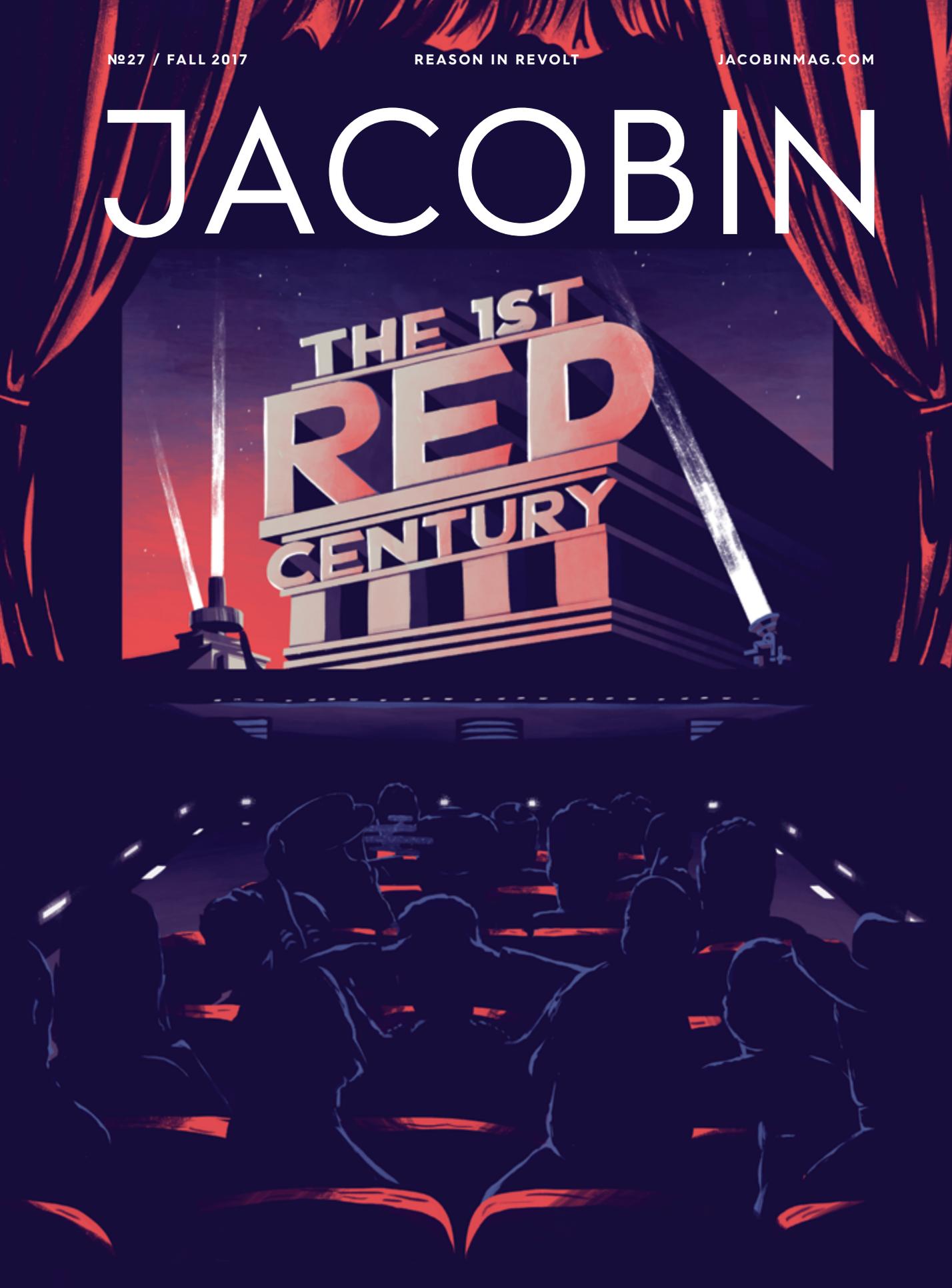


№27 / FALL 2017

REASON IN REVOLT

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JACOBIN



THE 1ST
RED
CENTURY



It is often said that “the germ of all Stalinism was in Bolshevism at its beginning.” Well, I have no objection. Only, Bolshevism also contained many other germs, a mass of other germs, and those who lived through the enthusiasm of the first years of the first victorious socialist revolution ought not to forget it. To judge the living man by the death germs which the autopsy reveals in the corpse — and which he may have carried in him since his birth — is that very sensible?

— Victor Serge, *From Lenin to Stalin*, 1937.

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THE FEW WHO WON

BHASKAR SUNKARA



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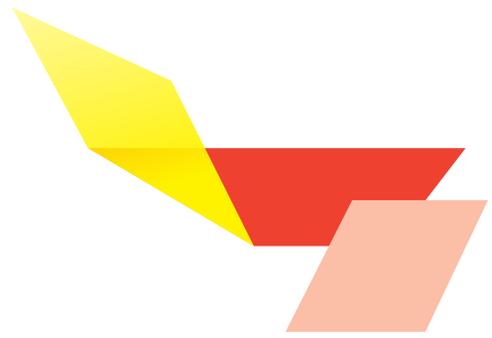
MEGAN ERICKSON



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OUR ROAD TO POWER

VIVEK CHIBBER



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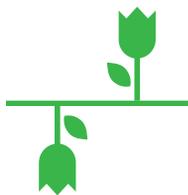


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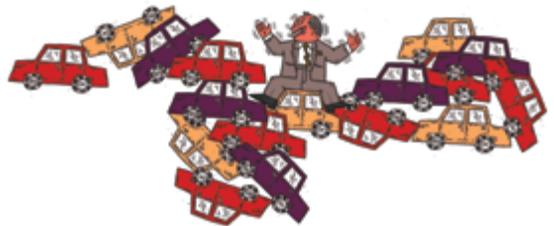
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FRONT MATTERS

TODAY IS THE FIRST DAY
OF THE REST OF YOUR MAGAZINE.



Socialism Won't Be Built in a Day

“I am convinced that there are only a few people in this hall who will not experience the great day.” August Bebel had plenty of swagger in 1891 — and he wasn’t alone. As he spoke, Rosa Luxemburg recounted, “a warm, electric stream of life, of idealism, of security in joyful action” swept through the crowd.

The Second International was just two years old and now, at the pivotal Erfurt Congress, the German Social Democrats — the largest socialist party in the world — were laying the groundwork for generations of working-class politics.

In the years that followed, socialists had plenty of cause for optimism. In election after election, labor and social-democratic parties saw their vote totals climb thanks to newly enfranchised workers. It seemed natural — both to terrified capitalists and ambitious trade unionists — that working-class political rights were translating into broader social emancipation.

Of course, history had other ideas. Most social democrats never lived to see their great day. New dynamics emerged that drew the movement close to the nation and class they once vowed to challenge. For those on its left wing, victory came in 1917 but proved to be a Pyrrhic one.

Now, a century later, the question is less whether any of us will live to see socialist triumph than if such dreams belong entirely in the past. We know that instead of great days, we need to think in terms of a “great epoch” of transformation. We also know the dangers of co-optation that face any patient political strategy. What we don’t know is whether anyone else is interested in our dreams.

The recent success of Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders, and the growing ranks of young socialists, could be signs of a surprising resurgence. Or they could just be an Indian summer.

Capitalism has proven more resilient to working-class challenge and more amenable to reform than any of our predecessors could’ve imagined. But the system isn’t meeting the needs of millions, and at its core, it’s still an economic order rooted in exploitation and coercion. As long as we live in a class society, there will be resistance to it. The unresolved question is whether we can take the small instances of everyday struggle and — rather than just celebrating them — aggregate them into a force capable of pushing beyond capitalism.

The challenges of doing so in the twenty-first century are daunting, and many on the Left are more willing to abandon than reimagine working-class politics.

But if I had to guess, I would say that our message is too simple not to find an audience: it’s not your fault. You’re working longer hours than ever, you’re doing whatever you can to survive, and yet you’re falling further and further behind. We don’t have a gospel of self-improvement or nativist fairy tales, but we have a set of villains — the small elite that benefit from your immiseration.

Class anger isn’t going out of style.

By itself, it isn’t politics either. Yet *Jacobin* was founded on the idea that a rich working-class movement can reemerge and that alternatives to capitalism can still be constructed. In 2017, just as much as in 1891 or 1917, we should have moral confidence about this goal — a world without exploitation or oppression. But there is something profoundly different between claiming that socialists can unexpectedly break the tide of history and the old assurances that socialism was the tide of history. ★

Letters

Did Kerensky Write a *What Happened?*

Kerensky was not some windbag or weakling. He spent the years 1905–17 defending the poor from the tsar’s oppression in court — a difficult and dangerous task that won him the love of the nation. It was often the case that the people he was defending couldn’t afford to pay. So he knew the faults of tsarism in great detail and knew what the people wanted instead. Given the mess left by Nicholas II, it is amazing that the Provisional Government survived a month, let alone eight.

— Stephen Kerensky, grandson of AF Kerensky

Cautious Creation

In “We Gave Greenpeace a Chance,” Angela Nagle urges us to set aside our “aesthetic aversion” to “Promethean modernity” and embrace the “ambitious technologies” and “confident economic transformation” that offer the “only way to save ... the natural world.”

This admonition might be more plausible if Nagle could bring herself to acknowledge that “Promethean modernity” has been a very mixed blessing. Promethean modernity has brought us suburbia, freeways, agribusiness, Big Pharma, the Great Leap Forward, the \$1.5 trillion Lockheed-Martin F-35 Lightning II fighter-bomber program, countless mind-numbing and spirit-debasing Hollywood and Bollywood blockbusters, and the destruction of much of Earth’s most beautiful landscapes and ecologically irreplaceable habitats, among many other disasters. It’s by no means certain that even democratic and socialist governments would wield “ambitious,” world-altering technologies with sufficient wisdom and restraint to avoid similarly horrific consequences. Adorno, whom Nagle quotes approvingly, would undoubtedly have offered some grave cautions on this score.

— George Scialabba, Cambridge, MA

The Internet Speaks

Because communication is at the heart of any good relationship.

We Want Answers Ja Rule May Have

I think these artists dropping all those hot new singles caused the planet to heat up if anything.

— Steve Fleet, Toronto, Canada

Yes, This Actually Happened

Social media ruined socialism.

— Ja Rule, New York, NY

He's Talking About Donald Duck, Don't Worry

UPHOLD
ANARCHO-DONALDISM

— Conor Mullins, Essex, United Kingdom

This Is Why We're Anti-Work

Have bad mood after work? — read *Jacobin* magazine, cause you are pure joke

— Arsen Danylyuk, Tartu, Estonia

Love in the Time of Anti-Communism

The couple that red baits together, stays together.

— Joe Vaccaro, Saint Paul, MN

This Word Essentially Has No Meaning Anymore

Jacobin is essentially a neo-liberal.

— Richard Elster, Los Angeles, CA

This Is Too Pop Front Even for Us

Let the Trotskyites heckle, their derision is not felt! They can have their Revolution, we have Roosevelt!

— Susan Carr, Chicago, IL

Jacobin: "The Popular Front Didn't Work"

Reader: "Trotskyism however proved to be a stunning success"

— Alex Hogan, New York, NY

Modi Got Shooters Everywhere

Why does Jacobin hate yoga?
Oh, I do so hope we get treated to a 1,000 word essay on the harm caused by white people with dreadlocks next cuz that is going to get the sociopaths elites out of power for sure.

— Isaac Bretz, State College, PA

No, Somos Titoistas

Seguro, no serán trotskistas — social demócratas vestidos de marxistas?

— Oskar Calvo, Madrid, Spain

This Sounds Like a Bad Idea

Under socialism all water will be cold, frothy beer.

— Kyle Bigley, New York, NY

You Solely Overestimated Us

As bad as Steve Bannon is, I'm disappointed Jacobin would stoop to fat shaming anybody.

— Sam Ginty, Kassala, Sudan

Richard Florida

So he's the one to blame for all those annoying people using "creative" as a noun.

— Tara Banks, The Internet

Standardize English!

Nationalize? Surely you mean nationalise?

— Tom Barker, Liverpool, UK

Finally, Someone Gets It

Thank you Jacobin Magazine. I would feel utterly lost in a mad world without you <3 <3 <3.

— Susie Seabrook, London, UK



FRONT MATTERS
FRIENDS AND FOES

BY CONNOR KILPATRICK
ADANER USMANI

The New Communists

**It's 2017. Time to stop worrying
about the questions of 1917.**



Nothing catches the eye like gold set against red. And in the great war of the twentieth century, the color scheme was on both sides of the divide — the Soviet hammer and sickle, McDonald's golden arches.

At its peak, some variation of the USSR's flag flew over 20 percent of the Earth's habitable landmass. But while McDonald's has now spread to over 120 countries, today only three of the four ruling Communist parties left fly the hammer and sickle. Of the five nations that claim Marxism-Leninism, the hammer and sickle appears on the state flags of none. Once the symbol of the struggle for a better world, today the hammer and sickle is a sign of little more than single-party sclerosis.



In effect, only two kinds of Communist Parties are left standing: Parties of Atrophy – who can boast large memberships but which have little to offer their supporters – and Parties of Marginality – who have entirely lost any substantial connection to workers.

Yet that very icon was forged in the kind of populist fires that have eluded it for decades. In 1918, the Bolsheviks were looking for a new flag for their young state. They knew that they had to communicate the weight of their achievement — the first workers’ state in history. Just as the French Revolution’s tricolor set the standard for the republics of the nineteenth century, Soviet iconography, they believed, should set the standard for the coming proletarian states. So Lenin and Anatoly Lunacharsky, the commissar of education, held a design contest to take in entries from all across the republic.

The winning entry borrowed the industrial imagery (the hammer) so celebrated in British, French, and German labor and social-democratic parties, but made a major concession (the sickle) to the three-quarters of Russians that were still peasant farmers. After all, the Bolsheviks were European social democrats, but their genius lay in their readiness to adapt doctrine to experience — to mold European Marxism to tsarist Russia.

In other words, in a country that didn’t neatly fit their understanding of the world, they made adjustments to their model.

Today, one hundred years later, the world has turned. Nowhere do the political tasks today look anything like those the Bolsheviks confronted in 1918. In the West at least, the agrarian question has been answered — by capitalism. The Bolsheviks inherited a Europe convulsed by murderous interimperial war; we live in the most peaceful period in recorded history.

The trade union movement that undergirded both the social-democratic and Western Communist parties has all but disappeared. Even the hammers have begun to look as antiquated as the sickles. Yet on the socialist left, we have hardly sundered our ties to the Soviet example. Leading academics convene conferences to debate “The Idea of Communism,” or publish books on “the resurgence of the communist idea,” or end their histories of October 1917 with a call to keep trying.

Lest we forget, most of us live in advanced capitalist societies ruled by sturdy, capacious states. In 1917, the tsarist regime had lost two million men to war; the rest returned to a country less developed than Angola, Bangladesh, or postwar Iraq today. No matter how many freshmen come to your September screening of

October, today the probability of such a revolution is infinitesimally small. And yet, the sharpest way to pillory a lefty is still to call her a reformist.

How has it come to this? To observe that communism is obsolete is not to argue that it never traveled well. France and Italy both had thriving, powerful Communist Parties with working-class social bases up through the 1980s. Membership in the Italian party peaked at over two million in 1947; it received its highest share of the vote (34.4 percent) in 1976. To Europeans who lived through the nightmares of fascism, the hammer and sickle stood for organized and effective resistance. And soon after the war, after their capitalist classes were discredited for either explicit or tacit support of fascism, those hammers and sickles were hoisted by mass workers’ parties who spent the following decades winning sweeping reforms. In their struggles against employers, those trade unionists saw the same noble cause of antifascism.

Examples abound elsewhere, too. In South Africa, the hammer and sickle flew at the head of a decades-long fight against another reactionary, racist power. In Brazil, the Communist Party is the oldest active political party, and built its legitimacy in the

struggle against a regime that took power after the US-backed 1964 coup d'état. In parts of India, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) weakened a venal landed elite and won much-prized gains for workers and peasants.

But today, the Italian Communist Party is no more. One wing has become the Tony Blair-inspired Democratic Party; the other the Communist Refoundation Party, which can boast of no more than 17,000 members. In France, the Communist Party (now at 130,000 members) was a mere junior partner in the coalition behind Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who achieved the highest voting share for a radical left candidate in France since 1969, but did so under his own banner — La France Insoumise, a populist left formation that had little use for Soviet iconography. By that point, the French Communists themselves had already removed the hammer and sickle from membership cards.

In South Africa, the South African Communist Party is an appendage of the ruling African National Congress — a coalition which has done little to transform the realities that today make South Africa the planet's most unequal nation. The Brazilian Communist Party is impotent — in the lower house of the National Congress, it has only 11 of 513 seats. In India, the CPI-M is today not much more than a regional patronage machine.

In effect, only two kinds of Communist Parties are left standing: Parties of Atrophy — who can boast large memberships but which have little to offer their supporters — and Parties of Marginality — who have

entirely lost any substantial connection to workers, if they ever had one. In some ways, they mirror the two tendencies of the prewar US Communist Party. On the one hand, there was the extreme sectarianism of the Third Period (the late 1920s to early 1930s), in which the Comintern took aim against socialist parties. On the other, the worst accommodationism of the Popular Front and war years, in which the party supported no-strike pledges, uncritically hailed Roosevelt's New Deal, and even briefly dissolved itself in 1944. CPUSA went so far as to denounce A. Philip Randolph for threatening the first March on Washington in 1941 in an attempt to desegregate war industries — quite a reversal for a party that had demanded “self-determination for the Black Belt” just a few years earlier. But these two extremes — ultra-left marginalism or defanged accommodation — only underline Communism's deep malaise.



The far left today embraces the Soviet obsession like a vampire hunter wields garlic. The problem is that garlic repels far more than just monsters — it makes you stink.

In fact, the problem goes far beyond parties that never broke with Moscow — it's anyone who insists on looking at the world through October's eyes. Counterfactuals have become the stuff of lifelong sectarian debates for the socialist left: “if only Germany had gone the right way, if only Lenin had lived, if only Stalin had been isolated, if only, if only...” In almost every instance of mass revolt they find the Bolshevik's October — Germany in 1918–20, France in 1968, Egypt in 2011, and everything in between — revolutions made mere “revolutionary rehearsals” by conniving bureaucrats or naive cadre.

Instead of seeing the Russian Revolution as a tragic story of impossible choices in the worst possible conditions, we fantasize about a time in which states could be sundered and built from the ground up by revolutionary will. A time in which small groups of disciplined activists and intellectuals could remake the world: “Next time, we'll be ready — we'll make sure we make *the right* decisions!”

Whether or not twentieth-century communism was fated to fail, we now live in a new era. The question of socialism in the twentieth century was unavoidably the Russian Revolution. Today, it is a question which interests professional historians and the far left.



The world's working classes have moved on. And yet the far left today embraces the Soviet obsession like a vampire hunter wields garlic. The problem is that garlic repels far more than just monsters — it makes you stink.

At its worst, in this crowd, isolation is proof of revolutionary virtue, rather than political calamity. Particularly in a country like ours, the politics of “Yay revolution! Boo reform!” has led to a rhetorical arms race in which the most virtuous, maximalist positions are the most progressive. That these positions are untethered not only from a mass social base but also any plausible political strategy becomes just more proof of their purity: “Try and co-opt *this*, you Menshevik!” They are symptoms of a Left that looks *inwards* for validation — one with a battle plan and plenty of generals but no army.

Despite what liberals might say, it's not an inability to atone for communism's body count which haunts the socialist left today — it's our inability to move on from these dreams of apocalyptic rupture; fantasies of new, unfathomable worlds that will somehow spring up unencumbered by the shells of the old one.

The lessons of social democracy's rightward trajectory have been overlearned to the point of paralysis.

There's nothing wrong with horizons — we need them. But the basic challenge of left-wing politics is to train our eyes on horizons that others can see.

As Ralph Miliband pointed out at the end of his life, Western European Communist Parties were *also* parties of reform. They differed from social-democratic parties “in terms of their sharper and more radical programmes of reform, and their willingness to resort to extra-parliamentary agitation and action.” The uncomfortable truth for both liberals and die-hard revolutionaries is that whenever and wherever Western Communist parties were strongest, it was because they were the most effective *reformers*, not revolutionaries. They won when they bested the social democrats at their own stated aims. It was not starry-eyed dreaming but everyday material victories that led 1.5 million people to attend Italian Communist Party leader Enrico Berlinguer's 1984 funeral. The flipside of this fact is that in the pre-World War II period, European Communism was feeble and ineffective — with the telling exception of the French Communist Party during the Popular Front and the Spanish one during the Civil War.

The unprecedented success of Bernie Sanders's run and his enduring popularity should have been a wake-up call to much of Leftworld: the country is ready for working-class politics, and even for the s-word, as long as we talk about it in everyday, tangible terms.

And yet, much of the radical left learned the opposite lesson from 2016. We have been staking out increasingly wilder terrain, moving the goalposts well beyond what most of the last century's socialists or communists thought possible. Of course, there's nothing wrong with horizons — we need them. But the basic challenge of left-wing politics is to train our eyes on horizons that others can see. Social democracy failed not because it traded utopianism for reform but because it swore off horizons entirely, and began to look inwards, upon its own parties and parliaments. In rhetoric, the radical left is different; but in practice, the mistake is similar: victory is defined as whatever makes the already-initiated tick. Ultra-leftism and reformism are united by their scorn for mass action.

If we are to learn something from October, let it not be from a reading group on Kronstadt. As Lukács said, Lenin's genius was to demand “the concrete analysis of the concrete situation.” Today, the relevant Lenin is not Lenin the indefatigable revolutionary, but Lenin the disconsolate strategist — the man who in 1920 chastised Communists “to *convince* the backward elements, to work *among* them, and not to *fence themselves off* from them with artificial and childishly ‘Left’ slogans.”

One has to ask what such a man would think of socialists' century-long obsession over the revolution he helped make. Four years before storming the Winter Palace, Lenin was grieving over the sad state of affairs in Russia. And he chose a peculiar example to highlight his own country's backwardness — the New York Public Library. In it, Lenin saw a

tangible, achievable example of what a modern, democratic society could deliver — not a hazy promise of a better world on the other side of disaster.

[T]hey see to it that even children can make use of the rich collections; that readers can read publicly owned books at home; they regard as the pride and glory of a public library, not the number of rarities it contains, the number of sixteenth-century editions or tenth-century manuscripts, but the extent to which books are distributed among the people, the number of new readers enrolled, the speed with which the demand for any book is met, the number of books issued

to be read at home, the number of children attracted to reading and to the use of the library....

Such is the way things are done in New York. And in Russia?

Today, it's time for us to stop worrying about old answers to old questions and start worrying about the ones working people are asking. For the Bolsheviks, that meant "Peace, Land, and Bread!" For us, the answers will be different. "Medicare for All!" is a good start. So is "Green Jobs for All!" Each of these strikes at the core of the socialist dream — a radically more equal distribution of work,

wealth, and leisure. These are horizons everyone can see — and most desperately want to reach.

But whatever the answers are, finding them is the only hope we have of winning. A radical must plant one foot firmly in the world as it is and the other in the world as she knows it could one day be. With the rise of Sanders and Corbyn, it's clear that even in the heart of global capital, tens of millions of people are dead set on changing the world.

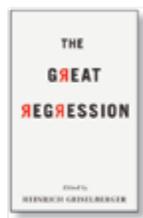
Everyone can see it. Everyone can feel it. Everyone, that is, who's not looking for October. ★

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Che, My Brother

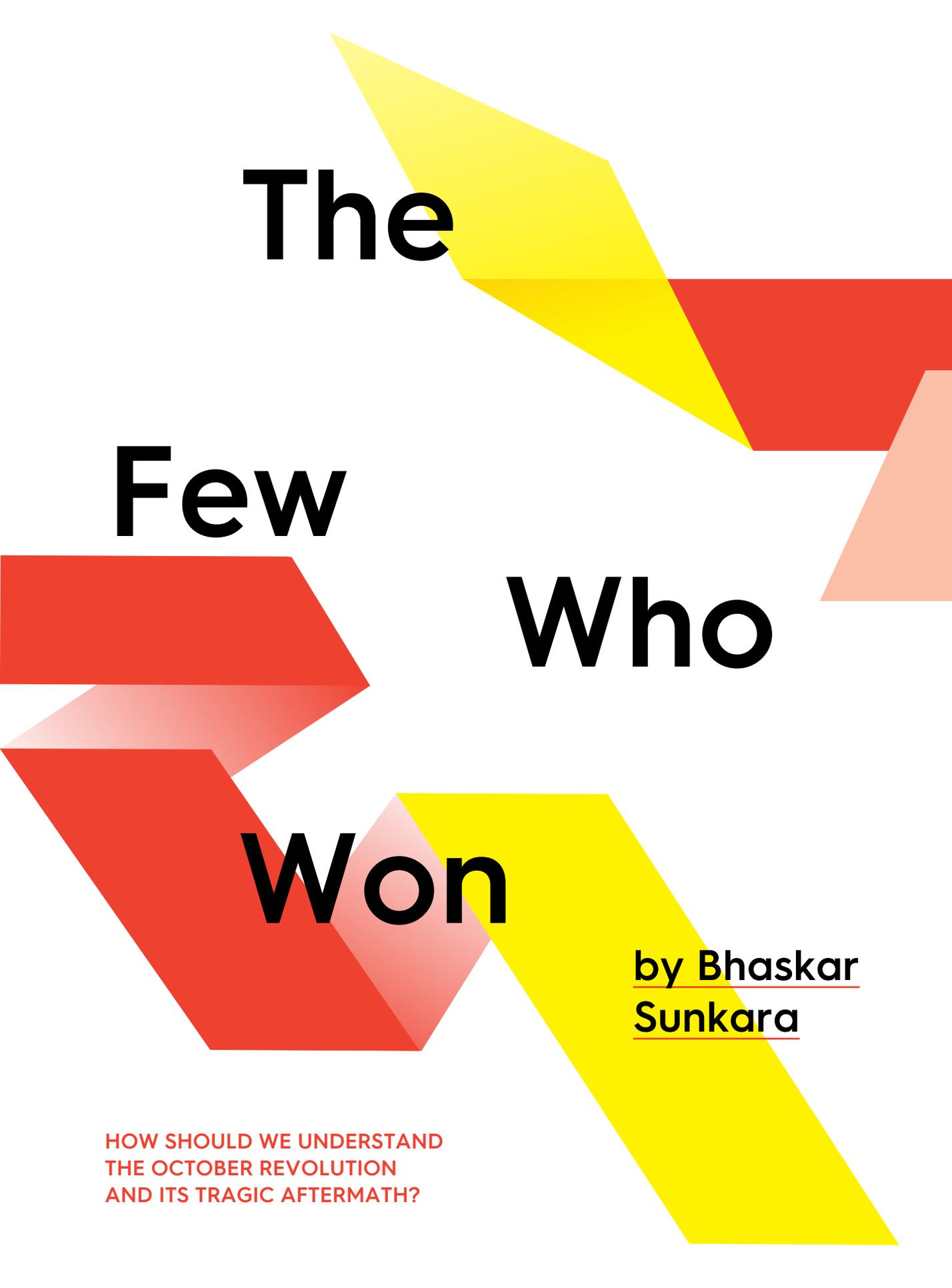
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"Page-turner" — The New Yorker



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The home of independent thinking



The Few Who Won

by Bhaskar
Sunkara

HOW SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND
THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION
AND ITS TRAGIC AFTERMATH?

A devout Polish Catholic, Felix Dzerzhinsky was once asked why he was sure there was a God. “God is in the heart,” the teenager replied. “If I ever come to the conclusion that there is no God, I would put a bullet in my head.”

A few years later, he realized just how alone humanity was. But instead of a bullet, he found a new faith, vowing “to fight against evil to the last breath” as a revolutionary socialist. By age forty, he was clad in black leather, designing a bloody terror as head of the young Soviet Union’s secret police.

This story of zealotry fits with the popular image of Bolshevism — a conspiratorial sect, singular in purpose. By virtue of their ruthlessness, they would take advantage of 1917’s democratic upheavals, perverting the noble February Revolution into the bloody excesses of October. That Stalinism emerged from its womb is no surprise — the extremism of men like Dzerzhinsky, confident the utopia they were building was worth any cost, made it all but certain.

The narrative is neat, and seemingly vindicated by history. The system that emerged out of the October Revolution was a moral catastrophe. But more than that, it was a tragedy — and tragedies don’t need villains.

Take Dzerzhinsky’s socialism. It was rooted in the humanist idea that the “present hellish life with its wolfish exploitation, oppression, and violence” could give way to an order “based on harmony, a full life embracing society as a whole.” The future executioner suffered for his beliefs — eleven out of twenty years underground spent in prison or exile — “in the torments of loneliness, longing for the world and for life.”

Poor, tortured, imprisoned, and martyred, the revolutionaries of Russia seemed destined to meet the same fate as radicals elsewhere in Europe. Only they didn’t. After half decade in solitary confinement, enduring beatings that permanently disfigured his jaw, Dzerzhinsky’s last letter from prison was resolute: “At the moment I am dozing, like a bear in his winter den; all that remains is the thought that spring will come and I will cease to suck my paw and all the strength that still remains in my body and soul will manifest itself. Live I will!”

Here’s what happens when noble, determined people win — and find themselves in an unwinnable situation.

THE BOLSHEVIKS BEFORE BOLSHEVISM



IN THE COLD WAR, both sides painted Vladimir Lenin and his party as special — unique in their brutality or their model for revolution. But despite being an underground movement, it's striking just how ordinary they were. Lenin saw himself as an orthodox Marxist, trying to adapt the German Social Democratic Party's (SPD) plan to a largely rural and peasant country with a weak civil society and mass illiteracy.

The supposed proto-totalitarian smoking gun, Lenin's 1902 pamphlet *What Is to Be Done?*, does have unusual elements. Lenin calls for professional organizers capable of eluding police and places special emphasis on the role of print propaganda, for instance. But it wasn't a blueprint for a radically different party; rather, these were tactics needed for a movement barred from the legal organizing and parliamentary work pursued by its counterparts elsewhere. Once tsarism was overthrown, backward Russia and its small working class could develop along Western lines and push the struggle further.

Siding with Karl Kautsky, Lenin took aim at Eduard Bernstein and others on the SPD's right wing for trying to change "a party of social revolution into a democratic party of social reforms." To be a revolutionary, for Lenin, meant smashing the capitalist state — it was a politics of rupture.

But his project, unlike the “Blanquists” he also denounced, was about cohering a workers’ movement and placing it at the center of political struggle, not creating a hardened core of putschists. For Lenin the problem wasn’t that workers weren’t flocking to the vanguard party, but that socialists were underestimating workers. His goal, following the German example, was a merger of the two currents — a militant socialist workers’ movement.

Then perhaps if not by design, the Bolsheviks were forced by repression to adopt a military-like structure that they would take into power. This claim, too, is doubtful. Bolshevik organs even functioned with transparency and pluralism few organizations in much rosier conditions today can match.

Take the “economists,” the grouping Lenin criticized so thoroughly in *What Is to Be Done?* He thought that they, like every other faction, deserved “to demand the opportunity to express and advocate views.” Lenin was hardly a genial interlocutor — like Marx, he was a fan of personal invective. Still, the leader had to deal with not getting his way. Between 1912 and 1914, forty-seven of his articles were refused by *Pravda*, the “party paper.”

Dissent cut through Russian social democracy; no one’s marching orders were followed without debate. It wasn’t just Bolshevik, Menshevik, and Socialist Revolutionary (SR), but dozens of shades of opinions among the Bolsheviks themselves.

On important political issues, however, the main wings of Russian social democracy were close. When the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks split in 1903, it was over small points of emphasis, not because of Lenin’s supposed call for a professional vanguard party. When the 1905 Revolution arrived, all parts of the movement fought side by side. Most Mensheviks, like most Bolsheviks, opposed the Great War, a clarity matched by few socialists elsewhere in Europe. In the lead-up to February 1917, they differed on how to view the liberal bourgeoisie, but agreed that the immediate task of Russian social democracy was overthrowing autocracy, not socialist revolution. Only in this period did it become obvious what set the Bolsheviks apart.

LENIN DIDN’T LEAVE SOCIAL DEMOCRACY, it left him. When he first got news that the SPD had voted for war credits on August 4, 1914, he thought it was capitalist propaganda.

His faith was misplaced. Only fourteen of ninety-two German socialist deputies opposed the decision. Following parliamentary norms, they voted with the majority as a bloc. An antiwar politician, Hugo Haase, was made to read the party’s pro-war statement in the Reichstag. Socialists in the French Chamber of Deputies followed suit the same day.

Kautsky wasn’t a parliamentarian, but he was present at the debate. He suggested abstaining, but agreed that Germany was waging a defensive struggle against an eastern threat. Within a year, he changed his tune and vigorously denounced the SPD’s pro-war leadership and the German state, but the damage was done. The longstanding social-democratic idea, affirmed by the Second International in congress after congress, was that the growing power of the working class would maintain peace “by resolute intervention.” If war did come to pass, the parties would not only oppose it, they would use the “crisis created by the war to rouse the masses and thereby to hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule.”

That was the theory — in reality, social democracy’s flagship not only voted for war, but promoted *Burgfriedenspolitik*, a policy of class peace to help it along. Sixteen million people died in the conflict.

For more than a century, the Leninist narrative was that Kautsky had been an ideal Marxist until almost the outbreak of World War I. It was his stance on war in 1914 and his opposition to the October Revolution in 1917 that transformed him from revered “Pope of Marxism” to a “great renegade.”

In his 1939 obituary for the German socialist, Trotsky sounds like a scorned lover: “We remember Kautsky as our former teacher to whom we once owed a good deal, but who separated himself from the proletarian revolution and from whom, consequently, we had to separate ourselves.”

Kautsky’s position on the war was indeed shocking. Within social democracy, a right-wing tendency had been growing among trade union leaders and parliamentarians who saw not just their own power, but that of the class they represented, as bound up more with the stability and prosperity of their respective nations than with vague notions of proletarian internationalism. But those were foes against whom Kautsky had waged intellectual and political battle for years.

“Modern society is ripe for revolution; and the bourgeoisie is not in a position to survive any insurrection.” Such a revolution would be won by “a well-disciplined minority, energetic and conscious of the goal.” Sounds like Lenin, but that was actually Kautsky.

There was, however, a growing gap between Kautsky’s ideas and those of his Russian admirers. He had developed a conception of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” that differed from Lenin and Trotsky’s. Kautsky might have used language similar to theirs in the 1880s, just a decade removed from the Paris Commune and with the SPD still underground. But his thought subsequently evolved. He believed workers would win power through free elections, extend political and civil liberties, and radically reform, not smash, the existing state.

Kautsky was skeptical that direct democracy could operate at scale. Though never equating nationalization with socialism, neither did he advocate a council-based “soviet democracy.” He saw overcoming capitalism as a struggle that required political democracy and a long battle for popular support. Well before publishing *The Road to Power* and other late works praised by the Bolsheviks, he had developed ideas distinct from both social democracy’s reformist right and its revolutionary left.

But Lenin still looked to the Paris Commune of 1871 and the great revolutions of 1848 and 1789. This was the spirit that spawned the communist movement.

In his 1939 obituary for Karl Kautsky, Trotsky sounds like a scorned lover.



TO THE FINLAND STATION

**1917 saw Trotsky's
vision vindicated – but
with one key exception:
the international
revolution didn't come.**

THE 1905 REVOLUTION SHOWED LENIN to be in step with his era. The “great dress rehearsal” came close to toppling tsarism and gave birth to the soviet.

Russia at that time was already pulsing with change. Rapid economic growth and social advance had taken place in the empire in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Industrial production doubled in the 1890s alone. Horses and carts and dusty tracks began to give way to vast railroads and, for a time, Russia even led the world in oil production.

But development was highly uneven. St. Petersburg's modern factories told little of life in an empire where, even in its European regions, only one in nine people lived in cities. Whatever Russia's progress in absolute terms, it was falling ever further behind Western Europe.

In the countryside, agricultural development advanced at an even more glacial pace, failing to keep up with huge population growth. Land-hungry peasants pushed westward from their traditional communes into the steppes. Rural poverty was still endemic. With economic stagnation in the countryside and growing but patchy capitalist industry in a few cities, generalized scarcity went along with a small but highly politicized working class.

January 1905 caught the Bolsheviks by surprise. The timing and shape of the revolt was not what they expected. In October, St. Petersburg workers established an organ to coordinate their actions. Factory delegates formed a soviet (council) in the city. The body soon became a kind of workers' parliament, with representation from a range of trade unions and committees. It was essentially a functioning local government.

Trotsky, not Lenin, shined brightest in 1905. Neither Menshevik nor Bolshevik, but respected in both camps, he immediately grasped the revolution's significance. Within the St. Petersburg Soviet's brief life, the twenty-six year old delegate emerged as an unparalleled orator and thinker. By the end of November, he was even elected its chair.

The situation by that point was untenable. As feared, Nicholas soon crushed the revolution and reneged on concessions promised to liberal forces. By April 1906, 14,000 people had been executed and 75,000 imprisoned.

But the revolutionaries now had a taste of real power. The transformation of Russian social democracy was stunning. Immediately before the 1905 Revolution, the Bolsheviks had just 8,400 members. By the following spring, they could count 34,000 among them. The Mensheviks also drew thousands to their ranks.

The revolutionary movement finally had something Lenin had been aspiring to for years — a mass base of workers. Attempts to mend the divide between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks would fail, but all had a sense that they were in a new era and that the tsar would soon fall.

But none came as close as Trotsky to guessing what would happen next. Grasping 1905's implications, Trotsky refined a novel theory of "permanent revolution." Marxists had traditionally thought that revolution would happen in stages. The first of these would be "bourgeois-democratic": economically, this stage would pave the way for peasant land reform and further urban industrialization; politically, it would create a capitalist republic with freedom of speech and assembly. That would then allow social democrats to

patiently organize for a second, socialist revolution. The Bolsheviks and Mensheviks agreed on this — they just argued over the role liberal capitalists would play. Mensheviks thought they would be at the heart of a bourgeois-democratic revolution, while Lenin thought workers could reconcile their interests with those of peasants and drive the process themselves.

Trotsky foresaw a different scenario. Instead of a bourgeois democratic revolution, the peasants would defeat the gentry in the countryside and the workers would conquer capitalists in the city. This "proletarian-socialist" revolution would merge democratic and socialist tasks into one. In underdeveloped Russia, however, this would create a situation of flux, with exploiting classes defeated but no material basis for large-scale socialist construction. As a result, the sequence would have to be "furthered by an international revolutionary process."

Nineteen seventeen saw Trotsky's vision vindicated — but with one key exception: the international revolution didn't come.

THE TWO REVOLUTIONS

TWO YEARS INTO THE GREAT WAR, three million Russians were dead, the empire's economy was in ruins, yet the army pushed ahead with futile new offensives. In February 1917, the stalemate was broken from within.

As in 1905, St. Petersburg (now Petrograd) and its working class led the upsurge. On International Women's Day, February 23, women textile workers began a strike which spread across the city. By day's end, 90,000 workers were involved; by the next day, 200,000. A similar situation developed in Moscow, where workers protested against skyrocketing inflation and bread shortages. Nicholas II refused concessions until he was forced to abdicate on March 1. The Romanov dynasty that had endured for three centuries was swept away in a week.

Its fall was almost universally celebrated. What to do next was less clear. The Bolsheviks' doctrinal dispute with the Mensheviks over how to relate to the liberal bourgeoisie would prove important here. Though the Bolsheviks agreed that the time wasn't ripe for socialism, they wanted workers and peasants to take power and carry out the revolution's democratic tasks. But most workers were instead drawn to the Menshevik call to simply revive the soviets; these would assert the interests of the oppressed, but not capture state power themselves.

Liberals established a Provisional Committee to fill the void, but it had little social base. On March 1, the day of the tsar's flight, soviet and liberal leaders came to an agreement: a new Provisional Government would form and agree to a wide range of reforms. Russia would have full civil liberties, with political prisoners released and the police and state apparatus transformed.

Important questions about the war, land reform, and elections remained unresolved, but the February Revolution was among the most sweeping the world had ever seen.

But a tense situation of "dual power" quickly emerged. Sovereign authority could now be claimed by the worker and soldier soviets and by the Provisional Government. Moderate socialists struggled to bridge the gap, believing they had to keep the "progressive bourgeoisie" within the February consensus.

They were right. Materially, Russia wasn't ripe for socialism. But those finally released from tyranny weren't

going to wait patiently for Marxist schema to mature. Freed from generations of oppression, workers seized factories and peasants divided up estates. Popular committees sprang up across the country: rank-and-file soldier committees resisted their officers and peasant organizations oversaw unsanctioned land expropriations. Authority in all its forms was questioned: the aristocracy was gone, but for a supposed "bourgeois revolution," the bourgeoisie was reeling.

Radicals didn't drive the change, though they benefited from it. In February, there were 24,000 Bolsheviks; within months they became a mass organization ten times that size.

For now, however, the democratically elected soviets were still dominated by Menshevik and SR forces. And meanwhile, the dynamic between those bodies and the Provisional Government was frustrated by the latter's lack of legitimacy. It's not hard to understand why — Prince Georgy Lvov, a link to the old regime, was the nominal head of state and the Kadets and Octobrists that ran the government were terrified by the revolution that brought them to power. Liberals could pass decrees and try to restore order and continue the war effort, but their wishes simply weren't carried out.

On March 1, the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies published its famous Order Number One. It declared that military orders from the Provisional Government were to be carried out "except those which run counter to the orders and decrees issued by the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies." With Order Number One, the soviet demanded a key component of sovereignty, yet refused to actually make itself the functioning authority in the country.

Moderate socialists still looked to the Provisional Government, which had been reconstituted to include more left-wing forces, including Alexander Kerensky, himself an SR. The hope was that this alliance would calm the country and create an environment in which socialists could press democratic demands and find a route to end the war. For now the fighting would continue, but was to be strictly "defensive and without annexations."

The Bolsheviks themselves were split on how to relate to the government. Returning from Siberian exile in March,

Lev Kamenev and Joseph Stalin saw the new republic as one that would stand for years, if not decades, and oriented the Bolsheviks along that time horizon.

Lenin, still in exile, was shocked by his party's complacency. The day after his arrival at Finland Station he presented his April Theses, where he reaffirmed an uncompromising antiwar posture and essentially embraced Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. Like Trotsky, Lenin thought that rather than let the revolution consolidate into a parliamentary republic, socialists should instead push it forward and build "a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers', and Peasants' Deputies." This wasn't empty rhetoric: the soviets already had more popular legitimacy than the Provisional Government.

Against the tamer position of Kamenev and Stalin, Lenin said "No support for the Provisional Government; the utter falsity of all its promises should be made clear." The die was cast — there would be another revolution in 1917.

Trotsky was also in exile when the February Revolution broke out, rousing the "workers and peasants of the Bronx" an ocean away. After a perilous return home, conditions were set for him and his followers to eventually join the Bolsheviks and play a pivotal role in the events to come.

The reception to Lenin's April Theses among many Bolsheviks was frosty at first, but it found some popular support. Lenin also had an ally in the young Nikolai Bukharin, then on the left of the party. Lenin's return and radical line elevated his stature.

The party was still split in this period: there were those like Lenin and Bukharin who looked to insurrection and those with a more moderate perspective — like Kamenev, Alexei Rykov, Viktor Nogin (who had long wanted to reunite with the Mensheviks), and Gregory Zinoviev. The latter wanted to replace the Provisional Government, but only with a broad coalition of socialist parties.

Lenin also didn't want a premature uprising that would leave the Bolsheviks isolated and unable to last in power like the Communards of Paris. As late as June, he would stress that: "Even in the soviets of both capitals, not to speak now of the others, we are an insignificant minority ... the majority of the masses are wavering but still believe the SRs and Mensheviks."

But the party's radical appeals were taking hold — tens of thousands of workers and soldiers joined. Some, inspired by slogans like "All Power to the Soviets," launched spontaneous armed demonstrations in Petrograd against the Provisional Government in July. A crackdown followed — Trotsky was imprisoned for a time, Lenin fled, publications were banned, and the death penalty was reintroduced for soldiers. With

the blessing of the Menshevik-SR majority, Kerensky's Provisional Government claimed more power for itself.

During his two months hiding in Finland, Lenin finished *The State and Revolution*. His argument with reformists was premised on a simple point: "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the state machinery and wield it for its own purposes." Like Marx and Engels, he saw the state as a tool of class oppression. A tiny minority used it to rule over a great majority. The state was, unsurprisingly, bloody and repressive. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat and its allies, by contrast, it would be the great majority repressing a tiny minority. There would be some violence, then, but by comparison it would be minimal.

"We are not Utopians," Lenin writes, "we do not 'dream' of dispensing at once with all administration, with all subordination." But as socialism triumphed, the need for a repressive apparatus would dissipate and the state would wither away. Many have portrayed *The State and Revolution* as a false flag — a libertarian socialist document from the father of socialist authoritarianism. But it seems to have been a genuine indicator of his political worldview. It was the simplicity with which Lenin made his case that prefigured the problems Bolshevism would face once in power.

In August, it was the Right's turn at revolt. General Kornilov, sensing the instability of the Provisional Government, tried to restore order by way of a coup. With no one else to call on for help, Kerensky appealed to the Petrograd Soviet. It easily beat back Kornilov, with the Bolsheviks playing a decisive role. The party's prestige was at a high and Kerensky was forced to release its captured leaders. In late September, Trotsky once again became chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, now under the control of a Bolshevik majority. What was recently a small, radical party could now claim popular legitimacy. The stage was set for the October Revolution.

Yet before it could transpire, the Mensheviks and SRs had one last chance. The mood in the country had swung even further left. It was clear the Provisional Government had no independent means of defense in a country that now had six hundred radicalized soviets. Among the Mensheviks, steadily hemorrhaging support to the Bolsheviks, a left wing under Julius Martov was gaining strength. Martov was resolutely antiwar and in favor of more sweeping reforms than the Provisional Government could offer. His position was nearly indistinguishable from that of the moderate Bolsheviks.

The Mensheviks and SRs could have stepped in and taken power as part of a broad front of socialist parties to create a constituent assembly and a framework for reforms.



The Bolsheviks could have formed a loyal opposition to such a government, or even directly joined it, as Kamenev and Zinoviev wanted. It was a moot point — the Mensheviks and SRs clung to the sinking Provisional Government, and even if they hadn't, the parties were divided on the war. Lenin and Trotsky's insurrection seemed like the only way.

With the Petrograd Soviet now under their control, Lenin finally convinced the Bolshevik Central Committee of that course. The "single greatest event in human history," as socialists called it for decades, was anticlimactic. On October 24, Bolshevik units quickly occupied rail stations, telephone exchanges, and the state bank. The following day Red Guards surrounded the Winter Palace and arrested the cabinet ministers. One-sixth of the world had been conquered in the name of the proletariat with barely a drop of blood spilled.

Did Lenin lead a coup? Though certainly not as spontaneous as the February Revolution, October represented a genuine popular revolution led by industrial workers, allied with elements of the peasantry. After the Kornilov coup, the Bolsheviks could claim a mandate for such an action. Their support was bolstered by a straightforward call for "peace, land, and bread." The Mensheviks demanded patience from the long-suffering masses; the Bolsheviks made concrete promises. Making those desires a reality would be another matter, but the Bolsheviks were the force most militantly trying to fulfill the February Revolution's frustrated goals.

In the first months after October, the character of the regime was not yet clear. The Bolsheviks didn't initially seek a one-party state — circumstances, as well as their decisions, conspired to create one. Immediately after the revolution, it fell to the Second Congress of Soviets to ratify the transfer of power from the Provisional Government. From 318 soviets, 649 delegates were elected to the body. Reflecting a dramatic shift in mood, 390 of them were Bolshevik and 100 Left SRs (those

Socialist Revolutionaries who supported the October rising).

Now transformed into a small minority, the Right SRs and Mensheviks attacked the Bolshevik action. Even Martov denounced the "coup d'état," but also put forth a resolution calling for an interim all-Soviet government and plans for a constituent assembly. Many Bolsheviks supported the motion and it carried unanimously. Martov's plan would have created the broad socialist government that many had sought in September — only now, in a more radical context, it would be pressured into taking principled positions on the war and land reform.

But as in September, the Right SRs and the Menshevik majority refused to go along. They walked out of the Congress, ceding the revolution's future to the Bolsheviks. Martov still wanted a compromise — negotiations for the creation of a coalition socialist government. But now, just two hours later, with the moderates no longer in the hall, the Bolshevik mood hardened. "The rising of the masses of the people requires no justification," Trotsky lectured his former comrade bitingly from the floor. "No, here no compromise is possible. To those who have left and to those who tell us to do this we must say: you are miserable bankrupts, your role is played out. Go where you ought to go: into the dustbin of history!"

Here is Trotsky epitomized — grand, rhetorically masterful, but tragically overconfident in the ordination of history. The delegates didn't have the benefit of hindsight. They erupted into applause. Martov began to leave with the other left-Mensheviks. A young Bolshevik confronted him on the way out, upset that a great champion of the working class would abandon its revolution. Martov stopped before the exit and turned to him: "One day you will understand the crime in which you are taking part."

Almost exactly twenty years to the day, that worker, Ivan Akulov, was killed in a Stalinist purge.

THE WORKERS' STATE

“WE WILL NOW BUILD THE SOCIALIST ORDER.” Lenin’s words just after the revolution suggested a radical course, but the Bolsheviks moved cautiously. Though they had popular support in a few major cities, they knew it would be a struggle to assert authority in a massive, mostly rural and peasant country.

They tried to make good on their program, however. Against the old elites’ resistance, worker control over production was expanded. Homosexuality was decriminalized, women won divorce and reproductive rights. Land rights were expanded to peasants, antisemitism was combatted, and steps were made toward self-determination in the former empire Lenin called “a prison house of nations.”

In industry, Lenin’s vision of worker control wasn’t syndicalist (“the ridiculous transfer of the railways to the railwaymen, or the tanneries to the tanners”); in the long run, he looked to more coordinated *class-wide* methods of ownership. In the short term, he said, “the immediate introduction of socialism in Russia is impossible,” and argued instead for worker oversight of management, alongside the nationalization of key sectors. That wasn’t the limit of his horizons, of course. Lenin was impressed with the wartime economy in capitalist states. If planning in the service of chaos was already a reality, why shouldn’t planning in the service of human need — under the watch of democratic soviets — be possible?

The push for more extensive nationalizations came from the grassroots. A contradictory late November order gave factory committees a legal mandate to interfere in production and distribution, while still asserting management’s right to manage. Not surprisingly, it fueled disorder and further hampered production. Many workers took to taking over factories on their own accord. Often, these were honest attempts to restore production after capitalist sabotage or flight; at other times, workers responded to chaos by hoarding supplies and protecting their own interests.

Within months the Bolsheviks would have to clamp down on such actions — the immediate task was restoring basic productivity and order. It’s clear that the government intended to maintain a mixed economy at least until its rescue by revolutions elsewhere in Europe.

But the confusion of these months was helped along by the fact that Bolsheviks never clearly delineated between the overlapping jurisdictions of factory committees and trade unions and a sprawling complex of soviets, not to mention the central state. They had vacillated on these questions for tactical reasons in the pursuit of power. Centralization and the blurring of party and state were simple, pragmatic ways to resolve the dilemmas.

On the question of the war, the Bolsheviks also saw their hopes complicated. The situation was urgent. Though fighting was subsiding, between the February and October Revolutions one hundred thousand died on the Eastern Front. The Bolsheviks made a call to all governments for a “just and democratic peace.” If they refused, Lenin was confident that “the workers of these countries will understand the duty which now rests upon them of saving mankind from the horrors of war.”

The decree was ignored by the Entente powers and, for the moment, so was the call for revolution. Negotiations with the Central Powers began. Against Lenin’s advice, the Bolshevik Central Committee turned down an initial peace offer. “Left Communists” led by Bukharin wanted to continue the war and fan the flames of revolt in their enemies’ homes. It was a grave miscalculation. Taking advantage of strife within the young socialist state, the Germans and Austrians advanced, seizing a huge swathe of land from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk’s painful concessions followed, cutting the Soviet state from key agricultural and industrial heartlands and putting it in a weaker position to deal with growing civil unrest.

“Having mounted the saddle, the rider is obliged to guide the horse — at the risk of breaking his neck.”

Attempts to undermine the Bolshevik government started from the day it took power in Petrograd. The White movement was an unholy alliance spanning the political spectrum — from right-Mensheviks and SRs to the liberal Kadet party to extreme nationalists and monarchists. Thirteen thousand American troops along with British, Canadian, French, Greek, Italian, and Japanese forces joined to aid a brutal domestic opposition. Against remarkable odds, the Bolsheviks oversaw the creation of a Red Army and triumphed in a five-year conflict that claimed nine million lives.

As Trotsky, that great army’s organizer, put it, “Having mounted the saddle, the rider is obliged to guide the horse — at the risk of breaking his neck.” The Bolshevik government rode on. Their argument for doing so was at first less about the immediate prospects for socialism within Russia and more in terms of a “holding action.” The survival of the first workers’ state would be a boon to the revolutionary movements that would take power in more advanced countries. These states would then come to the Bolsheviks’ rescue and help rebuild the country as part of a broader proletarian confederation.

It wasn’t as fantastical as it sounds today: this was an era of upheaval. Not long after October, German communists launched an ill-fated series of revolts trying to follow the Russian example. Newly liberated Finland saw its democratically elected socialist government dislodged in a bloody civil war. In 1919, a Hungarian Soviet Republic briefly took power. Two red years of factory occupations and mass strikes shook Italy. Even Ireland boasted soviets for a time.

Though the Bolsheviks still hoped for a breakthrough through the newly formed Communist International, it was becoming clear that no salvation from abroad was on its way. Lenin’s party had made a justified gamble to protect and extend the February Revolution’s gains and help end not just one grisly war, but all future ones as well. That gamble failed. And now with the only apparent alternatives to their leadership being a right-wing military dictatorship or even a form of Judeocidal fascism, they pressed on. Faced with an impossible dilemma, what the Bolsheviks had to do to survive would only exacerbate the party’s worst tendencies.

TERRORISM AND COMMUNISM

THE MOMENT CALLED FOR HARDENED MEN like Dzerzhinsky. His newly formed Cheka would collect information from across the empire and act on it immediately. Interrogations were quick, and those who failed to dispel suspicion were stood up against a wall and shot. With Lenin's blessing, the Cheka grew two hundred thousand strong and led a Red Terror in which as many were killed.

Were such terrible acts necessary to win history's most destructive civil war? Maybe, but the methods in which they were conducted certainly were not. There were no external controls on the Cheka's arrests and executions — the example of Dzerzhinsky's disciplined leadership would never be enough to curb excesses. Collective punishment, state terror, and intimidation — all these were initially exceptional measures that became norms when social conflict reemerged during Stalin's reign.

Though one can overstate the comparison, Abraham Lincoln's US Civil War government declared martial law, suspended habeas corpus, detained thousands, and used military tribunals, among other extra-Constitutional measures. But these were recognized as temporary deviations necessary for the restoration of normal republican government, which was restored before long.

The Bolsheviks didn't delineate their state of exception clearly enough, blurring together actions taken out of necessity and those performed out of virtue. There was no clear bedrock of rights and protections that Soviet citizens could claim once the emergency of war subsided. Open debate within the newly formed Communist Party would continue for some time, including factions pushing for democracy and worker power. But the broader political culture of engagement and contestation — sustained by a network of parties and newspapers — that had survived underground for long decades under tsarism would never reemerge.

A central problem was the lack of clear agreement on what the dictatorship of the proletariat should look like. Like other wings of social democracy, the Bolsheviks focused on seizing power, not exercising it. Aside from vague sketches, they hadn't thought much about politics *after* revolution. With the exploiting classes gone, would the proletariat need a socialist theory of jurisprudence or institutional checks on power? Caught in an unprecedented situation, they made it up as they went along.

With the exploiting classes gone, wouldn't the proletariat need a socialist theory of jurisprudence or institutional checks on power?

FROM WAR COMMUNISM TO THE NEP

MOVES TOWARD “WAR COMMUNISM” WERE spurred more by practical necessity than ideological zeal. Years of revolution and unrelenting war had disrupted agricultural production. Peasants had little incentive to direct what was still produced to the cities — there was a shortage of consumer goods and grain prices continued to decline in relation to those goods. A black market naturally developed, a market the tsarist state and Provisional Government both sought to combat.

The Bolsheviks continued that course, but even more ruthlessly — applying their class analysis to the countryside, which they saw as divided between poor peasants, middle peasants, and wealthy kulaks. They hoped to maintain support by focusing their actions on the latter, but divisions on the ground were less clear, and the presence of armed requisition squads searching for hoarders only served as a further disincentive to production. Despite the banning of private trade and energetic repression, it was largely thanks to the black market that Russian cities survived the Civil War.

The Bolshevik industrial policy also shifted in this period. The government nationalized the entire economy, instituted rationing, and imposed strict labor discipline. Not even the moderate visions of worker control survived the return to one-man management. No capitalist sabotage was necessary — shortages of parts and raw materials slowed production to a crawl. Highly ideological initiatives, like the attempt to construct moneyless budgets, coexisted with the reality of wholesale economic regression. By 1921, Russian industry was less than one-third its prewar size.

The Soviet state’s political base was decimated, too. Some industrial workers died in the Civil War, while others left starving cities and tried their chances in the countryside.

With the dream of German revolution buried for now, the issues were now practical ones: how to restore and expand Russian industry, and how to revive the worker-peasant alliance that sparked the revolution.

The New Economic Policy (NEP) was a step in this direction. The state still controlled the commanding heights

of the economy — large industries, banking, and foreign trade — but markets were legalized elsewhere. A tax on food producers replaced counterproductive forced requisitions, with peasants free to dispose of their goods how they wished once the tax was paid. Though the partnership would have to be skewed — peasant surplus was needed to restore and expand industry — the hope was to replace the direct coercion of war communism with accumulation through gradual, unequal exchange. Rather than forced collectivization, many NEP supporters looked to the voluntary creation of agricultural cooperatives that, in time, would outcompete what they saw as needlessly inefficient traditional peasant production.

Politically, the NEP was a period of hardening, not liberalization. Party leaders feared that the peasantry’s newfound economic power might morph into a political opposition. Not only opposition parties, but even internal Bolshevik factions were banned in 1921. There would still be debate within the party, but the Bolsheviks made clear that they would not step away from power. For the moment, the arts and intellectual life flowered undisturbed. But the one-party state was an easy trap to fall into: with the civil war, foreign intervention, blockade, and plots against the leadership, who could deny that Russia was under siege? Then, with the war over, the task of reconstruction required reliable men of action. One such man, Stalin, rose to general secretary in 1922.

Lenin was wary of what he saw. But though he decried the party-state elite’s abuses and excesses, he failed to see that democratic reform, however risky, was the only possible counterbalance to that power. Approaching death, he warned specifically about Stalin, encouraging the party congress to remove him, but his wishes went unfulfilled. Once Lenin was gone, Stalin used his post to scatter the supporters of his rival Trotsky within the party. Still, Stalin was not yet in control.

Debate within the party soon crystalized between three main camps: the left opposition of Trotsky, Stalin’s current, and those around Bukharin, who now found himself on the party’s right.

STALIN AND HIS CHILDREN

Trotsky pushed for party democracy and other anti-bureaucratic measures, faster industrialization and collectivization at home, and aggressive revolutionary exhortations abroad. Bukharin was more cautious, seeking to continue slowly “riding into socialism on a peasant nag,” with some adjustments. Stalin vacillated between the two positions, displaying a political savvy few knew the Georgian possessed.

Trotsky saw the real danger not in Stalin’s bureaucratic centrism, but in the risk that Bukharin’s program would accidentally bring about the restoration of capitalism. Bukharin, too, took far too long to see Stalin as a threat. Yet even had they united, Stalin might have been destined to win: he applauded the party men Trotsky criticized.

Meanwhile, Trotsky’s call for industrial rejuvenation hardly won him goodwill among the peasant majority outside the party. And without the support of the bureaucracy or the peasantry — and with the old Bolshevik workers dead or exhausted — on what social basis could Trotsky hope to win? Confidence in the dialectic of history wasn’t enough.

Trotsky was removed from power in late 1927 and sent into exile shortly after. Until his murder thirteen years later, he remained Stalinism’s greatest critic. Yet he couldn’t admit that any part of the system he so despised had its genesis in the early repression that he himself had helped engineer.

DESPITE THE POLITICAL TURMOIL IN RUSSIA, the NEP was working. By 1926, Soviet industry had surpassed prewar levels — a remarkable turnaround from just five years prior. What to do with this new wealth was hotly debated: agricultural improvements and light industry or heavy industry? These choices weren’t just technical. For a party that grounded its legitimacy in an industrial proletariat, continuing along the NEP route had profound political implications.



With the left opposition eliminated and his erstwhile ally Bukharin marginalized, Stalin was free to answer these questions as he saw fit. He was growing frustrated with the NEP. Industrial investment increased, yet grain prices were kept low. Peasants, naturally, clung to their stock. Periodic crises of this kind occurred throughout the 1920s, as industrial and agricultural prices fell out of sync.

In the past, these problems had been alleviated through price adjustments and other policy changes.

This time, however, Stalin made no such adjustment. Instead he sent police to commandeer legally produced and traded grain. Local officials who followed existing laws were dismissed. A new period of coercion against every layer of the peasantry was born. Stalin wanted a “revolution from above.” The first show trials took place, the first five-year plan was introduced, which called for the tripling of industrial output and investment.

And then, without warning, millions were forcefully collectivized into farms. Planners thought this would permanently solve food supply issues. It had the opposite effect — production fell dramatically and scapegoats had to be found. Collective punishment returned, not just against supposedly wealthy kulaks, but now also against “ideological kulaks,” that is, those who opposed the policy. At least six million perished in famine, and millions more would spend their lives in a vast network of forced-labor camps.

Many, of course, resisted the new serfdom. Stalin’s own wife, Nadezhda Alliluyeva, committed suicide in 1932 to protest the new course. But there was no serious challenge to the dictator. Within a decade, a once-vibrant, fractious party became a monolithic sect.

Yet if we can close our eyes to the cost, the five-year plan was a success. The Soviet Union made an incredible advance — largely in spite of forced collectivization, rather than because of it. State planning led to a rapid rise in GDP, capital accumulation, and consumption. Foreign observers downplayed reports of mass famine and celebrated the achievement. (Not just the *Daily Worker*, but also liberal outlets like the *New York Times* and the *Nation*.) As the fascist threat grew, so did Communist prestige. But this economic breakthrough was accompanied by new political terror. A campaign of mass murder began in 1936, with thousands purged from the Communist Party, including lifelong Bolsheviks. Many of them were imprisoned as counterrevolutionaries, forced to confess to elaborate plots, and then executed. More than half a million were killed.

Stalin had used a food shortage to transform the Soviet Union from a slowly rebounding authoritarian state to a horrific totalitarian regime unlike any the world had ever seen.

Dzerzhinsky, who died of a heart attack in 1926, supposedly anguished over every execution order he signed. He was replaced by men with no such compulsion.

Stalin’s Soviet Union did win a great war against a far greater evil. Yet for every action the leader took to defeat fascism, he took another to undermine the antifascist struggle — supporting the disastrous Third Period policy, purging the Red Army of capable officers, ignoring news of imminent Nazi invasion. The victorious regime was deeply conservative, pursuing great power policies on a scale even the tsars couldn’t have imagined, along with episodes of mass ethnic cleansing and even its share of antisemitism. Under Stalin, the worldwide Communist movement, too, became a tool of Russian national interests rather than one of working-class emancipation.

Once Stalin was gone, the Soviet system morphed into something profoundly different. His command economy remained, but the bureaucrats who now ruled remained haunted by the totalitarian terror that had cut through their own ranks. The new order was grey and repressive, but capable for a while of delivering peace and stability. Yet the ruling elite had no interest in building a free civil society from which socialist democracy might have sprung. Attempts to renovate the system only undermined the coercion that held it together. Its collapse gave way to an even more predatory order.

For a century, socialists have looked back at the October Revolution — sometimes with rose-colored glasses, sometimes to play at simplistic counterfactuals. But sometimes for good reason. Exploitation and inequality are still alive and well amid plenty. Even knowing how their story ended, we can learn from those who dared to fight for something better.

Yet both the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks were wrong in 1917. The Mensheviks’ faith in Russian liberals was misplaced, as were the Bolsheviks’ hopes for world revolution and an easy leap from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom. The Bolsheviks, having seen over ten million killed in a capitalist war, and living in an era of upheaval, can be forgiven. We can also forgive them because they were first.

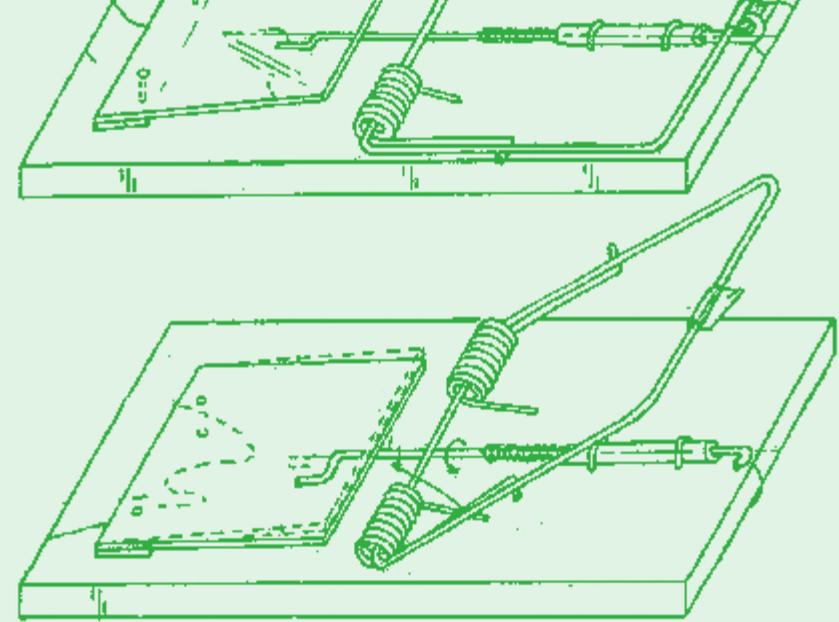
What is less forgivable is that a model built from errors and excesses, forged in the worst of conditions, came to dominate a left living in an unrecognizable world. ★

MEANS OF DEDUCTION

WE'VE GOT MORE GRAPHS
THAN GOSPLAN.

As Long as It Catches Mice

Central planning led to modernization in poor countries — and stagnation in rich ones.



EAST GERMAN AND BULGARIAN PER CAPITA GDP AS A PERCENTAGE OF WEST GERMAN PER CAPITA GDP, 1936–1992



- West Germany
- East Germany
- Bulgaria

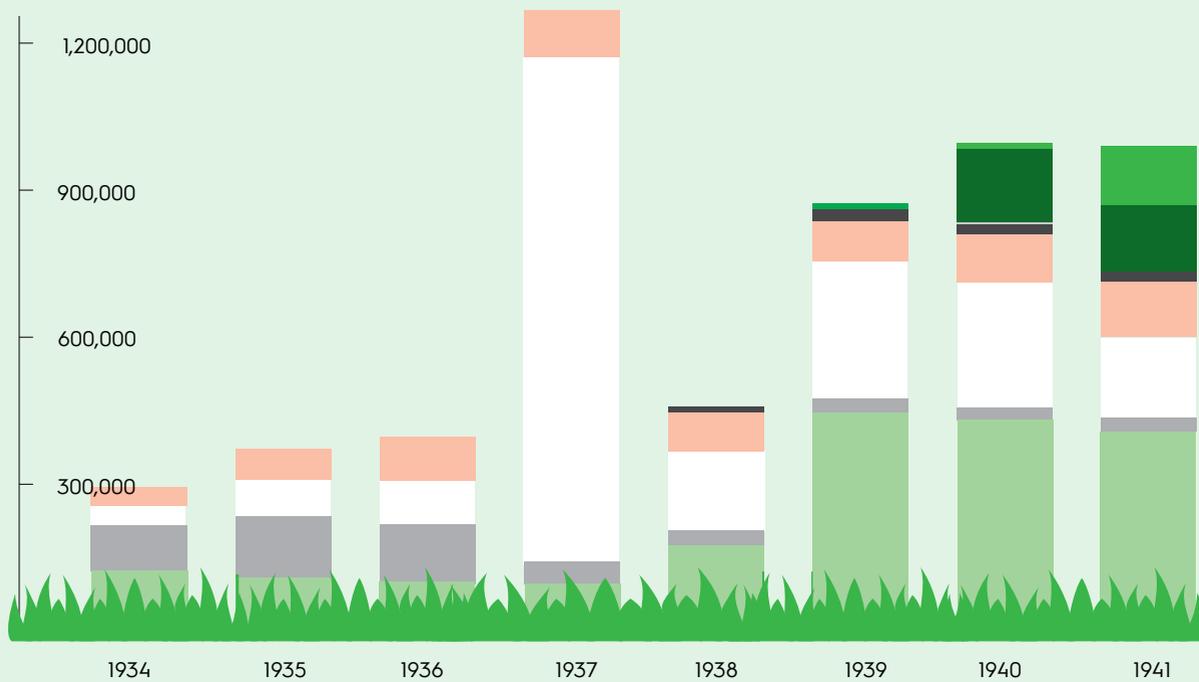
For years other than 1950–1989, East and West Germany refer to the respective territories of those countries.

Workers' Paradise Lost

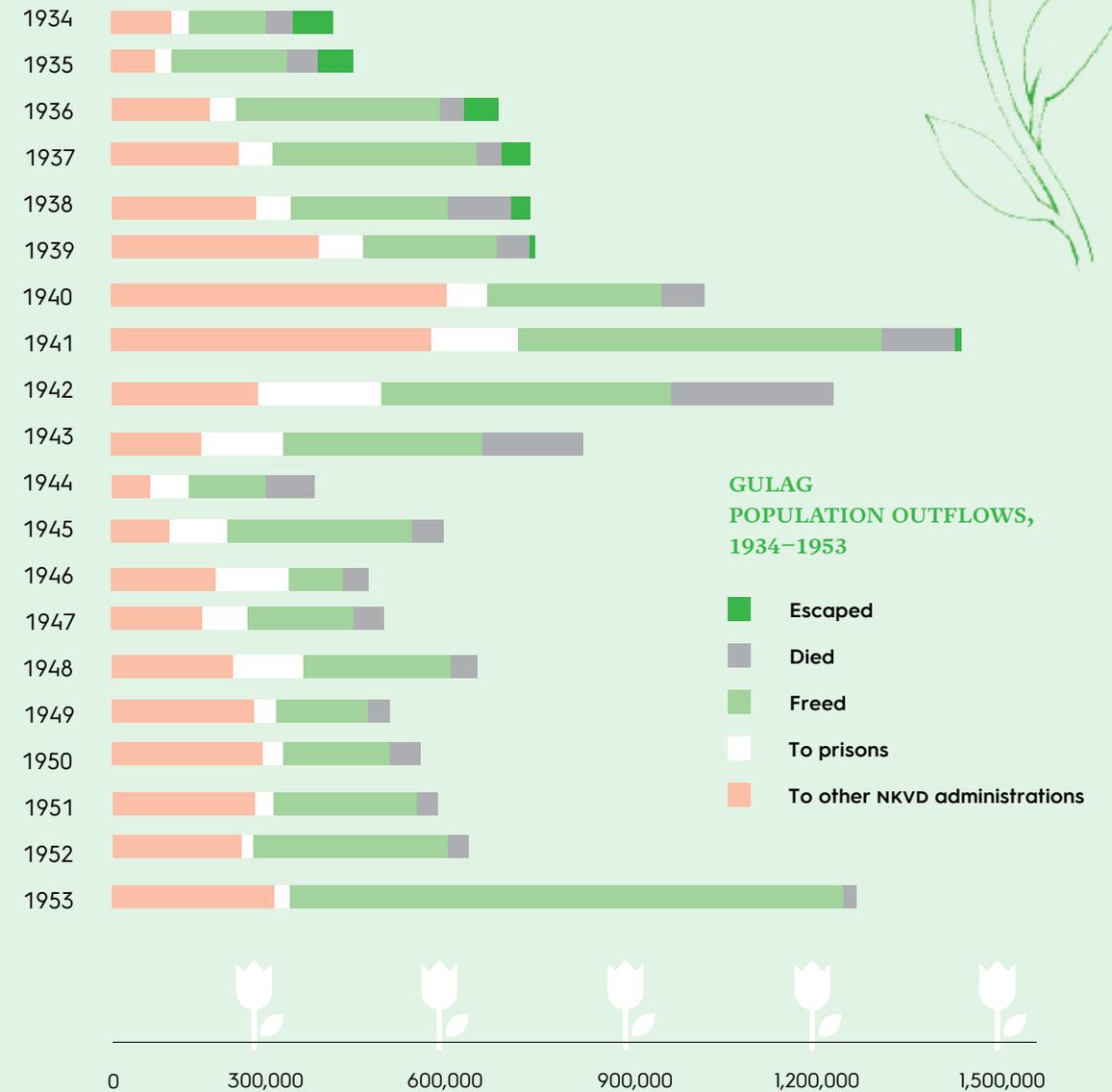
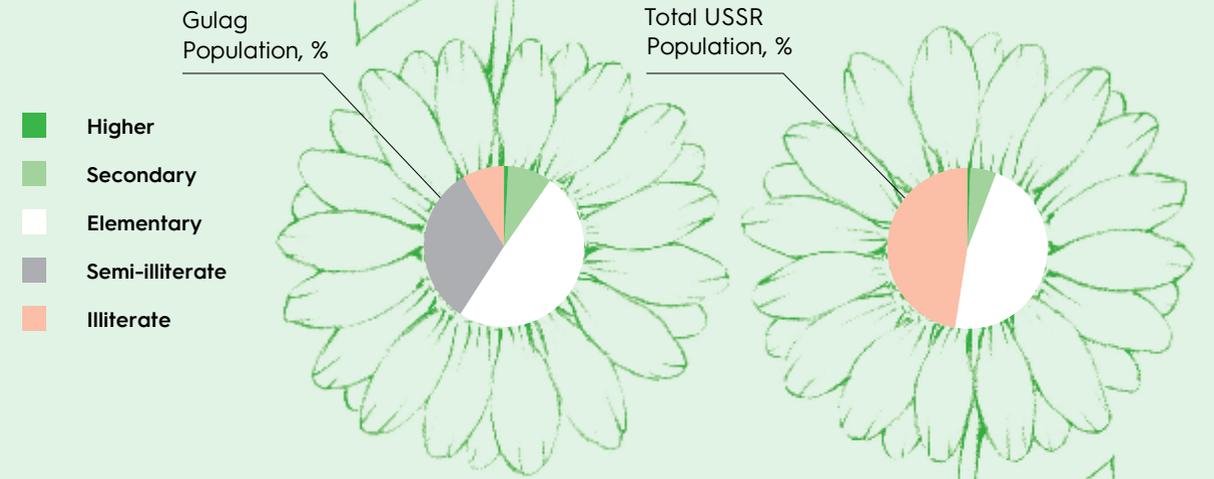
As Stalin advanced his vision of "socialism in one country," prisons sprouted like a thousand flowers across the USSR.

- Traitors' family members
- Other counterrevolutionary crimes
- Leader of a counterrevolutionary organization
- Participation in a rightist-Trotskyite organization
- Abuse of power; economic and military crimes
- Socially harmful and dangerous elements
- Theft of social property
- Counterrevolutionary crimes

POLITICAL PRISONERS IN CAMPS
BY TYPE OF CRIME,
1934-1941



EDUCATIONAL LEVELS OF THE GULAG POPULATION VERSUS THE USSR AS A WHOLE, 1937

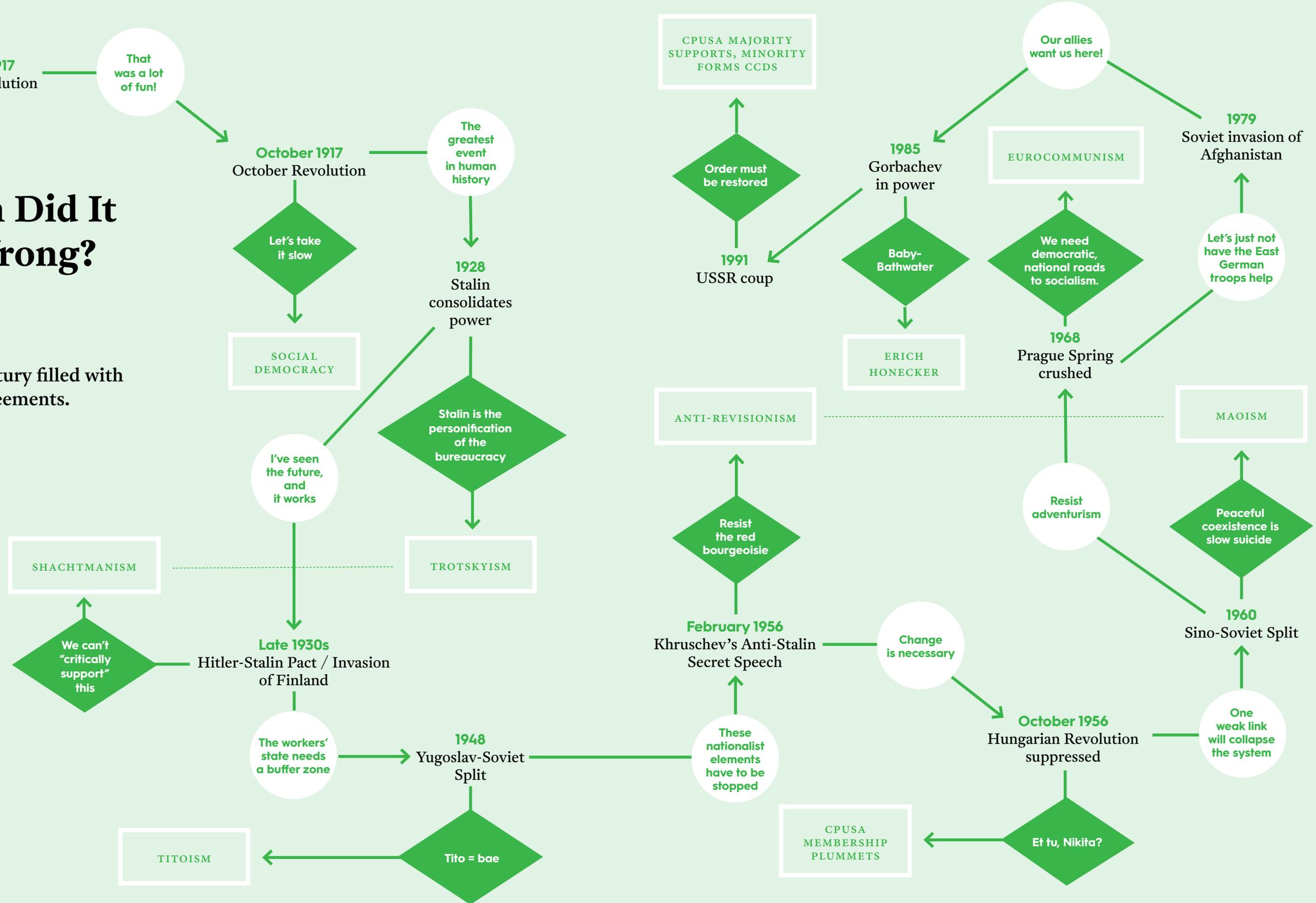


February 1917
February Revolution

That was a lot of fun!

When Did It Go Wrong?

A short century filled with long disagreements.



Moscow Globetrotters

Statues of Lenin, once ubiquitous in Communist countries, now cast shadows across the capitalist world.



POPRAD to SEATTLE

This Lenin, cast by the Bulgarian sculptor Emil Venkov at the request of the Czech Communist Party, stood in front of the Poprad regional party offices. First installed in 1988, the statue was removed in the early 1990s.

Lewis Carpenter of Issaquah, Washington spent the early 1990s tromping across the former Soviet world. In 1993, he sighted the sixteen-foot, eight-ton Lenin partially interred in a gravel lot in Poprad. He promptly purchased the sculpture and arranged for it to be shipped to Seattle, mortgaging his house to cover the costs. Carpenter died in 1994, but not before his Lenin was installed in Freehold Square, becoming an eccentric Seattle landmark. His arrangement with the city was peculiar kind of public consignment: he hoped installing the statue outdoors would facilitate its prompt sale.

Venkov, the artist, died earlier this year in Bratislava. The statue is still held in trust by Carpenter's family, and remains on sale, with an asking price of \$250,000.



MOSCOW to NEW YORK CITY

Today, the Lenin of New York's Lower East Side perches gargoye-like atop an apartment building on Norfolk Street. Before that, for more than twenty years, it stood sentry over a \$100 million Houston Street property, a twelve-story condo development called Red Square. But originally, it was fashioned in Moscow by sculptor Yuri Gerasimov in 1989 — a very bad year for Lenin statues.

In 1994, a pair of maverick real estate developers — one of whom, Michael Rosen, worked a day job as a professor of “radical sociology” at New York University — discovered the junked Lenin in a cluttered Moscow backyard. They wasted no time in getting it to New York to coronate their Houston Street passion project. But in 2016, Red Square was sold, and Lenin went underground.

A few months later, he reemerged just blocks away. He now presides over another of Rosen's buildings, and waves towards Wall Street once again.



LUGANSK to CAVRIAGO

The Lenin bust that today stands in the town square of Cavriago, in central Italy, isn't the real one — it's a replica installed by local communists. The real bust, minted in the Ukrainian town of Lugansk in 1922, had to enter protective custody decades ago after a string of twentieth-century misfortunes, including a thwarted Nazi kidnapping during the fascist period and an attempted bombing during Italy's tumultuous 1970s.

The workers who minted Lenin in 1922 had humble ambitions for their creation — the bust was to stand in front of the local train station. But during the German occupation of Ukraine in the 1940s, it came under attack. After a bitter struggle, it was finally trafficked to Italy in the hands of Italian partisans, who safeguarded it through the years of fascist rule until finally returning it to the Soviet embassy in 1970. The embassy promptly donated it to the city of Cavriago as a tribute to its historic socialist movement, which held local power during the interwar years.

Today, the original sits behind glass in Cavriago's cultural center, weathered but intact.



LANCHKHUITI to DALLAS

In 1991, as a bloody civil war raged in Georgia, Texas billionaire Harlan Crow sent his twenty-five-year-old assistant to the former Soviet territory on a mission — bring me back a Lenin. Tie Sosnowski, a humble history major without a word of Georgian, managed to contact David Uruchadze, whose 1970 Lenin statue stood in Lanchkhuti until it was toppled by a crowd and discarded, legless, behind a dumpster in 1991.

Sosnowski bought the sculpture from Uruchadze, who had rescued it from further ruin, and rented a Russian military helicopter to transport it out of the war zone. But Lenin proved too heavy a load to bear: he had to be transported by flatbed truck to Istanbul, through a landscape dotted with Georgian and Turkish military checkpoints. “I had to sleep with one eye open for three days,” the assistant later recalled. From there the statue was shipped to Texas.

Today, Lenin stands behind the hedges of the Texas mogul's private sculpture garden, sheltered from the outside world.

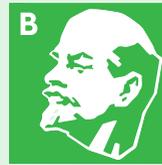


BERLIN, Germany

Originally, the sixty-two-foot Lenin of East Berlin was posted before two prominent housing blocks, the proud accomplishment of Nikolai Tomsky, then the head of the Soviet Academy of Arts, and the many workers who hauled its stone blocks from Russia on a convoy of trucks. But when political fortunes changed in 1989, this statue suffered an especially grisly fate.

Lenin was dethroned, decapitated, and his head interred in a massive grave outside the city. But in 2015, at great effort, the head was exhumed — one news outlet reported, somewhat incredulously, that “the 3.5 ton piece is to be resurrected from a sandpit under a pile of rocks which is home to a colony of lizards.”

Twenty-four years after his inglorious burial, Lenin sits under museum lights, part of an exhibition of important figures in German history.



KHUJAND, Tajikistan

In 1992, the residents of Khujand, Tajikistan’s second largest city, voted in a plebiscite to abandon the Soviet-era name Leninabad. The iconic, twenty-three-meter Lenin remained, however, until May 2011 when, in the dead of night, city officials dismantled it.

It now presides over “Victory Park,” an empty field on the city’s periphery. International travelers en route to the Lenin are advised to watch out for livestock and to seek advice from locals before attempting to cross the river.



KHARKIV, Ukraine

After a massive anti-Russia demonstration toppled this iconic thirty-foot Lenin in 2014, bystanders dismembered its prostrate figure. Days later, pieces of Lenin’s visage, including his ears and nose, appeared on online auction sites with advertisements like, “Come and listen to the sound of change — through Lenin’s ear!”

The political sympathies of Lenin’s assailants were transparent — one vendor offered a fragment of Lenin’s nose to anyone who could “provide a battalion of soldiers with underwear and uniforms,” and the UK’s *Daily Mail* reported that profits from other sales were funneled into anti-Russian militias.



ODESSA, Ukraine

After the passage of decommunization laws in Ukraine in 2015, pop artist Alexander Milov circumvented the decree that all Lenin statues be destroyed. Instead of dismantling the small Lenin of Odessa, he encased it in strategically molded titanium, bringing forth a new subject from within the frame of the old.

Where once stood Vladimir Ilych Ulyanov, now stood Darth Vader.



BUDAPEST, Hungary

No fewer than three Lenins stand in Budapest’s Memento Park, the sprawling colony of rejected sculptures where the city’s Soviet art is quarantined. The park was opened on June 29, 1993 and includes dozens of sculptures and reliefs to Communist personalities (Bela Kun, Lenin, Stalin, Dimitrov) and archetypes (the worker, the soldier, the proletarian wife).





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–C. L. R. James

"Passionate, partisan, and beautifully written."

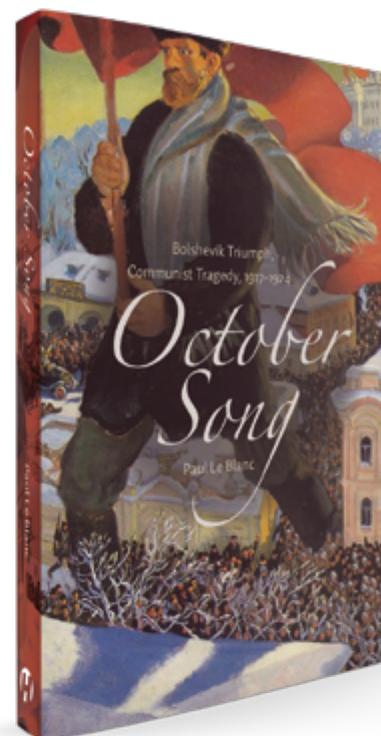
–Tariq Ali

CENTENARY HARDCOVER EDITION

HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

LEON TROTSKY

TRANSLATED BY MAX EASTMAN



OCTOBER SONG

BOLSHEVIK TRIUMPH, COMMUNIST TRAGEDY, 1917-1924

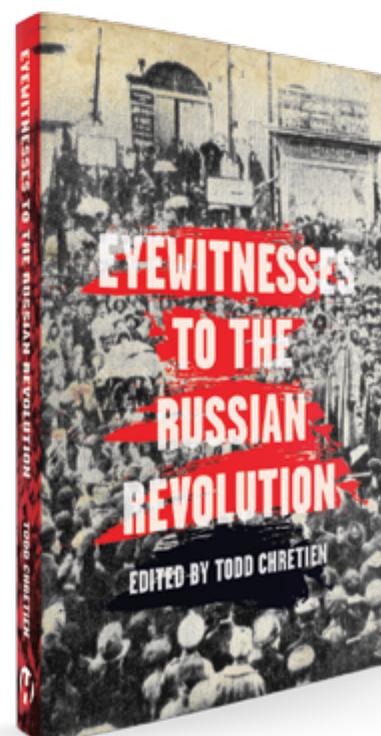
PAUL LE BLANC

"*October Song* is wonderful—a vivid account of the revolution, moving beyond the merely defensive to thoughtful consideration of not only external challenges but also internal problems among the revolutionaries, critical-minded yet at the same time deeply sympathetic."

–China Miéville, author, *October*

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"The 1917 revolution lifts its voice again in Todd Chretien's sparkling and moving collection. While providing new insights for the historian, *Eyewitnesses to the Russian Revolution* remains above all easily accessible to those with no prior knowledge."

–John Riddell, editor, *To the Masses*

A large yellow geometric shape, resembling a stylized arrow or a folded corner, points from the top right towards the bottom left, framing the text.

READING MATERIEL

BUT YOU DON'T HAVE
TO TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT.

Brussels, Dec. 12, 1975

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Officials from Germany's coalition government led by Social Democrat Helmut Schmidt (1974–1982). Genscher, the foreign minister, was from the liberal Free Democratic Party.

Officials of the Gerald Ford administration. (1974–1977)	US
Officials from Harold Wilson's Labour government. (1974–1976)	UK
Officials of Jacques Chirac's center-right government. (1974–1976)	France
	West Germany

NATO leaders from across the political spectrum found common cause opposing Eurocommunism.

Participants

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger

Secretary of State

General Alexander M. Haig, Jr.

Commander in Chief, US Forces, Europe

Helmut Sonnenfeldt

Counselor of the Department of State

Peter W. Rodman

National Security Council Staff
(Notetaker)

James Callaghan

Secretary of State for Foreign and
Commonwealth Affairs

Alan Campbell

Deputy Under Secretary

Jean Sauvagnargues

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Francois de Laboulaye

Political Director

Hans-Dietrich Genscher

Vice Chancellor and Minister
of Foreign Affairs

Guenther van Well

Political Director

Dr. Heinz Weber

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Interpreter)

Kissinger We have a rather full agenda. The Political Directors have been meeting and we have to discuss: Soviet relations (or East-West relations); Spain; Yugoslavia; Angola; Italy; Cyprus; Portugal; and the Northern Flank.

Is there any particular order you would like to discuss these?

Van Well In that order.

Kissinger East-West relations first?

Van Well Yes. East-West Relations (European Communist Parties)

Kissinger On East-West relations, I outlined our thinking at the restricted meeting [of the North Atlantic Council]. Would my colleagues like to express a view?

Callaghan I think the reading we haven't yet had is the reaction of the Soviet Union to the other European Communist Parties who seem to be **declaring their independence** to a certain extent. To what extent, if any, will this affect Soviet policy? We didn't cover this aspect in the NATO discussions. I have no particular information on it. Jean, what about France?

Sauvagnargues The French Communist Party has shown some independence but not much. My general impression is that it didn't come out just as Brezhnev wanted. The way **Helsinki** came out. He seems to be running into some trouble. I'll bet there is some criticism of Helsinki in the USSR.

Kissinger It's not easy to have a conference that creates domestic difficulties in every country. [Laughter]

In the 1970s, some Western European Communist parties developed theories about the "march to socialism" in stable capitalist democracies. Along with moving away from the Soviet model, they began to exercise more political independence and oppose aspects of USSR foreign policy.

The Helsinki Accords were a set of nonbinding European agreements signed in August 1975 in which participating states agreed to recognize existing borders and respect human rights. Intended to ease Cold War tensions, they were a high-point of East-West détente but controversial in the United States.

De Laboulaye Two of our experts studied this problem. They looked into the relations of the Communist Parties after Helsinki, relations of the Soviet Union to Communist Parties, and détente itself. I gave copies to my colleagues.

With respect to the relations of the Soviet Union to the Communist Parties in the West, a discussion seems to be taking place in Russia regarding what advantage the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Communist Parties can make of the so-called **crisis of capitalism**. They can't agree. Their press indicates this. Also there is a doctrinal difference on whether they should accept alliances with left-wing parties. This too came out in their specialized press.

Kissinger Did the Chinese give you a lecture on this?

Sauvagnargues Yes. It was part of the aggressive Soviet policy. They are partly right. It is not consistent with détente.

Kissinger To us the Chinese expressed opposition to all the European Communist Parties without distinction. They consider revisionism just a Soviet tactic. They showed uncompromising opposition to any alliance.

Callaghan Can't we make use of this to play on with the **Italian Communist Party**, to force them to declare their independence or not? Or would it backfire? If they are not dancing to Moscow's tune, we can't get Moscow to control them in our countries.

These parties will have considerable electoral appeal if they are independent of Moscow. When they say the capitalist system doesn't work, they seem to have a good case when there are six million unemployed. They may not be in government, but they could have substantial impact on government.

Since the late 1960s, China's foreign policy stance under the aging Mao Zedong had increasingly come to view the Soviet Union and its allies as the greatest threats to world peace. Global leaders became accustomed to hearing anti-Soviet harangues from their Chinese counterparts.

Amid the oil crisis and stagflation of the mid-1970s, the notion that capitalism was experiencing a possibly terminal "crisis" became a focal point of both Soviet propaganda and anxious Western commentary.

Headed by Enrico Berlinguer, the reform-minded Italian Communist Party peaked at 34.4 percent of the vote in 1976 and boasted a membership of over one million, making it the largest Western CP.

To the extent we can show they are not independent, it can be very useful to us electorally.

Kissinger How do we know if they are independent?

De Laboulaye I was with **Rumor** last night at dinner. He said that Berlinguer would have to be kicked out if they ever got to power. It is just a mask.

Kissinger The acid test isn't whether they would come to power democratically; the test is whether they would allow a reversal. It is difficult for a Communist Party to admit that history can be reversed, and allow themselves to be voted out of power.

Van Well Their papers say they are for a change in power democratically.

Kissinger Coming in?

Van Well No, going out.

Genscher We need some better assurance.

Kissinger It is almost inconceivable that in power they won't seek to bring about such political change that they couldn't be voted out.

Van Well The essence of that **Conference** was that they would accept democratic change.

Kissinger To the extent one can trust the Chinese view, they claim the **Spanish Communist Party** is more independent of Moscow than the French or Italian.

Mariano Rumor: Christian Democrat who served as Italian prime minister between 1968 and 1970 and again from 1973 to 1974.

Still underground following Franco's death, the Spanish Communists under Santiago Carrillo had already shed much of their earlier Leninism and were preparing to support the restoration of liberal democracy under a constitutional monarchy.

Likely a reference to two recent meetings of European Communists in which the French, Italian, and Spanish parties emphasized their acceptance of democratic principles.

De Laboulaye The Soviet Union themselves know that a Communist Party in government isn't compatible with détente.

Kissinger They may realize that if one gets in, the right wing parties in the US and Europe will use it against détente.

Genscher There is not one single Western Communist Party that has given up its final objective. They still want the dictatorship of the proletariat. That is the decisive point. The danger is they become more attractive to the voters. It is easier for us to accept orthodox parties than parties that give the appearance of being independent. They become more popular the more independent they become. The Italian Communist Party has one objective, to become independent.

Rumor was afraid that if there was a discussion of Italy's internal affairs here, it would have a dangerous effect on the **Socialists**. In other words, he sees a Popular Front as possible.

There is no problem in Germany and in Britain.

Callaghan Except that it weakens the alliance if it happens elsewhere. My point is we should recognize they are still the true enemy and not let them increase their appeal. Although the nuisance value is more from these little parties that **worm into the trade unions**, the Communists are in fact less trouble to deal with. But we shouldn't be deceived.

Sonnenfeldt No matter how much they are trouble for Moscow, their rise in our countries will affect the whole discussion of security issues and domestic priorities, and this will affect the balance of power over the long run.

Van Well The question is whether to cultivate them or to expose them and challenge their pretensions. They might be pushed even more to

Reference to the Italian Socialist Party: smaller than the PCI, but relatively radical at the time.

The party had been in crisis for years and there were fears that it would move towards alliance with the Communists.

Amid an atmosphere of shop-floor militancy, British trade unions were shifting to the left. The alleged Soviet sympathies of some union leaders provoked anxiety within NATO circles. For many on the right wing of the Labour Party, however, the activities of Trotskyist union militants posed the greater headache.

prove their independence.

Callaghan We've got to recognize that they are the real enemy, even if they are more independent. Secondly, presentationally, we should try to make them appear as not independent, to make them try harder to prove their independence.

Kissinger The problem is, if we stress their independence, we create the impression that that's the only obstacle. I agree with your first point: they're the real enemy, partly for Sonnenfeldt's reason and partly because it would weaken support for the Alliance in America.

Genscher The problem would still be the same even if a party completely independent of Moscow — like **Albania** — came into power.

Callaghan Where does this discussion lead to? Do we want them more independent or less independent?

Van Well We have to confront them on both counts: as part of the international Communist movement and on their commitment to parliamentary democracy.

Sonnenfeldt Make them prove their loyalty to democracy for 20 years, and then sec.

Kissinger But we don't want to encourage our intellectuals to try a dialogue with them.

Genscher It's not just the intellectuals. The Church, too, and other groups.

Callaghan We are strong enough intellectually to handle it; that's why we are for détente. But not the trade unions. I find it very hard to talk

The Hoxha dictatorship was the only ruling Communist government in Europe that took the Chinese side in the Sino-Soviet split. Their hardline "anti-revisionist" stance targeted Moscow.

to the trade unions on this.

Kissinger I don't know if contacts with Soviet groups are as bad as what the Italian Communists are doing in the U.S., making themselves respectable. To the extent they become accepted in the U.S., they can use this in Italy to prove their respectability. The Soviet groups are so clumsy.

Van Well Refusal of contact means we ignore them.

Kissinger What do we gain by talking with them?

Van Well We should confront them, challenge them. Especially labor groups.

Kissinger You mean the ILO?

Van Well Yes.

Kissinger That's domestic politics. That was the price we had to pay to **George Meany** to avoid cutting off all UN funds.

Callaghan My Labour friends asked me to raise this. I wasn't going to.

Kissinger Our objective is to use the next two years while we're in it to get reforms so we can stay.

Callaghan Let me know what reforms you want and our people will help. The Soviet Union constantly is making approaches, and other East Europeans, saying: "Why can't we have a dialogue?"

Genscher It does make a difference with the Western trade unions whether they cooperate with the Communists in their own countries

AFL-CIO leader George Meany, a hardline anti-communist, had been waging a long-running campaign to push the US to withdraw from the International Labour Organization over what he claimed was excessive Soviet influence in the labor body. A few months earlier, he had succeeded in winning the cancellation of a scheduled dues payment to the ILO.

or whether they have contact with East Europeans. Our unions have contacts everywhere in Eastern Europe but are free of Communist influence at home.

Kissinger The problem is people like Mitterrand or the Italians deliberately seeking high-level contacts in the US and using that at home to prove they can conduct a pro-Western policy. That will lead to reduction of concern with security and an undermining of the Alliance.

Genscher I didn't make myself clear.

Kissinger I understand your point.

I'm getting under pressure for blocking contacts with Italian Communists, and also some of your left wing people, Jean.

Back to the Soviet Union. The consensus of the Political Directors seemed to be that they would continue even after Brezhnev, and this age group, to conduct the same policy.

De Laboulaye Yes, but there will be temptation, such as Portugal and Angola.

Following the April 1974 Carnation Revolution, Portugal moved radically to the left. Pro-Soviet Communists took advantage of the opening and there were fears of a takeover.

Meanwhile, the former Portuguese colony of Angola was in the midst of a civil war, in which the Eastern Bloc and Cuba were increasingly involved.

In 1972, the French Socialist Party under François Mitterrand forged an alliance with the Communist Party and shifted sharply to the left. Many Western leaders feared that any Socialist-Communist government in France would undermine NATO.



Poster, Govorkov V.I., 1936

A Red by Any Other Name

Wondering
what to call your
newborn?

Vladimir Alexandrovich Bazarov

Born Vladimir Alexandrovich Rudnev. Bolshevik Party member known for pioneering economic planning. The pseudonym Bazarov comes from the main character of Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*.

Alexander Bogdanov

A doctor who became an early Bolshevik, he was born Alyaksandr Malinovsky. Malinovsky took his party name from the middle name of his wife, Natalya Bogdanovna Korsak.

Willy Brandt

The young socialist Herbert Ernst Carl Frahm took the name Willy Brandt in 1933 to avoid detection by Nazi agents. In 1969, he became the first social-democratic German chancellor since the Weimar Republic.

Dazdraperma

Short for "Long Live May First!" Needless to say this comically unpronounceable name didn't stick.

Gertruda

An old name of Germanic origin that got reinterpreted in the Soviet Union as a shortening for “Geroj Truda” (“Hero of Labor”).

Mike Gold

Itzok Isaac Granich, the American Communist editor and writer, took the name Michael Gold during the first Red Scare from a Jewish Civil War veteran he admired.

Maxim Gorky

Originally Alexei Maximovich Peshov. Highly regarded chronicler of Russia’s working class and associate of the Bolsheviks. He signed off his articles, which were usually about poor working conditions in Russia, with the name “Gorky,” which means “bitter.”

Iskra

The RSDLP’s newspaper, whose staff included Lenin, Plekhanov, and Trotsky, as well as a common female name in the early Soviet Union. Iskra Polyakova is the name of the main character of a 1984 novel and its film adaptation about the tragic fate of the war generation.



Still from *Shtetl* (“Hipsters”) by Valeriy Todorovsky featuring Anton Shagin as Mels Buryukov (2008).

Nikolai Lenin

Sometimes, Vladimir signed as N. Lenin. People mentally filled in the gap with Nikolai, a common Russian name. The N. didn’t, in fact, stand for anything.

Vladimir Lenin

One assumption is that Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov took the pseudonym Lenin after workers on the river “Lena” went on a strike. But even Nadezhda Krupskaya, his wife, didn’t know for sure.

Julius Martov

Also L. Martov. First Yuliy Osipovich Tsederbaum, this Menshevik founder settled on the name Martov in 1901. He took the “L.” to honor

his sister Lydia and “Martov” because he thought March (mart) was a “particularly revolutionary month.” It was in March 1848, after all, when *The Communist Manifesto* was published and revolt spread across Europe.

Mels

A popular Soviet name, made up of the initials for Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. In a recent Russian musical about 1950s youth subculture one of the main characters (Mels Biryukov) leaves out the last letter of his name as a part of his cathartic transformation.

Ho Chi Minh

Born Nguyen Sinh Cung. Using characters signifying “will” and “bright” — “chi” and “minh” respectively — the name forms the phrase “He who has been enlightened.”

Still from *Zavtra Bila Voina* (“Tomorrow There Was a War”) by Yuri Kara featuring its main heroine Iskra Polyakova (1984).



ЛЕНИН ИИИЭЛ ИИИЭЛ ИИИЭЛ
 ЕНИЛЕ ЭЛННЭ НЭЭИИ ННУЕН
 ИИНЛЕ ЭЛННН ЭЛННН ИИИУЕ
 ИИЛЕН НЭЛНН ЭЛННЭ ЕИИУЕ
 ИЛЕНИ ИИЭЛН ИИИЭЛ УЕННН

A Red by Any Other Name



Ninel' Myshkova born in 1926 was a prominent actress during the late forties.

Ninel'

One of the many names derived from Lenin's nom de guerre. While others came in and out of fashion this one stuck.

Karl Radek

Polish Comintern representative and writer whose birth name was Karol Sobelsohn. Pseudonym is taken from his favorite character in Stefan Żeromski's *The Labor of Sisyphus*.

Victor Serge

As a young anarchist, Victor Lvovich Kibalchich went by "Le Rétif" — meaning a mule that refuses to be broken. He later took the name "Victor Serge" in a March 1917 *Tierra y libertad* article, for unknown reasons.

Joseph Stalin

Before the world called him Stalin, to his mother he was just "Soso," Georgian for "Little Joey." His first pseudonym was "Koba," meaning "raven," the name of the Robin Hood-esque hero of Alexander Kazbegi's 1882 novel, *The Patricide*. Then, after experimenting with the names "Stefin," "Salin," and "Solin" — he was searching for a name like "Lenin" — he settled on "Stalin," "steel-person," in a 1912 *Pravda* article.

Josip Broz Tito

Given name Josip Broz. He took up a number of pseudonyms before settling on Tito due simply to its popularity in his home district. (Tito means "saved" in Latin — Titus was the Biblical Greek missionary to whom Paul wrote a canonical letter.)

Leon Trotsky

Lev Davidovich Bronstein took his famous pseudonym when he fled to London from Siberia.

Trotsky — the name he wrote in his fake passport — belonged to a prison guard he knew from a stint in an Odessan jail.

Vilen

An acronym of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and is the given name of Willi Tokarev, a Russian-American singer-songwriter who became famous in the 1980s for his songs about life as a Russian émigré in New York's Brighton Beach.

xxHitchcockGangster49xx

Slavoj Žižek's *Call of Duty* handle.

Grigory Yevseevich Zinoviev

Originally Hirsch Apfelbaum, the important Bolshevik stole "Zinoviev" from a rich Russian family. That family had its assets confiscated after the revolution.

Vilen ("Willi") Tokarev is a Soviet singer-songwriter born in 1934 who rose to fame after emigrating to New York City in the eighties.



W.I.L.L.

The Man Who Brought Pizza

Mikhail Gorbachev's journey
from Communist reformer to
“capitalist tool.”



World Summit of Nobel Peace laureates held in
Chicago — Scott Olson/Getty Images.

*Review of **Gorbachev: His Life and Times** by William Taubman (Simon & Schuster, 2017)*

A family in a Moscow restaurant argues over Mikhail Gorbachev's legacy. “Because of him we have economic confusion,” the father complains. “Because of him, we have opportunity,” the son protests. Claim is followed by counterclaim: “Because of him, we have political instability” — “Because of him, we have freedom” — “Complete chaos” — “Hope!”

The mother interjects: “because of him we have many things ... like Pizza Hut.” Now the family agrees. They and the whole restaurant rise from their seats, pizza slices in hand, to salute his achievements. The camera cuts to Gorbachev himself, basking in the attention.

Appearing during the 1998 Rose Bowl, this Pizza Hut ad was a rather strained portrayal of Russians' view of the former president. It was not shown in Gorbachev's own country. In Russian media he was instead widely ridiculed for taking part in the stunt, selling his past status for advertising purposes. This was not, however, simply a story of a politician reviled in his own country and appreciated abroad. For all his honorary degrees and his Nobel Peace Prize, Gorbachev had hardly become a revered global statesman. He was a symbol of an abortive reform project, a failure.

Gorbachev never got the liberal saint status conferred on Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama, or (until recently) Aung San Suu Kyi. Each of these figures could be depoliticized and canonized as modern-day saints, standing above the fray of ideological sparring. Gorbachev's bid for such

status soon ran aground. His *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness) policies as Soviet leader never lived up to their promise. The reform effort was followed by the Soviet Union's collapse, then a slide into chaos, gangsterism, and reimposed "order" under Putin. Russia's new rulers repudiated Gorbachev's record.

Faced with the dubious successes of post-Soviet Russia, William Taubman's new biography, *Gorbachev: His Life and Times*, is an attempt to present the leader's record in a more heroic light. The product of eleven years of research and interviews, this past biographer of Nikita Khrushchev presents Gorbachev as the most important political figure of the second half of the twentieth century. It was he who brought an end to the Cold War, and, against his own intentions, to the USSR itself. Nonetheless, Taubman also presents Gorbachev as something of a tragic figure, breaking up the sclerotic Soviet system yet lacking the means to create a liberal democracy in its place.

FROM PEASANTRY TO NOMENKLATURA

Taubman is above all concerned with the human side of the Gorbachev story, and to this end devotes over a quarter of the book to his life before his six-year spell in power. This includes a rich detailing of Gorbachev's youth, starting with the humble family to which he was born in 1931. From his teenage years he worked long days in the fields, including when his father was sent to the front in the fight against German invasion. Too young to fight in the war, Gorbachev still lived the ravages of Nazi occupation firsthand.

From his youth Gorbachev was a party man, first in the Komsomol (Communist Youth). His Order of Banner for Labour (achieved together with his father, for his toil as a farmer) together with his academic brilliance allowed him to attend Moscow State University, the most prestigious school in the Soviet Union. Graduating in 1955, he became a local Komsomol leader in the city of Stavropol, and by 1970, he was the Communist Party boss in this Southern city.

These were times of great change in the USSR. Victory over Nazi Germany meant the need to rebuild, but also the hope that the worst sacrifice was now at an end.

FOR ALL HIS HONORARY DEGREES AND HIS NOBEL PEACE PRIZE, IN RUSSIA, GORBACHEV WAS A SYMBOL OF A FAILED REFORM PROJECT.

Following Stalin's death in 1953, it was more liberal elements who asserted their control over the state, and new General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev began a reform process. This was most notably expressed in Khrushchev's Twentieth Congress speech denouncing the cult of personality and unjust acts of repression. Nonetheless, this posed the broader questions of where these ills had stemmed from, and what change the system would now undergo.

At Moscow State University Gorbachev showed a certain diffidence toward the rituals of the regime. But resistance to dogma didn't lead him to form any substantively different idea of what the Soviet Union might become. Gorbachev steered clear of more properly "dissident" elements seeking the system's overthrow.

He instead stayed close to the Khrushchevite mainstream, hoping for an end to the worst Stalinist repression. However, the leadership's own line of march was not clear. It was first tested in the 1956 Hungarian uprising. Moscow's response was to send in tanks, bloodily reimposing Soviet domination. Whatever the liberalization within the USSR, there was no prospect of Moscow allowing the disintegration of its sphere of influence won through the sacrifice of war.

Gorbachev himself outwardly supported the action, just as he would Brezhnev's 1968 suppression of the Prague Spring. Indeed, these events illustrated the basic problem of the USSR's relations with the rest of the Eastern Bloc. To allow even a single socialist regime to break from Soviet hegemony would threaten the unity of the Bloc and the Soviet role as the "leading state" in the socialist camp. Yet thwarting efforts to create "socialism with a human face" itself undermined the unity and idealism of the Soviet-led Communist movement, giving it a nakedly repressive character.

As general secretary from 1964 onward, Leonid Brezhnev developed a hardline doctrine of collective security within the Eastern Bloc, imposing an iron unity from Moscow. This conformed to his wider emphasis on

stability. Yet the regime was also losing its prestige, both internationally and at home. This was particularly clearly highlighted by the rise of China, Cuba, and Vietnam as alternative centers of revolutionary authority. Gorbachev was essentially the inverse product of this period. Too young to be part of the USSR's heroic war generation, he was among those Communists who rose through party ranks as economic growth slowed and the Soviet state lost its remaining sense of historical mission.

IN POWER

By the time Gorbachev joined the Communist Party Central Committee in 1971, the Soviet Union was no longer in the ascendant. The next decade would see economic stagnation and the hardening of a gerontocratic ruling elite focused above all on stability. It constantly had to firefight challenges from the periphery. The Polish strikes of 1980–81 crystalized Central and Eastern European opposition to the Warsaw Pact system, an opposition also expressed in dissident intellectual movements like Czechoslovakia's Charter 77. And all this while the USSR was bogged down in a military quagmire in Afghanistan.

The Soviet leadership reflected these challenges. Gorbachev was allied to figures like Yuri Andropov, who in 1981

counseled Brezhnev against direct military intervention to suppress the Polish opposition. General secretary of the Soviet Communist Party from just late 1982 until his early 1984 death, the elderly Andropov groomed Gorbachev as his successor. After a brief interregnum under Konstantin Chernenko, in January 1985 Gorbachev became the leader of both party and state.

His signal policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* sought to break the Soviet Union out of the conservative retrenchment of the Brezhnev period. However, unlike the 1990s

Chinese leadership, this approach in fact put relatively little premium on economic privatization. Internally, the most important change was the loosening of press controls and increased toleration of public criticism. Gorbachev's intention in 1985 was not the dissolution of the Soviet state. However, taking the lid off the repressive atmosphere opened up a swirl of contradictions.

Historians are not agreed on the role of economic factors in triggering the USSR's final crisis. Soviet military spending had built up over a long period, and did not suddenly increase in response to Reagan's expansion of the US defense budget.

However, there was a combination of disruptive factors. The fall in world oil prices coinciding with Gorbachev's rule was a severe blow to an already debilitated system, and the failing economies of states like Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Poland increasingly relied on Western loans.

In this sense, the developments in the Eastern Bloc countries played a decisive role in breaking up the Soviet Union. Most important in this regard was Gorbachev's explicit reversal of the Brezhnev doctrine, making clear that the USSR would not intervene to shore up the beleaguered Eastern Bloc regimes. The debt crisis in the late 1980s, and the resulting pressure on the price

of consumer goods, only fed mounting street protests in countries like East Germany and Poland. In certain states these were partially animated by left-wing and independent trade union movements, but they were also shaped by a strong rejection of Soviet control.

Gorbachev was not directly allied to reform movements in other Eastern Bloc countries or the advocate of a specific alternative path to socialism. His privileged interlocutors were reforming but non-ruling parties like the Italian Communists, like him bound to a specifically "Communist" identity and yet standing at odds with the



Gorby 80 Gala at The Royal Albert Hall — Concert — Ian Gavan/Getty Images

GORBACHEV'S INTENTION IN 1985 WAS NOT THE DISSOLUTION OF THE SOVIET STATE. HOWEVER, TAKING THE LID OFF THE REPRESSIVE ATMOSPHERE OPENED UP A SWIRL OF CONTRADICTIONS.

USSR's reality. Within the Warsaw Pact states themselves, the conflict set shaky Communist establishments, dependent on Soviet backing, in opposition to pro-democracy movements.

Gorbachev's refusal to intervene in defense of the other Warsaw Pact governments would in 1989 allow partly free elections in Poland and the fall of the Berlin Wall. However, the specifically nationalist dynamic of these movements also fueled tensions within the USSR itself. Imitating the national movements in Central and Eastern Europe, parts of the Soviet Union themselves demanded independence from Moscow. As the republics began to splinter, ethnic tensions spread in the Baltic states and Caucasus. Leader of the Russian republic Boris Yeltsin in turn asserted himself against Gorbachev and the unitary Soviet state.

The final crisis came from a backlash within the Soviet establishment. On August 19, 1991, with Gorbachev on holiday in Crimea, Soviet hardliners declared a new regime. Within two days the coup had failed, the army declaring its loyalty to Yeltsin. Gorbachev was restored to his post, but the reform project had failed. National tensions had developed over decades; the liberalization process did not calm them, but rather, finally allowed them out into the open. Yeltsin met with the Ukrainian and Belarusian leaders to declare a looser "Commonwealth of Independent States." Resigning as Soviet president on Christmas Day, 1991, Gorbachev sounded the death knell for the USSR.

REGRETS, I'VE HAD A FEW

Taubman presents Gorbachev in a sympathetic light, but as a figure who unleashed events beyond his control. The rapid escalation of liberalization into the total destruction of the USSR immediately forced the Soviet president out of political life. He was reduced to touring the Western world in search of public acclaim, even being

transported around the United States in a plane owned by *Forbes* magazine, the self-proclaimed "Capitalist Tool." In 1994 he appeared as a witness in the trial of the August 1991 plotters, but his

appearance produced only a shouting match between him and those who accused him of betraying the USSR.

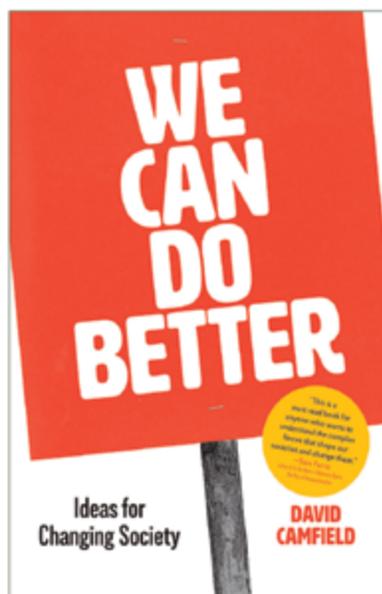
Gorbachev's ill-fated decision to stand in the 1996 presidential election illustrated how far he had fallen in Russian domestic politics. The election marked a revolt by the electorate against the soaring unemployment and social chaos of the early transition period, with the Communist candidate Gennady Zyuganov running neck-and-neck with Yeltsin in the first round. The contest pitched the desire for a return to former stability against the promise that Russian capitalism could eventually recover. Standing as an independent, Gorbachev achieved a feeble 0.5 percent of the vote.

If Gorbachev's greatest achievement was to end the Cold War, at twenty-five years' distance, this looks less like a complete success. In 1991 he gave the green light to the US-led war in Iraq, and the dissolution of Soviet counterpower would embolden neocons in their project of remaking the world in Washington's image. The rise of democracy in the former Eastern Bloc was a more definite success, though even Gorbachev himself bemoans NATO expansion into his own country's former sphere of influence.

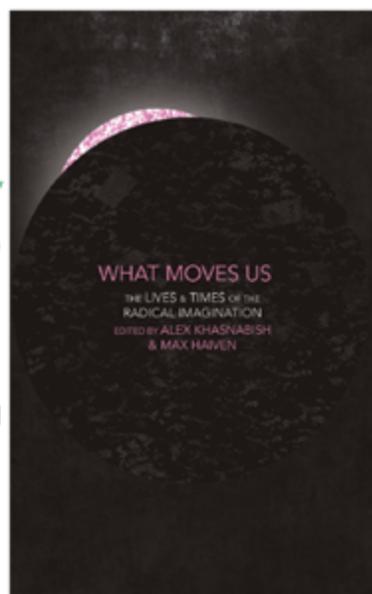
The peasant boy had risen through the ranks of the Soviet system, becoming its "ideal product." Yet ultimately, Gorbachev was left unable even to defend his own actions, or identify with the shallow progress made. ★

"With a new generation questioning capitalism and the social oppressions around us, there could not be a better time for David Camfield's innovative case for a renewed historical materialism."

—David McNally



Emerging from the Radical Imagination Project, a social movement research initiative based in Halifax, Canada, *What Moves Us?* brings together a diverse group of scholar-activists and movement-based thinkers and practitioners to reflect on the relationship between the radical imagination and radical social change.

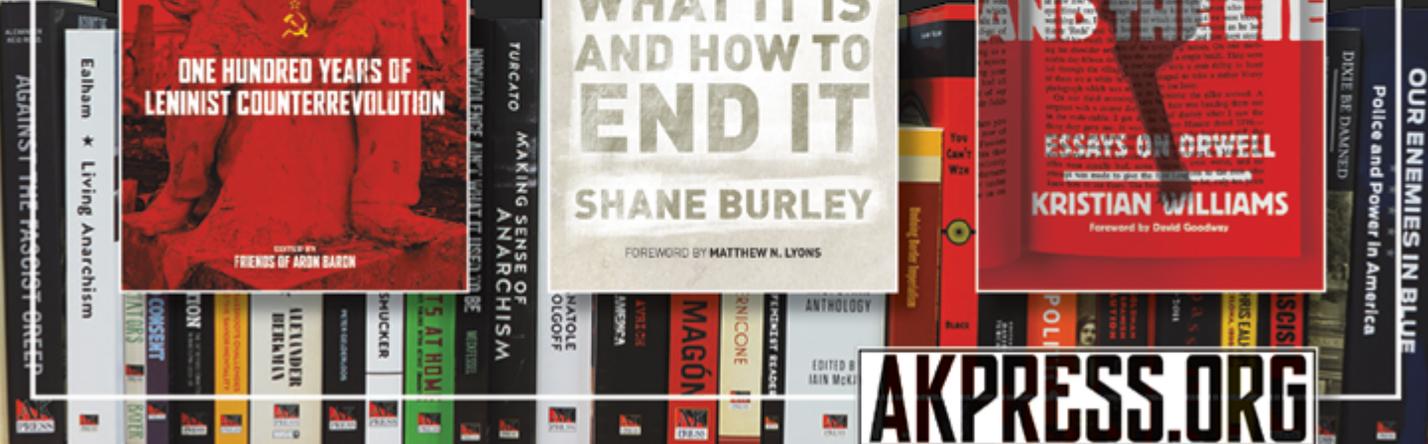
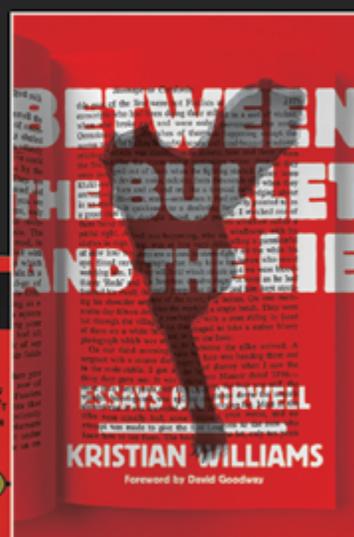
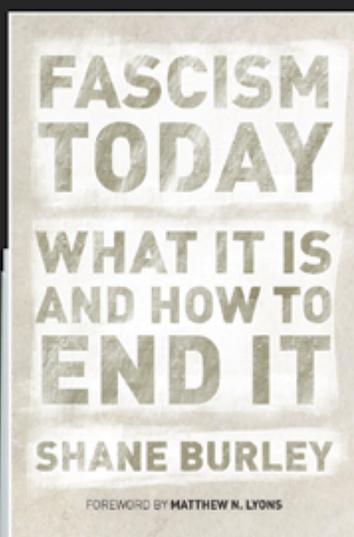
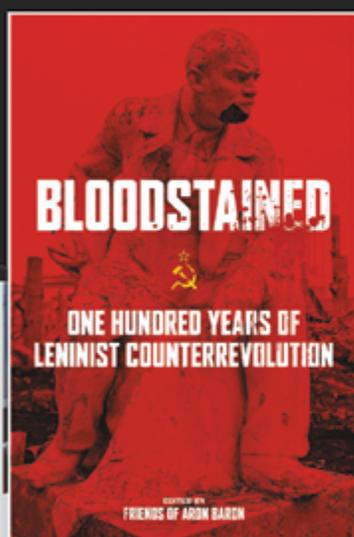


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Straying from the Party Line

My last years in the USSR.



BY GEORGI DERLUGUIAN

I KNEW THAT I WAS IN TROUBLE AGAIN when one cold Moscow night in early spring of 1989, my dissertation advisor at the USSR Academy of Sciences, the prominent and splendidly named Africanist scholar Apollo Borisovich Davidson, called on the phone and asked me tenderly: *Dear Georgi Matveevich* (the manners of old Saint Petersburg intelligentsia prescribed politely addressing even students by their first name and patronymic and, of course, never as “comrade”), *we all know that you do not value your life and your career. But I beg you explain, why you do not value MY life and career?*

Admittedly, in academic circles my sanity was regarded as somewhat suspect ever since my recent return after two years as an interpreter of Portuguese and Swahili in Mozambique. Such a reputation was not helped by my shaggy beard, unseasonal tropical tan, camouflage pants with so many handy pockets, and not in the least, the rumor that while doing my dissertation fieldwork I had nearly earned the Combat Red Star (Posthumous) in an encounter with the apartheid-supported “Contras.” But since I had survived, there could be no decoration, only a rumor. At most, curious colleagues would politely ask: *Did you kill many?* The Soviet participation in Cold War “regional conflicts” was always officially denied. What was undeniable was a hefty dissertation detailing the “social aspects of guerrilla wars in Southern Africa.” The most respected scholars studied something like Renaissance Italy, and they proudly bore their personal eccentricities. But someone had to study contemporary Africa, and were we not entitled to certain eccentricities, too? It was, however, the dissertation on contemporary Mozambique that unexpectedly got me in trouble with no less than the supreme organ, the *TseKa*. The Russian acronym stood for the apparatus of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Soviet Union. They obtained my drafts from a vigilant, or simply diligent, journal editor and, in the worried words of Professor A. B. Davidson, became “rather irate.”

But who exactly were “they”? And what earned me their thunderous charge of “grossly if not maliciously exaggerating the challenges of socialist orientation in the conditions of newly independent states in Africa”?

If I have any confessions to make, let it be this: yes, I did question what was previously regarded as obvious. My dissertation sought to explain why *Frente da Libertação de Moçambique* (FRELIMO) radicalized and adopted Marxism-Leninism as an ideology and organizational model during the anticolonial



war in the 1960s. I sincerely wondered how African peasants interpreted the revolutionary discourses of their Western-educated leaders, such as the intellectually formidable and very likable Eduardo Mondlane with his sociology PhD from Northwestern University in Chicago.

Even in Swahili the word “socialism” usually had to be either transliterated phonetically as *usoshalismi* or conveyed more metaphorically as *ujamaa*, literally “community-ness,” or even something like *shamba la ushiriki*, “a jointly cultivated field,” the commons. The word “imperialism” (*ubeberu*) was derived, as our textbook said, from *mbuzi*, meaning “goat” — a straightforward insult, like *cabrones* in Spanish. The African service of Radio Moscow was competing with Voice of America and the BBC in inventing and spreading the words to their audiences. What was happening in local languages like Likonde or Chichewa?

Yet somehow the peasants in northern Mozambique (though, for some important reason, not further down south) got the message and heroically mobilized for the war of national liberation. Surely there was something very important to be explained there. At the time, I did not know yet how useful

two famous concepts from the works of James Scott, “moral economy of the peasant” and “hidden transcripts,” would be.

At *TseKa* my dissertation was accused of being dangerously naïve or worse, potentially sacrilegious, in positing as research the oppressed’s conversion to Marxism-Leninism. What was there to explain when, according to the party slogan, our “teaching is all-mighty because it is true”? Once the “light of the Great October Revolution” had reached the remotest corners of Africa, the people there were naturally expected to join the “historical march of the humanity towards liberation and progress.” This seemed a pretty religious interpretation of what had once started as nineteenth-century social science theory.

Moreover, “they” from the Central Committee turned out to be a few career apparatchiks handling the CPSU International Department’s policy towards Angola and Mozambique. At first, they might look like orthodox Communists, which is perhaps how they really felt, at least at some level. But in daily reality, they were also bureaucrats engaged in turf wars against other of the superpower’s influential agencies: the KGB spies, the military, the diplomats, the economic planners from Gosplan. I already had some personal experience with such interagency feuds.

A year earlier, in 1988, while still in Mozambique I was briefly assigned as translator to the Soviet delegation visiting Maputo to negotiate regular renewal of the aid agreements. The delegation head was a folksy and rather meaty red-faced comrade P-ov. He had never been to Africa in his life. Instead, back in one of the economic ministries in Moscow he occupied a medium-high ranking position with a rather complex designation: the deputy head of the subdepartment for socioeconomic development in the regions of Far North and East, or something like that. For him, the trip to Mozambique was a well-paid tourist excursion.

In accordance with protocol, during negotiations the leader of the Soviet delegation sat at the middle of a long mahogany table directly opposite His Excellency Comrade Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of Mozambique. Funnily, this African revolutionary was to be simultaneously addressed by both titles. But then, many African nationalists in former colonies came from the families of petty officials. Their parents’ knowledge of Portuguese language and literacy qualified them for the formal stamp

of *assimilado*, or “civilized natives.” Revolution and national independence allowed the children of such local elites to overcome racist stigma and advance to the top government positions about which their parents could not dare dream. This certainly was part of the liberation process. But along with the spacious offices, mahogany desks, the culture of letter-heads and multiple rubber stamps, these sons of petty officials — turned revolutionaries — turned rulers of a national state have also inherited the colonial rituals of officialdom.

The premier, as host, opened the negotiations with a long litany of death and destruction “inflicted upon our *Pátria revolucionária*” by the apartheid regime of South Africa in the undeclared subversive war waged through their local puppets, the armed bandits. (“Armed bandits” was the official designation of domestic insurgency actually fostered by the



White Rhodesians and later South Africans. A few years later the same *bandidos armados*, or *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana*, would share the parliament with the then already ex-Marxist FRELIMO in a negotiated transition to democracy).

The high Soviet counterpart, with sighs of sympathy, diligently wrote down the numbers of burnt schools, hospitals, wrecked bridges, transports, and other losses. About fifteen minutes later, the premier ended his lengthy enumeration with a striking bottom line: *This is why we request our great Soviet allies and internationalist supporters in our struggle to increase aid for the coming period to the total amount of ...* The big number was in US dollars. As a nosy young interpreter, I just happened to know that on a different floor in the same building sat the International Monetary Fund delegation from Washington, whom the premier was asking for an even bigger stabilization loan. Market adjustment would soon begin in Mozambique and, at least by IMF standards, become a success story. But for now, the FRELIMO government was desperately shopping for foreign aid.

Startled by the sudden arrival of his turn to speak, the head of the Soviet delegation chewed his lips and started with a broad generous grin. I was preparing to interpret word for word in Portuguese when something extraordinary hit me, literally, from the left side. Number two in our delegation, a visibly overworked middle-aged man of an unhealthy, greenish complexion who had been absentmindedly leafing through a fat folder of documents kicked my foot under the table really hard. Looking completely stone-faced, he ordered me through clenched teeth:

Do not translate. Our delegation head is an incompetent fool.

But I must say something, I responded in a baffled whisper.

Speak about glasnost, perestroika, and Gorbachev's new humanistic thinking.

In the meantime, comrade P-ov had paused and benevolently nodded to me to begin interpreting his response. My shirt at once stuck to my sweating back. I felt all eyes in the room turn on me. If I were caught mistranslating at the negotiations of such level, would it be the end of my academic career, or worse? Yet the instinct momentarily suggested

following orders from the real boss in charge of the delegation. Staring at the ceiling fan, I went into a wild improvisation: *As comrade General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev said in his recent interview, the common goals of survival today unite the whole of humanity ...*

Judging from their bemused glances, the prime minister and especially his very intelligent aide, a young Indo-Portuguese economist who had joined the revolution at independence, understood the charade. But they also understood that it was not merely my mistranslating and said nothing. The only person in the room oblivious to what was going on was comrade P-ov. He continued deliberating while my heart was pounding: *Damn, what am I saying next?!*

How long this ordeal lasted I honestly cannot tell. An hour, two hours? Finally, a break was announced. I rose, holding onto the table, and staggered on shaking feet into the corridor where the green-faced handler was waiting for me with an open pack of cigarettes: *Have one, it will help. You deserve a decoration though you won't get it because nobody would know. Still, you have just spared our Motherland a substantial expense and political problem which she can no longer afford.*

He patted me on the shoulder and added in fatherly tone: *You are a quick thinker. What the heck is in your dusty academia? Let's get you a job in the apparat. Within a year you would be granted a decent apartment in Moscow, nice package of benefits, eventually you could get a car if you want one. Our job includes a lot of paperwork, including nights and many weekends, especially right before the party congresses. But you are young and you can handle it. Just one big condition. From day one you must learn how to live with an idiot right above yourself. All this is for the good of our great country.*

This common wisdom from the patriotic bureaucrat contained a clue to my predicament. I did not wear the wreath of principled anti-Soviet dissidence, not at all. I was patriotic and ideologically loyal. Yet I was perhaps just too curious and irreverent to fit in the prescribed social positions in Soviet institutions. The ill-fit of these traits with the hierarchy of dull and cautious elders, many of them dating back to the scary times of Stalinism, was my true infraction and career handicap.

Shortly before the scandal with my dissertation, a lesser imbroglio should have alerted me. Arriving at the institute late on a Monday morning (what was there to do before the usual department meeting anyway?) I was greeted by



the kind grey-haired Rufina Rudolfovna, our secretary for research, who looked more worried than usual: *My dear Georgi Matveevich, why are you so late? The institute's director himself passed here right at 9:00 AM and demanded to see YOU. He did not say why, only demanded to dispatch you to his office at once. Go now. But, please, try not to say anything offensive. In fact, just say nothing and listen to him attentively.*

She sent me off, heartily blessing me for good luck with a big Russian Orthodox sign of a cross. By the way, when I visit Moscow these days, I occasionally see the same indestructible director of our big research institute still holding to his position after all these years. He greets me like a prodigal son and asks to add my list of scholarly publications in various languages to embellish the institute's general output reports and citation index. But back in 1989, my treatment was different.

I sat in the director's anteroom for six hours while an imposing secretary loudly typed his official orders and letters on the big East German-made electrical typewriter. At the end of the workday, I was finally informed that the director had left for a meeting at the Presidium of Academy of Sciences and was not expected back. I would be seen by his deputy, a younger, very tall Latin Americanist dressed in a smart Western suit imported from Finland. He stared at me through his fashionable aviator glasses and started with a surprising apology: *Let us not consider our institute conservative. It is rather, ehh ... swamp-like. The esteemed Academician B. has spent his lifetime writing about the English bourgeois revolution, and yet he never saw the foggy Albion except on TV. The no less esteemed Corresponding Member Z. made her mark in world historical science studying Byzantine Empire, but obviously she never did any field-work abroad. So, she wondered at a recent meeting, why would they let you go to Africa? And now this letter from Paris ... Tell me honestly, how did you arrange for it?*

What letter? I wondered honestly.

Oh, come on! The invitation to give talks about your African escapades. Stop pretending. The prominent French Marxist anthropologist M. personally writes to our director inviting to Paris, all expenses paid, not the director himself, not any head of department, not even a junior-level scholarly employee, but [he hissed mocking a French accent] "votre

chercheur” meaning YOU, merely a graduate student! Do you realize that this is simply indecent?! How would you look into the eyes of senior colleagues after this?

Suddenly it dawned on me. It must have been Michel, the French researcher with whom I became friends in Mozambique. We were both interested in the same issues of state formation, nationalism, and political violence. He was a devoted Trotskyist, lest this compromising fact go unmentioned. Luckily, Michel showed just enough wits to get the letter signed by his erstwhile advisor, the prominent Marxist anthropologist with an acceptable academic reputation in Moscow. Like many Trotskyists in the mother country of Great Revolutions, Michel was also an ardent French nationalist. He reacted with horror and indignation to my first English publication in an American journal. To repair the upset balance, Michel personally translated my Portuguese draft of the summary of my dissertation chapter about RENAMO, the Mozambican “Contras.” And then he arranged to invite me to Paris to meet the French Africanists — and also his “true Marxist-Leninist” comrades.

This time, I was absolved and the whole affair was to be quietly forgotten. Our director, in a marvel of bureaucratic maneuvering, wrote back to Paris that, regretfully, they must have been misled. No such person as Georgi Derluguian had ever been employed at the Institute. Technically, this was true. My position was *aspirant*, a graduate student.

The *TseKa* guys, however, were no academic slackers. At seven in the morning the old widow with whom I was renting a room in the far-flung concrete outliers of Moscow, still wrapped in her night gowns, woke me up and said with big eyes: *There is a government courier for YOU!* (Oh, no, not for me again.) *He needs you to sign on a personal delivery.*

The large pale blue envelope was imprinted with the resounding logo

**COMMUNIST PARTY OF SOVIET UNION
Central Committee**

Inside was a single sheet of paper, typewritten on letterhead and stamped. The letter summoned me to appear at a given hour at an address in the historic center of Moscow. It was not at the *TseKa* headquarters but somewhere nearby.



There, behind an ancient desk upholstered in green plush cloth (stained with ink where the inkwell must have once stood), sat a strict-looking man who held in front of him a typewritten copy of my submission. On virtually every page, sentences and whole paragraphs were neatly high-lighted in red pencil, so neatly that it had to have been done with a ruler. The man tersely offered that I sit down and opened with a phrase which promised nothing good: *We wanted to hear your explanations regarding some questions that arise from reading your manuscript.*

So, I realized, it must be him, my previously invisible and unnamed censor. I once fancied myself becoming a journalist and writing about international affairs for the popular Communist Youth magazine, *Rovesnik*. The editor, an energetic chain-smoking woman, returned my first attempted article about the horrific damage to African wildlife done by the war, and conveyed the verdict of “an authoritative comrade” familiar with the current situation in Mozambique in a tone of the sincerest sympathy: *Vivid descriptions. Things may seem rough at the moment. But why should we depress your young readers with such stories?*



Still, I desperately wanted the magazine job and tried to write another article about something which, in my understanding, had absolutely nothing to do with “socialist orientation” in Africa. From a safe distance, I savaged the wildly grotesque anticommunist dictatorship of Malawi’s senile President Hastings Kamuzu Banda. This time I was called in to see the editor-in-chief himself. The diminutive Georgian, extremely well groomed and irritable like a Siamese cat, carefully extinguished his silver-tipped cigarette in the crystal ashtray and asked me softly: *Derluguian, help me decide. Are you a fool? Or an enemy cleverly passing himself for a fool? How should we understand your story about this Malawi where everyone is waiting for the death of a senile leader, where blue jeans and rock-n-roll are banned and instead folk choruses sing praises, and the squads of “Young Pioneers” conduct purges of suspected enemies of the people? Are these not thinly veiled references to certain periods in the recent past of our own country?*

On that occasion, I also escaped with merely probation. The editor-in-chief ended the conversation with, what seemed for a moment, a mischievous twinkle in his eyes: *Since you proved yourself entirely incapable of writing anything publishable in the Soviet press about East Africa, we are sending you to West Siberia. Try to write something more upbeat about the summer construction brigades of student volunteers who are helping build homes for the wounded internationalist fighters returning from Afghanistan.*

Needless to say, I failed that assignment too. A group of young Sandinistas from Nicaragua, who studied engineering at a famous technological university in Moscow, stopped my interview with a bitter question in Spanish: *Compañero, if all this disorganization, drinking, and corruption that we are witnessing at this construction site is really a socialist planned economy, then what are we fighting and dying for back in our country?*

So, I should have had enough personal experience to anticipate that my conversation at *TseKa* was going to end badly. The questions I was asked to answer sounded rhetorical and sometimes downright stupid. The only surprise was that this “authoritative comrade” really did not know much about the history of Mozambique or the actual workings of Portuguese colonialism. Nor that he cared. He had the party line — which was his departmental line — and it sounded pretty fantastical to me. It

did pain me that the country was collapsing before my eyes. Unlike him, I actually saw burnt villages, mutilated women, and dead children. I also met many decent and dedicated people who had really believed in the independence of their country and socialist development.

Our conversation ended in a shouting match. To my stubborn refusal to admit fault and attempts to explain anything, the man holding my manuscript in his hands finally said:

Very well, you might be smart. But, remember, as long as I am sitting in this chair, you will not publish a word anywhere in the Soviet Union, and the doors of your career will close on you. What would you say?

I would say that in my old age I will be telling tales about this conversation to my grandchildren, and they will ask, grandpa, what was TseKa?

Out of here!!!!

I wasn't as heroic as it sounds. It was, after all, 1989. The Berlin Wall would fall a few months later. The Party machine was still working as if nothing was happening. But a lot was happening.

Besides, a couple days earlier I did something daring by way of preparing myself to visit *TseKa*. I knocked on the door of the first *otdel* (office) which was, everybody knew, the KGB curator assigned to watch our aca-demic institute. Greeting me with a curious stare was a slick diplomat-like man in civilian suit which could hardly conceal his shoulder set of career officer. He was probably biding his time between foreign assignments. To my question about the possible consequences of my articles appearing in the scholarly journals in France and America, he laughed and pointed to the heavy safe box in the corner of his office: *Ha-ha, do you mean you bypassed publication in the proceedings of the spring conference of young scholars at Teachers Institute somewhere in Voronezh, circulation one hundred copies? Instead you went straight for Paris and New York? That is our next generation! Of course, I had this information. In this sacred box behind me sits*

the detailed instruction on dealing with such smart alecks. Fortunately for you, another instruction arrived last week that rescinded a whole bunch of previous instructions. Therefore, nothing is going to happen, not from my side. We are all into glasnost, perestroika, and democratization now, right?

A year later, in 1990, the same officer saw me in the institute's cor-ridor and advised with memorable directness: *Don't you have a job offer in America? Good for you. Get out of here before the whole thing collapses. I will sign off on your exit visa.*

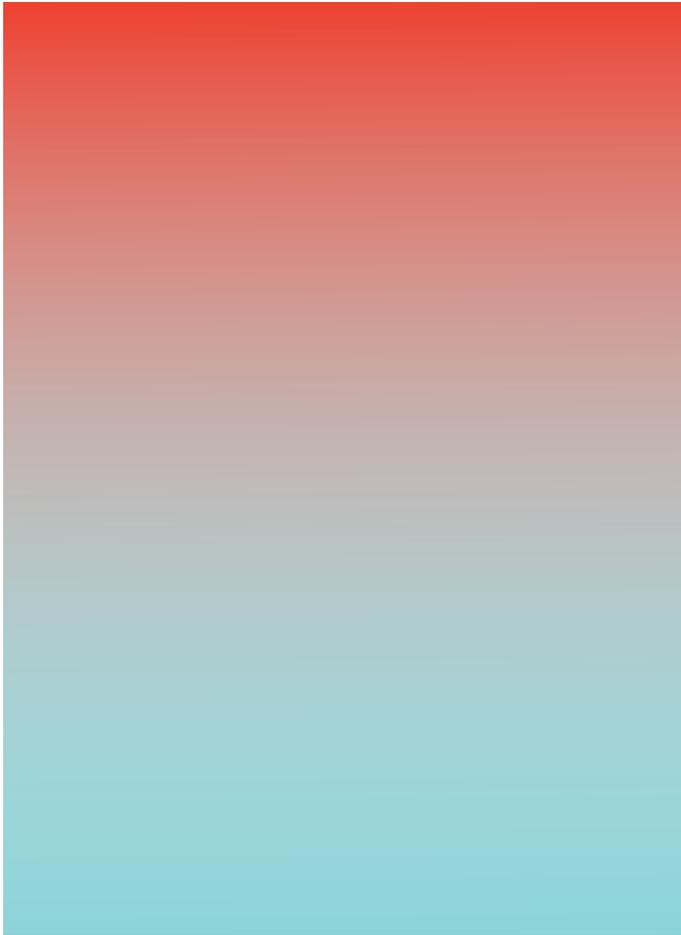
Obtaining an exit visa and the prized Aeroflot ticket to New York amidst the collapsing Soviet Union, moving to the improbable position at Binghamton University; that all belongs to a different story. So do the later encounters with the infinitely subtler and more effective American versions of academic censorship: *Too bad, he was not among the finalists for this job ...* No, I am not carping. I did fine, eventually. Life in the Soviet Union provided superb survival skills.

Still, the biggest academic honors I have ever received were the parting words from my long-suffering advisor Apollo Borisovich Davidson: *For everything that I was ever lauded, I was first criticized. Let your life be different.*

And, of course, the memorable bright morning in early May, the day after I had been banned from publishing. In the institute's corridors, I was greeted as an intellectual hero. Above all, by Aron Iakovlevich Gurevich himself, the pride and conscience of our institute and a world-famous medievalist. His eyesight almost gone in old age, Gurevich was moving in a slow stately gait, helped by his students. I politely stepped near the wall to give way when somebody whispered in the ear of old maître: *That Africanist whose dissertation ... at TseKa.* Aron Iakovlevich turned slowly, like a supertanker, and headed toward me with his hand outstretched to shake mine: *Well done, young man!* I am pretty sure he had no inkling of what my dissertation was about. But to be banned at *TseKa*? It had to be good. ★



The Soviets Abroad



Throughout its existence, the Soviet Union played the role of both liberator and oppressor.

by Daniel Finn



When the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, they didn't give much thought to the foreign policy their new state would follow. Lenin admitted as much in 1921: "Before the Revolution and even after it, we thought: if not immediately then in the worst case scenario very soon, the revolution would win in other more developed countries from a capitalist point of view; if this did not occur, we would have to succumb."

By then, the leader was forced to concede that "the movement has not been as linear as we expected." The Bolsheviks had managed to defeat their opponents in a bloody civil war, seeing off interventions by several foreign powers, and their position looked secure for the time being. Yet European revolution had not materialized — the Soviet Union would now have to survive in a world of hostile capitalist states for a period whose length nobody could foresee.

This unexpected scenario posed a dilemma for the Bolsheviks. On the one hand, they would have to govern a vast multinational state and set about constructing a socialist economy as best they could; on the other, they had promised to direct a worldwide revolutionary movement, the Communist International (Comintern), from its Moscow headquarters. The Soviet leadership's refusal to acknowledge the existence of any dilemma made it harder still.

When Stalin won the power struggle after Lenin's death, and the Bolshevik dictatorship began hardening into the system that we know as Stalinism, he gave priority to socialist construction on the home front, while insisting that there was a perfect harmony between Soviet national interests and the world revolution. In practice this meant subordinating the Comintern to the twists and turns of Soviet foreign policy. In the words of Stalin: "He is an internationalist who is prepared to defend the USSR unreservedly, without hesitations, without conditions." "Defence of the USSR" was implicitly conflated with the power of the ruling bureaucracy, and of Stalin himself.

The structure of the Comintern allowed its Moscow-based directorate to oust leaders from the various Communist Parties (CPs) if their performance was deemed unsatisfactory. Stalin used this power to ensure that every CP had a leadership team that would do exactly what it was told. The instructions from Moscow were often based on a faulty assessment of local conditions, and sometimes proved to be disastrous, as in China and Germany. The habit of reliance on outside authority drilled into leading Communist cadres was also profoundly debilitating. Party leaders trained to follow orders from afar weren't likely to make the right call when a sudden political crisis put revolution on the agenda.

Unity Against Fascism

For much of the 1930s, Stalin's priority was to cultivate a defensive alliance with the capitalist democracies of Western Europe against the threat of Nazi Germany. This led the Comintern to push for broad antifascist coalitions, resulting in the election of Popular Front governments in France and Spain. When the Spanish right staged a coup against the new administration, the popular classes' reaction snowballed into a revolution without parallel in the interwar period.

In theory, this moment should have been exactly what the Comintern was designed for, but Stalin saw the upheaval as a threat to his alliance policy. The Soviet Union was the only European state willing to assist the Spanish Republic, and threw its weight wholeheartedly behind the most conservative elements on the Republican side. Soviet agents were also despatched to pursue a murderous vendetta against the POUM, a party of the anti-Stalinist left, casting an ugly shadow over the struggle against Franco. This was all justified in terms of the necessity to win the war, but the Republic was crushed anyway, leaving Europe's fascist powers triumphant.

A conservative policy in Spain could not even secure the alliance Stalin wanted, as the French and British governments preferred to appease Hitler. Purges of the officer corps had also gravely weakened the Soviet military just as war seemed imminent. In August 1939, Stalin repaid the cynicism of the Munich agreement with interest by signing a nonaggression pact with the Nazi regime. The pact came as a shock to the European CPs, whose antifascist line now went against the grain of Soviet policy. The British and French parties tried to walk a tightrope by endorsing Stalin's agreement while supporting a military struggle against Hitler by their own governments, but Moscow quickly brought them into line: Communists were told to argue that the main responsibility for war lay with Anglo-French imperialism.

The Soviet leader was hoping for a lengthy conflict that would sap Germany's strength. Instead, the Wehrmacht conquered most of Western Europe in a lightning offensive, and Hitler was free to turn his attention eastwards. In June 1941, a giant invasion force crashed into Soviet territory and penetrated as far as the Moscow suburbs before it was contained. The Soviet government and the Comintern now swung back to the antifascist policy of the 1930s, negotiating a military alliance with Churchill and Roosevelt and organizing resistance movements throughout Europe. After

suffering enormous casualties, the Red Army started to roll back its genocidal adversary from 1943 onward, continuing the pursuit all the way to Berlin. By the time Germany surrendered, Soviet power was at its peak, along with that of the Communist movement.

Superpower

Soviet foreign policy would be dominated for the next four decades by its rivalry with the United States. Talk of a Cold War between two "superpowers" obscured the fundamental asymmetry between the two states. The US was already the world's richest economy before the war began, and its position had only grown stronger in the meantime. There had been no fighting on American soil, and limited battlefield casualties.

The contrasting Soviet experience was later described by John F. Kennedy, in a rare moment of empathy for a US president: "At least 20 million lost their lives. Countless millions of homes and farms were burned or sacked. A third of the nation's territory, including nearly two-thirds of its industrial base, was turned into a wasteland — a loss equivalent to the devastation of this country east of Chicago." For the most part, this trauma was shrugged off by American officials, who denied that the Soviet Union could have any legitimate security concerns.

According to the Cold War ideology that soon took root in Western countries, the Soviet Union was hell-bent on expansion and would only be deterred by the threat of overwhelming force. In fact, Stalin's policy was relatively cautious and pragmatic. His main priority was to secure the USSR against future attacks so that it could set about repairing the damage suffered during the war. That meant keeping a firm grip on the territory occupied by the Red Army in Eastern Europe, but there was no question of launching an aggressive war beyond this sphere of influence. As long as the wartime alliance endured and there was still hope of obtaining US aid for reconstruction, Stalin was even willing to allow some degree of political pluralism in his East European buffer zone. But when the Cold War began in earnest, he ruthlessly imposed Soviet-style regimes on all the satellite states.

This was certainly a crime against democracy and self-determination, but it did not form part of a scheme for world conquest. US military planners found no evidence of any Soviet plan to invade Western Europe in the late 1940s, and concluded that war would be the result of miscalculation if it came about. The main flash point of the early Cold War was Korea, where US and Chinese forces confronted each other directly on the battlefield. Stalin had given Kim Il-sung a green light to invade South Korea in 1950, but only on the understanding that he shouldn't expect Soviet troops to bail him out if things went wrong — that would be China's responsibility.

Washington's Crusade

In order to explain why the Cold War developed in the way that it did, we have to look beyond the stated goal of US policy — to contain Soviet aggression — and recognize that Washington had a much wider ambition: to make a world safe for capitalism in general, and US capitalism in particular. The main threat to this project came from homegrown revolutions, not Soviet military aggression.

Cold War ideology maintained that Soviet power and world revolution were two sides of the same coin: revolutions were made on orders from Moscow, and successful ones would produce new satellite states under its thumb. On both counts this analysis was false. Stalin was deeply ambivalent about the prospects for revolution outside his security zone in Eastern Europe. He had ordered Communist Parties in France, Italy, and Greece to cooperate as traditional elites were restored to power. When the Greek communists took up arms against the monarchist regime in 1946, Stalin gave them lukewarm support, believing their cause to be hopeless.

And when communist-led revolutions did take place after the war, it was in spite of Stalin's advice, not because of it. The Soviet leader told Chinese and Yugoslav communists to form governments of national unity with their rivals, only to have his instructions disregarded. Having come to power without the help of the Red Army and the NKVD, these new regimes had a life of their own. By 1948, the

Yugoslav leader Tito had broken with Stalin after deciding that Soviet arrogance was too much to bear.

At the very outset of the Cold War, this was clear evidence that, even when a revolution was led by Communists trained in the Moscow school, it need not simply result in the extension of Soviet power. But this ideological fantasy was much too valuable for the US ruling class to discard. By presenting every revolutionary movement as a Soviet proxy, they could mobilize support for a global crusade in defense of the established order. Freely elected, non-Communist reformers who threatened US economic interests would be targeted by this crusade as much as Communist insurgents. Such reformers would often have no choice but to ask the Soviet Union for its help against US aggression.

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Coexistence and Conflict

After Stalin's death in 1953, his successors tried to ease tensions with the West. Three years of immensely destructive war in Korea ended in stalemate. The new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev began speaking of "peaceful coexistence" as the framework for international relations, with economic competition between capitalist and communist states replacing violent revolution as the lever for systemic change.

For Moscow, maintaining control over Eastern Europe was challenging enough: troops had to be sent into Hungary to crush an anti-Soviet rebellion in 1956. Khrushchev had no desire to get involved in clashes with the United States or its allies further afield, and would have liked to dial down the arms race so money could be spent on raising living standards instead. But there was one insuperable barrier to long-term coexistence between the superpowers. As long as the Soviet Union continued to support revolutionary movements, the US would never accept it as a normal player in world politics.

The Soviet leaders had inherited this commitment from the early years of the revolution, and could never shrug it off entirely, even if the aid they supplied was selective and opportunistic. Giving up on the idea of "proletarian internationalism" would have meant abandoning the main ideological prop for their occupation of Eastern Europe (and for the multinational Soviet Union itself, which might otherwise look very much like the old, Russian-dominated tsarist empire). Support for revolutionary struggles was also a valuable weapon in the contest for global influence with the United States. The USSR was never in a position to wage full-scale wars on the other side of the world, as the US did in Korea and Vietnam. Beyond its East European protectorates, Moscow relied more on "soft power." And when the Chinese communists broke with Khrushchev in the early sixties, there was now a rival communist power willing to support Third World revolutions if the Soviet Union turned its back on them.

Third World in Revolt

With politics in Europe seemingly frozen, the main theater for superpower competition during the 1960s and '70s lay in the postcolonial states of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Stalin had shown little interest in the non-European world — he once described the Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh as a "communist troglodyte" — but

his successors cast their net wider in search of allies. The goal of Soviet policy in the Third World was by no means to promote revolution across the board. On the principle that an established government in the hand was worth any number of communist guerrillas in the bush, Moscow often struck up warm relations with nationalist regimes that were staunchly anticommunist at home. This helped scupper a once-powerful Arab communist movement: in Egypt, communists dissolved their organization to join Nasser's Arab Socialist Union; in Iraq and Syria, they were dragooned into subordinate alliances with the ruling Ba'athists.

From Europe to Latin America, Moscow-aligned Communist parties generally moved away from promoting revolution in favor of constitutional politics. One of the main exceptions was in Vietnam, where the local Communist leadership decided to launch a revolutionary war against the US client state in the south. The Vietnamese Communists held their Soviet and Chinese allies responsible for pressuring them to sign a compromise peace deal in the 1950s; they kept their own counsel thereafter, soliciting military aid from Moscow and Peking alike but allowing neither to determine war strategy. Without Soviet backing, the Vietnamese Communists probably could not have held their own against the US invasion, but that assistance was always of secondary importance: the main fuel propelling the revolution came from inside Vietnam.

If Soviet policy led Communists in the Middle East to prostrate themselves before nationalism, elsewhere its effect was to pull nationalists towards communism. The most important example of this phenomenon was Cuba. Fidel Castro and his allies took power in 1959 with a program of social reform that soon put them at odds with the United States, and had little choice but to reach out to Moscow for support against the threat of invasion. As Soviet economic aid flooded in, Castro merged his organization with the Cuban Communist Party and declared his allegiance to Soviet-style Marxism.

Khrushchev welcomed the Cuban Revolution, which gave his country an unexpected ally on Washington's doorstep. But the Soviet leadership found Castro to be a troublesome protégé. He accused them of conservative immobility and tried to foment revolutions throughout



"Krushyovka" apartment building in Germany.

Africa and Latin America. In the late 1960s, relations between Moscow and Havana were so poor that many expected an open breach. Castro later settled down as a more predictable Soviet client, but his government kept looking for opportunities to disrupt the status quo in world politics, when Moscow would have preferred to let sleeping dogs lie.

The Cuban experience was later repeated in a number of countries where radical nationalists came to power, from Mozambique to South Yemen. Soviet economic and military assistance often played a crucial part in helping these revolutions survive in the face of pressure from the US and its allies, and enabled them to raise living standards in some of the world's poorest countries. But the turn to Moscow usually meant importing the pathologies of the original Soviet model, based on a one-party state and a rigid, centrally planned economy. Only in Nicaragua did a group of Marxist revolutionaries break with this pattern and construct a model of socialism based on democratic pluralism.

Indian Summer

In the late 1970s, there was much talk in Washington of a worldwide Soviet offensive behind all of the recent setbacks for US foreign policy. This argument was used by Ronald Reagan and his New Right backers to justify a massive military buildup and a spate of Third World interventions that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. It led to a period of heightened tension between the two blocs and brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.

In truth, most of the unwelcome (from Washington's perspective) developments of the period had little or nothing to do with the USSR. Robert White, the US ambassador to El Salvador who was cashiered by Reagan, explained to his bosses that the revolutionary movements in Central America were fuelled, not by Cuban or Soviet money, but by "decades of oppression and a studied refusal on the part of the elite to make any concessions to the masses." The Marxist-Leninist who deserved most credit for the liberation of Portuguese Africa was the Guinean leader Amílcar Cabral, not Leonid Brezhnev. And the most traumatic experience of all for US public opinion, the Iranian Revolution, was led by Islamic fundamentalists who were equally hostile to both superpowers.

Brezhnev and his colleagues naturally welcomed these setbacks for their rival, which came as a timely distraction from the problems they faced closer to home. The Soviet economy was slowing down, an aging leadership had no idea how to get it moving again, and Moscow had effectively abandoned any hope of winning consent for Communist rule in Eastern Europe after sending in troops to crush a reform experiment in Czechoslovakia. Even the CPs of Western Europe had started to distance themselves from the USSR. Any relief from this depressing vista could only delight the Soviet leadership. But for the most part, they were spectators observing the new wave of Third World revolutions and hoping to take advantage where they could.

There were three notable exceptions to this rule. In Angola, the left-wing nationalists who had taken power after decolonization in 1975 were threatened by rival CIA-backed movements, supported in the field by South Africa and Zaire. Fidel Castro decided to send a Cuban task force to beat back the South African invasion, and the Soviet navy helped ferry them across the Atlantic. This enraged the foreign policy elite in Washington, whose leading figures had expected to get rid of Agostinho Neto's MPLA as easily as they had dealt with Patrice Lumumba in the Congo a decade earlier. Thwarted in their bid to impose Jonas Savimbi as the Mobutu of Angola, they gave enough support to his UNITA force to allow it to wreak a decade of havoc in the country.

Another large-scale Soviet and Cuban intervention in Africa had much less admirable results. Support for the military junta of Mengistu Haile Mariam in Ethiopia helped it repel a US-backed Somali invasion, but also kept one of Africa's most brutal regimes in power as it massacred the civilian left and crushed the Eritrean independence movement

(ironically led by pro-Soviet Marxists, who eventually disposed of Mengistu, in partnership with their Tigrayan allies, after his lifeline from Moscow was cut in the early nineties).

A Soviet Vietnam

But the most disastrous Soviet adventure was in Afghanistan. The Afghan Communists had seized power in a 1978 military coup and tried to impose radical reforms despite having a minuscule base of support. Facing violent opposition, they responded with mass executions, and also began purging their own cadres. At first the Soviet leadership rejected pleas for military assistance. As the KGB boss Yuri Andropov remarked in March 1979: “To deploy our troops would mean to wage war against the people, to crush the people, to shoot at the people. We will look like aggressors, and we cannot permit that to occur.”

But within months, as the regime looked set to collapse, a full-scale Soviet invasion began: the first time troops had been deployed outside the East European buffer zone since the Cold War began. The Afghan leader Hafizullah Amin, a thuggish figure disliked intensely by Soviet officials, was summarily executed and replaced by Babrak Karmal, who had been given strict orders to broaden the base of his government and moderate its policies. Whatever benefits this reorientation might have brought to Karmal were more than cancelled out by the stigma of being seen as a Soviet puppet.

Initially the intervention was meant to last for a few months, but the Afghan rebels had ideal terrain on which to fight and backing from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. The Soviet Union found itself fighting an unwinnable war, no matter how many bombs it dropped. US officials could hardly believe their luck. Though the Soviet invasion was the product of desperation, not overconfidence, it supplied the ideal backdrop for Reagan’s election campaign and the global offensive that followed. As CIA chief Bill Casey gleefully observed: “Here is the beauty of the Afghan operation. Usually it looks like the big bad Americans are beating up on the natives. Afghanistan is just the reverse. The Russians are beating up on the little guys.”

Withdrawal

When Mikhail Gorbachev became the new Soviet leader in 1985, he wanted to end the war in Afghanistan and scale back the nuclear arms race, a crippling burden on the Soviet economy. Gorbachev soon developed this foreign policy turn into a blueprint for a new world order based on cooperation and universal human values. This was certainly an attractive vision, which did much to explain his soaring popularity outside the USSR. But Washington had no interest in playing along.

At one of his summit meetings with Reagan, Gorbachev proposed a joint statement affirming that “equality of all states, noninterference in internal affairs and freedom of sociopolitical choice must be recognized as the inalienable and mandatory standards of international relations.” It was rejected out of hand by Reagan’s team of advisers. US demands for Soviet cooperation in solving regional conflicts in practice meant that Washington would be given a free hand to impose its will on countries like El Salvador and Nicaragua by force.

The end of the Cold War proved to be as uneven as its prosecution. Gorbachev followed through on his rhetoric, allowing the East European satellite regimes to fall in 1989 after promising not to repeat the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. But there would be no US withdrawal from Latin America to match the Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe. Desperate to normalize relations with the West, Gorbachev was prepared to make sweeping concessions which meant abandoning Moscow’s role as revolutionary sponsor for good.

Angola was a notable exception. As the Cold War fizzled out, the apartheid regime in South Africa geared up for an all-out offensive to oust the MPLA for good. Without consulting Moscow in advance, Castro again dispatched a huge military force that inflicted a crushing defeat on the South Africans — a crucial turning point in the demise of white supremacy across the region, and one that was achieved in spite of Reagan’s triumphalism and Gorbachev’s placations.

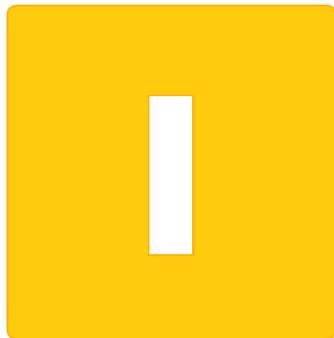
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It is unlikely that the fortunes of socialism will ever again be identified with a single country in the way they were with the Soviet Union. However, the idea of a simultaneous worldwide revolution is clearly utopian — power will be taken one state at a time, or not at all. International solidarity is vital, but the interests of political forces in different countries and continents will inevitably come into conflict. The best way to manage the ensuing tensions will be to acknowledge their existence and resolve them through negotiation, without subordinating an international movement to the interests of any one state. The demise of the Soviet Union has posed challenges for anticapitalist struggle around the world, but the absence of a single coordinating center is not one of them. ★

MEGAN ERICKSON

RED DIAPER BABIES

In America, school is
preparation for “real” life.
In the early Soviet Union,
school was filled with life.



WORKED IN A PRIVATE day care for three years, giving tours to parents obsessed with risk and liability. Did we fingerprint and background check employees? How often? Did male staff do diapers? And if so, could their child have

her diaper changed by the female teacher instead? It was sad that these questions were foremost on parents' minds, above ones about what their child would be doing all day in our care.

In capitalist societies, each nuclear family is thought to be a private entity, operating in opposition to each other and distinct from the state. Evangelicals might insist there be a patriarch at the head of that family, while liberals envision a broader spectrum of possible arrangements. But the family form is the same: atomized, and financially self-reliant. The child is the responsibility of the parents who almost solely invested in her, and parents are expected to vigilantly monitor risks to their investment, even when they aren't around. If your child is harmed or becomes ill, damage has been done to you, not to society, and it's your job to fix it.

The United States has the worst child abuse record in the industrialized world — but the vast majority (about four out of five cases) are perpetrated by parents, not day-care providers. Still, parents' anxieties about leaving their child in day care are not unfounded. American childcare is highly unregulated and availability is mediated by family wealth, leaving it to individual families to exercise "choice" and monitor program quality. A 2007 survey by the National Institution of Child Health Development found that only 10 percent of American childcare centers offer high quality care. Most were rated "fair" or "poor." And an OECD report on child well-being found that the United States ranks twenty-fourth out of thirty countries on health and safety, due in part to a lack of social policies for children.

This situation is perpetuated, on the one hand, by conservatives' commitment to the idea of the patriarchal nuclear family and hostility to state interference in parental rights. The only serious attempt to provide a federally funded universal childcare system in the US was vetoed

by Nixon due to its "family-weakening implications." For their part, American liberals have failed utterly to articulate a positive vision for social upbringing — instead, attempting to justify programs for children through a kind of morbid accounting, in which kids are entitled to care today because it's cheaper than imprisoning them down the line. "ROI" or return on investment is a favorite metric of both Democratic politicians and billionaire education reformers.

School systems are the spaces in which modern societies balance the needs, rights, and interests of parents, children, and the state. From schools, parents need childcare; children need an upbringing; and the state needs a future. But where Americans tend to view these as conflicting interests, the Bolsheviks saw state-run schools as having the potential to liberate mothers from the private drudgery of housework and economic dependence, while freeing children to participate in public, collaborative play. Almost immediately upon seizing power, they declared education from preschool to university the right of every citizen.

Before the October Revolution, 70 percent of Russians were illiterate. Under the tsar, schools were generally reserved for the rich and overseen by the church. Catherine II had made it known that she believed too much education was dangerous for the monarchical social order. The Bolsheviks agreed — identifying illiteracy as "an enemy of communism," they launched *likbez* in 1920, a campaign demanding all citizens learn how to read and write in their native language. For the first time, textbooks were produced

The only serious attempt to provide a federally funded universal childcare system in the US was vetoed by Nixon due to its "family-weakening" implications.

in hundreds of minority languages. Trade unions and youth organizations organized reading groups to promote literacy, with great success: according to the 1926 census, most people could read.

The early years of the revolution saw the planning and ad hoc creation of thousands of schools, distribution centers, children's clubs and communes, playgrounds, and crèches — many of them, initially, in the former homes of aristocrats. Libraries, art galleries, and museums which had once been open only to scholars were made public and heated to attract visitors. Women were given paid leave at childbirth, and “Palaces for the Protection of Maternity and Childhood,” offered food and medical services. Despite a profound lack of resources, Alexandra Kollontai, the People's Commissar of Social Welfare, aimed to cover the country with a network of institutions for the social upbringing of children. “I considered it to be my main task to chart the course that the labor republic should adopt in the sphere of protecting the interests of woman as a labor unit and as a mother,” she recalled. By 1921, there were 7,784 institutions serving 350,000 children.

Children were enticed to the new schools with free meals. But what to teach them once they were there? How should a young communist learn? The Bolsheviks had an ambitious political agenda — children could have been seen as nothing more than blank slates on which to write this radical new reality into existence. Yet rather than attempt to engineer the future with a didactic curriculum, they designed an educational system informed by America's then-progressive teaching methods, emphasizing self-expression, collaborative play, “hands on” activities, and student-directed group projects. Preschool students were to be taught to run their own games instead of having teachers run them for them. Fourth-year students spent the entire

year writing and producing a play about a theme they chose. To learn about anatomy, children examined each other's skin before and after a run. Teachers of all ages were instructed to use children's interests to determine a course of study. As one American principal put it, “Soviet Russia is actually giving to the masses in its state-supported public schools the kind of education that progressive private schools in this country and in Europe have been striving earnestly to give to the relatively few who come to them.”

Lucy Wilson was an American educator who interviewed hundreds of Russian teachers working around the world and visited the USSR twice in the 1920s. In a book recording her observations of “the new Russia,” she described both utter deprivation and a sense of incredible possibility. Teachers who didn't have paper and pencils instead took children on field trips and nature walks, and “everywhere, every pleasant day, in the streets, round the town walls, in public buildings, in industrial establishments, in museums, in art galleries, may be seen groups of school children of all ages, oblivious of the world, absorbed in seeing and

understanding.” The early Bolshevik school system more closely resembled the experimental “real city as school” vision of anarchists like Paul Goodman than it did anything out of 1984.

In capitalist societies like the United States, where public schools are increasingly used as tax-funded training camps for corporate workplaces, curriculum and standards focus more on preparing children for the demands of adulthood than on their immediate needs and development. Tech CEOs from Bill Gates to Mark Zuckerberg to Tim Cook have advocated that coding be taught starting as young as kindergarten, and policymakers like Obama agree (meanwhile, the trendiest private schools in Silicon Valley don't allow computers in the classroom). In America, school is



preparation for “real” life. In the early Soviet Union, the school was life; maybe even more real than the adult world outside its doors.

Another American who toured the Soviet Union with a group of educators in 1927, John Dewey, was convinced that the Bolsheviks were attempting on a large scale a democratic project which had only been tried by philanthropists and private schools in the United States. Dewey was called a communist dupe by conservatives for his praise of Soviet educators, but the admiration was mutual:

Nadezhda Krupskaya, the influential deputy Commissar of Education, read and enjoyed discussing his work, and *School and Society* was official recommended reading for Soviet teachers. Dewey documented his observations on unofficial excursions as well as official tours of “model” schools, which during famine and civil war served as articulations of what every Soviet school of the future should look like — inside schools and out, he wrote, children’s work was taken seriously and always intended to culminate in authentic participation in social life. In one model school,

for example, charts documented improvements to the children’s working-class neighborhood that they’d planned and brought about over the course of ten years. Meanwhile, all over the country, self-governing youth groups supported by Krupskaya promoted student engagement with local politics.

A constant refrain among American educators who observed the Soviet system was that it seemed to take seriously the democratic values to which American schools only paid lip service. While it’s true Soviet educators borrowed

The early Bolshevik school system more closely resembled the experimental “real city as school” vision of anarchists like Paul Goodman than it did anything out of 1984.



inspiration from bourgeois theorists abroad, homegrown psychologists were hard at work trying to apply historical materialism to theories of human development. The greatest of these, Lev Vygotsky observed that individual development was inextricable from social interaction and human progress, arguing that the language and tools available to us shape our intellectual possibilities as learners. Thus, skills like reading and writing should be honored in the classroom as complex cultural activities, and taught in ways that are meaningful to children and relevant to life, with teaching “organized in such a way that reading and writing are necessary for something.” Only when children embraced reading and writing as tools for shaping their environment, he argued, would they be motivated to master them.

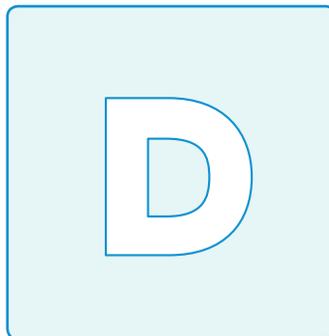
It is striking that a society whose literal existence was every day under siege made the conscious choice to affirm children’s present value over their future value-added, while a society as powerful as the United States continues to place anxiety over future productivity on the shoulders of students. Dewey was shocked by how little job training went on in Soviet schools compared to their American counterparts. Despite the Soviet Union’s urgent need for trained workers as it attempted to industrialize, every administrator from Lenin to Krupskaya to People’s Commissar of Education Anatoly Lunacharsky insisted that technical education take place only after primary and secondary education.

Both Dewey and Wilson were surprised to find no evidence of the indoctrination or intolerance they’d expected to encounter in Soviet schools. In a speech before the Third All-Russia Congress of the Russian Young Communist League, Lenin insisted that pamphlets and propaganda had no place in the schools, and that the way to raise communists was by promoting equality and self-governance:

The old society was based on the principle: rob or be robbed.... When the workers and peasants proved that they were able, by their own efforts, to defend themselves and create a new society — that was the beginning of the new and communist education, education in the struggle against the exploiters.... That is the reply to the question of how the young and rising generation should learn communism.

In contrast, the United States integrated preschools into the public school system during World War I with the express purpose that they would serve as tools for Americanizing

immigrant families. US kindergarten teachers were told to make home visits to check up on immigrant mothers, and to teach English in mothers’ meetings, “because of the ‘danger’ of the ‘new electoral power’ these women’s husbands wielded.”



URING THE FAMINE years, millions of bezprizorni (orphaned children) roamed the streets, and the Bolshevik promise of free, universal public childcare went unfulfilled. In response to widespread starvation, malnutrition,

and tuberculosis, mid-1920s NEP reforms slashed government funding for all but the basic necessities of life. Nevertheless, Soviet teachers and parents were vocally critical of school closures and worked to ensure they remained open, not just as feeding points, but as educational institutions where children encountered art, music, and stories. To keep schools open until the economic situation improved, parents volunteered in classrooms and pooled their resources to pay for supplies.

Compared to attempts in the famished Soviet Union, developments in the booming United States were unimpressive. In the late 1920s, just before the Great Depression, only 800 nurseries — more holding cells than educational programs — and about 300 preschools were in existence. Surveys of day nurseries in Chicago, New York City, and across Pennsylvania found inadequate hygiene, health care, and nutrition in many day nurseries. The basic safety regulations that social workers won in the mid-1920s went largely unenforced.

Even in 1944, at the height of the war effort, with 19 million American women in the labor force, the Lanham Act provided funding for just 1,900 childcare centers serving 75,000 children across the nation. The federal government provided about two-thirds of the funding with parents supplying the rest, and the program ended after the war. Until the mid-twentieth century, the dominant enduring

childcare policy in the United States was “mothers’ pensions,” which offered low-income women payments to stay home and take care of their children. Finally recognized as inadequate, these were replaced with childcare tax credits which “permitted the taxpayer to hold gainful employment.” But tax credits do little to make childcare more affordable for American families. The lowest-income families in the United States receive a tax credit worth a maximum of \$1,050 a year per child.

For Bolsheviks, schools were important both as public spaces where the youngest communists could be cared for while their parents worked, and as the means through which the oppressive, traditional nuclear family form would be destroyed, transcended, or remade. Meanwhile, the United States remained ideologically committed to upholding the nuclear family with a housewife at its core, even as industrialization and the integration of women into the workforce made this effort increasingly futile. Childcare policy has changed little since Roosevelt’s 1909 instructions

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to promote child welfare by strengthening the family and Nixon’s refusal to “commit the vast moral authority of the National Government to communal approaches to child rearing against the family-centered approach.” In the absence of a broad social solution, or even recognition of the problem, families struggle on their own to manage, and working-class women often end up taking on the burden of housework and childcare on top of their jobs.

Before long, things weren’t that different abroad. With the rise of Stalinism, the Soviets abandoned the dream of socialized childcare and began to sentimentalize housewives like Americans. Historian Lisa Kirschenbaum writes, “Stalinist ‘emancipation’ meant a double, even triple shift for women, who were enjoined to work outside the home, undertake public political work, and devote themselves to the task of raising future communists.” Sadly, after years of aggressive economic liberalization, Russia is back where it started, with elite private schools and rampant inequality. One contemporary financier and founder of “the Orthodox Eton” aims to literally prepare students for the reinstatement of Russian monarchy (“For me it’s very important to restore the traditions that were broken off in 1917”).

It’s not a surprise, given the economic and political limitations of the time, that the Bolshevik vision of creating schools that were tools of self-actualization rather than exploitation was ultimately a failure. Far more shocking to the conscience is the fact that this goal continues to be seen as impossible in the richest country in world history.

At my old job — a high-quality, state-licensed non-profit with a sliding tuition scale — the wait list was three to four years long. For those paying full cost, the program was \$30,000 annually. The only parents who were able to secure spots were those who joined the wait list while their child was still in utero. The only children who started with us as infants were siblings of kids that had been enrolled. Every day I spent at least an hour fielding desperate phone calls from parents. But there was a reason demand was so high. Our program was regulated and safe, a rarity in the United States, where the death rates for infants in home-based day care is seven times higher than in day-care centers. Some home-based day cares are great; others are horrifying. One parent told me that when she left her son with a provider in the morning, he was crying hysterically in a high chair — and when she returned that evening, the toddler was in the same high chair, screaming hysterically, while the provider ignored him.

Such is the way things are done in the United States. ★

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CULTURAL CAPITAL

OUT-OF-CONTEXT
MAYAKOVSKY QUOTES
GO HERE.

The Miracle on Ice

**Without even an indoor rink,
the Soviets changed hockey forever.**

The order to start playing hockey came, in 1946, from the very top. Stalin believed that with the war finished and his objectives in Eastern Europe achieved, the Soviet Union's isolation was at an end. The USSR had good athletes. They could send them to international championships and win over the nonaligned nations. As Charlie Chaplin once quipped, of early Soviet movies, it'd be better propaganda than executions.

The first great Soviet player was Bobrov. He wore #8. He liked to hang out by the red line and wait for a pass to send him on his way. He dangled the puck before him, daring

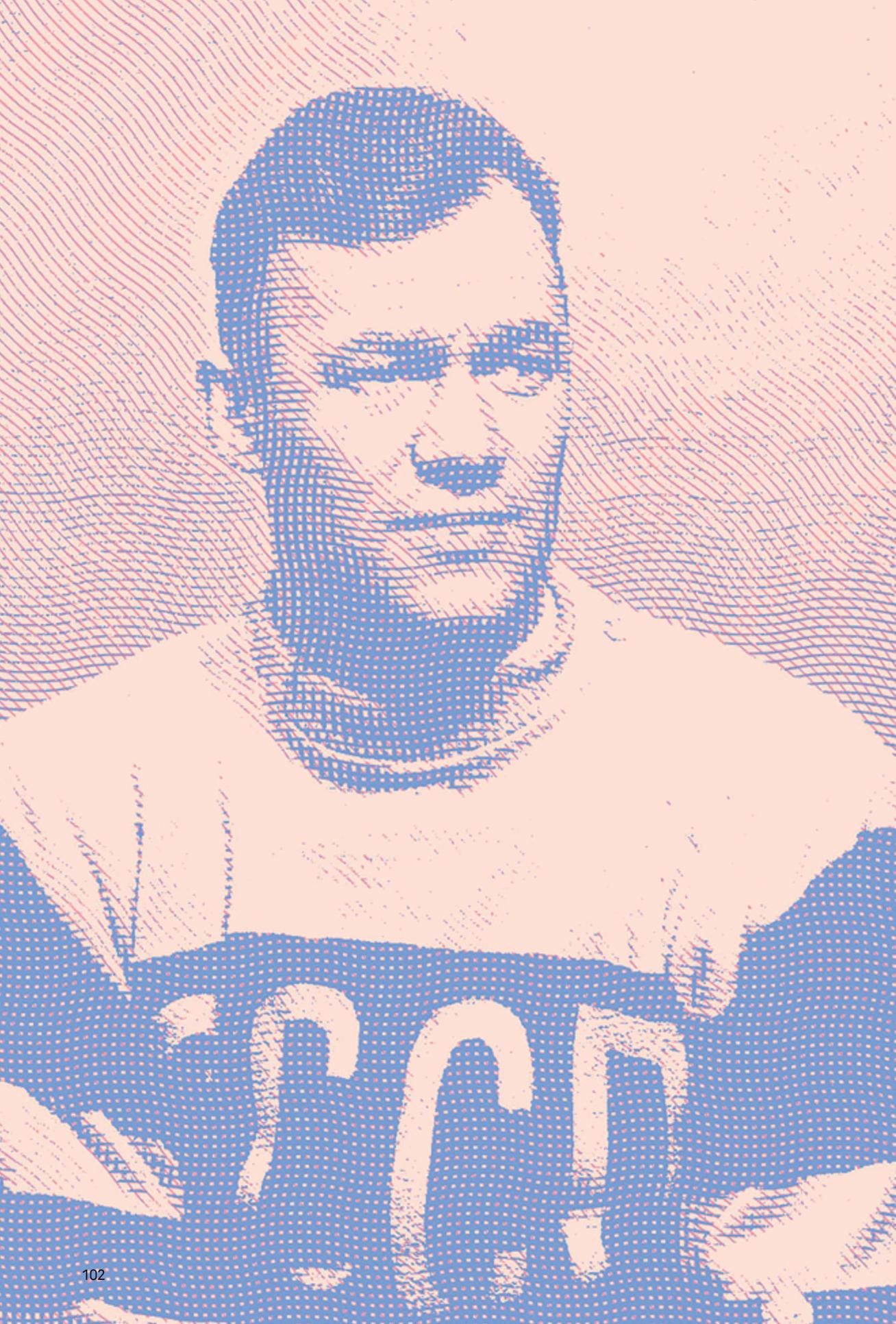
defensemen to take it, then scuttled past them with a burst of speed. He missed the first Soviet hockey season, 1946–47, with a knee injury sustained while playing soccer for the national team, but in the league's second season he scored fifty-two goals in just eighteen games, for TsDKA, the Central House of the Red Army — Red Army, for short.

Bobrov's linemate on that team, and also his coach, was Anatoly Tarasov. Tarasov had grown up playing soccer, as well as an old Russian game known as "hockey" but which in the West is known as "bandy," played on a large ice surface the size of a soccer field with eleven players on each side,

with curved sticks held in one hand and a ball. The new hockey was thus called "Canadian hockey," or "hockey with a puck."

There wasn't a single indoor rink in the Soviet Union at the time. Most of the games were played at one end of Dynamo Stadium. To make sure the ice didn't melt, they were played at night. Players didn't have proper equipment: their sticks were of domestic manufacture and easily broke, and they had no hockey helmets. Some wore bicycle helmets; some wore boxing headgear, which covered part of their faces; and a few players just put on their old infantry helmets. It didn't matter much, because no one could figure out how to lift the puck. In between periods, to save electricity, the stadium lights would be shut off, plunging everything into darkness.

Red Army's rival for supremacy was the Air Force team, run by Vasily Stalin. Despite his high parentage, Vasily had bad luck. He poached players from Tarasov's Red Army team, including Bobrov, but then lost most of them in a plane crash. Bobrov wasn't on the plane, and survived. After Stalin's death in 1953, Vasily was arrested and imprisoned, and Tarasov got back Bobrov.



Soviet ice hockey star Vsevolod Bobrov Merited Master of Sports

Practically from scratch, Tarasov invented the Soviet version of the game. In terms of skating and passing, he was building on a long tradition of Russian-style hockey. But beyond that, tactically, Tarasov had very little. He had never been to Canada, where the game was born, nor did he have films of games that he could watch. In the first few years of Soviet hockey, Tarasov would later write, he did not have “one person who knew European or world hockey. We learned the game out of a void.”

The result was a new kind of hockey. Making a virtue of necessity, Tarasov used the lack of ice time to pioneer a set of dry-land exercises that stressed lower-body strength and balance. He had his team play a lot of soccer, which helped them develop quick and nimble feet. Analyzing the game, Tarasov concluded that the key to it was passing, that no matter how fast a man traveled on his skates, the puck could travel faster. He described his years of playing on a line with the great scoring machine Bobrov and the excellent passer Babich as a kind of mistaken hockey; because Bobrov was the best scorer and the strongest skater, Tarasov and Babich were always passing him the puck. But this was wrong.

“If we rejected this principle,” wrote Tarasov, “then how were we to build our forward line? Perhaps we should include three aces, three Bobrovs, all the more so since with the passing of time more high-caliber players appeared? However, was it possible for three Bobrovs to play on the same line — three outstanding but quite similar attacking players? I do not think so. But three men like Babich could have made a winning

combination. In fact, I feel sure that even the best defensemen in the world could not stop a line of three Babiches. Because Babich could do everything. He could wind up a beautiful attack, he could feed his partners sizzling passes, and if need be, he could play defense.” Bobrov never played defense.

In the first few years of Soviet hockey, Tarasov would later write, he did not have “one person who knew European or world hockey. We learned the game out of a void.”

Later on, when he had visited the United States and been amazed both by the prodigiousness of its cities, the variety of its supermarkets, and the tricks of the animals at Sea World, he would say to an American scout: “Your people can build the world’s tallest buildings. You can make forty-nine different kinds of mayonnaise. You can teach dolphins to do the most complex tasks. Why can’t you teach your hockey players to pass the puck more than two meters?” He would eventually even come to rue the overemphasis on passing in the Soviet game that he developed, and in fact blame the

poor quality of Soviet hockey sticks, which players were afraid to break. Nonetheless this fast-paced passing style, and the use of all five players to mount wave upon wave of attacks, was a revelation for a game that had become, in its birthplace, primarily a matter of one man taking the puck and trying to get through the rest of the other team while his teammates looked on. North Americans defended this as an expression of “individuality.” The Soviets didn’t argue. Between 1956 and 1990, they won seven of the nine Olympic gold medals, and twenty-one of thirty-four world championships.

But this was later. In the early fifties, the Soviets played their first friendly matches. They missed the world championship in 1953 because Bobrov was hurt and Stalin decreed, over Tarasov’s fierce objections, that they should skip the tournament rather than lose without their best player. But Stalin was soon dead, and in 1954 they entered the world championship tournament in Stockholm. Tarasov and his team had no idea how they would do; they had never faced international competition. They knew their country was poorer than other countries, less developed, and had lost an entire generation of athletes during the war. The point of the international sports program was to prove to themselves and others that things were not so bad in the USSR; but what if they were? As one Soviet sports doctor who ended up in the gulag sarcastically put it, of the top Russian soccer team: “If Dynamo can beat a French team, obviously the French have even less bread and meat than we do.” But was the converse also true? If the French had more bread and meat — and they

did, by far — would that mean they'd make short work of the Soviet teams?

Soviet athletes, traveling abroad, could not have failed to see the contrast between a place like Stockholm or Paris and the poverty back home. Tarasov, during his first team's trip abroad, to Prague, refused to put his players in their assigned hotel, forcing them instead to sleep in cots at the workout facility. This has been both praised and criticized as an example of Tarasov's commitment to fitness. But it may also have been the case that Tarasov did not want his players to be intimidated by a nice hotel.

Nonetheless, in 1954 in Stockholm, the Soviets won gold, initiating four decades of hockey dominance. In 1972, after years of beating all amateur competition, the Soviets played an all-star team of Canadian professional stars, including Phil Esposito, Ken Dryden, and Brad Park, to a virtual tie, and they would likely have won the series had Bobby Clarke of the Philadelphia Flyers not deliberately broken the ankle of the Soviets' best player with a vicious slash.

Tarasov had been removed as the coach of the national team just before that tournament: he was too cantankerous and independent-minded and had apparently refused an order to throw a game against the Czechs (to screw over the Americans). He was replaced as head coach by his old rival Bobrov, and then as the head of the national program by the less charismatic, more dictatorial Viktor Tikhonov, who took Tarasov's ways and regimented the life out of them. As soon as the Soviet Union opened up a bit in the late eighties, the players rebelled;

Title-winners. From left to right: Vladimir Nikanorov, Grigory Mkrtychan, Mikhail Orekhov, Yevgeny Babich, Anatoly Tarasov, Vsevolod Bobrov, Vladimir Venetsev.



those who were good enough left for the NHL.

Nonetheless, Tarasov had forever changed the game of hockey. If five attackers, using the entire ice, weaving back and forth and launching long passes to one another, does not sound entirely unfamiliar, that is because Wayne Gretzky's Edmonton Oilers adapted much of the Soviet style during their 1980s championship run. Tarasov revolutionized the game by making it less individual and more collective. And he did it despite immense obstacles. It took until 1956 for an indoor rink to be built in the USSR. Thirty years later, after three decades of total international dominance, there were, across the entire Soviet Union, 102 indoor rinks; in Canada at that point there were 9,000. In 1980, during the Olympics at which the Soviets lost to the US in the "miracle on ice," the American trainer noticed that the Soviets were still badly equipped. They "were always looking to trade

sticks, scoop up supplies," he said. "The trainer would ask if he could have a few Band-Aids, and he'd reach in and take the whole box. Here they were, the greatest team in the world, a superpower, and they didn't have anything."

But people working together, and passing each other the puck, and doing lots of plyometric exercises, can accomplish anything. Saith Tarasov, of his great Alexandrov, Almetov, and Loktev line, which dominated international hockey throughout the 1960s:

I can see if a player is happy when his teammate scores, whether he shares this happiness. And even though they say it does not become men, athletes, to hug each other out on the ice, I know that when Loktev gives Almetov a bear hug or loving rap on the behind, or when Almetov hugs Alexandrov, this is only a sincere way of displaying their recognition and gratitude. ★



The Elvis of East Germany

If you asked an East German back in the 1970s who the most famous American in the world was, they wouldn't have said Elvis or JFK. They would have said Dean Reed.

It was a strange journey for Reed. He had an idyllic childhood, riding horses on a Colorado farm and playing guitar in local restaurants to pay his way through meteorology school. But before he could become Denver's next weatherman, he went to Hollywood to study acting.

There, less for his musical talent than his good looks, Reed caught Capitol Records' interest. He didn't quite catch on as the teen pop idol he was groomed to become in the United States, but his 1961 single "Our Summer Romance" became a hit in South America. After touring and living in Chile, Reed encountered poverty and inequity that made him sympathetic to socialist ideas emerging in the region at the time.

This conversion took him all over the world, rallying support for left-wing struggles from Vietnam to Palestine.

How a young man from Colorado became the Eastern Bloc's biggest pop star.

While other peace activists were burning the US flag in opposition to the Vietnam War, Reed made headlines by standing in front of the American embassy in Chile trying to scrub one clean. He decried American imperialism and vocally supported Chilean socialist Salvador Allende's presidential campaign, but when he traveled across Eastern Europe, he would often describe his vision for a *better Americanism*, trying to show his adoring fans that the empire had produced its fair share of progressives too.

The novelty of being "the American" quickly propelled him to a stable career, but limited his artistic

freedom. He regularly portrayed archetypal cowboy characters in East German films, and in concert his renditions of American folk songs "We Shall Overcome" and "This Land Is Your Land" endured as crowd favorites, rather than his original work.

In 1973, after marrying an East German woman, Reed moved to Berlin. A famous artist choosing to live and work in the Eastern Bloc was unusual, and great PR for Communists. Even better: this American was keen to profess his deeply held socialist ideals. East German politician Egon Krenz, who arranged for Reed to play at the

A famous artist choosing to live and work in the Eastern Bloc was great PR for Communists. Even better: this American was keen to profess his deeply held socialist ideals.

Communist Free German Youth movement's summer festival in 1979, described the singer-songwriter's relationship with state officials as a "fruitful and reciprocal." Unsurprisingly, others accused him of being a puppet.

Reed recognized the gap between his socialist politics and the reality of everyday life in the German Democratic Republic (DDR). He hoped that his music and public presence would inspire people to improve the system. Faced with the more concrete questions of opposition to the politics of the East German state, Reed showed himself unwilling to challenge authority. In 1976, some influential residents launched a petition against the expulsion of actor Wolf Biermann — an outspoken critic of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED). Reed refused to add his name.

Indeed, he preferred to stay on good terms with government officials, focusing his criticism vaguely on the state bureaucracy as a whole. Any reservations he may have had didn't stop him from acting as a Stasi informant.

By the mid-eighties, Reed's audiences were shrinking. Front rows once packed with screaming young women now held polite party functionaries. The East German and Soviet cinema boards were throwing up obstacles to his latest film project. He considered returning to the United States.

Reed hoped that a May 1986 interview with *60 Minutes* would help relaunch his career back home. Instead, he proved himself to be out of touch with most Americans' political sentiments. Reed tried to compel left-liberals to take up the cause of revolution, insisting "we were very proud of it one time, to call ourselves American revolutionaries." He suggested that he could bring change himself: "I would love to go back to Colorado and be a senator." His wistful idealism didn't stand up to Mike Wallace's harsh interview style.

Reed sounded naïve or, at worst, foolish, but the public reacted bitterly to his more brazen statements. He defended the Berlin Wall, compared Reagan and Stalin, and, with some merit, said Gorbachev

was "absolutely, without a doubt" a more just, moral, and peaceful man than the US president.

A few weeks after his *60 Minutes* appearance, Reed's body was found floating in a lake near his East Berlin home. He was just forty-seven years old. A suicide note, addressed to Reed's friend and long-time DDR propaganda minister Eberhard Fensch, was found scrawled on the back of a screenplay in his car. The Stasi hid the letter. Fensch explained the decision was meant to protect the feelings of Reed's wife Renate Blume, whom Reed blamed for his suicide.

Reed didn't live to see the fall of the Berlin Wall, and his belief in a socialist future remained with him until the end. In his suicide note's final postscript, addressed to SED general secretary Erich Honecker, Reed wrote, "I have not agreed with everything, but socialism is still developing. It is the only solution to the main problems facing humanity and the world."

With the note concealed, official statements ruled his death a "tragic accident." And though the circumstantial evidence made available to his friends and family pointed to suicide, a series of inconsistent reports produced countless conspiracy theories. Some suspected the Stasi or KGB of murder; others blamed the CIA. But most paid no notice at all. ★

17 Soviet Films

The October Revolution unleashed cinematic brilliance that even decades of political censorship couldn't extinguish.

★ to ★★★★★ for the level of visual interest

★★

**THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF MR. WEST
IN THE LAND OF THE BOLSHEVIKS (1924)**
director **Lev Kuleshov**

If you're an American, it's rare and refreshing to watch a film featuring Russian communists mocking American capitalists. This silent slapstick comedy is about the misadventures in the newly formed Soviet Union of an American named J. West, "President of the YMCA," who looks like a middle-aged, slightly demented Harold Lloyd. He's read "certain New York magazines" before his trip and consequently brings with him a defensive American flag to wave plus a maniacal cowboy sidekick. Mr. West sees menacing "Bolshevik barbarians" behind every tree, all of them, in his fevered imagination, sporting hugely overgrown moustaches, ratty fur hats, and a lot of murderous weaponry. Though Mr. West does get menaced in Russia, it's by impoverished aristocratic White Russians running long cons. Eventually Mr. West is rescued by kindly Reds.



Though the film drags on a bit and comedy doesn't seem to be Kuleshov's particular forte, it's one of the first to emerge from the Moscow Film School he co-founded, where he taught basic film theory and practice to pioneers of Soviet montage cinema including Vsevolod Pudovkin and Sergei Eisenstein. Kuleshov demonstrated through experimentation that editing is central to cinematic art. If you've heard of Kuleshov, it's because of his famous experiment revealing the "Kuleshov Effect." The experiment showed that an audience would attribute the appropriate emotion to the actor whose face was intercut with shots of various stimuli such as a bowl of soup, a coffin, or an open prison door. Viewers praised the actor's ability to convey hunger, sorrow, and joy. The punch line was that it was the same shot of the actor's neutral face each time — a revelation that helped to squelch film theorists' desire to study film performance seriously for decades to come.

★★★

STRIKE (1925)
director **Sergei Eisenstein**

Sergei Eisenstein's first feature film after years of directing radical agit-prop theater, *Strike* is best remembered today for its climactic scene showing the massacre of striking workers symbolically intercut with the grisly slaughter of a bull. It's still agonizing to watch. The symbolic bull-slaughtering conceit was stolen by Francis Coppola for *Apocalypse Now*'s ending.



★★★★

BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN (1925)
director **Sergei Eisenstein**

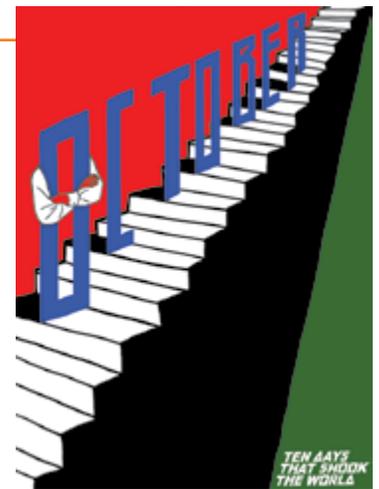
Eisenstein's most famous film, this is the one that awed the world and got banned in several Western nations for decades. Even Stalin wound up shelving it for fear of its power to incite rebellion. As Third Reich minister of propaganda Joseph Goebbels expressed it in grudging admiration, "Anyone who had no firm political conviction could become a Bolshevik after seeing the film." Eisenstein's sensational montage techniques in certain famous sequences

look better and better as time goes by and popular film-cutting styles get almost as fast and furious as Eisenstein's. When an abused sailor of the Russian Imperial Navy stationed on the battleship Potemkin gets fed up with another serving of maggoty meat and breaks a plate, that plate gets broken in a fusillade of cuts that makes plate-breaking an extended act of smashing violence that will carry Russia from the fomenting year of 1905, when the film is set, with its worker strikes, peasant revolts, and military mutinies, right through the world-shaker of the 1917 revolution up to 1925, when Eisenstein gleefully sliced and diced the film in accordance with theories of Marxist dialectic. The film's legendary "Odessa Steps" sequence is still film history's most famous editing tour de force, with the possible exception of the shower scene in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. In it, a tsarist military force of formidable machine-like uniformity marches down the steps slaughtering Odessian citizens who scatter before them. Those who hesitate, protest, or plead for mercy are cut down in the same mechanical rhythm, and you'll remember all the victims' faces — the mother bearing her trampled child, the widow with the baby carriage that gets knocked down the steps as she is shot and falls against it, and the bespectacled woman whose glasses are bloodily broken by Eisenstein's film cut that represents a sword strike.

★★★

MOTHER (1926)
director **Vsevolod Pudovkin**

Based on a novel by Maxim Gorky, Pudovkin's silent film drama about the political radicalization of a downtrodden middle-aged woman still packs a surprising punch. In the USSR, it was the most popular of all the Soviet montage films. Note the clever camerawork at the beginning of the film featuring high-angle shots looking down on the abject creature worn out by work and abuse at the hands of her drunken brute of a husband. The shots level out as Mother is drawn into the revolutionary activities of her idealistic son, then end in low-angle shots gazing up admiringly at the transformed revolutionary as she catches the fallen red flag and leads the marchers on their way to free political prisoners, her son included. Moscow Art Theater graduate Vera Baranovskaya as sad-faced Mother will slay you.



★★★★

OCTOBER: TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD (1928)
directors **Sergei Eisenstein & Grigory Aleksandrov**

Named after John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*, this film commemorated the tenth anniversary of the Bolsheviks' revolt. Intended to celebrate revolutionary heroes Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, the film was harshly truncated as Trotsky fell dramatically out of favor and was eliminated from the film. Still, it contains some of Eisenstein's boldest experiments in "intellectual montage," generating ideas from the collision of images. Eisenstein illustrates the dreadful ease with which monarchies return to power through shots of a statue of the tsar, pulled down earlier by revolutionaries, reassembling itself. He satirizes Provisional Government head Alexander Kerensky's lofty ambitions, through shots of his climb up a long flight of stairs intercut with shots of lavish crystal goblets and china figures of Napoleon seeming to watch his progress approvingly.

★★★★

MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA (1929)
 director **Dziga Vertov**

Director Dziga Vertov scorned Eisenstein's films for what he considered their hopelessly old-fashioned nineteenth-century theatrical narratives. This should give you some idea of Vertov's visionary radicalism and furious montage techniques. *Man With a Movie Camera* is nominally part of the "city symphony" documentary trend paying tribute to the day in the life of a single city, but Vertov adapts the subgenre to his own purpose, creating a dynamic composite Soviet city by assembling bits of what he called "life caught unaware" in Moscow, Odessa, Kiev, and Kharkov. Vertov's camera can go anywhere, surveying the bustling urban populace on top of buildings during the workday or hiding in a glass of beer to surreptitiously observe Russians at leisure. Through the use of superimpositions and dissolves, fast motion and slow motion, freeze frames, jump cuts, stop-motion animation, and a reflexive examination of how cinema works by showing us footage of *Man With a Movie Camera* being shot, edited, and watched by an audience in a theater, Vertov advocated for the power of the "Kino-eye" to reveal the moldable plasticity of modern reality and to launch humanity into the communist future as technologically enhanced super-beings.

// Vertov's camera can go anywhere, surveying the bustling urban populace on top of buildings during the workday or hiding in a glass of beer to surreptitiously observe Russians at leisure. //

★★★★

TURKSIB (1929)
 director **Viktor A. Turin**

A documentary about the Turkestan-Siberia Railway's construction, *Turksib* features awesome footage of the USSR's harsh landscapes and the people who lived there, including fur-hatted Turkic men mounted on camels. Turin's propulsive shots of seemingly unmanned railcars transporting lumber and other materials necessary to keep building out the railroad suggest the force of the people's will behind the immense project. *Turksib* was a big influence on John Grierson's left-wing GPO Unit documentaries that distinguished 1930s British filmmaking.

★★★

EARTH (1930)
 director **Alexandr Dovzhenko**

Ukrainian director Alexandr Dovzhenko's mesmerizing drama of a rural village community's transition to collectivized farming. Their biggest obstacle is presented as being "kulaks," whose affluence depended on hoarding land granted to them under the tsars. Dovzhenko's ability to represent with equal seriousness and beauty farmers, horses, cattle, and newly harvested vegetables would inspire the poetic cinema of directors Andrei Tarkovsky and Sergei Paradjanov. The celebrated "It's here!" sequence is an ecstatic montage of hope as the poor villagers welcome the delivery of their first tractor.

★★

CHAPAYEV (1934)directors **Sergey & Georgi Vasilyev**

A definitive film in the Socialist Realist style instituted by Stalin and his appointed head of the film industry, Boris Shumyatsky. Stalin banned the Soviet montage experimentalism of Kuleshov, Pudovkin, Eisenstein, and Vertov on the grounds that it was aligned with decadent Western art movements. Instead, “people-centered,” “party-minded” films were mandated that were almost invariably tales illustrating how to be a better communist. *Chapayev*, a huge hit, was Stalin and Shumyatsky’s Exhibit A. A fictionalized celebration of Russian civil war hero Vasily Ivanovich Chapayev, the film features stirring scenes of bravery in battle, such as the one introducing the title character riding across open fields in a wagon adorned with jingling bells, urging his fleeing comrades to stand and fight. Stalin particularly loved the scene when Chapayev uses assorted potatoes to explain complex military maneuvers.

The plot functions allegorically, with the barely literate Chapayev representing the revolutionary fervor embodied in the Red Army as he’s taught to appreciate the sophisticated organizational leadership of his superior officer, representing the Communist Party. Teamwork makes them great!

★★★★

IVAN THE TERRIBLE PART I (1945)director **Sergei Eisenstein**

Stalin loved it, which was all that mattered.

He watched practically every film that came out in Russia and was one of those harsh critics who might send you to the gulag if he didn’t like your film. *Ivan the Terrible* represents director Sergei Eisenstein’s attempt to preserve a film career that was founded on radical montage experiments through this new, lethal era when those experiments were strictly forbidden. He cannily chose to film a historical biography of a figure Stalin identified with — the “terrible” tsar (“terrible” meaning scarily awesome) who sought to unify Russia and repel foreign invaders with extreme prejudice.

But while Stalin was admiring Ivan’s ruthless machinations in acquiring and holding power in the cutthroat imperial court, Eisenstein snuck past him a ton of stylized formalism that looked nothing like Socialist Realism’s approved techniques. As long as he stuck to the “no montage” rule, Eisenstein was allowed every baroque flourish and bizarre operatic artifice imaginable, such as fantastically coiffed, costumed, and bejeweled actors, lit by ostentatiously fake painted-on rays of sun or plunged into expressionistic shadow, holding mad poses as if imitating hawks, bears, and other beasts of prey.

★★★★

IVAN THE TERRIBLE PART II (1945)director **Sergei Eisenstein**

Stalin hated it, which was all that mattered.

Unless you study up on it, you might be puzzled to understand why Part I got the Stalin Prize but Part II got Eisenstein a one-way ticket to early retirement. Maybe there’s a bit more paranoia and plotting and assassination in it that could be seen as an uncomfortable allegory for life under Stalin. For example, there’s an astonishing color sequence late in this black-and-white film, a wild and sinister party where murder plots collide, shot all in red, gold, black, and green. The sickening blacks and greens take over the image as Ivan saves himself from imminent assassination by tricking the most vulnerable dumb bunny in the court into putting on the tsar’s robe and crown and walking into the dark cathedral alone, where he’s promptly mistaken for Ivan and stabbed to death.

But apparently what really ticked Stalin off about Part II was the flashback structure, showing pre-terrible Ivan as an androgynously beautiful boy cowering in shadowy corners of the imperial court. All that tender young vulnerability, seared in terror, is shown by Eisenstein to be at the root of Ivan’s adult ruthlessness, and you could see how Stalin would say that kind of psychologizing is a bunch of bourgeois bullshit.

★★★★

THE CRANES ARE FLYING (1957)

director **Mikhail Kalatozov**

During the “thaw” period following Stalin’s death, a “New Humanism” manifested itself in film. Films about World War II now focused on the plight of young people caught up in devastating events, and sympathized with their lack of traditionally dauntless Socialist Realist heroism. Young filmmakers like Mikhail Kalatozov were allowed to draw on Western trends like widescreen filmmaking, and Kalatozov responded with an internationally heralded work of genius, dynamizing that daunting long rectangular frame that German director Fritz Lang condemned as good only for filming “snakes and funerals.”

Tatiana Samoilova as Veronika set a new standard for psychological realism in Soviet cinema with her complex and compelling portrayal of a young woman braving the loss of her boyfriend and her parents in the appalling violence of World War II.

★★★★

BALLAD OF A SOLDIER (1959)

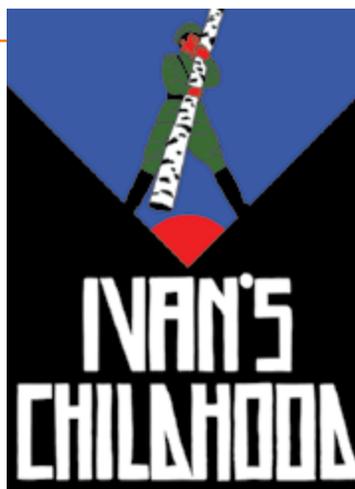
director **Grigoriy Chukhrai**

The loveliest mother in the world waits on a dirt road for the return of her young soldier son coming home on leave. It takes him so long to get there on foot that he only has time to embrace her once before he must turn around and start the long walk back to the front, where we already know he’ll be killed. Another “New Humanist” film of the post-Stalin thaw, *Ballad of a Soldier* features some amazing battle cinematography including a rotating camera shot to convey the world-turned-upside-down terror felt by our young soldier as he’s relentlessly pursued across the war-torn landscape by a Nazi tank.

★★★★

IVAN’S CHILDHOOD (1962)

director **Andrei Tarkovsky**



The bitter and the beautiful combined is a hallmark of Soviet cinema, and this film is among the greatest examples. It deals with a scout spying on the Nazis for the Soviet army, whose traumatic experience of the war, and obsession with avenging the deaths of his mother and sister, have made him a freakishly hard-bitten old veteran in a boy’s body. Ivan’s childhood before the war haunts him, and us, in his dreams. All the film’s scenes are noteworthy, but two absolute stunners include the use of foreboding, irradiated-looking negative imagery during Ivan’s dream of his apple-picking outing with his little sister, and the mesmerizing seduction scene in a birch-tree forest.

SOY CUBA (1964)director **Mikhail Kalatozov**

A hot contender for the international Greatest Cinematography of All Time Award, this Russian-Cuban coproduction mourns the Western exploitation of this “most beautiful island in the world” from its ill-fated discovery by Christopher Columbus through its rescue via the Cuban Revolution, whereupon the film turns triumphant. Each major segment is shot in a different gorgeous style, as Kalatozov shows off his own stellar technique in celebrating the wonders of Cuba and its people. Pay special attention to the beginning of the painful sequence showing Cuba at the mercy of the sex tourism industry. It features a jaw-droppingly complicated, unedited tracking shot as the camera threads through bikini-clad Cuban women being judged in a beauty contest by cocktail-swilling American and European cavorters on a Havana hotel rooftop, then glides down the side of the building onto a lower-level terrace where it plunges into the pool to swim with the jetsetters.



★★★★

SHADOWS OF FORGOTTEN ANCESTORS (1965)

director **Sergei Paradjanov**

Born in Georgia of Armenian descent, and aesthetically inspired by Tarkovsky's film *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), director Sergei Paradjanov departed from what he considered to be the worthless films he'd made up to that point and plunged into the folkloric mists of Ukraine's long ago Carpathian Mountains culture. Paradjanov's spell-casting tale is of Ivan, a Carpathian man of constant sorrow, whose loss of his great love Marichka turns the richly colored world of the film to black-and-white. After much suffering, Ivan's magical reunion with Marichka, who drowned, takes place in the autumn forest where he finds her again in the dark reflection of the water. Her long white reaching hands uncannily take on the look of surrounding tree branches as they extend toward him. The scene culminates not in an embrace but in Ivan's haunting off-screen scream, and a series of images of red branches frozen into twisted sculptures.

Paradjanov paid a big price for his departure from the principles of Socialist Realism with films such as *Shadows* and the even more avant-garde *Color of Pomegranates*. His creative defiance plus his bisexuality put him in the crosshairs of the KGB, and he was packed off to a Siberian labor camp for four years. "The bugs covered you instantly," he recalled calmly in interviews, and "never left you until you died or were freed." His international fame was instrumental in getting him an early release, but his ability to make films was in constant peril thereafter.

★★★★

STALKER (1979)

director **Andrei Tarkovsky**

“*Stalker* is an allegorical journey through a ruined postindustrial landscape into “the Zone” where, rumor has it, human desire can be fulfilled at certain possible costs to one’s progeny.” //

Kids, don't try this at home, because only Andrei Tarkovsky is any good at this kind of hypnotically slow, enigmatic, mind-blowing dystopian sci-fi. (See: *Solaris*.) One of Tarkovsky's last films before he defected to Europe, *Stalker* is an allegorical journey through a ruined postindustrial landscape into “the Zone” where, rumor has it, human desire can be fulfilled at certain possible costs to one's progeny. Filmed in murky blues and browns by the notoriously color-phobic director who manages, as always, to allegorically suggest both political condemnation and cosmic significance.

★★★★

COME AND SEE (1985)
 director **Elem Klimov**

Well, I'll never see it again, but if you have a high tolerance for the horrors of war captured convincingly onscreen, I can recommend this brutal and harrowing film about two teenagers caught between armies trying to survive the Nazi invasion. This takes the tentative "humanizing" of young people caught in the savagery of World War II much further into chaos and the abject struggle for survival. As brilliant as the film is, I never wanted to leave a theater so badly, in hopes of avoiding what I knew was coming — the scenes of Nazi rape, torture, and massacre of an entire village. The film's highly immersive bombing scenes, which create the effect of traumatic near-deafness in the audience, inspired aspects of the great D-Day sequence in Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*.

Director Elem Klimov, a friend of Mikhail Gorbachev's, played an active role in the aspects of *perestroika* (restructuring) that applied to the film industry. As head of the Soviet filmmakers union, Klimov supervised the release of formerly banned films and the removal of censorship rules in preparation for a planned new era of *glasnost* (openness) in the Soviet Union. It never came to be.

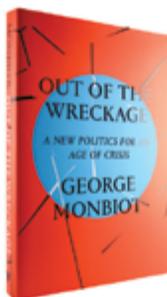
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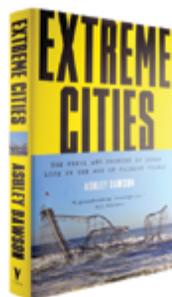
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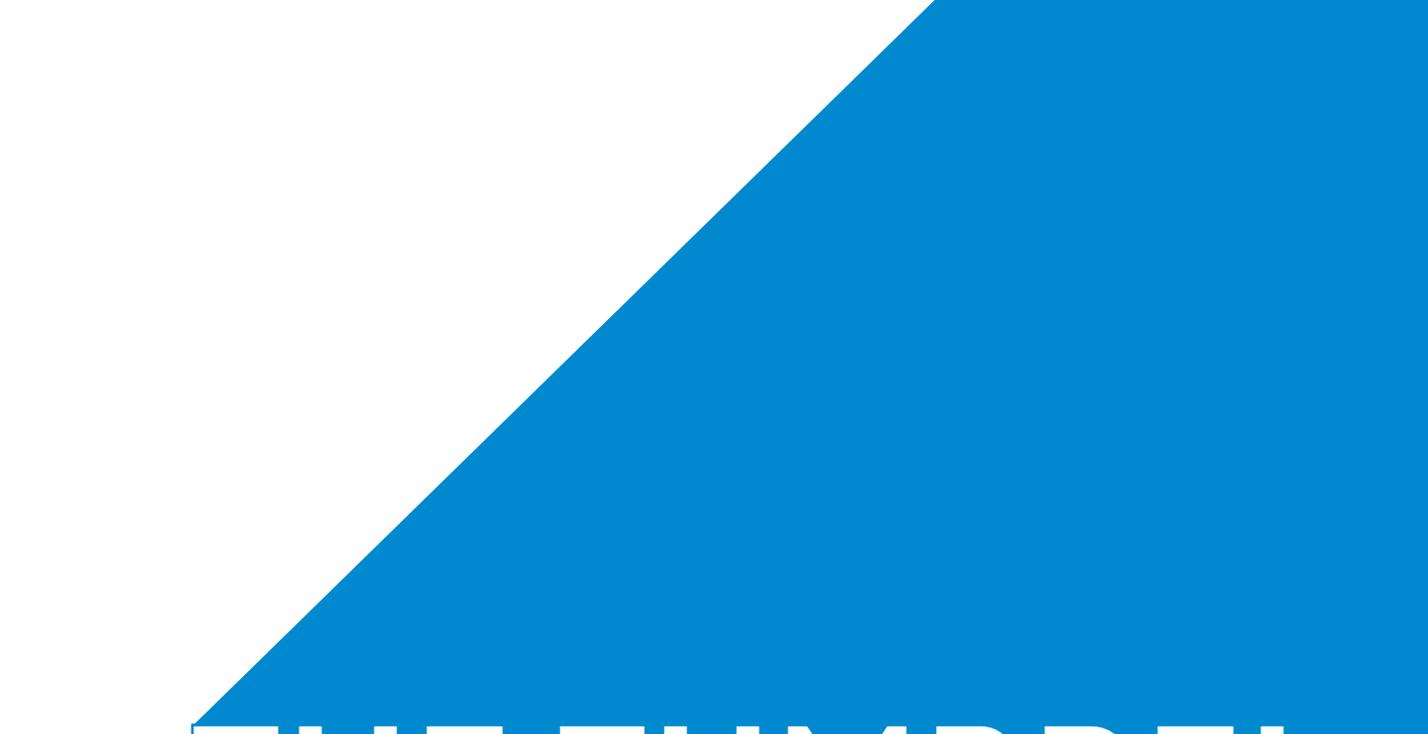
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THE TUMBREL

WE'RE NOT MAD,
WE'RE JUST DISAPPOINTED.

Our Favorite Dupe

Hours after Harry Truman fired him from the cabinet in September 1946, Henry Wallace issued a statement. He'd been dismissed over a speech implicitly criticizing the president's hardening anti-Soviet stance. Now, as US and Soviet negotiators wrangled over occupied Germany's future, he hinted at his own plans: "I, for my part, firmly believe there is nothing more important that I can do than work in the cause of peace."

So began a two-year political odyssey so disastrous, it came to be rued by almost everyone concerned: Wallace himself; his followers in the short-lived Progressive Party; and, not least, the organization that played the central role in the whole affair — the Communist Party USA.

After leaving the cabinet, Wallace embarked on a nationwide speaking tour and took up a post as the figurehead editor of the *New Republic*, then the country's leading organ of Popular Front liberalism. As his presidential ambitions became clear, the Communists' attitude toward him changed. The *Daily Worker* had initially denounced the speech he'd been fired for, labeling it a sinister call for "imperialist intervention." Now, the paper began to praise him.

As a new group of advisers surrounded Wallace, his old friends grew concerned. After finishing his speaking tour in early 1947, he met with Michael Straight, the *New Republic* publisher who'd hired him the previous year. Unbeknownst to Wallace, Straight himself had been a dedicated Communist in the thirties — a KGB spy, in fact — but had quietly left the party.

The Communists, Straight warned, had organized all of Wallace's biggest speaking events. "Can you prove that?" Wallace asked. "No, I can't," Straight replied. "Then you shouldn't say it," Wallace said.

Henry Wallace was a brilliant progressive with an open mind. That's where the trouble began.

Straight recalled the meeting years later:

We were like passengers on passing ships, Henry heading for the land of illusions from which I had come. I knew from my own experience that collaboration with the Communist Party would destroy Wallace, but I could not share my experience with him.

He looked on collaboration with the Communists, in or out of Russia, as an *idea*. He had traveled on a broad highway from Iowa to Washington, and by daylight. He knew nothing of the back alleys of the political world.





Henry Agard Wallace was born in 1888 to a family of Iowa notables, publishers of *Wallace's Farmer*, perhaps the country's leading farm paper. Theirs was a world of wholesome gentility, of sing-alongs and picnics and church suppers, punctuated by broad-minded sermons in the social gospel tradition. Wallace grew up a Presbyterian, a Midwestern Republican, and a teetotaler.

Until well into adulthood, Wallace had only two absorbing interests. One was plants. The other was what we would now call "spirituality." "All manner of esoteric phenomena fascinated him," a biographer writes: "seances, symbols, secret societies, rituals, astrology, Native American religion, Oriental philosophy." In the early 1930s, Charles Roos, a self-styled Chippewa shaman of Finnish extraction, persuaded Wallace that the two of them had been Seneca warriors in their past lives. Wallace trekked to upstate New York to confirm the fact. In 1932, Wallace consulted an astrologist named L. Edward Johndro to help him analyze weather statistics. Standard methods were inadequate, he felt, since they "assume that all terrestrial conditions can be accounted for by terrestrial causes."

"Very few would have said he was a screwball," a loyal aide to Wallace once remarked, "but they would have said he was queer."

But Wallace was also a genuinely brilliant man. An outstanding amateur plant geneticist, he immediately grasped the significance of a new, experimental "double-cross" method for producing hybrid

corn, and in 1926 he and a group of partners founded a company to mass produce the seeds. The result was Pioneer Hi-Bred, a corporate titan acquired by DuPont decades later for billions of dollars. It was part of the mid-century scientific revolution in agriculture that multiplied worldwide crop yields.

A self-taught economist and statistician, his 1920 book *Agricultural Prices* — packed with charts and tables presenting painstakingly gathered data — was a landmark in empirical economics. One statistician called it the first true econometric study published in the United States. Wallace had no truck with elaborate abstract theories, whether in economics or any other field. An admirer of Thorstein Veblen and his institutionalist school of economics, Wallace believed in hard facts; he was averse to dogma. His was a marriage of the mystic and the tinkerer's minds.

As Franklin D. Roosevelt's agriculture secretary, Wallace gathered around him a brain trust of idealists and radicals, many of them Communists, determined to stem the flood of human suffering in the countryside. Their ambitions sometimes outran political reality and the New Deal revolution in farm policy proved curiously conservative in its long-run effects. Yet seldom has so much practical idealism been concentrated within a single government department. Even among Wallace's enemies, few questioned his intelligence, integrity, or competence. Wallace's status as a liberal icon crystallized with the coming of war and his elevation to the vice presidency. His so-called

"Century of the Common Man" speech in 1942, a riposte to Henry Luce's "American Century" screed, was translated into twenty languages, with millions of copies distributed overseas. A soaring internationalist manifesto, it envisioned a postwar world in which New Deal principles would be stamped into the fabric of American foreign policy. Colonial empires would be dismantled, poor countries would be helped to industrialize, modern medical care and schooling would spread to every corner of the globe.

"A quart of milk for every Hottentot," sneered the head of the National Association of Manufacturers in an oft-quoted racist jibe. Many, including Roosevelt, came to believe the phrase had actually appeared in Wallace's speech.



By war's end, the American political scene was, from today's perspective, an alien landscape. Thanks to Roosevelt's wartime rhetoric, a "liberal" was now understood to be a champion of "economic planning" and "industrial democracy," an "antifascist" and "anti-imperialist," contemptuous of red-baiting and eager for the Grand Alliance to continue. In November 1945, even Dean Acheson, then the number-two man in the State Department, spoke at a rally of the National Council on American-Soviet Friendship in Madison Square Garden after an address from Paul Robeson hailing Stalin.

Wallace, however, had been ousted as Roosevelt's 1944 vice-presidential

Wallace’s so-called “Century of the Common Man” speech envisioned a postwar world in which New Deal principles would be stamped into the fabric of American foreign policy.

nominee, in a conservative coup that installed Harry Truman in his place. Truman, who assumed the presidency after FDR’s April 1945 death, began replacing aging or retiring New Dealers with a new crowd: back-slapping, small-town courthouse-ring types with little loyalty to liberalism. Like many staunch New Dealers, Wallace was especially alarmed by Truman’s emerging anti-Soviet line.

The Communist Party was changing, too. Gone was its patriotic wartime face, festooned with American flags and encomiums to Abraham Lincoln. Gone, too, was its desire for meaningful alliances on the Left. Responding to signals from Moscow, the CPUSA effected a postwar U-turn, dumping Earl Browder, its Popular Front leader, in favor of William Z. Foster, an increasingly sectarian veteran Communist. Foreseeing an imminent revival of fascism and imperialist war, the party now insisted on playing a “leading role” in any “antimonopoly coalition” of the Left. The change of line had an element of farce: most historians believe the Party misinterpreted Moscow’s signals, which were mainly aimed at European Communists.

As historian Thomas W. Devine has shown in his devastating account of the Wallace crusade, by the time the campaign was underway practically every knowledgeable observer could see it was being run by the Communist Party — everyone, that is, except Wallace.

Calvin “Beanie” Baldwin, his campaign manager and top aide, kept his own affiliation secret, but in left-wing circles it had long been widely assumed. The head of research for Wallace’s new Progressive Party was also a secret Communist, and wrote most of the candidate’s stump speeches. In February 1948, Wallace presented his alternative to the Marshall Plan at a hearing of the House foreign affairs committee; his testimony was written for him by Victor Perlo and David Ramsey, both secretly Communists. Wallace’s convention acceptance speech was penned by Hannah Dorner, another concealed Communist.

Wallace dismissed the fears of friends who tried to point out these facts. Such concerns, he thought, could only lead to red-baiting.

But it was the *content* of what he said on the stump that did the most

damage. Rather than present a realistic critique of Truman’s Cold War policies, Wallace spent the campaign making ludicrous factual claims and increasingly nonsensical arguments, a *mélange* of party propaganda and Sunday-school platitudes. Was Moscow interfering in East European politics? “It is impossible to know what the truth is from the American press.” What about the Communist coup that had just installed a Stalinist regime in Czechoslovakia? There were no grounds to say “that the present political situation in Czechoslovakia is less democratic than the situation in France,” he insisted. The US, he charged, had “blocked” plans by Britain’s Labour government to nationalize its steel industry — a claim that prompted left-wing British MP Jennie Lee, a one-time Wallace admirer, to write in exasperation, “Where does Wallace get that sort of story?” (A recent article in the *Daily Worker*, as it turned out).

Wallace’s critique was grounded in his conviction that no real clash of interests divided the US from the USSR. Rising tensions were simply due to the greed and ill will of

**“He sees only what he yearns to see,”
bemoaned Harold Laski, a leading British
socialist and former Wallace supporter.
“And he has bitter anger for those who cannot
see beyond reality to the visions by which
he is haunted.”**

“monopolists” and “warmongers” in Washington. A lasting peace could be achieved if only “President Truman would take all those things which he believes we want from Russia, and if Stalin would take all those things which he believes Russia wants from us, and at a meeting of the two heads of government, each item was canceled against each other.”

“He sees only what he yearns to see,” bemoaned Harold Laski, a leading British socialist and former Wallace supporter. “And he has bitter anger for those who cannot see beyond reality to the visions by which he is haunted.”

By the time Wallace accepted the Progressive Party’s nomination that summer, former supporters were abandoning him in droves. The convention had put the Communists’ cynical maneuvering — and the non-Communist delegates’ blinkered unwillingness to challenge it — on glaring display. Ordinary voters who’d petitioned to place Wallace on the ballot were now telling party door-knockers they wouldn’t vote for him in the fall. Liberal luminaries, like the famed New

Dealer Rex Tugwell, began drifting away. State party organizations experienced mass resignations. When Wallace first decided to run, his aim had been to win three million votes. He ended up with less than half that number, and finished in fourth place.

In the long run, the Wallace campaign had three outcomes. It catastrophically isolated the Communist Party, sundering its ties to the labor movement and heightening its vulnerability to the coming tsunami of Cold War repression. Partly for that reason, it accelerated American liberalism’s drift to the right, from an adventurous social-democratic reformism to a sterile “vital center” liberalism. Finally, it cemented the Democratic Party loyalties of key groups in the American working class — Catholics, trade unionists, and above all, blacks, who flocked to Truman’s civil rights program.

★★★

Why did Wallace do it? According to that era’s vital-center orthodoxy, the essence of the liberal worldview

is a skeptical, empirical cast of mind. Radicals, in contrast, shackle themselves to rigid theories. By that definition, Wallace was no radical. “A central characteristic of Henry A. Wallace’s personality,” writes a biographer, “was independence of mind. He was open to any idea, however silly sounding, until he could test its validity. He was prepared to reject any idea, no matter how broadly accepted, that would not stand the weight of inquiry.”

But in the end, his open-mindedness did him no favors. In 1892, when Wallace was still the four-year-old child of an antimonopoly Iowa newspaperman, Friedrich Engels wrote acidly to a friend about the American reform movements of the day. “The tenacity of the Yankees,” he argued, “is a result of their theoretical backwardness and their Anglo-Saxon contempt for all theory. They are punished for this by a superstitious belief in every philosophical and economic absurdity, by religious sectarianism, and by idiotic economic experiments.”

Henry A. Wallace was nothing if not open-minded. His mind was so open his brains fell out. ★

Fascism's Face-Lift

Anti-communist campaigns in Eastern Europe aren't about building a more democratic society — they're about rehabilitating the far right.

Last year, antifascists in Poland commemorated the country's international brigades on the eightieth anniversary of the Spanish Civil War. Their gathering came under attack and a smoke grenade was thrown through the door. Inscribed on the projectile was the phrase “ha pasado,” “we have passed,” Franco's retort to Dolores Ibárruri's “no pasarán” on the day the Republic fell.

Another iconic turn of phrase associated with the civil war owed much to Poland's influence. “A las Barricadas,” the anthem of the anarcho-syndicalist CNT federation, became the war's most famous

song — but it wasn't exactly an original. Its tune had been written by Józef Pławiński and its lyrics by Waclaw Świącicki, both Polish socialist musicians. Their “Warszawianka” had been the anthem of the 1905 Polish Revolution, when worker militias sought to overthrow the Russian imperial government.

Today, progressive history is under attack not only in Poland but across Eastern Europe. From its beginnings “decommunization” took aim not only at the Soviet era but at earlier socialist and republican history too. In the 1990s, as the Hungarian government began the wholesale removal of Communist statues, it

decided to store them all in a single place. Budapest's Memento Park was born and the architect who won the competition to design it, Ákos Eleőd, was clear about its intentions. “This park,” he said, “is about dictatorship.”

But, for a park about dictatorship, it has an interesting lineup. Alongside monuments to politicians from the Communist period — and Marx, Engels, and Lenin — stand those left-wingers from generations earlier. There are commemorations for figures from the short-lived 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic, including Tibor Szamuely and Jenő Landler, as well as Ede Chlepkó

and Béla Kun, who were executed in Stalin's purges. Róbert Kreutz and Endre Ságvári, killed by the Nazis and Hungary's fascist government during World War II also have statues. They are joined by Miklós Steinmetz and I.A. Ostapenko, Red Army captains who died liberating Budapest from German occupation. And, of course, there's a memorial to the Hungarian international brigade to Spain.

Unfortunately, it is no surprise that initiatives which purport to challenge dictatorship are instead demonizing those who struggled against fascism. Decommunization has become a tool for resurgent nationalist movements to rehabilitate their own record — one which often involved Nazi collaboration.

In 2015, riding a wave of nationalist sentiment in the wake of conflict in the country's east, Ukraine began an intensive process of decommunization. Since then thousands of streets and hundreds of towns have been renamed, statues of Lenin have been torn down in every corner of the country, and political parties which are deemed too sympathetic to the Communist past have been banned — including the Communist Party of Ukraine, which regularly received millions of votes.

The legislation that Ukraine's Parliament voted on wasn't exclusive to Communism. Its text promised to combat celebration of both "Communist and National-Socialist totalitarian regimes." But in 2015, as these measures passed, Ukraine's government was in fact institutionalizing fascist militias into its armed forces. That summer the Azov

Battalion, founded by members of the neo-Nazi Social-National Assembly, was officially upgraded to a Special Operations Regiment of the Ukrainian Army. Its members celebrated with photos showing their SS tattoos, symbols which the government was supposed to have banned.

The Lithuanian government, keen to construct a nationalist narrative which justifies collaboration with the Nazis, has accused its Jewish partisans of war crimes.

The institutionalization of fascism isn't confined to the military. The country's far right is increasingly prominent in official history as well, part of a state-sponsored revisionist project designed to venerate Ukrainian nationalism. The most high-profile figure to be rehabilitated is Stepan Bandera, the nationalist leader who collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War and whose Ukrainian Insurgent Army participated in the Holocaust.

But Bandera is far from the only figure to undergo such a rebranding. In October 2017 the Ukrainian city of Vinnitsa unveiled a statue to Symon Petliura, who led an anti-communist uprising against the Bolshevik Revolution. Under his reign, fifty thousand Jews were killed in pogroms in the Ukrainian People's Republic. This isn't a record that the city is hiding from — local authorities ultimately decided to place his statue in the city's historic Jewish quarter, a short walk from one of the few remaining synagogues.

Elsewhere, too, decommunization has been a cloak for attacks on Eastern Europe's Jews. The Lithuanian government, keen to construct a nationalist narrative which justifies collaboration with the Nazis, has accused its Jewish partisans of war crimes. A monument to their struggle, once placed prominently in the country's capital, has been hidden away in another "dictatorship" park. Today its plaque notes that the partisans who fought the Nazis — in a country where almost two hundred thousand died in the Holocaust — were "mostly Jewish." Lithuanians, it says, "didn't support the Communists."

The Soviet Union's record in Eastern Europe was bleak — its population transfers, political repression, and forced collectivizations contribute to much lingering resentment. But the drive to decommunize has little to do with building a more democratic society. It is, at its heart, a project designed to rewrite history, forgiving fascism and condemning those who fought it. ★

Yacht Party Men

Not everyone hated
shock therapy.

Vagit Alekperov

Born in the capital city of Baku, Azerbaijan, Alekperov came from modest origins — his father worked in the oil fields and he briefly did the same. He was educated at the Azerbaijan Oil and Chemistry Institute. After stints in the Caspian Sea and Siberia, he became the Soviet Union's deputy energy minister in 1989.

After dissolution, he used his position to his advantage. Alekperov ended up with a 10 percent stake in the company Lukoil. Formerly known as Langepas-Uray-Kogalymneft, Lukoil was originally a subsidiary of the Ministry of Fuel and Energy made up of three companies based in three Siberian towns. As a result of their merger, Lukoil was reorganized into a firm involved in discovery, extraction, refinery, and sales.

Industry Fossil Fuels
Net Worth \$11.3 billion



Vladimir Olegovich Potanin

Potanin's path to wealth was straightforward. After his studies at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, he worked as a senior clerk for the Foreign Trade Ministry. The title was more grandiose than the position: he sold fertilizer. In this role, he traveled to the Kola Peninsula in the far reaches of Russia where he discovered an incredible amount of recently unearthed metal that would later make him his fortune.

In the early nineties, he founded the United Export-Import Bank. By 1994, the Russian government was increasingly desperate and lacking in the necessary funds to pay wages and pensions. They accepted Potanin's offer of a loan and used the state's resources as collateral. Nor Nickel controlled one of those resources: the nickel deposits of the Norilsk-Talnakh. By 1995, Potanin controlled 38 percent of Nor Nickel, which is today one of the world's largest producers of nickel and palladium.

Industry Mining
Net Worth \$14.3 billion



Mikhail Borisovich Khodorkovsky

Using liberalizing reforms in the 1980s and his connections to the party — he was deputy chief of the Communist Youth at the Mendeleev Institute of Chemical Technology — Khodorkovsky gained opportunities to develop small businesses. Using state money, he funded projects such as state youth science centers and then recouped the profits they generated. His connections allowed him to elude punishment.

Khodorkovsky flirted with other industries, including counterfeit cognac and computers, but landed in banking. His bank was instituted in 1988 with capital stolen from state youth science centers. Khodorkovsky held Soviet authorities at bay long enough to cheaply acquire state enterprises after dissolution through a “loans for shares” program.

This program’s putative purpose was to streamline privatization through the auctioning off of the state’s commodities with money lent by banks. Oligarchs who owned banks such as Khodorkovsky were able to purchase state-owned enterprises for pennies on the dollar — he got Yukos, an oil company worth \$5 billion, for \$310 million.

■ ■ **Industry** Fossil Fuels
Net Worth \$500 million

Yury Luzhkov

Luzhkov was integral to the shift from communism to capitalism. His early years were spent in the Moscow city government. An early believer in free enterprise, he attempted to promote the idea of self-financing. In 1980, Luzhkov supported the retention of profits within factories and the sale of research results at Khimavtomatika (Chemical Automatics Design Bureau).

He pushed through cooperatives during his tenure at the Moscow executive committee. After becoming Moscow’s mayor in 1992, Luzhkov used his power to award lucrative government contracts to his friends before being fired from his post by President Dmitry Medvedev.

■ ■ ■ ■ **Industry** Politics
Net Worth \$1 billion (2013)



Rem Ivanovich Vyakhirev

Rem Ivanovich Vyakhirev was named after “revolution,” “Engels,” and “Marx.” He didn’t live up to the billing. Vyakhirev ascended the ladder of power the usual way. Before the dissolution of the USSR, he held several positions in the gas industry. In the 1970s, he worked as a director for the regional state gas company Orenburgneft. At the time of his departure, he held the title of chief engineer.

By the 1980s, he had been promoted to deputy minister of the gas industry of the USSR. When it was privatized, he became chairman of the new public-private corporation Gazprom. Vyakhirev used Gazprom’s money to aid the debt-ridden Russian state. This brought him influence and assets, but in 2001 Putin dismissed him from his position. Retreating to private life, Vyakhirev died in 2013 of natural causes.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ **Industry** Fossil Fuels
Net Worth \$1.5 billion (2013)



Vladimir Viktorovich Vinogradov

A party member since childhood — he was a Communist Youth leader — Vinogradov studied at Plekhanov Russian Academy of Economics. After his studies, Vinogradov worked as head economist at Promstroibank.

In 1988, he went on to make his fortune through the creation of one of Russia’s first nonpublic and strictly commercial banks: Inkombank. The bank falsified its assets, but Vinogradov managed to conceal this by suing employees who reported suspicious balance sheets. Inkombank lost its license in the 1998 crisis when it was revealed that the bank would be unable to repay its debts. He died of a stroke in 2008.

Industry Banking
Net Worth \$25 million (2005)

Vladimir Yevtushenkov

An engineer by trade, Yevtushenkov worked at Karacharovo Plastics Works and Polymerbyt Scientific and Production Association during the 1980s. From 1987 to 1992, Yevtushenkov headed the Moscow Committee on Science and Technology. A year later, his connection to the city’s mayor Yury Luzhkov allowed him to transition the department to a company, which became Sistema. Sistema was provided with money from the Moscow government and Yevtushenkov was able to exert his influence on the city administration.

Yevtushenkov’s bank held the city’s funds, and the city loaned money to his construction and electronics companies. He held a seat on the city council and was also able to acquire a monopoly on Moscow’s telephone lines. By 1996, Sistema’s assets were valued at \$1 billion. Yevtushenkov — despite a 2014 money laundering charge that led to his house arrest — is still thriving along with Sistema.

Industry Telecommunications
Net Worth \$3.3 billion



Boris Berezovsky

Though he spent sixteen years studying optimization and control theory, Berezovsky emerged from the USSR Academy of Sciences with a different skill — political maneuvering.

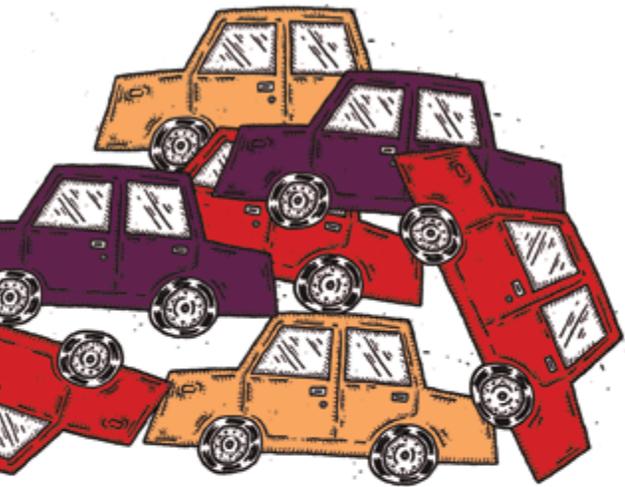
Berezovsky made his wealth through a series of scams. His most infamous involved the use of his connections to secure a consignment of 35,000 cars from the government. Due to hyperinflation, the ruble was devalued. Therefore, when Berezovsky paid the government back for the cars, he paid at a much lower rate.

This success led Berezovsky to pursue greater grifts. Along with Alexander Voloshin he started a venture fund, the All-Russian Automobile Alliance (AVVA), in 1993 to build a factory to make a so-called “people’s car.” The certificates he sold were supposed to be exchanged for shares in the factory, but they were basically impossible to trade in. The hustle funded Berezovsky’s purchase of the newly privatized AvtoVAZ factory. By 2000, AVVA owned 30 percent of AvtoVAZ.

Berezovsky died in 2013 under suspicious circumstances.

Industry Auto
Net Worth \$3 billion





Alexander Pavlovich Smolensky

Smolensky's path to oligarchy was a fitful one. He grew up in poverty and felt limited in his upward mobility as a result of his Jewish heritage. Through his own self-industry, he managed to make money on the black market. His product: bibles. He was arrested for stealing ink and subsequently thrust into construction work for two years as punishment.

Smolensky continued in construction after his sentence. When the Law of Cooperatives passed in 1988, Smolensky used his experience to create a cooperative that collected scrap and built houses. Afterwards, Smolensky realized there was no restriction on what business cooperatives could engage in. This led him to found Stolichny Bank in 1989. The decimation of the Soviet Union provided an opening for Smolensky. Due to political turmoil and confusion, the ruble was highly unstable. Therefore, Smolensky's bank could "bet" on the vagaries of the ruble-dollar exchange market. This risky currency speculation business crashing down in the 1998 financial crisis. When asked what he owed Stolichny Bank's investors, Smolensky responded, "Dead donkey ears."

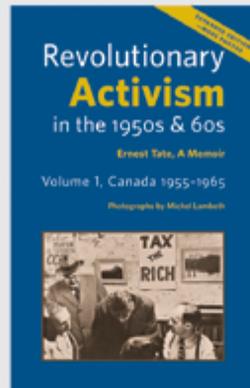


Industry Banking
Net Worth \$230 million (2003)

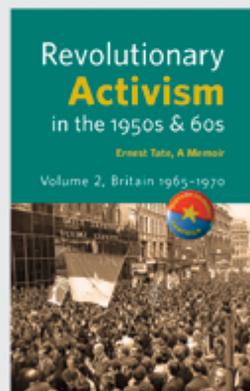
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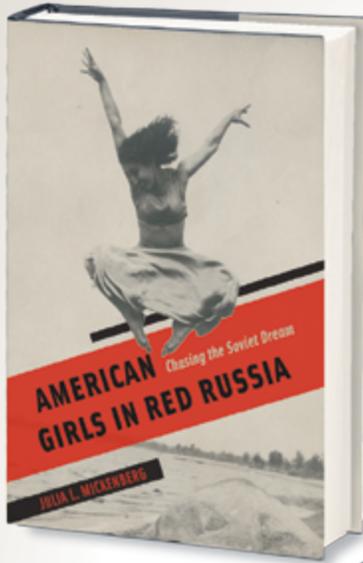
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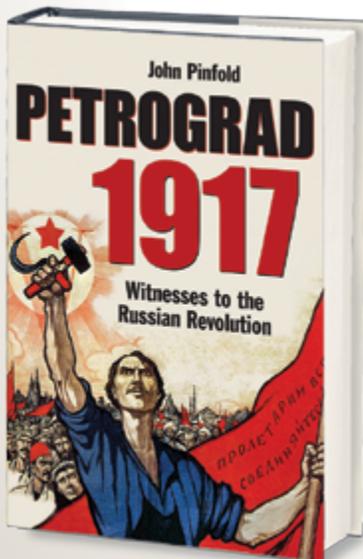
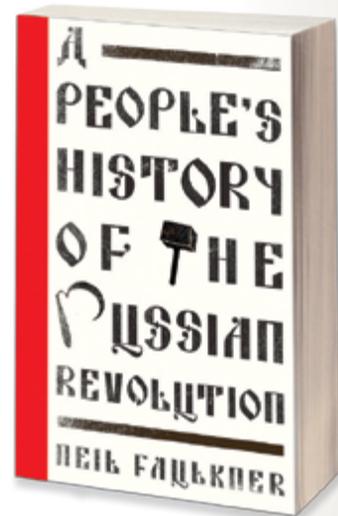
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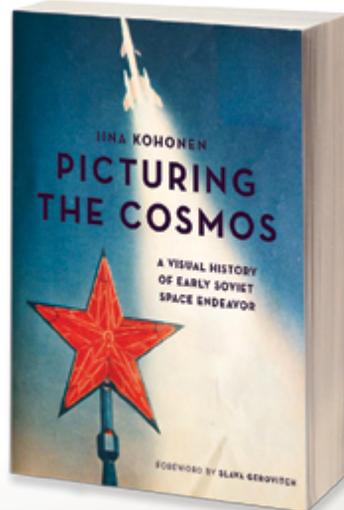
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OUR ROAD TO POWER

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY LEFT SOCIALISTS LEFT PLENTY OF LESSONS. WILL WE HEED THEM?

1 ORGANIZATIONAL

How should we understand a socialist party's internal structure, its relation to its base, and its strategic vision?

STRUCTURE

The Left is of two attitudes when it comes to Leninist party organization. One is to see the model as a disaster, or at least as something of a negative experience. The accusation is that Leninism has always and everywhere ended up in authoritarianism. Others have responded by saying, "Well that's true, but you are confusing Stalinism with Leninism." In other words, it is really with the advent of Stalin that you see the shutting down of debate.

The defenders of the Leninist party are right that in its early history it was remarkably open and dynamic. But at the same time, the fact is that its global experience since the 1930s veers much closer to its later, undemocratic form. So while *Lenin's* party was very democratic, the *Leninist* party has not been. And we can't lay the blame solely on Stalin, Zinoviev, or whoever your favorite villain is.

A party model with strong and resilient democratic structures should have generated a more diverse set of experiences, not a uniform history of ossification.

That being the case, it's easy to come to the conclusion, as most progressives do today, that the next left has to reject the Leninist party model. The problem with that view is that no other model has come anywhere as close to being politically effective. All the putative alternatives coming out of the Left since the 1960s — the multi-tendency organizations, the horizontalists, the anarchists and their affinity groups, the movement of movements, etc. — have been able to mobilize for a time,

but they have had little success sustaining movements, much less achieving real material gains. Indeed, the cadre-based model has been so successful that every major mobilizational party of the twentieth century replicated it to some extent, even on the Right.

Given that history, it's hard to imagine a way for the Left to organize itself as a real force *without* some variant of the structure the early socialists hit upon — a mass cadre-based party with a centralized leadership and internal coherence. Now, maybe that will turn out to not be true. Maybe we will come up with organizational forms that are more open, more diffuse, yet which also manage to get things

THE DEFENDERS OF THE LENINIST PARTY ARE RIGHT THAT IN ITS EARLY HISTORY IT WAS REMARKABLY OPEN AND DYNAMIC.

BASE

The second organizational issue is that of the party's relationship to its base. Here the Russian Revolution teaches us something. In Cold War historiography, the Bolsheviks are depicted as having taken power through something like a coup. The idea is that they really didn't have a mass base, that they were a small group of fanatically committed ideologists who imposed a dictatorship. But what recent historians have shown, in dramatic detail, is that the main reason the Bolsheviks were able to take and hold onto power was that of all the parties in Russia, they had the deepest, strongest, and firmest links to the working class in the country's major industrial centers. This is why it happened that, with every shift in working-class political mood — particularly in Petrograd but also in Moscow — in the months leading up to the capture of power, it was the Bolsheviks who were the most keenly aware of those shifts, able to understand the situation, and therefore able to generate slogans and programs that captured the popular consciousness.

The Bolsheviks weren't alone in this outlook. It was taken for granted by all socialist parties in the interwar years that the foundation to their political strategy was to be anchored in the everyday life of their base. And not just in the West. This was the sine qua non of socialism across the world. And it worked. The great era of left expansion — from the early 1900s to the early 1950s — happened because the parties were parties in, of, and for the laboring poor.

The strategy was successful for several reasons. First and most importantly, it enabled

those organizations to generate programs that represented their base's real interests, since the parties were in constant communication with them — since they *fought alongside* the base every day, in the workplace and in the neighborhood. Second, it gave the party enormous legitimacy at the mass level, again because they were there through thick and thin. This legitimacy was the essential condition for promoting political struggle, since when cadre encouraged their base to undertake any kind of action, they had the trust and support needed to succeed. Third, this deep and organic connection also supported a vibrant internal culture — of democracy and accountability. A party immersed in everyday working-class life and struggle not only could sustain a democratic culture, but benefited from it. After all, a democratic culture was one of the essential preconditions for gaining the trust and support of the class. Having a deep base didn't guarantee success, but not having one guaranteed failure and marginalization.

This is, of course, what most differentiates the early socialist parties from left groups in the West today. The socialist left is only tenuously connected to working-class communities, if at all. By and large, it is structurally separated from workers, and operates mostly as small groups in middle-class settings — campuses, nonprofits, study groups, and so on. This has several important consequences. First of all, unlike the traditional labor left, it cannot actually organize and lead working-class struggles, because it is physically separated from that class. The overwhelming bulk of its political engagement is supportive and

HAVING A DEEP BASE DIDN'T GUARANTEE SUCCESS, BUT NOT HAVING ONE GUARANTEED FAILURE AND MARGINALIZATION.

reactive — showing up for a spell at a picket line, spreading the word, trying to drum up sympathy. But this means that it is entirely dependent on *other* people's organizing, since it is not in a position to initiate struggle itself.

Second, its confinement to these environments means that for it to maintain its socialist commitments, it has to socialize its members into sympathizing with *another* class's interests and another class's oppression. This is very different from traditional left parties, which were in working-class settings, were able to recruit from within that class, and hence trained their members to fight around *their own* material interests. Struggle was a necessity for these earlier groups, because they were fighting for their members' own livelihoods and their own well-being.

Today's groups have to largely *imagine* what those interests are, since they can't learn about them through direct engagement. They mostly do so by reading about past events and then trying to find parallels to the current scene. But this makes it hard to *develop* strategy. It is almost impossible to be innovative, since most members are not directly experiencing changes in the workplace, nor are they in a position to try new initiatives. This naturally leads to a kind of dogmatism, since the only thing they really know is what worked in the past.

The long-term result of being isolated from workers is that these organizations become a haven for a kind of lifestyle politics for morally committed students and professionals. They provide members with a means

IF THE LEFT IS GOING TO BE THE ENGINE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AGAIN, IT WILL ONLY DO SO BY REPLANTING ITSELF WITHIN LABORING COMMUNITIES.

STRATEGY

In the question of strategy, the October Revolution is perhaps less instructive. The Bolshevik seizure of power was not a coup, but it did embody a violent and sudden overthrow of a regime, in a context of state breakdown and military disintegration. One might describe this as a strategy of a *ruptural* break with capitalism.

Now there's no doubt that the decades from the early twentieth century all the way to the Spanish Civil War could be described as a revolutionary period. It was an era in which the possibility of rupture could be seriously contemplated and a strategy built around it. There were lots of socialists who advocated for a more gradualist approach, but the revolutionaries who criticized them weren't living in a dream world.

The Russian road, as it were, was for many parties a viable one. But starting in the 1950s, openings for this kind of strategy narrowed. And today, it seems entirely hallucinatory to think about socialism through this lens. This is indubitably true in the advanced capitalist world, but it also holds for much of the South. Today, the state has infinitely greater legitimacy with the population than European states did a century ago. Further, its coercive power, its power of surveillance,

and the ruling class's internal cohesiveness give the social order a stability that is orders of magnitude greater than it had in 1917. What that means is, while we can allow for and perhaps hope for the emergence of revolutionary conditions where state breakdown is really on the cards, we can't *build* a political strategy around it as an expectation — we can't take it as the Left's fundamental strategic perspective. Today, the political stability of the state

is a reality that the Left has to acknowledge. What is in crisis right now is the neoliberal *model* of capitalism, not *capitalism* itself.

If this is so, then the lessons that the Russian experience has to offer — as a model of socialist transition — are limited. Our strategic perspective has to downplay the centrality of a revolutionary rupture and navigate a more gradualist approach. For the foreseeable future, left strategy has to revolve around building a movement to pressure the state, gain power within it, change the institutional structure of capitalism, and erode the structural power of capital — rather than vaulting over it. This entails a combination of electoral and mobilizational politics.

You build a party based in labor, you strengthen the organizational capacity of the class, you take on employers in the

workplace and create rings of power in civil society, and you use this social power to push through policy reforms by participating in electoral politics. The reforms should have the dual effect of making future organizing easier, and also constraining the power of capital to undermine them down the road. There are many names for a strategy of this kind — non-reformist reforms, revolutionary reforms. But whatever you call it, it entails a more gradual approach than the ones available to the Bolsheviks.

But that means that we have to carefully study the experience of parties and countries that fell short of socialism but achieved real organizational and political gains nonetheless. We need to study social democracy, particularly its more ambitious variants. First of all, to understand how they combined electoral and non-electoral dimensions in an overall strategic perspective. This also entails studying their legislation, the economic models they implemented, how they used the state, how they dealt with capital's structural power and its hostility to labor's advance. The gains made by the most advanced social democracies, like the Nordic countries, are quite extraordinary, and their ritual denigration by the Left as merely "reformist" is an instance of genuine stupidity. Those achievements came through struggle and were fought

WE HAVE TO CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY THAT PLANNING AS ENVISIONED BY MARX MIGHT NOT BE A REAL OPTION.

One hundred years removed from the Russian Revolution, we're in a moment unlike any in decades.

With both neoliberalism and social democracy's traditional parties in disrepute, new opportunities are finally emerging for the radical left.

Every crisis finds a resolution of some kind, and this one will too. Where we end up depends in large measure on how the Left responds. If we play our cards right, the opening could be the occasion

for starting a new cycle of organizing — revitalizing left parties where possible, and starting new ones if they prove to be immune to reform.

But rather than just looking forward, this is also an occasion to look back at the lessons of the past. The Russian Revolution remains the most ambitious experiment in socialist politics, and its successes and failures have to be part of any discussion of how to revitalize the Left. But it isn't just the Russian

WE'RE IN A MOMENT UNLIKE ANY IN DECADES. IF WE PLAY OUR CARDS RIGHT, WE COULD START A NEW CYCLE OF ORGANIZING.

experience. We have to place the Bolshevik experiment in the broader story of socialist politics in the twentieth century — alongside examples from Chile, Germany, and Sweden, among others.

There are two broad legacies of the Russian Revolution — an *organizational* one and an *institutional* one. By organizational, I mean issues pertaining to building vehicles for collective action in capitalism — unions, parties, and the like. By institutional, I mean the basic structures that will comprise a post-capitalist society — the political system, economic organization, the structure of rights. The organizational dimension pertains to how you build power *inside* capitalism, and the institutional refers to what you will build *after* capitalism.

2 INSTITUTIONAL

How do we build socialism?

won't dwell on the obvious point, which is that the lesson from October is in many ways a negative one — we have to reject wholesale the political model generated by the Bolsheviks, of a one-party dictatorship and the abrogation of basic liberties.

It was a calamitous mistake to denigrate liberal rights as "bourgeois," which many Marxists of the early twentieth century did, implying that those rights were illusory or fraudulent in some way. This rhetorical ploy made it far easier for those rights to be extinguished by Stalin and before him, by Lenin himself. Liberal rights were all fought for and won by working-class movements, not by liberal capitalists. Any left worth its salt has to protect and deepen those rights, not throw them aside.

What is more challenging is the issue of economic planning. We have to start with the observation that the expectation of a centrally planned economy simply replacing the market has no empirical foundation. We can *want* planning to work, but we have no evidence that it *can*. Every attempt to put it in place for more than short durations has met with failure. The Russian experience is the most elaborate example of that. And the fact of its failure has to be acknowledged, not sidestepped. It won't do to say, as many Marxists do, that "that wasn't really socialism, so it doesn't count." It may not have been socialism — and maybe real socialism with real democracy and real workers' councils and real computers will make it work. But the burden of proof is entirely on those socialists who say it will. The argument can't be won with a wave of the hand and dismissal of the past century's experience.

In other words, we have to seriously consider the possibility that planning as envisioned by Marx might not be a real option. Any discussion has to proceed with a close examination of the Soviet experience, to try to assess if its failure was due to the particular way planning was instituted, or whether the lesson is that a modern industrial economy is just not amenable to planning. It's quite astonishing how little attention this issue gets on the Left today, compared to, say, the energy poured into deconstructing Bollywood movies.

In any case, given the dubious record of central planning, we have to seriously consider that a post-capitalist economy might have to

take the form of some sort of market socialism. There are many models on the Left of this kind of economy, and they all have different features. What's important is that whatever market socialism's institutional structure, the principles underlying its design are faithful to what socialists seek — putting people before profits. More elaborately, whatever the model turns out to be, it will differ from capitalism in that:

- The market will be constrained so it isn't the arbiter of people's basic well-being
- Economic decision-makers will be democratically accountable
- Wealth inequalities will not be allowed to translate into political inequalities

There will, of course, be other principles constraining the institutional design. But it is hard to imagine any acceptable model of socialism — market or planned — that eschews any of the ones listed. An economy that contravenes any one of these principles will probably not qualify as socialist, at least not in the sense that leftists have understood the concept.

Being clear about what we want out of an economy allows us to understand what is at stake. Planning is not desirable for its own sake. It has always been embraced as a means to an end, and the basic end socialists seek is a humane and just social order. It might turn out that full planning is not only unrealistic, but also unnecessary — maybe the fundamental goals that socialists seek are in fact achievable through a market socialism after all. It might even be the case that central planning is in tension with some dimensions of social justice.

One of the worst legacies of the Second International era was to identify socialism with central planning. That equation should never again be made. Economic models are not ends in themselves, but instruments for achieving what we're really after — a society in which people are able to treat one another as ends, not as means.

OUR STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE HAS TO DOWNPLAY THE CENTRALITY OF A REVOLUTIONARY RUPTURE AND NAVIGATE A MORE GRADUALIST APPROACH.

3 LOOKING FORWARD

We know from the last century of socialist efforts that the path to a more egalitarian order goes *through* a confrontation with capital, not around it. And the only parties that have ever had any real success in this endeavor have been mass-based cadre parties with deep roots in the laboring classes. The biggest challenge right now for the Left is to cut the umbilical cord tying it to campuses and nonprofits and return to immersing itself in the milieu of labor. Any viable left has to also embrace electoral politics as the other node of a two-pronged strategy, in which power at the base is combined with a parliamentary wing, each feeding the other. At this moment, the parliamentary

dimension seems to be opening up faster than the one at the base — the Left should jump in, capitalize on it, and then use its gains to build the base. At the same time, we need to deepen the discussion of what we're fighting for.

It is clear that a viable socialism will be a pluralistic, multiparty order with a significant rolling back of the market. How far we push it back depends in large measure on practical questions about what is feasible and what is not. But precisely because a ruptural strategy isn't on the table, we must start down the road of social democracy strategy, in which power at the base is combined with a parliamentary wing, each feeding the other. At this moment, the parliamentary

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FOR THE LEFT IS TO CUT THE UMBILICAL CORD TYING IT TO CAMPUSES AND NONPROFITS.

THE TASK NOW IS TO FIND A WAY OF CHALLENGING CAPITAL IN OUR TIME.

LEFTOVERS

WE HOPE YOU ENJOYED YOURSELF
AND GET HOME SAFE. REMEMBER TO TIP
YOUR MAGAZINE ON THE WAY OUT.



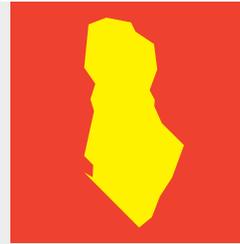
From Red Square to Square One

What's left of the Left in the post-socialist world?



Afghanistan

The fall of the Soviet-backed People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and the victory of the Mujahadeen in 1992 splintered the Afghan left and sent it underground. It survived in the form of groups like the left-nationalist Watan Party of Afghanistan (a successor of the PDPA), the small, urban Left Radical of Afghanistan, and the Solidarity Party of Afghanistan, a left-wing, anti-imperialist party currently out of parliament but aligned with independent woman senator Bulquis Roshan.



Albania

After the fall of Communism, two parties have dominated the Albanian political spectrum: on the right, the Democratic Party of Albania and on the left, the Socialist Party of Albania (PS). The PS has formed a government four times since 1992, including in 2017, when it won 48% of the vote. While it previously tacked to the center, it has moved somewhat left recently, introducing a progressive tax system. The center-left Socialist Movement for Integration, which spun off from the PS in 2004, has dodged corruption scandals to become the country's largest third party.



Angola

Since the vicious Cold War–infused civil war between the ruling People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola ended in 2002, the country has remained in the hands of the corrupt, violently repressive MPLA while maintaining the veneer of a multiparty system. Though the disputed 2017 election saw longtime dictator José Eduardo dos Santos step down, the MPLA retained power. No left-wing parties threw their hats in the ring, though the National Patriotic Alliance promised various generous social programs and was rewarded with a mere 0.51% of the vote.



Armenia

Armenian politics is extremely fragmented, personality driven, and largely nonideological, but the Armenian Revolutionary Federation serves as a decidedly left-of-center choice. It has pushed for a parliamentary form of government since 1995 and calls on the state to provide a decent standard of living for all Armenians through minimum wage increases, universal health care, and more. It was the third largest party in 2007, winning 16 seats, and came fourth this past April, winning seven seats, far behind the 58 won by the ruling (and ideologically opposed) Republican Party of Armenia.



Azerbaijan

Over the 24 years it has ruled Azerbaijan, the Aliyev regime (first the father, now the son) has systematically crushed all political opposition, from parties like the dissident Popular Front and the liberal, pan-Turkist Müsavat (Equality), to student movements in the late 2000s that protested corruption, repression, pollution, and forced resettlement. The most popular opposition group today is Republican Alternative, which supports the rule of law and free markets. Even it is facing suppression.



Belarus

Left-wing opposition to the authoritarian Lukashenko regime has been somewhat dampened by events in Ukraine, as well as government repression of anarchists, environmentalists, unions, and opposition activists. A stronger left could have capitalized on recent protests against the government's so-called parasite tax.



Bosnia and Herzegovina

2011 was the center-left's biggest electoral victory since the end of World War II: the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina (SDP) won almost 18% nationally. Massive defeats in 2014, when its support dropped to 6.65%, and 2016, when ethnic nationalist parties won 34 municipalities to the SDP's eight, have consigned the left parties to irrelevance.



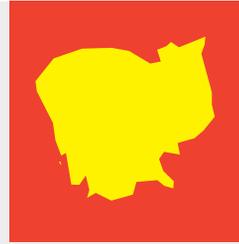
Bulgaria

The Bulgarian Socialist Party, successor to the country's Soviet-era Communist Party, was powerful through the 1990s, peaking at 43.5% of the vote, but it has suffered a remarkable decline in 1997, when it lost 67 seats. Since then it has taken turns at power with the center-right, dodging corruption scandals and pursuing its own austerity agenda.



Burkina Faso

A popular uprising in 2014 ended the brutal, autocratic twenty-seven-year rule of Blaise Compaoré. The next year, longtime government critic Bénéwendé Sankara — a disciple, not a relation, of the country's original Marxist revolutionary president, Thomas Sankara — ran on a promise to continue his idol's program. His fourth-place result was disappointing (and lower than the third and second he placed in the last two elections), but his Union for Rebirth / Sankarist Party won five seats and two cabinet positions.



Cambodia

After losing the UN-sponsored 1993 election, the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) — an outgrowth of Cambodia's former Communist Party that replaced Marxism-Leninism with an embrace of market principles and membership in the Centrist Democrat International — never lost another election and has grown increasingly authoritarian. The party has faced sustained pressure only from the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), a centrist reform party that's facing severe repression. From July 2013 to July 2014, the country saw protests against election fraud, political corruption, and poor working conditions.



Croatia

With Croatia's Social Democratic Party dragged down by neoliberalism and empty sloganeering, the hunger for alternatives fostered some leftist activity, as seen in the annual Subversive Festival and the Workers' Front. The latter, dubbed the "Croatian Syriza," recently entered into a coalition with three other left-of-center groups for the Zagreb local elections and won 7.64% of the vote, gaining four seats.



Czech Republic

The Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), a center-left party that was a dominant force since the end of Communism, suffered a monumental collapse in this year's elections, falling 13 points and becoming the lowest-polling "large" party. The country's largely unreconstructed Communist Party still receives a steady percentage of the vote (a rarity in post-Communist Europe), governs in several regions, and slightly outpolled the ČSSD in 2017.



East Germany

After German reunification — which felt more like annexation for many East Germans — the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) regularly won a quarter of the vote in the former DDR. The legal successor to the former ruling Socialist Unity Party, it transitioned fully to democratic socialism. In 2007, the PDS merged with the West German-based Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice to form Die Linke. Die Linke today still commands around 10% of the national vote, but it's watching its traditional strongholds in the East erode as its support base ages and it faces challenges from the far-right Alternative for Germany.



Estonia

The Left has struggled in Estonia, where left-leaning parties have only ever been in power as junior partners of center-right-dominated coalitions. Despite economic decline, crushing austerity measures, and actions like the elimination of the corporate tax, left-wing activism is barely visible.



Ethiopia

Since the overthrow of the self-described Marxist-Leninist Derg dictatorship in 1991, Ethiopia has been ruled by the nominally leftist Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, which has gradually turned the country into an authoritarian developmental state.



Georgia

Georgia's post-Soviet politics have been defined by a combination of nationalism and free-market economics that has sent inequality soaring. 2012 saw the end of the eight-year authoritarian and corrupt reign of the United National Movement thanks to the six-party Georgian Dream coalition. A billionaire political novice headed this formation, promising greater social spending, including a public health-insurance system. In 2016, it brought three lawmakers from the antiwar, pro-labor Social Democrats for the Development of Georgia (SDD) into parliament. SDD now makes up one-third of a smaller Georgian Dream coalition, giving it greater influence.



Grenada

The country's New JEWEL Movement (NJM) took power in a 1979 coup under the leadership of Maurice Bishop. The Marxist-Leninist People's Revolutionary Government instituted a series of reforms with Cuban and Soviet aid before bloody infighting led to Bishop's murder. A 1983 US invasion saw the NJM completely overthrown. Afterwards, the Maurice Bishop Patriotic Movement contested in democratic elections without much success.



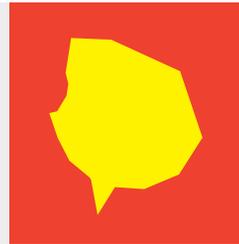
Hungary

From 1998 to 2010, a semi-two-party system existed in Hungary. The Hungarian Socialist Party (MZSP) — a center-left party that renounced Marxism and embraced austerity in 1994 — had support from its coalition partner, the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ). But over the eight years it was in power from 2002–2010, the MZSP lost 60% of its voters and the SZDSZ was knocked out of parliament, allowing a proliferation of low-polling left and liberal movements devoted to bringing down Viktor Orbán's right-wing government.



Kazakhstan

Though nominally a democracy, Kazakhstan is in practice a one-party state dominated by authoritarian president Nursultan Nazarbayev and his Nur Otan (Fatherland) party, in power since 2007. Left-of-center parties do exist, such as the Social Democratic Auyl Party, but Kazakhstan's personality-based politics and onerous rules (a 50,000-member requirement and a 7% parliamentary threshold) hamstringing the development of real electoral contests. The Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan (CPPK) scraped into parliament the last two elections — owing largely to the ongoing ban on the Communist Party, from which the CPPK split in 2004 — but it supports Nazarbayev, so it's not much of an opposition.



Kosovo

The Left has had tremendous success in Kosovo with Vetëvendosje (Self-Determination), a political movement and now parliamentary party. It won more seats (26% of the vote) than any other left party this June. First emerging in 2004, Vetëvendosje has a unique message that resists both Western efforts to manage Kosovan affairs and the power of former domestic warlords.



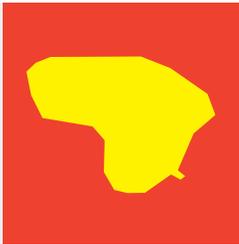
Kyrgyzstan

Known as the “democratic experiment” of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan’s political parties largely serve as vessels for elite interests rather than divide along ideological lines. Still, the center-left Ata Meken (Fatherland) Socialist Party has been a fixture since 1992. This pro-Western, pro-democracy party wants a strong social safety net, including health care and housing guarantees. It belonged to a four-way coalition with the more centrist Social Democrats until 2016, when it quit over proposed executive-power-centralizing reforms. The country also had a Communist Party, which called for the reconstitution of the Soviet Union and opposed the formation of a parliamentary republic. It was the country’s largest and most influential party through the 2000s, after which it has all but disappeared.



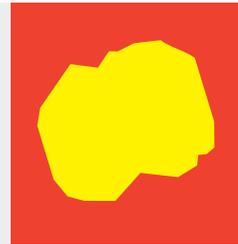
Latvia

Latvia’s political spectrum is split along “Latvian” and “Russian” lines rather than the traditional left/right divide, and it has a fragmented and unstable party system. Despite socioeconomic conditions that seem ripe for left-wing triumph, the small parliamentary left has been constrained by various factors, most notably ethnic divisions.



Lithuania

Through the 1990s, Lithuania’s political left was dominated by the Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party (LDDP), the reformed Lithuanian Communist Party that broke from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1989 and won 73 of 141 seats in the country’s first post-Soviet election. In 2001, it merged with a left-wing rival to form the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania, which took up the LDDP’s former spot on the center-left, but a number of scandals and mistakes forced it to cede ground to a centrist coalition of farmers and environmentalists in 2016.



Macedonia

After decades in the wilderness, various movements came together in 2015 to form Levica (the Left), the country’s first unapologetically left-wing party since Yugoslav breakup. Though it failed to cross the electoral threshold in 2015, ongoing grassroots protests over the right-wing government’s corruption may boost the Left’s chances.



Moldova

Moldova was the first European nation where an unreformed Communist Party (PCRM) was elected to power in 2001. But nothing is as it seems in Moldova: the PCRM is nationalistic, authoritarian, and socially conservative, and the party that eclipsed it in 2014, the Party of Socialists, is much the same. Then there's the Democratic Party of Moldova, a social-democratic party whose chairman and funder is a current deputy president of the Socialist International and a crooked oligarch.



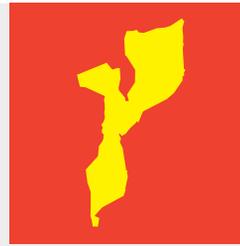
Mongolia

Mongolia's former ruling communist party, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party — now simply the Mongolian People's Party — has dominated post-Cold War politics, winning parliamentary elections in 1990, 1992 (where it took 95% of the seats), 2000, and 2008. Though it recently returned to power with 45% of the vote and 65 seats, it has moved ever further to the center. The two social-democratic parties are little better: the first joined the right-wing coalition that anticommunist GOP political operatives helped take power in 1996; the second ran on a soft neoliberal platform in 2016.



Montenegro

Since the country's first multiparty elections, the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) has loomed over Montenegrin politics: its party membership comprises around a fifth of all registered voters, it's triumphed in every parliamentary election (51.9% of the vote most recently), and its leader won seven terms as prime minister before stepping down last year. Despite its progressive trappings, the DPS is a neoliberal party and its president a devoted kleptocrat. The Social Democratic Party, the other nominal left force, in fact partnered with the DPS from 1997 to 2016.



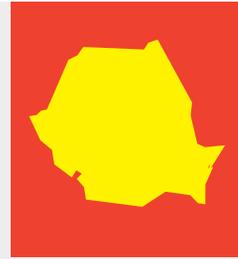
Mozambique

Through a combination of patronage, experience, an already existing party structure, and the institution of a first-past-the-post electoral system, the formerly Marxist-Leninist Frelimo (the Mozambique Liberation Front) has stayed in power since the end of civil war in 1992. It's getting hard to tell where the party ends and the government begins. Frelimo abandoned socialism for "modernization," cutting social services and privatizing assets to benefit ranking officials' wallets. It has recently started committing human rights abuses in a renewal of its conflict with the former rebel group, Mozambican National Resistance. Though unions remain under the government's thumb, popular frustration has found outlets in protests over rising prices and recent transport, education, and sugar mill strikes.



Poland

The parliamentary left has been all but put out to pasture, with no even remotely left-of-center party winning an election since 2001. As of 2015's electoral massacre, no left-wing party sits in parliament for the first time since 1989. However, Razem (Together), a Podemos-like movement, has emerged. It fell short of the 5% threshold in 2015 but won enough support to receive public funding. It organized a successful series of large protests against a proposed 2016 abortion ban.



Romania

The center-left Social Democratic Party (PSD) has had unique staying power in Romania, ruling through the first half of the 1990s and much of the new millennium. It won 46% of the vote — more than double its center-right opposition — in 2016 parliamentary elections, despite a string of scandals associated with its former prime minister and other prominent party members, including corruption, election fraud, and a nightclub fire that left 32 dead.



Russia

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) once controlled many regional authorities, its leader nearly beat Boris Yeltsin in 1993, and it continues to maintain some support, even after a major party split in 2004 sent it increasingly toward neo-Stalinism and social conservatism. But it has significantly declined, and the other major alternative — A Just Russia — is viewed as a “pocket opposition.” It won just over 6% of the vote in 2016.



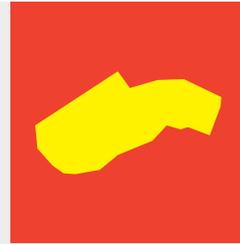
Serbia

The student-led, left-of-center movement Otpor! removed dictator Slobodan Milošević from power before dissipating in 2002. Today, the Serbian left finds political expression in the Left Summit of Serbia, a coalition of activists that has helped organize the more-than-yearlong series of anti-neoliberal protests known as Ne(da)vimo Beograd.



Slovakia

It's been five years since Robert Fico's social-democratic Direction-Social Democracy won a landslide electoral victory with 44.4% of the vote, giving it more than half the parliament's seats. During this time, it has raised the minimum wage, reintroduced a progressive income tax, and offered free railway tickets to certain groups, among other measures. The party underperformed in 2016, but its 28.7% still far outdid its rivals. More radical movements remain dormant.



Slovenia

After 2013 anti-corruption protests brought down the government, left-wing activists founded Združena Leвица (United Left), inspired by Syriza and Podemos, which has since morphed into Leвица (the Left). Supported largely by youth, it won six seats in parliament in 2014 and remains a model for other radical movements in former Yugoslavia, though it recently suffered an exodus of 94 members who cited a lack of internal democracy and a decline in outreach efforts.



South Yemen

Communists made their biggest Middle East breakthrough in Yemen, where most of the country was once governed by the Marxist-Leninist National Liberation Front (NLF). The NLF and its successor, the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), ruled the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen from 1967 until after the USSR's collapse and the unification of the country.

Following a 1994 civil war, the party declined and fragmented. As a more moderate, democratic socialist opposition, the YSP received 4.7% of the vote in 2003, the last time parliamentary elections were held. It also played a part in the 2011–2012 Yemeni uprising, giving hopes of a left resurgence, which were soon dashed as a result of the ongoing civil war.



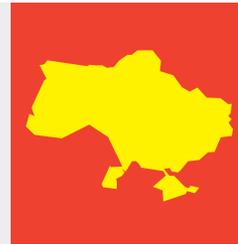
Tajikistan

Things are not good for the Left in this Central Asian country, which has been ruled by an authoritarian president since 1994. The sham 2015 election results say it all: the Socialist Party entered parliament for the first time ever, but it's considered a puppet opposition; the Communist Party lost its parliamentary seats, but it largely backed the government anyway. The regime's only true opposition is the Islamic Renaissance Party, which was kicked out of parliament for the first time since 2000.



Turkmenistan

On paper, Turkmenistan has three political parties: the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, which has ruled unopposed since 1991, the Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, and the Agrarian Party of Turkmenistan. But the latter two were created at the government's behest after 2012, and they serve as opposition in name only. Movements calling for democracy and freedom do exist, but repression has driven them underground and forced their leaders into prison or exile.



Ukraine

The Left in independent Ukraine was at first represented by parties that grew out of the initially banned and unreformed Communist Party of Ukraine (КПУ), such as the Socialist Party of Ukraine — which moved gradually toward middle-of-the-road social democracy — and the Peasant Party of Ukraine. The КПУ itself took the largest share of the national vote in 1994 and 1998 and nearly won the 1999 presidential election. Partly because of this, socialism remains linked to Stalinism in the popular imagination. Amid current turmoil, the pro-Russian КПУ fell below the 5% for the first time in 2014 before being re-banned. In the meantime, the far right is ascendant and left-wing activists from groups like Social Movement — a local analogue to Podemos — are being attacked and kidnapped.



Uzbekistan

For virtually its entire post-Soviet existence, Uzbekistan has been ruled by the authoritarian government of Islam Karimov, and its various political parties — including the renamed Communist Party — support him unanimously. The chief opposition has been the radical Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which aims to set up an Islamic state in the region.



LEFTOVERS
THE DUSTBIN

BY JONAH WALTERS

Choose Your Own Adventure

When your God that fails is Pol Pot.



IT'S ALMOST A TRADITION. For generations, Americans eager for insurrection have traveled the world in search of an exemplar to deify. Sometimes what they've found has horrified them. Other times it hasn't — but it should have.

By 1978, American left groups had grown increasingly distant from mass politics yet ever more radical in their aspirations. So it's hardly a surprise that three years into the death camp revolution that would kill a quarter of the country's population, an American Marxist could celebrate Cambodia as "a nation reborn, a nation that has regained its soul."

The man who wrote those words was David Kline, one of the few Americans permitted a visit to the Khmer Rouge's bloody playground. As a guest of Foreign Minister Ieng Sary, he traveled to Democratic Kampuchea along with three other members of the Communist Party Marxist-Leninist (CP-ML) — a Maoist organization grown out of the October League, which, like so many New Left groups, had itself sprouted from the remains of Students for a Democratic Society.

They arrived in Phnom Penh to a state banquet, where another member of the expedition, Dan Burstein, rose to offer a toast. He was moved by "the profoundest revolutionary feelings," he explained, to offer his party's "complete and utter support" for the "great battle" waged by the Communist Party of

The American delegation, eager to ogle a successful peoples' insurrection, was duped.

Kampuchea and comrade Pol Pot. The purpose of his visit, he said, was "to bring the truth about Kampuchea's revolution to the American people, who are currently being subjected every day to the most outrageous lies."

In a remarkable pamphlet published after their trip, the CP-ML members describe the success of rural cooperatives in triumphant terms, boasting of unprecedented rice yields, of a landscape cleansed of lethal malaria-bearing mosquitos,

of men and women living as equals in a proud revolutionary society — and of near-universal support for the Khmer Rouge government, which villagers say delivered Kampuchea from darkness. Of Sary, who oversaw the purging of "subversives" from government and mass executions of Muslim and Vietnamese minorities, they report positive impressions: he was "friendly and down to earth," and generously entertained their many questions over tea.

The American delegation, eager to ogle a successful peoples' insurrection, was duped.

Of course, sometime between their visit and the Khmer Rouge's ouster in a 1979 Vietnamese intervention, they were forced to recant. Any evidence of killing fields was hidden from them, they said, and at the time they had no reason to doubt the authenticity of the euphoric revolutionary peasants they encountered on their tour.

Maybe the Khmer Rouge's treatment of other international visitors had something to do with the CP-ML's change of heart. At the end of that year, a Scottish Marxist named Malcolm Caldwell visited Democratic Kampuchea in much the same circumstances as his American counterparts. A left-wing professor and enthusiast of Asian revolutions, Caldwell had become one of the English-speaking world's biggest defenders of Pol Pot, fond of

celebrating what had happened in Cambodia as "a really radical rural revolution, breaking away in important respects from all previous models."

In July 1978, just a few months after Burstein and Kline returned from their sight-seeing mission, Caldwell wrote, "It is good that more and more visitors are now going to the country." In fact, he continued, "I am ... holding out completion of my own book on Kampuchea lest a chance presents itself for me to see it for myself." He got that opportunity just six months later.

While in Phnom Penh, Caldwell dined privately with Pol Pot one evening. He was giddy after discussing peoples' revolution with his political idol — the professor's traveling companions, two journalists, recalled his "euphoric" demeanor when he returned to their shared accommodations. But his tour of Kampuchea would soon come to an end.

A group of men, almost certainly agents of the regime, entered the guest house at about eleven that night. After threatening his companions at gunpoint, they entered Caldwell's bedroom, where they remained for about an hour. Gunshots sounded. Before they left, they informed the two American journalists that Caldwell was dead — shot in the chest, for reasons that still remain a mystery.

Malcolm Caldwell's killing must have been disquieting for Burstein, Kline, and their associates. They had been guests of the same murderous regime less than a year earlier, swearing to "march forward on the road of socialism" alongside the Khmer Rouge, and describing their friendship with Kampuchea as "sealed in blood."

After threatening his companions at gunpoint, they entered Caldwell's bedroom...

A personal and political crisis rocked the CP-ML once they realized the severity of their error. Burstein, then in his mid-twenties, foreswore Marxism-Leninism and left the party, which started "a process of liquidation" that quickly disbanded the group.

A few years ago, an email supposedly written by David Kline found its way onto the comments section of a

website deriding the CP-ML's naivete. His message is simple and undefensive: "I was an idiot." Kline continues,

Like many other youthful ideologues and utopians throughout American history, I allowed myself to be duped. And I regret it more than any other mistake I've made in my life.

Only a year after proudly describing Cambodia as "a nation reborn," he withdrew from political life entirely, spending the 1980s working as a war reporter in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and elsewhere.

Burstein, today "a small time venture capitalist," became an author of trade books about international commerce and business. He continues to collaborate with Kline, his longtime coauthor. "As for my former youthful leftism," Kline reports in his email, "if you've scanned my work since you'll see that I finally came to appreciate the social value of entrepreneurial capitalism." ★



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We've accomplished a lot in 2017 — from publishing over a thousand articles to launching new podcasts and hosting events and reading groups to the creation of *Catalyst: A Journal of Theory and Strategy* and the relaunch of *Africa Is a Country*. But our plans for 2018 are even loftier, including increasing our print frequency, publishing new books, and launching exciting new investigative journalism projects.

These kind of donation appeals aren't really our style — they feel rote and forced. But we really need the support to keep going and we know how unique our contribution is. And if you don't trust us, just ask Jacobin Comrade #1, Noam Chomsky:

"The appearance of *Jacobin* magazine has been a bright light in dark times. Each issue brings penetrating, lively discussions and analyses of matters of real significance, from a thoughtful left perspective that is refreshing and all too rare. A really impressive contribution to sanity, and hope." ★

PICTURED ON REVERSE COVER

Row 6: Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Karl Kautsky

Row 5: Antonio Gramsci, Joseph Stalin, Julius Martov

Row 4: Leon Trotsky, Vladimir Lenin, Alexandra Kollontai

Row 3: Josip Broz Tito, Ho Chi Minh, Mao Zedong, Fidel Castro

Row 2: Nikita Khrushchev, Mikhail Gorbachev, Leonid Brezhnev and Erich Honecker

Row 1: Slavoj Žižek, Felix Dzerzhinsky's coat, Tony Blair

Projection Booth: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

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J

**You stuck listening devices
all over the dacha — even in
the bathroom. You spend the people's
money to eavesdrop on my farts.**

— Nikita Khrushchev