manifest form, the incarnation of those general laws.

In the Introduction to the Grundrisse Marx drew up a plan for his projected economics, according to which the starting point was to be "the general abstract determinants which obtain in more or less all forms of society, but in the above mentioned sense",¹¹ (emphasis mine), i.e. in their historically specific, differentiated form. That the evident contradiction between the general and the historical and specific was problematic seems clear from the number of revisions which Marx made between September 1857 when

¹⁰ Ibid., p.86.

¹¹ Ibid., p.108.

the Introduction to the Grundrisse was completed, and 1859, when he wrote his Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy.

Prior to 1857 Marx had taken wage labour as a starting point, but in the first of the economic notebooks known as the Grundrisse he opens with money, as the power ruling over every aspect of bourgeois economy. A letter from Marx to Lassalle (February 1858),¹² contains a new plan, which omits the general introduction, taking "Capital" as its starting point, and a further letter, to Engels, (April 1858),¹³ contains a plan according to which the starting point is "capital in general". The critical alteration is stated in a letter to Engels (November 1858),¹⁴ where Marx introduces "the commodity" as his starting point.

Hence in the Preface to the Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, Marx specifically repudiates the plan

¹² Letter, from Marx to Lassalle, February 22, 1858, MEW., 29, p.551.

¹³ Letter, from Marx to Engels, April 2, 1858, MEC., pp.105-9.

¹⁴ Letter from Marx to Engels, November 29, 1858, MEW., 29, p.372.

contained in the 1857 Introduction.¹⁵ The starting point is still the abstract, but it is no longer production in general, but bourgeois production, and that category, the commodity, which is the nexus of bourgeois relations of production.

The method of abstraction

The Introduction to the Grundrisse is not primarily addressed to the question of which economic category occupies a position of fundamental importance within bourgeois production, and thereby constitutes its correct starting point. Rather it is a question of the proper mode of logical procedure for the scientific analysis of bourgeois production. It has already been observed that Marx distinguishes between the analytic and synthetic methods of political economy. The analytic method is decidedly naive, according to Marx. It approaches the complex whole, population, the precondition, foundation, and subject of production, which therefore appears as the correct starting point.

¹⁵ A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, p.19; "A general introduction, which I had drafted, is omitted, since on further consideration it seems to me confusing to anticipate results which still have to be substantiated, and the reader who really wished to follow me will have to decide to advance from the particular to the general".

Population, however, is an abstraction from the classes of which it is composed, and from the elements on which those classes rest; wage labour and capital. (In turn, wage labour and capital presuppose and rest on exchange, division of labour, prices, etc.). It is an abstraction, a conceptualisation of reality, which is too simple to express the complexity of the concrete. The analytic method, therefore, having perpetrated a crude and simple abstract form of the concrete, proceeds to break down this form into narrower abstractions.¹⁶

In this mode of analysis, the abstract appears to follow logically from the concrete, real object of analysis, but in fact, the sequence is arbitrary. Marx criticises Proudhon, who in The Philosophy of Poverty begins by presupposing industry, which exists to supply man's needs. Since one man cannot turn his hand to the variety of his needs, industry 'presupposes' the division of labour. In presupposing the latter, Proudhon must presuppose exchange, and with it exchange value. "One might as

¹⁶ Grundrisse, p.100; "Thus, if I were to begin with the population, this would be a chaotic conception of the whole, and I would then, by means of further determination, move analytically towards ever more simple concepts, from the imagined concrete towards ever thinner abstractions until I had arrived at the simplest determinations".

well have presupposed exchange value from the very beginning",¹⁷ since the relation in the 'logical progression' of the argument is one of 'it follows that...'.

Proudhon, proceeding analytically, has derived an economic category, exchange value, from a concrete reality, social production. He has merely taken the economic categories of bourgeois production and "put in order these thoughts, which are to be found alphabetically arranged at the end of every treatise on political economy".¹⁸ Economic categories which express specific economic relations have been translated into hard and fast principles of economic relations immutable and ahistorical, and expressed in the form of 'the myth of Prometheus'.¹⁹

Marx's point is that Proudhon, whilst claiming to set out from social production, in fact sets out from the received dogmas of the economists; the whole world is "drowned thus in a world of abstractions, in the world of logical categories". Proudhon's analysis proceeds in the medium

¹⁷ The Poverty of Philosophy, MECW.,6, (London, 1976), pp.111-2; "Thus need, as M. Proudhon presupposes it, itself presupposes the whole division of labour. In presupposing the division of labour, you get exchange, and, consequently, exchange value. One might as well have presupposed exchange value from the very beginning".

¹⁸ Ibid., p.162.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.157-8.

of pure reason. What emerges is a complex of inter-related categories which appear to engender one another "by the very workings of dialectical movement". Marx refers to this as "the logic and metaphysics of political economy".²⁰

The metaphysical method abstracts everything which is particular to its object, and not surprisingly, ends up with nothing more than a logical category. The Prometheus myth is an apt analogy; the representation, in pure logic of social production. Metaphysical method produces abstract formulations of real social relations - abstract to such an extent that the antagonisms within social relations in reality, become purely logical antagonisms between categories, form without content.

Marx's conception of the status of economic categories is relatively consistent. "Economic categories are only the theoretical expressions, the abstractions, of the social relations of production".²¹ "The abstraction is no more than the theoretical expression of those material relations which are their lord and master".²² In Capital, abstraction is the instrument of scientific analysis:

²⁰ Ibid., pp.163-5.

²¹ Ibid., p.165.

²² Grundrisse, p.164.

"In the analysis of economic forms...neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of use. The force of abstraction must replace both".²³

Abstract categories for Marx, represent the starting point of the synthetic mode of theory. Political economy had arrived at and established "a small number of determinant, abstract, general relations such as the division of labour, money, value etc.". Marx refers to these as the "individual moments", which, having become established more or less firmly, become the starting point for a synthetic approach to political economy. On the basis of these individual moments, the synthetic method sets about the reconstruction of the whole.²⁴

Marx's criticism of the synthetic method employed by political economy is that it transmuted the economic categories which served as its starting point into hard and fast principles, natural laws which govern the process of production in bourgeois economy. In doing so, the political economists presented as the governing principles of the social relations of production, what were no more than mental categories for the construction in thought of the sum total of those relations.

²³ Capital, 1, p.19

²⁴ Grundrisse, p.100

Marx's own synthetic method is a process of concentration, whereby the concrete appears in the process of thinking, as a result, and not as a point of departure. This is not to imply that the concrete/real is determined by abstract economic categories, but that the reproduction of the concrete/real in thought, is a result of the synthesis of abstract categories.²⁵

The mental process of synthesis, however, has no autonomous existence independent of the concrete/real. Still less does the mental process of abstraction and synthesis produce the concrete real, as in philosophical speculation, for which the conceptual world is the only reality. That speculative thought leads to empty philosophy and to utopian political practice, is reiterated throughout Marx's work, (as it is too, throughout that of Lenin - nowhere more so than in Materialism and Empirio-Criticism).

The thrust of the argument in The German Ideology was against the speculative philosophy of the Young Hegelians,

²⁵ Ibid., p.101; "...the concrete totality is a totality of thoughts, concrete in thought, in fact a product of thinking and comprehending; but not in any way a product of the concept which thinks and generates itself outside or above observation and conception; a product, rather, of the working up of observation into and conception into concepts".

and its political corollary.

Since the Young Hegelians consider conceptions, thoughts, ideas, in fact all the products of consciousness, to which they attribute an independent existence, as the real chains of men, (just as the old Hegelians declared them the true bonds of human society), it is evident that the Young Hegelians have to fight only against these illusions of consciousness.²⁶

In The German Ideology, Marx opposes his own method to the German idealists'. Speculative philosophy descends from heaven to earth; its premises are philosophical, whilst he ascends from real premises - from social relationships and their development. Real positive science, (not to be confused with positivism), begins where philosophy ends.

When the reality is described, a self-sufficient philosophy loses its medium of existence. At the best its place can only be taken by a summing up of the most general results, abstractions which are derived from the observation of the development of men.²⁷

The above passage demonstrates the continuity between the earlier work and the Introduction to the Grundrisse. The highly concentrated notes on possession in primitive family relations to be found in the latter are a precis form of the more elaborated formulations of 1846.

²⁶ The German Ideology, MECW., 5, p.30.

²⁷ Ibid., p.37.

The early statement of Marx's materialism, however, has been used by those who wish to portray Marx as a proponent of the reflection theory of knowledge.²⁸ The argument is based on the notion that "abstractions arise from the historical development of men", that is, from concrete, historical reality. Hoffman, for example, cites The Communist Manifesto; "The theoretical conclusions of the Communists...merely express in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes".²⁹ It is true that "merely express" might be suggestive of reflection when taken out of the context of their political purpose, and more importantly, from the overall formulation of Marx's method.

In the Introduction to the Grundrisse, abstraction stands in a relation to the concrete/real which is mediated by observation and conception. This much is not incompatible

²⁸ c.f., J. Hoffman, Marxism and the Theory of Praxis, (London, 1975), p.83; the ascription of a reflection theory of knowledge to Marx is part of an argument that Marx was in the tradition of Enlightenment materialism. "Marx and Engels never rejected the materialism of the Enlightenment: even when they criticised it, they built nevertheless upon its foundations, and at no time did they ever have occasion to reverse the judgement of 1845 that materialism is necessarily 'connected with socialism and communism': that it in fact provides its logical basis".

²⁹ The Communist Manifesto, MECW., 6, (London, 1976), p.498.

with reflection. It represents, however, only the preliminary to the mental process by which the concrete/real is reconstructed in thought. The concrete/real is the starting point for observation and conception, from which abstract categories and concepts are formulated. But the abstract category or concept is itself only the starting point for the synthetic mode of thought which reproduces the concrete/real as the "mental concrete".

The method of procedure from abstract to concrete, then, is the "working up of observation and conception into concepts", the product of which is "the concrete in thought".

The totality as it appears in the head, as a totality of thoughts, is a product of a thinking head, which appropriates the world in the only way it can, a way different from the artistic, religious, practical and mental appropriation of the world.³⁰

Of what, precisely, the "working up" consists is less clear than it might be due to the inconsistent use of the terms concrete, abstract, simple, complex. Marx begins by using the antonyms abstract/concrete to contrast and confront the conceptual with the concrete real. He then narrows down his discussion to the concept world and uses the antonyms simple/concrete to denote the distinction between simple, abstract concepts and more concrete complex concepts. Though 'concrete' appears in both sets of

³⁰ Grundrisse, p.101.

antonyms, its meaning is by no means the same. In the first it refers to concrete reality, the 'real world', (rendered here as 'concrete/real'), in the second it refers to the more concrete category, or concept as opposed to the simpler, more abstract general relation. Labour, division of labour, need, exchange value, money, are simple abstract categories, whilst at the other end of the continuum, at the most concrete level of conceptualisation are the state, exchange between nations, the world market. Between these extremities of the abstract-concrete spectrum of categories and concepts, there is an infinite number of gradations, of levels of abstraction or levels of concreteness.

The extreme of abstraction is mere, empty abstraction. Hegel begins his Philosophy of Right for example, with the abstract category possession, which Marx confirms as the correct point of departure, it being "the subject's simplest juridical relation".³¹ There are cases, however, where possession is mere possession, an empty abstraction. The savage can be said to possess something, but there is no juridical relation here. Nor is there in the case of the simple family or clan, which still merely possesses, but has no property, (the juridical relation being absent).

³¹ Ibid., p.102; "...Hegel...correctly begins the Philosophy of Right with possession, this being the subject's simplest juridical relation".

Here possession is an empty abstraction because it lacks the underpinning of a concrete substratum of social relations. An abstraction always presupposes this concrete substratum - hence possession always presupposes "the more concrete juridical category".

In more highly developed society, possession appears as the simpler relation of a developed organisation.

...simple categories (e.g. possession) are the expressions of relations (undeveloped family/clan relations) within which the less developed concrete (undeveloped property relation) may have already realised itself before having posited the more many sided connection or relation (juridical property relation) which is mentally expressed in the more concrete category (property).³²

Similarly in the case of money. Money (simple category) existed before capital, banks, wage labour, (the 'more many sided' connection expressed in the more concrete category). It can be seen then, that the simpler category can express the dominant relation of the less developed whole, or a subordinate relation of the more fully developed whole.

Furthermore, Marx asserts, the categories embodied in the more developed whole had a historical existence before the whole developed in the direction expressed in the more concrete category.³³ This is to say that capital wage

³² Ibid., pp.102-3.

³³ Ibid., p.102.

labour etc. existed historically before capital became dominant in the sense that it dominates in modern bourgeois society. It can therefore be said that the mode of procedure from abstract to concrete corresponds to an actual process of historical development. This is not to say however, that the correct method of political economy simply traces economic categories in their historical development. Rather is it a logical procedure from the simplest categories, (money, value, capital in the 1857 plan), to the more concrete categories now firmly located in their wider context, (the state, world market, crises). The logical thought process must be kept distinct from the historical process of development from simple economic formations to more highly developed ones. Failure to observe this distinction leads to a two-fold error. It might appear that the simple category, (e.g. money), is to be found "wading through history", and further, the simple category, which is a mental expression of a real economic relation might take on a real independent existence, (the conceptual masquerading as the real).

Marx emphasised that simple categories, which achieve the full richness of their expression in the most developed and complex forms of society, that is in bourgeois society, are by no means to be found universally throughout history. Money, for example, played no part in Inca civilisations, and only a peripheral role in Slavic communities or in the

Roman Empire.³⁴ Its properties as a simple, abstract economic category are derived from the role which money plays in bourgeois society. Further, Marx was at pains to distance himself from the Hegelians, for whom the logical procedure of categories was the historical process, and the concept world was the concrete/real. For Marx the logical procedure of categories reflected the connections within the relations of bourgeois society.

The above can be summarised as follows.

- i. The correct method of procedure in political economy is to move from simple abstract categories towards more complex concrete ones.
- ii. The abstraction is a mental artefact for the breaking down of a complex whole into simpler determinations in order, by combining these into more complex categories, to reconstruct the concrete/real.

³⁴ Ibid., p.103; "This very simple category...makes a historic appearance in its full intensity only in the most developed conditions of society. By no means does it wade through all economic relations. For example in the Roman Empire, at its highest point of development, the foundation remained taxes and payments in kind...Thus, although the simpler category may have existed historically before the more concrete, it can achieve its full...development in a combined form of society, while the more concrete category was more fully developed in a less developed form of society".

iii. The movements, abstract to concrete, simple to complex, are movements which take place in thought; they are conceptual movements. They are part of a method of working which takes the abstract as a starting point, and works successively through more concrete concepts to a mental construction of the concrete/real.

iv. This method of working is in direct contradiction to early political economy, (which proceeded analytically), and to classical political economy (which tended to transpose abstract categories into universal principles). It also runs counter to those Hegelians who ascribed to abstract categories and independent existence, an error which has affinities with that of the classical political economists.

Levels of abstraction - Capital

There are two sides then, to abstraction in Marx. It is the reduction of the complex whole into simpler determinations, and it is the conceptual expression of real economic relations - the expression of their essence. It is not an adequate rendering of Marx's use of abstraction simply to recite the first function as does Sweezy.

The legitimate purpose of abstraction in social science is never to get away from the real world, but rather to isolate certain aspects of the real world for intensive investigation. When we say therefore, that we are operating on a high level of abstraction, we mean that we are

dealing with a relatively small number of aspects of reality; we emphatically do not mean that those aspects with which we are dealing are not capable of historical investigation and factual illustration.³⁵

Sweezy's characterisation of abstraction is one sided; it embraces but one aspect of the process - that of selection or reduction - and fails to make clear the conceptual level on which the abstraction operates. When he measures the distance between Marx's method and that of political economy, he can show no more than different sets of objectives - "to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society", (Marx), investigate "the nature and causes of the wealth of nations", (Smith), or "the laws which regulate the distribution of the product of the earth".³⁶

These constitute different standpoints it is true, but this in itself does not differentiate Marx's method from that of political economy. The critical break is Marx's use of the abstraction as a conceptual instrument for approaching the concrete/real by means of progressively more concrete, but still conceptual categories. It may be that Sweezy neglects the conceptual quality of Marx's abstraction in the interests of his general purpose, which is to deny that to abstract is to flee the 'real world'. Certainly he

³⁵ P. M. Sweezy, The Theory of Capitalist Development, (London, 1946), p.18.

³⁶ Ibid., p.12.

points out that Marx made use of what modern theorists call "successive approximation", but it appears that he is attempting to frame Marx's method in such a way that it becomes 'respectable', or at least recognisable to modern economists - analogous to their 'models'. This is the impression he gives with his use of the term "simplifying assumptions".

Sweezy's characterisation of Marx's method of abstraction in terms of "simplifying assumptions" neglects the relation between the abstract category and the concrete real. The former is more than just a narrow segment of the latter, isolated for the purposes of intensive investigation. It is the relatively simple expression of a complex economic relation. The commodity, for instance, is the simple expression of the relations included in the exchange of products, of labour power and of money. As an economic category it possesses relative theoretical simplicity, but in the concrete real it is by no means simple, carrying enormous implications. It expresses the essential properties of all economic relations in bourgeois society. The commodity is the simplest, most abstract of economic categories because it expresses conceptually the fundamental economic relation which pervades and entangles all other economic relations of bourgeois society. In short the system of bourgeois production is commodity production.

Carver points out that the most striking advance evident in the Introduction to the Grundrisse is its illumination of the logical interrelation of the concepts and categories of political economy.³⁷ The 1859 Critique and Capital build on this foundation. Capital, I, consists of an exposition of the logical interrelation of these abstract categories, beginning with the most abstract, the commodity. This, Carver suggests, is consonant with Marx's comments in the 1867 Preface to Capital, where he refers to the force of abstraction.³⁸ In Capital, II and III, there is to be found a more concrete kind of analysis. Marx had progressed from the realm of the abstract to the confrontation of real phenomena, a confrontation which is grounded upon the exposition of abstract relations in the first Volume. The progression is by stages and never arrived at the most concrete determinations, for example class, since the work was curtailed by Marx's failing health and eventual decease.

This is a more adequate account of the various levels of abstraction in Capital than that of Sweezy, who asserts

³⁷ Carver, ed., Karl Marx: Texts on Method, pp.37-8.

³⁸ Capital, I, p.19; "In the analysis of economic forms, neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of use. The force of abstraction replaces both".

that "the intention of Volumes II and III was to take into account factors which were consciously left out in Volume I", implying that Marx merely chose, for simplicity's sake, to ignore certain determinations in Volume I. A better rendering of Marx's method is that he regarded as an essential pre-requisite for the exposition of concrete concepts, an exposition of those more abstract concepts on which the former rest.

Certainly, the "simplifying assumptions" of Sweezy's account are to be found in Marx, for instance, in the discussion of expanded capitalist reproduction in Capital, II. But its inadequacies, if it is to be regarded as an account of the method of abstraction in Capital overall, are clearly demonstrated when Sweezy goes on to discuss abstract labour. This highly complex conception becomes "abstract only in the quite straightforward sense that all special characteristics which differentiate one kind of labour from another are ignored",³⁹ (emphasis mine). This is to say that the notion is only an abstraction in the sense that "simplifying assumptions" are abstractions.

If however, epistemological scrutiny is applied, it becomes clear that these two forms of abstraction are quite dis-

³⁹ Sweezy, The Theory of Capitalist Development, p.19.

similar. The distinctive nature of the concept 'abstract labour' is pointed out by Arthur.

It is abstract because, in value, all labours are credited with the same abstract essence and differ only as quantities of simple average labour. This is not a secondary feature or a mode of accounting...but a fundamental mode of being of labour as it appears crystallised in value.⁴⁰

Such a conception bears no resemblance to a "simplifying assumption".

The introduction of the concept of abstract labour gives an indication of the complexity of Marx's use of abstraction. The conception does not fit readily into the discussion of abstraction to be found in the Introduction to the Grundrisse, although it is employed here as part of the exposition of abstraction in general. In the Introduction, Marx is trying to establish two major points regarding abstraction and the abstract category. i. That although abstract categories would appear to be ahistorical - since they abstract the common from the particular - they must be specified to a particular historical period or epoch if they are to have any meaning. Further, their role in the network of social relations must be specified.

⁴⁰ C. J. Arthur, 'The Concept of "Abstract Labour"', Capital and Class, Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists, No.1, October 1976, p.11.

ii. That although abstraction is a mental process, and abstract categories are mental constructs, there must nevertheless be a correspondence between the category and the concrete/real. In his demonstration, the category abstract labour is introduced,⁴¹ but its exposition never approaches the complexity or richness which it attains in Capital. There is in 1857, no indication that the notion of abstract labour is not of an entirely similar kind to the category money.

In Capital, however, abstract labour emerges as a quite different kind of abstraction. It becomes clear that Marx is not dealing with abstraction as a theoretical act, but as a definite social event.⁴² Abstract labour emerges from the fabric of social relations themselves. It is in the act of exchange, where specific labours which are qualitatively different, are equalised, reduced to simple homogenous labour, and thereby rendered into relations of equivalence.

Whenever, by exchange, we equate as values our different products, by that very act, we also equate as human labour the different kinds of labour expended upon them.⁴³

⁴¹ Grundrisse, pp.103-5.

⁴² c.f., Arthur, 'The Concept of "Abstract Labour"', Capital and Class, p.9; I. I. Rubin, Essays on Marx's Theory of Value, (Detroit, 1972), pp.132-8.

⁴³ Capital, I, p.78.

Marx is here rehearsing an argument which first appears in the Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy.

This reduction (of specific labours to abstract) appears to be an abstraction; but it is an abstraction which takes place daily in the social process of production. The conversion of all commodities into labour time is no greater abstraction nor a less real process than the chemical reduction of all organic bodies into air.⁴⁴

In the work of 1859, Marx hints that abstract labour is no ordinary abstraction, that is, it does not correspond to that mode of abstraction outlined in 1857. In Capital, I, the concept is developed to the point where it becomes clear that it is of a different order to the simple abstract category to which he refers in 1857. This simple category appears to signify commonalities between different economic forms, common elements which are more than mere common denominators, but the expression of the essence of economic forms, which may be developed in particular directions, and combined in more concrete categories. In 1857, the simple abstract category is a more simple expression of the concrete/real and as such it is a mental construct.

The reverse is true of abstract labour. In the first edition of Capital, Marx claims that the concrete/real, (here the particular form of labour), is a realised form of the abstract. The abstraction is no longer a property

⁴⁴ A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, p.30.

of the concrete; the concrete is the realisation, the hypostasis, or determinate form of the abstract.

Within the value relation and the expression of value contained in it, the abstract universal is not a property of the concrete, the sensuous actual; on the contrary, the sensuous actual is a determinate form of the abstract universal. Tailors' work, which is to be found, for instance in the equivalent, coat, does not have, within the expression of value of cloth, the universal property of also being human labour. It is the other way round. Its essence is being human labour, and being tailors' work is a hypostasis or determinate form of realisation of that essence.⁴⁵

Now if as Marx declared in 1857, abstraction is a mental process, and the abstract category a mental construction, then Marx would have to be found guilty of deriving the concrete/real from the concept. But abstract labour is clearly not a mental category. The concrete, specific form of labour becomes abstract, (the becoming belongs to the sphere of the concrete real rather than that of mental process), as and when labour becomes social. That is to say that the specific labours become abstract when they confront each other as commodities in the exchange process, and that abstract labour is a condition of capitalist society.

⁴⁵ Cited in Arthur, 'The Concept of "Abstract Labour"', Capital and Class, p.16, from Marx-Engels, Kleine Ökonomische Schriften, (Berlin, 1955), p.271. The passage appeared under the title 'Die Wertform', and was originally an appendix to Capital, I.

Implications for Marxist theory and practice

What should have emerged from the above is that there are, in Marx's work, a number of different levels of abstraction. These are levels, not merely of more abstract, or more concrete categories, as appeared to be the case in the Grundrisse. The levels are qualitatively distinct. In the first and second volumes of Capital, Marx took as the object of his enquiry 'capital in general'. Total social capital is not distinguished from individual capitals. Volume I is concerned with the "immediate process of production as such", with the categories which make up the inner structure of bourgeois society. In Volume II Marx addressed himself to the circulation of total social capital, within which individual capitals were not differentiated, although the form taken by capital - constant and variable capital, surplus value - was distinguished. In Volume III, more concrete forms were introduced. Competition between individual capitals, technical progress, now appeared in Marx's formulations.⁴⁶

The schema which Marx constructed in Capital, II, demonstrating the movements between the various forms of

⁴⁶ L. Colletti, 'Marxism and the Dialectic', New Left Review, No.93, September-October, 1975, p.20.

capital in the process of capital accumulation, were pitched at a level of abstraction which eliminated certain characteristics of that process. In Capital, III, as Marx progressed towards more concrete formulations, these characteristics were introduced. Lacking the insights provided by the Grundrisse, the Second International Marxists, with the exception of Lenin, were unable to reconcile the two formulations.

In Capital, III, Marx had indicated certain tendencies within the structure of capitalist economic forms which entailed the periodic dislocation of production and the accumulation of capital, in crises. These tendencies were the consequence of contradictions within the capital form itself. Marx had indicated these contradictions in Capital, I.⁴⁷

The antithesis, use value and value; the contradictions that private labour is bound to manifest itself as direct social labour, that a particularised concrete kind of labour has to pass for abstract human labour; the contradiction between the personification of objects and the representation of persons by things; all these antitheses and the contradictions which are inherent in commodities, assert themselves and develop their modes of motion, in the antithetical phases of the metamorphosis of a commodity.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.21-2.

⁴⁸ Capital, I, p.115.

In the Second International there was a strong tendency to transpose the abstract 'laws' in Marx's exposition, into positive laws with direct unmediated applicability to the social world. When, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, these laws which 'entailed' economic dislocation and crisis were manifestly at odds with the observable and palpable stability and vitality of the capitalist economy, there was a movement to abandon them - the revisionist movement, its spokesman Bernstein.

Of the Second International Marxists, only Lenin showed any indication that he might have grasped the abstract quality of the contradictions which Marx had indicated in the inner workings of capital, and of the laws which Marx had extrapolated in the course of his exposition.

Luxemburg's defence of Marxism as a body of scientific laws was first and foremost to assert that they were the cornerstone of an undeviating political practice. Her Accumulation of Capital betrayed a weak grasp of the layers of abstraction in Capital. In economics, Luxemburg's mode of thought was rather formalistic and inflexible.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ c.f., P.M. Sweezy, 'Rosa Luxemburg's "The Accumulation of Capital"', Science and Society, Vol.31, No.4, 1967, p.474; "She liked logically complete and tidy intellectual constructions, and the discovery of what she thought were loose ends in the Marxist system was in itself enough to spur her into action".

Luxemburg set out to falsify Marx's formulation of the question of capital accumulation. Her strategy was threefold. She attempted to demonstrate the internal inconsistencies of Marx's models, to 'prove' mathematically that the models were flawed. She confronted the models in Capital, II with his formulations in Capital, III which apparently conflicted with them. She argued that once the 'variables' which Marx had omitted in Capital, II - competition and technical progress, which entailed a change in the internal structure of capital - were included, the models collapsed and it became apparent that the cumulative reproduction of capital in a closed system was impossible. And finally, she confronted Marx's schema with the evidence of history. In an era of imperialism, the export of capital to the non-capitalist world indicated to Luxemburg that its potential for accumulation within the confines of the domestic market was rapidly becoming exhausted.

By all three routes, she arrived at the conclusion that Marx's model, which purported to demonstrate the accumulation of capital within a closed system, was incorrectly formulated. Her reasoning revealed her weak grasp of the mode of abstraction in Marx's economic work. The contradictions which he indicated in Capital, I, the reproduction schema in Capital, II, and those tendencies which he outlined in Capital, III, were of a qualitatively

different order in terms of their level of abstraction. The positivist mind was unable to reconcile itself with that fact, and in this respect Luxemburg shared its disabilities.

SECTION ii

The Historical Method

Marx's statement of the method

The notion 'Marxist history' is one that is susceptible to several interpretations,¹ only one of which will be treated here. Marx clearly wrote history in the conventional sense, (The Civil War in France, The Eighteenth Brumaire, The Class Struggles in France, articles for the New York Daily Tribune), but it is not in these works that the fullest statement of the historical method lies. In these works, Marx analysed historical epochs from a particular standpoint; that of class and alignments between classes, concepts based on an implicit ascription of causal and explanatory primacy to economic phenomena. Furthermore, there is a distinct inclination in the choice of subject matter towards the development of modern social and economic forms, and the political tensions and forms contingent thereon.²

¹ c.f., Hobsbawm, 'Karl Marx's Contribution to Historiography', Blackburn ed., Ideology in Social Science, pp.270-1.

² c.f., Fernbach, ed., Karl Marx, Surveys from Exile, p.9.

Undeniably, the bias in Marx's own choice of subject matter and his materialist perspective is reflected in Marxist history, that of the classical school and of modern Marxist historians. (Examples of the former are Kautsky's Thomas More and his Utopia, Communism in Medieval Europe, Lenin's The Development of Capitalism in Russia). And further, Marxist historians have been drawn towards those areas to which Marx ascribed importance, but which he neglected, or else sketched only briefly, (for example, pre-capitalist economic formations). These accounts vary in their quality and in their fidelity to Marx's method, but few have approached, and none surpassed Lenin's work on Russia, precisely because of the authors' unswerving, almost dogged fidelity to the underlying historical method in Marx. It has been argued,³ and will be argued here, that it is the underlying methodology which distinguishes Marx's and Marxist history from that of other schools to which it might bear passing resemblance.⁴

³ c.f., P. Villar, 'Marxist History, a History in the Making: Towards a Dialogue with Althusser', New Left Review, 80, July-August 1973, pp.66-71; "Marx... sought passionately to locate the smallest germs of his own discoveries in the most remote past".

⁴ Notably, the historians of the Annales school. F. Braudel, Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800, (London, 1973), approaches a Marxist method of history quite closely.

The underlying method is found most strikingly stated in the Introduction to the Grundrisse, and an important passage from this work is worth quoting at some length, since it informs much of the discussion below.

In the succession of economic categories, as in any other historical, social science, it must not be forgotten that their subject - here modern bourgeois society - is always what is given, in the head as well as in reality, and that these categories therefore express the forms of being, the characteristics of existence, and often only individual sides of this specific society, this subject, and therefore it⁵ by no means begins only at the point where one can speak of it as such. This is to be kept in mind because it will shortly be decisive for the order and sequence of the categories. For example, nothing seems more natural than to begin with ground rent, with landed property, since this is bound up with the earth, the source of all production and all being, and with the first form of production of all more or less settled societies - agriculture. But nothing would be more erroneous. In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialised within it.⁶

⁵ Grundrisse, pp.106-7. Nicolaus, trans., Grundrisse, translates 'it' as "this society", whilst Carver, ed., Karl Marx, Texts on Method, p.79, renders 'it' as "social science". This disparity will be taken up below.

⁶ Grundrisse, p.106.

The fundamental precept of Marx's historical method can be extricated from the above, rather convoluted passage. Capital, in common with every other category of political economy, is conditioned by its place in the network of productive relations. In pre-capitalist periods capital expresses relations subordinate to the dominant relations of landed property and ground rent and can be understood only as such. As a category for the exposition of the economic relations of bourgeois society however, capital reflects those relations, which are qualitatively different from, and not simply more highly developed forms of, pre-capitalist relations.

In primitive society, and in the feudal period, Marx goes on, every economic relation takes the form of a particular kind of landed property - this is true even of capital. In bourgeois society, those relations are transformed; even agriculture takes the form of a branch of industry.⁷ Economic categories now have meaning only in as much as they are related to capital, (ground rent, for instance, can only be understood as capital). Moreover, the economic category, capital, possesses meaning without reference to its historically antecedent form.

⁷ c.f., Lenin's work on Russian capitalism, C.W., 3, p.38; "It goes without saying that the...separation of manufacture from industry transforms agriculture into an industry, into a commodity producing branch of the economy".

It would therefore be unfeasible and wrong to let the economic categories follow one another in the same sequence as that in which they were historically decisive. Their sequence is determined rather by their relation to one another in modern bourgeois society, which is precisely the opposite to that which seems to be their natural order, or which corresponds to their historical development. The point is not the historic position of the economic relations in the succession of different forms of society. Even less is it their sequence 'in the idea' (Proudhon), (a muddy notion of historic movement). Rather, their order in modern bourgeois society.⁸

The above passages immediately distinguish Marx's historical method from that of orthodox historiography.

In his reconstruction of economic categories, the ordering is the reverse of the historians', since he moves from the present to the past, ascribing explanatory primacy to the former. It might be argued that this method constitutes a rejection of history as such, an assertion of the discrete and separate constitution of the analysis of contemporary forms, but this would be to overlook Marx's comments on historical explanation, and his method of shuttling between the contemporary form and its antecedents.

This aspect of Marx's historical method throws some light upon the disputed translation in the first of the passages

⁸ Grundrisse, pp.107-8.

above. The fragment quoted is an expansion of an observation which Marx makes on the previous page that "human anatomy contains the key to the anatomy of the ape".⁹ Similarly, the categories which emerge out of, and express bourgeois relations of production, also allow insights into pre-modern forms.

The sense which these statements convey is that the social and historical sciences, (which Marx brackets together) must begin by analysing the most developed forms in order to understand the 'subordinate species'. Analysis moves from the highest form of development towards its antecedents. To understand ground rent it is first necessary to understand capital.¹⁰ It is necessary to understand this latter category in its most highly developed form in order to render an explanation of its earlier forms. Capital existed in pre-modern society, though it occupied a subordinate position in the structure. Marx makes it clear that it is not his intention to trace this economic category through the stages of its development. It is in this

⁹ Ibid., p.105.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.107; "Ground rent cannot be understood without capital. But capital can certainly be understood without ground rent. Capital is the all-dominating economic power of bourgeois society. It must form the starting point as well as the finishing point, and must be dealt with before landed property. After both have been examined in particular, their interrelation must be examined".

sense that we should construe the sentence "it (the economic category, capital), by no means begins only at the point where one can speak of it as such", (that is, in pre-modern societies where it has not yet developed to the fullness of its potential).

According to this rendering, neither Nicolaus nor Carver captures the exact sense of Marx's meaning, though the latter approximates most closely. Capital is an economic category, (of social science),¹¹ expressive of an economic relation (of society).¹² But strictly speaking 'it' must be taken to refer to the category, which attains its full range of expression with the fullest development of the relation it expresses. It is self contradictory to refer to an economic relation which "by no means begins where one can talk of it as such".

Marx is here making two assertions; about his historical method, and about the actual development of societies. Actual economic relations are coloured by the dominant mode of production, and economic categories, ("what is given in the head as well as in reality"), are specific to particular epochs, particular modes of production.

¹¹ c.f., Carver, ed., Karl Marx: Texts on Method, p.79.

¹² c.f., Nicolaus, trans., Grundrisse, p.106.

They cannot be said to "wade through history" as the universal expression of an economic relation.¹³

History and contemporary forms

In the body of the Grundrisse texts Marx expands upon the undeveloped and often enigmatic statements in the Introduction. As has been pointed out, the historical method of constructing economic categories and their inter- relations ascribes primacy to those categories which express the most highly developed economic forms - to the contemporary form rather than its antecedents. In the Grundrisse Marx elaborates the relation between the contemporary form and its antecedents, or preconditions, with regard to capital.

In preceding sections there is an account of the pre- conditions of capitalist production; one of these is that the producer should reintroduce his surplus into production, (that is, as opposed to hoarding it). Further, in order to realise the surplus value as capital, the producer must introduce the values which he has created into circu-

¹³ Grundrisse, p.105; "...even the most abstract categories, despite their validity - precisely because of their abstractness - for all epochs, are nevertheless, in the specific character of this abstraction, themselves likewise a product of historic relations, and possess their full validity only for and within these relations".

lation, which presupposes the creation of markets. These preconditions are simply the conditions of development of capitalist production; they do not form part of the movement of "the real system of the mode of production rules by it", (capital). The implication is that the development of economic relations, having reached maturity, dispenses with its preconditions, which are rendered "antediluvian".¹⁴

Marx takes the example of the flight of the serfs to the towns, which phenomenon is one of the "historic conditions and presuppositions of urbanism". It is not, however, "a moment of the reality of developed cities". Once urbanism is established, its preconditions cease to function as such; they now appear "not as conditions of its arising, but as results of its presence".¹⁵

Similarly with capital; it becomes its own prerequisite, it proceeds from itself, creates the conditions of its own existence. Value, having become capital, confronted by living labour as mere use value, which appears as merely a means of realising dead labour, producing alien wealth on one side and penury on the other, are the conditions, the prerequisites and consequences of

¹⁴ Grundrisse, p.459.

¹⁵ loc. cit.

capital. "The process itself, in and by itself, posits the real, objective conditions of its existence."¹⁶ This was a radical break with political economy, which, taking capital to be an eternal, ahistorical form of production, portrayed the conditions of development of capital as the process itself.¹⁷ Marx has set up a radical disjuncture between the conditions of development, and the process as a self-contained system, between historical development and the contemporary form.¹⁸

To return to the comparison between Marx's historical method and that of orthodox historiography. The radical disjuncture created by Marx, between historical development and contemporary form, might be taken as simply a mode of periodisation, of the kind employed in orthodox historio-

¹⁶ Ibid., p.461.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.460; "The bourgeois economists who regard capital as an eternal and natural (not historical) form of production then attempt at the same time to legitimise it again by formulating the conditions of its becoming as the conditions of its contemporary realisation; i.e. presenting the moments in which the capitalist still appropriates as non-capitalist...as the very conditions in which he appropriates as capitalist".

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.460-1; "In order to develop the laws of bourgeois economy, therefore, it is not necessary to write the real history of the relations of production. But the correct observation and deduction of these laws, as having themselves become in history, always leads to primary equations...which point towards a past lying behind this system".

graphy. Mere periodisation, however, is always, to some degree at least, arbitrary. It is based on a break event, or upon some (more or less) vague observation of an "over-determining totality" of the kind which characterises Lucien Febvre's Sixteenth Century.¹⁹ Marx's 'periodisation' is purely theoretical, and is marked by the absence of temporal specification. This in itself does not set him apart in any positive way; it merely means that he did not do what most historians do. But it is an intrinsic element in Marx's historical method that economic categories are rendered historically specific, and this is so precisely because their developmental history is separated from their contemporary forms.

Economic categories and their interconnection in Marx's later economic works (post 1857) are part of a theoretical structure. The method of presentation and ordering of

¹⁹ c.f., Villar, 'Marxist History, a History in the Making', New Left Review, 80, July-August 1973, p.86; "Febvre's 16th century is not closed: Luther, Lefevre, Marguerite, Rabelais, des Periers: all appear there within the exact limits which the cohesion of the 'over-determining' totality imposes on them. But the latter is in movement...The historian had to demonstrate this against the ideology of his own time, of the rulers. If he could do it, it was because he had first made the sixteenth century 'his own', at all its levels, and held it 'present' through a process of research which was concrete but not empirical. His research was systematised by his struggle to determine its problematic, against the historical positivism of the age...".

economic relations proceeds according to their place in the theoretical structure which emerged in the Grundrisse and in Capital; not according to their place in history. Hence the transformation of money into capital is presented as a process which takes place first and foremost in the inner workings of capital itself, rather than in the historical transformation of one form into another. In this sense the mode of production is a theoretical rather than a historical construction.

Nevertheless, bourgeois society contains the key to pre-modern societies, and whilst Marx never systematically addressed himself to these, he did cast glances towards them in Capital, I, largely for the purpose of furthering an exposition of modern economic forms by emphasising their qualitative difference from the pre-modern. For example, in the second chapter, in his discussion of exchange value, use value and the money form, Marx emphasises the separation between the two forms of value, which obtains in capitalist production, with reference to primitive society based on property in common, (India, Peru). Here the exchange of commodities is at first only an external relation - with the outside world - which inevitably becomes transformed into an internal relation. The constant repetition of exchange makes it a normal social act, and in the course of time, a portion of the product is set aside with a view towards exchange. The distinction

between utility for consumption and utility for exchange is fixed.²⁰

At this stage of direct barter, that is, equivalence is still based on use value. The product does not acquire a value form independent of its use value, or of the individual needs of the parties to the exchange. There is, however, an increasing need for a value form, a need which arises historically with the increasing complexity of exchange. The problem creates its own solution in the form of a 'special' commodity (precious metals) to which other commodities can equate.²¹

Now whilst this exposition might appear to be historical, it is couched throughout in terms of bourgeois production, and in furtherance of the exposition of the money form in bourgeois society. There is no element here of Marx deriving an explanation from a historical account. Rather the reverse; he derives a historical account of the development of commodity production, and of money becoming capital, from the contemporary money form in bourgeois production. In this sense Marx is writing history backwards.

²⁰ Capital, I, pp.92-3.

²¹ Ibid., p.92.

The historical progress and extension of exchanges develops the contrast, latent in commodities between use value and value.

The necessity for giving an external expression to this contrast for the purposes of commercial intercourse, urges on the establishment of an independent form of value, and finds no rest until it is once and for all satisfied by the differentiation of commodities into commodities and money.²²

Here is a statement of causality which has as its foundation the logical inter-relation of categories in bourgeois economic relations. The historical development of these relations is seen in terms of "the necessity for giving an external expression" to these categories. In this sense there are elements of tautology in Marx's method. The past is described as the necessary development towards the present.

There is however a more sophisticated side to this aspect of the historical method in Marx. It involves an account of the evolutionary development of bourgeois society, but there is in the description more than the simple, even development of the categories which constitute the relations in that society. Rather are those categories themselves historically differentiated in a qualitative fashion. The role of money, for instance, is qualitatively different in modern and pre-modern society.

²² Ibid., p.90.

The historical account of money in Capital begins with the "gold chrysalis". The metamorphosis of the commodity into money, "far from being the mere means of effecting the circulation of commodities, becomes the end and aim".²³ The money form is not yet the unconditionally alienable form which it becomes in mature capitalist society, but becomes petrified into the form of a hoard. This is so because in the early stages of the circulation of commodities it is the surplus use values alone that are converted into money. Money becomes the social expression of the superfluity of wealth. Money qua money is the goal, the end product of production.

The next phase in the development of money in Marx's account begins where it takes on the role of a means of payment. With the development of circulation, conditions arise by which "the alienation of commodities becomes separated, by an interval of time, from the realisation of their prices", (that is, the separation of sale and purchase). Sale and purchase are not only separated, they are reversed. "The buyer converts money back into commodities before he has turned commodities into money; in other words he achieves the second metamorphosis of commodities before the first".²⁴

²³ Ibid., pp.130-1.

²⁴ Ibid., p.136.

The seller's commodity circulates and realises its value, but only as a legal claim upon money. Money is still the end product of production, but not now as money, but as the value form of commodities. "The value form of commodities, money, is therefore now the end and aim of a sale, and that out of, owing to, a social necessity springing out of the process of circulation itself".²⁵

With the further development of the production of commodities, the role which money fulfils expands still further. It begins to serve as a means of payment beyond the sphere of the circulation of commodities; it becomes the universal medium of rents, taxes, etc. And it expands beyond the sphere of domestic circulation, into the world market, where its universal character is developed. This is the ultimate manifestation of its "ideal concept".²⁶ If the significance and power of money rises to an apex with the development of a world market, however, then this condition heralds its decline into a role in which it is subservient to capital.

²⁵ loc. cit.

²⁶ Ibid., p.141; "It is only in the markets of the world that money acquires to the full extent the character of the commodity whose bodily form is also the immediate social incarnation of human labour in the abstract. Its real mode of existence in this sphere adequately corresponds to its ideal concept".

Its subservience lies in the fact that money is transformed into capital, not merely in its historical development, but in the process of capitalist society itself; as a function of this process. This is the sense in which Marx asserts that "we have no need to refer to the origin of capital to discover that the first form of capital is money. We can see it daily under our very eyes".²⁷ All new capital first appears as money, which, by a definite process is transformed into capital. The transformation of money into capital being a function of the circulation process. In simple circulation the sequence is represented by the formula C-M-C, whilst in expanded, or capitalist circulation, it appears as M-C-M.²⁸

In simple circulation, money is the value form, whilst in capitalist circulation it is merely a mode of existence of value itself. Value takes on the independent form which previously was the property of money. It does so because,

²⁷ Ibid., p.145.

²⁸

These are shorthand forms representing the circulation of commodities and money. In the first, commodity-money-commodity, one 'piece' of money changes hands; circulation begins with a sale and ends with a purchase. Here, money dominates the circulation process. In the second, money-commodity-money, one commodity changes hands twice. Circulation begins with a purchase; the commodity dominates the circulation process. This second formulation represents the circulation and commodities in capitalist society.

"the movement in the course of which it adds surplus value, is its own movement; its expansion therefore is automatic expansion. Because it is value, it has acquired the occult quality of being able to add value to itself. It brings forth living offspring, or at least, lays golden eggs".²⁹ Value is now the active factor in the process - it can take the form of money, or of commodities. In either form, however, value is capital.

Marx's account of the transformation of money into capital is indicative of his historical method. As an economic category, money is historically differentiated not in a chronological sense, (though Marx does attach a date to the emergence of capital in England - the sixteenth century), but theoretically. Moreover, the theoretical location of the early money form is couched in terms which Marx developed in his study of bourgeois economic relations and not in an analysis of the feudal, or pre-feudal periods. It is possible to see in this style of historiography a blueprint for Lenin's The Development of Capitalism in Russia.³⁰ It

²⁹ Capital, I, p.152.

³⁰ c.f., C.W., 3, p.37; "The market is a category of commodity economy which in the course of its development is transformed into capitalist economy and only under the latter gains complete sway and universal prevalence. Therefore, in order to examine the basic theoretical propositions concerning the home market we must proceed from simple commodity economy and trace its gradual transformation into capitalist economy".

is marked by a radical disjuncture between developmental history and the contemporary form, by which the latter informs the former.

This relation is by no means an arbitrary ascription of explanatory primacy. It rests upon the reasoned assertion that bourgeois society contains the key to an explanation of pre-bourgeois societies. The evidence here lies in the manifestation of the historical development of economic categories in the movements of capitalist society itself. That is to say that the process by which money develops historically into capital is mirrored by that process by which money becomes capital within bourgeois society.

The same phenomenon is described in the Grundrisse in respect of wage labour and ground rent in relation to capital. In modern bourgeois society, capital, as the 'power ruling over everything', determines the value form, creating value in its own image, as it were. At the same time, however, it "has to posit a value, a form of wealth specifically distinct from capital".³¹ This form is ground rent. But the determination of ground rent by capital is a twofold process. It is inherent in the nature of capital per se, and it is a historical function of capital to create ground rent. "By its nature as well as historically capital is the creator

³¹ Grundrisse, p.275.

of modern landed property, of ground rent; just as its action therefore appears also as the dissolution of the old form of property in land".³²

In the 'organic system' which comprises bourgeois society, every economic relation presupposes the other relations of that society.

This organic system itself, as a totality, has its presuppositions, and its development to its totality consists precisely in subordinating all elements of society to itself, or of creating out of it, the organs which it still lacks. This is historically how it becomes a totality. The process of becoming a totality forms a moment of its process, of its development.³³

This is to say that bourgeois society contains within itself the dynamic of its own development. Its historical development, as well as the movements which take place within it, are therefore under the rule of capital. It is for this reason that capital, "by its nature as well as historically", creates modern landed property. As a statement of historical causality, this is more than merely saying that modern landed property and ground rent were a response to capital. It is to say that capital necessarily implies the ground rent relation. Ground rent is a value form implicit in the structure of capital. Hence when capital takes in new territories through colonisation, it finds that it ceases to be capital without wage labour, and it finds that to create wage labour

³² Ibid., p.276.

³³ Ibid., p.278.

it must create modern landed property. This accounts, according to Marx, for British policy in Australia, where landed property is created in its modern form in order to create wage labour, and to "make capital act as capital" - to develop the new territory along capitalist lines.³⁴ The policy is not simply a device - it is in accordance with the intrinsic nature of capital.

Here is a particularly good example of historical development derived from the contemporary form, since the two are telescoped into one by the very nature of the development of economic relations. It is also of interest with reference to Lenin, who was aware that the transition to a capitalist form of agriculture, which he held as inevitable, would presuppose the establishment of a modern form of landholding.³⁵

³⁴ loc. cit.

³⁵ c.f., C.W., 13, p.239; "...the feudal latifundia...are the most conspicuous embodiment and the strongest mainstay of the survivals of serfdom in Russia. The development of commodity production and capitalism will certainly and inevitably put an end to those survivals. In that respect Russia has only one path before her, that of bourgeois development".

It is evident here that what might be termed the 'dynamic' of bourgeois society is implicit within the capital form itself. It is the same dynamic which governs the historical emergence of that form of society. The possibility is posited that the same dynamic which entailed its development might also entail its transformation, especially since Marx demonstrated the contradictory nature of its essential relations. Herein lies the core of Luxemburg's argument against Bernstein,³⁶ as will be demonstrated in Part III.

Marx as historian

Marx was preoccupied with two historical themes which are distinct, but inter-connected. His treatment of contemporary economic forms, and their historical development which has been outlined above has a 'sequel' in his work on the historical development of classes and the struggle between them. It could not have been otherwise if Marx was to remain faithful to his initial postulate of the relation between state and civil society, which originated in his Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of the State', and was developed in On the Jewish Question.

³⁶ c.f., Social Reform or Revolution, M.A. Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, (New York, 1970), p.68.

Briefly, the formulation of the state/civil society relation is as follows. Civil society is that sphere where men are regarded as private, egoistic, atomised individuals with inalienable rights. The state is that public sphere of politics, the illusory community, wherein men formulate the laws which govern and restrain them. The two spheres are separated as a result of historical development, (the separation being specific to post-feudal society), whereby civil society attains an independent existence, and politics is 'pure' in the sense that it becomes distinct from the former.³⁷ The political state, however, does not possess the same quality of independence as does civil society. For this reason, political emancipation is not real emancipation - the abolition of the property qualification for voting, for instance, is not the abolition of property as such. Real emancipation can only be brought about by the transformation of civil society, the economic and social sphere, and then only by the proletariat, a class in civil society but not of it, a class motivated by the material conditions of its existence.

The first concrete formulation of the state/civil society relation, and its consequences for the historian, is to be found in The German Ideology, wherein Marx claims that civil

³⁷ On the Jewish Question, MECW.,3, (London, 1975), pp.165-6.

society is the true source and theatre of all history, and that the conception of history held hitherto, which confines itself to "spectacular historical events",³⁸ is absurd. The Class Struggles in France and The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte represent the incarnation of this axiom of Marx's historiography. In these works a distinction is made between the political forms of the French state post 1789, and the real content of the successive regimes in terms of the configuration of relations in civil society - class relations.

The German Ideology provides a schema, a systematic framework, which informs Marx's history. The "fundamental conditions" of history are enumerated,³⁹ conditions which appear in condensed form in the Preface to the 1859 Critique. In this latter, Marx emphasises the distinction between successive forms of economic relations, and accompanying ideological forms, that is, 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, aesthetic or philosophic - in short, ideological

³⁸ The German Ideology, MECW.,5, p.50; "Already here we see that this civil society is the true focus and theatre of all history, and how absurd is the conception of history held hitherto, which neglects the real relations and confines itself to spectacular historical events".

³⁹ Ibid., pp.41-50.

cal forms in which men become conscious of this conflict, and fight it out".⁴⁰ The distinction is of crucial importance for a Marxist political stance, since it clearly implies that ideological moments of historical transformation (that is, including the political), are in some sense secondary to economic moments, material conditions. The political struggle, in its outward appearance, is only a partial, one sided, limited, (though still necessary) struggle, its aims, likewise, limited and partial. Here is the statement of the necessity for harnessing the political thrust of the working class movement to the economic, a necessity which informed Luxemburg's Mass Strike, and which Lenin emphasised in his rejection of 'economism' and 'opportunism'.

The Class Struggles in France, and The Eighteenth Brumaire represent the application of a materialist historiography to the analysis of a specific period of political change. The central theme of these works was the chimeric quality of the various political forms which emerged, and of the purely ideological nature of the apparent cleavages in French

⁴⁰ A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, p.21; "...one cannot judge...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".

society - for example that between Royalist and Republican. Marx's intention in the first work was to demonstrate that the defeat of the February revolution was a positive development in the struggle, since it exposed, by the counter revolution it called forth, the chimeric nature of the 'democratic republic' and the reality of class rule.

What was overcome in these defeats was not the revolution. It was the pre-revolutionary, traditional appendages, the product of social relationships which had not yet developed to the point of sharp class antagonisms - persons, illusions, ideas and projects from which the revolutionary party was not free before the February revolution and from which it could be freed only by a series of defeats.⁴¹

The massacre of June 1848 destroyed the myth that the proletariat had any stake in the Republic, since "by making its burial place the birthplace of the bourgeois republic, the proletariat forced the Republic to appear in its pure form, as the state, whose armed purpose it was to perpetuate the rule of capital and the slavery of labour".⁴² Further, the fiasco of June 1849 demonstrated the vacuous nature of the 'democratic' Republic, whilst the ultimate degeneration of the parliamentary republic, that period characterised by the withdrawal of universal suffrage and press freedoms, its descent into the Second Empire, revealed that the divided

⁴¹ The Class Struggles in France: 1848 to 1850, Fernbach, ed., Karl Marx, Surveys from Exile, (New York, 1974), p.35.

⁴² Ibid., p.61.

opposition of class interest

class interest between Legitimist and Orleanist monarchies, was stronger than their common interest. The Royalist Republican cleavage is exposed as a chimera, whilst it is apparent to Marx that the real cleavage in French society is that between capital and landed property. This latter [?] is the historic form of the economic transformation of landed property into capital.

The various political forms and alignments which emerge in the period 1848-1851 are temporary and precarious class alliances in which the emergence of ⁶⁰ Louis Bonaparte is based on his strategy of playing one class off against another. His ostensible means of support is the peasantry, but it is based on a purely ideological appeal. Materially, the Second Empire represents the interests of the bourgeoisie. Hence its contradictory, and essentially unstable nature. ² (It is a common criticism of Marx's assessment that he underestimated the durability and potential of the Second Empire). ⁴³ Inherent in this account is Marx's theory of the state. Apparently neutral, standing above civil society, it is by no means a power external to society. Rather is it a product of society at a certain stage of development.

⁴³ c.f., M. Evans, Karl Marx, (London, 1975), p.118.

The French state possessed an "immense bureaucratic and military organisation, an ingenious and broadly based state machinery"⁴⁴ which arose in the time of absolute monarchy, with the decay of the feudal system which it helped to accentuate. The first revolution destroyed the dispersed centres of power and created the unity of a nation. Napoleon perfected this state machinery, and the Bourbon and Orleanist monarchies created a "division of labour" within the state, corresponding to and growing out of the division of labour in bourgeois society itself. The state emerged as the embodiment of a 'general interest' shared by the various factions of the bourgeoisie.

Every common interest was immediately detached from society, opposed to it as a higher general interest, torn away from the self activity of the individual members of society and made a subject of governmental activity...Finally the parliamentary Republic was compelled in its struggle against the revolution, to strengthen by means of repressive measures the resources and centralisation of government power. All political upheavals perfected this machine instead of smashing it. The parties that strove in turn for mastery regarded possession of this immense state edifice as the main booty for the victor.⁴⁵

Under Napoleon, the state machine is the means of preparing the class rule of the bourgeoisie. Under the restoration,

⁴⁴ The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Fernbach, ed., Surveys from Exile, (New York, 1974), p.237.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.237-8.

Louis Philippe and the parliamentary Republic, it becomes the actual instrument of the ruling class, "however much it strove for power in its own right". Under the Second Empire, it appears to have achieved autonomy, but state power does not "hover in mid air"; it rests on the most numerous class in French society - the peasantry. As such, though, it is an absurdity, containing within itself an inherent contradiction. The state in the Second Empire is the most highly developed and nakedly oppressive form of state machinery, but it rests on a class, and on the economic form of the smallholding, which have become marginal.⁴⁶ (Marx has been criticised for underestimating the durability of peasantry and smallholding). Thus with the progressive disintegration of the small peasant property, Marx predicted that the state machine would collapse.

In despair and disappointment at the Napoleonic restoration, the French peasant will abandon his faith in his smallholding, and the entire state edifice erected on the smallholding will fall to the ground, and the proletarian revolution will obtain the chorus without which its solo will prove a requiem in all peasant countries.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.241-3.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.245: Marx omitted this passage from the 1869 edition. He modified his position in The Civil War in France, Address of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association, MESW., pp.286-7, where he asserted that the Second Empire was "...the only form of government possible at a time when the bourgeoisie had already lost, and the working class had not yet acquired, the faculty of ruling the nation".

Marx clearly did underestimate the resilience of the peasantry, and failed to see that the state under the Second Empire was an archetypal bourgeois state, which had merely an ideological appeal to an essentially fragmented and disparate peasant class. But the Eighteenth Brumaire remains Marx's most comprehensive account of the state, located in a historical framework of its role in a specific bourgeois society. It is not difficult to extrapolate from Marx's formulation of the state under the Second Empire, an explanation of the ability of the bourgeoisie to 'rule' through a state which is not ostensibly its own. This formulation represents a radical advance on earlier versions whereby the state is merely the political branch of the bourgeoisie.

The construction of the state/civil society relation implied here is carried forward to The Civil War in France. In the third section Marx rehearses his earlier analysis of the development of the French state in terms of increasingly oppressive and class based nature.

At the same pace at which the progress of modern industry developed, widened, intensified the class antagonism between capital and labour, the state power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labour, of public force organised for social enslavement, of an engine of class antagonism.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ The Civil War in France, MESW., p.285.

In Marx's account, the Commune is an expansive political form, in contrast to its repressive predecessors, by virtue of the fact that it possesses potential for the emancipation of hitherto oppressed classes, not merely in the political sense, but also in the social. It constitutes a revolution extending into civil society, having as its aim the abolition of private property.

...the Commune intended to abolish that class property which makes the labour of many the wealth of the few. It aimed at the expropriation of the expropriators. It wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land and capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labour, into the mere instruments of free and associated labour.⁴⁹

In its content, as well as in its political form, the Commune was expansive. Whilst the state under the Empire had stood above civil society, the Commune rests on the real interests of classes in civil society; the proletariat, and the peasantry.

The French peasantry had elected Louis Bonaparte president of the Republic, but the Party of Order created the Empire. What the French peasant really wants, he commenced to show in 1849 and 1850 by opposing his maire to the government's prefect, his schoolmaster to the government's priest and himself to the government's gendarme. All the laws made by the Party of Order in January and February 1850, were avowed measures of repression against the peasant. The peasant was a Bonapartist, because the great Revolution, with all its benefits to him, was in his eyes, personified by Napoleon. This delusion, rapidly breaking down under the Second Empire...this

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.290.

prejudice of the past, how could it have withstood the appeal of the Commune to the living interests and urgent wants of the peasantry.⁵⁰

The innovatory nature of the Commune for Marx was its extension into civil society, and the identity of its form and social content with the interests of the proletariat and the peasantry. Its historical importance was as a "glorious harbinger of a new society",⁵¹ a social and political representation of the "new world",⁵² "the direct antithesis of the empire".⁵³ It symbolised, rather than represented - since its forms were temporary and ephemeral - a social form which transcended earlier forms. Marx emphasised its distinctness from earlier forms, categories and aspirations with which it had been associated. The primary characteristic of the Communal Constitution was that it contained the potential for the restoration "to

⁵¹ Ibid., p.307; "Working men's Paris, with its Commune, will be for ever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators history has already nailed to that eternal pilory from which all the prayers of their priests will not avail to redeem them".

⁵² Ibid., p.296; "Opposed to this new world at Paris, behold the old world at Versailles - that assembly of the ghouls of all defunct regimes, Legitimists and Orleanists, eager to feed upon the carcass of the nation".

⁵³ Ibid., p.287; "The direct antithesis to the Empire was the Commune. The cry of 'social republic', with which the revolution of February was ushered in by the Paris proletariat, did but express a vague aspiration after a Republic that was not only to supersede the monarchical form of class-rule, but was class-rule itself. The Commune was the positive form of that Republic".



the social body" of "all the forces hitherto absorbed by the state parasite, feeding upon, and clogging the free movement of, society".⁵⁴ This was no simple reflection on the "ancient struggle against over centralisation" but an expression of a radically different social structure based on the suppression of the specifically bourgeois separation between state and civil society.

The argument is not concerned here with the historical accuracy of Marx's reconstruction of the events of the Commune, but with the fact that it clearly represented, for Marx, a novel historical form differing qualitatively from the bourgeois. It represented the political form of social emancipation⁵⁵ - herein lay its historical significance. To this extent, argument over whether the Commune was a true representation of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat',⁵⁶ or simply Blanquist putschism,⁵⁷ are incon-

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.289.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.290; "It was essentially a working class government, the produce of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the emancipation of labour".

⁵⁶ c.f., Evans, Karl Marx, pp.156-7; "Does the Paris Commune fulfil the conditions for a dictatorship of the proletariat? Engels certainly thought so...but he refers only to its democratic nature...Marx began to see that the chances of a socialist policy in the Commune were very slim...the Commune ...was essentially a defensive posture against those who wanted to destroy the Republic".

⁵⁷ c.f., S. Avineri, The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx, (Cambridge, 1970), pp.243-6.

sequential. For present purposes it is sufficient that in the Commune, Marx recognised a new historical form of the relationship between state and civil society, and between capital and labour, and that the significance of the Commune for Marx extended beyond its purely political dimension.

Marx's history explains the evolution of social structures in terms of complex, interrelated determinants, certain of which occupy positions of predominant importance - the relation between state and civil society, relations between classes in civil society and the political sphere. Society is never a 'neutral' or abstract conception, but always a certain determinate form of society. A variety of economic or political forms might co-exist within a specific society, but not in random fashion. There are always those which are dominant and those which are subservient. In feudal society political relations of hierarchy dominate - capitalist society is marked by the dominance of market forces - the anarchic relations of civil society attain, that is, attain independence of the state, the political sphere. Political forms and relations do not possess the same quality of independence; their significance is marked by the stage of development attained by economic relations in civil society. The apparent independence of the French state under the Second Empire was, therefore, quite illusory.

In The Class Struggles in France, The Eighteenth Brumaire, and The Civil War in France, Marx documents the successive political forms with reference to shifting relations within civil society. This is the essence of his historical method. These relations are in harmony or conflict internally, contingent upon the stage of their development. In this sense Marx might be said to have held to a structuralist conception of history, the structure at any given moment containing elements both of stability and disruption. In practice, this 'model' is difficult to apply, since there is a tendency to "operate it according to taste or occasion, either as a model of stable functionalism, or one of revolutionary social change".⁵⁸ Bernstein, for instance, took it to be a model of stable functionalism; Luxemburg saw in it only revolutionary ferment.

Marx's structuralism, however, is in no sense static-economic and social relations, in his conception, never appear in stasis, nor are they significant in themselves. Their significance is ascribed by the part which they play in the whole structure, but more definitely, by their relation to capital. And this latter relation is constantly in change as capital moves through its very definite stages of development. Equally as the money form, or

⁵⁸ Hobsbawm, 'Karl Marx's Contribution to Historiography', Blackburn, ed., Ideology in Social Science, p.280.

landed property, that is to say, economic forms, are ascribed their position in relation to capital, so militarism, colonialism, forms of state power - political forms - are significant in relation to capital also.

The significance of imperialism can be traced through successive stages of capitalist development to illustrate the point.

Imperialism is, at the same time, the most prostitute and ultimate form of State power, which nascent middle class society had commenced to elaborate as a means of its own emancipation from feudalism, and which the full-grown bourgeois society had finally transformed into a means for the enslavement of labour by capital.⁵⁹

In the last years of his life Marx "felt that capitalism was gaining a new lease of life by spreading outward over the world".⁶⁰ It was left to Luxemburg and Lenin to demonstrate that imperialism had taken on a radically new significance in a new era of capitalist development, as an agent of barbarism and collapse. Militarism, colonial aggrandisement once the properties of a burgeoning dynamic capitalist economy had become symptoms of decadence; their significance was purely contingent on their historical milieu.⁶¹

⁵⁹ The Civil War In France, MESW., p.287.

⁶⁰ V.G. Kiernan, Marxism and Imperialism, (London, 1974), p.6.

⁶¹ c.f., Reform or Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, pp.54-5; The Crisis in the German Social Democracy, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, pp.280-1.

The sense of historical milieu, the sense of the present as the "reflecting surface of the past",⁶² the sense of history 'underwriting' a socialist future, the historical mode of a subjects presentation, were all aspects of Marx's method which were espoused by Lenin and Luxemburg, so much so that Luxemburg could write that "historical dialectics" represented "the rock on which the whole teaching of Marxian socialism rests".⁶³

⁶² Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.728.

⁶³ The Mass Strike, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.158.

SECTION iii

The Concept of Methodological Totality

The unity of the economic system

The concept of methodological totality is closely associated with Hegel and it has been pointed out that Hegel's Logic was to the fore in Marx's mind whilst he was writing both the 1857 Introduction and the 1859 Critique.¹ There is a marked Hegelianism about the Grundrisse² and Lenin's famous remark - "it is impossible completely to understand Marx's Capital without having thoroughly studied and understood Hegel's Logic"³ - bears witness to the Hegelian influence in Marx's mature economic work. Nevertheless, Hegel's influence in the formation of Marx's method ought

¹ c.f., Carver, ed., Karl Marx: Texts on Method, pp. 43-4.

² c.f., Nicolaus, trans., Grundrisse, p.32; "If one considers not only the extensive use of Hegelian terminology in the Grundrisse, not only the many passages which reflect self-consciously on Hegel's method and the use of the method, but also the basic structure of the argument in the Grundrisse, it becomes evident that the services rendered Marx by his study of the Logic were very great indeed".

³ C.W., 38, p.180.

not to be overestimated.⁴ The method was elaborated in the course of Marx's critique of political economy, and it is not uncommon to find it stated in direct contradistinction to that tradition of economic discourse.

The Introduction to the Grundrisse is a coherent statement of Marx's method, radically distinguished here from the method of political economy. It provides an explicit statement of the concept of totality as it applies to economic analysis. Marx concludes that "production, distribution exchange and consumption are identical", but that "they all form the members of a totality, distinctions within a unity".⁵ The conception is a complex one, which must be examined more closely, since it underlies the formulation of the relation between production and the complementary spheres of circulation and consumption which Marx presents in Capital, II.⁶

According to political economy, the four fundamental categories of economics are regarded as "independent, autonomous neighbours". Production appears as the point of departure,

⁴ c.f., J.O'Mally, 'Marx's "Economics" and Hegel's Philosophy of Right: an Essay on Marx's Hegelianism', Political Studies, Vol., XXIV, No.1, March 1976, p.43ff. O'Mally argues that Marx's plan for his economic work corresponds to the ordering of categories in Hegel's Philosophy of Right.

⁵ Grundrisse, p.99.

⁶ Capital, II, (London 1974), pp.497-9.

consumption as the conclusion, distribution and exchange as intermediate stages. Relations between them are conceived of as a syllogism - production the generality, distribution and exchange the particularity, consumption the singularity. The coherence is a shallow one however, since the economic categories in the account rendered by political economy are of a different order of causality from each other. Production is governed by general, natural laws, distribution by social accident, exchange is a simple, formal movement, and consumption, as a terminal point, is seen as an end in itself - falling outside of economics properly so-called.⁷

Marx states his own position in contradistinction to the political economists. He begins by arguing the identity of production and consumption. There is no simple identity - as there is in the political economists notion of productive consumption - rather a multifaceted identity. Firstly, each is immediately the other, (immediate identity). The individual expends his abilities and labour power, raw materials are used up, simultaneously as production takes place. "The act of production is therefore, at once the act of consumption". The political economists acknowledge this, but go on to distinguish 'productive consumption'

⁷ Grundrisse, p.89.

from 'consumption'.⁸

To produce, in Marx's account, is to consume, and vice versa. Each is immediately the other, but at the same time each is immediately the opposite of the other. Further, a mediating movement takes place between the two, a movement which relates production and consumption, makes them appear indispensable to one another, but still leaves them external to one another. Production creates the material as an external object for consumption, whilst consumption creates need as the purpose of production. Marx refers to a 'mediated' relation between the two.⁹

There is in Marx's account, a third relation between production and consumption. Each "creates itself as the other". The act of consumption completes the act of production, and the producer a producer in the capitalist sense of those terms. On the other hand, production, by stamping man with

⁸ Ibid., pp.90-1; "Production, then, is also immediately consumption, consumption is also immediately production. Each is immediately its opposite".

⁹ Ibid., pp.91-2; "...at the same time a mediating movement takes place between the two. Production mediates consumption; it creates the latter's material; without it consumption would lack an object. But consumption also mediates production, in that it alone creates for the products the subject for whom they are products".

his social nature, produces the specifically capitalist form of consumption.¹⁰

The intention behind Marx's rather convoluted and opaque presentation of the relation between production and consumption was to show that whilst production and consumption are by no means autonomous and independent neighbours, neither are they simply identical. One of the errors of political economy, according to Marx, is that it regarded production and consumption as two aspects of a single act. The political economist Say, for example, adopted a standpoint from which production and consumption appeared as the activity of an entire people - of humanity in the abstract - of a single subject. "With a single subject" Marx argues, "production and consumption appear as moments of a single act". Marx eschewed the abstract standpoint. The object of his enquiry was society - comprised of real individuals, between whom there existed a complex network of interrelationships.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.93; "...each of them, apart from being immediately the other, and apart from mediating the other, in addition to this creates the other in completing itself, and creates itself as the other. Consumption accomplishes the act of production only in completing the product as product...by consuming its independent material form...On the other side, production produces consumption by creating the specific manner of consumption...".

In society, however, the producer's relation to the product, once the latter is finished, is an external one, and its return to the subject depends on his relation to other individuals. He does not come into possession of it directly, nor is its immediate appropriation his purpose when he produces in society. Distribution steps between the producers and the products, hence between production and consumption, to determine in accordance with social laws what the producer's share will be in the world of products.¹¹

Amongst the relations of production, consumption and distribution, Marx ascribed primacy to the sphere of production. Again, he articulated his own ideas in contrast to those of Say, who had located need as the motive force behind production. Marx did not deny that need was one of the forces which impelled productive activity, but he was not prepared to allow it predominance.

Consumption as urgency, as need, is itself an intrinsic moment of productive activity. But the latter is the point of departure for realisation and hence also its predominant moment; it is the act through which the whole process again runs its course. The individual produces an object and, by consuming it, returns as a productive and self-reproducing individual. Consumption thus appears as a moment of production.¹²

¹¹ Ibid., p.94.

¹² Loc. cit.

Consumption, in Marx's view, is plainly an important element in the productive process, but equally clearly, it is not the sole and single end. Production is the point of departure; it contains the source of its own momentum. This was a point which was to assume major significance in the debates, within Second International Marxism, over the ability of capital to reproduce itself in the face of the finite consumptive capacity of the market.

When Marx turned to the relation between production and distribution, he maintained from the outset and without equivocation, that production was the predominant relation.

The structure of distribution is completely determined by the structure of production. Distribution is itself a product of production, not only in its object, in that only the results of production can be distributed, but also in its form, in that the specific kind of participation in production determines the specific forms of distribution, i.e. the pattern of participation in distribution.¹³

At the same time, Marx argues emphatically against the theoretical treatment of distribution apart from production. The rewards accruing to the instruments and agents of production - ground rent accruing to land, interest to capital, wages to labour - govern the pattern of the social distribution of products. And since the distribution of

¹³ Ibid., p.95.

instruments and agents of production constitutes the inner arrangement of the structure of production - which can be subsumed under the rubric, 'relations of production' - it therefore belongs within the sphere of production.

Ricardo, Marx argued, failed to recognise this. His concern was with the social structure of modern production, but he focused on what he classified as 'distribution'. He regarded production as such, as outside the realm of economics; as an eternal and universal category of human life. Relations of production appeared to Ricardo as spontaneous, natural.¹⁴

In Marx's conception, relations of production, like all economic forms, were historically transient: "...if they appear to one epoch as natural presuppositions of production, they were its historic product for another". Marx concluded this part of his argument with a statement relating to the mode of production in history.

The questions raised above all reduce themselves in the last instance to the role played by general historical relations in production, and their relation to the movement of history generally. The question evidently belongs within the treatment and investigation of production itself.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid., pp.95-6.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.97.

The decisive nature of the mode of production is apparent from the Introduction to the Grundrisse. It is evident, furthermore, that the concept of the mode of production expresses the inter-relatedness of economic and social forms. That is to say that the mode of production embraces within it the mode of consumption and distribution, and stamps each with its own particularity.

In order to demonstrate the point historically, Marx turned briefly to conquest; to economic relations between conquering and conquered countries. In Marx's account, there are three possible outcomes. The first is that the conquering nation imposes its own mode of production upon the conquered - the English in Ireland, or India, for instance. The second is that the conqueror leaves the indigenous mode of production intact, extracting tribute in a form determined by the indigenous mode of production. This pattern obtained in Turkish and Roman conquests. The third possibility is that a reciprocal relation is established between the mode of production in conquering and conquered country. The Germanic conquests serve as an example here. But in all cases, the mode of production is decisive for the new mode of distribution which is established.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid., p.96.

Regarding exchange, Marx makes three points which set it firmly within the productive sphere. Firstly, there can exist no exchange without the division of labour, which is a function of the historical development of production. Secondly, private exchange presupposes private production. Finally, the intensity, extent and mode of exchange are directly connected with the development of the structure of production. "Exchange in all its moments thus appears as either directly comprised in production or determined by it".¹⁷

Lenin's The Development of Capitalism in Russia contains resounding echoes of these passages from the Introduction to the Grundrisse, which Marx reiterated and refined in the body of the Grundrisse texts and in Capital. The division of labour, the fundamental characteristic of commodity production, "manifests itself in agriculture, creating specialised agricultural districts...and giving rise to exchange not only between the products of agriculture and industry but also between the various products

¹⁷ Ibid., p.99; "...the exchange of activities and abilities which takes place within production itself belongs directly to production and essentially constitutes it. The same holds...for the exchange of products. Thirdly, the so-called exchange between dealers and dealers is by its very organisation entirely determined by production... Exchange in all its moments thus appears as either directly comprised in production or determined by it".

of agriculture...the social division of labour is the basis of the entire process of commodity economy and of capitalism".¹⁸ One of the central themes of Lenin's major economic work is that exchange - the market - develops alongside of the division of labour. Lenin emphasises the interrelatedness of economic forms, echoing Marx's statement in the Grundrisse that "in the bourgeois economic system, as in all economic systems, every relationship presupposes another in a bourgeois economic form, so that every factor posited is at the same time a presupposition...this is no different from any other organic system".¹⁹

Production and circulation

What emerges from the Introduction to the Grundrisse is a conception of an economic system embracing the spheres of production, distribution, exchange and consumption, wherein production either 'comprises or determines' the other categories, thereby constituting the mode of production as an inter-related entity. In the Introduction, however, the primacy of the productive sphere is an assertion rather than the outcome of an economic argument. And the related

¹⁸ C.W., 3, pp.38-9.

¹⁹ Grundrisse, p.278.

economic categories which Marx had evolved are primordial categories which represent production as such, rather than specifically capitalist production.

A fuller statement is found in the body of the Grundrisse texts. Here the force impelling production becomes the movement of capital, the creation of surplus value, and its realisation as profit. Marx sketches the phases through which capital passes, as follows. The beginning of the process is the creation of surplus value in the immediate process of production. The second stage is the presentation of the product onto the market, that is, the transformation of the product into a commodity. The third is the entry of the commodity into circulation, resulting in its transformation into money - this is the stage of the realisation of surplus. The final stage is the renewal of the productive process - that is, the reproduction of the original capital and the production of surplus.²⁰

The question arises, however, how can Marx construct a unity between production and circulation when there are evidently a number of different processes involved which are temporally and spatially distinct? Marx's answer concerned the nature of capital. He argued that the entire

²⁰ Ibid., p.619.

productive process rested on - was governed by - capital, which created the conditions of its own formation and reproduction.

Regarded broadly and as a whole, this inner unity must necessarily maintain itself to the extent that the whole of production rests on capital, and it must therefore realise all the necessary moments of its self-formation, and must contain the determinants necessary to make these moments real.²¹

In the immediate productive process, these conditions are, theoretically at least, unproblematical. However, in the sphere of circulation, capital appears to confront a barrier to its realisation in the apparently limited capacity of the market. For commodities to be transformed into money in the course of exchange, it is necessary that there must exist a need for those commodities. Demand must exist in sufficient magnitude, and there must be a sufficiency of equivalents for exchange.

The barriers confronting capital reproduction were the focus of protracted debate in both bourgeois and Marxist political economy. Amongst others, Rosa Luxemburg argued that capital reproduction was strictly limited by the capacity of the market. The production of commodities proceeded without hindrance, impelled by its own dynamic. The realisation of the surplus value which was derived

²¹ Ibid., p.403.

from production, however, depended on the availability of an ever widening market. Luxemburg, and the 'under-consumption' school of economists, argued that the capacity of the market was finite. In consequence, capital reproduction was faced with an absolute barrier.

Capital was ambiguous on the question of capital reproduction. Volume Two contained a schematic presentation of the mechanisms by which capital reproduced itself, in which Marx appeared to have demonstrated that capital possessed an infinite capacity for reproduction. Volume Three, on the other hand, contained statements which cast serious doubts on this conclusion. Lenin was one of the few amongst the Marxists of the Second International who resolved the question in accordance with Marx's own solution.

The Grundrisse was not, of course, available to Lenin and Luxemburg. Here Marx argued that every limit to the cumulative expansion of capital was a barrier to be overcome. Since it is an inherent predisposition of capital to expand and reproduce itself, there must, of necessity be a tendency within the sphere of circulation towards expansion. This tendency can take the form of an expansion of the sphere of circulation, or the creation of "new points of production". (Here Marx is presumably referring to exchange which takes place between capitalists engaged in production - this is an important element in the schema for reproduction in Capital, II).

Marx does not solve the question of consumption in the Grundrisse. He denies that it exists. Since the circulation of commodities is a moment of production, the expansive drive within the sphere of production calls forth a response in the sphere of circulation. That response is the development of the world market.

The tendency to create the world market is directly given in the concept of capital itself. Every limit appears as a barrier to be overcome. Initially, to subjugate every moment of production to exchange and to suspend the production of direct use values not entering into exchange, i.e. precisely to posit production based on capital in place of earlier modes of production, which appear primitive from its standpoint. Commerce no longer appears here as a function taking place between independent productions for the exchange of their excess, but rather as an all-embracing presupposition and moment of production itself.²²

In capitalist production, the object is not the production of products, but the production - or cumulative reproduction - of capital itself. The reproduction of capital includes not only the production of commodities, but the circulation of commodities and their retransformation into productive capital. The unity of the process, therefore, consists of two complementary movements - labour time and circulation time. The two movements together make up one rotation of the turnover of capital.

²² Ibid, p.408.

This unity itself is motion, process. Capital appears in this unity-as-process of production and circulation, a unity which can be regarded both as the totality of the process of production, as well as the specific completion of one turnover of capital, one movement returning into itself.²³

It is the reproduction of capital which comprises the process and which stamps the component parts of that process with their identity.

Circulation is not merely an external object for capital. Just as it only becomes capital through the production process, so does it become transformed into the pure form of value...only through the first act of circulation; while the repetition of this act, i.e. the life process (of capital) is made possible only through the second act of circulation, which consists of the exchange of money for the conditions of production and forms the introduction to the act of production. Circulation therefore belongs within the concept of capital.²⁴

This is to say that whilst the production of capital, that is of value, takes place within the immediate process of production as such, the result of which is the commodity form of the product, and the motive for which is the production of surplus value, the reproduction of capital consists of this immediate process alongside the process of circulation. "It comprises the entire cycle, which, as

²³ Ibid., p.620.

²⁴ Ibid., p.638.

a periodic process, constantly repeated at definite intervals constitutes the turnover of capital".²⁵ It is this premise - the condensed conclusion of the Grundrisse texts - with which begins Part III of Capital, II, where Marx confronts the 'process as a whole' in his analysis of capital reproduction.

Prior to this point Marx has taken as the object of his investigations either 'capital as such' or 'individual capital'. In Capital, I, that is, the changes in form which capital undergoes in the circulation process, are assumed. The only aspect of the circulation process which is investigated in the first volume is the sale and purchase of labour power.²⁶

In the first two parts of Capital, II, the transformations of the form taken by capital enter into the investigation - labour power, commodity capital, capital as means of production, money capital - and the laws of circulation are established by which these transformations take place. Again, though, capital is presented as individual capital, the process of its production as the movement of some individual part of social capital.

²⁵ c.f., Capital, II, p.355.

²⁶ Ibid., p.356.

Part III, however, takes a step towards the process as a whole with the introduction of aggregate social capital.

We now have to study the process of circulation (which in its entirety is a form of the process of reproduction) of the individual capitals as components of the aggregate social capital, that is to say, the process of circulation of this aggregate social capital.²⁷

In Capital, III, the significance of the mode of procedure from abstract to concrete can clearly be seen. Here Marx set out to "locate and describe the concrete forms which grow out of the movement of capital as a whole".²⁸ These concrete forms include the various forms of capital - constant, variable, surplus value - which Marx has introduced in the first volume, but in the abstract form. In the second volume these are presented as component parts of the aggregate social capital, specifically differentiated in two departments. In the final volume, the concrete relations between the forms of capital are elaborated - profit, average rate of profit, competition between capitals.

²⁷ Ibid., p.358.

²⁸ Capital, III, (London, 1974), p.25; "In Book I we analysed the phenomena which constitute the process of capitalist production as such, as the immediate productive process, with no regard for any of the secondary effects of outside influences. But this immediate process of production does not exhaust the life span of capital. It is supplemented in the actual world by the process of circulation which was the object of study in Book II... Considering what this third book treats, it cannot confine itself to general reflection relative to this synthesis. On the contrary, it must locate and describe the concrete forms which grow out of the movements of capital as a whole".

In Parts IV, V and VI of Capital, III, Marx relates to the capital form, those "relationships seemingly independent of it"²⁹ - merchants capital, interest, landed property, rent. In the chapter entitled 'The Trinity Formula' - representing the tripartite division of revenue postulated by the political economists - he concludes that these economic forms, and the revenues derived therefrom, are contingent upon industrial capital, and that they are ultimately derived from surplus value extracted in the production process, and moreover, that whether it is constituted as the profit accruing to capital or the rent accruing to landed property, this can "in no whit...alter its nature".³⁰

There is in this chapter a passage strongly redolent of the well known passage in the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, where Marx states the integral nature

²⁹ Ibid., p.44; "The actual process of production and the process of circulation intertwine and intermingle continually...Capital passes through the circuit of its metamorphoses...stepping beyond its inner organic life, so to say, it enters into relations with outer life...The original form in which capital and labour confront one another is disguised through the intervention of relationships seemingly independent of it".

³⁰ Ibid., p.821; "Profit of capital...and ground rent are thus no more than particular components of surplus value, categories by which surplus value is differentiated depending on whether it falls to the share of capital or landed property, headings which in no whit however alter its nature".

of the capitalist mode of production, and the pervasive nature of the productive process which stamps the totality of social relations in its image.

We have seen that the capitalist process of production is a historically determined form of the social process of production in general. The latter is as much a production process of material conditions of human life as a process taking place under specific historical and economic production relations, producing and reproducing these production relations themselves, and thereby also the bearers of this process, their material conditions of existence and their mutual relations, i.e. their particular socio-economic form. For the aggregate of these relations, in which the agents of this production stand with respect to nature and to one another, and in which they produce, is precisely society, considered from the standpoint of its economic structure. Like all its predecessors, the capitalist process of production proceeds under definite material conditions, which are however, the bearers of definite social relations entered into by individuals in the process of reproducing their life.³¹

In the Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, the statement is simply an assertion that the productive process is simultaneously the production of the material conditions and social relations of the producer. In Capital, III, it represents the conclusion to an investigation of the concrete forms representing the sum total of capitalist economic relations - i.e. the mode of production.

³¹ Ibid., p.818.

Mode of production as social totality

Rosa Luxemburg asserts in The Accumulation of Capital that the drive of production towards self-enlargement, and the impossibility of the realisation of surplus within a closed capitalist system necessarily entail capitalist incursions into a 'third market'. In her account, however, the 'third market' is brought within the bounds of the capitalist economy, providing a source of demand, labour, and means of production. There is, in Luxemburg's account, a notion of capital imposing itself on a non-capitalist mode of production, and thereby transforming it.

Marx maintains, citing Balzac's Les Paysans as anecdotal, corroborative evidence that "in a social order dominated by capitalist production, even the non-capitalist producer is gripped by capitalist conceptions".³² This is to say that a social order dominated by capitalist production is a 'total system', wherein all the constituent elements, all its social and economic relations are cast in the illumination of capital, and are in some degree at least, capitalist relations. This conception of the capitalist social order represents the mode of production.

In its most general formulation, the mode of production is the framework of social and economic relations within which

³² Ibid., p.39.

are produced those "definite relations" into which men enter in social production, and which correspond to a definite stage in the development of their material powers of production. The aggregate of these relations constitutes the economic structure of society, the mode of production. This structure embraces both the mode of appropriation of nature - that is, the manner in which the forces of production are wielded - and the mode of appropriation of the product, which is fixed in the sphere of production as such - in the confrontation between capital and labour - and articulated, or mediated by the sphere of circulation, into which Marx collapses those spheres of distribution and consumption which in political economy are held distinct.

In Marx's account of the capitalist mode of production, production and circulation are determined in accordance with the ubiquitous nature of capital. Capital renders as liege every agent in the productive process - including commercial capital,³³ capital in circulation, that is, and

³³ Ibid., p.279; "Merchant's capital is simply capital functioning in the sphere of circulation".

land, which as an instrument of production is formally separated from landed property and the landowner.³⁴

It can be argued that the concept of the mode of production rendered Marx distinct from the political economists, with their arbitrary ascription of autonomy and independence to those spheres of economic activity surrounding capitalist production. Rowthorn, for instance, argues that

the intellectual reason he (Ricardo) failed to characterise the capitalist system adequately is quite simply that he lacked a concept - the concept of the mode of production. Virtually every one of Marx's specific criticisms of Ricardo can be traced back to the absence of this concept in the latter's work. Ricardo's confused treatment of price and value might be traced to the arbitrary, but ill-defined separation between production and circulation, for instance - since value arises in production and price in circulation, any account which holds these spheres distinct is bound to experience difficulty in reconciling the two.³⁵

The economic importance of the concept 'mode of production' by no means exhausts its originality, or its methodological

³⁴ Ibid., p.614; "...agriculture is dominated by the capitalist mode of production, just as manufacture is; in other words...agriculture is carried on by capitalists who differ from other capitalists primarily in the manner in which their capital, and the wage labour set in motion by this capital, are invested...The assumption that the capitalist mode of production has encompassed agriculture implies that it rules over all spheres of production and bourgeois society".

³⁵ B. Rowthorn, 'Neo-Classicism, Neo-Ricardianism and Marxism', New Left Review, No.86, July-August, 1974, p.76.

significance, however, since in it, Marx expresses not merely the integral nature of economic relations, but those relations comprising the social whole. In this particularity lies the specificity of the capitalist mode of production - previous modes of production rested on a hierarchical system of social relations, whilst the social relations of capitalism are engendered by the mode of production itself.³⁶

Marx's comments on the mode of production as a set of economic relations were never systematised, though the concept underlies the method of presentation of Capital, and becomes apparent in the third volume. It raises the possibility of a theoretical structure representing a mode of production, and Lenin employed such a structure in The Development of Capitalism in Russia. In this work, Lenin took the possibility as a starting point, and elaborated the structure in the course of his analysis of Russian conditions.

As is well known, Marx never employed the concept of the mode of production in any concrete way, beyond a few passing references to the mode of production in England,³⁷ and

³⁶ c.f., Ibid., pp.78-82.

³⁷ See, for instance, Capital, III, p.677.

several journalistic, historical vignettes.³⁸ On the British in India, for example, he gives an account of the impact of capital on the antique mode of production and its social structure. The incursions of capital into India effectively destroyed the native social structure, which had earlier survived "civil wars, invasions, revolutions, conquests, famines" whilst "remaining unaltered since its remotest antiquity, until the first decenium of the nineteenth century".³⁹ Its social structure had been largely built upon "small stereotype forms of social organism", extended villages, which in 1853 were rapidly dissolving "not so much through the brutal interference of the British tax gatherer and the British soldier as to the workings of English steam and free trade".⁴⁰ The ubiquity and pervasiveness of capital then displays itself by the dramatic and effective destruction of social relations not conducive to its development. The presence of the colonial power inhibited their replacement by orthodox relations of capitalism but the fact remains that capital is capable of sweeping away the foundation of the Hindu social structure.

³⁸ For a review of these, see Kiernan, Marxism and Imperialism, pp.165-202.

³⁹ New York Daily Tribune, June 25, 1863, Fernbach, ed.,, Karl Marx, Surveys from Exile, (New York, 1974), pp.302-4.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.305-6.

English interference (that is the interference of English capital) having placed the spinner in Lancashire and the weaver in Bengal, or by sweeping away both Hindu spinner and weaver, dissolved these small...communities by blowing up their economical bases and thus produced the greatest, and to speak the truth, the only social revolution ever heard of in Asia.⁴¹

Another of Marx's historical studies sketches the development of the capitalist social structure in England, where "the momentous development and transformation of bourgeois society...only began with the consolidation of the constitutional monarchy".⁴² Manufacturing began to expand at an unprecedented rate, making way for the steam engine and large scale industry. "Whole classes disappeared from the population, new classes taking their place with a new basis of existence and new needs".⁴³ A new bourgeoisie arose and conquered world markets, whilst the old one occupied itself with the French Revolution. Marx is writing here about the history of a specific mode of production and of the social relations which accompanied it, of the evolution of a new and definite social structure, encompassing new class alignments, political and legal relations.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.306.

⁴² Neue Rheinische Zeitung, February, 1850, Fernbach, ed., Karl Marx, Surveys from Exile, (New York, 1974), p.254.

⁴³ Ibid., p.255.

The notion of the totality of social structure, though lacking in explicit development in Marx's work, is implicit in Capital,⁴⁴ and underlies the historical works. Stemming from what has been described here as the ubiquity and pervasiveness of capital, it represents at once a substantive assertion about capitalist society and a methodological imperative for its analysis - especially for that analysis which informed the political standpoint of the classical Marxists. The methodological imperative is at the core of Marx's materialism.

The concepts 'mode of production' and 'social structure' imply an underlying unity in economic and social relations - reflective of the ubiquitous nature of capital, its ability to subject non-capitalist forms to itself, and to penetrate relations ostensibly external to itself - market relations, international relations between colonial powers, social relations of village life in India, the communal form of organisation amongst the Russian peasantry, political relations between classes. The analysis of these relations must penetrate the surface, whereon these forms of economic

⁴⁴ c.f., Capital, III, p.791; "It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers...which reveals the innermost secrets, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relations of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of state".

and social life appear in isolation. A Marxist explanation must relate seemingly isolated phenomena.⁴⁵

It was precisely this imperative which informed Lenin's methodology.⁴⁶ The inspiration behind much of Lenin's work - What the Friends of the People Are, The Development of Capitalism in Russia, Two Tactics of Social Democracy, The Collapse of the Second International, Imperialism - was a felt need to locate class alignments and the political choices which they entailed, in the context of the underlying economic forces on which they rested. The evolution of economic forms in Russia and in Europe, was paralleled by changing patterns of class alignment which called for appropriate organisational modes and precepts.⁴⁷ Moreover it was the unique position of the proletariat in the social structure which recommended it to Lenin as the vanguard class.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ c.f., G. Lukács, Lenin, a Study on the Unity of his Thought, (London, 1970), p.18; "...for every genuine Marxist there is always a reality more real and therefore more important than isolated facts and tendencies - namely, the reality of the total process, the totality of social development".

⁴⁶ c.f. Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.I, p.8.

⁴⁷ c.f., Ibid., pp.103-6.

⁴⁸ c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.830.

Luxemburg too observed the methodological imperative of totality. Accumulation was an attempt to establish the economic causality of a series of inter-related political phenomena collectively known as imperialism. Her work represents a commentary on economic development "with its effects on the interests, views, aims, and political activities of the various groups in society". Luxemburg realised the importance of maintaining an "intellectual mastery of the total social process".⁴⁹ For her, as well as for Lenin, Capital was the key to the achievement of intellectual mastery, precisely because it rendered intelligible the chaotic totality of the social process.

⁴⁹ Frolich, Rosa Luxemburg, p.49.

SECTION iv

Marxism as science, and the working class

A standpoint entirely alien to bourgeois society

Amongst the lacunae in Marx's legacy, the omission of any explicit treatment of the class structure of capitalist society, and more specifically, of the sociological and political contours of the working class in that society assumed the greatest significance for Second International Marxism.¹ The Holy Family, The Poverty of Philosophy and The Communist Manifesto contained quite categorical statements relating to the proletariat, which emerged from these works as an entirely unproblematical conception. In accordance with its position in capitalist society, the class took on the form of a force irreconcilable with, and antagonistic to the bourgeoisie and bourgeois society alike.

...its aim and historical action is visibly and irrevocably foreshadowed in its own life situation.²

...the bourgeoisie...in order to attain its own political ends, is compelled to set the whole proletariat in motion.³

¹ D. McLellan, Marxism After Marx, (London, 1979), p.3-4.

² The Holy Family, MECW.,4, (London, 1975), p.37.

³ The Communist Manifesto, MECW.,6, p.492.

These statements were the source of a conception of the proletariat which - lacking sociological and epistemological elaboration - represented that class as a simple product of capitalist society. In this conception, the objective conditions which gave rise to the working class imposed upon it a consciousness of itself as a class, and compelled it to perform the historical role which Marx had ascribed to it.

In spite of the fact that an unshakeable belief in the historical mission of the proletariat was a part of the orthodoxy of Second International Marxism, class consciousness was not widely discussed in the prolific literature which the Marxists of the International produced. It was simply not regarded as problematical by any prominent Marxist other than Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg.

Marxism was regarded as a corpus of social and economic theory derived from a scientific analysis of capitalist society.⁴ Somewhat ironically, since empiricism was held to be opposed to the statutes of the International,⁵ the

⁴ McLellan, Marxism After Marx, p.2.

⁵ P. Thomas, 'Marx and Science', Political Studies, Vol. XXIV, March 1976, p.7; "The International, whose Brussels Congress passed a resolution claiming that 'Karl Marx has the inestimable merit of being the first economist to have subjected capital to a scientific analysis', nevertheless insisted that the principles of positivism were directly opposed to its statutes".

'laws of development' of that society, the 'contradictions' which Marx had discerned in its economic structure, were rendered empirically, literally, and applied directly to economic and social life, with no mediation, or epistemological nuance of any description. It was widely accepted that a class conscious proletariat would emerge at the stage of capitalist development at which the contradictions and antagonisms inherent in capitalist society reached their climax.

The philosophical connotations and underpinnings of the conception of class consciousness did not enter into the forum of Marxist discussion until the 1920s, with Lukács's History and Class Consciousness. One obvious reason for this is that Marx's early writings, where the philosophical dimension of his thought was most prominent, were not published until the 1930s. In consequence, the theory of alienation, the substructure of Marx's undeveloped conception of proletarian class consciousness was almost totally neglected.

Only Rosa Luxemburg evolved any conception of alienation and she grasped the concept only instinctively and without giving it formal expression. Nevertheless, it was no accident that Luxemburg's conception of class consciousness and her formulation of the relation between the party and the masses of the working class contained an element which was absent from other accounts.

What Luxemburg instinctively grasped, if but partially, and what Lenin unsuccessfully groped for in 1914, was the realisation that Marxism represented something more than the empirical, scientific exposition of capitalism. Luxemburg's achievement was to penetrate the miasma of economic relations presented by Marx, to perceive the human and social dimensions. Generally, the Second International Marxists failed to appreciate that the economic sphere, of which Marx wrote in Capital, embraced the production of commodities, and also the production of conceptions and ideas.

Marx's theory of alienation was a theory of the social relations in capitalist society - specifically, of the way in which social and human relations became objectified. Relations between men, engaged in production and exchange, became as those between objects, whilst relations between commodities were animated. In order to approach this realisation, Marx had to step outside the network of social relations engendered by capitalism, to liberate himself from the ideas and conceptions produced therein, to adopt a standpoint entirely alien to bourgeois society.

Capital was not only a critique of the bourgeois preconceptions of the political economists - it was a critique of bourgeois society tout ensemble. That is to say that it was not merely a scientific way of looking at capitalist

society, but an alternative way. In short, Marx adopted the perspective of the working class.

In Capital, Marx approached capital from its simplest component - the commodity. Before he did so, however, he had formed his conception of the commodity, and of commodity relations, and that conception was a philosophical one, which Second International Marxism failed to penetrate.

The philosophical foundations of Marx's economic theory

There is in Marx's work a unity, a continuum, from the philosophical works of the young man to the mature economic theory of Capital. Concepts are developed, rendered more complex and sophisticated, by a process of constant refinement. The philosophical enquiry of the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts gives way to economic analysis, but the ideas and conclusions of the earlier work are present beneath the surface in the Grundrisse and Capital. Marx never abandoned philosophy. He made use of it in his criticism of the political economists and in the evolution of his own economic thought.

In the Manuscripts, Marx combined an empirical analysis of the economics of capitalist society with a philosophical study of the human condition in that society. He prefaced the work with a comment on 'theological criticism' -

specifically directed at the speculative philosopher Bruno Bauer. In contrast, he remarked, "my results have been attained by means of a wholly empirical analysis based on a conscientious critical study of political economy".⁶ Empirical analysis, however, by no means precluded philosophy, and the text of the Manuscripts demonstrates clearly how Marx interwove the two. His conception of scientific investigation embraced philosophy and empirical analysis. The former provided the presuppositions of the latter, establishing its theoretical framework.

The charge which Marx levels at Bauer is that he either begins with philosophical presuppositions and adheres doggedly to them, or else he abandons his postulates in "a cowardly and unwarrantable fashion, abstracts from them, thus showing his servile dependence on these presuppositions and his resentment at this servility merely in a negative unconscious and sophistical manner".⁷ Marx also begins by stating his philosophical presuppositions, the most fundamental of these being his ascription to production of ontological status. However, his thought possesses an inner consistency. It develops out of its presuppositions by means of empirical progressions.

⁶ Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, MECW, 3., p.231.

⁷ Ibid., p.232-3.

One of Marx's criticisms of political economy is that it proceeds from a 'present fact' - for example, private property - but it proceeds to transform material facts into abstract and general formulae, which it then takes as laws, whilst giving no indication that these laws follow from the material relations from which they are derived.⁸ Marx contrasts to this mode of procedure, the inner logic of his own work. He also proceeds from "an actual economic fact" - that the worker becomes a cheaper commodity as he produces more commodities. He deduces from this 'fact' that "the object which labour produces...confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer".⁹ The elaboration of the concept of alienation which follows, is at once an economic and a philosophical exposition.

Marx's notion of alienation has four facets. Firstly, an alienated relation exists between the worker and the product. Secondly, there is a relation of alienation between the worker and the act of production. Thirdly, since man is by his nature a producer, and should find fulfilment in the productive act, his alienation from the productive act necessarily alienates him from what Marx terms his 'species being'. Finally, it follows that man is alienated from man. Marx sums up the course of reasoning which has led him to this conclusion.

⁸ Ibid., p.271; "The economist assumes in the form of a fact of an event, that which he is supposed to deduce - namely the necessary relationship between two things - between, for example, division of labour and exchange".

⁹ Ibid., p.272.

We took our departure from a fact of political economy - the estrangement of the worker and his product. We have formulated this fact in conceptual terms as estranged, alienated labour. We have analysed this concept - hence analysing merely a fact of political economy.¹⁰

Marx has thus derived a philosophical concept relating to social life, through a series of progressions, from an 'economic fact'. Only now does he return to the 'economic fact' of private property, which represents "the result, the necessary consequence, of alienated labour".¹¹

These concepts, private property and alienated labour assumed central importance in Marx's schema of political economy.

Just as we have derived the concept of private property from the concept of estranged, alienated labour by analysis, so we can develop every category of political economy with the help of these two factors; and we shall find again in each category, e.g., trade, competition, capital, money, only a particular and developed expression of these first elements.¹²

The Manuscripts contained Marx's first statement of the theory of alienation. It was elaborated in The German

¹⁰ Ibid., p.278.

¹¹ Ibid., p.279; "Through estranged, alienated labour, then, the worker produces the relationship to this labour of a man alien to labour and standing outside it. The relationship of the worker to labour creates the relation to it of the capitalist...Private property is thus the product, the result, the necessary consequence, of alienated labour, of the external relation of the worker to nature and to himself".

¹² Ibid., p.281.

Ideology, and some of the points which Marx had made earlier were taken up. In the latter work Marx rehearsed the premises of a materialist method. These were not arbitrary premises, or dogmas. Marx presented them as derivations from the material conditions under which real individuals live. The premises of Marx's materialist method were "men...in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions".¹³

According to Marx, alienation was a generalised characteristic of production in capitalist society, permeating all aspects of economic life in this society. He refers to the "multiplied productive force"¹⁴ which manifests itself as an alien power to the producer. "In history up to the present it is...an empirical fact that separate individuals have, with the broadening of their activity into world historical activity, become more and more enslaved under a power alien to them".¹⁵

Marx went on to introduce the possibility of the abolition of the conditions of alienation - a possibility contained within the conditions themselves. The possibility rested

¹³ The German Ideology, MECW., 4, p.37.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.48.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.51.

on two assumptions, which Marx made explicit. Firstly, it assumed that the alien power represented by capitalist production entailed an intolerable burden on the mass of producers, since it rendered them propertyless. Secondly it presupposed the socialisation of production - production, that is, on an increasingly large scale, whereby large numbers of workers would be brought together. Only under these conditions would the mass of producers become aware of the enormity of the power which oppressed them. Marx argued that capitalist production entailed both of these developments, and that the premises for the transformation of capitalist production, for the abolition of the conditions of alienation, were therefore contained within capitalist production. The premises were in no sense abstract - they existed in the material conditions of capitalist production.¹⁶

Recapitulating Marx's conclusions, and the inferences which he drew from them - alienation is a philosophical concept relating to social life, and drawn out of what Marx represented as an economic fact. The full range and extent of its meaning depends on a special status which he ascribed production - and on further philosophical presuppositions regarding the nature of man. From these presuppositions the concept of alienation derives a moral force. It also

¹⁶ Ibid., p.52.

possesses an economic content. Individuals are enslaved under an alien power - private property, capital - which oppresses them to the point where they find it intolerable.

In the Manuscripts and in The German Ideology, then, alienation is set in a social, philosophical and moral context, but one which is not devoid of empirical specification. In these works Marx was developing a method whereby philosophical abstraction and empirical analysis could co-exist. According to Marx's method, philosophical abstractions possessed no validity apart from history, from the material conditions of existence of real individuals. They served to organise - to facilitate the arrangement - of empirical material. They provided a foundation from which to criticise existing concepts, and to frame new concepts with which to grasp the material world.

Marx did not, in these works, construct scientific laws, nor did he relate alienation to a detailed economic analysis of capitalist society. What he did was to criticise the concepts of political economy from a philosophical and empirical standpoint. In the course of that critique he developed the germ of concepts which were to assume pivotal positions in his mature economic work.

There is in the notion of alienated labour, a strong subjectivist theme, and consequently the theme has been taken

up in those interpretations of Marxism which place emphasis on consciousness, and specifically, on the active role of a class conscious proletariat in history. Conversely, interpretations of Marxism which place emphasis on positive scientific laws which Marx occasionally appeared to be suggesting in Capital, neglect the theme entirely, in spite of the fact that it is by no means absent from that work. The interpretation of Marxism which dominated the Second International falls into the latter category.

In the Manuscripts Marx elaborated a concept of alienation with two related but distinct meanings¹⁷ and expressed in two distinct vocabularies. In its first meaning the concept is rendered as "to make alien, estrange", and refers to the individual's alienation from his 'species being' - a philosophical, even utopian conception bearing the imprint of Hegel.¹⁸ Marx did not drop this conception after 1844; it is present in The German Ideology and is reiterated in the Grundrisse. In its second meaning it is rendered as "alienate, externalise, part with, sell". Here it is a specifically economic conception. It is this meaning which, in the Grundrisse, is taken up more fully, and specified closely in Capital.

¹⁷ c.f., Evans, Karl Marx, p.94.

¹⁸ c.f., D. McLellan, Marx's Grundrisse, (St. Albans, 1973), p.23.

The theory of commodity fetishism

In the Grundrisse Marx outlines the way in which "every producer becomes dependent on the exchange value of his commodity". This development proceeds in step with the deepening division of labour, and the increasingly social nature of production. As the latter becomes more pronounced, so the power of money - the "supreme arbiter" of exchange, the universal commodity - grows. The exchange relation establishes itself as a power over and above the producers. "What originally appears as a means to promote production becomes a relation alien to the producers".¹⁹ The gulf between the product as a use value and as an exchange value begins to widen.

In exchange, Marx argues, the individual pursues his private interest, which is socially laid down by conditions independent of human agency or volition. The producer must produce a general product, devoid of all individuality, measurable commensurable only against money.

The social character of activity, as well as the social form of the product, and the share of individuals in production here appear as something alien and objective confronting the individuals, not as their relation to one another, but as their subordination to relations which subsist independently of them and which arise out of collisions between mutually indifferent individuals. The general

¹⁹ Grundrisse, p.146.

exchange of activities and products, which has become a vital condition for each individual - their mutual interconnection - here appears as something alien to them, autonomous, as a thing. In exchange value the social connection between persons is transformed into a social relation between things.²⁰

The crystallisation of alienation in the exchange relation is in the money form - the "dead pledge of society".²¹

Whilst the economic aspects of alienation are specified more exactly in the Grundrisse than in earlier works, there remains a heavy substratum of philosophy and philosophical terminology. However, the dualism present in the Manuscripts, between the philosophical concept 'estrangement' and the economic concept 'externalisation' is no longer present. In short, in the Grundrisse Marx went some way towards resolving the disjunction between the philosophical and the empirical.

In Capital, Marx made further progress towards 'marrying' philosophy and empirical science. The concept of alienation is present in two specific manifestations, both of which are grounded in the empirically perceptible, material conditions of capitalist society.

²⁰ Ibid., p.157.

²¹ Ibid., p.160; "Every other collateral may serve the holder directly in that function: money serves him only as the 'dead pledge of society', but it serves as such only because of its social (symbolic) property; and it can have a social property only because individuals have alienated their own social relationship from themselves so that it takes the form of a thing".

Firstly, in the labour theory of value, Marx develops the idea of an opposition between the use value of a commodity, which is specific to a particular commodity, and its exchange value, which is homogenous, undifferentiated, value as such. As a corollary to this opposition, there exists an opposition between that specific, concrete form of labour - tailoring or weaving, for example - which creates use value, and abstract, undifferentiated labour which is embodied in the 'general product', or commodity. Marx outlines what he refers to as "the two-fold character of labour"²² in the first chapter of Capital.

Productive activity, if we leave out of sight its special form, viz., the useful character of the labour, is nothing but the expenditure of human labour-power. Tailoring and weaving ...are but two different modes of expending human labour power...the value of a commodity represents human labour in the abstract, the expenditure of human labour in general.²³

In the labour theory of value, Marx presented the concept of alienation in a form in which it was empirically, and not merely philosophically, recognisable in bourgeois society.

²² Capital, I, pp.48-9; "At first sight a commodity presented itself to us as a complex of two things - use-value and exchange-value...Labour, too, possesses the same two-fold nature; for, so far as it finds expression in value, it does not possess the same characteristics that belong to it as a creator of use-values".

²³ Ibid., p.51.

The second form in which Marx presented the concept of alienation in Capital was in the theory of commodity fetishism. "This fetishism of commodities has its origin in the peculiar social character of the labour which produces them".²⁴ Products become commodities only because they are the products of producers, producing independently of each other. The social character of production does not become evident until the act of exchange, which establishes direct relations between products, but only indirect relations between producers. Relations between producers - between human individuals - are mediated by relations between things.²⁵ Hence whilst human relations are rendered objective, relations between products become animated.

In the labour theory of value, and in commodity fetishism Marx's conception of alienation acquired its final finish. The philosophical postulates of the Manuscripts and The German Ideology are rendered in empirical, economic terms. However, Capital is by no means a work restricted to the

²⁴ Ibid., p.77.

²⁵ Ibid., p.78; "...the labour of the individual asserts itself as part of the labour of society, only by means of the relations which the act of exchange establishes directly between the products, and indirectly, through them, between the producers. To the latter, therefore, the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things".

empirical, scientific level. The philosophical postulates are still present. Nor is it a work restricted to economics. In Capital Marx described the way in which economic relations take shape in capitalist society, but he also described the way in which social relations, and ideas are produced.

In the conception of alienation which crystallised in Capital, and most particularly in the theory of commodity fetishism, there was a theory of cognition, a sociology of knowledge. The leitmotif of Marx's theory of knowledge was the idea that economic and social relations in capitalist society presented themselves as something other than their true form. That is to say, they presented themselves in illusory fashion. In Marx's exposition of the alienated and fetishised relations in capitalist society these relations are relations of dominance. Objective economic and social relations dominate the producers between whom those relations occur. Marx is referring not merely to the domination of one class by another, but rather to the domination of workers and capitalists alike, by the economic and social relations which are vested in production, but extend to all aspects of life, including the production of ideas - including that is, perception.

Marx cites the sphere of circulation, that "very Eden of the innate rights of man", where "Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham" rule supreme, where "everything takes place

on the surface and in the view of all men".²⁶ The sphere of circulation is the foundation of a superstructure of juridico-legal relations in which the illusion of the free and equal exchange of commodities - including labour - is fostered. This sphere of economic activity is commonly the subject matter of political economy, which deduces from it that land is the source of rent, capital the source of profit and labour the source of wages. Marx adopted a different standpoint.²⁷ Instead of dividing the factors of production into the component parts, land, labour, capital, he addressed 'capital in general', dividing it into the component parts, constant and variable capital. He exposed the illusions of the sphere of circulation by excavating in the substrata of production.²⁸

In the doctrine of commodity fetishism, Marx exposed an illusion of a different kind. The labour theory of value held that value is imparted to commodities by the expenditure on them of human labour. The theory was not entirely

²⁶ Ibid., p.172.

²⁷ See Theories of Surplus Value, Vol.III, (London, 1972), p.453ff.

²⁸ Capital, I, p.172; "...we...take leave for a time, of this noisy sphere where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of all men, and (enter)...into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there stares us in the face 'No admittance except on business'. Here we shall see not only how capital produces, but how capital is produced. We shall at last force the secret of profit making".

original, since as Marx acknowledged, Ricardo, amongst others had already come to similar conclusions.²⁹ Ricardo, however, had identified labour as the source of value in a purely positive fashion. Marx claimed that had Ricardo examined his conclusions, subjected them to interrogation, he would have found that the formulae which expressed the labour theory of value "bear stamped upon them in unmistakeable letters that they belong to a state of society, in which the process of production has mastery over man, instead of being controlled by him".³⁰

Marx took his own investigations further. For Marx the products of labour possess value in as much as they are the material expression of human labour. Under commodity production, value appears as the attribute of commodities themselves. Commodities assume an existence independent of their producers, expressing their values in terms of equivalence with other commodities - a ton of iron and two ounces of gold, for instance. They express their value in terms which are extraneous to their producers. Their relations of equivalence represent a self-contained system which acts

²⁹ Ibid., pp.84-5; "Political economy has indeed analysed, however incompletely, value and its magnitude, and has discovered what lies beneath these forms". According to Marx, Ricardo's failing was that he paid "little attention to the two-fold character of the labour that has a two-fold embodiment", p.84n.

³⁰ Ibid., p.85.

over and above the relations of producer with producer.

It is in this sense that production has the mastery over man.

The character of having value, which once impressed upon products obtains fixety only by reason of their acting and reacting upon each other as quantities of value. These quantities vary continually, independently of the will, foresight and action of the producers. To them, their own social action takes the form of the action of objects which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them.³¹

The labour theory of value is simultaneously the theory of alienation.³² Value is imparted to commodities by the expenditure upon them of abstract human labour. Once expended, labour is objectified in the commodity. The only arena in which different labours can react with one another is the sphere of exchange. In exchange, commodities enter a relation of equivalence with one another - a relation which rests on the labour embodied in them. In exchange, then, individual labours relate to, or react with one another, but they do so only because they are abstract, undifferentiated, and therefore objectified and alienated. Commodities, however, react with one another directly, in exchange. They take on an animated form in which they dominate the producers.

³¹ Ibid., p.79.

³² c.f., L. Colletti, 'Marxism and the Dialectic', New Left Review, No.95, September-October, 1975, p.20; "...it began to dawn on me that the theory of value was entirely at one with the theory of alienation and fetishism".

The 'illusion' which Marx exposed in his theory of commodity fetishism, however, was of a different quality from the illusion of free and equal exchange which was vested in the sphere of circulation. The latter was exposed by Marx in the course of a critique of the concepts and categories employed by political economy, a critique expressed in terms of positive science. The theory of commodity fetishism, on the other hand, exposed an illusion which possessed a certain 'social validity'.³³ The domination of the producer by the commodity, the reversal of roles between the two, was not an illusion in the accepted sense of the term.

The categories of bourgeois economy...are forms of thought expressing with social validity the conditions and relations of a definite, historically determined mode of production, viz., the production of commodities.³⁴

The illusions attaching to commodities, then, are not chimeric illusions fostered by political economy. They have their origin in the commodity form itself. The commodity presents itself as something other than it actually is. Immediately the product emerges as a commodity it becomes capable of the most massive and far reaching deceptions.

³³ c.f., N. Geras, 'Marx and the Critique of Political Economy', R. Blackburn, ed., Ideology in Social Science, Readings in Critical Theory, (Fontana, 1972), pp.294-7.

³⁴ Capital, I, p.80.

...it is changed into something transcendant
...it stands on its head, and evolves out of
its wooden brain grotesque ideas...³⁵

Marx continually refers to the mysterious nature of commodities
and the relations surrounding them.³⁶

It has been observed above that in his critique of political economy, Marx proceeded from philosophical postulates, rendering them in a more empirical form in the course of his analysis. He emphasised the empirical nature of his work in order to mark himself off from the tradition of German idealism in polemic with which much of his early work was written. In the preface to the German edition of Capital, he cast himself in the role of scientific investigator. However, the theory of alienation and commodity fetishism which is inextricably connected with the labour theory of value in particular, and Marx's economic work in general was not, and could not have been the fruit of an empiricist

³⁵ Ibid., p.76.

³⁶ Loc. cit., "...analysis shows that (a commodity) is a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties", "...the mystical character of commodities...", "...the enigmatical character of the product of labour..."; p.77, "A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing..."; p.80, "The whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy which surrounds the products of labour as long as they take the form of commodities...".

or positivist methodology.³⁷ A scientific methodology which regarded the relationship between the real, concrete, material world, and the observer or scientific investigator, as unproblematical - a mere matter of scientific investigation of a given object, the elucidation of positive laws governing the internal functions of that object - would simply not have been capable of grasping, or exposing the mystificatory nature of the commodity.

The theory of commodity fetishism was not simply a critique of bourgeois political economy, an indictment of its scientific shortcomings - its inability to pierce the veil of opacity which shrouded the economic relations of capitalist society. It was a critique of those relations themselves, in the course of which Marx challenged the objectivity of reality. (This form of critique was not unprecedented in Marx's work. He had applied it to the state in his Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right').³⁸ In issuing his challenge simultaneously to positive science and to the objectivity of reality, it has been suggested that Marx

³⁷ c.f., Thomas, 'Marx and Science', Political Studies, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, p.18; Thomas quotes from the 1867 Preface to the first German edition of Capital; "(In) the analysis of economic forms...neither microscope nor chemical re-agents are of use. The force of abstraction must replace both". Thomas comments "...a statement no positivist could make or accept".

³⁸ c.f., L. Colletti, 'Marxism; Science or Revolution', R. Blackburn, ed., Ideology in Social Science, Readings in Critical Theory, (Fontana, 1972), p.373.

laid the foundation stone for 'proletarian' or 'revolutionary' science.³⁹

The idea of revolutionary science finds an echo in Marx's own work. In The Poverty of Philosophy, for instance, he asserts that "the socialists and the Communists are the theoreticians of the proletarian class" in the same way as the economists are the "scientific representatives of the bourgeois class".⁴⁰ In The Communist Manifesto, "The theoretical conclusions of the Communists...merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle".⁴¹

Marx and 'proletarian science'

It has been argued that Marx's conception of the proletariat, at least as it emerged in his early writings, was derived from, or developed alongside and in accordance with, his theory of alienation.⁴² This view is at variance with

³⁹ Ibid., pp.374-5; c.f., Thomas, 'Marx and Science', Political Studies, Vol., XXIV, No.1, March 1976, p.20.

⁴⁰ The Poverty of Philosophy, MECW, 6, p.177.

⁴¹ The Communist Manifesto, MECW, 6, p.498.

⁴² c.f., T. McCarthy, Marx and the Proletariat: a Study in Social Theory, (Westport, Connecticut, 1978), p.16; "...Marx's concept of the revolutionary proletariat, as formulated in the early writings, rests entirely on the theory of alienation...".

others, according to which Marx derived his conception of the proletariat from a historical analogy between that class and the bourgeoisie in the French Revolution of 1789, and from the ideas of socialist intellectuals with whom Marx came into contact in 1843.⁴³

It is not the concern of the argument here to enter into discussion with these views. Suffice it to maintain that there is, in the theory of alienation which Marx developed in his early works from philosophical and empirical observations on social life in capitalist society, the foundation of a conception of the working class, its theory and its practice. Marx made the connection himself in the Manuscripts.

The extent to which the solution of theoretical riddles is the task of practice and effected through practice, the extent to which true practice is the condition of a real and positive theory, is shown, for example, in fetishism.⁴⁴

The fetishism to which Marx is referring is not solely the fetishism of economic forms. "Naturally, the transcendence of estrangement always proceeds from that form of estrangement which is the dominant power: in Germany, self-consciousness; in France, equality, because it is politics".

⁴³ c.f., D. McLellan, Karl Marx: His Life and Thought, (London and New York, 1974), pp.96-7.

⁴⁴ Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, MECW., 3, p.312.

Marx singled out England as that country where economic estrangement was dominant, and where the 'trancendence of estrangement' - that is, practice - was based on "real, material, practical need".⁴⁵

Here is a statement of the possibility that the working class, and working class practice, might take on a theoretical and conscious character, a statement which finds echoes in Marx's comments on the Silesian weavers' rising of 1844.

...recall the song of weavers,⁴⁶ that bold call to struggle, in which there is not even a mention of hearth and home, factory or district, but in which the proletariat at once, in a striking, sharp, unrestrained and powerful manner, proclaims its opposition to the society of private property. The Silesian uprising begins precisely with what the French and English workers' uprisings end, with consciousness of the nature of the proletariat...not only machines, these rivals of the workers, are destroyed, but also ledgers, the titles to property. And while all other movements were aimed primarily only against the owner of the Individual enterprise, the visible enemy, this movement is at the same time directed against the banker, the hidden enemy.⁴⁷

Marx refers to "this vehement and brilliant literary debut of the German workers", and adds that "it has to be admitted

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.313.

⁴⁶ Marx is referring to the revolutionary song, Das Blutgericht which was popular with the weavers on the eve of the uprising; see Ed., MECW.3, (London, 1975), p.596.

⁴⁷ Critical Marginal Notes on an Article by a Prussian, MECW.3, (London, 1975), p.201.

that the German proletariat is the theoretician of the European proletariat".⁴⁸

Granted that these comments were made in a period of impending revolutionary upheaval, in which Marx might have been moved to make statements which were untypical of his general opinions, they nevertheless indicate that he was prepared to pose the possibility of 'proletarian science'. Moreover, they show that he at least glimpsed the possibility that the working class possessed the power to penetrate, in its daily life and in its class practice, the mystificatory forms of commodity production.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp.201-2.

PART II

MARX'S METHOD IN THE WORK
OF V. I. LENIN

SECTION i

Lenin's Mode of Thought and the Role of Abstraction

Lenin's epistemological sophistication

One of the principal shortcomings of the Second International Marxists was their inability to recognise the gradations of abstraction which permeated Marx's work, especially his mature economic work. In the Introduction to the Grundrisse, Marx set out what was for him the correct mode of procedure for a scientific analysis of bourgeois production, the order in which economic categories should be approached. In so doing, he differentiated between abstract categories, his starting point, and the increasingly concrete categories through which analysis had to progress in order that the real concrete relations of bourgeois society - the state, international exchange, the world market - might be constructed theoretically.¹ Abstraction was synonymous with the process through which the theoretical analysis of bourgeois society had to pass.

In Capital, Marx worked up his analysis of bourgeois society from the commodity, a relatively simple expression of those economic relations involved in the exchange of products,

¹ Grundrisse, p.108.

of labour power, and of money. The commodity is the simplest, most abstract of economic categories, which expresses conceptually the fundamental economic relation of bourgeois society; that which pervades all others. In common with other abstractions in Marx's economics, it is the expression of a real economic relation. It is an abstraction from the concrete, real, in as much as it expresses an essential characteristic of economic relations, rather than depicting those relations in the full complexity in which they occur. Similarly, the abstract laws and schema which Marx expounded in his exposition of bourgeois production - the reproduction schema, the falling rate of profit, for instance - are expressions of essential characteristics, and in no sense depict the process of the reproduction and accumulation of capital in its fullest complexity.

Althusser has pointed out that Marx said very little concerning the status of "the famous abstract categories... the abstractions that we have to start from...these abstractions were no problem for Marx then". Marx remained silent about precisely how he arrived at his 'preliminary abstractions', and there has been a tendency amongst his readers to identify the abstractions in Capital too immediately, literally, as a simple depiction of the concrete real. They have "rushed into empiricism",

failing to recognise a problem in the relationship between the theoretical constructions of Marxism and the order of the real.²

Luxemburg is a case in point. In her work on the reproduction of capital, she confronted Marx's reproduction schema, the abstract formulation of the economic relations involved in the accumulation of capital, with the observable form of capital accumulation, with actual economic relations, that is, in their historical context. Upon discovering that there was no exact correspondence, Luxemburg dismissed the abstract formulation as "bloodless, theoretical fiction",³ since it removed its object from the concrete context in which it occurred. Her error had serious consequences for her treatment of Marx's schema for the reproduction of capital, and it demonstrated "the extent to which she misunderstood the method of Capital".⁴

² Althusser and Balibar, Reading Capital, p.90.

³ The Accumulation of Capital - an Anti-Critique, K. Tarbuck, ed., R. Luxemburg and N. Bukharin, Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital, (London, 1972), p.61; c.f., The Accumulation of Capital, (London, 1963), p.348; here Luxemburg refers to Marx's formulation of the reproduction question as a "theoretical contrivance".

⁴ Rosdolsky, The Making of Marx's 'Capital', pp.71-2.

The Second International Marxists shared a common commitment to Marx's economics, and a common perspective in respect of this body of theory. They articulated their theoretical positions and political stances on the basis of, and in terms of what they took to be positive economic laws which had their origin in Capital. However, they exhibited a blithe disregard towards the method underlying Marx's economic works,⁵ the relationship between the theoretical formulations which those works contained and the actual, real processes confronting them in capitalist society.

Lenin began to distinguish himself from the Marxists of the Second International by his epistemological sophistication, not merely after 1914,⁶ but as early as 1894-5. What the Friends of the People Are...(1894), has been described as "an exposition of the epistemological principles of Marx's scientific discovery",⁷ an elucidation of "the skeleton of

⁵ Ibid., pp.568-9.

⁶ Lowy, 'From the "Logic" of Hegel to the Finland Station in Petrograd', Critique, No.6, 1976, p.9; Lowy argues that there is evidence of a break between Lenin's work prior to 1914 and his subsequent work. Lowy cites passages from the Philosophical Notebooks to demonstrate the transformation in Lenin's mode of thought.

⁷ L. Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, (London, 1971), p.100.

Capital",⁸ whilst The Economic Content of Narodism, (1895), contained a statement of the materialist method in economics and sociology which underpins his later work, The Development of Capitalism in Russia.⁹ The 1895 work was a critique of the 'legal Marxist' Peter Struve - the criticism pivoted around Struve's mechanical and fatalistic conception of materialism,¹⁰ which clung to "the necessity of a given

⁸ c.f., C.W., 1, p.141; Lenin makes a succinct sketch of what he takes the "skeleton of Capital" to be. Although the account is quite sophisticated, it nevertheless contains elements of that 'vulgar' materialism which permeates Lenin's work. Both the sophistication and the traces of 'vulgar' materialism are evident in the following passage. "Marx... took one of the social-economic formations - the system of commodity production - and on the basis of a vast mass of data...gave a most detailed account of the laws governing the functioning of this formation and its development... Marx makes it possible to discern how the commodity organisation of social economy develops, how it becomes transformed into capitalist organisation, creating antagonistic classes ...how it develops the productivity of social labour, and thereby introduces an element that becomes irrevocably contradictory to the foundations of this capitalist organisation itself".

⁹ Ibid., p.437; "... the essential features of capitalism ...are...(1) commodity production, as the general form of production. The product assumes the form of a commodity in the most diverse social production organisms, but only in capitalist production is that form of the product of labour general, and not exceptional, isolated, accidental ... (2) not only the product of labour but also labour itself ...assumes the form of a commodity. The degree to which the commodity form of labour power is developed is an indication of the degree to which capitalism is developed". This was a characterisation of capitalism which was to inform The Development of Capitalism in Russia.

¹⁰ c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, p.106; T. Cliff, Lenin, Vol.1, Building the Party, (London, 1975), p.36

historical process...insurmountable historical tendencies".¹¹ Althusser, who sets Lenin in the first rank of the faithful articulators of, and practitioners in Marxist method notes the "acute epistemological reflections which accompanied his early work".¹²

It is well known that after 1914, in that body of work known as the Philosophical Notebooks, Lenin was to return to a preoccupation with Marx's method. His notes testify to a thorough and sophisticated reading, as is evident from the following extract.

In his Capital, Marx first analyses the simplest, most ordinary and fundamental, most common and everyday relation of bourgeois (commodity) society, a relation encountered billions of times, viz. the exchange of commodities. In this very simple phenomenon (in this 'cell' of bourgeois society) analysis reveals all the contradictions (or the germs of all the contradictions) of modern society. The subsequent exposition shows us the development ...of these contradictions and of this society...¹³

Rosdolsky comments upon "how accurately these sentences capture the real meaning of Marxist economics".¹⁴

¹¹ C.W., 1, pp.400-1; c.f., pp.434, 439, 499.

¹² Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy, p.53; c.f., Althusser and Balibar, Reading Capital, p.76n; "...his philosophical understanding of Capital gives his economic and political an incomparable profundity, rigour and acuity...it is no accident that we owe to the first years of Lenin's public activity...so many acute texts devoted to the most difficult questions of the theory of Capital".

¹³ C.W., 38, p.360.

¹⁴ Rosdolsky, The Making of Marx's 'Capital', p.134.

It is generally agreed, however, that Lenin's foremost economic work, in terms of its scope, accomplishment and originality, is The Development of Capitalism in Russia. Harding refers to it as Lenin's "magnum opus", "the fullest, best documented and best argued examination of the crucial period of the evolution of capitalism out of feudalism in the literature of Marxism".¹⁵ Wolfe acknowledges it as "the major theoretical work of his lifetime",¹⁶ Cliff as his "major theoretical work",¹⁷ whilst Althusser extols it as an "unparalleled work of economic sociology".¹⁸

In this work, Lenin marshals an impressive array of statistical material in a demonstration that the traditional Russian economy of subsistence peasant farmers and handicraft workers has already been permeated by capitalist economic relations, and that there is a tendency towards the break-up of patriarchal and communal institutions and relations. These traditional forms of economy and society were the basis of the Narodniks' aspirations towards a specifically Russian form of socialism which according to

¹⁵ Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, pp.139, 107.

¹⁶ B. D. Wolfe, Three Who Made a Revolution, (Harmondsworth, 1966), p.150.

¹⁷ Cliff, Lenin, Vol.1, p.33

¹⁸ Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy, p.43.

their conception was capable of pre-empting capitalist industrialisation, and Lenin, in common with Struve and Plekhanov, was sharply critical of the notion. However, whilst Plekhanov and Struve had asserted rigid and dogmatic laws of history acting against the Narodnik conception,¹⁹ Lenin sought to lay bare the process of capitalist development in Russia, to reveal factually and in theory, the dimensions of this development and the forms which it was taking.

The Development of Capitalism in Russia has been described as "a theoretical demolition of the arguments and evidence of Narodism", theoretical because Lenin was aware that "no statistics in the world" could resolve the question he was addressing.²⁰ The achievement of the work, contrary to the view of some commentators,²¹ did not lie in its statistical buttresses, but in the theoretical structure of the edifice.

¹⁹ Cliff, Lenin, Vol.1, pp.36-7.

²⁰ B. Hindess and P. Q. Hirst, Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production, (London, 1975), pp.322-3.

²¹ c.f., Wolfe, Three Who Made a Revolution, p.130; "... his examination of the real statistical trends tended to prove that Russia was already taking giant strides along the path of capitalism"; A. Nove, 'Lenin as Economist', P. Reddaway and L. S. Schapiro, eds., Lenin the Man, the Theorist, the Leader, (London, 1970), p.190; "To prove his point Lenin deployed an immense battery of statistics".

The object of his enquiry was twofold. There was an empirical object - the economic relations prevailing in Russia - and a theoretical object - the relationship between the mode of production and the social formation. The second of these objects of enquiry yielded the richest results. There was the theory of the differentiation of the peasantry - the term itself was not original, as Lenin himself acknowledged, but those writers who had dealt with the question previously had regarded the phenomenon "simply as the emergence of property inequality, as simple differentiation".²² In Lenin's formulation, the concept was a component in a theoretical construction of the relation between mode of production and social formation which remains a major contribution to Marxist theory.²³

In The Development of Capitalism in Russia is to be found a theoretical presentation of the relation of the mode of production - structure of capital, landholding system, labour relation, and the social formation - structure of the peasantry, relation of village to town, agriculture to industry. The social formation is presented as a theoretical construction corresponding to commodity production in the relatively early stages of its evolution out of natural

²² C.W., 3, pp.173-4.

²³ c.f., Althusser and Balibar, Reading Capital, p.207n.

economy. Lenin's conception of commodity production is taken from Capital,²⁴ and he does not expand significantly upon Marx, but in his theoretical exposition of the emerging capitalist social formation he is breaking new and valuable ground.

Lenin began work on The Development of Capitalism in Russia whilst in prison for his part in the St. Petersburg League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class. In a letter dated January 2, 1896, he wrote that he had embarked upon an economic study of the problem of "the marketing of the product of the manufacturing industry in Russia". He enclosed a list of books which he required for the project, a list "divided into the two parts into which my book is divided. A - the general theoretical part...B - the application of the theoretical principles to Russian facts".²⁵ There were indications in the letter that the general, theoretical part would be considerably briefer than its application to Russian data, and this was in fact the case, only the first chapter being devoted to the theoretical framework.

The first chapter is uncharacteristically concise, pithy, distilled, with none of the repetition, heavy irony, or

²⁴ c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, pp.87-8.

²⁵ C.W.3, p.37.

polemic which overlay his more overtly political works. It was concerned with the theoretical presentation of what Lenin considered to be the crucial dimensions of an emergent capitalist economy. It relates the manifestations of an emergent capitalist economy - the growth of the industrial population at the expense of the agricultural, the differentiation of the peasantry and the ruin of the small producer, the division of labour - to that aspect of capitalist development which is fundamental to them all, the appearance of the commodity form, and a domestic market on which the product appears as a commodity.

The commodity form and the domestic market for commodities develop simultaneously with the social division of labour.²⁶ Under natural economy manufacture is combined with the production of raw materials, notably, agricultural production. With the development of commodity economy, however, there is an increase in the number of separate and independent branches of industry, hence this development "takes the shape of the separation from agriculture of one branch of industry after another".²⁷ A new population structure emerges. In pre-commodity economy the population is almost

²⁶ C.W., 3, pp.38-9; The connection between the development of the market and the social division of labour had already been established in Lenin's earlier work, On the So-Called Market Question, C.W., 1, p.100.

²⁷ C.W., 3, p.40.

exclusively agricultural, engaged in either agricultural production or the manufacture of the product of that activity. The two activities are combined in the same enterprise. Under commodity economy however, not only does manufacture achieve an independent status, but it attracts an increasing share of the workforce. The agricultural population is subject to continual shrinkage contingent upon the tendency for constant capital - land - to increase, relative to variable capital - labour. In industry the relative decrease in variable capital is offset by the absolute increase in both constant and variable capital, but in agriculture this presupposes that new land be taken into cultivation, which in turn requires as a pre-requisite a still greater growth in the non-agricultural population to stimulate it. "Thus one cannot conceive of capitalism without an increase in the commercial and industrial population at the expense of the agricultural".²⁸

Lenin accuses the Narodniks of a failure to recognise either of these tendencies - the division of labour and the relative shrinkage of the agricultural population - as the inevitable corollary of commodity economy, susceptible to deduction from theory. Equally the ruin of the small producer, who is stripped of his possession of the means of production, is

²⁸ loc.cit.

an intrinsic feature of development towards commodity economy - in the course of which the domestic market emerges.

The Narodnik economists purported to demonstrate that the economic decline of the small producers meant a reduction in purchasing power on the domestic market and thus erected a barrier to the further development of that market. What Lenin attempts in his first chapter is to demonstrate, theoretically, rather than empirically, the error in the Narodnik conception, by showing the necessarily complementary nature of those dimensions of economic development which they held to be contradictory. "The question is posed purely theoretically, i.e., it relates to commodity production in general".²⁹ What emerges is a presentation of a process of development by which hitherto isolated producers and productive enterprises are transformed into commodity producers, integrated into a unified system - the national economy - the constituents of which are mutually related and reciprocally conditioned.³⁰ Natural economy does not possess this underlying unity, which is essentially a characteristic of capitalism. The Development of Capitalism in Russia sets out a 'physiology' of capitalism

²⁹ Ibid., p.41.

³⁰ c.f., I. I. Rubin, Essays on Marx's Theory of Value, p.10.

at a certain stage in its development, within which Lenin locates specific elements - a differentiated peasantry, the deepening division of labour and so on.

Lenin refers emphatically to "the system of social and economic relations...the system which has taken shape in the post-Reform period...".³¹ This system is no other than the social formation, which he has presented in a series of related concepts. Only the skeleton is to be found in the first chapter. Lenin fleshed it out in the remainder of the work, devoted to Russian conditions. An important point which should be emphasised is that he did not derive the theoretical construction of the social formation from the data, but from Capital, which had occupied his mind since the winter of 1888. This is a measure of the sophistication of the work, and of its superiority over other works addressed to the same question.

The concept of the social formation

The superiority of The Development of Capitalism in Russia over, for instance, Plekhanov's work on Russian capitalism lay primarily in its sophisticated economic analysis of

³¹ C.W., 3, p.310.

the emergence out of natural economy, of a system of commodity economy and its attendant social formation. Lenin presented the process theoretically in all the complexity with which it was occurring. Plekhanov's work was more limited - restricted to an attempt to show that Russia was experiencing the conquest of old industrial forms by manufacture - and relied heavily on simply drawing conclusions from the most advanced industrial sectors and establishing these conclusions as general trends.³² As far as agriculture was concerned, the natural economy was being permeated by capitalist forms from outside the agricultural sphere.

In contrast, Lenin exposed the 'internal dynamic' of capitalist development where that development was weakest - that is, in the countryside.³³ It was precisely here where a new social structure was taking shape, contingent upon the differentiation of a previously homogenous peasantry into rural bourgeoisie and proletariat. The differentiation of the peasantry was not simply a phenomenon contingent upon capi-

³² c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, pp.43-5; According to Plekhanov, "...the Social Democrats must take as their yardstick conditions in the most advanced sectors of industry. Knowledge of the laws of capitalist development, foreknowledge, therefore, of the evolving social composition of the population, are the Social Democrats immense advantages over their opponents".

³³ Ibid., p.87.

talist development, but was a precondition for the formation of a domestic market - a precondition of commodity production itself.

We have seen that in capitalist production, the basis for the formation of a home market is the process of the disintegration of the small cultivators into agricultural entrepreneurs and workers.³⁴

The point is reinforced in the chapter on "The Formation of the Home Market". Lenin concludes that "the home market for capitalism is created by the parallel development of capitalism in agriculture and in industry, by the formation of a class of rural and industrial employers on the one hand and a class of rural and industrial wage workers on the other".³⁵

The home market, the unifying theme of capitalist development, to which all other dimensions contribute, and from which these dimensions of development receive added impetus, grows primarily as a result of the conversion into a commodity of the product of commercial, entrepreneur farming, and of the conversion into a commodity of the labour power sold by the badly-off peasant.

In the post-Reform period, the peasantry, by virtue of the deepening social division of labour, has become differentiated

³⁴ C.W., 3, p.70

³⁵ Ibid., p.590.

into large and small cultivators. Small producers tend to cultivate unproductive allotments, whilst large scale producers farm purchased and rented land, employ badly off peasants, and seek outlets for their surplus yield in commercial markets. In addition to differences in type of holding and scale of cultivation there is a marked difference in technology and techniques employed, and hence in productivity, and accordingly, the differentiation of the peasantry deepens. There emerges a rural bourgeoisie, producing for a commercial market and employing the labour of a rural proletariat, landless or with a small unproductive plot, such that it is obliged to take recourse to the market for the satisfaction of its material requirements, and further obliged to place its labour on the market. The product, and equally, human labour power, takes the form of a commodity on the market.

The differentiation of the peasantry is more than merely a shift in property relations, or a process of social fragmentation. It represents the dissolution of an entire socio-economic structure. "New types of rural inhabitants" emerge - "types that are the basis of a society in which commodity economy and capitalist production prevail".³⁷ Lenin could not have arrived at this conclusion from a data gathering exercise. It was "the purely theoretical

³⁷ Ibid., p.174.

analysis of the formation of agricultural capitalism" which "points to the differentiation of the peasantry as an important factor in this process".³⁸

Between the rural bourgeoisie and the proletariat there exists an intermediate stratum of independent peasants, distinguished by the least degree of commodity production.³⁹ This stratum is only completely independent under the most favourable economic conditions - under any but these conditions the middle peasantry is forced to seek employment for wages, forced, that is, into the ranks of the rural proletariat. The independent, medium sized peasantry is a feature of corvée economy in which rent was extracted in the form of labour service performed on the landholder's estate, and in which, therefore, surplus labour was quite distinct from that necessary to provide for the peasant's subsistence. The remnants of corvée economy are undermined by the extension of the market, and the differentiation of the peasantry,⁴⁰ and survived because of cultural resistance on the part of the peasantry, rather than through any remaining functional vitality - the peasantry was simply

³⁸ loc. cit.

³⁹ Ibid., p.181.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.207-10.

unaccustomed to wage work, and resisted it at the expense of his standard of living.⁴¹

In Lenin's formulation, then, the domestic market expands with the differentiation of the peasantry, the latter representing a pre-condition and premise of the former. The creation of the home market sets in motion a radical and highly significant metamorphosis in the capital form itself. As the market extends its scope, merchants, or commercial capital - which contributes to the impoverishment of the peasantry, and therefore to its descent into the proletariat - tightens its grip on the rural economy.

In his discussion of merchants' capital and its relation to industrial capital Lenin returns to the roots and premises of his survey - to Capital - in order to "indicate how theory presents this question".⁴² His conclusions, drawn from Marx, are firstly that merchants' capital and industrial capital represent a single type of phenomenon - they are differentiated only by virtue of the fact that the former has not yet entered the sphere of production. Secondly, that merchants' capital predates industrial capital as its premise. Merchants' capital is instrumental in bringing about a dissolution of the old mode of production

⁴¹ Ibid., p.193.

⁴² Ibid., p.183.

- the extent to which it does so depends on its solidarity and internal structure. Thirdly, the independent development of merchants' capital - that is, its development exclusively in the sphere of circulation - is inversely proportionate to the degree of development of industrial capital. Consequently, an index of the stage of maturity reached by capital is the extent to which merchants' and industrial capital are connected; the extent, that is, to which merchants' capital enters production.⁴³ Lenin's assertion is that on the basis of the available evidence for Russia, merchants' and industrial capital are quite closely connected, and indicate the maturity of Russian capitalism.⁴⁴

Lenin's starting point in his discussion of capitalist development in industry is the division of labour - the same point of departure from which he proceeded in his discussion of the rural economy. The division of labour signifies the genesis of capitalist development. In its initial stage it takes the form of a separation of artisan production from patriarchal agriculture.⁴⁵ New handicraft industries develop, characterised by an increasingly marked

⁴³ Ibid., pp.183-4.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp.184-5.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.331-2.

degree of specialisation. A migration of producers takes place, as new branches of production grow up in areas outside the long settled and economically advanced areas.⁴⁶

The division of labour and commodity economy develop simultaneously, and Lenin points to the intrinsic connection between these developments.⁴⁷ Contingent upon the division of labour and the spread of commodity circulation, there occurs a differentiation amongst the small producers, and Lenin goes on to "examine the social and economic relations that develop among the small commodity producers in industry", an undertaking which is "similar to the one outlined above ...in relation to the small farmers".⁴⁸ The conclusion which he draws is that "the tendency of small commodity production is towards the ever growing employment of wage labour, towards the formation of capitalist workshops.⁴⁹ And this cannot take place "except by generating a minority of small capitalists on the one hand, and a majority of wage workers...on the other".⁵⁰ The system of production which emerges is manufacture, which "belongs directly to the 'first stages of capitalism in industry'".⁵¹ It is

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.339.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.343-4.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.344.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.348.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.355.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.384.

that form of industry which "stands between small scale industry and large scale machine industry".⁵² As a transitional type of industry it takes a wide variety of forms.⁵³ Under manufacture, the great mass of workers are wage workers, though not in the purest sense of the factory wage worker, since they work either domestically or in their own small workshops. Hence they are lent a spurious appearance of independence - spurious because, in fact, they are entirely "subordinated to capital, and receive only wages, owning neither raw material nor finished product".⁵⁴

The appearance of independence had led the Narodnik economists in their stubborn and intransigent refusal to acknowledge the self-sustaining, dynamic and pervasive nature of capitalism in Russia; to maintain that the persistence of 'handicraft industry' was evidence of a resistance to capitalist development.⁵⁵ Capitalism, in their conception,

52 Ibid., p.453.

53 Ibid., pp.433, 541-2.

54 Ibid., p.435.

55 c.f., C.W.,3, p.591; Lenin summarises the Narodnik conception as articulated by the economist N. F. Danielson; "...capitalism does not divert the population from agriculture to industry, does not divide the agriculturalists into opposite classes. Quite the contrary. Capitalism 'frees' the workers from industry and there is nothing left for 'them' to do but to turn to the land, for 'our peasants have not been deprived of the land'!! At the bottom of this 'theory'...lie the ingenious tricks of all Narodniks...they lump together the peasant bourgeoisie and the rural proletariat; they ignore the growth of commercial farming; they concoct stories about 'people's handicraft industries' being isolated from 'capitalist' 'factory industry', instead of analysing the consecutive forms and diverse manifestations of capitalism in industry".

remained restricted to pockets of large scale machine industry.⁵⁶ It was Lenin's intention to show that 'handicraft industry' was a term "absolutely unsuitable for the purposes of scientific investigation...usually employed to cover up all and sundry forms of industry from domestic industry and handicrafts to wage labour in very large manufactories", and that "on the basis of this kind of 'analysis' the question of the different forms of industry in Russia is completely evaded".⁵⁷

The conceptual depiction of manufacture was important to Lenin because its economic, technical and cultural features provided him with a key to the complexity and diversity of an economy undergoing transformation through the manufacture stage. Moreover, the connection which he established between manufacture and large scale machine industry enabled him to expose, in what were the least developed and ostensibly pre-capitalist areas of the Russian economy, the vigorous infant form of capitalist development.

⁵⁶ c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1., p.97.

⁵⁷ C.W., 3, pp.451-2.

In a series of case studies,⁵⁸ Lenin examined the structure of manufacturing industry. Its economic basis was large scale capital, controlling the purchase of raw materials and the sale of finished goods,⁵⁹ its technical basis, hand production, with an extensive and systematic division of labour.⁶⁰ In Lenin's account of the development of manufacture, it is typically located in relatively small, isolated establishments in small isolated regions, the merchant, who is sometimes also a small workshop owner, representing the connection between these establishments and regions, and the outside world. These industrial settlements are frequently surrounded by agriculture. Since the mass of the producers are quickly reduced by their dependence on the merchant to a state of impoverishment, peasant farmers in the area who are at all sound economically resist recruitment into the ranks of industrial workforce and small agriculture remains. The sound peasantry, moreover, frequently engage in non-agricultural production on a small scale,

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp.386-427; Lenin took as his case studies, i. the weaving industry, p.386; ii. other branches of the textile industry, p.390; iii. the hat-and-cap and hemp-and-rope trades, p.393; iv. the wood working trades, p.397; v. the processing of livestock produce - the leather and fur trades, p.402; vi. the remaining livestock trades, p.409; vii. the processing of mineral products, p.413; viii. the metal trades, p.415; ix. other metal trades, p.419; x. the jewelry, samovar and accordian trades, p.422.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.435.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.427.

hence large and small industrial undertakings are juxtaposed in the same region. It is not until the advent of large scale machine industry that the industrial sector finally succeeds in detaching itself from agriculture, and the system of patriarchal relations and values attendant upon it.⁶¹

The Development of Capitalism in Russia represents the exposition of an emergent capitalist economy in the process of transformation from the stage characterised by Lenin as manufacture, to that of large scale machine industry. The work contains two 'scenarios'. One is descriptive of that stage of capitalist development - where manufacture is the dominant form of production - attained by the Russian economy. The other is a depiction of the dynamics of the transformation - of the nature of the process itself. The two scenarios co-exist in the work, and overlap. Lenin is aware of their co-existence, pointing it out to the reader in his discussion of capitalist development in agriculture, for instance.

The problem of capitalism in Russian agriculture has been examined from two angles. First we examined the existing system of social and economic relations in peasant and landlord economy, the system which has taken shape in the post-Reform period.

Then another standpoint was adopted.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp.536-41.

We took as our starting point the manner in which agriculture is transformed into commodity production, and examined the social and economic relations characteristic of each of the principal forms of commercial agriculture.⁶²

The two approaches are similarly employed in industry.⁶³ They are connected by virtue of the fact that the existing system of socio-economic relations in Russia ~~were~~ held by ^{was} Lenin to contain within itself the motive forces behind the transformation process.⁶⁴

Simultaneously The Development of Capitalism in Russia was a work in economic sociology and an exposition of the 'natural history' of capitalism⁶⁵ - the succession of its developmental forms. It is with the first of these approaches that this section has been concerned - the second will be treated in the next section. As a work of economic sociology, it amounted to the elaboration of a theoretical framework in which were located the socio-economic forms and relations of an emergent Russian capitalism - differentiated classes of peasantry and industrial producers, relation

⁶² Ibid., p.310.

⁶³ Ibid., p.331.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.172; "The system of socio-economic relations existing amongst the peasantry...shows us the presence of all those contradictions which are inherent in every commodity economy and every order of capitalism".

⁶⁵ c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1., pp.85-6.

between village and town, hinterland and settlement, agriculture and industry, the relation of all these to the domestic market. In short, it represented the systematic, abstract construction of that social formation attendant upon commodity production at a certain stage in its development.

The social formation in Russia embraced seemingly disparate economic forms - diverse forms of landholding, types of industrial undertaking. Lenin's achievement lay in relating these forms to a single socio-economic structure. He succeeded precisely because he derived his conception of that structure, not from the empirically observable, but from abstract theory. The differentiation of the peasantry, it is true, was an empirically observable phenomenon, but it was also an abstraction - related to other abstractions such as the division of labour, the growth of the domestic market. The Development of Capitalism in Russia is a work of theoretical abstraction, "no less theoretical and no less abstract than Marx's Capital".⁶⁶ It was not simply concerned with "correctly identifying the trends" in Russian economic development - Plekhanov had done as much. It was rather, an attempt - notably successful - to generate through the abstract formulation of relatively simple concepts - the differen-

⁶⁶ Hindess and Hirst, Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production, p.4.

tiation of the peasantry, for instance, is not a complex conception - the wherewithal to approach a highly complex socio-economic structure. Moreover, unlike Marx, Lenin cogitated 'aloud' on the working up of his conceptual apparatus, and for this reason if for no other, The Development of Capitalism in Russia is a work of lasting importance.

Lenin thought of Narodnism as more than simply a misconceived assessment of Russia's economic development. It represented, to him a "theoretical doctrine that gives a particular solution to highly important sociological and economic problems".⁶⁷ It was imperative for social democracy in Russia that the widespread and highly influential weltanschauung which Narodnism represented should be neutralised. In order to fulfil the imperative Lenin constructed a Marxist vision of the Russian social formation as one corresponding to a particular stage in commodity production. The project was theoretical, but it nevertheless confronted the observable phenomenon of economy and society in Russia. In the execution of the project, Lenin exhibited an ability to move between abstract and concrete categories, an ability demanded by the complexity of the Marxian mode of analysis, but rarely found in Marxists of his era.

⁶⁷ C.W., 1, p.337.

Lenin's contribution to the question of capital accumulation

Lenin's work on Russian economic development was a contribution to a debate which reached its climax in the eighteen nineties. It was essentially a confrontation between a native intellectual tradition with its roots in Russian social and economic conditions, and Western, capitalist, bourgeois ideas which had been making incursions into Russia since the eighteen sixties - a period which has been called the Russian Enlightenment.⁶⁸ Ironically, Marx was one of the chief harbingers of capitalism - Capital was first published in Russia in 1872, translated by the revolutionary populist Hermann Lopatin.⁶⁹

Narodnism expressed "the reaction of the Russian intellectuals to the Marxist analysis of the tragic consequences of capitalist development".⁷⁰ Marx presented the negative side of capitalism and the Narodniks reacted strongly against it. There was a sustained attempt to deny that Russia was irrevocably on the road to capitalism, and at the same time there was, amongst Narodnik economists,

⁶⁸ A. Walicki, The Controversy over Capitalism, Studies in the Social Philosophy of the Russian Populists, (Oxford, 1969), pp.14-6.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.133.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.138.

notably, N. F. Danielson and V. P. Vorontsov,⁷¹ an attempt to demonstrate that capitalism simply was not viable under Russian conditions. In order for capital to reproduce and sustain itself in cumulative fashion, it necessarily took recourse to foreign markets. Only thus could its surplus be realised, granted the limited nature of domestic consumption. (Narodnik analysis was similar in this respect to that of Rosa Luxemburg,⁷² although her 'third market' was not an exclusively foreign one - it was to be found in non-capitalist enclaves within the domestic economy). Russia, as a latecomer to capitalism, had restricted access to foreign markets. There was, therefore, the Narodniks argued, no future for Russian capitalism.⁷³

The controversy over the viability of Russian capitalism focused on the question of the capacity of capital to reproduce itself in an enclosed market. The point of departure of the debate was the scheme for capital reproduction contained in Capital, II. The same questions were to occupy German Marxists a decade or more later, when the militaristic and imperialistic tendencies exhibited by

⁷¹ c.f., C.W., 3, p.25; editor's note, C.W., 3, p.637.

⁷² c.f., M. Dobb, On Economic Theory and Socialism, (London, 1955), p.270.

⁷³ c.f., P. M. Sweezy, The Theory of Capitalist Development, p.184.

the German state prompted Rosa Luxemburg to suggest that imperialist adventures were in fact manifestations of capitalism's inner drive for ever expanding markets without which the continued accumulation of capital was not possible. In Russia, historical developments had placed the question on the agenda earlier.

The Russian Marxist response to the Narodniks' under-consumption theory was orchestrated initially by the 'legal Marxists' Struve, Bulgakov and Tugan-Baronovsky. Marxism was a strong current in Russian intellectual life in the eighteen nineties, but there was a deepening schism within the ranks of its adherents. Whilst the Emancipation of Labour Group, and related agitational groups, adopted a revolutionary perspective, the 'legal Marxists' - intellectuals, academics - held to a hybrid form of bourgeois liberal political economy and a vulgarised, diluted Marxism. One of the fixed points in the otherwise moveable firmament of their ideas was a firm belief in the historical necessity of capitalist development, in its progressive nature. They also asserted that capitalist economic development led towards socialism - a principle to which they attached the status of an objective law, which Struve articulated in his influential work, Critical Notes Concerning the Economic Development of Russia, (1894).

The position which the 'legal Marxists' took up was paradoxical if not actually contradictory. Capitalism was viable, despite the opposition between the limitless expansion of production and the limited basis of consumption on which it rested, but its contradictions, including this one, testified to its historically transient nature. Finally the attempt to overcome this paradox overcame Struve, and his fellow thinkers, Bulgakov and Tugan-Baronovsky. In demonstrating that capitalism in general, and Russian capitalism in particular, was viable without external markets, they convinced themselves that it was capable of perpetuating itself - of generating new capital indefinitely. As Rosa Luxemburg put it, "they proved this capacity to the extent of even offering theoretical proof that capitalism can go on for ever".⁷⁴ And by 1900 the 'legal Marxists' "ended up just where we should expect them to from their theoretical position - in the camp of bourgeois harmonies".⁷⁵

The nub of the question concerned the ability of capital to reproduce itself in a closed system - that is, within the confines of the domestic economy. Bulgakov and Tugan-Baronovski argued that Marx's schema showed that so long as the correct proportional relations were maintained between

⁷⁴ The Accumulation of Capital, p.325.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.326.

that department of production producing means of production (Department I in Marx's schema) and that producing consumption goods, (Department II), then exchange between the capitalists of the two departments facilitated the realisation of surplus within the closed system. Periodic crises of capitalism were not contingent upon deficiencies in consumptive capacity, but on disproportion arising between production in the two departments.⁷⁶ They were crises of disproportion, not of underconsumption. Bulgakov and Tugan-Baronovski went on to conclude that by achieving the correct proportions between capital in the two departments, capitalism could perpetuate itself indefinitely. (In taking this last step, they made the assumption that capitalism was capable of regulating itself in such a way as to achieve those correct proportional relations,⁷⁷ an assumption with which Rosa Luxemburg was to take issue).

Struve arrived at a similar conclusion to Bulgakov and Tugan-Baronovsky - that capital could reproduce itself indefinitely - though by a different route. The surplus created by capitalism was realisable through the consumptive capacity of non-capitalist enclaves in the economy.

⁷⁶ c.f., Rosdolsky, The Making of Marx's 'Capital', pp.464-72.

⁷⁷ c.f., M. Kalecki, Selected Essays on the Dynamics of the Capitalist Economy, 1933-70, (London, 1971), p.147.

The error of the 'legal Marxists' was that they identified, in an immediate and direct fashion, the abstract and partial analysis contained in Capital, II, with the real concrete process of capital reproduction. "What is most immediately obvious in the books and essays of the Russian Legal Marxists in question (Bulgakov and Tugan-Baronovski), is that they continually confuse Marx's abstract analysis with capitalist reality...and therefore draw conclusions from this analysis which are in no way justified".⁷⁸

Marx's schema demonstrated the abstract possibility that under certain carefully defined conditions, capital was capable of reproducing itself in a closed system. Bulgakov and Tugan-Baronovski ripped these abstract schema from their theoretical context, and translated them directly into statements about the reproduction of capital in its palpable form, treating them as expressions of positive laws. And Struve simply pointed to the absurdity, plain from mere observation and common sense, of the realisation of surplus in an economy made up exclusively of capitalists and workers, (one of the conditions which Marx assumed). Their frame of reference, a positivist one, simply prevented the 'legal' Marxists' from comprehending the significance of Marx's abstract schemes.

⁷⁸ Rosdolsky, The Making of Marx's 'Capital', p.464.

Lenin was absolutely adamant on this question. Capitalism in Russia, he argued, was a progressive force with a historical mission, and was demonstrating an energetic ability to expand the domestic market - "the data indicate an enormous growth of commodity circulation and capital accumulation".⁷⁹ In On the So-Called Market Question, The Economic Content of Narodism, The Development of Capitalism in Russia, Lenin tried to show that the market developed with the deepening division of labour which created a class of wage workers in industry and agriculture, no longer self-sufficient, but thrown on the market for commodities and labour, thus immeasurably expanding the market. Consumption was categorically not an absolute barrier to capitalist development. The stress on absolute is important - it will be taken up below to distinguish Lenin from the 'legal Marxists'.

In the last named of the above works, Lenin confronted Marx's reproduction schema in order to demonstrate the theoretical source of the Narodniks' errors. When he wrote The Development of Capitalism in Russia he was tactically allied to the 'legal Marxist' in the attempt to show the viability of Russian capitalism - in spite of their proximity to a neo-harmonious view of capitalism - in opposition to the underconsumption school. It was not until he wrote

⁷⁹ C.W., 3, p.557.

the Preface to the second edition in 1907, after the 'legal Marxists' had finally made a breach with Marxism, and committed themselves to the liberal camp that Lenin distinguished himself from Struve, Bulgakov and Tugan-Baronovski. (Lenin inserted in the second edition a number of footnotes critical of the 'legal Marxists').⁸⁰

Moreover, it must be noted that Lenin took the part of the avowedly revisionist Austro-Marxist Otto Bauer, a protagonist of the neo-harmonious interpretation of capitalism, in his dispute over the reproduction schemes with Luxemburg. And in important respects, as Rosdolsky points out, Lenin came close to Tugan-Baronovski in his own formulation of the question, and never attacked the fundamental basis of either Tugan's or Bulgakov's ideas.⁸¹

Lenin's treatment of the reproduction schema and of the related questions of proportion between the two departments of production, underconsumption and crises, has been the subject of sharply conflicting commentary. Sweezy, for instance, writes that "the only Marxist writers, aside from Marx himself, who correctly understood the general relation between disproportionality, underconsumption and crises

⁸⁰ c.f., editor's note to C.W., 3, p.642. For an example of such a footnote see p.45n.

⁸¹ Rosdolsky, The Making of Marx's 'Capital', p.481.

were Lenin and his followers",⁸² whilst Rosdolsky, as has been indicated above, casts severe doubts on the correctness of Lenin's analysis.

Rosdolsky makes two fundamental criticisms. The first concerns the contradiction between production and consumption, a contradiction which "plays a key role in Marx's theory, and was only left out of consideration in the analysis in Volume III for methodological reasons", but which Lenin simply reduces to the status of disproportion.⁸³ Marx emphasised the contradiction between the limitless expansion of production and the narrow basis of consumption on which it rests, in Capital, III. Lenin subsumed the limited capacity of society to consume - a major barrier to capital accumulation, into the concept of disproportion between the constituent parts of capital - which represents no more than a partial hindrance to accumulation, accounting for the dislocations which punctuate it, but in no sense attenuating it. According to Rosdolsky, this capital error stems from the fact that Lenin read the reproduction schema in Capital, II as the "final and definite word of the Marxist theory of realisation, and accordingly did not wish to recognise the relevance of the later enlargements and modifications to this analysis as found in Volume III".⁸⁴

⁸² Sweezy, The Theory of Capitalist Development, p.184.

⁸³ Rosdolsky, The Making of Marx's 'Capital', pp.478-9.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.477.

The second of the errors to which Rosdolsky draws attention is in Lenin's reading of the reproduction schema themselves. Rather ironically, in view of the above criticism, Lenin is accused of attempting to "project the law of the increasing composition of capital" - which Marx formulated in Capital, III - "onto Marx's schemes of reproduction, and to interpret these schemes as implying a necessarily more rapid growth of the production goods industries".⁸⁵

Rosdolsky is quite correct in asserting that in the reproduction schema, the production goods sector undergoes exactly the same rate of growth as the sector producing consumption goods. But the tendency of the organic composition of capital to increase, exposed by Marx in Capital, III, does nevertheless imply that the department of social production which makes the means of production grows faster than the one producing consumption goods. The question might be put to Rosdolsky with some force; should the reproduction schema in Capital, II be read in the illumination cast by Marx's comments in Capital, III, as he seems to suggest in the first mentioned of the above criticisms, or are they to be read as a self-contained piece of analysis, which elsewhere he seems to imply.

⁸⁵ loc. cit.

In The Development of Capitalism in Russia, Lenin emphatically and repeatedly referred to the contradiction between production and consumption,⁸⁶ quoting extensively from Capital, III.⁸⁷ But he avoided the empiricist trap of transforming a contradiction into a positive law. In a telling passage, to which Rosdolsky, who quotes widely from Lenin, fails to refer, Lenin elaborates upon the nature of the contradiction.

Nothing could be more senseless than to conclude from these passages in Capital that Marx did not admit the possibility of surplus value being realised in capitalist society, that he attributed crises to underconsumption, and so forth. Marx's analysis of production showed that the circulation between constant and variable capital is definitely limited by personal consumption; but this same analysis showed the true character of this limitedness, it showed that compared with the means of production, articles of consumption play a minor role in the formation of the home market...the contradiction between the drive towards the unlimited expansion of production and limited consumption is not the only contradiction of capitalism which cannot exist and develop at all without contradictions. The contradictions of capitalism testify to its historically transient character, and make clear the conditions and causes of its collapse and transformation to a higher social form.⁸⁸

There is, in the above passage, evidence of a dialectical reading of Marx's theory of capital reproduction, realisation

⁸⁶ C.W.3, pp.56, 58.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.57; Lenin quotes here from Capital, III, p.481 "The ultimate reason for all real crises always remains the poverty and restricted consumption of the masses as opposed to the drive of capitalist production to develop the productive forces".

⁸⁸ C.W.3, p.58.

and crisis, which sharply differentiated Lenin from all the other protagonists in the debate. The contradiction inherent in the accumulation process is precisely that feature which enables it to overcome the barriers which appear in its path. That is to say that growth in that sector of production which produces means of production is relatively greater than growth in the consumption goods sector, and that this characteristic circumvents the limitations placed on capital reproduction by the market, and simultaneously underwrites, in the ultimate analysis, the finite nature of capital accumulation. The mechanisms of capital regeneration are the same mechanisms which guarantee its historical transience.

That Lenin recognised the nuances of Marx's theory, and the potential contradiction between the schema in Capital, II and the theory of realisation in Capital, III is plain. "The development of production...chiefly on account of means of production seems paradoxical and undoubtedly constitutes a contradiction...But it is a contradiction not of doctrine, but of actual life".⁸⁹ What distinguishes capitalism from earlier modes of production is that it relies for its survival on the production of means of production - production for its own sake - and that it is not aware that it does so. The producer is not aware of his relation to production in general. This lack of

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.56.

awareness is a function of an intrinsic characteristic of commodity production - commodity fetishism.

This very good knowledge of ones relation to production...has disappeared in capitalist society, owing to the latter's inherent fetishism, which presents the social relations of men as relations of products, owing to the conversion of every product into a commodity...And it is a matter of the utmost indifference to the individual entrepreneur what kind of article he produces - every article yields a revenue - this same superficial individual point of view was adopted by the economist theoreticians in relation to the whole of society and prevented the process of the reproduction of the total social product in capitalist society from being understood.⁹⁰

The above passage bears witness to Lenin's comprehension of the significance of Marx's theory of realisation. There is a methodological distinction which must be made between Marx's investigation of capital in general, and his analysis of the interaction between individual capitals, and between the component parts of capital, in the real conditions in which capital reproduction takes place. As Marx indicated, and as Rosdolsky reminds us, the distinction is located between the first two volumes of Capital and the third, where Marx's formulations "gradually approached the form ...in which they themselves appear on the surface of society".⁹¹

⁹⁰ loc. cit.

⁹¹ R. Rosdolsky, 'Comments on the Method of Marx's Capital and its Importance for Contemporary Marxist Scholarship', New German Critique, Vol.1, No.3, 1974, p.70.

The reproduction schemes are part of Marx's formulations of 'capital in general' - that is, they are highly abstract formulæ. Accordingly, the proposition that exchange occurs between the two departments of production was made on a high plane of abstraction. It by no means implies that this necessarily will, or does occur in the real interplay of capitalist relations in such a way as to constitute a mechanism for capital's self-regulation and cumulative reproduction. Nor does the ultimate, fundamental opposition, elaborated in Capital, III, between the unlimited production drive and the limitedness of consumption, imply the impossibility of capital reproduction.

The 'legal Marxists', like the German revisionists "sought to apply directly, the correct yet abstract teachings of their master, devoid of any mediations, to the phenomena of the world of appearances which prime facie seems to contradict them".⁹² As is evident from the foregoing, Lenin interpreted the abstract formulations of the reproduction schemes and Marx's general theory of realisation, and related them to each other, in a fashion which was untypical of his generation of Marxists.

Two qualifications must be made. Firstly, as Rosdolsky points out, Lenin did tend to ascribe a roughly equivalent

⁹² Ibid., p.71.

status to the opposition between consumption and production - the fundamental contradiction in capital accumulation - on the one hand, and the possibility of disproportion arising in the relations between the component parts of capital - the source of periodical dislocation in the accumulation, on the other.⁹³ And secondly, whilst his analysis did not rely solely on the reproduction schema in Capital, II, he does nevertheless imply in at least one comment that the viability of capital realisation and accumulation can be deduced exclusively from the reproduction schema.⁹⁴ In this respect he comes into proximity with neo-harmonious interpretations of capitalism.

Nevertheless, his analysis of the question of accumulation, taken as a whole, contains evidence of a dialectical approach which demonstrates a general ability to identify the different levels of abstraction on which Marx was operating in Capital, and on these grounds Lenin's theory should be distinguished

93. See, for instance, Lenin's polemic against Tugan-Baronovski in 'A Note on the Question of the Market Theory', C.W., 4, p.58; "'The consuming power of society' and the 'proportional relations of the various branches of production' are not conditions that are isolated, independent and unconnected with each other. On the contrary, a certain level of consumption is one of the elements of proportionality".

94. C.W., 3, p.68; "By establishing these main theoretical propositions", (those of the reproduction schema), "Marx fully explained the process of the realisation of the product in general and of surplus value in particular...."

from the "blatant empiricism" of the Second International Marxists,⁹⁵ and from the neo-harmonious interpretation of Struve, Bulgakov and Tugan-Baronovski.

⁹⁵ Rosdolsky, 'Comments on the Method of Marx's Capital', New German Critique, Vol.2, No.3, 1974, p.63.

Section ii

The Historical Method

Lenin's historical acuity

Marx's theory presented Western European Marxists with a set of categories and concepts with which to frame their own theoretical orientation and political practice. Where capitalism was less well developed, Marxists were faced with the task of modifying categories and concepts, the fullest applicability of which was to relatively advanced capitalist society. Russia was idiosyncratic in important respects of its economic and social development. Capitalist economic and social relations in agriculture and industry existed only in embryonic form. In agriculture, landholding remained bound by a pre-capitalist mode, and in many branches of industry, the wage labour relation was obscured by the appearance of independence, and the persistence of old techniques.

In his protracted polemic with the Narodniks, Lenin articulated an essentially Western Marxist orthodoxy concerning economic and social relations, against a populist intellectual tradition running from Chernyshevsky to Mikhailovsky.

Whilst admiring Chernychevsky as an exemplar of the dynamic

populism of the eighteen sixties,¹ Lenin was sharply critical of Mikhailovsky, against whom his What the Friends of the People Are was directed. Populism had, by the 'nineties become outdated, historically redundant. It was no more than 'sociological romanticism',² "the attempt to measure the new society with the old patriarchal yardsticks, the desire to find a model in the old order and traditions which are totally unsuited to the changed economic conditions".³ In his early work, therefore taking on Plekhanov's mantle, Lenin extracted the study of Russian economic and social development from its traditional frame of reference and set it in the context of Western capitalist development expounded by Marx.

However, if the development of economic and social relations in Russia had outgrown Chernyshevsky, it had not yet attained that level at which it would readily fit into Marx's exposition of relatively advanced capitalist society. To a large extent it was true that "Marxist theory supplied no ready-made recipes for application to Russia, and that what was required was a creative remaking of the Marxist categories".⁴

¹ c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, pp.15-6.

² Walicki, The Controversy over Capitalism, pp.14-6.

³ C.W., 1, p.241.

⁴ A. C. MacIntyre, Against the Self Images of the Age: Essays on Ideology and Philosophy, (London, 1971), p.46.

Amongst the most important of the concepts which were to be reconstructed were the schema for historical development which Marx had formulated, or which were implicit in Marx's work and had passed into Marxist theory. Capital, for example, contained a theoretical foundation for the study of the emergence of capitalist economic forms out of their pre-capitalist precursors. Although a systematic exposition was lacking, there were significant chapters - in Capital, I, on the division of labour, manufacture, machine industry, the origins of capitalist farming, the creation of a home market, the transformation of money into capital; in Capital, III, on the origin of capitalist ground rent⁵ - of which Lenin made use in The Development of Capitalism in Russia.

Lenin's major theoretical work was, as has been stated above and elsewhere, a work of natural history. In addition to a conceptual and empirical depiction of a social formation, it contained a historical schema for the emergence of capitalist out of pre-capitalist forms. Lenin's schema retained a fidelity to Marx's historical method. It embarked

⁵ c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, p.91; "Lenin expressly derived his analysis of labour-rent and its subsequent transformation into money-rent from Chapter Forty-Seven of Capital". For an affidavit testifying to the sophistication of Lenin's formulation of the question see Hindess and Hirst, Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production, p.186; "Lenin has given one of the ablest short accounts of the theory of differential rent...".

from simple concepts - division of labour, the commodity - and proceeded towards the more complex - home market, foreign trade. It accommodated the co-existence of capitalist and pre-capitalist forms, modes of organisation, relations, in which the dominance and ascendancy of capital was demonstrated.

Marx's legacy contained another set of concepts and categories representing a frame of historical reference which Lenin fined to the context of Russian social and economic conditions. Prior to 1905, Russian Social Democrats had been in concert over the orthodoxy that bourgeois revolution was an essential pre-requisite for a socialist revolution, and that the impending revolution in Russia was limited to bourgeois, democratic objectives.⁶ However, the logical inference that the revolution would be led by the bourgeoisie - one which the Menshevik faction drew - was sharply discordant with Russian circumstances. Incohesive, subordinate to the Tsarist state, the bourgeoisie was categorically not a revolutionary class⁷ - as events were to confirm.

⁶ c.f., N. Geras, The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, (London, 1976), p.87; Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, p.62.

⁷ c.f., Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, pp.74-5.

Lenin's revised schema - his solution to the problem - was based on a clear appreciation of the configuration and constituency of classes - especially the peasantry, of which he was appraised by virtue of his early studies of that class.⁸ How Lenin formulated his schema, upon what premises it was based, are questions which become clear from a reading of The Agrarian Programme of Social Democracy in the First Russian Revolution, 1905-1907. It is evident from this work that the schematic separation which Lenin maintained between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions was not simply a doctrinaire and formal schema, nor was the strategic alliance between proletariat and peasantry, expressed in the slogan, 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry', the product of an empirical mode of thought. Rather was the schema for bourgeois and proletarian revolution, and the formulation of the strategic alliance between proletariat and peasantry a product of Lenin's historical acuity, his close analysis of the significance of the agrarian question for the revolution, and of the revolution for the agrarian question.

8 c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, p.216; "Lenin's own theoretical analysis had provided him with the answer - only the proletariat and the poor peasantry were wholeheartedly committed to the destruction of landlordism". This view contradicts that of H. Willetts, 'Lenin and the Peasants', P. Reddaway and L. S. Schapiro, eds., Lenin the Man, the Theorist, the Leader, (London, 1970), p.217. Willetts argues that Lenin's strategic formulations after 1905 "were no longer based on close investigation or careful analysis of new statistical data, like his work in the 1890s".

During the revolutionary upheaval of 1905 there is evidence that there occurred to Lenin the prospect of carrying over a bourgeois revolution, of which the proletariat was the driving force, into a revolution which would express the interests of the proletariat - a socialist revolution.⁹ The defeat of the proletariat, and the restoration of autocracy, however, heralded a period in which Lenin's pre-occupations were with combating tendencies within Russian Social Democracy towards a quiescent acceptance of the restraints imposed by defeat - towards a European orientation of 'revolutionary socialism'.¹⁰ Revolution was plainly not on the historical agenda.

The more aggressive, antagonistic mood of the masses in the four years preceding the outbreak of war, however, was recognised by Lenin with remarkable, almost prescient, perceptiveness. In 1910 he wrote that the "period of the golden days of the counter revolution... is coming to a close and being replaced by a period of incipient upsurge".¹¹

⁹ Frequently cited is a passage from an article written by Lenin in 1905; C.W.,9, p.237; "From the democratic revolution we shall at once, and precisely in accordance with the measure of our strength, the strength of the class conscious and organised proletariat, begin to pass to the socialist revolution. We stand for uninterrupted revolution".

¹⁰ c.f., Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, p.98.

¹¹ C.W.,16, p.339.

Thereafter his orientation became altered in two important respects. He began to adopt that global perspective which was to inform his Imperialism,¹² and he recaptured the revolutionary élan, which presupposed the actuality of revolution as an event imminent in history.¹³

The actuality of revolution is a theme which runs through Lenin's work and his political career, assuming dominance in periods of class antagonism and revolutionary fervour. But revolution remained circumscribed, in the years before the outbreak of war, by the orthodox Marxist schema for the separation of bourgeois and proletarian stages. By April 1917, it is clear that Lenin had allowed the schema to be overcome by the dynamic forces of the revolution.

Commentators differ in their assessments of precisely when the break occurred.¹⁴ It will be argued below that the crucial period in the evolution of Lenin's formulations of revolution was from the outbreak of war to the end of 1915, when revolutionary awareness overwhelmed the historical

¹² c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, pp.304-5.

¹³ c.f., Lukács, Lenin, a Study on the Unity of his Thought, pp.26-9.

¹⁴ Geras, The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, pp.106-8, and Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, p.83, maintain that Lenin's thinking changed in 1917. This date is generally accepted.

schema, and the tension between the two, evident since 1905, was finally resolved.

That Marxism represents a 'science of history' is hardly deniable. For the Second International Marxists, in their belief in the imminence of socialist transformation,¹⁵ a sharp historical sense was an essential pre-requisite for a correct conception of Marxist history and a political practice attuned to the potentialities of the historical situation. Kautsky's fatalistic belief that "we are approaching a revolutionary epoch, as to the date of which, however, it is impossible to say anything",¹⁶ restricted his vision of history to a unilinear trajectory towards the historic objective, which was capable of accomodating a thoroughly reformist and unimaginative strategy.

Lenin's sense of history was more nuanced and acute. Sharing the belief in the imminence of social upheaval, history was for him a complex series of conjunctures, a

¹⁵ Engels was responsible in large measure for the optimism of the Second International. In his 1895 Introduction to The Class Struggles in France, he came to the conclusion that the revolutionary movement must be based firmly on the class conscious masses. Taking the German movement as his model, Engels was convinced that in the course of its normal development, the S.P.D. had socialism within its grasp. See Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin, p.47.

¹⁶ K. Kautsky, The Social Revolution, and On the Morrow of the Social Revolution, (London, 1907), p.48.

concatenation of shifting class predilections, allegiances, loyalties, set against a backdrop of economic and social relations at any given moment of their uneven development. The relation in which the political response of a particular class stood to its economic and social position was neither immediate nor static. It was mediated by its consciousness - its awareness of its position - and its level of awareness was not a fixed point. It was heightened in periods of sharp class antagonism. Lenin's historical acuity was in his perception of the tension between the low level of economic and social development in Russia, and the manifest revolutionary potential of the masses. It was this perception which prevented his historical schema from dominating his political practice in a dogmatic or doctrinaire manner.

The historical schema; The Development of Capitalism in Russia

The historical schema which Lenin outlined in his major theoretical work represented the underpinning of his theoretical and political formulations up to 1914, when the evident emergence of international monopoly capitalism, European war, and the collapse of the Second International, obliged him to integrate his earlier formulations into a

global perspective. It also represents the culmination of the Russian Marxist attack on Populist economic thought.¹⁷

Plekhanov had initiated this attack. In Socialism and the Political Struggle, and its sequel, Our Differences, he made a sustained attempt to apply a Marxist method to an economic analysis of Russian conditions.¹⁸ His conception of Marxist method, however, was heavily laden with teleological implications. Walicki refers to a 'rational necessity' in Plekhanov's historical perspective. Nothing less than an absolute belief in the necessity of capitalist development would suffice to justify the suffering that capitalist development inflicted upon the working class.¹⁹ Plekhanov derived his 'rational necessity' from historical laws, which despite the caveats with which he qualified them, give his work an abstract and rigid appearance.²⁰

¹⁷ For a succinct account of the Populists' position, see Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, pp.81-5.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.37-8.

¹⁹ Walicki, The Controversy over Capitalism, pp.159-60.

²⁰ c.f., Tanaka, 'The Controversy Concerning Russian Capitalism', Kyoto University Economic Review, Vol.XXXVI, No.2, October, 1966, p.33; "...his overall approach was simple and abstract"; Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, p.44; "He did not pursue the more explicitly economic aspects of his thought at any great length...His arguments tend to convince more by the authority with which they were pronounced than by the volume of data substantiating them".

The schema which Lenin enunciated in The Development of Capitalism in Russia was more nuanced and demonstrated a greater awareness of the unevenness of economic development, of the actual course of that development, and possessed an impeccable theoretical pedigree. It was not merely a chronological sequence of stages, leading in unilinear fashion towards mature capitalism. It was derived from the evolutionary dynamic of the capital form.

Capital progresses through a series of stages from usurers' and merchants' capital to manufacturing, and finally industrial capital, and the various dimensions of capitalist development - formation of the home market, division of labour, technical basis and scale of production, class configuration of producers - advance as this occurs. Lenin does not impose his schema on the empirical material for the purposes of ordering and rendering intelligible the evolution of Russian economic forms. Rather does the schema arise out of the nature of capital itself. Capital imposes a schema on the historical account of its own development.

In capitalist society, the forms which capital assumes impose themselves on economic and social life. In Lenin's account, usurers' capital and merchants' capital are treated as a single type - money capital. Its development

accompanies the transition from the labour service (corvée) system, to the capitalist system of agriculture, and the transformation of labour rent into money rent. Labour rent - where the peasant expends a proportion of his labour on land belonging to the feudal lord - and rent in kind - where the peasant delivers a proportion of his product to the lord - are supplanted by money rent. The rent in kind system has already granted the peasant producer a certain degree of independence, which is reinforced by the introduction of money rent. The possibility arises that some amongst the peasantry might benefit from favourable circumstances - family size, size of plot, fertility of land, conditions of rental - such that they are able to produce surplus to their immediate needs. In turn, this raises the possibility of a differentiation between prosperous peasant producers, employing labour, and less prosperous producers who are forced to hire out their labour in order to fulfil their obligations to the landlord. The potential for this sort of differentiation existed under the rent in kind system, but it is only fully realised with the money rent form.²¹

Money rent prepares the way for wage labour. The badly off peasant, forced to sell his labour in order to fulfil

²¹ C.W.3, p.175.

his obligations, becomes a wage worker on the plot of his well-to-do counterpart.²² The latter might invest his surplus in the extension of the land under his ownership, or he might engage in commercial operations, either of a usurous or commercial kind.²³ Once he enters into commerce, other means of asserting his domination over the badly off peasant present themselves. He deals in the raw materials which are the product of agricultural activity, and the basis of non-agricultural production.²⁴ In this way he becomes the link between isolated producers and the market upon which they are dependent, and there exists potential for still greater domination - the merchant who sells the raw materials and buys the product of the peasant producer becomes his employer. He merely supplies the raw material for 'working up' into the product by a producer working with his own tools. Raw material and product remain the property of the merchant - the producer is, in effect, employed as a wage worker on piece rates.

The intrusion of merchants' and usurers' capital into the peasant economy entails no technical advance, nor any change in the mode of production. It does however, set agriculture and handicraft industry firmly on a commercial basis. Even where money capital is only weakly developed, the peasantry "cannot exist at all without buying and selling and are

²² Ibid., p.176.

²³ Ibid., p.177.

²⁴ Ibid., p.360.

already completely dependent on the market, on the power of money".²⁵ There are two important effects. Firstly, commercial relations supplant patriarchal, feudal relations, and secondly, money wealth is centralised, and an entrepreneur class created. Both these developments lay the foundations for capitalist agriculture and industry.

The rise of usurers' and merchants' capital is therefore a necessary premise for the development of capitalism. It is not, however, a sufficient premise. Money capital, in its initial form, existing that is, independently of industrial capital, represents a barrier to the further development of capitalist production.²⁶ Lenin locates money capital within the boundaries of natural economy - the relation between peasant and owner of money capital being one of dependence and bondage.²⁷ Not until that personal relation of dependence is dissolved can capital exert the full force of its dominance.

As money wealth is centralised, however, a further transformation takes place. Money capital is introduced into the productive process - the merchant becomes a manufacturer, employing wage labour. The degree of maturity attained by capitalist development may be gauged from the degree to which merchants' capital ceases to lead an independent existence, but becomes merged with industrial capital.²⁸

²⁵ Ibid., p.155. ²⁶ Ibid., p.184. ²⁷ Ibid., p.383.

²⁸ Ibid., p.184.

The emergence of manufacturing capital out of usurers' and merchants' capital, marks a qualitative change in the relations of production. The technical basis of manufacture is still hand labour,²⁹ but it is accompanied by a sharpening division of labour, and increased productivity. Manufacture is designated by Lenin as a form of commodity production, a form of production which approaches large scale machine industry in as much as it entails a widening of the market, an increase in the size of productive establishments employing wage labour in a pure form, untrammelled by the remnants of feudal bondage. In short, manufacturing capital is large scale capital with all that it entails.³⁰

In its early forms - usurers' and merchants' capital - capital appears as a subordinate form - it has not yet attained that stage of maturity at which it is able to transform economic and social relations, to impose its own characteristics on those relations. In its more mature form of manufacturing capital, it becomes dominant, and subordinates economic and social relations to itself.

²⁹ Ibid., pp.427-8.

³⁰ Ibid., p.385; "What brings manufacture closer to the factory is the rise of the big market, of big establishments, with wage workers, of big capital, which has brought masses of propertyless workers under its complete domination".

The zenith of capital's evolution, however, is large scale machine industry, the fullest realisation of the potential which it contains. Those developments which began to emerge alongside money capital - the differentiation of the peasantry, the separation of industry from agriculture, the wage labour relation, the socialisation of production, the expansion of the market - find their quintessential form in large scale machine industry and factory production.

Lenin documents the radical changes in economic relations which are contingent upon large scale machine industry. "Large scale machine industry throws manual skill overboard, transforms production on new, rational principles, and systematically applies science to production".³¹ "In large scale machine industry...the acuteness of social contradictions reaches its highest point. All the dark sides of capitalism become concentrated, as it were...";³² "production acquires the instability characteristic of capitalism, an instability which attains the greatest intensity under factory production".³³ "Large scale machine industry...separates agriculture from industry once and for all...absolutely refuses to tolerate survivals of patriarchalism and personal dependence and is marked by a truly contemptuous attitude to the past".³⁴ Large

³¹ Ibid., p.543.

³² Ibid., p.544.

³³ Ibid., p.545.

³⁴ Ibid., p.546.

scale machine industry engenders

...production for an enormous national and international market, development of close commercial ties with various parts of the country and with different countries for the purchase of raw and auxiliary materials, enormous technical progress, concentration of production and of the population in colossal enterprises, demolition of the worn out traditions of patriarchal life, creation of the mobility of the population...³⁵

In its primitive form of money wealth, capital has appeared as a subordinate form within a framework of natural economy which it leaves largely unchanged. It has not yet reached that stage of maturity where it is able to transform economic and social relations, to impose its own characteristics on those relations. In the more mature form of manufacturing capital, and especially large scale machine industry, capital subordinates, in the most sweeping fashion, all other relations to itself. In treating capital in this way, Lenin is following Marx's method as set out in the Grundrisse and in Capital.³⁶

³⁵ Ibid., pp.549-50.

³⁶ c.f., Grundrisse, pp.106-7; "in all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to all the others"; Capital, I, p.154; "As a matter of history capital, as opposed to landed wealth, invariably takes the form at first of money; it appears as money wealth, as the capital of the merchant and of the usurer".

Economic forms and relations undergo change. Their significance, in terms of rank order of influence, shifts with their historical development. Shifts are not always readily perceptible. To recognise them it is necessary to look beneath the immediately apparent forms, to their substance. Lenin repeatedly stresses the point that historical analysis must be acutely aware of the substance beneath the form. Added weight attached to this imperative in view of the co-existence in Russia of economic forms which, whilst ostensibly similar, possessed characteristics marking them off from each other in terms of their substance.

The textile industry in the 1860s, for instance, contained factories which whilst organised on the basis of large scale machine industry, were owned by landlords employing bound peasants.³⁷ In the following two decades the number of these enterprises declined, whilst other capitalist enterprises emerged from merchant owned, large scale manufacturing establishments. The decline of one form of factory production and the rise of another, represent two opposite trends, which had to be disentangled from statistical data which tended to confuse the two. The data simply added to the confusion, since enterprises were classified according to size, and the number of wage

³⁷ C.W., 3, p.470.

workers employed.³⁸ Consequently, manufacture and factory production were conflated in the same category, blandly passing over differences in the technical basis of production.

Lenin set about distinguishing the substance from the form of the enterprise.

...It is ridiculous to reduce the problem of the development of large scale machine industry to mere factory statistics. It is a question not only of statistics, but of the forms assumed and the stages traversed by the development of the country under consideration. Only after the substance of these forms and their distinguishing features have been made clear is there any sense in illustrating the development of this or that form by means of properly compiled statistics. Failure to carry out this refinement of method leads to the lumping together the most diverse forms of capitalism, to not seeing the wood for the trees.³⁹

The above passage reinforces two points made above. That The Development of Capitalism in Russia was much more than an empirical compilation of statistics is the first. The second is that Lenin's conceptual apparatus provided him with the means to cut a swathe through the complexities of co-existing modes of production - to isolate elements of the old and the new, and to assess the inroads made by capitalist economic forms into feudal.

³⁸ Ibid., p.454.

³⁹ Ibid., p.455.

The 'story of Engelhardt's farm' reinforces the second point further. Engelhardt was a Narodnik agrarian economist who also happened to be a farmer, and whose Letters from the Countryside had contained an account of development on his own farm. Lenin neatly uses the account to demonstrate the error of the Narodnik conception of capitalism in agriculture. Engelhardt had set out to farm on rational lines, "but was unable to do so, under the given social and economic conditions, except by organising the farm on the basis of employing farm labourers".⁴⁰

Realising that obsolete systems of field cultivation and cattle raising were suffocating the viability of his farm in face of competition from the grain producers of the steppe regions, the farmer-economist introduced flax onto his farm - "a commercial and industrial crop requiring the employment of labour on a big scale".⁴¹ At first he applied the old labour service system to the new type of commercial cultivation, but the project was unsuccessful. The labourers could not be induced to work in the regimented fashion demanded by commercial cultivation. Therefore, he introduced the capitalist system of piece work. At the same time, he acquired the appurtenances of capitalist agriculture - horses, ploughs, carts, harrows - the result being a substantial increase in productivity. Hired

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.219.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.216.

labour, and techniques appropriate to capitalist production were then applied to other agricultural operations - threshing, for instance. This was an operation "that on all farms run by private landowners...is mostly performed on capitalist lines".⁴² Even where the labour service system predominates, that is to say, capitalist forms are capable of intervening. Conversely, where capitalist forms predominate, remnants of the pre-capitalist survive as necessary adjuncts. Part of Engelhardt's land was leased to peasants on a labour service basis to provide a 'reserve pool' of labour available for harvesting. "Thus, labour service functions as a direct transition to capitalism, by ensuring the former a supply of day labourers in the busiest season".⁴³

Lenin's observations on Engelhardt's farm are as follows.

The change in the technique of agriculture... proved to be inseparably bound up with the elimination of labour service by capitalism. Particularly interesting in this regard is the gradualness with which this elimination takes place; the system of farming, as hitherto, combines labour service and capitalism, but the main weight gradually shifts from the former to the latter...Labour service and bondage remained...even on a 'properly' conducted farm; but...they now occupied a subordinate position as compared with free hire.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., p.217.

⁴³ loc. cit.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.218.

As has been pointed out, Lenin employs a minimum definition of capitalism in The Development of Capitalism in Russia.⁴⁵ Capitalism represents that stage in the development of commodity production where human labour power becomes a commodity. But implicit in this conception is the notion that capitalist economic forms - wage labour, capital - make their earliest appearance occupying subordinate positions in a less well developed system, only achieving predominance, and the fullest expression of their potential, in fully developed capitalism. Only as capitalist forms approach maturity, that is, do they subordinate other relations and forms to themselves. Lenin had explored the implications of this conception of historical development in The Economic Content of Narodnism.⁴⁶ It is implicit in The Development of Capitalism in Russia.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, p.87.

⁴⁶ C.W.1, pp.437-8.

⁴⁷ c.f., C.W.3, p.184; Lenin quotes from Capital, III; "Merchants' and usurers' capital always historically precede the formation of industrial capital, and are logically the necessary premise of its formation...but in themselves neither merchants' capital nor usurers' capital represents a sufficient premise for the rise of industrial capital (i.e. capitalist production); they do not always break up the old mode of production and replace it by the capitalist mode of production; the formation of the latter depends entirely upon the stage of historical development and the attendant circumstances".

Lenin's schema for Russian capitalist development was in no sense chronological. The evolution of the money form into capital as such, the development of the market, the sharpening differentiation amongst the producers, were all derived theoretically from a study of the processes at work within the larger process of capital formation. As Tanaka has pointed out "the stages of economic development not only appear chronologically, but also exist simultaneously. In other words it is expected that at one period, different stages co-exist. If this is true, any chronological presentation is in fact, an attempt to rearrange in relation to time of several stages which exist side by side in a space relationship". Lenin's conceptual scheme accommodated, methodologically, this evident truth. "Such a conceptual scheme seems to make more sense than that of Plekhanov, and the kind of rearrangement which Lenin makes helps us see clearly the relations existing between different developmental stages".⁴⁸

The superiority of Lenin's presentation of Russian capitalist development over that of Plekhanov, follows from the mode of presentation. Whilst Plekhanov proceeds from the higher phase to the lower, taking as his starting point the influence

⁴⁸ Tanaka, 'The Controversy Concerning Russian Capitalism', Kyoto University Economic Review, Vol. XXXVI, No.2, October 1966, p.40.

on the Russian economy of Western capitalism,⁴⁹ Lenin proceeds from the least developed forms of capital - money capital - and traces the evolution of money capital into the higher form - industrial capital. That is to say, he traces historically, the route which capital takes from the sphere of circulation into the sphere of production, a method which mirrors that of Marx in Capital.

The agrarian question and the bourgeois revolution

Prior to 1905, as is well known, Marxist orthodoxy, to which Lenin subscribed, held that a democratic revolution in Russia was, for socialism, a pre-requisite which could not be circumvented. Democratic revolution would serve to sweep away the remnants of feudalism, set Russia on a 'European' path to capitalist development, initiate bourgeois class rule, and carry in its wake those bourgeois freedoms of organisation and expression, the effect of which would be to loosen the fetters on the working class movement. In short, it would create the conditions without which Social Democracy was condemned to a partial and ineffectual existence.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.41.

Within Russian Social Democracy there was unanimity over this doctrine before 1905. Differences were restricted to organisational questions,⁵⁰ which, it has been argued, have themselves been over-emphasised.⁵¹ There was a consensus regarding the bourgeois nature of the impending revolution,⁵² and over the necessity of maintaining a hermetic barrier between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions. The former was a prerequisite for the latter, but an intervening period was posited in which the proletarian revolution would gather pace.

In the revolutionary fervour of 1905, Lenin maintained the strict separation of bourgeois and proletarian revolutions⁵³ against a considerable fraction - prominent Mensheviks, as well as Trotsky and Parvus, who advocated the fusion of bourgeois and proletarian revolutions. After 1905, when counter-revolution had cowed the Mensheviks, including Plekhanov - into the abandonment of the doctrine of pro-

⁵⁰ C.W.9, pp.48-9.

⁵¹ Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, p.196.

⁵² c.f., Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, p.62; Geras, The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, p.87.

⁵³ C.W.9, pp.84-5; Lenin refers to the necessity of "...logically and historically distinguishing between the major stages of development. We all contrapose bourgeois revolution and socialist revolution; we all insist on the absolute necessity of strictly distinguishing between them...".

letarian hegemony in the democratic revolution, Lenin proclaimed the urgent necessity for the proletariat, led by the vanguard party, to drive the vacillating bourgeoisie towards the consummation of the revolution. But Lenin was still under no illusions that the revolution was anything other than bourgeois in character, and the separation between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions was maintained.⁵⁴

The corollary of the separation between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions was the distinction which Lenin made between the 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' - a formula expressing the community of interests between these classes in the furtherance of the democratic revolution, and the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' - a formula appropriate to the socialist revolution. Both distinctions were part of Lenin's attempt to resolve, for tactical purposes, the contradiction between the hegemonic role which the proletariat was destined to play in the revolution, and the bourgeois nature of that

54 C.W., 10, p.77; "Naturally, as a result of the special position which the proletariat occupied in capitalist society, the striving of the workers towards socialism, and their alliance with the Socialist Party assert themselves with elemental force at the very earliest stages of the movement. But purely socialist demands are still a matter of the future: the immediate demands of the day are the democratic demands of the workers in the political sphere, and economic demands within the framework of capitalism in the economic sphere. Even the proletariat is making the revolution, as it were, within the limits of the minimum programme and not of the maximum programme".

revolution. They represented, for Lenin, a theoretical construction intended to allow the proletariat and its vanguard to participate in the democratic revolution, alongside other social groups, whilst retaining its autonomy of action and principle intact. The construction was a sheet anchor for the theory and practice of party and class.

Lenin's schema for revolution, its application to the course of events in 1905, were heavily criticised by Trotsky, whose criticisms have been taken up in recent commentary. Trotsky characterised Lenin's theoretical construction as 'scientific schema'. The proletariat, once engaged in the revolution, could not be expected to remain bound to the limited objectives of a democratic revolution by the fetters which such schema represented.⁵⁵ Liebman echoes Trotsky's criticism, referring to the "sharp line of demarcation between the bourgeois and proletarian revolutions", which "failed to reckon with the revolutionary dynamic".⁵⁶ Liebman argues that Lenin's stage theory of revolution faltered in 1905, and albeit briefly, Lenin glimpsed the possibility of 'permanent revolution'.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ L. Trotsky, 1905, (Harmondsworth, 1973), p.330.

⁵⁶ Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, p.78.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp.79-83.

The notion that Lenin, at any time before 1917, acknowledged the possibility of merging the two stages of revolution is rejected by Geras.⁵⁸ He refers to a profound tension within the Leninist perspective, which contained a 'dogmatic schema' for the separation of the bourgeois from the proletarian revolutions, but simultaneously embodied "a strategic approach which was revolutionary to the very core" because it was attentive to "every real revolutionary possibility which might present itself".⁵⁹ Read thus, a theoretical construction which taken out of the context of Lenin's general theoretical orientation, takes the appearance of a doctrinaire and formal schema, becomes less doctrinaire and formal

A reading of The Agrarian Question, where the theoretical formulations on the bourgeois revolution are given added

58 Geras, The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, pp.94-6, points to the danger of disregarding "in favour of one lonely phrase", that substantial body of material which clearly indicates that Lenin maintained the two stage theory of revolution throughout 1905 and 1906. Much of this material concerns the development of capitalism, of the bourgeois state, indicating that Lenin had no illusions concerning the immediate prospects for socialist revolution in Russia.

59 Ibid., p.93; c.f., J. C. Rees, 'Lenin and Marxism', P. Reddaway and L. S. Schapiro, eds., Lenin, the Man, the Theorist, the Leader, (London, 1970), pp.98-9. Rees expresses the tension in Lenin's perspective slightly differently; "...the argument", (for the separation of bourgeois and proletarian revolution), "would seem to conform in the main to the canons of Marxist orthodoxy. But there are signs of what was to become, in 1917, little less than a burning impatience with the restraints a rigid orthodoxy imposed".

substance, serves to illuminate this point further. It was stated above that Lenin's formulation of the tasks appropriate to the bourgeois revolution, the form of this revolution, the significance of its demands and the alliance between proletariat and peasantry necessary to drive it forward, was a product of his historical acuity. Lenin's meticulous examination of the social formation was a base from which he was able to assess the political responses, demands and slogans of socio-economic classes and groups in the revolution, and to assess also the economic content of those responses. For this reason, he occupied an advantageous position - of which he was aware - in relation to others in the party. It was a criticism frequently voiced by Lenin that contributors to inner party debate were inadequately appraised of economic realities.

On the land question this failing was particularly marked. Hence "a grave fault of almost the whole Social Democratic press on the question of the agrarian programme in general...is that practical considerations prevail over theoretical, and political considerations over economic".⁶⁰ Lenin's own analysis of the question of land reform and nationalisation reveals a historical acuity, an ability to set a demand spontaneously voiced

⁶⁰ C.W., 13, p.294.

by the peasantry, in the context of the historical development of Russian agriculture, and to assess in this illumination, its significance for revolutionary Social Democracy.

The agrarian question had been widely debated in R.S.D.L.P. Unity Congresses and in Bolshevik fraction conferences during 1905 and 1906. At the Third (Unity) Congress of the Party, held in Stockholm in April 1906, Lenin spoke of a pamphlet, written by himself, advocating the incorporation of the demand for land nationalisation into the party programme. In his report of the Stockholm Congress he wrote that

from the strictly scientific point of view, from the point of view of the conditions of development of capitalism in general, we must undoubtedly say - if we do not want to differ from Volume III of Capital - that the nationalisation of the land is possible in bourgeois society, that it promotes economic development, facilitates competition and the influx of capital into agriculture, reduces the price of grain...⁶¹ Land nationalisation is "the logical conclusion" of the bourgeois revolution since it promotes the further development of capitalism, and sweeps away absolute rent - a butress of pre-capitalist economic forms.⁶²

⁶¹ C.W., 10, p.346.

⁶² Ibid., p.378.

In The Agrarian Programme, Lenin acknowledged that earlier discussions within the party were incomplete, having taken place under the pressures of political circumstances, and proceeded to elaborate the theoretical basis of the question at further length. The mistake made by the Narodniks in their demand for land nationalisation, lies not in the demand itself, but in the perspective in which it is set. "They fail to perceive the bourgeois nature of the social relations into which the peasant enters on coming out of the fetters of serfdom. They convert the 'labour principle' of petty bourgeois agriculture and 'equalisation', which are their slogans for breaking up the feudal latifundia, into something absolute, self-sufficing, into something implying a special, non-bourgeois order". Nevertheless, the demands expressed by the Narodniks, if not the form in which they are expressed, do possess a "historically real and historically legitimate content in the struggle against serfdom". They express "progressive, revolutionary petty bourgeois democracy...they serve as the banner of the most determined struggle against the old feudal Russia".⁶³

Lenin extends his criticism to those Marxists who condemn not only the socialist guise in which the Narodniks present

⁶³ C.W., 13, p.237.

their bourgeois demands, but also the demands themselves, failing to recognise their historical significance. He refers to the "short-sighted and unhistorical judgements of some Russian Marxists", which he explains by the fact that they have not reflected on the economic basis of the demand for nationalisation in the existing relations of landholding, nor on the potential for the eradication of the last vestiges of feudalism and serfdom which the demand possesses.⁶⁴

In his contribution to debates within the Party in the preceding two years, Lenin had maintained that capitalism was bound to sweep away the feudal remnants in Russian agriculture, but he had proposed two alternative forms which might emerge.⁶⁵ In The Agrarian Programme he reiterates his earlier position.

Those two paths of objectively possible bourgeois development we would call the Prussian path and the American path, respectively. In the first case feudal landlord economy slowly evolves into bourgeois, Junker landlord economy, which condemns the peasants to decades of most harrowing expropriation and bondage, while at the same time a small minority of Grossbauern ('Big peasants') arises. In the second case there is no landlord economy, or else it is broken up by revolution, which confiscates and splits up the feudal estates. In that case the peasant predominates, becomes the

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.238.

⁶⁵ c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, pp.214-6.

sole agent of agriculture, and evolves into a peasant farmer. In the first case the main content of the evolution is transformation of feudal bondage into servitude and capitalist exploitation on the land of the feudal landlords - Junkers. In the second case the main background is transformation of the patriarchal peasant into a bourgeois farmer.⁶⁶

Both types of development are apparent in Russian economic history. The abolition of serfdom in 1861 was carried out in such a way as to promote a Junker style of landholding system. It was the outcome of a struggle between landlord and peasant, the former prevailing. The result was a system of land tenure which effectively preserved an economy in which the landlord's revenues and methods of exploitation were maintained. In those areas where no serfdom had existed, where agriculture had been undertaken by free peasants, development was on American lines. Lenin pointed out that here capitalism proceeded more rapidly than elsewhere - there quickly emerged a rural bourgeoisie and proletariat.⁶⁷

The two modes of agrarian development co-exist in Russia, representing two alternative outcomes of the struggle between landlord and peasant which Lenin locates as the central theme in post-Reform Russia. The struggle "runs

⁶⁶ C.W., 13, p.239.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp.240-1.

like a scarlet thread through the whole history of post-Reform Russia and constitutes the most important economic basis of our revolution...a struggle for one or other type of bourgeois agrarian revolution".⁶⁸ The Stolypin programme of agricultural reforms, conceived in June 1907 and rapidly implemented thereafter, was an attempt by the Tsarist state to limit the effects of the peasant initiative in the rural revolution - to retain the old landholding system in the face of the dissolution of the feudal commune. The programme also aimed at consolidating the political resilience of the Tsarist regime by creating a class of well-to-do peasants to act as a balance to the urban proletariat.⁶⁹

There was no doubt in Lenin's mind that the Stolypin legislation would promote a measure of capitalist development in agriculture - "it follows the line of capitalist evolution, hastens the expropriation of the peasantry, the break-up of the village commune, and the creation of a peasant bourgeoisie. Without a doubt that legislation is progressive in the scientific, economic sense".⁷⁰ He repeatedly stressed, however, the importance of the

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp.254-5.

⁶⁹ c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, p.258.

⁷⁰ C.W., 13, p.243.

break-up of the feudal latifundia for Russia's economic and political development.⁷¹ The Stolypin programme, he argued, would serve to maintain the latifundia, to preserve the landowner class and its privileges. As such it was heir to the legacy of 1861 - in the mainstream of Russian agrarian development along Prussian lines.

The struggle between landlord and peasant to determine the future of capitalist development in Russian agriculture was, for Lenin in 1907, the key to the complexities of political alignments in the Duma. With reference to this struggle, Lenin condemned the liberal Cadets, whose bland acceptance of the Stolypin programme as a progressive influence in Russian agriculture was a clear indication of their conciliatory attitude towards autocracy. In the Second Duma they had considerably moderated their demands - the lip service which in the First Duma they had paid to the principle of land nationalisation was no longer heard in the Second.

An appreciation of the struggle between landlord and peasant - its decisive historical importance - also served to reorientate Lenin in his attitude towards populism,⁷²

⁷¹ C.W., 13, pp.239, 242, 251, 254.

⁷² c.f., Tanaka, 'The Controversy Concerning Russian Capitalism', Kyoto University Economic Review, Vol. XXXVI, No.2, October, 1966, p.48.

and in his formulation of the Social Democrats' Party programme on the land question. The 1903 programme was "a declaration in the most general terms". Its shortcomings lay in its abstract character, its failure to articulate concrete demands, and they were only exposed in the light of the experience of the peasant movement. "In 1903...we did not yet have such experience as would enable us to judge the character, breadth and depth of the peasant movement".⁷³ The programme had been based on a distinction between "lands which serve for exploitation by means of serfdom and bondage" and "lands which are exploited in a capitalist manner". In 1907 Lenin regards such a distinction as fallacious, since the peasant movement had revealed itself as a movement against landlordism in general. The distinction between different categories of estate was not one to which the peasantry was attuned.⁷⁴

The demand for nationalisation represents precisely the peasants' struggle against the landlord. In the bourgeois revolution, the demand was a legitimate component in the Social Democrats' programme because it expressed one of principal historical objectives of that revolution - the

⁷³ C.W., 13, p.256.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.257.

clearing of estates for capitalism by the peasantry.⁷⁵ Nationalisation of the land is the outcome most favourable to the freest, most complete and widespread emancipation of capitalist relations in commercial agriculture from "all the rotten rags of all forms of medieval landownership".⁷⁶

The economic foundation of the demand for land nationalisation is the theory of rent in Marx's Theories of Surplus Value. Here Marx differentiated differential rent from absolute rent. The former represents that form of rent which occurs wherever capitalist methods of farming are practiced, irrespective of the landholding system. It is the difference between the tenant farmer's profit, where it is inflated by favourable conditions of cultivation, and the average rate of profit applying to all agricultural production. Differential rent has the effect of intensifying competition in agriculture, of levelling profits in agriculture on a par with non-agricultural profits, and consequently of compelling the farmer to employ the most efficient techniques available.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.280.

⁷⁷ Theories of Surplus Value, Vol.II, (London, 1969), pp.241-2.

Absolute rent contains elements of monopoly, and exists where land is concentrated in large parcels in private ownership. It hinders free competition between capitals, and therefore prevents the equalisation of profits between agricultural and non-agricultural capitals. Consequently, it artificially inflates the market price over and above the price of production.⁷⁸ Whilst differential rent is "an inherent feature of every form of capitalist agriculture", absolute rent "arises only under the private ownership of land, only under the historically created backwardness of agriculture, a backwardness that becomes fixed by monopoly".⁷⁹

Where capitalism in agriculture is only weakly developed, differential and absolute rent co-exist, and nationalisation fulfills a dual function. It represents a partial reform, merely transferring the ownership of surplus value extracted by way of capitalist rent from private hands to the state. At the same time it completely abolishes absolute rent, with its features of monopoly which hinder the full development of capitalism.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.316.

⁷⁹ C.W.,13, p.298.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.300.

Lenin was adamant that land nationalisation was a demand which had to be understood in its dual role. In one sense partial and contained within the bounds of capitalism, it was in another sense complete, since it represented the total destruction of the feudal economy - a pre-condition of capitalist development in agriculture.⁸¹

The analysis of capitalist development, in the context of which the land question was set, differed from that which had informed the 1903 programme in one important respect. The 1903 programme was based on premises drawn from The Development of Capitalism in Russia, where Lenin seems to have overestimated the significance of the 1861 reforms. These had made possible a differentiation of the peasantry - a shift, that is, in the social formation - without significantly impinging on the system of land tenure. Nowhere in The Development of Capitalism in Russia does Lenin emphatically identify the feudal system of land tenure as a barrier to capitalist development.⁸²

⁸¹ Ibid., p.319; "Theoretically, nationalisation is the 'ideally' pure development of capitalism in agriculture ...nationalisation is a condition for the rapid development of capitalism".

⁸² c.f., Tanaka, 'The Controversy Concerning Russian Capitalism', Kyoto University Economic Review, Vol.XXXVI, October, 1966, p.47.

The statement that "one can fully apply to post-Reform Russia what was said half a century ago about Western Europe - that agricultural capitalism has been the motive force which has drawn the idyll into history",⁸³ clearly does not envisage such absolute barriers. The repeated emphasis on the suffocating effects of a feudal landholding system, which The Agrarian Programme contains, is in sharp contrast.

The weakness of the 1903 programme, exposed in 1905, was its failure to recognise that the development of capitalism in agriculture was not a spontaneous historical effect, but was the product of class struggle.⁸⁴ Lenin acknowledges that it was only the experience of the mass movement of the peasantry in 1905, the demands voiced in the First and Second Dumas, which furnished the Social Democrats

⁸³ C.W., 3, p.313.

⁸⁴ C.W. 13, p.258; "At all events, the fundamental mistake in the agrarian programme of 1903 was the absence of a clear idea of the issue around which the agrarian struggle could and should develop in the process of the bourgeois revolution in Russia - a clear idea of the types of capitalist agrarian evolution that were objectively possible as the result of the victory of one or other of the social forces engaged in the struggle".

with the wherewithal for formulating a concrete agrarian programme.⁸⁵

It is now possible to draw out of the foregoing those elements of Lenin's analysis of the agrarian question which shed light on his schema for bourgeois revolution. The demand for land nationalisation, it is clear, was a central pillar in his formulation, since it contained the potential for the destruction of a feudal landholding system which had acted as a barrier to capitalist development. The demand represented the concrete expression of the alliance between proletariat and peasantry, an alliance which rested on their shared interest in the destruction of the feudal remnants in Russian agriculture, and the promotion of the fullest possible development of capitalism.

There was no sense in which land nationalisation was a demand which possessed significance beyond the bourgeois stage of revolution.⁸⁶ It was simply a political response

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.256; "Without the experience of a mass... peasant movement, the programme of the Social Democratic Labour Party could not become concrete; for it would have been too difficult, if not impossible, on the basis of theoretical reasoning alone, to define the degree to which capitalist disintegration had taken place amongst our peasantry, and to what extent the latter was capable of bringing about a revolutionary-democratic change".

⁸⁶ c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1., p.255.

derived from an appreciation of the special conditions prevailing in post-Reform Russia,⁸⁷ of the vital importance of the outcome of the struggle between landlord and peasant for the future development of the Russian economy, and of the direction and purpose of the agrarian movement arising out of the spontaneous clamourings of the radical peasantry.

These clamourings were less than the plain and unequivocal call to further the progressive march of capital towards the fulfilment of the pre-conditions for Marxian socialism along Western lines. They were rather the expression of backward, petty-bourgeois aspirations. Their real significance lay in the fact that in spite of the ideological form which they took, they contained the potential for setting capitalist development on the path most favourable to its fullest and most rapid development. Lenin's analysis of the agrarian question can be seen to mirror Marx's analysis of the class struggles in nineteenth century France, in as much as there is in both, an attempt to strip away the ideological forms which shroud the economic content of slogans, demands and programmes.

⁸⁷ C.W.,13, p.219; "The revision of the Social Democratic agrarian programme must be based on the latest data on landed property in Russia in order to ascertain with the utmost precision what actually is the economic background of all the agrarian programmes of our epoch, and what precisely are the issues in the great historic struggle".

The bourgeois revolution represented, for Lenin, a necessary step in the completion of capitalist development in Russia. The question of land reform demonstrated the backwardness of economic development, since the struggle between landlord and peasant was a pre-capitalist struggle. But the resolution of the struggle in favour of the peasantry was crucial for the fullest possible realisation of capitalism and bourgeois democracy.

The agrarian question demonstrated concretely what was at stake in the bourgeois revolution. The political events of 1905-1907 represented the ideologically mediated reaction of diverse social and economic groups to absolutism in all its forms, including landlordism. These events might amount to a thoroughgoing bourgeois revolution only if they were driven to their logical conclusion. Through his analysis of Russian economic history, Lenin was able to determine what this logical conclusion was. It then became imperative for Lenin to drive the revolution towards the point at which it would fulfil its historical objectives. Apropos of the agrarian question, the objective was land nationalisation. A revolution which fell short of this demand would necessarily be one which had failed to realise its historical objective.

History, for Lenin, was not a "steady procession through a pre-determined and invariant sequence of historical

stages" - the Menshevik conception.⁸⁸ Social and economic change was not a spontaneous historical effect, but the product of class struggle, at a particular conjuncture in which there appeared on the agenda questions of decisive importance for future historical development. Bourgeois revolution was such a conjuncture. It had certain functions to perform, which unperformed would imply a pattern of historical development unconducive to socialist revolution. Lenin's historical acuity told him what these functions were, and made plain to him the implications of a failure to fulfil them. It was in this sense that bourgeois revolution had to be held distinct from socialist revolution. The distinction was neither the product of 'quasi-Marxist asceticism' nor of a purely empirical mode of thought, but of a sharp sense of history.

The emergence of a new historical schema

Prior to 1914, Lenin's political strategy, and the theoretical orientation within which it was located, was informed and circumscribed by the parametres set out in The Development of Capitalism in Russia, and amended in

⁸⁸ Hindess and Hirst, Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production, p.281.

The Agrarian Question. After 1914 there is a shift which can be depicted in two dimensions. Firstly, the range and scope of his theoretical work was broadened. The outbreak of war and the collapse of the Second International provoked a shift towards an internationalist perspective which stands in marked contrast to the insularity of a perspective restricted to Russia. Secondly, there is a modification in the historical schema in relation to which he defined the limits of the revolutionary movement. The distinction between bourgeois and socialist revolutions became more fluid and the prospect emerged of two revolutionary stages which, whilst remaining theoretically distinct, merged chronologically to the extent that the socialist revolution was envisaged following immediately on the heels of the bourgeois.

The shift in the scope of Lenin's theoretical work will be examined in detail in the next section. This section is restricted to a documentation and examination of the modification in the historical schema of revolution and revolutionary stages.

There is in the pre-1914 work a presage of the shift, though it is expressed in opaque and nebulous terms and is never consolidated into the mainstream of Lenin's thought. The period from 1911 until the outbreak of war had witnessed a strike movement resembling that which prefaced the 1905

revolution. Lenin's recognition of the revolutionary potential which the masses displayed in these years was integrated into his political and theoretical orientation.⁸⁹

If the resurgent momentum of class struggle was to be maintained, and harnessed to the revolutionary movement, then the leadership of the movement had to be decisive and uncompromising. Hence much of Lenin's immediately pre-war work was directed towards the establishment of Bolshevik hegemony over the movement and the exposure of deviation and 'class collaboration'. Deviationism was epitomised by the 'August Bloc', which had formed in 1912 in an attempt to establish a caucus on the left committed to legal activity, and to which the Mensheviks subscribed. Lenin regarded this as an essentially liberal amalgam of groups, and was determined to prevent the 'liquidation' of the underground movement - the assimilation of the Bolsheviks into the larger group.⁹⁰

Preoccupations with the revolutionary struggle in Russia, and its organisational forms dominated Lenin's work between 1911 and 1914, and it has been observed that during these years, there emerged a revolutionary strategy based on

⁸⁹ c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, pp.289-90.

⁹⁰ C.W., 20, pp.158-60, 277-80.

generalised support for the militant, urban, proletariat, which was to inform his actions in 1917.⁹¹

Nevertheless, Lenin did not allow himself to forget the backwardness of economic and social conditions in Russia, and the revolutionary objectives which he had in mind were those of the bourgeois, democratic revolution. In October 1914, in spite of the revolutionary potential demonstrated by the masses, Lenin's theoretical formulations are still circumscribed by the backwardness of Russian economic development.

Since Russia is most backward and has not yet completed its bourgeois revolution, it still remains the task of Social Democrats in that country to achieve the three fundamental conditions for consistent democratic reform, viz., a democratic republic (with complete equality and self-determination for all nations), confiscation of the landed estates, and an eight hour working day.⁹²

The schema for revolution is still, at this juncture, dependent upon a historical schema of economic development in accordance with the Marxist orthodoxy which he had enunciated in 1905.

By December 1915 a new strategy had emerged, wherein the revolutionary potential of the masses was at least beginning

⁹¹ Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1., p.290.

⁹² C.W., 21, p.33.

to predominate over the backwardness of Russian economic and social development. A new historical schema had been evolved, in which the rigid chronological separation between stages was ameliorated.

The (Russian) proletariat are fighting, and will fight valiantly to win power, for a republic, for the confiscation of the land, i.e. to win over the peasantry, make full use of their revolutionary powers, and get the non-proletarian masses of the people to take part in liberating bourgeois Russia from the military-feudal 'imperialism' (tsarism). The proletariat will at once utilise the ridding of bourgeois Russia of tsarism and the rule of the landowners...to bring about the socialist revolution in alliance with the proletariat of Europe.⁹³

The schematic separation between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions is still evident in the above passage, but Lenin's revolutionary awareness is heightened. The limitations imposed by economic backwardness, whilst still operative, no longer represent an absolute barrier. The schematic separation assumes less importance than the revolutionary potential of the masses, which has developed in the strike movement and has been sharpened by the war. For the first time since 1905, Lenin allows himself to express the reality, and the imminence of the socialist revolution.

It has been argued that Lenin maintained an allegiance to the theory of distinct and chronologically separate

⁹³ Ibid., p.420.

revolutionary stages until April 1917, by which time it had been stretched to its limits.⁹⁴ The April Theses represent the culmination of the rupture, there is no doubt. In them, Lenin asserts that the revolution is passing from the bourgeois to the proletarian stage.⁹⁵ But April 1917 was no more than the culmination of a change in Lenin's thinking which had begun in December 1915.

By 1917 an entirely new formulation of revolution had emerged. The schematic and chronological separation between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions had lost all relevance. Lenin was now preoccupied with the form of the political state. This change in emphasis corresponded to a change in perspective from the acknowledgement of the economic backwardness of Russian society to the recognition of its political readiness for revolution. It was a shift away from the old orthodoxy which had held that the level of capitalist economic development circumscribed the revolutionary potential of a given society.

⁹⁴ Geras, The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, p.78; "That conception", (The schematic separation between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions), "was confounded by events during 1917, and they", (Lenin and Luxemburg), "then crossed its limits".

⁹⁵ C.W.,24, p.22; "The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that the country is passing from the first stage of the revolution - which owing to insufficient class-consciousness and organisation of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie - to its second stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest section of the peasants".

In The State and Revolution, the shift is complete. Here Lenin posits revolution at the express level of politics, in terms of state power. The content of this work is too well known to require lengthy exegesis. Briefly, Lenin proceeds as follows. At a certain stage in the development of society, antagonisms and conflict between irreconcilable class interests threaten to convulse that society. Society responds by evolving out of itself, but above itself, a power capable of preserving it. That power is the state. It is of society but above it, and is increasingly alienated from society.⁹⁶ The state in modern society is a means of domination of labour by capital. The best political shell for the capitalist state is the democratic republic, embodying universal suffrage.⁹⁷

Lenin moves on to the notion of the withering away of the state, which alone of the ideas of Marx and Engels retains a place in the theoretical arsenal of European socialist parties. The concept, however, has been emasculated, and is the origin of all brands of opportunism.⁹⁸ Lenin calls attention to the fact that Marx and Engels drew on the experience of the Paris Commune to express the idea that the state does not wither away of its own accord, but must be liquidated by the proletariat. Lenin draws

⁹⁶ C.W., 25, pp.387-8.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp.393-4.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.400.

on The Poverty of Philosophy and The Critique of the Gotha Programme as evidence that Marx's theory of the state is inseparably bound up with the whole of his doctrine of the revolutionary role of the proletariat in history.⁹⁹

On the basis of Marx's account of the period 1848-1851 in France, Lenin draws a schematic history of the bourgeois state. The first stage consists of the development of parliamentary power in the form of a republic. This stage precedes a struggle between bourgeois and petty-bourgeois fractions, which takes place within the framework of the bourgeois state, which remains intact. The third stage is the perfection and consolidation of executive power in the shape of the military and the bureaucracy. The course of the democratic revolution in Russia between February and August 1917 runs exactly parallel to this schema, and Lenin makes the point that the course of events impresses upon the working class its irreconcilable hostility to bourgeois society.¹⁰⁰

Marx's early comments on the state in the Communist Manifesto were on a high plane of abstraction, Lenin writes, and it was only the experiences of 1848-51 and the Commune which enabled him to concretise those formulations. The lesson to be learned from the events of 1871 is that in

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.404.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.408.

order to pass from the stage of bourgeois democracy to one of proletarian democracy, it is necessary for the proletariat first to seize state power, then to transform the apparatus through which that power is exercised.

There is a qualitative difference between the bourgeois state and the proletarian state which succeeds it. The military and bureaucratic functions of the bourgeois state acting as a special force for the suppression of one class by another, must be transformed into the functions of a state acting as a general force representing the majority of the people.¹⁰¹

The State and Revolution has been taken as a treatise in libertarian socialism.¹⁰² Here it is taken to be the articulation of a historical schema for distinguishing between a bourgeois revolution and a proletarian revolution where chronologically, the two stages merged. The old distinction, couched in terms of economic content, is superseded by one expressed in terms of the political nature of the state.

Set in the context of the continuum from Lenin's first acknowledgement of the immediate reality of proletarian revolution, in December 1915, to the full and concrete

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp.418-20.

¹⁰² c.f., Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, pp.191-6.

expression of that reality in The State and Revolution, the April Theses represent no compromise whatever with Trotsky's notion of continuous revolution. There is evidence to show that The State and Revolution was practically complete before the February rising,¹⁰³ and that the Theses were merely the public expression of a shift which Lenin had theorised well in advance, in accordance with a new historical schema which had been taking shape since 1915. This schema provides the backdrop to all Lenin's strategic formulations in 1916 and during the revolutionary period. In particular, the Social Democrats and the working class are warned to avoid 'constitutional illusions' based on a failure to recognise the class nature of the state, and the limitations of the bourgeois revolution which was taking place in the spring and summer of 1917.¹⁰⁴

The historical schema - for economic development, and for revolution - which underpin Lenin's theoretical and strategic formulations, are premised on the Marxists' sense of history which Lenin possessed in common with Rosa Luxemburg. Capital, by its nature, presupposes economic relations which emerge out of it and are indispensable to

¹⁰³ c.f., T. Cliff, Lenin, Vol.2, All Power to the Soviets, (London, 1976), p.315.

¹⁰⁴ See especially, 'Constitutional Illusions', C.W.,25, pp.194-202, and 'The Political Situation', C.W.,25, pp.176-9.

its development. It therefore sets its stamp on the epoch. In the early stages of its development, a tension exists between capitalist and pre-capitalist relations, which manifests itself in a struggle for dominance between the two types of economic forms - money and capital, labour service and wage labour, money rent and capitalist rent.

In The Development of Capitalism in Russia, Lenin charts the progress of this struggle, and its implications for the social formation in a period of transition from feudalism to capitalism.

It is fundamental to Marxist history that social and political forms react with economic forms. Lenin's analysis of the land question and the political responses it elicited in a period of political ferment is a study in Marxist history. The land question is pivotal to Lenin's theory of the bourgeois revolution as a struggle over the direction of economic development. The role of the proletariat and the peasantry is to ensure the destruction of the feudal landholding system, which acts as a barrier to capitalist development - to which is ascribed a historical mission. All of Lenin's strategic political formulations in the bourgeois revolution were related to his analysis of Russian economic history. He was aware that the historical process does not evolve spontaneously, but is the product of class struggle. It was important

to him, therefore, that the working class and its political vanguard were aware of what was at stake.

Lenin's historical acuity, honed in the analysis of transitional economic relations - of the tension characteristic of the co-existence of disparate economic forms - was attuned to exposing the content beneath the form. Political forms also unfolded, revealing their true class content to the sharp eye, focused beneath the surface phenomena of Dumas and constitutions.

Lenin was at his most inflexible in maintaining the schematic separation between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions. This distinction, seen in isolation, appears lifeless - animated only by an acute revolutionary awareness. Trotsky's permanent revolution was more fluid and no doubt more imaginative. But Lenin's historical acuity added gravity to his formulations. He saw the danger that a bourgeois revolution carried forward to a proletarian revolution in defiance of the historical backwardness of Russian conditions, might stop short of its objectives - might exhaust itself without carrying through its historical mission. In 1905 he saw the historical mission in economic terms - even before 1917 he began to see revolution in political terms - in terms of the revolutionary potential of the masses to impose a new pattern on economic relations. The seizure of state

power was a means of effecting this transformation - of effecting historical caesura. Such an attempt would always be historically premature; its success could never be guaranteed in advance. But uncertainty was endemic to the intervention of the masses in history.

Lenin's intellectual and political psyche presents the observer with a historical acuity which grasps, at any given moment, the course of events - the undercurrents beneath the surface phenomena - whether those phenomena are secular changes in economic statistics or the succession of economic forms. Applied to a common stock of theory, Marx's legacy, Lenin's historical acuity produced a greater analytical sophistication than is evident in the work of any of his contemporaries. What marks him off even more emphatically from his contemporaries is the perception of the possibilities and potentialities of the decisive intervention of the working class and its political vanguard in the course of history.

SECTION iii

Structural Interconnectedness in Lenin's Work

Capital and capitalism

In the confrontation between the bourgeois and the Marxist perspectives, the relation between the object of social enquiry and its wider context was at issue. The polemic with political economy which runs through Marx's economic works exposed as fallacious the arbitrary separation which the political economists had imposed on economic phenomena. Granting to forms of economic and social activity an autonomous, independent existence, they were prevented from perceiving the interconnectedness of the whole. Ricardo - a relatively sophisticated exponent of political economy - held the spheres of production and circulation distinct, and was unable to reconcile value and price as a result. Marx dismantled the structures which the political economists had assembled, reconstituting their categories and concepts in a unitary system, which he took to represent the inner logic of capital.

In the Grundrisse, Marx referred to "capital in the totality of its relations".¹ These latter are the relations of bourgeois society.

¹ Grundrisse, p.276.

While in the completed bourgeois system every economic relation presupposes every other in its bourgeois economic form, and everything posited is thus also a presupposition, this is the case with every organic system. This organic system itself, as a totality, has its pre-suppositions and its development to its totality consists precisely in subordinating all elements of society to itself, or in creating out of it the organs which it still lacks.²

Passages such as this represent the imprimatur of structuralist interpretations of Marxism, which have suffered from the misfortune that whilst Marx laid bare the inner logic of capital, he provided only fleeting insights into the structure of bourgeois society in the full complexity of its socio-economic relations.³

In The Development of Capitalism in Russia, Lenin depicted emergent Russian capitalism as a unified - although not uniform - system of socio-economic relations in flux. He demonstrated the structural interconnectedness of its features - the division of labour, separation of industry from agriculture, differentiation of the peasantry, demographic shift from countryside to urban centre, displacement

² Ibid., p.278.

³ E. P. Thompson, The Poverty of Theory, and Other Essays, (London, 1978), pp.253-4, argues that Marx was locked in a framework constituted by political economy. He reconstituted the frame-work in terms of the internal relations of capital, but failed to break out of its boundaries - he failed, that is, to extend the scope of political economy, to show that capitalism was capital in the totality of its relations.

of labour service by wage labour, transformation of technique in agriculture and industry, emergence of a national market, erosion of patriarchal culture. The work is the incarnation of the phrase 'capital in the totality of its relations', and exhibits a conceptual coherence lacking in the work of his contemporaries. In The Agrarian Programme he added the political dimension to the picture, relating the demands and slogans of the peasantry to the position which that class occupied in the class structure.

The outbreak of war obliged Lenin to adopt a global perspective,⁴ in which the conceptual coherence is equally marked. The result was a series of works between 1915 and 1917, the most important of which are The Collapse of the Second International, Socialism and the War, The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self Determination, and Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, which together represent a depiction of the anatomy of the epoch of imperialism. Like Luxemburg, Lenin did not produce a theory of imperialism. Rather he built up a picture of the economic, social and political relations and characteristics of international capitalism at a definite stage in its development.

⁴ c.f., Geras, The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, p.98.

In Lenin's conception, imperialism was monopoly capitalism. Capital concentration, the dominance of finance capital, colonialism, opportunism and social-chauvinism within the European working class movement, the tendency to war arising out of the antagonistic rivalry between capitalist states - they were merely single dimensions of the same phenomenon. In his analysis they appeared as part of a structural totality.

Georg Lukács, in his study on the unity in Lenin's thought, repeatedly emphasises that what set Lenin apart from his contemporaries was the all-embracing perspective which he adopted; the coherent articulation of the structural interconnectedness of international capitalism as an integral system.⁵ Sweezy sees Lenin's work on imperialism as the culmination of the development of a concept which originated as a term of limited, political significance, but in Lenin's usage denotes a system of socio-economic relations.⁶

⁵ Lukács, Lenin, a Study on the Unity of his Thought, p.41; "Lenin's superiority - and this is an unparalleled theoretical achievement - consists in his concrete articulation of the economic theory of imperialism with every political problem of the present epoch". p.42; "It is a purely theoretical superiority in assessing the total process". p.43; "Lenin's theory of imperialism...is less a theory of its necessary economic generation and limitations than the theory of the concrete class forces which, unleashed by imperialism, are at work within it: the theory of the concrete world situation created by imperialism". p.53; "Socio-economically, war is therefore only a stage in the imperialist development of capitalism. It is thus also necessarily only a stage in the class struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. The Leninist theory of imperialism is significant because Lenin alone established this relation between world war and historical development as a whole with theoretical consistency, and clearly proved it on the basis of concrete problems posed by the war. But because historical materialism is the theory of proletarian class struggle, the establishment of this relationship would have remained incomplete if the theory of imperialism had not simultaneously become a theory of the different currents within the working class movement in an age of imperialism". See also, pp.36, 39, 92.

⁶ P. M. Sweezy, The Present as History, (New York, 1953), p.81; "The term, from defining a particular political relation, gradually came to take in the entire politico-economic system of which that relation was merely one part".

Methodological precepts were a significant part of what was regarded as Marxist orthodoxy in European Social Democracy in this period. It was not an uncommon form of criticism to point to a departure from 'Marxist dialectics' in an opponent's argument of theoretical position. In his works of 1915-1916 Lenin repeatedly accused Plekhanov and Kautsky of deviation from the imperative of the 'many sided examination' of a question - one which examines a question in the full complexity of its relatedness to a wider context.

The Right of Nations to Self-Determination was a polemic against Rosa Luxemburg, who argued, from an internationalist perspective, that in an era of imperialism, nationalist movements and their demands had been rendered historically redundant. Luxemburg's formulation is treated in Part III under the rubric of her historical method, since she consistently deployed a historiographical critique in her exchanges with Lenin.

Lenin's rejoinders accused Luxemburg of the same methodological error - a failure to recognise that the significance of political demands depended on the historical context in which they were articulated, and the class composition of the chorus which voiced them. Lenin concluded that the national-democratic movements of greater Russia and the Balkan countries belonged to a historical period in

which their demands were progressive and revolutionary. According to Lenin, Luxemburg had evolved a critique of nationalism from those European states where national integrity and democratic institutions were already well established, where a nationalist ethos simply represented bourgeois self-aggrandisement, and had applied the same critique to national movements which still had a historical role to fulfil, since they expressed the interests of capital against those remnants of absolutism and feudalism which hindered its further development.

Lenin, then, integrated the national question into his discussion of democracy.⁷ Democratic rights and demands were in turn, conditional on and subordinate to the proletarian class struggle. The national question thus became part of the larger question of democratic and socialist revolution.

⁷ c.f., Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, p.271; A. D. Low, Lenin on the Question of Nationality, (New York, 1958), p.145; Cliff, Lenin, Vol.2, p.54.

The 'many sided investigation' into the collapse of the Second International

The endorsement by the socialist parties of the Second International of legislation preparatory for war, threw the movement into confusion organisationally and theoretically. Hitherto, the revolutionary left had been unaware of the profundity of the reformist ethos which had been disguised by an ideological cloak of Marxist orthodoxy. That Lenin shared this lack of awareness is clear from the extent of his fury at Kautsky's betrayal, and his astonishment at the total abandonment of allegiance to the anti-war resolutions of the Basle Congress of 1912.⁸ This was in spite of the fact that he had detected shifting sands within the International well in advance of 1914, and had perceived the inroads made by the ethic of imperialism into working class consciousness as early as 1908.⁹

Lenin's response to the debacle was twofold. On an organisational level he worked towards the secession of the left and the formation of a Third International. Theoretically, he embarked upon a comprehensive critique of 'social chauvinism', the direct ideological counterpart to the economic phenomenon of imperialism. The Collapse of the

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M. Fainsod, International Socialism and the Great War, (Cambridge, Mass., 1935), p.10.

9

Ibid., p.12.

Second International was the culmination of the critique. It opened with an exposition of the fundamental capitulation of the International from the high sounding rhetoric of the Basle Congress,¹⁰ and tentatively proffered an explanation,¹¹ - that the Congress resolution had been a sincere attestation of faith that war would engender a revolutionary situation, but that such a situation had failed to materialise in the event. Lenin categorically rejects such an explanation, refusing to accept that the outbreak of war did not contain the potential for revolution, and concludes that what he was dealing with was simply a heinous betrayal. To show the extent of the betrayal, and the difficulty which the betrayers had experienced in theorising their position, Lenin engages in a critical survey of their attempts at a theoretical justification.¹²

The position taken up by Plekhanov and Kautsky contains common elements. Each cites Marx's comments on the Prussian war of 1813 and Germany's national war of 1870. Marx had acknowledged these wars as struggles of the bourgeoisie towards nation building. Plekhanov and Kautsky both contrive to locate the present war in a similar perspective. Lenin is scornful of this ahistorical contrivance. Its perpetrators have failed to recognise that the bourgeoisie

¹⁰ C.W., 21, pp.208-12.

¹¹ Ibid., p.212.

¹² Ibid., p.217.

is no longer progressive and dynamic, but has started upon a decline into barbarism. Plekhanov and Kautsky fail to see the historical distinction between the struggle of a nascent bourgeoisie against feudalism and absolutism, characteristic of an earlier phase of nationalism, and the internal dislocation of a decrepit and imperialist bourgeoisie.¹³

Both Plekhanov and Kautsky subscribe to the 'defence of the fatherland' rationale. Plekhanov ascribes war guilt to Germany without "the slightest attempt to study the economic and diplomatic history of at least the last three decades, which history proves conclusively that the conquest of colonies, the looting of foreign countries, the ousting and ruining of the more successful rivals have been the backbone of the politics of both groups of the now antagonistic powers".¹⁴ Plekhanov, that is to say, fails to recognise that war is merely the continuation of the politics of imperialism.

Kautsky's response was a corollary of his theory of 'ultra-imperialism', which contained a rebuttal of the thesis that war was endemic to monopoly capitalism. In the historical developments of the immediate pre-war years,

¹³ Ibid., pp.220-1.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.218.

Kautsky had glimpsed the possibility of the peaceful resolution of the antagonisms of monopoly capitalism.

The subsiding of the protectionist movement in Britain; the lowering of tariffs in America; the trend towards disarmament; the rapid decline in the export of capital from France and Germany in the years immediately preceding the war; finally the growing international interweaving between the various cliques of finance capital - all this has caused me to consider whether the present imperialist policy cannot be supplanted by a new, ultra-imperialist policy, which will introduce the joint exploitation of the world by internationally united finance capital in place of the mutual rivalries of national finance capital.¹⁵

Ultra-imperialism ushers in a new era of hopes and expectations within the framework of capitalism. Kautsky looks forward to a peaceful, modulated period of capitalism development.¹⁶ In his conception, the axiom of imperialist war gives way to one of national war, since having denied that war is an inevitable outgrowth of monopoly capitalism, Kautsky goes on to locate as a central question in the current war, the national liberation of

¹⁵ Neue Zeit, No.5, April 30, 1915, p.144. Cited by Lenin, C.W.,21, p.223.

¹⁶ c.f., G. Lichtheim, Imperialism, (London, 1971), p.109; "Kautsky, with his habitual optimism, had affirmed that imperialism was a retrograde phenomenon which did not really serve the interests of modern capitalism".

peoples in the Russian and Austrian Empires.¹⁷

Lenin's rejoinder is that Kautsky is simply evading the questions raised by the war and the collapse of the International. His arguments are one sided and partial. He deliberately obscures the real nature of the war by extracting it from its context, from the theoretical framework - the analysis of capitalism in the era of imperialism - which renders it intelligible. Kautsky's explanation is a fundamental distortion of Marxist method which "excludes any isolated examination of an object".¹⁸ Kautsky's concern is to "throw dust in the eyes of the masses, dumbfound them with the sound of authoritative names, prevent them from raising a clear issue and examining it from all sides".¹⁹

Lenin counterposes his own 'many sided' account of 'social chauvinism', its historical origins, the conditions,

¹⁷ C.W., 21, p.234; "Kautsky vacillates amazingly on the question of the character and significance of the present war; this party leader evades the precise and formal declarations of the Basle and Cheminitz congresses...In his pamphlet, 'The Nation State', etc., written in February 1915, Kautsky asserted that 'still, in the final analysis', the war is an 'imperialist one'...Now a fresh reservation is introduced: it is not a purely imperialist war. What else can it be? It appears that it is also a nationalist war! Kautsky arrives at this monstrous conclusion by means of... 'Plekhanovist pseudo-dialectics'".

¹⁸ Ibid., p.235.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.239.

significance, and strength of the tendency. Social chauvinism represents "acceptance of the idea of the defence of the fatherland in the present imperialist war, justification of an alliance between socialists and the bourgeoisie and governments of their own countries in this war".²⁰ Its foundations can be identified with those of opportunism, the imprimatur of which is class collaboration, engendered by the temporary coincidence of the interests of a stratum of the working class with those of the bourgeoisie. The privileged stratum of workers is 'bourgeoisified' by the distribution of the spoils of imperialism. The upper stratum, or aristocracy, of the working class, isolated from the suffering and revolutionary temper of the class as a whole, embraces a conciliatory attitude to the bourgeoisie. The war has exacerbated tendencies which have existed within the working class movement for some time. Lenin summarises the relation between opportunism and social chauvinism as follows.

Firstly, chauvinism and opportunism in the labour movement have the same economic basis in the alliance between a numerically small upper stratum of the proletariat and the petty-bourgeoisie - who get but morsels of the privileges of their 'own' international capital - against the masses of the proletarians... Secondly, the two trends have the same ideological and political content. Thirdly, the old division of socialists into an opportunist trend and a revolutionary, which was characteristic of the period of the Second International ...corresponds, by and large to the new division into chauvinists and internationalists.²¹

²⁰ Ibid., p.242.

²¹ Ibid., p.244.

The 'aristocracy of labour' is a concept which Lenin drew from Britain. It appears in Engels's The Condition of the Working Class in England,²² and was a central concept in Sidney and Beatrice Webb's Industrial Democracy, which Lenin had translated whilst in exile in Siberia.²³ Lenin took a concept which had arisen in, and appertained to, a definite social and historical setting, generalised it, and integrated it into his conceptual framework of imperialism. He regarded the concept as a pivot in the formulation of a strategy for the working class movement in the age of imperialism.²⁴

In his analysis of chauvinistic currents in the Second International, Lenin demonstrated an ability which distinguishes him as a theorist and a strategist in this period - the ability to locate a specific issue in a wider context, to approach a problem in multi-dimensional fashion. He himself identified this approach as 'dialectical', and

²² F. Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England, (St. Albans, 1969), p.31; "The engineers, the carpenters, the joiners, the bricklayers, are each of them a power to the extent that they can even successfully resist the introduction of machinery...They form an aristocracy among the working class".

²³ E. Hobsbawm, 'Lenin and the Aristocracy of Labour', P. M. Sweezy and H. Magdoff, eds., Lenin Today, (New York, 1970), p.40.

²⁴ M. Nicolaus, 'The Theory of the Labour Aristocracy', P. M. Sweezy and H. Magdoff, eds., Lenin Today, (New York, 1970), p.94.

opposed it to that of Plekhanov and Kautsky. Their approach was to disassociate events from each other - to isolate events from tendencies and forces which bore directly upon them. The proposition which acted as a foundation to Lenin's theoretical and strategic position during this period - which lent it the coherence lacking in the position taken up by Kautsky and Plekhanov - was that monopoly capitalism with its imperialist manifestations was the general illumination in which all other social and political relations were bathed. It represented the central pillar in his stand against the centre and right in wartime social democracy, and it was for this reason that he felt it necessary to augment the already copious literature on imperialism.

Imperialism

Lenin described the purpose of his work on imperialism as a presentation of "a composite picture of the world capitalist system in its international relationships at the beginning of the twentieth century".²⁵ The economic characteristics of this system are adumbrated on the basis of five main points.²⁶ Firstly, consequent upon the concentration of capital, there have emerged monopolies

²⁵ C.W., 22, p.189.

²⁶ Ibid., pp.266-7.

which play a decisive role in economic life. Secondly, close links have developed between banking and financial institutions and industry. From this merger has emerged a hybrid form of finance capital, dominated by a financial oligarchy. Thirdly, the export of finance capital has achieved predominant importance over the export of commodities - finance capital has acquired an existence independent of industrial capital. Fourthly, these developments have given rise to the formation of international monopolist associations which parcel out world markets and resources amongst themselves. Finally, the economic division of the world between international capitalist trusts has been reflected in the territorial division of the globe between the dominant capitalist countries.

Using production census data, Lenin traces two kinds of capital concentration - concentration in single capital formations of increasing magnitude, and in combines of multiple capital formations. He traces the advent of monopoly capital back to the 1860s. Citing authorities from German economics and economic history he chronicles its development. During the decade from 1860 to 1870 free competition reached its apex in a period of economic prosperity. In the course of the recession from 1873 through the 1880s smaller capitals failed, and were absorbed into large scale capital formations. At this stage, cartels and trusts are a transitory feature of

economic life, however, and do not succeed in establishing themselves until the 1890s. Lenin quotes contemporary sources to the effect that during the short-lived boom of 1889-90 the cartel system became established, and that the subsequent boom of 1900-1903 was provoked - in the mining and iron industries at least - by the success of the cartels.²⁷

With the organisation of production on the basis of cartels, the nature of production itself changes. The social character of production is exacerbated whilst appropriation remains private.²⁸ The framework of formally recognised free competition remains, and the yoke of a few monopolists on the rest of the population bears heavier. The general nature of capitalist production is no more stable, nor immune to crisis - in fact, in certain branches of industry, monopoly serves to exacerbate the anarchy of market relations which prevail.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., p.201.

²⁸ Ibid., p.205; "Competition becomes transformed into monopoly. The result is immense progress in the socialisation of production. In particular, the process of technical innovation and improvement becomes socialised".

²⁹ Ibid., p.208; "The statement that cartels can abolish crises is a fable spread by bourgeois economists who at all costs desire to place capitalism in a favourable light. On the contrary, the monopoly created in certain branches of industry increases and intensifies the anarchy inherent in capitalist production as a whole".

Lenin explores the monopoly movement in banking, and the power which banks are able to exert over industry through their control of credit and precise knowledge of the financial position of their clients. Banks are able to manipulate their industrial clients, effectively becoming 'umbrella' agencies, acting over and above industrial enterprises. "Thus the twentieth century marks the turning point from the old capitalism to the new, from the domination of capital in general to the domination of finance capital".³⁰

The transformation manifests itself as follows. A steadily increasing portion of capital in industry ceases to belong to those who employ it productively. And the corollary of this tendency is that banks are obliged to invest an increasing proportion of their funds in industry. The institutional form of these manifestations is the holding company. In general terms, the outstanding feature of the new era of capitalism is the hegemony of finance capital over industrial capital and the separation

³⁰ Ibid., p.226; see also p.219; "...the old capitalism, the capitalism of free competition with its indispensable regulator, the Stock Exchange, is passing away. A new capitalism has come to take its place, bearing obvious features of something transient, a mixture of free competition and monopoly. The question naturally arises: into what is this new capitalism 'developing'? But the bourgeois scholars are afraid to raise this question".

of the ownership of capital from its application to production.³¹

The connection between domestic capitalism and the foreign market is constituted by the practice of capital export. The domestic market is inextricably bound up with markets abroad, since cartels organised on a national basis seek foreign outlets for capital and commodities. As monopoly capital extends its scope, associations and agreements take on an international dimension, and international cartels emerge. Lenin describes the resultant phenomenon as 'super-monopoly',³² and demonstrates its pervasiveness by way of an examination of the development of the electrical industry in Germany and the United States. Here capital concentration has proceeded to such an extent that two conglomerates, one German the other American, linked by a number of interdependencies, comprise a world monopoly.³³

³¹ Ibid., p.239; "It is characteristic of capitalism in general that the ownership of capital is separated from the application of capital to production, that money capital is separated from industrial or productive capital... Imperialism, or the domination of finance capital, is that highest stage of capitalism in which this separation reaches vast proportions".

³² Ibid., p.246; "This is a new stage of world concentration of capital and production, incomparably higher than the preceding stages".

³³ Ibid., p.246-8.

A similar example of the division of world markets and resources between super-monopolies is to be found in the oil industry. In this case, the role of finance capital and the state - in Germany a state oil monopoly was set up - is particularly marked.³⁴

Parallel to the division of the world between financial and industrial oligarchies is a territorial division of the world between the dominant capitalist states.

The epoch of the latest stage of capitalism shows us that certain relations between capitalist associations grow up based on the economic division of the world: while parallel to and in connection with it, certain relations grow up between states, on the basis of the territorial division of the world, of the struggle for colonies, of the struggle for spheres of influence.³⁵

Colonialism, the struggle for spheres of influence, is identified as a dimension of monopoly capitalism. Hobson had marked the years 1884-1900 as a period of major colonial expansion - during this period Britain had acquired over three and a half million square miles of colonial territories³⁶ - and these are years which Lenin cites as the opening of the era of monopoly capitalism. This is only corroborative evidence, however, Lenin is seeking to establish the structural interconnectedness

³⁴ Ibid., p.248.

³⁵ Ibid., p.253.

³⁶ Ibid., p.255-6.

of monopoly capitalism and colonialism - its political manifestation.³⁷

The title of Lenin's major work on imperialism provides the key to the notion of structural interconnectedness. It contains the implication that imperialism is monopoly capitalism - that is to say that there exists an identity between imperialism and monopoly capitalism.³⁸ Read thus, the term becomes an overarching concept designating the relations and characteristics of an entire epoch. The question then arises - what is the value of so broad and generalised a conception? Lenin was clearly aware of the question. He warned that no definition was capable of

³⁷ Ibid., p.267; "...imperialism can and must be defined differently (from a definition based on economic characteristics) if we bear in mind not only the basic, purely economic concepts...but also the historical place of this stage of capitalism in relation to capitalism in general, or the relation between imperialism and the two main trends in the working class movement. The thing to be noted at this point is that imperialism, as interpreted above, undoubtedly represents a speical stage in the development of capitalism".

³⁸ c.f., G. Arrighi, The Geometry of Imperialism, the Limits of Hobson's Paradigm, (London, 1978), pp.11-14; Arrighi criticises such a formulation of the question as unscientific; p.20; "The terms 'imperialism', 'monopoly stage of capitalism', 'finance capital', are employed in the text interchangeably, as if they designated the same phenomena. This linguistic imprecision...is)... symptomatic of the non-scientific limits of the pamphlet". (This criticism is outside the scope of the present argument and cannot be taken up).

embracing "all the concatenations of a phenomenon in its full development".³⁹ For this reason he avoided the attempt to define imperialism. Instead, his project was to relate the analysis of all the questions of the historical period to capital at a definite stage in its development.

The concentration of capital under the hegemony of finance capital, the formation of cartels, the drive for colonies and colonial parasitism, the emergence of the aristocracy of labour, the growth of opportunism in European socialist movements, the subjugation of nationalities, the tendency towards war between rival capitalist countries - all the characteristics of the era, taken together, represented the phenomenon of imperialism. Lenin did not define capitalism, though he occasionally gestured towards definition. He wrote its history, and dissected those relations which comprised it.

Imperialism was a highly polemical work - an attack upon Kautsky's theory of ultra-imperialism, and on the methodological underpinnings of Kautsky's theory. The root of Kautsky's error was that he removed the concept of imperialism from its concrete historical context. Consequently, ultra-imperialism was a 'lifeless abstraction'.

³⁹ C.W.,22, p.266.

If...we are discussing the 'purely economic' conditions of the epoch of finance capital as a historically concrete epoch which began at the turn of the twentieth century, then the best reply one can make to the lifeless abstractions of 'ultra-imperialism'...is to contrast them with the concrete economic realities of the present day world economy.⁴⁰

Kautsky believed that monopoly capital could transcend its antagonistic, imperialist phase - a belief which Lenin categorically rejected as naive. Kautsky was able to hold to this belief because he detached from each other those elements of imperialism which in Lenin's conception were part of an inter-related structure. Kautsky "detaches the politics of imperialism from its economics". His conception of imperialism "is no use at all because it one-sidedly, i.e. arbitrarily, singles out only the national question...it arbitrarily and inaccurately connects this question only with industrial capital in the countries which annex other nations and in an equally arbitrary and inaccurate manner pushes into the forefront the annexation of agrarian regions".⁴¹ Kautsky's explanation, according to Lenin's critique, deals only with forms, manifestations, and provides explanations which possess, at best, only partial validity. Lenin's point is that partial explanations, by their arbitrariness, penetrate the surface of phenomena and no further. Only an explanation which embraces the sum total of relations as an inter-related structure can lay bare the substance of those relations.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.271-2.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp.268-70.

The interlocking nature of all the relations and characteristics of the era is continually stressed in Imperialism.

Finance capital has created "an extraordinarily dense and widespread network of relations and connections",⁴² which act upon the whole range of capitalist relations, down to the level of the smallest enterprise, and permeate the thinking of bourgeoisie and working class alike.

Its ideological hold over the working class has a material basis since a section of the workers in the exploiting country benefit from the profits of the monopolists, and certain industrial sectors rely directly upon colonial involvement. In Britain, in mid-nineteenth century the foremost colonial power, opportunism and reformism took root early, and the working class response to imperialism is hardly distinguishable from bourgeois attitudes. What characterises both is passive complicity allied to an abhorrence of the excesses of imperialism.⁴³

The outcome of this dual response is a bifurcation of the total domination of monopoly capital, and of the essential unity between imperialism as a political creed and its foundation in monopoly capitalism. Specific and secondary details are highlighted, and vague ideas of reform are expressed - pious wishes, cant. Lenin locates Kautsky firmly within this perspective.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., p.285.

⁴³ Ibid., p.288.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.293-4.

Imperialism contributed nothing, in terms of economic theory, to existing works. The connections between the predatory nature of colonialism and the monopolistic nature of capitalism had been observed by Hobson and Hilferding, as Lenin himself acknowledged. Moreover, Lenin's formulation has been the subject of criticism on at least two points - on the role of the banks, which it has been said that Lenin exaggerated on the basis of evidence taken from Germany, which was unrepresentative of the rest of the capitalist world. And the compatibility of the theory of labour aristocracy with actual data on wage levels in capitalist countries, has also been questioned.⁴⁵

Where then, does the value of Lenin's work lie, and what are the characteristics which distinguish it from that of Hobson and Hilferding? These writers both embraced a wide span of social and economic relations; both, for instance, perceived the material basis for socialist reformism in the 'superprofits' derived from colonialism.

Hobson, however, saw finance capital as a supra-national entity, unconnected to manufacturing capital, which he took to be nationally based.⁴⁶ In Hobson's account, imperialism was an outgrowth of finance capital - a source

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Cliff, Lenin, Vol.2, p.60n.

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Arrighi, The Geometry of Imperialism, p.25.

of gain to the investor, but of little value to the manufacturer. Hobson failed, that is to say, to recognise the full extent of the pervasiveness of finance capital; its ability to invade all other economic and social relations. Moreover, he did not share Lenin's belief in the inevitability of imperialist conflicts. He regarded them as the consequence of underconsumption in the capitalist world, and therefore susceptible to resolution through the internal regulation of capitalism.⁴⁷

It is less easy to distinguish Lenin's position from that of Hilferding, since Lenin never explicitly repudiated his theory as he did Hobson's. The distinction can be made, however, with reference to the historical significance which each ascribed to imperialism. Hilferding regarded the phenomenon as a transient phase in the evolution of capitalism - in his conception "the dramatic phase of capitalist concentration and imperialist rivalries is but a stage in the dialectics of the historical process of capitalism".⁴⁸

⁴⁷ S. Cohen, The Question of Imperialism, (London, 1974), pp.41-2.

⁴⁸ R. Hilferding, Finanzkapital, cited in G. Haupt, Socialism and the Great War: the Collapse of the Second International, (Oxford, 1972), p.149.

It might be concluded then, that what ultimately distinguished Lenin's theory of imperialism from those of his contemporaries was his unshakeable belief that imperialism was the highest, and therefore the last stage of capitalism; that it was the preface to socialism. Imperialism was capitalism in the terminal stage of decay.

This intensification of contradictions constitutes the most powerful driving force of the transitional period of history which began from the final victory of world finance capital.⁴⁹

From all that has been said in this book on the economic essence of imperialism, it follows that we must define it as capitalism in transition, or more precisely as moribund capitalism.⁵⁰

Imperialism was written in the Marxist style and tradition, as was Hilferding's Finance Capital, and the perspective of structural totality is endemic to that tradition. What distinguishes Lenin in this company is that he was a revolutionary Marxist. His perspective contained the notion that imperialism represented a complex set of interconnected relations subordinate to and defined by the relations of monopoly capital. But he went further - he introduced the element of contradiction and antagonism. Lenin ends his preface to the French and German editions

⁴⁹ C.W., 22, p.300.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.302.

of 1920 with the claim that "imperialism is the eve of the social revolution of the proletariat. This has been confirmed since 1917 on a worldwide scale".⁵¹ Like Hobson, Hilferding regarded the contradictions and antagonisms of imperialism as susceptible to resolution within the confines of capitalism, whilst for Lenin they were irreconcilable - entailed by the structure of monopoly capital.

A point which should be added to the above characterisation of Lenin's theory of imperialism is that whilst stressing the structural totality of economic and social relations in the era in question, his conception was not of a monolithic structure. (Lenin was later to criticise Bukharin's conception of imperialism as monolithic, unvariegated).⁵² Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, co-existed with pre-imperialist forms of capitalism in much the same way as the early capitalist forms which Lenin had described in The Development of Capitalism in Russia co-existed with pre-capitalist forms.

Hence monopoly co-existed with free competition, finance capital existed alongside 'honest trade', cartels alongside

⁵¹ Ibid., p.194.

⁵² c.f., R. B. Day, 'Dialectical Method in the Political Writings of Lenin and Bukharin', Canadian Journal of Political Science, Vol. IX, No.2, June, 1976, pp.248-9.

small enterprises.⁵³ Recognition of the co-existence of different economic forms was expressed in Lenin's 'law of uneven development'.

It has been observed that "Lenin held that society could only be understood as a complex of heterogenous relations".⁵⁴ What Lenin was depicting in Imperialism was not pure imperialism. "Marxist dialectics teaches us...that the very concept of purity indicates a certain narrowness, a one-sidedness of human cognition, which cannot embrace an object in all its totality and complexity".⁵⁵

The question of nationalities

For a variety of reasons the national question assumed major importance in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of European war. The Balkan wars were a clear manifestation of nationalism within the Habsburg Empire, and in Russia, where national minorities constituted over half the Empire, the question became pressing in proportion to the decline of Tsarist authority. The

⁵³ C.W., 22, p.293.

⁵⁴ Day, 'Dialectical Method in the Political Writings of Lenin and Bukharin', Canadian Journal of Political Science, Vol. IX, No.2, June, 1976, p.244.

⁵⁵ C.W., 21, p.236.

immediacy of the question amongst these polyglot amalgamations of peoples imposed a fierceness upon debate within their respective Social Democratic movements, and the imminence of war conferred a still greater importance on the question of oppressed and oppressor peoples and nations. Lenin's own thoughts on the question were stimulated by a period of residence in 1912, in Cracow, the centre of the Polish national movement.⁵⁶

The range of responses to the question can be sketched in relation to its two poles. Cultural nationalism - the substitution of the demand for cultural self-determination for the political demand for national self-determination - was the more moderate position, oriented towards the resolution of the nationalities question within the framework of Empire. The Austrian Social Democrats were firmly committed to the cultural conception,⁵⁷ and there was a positive response to the principle of cultural self-determination within the ranks of the R.S.D.L.P. The Jewish fraction adopted the cultural demand as early as 1901, and seceded from the Party in 1902 as a result of the Second Congress, where the cultural response was rejected as inadequate. And in 1912, the 'August Bloc'

⁵⁶ C.F., Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, p.270.

⁵⁷ c.f., Low, Lenin on the Question of Nationality, p.145.

of Mensheviks and non-Russian parties - the Jewish Bund, the Latvians, Caucasians, Lithuanians and Poles - resolved that the demand for cultural self-determination was not contrary to the Party's programme.⁵⁸ Lenin was severely critical of the cultural standpoint on the national question.⁵⁹

Lenin's differences were not exclusively with the right, however. He also engaged in polemic with Rosa Luxemburg, the left Bolsheviks, Bukharin and Radek and their Polish fellow traveller Piatakov. These he accused of holding nihilistic views on the national question.⁶⁰ The gist of the leftist position was that thoroughgoing self-determination could never be achieved under capitalism - where the demand was utopian - but only under socialism, where it was superfluous.⁶¹

Both Lenin and Luxemburg drew on Marx and Engels in some sense. But whilst Lenin maintained the Marxist orthodoxy which had acknowledged the (limited) value of the nationalist demand, Luxemburg maintained that the situation in Europe and in Russia had changed so extensively that the attitude of Marx and Engels towards the national movements had

⁵⁸ c.f., Cliff, Lenin, Vol.2, p.46.

⁵⁹ See, for instance, C.W., 19, p.115.

⁶⁰ c.f., Low, Lenin on the Question of Nationality, pp.70-1.

⁶¹ c.f., Frolich, Rosa Luxemburg, p.246.

become untenable.⁶² In particular, in opposition to Marx and Engels, she trenchantly opposed the articulation of the demand for national self-determination by the S.D.K.Pi.L. The left Bolshevik group maintained an allegiance to internationalism, opposing the conception directly to nationalism and the demand for national self-determination. In general "Marxism could only draw upon the resources of an internationalism that naturally tended to play down the importance of national questions".⁶³

The nationalities question was highly divisive within the European Social Democratic movement. The cultural nationalism of the right tended to lead to the establishment of federalism within the movement, whilst the left's internationalism drove a wedge between socialist demands and nationalist demands, and between socialist and nationalist movements. In contradistinction to both positions, Lenin formulated a framework in which nationalism and socialism might co-exist. Maintaining an allegiance to international working class unity, he insisted that national movements, and their programmes should be integrated into, yet subordinate to the proletarian class struggle.

⁶² c.f., Low, Lenin on the Question of Nationality, p.147.

⁶³ Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, p.270.

Before entering into a detailed account of Lenin's conception, there is a significant feature to explore in the polemic between Lenin and the left Bolshevik group. This feature demonstrates the power which attached to methodological orthodoxy in intra-party debate, and the authority which it added to argument.

The Theses and Programme of the Bukharin-Piatakov group, (November 1915), asserted that the slogan 'self-determination of nations' was utopian, and damaging, since it disseminated illusions. Its error consisted of "a one-sided examination of the question...an omission of the specific gravity of a given social ether; in other words it is a purely rational-utopian and not revolutionary-dialectical examination of the question".⁶⁴

Significantly, this stricture is one which Lenin himself frequently applied in the course of criticisms of his opponents' theoretical orientations. It was an axiom of Marxist orthodoxy that any theoretical or strategic question should be approached in the complexity of socio-economic relations of which it formed a part, including the inter-relation of classes and the class struggle.

⁶⁴ c.f., Q. H. Gankin and H. H. Fisher, The Bolsheviks and the World War; the Origins of the Third International, (Stamford, 1940), pp.219-20.

This item of methodological orthodoxy was commonly referred to as 'revolutionary dialectics'. In point of fact, Lenin adhered to this precept in his formulation of the national question, as will shortly be demonstrated. It would appear that the accusation levelled against Lenin in the Bukharin group programme was sheer invective - but invective carefully calculated around an analytical issue which was highly sensitive because it was so central to orthodoxy.

The Right of Nations to Self-Determination was written in polemic against Rosa Luxemburg, whose position on the question of nationalities will be explored in Part III. Briefly, her position was derived from three sources. Firstly, from a perspective which was decidedly German. The national question was not current in Germany, and she tended, for that reason to regard it as irrelevant to Social Democracy in general. Secondly, from an analysis of Polish economic history - the subject of her doctoral thesis - which suggested to her that the Polish economy had, to all intents and purposes, been integrated into the Russian. For this reason she saw the notion of the Polish nation as a socio-cultural myth, and tended to generalise from this judgement. Thirdly, from an appreciation - at which she arrived much earlier than Lenin - of imperialist tendencies in the world economy and in international politics. In an era of imperialism she regarded

the national question as historically redundant. For all these reasons, the question was a deviation from the class struggle, and from the politics of the working class.

Generally the arguments of Lenin and Luxemburg passed each other by rather than meeting head on, originating as they did from different perspectives. As has been pointed out above, the national question threatened the unity of the Russian movement, and consequently pressed on Lenin. Moreover, self-determination was a demand which mobilised the non-Russian proletariats of the Empire, and working class movements in the Balkans, and could not therefore be dismissed as bourgeois, historically irrelevant. And in economic terms, the consolidation of nations embodying democratic freedoms represented a necessary complement to capitalist development.

Throughout the world, the period of the final victory of capitalism over feudalism has been linked up with national movements. For the complete victory of commodity production, the bourgeoisie must capture the home market, and there must be politically united territories whose population speaks a single language, with all obstacles to the development of that language, and to its consolidation in literature eliminated. There is the economic foundation of national movements...Therefore the tendency of every national movement is towards the formation of national states, under which these requirements of modern capitalism are best satisfied.⁶⁵

65 C.W., 20, p.396.

It is in this context that he sets the question of self-determination. In contrast to Luxemburg, he comes to "the inescapable conclusion that profound economic factors underlie the urge towards a national state".⁶⁶ The national question, in Lenin's conception, is located within the theoretical orbit of his discussion of democracy and the emergent capitalist state. He schematises the development of the capitalist state into two phases. The first is the nascent bourgeois stage, borne by mass nationalist movements which draw all classes of society into politics in connection with the struggle for democratic liberties in general, and the right of self-determination in particular. The second is the fully formed capitalist state, with an established constitutional regimen and a highly developed antagonism between proletariat and bourgeoisie. This stage of national development is characterised by the absence of mass democratic movements, and the internationalism of capital and labour. The fundamental difference between the two stages in terms of the national question is that whilst in the first, the question is the focal point of the whole range of social classes, in the second it is the slogan of bourgeois self-aggrandisement. It is part of Lenin's critique of Luxemburg that she fails to make the distinction between these stages.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.397.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.401.

In The Right of Nations to Self-Determination Lenin integrated the nationalities question into a historical account of democracy, but as in his 1905-1907 works on the democratic revolution, he assessed the significance of democratic demands from the point of view of their place in the structure of socio-economic relations, and more specifically, from the standpoint of the proletariat. Lenin's conception of democracy, that is to say, revolves around the theoretical axis of class struggle and proletarian revolution.⁶⁸ In Imperialism, where the formulations of his earlier work remain intact, Lenin emphasises that all democratic demands are conditional upon wider considerations.

The several demands of democracy, including self-determination, are not absolute, but only a small part of the general-democratic, (now: general socialist), world movement. In individual cases the part may contradict the whole: if so, it must be rejected.⁶⁹

Demands for self-determination were subordinated to class struggle - there was no clear endorsement of national

⁶⁸ C.W., 22, p.145; "...these demands must be formulated and put through in a revolutionary and not a reformist manner, going beyond the bounds of bourgeois legality, breaking them down, going beyond speeches in parliament and verbal protests, and drawing the masses into decisive action, extending and intensifying the struggle for every fundamental democratic demand up to a direct proletarian onslaught on the bourgeoisie, i.e., up to the socialist revolution that expropriates the bourgeoisie".

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.341.

movement per se. Lenin asserted the right to self-determination in the abstract. He endorsed the demand for national liberation, but not the necessity of such as a pre-requisite for socialism. In making the distinction he incurred further criticism from Luxemburg, who regarded the assertion of a right as metaphysical, unpractical. Lenin's reply was that his conception appeared "unpractical from the standpoint of the bourgeois and philistine, but it is the only policy in the national question that is practical, based on principles, and really promotes democracy, liberty, and proletarian unity".⁷⁰

The right of nations to self-determination, in Lenin's conception, might be regarded as a mental construction, designed to incorporate the analysis of, and subsequent political orientation to a particular issue into a broader conception of class struggle and revolution. Lenin was

⁷⁰ C.W., 20, p.410.

able to reconcile nationalism and internationalism precisely because he adopted a perspective in which the single issue became part of the integral composition.⁷¹

⁷¹ Lukács, Lenin, a Study on the Unity of his Thought, p.84, provides a rather elliptical statement of Lenin's method of analysis; "...every situation contains a central problem, the solution of which determines both the answer to other questions raised simultaneously by it and the key to the further development of all social tendencies in the future. 'You must' said Lenin 'be able at each particular moment to find the particular link in the chain which you must grasp with all your might in order to hold the whole chain and to prepare firmly for the transition to the next link; the order of the links, their form, the manner in which they are linked together, the way they differ from each other in the historical chain of events, are not as simple and not as meaningless as those in an ordinary chain made by a smith".

SECTION iv

Empiricism and Dialectics

Lenin's empiricism

It is well known that in his Preface to the first German edition of Capital and in his Afterword to the second, Marx presented himself as scientific investigator.¹

It is less well known that he harboured an admiration for Darwin, and regarded The Origin of Species as corroborative of historical materialism.² The Marxists of the Second International echoed Marx's commitment to the scientific ethos.³ Lacking Marx's scepticism towards

¹ c.f., L. Colletti, 'A Political and Philosophical Interview', Western Marxism, (London, 1977), p.335.

² c.f., Thompson, The Poverty of Theory, p.255; "Marx read the book in December 1860, and at once wrote to Engels: 'Although it is written in the crude English style, this is the book which contains the basis in natural history for our view'".

³ c.f., Colletti, 'Marxism and the Dialectic', New Left Review, No.93, September-October, 1975, p.19; "...an old and profound aspiration, one that had already been enunciated by Engels over the tomb of Marx, by Lenin in Friends of the People, by Hilferding in Finance Capital, and after them by thousands of others: the aspiration of Marxism to constitute itself as the foundation of the social sciences, i.e. as the science of society - and science not just in the metaphorical sense, but in the serious sense of the word, i.e. as a science on the same footing (albeit using different techniques) as the natural sciences".

positivism,⁴ however, their conception of science leaned heavily on the crutches of the natural sciences. The result was a limited and sterile vocabulary and an acid and doctrinaire mode of thought.

Kautsky regarded Marxism as "the scientific study of the evolution of the social organism",⁵ Hilferding as "only a theory of the laws of development of society...a scientifically logical and objective doctrine".⁶ The proletariat emerged in the course of the working out of these laws in accordance with the doctrine. It became conscious of itself as a class in the same measure that the antagonisms and contradictions, which the doctrine entailed, grew sharper.

It was an item of orthodoxy that the level of development of the proletariat and proletarian consciousness were quotients of capitalist development. Hence Axelrod posed

⁴ See, for instance, Marx's comments in Capital, I, p.26; "...the Paris Revue Positiviste reproaches me that, on the one hand I treat economics metaphysically, and on the other hand - imagine! - confine myself to the mere critical analysis of actual facts, instead of writing recipes (Comtist ones) for the cook shops of the future".

⁵ K. Kautsky, The Agrarian Question, cited in Lowy, 'From the "Logic" of Hegel to the Finland Station in Petrograd', Critique, no.6, 1976, p.10.

⁶ R. Hilferding, Finanzkapital, cited in Colletti, 'Marxism; Science or Revolution', Blackburn ed., Ideology in Social Science, p.370.

the question in relation to the Russian proletariat - "Does Russian life possess the means necessary for the development within the Russian workers of such political consciousness and self-activity, which would enable them to be organised into an independent and revolutionary party?".⁷ In the formulation of the orthodoxy which Axelrod's rhetorical question represented, the objective - conditions of economic and social life - was rendered as distinct from the subjective - class consciousness of the working class. The subjective was predicated on the objective in a formalistic and mechanical manner.⁸ This formulation was lent added authority by those passages in The Holy Family and The Communist Manifesto in which the consciousness and activity of the working class were represented as being foreshadowed in the 'life situation' of that class.

Lenin subscribed to this canon of materialist method as it was construed by the Second International Marxists, although he reacted strongly against any suggestion that its conditions of existence imposed on the working class in any direct sense, an awareness of itself, either politically or in relation to capital. In Lenin's view this was

⁷ P. B. Axelrod, k voprosu, cited in Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, p.153.

⁸ Lowy, 'From the "Logic" of Hegel to the Finland Station in Petrograd', Critique No.6, 1976, pp.7-8.

a fiction propagated by the economist tendency in Russian Social Democracy at the turn of the century. Moreover, in periods of revolutionary upheaval he tended to emphasise the subjective - the heroic action of the masses, the leap forward in their political awareness and class consciousness which revolution entailed.

Lenin, that is to say, did not allow himself to be immobilised by the straightjacket of determinism. He did, however, share the scientific conception of Marxism, which he repeatedly emphasised in What the Friends of the People Are. In this item of belief the scientific materialism of Second International orthodoxy is evident.

Lenin did not contribute to philosophical discourse in the Party until 1908, when he wrote Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, the only expressly philosophical work he wrote for publication. Written for political purposes⁹, it contained a vituperative polemic against the phenomenological method in philosophy - which was severely distorted in Lenin's account¹⁰ - to which he opposed a profoundly mechanistic and crude materialism in the starker possible contrast.

⁹ D. McLellan, Marxism after Marx, pp.105-6.

¹⁰ P. Scheibert, 'Lenin, Bogdanov and the Concept of Proletarian Culture', B. W. Eisenstat, ed., Lenin and Leninism, (Lexington, 1971), p.47.

The metaphorical devices deployed in the polemic with subjectivist philosophy were culled from the natural sciences.¹¹ Materialism was imbued with the scientific ethic, and was permeated throughout with a reflection theory of knowledge which held that human cognition simply reproduced mentally the reality of the natural and social world. Lenin never repudiated this conception. There are traces of it in his Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic.

Lenin's response to the outbreak of war and the collapse of the International, as is well known, was to re-read Hegel's Logic - a recognition of the epistemological decay which had sapped the intellectual vigour from the Marxism of the Second International. Thereafter, it has been argued,¹² Lenin's work exhibited markedly dialectical characteristics, since his thought had been liberated from that suffocating orthodoxy which had entailed, amongst other methodological infirmities, a crude materialist perspective, a Darwinian conception of historical development governed by positive laws, and a mechanical relationship between subject and object.

¹¹ See, for example, C.W., 14, pp.116, 129.

¹² Lowy, 'From the "Logic" of Hegel to the Finland Station in Petrograd', Critique, No.6, 1976, p.6ff.

Colletti has argued that Lenin misunderstood Hegel when he read the Logic in the Autumn of 1914,¹³ and it does appear from the Philosophical Notebooks that he read it in a way which was consonant with his own materialist methodology. Certainly, substantial evidence can be assembled to support the view that in its essentials, his methodology was not dramatically changed. In the Philosophical Notebooks the vocabulary is not dissimilar from the vocabulary of the reflection theory of knowledge.¹⁴ It will be argued below that Lenin's epistemology remained relatively stable throughout his pre-1917 work - an orthodox, materialist perspective ameliorated by some sophistication, (though not in Materialism), and by the intrusion of a subjective dimension represented by the revolutionary Russian masses.

In Lenin's political work, especially What is to be Done?, the commitment to Marxism as science was never far beneath the surface. It was evident in a conception of class consciousness, which although more nuanced and complex than is commonly acknowledged, rested ultimately on the idea that the proletariat could arrive at a correct and adequate awareness of itself as a class only through the consistent application of a scientific, materialist analysis

¹³ Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin, pp.122-3.

¹⁴ J. Hoffman, Marxism and the Theory of Praxis, (London, 1975), p.76.

of the economic and political circumstances which surrounded it. Class consciousness, that is, was equated with empirical knowledge, theoretically derived.

The question of organisation arose at the Second Congress of the R.S.D.L.P. in December 1902 - January 1903, where there were heated exchanges concerning the rules governing admissions to the Party. Lenin's ideas on organisation, and on the relation between the party and the class, have been badly distorted in the literature.¹⁵ He did not advocate a conspiratorial party of professional revolutionaries. Rather he insisted that admission to the party should be restricted to the advanced workers - those possessed of a political awareness of the position of the working class in relation to other classes, capable of recognising and responding to the exploitation of other classes, sufficiently perspicacious to see through the sophistry and posturing of other political parties and factions. In short, Lenin held that admission to the Party should be restricted to those amongst the working

¹⁵ c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, p.135; "...according to the dominant interpretation, Lenin forsook orthodox Marxism and identified himself as a Jacobin or Blanquist. As a consequence of this voluntarist deviation, so the legend goes, the Russian Social Democratic Party split into two warring sections, the Mensheviks holding fast to orthodox economic determinism, and the Bolsheviks asserting the creative historical role of a determined and disciplined group of professional revolutionaries".

class capable of deploying their analytical faculties in a field broader than their own experience - a highly demanding criterion.

The formulation of the relationship between party and class which is to be found in Lenin's work throughout the pre-1917 period, followed from his conception of class consciousness, and ultimately from his rather mechanical theory of knowledge. The distinction upon which Lenin insisted, between the party and the working class,¹⁶ mirrored the distinction which he drew between Marxist science and the limited class consciousness which the working class evolved spontaneously.

Lenin demanded a rigorous application of theory to the immediate political and economic issues which arose in the labour movement. Wage demands, strikes, arising out of the relations between workers and individual capitalists, had to be theorised in the terms of relations between capital and labour. Equally, questions of national autonomy, demands for political democracy, had to be related to the whole question of autocratic rule. In What is to be Done? Lenin consistently reiterated the belief that the mass of the workers were incapable of

¹⁶ Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, p.32; "Lenin did draw a clear distinction between the 'organisation' and the 'movement', and thought that the activity of the masses belonged essentially under the latter heading".

carrying out this arduous process of theoretical labour, which devolved onto the intellectuals and advanced workers belonging to the party. These latter were called upon to exercise tutelage amongst the masses.

One of the principal difficulties inherent in any attempt to characterise Lenin's conception of class consciousness or his formulation of the relation between party and class is the fact that his conceptions and formulations were often articulated in the course of polemics against his political opponents, and were in consequence overstated. This problem is compounded by the co-existence in Lenin's work of the crude and mechanical with the sophisticated and dialectical. His conception of class consciousness was somewhat mechanical, whilst his formulation of the relation between party and class was both sophisticated and dialectical. (This paradox might be explained by the fact that the question of organisation, of the relation between party and class, was pressing for Lenin, and demanded clear and unequivocal resolution, whilst the question of class consciousness was not. It was a question of philosophy, and Lenin possessed neither a philosophical cast of mind nor the inclination to engage in philosophical discourse, or to interrogate his philosophical preconceptions).

Whilst Social Democracy - synonymous in Lenin's usage with the party - and the spontaneous working class movement

were held distinct in Lenin's conception, the two were not mechanically separated. In fact Lenin emphasised the imperative that there should be the closest possible connection between the two. The relationship between the party and the working class was characterised by the combination of distinctness and inseparability. Here was the dialectical subtlety of Lenin's conception. It will be elaborated more fully below.

The distance separating Lenin's formulation of the organisational question from that of Luxemburg is less than is often supposed.¹⁷ She was never dismissive of the need for a centrally organised party, though the bureaucratic inertia of her own party engendered in her a mistrust of organisational structures. Equally, Lenin was never dismissive of the spontaneous initiatives of the working class movement, though he was not prepared to abnegate the responsibility of the party to impart direction to, and if necessary restrain the impulses of the working class.

There were two ideas, however, over which Lenin and Luxemburg were implacably opposed. Whilst Lenin insisted

¹⁷ loc.cit.; "...the divergence between Luxemburg's 'belief in spontaneity' and Lenin's criticism of spontaneity was not so wide as has been alleged".

on a distinction between party and class, between Social Democracy and the working class movement, Luxemburg stressed the identity between the two. For Luxemburg the party was the masses. The identity was not literal, of course. Luxemburg's formulations were often elliptical and ill-defined. Her mode of thought in this respect was quite foreign to that of Lenin.

From the relation of identity between Social Democracy and the working class, it followed that there should be the widest possible participation of the masses in the life of the party, and that the party should adopt an organisational form conducive to mass participation. These prescriptions were in direct opposition to Lenin's principle of restricted admission to the party. The second idea which divided Lenin and Luxemburg concerned the potential of the masses for 'self-activity', and their ability to develop, in the course of independent economic and political offensives, an awareness of themselves as a class. Lenin did not deny that the masses possessed the potential for taking independent initiatives. He categorically denied, however, the possibility that they could emerge from these initiatives with anything more than a strictly limited class consciousness.

The root of the differences between Lenin and Luxemburg lay in the philosophical substructure of their respective

political and strategic formulations. Luxemburg's formulations were underpinned by a theory of knowledge which Lenin would have repudiated utterly had Luxemburg ever articulated it. Underlying her notion of the 'self-activity' of the working class was a belief that the incessant daily confrontation and collision between capital and labour in the workplace, sharpened by a general atmosphere of class antagonism, possessed the power to reveal to the working class the relation in which it stood to capital. In the course of the confrontation between capital and labour, she believed, the working class could evolve a political perspective which reproduced the standpoint which Marx took up in his critique of political economy - a standpoint entirely alien to capital and bourgeois society.

Lenin would have repudiated the epistemology which permitted such a view because his mechanical theory of knowledge did not encompass the possibility that an ideological perspective could transcend the immediate material conditions in which it was formed. Only Marxist science was capable of penetrating the miasma of illusions and chimeric forms which held the masses in thrall.

The scientific conception of Marxism

Lenin's reputation in the Marxist circle in St. Petersburg was first established on the basis of a work which had originated in a series of lectures which he had delivered to the Marxist group in Samara, his family home, shortly after his graduation in law. The Samara Marxists were engaged in exchanges with local populist groups, and What the Friends of the People Are emerged out of Lenin's contribution to these debates, in which he intended to clarify the differences between the Marxists and the populists.

The work was in three parts. The second and third were intended to prove the Marxists' contention that the Russian economy was developing rapidly along capitalist lines, and that the populist, Narodnik socialism, which had been a dynamic force in the 1860s was outdated and historically redundant in consequence.¹⁸ The first part of the work, with which the argument here is concerned, was a clarification of the theoretical principles of Marx's work, and a defence of that work against attacks launched upon it in the liberal Narodnik journal Russkoye Bogatstvo. The terms in which Lenin enunciated Marx's doctrine reveal his earliest conceptions of Marxism.

¹⁸ Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol. 1, pp.66-7.

What the Friends of the People Are is marked by the positivist materialism which was dominant in Russian Marxism no less than in Second International Marxism generally. The scientific conception is reiterated on almost every page of the first part of the work. Lenin's vocabulary, his characterisation of Marx's achievement in Capital, his statement of the materialist method, all bear the stamp of positivism.

...the analysis of material social relations at once made it possible to observe recurrence ^e and regularity and to generalise the systems of the various countries in the single fundamental concept: social formation. It was this generalisation alone that made it possible to proceed from the description of social phenomena...to their strictly scientific analysis, which isolates, let us say by way of an example, that which distinguishes one capitalist country from another and investigates that which is common to all of them.¹⁹

It is hardly necessary to point to terms like 'recurrence and regularity' or to the method of generalising from the particular. Lenin plainly wanted to set Marxism alongside the natural sciences in respect of its methodology and the imposing certainty of its findings.

The work is permeated throughout with forms of expression taken from the natural sciences. References to the laws governing economic and social development are particularly prominent.

¹⁹ C.W., 1, p.140.

Marx...took one of the social-economic formations - the system of commodity production - and on the basis of a vast mass of data...gave a most detailed analysis of the laws governing the functioning of this formation and its development.²⁰

The one thing of importance to Marx...is to find the law governing the phenomena he is investigating.²¹

If the application of materialism to the analysis and explanation of one social formation yielded such brilliant results, it is quite natural that materialism in history already ceases to be a mere hypothesis and becomes a scientifically tested theory.²²

It would not be difficult to discover which of the natural sciences Lenin aspired to, even had he not stated it. It has already been noted that Marx admired Darwin's scientific achievements. Lenin echoed that admiration without any of Marx's caveats or reservations.

...Capital...showed the whole capitalist social formation to the reader as a living thing - with its everyday aspects, with the actual social manifestation of the class antagonism inherent in production relations, with the bourgeois political superstructure that protects the rule of the capitalist class, with the bourgeois ideas of liberty, equality and so forth, with the bourgeois family relationships. It will now be clear that the comparison with Darwin is perfectly accurate.²³

²⁰

Ibid., p.141.

²¹ Ibid., p.166.

²²

Ibid., p.145-6.

²³ Ibid., p.140-1.

In his copious references to biological evolution, Lenin equated historical materialism with Darwin's theory, and equated the subject matter of those theories. "Economic life constitutes a phenomenon analogous to the history of evolution in other branches of biology".²⁴ He continually drew close parallels between transformism in biology and the materialist method in history.²⁵

Lenin's scientific conception of Marxism, his notion of historical materialism, his belief that the achievement of Capital lay in the exposition of a set of laws governing the evolution of economic and social forms, had a corollary in a view of history as the unfolding of the inevitable. Lenin clearly stated that Marx proved "the necessity of the present order of things", and "the necessity of another order which must inevitably grow out of the preceding one".²⁶ Here was that theme which effectively paralysed the Second International. Neither the conscious action of the masses, nor the decisive intervention of the revolutionary party entered into Lenin's discussion. The emergence of the working class was a simple quotient of capitalist development.

²⁴ Ibid., p.167.

²⁵ Ibid., p.137;142;146;155.

²⁶ Ibid., p.166.

As Marx saw it, the progressive and revolutionary work of capitalism consists in the fact that, in socialising labour, it at the same time 'disciplines, unites and organises the working class' by the mechanism of that very process, it trains them for the struggle, organises their 'revolt', unites them to 'expropriate the expropriators' seize political power and wrest the means of production from the 'few usurpers' and turn them over to society.²⁷

Lenin's determinism is evident also in his summary of the well known passage in Marx's preface to his Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy - a passage in which Marx gave the fullest expression to his materialist method.

It is obvious that Marx's basic idea that the development of the social-economic formation is a process of natural history cuts at the very root of this childish morality which lays claim to the title of sociology. By what means did Marx arrive at this basic idea? He did so by singling out the economic sphere from the various spheres of social life, by singling out productive relations from all social relations as being basic, primary, determining all other relations.²⁸

It may be argued that Lenin did not more, in What the Friends of the People Are, than reproduce Marx's own materialism. In Lenin's formulation, however, it was stripped of its dialectical qualities and rendered in an entirely positivist fashion.

It is significant that Lenin relied for his authority on those writings of Marx and Engels which represented the

²⁷ Ibid., p.310.

²⁸ Ibid., p.137-8.

imprimatur of positivist interpretations of Marxism, and that he casually dismissed the influence of Hegel, whom he had not, at this stage, read. The works which he specifically cited were Engels' Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, the Afterword to the second edition of Capital and The Poverty of Philosophy.²⁹ Hegelianism was presented as an intellectual relic "which scientific socialism has outgrown".³⁰

It should be evident from the foregoing that the polemic against Mikhailovsky and the 'subjectivist sociology' of Russoye Bogatsvo was as firmly entrenched in doctrinaire, mechanical, positivist materialism as was the later polemic against Bogdanov. Doubtless both polemics were overstated and went to extremes, and both were written for political purposes. It is difficult to believe, though, that Lenin wrote two works imbued with positivist materialism in vocabulary, mode of thought and direction of argument, without having a marked predilection for the genre.

²⁹ Ibid., p.165.

³⁰ Ibid., p.164.

Bogdanov had led an assault on what he described as "absolute Marxism"³¹ - none other than the scientific, materialist Marxism which Lenin had enunciated in What the Friends of the People Are. He categorically denied that Marxism was materialist in the positivist, scientific sense to which Lenin held. "Although Marx called his doctrine 'materialist' its central concept is not matter but practice, activity, live labour".³²

Lenin did not respond to the denial of Marx's materialism, but took issue with Bogdanov's subjectivist, phenomenological standpoint, counterposing to it a crude, reflection theory of knowledge derived from eighteenth century philosophy.³³ The connection between Materialism and Empirio-Criticism and the rest of Lenin's work should not be

³¹ A. Bogdanov, cited in Scheibert, 'Lenin, Bogdanov and the concept of Proletarian Culture', Eisenstat, ed., Lenin and Leninism, p.47; "The enigma of the fate of ideologies is contained in the changes of the social-economic formations...Marxism, as the ideology of the most progressive class, was forced to deny to all systems, its own included, an absolute relevance. Marxism claimed to develop itself according to the changing conditions of life of the proletariat...But the old world, after a long and unsuccessful strife...created a vampire in the image of the foe and sent it forth to the struggle against life. The name of this delusion is absolute Marxism".

³² A. Bogdanov, Revolution and Philosophy, cited in S.V.Utechin, 'Philosophy and Society; Alexander Bogdanov', L. Labedz, ed., Revisionism, Essays on the History of Marxist Ideas, (London, 1962), p.117.

³³ McLellan, Marxism after Marx, p.107.

overlooked³⁴ simply because the former was written in terms of pre-Marxist philosophy. The 1908 work was an attempt to defend the very foundation of his conception of Marxism.

Bogdanov - along with Ernst Mach, a philosopher of the natural sciences, upon whose work Bogdanov drew - called into question the concept of matter; the heart of scientific objectivity as such. Given the close relation between science and Marxist materialism in Lenin's conception, it is unsurprising that he responded in so vituperative and dogmatic a manner.

It has been suggested that Lenin's positivist, or 'pre-dialectical' materialism was transformed upon his re-reading of Hegel's Logic in the Autumn of 1914.³⁵ Evidence for this view is taken from the Philosophical Notebooks which contain Lenin's reflections on Hegel. In his notes, Lenin criticises Plekhanov - the foremost orthodox

³⁴ Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, p.434, holds that "Materialism and Empirio-criticism holds an isolated position among Lenin's many writings".

³⁵ Lowy, 'From the "Logic" of Hegel to the Finland Station in Petrograd', Critique, No.6, 1976, p.11; "...the critical reading, the materialist reading of Hegel had freed Lenin from the straightjacket of the pseudo-orthodox Marxism of the Second International, from the theoretical limitations it imposed on his thinking".

Bolshevik philosopher - for paying insufficient attention to Hegel.³⁶ He also expressed reservations regarding the materialist method,³⁷ and adopted a subtler view of causality³⁸ and scientific laws,³⁹ and he recognised the category of 'totality'⁴⁰ - a recognition which is apparent in his criticisms of Kautsky in The Collapse of the Second International.

However, to set against this evidence, there is some indication that Lenin clung to the materialism of What the Friends of the People Are and Materialism and Empirio-Criticism. He acclaimed with obvious relish what he took to be a statement of materialist belief in the Logic. Against the following passage is inscribed in the margin, "nota bene".

³⁶ C.W., 38, p.277; "Plekhanov wrote on philosophy (dialectics) probably about 1000 pages... Among them, about the large Logic...nil".

³⁷ Ibid., p.276; "Intelligent idealism is closer to intelligent materialism than stupid materialism".

³⁸ Ibid., p.159; "Cause and effect, ergo, are merely moments of universal reciprocal dependence, of (universal) connection, of the reciprocal concatenation of events, merely links in the chain of the development of matter".

³⁹ Ibid., p.151; "...law, every law, is narrow, incomplete, approximate".

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.151-2; "Lenin refers to "...the cognition by man of unity and connection, of the reciprocal dependence and totality of the world process".

Cognition... finds itself faced by that which truly is as actually present independently of subjective opinions... (This is pure materialism!). Man's will, his practice, itself blocks the attainment of its end... in that it separates itself from cognition and does not recognise external actuality for that which it truly is (for objective truth).⁴¹

And three pages further on, Lenin emphasises another passage in the Logic.

The Idea of the Notion which is determined in and for itself is thus posited no longer merely in the active subject, but equally as an immediate actuality; and the latter conversely is posited as it is in Cognition, as objectivity which truly is.⁴²

Colletti points out that Lenin read Hegel in a materialist manner precisely where Hegel engaged on the task of annihilating matter.⁴³

Elsewhere, Lenin characterised dialectics as the identity, or unity of opposites - by way of exemplification he returns to the natural sciences.⁴⁴ Lenin's notes are peppered with allusions and metaphors which belong to his

⁴¹ Ibid., p.216.

⁴² Ibid., p.219.

⁴³ Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin, pp.122-3; "In reality, Lenin's reading of these pages is based on a fundamental misunderstanding. He has 'forced' himself to read Hegel 'materialistically' exactly at that point where Hegel is in fact...annihilating matter".

⁴⁴ C.W., 38, p.359.

earlier positivist formulation of materialism.⁴⁵ In short, the textual evidence of the Philosophical Notebooks does not conclusively support the theory of a clean epistemological break in Lenin's work.

Lenin's political works do exhibit some tendencies towards the dialectical after 1914. The category 'totality' informed the corpus of work on imperialism, social chauvinism and the question of nationalities. The State and Revolution pivoted on the notion of the radical transformation of the state. The revolutionary initiative, the transformation of bourgeois revolution into socialist revolution, which Lenin advocated in the Letters From Afar and the April Theses might be said to reflect the Hegelian notion of the "interruption in gradualness".⁴⁶

...the proletariat can and must, in alliance with the poorest section of the peasantry take further steps towards control of the production and distribution of the basic products...In their entirety and in their development these steps will mark the transition to socialism, which cannot be achieved in Russia directly, at one stroke, without transitional measures, but is quite achievable and urgently necessary as a result of such transitional measures.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.171, 180, 182, 183, 195, 201, 216, 219.

⁴⁶ Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, pp.434-5.

⁴⁷ C.W., 23, p.341.

The leitmotif of this formulation is the idea of the 'quantitative leap' which contrasts sharply with the theme of biological evolution which Lenin invoked in his earlier works.

It should be noted, however, that aspects of Lenin's earlier materialism are still evident. The transformation of productive relations which he advocated were pre-figured with inevitability in "the conditions created by the war".⁴⁸ Moreover, as has been noted above, in Lenin's earlier works crude and positivist materialism co-existed with political and strategic formulations which possessed subtlety and sophistication, and were marked by dialectical qualities. The tension between determinism and an awareness of the revolutionary potential of the masses, between the distinctness of party and class and their inseparability, is evidence of a dialectical cast of mind as early as 1902.⁴⁹

48 loc.cit.

49 Lowy, 'From the "Logic" of Hegel to the Finland Station in Petrograd', Critique, no.6, 1976, p.15, qualifies his argument on the importance of Lenin's reading of Hegel; "...we in no way wish to suggest that Lenin 'deduced' the April Theses from Hegel's Logic...The theses are the product of revolutionary, realistic thinking in the face of a new situation...They are the result of what constitutes the very essence of the Leninist method: concrete analysis of a concrete situation".

Class consciousness

Lenin's conception of class consciousness was indelibly marked by his positivist brand of materialism, although in periods of revolutionary upheaval he did transcend the restricted formulation which he had set out in What the Friends of the People Are.

Marx treats the social movement as a process of natural history, governed by laws not only independent of human will, consciousness and intentions, but rather, on the contrary, determining the will, consciousness and intentions of men.⁵⁰

Consciousness was subordinate to the conditions of social existence. Its point of departure was the external, the objective.

Even at the height of the revolutionary upsurge of 1905, Lenin still insisted that the class consciousness of the working class was a function of Russia's retarded economic development, which imposed strict limitations on the extent of the revolution. "The degree of Russia's economic development (an objective condition), and the degree of class consciousness of the broad masses of the proletariat (a subjective condition inseparably bound up with the objective condition) make the immediate and complete emancipation of the working class impossible".⁵¹

⁵⁰ C.W.,1, p.167.

⁵¹ C.W.,9, p.28.

In Lenin's conception, proletarian class consciousness was rendered as scientific knowledge of the laws governing the evolution of capitalist society, and the ability to recognise the working out of those laws in the economic and political life of the working class and of all other classes.

The consciousness of the working class cannot be genuine class consciousness unless the workers learn to apply in practice the materialist analysis and the materialist estimate of all aspects of the life and activity of all classes, strata and groups of the population.⁵²

The conception of class consciousness as the product of a materialist analysis, or as "contemporary science",⁵³ or "knowledge"⁵⁴ was incompatible with the notion of the working class adopting a perspective of itself as a class in the course of its struggle.⁵⁵ In Lenin's formulation of the question of class consciousness, the party was ascribed a didactic role.

⁵² S.W., 1, (Moscow, 1970), p.174.

⁵³ See, for instance, C.W., 4, p.217.

⁵⁴ S.W., 1, p.182.

⁵⁵ C.W., 1, p.299; "And in order that he (the worker) may fulfil his function of representative in an organised, sustained struggle, it is by no means necessary to enthuse him with 'perspectives'; all that is needed is simply to make him understand the political and economic structure of the system that oppresses him...".

Lenin wrote What is to be Done? in order to crystallise support within the Russian Social Democratic movement for a new type of party. Since 1897 the movement had been subject to fragmentation. There had emerged in the Union of Social Democrats Abroad, a group of young emigres who were increasingly hostile to the Marxist orthodoxy of Plekhanov and Axelrod, and the tutelage which the Emancipation of Labour Group exercised within the Union. The dissenting fraction possessed two mouthpieces - the 'workerphile' newspapers Rabochaya Mysl, (Worker's Thought), and Rabochaya Delo, (Worker's Cause), which had opened publication in 1897 and 1899 respectively.

The ideological outlook of this tendency was branded by the orthodox Marxists as 'economism', and bore a marked resemblance to the revisionist tendency in the S.P.D. It advocated the severance of the economic struggle of the working class from the political programme and goals of the Emancipation of Labour Group, which, it maintained, placed undue emphasis on the role of the intelligentsia.

The economists maintained that the working class should conduct an independent struggle for their economic goals, whilst leaving the progressive bourgeoisie to fight for constitutional democracy. Plekhanov and Axelrod were quick to respond to the threat to orthodoxy which they represented, and the threat to their own positions as

patrician theorists of the Social Democratic movement, and Lenin rallied to their support. Their response was a vigorous polemic against economism, and the establishment of their own newspaper - Iskra.⁵⁶

What is to be Done? was the culmination of Lenin's critique of economism, and simultaneously a strategy for hardening the orthodox core of Russian Social Democracy, in the face of incipient fragmentation. It was a work expressing views which were shared by all the major figures of Russian Marxism.⁵⁷ Lenin's fundamental contention was that in the course of their struggle for economic advances, the working class could achieve no more than a 'trade union consciousness'. In no sense did he denigrate the spontaneous activity of the working class, but he rejected totally the notion that unaided, the spontaneous struggle of the working class possessed the potential to generate in that class a political consciousness. In the forceful

56 For an elaboration of the differences between Plekhanov, Axelrod, Lenin, and the economists, see Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, pp.140-155; Liebman, p.30; T. T. Hammond, Lenin on Trade Unions and Revolution 1893-1907, (New York, 1957), pp.18-33.

57 Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, p.28; "It was...in the columns of (Iskra), filled by the outstanding figures of Russian Marxism - Plekhanov, Martov, Axelrod, Lenin, Trotsky - that between December 1900 and October 1903 were developed the ideas, which, when systemised and perfected, were destined to form the essence of Lenin's theory of organisation".

and categorical statement of this contention, Lenin articulated a view in which the ethos of the working class movement and the Marxist tradition of socialism were held to be quite foreign to one another. Whilst the latter had been elaborated by an intelligentsia which was in origin bourgeois, the ethos of the working class had emerged from the rigours of its economic life and was restricted in scope to the narrow confines of this area of class struggle.

The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. By their social status the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working class movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought amongst the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia.⁵⁸

This statement encapsulates Lenin's theory of class consciousness. The working class movement generated no more than a collective ethos - an ill-formed Weltanschauung - which was partial and incomplete as a conception of itself

⁵⁸ S.W., 1, p.143.

as a class. Scientific socialism, on the other hand, was derived from theoretical activity. The two existed quite independently of one another.

Lenin's conception clearly did not allow of any notions of the working class adopting, in the course of the economic struggle, a perspective wider than its own limited experience.⁵⁹ He denied the ability of the workers to think of themselves as a class at all; since the day to day economic struggle of the workers took different forms in different branches of industry, it was positively divisive.⁶⁰

Lenin conceived of the mass of the workers as being entombed within the confines of their immediate environment, unable to stand outside their experience, or to apply the critical perspective which class consciousness entailed, to the whole sweep of social and economic relations. Far from engendering a political consciousness in the working class, capitalism simply deadened its perceptions. Lenin refers to "...that infinite

⁵⁹ C.W., 4, pp.215-6; "The struggle of the workers becomes a class struggle only when all the foremost representatives of the entire working class of the whole country are conscious of themselves as a single working class and launch a struggle that is directed, not against individual employers, but against the entire class of capitalists and against the government that supports that class".

⁶⁰ S.W., 1, p. 167-8.

disunity, oppression and stultification which under capitalism is bound to weigh down upon very many sections of the 'untrained' unskilled workers".⁶¹ Consequently "...it would be 'tail-ism' to think that the entire class, or almost the entire class, can ever rise, under capitalism, to the level of consciousness and activity of its vanguard, of its Social Democratic Party".⁶²

It followed that class consciousness would have to be injected into the working class from outside the immediate sphere of relations between labour and capital, by an agency capable of seeing beyond the confines of the factory walls. The Social Democrats were ascribed the theoretical task of the application of a materialist analysis to the working out of relations between classes.

⁶¹ C.W., 7, p.262.

⁶² Ibid., p.260.

Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships of all classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of the interrelations between all classes. For that reason, the reply to the question as to what must be done to bring political knowledge to the workers cannot be merely the answer with which, in the majority of cases, the practical workers, especially those inclined towards Economism, mostly content themselves... To bring political knowledge to the workers the Social Democrats must go among all classes of the population; they must dispatch units of their army in all directions.⁶³

In the context of a polemic against economism it is unsurprising that Lenin should have stressed the political dimension of class consciousness. For him, class consciousness was political consciousness. The focus of the worker's struggle was autocracy, in all its forms and ramifications.⁶⁴ In this respect, he differed from Rosa Luxemburg. Her perspective was the irreconcilable antagonism between capital and labour. This difference in perspective helps to explain the differences between Lenin and Luxemburg in respect of their ideas on class consciousness.

⁶³ S.W., 1, p.182; c.f., p.143.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp.164-5; c.f., pp.144, 191; "...we shall not be fulfilling our task of developing the political consciousness of the workers if we do not undertake the organisation of the political exposure of the autocracy in all its aspects"; see also, C.W., 4, p.368, 370.

Lenin's conception of class consciousness was highly rigorous. The experience of the working class was the raw material, but raw material had to be 'worked up' theoretically before it crystallised as Social Democratic class consciousness. The latter had then to be disseminated amongst, instilled into the working class. The means which Lenin advocated were borrowed from the economists themselves, but their strategy was transformed. It was a practice of the economists to issue leaflets in factories 'exposing' the abuses which the workers suffered. Lenin broadened the tactic of exposure - set it on a political plane. The Social Democrats had to expose all the abuses which capitalism and autocracy imposed on all exploited classes.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ See Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, pp.174-5.

In order to become a Social-Democrat, the worker must have a clear picture in his mind of the economic nature and the social and political features of the landlord and the priest, the high state official and the peasant, the student and the vagabond; he must know their strong and weak points; he must grasp the meaning of all the catchwords and sophisms by which each class and stratum camouflages its selfish strivings and its real 'inner workings'; he must understand what interests are reflected by certain institutions and certain laws and how they are reflected. But this clear picture cannot be obtained from any book. It can be obtained only from living examples and from exposures which follow close upon what is going on about us at a given moment; upon what is being discussed...upon what finds expression in such and such events, in such and such statistics, and in such and such court sentences, etc., etc. These comprehensive political exposures are an essential and fundamental condition for training the masses in revolutionary activity.⁶⁶

As has been observed, Lenin never denigrated the capacity for activity of the masses of the working class. In What is to be Done? he cited the strike movements of the 1890s as evidence of the capacity of the working class to take spontaneous political initiatives. In the course of these initiatives, the working class advanced in consciousness beyond the primitive mentality which it had demonstrated in earlier outbursts. However, its consciousness was still only embryonic, ill-formed, partial. Lenin stressed categorically that it was not a Social Democratic consciousness.

⁶⁶ S.W., 1, p. 175.

The strikes of the nineties revealed far greater flashes of consciousness; definite demands were advanced, the strike was carefully timed, known cases and instances in other places were discussed, etc. The revolts were simply the resistance of the oppressed, whereas the systematic strikes represented the class struggle in embryo, but only in embryo... They marked the awakening antagonisms between workers and employers; but the workers were not, and could not be, conscious of the irreconcilable antagonism of their interests to the whole of the modern political and social system, i.e., theirs was not yet Social-Democratic consciousness.⁶⁷

Lenin castigated the Social Democrats for falling behind the spontaneous initiatives of the working class in their theoretical and organisational efforts.⁶⁸ But his advocacy of the exposure strategy, and the terminology in which he framed that strategy, is indicative of a denial of the capacity of the masses of the working class independently to adopt a standpoint antagonistic to autocracy - to form, that is, a comprehensive awareness of itself as a class - on the basis of its own experience.

Plainly, the ideological hold of the autocratic state over the working class in a relatively backward country, was firmly entrenched - Lenin referred to "gendarmes in surplices".⁶⁹ His response was to invoke the exposure strategy as a method of taking theory to the masses, as a didactic device.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.142-3.

⁶⁸ Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, p.156.

⁶⁹ S.W., 1, p.175.

It can be argued that Lenin's political formulations in What is to be Done? and elsewhere were the fruits of an empirical cast of mind which imposed a separation - unmediated by experience - between consciousness and the forms of social existence which governed it. Consciousness and science, equally, were distinct in Lenin's conception. Science represented a 'special' form of mental activity with greater penetrative qualities than consciousness derived from experience. Consciousness was constrained by the limitations imposed by the material world - science alone could penetrate those forms.

Lenin was not however, prepared to accept these conclusions unreservedly. There remained a tension in his mind between the scientific and the practical.

...the self-knowledge of the working class is indissolubly bound up, not solely with a fully clear theoretical understanding - or rather, not so much with the theoretical, as with the practical understanding - of the relationships between all the various classes of modern society, acquired through the experience of political life.⁷⁰

In periods of revolutionary activity, when even his closest comrades in the Bolshevik fraction were outpaced in their grasp of events - in their political vision - by the revolutionary awareness of the working class,⁷¹ Lenin was

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 174.

⁷¹ See Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, pp.199-201.

prepared to grant to practice, to participation in revolutionary activity, a radicalising function. It awakened the proletariat to an awareness of its position in the configuration of class forces.⁷² But it should be noted that Lenin rarely used the term 'consciousness' to denote the heightened awareness of the revolutionary masses.⁷³

Lenin was not prepared to render consciousness unreservedly as science - to the total exclusion of the practical element. But it is plain that sensuous practice must be mediated by scientific theory. In the mental process of forming his answer to the question of class consciousness - a protracted process which was never systematic, nor ever completed - Lenin's empirical cast of mind was ameliorated by a glimpse of the possibilities which lay beyond the empirical.

⁷² c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, p.246; "Clarity began to emerge, initial illusions were purged, and the further the revolution progressed, the more political positions were polarised".

⁷³ Ibid., p.242; "Lenin clearly distinguished between the way in which the Social-Democratic intelligentsia came to consciousness and the generation of consciousness in the mass".

The organisational question

There has been a tendency in the literature to characterise Lenin's strategic formulation of the question of the revolutionary organisation as Blanquist and/or Jacobin, and to locate it alongside the alleged Blanquism of the early Marx, or in the tradition of P. N. Tkachev, the "foremost Russian Jacobin", or P. L. Lavrov, his successor.⁷⁴ In this characterisation, Lenin is represented as a deviant from the Marxist orthodoxy of Plekhanov and Axelrod.⁷⁵ Harding has argued convincingly, that on the contrary, Lenin's formulation of the organisational question up to and including What is to be Done? was in concert with the assumptions and precepts of Russian Marxism as articulated by its leading theorists in the 1890s.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ See, for example, the account in D. P. Hammer, 'The Dictatorship of the Proletariat', B. W. Eisenstat, ed., Lenin and Leninism, (Lexington, 1971), p.27.

⁷⁵ For a catalogue of these interpretations see N. Harding, 'Lenin's Early Writings - the Problem of Context', Political Studies, Vol. XXXIV, no.4, December 1975, pp.442-3.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.457; "My argument, put briefly, is that Lenin's early works, up to and including What is to be Done? can be seen as a consistent and intelligible body of thought only when they are viewed in their appropriate context. I have argued that a central facet of that context was the orthodoxy of Russian Marxism encapsulated in the precepts he inherited from Plekhanov and Axelrod".

It is not possible to separate the evolution of the political and intellectual tradition of Marxism from the chequered course of revolutionary politics in the decades after Marx's death. By his own admission, Lenin's theory of organisation, of the relation between the party and the class, arose in part out of specifically Russian conditions, and owed something to the Russian revolutionary tradition.⁷⁷ In the German party, the question was rarely discussed - the German working class was not as backward as was the Russian, either in formal or in political education, and the impressive organisational structure of the S.P.D. engendered complacency which only Rosa Luxemburg and the left of the party defied.⁷⁸ Russian backwardness, and the organisational weakness of Russian Social Democracy rendered organisation a burning question of that movement around the turn of the century, and called forth a particular kind of solution.

In What is to be Done? Lenin articulated a schema to satisfy the organisational requirements of a Social Democratic movement which was no more than a loose collection of Marxist reading circles in the larger towns and cities inside Russia, and discrete groups of emigres abroad. The Emancipation

⁷⁷ C.W., 4, pp.217-8; Lenin refers to "...the necessity of learning revolutionary techniques from the old Russian masters (we do not in the least hesitate to admit this necessity)".

⁷⁸ c.f., Scheibert, 'Lenin, Bogdanov, and the Concept of Proletarian Culture', Eisenstat, ed., Lenin and Leninism, p.48.

of Labour Group exercised some hegemony, but powerful centrifugal forces threatened its centralising influence. In particular, there was a growing distance between the spontaneous economic movement of the working class and the political work of the party. For this reason, Lenin focused on the question of organisation as it bore on the relationship between the spheres of the economic and political struggles.

A distinction between the party and the spontaneous movement of the masses in their economic struggle was the pivot of Lenin's theory of organisation. It corresponded to the distinction between Social Democratic class consciousness and the practical political awareness of the working class. Lenin never conflated theoretical knowledge with practical knowledge - equally, he insisted on a dividing line between the party and the movement, and between the political and the economic struggle. For Social Democrats not to do so, in Lenin's view, was for them to close their eyes to evident realities of political life.

Lenin aspired towards the fusion of the economic and the political struggles, but he recognised that the mass of Russian workers did not think of their economic demands, and confrontations with their employers in political terms. Lenin did not deny that the economic struggle which the working class waged in the course of its day to day con-

frontation with employers possessed a political content. He did deny, however, that alone, the workers could perceive the political content which was obscured by the trade union form which the confrontation took. He shared this axiom of belief with Plekhanov and Axelrod; together they had articulated it repeatedly in their exchanges with the economists. Their contention was that only the intervention of the Social Democrats would expose the political content of the struggle.

'Every struggle is a political struggle' - these famous words of Marx are not to be understood to mean that any struggle of workers against employers must always be a political struggle. They must be understood to mean that the struggle of the workers against the capitalists inevitably becomes a political struggle insofar as it becomes a class struggle. It is the task of the Social-Democrats, by organising the workers, by conducting propaganda and agitation among them, to turn their spontaneous struggle against their oppressors into the struggle of the whole class, into the struggle of a definite political party and socialist ideals. This is something that cannot be achieved by local activity alone.⁷⁹

It was the aim of Lenin's organisational strategy to overcome the separation of political from economic struggle, between Social Democracy and the working class movement - a separation which he recognised as one which existed in Russia, and which resulted in the weakening of both party and movement.

⁷⁹ C.W., 4, p.216.

Social-Democracy is the combination of the working class and socialism. Its task is not to serve the working class movement passively...but to...point out to this movement its ultimate aim and its political tasks, and to safeguard its political and ideological independence. Isolated from Social-Democracy, the working class movement becomes petty and inevitably becomes bourgeois...In every country there has been a period in which the working class movement existed apart from socialism, each going its own way; and in every country this isolation has weakened both socialism and the working class movement. Only the fusion of socialism with the working class movement has in all countries created a durable base for both.⁸⁰

It was Lenin's contention that to allow the Social Democratic party and labour movement to merge - which was effectively what the principle of open admission, advocated by Martov,⁸¹ would have meant - was to abnegate the responsibility of the party to lead the movement in accordance with the tasks which its theory dictated.

Therefore Lenin drew up a most explicit and precise specification for the governance of the party organisation and the relations between the party and the class. Inside the party there were to be "organisations of revolutionaries", and "organisations of workers, as broad and as varied as possible". Outside, but related to the party were "workers

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.368.

⁸¹ C.W., 7, pp.266-7; "As comrade Martov sees it, on the contrary, the border line of the party remains absolutely vague, for 'every striker' can proclaim himself a Party member".

organisations associated with the Party;...workers organisations not associated with the Party but actually under its control and direction;...unorganised elements of the working class, who in part come under the direction of the Social-Democratic Party, at any rate during big manifestations of the class struggle".⁸²

The differences which culminated at the Second Party Congress between Lenin and Plekhanov on the one side, and Martov and Axelrod on the other, often appeared to be semantic,⁸³ but beneath the misunderstandings and hair-splitting there lay a fundamental conflict between two principles - restricted admission to the party, and 'elasticity'. With the exception of the period 1905-1906 when Lenin argued for open admission to the party, he never deviated from the position he stated so categorically in 1902.⁸⁴

However, whilst insisting on the policy of restricted admission and a distinction between party and class, Lenin never countenanced a hermetical seal between the two. On the contrary, there was to be the closest possible connection between the Social Democrats and those working class organisations which

⁸² Ibid., p.266.

⁸³ c.f., Harding, Lenin's Political Thought, Vol.1, pp.190-1.

⁸⁴ c.f., Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, pp.99-100.

were excluded from the party.⁸⁵ There was nothing mechanical about the separateness which Lenin advocated. In One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, Lenin quotes from a speech he had made at the Congress.

We need the most diverse organisations of all types, ranks, and shades, beginning with extremely limited and secret and ending with very broad, free,

Elsewhere Lenin asserts that "...the task of Social-Democracy is to bring definite socialist ideals to the spontaneous working class movement...in a word, to fuse this spontaneous movement into one indestructable whole with the activity of the revolutionary party".⁸⁷

Lenin's formulation of the relationship between party and class bears the imprint of the dialectical cast of mind which marked all of his political formulations, in sharp contrast to his philosophical and epistemological conceptions.

His formulation of the organisational question was the only one which he regarded as appropriate to the conditions of an illegal, underground political party, in which orthodoxy was

85 In order to acquaint the party with exact information regarding the working class movement and the existing state of relations between the party and the movement, Lenin drafted a 'questionnaire' to be returned by local party cells to the Second Congress. See C.W., 6, pp.292-300.

86 C.W., 7, p.263.

87 C.W., 4, p.217.

in constant danger of being submerged in deviationist tendencies. In this sense it was simply a practical response to the exigencies of the political situation. However, it must also be seen in the light of the theory of class consciousness alongside which the political formulation was articulated in What is to be Done?

Lenin's theory of class consciousness was marked by a positivist conception of Marxism and socialism as scientific knowledge - the product of theoretical practice. Practical activity, in Lenin's conception, was capable of engendering political awareness, but this was of a quite different order from socialist class consciousness. At best, it was class consciousness in embryonic form. This is to say that whilst Lenin was able to appreciate the educative properties of practical, spontaneous working class activity, he had no philosophical or epistemological conception of a relationship between practice and class consciousness.

If Lenin's mind was cast in flat, empirical terms - if he was a positivist, that is - in philosophy, in politics he nevertheless possessed a dialectical cast of mind capable of the formulation of questions, and their resolution, with dialectical subtlety. His formulation of the organisational question bears out this conclusion.

PART III

MARX'S METHOD IN THE WORK
OF ROSA LUXEMBURG

SECTION i

The Accumulation of Capital

Luxemburg as economist

Rosa Luxemburg wrote only one work which was not imbued with polemic and addressed quite categorically to a definite area of political debate. This work was The Accumulation of Capital, and it represents her only major contribution to economics, though she did leave a collection of fragments entitled An Introduction to Economics, published posthumously in incomplete form in 1925,¹ and her doctoral thesis, published in Poland in 1898, was a treatise on the industrial development of that country.

Her interest in economics, in which she had received a training, was rekindled by her work in the S.P.D. party school in Berlin, in which she was increasingly involved after 1906, but she did not begin writing Accumulation until 1912. She proceeded rapidly to complete the manuscript in four months.

¹ c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.828-30; Frolich, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.148-9.

I lived really as if in a state of intoxication, day and night seeing nothing but this one problem that was unfolding itself so beautifully in front of me...I wrote the thirty galleys in one go within four months - something unheard of...I sent off the rough draft to the printer without even once reading it over.²

If her ideas were as well formed as appears to have been the case, it might be asked why Luxemburg produced the book no earlier than 1912, or what urgent purpose called forth the writing and publication of the work with such alacrity. The circumstances suggest that though Accumulation lacks express polemical or political content, it was written nevertheless with polemical intent, to draw attention to, and set in a theoretical context, the imperialist tendencies manifested by German monopoly capital, and a chauvinistic Prussian militarism.³ Moreover, Accumulation represents an attempt by Luxemburg to undermine within the S.P.D. the dominant ethos of reformism, which had co-existed with Marxist doctrine since the Party's inception, and which had assumed a doctrinal form of its own - revisionism. The S.P.D. has often been characterised as a party with a reformist practice, masked by a Marxist ideology,⁴ but this is too crude a construction, since practice increasingly

² Cited in Frolich, Rosa Luxemburg, p.159.

³ c.f., Tarbuck, ed., Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital, p.15.

⁴ c.f., Schorske, German Social Democracy, 1905-1917, p.6.

came to impinge on ideology, imposing itself on the norms and attitudes of the Party - spilling over that is, beyond simple practice.

To understand revisionism, and the forces and conflicts within the S.P.D. (which is in turn a pre-requisite for understanding the purposes behind Accumulation), it is necessary to elaborate a conception of ideology nuanced in such a way as to accommodate the distinction between 'pragmatic' and 'expressive' ideology, between ethos and doctrine.⁵ Nettl has pointed out that Luxemburg first saw deviations within the S.P.D. as a doctrinal misunderstanding, then as a difference in politics and policy, and finally as a fundamental conflict of Weltanschauung - values; a difference of ethos.⁶

Her strategy altered accordingly. From a theoretical attack on Bernstein (1899-1904) it became a political critique of a bureaucratic party, isolated from the working class, possessed of a formalistic and arid doctrine of purely expressive function, and increasingly oriented towards parliamentarism, (1904-1912). Finally she recognised the extent of the gulf between the Weltanschauung of

⁵ c.f., H. Drucker, Doctrine and Ethos in the Labour Party, (London, 1979), pp.8-11.

⁶ c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.248.

the party and her own revolutionary outlook and Marxist standpoint, and attempted to undermine the former by attacking its theoretical premises, its inability to grasp, and incompatibility with, manifest tendencies of contemporary capitalism. This last phase in her increasingly bitter and irreconcilable struggle amounted to a thoroughgoing confrontation between two fundamentally opposed standpoints. It represented much more than simply a conflict of doctrine, or theoretical debate. It was a conflict, in 1912 relatively undeveloped, between revolutionary elan and socialist certainty, typified by Luxemburg's position, and an ethos locked within the parametres of 'practical politics' - participation in elections, trade union activity, rapprochement with bourgeois parties in the Reichstag, an ethos which never questioned the mores of political behaviour appropriate to parliamentarism, and the assumptions of a socialist party in permanent opposition, accepting the ground rules of a bourgeois, capitalist society.

Accumulation was an expression, an articulation, a reasoned assertion of Luxemburg's socialist certainty - the foundation of which was the belief that capitalist accumulation was subject to definite limits, could only proceed under certain conditions, and that those very conditions implied what can only be described as eventual capitalist collapse. This belief was, for Luxemburg, the sine qua non of the socialist

movement, an article of faith necessary to sustain it against opportunist or reformist deviations. It was a premise, rather than a conclusion of her argument in Accumulation.

This statement requires clarification. In her work of 1913, Luxemburg embarks on an economic 'proof' of the inability of capitalist accumulation to maintain itself indefinitely in the face of finite markets for the commodities it produces. She is concerned specifically to refute the implications of the reproduction schema contained in the second volume of Capital. Urgency was lent to her task by the co-option of these schema to the argument, prevalent amongst 'legal' Marxists in Russia, (notably Struve, Bulgakov, and Tugan-Baronovski),⁷ and sympathetic to the assumptions of revisionism, that surplus value might be realised, and accumulate in the form of capital, without restrictions imposed by consumption or the ready availability of markets. Crises were simply the product of disproportion between the various branches of production, an imbalance susceptible to redress within the framework of capitalist production.

⁷ The Accumulation of Capital, (London, 1963), pp.292-323; for a succinct exposition of Tugan-Baronovski's argument, see M. Kalecki, 'The Problem of Effective Demand with Tugan-Baronovski and Rosa Luxemburg', Kalecki, Selected Essays on the Dynamics of the Capitalist Economy, pp. 146-55.

It was imperative that Luxemburg should refute this argument, since it contradicted quite decisively her theory of contradiction and collapse, thereby undermining those "grounds of support for the realisation of socialism" which derived scientifically from "the economic condition of capitalist society".⁸ This was that foundation of her socialist certainty which had been successfully defended, under seige from Bernstein, in Reform or Revolution. In 1912 she recognised the extent to which revisionism had taken hold of the S.P.D., and the danger which this presented - that the party would fail to recognise imperialism and international antagonisms as the manifest forms of those tendencies in the economics of capitalism which she had (no more than) sketched in Reform and Revolution.

Nettl, amongst others, fails to realise the full significance of Accumulation. Whilst ascribing to the work a certain "uneven, flickering genius",⁹ he blandly claims that "for the moment revolution and politics hardly matter", and that unlike Lenin, Luxemburg was capable of thinking in an "extended and scientific manner".¹⁰ Nettl assesses Accumulation as a self-contained work of economic theory,

⁸ Reform or Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.63.

⁹ c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.839.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.841.

the value of which lies in its contribution to development theory¹¹ rather than its exposition of imperialism.¹² The work is lifted out of its political context, from whence it sprang, and the errors and crudities in Luxemburg's treatment of the reproduction schema are left unaccounted. These imperfections, documented below, are a consequence of the subordination of economic or theoretical refinement to political purposes and imperatives.

Elsewhere in Nettl's work he fastidiously constructs what he refers to as the 'physiognomy of imperialism', (less coherent than a theory), out of Luxemburg's minor, expressly political works on the subject. Moreover he acknowledges that "the pressure under which her physiognomy of imperialism developed was not intellectual, not scientific, but polemical".¹³ Yet he emphatically distances these contributions from Accumulation. His justification is pace, a powerful one. Luxemburg herself wrote that "the work will be a strictly scientific explanation of imperialism and its contradictions".¹⁴

It would be a mistake, however, to take Luxemburg's own account at face value - she never wrote a theoretical work for other than polemical purposes, but was acutely aware of the powerful impact which a seminal work of theory might have

¹¹ Ibid., p.836.

¹² Ibid., p.835.

¹³ Ibid., p.526.

¹⁴ Letter, from Luxemburg to Konstantin Zetkin, November, 1911; cited in Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.530.

on the S.P.D. (In fact she almost certainly overestimated the potential of such a work). Imperialism was the manifestation, in sharp relief, of the brittle and fragile qualities of capitalism - it was essential that social democracy should be apprised of its full significance and should acquire a theoretical perception of its origins and roots. In short, although, as Nettl points out, Luxemburg never refers to politics, nor to social democracy, or to the S.P.D. in either Accumulation or the Anti-Critique, the very assertion of collapse, implicit in every strand of her argument, and expressed more than once,¹⁵ posited an imperative for social democracy in an era of imperialism.

Within the S.P.D., Accumulation elicited vitriol which evidently surprised Luxemburg. The central party newspaper, Vorwärts, poured scorn on the book, as did the theoretical organ, Neue Zeit.¹⁶ Her bitterest assailants in these publications were the Austro-Hungarian Social Democrats, but their authorship might have been a strategic attempt to divert the storm centre of controversy away from the S.P.D. itself. Certainly, these attacks bore the imprimatur of Kautsky, the editor of Neue Zeit.

¹⁵ The Accumulation of Capital, pp.446, 453, 466-7.

¹⁶ The Accumulation of Capital - An Anti-Critique, Tarbuck, ed., Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital, p.47.

The line taken by the critics was that Luxemburg's construction of the reproduction schema was erroneous, her conclusions spurious in consequence. The critics declared themselves entirely satisfied with the schema in the second volume of Capital and confident that Marx had plainly demonstrated the ability of capital to reproduce itself - the reproduction question simply did not exist as a problem. Accordingly, there could be no question of the "mechanical impossibility of realising surplus value",¹⁷ that is, no theory of collapse. The criticisms of Luxemburg's own formulation of the schema were largely of a technical nature, and often rather shallow.

Academic economists have criticised Luxemburg's formulation of the problem of accumulation by questioning her assumptions,¹⁸ or by introducing into her schema variables which, they allege, she omitted - competition between individual capitals,¹⁹ exchange between producers of commodities and gold producers.²⁰ These critics modify Luxemburg's schema

¹⁷ Neue Zeit, No.24, 1913; cited in The Accumulation of Capital - an Anti-Critique, Tarbuck, ed., Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital, p.149.

¹⁸ Sweezy, 'Rosa Luxemburg's "The Accumulation of Capital"', Science and Society, Vol.31, No.4, 1967, p.482.

¹⁹ E. Mandel, Marxist Economic Theory, (London, 1968), p.362.

²⁰ Dobb, On Economic Theory and Socialism, p.269.

in order to show that she was in error - that capitalist accumulation in a closed system is possible and does not depend on a third market. Other critics argue that Luxemburg was correct in her conclusions, but that she was nevertheless guilty of errors which detract from the force of her case.²¹ Tarbuck criticises Luxemburg's inability to recognise the different layers of abstraction upon which Marx's reproduction schema are constructed. Interpreting the schema in "a most literal manner", she argues that there is a contradiction between these, and the formulation in the third volume of Capital, of general laws which govern capitalism's internal movement. "On such points we see the confusion between theoretical abstraction and reality that continually creep into Luxemburg's exposition".²²

The argument below is an extension - and a refinement - of this line of criticism. Luxemburg was less than capable of following Marx's shift in level of abstraction, because she was a dealer in the currency of categorical certainties, underwriting political purposes. The impossibility of capitalist accumulation was something she "felt in her bones".²³ Its theoretical expression - a theory of crisis

²¹ T. Cliff, Rosa Luxemburg, (London, 1968), pp.80-81.

²² Tarbuck, ed., Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital, p.31.

²³ Sweezy, 'Rosa Luxemburg's "The Accumulation of Capital"', Science and Society, Vol.31, No.4, 1967, p.482.

implying the virtual certainty of capitalist collapse - was the only one compatible with her political stance, which owed more to an intuitive perception of the historical development of economic forms, than it did to scientific theory. Hence Luxemburg's practice in Part Three of Accumulation, of counterposing directly Marx's theoretical constructions to "the accumulation of capital as a historical process".²⁴

The problems which Luxemburg encounters in Marx's reproduction schema are twofold - their form, and the assumption on which they are based do not correspond to the palpable historical process, and moreover, they contradict Marx's general theory of capital accumulation. It is argued below that these contradictions and incompatibilities are products of a mind trained on positive laws and formulæ, and unprepared for the subtleties of theoretical mediation between the abstract formulations of economic relations and empirically observable forms.

²⁴ The Accumulation of Capital, p.366; c.f., pp.76, 119, 348, 350.

The question of accumulation - Luxemburg's formulation

The Accumulation of Capital is a discursive work, focused on Marx's formulation of the reproduction question, but concerned also to review pre-Marxist contributions to the debate, to assess the advances and refinements which Marx's formulation represented, and to criticise what she regarded as distortions perpetrated by the Russian 'legal Marxists'. Her mode of presentation in Section I mirrors that of Marx in Part III of the second volume of Capital, which contains a general introduction to "the subject investigated",²⁵ and a review of "former presentations of the subject",²⁶ notably that of Adam Smith, before moving on to simple and extended reproduction.

Marx's crucial advance on political economy was in his formulation of, rather than his solution to, the question. Whilst Smith had refined considerably the approach of the Physiocrats, his error had been to break down the aggregate product of capitalist society into wages, profit and rent - that is, in Marx's terms, variable capital and surplus - neglecting that component represented by means of production - constant capital.²⁷

²⁵ Capital, II, p.355.

²⁶ Ibid., p.363.

²⁷ The Accumulation of Capital, p.51; Capital, II, p.366.

Aggregate social capital, that is to say, is considered by political economy as revenue, not as capital advanced,²⁸ on the grounds that capital advanced in one quarter can always be resolved into revenue in other quarters. Since the reproduction of capital depends on the repetitious advance, or reintroduction of capital into the productive process, an account which neglects the dimension of capital advanced is necessarily a barren one.

The shortcomings of Marx's analysis, argues Luxemburg, stem from his mode of presentation, which reflected the author's preoccupation with the polemic with Smith. The starting point and emphasis of Marx's account is the notion of constant capital, which predominates at the expense of any serious consideration of the realisation of surplus value, a function of the consumptive potential of society. That Luxemburg's presentation takes the form of a historical account of the question reflects her belief that it was precisely the way in which political economy had formulated the question which had confounded attempts to solve it, and that Marx had allowed himself to become ensnared in a bifurcatory colloquy with political economy which had deflected him from the nexus of the question.

²⁸ The Accumulation of Capital, pp.61-2. 73-5; Capital, II, pp.394-5.

Marx repeatedly stressed and emphasised the fact that he considered replacement of the constant capital from the aggregate social product the most difficult and important problem of reproduction. The other problem, that of accumulation, i.e. realisation of surplus value for the purpose of capitalisation, was pushed into the background, so that in the end Marx hardly touched upon it.²⁹

In short, political economy failed to solve the question satisfactorily because it was incorrectly formulated. Marx correctly formulated the question, but fell short of the solution because he failed to cut, or even to wield the axe at the Gordian knot - the potential of capital to realise its surplus in order to reconstitute itself as constant capital.

Luxemburg opens by stating the problem of accumulation in such a way as that its centre of gravity is plainly and firmly located in the question of markets and consumption. Her formulation does not immediately appear to depart radically from that of Marx, but where the latter touches on consumption only tangentially and obliquely, she develops these themes, rendering them explicit, and demonstrating that accumulation is subject to barriers and restrictions imposed by the market.

²⁹ The Accumulation of Capital, pp.169-70.

Following Marx, she divides aggregate social capital into three portions, constant and variable capital and surplus value, the production of the latter being the essential characteristic and motive force behind the capitalist production of commodities. Capitalist production consists in the repetitious and cumulative process of the production and realisation of surplus value, which process becomes a coercive law.³⁰ The reproduction of surplus value takes place in the form, however, of commodity production, "and is thus, in the last instance, the production of consumer goods".³¹

It should be added that Luxemburg is here referring to expanded reproduction - the cumulative reproduction of the aggregate stock of social capital. By and large she is prepared to grant Marx's schema for simple reproduction - the maintenance, simple replenishment, of constant capital out of surplus value - some objective social validity, though she dismisses simple reproduction as a theoretical fiction,³² a somewhat paradoxical position to which the argument will return. Already there is evidence that Luxemburg, in her determined haste to introduce the question of consumption and markets, is conflating levels of abstraction which in Marx's account are incompatible. In his

³⁰ Ibid., p.41.

³¹ Ibid., p.42.

³² Ibid., p.130.

introduction to his analysis of simple reproduction Marx makes it plain that the schema are couched in terms of value. In the analysis in Volume One, of the individual capital, value may be considered simply as undifferentiated, homogenous value. Turning from individual capital to total social capital, however, it becomes necessary to consider the bodily form.³³ This is to say that a shift in the level of abstraction has taken place. It does not follow, however, that production has become "the production of consumer goods". At the level of abstraction at which Marx is operating in the reproduction schema, value is differentiated according to its bodily form as it undergoes the transformation from surplus value in the form of commodity capital, to constant capital in the natural form of means of production.

Marx is concerned with the relations of proportion obtaining between the differentiated forms of value - surplus value, constant and variable capital - in the two departments into which production is schematically divided. The purpose of the schema for simple reproduction is to demonstrate the possibility that these proportions might be such as to facilitate exchange between Department I and Department II, upon which reproduction depends.

³³ Capital, II, pp.397-8.

In her formulation of the question, Luxemburg introduces the "licence and anarchy of the commodity market"³⁴ as the environment in which accumulation takes place. The reproduction of value in a materially differentiated, but still abstract form, which Marx's schema represents, is equated in Luxemburg's account, with the physical scale of production itself. Whilst Marx set out to demonstrate, in abstract terms of value, that the reproduction of capital was possible on both a simple and an expanded scale, Luxemburg attempts a demonstration to the contrary by juxtaposing Marx's abstract formulations to the concrete conditions of capitalist production.

The reproduction of capital presupposes that surplus value in the form of commodity capital should be realised in the form of money capital which then re-enters the productive process as constant capital in its natural form, and variable capital in the form of wages. In Marx's account of simple reproduction, this occurs by virtue of exchange between the capitalists of the two departments of production.³⁵ This holds good too for the expanded form of reproduction. The capitalists and workers of both departments consume the product of department II - consumption goods - whilst the product of department I - means of production - furnishes

³⁴ The Accumulation of Capital, p.45.

³⁵ Capital, II, pp.399-415.

the constant capital requirements of both departments. Exchange between them is facilitated by the mediation of money.³⁶ Each department furnishes a market for the other, and the problem of markets is resolved in the circulation of the various material forms of capital within the aggregate social capital.

Luxemburg takes issue here. She enumerates the conditions which must apply if reproduction, on an extended scale is to take place.³⁷ These conditions pertain to the market.

How is it possible that the unplanned supply in the market for labour and means of production, and the unplanned and incalculable changes in demand nevertheless provide adequate quantities and qualities of means of production, labour and opportunities for selling which the individual capitalist needs to make a sale? How can it be assured that every one of these factors increases in the right proportion?³⁸

Where Marx has been concerned with the essentially abstract relations of proportion between the material forms of capital in the two departments, Luxemburg is concerned instead with the relations of correspondence between individual capitals and the market. Observing from the daily deviations, fluctuations and uncertainties of the market, and from the periodic crises of the capitalist economy, a disharmonious

³⁶ Ibid., p.46.

³⁷ The Accumulation of Capital, pp.44-5.

³⁸ Ibid., p.46.

relationship, she is unable to reconcile Marx's abstract formulations with the empirical evidence of her own eyes.

Her error is threefold. Firstly, the standpoint of the reproduction schema is not that of the individual capitalist, but of aggregate social capital. Moreover, the market does not represent a sphere distinct from production, an assumption implicit in Luxemburg's formulation, but that sphere of circulation which is implied by commodity production itself.³⁹ Secondly, the reproduction of capital is not an act as Luxemburg implies, to be frustrated or prevented by the anarchic nature of the market, but rather, a process. The process may be dislocated by imbalance or disproportion in the relations which comprise it, since it is essentially spontaneous. But dislocation and imbalance simply present the possibility of crisis, not the impossibility of the process. Thirdly, and most significantly for present purposes, that she confronted the abstract formulation of the relations involved in the reproduction of capital, with the observable surface phenomena in so immediate and stark a fashion, reflects Luxemburg's impatience with abstract formulations, her preference for the palpable, and her unreadiness to mediate the two.

³⁹ Capital, II, p.499.

The reproduction schema - abstraction and the palpable form

Luxemburg's impatience with the abstract and her characteristic tendency to look to the palpable for its verification are evident in her treatment of the reproduction schema. Her mistrust is plain from the questions she asks of their formulation - "is it only a theoretical abstraction or does it convey any real meaning when applied to social life?"⁴⁰ - implying that the alternatives are mutually exclusive.

Luxemburg recognised that the schema for simple reproduction possessed a certain "objective social validity", but held that their validity was little more than tautological since they were the product of an abstraction from the concrete conditions of capitalist production. The schema thus represented a reduction from the complex concrete, in which the distinctive characteristics of capitalist production lay, to the simple abstract, the essential elements not only of capitalist production, but of social production as such.

Any system of social reproduction must necessarily replenish its stock of means of production and simultaneously furnish consumer goods to satisfy the needs and requirements of its

⁴⁰ The Accumulation of Capital, p.76.

members. The schema for simple reproduction represents no more than a statement of the essence, the sine qua non of social production, whether it be in the form of a planned economy, or one based on the anarchic exchange of commodities.

The proportions of the diagram are as natural and as inevitable for a planned economy as they are for a capitalist economy based upon anarchy and the exchange of commodities. This proves the diagram to have objective social validity, even if, just because it concerns simple reproduction, it has hardly more than theoretical interest for either a capitalist or a planned economy, finding practical application only in the rarest of cases.⁴¹

The schema express the necessary conditions pertaining under the social division of labour, but by virtue of the static nature of the productive process which it postulates - that is, one which simply maintains itself - it ceases to correspond to the reality of the productive process which, whatever form it takes, is almost always seen to be undergoing expansion.

Moreover, whilst expressing a certain social validity, simple reproduction cannot account for the genesis of the productive process, whether it be capitalist production or production in general. Production of any description presupposes a "hoard of past labour, surpassing in volume the labour annually performed for the maintenance of society". The formation of a stock of past labour constituted as a

⁴¹ Ibid., p.130; c.f., p.107.

stock of constant capital, exposes the weakness of simple reproduction, since it "inexorably points towards enlarged reproduction".⁴²

Luxemburg fails to observe that Marx recognised as much. His schema for simple reproduction represented a preliminary demonstration of the possibility of the maintenance of correct proportions between the various forms of capital in the two departments of production as necessary to facilitate exchange between them in the course of the productive process at a static level - as opposed that is to accumulation. "However, as far as accumulation does take place, simple reproduction is always part of it, and can therefore be studied by itself, and is an actual factor in accumulation".⁴³

Marx's schema for reproduction on a simple scale is not intended to represent a historical stage in the development of the productive process, but rather a theoretical stage in the exposition of the inner workings of that process. It is clear that there is some theoretical continuity in Marx's account, between simple and expanded reproduction. In Luxemburg's critique, however, a sharply defined line is drawn between the two.

⁴² Ibid., p.89.

⁴³ Capital, II, p.399; c.f., p.415.

When Luxemburg turns her attention to the schema for reproduction on an extended scale she reiterates her mistrust of the mathematical form in which they are expressed. Having sketched the arithmetical diagrams of extended reproduction, Luxemburg goes on to question the social validity of "fool-proof mathematical exercises" enumerating the pre-requisite conditions which must obtain if accumulation is to take place and the diagrams hold good. A certain proportional relation must hold between the forms of capital in the two departments of production, and must be maintained as capital accumulates.⁴⁴

Now, as has been shown above, Luxemburg held this circumstance to be incompatible with the anarchy of the market. In her formulation of the question in the first chapter of Accumulation she cites imperfections in the market as a barrier to capital accumulation on an extended scale - the non-correspondence of the market for means of production, the supply of labour and the demand for commodities, with the requirements of individual capitals.⁴⁵

The logical conclusion to this argument would have been a 'disproportion theory of crisis' - which was, for all practical purposes, official S.P.D. doctrine by 1912. Its corollary

⁴⁴ The Accumulation of Capital, p.131.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.146.

was the belief that crises might be ameliorated, or even eliminated by planning and foresight, a belief widely held in revisionist circles. For this reason Luxemburg felt the imperative to go further - to question the whole concept of capital accumulation in a closed system of capitalists and workers, as postulated by Marx.

Capital accumulation entailed an enlargement of production, argued Luxemburg, which could only be called forth by an incentive, and inducement in the form of an increase in the demand for commodities. She considered the possible sources of new demand, arising within the closed capitalist system.

According to Marx's formulation, the impetus for enlarging production comes from department I, that department engaged in the production of means of production. This she regards as absurd since she has it firmly entrenched in her mind that the market for producer goods is directly derived from that for consumer goods - the ultimate goal of production in the 'commonsense view'. (She fails to observe that commodity production is driven, not by common sense, but by the drive to accumulate profit, which acts as an end in itself).

Luxemburg grants that an increase in production in department I would itself create an increase in demand for means of production, for the very purpose of enlarging production. Further, the swelling workforce would create a demand for

articles of consumption produced in department II. But this explanation is tautological and circular.⁴⁶ To initiate the original increase in production, some prior inducement is necessary.⁴⁷

It is inconceivable, she concludes, after a cursory consideration of the possibilities of new demand issuing forth from the capitalist or the working class,⁴⁸ that the inducement to increase production should originate from within the capitalist system. The logical destination of this line of argument was the 'third market' - non-capitalist enclaves within capitalist society, or external to it, a conclusion which, as is well known, led in turn to the theory of imperialism as the expression of the economic necessity of mature capitalist countries making incursions into the non-capitalist world.

In her formulation of the question, Luxemburg departed from the procedures and assumptions which Marx employed in constructing his schematic presentation of the question of

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.132; c.f., The Accumulation of Capital - an Anti-Critique, Tarbuck, ed., Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital, p.58.

⁴⁷ Sweezy, 'Rosa Luxemburg's "The Accumulation of Capital"', Science and Society, Vol.31, No.4, 1967, p.477.

⁴⁸ The Accumulation of Capital, pp.132-5.

capital accumulation. In her treatment of the reproduction schema themselves, she compounded those errors. Firstly, the unmediated juxtaposition of abstract theory with the concrete conditions under which accumulation takes place prevented her from appreciating that the schema are couched in terms of value and value relations, albeit in their materially differentiated form. She confuses the value relations within the productive process with the physical form of production itself, and is thus unable to see how, in Marx's schema, surplus value can be realised and transformed into new constant capital, without confronting the anarchic conditions of the market, which confound the process of transformation.

Secondly, and as a corollary of her first error, whilst Marx's schema were couched in terms of total social capital and the relations between its various forms, Luxemburg reduces total social capital to an amalgamation of individual capitalists. From the standpoint of the individual capitalist thus adopted, production and accumulation become an act, rather than a process, and as an act, stand in need of an inducement.

Thirdly, Luxemburg's preoccupation with concrete conditions, social validity, entailed a focus on the phenomenal form, which led her to repeat the errors of the political economists in regarding production and consumption as distinct

spheres, capable of standing in opposition to one another. In Capital, Marx clearly does not grant these spheres autonomy and independence vis a vis production. That Luxemburg implicitly did so enables her to locate the barrier to expanded reproduction in the spheres of circulation and consumption.

Fourthly, Luxemburg retained the assumptions which held in the schema for simple reproduction, in her consideration of the expanded form. This obscured her view and prevented her from recognising that the dynamic form of expanded reproduction - as opposed to the static, simple form - entails an increase in the capacity for consumption of the capitalists and workers alike. She makes it quite clear that she regards the diagrams for accumulation as a representation of "static inter-relations and interdependence between the two great departments of social production".⁴⁹

All these errors originate in Luxemburg's inability to shuttle between levels of abstraction, or to recognise intermediate strata of abstraction between 'abstract theory' and 'concrete conditions'. Chaotically presented,⁵⁰ her argument jumps between the two forms of reproduction, between the

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.417.

⁵⁰ c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.531.

individual capital and total social capital, between arithmetical presentation of a problem and observable manifestation. The inconsistencies of her vigorous argument finally destroy it, and her attempt at its defence in the Anti-Critique consist of little more than reiteration, with an additional ingredient - invective.

Imperialism and the laws of accumulation

The lasting impact of Accumulation was in its insight into the economic causality of imperialism. That this insight was not imparted to Luxemburg's contemporaries in the S.P.D. majority was due to her status as enfant terrible of the party rather than to the convolutions in the intricacies of her argument. The logic is simple enough in its broad outline - the inconsistencies appear in the treatment of Marx's reproduction schema.

Imperialism was seen as a historical manifestation of impending capitalist collapse. Marxist theory purported to have exposed within the inner workings of the capitalist economic system, certain flaws and contradictions, which entailed its collapse. There was however, in Marx's theory, a lacuna where the exposition of imperialism should have been. Luxemburg saw it as her task to

elaborate a theory of imperialism, extrapolating from the analysis of capitalist economic forms contained in Capital.

Imperialism appeared to Luxemburg as the result of the inability of capital to accumulate in the domestic context - that is, in a closed system. The temporal coincidence of capitalist crises and imperialist forays suggested to her that there was a causal connection between the two. Informed by her reading of Marxist theory, she inferred from the coincidence that the accumulation of capital and the enlargement of production were finite, eventually confronted with insurmountable barriers. Finding itself thus contained within the closed system, the inherent drive of capital towards expansion finds expression in incursions into non-capitalist areas.

At this stage in her reasoning she drew on Capital, III, Part III, where Marx refers to a "conflict of antagonistic tendencies", "imminent barriers", "contradictions", which arise in the course of the capitalist mode of production, and which Marx specifically locates in the process of accumulation.⁵¹

51 Capital, III, pp.248-9; "These two elements embraced by the process of accumulation" (i.e., the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and the development of the productivity of labour) "...are not to be regarded merely as existing side by side in repose...They contain a contradiction which manifests itself in contradictory tendencies and phenomena. These antagonistic tendencies counteract each other simultaneously".

Turning to the reproduction schema, where Marx elaborates the accumulation process, Luxemburg finds that the schema demonstrate not the impossibility of accumulation, which the formulations in Capital, III might lead one to expect, but its possibility. Moreover, she finds that the schema are based on an assumption of a closed capitalist system consisting solely of capitalists and wage labourers, whilst the parametres within which her problem is set are defined by a capitalist system voraciously devouring new areas and embracing them in an ever expanding capitalist system.

Luxemburg was thus placed in a considerable dilemma. She expressed the dilemma, and the outlines of its solution as follows.

The salient feature of the problem of accumulation, and the vulnerable point of earlier attempts to solve it, has only been shown up by Marx's more profound analysis, his precise diagrammatic demonstration of the total reproductive process, and especially his inspired exposition of the problem of simple reproduction. Yet he could not supply immediately a finished solution either, partly because he broke off his analysis almost as soon as he had begun it, and partly because he was then preoccupied, as we have shown, with denouncing the analysis of Adam Smith and thus rather lost sight of the main problem. In fact he made the solution even more difficult by assuming the capitalist mode of production to prevail universally. Nevertheless, a solution of the problem of accumulation, in harmony both with other parts of Marx's doctrine and with the historical experience and daily life of capitalism, is implied in Marx's complete analysis of simple reproduction and his characterisation of the capitalist process as a whole, which shows up its immanent contradictions and their development (in Capital, III). In the

light of this, the deficiencies of the diagram can be corrected. All the relations being, as it were, incomplete, a closer study of the diagram of enlarged reproduction will reveal that it points to some sort of organisation more advanced than purely capitalist production and accumulation.⁵²

Luxemburg went on to demonstrate that those conditions necessary for capital accumulation to take place, whilst absent from economic organisation in a closed capitalist system, are precisely those to be found in that form of economic organisation constituted by imperialism.

Imperialism furnishes an extended market, susceptible to expansion,⁵³ a ready supply of cheap elements of constant capital,⁵⁴ and a supplementary source of labour.⁵⁵ Luxemburg affirms the absolute necessity of these elements for the process of accumulation. Whilst Marx had dealt with the appropriation of non-capitalist spheres in his treatment of the evolution of capitalism as a historical form,⁵⁶ in his analysis of production and circulation "he

⁵² The Accumulation of Capital, p.351.

⁵³ Ibid., pp.351-4.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.355-8.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp.359-63.

⁵⁶ Capital, I, p.561ff., on the creation of an agricultural proletariat in England; p.671ff., on the expropriation of the English rural proletariat; p.697ff., on the creation of a home market; p.716ff., on colonisation.

reaffirms the universal and exclusive domination of capitalist production".⁵⁷ In his assumption of 'pure' capitalism, of a closed system, that is, Marx excludes those very aspects of accumulation which render it possible. Hence his difficulty in demonstrating mathematically the viability of capitalist accumulation, and the ultimate failure of the reproduction schema to represent the historical process of accumulation.

Whatever the theoretical aspects, the accumulation of capital as a historical process, depends in every respect upon non-capitalist strata and forms of social organisation.⁵⁸

Luxemburg has finally achieved her objective - proof positive that capital accumulation cannot take place in a closed system, but entails global expansion which threatens to convulse it into self-destructive barbarism.

Luxemburg's error lies in her supposition that those conditions which obtain in the historical evolution of capital, continue to exist in the mature form. In Marx's account it is clear that in its historical evolution capital possesses qualities of expansiveness and ubiquity which entail its confrontation with non-capitalist forms, which it subjects to itself.⁵⁹ The process of subjection is a prerequisite

57 The Accumulation of Capital, p.365.

58 Ibid., p.366.

59 See, for example, Marx's article on the British in India, New York Daily Tribune, June 25, 1853, Fernbach, ed., Karl Marx, Surveys from Exile, pp.301-6.

but, once completed, is rendered redundant - an antediluvian condition of its historical development.⁶⁰ There is no indication that the tendency towards expansion exhibited by a developing capitalism presents the mature capitalist form of production with an absolute barrier.

Rather are the barriers to capitalist accumulation constituted by tendencies inherent within it - in the composition of capital itself. Marx 'discovered' them through an analysis of the internal composition of capital - the relation between constant capital and variable capital, which in the course of accumulation undergoes changes by which the ratio of constant to variable capital increases. There occurs, that is, a shift in the organic composition of capital, contingent upon technological advance.

Again, this is by no means an absolute barrier to accumulation - it represents a tendency imminent within capital

⁶⁰ c.f., Grundrisse, pp.459-62.

- which entails a tendency for the rate of profit to decline in the course of accumulation.⁶¹ Ultimately it testifies to the historically transient nature of the capitalist form of production - a nuance which Lenin recognised but Luxemburg did not⁶² - rather than to the a priori impossibility of accumulation.

At the level of abstraction at which Marx was working in Capital, II, the organic composition of capital was held constant and accumulation was allowed to proceed apace. As Marx approached towards an analysis of the concrete conditions of capital accumulation in the third volume, it became evident that the process ultimately came into conflict with the concrete conditions which it had called into being.

⁶¹ Capital, III, pp.244-5; "Capitalist production seeks continually to overcome these imminent barriers, but overcomes them only by means which again place these barriers in its way and on a more formidable scale. The real barrier to capitalist production is capital itself...The limits within which the preservation and self-expansion of the value of capital resting on the expropriation and pauperisation of the great mass of producers can alone move - these limits come continually into conflict with the methods of production employed by capital for its purposes, which drive towards unlimited extension of production, towards production as an end in itself, towards unconditional development of the social productivity of labour. The means...continually come into conflict with the limited purpose, the self-expansion of the existing capital. The capitalist mode of production is, for this reason, a historical means of developing the material forces of production and creating an appropriate world market and is, at the same time, a continual conflict between this its historical task and its own corresponding relations of social production".

⁶² c.f., Sweezy, 'Rosa Luxemburg's "Accumulation of Capital"', Science and Society, Vol.31, No.4, 1967, p.485.

By conflating the levels of abstraction within Capital under the simple designation 'abstract theory', Luxemburg was able to imagine that she had demonstrated that inconsistencies existed, firstly between the reproduction schema and Marx's analysis of accumulation in Capital, III, and secondly, between the schema and the historical process itself. Her error was a function of a purely functional conception of theory - its purpose the elucidation of positive laws couched in terms of categorical certainties and absolutes with which to inform political practice. Ultimately it was her political vigour which overcame and confounded her economic theory.

SECTION ii

Luxemburg's Historical Method

The Marxist's sense of history

The historical perspective which Rosa Luxemburg brought to bear on each question which she subjected to scrutiny is a common theme in commentary upon her work. Nettl, for example, observes that "the present was real only as the reflecting surface of the past",¹ whilst Basso asserts that "...she always tried in her writings to develop a historical sense of the present".² These aphorisms, however, do not convey the full meaning or significance of the historical method in Luxemburg's work. Her vocabulary, mode of thought, exegesis of questions under discussion, were all imbued with a sense of history, which she possessed in common with Marx. Moreover, also in common with Marx, and Marxist historians, she was drawn to certain areas of historical research and writing which she perceived as significant for the socialist movement. Hence her historical

¹ Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.728, c.f., p.508; "Any valid analysis had to be based on real life, and real life was history...Whenever Rosa Luxemburg wanted to illuminate any particular aspect of socialist policy she always began with a historical analysis of how it came to be there in the first place...This method was, and of course, still is common to all Marxists". p.509; "The mass strike pamphlet demonstrated that the more elaborate the historical foundation, the greater importance and present relevance of the subject".

² L. Basso, Rosa Luxemburg, a Reappraisal, (London, 1975), p.28.

exposition of the debate on capital reproduction in Section Two of Accumulation, and her doctoral thesis, The Economic Development of Poland, a historical work which she conceived of as a decisive contribution to the Polish national question.³

However, if a definite mode of historical analysis is to be established as a distinct analytical instrument, exclusive to Marx and a select few amongst the exponents of Marxism, it must be rendered more specific. The Marxist sense of era, or epoch, which in historical writing ascribes significance to, and makes intelligible the particular event or moment, with reference to a general historical milieu, must itself be specified.

In orthodox historiography, periodisation, that mental exercise out of which the epoch springs, is more or less arbitrary, capricious and despotic. In Marxist historiography, the epoch or era is predicated on a specific stage in the development of the capital form, which alone lends significance and ascribes meaning to economic social and political relations. It is in this sense that Nettl can refer to a "physiognomy of imperialism"⁴ in Luxemburg's work. It emerges out of her method of working - constructing the epoch theoretically

³ c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.829; Basso, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.112-3; Frolich, Rosa Luxemburg, p.27.

⁴ Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.526-9; c.f., Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness, p.30.

by relating contemporaneous phenomena to that stage in the development of capital at which it is impelled to expand its boundaries in order to maintain its accumulation. This imperative, contained within the capital form itself, lends significance and meaning to a range of related phenomena - the debate between free trade and protectionism, the international loan system, militarism - each of which takes on a new significance in an era of imperialism, quite different from that which attached to it in previous eras. A consideration of the following extracts should serve to demonstrate the point.

The doctrine of Free Trade with its delusions about the harmony of interests on the world market corresponded with an outlook which conceived of everything in terms of commodity exchange. It was abandoned just as soon as big industrial capital had become sufficiently established...to look to the conditions for its accumulation. As against the mutual interests of capitalist countries, these latter bring to the fore the antagonisms engendered by the competitive struggle for the non-capitalist environment.⁵

The imperialist phase of capitalist accumulation which implies universal competition, comprises the industrialisation of the hinterland where capital formerly realised its surplus value. Characteristic of this phase is lending abroad, railway construction...⁶

⁵ The Accumulation of Capital, p.450.

⁶ Ibid., p.419.

Militarism fulfils a quite definite function in the history of capital, accompanying as it does every historical phase of accumulation. It plays a decisive part in the first stages of European capitalism...as a medium of conquering the new world and spice-producing countries of India. Later it is employed to subject the modern colonies to destroy the social organisations of primitive societies so that their means of production may be appropriated, forcibly to introduce commodity trade...It is responsible for the creation and expansion of spheres of interest for European capital in non-European regions...Finally, militarism is a weapon in the competitive struggle between capitalist countries for areas of non-capitalist civilisation.⁷

The above extracts convey the sense that economic and political categories undergo shifts in their significance - that their significance varies with the stage of development attained by capital. In as much as this is so, Luxemburg is following Marx - in the Grundrisse the significance of money, for example, is dependent on its relation to capital.⁸ In Luxemburg's historical schema, militarism undergoes changes which are independent of its own characteristics and properties, but are predicated instead on those characteristics assumed by capital.

Luxemburg's 'physiognomy of imperialism' represents the construction of a historical milieu, predicated on that stage

⁷ Ibid., p.454.

⁸ Grundrisse, pp.459-60.

of development attained by capital, within which to locate otherwise singular and disparate historical phenomena. This becomes evident from her analysis of the war and the political response of the S.P.D. towards it, contained in The Crisis in the German Social Democracy, (The Junius Pamphlet). "Imperialism...is the product of a particular stage of ripeness in the world development of capital",⁹ "...it is always the historical milieu of modern imperialism which determines the character of the war in the individual countries".¹⁰

Historical milieu is a phrase frequently employed by Luxemburg.¹¹ Central to the notion is the imperative that economic and political categories must be rendered historically specific to their period. Economic and political categories, that is, do not "wade through all economic relations"¹² in an undifferentiated fashion, but are specific to a particular historical juncture; a Marxist historical method is based on this recognition.

⁹ The Crisis in the German Social Democracy, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.306.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.310.

¹¹ See, for example, The Mass Strike, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.201; What is Economic?, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.245; The Crisis in the German Social Democracy, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, pp.305, 310.

¹² Grundrisse, p.103.

What emerges from Marx's treatment of the money form, or Luxemburg's treatment of militarism, is that within the historical period or epoch characterised as capitalist society, a historical period determined theoretically with reference to the predominance of the commodity, as was demonstrated in Part I in respect of Marx - economic and political categories are mutable. They are so, however, only within certain limits established by the capital form. Capital is adaptive in as much as it is capable of modifying its circumstances, calling forth those circumstances most favourable to its existence and continued accumulation, overcoming barriers which appear in its path, threatening to attenuate the process of its accumulation.

The Marxist's historical sense is attuned to the mutability of capitalist forms. It recognises the progressive stages through which economic and political forms pass. Here lies the imperative of historical specificity - these forms must be perceived to be specific to a particular historical milieu. But it also recognises the boundaries of mutability, the limits outside of which it cannot evolve. It is these boundaries which testify to the finite nature of capital accumulation - to the historically transient nature of capitalism.

In the Marxist schema, the relation between the mutation of economic forms within capitalism, and the ultimate

boundaries to mutation gives rise to the dialectic of history. Capital evolves new economic forms in order to surmount barriers which are continually placed in its path obstructing the progress of its accumulation. The emergence of new economic forms and the mutation of old ones enables the resolution of antagonisms within the capitalist economy. It is in this sense that capitalism is adaptive. As they emerge, however, these new economic forms create new antagonisms, new barriers, which impede that process of accumulation, the purposes of which called them into being.

The contradictory significance of historical developments which promote capital accumulation, but simultaneously undermine its continued existence, represents a paradox, for the revelation of which Marx was responsible. The classical Marxists, Kautsky, foremost amongst them, interpreted Marx's comments on history in positivist fashion - their conception was of a rectilinear trajectory towards capitalist collapse.¹³ Luxemburg distinguished herself from them by recognising the paradoxical nature of Marx's view of history, in which antagonistic tendencies sharpened with the development of forms which ostensibly served to resolve those antagonisms.

¹³ c.f., Hobsbawm, 'Karl Marx's Contribution to Historiography', Blackburn, ed., Ideology in Social Science, pp.270-1.

The historical method articulated against revisionism

In Reform or Revolution, that work of "Talmudic subtleties encased in Hegelian splints",¹⁴ the sense of historical milieu is most pronounced. It might be said to have furnished Luxemburg with the intellectual weaponry with which to defeat revisionism in inner party debate. The revisionists held to an ahistorical conception of capitalism as being endowed with properties of permanence, yet susceptible to evolutionary mutation towards socialism. Luxemburg pointed out the fundamentally contradictory nature of this conception.

Those properties which stamped capitalist economic relations with their specific historical identity, she argued, notably the domination of market forces over all aspects of economic relations, served to distinguish those forms from their feudal precursors and from their socialist successors. The domination of market forces is the sine qua non of capitalist economic relations, impervious to regulation through human agency.¹⁵

¹⁴ Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.224.

¹⁵ Reform or Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, pp.48-9; "...these conjunctures - (1) the labour demand determined by the state of production, (2) the labour supply created by the proletarianisation of the middle strata of society and the natural reproduction of the working class, and (3) the momentary degree of productivity of labour - remain outside of the sphere of influence of the trade unions".

Luxemburg set out to demonstrate, contrary to Bernstein and Konrad Schmidt,¹⁶ that capitalism is adaptable only within strictly defined limits, that its inherent characteristics are impervious to social reforms and trade union activity, and that socialist aspirations rest precisely on that quality of transience in capitalist economic forms which the revisionist argument denies.

Briefly, Bernstein had argued as follows. Capitalism has developed adaptive mechanisms - for example, credit, cartels - which enable it to regulate the anarchy of the market and to eliminate crises.¹⁷ Further, the continued existence of small and middle sized enterprises reveals the concentration of capital, and of production, with its revolutionary potential

¹⁶ Schmidt was one of a number of Kathedersozialisten, (academic socialists), outside of the mainstream of the party; see Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.230.

¹⁷ E. Bernstein, Evolutionary Socialism, (New York, 1961), p.81; "Rosa Luxemburg maintains that the credit system, far from working against crises, is the means of pushing them to extremity...The only question is whether it rightly represents the facts of the case today, or whether the question has another side. According to the laws of dialectical evolution to which Rosa Luxemburg so much likes to give play, it ought certainly to be the case; but even without falling back on these, one should realise that a thing like credit, capable of so many forms, must under different conditions work in different ways". Bernstein concludes that "...we have seen that the credit system today undergoes less, not more, contradictions leading to the general paralysis of production and so far, therefore, takes a minor place as a factor in forming crises".

and implications, as a fallacy.¹⁸ Bernstein advocated a revision of Marxist doctrine in the light of these developments. He argued that a political strategy of revolutionary socialism was inappropriate to this latest stage of capitalist development, since it was predicated on economic crisis and impending collapse - in short, on a construction of capitalism to which the reality no longer conformed.¹⁹

The political strategy which Bernstein proposed was already enshrined in the Erfurt Programme of the S.P.D. A strategy of political reform and trade union activity, however, had figured only as a minimum programme, complemented, indeed informed by the ultimate goal of a revolutionary transformation

¹⁸ Ibid., p.59; "...in a whole series of branches of industry, small and medium sized undertakings appear quite capable of existing beside the large industries". p.100; "...the material preliminary conditions for the socialisation of production and distribution - advanced centralisation of enterprises - is at present only partly achieved".

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.210-11; here Bernstein refers to "...certain statements in Capital which are falsified by facts". On Marx's mode of theoretical construction he comments, "... as Marx approaches a point where (the) final aim enters seriously into the question, he becomes more uncertain and unreliable. Such contradictions then appear as were shown in the book under consideration, for instance, in the section on the movement of incomes in modern society. It appears that this great scientific spirit was, in the end, a slave to a doctrine. To express it figuratively, he has raised a mighty building within the framework of a scaffolding he found existing, and in its erection he kept strictly to the laws of architecture as long as they did not collide with the conditions which the construction of the scaffolding prescribed, but he neglected or evaded them when the scaffolding did not allow their observance".

of capitalist relations. Bernstein proposed that new forms of capitalist relations were susceptible to progressive and gradual transformation,²⁰ and that the revolutionary goal was not only inappropriate, but unnecessary. The political and trade union struggle for social reform would lead to progressively more extensive social control over production until the capitalist became simply an administrator.

Luxemburg's argument is couched in terms of the contradictory nature of the historical development of capital. Credit, whilst appearing as a regulatory mechanism within capitalist economic relations, and in fact actually ameliorating certain antagonisms within capitalist production, ultimately exacerbates those contradictions.

Its two most important functions are to extend production and to facilitate exchange...It renders all capitalist forces extensible, relative, and mutually sensitive to the highest degree.²¹

In as much as this is true, credit acts to promote capital accumulation, but it acts also in the opposite direction.

²⁰ Ibid., p.208; "It is clear that where legislation, this systematic and conscious action of society, interferes in an appropriate way, the working of the tendencies of economic development is thwarted, under some circumstances can even be annihilated".

²¹ Reform or Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.42.

...credit reproduces all the fundamental antagonisms of the capitalist world. It accentuates them. It precipitates their development and thus pushes the capitalist world forward to its own destruction.²²

Equally cartels, whilst ameliorating certain adverse tendencies in capitalist production, ultimately aggravate latent or already existing antagonisms. Characteristic of a definite phase of capitalist development, cartels are "fundamentally nothing else than a means resorted to by the capitalist mode of production for the purpose of holding back the fatal fall of the rate of profit in certain branches of production".²³ Ultimately, however, cartels serve to exacerbate contradictions between mode of production and appropriation, between production and exchange, and finally, between the international character of the world economy and the national character of the state. They are "a determined phase of capitalist development which in the last analysis aggravate the anarchy of the capitalist world and express and ripen its internal contradictions".²⁴

Evident in Luxemburg's response to Bernstein is a view of history in which a given historical development is recognised in all the aspects of its multifaceted nature - aspects which act in different and contradictory directions. In her treatment of middle-sized capital, for instance. Bernstein's

²² Ibid., p.43.

²³ Ibid., p.44.

²⁴ Ibid., p.45.

account maintains that the continued existence of medium-sized capital alongside, and in spite of capital concentrated in large units, casts doubt on Marx's formulation of the tendency of capital to become concentrated in ever larger units, and undermines one of the 'objective conditions' of revolutionary socialism. Luxemburg argues that medium-sized capital is subject to contradictory tendencies. The continued increase in the scale of production represents a tendency acting against middle-sized capital, whilst the periodic depreciation of existing capital lowers, temporarily, the scale of production, and therefore acts favourably towards it.

The course of this development is...purely dialectical and moves constantly amongst contradictions...it is false to imagine that the history of the middle-sized capitalist establishment proceeds rectilinearly.²⁵

Luxemburg's conception of dialectics is doubtless presented in a slightly naive and jejune fashion - as simple contradiction, opposition - but nevertheless, the perspective which Luxemburg employed in her argument enabled her to grasp economic developments in a subtler configuration than the linear constructions of orthodoxy which were particularly susceptible to empirical falsification at the hands of the revisionists. Kautsky simply reiterated the orthodoxy of

²⁵ Ibid., p.47.

historical laws which served to underwrite the inevitability of ultimate capitalist collapse. It was Luxemburg who traced Bernstein's errors to their logical sources - the abandonment of Marxist methodology. And Bernstein himself recognised that Luxemburg's rejoinders were, "as far as method goes, the best that were written against me".²⁶

A methodological critique was brought to bear also, on the notion of the transformation of capitalist economic and political relations through the agency of political pressure towards reform, and the trade union struggle. Luxemburg's historical sense, her grasp of the dialectical method, allowed her to differentiate between adjustments within the barriers and framework of capitalist relations, and the transformation of those relations.

Trade unions enable the working class to "utilise at each instant the conjuncture of the market" - that is, the market for labour, its supply, demand, and its productivity. But the conjuncture of these elements remains outside the sphere of influence of the trade unions - "labour unions can in no way influence the process of production itself".²⁷ The

²⁶ E. Bernstein, Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie, (Stuttgart, 1899), p.178; cited in Basso, Rosa Luxemburg, p.139.

²⁷ Reform or Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg, p.49.

essential characteristic of capitalist society - the domination of market relations over human volition - is inviolable, impervious to trade union encroachment, to adjustment or regulation.

The error is one of incorrect historical perspective,²⁸ a lack of appreciation of the nature of capitalist economic relations which circumscribes the possibilities and potential for the transformation of those relations. The historical development of capitalist economic forms in Luxemburg's conception, entails the intensification of the antagonisms inherent in them. The mutations undergone by economic forms, the new economic forms thrown up, simply serve to set production in a yet more antagonistic relation with exchange and consumption. This 'fact' is, for Luxemburg, a function of the necessarily antagonistic nature of the internal relations of capital.

If it is true that capitalism will continue to develop in the direction it takes at present, then its contradictions must necessarily become sharper and more aggravated instead of disappearing. The possibility of the attenuation of the contradictions of capitalism presupposes that the capitalist mode of production itself will stop its progress. In short, the general condition of Bernstein's theory is the cessation of capitalist development. This way, however, his theory condemns itself in a twofold manner. In the first place it manifests its utopian character in its stand on the establishment of socialism. For it is clear that a defective

²⁸ Ibid., p.51.

capitalist development cannot lead to a socialist transformation. In the second place, Bernstein's theory reveals its reactionary character when it is referred to the rapid capitalist development that is taking place at present.²⁹

The alternatives are plain. Capitalism either develops antagonistically, or it does not develop at all. Luxemburg follows this line of reasoning to its conclusion. Capitalism evolves - but the mode of its evolution is self-destructive.

The implications of this axiom are that capitalist development is finite but that its limits are elastic. It conveys the sense of Marx's statement that the contradictions of capitalism entail the imminent possibility, but "no more than the possibility" of crisis.³⁰ It was an imminent, rather than an immediate certainty which lent Luxemburg her faith in the ultimate outcome, in spite of her deep pessimism, occasionally expressed over the immediate prospects for the socialist movement.³¹

The origin of her certainty was a dialectical view of history, a preparedness to look beyond immediate appearances - of

²⁹ Ibid., p.60.

³⁰ Capital, I, p.115.

³¹ See, for example, Rote Fahne, January 14, 1919, R. Looker, ed., Rosa Luxemburg, Selected Political Writings, (London, 1972), pp.17-8.

capitalist stability, for instance - to the opposite, contradictory tendencies inherent in the historical development of capital.

...it was thanks to dialectical methods of thinking that Rosa Luxemburg was able to see a socialist future as already existing in the capitalist present; this meant seizing on the contradictory aspects of present reality, which were indissolubly bound together, seeing the historical process that derived from their contradictory nature and realising that the real essence of every movement can appear only if we consider that moment as existing within the continuity of history.³²

The dialectical character of Luxemburg's thought lent a resilience to her socialist certainty which was absent from the brittle, formalistic assertions of positive laws which were susceptible to falsification by the merest empirical evidence.

Revisionism represented a direct attack on that socialist certainty which underpinned the 'final goal' in the programme and politics of the S.P.D. The transitory nature of capitalist economic and social relations, for Luxemburg, as for Marx, informed both the analysis of those relations, and the determination of the social democratic movement to transform them.³³ In Reform or Revolution, she made quite plain the

³² Basso, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.17-8.

³³ See, for example, Reform or Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.86; What is Economics?, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.245; The Accumulation of Capital, p.467.

extent of the revisionist assault, and its ramifications for the socialist movement.

The "key which enabled Marx to open the door to the secrets of capitalist phenomena", Luxemburg argued, was his conception of capitalism as a historical phenomenon - one moreover, which contained imminent within it, socialism. She maintained that it was only by adopting "the socialist viewpoint" that Marx was able to lay bare the inner workings of the bourgeois economy, thereby to give a "scientific base to the socialist movement".³⁴ Bernstein specifically challenged the scientific basis of Marxism, accusing Marx of presupposing that which he set out to demonstrate.

...the work (that is, Marx's work) aims at being a scientific inquiry and also at proving a theory laid down long before its drafting; a formula lies at the basis of it in which the result to which the exposition should lead is fixed beforehand.³⁵

Having undermined the scientific basis of socialism, which rests in an analysis of the historical development of capitalist economic forms, Bernstein is "obliged to transform socialism itself from a definite historical phase of social development into an abstract principle".³⁶

³⁴ Reform or Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.68.

³⁵ Bernstein, Evolutionary Socialism, pp.209-10.

³⁶ Reform or Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, pp.68-9; c.f., D. Howard, ed., Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, (New York and London, 1971), pp.14-5.

Revisionism was correctly perceived by Luxemburg as an empiricist attack upon the dialectical method of Marxism. Historical development was conceived of by Bernstein as a linear movement "in the direction of socialism".³⁷ Kautsky, a trenchant opponent of revisionism, and defender of Marxist orthodoxy, appears to have shared the empirical conception of historical development. His arguments are reduced to the assertion of an ineluctable tendency in capitalist economic development to create a revolutionary working class, the potency of which depended on its numerical strength.³⁸ Kautsky that is, held fast to a rectilinear view of history, embodying the "naive pseudo-Darwinian metaphysics of evolution", which Korsch ascribes to him.³⁹

Luxemburg's historical method distinguished her from Bernstein and Kautsky equally. Historical transformation transcends the merely quantitative, cumulative, incremental evolution of economic and political forms. The secret of historic change "...resides precisely in the transformation of simple quantitative modification into a new quality, or

³⁷ Bernstein, Evolutionary Socialism, p.199.

³⁸ c.f., M. Salvadori, Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution, 1880-1938, (London, 1979). p.67; "...socio-economic was indisputedly creating the essential precondition for socialism itself: an increasing number of wage workers".

³⁹ K. Korsch, Three Essays on Marxism, (New York and London, 1972), pp.34-5.

to speak more concretely, in the passage of a historic period from one given form of society into another".⁴⁰ This conception of the historical period, of historical transformation, had implications for Luxemburg's strategy for the conquest of political power. It forms the basis of her rejoinder to Bernstein's criticism of the conquest of power as Blanquist.⁴¹ For Bernstein, since democracy and socialism were contained in a single continuum,⁴² the conquest of power simply did not exist as a question. Luxemburg held the two quite distinct. Democracy she located as a characteristic feature of bourgeois society, "one which the latter was capable of abandoning when it ceased to be useful".⁴³ Democracy too was a historical phenomenon. It was separated from socialism by the caesarian of qualitative historical transformation. Upon this

⁴⁰ Reform or Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.77.

⁴¹ loc. cit.

⁴² Bernstein, Evolutionary Socialism, p.153. Bernstein conflated liberalism and socialism; "That it (liberalism) at first strictly maintained the form of bourgeois liberalism did not stop it from actually expressing a very much wider reaching principle of society whose completion will be socialism". c.f., Geras, The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, p.159.

⁴³ c.f., Geras, The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, pp.54-63.

separation was predicated Luxemburg's belief, maintained until 1917, in the distinctness of bourgeois and proletarian stages of revolution.⁴⁴

In short, adherence to a historical framework of analysis, to a dialectical rather than a rectilinear view of history, and to the specificity of economic and political forms, to a distinct historical period, milieu, is a feature of Luxemburg's work which distinguished her not merely from Bernstein, but from those - Kautsky, Trotsky - with much sounder Marxist credentials.

Historical milieu and periodisation

In Marxist historical method, as has been argued above, economic and political phenomena are ascribed their significance with reference to their relation to capital. The totality of these phenomena - society - is not a neutral or abstract conception, but is always a determinate form of society - its determination a function of that stage of development attained by capital. It might be argued that it was her grasp of political economy which distinguished

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.109.

Luxemburg from the revisionists.⁴⁵ She apprehended capital as the "particular ether" determining the "specific gravity" of economic and political forms.⁴⁶ In her treatment of militarism and the nation, she demonstrates a grasp of the Marxist notion of a historical milieu, wherein singular and particular forms are ascribed significance in respect of capital.

In a period of heightening military antagonisms it was natural that Luxemburg should direct her attention towards the phenomenon of militarism, which she did in Reform and Revolution, and The Crisis in the German Social Democracy. Militarism represented, in her account, an indispensable feature of capitalist development in its heroic phase, the means by which it liberated itself from the remnants of feudalism which inhibited it.

The United States, Germany, Italy, the Balkan States, Poland, all owe the condition of the rise of their capitalist development to wars, whether resulting in victory or defeat. As long as there were countries marked by internal political division or economic isolation which had to be destroyed, militarism played a revolutionary role, considered from the viewpoint of capital.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.61.

⁴⁶ Grundrisse, p.107.

⁴⁷ Reform or Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.54.

However, the imminent military conflagration, of which Luxemburg had a presentiment as early as 1898-1900, (the period in which Reform or Revolution was written), was not to be a manifestation of capitalism's dynamic qualities; "from a motor of capitalist development, militarism has changed into a capitalist malady".⁴⁸ Luxemburg's comments on militarism in Reform or Revolution serve as a preface to her analysis of the war, and the response it called forth from the social democrats in Germany. The Crisis in the German Social Democracy, better known as the Junius Pamphlet, set out to demonstrate that the war was not one of patriotic defence. Militarism had entered a new historical phase. Patriotic heroism was no longer an element in it.⁴⁹

The new phase was, of course, imperialism. Luxemburg had already demonstrated that militarism was a component in the physiognomy of imperialism.

...production for militarism represents a province whose regular and progressive expansion seems primarily determined by capital itself...capitalism increasingly employs militarism for implementing a foreign and colonial policy to get hold of the means of production and labour power of non-capitalist countries and societies.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.55.

⁴⁹ c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.633.

⁵⁰ The Accumulation of Capital, p.466.

Militarism, in Luxemburg's account, was the product of a definite historical milieu, in which it was rendered intelligible as a manifestation of the collapse into barbarism, of which Engels had warned.⁵¹ This was the fundamental premise of Luxemburg's stand against militarism and the war and the basis of her criticism of the German party's response.

In the present imperialistic milieu there can be no wars of national self defence. Every socialist party that depends upon this determining historical milieu, that is willing to fix its policies in the world whirlpool from the point of view of a single nation, is built upon a foundation of sand.⁵²

It was necessary to emphasise and reiterate the point, since "the legend of the defence of the existence, freedom and civilisation of Germany plays an important part in the attitude of our group in the Reichstag and our socialist press".⁵³

In 1917 Luxemburg reiterates the statement further, in respect of the involvement of the new Russian Republic in the war. "By reason of its historic character...the present world war is an international contest between imperialist

⁵¹ The Crisis in the German Social Democracy, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.269.

⁵² Ibid., p.305.

⁵³ loc. cit.; for a documentation of the 'legend', as it appeared in the socialist press, see pp.285-7.

powers". Consequently the Republic cannot extricate itself from the war, nor turn its own war effort into a purely defensive exercise. The historic milieu stamps the war with its character in a fashion which cannot be controverted by strategy or tactic.⁵⁴

Equally, the question of nationalism cannot simply be determined on the basis of strategy, but has to be located in a historical milieu which lends content to the form of the phenomenon and to the demand for national self-determination which emerges out of it. In a historical era characterised by imperialism, nationalism is a mystification.⁵⁵

Lowy's critique of Luxemburg's position on the national question fails to recognise its relation to her physiognomy of imperialism. He accuses her of holding to a "mechanistic preconception", a doctrinaire assertion that since Polish manufacture depends upon Russian markets, the Polish nation was a politico-cultural myth incapable of realisation. Evidence for this view is taken from her doctoral thesis.

⁵⁴ Spartakusbriefe, August 1917, cited in Frolich, Rosa Luxemburg, p.235.

⁵⁵ The Crisis in the German Social Democracy, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.304; Theses on the Tasks of International Social Democracy, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.329; c.f., M. Lowy, 'Marxists and the National Question', New Left Review, No.96, March-April 1976, p.87.

Her later contributions to the national question, notably those in the Junius Pamphlet, were, he argues, essentially political, and not based on any mechanistic preconceptions derived from economics.⁵⁶

Lowy claims that in the Junius Pamphlet, Luxemburg "to some extent" acknowledges self-determination as a political right - a legitimate political demand for a socialist movement to make.⁵⁷ However, in as much as this is true, it has to be said that her acknowledgement of the socialist legitimacy of the demand for self-determination is very heavily guarded - "...so long as imperialistic world policies determine and regulate the inner and outer life of a nation there can be no 'national self-determination' either in war or peace".⁵⁸

Nationalism as a movement and as a slogan was appropriate to an earlier historical period.

The national state, national unity and independence were the ideological shield under which the capitalist nations of central Europe constituted themselves in the past century...The national programme could play

⁵⁶ Lowy, 'Marxists and the National Question', New Left Review, No.96, March-April 1976, p.88.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.87.

⁵⁸ The Crisis in the German Social Democracy, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.305.

a historic role only so long as it represented the ideological expression of a growing bourgeoisie lustng for power, until it had fastened its class rule... and had created...the necessary tools and conditions of its growth. Since then, imperialism has buried the old bourgeois democratic programme completely...The national phase, to be sure, has been perverted into its very opposite. Today the nation is but a cloak that covers imperialistic desires, a battle cry for imperialistic rivalries, the last ideological measure with which the masses can be persuaded to play the role of cannon fodder in imperialistic wars.⁵⁹

Luxemburg's contribution to the national question departed from Marxist orthodoxy in as much as she argued strongly against that autonomy for the Polish nation of which Marx had been a champion. However, Marx and Engels had subordinated the question of national autonomy to a wider strategem of Russian containment.⁶⁰ There was no attempt to formulate, on the basis of the Polish example, any general doctrine of nationalism. Thus, whilst Marx and Engels had established a tradition of support for self-determination,

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp.306-7.

⁶⁰ Letter from Engels to Marx, May 23, 1851, Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence, p.37; "...The more I think over the business the clearer it becomes to me that the Poles as a nation are done for and can only be made use of as an instrument until Russia herself is swept into the agrarian revolution. From that moment onwards Poland will have absolutely no more reason for existence".

which passed into Marxist orthodoxy, it was by no means unconditional support, and never a dogmatic and abstract principle.⁶¹

Luxemburg's position was based, firstly, on a denial of self-determination as an abstract principle in a social democratic programme,⁶² secondly, on the subordination of the concept of nation to that of class,⁶³ and thirdly, on a reasoned assertion that in an era of imperialism, national struggles lose their narrow national significance and take on a wider international character.⁶⁴

⁶¹ c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.842-4.

⁶² The Crisis of the German Social Democracy, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.304.

⁶³ The Russian Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.380; Przeglad Socjaldemokratyczny, August 1908, No.6, reprinted in Wybor Pism, Vol.II, pp.147-8, cited in Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.849; "Speaking of the right of nations to self-determination we dispense with the idea of the nation as a whole. It becomes merely a social and political unit (for purposes of measurement). But it was just this concept of nations as one of the categories of bourgeois ideology that Marxist theory attacked most fiercely, pointing out that under slogans like 'national self-determination' - or 'freedom of the citizen', 'equality before the law', there lurks all the time a twisted and limited meaning. In a society based on classes, the nation as a uniform social-political whole simply does not exist. Instead there exists within each nation, classes with antagonistic interests and 'rights'. There is literally no social arena...in which the possessing classes and a self-conscious proletariat could take one and the same position and figure as one undifferentiated nation".

⁶⁴ The Crisis in the German Social Democracy, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, pp.309-10; The Russian Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.382.

There is widespread agreement that Luxemburg underestimated the revolutionary potential of nationalist movements,⁶⁵ but set in an international context of imperialist aggression, militarism, and the bourgeois call to the defence of the nation, the very notion of nation was anathema to her. It was simply inappropriate to a historical period. An anachronistic concept, it nevertheless threatened to engulf the concept 'class' in the proletarian consciousness.

Doubtless Luxemburg over-reacted against the demand for national self-determination. She failed to perceive that the demand could express a revolutionary socialist aspiration, and form part of its programme. She conflated into one self-determination as a demand, and nationalism as a historical phenomenon. Characteristically extreme, and unequivocal, she regarded the concept of nation as irredeemably bourgeois, its progressive aspects exhausted, and in an era of imperialism historically bankrupt, merely reactionary.

In The Crisis in the German Social Democracy, Luxemburg interrogates the principle of nationality in the context of the war. The concept is given a new content in the historical milieu of imperialism. Called into being by

⁶⁵ c.f., Waters, Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.17; Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.849.

a nascent capitalism as a dynamic progressive political form, it is merely mobilised by capitalism in its final convulsions. But in its latest phase it can solve nothing. In short, it ceased to be a progressive historical force. It heroic phase is over. Its historical justification has ceased to exist. This is true not simply of the powerful capitalist states. Imperialism stamps its identity on the national struggles on the smallest, least imperialistically oriented countries.

Regarded as an isolated occurrence, the young Balkan states were historically justified in defending the old democratic programme of the national state. In their historical connection, however, which makes the Balkans the burning point and centre of imperialistic world policies, these Balkan wars, also, were objectively only a fragment of the general conflict, a link in the chain of events that led, with fatal necessity, to the present world war.⁶⁶

In voting against war credits, then, the Serbian social democrats shared a clear historical conception of the real causes of the war.⁶⁷

In her response to the national question, Luxemburg consistently applied criteria derived from her analysis of imperialism, with its attendant phenomena to each aspect of the question. Her use of historical milieu is particularly

⁶⁶ The Crisis in the German Social Democracy, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.309.

⁶⁷ loc. cit.

pronounced in the Junius Pamphlet, but is evident too in her doctoral thesis. One of the reasons for her choice of subject was a belief that Russian policy in Asia was leading the Empire towards a confrontation with Western Europe. Moreover, since Poland constituted "one of the most important and progressive industrial districts of the Russian Empire...one in whose history the economic policy of Russia finds perhaps its clearest expression",⁶⁸ its internal economic life and economic relations with the Empire were of legitimate and necessary interest not merely for a Polish, but for a European socialist. The doctoral thesis set the Polish question in the context of its wider historical importance. The historical milieu of impending international confrontation was brought to bear. From the outset Luxemburg denied the existence of the Polish question as an entity in itself.

Nettl maintains that Luxemburg felt herself to be the "innate continuator of Marx's method which did not in the least depend on retaining the concrete historical phenomena of any particular period".⁶⁹ Nettl might have gone further

⁶⁸ The Industrial Development of Poland, (Dissertation for the attainment of the Doctorate of Political Science from the Political Science Faculty of the University of Zurich), (New York, 1977), p.82.

⁶⁹ Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.847.

- neither did Marx's method entail retaining the sense of those economic and political categories superceded by historical development. New categories emerge, or their sense changes with each new historical era. In her analysis of militarism, and the nation, Luxemburg encapsulates the metamorphosis of categories with the unfolding of successive historical milieux.

SECTION iii

Luxemburg's Global Perspective

Luxemburg's standpoint on totality

One of the categorical imperatives of the methodology which the Second International Marxists inherited from Marx was the requirement that social and economic enquiry should be conducted from an intellectual standpoint capable of taking in the broad sweep of the social process in its entirety. Lenin articulated this methodological precept frequently after 1914. The capitulation of the European socialist parties to national war efforts in their respective countries impressed on him the urgent need to maintain an internationalist ethos, entailing a global perspective on the motives and objectives which had impelled national governments towards war. Lenin's reading of Hegel's Logic impressed the precept still more deeply on his mind. His works of the 1915-17 period bear the imprint of a Hegelian vocabulary and mode of thought. The 'many-sided investigation' into the political issues of the period became almost a cliche in these works, and 'narrowness of vision' was a charge frequently levelled at those erstwhile comrades of Lenin who had espoused the national war effort.

Luxemburg arrived at a global perspective much earlier than Lenin, whose horizons before 1914 were confined largely to Russia. Her appreciation of the significance of imperialism and its manifestations - colonial antagonisms, international cartels, a deepening mood of militarism - was sharpened by her experience of German politics. Within the S.P.D. there was a powerful bloc which was determined to keep militarism and imperialism out of the forum of party debate. Along with the mass strike issue, these questions became the pivot of Luxemburg's oppositional strategy within the S.P.D.¹ By 1910, imperialism had become the focus of Luxemburg's attention. It dominated her perspective, and she repeatedly emphasised the need to relate every issue of German politics to this central theme.²

Luxemburg's political formulations on imperialism were underpinned by an economic theory in which a grasp of the structural interconnections between economic forms in capitalist society was made abundantly plain. In her polemic with Bernstein she had accused him of dismembering the integral structure of economic forms - of presenting economic forms in isolation from one another, out of the

¹ c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.396-401, on the S.P.D. at the 1907 Stuttgart Congress of the International.

² c.f., Looker, ed., Rosa Luxemburg, p.29; "The 'enemy at home' had to be dealt with as part and parcel of the process of dealing with the 'enemy abroad'".

context which rendered them comprehensible in the full complexity of their significance.³ In consequence, his theory had misrepresented the significance of certain economic forms - credit, for instance - which he had taken to be a regulatory mechanism, capable of exerting a stabilising influence on economic life. Luxemburg counterposed her own conception, in which credit was integral to the process of capitalist exchange, and therefore equally susceptible to the periodic convulsions and dislocations which were endemic to capitalism.⁴

The 'inner connections' and 'living bonds' existing between economic forms in capitalist society is also a theme in Luxemburg's Introduction to Political Economy,⁵ but they received their fullest expression in Accumulation, where

³ Reform or Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.61; "Bernstein's theory does not seize these manifestations of contemporary economic life as they appear in their organic relationship with the whole of capitalist development, with the complete economic mechanism of capitalism. His theory pulls these details out of their living economic context...treats them as disjecta membra of a lifeless machine".

⁴ loc. cit.; "...credit, like money, commodities and capital, is an organic link of capitalist economy at a certain stage of its development. Like them, it is an indispensable gear in the mechanism of capitalist economy...".

⁵ There is no English translation of this work. It is, however, quite widely quoted in Rosdolsky, The Making of Marx's 'Capital'. Rosdolsky's references are to Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften, (Selected Speeches and Writings), (East Berlin, 1951), to which references below will relate. Rosdolsky's quotations will be cited in parentheses.

Luxemburg systematically exposed the economic nexus of the question of imperialism. In this work, production and exchange relations, international finance, competition, trade tariffs, were depicted in relation to each other. It was Luxemburg's contention that this network of economic relations "engulfed the entire globe",⁶ impelled by the inner drive of capital towards expansion.

In Accumulation, Luxemburg expounded a systematised economic theory of imperialism. She never constructed a political theory of the phenomenon in the same systematic fashion,⁷ partly because she wrote much of her political work in the form of newspaper and journal articles. Nevertheless, there was an underlying unity in her work, which stems from her firm belief that in an era of imperialism every aspect of politics was permeated by the imperialist ethos. In the years between 1910 and the outbreak of war, Luxemburg continually drew parallels between Germany's aggressive military and colonial policies and the stubborn resistance of a semi-autocratic government to mounting popular demands for domestic reforms.

⁶ The Accumulation of Capital, p.467; "Capitalism is the first mode of economy with the weapon of propaganda, a mode which tends to engulf the entire globe and to stamp out all other economies, tolerating no rival at its side".

⁷ c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.493.

The mass strike emerged as a burning question in the S.P.D. in 1905 at the Jena Congress, and the strategy had been discussed, in the Party and in the International, as a weapon to be used against militarism, since 1907. After 1910, when the Prussian suffrage question accentuated antagonisms in German politics, provoking the masses into demonstrative action, the mass strike re-emerged as a point of contention in the German Party. Since militarism and colonialism were reaching their zenith in the years immediately preceding the war, the mass strike was discussed alongside imperialism in inner Party debate. For Luxemburg, and the left of the Party, the mass strike represented the form of working class offensive with which to confront imperialism.⁸

Luxemburg's strategy for Social Democratic opposition to the rising tide of imperialism was the crystallisation of her earlier formulations of the tasks of the movement. In her polemic with Bernstein she had continually stressed the importance of the relationship between the day to day political struggle for social reform and democratisation of the state,

⁸ c.f., Looker, ed., Rosa Luxemburg, p.28; "...it was the form of class struggle which she saw as emerging in Europe as a response to developments taking place in the capitalist system; considered in its imperative mode, it was a generic term for describing that complex of military actions which she saw as the only viable proletarian response to the ruling class offensive known as imperialism".

and the ultimate goal of socialism. In her speeches to the Stuttgart Party Congress of 1898 she had articulated the belief that what stamped the Party with its character was the socialist goal to which it aspired.⁹ In Reform or Revolution she had reiterated the belief.¹⁰

The Russian revolution of 1905 demonstrated for Luxemburg the power and potential which attached to local economic offensives and partial political campaigns in a period of revolutionary upheaval. The mass strike movement which had preceded revolution was the expression of what Luxemburg meant by the unity of the partial demand with the ultimate

⁹ Speech to the Stuttgart Congress, October 3, 1898, D. Howard, ed., Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg, (London and New York, 1971), pp.38-9; "Think about it: what really constitutes the socialist character of our movement? The really practical struggle falls into three categories: the trade union struggle, the struggle for social reforms, and the struggle to democratise the capitalist state...what is it in our day-to-day struggles that makes us a socialist party? It can only be the relation between these three practical struggles and our final goals. It is the final goal alone which constitutes the spirit and the content of our socialist struggle, which turns it into a class struggle".

¹⁰ Reform or Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.36; "...the final goal of socialism constitutes the only decisive factor distinguishing the social democratic movement from bourgeois democracy and from bourgeois radicalism...".

goal.¹¹ In the Mass Strike pamphlet she drew a vivid sketch of a period of revolutionary activity in which the isolated and partial initiatives of the Russian working class movement converged in a common purpose - the overthrow of autocracy.

The German Party, in a less inflammatory environment, never generated the same heat. Disciplined and highly organised, there was a division of labour within the Party between political and economic functions, and a tendency to separate issues out from one another - to place them in discrete compartments. The fight against militarist and colonialist tendencies exhibited by the German state provided Luxemburg with a single purpose behind which to mobilise every political initiative taken by the Party. To this end she strongly urged that the S.P.D. campaign in the Reichstag elections

¹¹ Mass Strike, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, pp.179-80; "The mass strike, as the Russian revolution shows it to us, is such a changeable phenomenon that it reflects all phases of the political and economic struggle, all stages and factors of the revolution...Political and economic strikes, mass strikes and partial strikes, demonstrative strikes and fighting strikes, general strikes of individual branches of industry and general strikes in individual towns, peaceful wage struggles and street massacres, barricade fighting - all these run through one another, run side by side, cross one another, flow in and over one another - it is a ceaselessly moving, changing sea of phenomena. And the law of motion of these phenomena is clear: it does not lie in the mass strike itself nor in its technical details, but in the political social proportions of the forces of the revolution".

of 1912 should be oriented about the question of imperialism.¹² In Luxemburg's mind, militarism and colonialism placed socialism on the agenda as an urgent item, since socialism was the only alternative to a descent into barbarism which was already foreshadowed in the imperialist rivalries between European powers.

The underlying harmony of Luxemburg's political formulations, especially after 1910, stemmed from her almost prescient 'vision' of the decay of European civilisation. The socialist goals which had figured so prominently in her rhetoric in the debates with the revisionists had possessed a certain ethereal quality. Now they took on a concrete form, momentous significance, and dominated her thinking.

The various aspects of Luxemburg's perspective on totality are a common theme in commentary on her work. Basso observes that the "total conception is always Rosa Luxemburg's standpoint...it is a concrete totality, implying an organic nexus of relationships in which everything is related to the whole and the whole predominates over the parts...It could be said that the theoretical basis of Rosa Luxemburg's

¹² Leipziger Volkszeitung, July 24, 1911, Looker, ed., Rosa Luxemburg, p.166; "Above all we should propagate socialist enlightenment in the Reichstag elections, but this we cannot do if we restrict our criticism to Germany's domestic circumstances, if we fail to depict the great international relationships, the growing dominance of capitalism in all parts of the world...".

long struggle against revisionism and reformism is the constant reference to the concept of totality...whereas the revisionists are vulgar empiricists who separate out isolated facts and fail to see the global nature of the historical process".¹³ Basso discusses extensively the "unity of the ultimate goal and day-to-day activity", which is "the basic and central point of Rosa Luxemburg's strategy for the class struggle".¹⁴

Howard, in rather Hegelian fashion, focuses on the teleological implications of the notion of the 'final goal'. "The necessity of the final goal provides that teleology which makes it possible to understand the present as a process of becoming...Without the teleology provided by the final goal...social analysis would be reduced to empirical, inductive methods which are incapable of dealing with capitalism as a totality".¹⁵ In Fetscher's account of Luxemburg's method, the concept of totality is also prominent. "She was able to grasp reality as a totality...Rosa Luxemburg analysed the imperialist phase of capitalism as a whole, not - as in vulgar Marxism - in its individual aspects, but as a total process".¹⁶ Frolich

¹³ Basso, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.18-9.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.20.

¹⁵ Howard, ed., Selected Political Writings, p.12.

¹⁶ I. Fetscher, Postscript to Frolich, Rosa Luxemburg, p.307.

refers to her "intellectual mastery of the total social process",¹⁷ and according to Looker, Luxemburg's political writings "seek to delineate the concrete historical totality in a manner which dissolves the false dichotomy of 'the unique' and 'the general'".¹⁸

Geras, arguing against Nettl's assertion that Luxemburg's economic analysis was kept distinct from her political formulations, holds that "there is an obvious connection between the economic explanation of imperialism and her political writings on the same subject... The economic analysis claimed to lay bare the roots of those phenomena, such as colonialism, militarism, tariffs, the collapse of bourgeois liberalism etc., to which Luxemburg's political writings of the period repeatedly and urgently drew attention".¹⁹ Luxemburg's economic theory of imperialism, moreover, "... gave a firm foundation to a stance of revolutionary opposition to imperialism".²⁰

With the exception of that of Geras, all the above accounts of the principle of totality in Luxemburg's methodology, resound with the echo of Lukács's pioneering essays on

¹⁸ Looker, ed., Rosa Luxemburg, p.13.

¹⁹ Geras, The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, pp.25-6.

²⁰ Ibid., p.27.

Rosa Luxemburg's Marxism in History and Class Consciousness, first published in 1922. In this work, Lukács collapsed the whole of Marx's method into the principle of totality.

It is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxist and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality. The category of totality, the all pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts is the essence of the method which Marx took over from Hegel and brilliantly transformed into the foundations of a wholly new science.²¹

The whole system of Marxism stands or falls with the principle that revolution is the product of a point of view in which the category of totality is dominant.²²

Lukács formulated his own idiosyncratic version of Marxism, and Marxist methodology, and in the same measure, he imputed his own ideas to Luxemburg. His work represents a radical revolt against the scientific conception of Marxism.²³

Lukács's notion of totality includes a conception of unity between subject and object - between thought and existence,²⁴

21 Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p.27.

22 Ibid., p.29.

23 c.f., G. Stedmen Jones, 'The Marxism of the Early Lukács' Western Marxism, a Critical Reader, (London, 1977), p.33; "History and Class Consciousness...represents the first major interruption of the romantic anti-scientific tradition of bourgeois thought into Marxist theory".

24 Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p.2; "Even more to the point is the need to discover those features and definitions both of the theory and the ways of gripping the masses which convert the theory, the dialectical method, into a vehicle of revolution. We must extract the practical essence of the theory from the method and its relation to its object".

and falls outside the boundaries of the present discussion.

Briefly, however, Lukács maintained that the proletariat alone was in a position to rise triumphantly above contemplative rationalism - mere empirical observation of social phenomena, because it alone possessed the capacity for taking up the standpoint of a class - the standpoint, that is, of totality.²⁵ It took up this position in the course of its political practice, in which it acquired a consciousness of itself as a class. For Lukács, the idea of totality was bound up with the idea of the unity of theory and practice.²⁶ Because Luxemburg sometimes emphasised the subject aspects of working class consciousness, and because she did not dismiss the possibility that the working class acquired a socialist consciousness in the course of its political practice, Lukács looked to her as a sympathetic mind, and exaggerated the intellectual affinities between the two of

²⁵ Ibid., p.28; "The totality of an object can only be posited if the positing subject is itself a totality; and if the subject wishes to understand itself, it must conceive of the object as a totality"; also, p.39.

²⁶ Ibid., p.39; "...the destruction of a totalising point of view disrupts the unity of theory and practice".

them.²⁷ There is nothing in Luxemburg's work to indicate that she would have accepted the relativist implication of Lukács's categorical denial of any scientific status to Marxism.

The argument below is concerned with the analytical dimension of Luxemburg's standpoint on totality, rather than with the wider philosophical dimensions which Lukács explored. That is to say, it is concerned with the structural interconnections between economic forms as they appear in Luxemburg's work, with the connections between her economic theory and her insight into the politics of the imperialist era.

Imperialism and the world economy

Luxemburg's major economic work, Accumulation, was a hybrid work, containing a history of bourgeois political economy reaching back to the eighteenth century, and an extremely intricate discussion of the 'models' for capital reproduction which Marx constructed in the second volume of Capital. It emerged out of lectures which she wrote for the S.P.D.

²⁷ Lukács's position changed rapidly; c.f., Stedman Jones, 'The Marxism of the Early Lukács', Western Marxism, p.50; "The success with which Lukács did break out of the historicist idealism of History and Class Consciousness...can be seen in the short work which he published a year later - Lenin".

school, and which she had intended to consolidate in the form of an Introduction to Political Economy. Such a work was published, posthumously, from her notebooks. A constant theme in her economics was the ubiquity of capital, the power which it possessed to subordinate all economic, and ultimately, all political forms and relations to itself, to extend its dominion over the globe. This theme culminated in Accumulation where she systematically demonstrated both the inner drive of capital towards expansion and the constraints which, in her view represented the ultimate limit of its expansiveness.

Luxemburg's 'vision' of the world economy was of an entirely different order to that which Lenin articulated in Imperialism. Where Lenin, drawing on Hilferding and Hobson, wrote a scholarly and well documented work, depicting in detail the concentration of capital, the role of the banks, capital export, the hegemony of finance over productive capital, the international configuration of monopolies, Luxemburg drew an impressionistic sketch of the world economy. The only definite lines in that sketch related to the inability of capital to reproduce itself in a closed system.²⁸ Elsewhere

²⁸ The Accumulation of Capital, p.417; "For capital, the standstill of accumulation means that the development of the productive forces is arrested, and the collapse of capitalism follows inevitably, as an objective historical necessity. This is the reason for the contradictory behaviour of capitalism in the final stage of its historical career: imperialism".

she simply conjured up the impression of a "large and colourful complex of imperialist phenomena".²⁹

The ubiquity of capital, its pervasiveness, its ability to dominate the globe, was a function of its inner drive towards expansion, which existed quite independently of human volition, will, or plan. Passages from the Introduction to Political Economy reveal Luxemburg's vision of the world economy as anarchic and planless.

If we look into one individual private enterprise, a modern factory, or a huge complex of factories and works, such as Krupp, or at an agricultural ranch in North America, then we find there the strictest organisation the most extensive division of labour, the most refined forms of planning based on scientific findings. Everything works marvellously - directed by one will, one mind. However, no sooner have we left the gates of the factory or the farm, than we are greeted by chaos. Whereas the numerous individual parts are highly organised, the whole of the so-called 'people's economy' (Volkswirtschaft), i.e. the capitalist world economy, is totally disorganised. In this totality, which envelopes oceans and continents, no plan, consciousness, or regulation makes itself felt; only the blind rule of unknown, unfettered forces plays its capricious game with the economic destiny of mankind...And it is precisely this...which produces the unpredictable and puzzling result which makes the economy into an alien phenomenon...³⁰

²⁹ Anti-Critique, p.60; "...competition amongst capitalist countries to win colonies and spheres of influence, opportunities for investment, the international loan system, militarism, tariff barriers, the dominant role of finance capital and trusts in world politics...this large and colourful complex of imperialist phenomena".

³⁰ Introduction to Political Economy, Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften, pp.468-9, 480-1, (Rosdolsky, pp.555-6).

Luxemburg's conception of the impulsive, anarchic drive of capitalism towards expansion, the hidden forces at work within it, has a parallel in her formulation of the relation between capital and labour. The Introduction to Political Economy contained a theory of relative wages - the worker's share of the value he produces - according to which the fall in the level of the relative wage followed "quite automatically from commodity production and the commodity character of labour power"³¹ It was in the character of capitalism to depress the level of the relative wage, just as it was in the character of capitalism to encroach into the non-capitalist areas of the globe. The conclusion she draws from this fact is that "the struggle against the fall in relative wages...implies a struggle against the commodity character of labour power, i.e. against capitalist production as a whole".³²

It was her conception of the integral totality of capital, the interrelatedness of the economic forms which it engendered, which she presented against the revisionists. The economic structure of capitalism was an organic whole, which stamped each individual part with its character. Bernstein's error was to treat economic forms as 'disjecta membra of a lifeless machine'. Viewed in their totality, economic forms were not susceptible to reform. Capitalism had to be encountered on a broad front. The same was true of imperialism.

³¹ Ibid., p.717 (295).

³² Ibid., pp.719-20 (295).

In the concluding chapters of Accumulation, Luxemburg presented an account of the ubiquity of capital, showing how it intruded in subcutaneous fashion into non-capitalist economies. She refers to the "triumphant march of commodity economy", which proceeds from the apparently beneficent construction of modern transport projects and peaceful commodity exchange, through increasingly piratical and fraudulent methods, to open pillage.³³ Beneath these surface phenomena of imperialism, capital erodes the indigenous economic modes and forms. It transforms the means of production and labour power into capital,³⁴ and appropriates the most important means of production - land, for instance - since indigenous forms of social organisation stand as a barrier to their rapid transformation into capital. All hopes that capitalism can operate in a 'peaceful' or 'normal' fashion in its colonial incursions are illusory, Luxemburg argues, since the disintegration

³³ The Accumulation of Capital, pp.386-7.

³⁴ Ibid., pp.369-70; "At the time of primitive accumulation, i.e. at the end of the Middle Ages, when the history of capitalism in Europe began, and right into the nineteenth century, dispossessing the peasants...was the most striking weapon in the large-scale transformation of the means of production and labour power into capital. Yet capital in power performs the same task even today, and on an even more important scale - by modern colonial policy".

of those forms of social organisation which stand in its way would take centuries.³⁵ It can be assumed that Luxemburg was concerned here to gainsay those interpretations of imperialism which held that the more abrasive aspects of colonialism could be ameliorated through restraint and regulation.

In Luxemburg's view, the aggressive aspects of capital were inherent in its internal dynamic, in its expansiveness, its drive to accumulate.

The general result of the struggle between capitalism and simple commodity production is this: after substituting commodity economy for natural economy, capital takes the place of simple commodity production...Historically, the accumulation of capital is a kind of metabolism between capitalist economy and those pre-capitalist methods of production without which it cannot go on and which, in this light, it corrodes and assimilates.³⁶

Luxemburg demonstrates the ubiquity of capital, its corrosiveness, with reference to historical examples. In Egypt, the building of the Suez Canal opened up the country for British and French capital.³⁷ With inexorable logic, and

³⁵ Ibid., pp.370-1; "Accumulation, with its spasmodic expansion, can no more wait for, and be content with, a natural internal disintegration of non-capitalist formations and their transition to commodity economy, than it can wait for, and be content with, the natural increase of the working population".

³⁶ Ibid., p.416.

the connivance of the Khedive, the British Viceroy and the Suez Canal Company, a cotton industry emerged, operating on capitalist lines, giant sugar factories were established, a vast transport network evolved, all financed by international loans,³⁸ which effectively mortgaged the country to European capital.³⁹ The new capitalist enterprises destroyed Egypt's peasant economy. The fellahs provided the labour, their land was consolidated into large capitalist estates, and they were subjected to swinging taxation in order to defray the debt to European capital. Luxemburg concludes that the vast and apparently illogical machinations of international capital in the Egyptian economy are in fact, the logical and necessary consequences of the accumulation of capital.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid., p.433; "What had provided the capital for these enterprises? International loans".

³⁹ Ibid., p.434; "These operations of capital, at first sight, seem to reach the height of madness. One loan followed hard on the other, the interest was defrayed by new loans, and capital borrowed from the British and French paid for the large orders placed with British and French industrial capital. While the whole of Europe sighed and shrugged its shoulders at Ismail's crazy economy, European capital was in fact doing business in Egypt on a unique and fantastic scale - an incredible modern version of the biblical legend about the fat kine which remains unparalleled in capitalist history".

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.438; "It should now be clear that the transactions between European loan capital and European industrial capital are based upon relations which are extremely rational and sound for the accumulation of capital, although they appear absurd to the casual observer because this loan capital pays for the orders from Egypt and the interest on one loan is paid out of a new loan. Stripped of all obscuring connecting links, these relations consist of the simple fact that European capital has largely swallowed up the Egyptian peasant economy".

In Luxemburg's account, the Egyptian economy, where "...the claims of European capital became the pivot of economic life..."⁴¹ exemplifies the ubiquity of capital, its ability to subject economic relations - even entire modes of production - to itself. The anarchy exhibited by the world economy is purely on the surface, beneath which the inexorable logic of capital accumulation is at work. Capital accumulation entails the bewildering complex of economic phenomena which imperialism represents. It also entails 'political violence', and the international 'contest for power'. "In reality, political power is nothing but a vehicle for the economic process. The conditions for the reproduction of capital provide the organic link between these two aspects of the accumulation of capital".⁴²

Here is the definitive statement of that link which Nettl denies, between the economics and the politics of imperialism in Luxemburg's thought. In a succinct summary of the method of enquiry which afforded her the penetrating insights into capital accumulation and imperialism, she asserts that the accumulation of capital has two aspects. In its economic aspect it is characterised by apparently free and equal exchange. "Here, in form at any rate, peace, property and equality prevail", and an acute scientific analysis was required to "reveal how the right of ownership changes in

⁴² Ibid., p.452-3.

the course of accumulation into appropriation of other people's property, how commodity exchange turns into exploitation and equality becomes class rule".⁴³

Capital accumulation proceeds alongside a struggle between capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production, which represents the other aspect of the accumulation of capital. Luxemburg regards this struggle as integral to the economic process of capital accumulation. In the course of its struggle for dominance, capital must employ coercive methods to extend its sphere of influence. "Force, fraud, oppression, looting, are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment, and it requires an effort to discover within this tangle of political violence and contests for power the stern laws of the economic process".⁴⁴

Luxemburg's entire analysis of imperialism rested on her initial postulate that cumulative capital reproduction could not take place in a closed economic system. From this it followed that capital's expansive drive compelled it to take in non-capitalist areas of the globe, to establish commodity economy where none had previously existed. The resistance of the indigenous mode of production was a barrier to the

⁴³ Ibid., p.452.

⁴⁴ loc. cit.

establishment of commodity economy and as such had to be overcome by coercive means. Hence where domestic capitalism had the appearance of peaceful and equal exchange between capital and labour, in its incursions into the non-capitalist world, oppression and exploitation were more explicit.

The ultimate form of coercion was military might. Militarism fulfilled a dual function. It enabled the capitalist country to take into its possession indigenous means of production in the non-capitalist regions. At the same time it furnished domestic capitalism with an additional source of consumptive capacity, thus enabling the continuing depression of wage levels without prejudice to the ability of capitalists to sell their products - that is, to realise their surplus.

Capital increasingly employs militarism for implementing a foreign and colonial policy to get hold of the means of production and labour power of non-capitalist countries and societies. This same militarism works in a like manner in the capitalist countries to divert purchasing power away from the non-capitalist strata. The representatives of simple commodity production and the working class are affected alike in this way. At their expense, the accumulation of capital is raised to the highest power, by robbing the one of their productive forces and by depressing the other's standard of living.⁴⁵

Militarism furthered the exploitation of the working class in the capitalist country and the simple commodity producer equally.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.466.

At the root of imperialism, Luxemburg saw those structural deformities which she held to be endemic to capitalism. These deformities amounted to the inability of capital to reproduce itself in cumulative fashion. The machinations of capital abroad, therefore, were simply a reflection of capital accumulation as such. Imperialism was merely a form taken by capital in its expansive drive.

Luxemburg's advocacy of an anti-imperialist strategy for the S.P.D. followed from these insights - to confront capitalism it was necessary to confront imperialism and its attendant forms, such as militarism. The insights were ones at which she arrived through her acute appreciation of the global connections between capitalist forms in the world economy.

The political strategy against imperialism

The years between 1907 and 1910 were not satisfying ones for Rosa Luxemburg. In 1907 her long standing relationship with Leo Jogiches deteriorated irreparably,⁴⁶ and she developed a sense of ennui with the culture and politics of the Reich.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.378.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.387-8.

She did develop a consuming interest in the party school, but as regards party politics she was unusually inactive. She did not even attend the S.P.D. Congress in 1909.⁴⁸ The sense of ennui was dispelled, however, in February 1910 when the government published its draft for the reform of the Prussian electoral system. Its proposals fell short of any substantial alteration to the suffrage and were greeted with demonstrative mass action and a wave of strikes.⁴⁹ Luxemburg was immediately galvanised into activity, seizing the issue as a focus for a fresh assault on the S.P.D. centre.

Luxemburg's strategy was to generalise the issue, and the mass discontent and unrest which it had provoked. The conditions, she felt, were fertile ground for the germination of the mass strike conception in the party and in the minds of the masses.⁵⁰ Her declaration of intent was an article published in mid-March in the Dortmunder Arbeiterzeitung. In 'The Next Step', Luxemburg set the question of the Prussian vote in the general context of mounting radicalism

48 Leipziger Volkszeitung, September 11, 1909, Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.408; "...no new tactical problems or questions involving any theoretical principle are up for discussion ...the numerous resolutions do not show a very lively picture of the party's mental state".

49 Looker, ed., Rosa Luxemburg, p.33; Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.417-8.

50 Looker, ed., Rosa Luxemburg, p.33; "Here at last were the conditions for a developing mass strike strategy".

in Germany. Characteristically, she emphatically rejected the separation of issues, the compartmentalisation of demands. Her political strategy reflected her intellectual commitment to the category of totality, and her instinctive grasp of the broad canvas of events.

In any great mass movement of the proletariat, a great number of political and economic factors coincide. To attempt to peel these away from each other in an artificial manner, to attempt to keep them separate from one another in a pedantic fashion, would be a vain and detrimental start. A healthy, viable movement, such as the Prussian campaign must and should draw its sustenance from all the accumulated inflammatory social material.⁵¹

Luxemburg's answer to the question which the title of her article posed, was that the urgent priority for the German working class movement was to articulate its demands in the form of a mass strike.⁵² The strategic and propagandist value of the mass strike in Luxemburg's conception was in generalising the individual demands of the class struggle, in confronting capitalism and the bourgeois state on the broad front.

51 Dortmunder Arbeiterzeitung, March 14-15, 1910, Looker, ed., Rosa Luxemburg, p.155.

52 Ibid., p.152; "The mass of party comrades in this country must consider and decide what the next step is to be...The answer has already been given in a number of resolutions and statements of the Social-Democratic workers in various centres of our movement. In Halle, in Bremen, in Breslau, in the agitation district of Hessen-Nassau, in Konigsberg, our comrades have loudly named the method of struggle which the present mass struggle compels the party to employ; it is the mass strike".

'The Next Step' was Luxemburg's declaration of war on the S.P.D. centrists. She had first sent the article to Vorwärts, which had refused it because of its advocacy of the mass strike strategy, discussion of which was counter to editorial policy. Kautsky, editor of Neue Zeit then rejected it because of the demands for a republic which it contained.⁵³ In the form in which it was finally published in the Dortmund paper, the article contained no more than veiled references to republican demands. Those sections of the original article dealing with the republican demands were published separately in the Breslau newspaper Volkswacht. They represented a thinly concealed challenge to Imperial Germany.⁵⁴

Whilst the mass strike was the means by which to generalise the form of the struggle provoked by the Prussian suffrage question, a republican platform was the means by which to generalise its content. Moreover, 'The Next Step' contained a prefiguration of Luxemburg's anti-imperialist campaign, which was to gather momentum in 1911 after the Moroccan crisis. Referring to the forthcoming Reichstag elections

⁵³ Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.421-5.

⁵⁴ Volkswacht, (Breslau), March 25, 1910, Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.426; "By emphasising the republican character of Social Democracy we shall have one more opportunity to elucidate our general attitude in a comprehensive and popular manner...in the teeth of the united camp of all bourgeois parties".

as 'Hottentot Elections', she evokes memories of the 1907 elections, when the Chancellor, von Bülow, campaigned on an expressly imperialist platform and cast the S.P.D. in the role of 'rogues without a fatherland'.⁵⁵

In 1912 we shall have the Reichstag elections in which we shall be expected to give our general consent to the Hottentot Elections...For our part, however, we cannot create a more splendid situation than to arrange a great preliminary mass action on a scale which Germany has not yet witnessed. By arousing the broadest masses, by increasing their idealism and by channelling their fighting energy as much as possible, we can achieve a degree of enlightenment and understanding which will make the coming elections a stunning Waterloo for the ruling system.⁵⁶

In 1911, the dispatch of the German cruiser Panther to Agadir engendered the Moroccan crisis. Luxemburg seized on the event immediately to set the question of imperialism at the centre of party debate. The S.P.D. leadership resisted being drawn on the question, as it had resisted at the 1907 Congress of the International. The resultant

55 Looker, ed., Rosa Luxemburg, p.158n.

56 Dortmunder Arbeiterzeitung, March 14-15, 1910, Looker, ed., Rosa Luxemburg, p.158.

conflict in the party sealed Luxemburg's rupture with Kautsky, which had opened with his rejection of her article the previous year.⁵⁷

Luxemburg's response to the Moroccan adventure was to draw the immediate parallels between domestic and imperialist politics which she set out theoretically in the closing chapters of Accumulation. The connections were manifold. Luxemburg pointed out that the global expansiveness of capital, German financial policy, Junker class interests, militarism and naval policies aimed at furthering financial interests, were linked by a myriad connection to autocratic rule, resistance to social and electoral reform, and the virulent campaign of vilification directed at the S.P.D.

...financial policy, the rule of the Junkers and the stagnation of social reform are organically bound up with militarism, naval policy, colonial policy, and with personal rule and its foreign policy. Any artificial separation of these spheres can only present an incomplete and one sided picture of the state of our public affairs.⁵⁸

57 c.f., Looker, ed., Rosa Luxemburg, pp.33-4; "...the International Socialist Bureau sought to convene a conference of the socialist parties of the nations involved, only to meet with a firm refusal from an S.P.D. executive fearful of exposing itself still further to the charge of 'anti-German' behaviour. It was Luxemburg's publication of the details of this act of cowardice...and her exposure of the tacitly nationalistic premises upon which it was based, which sealed her break with the leadership and the Marxist centre around Kautsky which provided it with its intellectual justification".

58 Leipziger Volkszeitung, July 24, 1911, Looker, ed., Rosa Luxemburg, p.166.

Denied the columns of central S.P.D. organs, her article, 'Concerning Morocco' appeared in the Leipziger Zeitung. In it she referred to "...the great international relationships, the growing dominance of capitalism in all parts of the world, the obvious anarchy in all corners of the globe, and the major role played by colonial and global policy in this process".⁵⁹

In the Moroccan article, the electoral strategy which she advocated hinged entirely on the question of imperialism. The veiled reference to imperialism in her article of 1910, the embryo of the idea that the S.P.D. should stand against the imperialist ethos in German politics, emerged as a full blown counter offensive.

We must conduct our electoral agitation not as an abridged political primer reduced to a few simple points now 'in vogue' but as a socialist world view in all its comprehensiveness, richness and diversity.⁶⁰

In these passages, Luxemburg exercised the fullest force of her internationalism, and the fullest range of her intellectual vision. Liberated by her definitive doctrinal break with the party centre, her formulations confronted the multiple economic and political phenomena of imperialism on the broadest of fronts. Nettl presents an account of Luxemburg's confrontation with imperialism which captures

59 loc. cit.

60 loc. cit.

well the vibrancy of her writings in the four years prior to the outbreak of war, and the sense in which they were the acute and immediate response to novel events as they unfolded⁶¹ - Lenin's work on imperialism seems arid and scholastic in contrast. But he refuses to accept that Luxemburg had a theory of imperialism, except for that articulated in Accumulation,⁶² which, as has been noted above, he isolates from the rest of her work on the subject.

It is quite true that Luxemburg never systematically set out a political theory of imperialism, and in this sense Nettl's term 'physiognomy' is appropriate. Her Morocco article, however, demonstrated clearly that she possessed a tremendously acute appreciation of the ubiquitous and expansive nature of capital and its machinations in the world economy, that this appreciation was fully formed before she wrote Accumulation, and that it served as the foundation of her entire political strategy against imperialism.

Her political orientation against imperialism dates from 1900 when she was sharply critical of the German party's

⁶¹ c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.522; "Rosa Luxemburg's physiognomy of imperialism was the organic creature of a policy, being sweated out with all the difficulties of the apparently unorthodox and unfamiliar".

⁶² Ibid., p.521; "With one...exception Rosa Luxemburg did not theorise about imperialism".

complicity in the government's participation in the Chinese wars.⁶³ An awareness of the chauvinistic tendencies inherent in Prussian militarism is evident throughout her work. She never countenanced the separation of the question of militarism from the general context in which it arose, refusing to join the anti-militarist bloc led by her close comrade on the left of the party, Karl Liebknecht. She was scornful of a campaign which opposed militarism in isolation and in abstraction. For her, militarism was simply one facet of a generalised phenomenon which had its roots in the inner structure of capitalist society.

For Luxemburg, as for Lenin, imperialism was not merely an aberration of history. It was a definite stage in the development of capitalism, dictated by the inner logic of capital itself. Therefore she regarded a partial or narrow confrontation with imperialism as futile. The struggle against imperialism was an extension of the struggle against capitalism. Luxemburg's political position derived from an appreciation of the structural interconnectedness of the global economy, the ubiquitous nature of capital, the tendency - indeed, necessity - for capital to encroach into every corner of the world economy.

⁶³ Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.451.

SECTION iv

The Proletariat and Class Consciousness

Luxemburg, Lenin and Bernstein

Rosa Luxemburg's most distinctive contribution to Marxist theory lies in her formulation of the active role of the proletariat in class struggle and history, and the necessarily reciprocal relationship between the proletariat and its political vanguard, the party. These formulations contrasted sharply with the Leninist conception of class struggle and the vanguard party, of which Luxemburg was sometimes critical. However, the extent of Luxemburg's critique of Lenin has often been exaggerated - represented as a libertarian, democratic critique of a dictatorial, centralist position - until it appears as a condemnation of Lenin and Leninism tout ensemble.¹

To confront centralism and dictatorship with democracy, and organisation with spontaneity, is to overlook nuances in the positions adopted by both Lenin and Luxemburg. Moreover, a

¹ See, for example, B. D. Wolfe, ed., The Russian Revolution & Leninism or Marxism? (Ann Arbor, 1961), pp.23-4; E. Vollrath, 'Rosa Luxemburg's Theory of Revolution', Social Research, Vol.40, No.1, Spring, 1973, pp.83-91. c.f., Geras, The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, pp.133-41.

direct confrontation of Lenin's conceptions of party and class with those of Luxemburg neglects the vast differences in levels of maturity and development between S.P.D. and R.S.D.L.P., Russian working class and German, a shortcoming to which Luxemburg - Eurocentric, preoccupied with the internal struggles within the S.P.D., inflexible in her preconceptions, unreceptive to Russian perspectives - was herself susceptible.²

Those commentators who employ more subtle techniques than direct confrontation tend to construct, often carefully, with due regard for nuance and background, a framework in which Luxemburg and Lenin are located in respect of their political strategy and tactics.³ This mode of analysis is, of course, valuable and necessary. But the contours of political formulations often reflect an underlying philosophical structure. What distinguished Luxemburg from Lenin was her fundamental philosophical postulate of the proletariat, its experience and its consciousness. Her formulation of the party, its organisation, and its relationship to the working class, was derived from philosophical conceptions of the manner in which class consciousness was generated.⁴

² c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.288-9.

³ See, for example, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.17ff; Looker, ed., Rosa Luxemburg, p.42 ff.

⁴ c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.226.

Luxemburg's political strategy entails a denial of the separate identities of party and class which Lenin seemed to imply. Social democracy - a term she consistently uses in preference to 'the party' - "is itself the proletariat" and it is in this particular - its mass character - where lies the uniqueness of social democracy, that characteristic which differentiates it from earlier revolutionary movements.⁵ The mass character of social democracy demands an appropriate organisational mode, one which enables the mass to participate in the life of the party. Participation is especially important to Luxemburg because of the active and dynamic role which she ascribes to the proletariat in driving the party forward and in the attainment of the socialist goal. (Luxemburg shows a tendency to generalise from the experience of the S.P.D. wherein it often appeared that the leadership was a conservative influence on the most militant sections of the working class).⁶

In Luxemburg's formulation, the proletariat assumes its leading role by virtue of the objective conditions of its existence - direct confrontation with capital and the bourgeoisie in the labour process, trade union activity,

⁵ Organisational Questions of Social Democracy, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, pp.117-9.

⁶ Ibid., p.121.

and in the political struggle. There are two dimensions to the confrontation, implying two quite different philosophical conceptions.

The first can be summarised as follows. In the course of its confrontation with capital and the bourgeois, the proletariat evolves a consciousness of itself as a class, and develops a mode of thought specific to itself.⁷ It does so, however, only if it confronts capital and the bourgeoisie from a socialist perspective - a perspective which derives from the final revolutionary goal.⁸ The philosophical conception of a working class evolving a socialist awareness of itself out of a confrontation with bourgeois economic and political forms is a problematical one.⁹ It centres on the mystificatory nature of economic relations in capitalist society, and attributes to confrontation, demystificatory powers and properties. It poses the possibility that in the process of confrontation the proletariat will adopt the perspective which Marx took up in Capital -

⁷ Reform or Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks; here Luxemburg refers to "...the specific mode of thought employed by the conscious proletariat in the struggle for liberation".

⁸ Ibid., p.58; "...the trade union struggle and our parliamentary practice are vastly important insofar as they make socialistic the awareness, the consciousness, of the proletariat and help to organise it as a class".

⁹ c.f., Goldmann, 'History and Class Consciousness', Mészáros, ed., Aspects of History and Class Consciousness, pp.69-70.

a standpoint "entirely foreign to commodity production",¹⁰ and that its close confrontation with bourgeois forms will reveal to it the chimeric nature of their appearance - stripping bourgeois ideology of its hold over the collective mind of the proletariat.

In its other dimension, Luxemburg's philosophical conception is quite different. Here there are echoes of Marx's well known statement in The Holy Family.

It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat regards as its aim. It is a question of what the proletariat is, and what, in accordance with this being, it will historically be compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is visibly and irrevocably fore-shadowed in its own life situation as well as in the whole organisation of bourgeois society.¹¹

Evidence can be found in Luxemburg's work to support the view that it is this conception which underlies her political strategy.¹² The proletariat is itself one of the objective conditions of capitalism, its consciousness a necessary product of the contradictions inherent in capitalist economic and social relations. This conception is redolent of that

¹⁰ Capital, I, p.550.

¹¹ The Holy Family, MECW.,4, (London, 1975), p.37.

¹² See, for example, Reform or Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.63; Organisational Questions of Social Democracy, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.116.

in The Communist Manifesto, whereby the bourgeoisie, "in order to attain its own ends, is compelled to set the proletariat in motion".¹³

These conceptions are riddled with ambiguities, and Luxemburg's own statement of them was never comprehensive, often apparently contradictory, and always susceptible to misinterpretation.¹⁴ They are taken up in greater detail below, but at present the argument is more concerned with Luxemburg's defence of her political strategy, entailing as it did, a defence of her philosophical conceptions.¹⁵

Social Reform or Revolution, addressed to the revisionist debates with Bernstein, and Organisational Questions of Russian Social Democracy, addressed as a polemic against Lenin, are informed by the same theme - the assertion of the leading role of the proletariat in the social democratic movement - the assertion, that is, of its mass character.

¹³ The Communist Manifesto, MECW.,6, p.492.

¹⁴ See, for example, P. Gay, The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism, Edward Bernstein's Challenge to Marx, (New York, 1952), p.269; Gay quotes from a speech made by Luxemburg at the S.P.D. Congress, 1898; "I say that the only force that will lead us to victory is Socialist enlightenment of the working class in the daily struggle". Gay comments, "...her statement just does not fit in with her other views and sounds just like Bernstein".

¹⁵ c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.223-4, 286-7.

As has been pointed out, one of Luxemburg's purposes in the revisionist debates was a defence of the validity of Marxist theory against Bernstein's contention that capitalism had developed mechanisms of self regulation and adjustment capable of resolving its contradictory tendencies. She felt that the maintenance of 'socialist certainty' which Marxist theory lent to the social democratic movement was vital as a bulwark against the reformist tendencies in the S.P.D. In Reform or Revolution she sought to demonstrate the shallowness of the analysis of capitalism contained in Bernstein's Evolutionary Socialism.

The corollary of Bernstein's economic argument was that in its new form, capitalism was susceptible to a gradual transformation to social ownership, and administration - in short to collectivism, by means of trade union and legislative pressure. "Therefore trade unions, social reforms and, adds Bernstein, the political democratisation of the state, are a means of the progressive realisation of socialism".¹⁶

Bernstein's contention ran directly counter to the conception of trade union and legislative struggle established in S.P.D. doctrine.

¹⁶ Reform or Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.48.

According to the present conception of the party, trade union and parliamentary activity are important for the socialist movement because such activity prepares the proletariat, that is to say, creates the subjective factor of the socialist transformation for the task of realising socialism.¹⁷

Revisionism was a challenge to both dimensions of Luxemburg's conception of the proletariat and its leading role in the social democratic movement. Effectively it denied that the proletariat emerged as one of the objective conditions of capitalism, standing in contradictory opposition to bourgeois economic relations with a class standpoint derived from that position. Bernstein denied the scientific basis of the social democratic movement.¹⁸

Furthermore, Bernstein had replaced the antagonistic confrontation between the proletariat and bourgeois forms with a partial, limited, instrumental confrontation. Since, in Luxemburg's conception, it was in the course of confrontation that the proletariat evolved its conscious mode of thought, an attenuated, ameliorated form of struggle has far reaching consequences. Once trade union and legislative struggles become direct instruments of a gradual transformation to socialist economic and political forms, they lose the function of politicising the working class since this function depends on an antagonistic collision in which is demonstrated the manifest futility of this form of struggle.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.58.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.68.

Instead of defining the class in opposition to the bourgeoisie, trade union and legislative activity, conceived of in an exclusively reformist sense, serves to integrate the proletariat into the bourgeois economy and state.¹⁹

Luxemburg concludes that Bernstein has abandoned the class standpoint of the proletariat. Antagonism, confrontation, contradiction - all aspects of "the dialectical system" - are abandoned with it. Finally, he casts off the language of the proletariat, employing the classless term, 'citizen'.

Logical to the end, he has exchanged, together with his science, politics, morals and mode of thinking, the historic language of the proletariat for that of the bourgeoisie.²⁰

In terms of S.P.D. politics, Luxemburg's fear was that a denial of the scientific basis of social democracy, and of the creative energy generated by antagonistic class conflict would lead inexorably to the loss of its class character. She had an as yet ill-defined faith in the revolutionary potential of the masses to resist and counteract this tendency, but a strategy which substituted compromise for confrontation threatened to erode this potential.

There is, in Luxemburg's work of this period, an embryonic theory of the political integration of the working class party into the bourgeois state, a theory more subtle than

¹⁹ Ibid., p.58

²⁰ Ibid., p.86.

that developed later by Robert Michels.²¹ But her theoretical awareness failed to sharpen her perceptions sufficiently for her to recognise the manifestations of revisionism in the S.P.D., especially in South Germany.²² Engrossed as she was in the internal life of the party in Berlin, in its essentially intellectual exchanges, she had a conceptual grasp of the proletariat, but no real knowledge of the German working class.²³

Rosa Luxemburg failed to recognise also, what was obvious to Ignaz Auer, S.P.D. secretary. "One does not formally make a decision to do the things you (Bernstein) suggest, one doesn't say such things, one simply does them".²⁴ A measure, perhaps, of Luxemburg's organisational naivety, is that she was content to restrict the revisionist debate to the level of rhetoric in party Congress where unreality was the ambient atmosphere - in 1901 and 1903, resolutions condemning the theoretical tenets of revisionism were adopted, supported by Bernstein and Vollmar. The appearance

²¹ R. Michels, Political Parties, (New York), 1962).

²² c.f., Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.34.

²³ Barrington Moore Jnr., Injustice; the Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt, (London, 1978), pp.173-84.

²⁴ c.f., J. Joll, The Second International, 1888-1914, (London, 1968), p.94; Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.156; Geras, The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, p.117.

of shadow boxing was also a consequence of Luxemburg's lack of a definite strategy. At this stage she had only an ill formed notion of the potential of the proletariat with which to oppose Bernstein.²⁵

The polemic with Bernstein, ostensibly concerned with strategy and tactics, was more extensive in its implications. At issue was the philosophical orientation of the party, the very existence of social democracy as she understood it - as a movement of the masses towards their socialist goal.²⁶ The same preoccupations are evident in the polemic with Lenin. They permeate Organisational Questions of Russian Social Democracy, a work which, as its title suggests, is addressed to the question of organisation, but in which Luxemburg expresses the full force of her methodological predilections.²⁷

25 c.f., Geras, The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, p.116.

26 Reform or Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.36.

27 c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.226-7.

Luxemburg's position on organisation was paradoxical. She plainly did not deny the necessity for organisation,²⁸ but she equally plainly mistrusted it, and associated it with conservatism - a mistrust derived from her experience in the German party. Her neglect of organisation is clearer from her political practice than from her political writings. Three things stand out. She remained in the main body of the S.P.D., a party of which she despaired, without countenancing the possibility of giving organisational form to that group on the left of which she was the focus. Further, whilst she was one of the leading figures in the Polish party, the SDKPiL, she refused election to its Central Committee.²⁹ And finally, when it became apparent, after 1914 that the S.P.D. was, for her purposes, bankrupt, she still resisted pressure - from Lenin amongst others - to establish the Spartakus group as an autonomous and distinct organisational entity.³⁰

²⁸ Some commentators go too far in suggesting that she denied the necessity for organisation. See, for example, Basso, Rosa Luxemburg, p.105; "...she...made the mistake of thinking of the struggle of the masses as being possible without the intermediary of the party and its organisation or at least of strongly underrating this factor".

²⁹ c.f., Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.17.

³⁰ c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.657-8.

In Organisational Questions she emphasises the imperative of organisation, in the form of a "unified, single Russian party", and concedes that centralism is a necessary characteristic of social democratic organisation.³¹ Her notion of centralism, however, is a distinctive one.

Generally speaking it is undeniable that strong tendency towards centralisation is inherent in the social democratic movement. This tendency springs from the economic make up of capitalism, which is essentially a centralising factor.³²

In Luxemburg's conception, the economic and social conditions of bourgeois society represent a source of centralist tendencies within the Social Democratic movement. The factory, the urban centre, impose centralism on the proletariat as much as capital imposes on it its revolutionary character.

The other source, in contrast, is the self-activity of the class conscious proletariat. Social democratic centralism "can only be the concentrated will of the individuals and groups representative of the most class-conscious, militant, advanced sections of the working class. It is, so to speak, the self-centralism of the advanced sectors of the proletariat".³³

³¹ Organisational Questions of Social Democracy, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, pp.116-7.

³² Ibid., p.116.

³³ Ibid., p.119.

Party organisation, the growth of awareness, the struggle itself, are not, in Luxemburg's conception, separated chronologically or mechanically - they are aspects of the same process.

Again Luxemburg is demonstrating the philosophical dualism of her tactical formulations of Reform or Revolution. Centralism is a product of the objective conditions of capitalist society, and simultaneously, of a concerted effort on the part of the class itself. And in the same measure that there was lacking in this earlier work any concrete formulation of a strategy, so there is lacking in Organisational Questions any concrete formulation of organisation; there is merely an inventory of what the mode of organisation appropriate to social democracy is not.

In writing Organisational Questions as a response to Lenin's One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, (not What is to be Done?, as is commonly supposed),³⁴ Luxemburg was acting as the S.P.D.'s leading 'Russian expert', a reputation gained largely in the S.D.K.PiL, which was much closer to the Russian party than was the German. She writes entirely from the German perspective, a perspective, moreover, which is focused on the question of organisation as it had arisen in the revisionist debates. The particularities of the conditions

³⁴ c.f., Geras, The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, pp.196-7.

obtaining in Russia are noted, but only for Luxemburg to state the obvious - that they do not correspond to those conditions necessary for the emergence of a unified centralised social democratic party, the existence, that is, of a large contingent of workers educated in class struggle, and of the opportunity for those workers to develop their own political activity through participation in the life of the party.³⁵ It is ironical that Luxemburg should have accused Lenin of failing to appreciate the backwardness of the Russian working class, and its consequences for the mode of organisation appropriate to that class, but it is also indicative of her conception of the proletariat that she believed the Russian proletariat capable of evolving its own organisation.

Luxemburg criticised Lenin's formulation of the organisational question as mechanistic, "in the sterile spirit of the overseer". The splits which had emerged in the R.S.D.L.P. in the ensuing debate she regarded as sectarian. It is Luxemburg's analysis which failed to confront Russian conditions. She simply reiterated her philosophy of proletarian self-activity as a political panacea.

35 Organisational Questions of Social Democracy, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, pp.119-21.

In The Russian Revolution, the panacea is still evident. The work was not an indictment of Lenin - the Bolsheviks are praised as "the historic heirs of the French Jacobins", which implied a shift from the 1904 position which employed 'Jacobin' in a rather perjorative sense. The "driving force of the revolution was the mass of the urban proletariat", but the Bolshevik party "was the only one which grasped the mandate and duty of a truly revolutionary party, and which, by the slogan - 'all power in the hands of the proletariat and the peasantry' - insured the continued development of revolution".³⁶ Luxemburg is critical of Bolshevik policy on the question of land reform,³⁷ and on the national question,³⁸ but her fiercest criticism was of the suppression of democratic freedoms.

Trotsky had defended the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly with a critique of representative democracy which had asserted the sterility of elected institutions.

Luxemburg took issue with Trotsky's denial of the "mental connection" between representatives and represented - she did not defend the institutions themselves, but criticised the "rigid and schematic conception which is expressly

36 The Russian Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.374.

37 Ibid., pp.374-8.

38 Ibid., pp.378-82.

contradicted by the historical experience of every revolutionary epoch". It was the political effervescence of the masses which Luxemburg was defending - that property which the proletariat has exhibited in its revolutionary effort.

It is precisely the revolution which creates by its glowing heat that delicate, vibrant, sensitive political atmosphere in which the waves of popular feeling, the pulse of popular life, work for the moment on the representative bodies in the most wonderful fashion.³⁹

Revolutionary upheaval clearly demonstrates "the living movement of the masses, their unending pressure", which Luxemburg contrasts to the "rigid party banners, outgrown tickets etc." of party leadership. Party discipline, that is, "stops up the very living source from which alone can come the correction of all the innate shortcomings of social institutions. That source is the active, untrammelled, energetic political life of the broadest mass of the people."⁴⁰

Constituent assemblies, suffrage, press freedoms, rights of assembly, are the source of political experience and training - the medium of political expression. Their suppression stifles public life, and consequently, "life in the soviets must become more and more crippled".⁴¹ The critique is redolent of Organisational Questions in its insistence on the creative energy and auto-didactic potential of the masses.

³⁹ Ibid., p.386.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.387.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.391.

The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is identified with the proletariat itself, in the same measure that social democracy is identified with the proletariat. The implication is that the identity is in some sense direct, unmediated. It may be that the stridency with which Luxemburg engaged in criticism and polemic carried her argument further than it was intended. She was as firmly committed to the idea of a party as she was to the S.P.D., but her lack of interest in organisation prevented her from elaborating a role for the party as mediator between the abstract idea, 'social democracy', 'dictatorship of the proletariat', and the phenomenal form - the proletariat.

The argument above has avoided the term 'spontaneity' - below is the contention that it is inadequate as an expression of Luxemburg's conception of the proletariat. Basso relies on the term too heavily in his comparison between Luxemburg and Lenin,⁴² as does Lee,⁴³ whilst Howard tentatively

⁴² Basso, Rosa Luxemburg, p.98.

⁴³ G. Lee, 'Rosa Luxemburg and the Impact of Imperialism', The Economic Journal, Vol.81, No.324, December 1971, pp.859-60.

applies the term before deciding, for the wrong reasons, that it is inappropriate.⁴⁴ Geras dispenses with the term in terse fashion,⁴⁵ whilst Nettl, with characteristic insight and presience, notes that the notion of Luxemburg's spontaneity is under reappraisal and may soon be "denounced as a slander".⁴⁶

As a concept with which to differentiate Luxemburg's thought from that of Lenin, 'spontaneity' is insufficiently chiaroscuro to accomodate the complexities involved. The argument here will not in any case, confront the rather futile task of comparative assessment. Even when the two met in polemic, they argued with different perspectives, premises and preoccupations, and their arguments usually went past each other instead of meeting head on. The argument under the above rubric has used Lenin's thought as a counterpoint to accentuate the distinctiveness of Luxemburg's, without

⁴⁴ Howard, ed., Selected Political Writings, pp.161-2. Howard ascribes to Luxemburg a gradualist standpoint. Making the same mistake as Gay (see n.14 above), he takes her comments in Reform or Revolution on the trade union and parliamentary struggles to mean that this form of struggle might result directly in socialist transformation. In Howard's account it is her gradualism which militates against a 'spontaneist' reading.

⁴⁵ Geras, The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, pp.35-8, p.118.

⁴⁶ Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.826.

attempting to compare, and to a certain extent, Lenin's own assessment of Luxemburg can stand in lieu of comparison.⁴⁷

The mass strike

Holding to vague and nebulous philosophical notions of the proletariat, with no clear concept of organisation, Luxemburg seized every opportunity to render her theoretical formulations in concrete form. The opportunity arose wherever the working class constituted itself, if only momentarily, as a mass movement with a semblance of organisational coherence. This occurrence galvanised Luxemburg politically - renewing her oratorical vigour, extending her horizons beyond the theoretical exchanges within the inner sanctum of the S.P.D., defining her strategies and sharpening and refining her theoretical conception of the party-class relationship, and in consequence, driving a wedge between her and the party centre.

47 C.W.,33, p.210; "In spite of (her) mistakes, she was and is an eagle, and not only will she be dear to the memory of Communists in the whole world, but her biography and the complete edition of her works...which the German Communists are falling incredibly behind (in publishing)...will be a very useful lesson in the education of many generations of Communists".

The strike movement in Russia, and its culmination in the 1905 revolution, and a wave of militant strikes in Germany stimulated in party Congresses smouldering debates which flared periodically into conflagration. In the early years, at Jena, (1905), and Mannheim, (1906), the centre attempted to bridge left and right by combining rhetorical support for the resolutions of the left, with tacit acceptance of the political ethos of the right, and even after 1910 - when rhetoric assumed a more meaningful tone in the aftermath of the German strike movement which had precipitated a march on Berlin - the centre persevered with the attempt.⁴⁸ But 1910 was nevertheless a watershed in as much as it marked the end of old alignments - a rift appeared between the left and the centre,⁴⁹ which was reflected in Luxemburg's personal relations with Karl Kautsky.⁵⁰

The question of the strategic role of the mass strike as a weapon in the social democratic arsenal dominated the S.P.D. and was inevitably documented by Luxemburg in The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions.

⁴⁸ c.f., G. Roth, The Social Democrats in Imperial Germany; a Study in Working Class Isolation and National Integration, (Totowa, New Jersey, 1963), pp.280-3.

⁴⁹ c.f., Salvadori, Karl Kautsky, p.135; Basso, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.87-8.

⁵⁰ c.f., Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.412; Basso, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.82-4.

The mass strike as a historical event served for Luxemburg the same purpose as did the Paris Commune for Marx. In it she saw the phenomenal form of a conception of class conflict which had been central to her earlier political work without ever receiving precise definition.

The inter-related currents of the strike movement in Russia, the organisational forms which they assumed, the hardening of class standpoint of proletariat and bourgeoisie, are seen as manifestations of that conception of proletarian self-activity which Luxemburg had opposed to Lenin's formulation of the party-class relationship, and to the mechanical formalism of the notions of the German party.

Luxemburg documented the limited and partial demands from which the movement grew - the demand for the eight hour day, for better piece work rates, the abolition of factory fines⁵¹ and the new organisational forms which the movement evolved, demonstrating that "apparently 'chaotic' strikes and... 'disorganised' revolutionary action...are becoming the starting point of a feverish work of organisation".⁵² She confronts the bureaucratic mentality of the German party and trade unions, no longer with a conceptual challenge, but with the palpable movement of the masses.

⁵¹ The Mass Strike, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, pp.173-5

⁵² Ibid., p.176.

There are quite definite limits set to initiative and conscious direction. The movement defies calculation. It is not a "manoeuvre of the proletariat in the open field, but a fight in the midst of incessant crashing, displacing and crumbling of the social foundations". The frequency of the appearance of the term 'spontaneous', 'spontaneity', invites proponents of the spontaneist argument to lift apparently conclusive quotes from The Mass Strike, but there is, in the text, no denial of organisation as such.

The work must be set in context. Whilst the Russian strike movement had generated intellectual interest within the German party and trade unions, the mass strike remained a strategic instrument, and one which required tailoring to German conditions. It was conceived of as an act, to be called forth at will, its force harnessed to party and union organisation for the attainment of particular ends. Luxemburg argues that the force of the movement is not susceptible to formal controls, that the spontaneous element in the Russian movement is a function of the nature of the strike movement itself, and not of the weakness of Russian social democracy. The strong and powerful S.P.D. cannot simply lay hold on the mass strike as an instrument at its own disposal and direction. Instead, in Luxemburg's conception, the role of the party in the mass strike is

one of co-ordination - adaptability to the mood of the
masses is an imperative.⁵³

The movement imposes its revolutionary character on every partial, limited instrumental act which it embraces. Here is a reiteration, in sharper clarity, of one of the central themes of Reform or Revolution - the unity of the partial demand with the ultimate goal. The role of the party is to relate, where necessary, the individual issue to the general direction of the movement.⁵⁴ The irony was that the party was out of sympathy with 'revolutionary romanticism', hence the increasing isolation of Luxemburg within the S.P.D. In the same measure that her conceptual formulations grew sharper, her isolation became more acute.

If Luxemburg's conceptual grasp of proletarian 'self-activity' is cast in sharper relief by her analysis of the Russian strike movement, the latter also served to refine her notion of class consciousness. In Luxemburg's formulation, the mass strike movement is instrumental in generating in the working class, aspirations which transcend the immediate demands and origins of the movement and which, in the course of an apparently anarchic mobilisation of the masses, become

⁵³ Ibid., pp.188-9.

⁵⁴ c.f., Geras, The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, p.121.

consolidated into a political awareness which lends the movement a direction and purpose which cannot be controlled by the party.

The comparison between Russia and the West reveals an apparent paradox in as much as "the badly educated and still worse organised Russian proletariat is immeasurably stronger than that of the organised, trained and enlightened working class of Germany or any other western European country".

The paradox is only apparent, however.

In the case of the enlightened German worker, the class consciousness implanted by the social democrats is theoretical and latent; in the period ruled by bourgeois parliamentarism it cannot as a rule, actively participate in a direct mass action; it is the ideal sum of the four hundred parallel actions of the electoral sphere during the election struggle, of the many partial economic strikes and the like. In the revolution when the masses themselves appear upon the battlefield this class consciousness becomes practical and active.⁵⁵

Luxemburg has already indicated that the lasting significance of the mass strike movement is "the mental sediment: the intellectual, cultural growth of the proletariat"⁵⁶ which it entails. The mass strike is the didactic medium of social democracy.

55 The Mass Strike, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.199.

56 Ibid., p.176.

Six months of a revolutionary period will complete the training of these as yet unorganised masses which ten years of public demonstrations and the distribution of leaflets would be unable to do.⁵⁷

There is an evident mistrust and scepticism of those sections of the working class organised and educated in traditional fashion by German Social Democracy, clearly expressed in the assertion that "if it should come to a mass strike in Germany" it will be the least organised - and by implication least educated - of German workers who take the initiative, rather than those sections of the working class which in their organisational strength, were the pride of European social democracy. Here is a development of that embryonic theory of the integrative function of the working class party on which the above argument has touched tangentially. The implication that formal organisation and training deadens, rather than sharpens working class militancy is an important theme in Luxemburg's thought - an evocation of her experience in the S.P.D. - and its recognition is crucial to an understanding of her formulation of the party-class relationship.

57 Ibid., p.199.

Class consciousness and Luxemburg's sociology of knowledge

There is a definite consistency between economic determinism and the notion of a working class consciousness spontaneously emerging out of the conditions of existence of that class - a derived moment of the 'laws of motion' which govern capitalist society, the discovery of which is the achievement and the value of Marxist theory. This positivist conception dominated the Marxism of the Second International as an axiom of orthodoxy. Kautsky was slave to it, Lenin predicated his organisational formulations on it, and Luxemburg felt some intellectual loyalty towards it.

Characterised in the first place by its assertion of the radical distinction between judgements of fact and judgements of value, between external reality which is subject to 'objective' laws and human activity which can at most pass moral judgements on this reality or modify it by means of technical action based on the knowledge and utilisation of these objective laws, positivism corresponds to situations where the structures of society are so stable that their existence seems unaffected by the action of the men who compose them and experience them.⁵⁸

Characteristic of this philosophical standpoint was the 'fatalism' prevailing in the S.P.D. - the apparent stability of European capitalism signified that economic and social conditions were 'not yet ripe' for militant class action.

⁵⁸ Goldmann, 'History and Class Consciousness', Mészáros, ed., Aspects of History and Class Consciousness, p.67.

Revisionism was an attempt to establish an admission of momentary economic stability and class quiescence as a fundamental, theoretical re-orientation. Lenin's formulations in What is to be Done? and One Step Forward Two Steps Back outlined a strategy based on peculiarly Russian conditions - retarded capitalist development entailed a retarded proletariat, but the inherent instability of the Tsarist regime might be exploited nevertheless by a nucleus of revolutionaries implanting their class consciousness in the proletariat. Both revisionism and Leninism implied a notion of class consciousness as a quotient of economic development.

The positivist conception, moreover, rendered class consciousness as akin to 'scientific knowledge' of the laws of motion of capitalist society, a scientific awareness that historical developments - strike movements, militarism, imperialism - were merely the manifest forms of the contradictory conditions created by capitalist economic relations. The task of social democracy was to inform the working class accordingly. This standpoint implied a theory of knowledge as the product of theoretical not practical activity. Science, not experience was the medium from which an accurate class consciousness emerged, the more so since the relations of capitalist society were mystificatory, fetishised, appearing in a form which did not correspond to their real nature, and therefore not susceptible to immediate perception.

Whilst Luxemburg never challenged the notion of objective laws, of the proletariat as a moment in the historical process, ultimately compelled to act in accordance with those laws, she held to a radically different theory of knowledge. Without ever systematically elaborating them, her work contained the elementary forms, a vocabulary and a notion of cognition, which posited a theory of knowledge which might, in contrast to the positivist, be termed dialectical.⁵⁹

Her theory, or sociology of knowledge is apparent in The Mass Strike, where she counterposes a theoretical consciousness to practical, active consciousness. Implicit in her conception of the autodidactic element in the mass strike movement is the assertion that knowledge and class consciousness are derived from and generated by experience. There is no directly derived connection between knowledge and experience - for in the crude conception it is hard to escape from the conclusion that the proletariat, its experience restricted to bourgeois society and bourgeois forms, is restricted likewise to a bourgeois, 'trade union' consciousness. Experience, rather, is not a given objective element, but is itself mediated by consciousness - experience is a function of consciousness, equally as consciousness is a function of experience - since experience

59 c.f., Rosa Luxemburg, p.225.

is never neutral, but always interpreted from a particular standpoint. This standpoint is a function of consciousness - the residue of past experience, and interpretations placed upon it.

It should be stressed that the above is an extrapolation of the implications of Luxemburg's formulations, but it is one which can be substantiated in the text of The Mass Strike.

The mass strike movement is "the living political school" of the proletariat, wherein events assume such a galvanising political intensity, and move with such rapidity, that experience is immediately crystallised into consciousness, which in turn sharpens experience in a reciprocal, cumulative fashion. The medium of the process is that antagonism which the struggle generates, in the course of which, classes are sharply delineated and brought into direct confrontation with one another in "incessant mutual friction". The origin is the confrontation between capital and labour endemic to the factory, which is the engine room of the mass strike movement.

The mass strike is the first natural, impulsive form of every great revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, and the more highly developed the antagonism is between capital and labour, the more effective and decisive must mass strikes become.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ The Mass Strike, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.202.

The workplace confrontation between capital and labour, however, is not spontaneous or automatic - it is only cast in its stark form by the illumination of the struggle itself. The ambient atmosphere of conflict, confrontation, friction between classes sharpens the proletariat's 'trade union' reflexes, reveals the absolute nature of the opposition in which stands labour to capital.

In *The Mass Strike*, is evident in corporeal form, the skeletal structure of the sociology of knowledge apparent in Reform or Revolution. From the 1906 work a conception of 'socialist knowledge' emerges - the self-awareness of the proletariat as a class, of its structural position in the network of economic and social relations engendered by capital. This knowledge arises out of confrontation and friction, the function of which is to strip from capitalist relations their mystical veil - to reveal in all its forms the underlying power of capital confronting the proletariat. In the same measure as it acquires a class consciousness the proletariat begins to challenge that order of society, and to pose an alternative. The immediate forms arising out of the mass strike represent the proletariat's recognition of its own potential for undermining and overturning capitalist relations.

Even the relations of employee to employer are turned round,...the principle of the capitalist 'mastery of the house' is de facto abolished. In the larger factories of all important industrial centres the establishment of workers' committees has, as if by itself, taken place...⁶¹

Further, in the course of the movement, political forms are challenged.

...the mass strike appears as the natural means of recruiting the widest proletarian layers for the struggle, as well as being at the same time a means of undermining and overthrowing the old state power and of stemming capitalist exploitation...In order to carry through a direct political struggle as a mass, the proletariat must first be assembled as a mass, and for this purpose must come out of factory and workshop...must overcome...the decay to which they are condemned under the daily yoke of capitalism.⁶²

The proletariat constitutes itself as a class with a distinct mode of thought in opposition to the bourgeois mode, only when it casts off the manner of thought and action endemic to its subservience to the fetishised forms of the workplace. Without having to extrapolate too far from the text, it is possible to embellish the last sentence of the above passage with a meaning which is descriptive of the alienated existence of the factory - hierarchical discipline, worker relations mediated by machine and product, trade unions slavishly recreating formalistic and disciplinarian conditions

⁶¹ Ibid., p.176.

⁶² Ibid., p.202.

in their own organisation.⁶³ The indiscipline, apparent chaos, self-organisation of the mass strike provides, in Luxemburg's account, a means of overcoming alienation and fetishised form.

Nettl takes up the alienation theme enigmatically, but regards alienation as a simple "break between objects", rather than a definite relationship. Hence "any rapprochement reduces or destroys it, whether friendly or hostile". The S.P.D. having erected barriers between itself - a state within a state - and society, merely formalised the break. Luxemburg, after 1905, saw a need to propel the party into closer contact with society. The mass strike provides her with the "technique of dynamic mass action" appropriate to the task.⁶⁴

Geras recognises alienation as a characteristic of definite economic and social relations, emerging from the "power of capital...reproduced in a million different ways in the regulation of the social process...the impersonal mechanisms of the market and the opacity of its forms". The mass strike has the effect of "stimulating and organising the

⁶³ c.f., Barrington Moore Jnr., Injustice, p.219.

⁶⁴ Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, pp.536-7.

capacities of the masses" in order to "undermine the social routines sustaining bourgeois power and prepare its destruction".⁶⁵

The alienated and fetishised relation in which labour stands to capital, the proletariat to bourgeois forms, was explicated by Marx in Capital, in which Marx consciously employed a "standpoint entirely foreign to commodity production".⁶⁶ In The Mass Strike, Luxemburg duplicates this standpoint with reference to the proletariat in class struggle.⁶⁷ In the course of the mass strike movement, the proletariat takes up a position opposed to and outside of social relations in their bourgeois form - it develops a consciousness untrammelled by bourgeois forms and modes of thought. That consciousness is the product of activity, and a cognitive process which is based on experience.

The theory of cognition implicit in The Mass Strike is of enormous significance for Marxist theory and its relation to social democracy, and the mode of political direction appropriate thereto. As a corpus of scientific observations pertaining to the economic and social relations of capitalist

⁶⁶ Geras, 'Marx and the Critique of Political Economy', Blackburn, ed., Ideology and Social Science, p.302.

⁶⁷ Goldmann, 'History and Class Consciousness', Mészáros, ed., Aspects of History and Class Consciousness, p.69.

society, Marxism is clearly only available to the working class through the didactic efforts of an intermediary armed with a theoretical understanding of its content - a content susceptible to vulgarisation into slogans which ossify into 'scientific' laws - often couched in positivist terminology and rendered anodyne through repetition. Kautsky's rendition, for example, was both positivist and anodyne.

In this reading, the subjective, active aspects of the proletariat's cognitive potential are neglected. Its intellectual slavery to alienated and fetishised forms, the problems connected with their transcendence, are questions which are dissolved in sterile formulæ equating consciousness with being, and meaningless notions of 'false consciousness' derived therefrom.

Now whilst Luxemburg held fast to the orthodoxy of Marxism as a scientific body of theory of inestimable value to social democracy and the working class, she posed the possibility of a mode of cognition which could mirror the procedure of that science in the confrontation between the proletariat and the bourgeois forms which it explicated. The resultant notion of consciousness was not one spontaneously and metaphysically derived from being, but from those social relations which constituted the being of the proletariat - relations which were alienated and fetishised, but not impregnable in their opacity - at least, not when experienced from a particular standpoint.

The argument is now in a position to confront what has been referred to as Luxemburg's philosophical dualism. The two philosophical strands in her thought can be reconciled through her postulation of the identity of subject and object.⁶⁸ The proletariat is at once an objective moment in the historical process and a subjective actor in that process, and it is stamped with its character - evolves and discovers its identity - in both of those roles. As an objective moment in the historic process, the proletariat, according to Marx's formulations in The Holy Family, is stamped with a character which renders it by its nature - its being - implacably opposed and antagonistic to capital and bourgeois forms. In this formulation there is no notion of consciousness - antagonism arises independently of the will of the working class. Its basis is the economic and sociological nature of the class. Scientific exploration in these disciplines has led Marx to the conclusion that the proletariat possesses certain properties which are ultimately opposed to the reproduction of capital and capitalist relations. The working class, and its organisational form, social democracy, in this conception, is a necessary historical product of the objective conditions of existence, and stands in opposition to capital and bourgeois forms.

68. Reform or Revolution, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, p.38.

This formulation is susceptible to reduction to a level of flat, bland empiricism - Marxism as a social science of economic and social laws, ostensibly lacking in an ideological dimension. Its shortcoming is its inability to free the working class from the miasma of fetishised forms - which Marx documented in Capital - presented through bourgeois ideology, which together hold the perceptions and conceptions of the working class in thrall, by the imposition of values, modes of thought, forms of social and political life - in short, the consciousness - of a dominant class. According to the empiricist conception of materialism, the imposition of a bourgeois consciousness in a multitude of different ways, is simply a function of the existence of the working class inside bourgeois society. The anachronism arises that the class which, by virtue of its position within capitalist economic relations, stands in opposition to capital and bourgeois forms, is ideologically restrained within them.

Luxemburg's achievement was a sharp perception of the anachronism inherent in the empiricist conception, and of the limitations and sterility of Marxism conceived of as a science. In her early comments on the relation of the working class to Marxist doctrine she simply reproduced the anachronism.

Only when the great mass of the workers take the keen and dependable weapons of scientific socialism in their own hands will all the petty bourgeois inclinations, all the opportunist currents, come to naught.

Yet she is by no means sanguine concerning the capacity of the working class to lay hold on its theoretical weaponry.

It is pure illusion to suppose that the working class, in its upward striving, can of its own accord become immeasurably creative in the theoretical domain...active participation of the workers in the march of science is subject to the fulfilment of very definite social conditions.

...enlightenment concerning the laws of social development has become essential to the workers in the class struggle; this connection has borne good fruit in social science, and the monument of proletarian culture in our day is Marxist doctrine.

However,

Not until the working class has been liberated from its present conditions of existence will the Marxist method of research be socialised with the other means of production, so that it can be developed to the full measure of its functional capacity.⁶⁹

The anachronism is overcome, however, in the cognitive theory, evident in The Mass Strike, which postulates the possibility that the working class will free itself from the fetishised and ideological forms of bourgeois society, and develop its own mode of thought, in the course of class confrontation and friction.

⁶⁹ Stagnation and Progress of Marxism, Waters, ed., Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, pp.107-11.

The imperative which Luxemburg repeatedly emphasised was that the proletariat must take up a standpoint outside of bourgeois economic and social relations - thus recognising the objective conditions of its existence for what they are. This entails the reproduction of Marxist science in the mode of thought of the proletariat, the adoption of the antagonistic role which its conditions of existence demand, and which Marxism as a body of economic and socio-logical knowledge merely posits. This imperative clearly ascribes to the proletariat the capacity for evolving independently, a consciousness of its objective position in relation to capitalist forms through confrontation and conflict with those forms - that is to say, as subject in the historical process.

Whilst Luxemburg's philosophical conception is coherent and consistent both internally and in respect of its relation to Marx's formulations, the political strategy derived therefrom was never authoritative. After 1910 Rosa Luxemburg was increasingly isolated in the German party, after 1914 she was relatively insignificant in opposition. Her isolation distanced her from the proletariat whose revolutionary role she had drafted. Yet she never modified her prescriptions, as evidenced by her comments on the role of the proletariat in the emergent Soviet state. In the revolutionary upheavals in Germany in 1919 she was a propagandist, marginal and peripheral to the revolutionary

movement, but she held to her earlier formulations of 'self-activity', 'self-organisation'.

...Germany has always been the classic country of organisation, and still more of the fanatic organisation mentality, but...the organisation of revolutionary actions can and must be learnt in the revolution itself, as one can only learn swimming in the water.⁷⁰

A problem which the above argument has not confronted, since it has been concerned with the methodology, not the sociology of class politics, is the sociological character of the 'proletariat'. To refer to the proletariat as an 'actor' in the historical process implies that a proletariat exists as more than simply a 'working class' or 'working classes', or 'masses'. That Rosa Luxemburg used these terms interchangeably suggests that she never confronted the sociological aspects of the question.

Luxemburg did, however, come closer to confronting the philosophical aspects of the working class, its relation to social democracy and to Marxism than any of her contemporaries, and her formulations were sufficiently potent to cause ripples in the muddy waters of Soviet Marxism, to inspire the philosophical mind of Georg Lukacs, and to resurface half a century after her death, in a revival of interest in her thought. It might be said that this was due to her perspicacity, which penetrated the methodological implications with which Marxism is pregnant.

⁷⁰ Rote Fahne, January 11, 1919, cited in Nettl, Rosa Luxemburg, p.765.

CONCLUSION

The Marxists of the Second International occupied a position of some importance in the history of Marxian socialism. The quarter century preceding the outbreak of war was a formative period for the nascent Social Democratic movements, within which the Second International Marxists moved. They regarded their role as one of intellectual leadership and inspiration.

Whilst Marxism was the dominant intellectual current in European Social Democracy in this period, its supremacy did not go unchallenged. Romanticist and retrospective populist attitudes were still strong in Russia in the eighteen nineties, and in the first decade of the present century, the workerphile and philistine 'economist' movement was antagonistic towards the Marxist orthodoxy which Lenin represented. Furthermore, the canons of bourgeois liberalism came increasingly to dominate the Menshevik wing of the R.S.D.L.P., and orthodoxy also faced a challenge from the radically anti-materialist circle around Bogdanov.

In the S.P.D., a stultifying bureaucratic ethos effectively rendered Marxism as a dead letter, and the critique of Marxism articulated by Bernstein threatened to destroy the system of thought which Marx had constructed, and to

falsify its conclusions. The ills from which the Marxist mode of thought suffered most acutely, however, were inflicted by the insidious encroachment of positivism - insidious because the carriers of positivism were numbered amongst the orthodox.

Classical Marxism was enunciated by a generation of Marxists who lived in a period when the scientific ethos was at its strongest. Whilst the Second International Marxists were constantly alert to the threat of bourgeois or liberal ideas or ideology insinuating themselves into socialist thought, they were unaware of the infiltration of alien, positivist conceptions into the body of Marxist thought. Seduced by the authority of science, they sought to emulate it - to set their own social enquiry on a scientific basis. They were encouraged in this project by those utterances of Marx which apparently expressed his own scientific aspirations. Moreover, Engels, the chief executor of the Marxian legacy, possessed a mind attuned to positivism and sympathetic to the scientific ethos.

There emerged in the classical Marxist tradition, a strong positivist tendency. The terms in which almost all the important theoretical issues were debated in this period bear the unmistakeable imprint of positivism. The vocabulary which the Marxists of the Second International

deployed, was littered with analogies drawn from the natural sciences. Marx's economic theory was conceived of as a set of positive laws operating with causal certainty. History became simply the unfolding of those laws without subtlety or inflection of any kind.

Economics dominated at the expense of philosophy, and serious epistemological questions were rarely raised. A crude and doctrinaire materialism served as the philosophical orientation of orthodoxy. That obeisance to the objective which derived from the precepts and laws of positive economics, obscured the subjective aspects of Marx's thought. The corollary of this was that the politics of the Second International Marxists were heavily circumscribed by rigid, doctrinaire formulations which minimised the active role of the working class. Unimaginative, timid and passive politics ensued.

Bound by the fetters of positivism and empiricism, the mode of thought of most of the Marxists of this period was incapable of grasping the subtleties of Marx's thought. The economic theory contained in Capital had as its foundation philosophical conceptions which the Second International Marxists simply failed to explore. Marx's project in his economic works had been to lay bare the inner workings of the capitalist economy, the innermost element of which was the commodity, which

contained the secrets of the economic structure which surrounded it. Taking the commodity as his starting point, Marx had proceeded through descending levels of abstraction, to the projected destination of his major work - the real, empirically observable manifestations of capital.

Marx had deconstructed the capitalist economic formation in its full complexity - the chaotic whole - into simpler, abstract elements, and had proceeded to work towards a mental reconstruction of these elements in a form in which the theoretical representation corresponded to the observable, concrete form. The Marxists of the Second International displayed an inability to discern the variations in the pitch of abstraction in Marx's economic theory. Generally, the relation between theory and its object was simply not regarded as a problem. There was a tendency to juxtapose directly, without any intervening mediation, the palpable, observable form and its theoretical representation.

There were other deformities in the Marxism of the Second International. It was characterised by a certain narrowness of vision which was incapable of grasping the individual issue or event in the full context of its connectedness with other, seemingly disparate issues and events. It was this inability which cast a veil over

the full significance of the escalation towards European war. In the German party, compromises were made with national chauvinism in the years immediately prior to 1914. Only Luxemburg's mind registered the full significance of the rising tide of military and economic aggression in the early years of the century.

A major weakness of Second International Marxism - one shared by Lenin to some extent before 1914 - was a general inability to engage in an intellectual confrontation with the object of enquiry in the full complexity of its relationships with other spheres. There was a tendency to break down the economic sphere into discrete compartments. In the debates over the reproduction of capital, the underconsumptionist school of thought produced formulations entirely at odds with those of Marx because its protagonists treated consumption as an autonomous variable, independent of production and consequently capable of acting as a barrier upon it.

The positivist mode of thought discouraged an intellectual confrontation with the world on a broad front. Only rarely did the classical Marxists adopt the global perspective which was necessary to recognise the various manifestations of imperialism - militarism, the quests for markets and colonies - as necessary corollaries of the development of the capital form at a certain stage of maturity.

It has been the central argument of the present work that Lenin and Luxemburg distinguished themselves from their contemporaries by their mode of thought, which was attuned to the nuances and subtleties of Marx's method, and which enabled them to replicate those subtleties in their own work. It must be acknowledged that both were in some respect children of their age, and that in places, their thought is marked by certain of its intellectual characteristics. Nevertheless, sufficient evidence can be found in their work to substantiate the thesis that on most of the issues which caught the attention of Marxists in the period, Lenin and Luxemburg demonstrated certain attributes which set them apart from their peers.

Lenin and Luxemburg shared the widespread notion of Marxism as a body of scientific thought, and the conviction that the concepts which Marx had elaborated possessed the attribute of objectivity. Moreover, neither of them was generally inclined to submit to epistemological or philosophical scrutiny, those concepts which they employed in their formulations. They had in common, however, a grasp of the methodology which underpinned Marx's work. Luxemburg's accomplished rejoinder to Bernstein contained an account of Marx's ideas on the contradictions within the capitalist economy, which was characterised by a subtlety and fidelity to Marx's method without equal in the literature of the period. And Lenin's account of

the development of Russian capitalism contained an exposition of the concept of the social formation which demonstrated a sharp insight into the internal construction of Capital.

In Social Reform or Revolution, Luxemburg contested Bernstein's view that capitalism had evolved certain regulatory mechanisms capable of eliminating the periodic crises which punctuated capitalist production. Arguing that whilst credit and cartels possessed the potential to overcome certain of the barriers which were placed in the way of the reproduction of capital, they simultaneously exacerbated the anarchy inherent in the market, Luxemburg appeared to have grasped the significance of the contradictions within the capital form to which Marx had drawn attention in Capital. She was acknowledged by Bernstein as his most penetrating of his critics, and her contribution to the revisionist debates set her in the front line of European Marxists. Luxemburg moved freely in the discipline of economics. Her greatest asset was the ability to recognise the level of abstraction on which certain of Marx's formulations were set, and this attribute allowed her to defend the principles of Marxist economics in the face of empirical evidence which appeared to falsify those principles.

Luxemburg's major economic work, The Accumulation of Capital, on the other hand, exposed her limitations. She was unable to reconcile the formulations of the question of capital reproduction which were contained in the second volume of Capital, and which apparently demonstrated that capital accumulation could take place within a closed system, with the formulation of the same question contained in the third volume. Failing to recognise that in the third volume, Marx was no longer addressing himself to 'capital in general' but had moved onto a different plane of abstraction which approximated more closely to the actual forms taken by capital, she concluded that Marx had contradicted himself. Moreover, juxtaposing to the schema contained in Volume Two, the observable process of capital accumulation, she concluded that Marx's theoretical formulations were falsified by the empirically observable data. Accumulation belies the accomplishment and sophistication of her polemic with Bernstein.

The Accumulation of Capital was not simply a text in economics, occupying an isolated position amongst her other works, as is sometimes argued. Its purpose was to locate the roots of the imperialist ethos which was gaining momentum in Europe in the early years of the century, in the internal structure of capital. To this end she had to falsify those economic theories which purported to

show that capital reproduction might take place indefinitely in a closed capitalist system. She wanted to prove that imperialism was the response of capital when its irrepressible drive towards expansion became frustrated by the limitations of the market. This fundamental antagonism between the impulse of capital towards expansion, and the finite nature of the market was, for Luxemburg, the most basic of the contradictions within the capital form. It served to underwrite her notion of capitalist collapse, which was the lynchpin of her political outlook. The urgent requirement that this fundamental item of belief should be defended from the assaults of Struve, Bulgakov and Tugan - Baronovski called forth her work and dictated its conclusions.

Luxemburg's mind was not cast in the positivist mould, although it resembled the positivist cast in its readiness to take recourse to the empirically observable in corroboration of a theoretical postulate, without benefit of mediation.

Lenin never fell into this trap. The Development of Capitalism in Russia was above all else a work of theory, in which he constructed conceptually a model of the social formation in the process of transformation from the feudal to the capitalist. His premises were drawn from Capital, but he elaborated certain concepts - the differentiation

of the peasantry, differential rent, the rise of factory production out of manufacture - which extended the scope and depth of Marx's work. Lenin did not impose the concepts which he had developed on the copious collection of data which he amassed. Rather he used the concepts to organise his empirical material - to render it intelligible. Only by proceeding in this fashion was he able to make sense of the complexities of a social formation in which the capitalist coexisted with the pre-capitalist.

In a period in which there was a tendency for Marxism to ossify into a rigid and doctrinaire system of dogma, Lenin's mind was unusual in its capacity for flexibility. A marked characteristic of Marxist orthodoxy was its inflexibility - partly a consequence of its vulnerability to revision and erosion. The schematic separation of the bourgeois and proletarian stages of revolution was an item of orthodoxy which bound Marxists hand and foot. The belief that bourgeois revolution was an essential precondition for proletarian revolution, and that the two were necessarily separated by a period of time, was an article of orthodoxy to which Lenin subscribed in 1905. It was a corollary to the received belief that the political maturity of the working class was contingent upon an advanced degree of economic development.

In 1905 only Trotsky had challenged the doctrine of the separation of bourgeois and proletarian revolutions. Lenin momentarily genuflected towards the possibility of 'permanent revolution', but maintained his orthodox position. Nevertheless, Lenin was torn between the orthodox timetable for revolution, and a recognition of the potential of the Russian masses for a spontaneous political initiative. The formula for a working class initiative in a bourgeois revolution expressed in Lenin's phrase 'the revolutionary - democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' was a method of resolving the tension in Lenin's mind. Preconceived formulæ did not rule Lenin's mental processes in the impervious and inflexible manner in which they dominated others. The change in the direction of his thought, of which evidence is to be found in his work of 1915, and which crystallised in The April Theses, is evidence of this. Moreover, in The State and Revolution, Lenin set the question of revolution on a new axis. According to the old orthodoxy, of which Lenin had been an adherent prior to 1915, the level of maturity attained by economic development circumscribed the agenda for revolution. In the new formulation, the question hinged upon the potential of the working class to seize and wield political power.

In his philosophical discourse, Lenin did not demonstrate those intellectual attributes which are evident elsewhere in his work. His economic enquiries bore the stamp of a

mind which was at ease with the subtleties of Marx's economic theory, and his political formulations were dialectical where those of other Second International Marxists were simply crude and doctrinaire. He had no inclination towards philosophical considerations, however, and he wrote in the genre only for political purposes. The only expressly philosophical text which he undertook was crudely constructed, repetitive and one dimensional. Moreover, the philosophical perspective which informed those of his works which bore on the question of class consciousness, was markedly mechanistic.

Lenin's formulation of the relation between party and the working class was misrepresented by certain of his contemporaries, and has been deformed further by certain of his intellectual biographers. In fact, his notion of party and class, distinct and yet connected by the closest possible ties, comes close to Gramsci's conception, which is most usually regarded as one of signal subtlety and sophistication.

The distinction which Lenin drew between the political awareness which the working class developed spontaneously in the course of its political experience, and class consciousness, which was a product of an intellectual activity in some sense scientific, was less subtle. It did not embrace the possibility, which Marx had posed

and which Luxemburg developed, of the working class evolving independently, a point of view antagonistic to its environment. Such a standpoint, for Lenin, could only be the product of theoretical practice, which Lenin conceived of as quite a different cognitive process from the spontaneous organisation of knowledge derived from experience.

The distinction which Lenin drew between scientific theory and spontaneously generated knowledge was characteristic of a positivist theory of knowledge which distinguished qualitatively between higher and lower forms. The sociology of knowledge implicit in Luxemburg's writings on the working class was a far more fluid conception. Whilst she accepted the requirement that the party must perform an educative and propagandist role, she also believed that in its daily confrontation with capital, the working class might assume independently, a standpoint entirely antagonistic to its environment.

Luxemburg's sociology of knowledge did not recognise the distinction which Lenin clearly drew between 'science' and that form of knowledge which is spontaneously generated. Her conception is elusive, and never systematically expressed. It is related to Marx's notion of alienation, and emphasised the active and subjective aspects of cognition. It was the product of a mind more attuned

than was Lenin's to philosophical nuance. It sufficed for Lenin that Marxism alone provided the key to an objective view of the economic and social world. For Luxemburg, in spite of her repeated and emphatic avowals of the scientific status of Marx's theory, the Marxist mode of thought was not the specialised form or scientific practice which it was for Lenin. It was a perspective on the world which the working class was capable of adopting.

Positivism included a belief that science, and social science, is a specialised form of cognition. Simultaneously it does not regard as problematical the relation between science and the objective of its enquiry. Lenin held to both of these philosophical postulates.

The present work has attempted to characterise the intellectual attributes which set Lenin and Luxemburg apart from the Marxists of the Second International by virtue of the fact that they afforded an insight into the methodological precepts and undercurrents in Marx's work. Under the influence of the dominant, positivist or empiricist mode of thought, Marx's use of abstraction, his conception of history, his perspective on the totality of social and economic relations, the relation between the thinking subject and the external environment, were all in some manner deformed in Second International Marxism.

Lenin and Luxemburg were possessed of a sharper appreciation of Marx's method of working and of the epistemological underpinnings of his thought than were their contemporaries. Their mode of thought was more closely in harmony with Marx's own. In their mode of thought, Lenin and Luxemburg escaped the intellectual straight-jacket of positivism which constrained other Marxists of the period. They were capable of greater subtlety and mental flexibility, their mental processes transcended the restrictions of direct and unilinear causality. They possessed the capacity for broad vision.

Throughout this work, the term 'positivism' has been employed rather loosely, to designate a mode of thought which is the antithesis of these qualities. A comment of Engels encapsulates the sense which the term positivism has been intended to convey. Receiving from Marx the draft for the abstract of the economic work which later emerged as Capital, Engels replied, "It is a very abstract abstract indeed...and I often have trouble in searching for the dialectical transitions, as all abstract reasoning has become very foreign to me".¹

¹ Letter, from Engels to Marx, April 9, 1858, MEC., p.110.

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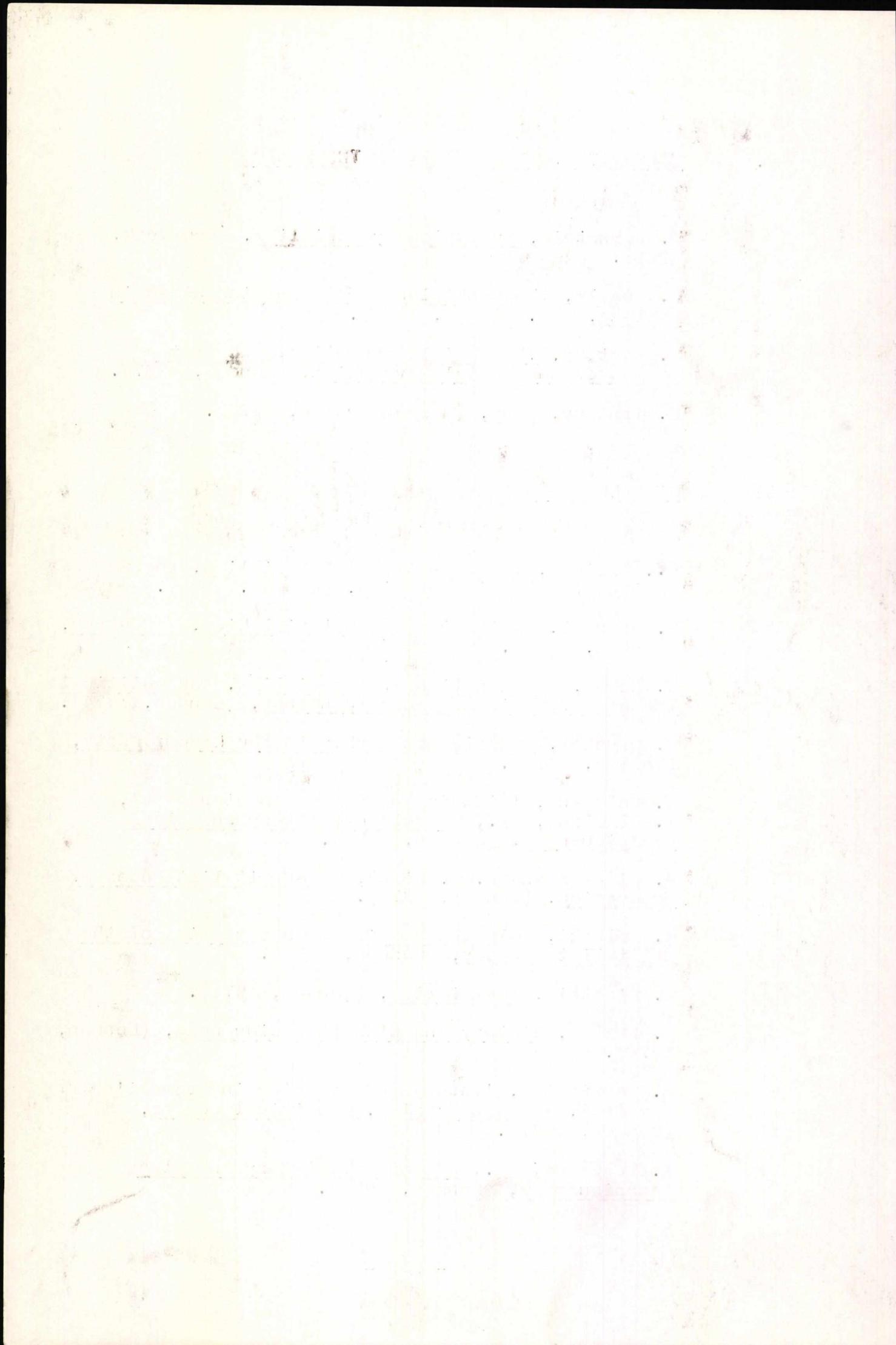
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