

After the Revolution: The Ambiguities of Class Struggle

1 THE SPECTRE OF THE NEW CLASS

Even before the Bolsheviks could really get down to implementing their programme, voices were raised in the West proclaiming the failure of the socialist programme. A few weeks after October 1917, without losing any time, Kautsky declared: '[w]hat is occurring in Russia is in fact the last of the bourgeois and not the first of the socialist revolutions'.¹ For the German socialist leader, no doubt was possible. It was not only that, in his view, the semi-Asian country was too backward to be capable of building a society beyond capitalism. Once socialism was cast as the end of any contradictions and conflict, and in any event, as totally different from the existing order—in fact, from any historically existing order—the affirmation of the non-socialist character of the revolution in Russia, or any other country, was in a sense tautological. Once socialism was defined in such a way as to entail the negation of any contamination by, or compromise with, the surrounding world, both at home and abroad, it was not difficult polemically to deploy the tautology of the failure to supersede bourgeois society.

Kautsky's 'demonstration' proceeds briskly. Brest-Litovsk, the peace treaty with Germany, by definition involved 'compromises with [German] capital'. Hence, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' had destroyed 'Russian capital', but only to make room for capital from other countries. In the

countryside, while small peasants had taken the place of the large-scale feudal property, overall, the putative socialist revolution had ‘consolidated private property in the means of production and commodity production’. It might be said that small peasants were embarking on the path of cooperation, but it should not be forgotten that cooperative property was merely ‘a new form of capitalism’. The new Soviet power might proceed to nationalize the whole economy, but it should be borne in mind that the ‘state economy is not yet socialism’. The market and commodity production would continue to exist; and even were both of them to disappear, it remained to be seen whether the ‘basis of [genuine] socialist production’ had been realized. Hence, the liquidation of a determinate form of capitalism did not in and of itself signify the abolition of capitalism as such: the new government ‘can abolish many forms of capitalist property’, without really leaving behind the old social system. As we can see, the bar which the new regime was required to clear, in order to be defined as socialist, was set ever higher, so that this regime, whatever its efforts and results, by definition remained non-socialist.

The socialism referred to here is like the Kantian thing-in-itself. Contrasted with the phenomenal world (the only world accessible to human consciousness), it is so defined (according to Hegel’s analysis) as to prove unattainable and unknowable. Analogously, the socialism of Kautsky (and so many other authors who argue like him), by dint of its ethereal, rarefied character, is unattainable and unrealizable. The countless propositions that eloquently demonstrate the unknowability of the thing-in-itself, or the failure to construct socialism, prove on closer inspection to be empty tautologies.

Although posing as a champion of orthodoxy, Kautsky did not challenge the ‘universal asceticism’ and ‘social levelling in its crudest forms’, harshly criticized by the *Communist Manifesto*, characteristic of Soviet Russia at the time. Instead, he denounced the emergence and self-assertion of a new exploiting class in the country ruled by the Bolsheviks: ‘[i]n place of those who were hitherto capitalists, and have now become proletarians, come intellectuals or proletarians who have now become capitalists’.² The October Revolution had only just occurred: the spectre of the advent of the power of a new exploiting class accompanied Soviet Russia from birth.

Grappling with such positions, Lenin responded. In an article published in *Pravda* on 7 November 1919, he stressed that the transition from capitalism to communism ‘must combine the features and properties of both these forms of social economy’ and encompassed ‘a whole historical era’.³

In Kautsky's view, by contrast, the persistence of bourgeois social relations was proof that either an old or a new exploiting class held power in Russia. The Soviet leader argued the opposite: crying scandal because of the co-presence of heterogeneous social relations during the transition meant bemoaning the fact that the conquest of power did not betoken the cessation of class struggle. It was clear that '[p]etty-bourgeois democrats are distinguished by an aversion to class struggle, by their dreams of avoiding it, by their efforts to smooth over, to reconcile, to remove sharp corners. Such democrats ... avoid recognising any necessity for a whole historical period of transition from capitalism to communism'.⁴

But in this determinate situation how did class struggle manifest itself? As early as 1920, attempts by Soviet leaders to restore and revitalize the productive apparatus, reintroducing the principle of competence into factories, were met by recalcitrant circles with denunciations of the ascendancy of 'bourgeois specialists' or a 'new bourgeoisie'.⁵ In Lenin's eyes, by contrast, measures to revive production and consolidate the social base of support for the revolutionary government, by recourse to 'bourgeois specialists' and the NEP and 'state capitalism' as well, were the concrete way that the proletariat waged class struggle in the new situation. For the inner-party opposition, the return to capitalism, albeit in limited form, was proof that the proletariat had lost, or was in the process of losing the class struggle and that the bourgeoisie, old and new, had reconquered power or was in the process of so doing. Dismayed, Lenin noted: it was 'assumed that [with the NEP] the change is from communism in general to the bourgeois system in general'.⁶ Disappointed Bolsheviks felt confirmed in their bitter conviction because cries of triumph arose on the other side. For the Mensheviks, observed an indignant Lenin, the NEP betokened the 'collapse of communism'. Indeed, 'the leitmotif of the Mensheviks is: "The Bolsheviks have reverted to capitalism; that is where they will meet their end. The revolution, including the October Revolution, has turned out to be a bourgeois revolution after all!"'⁷ A broad front of opinion argued thus. Astonishing reactions were not wanting. Amused, this time, Lenin referred to the fact that some of the 'Cadets' (Russian liberals), who had been defeated and were in exile, were calling for support for Soviet Russia, which had now set out on the path towards 'the ordinary bourgeois state'.⁸

Replicas of this debate occurred in the wake of other revolutions led by communist parties. In replying to cries of alarm or triumph at 'bourgeois restoration', the leaders of such parties were obliged to re-think the

Marxist theory of class struggle and class rule. The result was reflections that are sometimes of major interest, which not only help us to understand an extraordinarily important chapter in contemporary history, but also shed new light on the Marx and Engels' texts.

2 SOCIAL CLASSES AND POLITICAL CASTES

The Bolsheviks won power and proclaimed the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' precisely when that social class, as a result of the catastrophe of the war, civil war, and economic crisis, showed signs of passing away in Russia. In January 1919, a trade union leader sounded the alarm: '[w]e observe in a large number of industrial centres that the workers, thanks to a contraction of production in the factories, are being absorbed in the peasant mass, and instead of a population of workers we are getting a half-peasant or sometimes a purely peasant population'.⁹ This is something to which Lenin first drew attention, as emerges in particular from an intervention of October 1921: the 'industrial proletariat' in Russia had been 'dislodged from its class groove, and has ceased to exist as a proletariat'. Given that 'large-scale capitalist industry has been destroyed, since the factories are at a standstill, the proletariat has disappeared'.¹⁰

In a country like Russia, the more the stress shifted from revolution from below to revolution from above, the more difficult and complex it became for the ordinary student of a Marxist persuasion to interpret the historical sequence initiated with the October Revolution; which class held power in the countries that used to identify with socialism or still do? To answer this question, we must first free ourselves from the mechanistic interpretation of the Marxian theory of the relationship between economics and politics, between social classes and government and state apparatus.

When he represented the government in a more or less democratic capitalist society as an executive committee of the bourgeoisie, Marx, rather than describing an empirical reality, delineated an ideal type. The two things tend to largely coincide as long as the subaltern classes are incapable of making their presence and pressure felt. In the early nineteenth century, in *The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns*—a kind of liberal manifesto—Benjamin Constant observed: '[p]oor men look after their own business; rich men hire stewards'. And this is government: '[b]ut, unless they are idiots, rich men who employ stewards keep a close watch on whether these stewards are doing their duty'. Constant explicitly

stated that wealth is, and must be, the arbiter of political power and that the very essence of modern liberty consisted in the uncontested and incontestable dependence of government on property-owners: '[c]redit did not have the same influence amongst the ancients; their governments were stronger than individuals, while in our time individuals are stronger than the political powers. Wealth is a power which is more readily available in all circumstances, more readily applicable to all interests, and consequently more real and better obeyed'.¹¹ Starting, in fact, with the *Communist Manifesto* and the proletariat's initial attempts to organize as a class, the picture changed. In 1864, the International Working Men's Association credited the British working class with having prevented the implementation of plans, entertained by the dominant social bloc in Britain, to intervene on the side of the secessionist, slave-holding American South. There was no longer an immediate identification between the dominant social class and the political line of the government.

What conclusively infirms the mechanical view of the relationship between economics and politics is the tendency to an autonomization of the political and governing caste that emerges in certain historical situations. Which social class exercised power during the period of absolutism? Not the feudal aristocracy, which in fact viewed the emergence and development of the bourgeoisie with dismay and increased anxiety. But it was not the bourgeoisie that held political power; at a certain stage of its development, it evinced ever greater impatience at the fetters imposed on it by the absolutist state and finally committed itself to overthrowing it. From his earliest writings, Marx stressed the social ambiguity of absolutist monarchy: it was characteristic of a situation of unstable equilibrium between (declining) feudal aristocracy and the (rising) bourgeoisie.¹² Later, Engels was to define 'absolute monarchy' as 'a natural compromise between aristocracy and bourgeoisie'.¹³ Called upon to monitor the unstable equilibrium, and seal the labile compromise, was a regime which, for a whole historical epoch, was not identified with either of the two competing and then antagonistic classes.

A similar phenomenon occurs during more or less severe historical crises. Which social class exercised power in France during the most acute radicalization of the revolution? *The German Ideology* observes that only in and through a whole contradictory process did the bourgeoisie 'absorb the branches of labour directly belonging to the state and then all more or less ideological professions'.¹⁴ On closer examination, it was not,

strictly speaking, a social class that wielded political power in the years of Robespierre and the Jacobin Terror, but an ideological and political caste. On account of a set of circumstances (the general agitation prompted by the fall of the *ancien régime* and the state of emergency occasioned by the invasion of the counter-revolutionary powers and civil war), it acquired a certain degree of autonomy. We can now understand the irritation which, some decades later, Engels expressed at an essay on the French Revolution by Kautsky. In criticizing ‘veiled allusions to new modes of production’, he made this significant recommendation: ‘I would say a great deal less about the modern mode of production. In every case a yawning gap divides it from the *facts* you adduce and, thus out of context, it appears as a *pure abstraction* which, far from throwing light on the subject, renders it still more obscure’. The discourse on the transition from the *ancien régime* to bourgeois society assumed an ‘absolute’ tone ‘where the utmost relativity is called for’. Far from being the organic expression of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois mode of production, the Jacobin Terror represented ‘a military measure’ and registered impetus from below to bend the ‘equality and fraternity’ proclaimed in 1789 in a plebeian direction. In conclusion, bourgeois rule and the ‘bourgeois orgy’ began only after Thermidor, which was facilitated by the victory of the French army and the disappearance of the need for the Terror at an international level.¹⁵

The German Ideology draws some general conclusions from its analysis of Jacobinism. There is a division of labour within the bourgeoisie between sections of it directly engaged in economic activity and ideological and political strata; and this division can become a ‘cleavage’—a split which, in particular circumstances, ‘can even develop into a certain opposition and hostility between the two parts’.¹⁶

The phenomenon being analysed here is not exhausted by the fall of Jacobinism. Thermidor was followed five years later by 18 Brumaire. But of which class was Napoleon I an expression? Let us read the answer given by *The Holy Family*:

He fed the egoism of the French nation to complete satiety but demanded also the sacrifice of bourgeois business, enjoyments, wealth, etc., whenever this was required by the political aim of conquest. If he despotically suppressed the liberalism of bourgeois society ... he showed no more consideration for its essential material interests, trade and industry, whenever they conflicted with his political interests. His scorn of industrial *hommes*

d'affaires was the complement to his scorn of ideologists. In his home policy, too, he combated bourgeois society as the opponent of the state which in his own person he still held to be an absolute aim in itself.¹⁷

In conclusion, thanks to his domestic and foreign policy, Napoleon gave a strong impetus to the development of the French bourgeoisie. At the same time, however, in a situation marked by protracted revolutionary crisis and permanent war, he exercised a dictatorship over the very class benefited by him. This was a genuine conflict, which at a certain point saw 'Parisian speculators' and considerable sections of the 'liberal bourgeoisie' artificially create a famine, thereby sabotaging Napoleon's military operations and contributing to his fall.

In France, the process of autonomization of intellectual and political (and military) castes manifested itself again during the revolutionary crisis that resulted in the dictatorship of Napoleon III. According to Marx's analysis, the military apparatus developed by the bourgeoisie for anti-working class purposes ended up engulfing society as a whole and the dominant class itself. With the repression of the workers' revolt in June 1848, General Jean Baptiste Cavaignac (beloved by the liberal bourgeoisie) exercised 'the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie by the sabre', but this ended up being transformed into 'the dictatorship of the sabre over bourgeois society' and even over the bourgeoisie itself.¹⁸

Tocqueville may be regarded as the emblematic figure of this transition. As the clouds foreshadowing the tempest of June 1848 were gathering, he expressed the opinion that 'the National Guard and the army will be pitiless this time'. After the outbreak of the workers' rebellion, the French liberal was not only favourable to the granting of emergency powers to Cavaignac, but recommended shooting on sight any member of the populace caught 'in a posture of defence'. Sanguinary repression was not enough to assuage anxieties. Hence, the invocation of an 'energetic and definitive reaction on behalf of order', to put an end to the revolutionary and anarchical chaos. 'Palliatives' would not do. Not only the Mountain, but 'all the surrounding hills', must be swept away, without hesitation over a 'heroic ... remedy'. The option for the 'dictatorship of the bourgeoisie by the sabre' was clear and impassioned. But it was Tocqueville himself who added: 'France belongs to the one who will restore order' and terminate the 'lunacy of 1848'. Unwittingly, he evoked the figure of Napoleon III, who transformed 'the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie by

the sabre' into the 'dictatorship of the sabre over bourgeois society', condemning Tocqueville and the liberal bourgeoisie as a whole to impotence and internal exile.¹⁹

The same dialectic seemed to be on the point of repeating itself following the ferocious repression of the Paris Commune in 1871. Marx wrote:

After Whit-Sunday, 1871, there can be neither peace nor truce possible between the working men of France and the appropriators of their produce. The iron hand of a mercenary soldiery may keep for a time both classes tied down in common oppression. But the battle must break out again and again in ever growing dimensions....²⁰

In this instance, for a variety of reasons (international détente and strong economic development), a new 'dictatorship of the sabre', or its prolongation, did not occur. But the reality of the phenomenon brilliantly analysed by Marx remains. In general, the duration of the historical crisis and revolutionary cycle in France explains the recurrent process of autonomization, or the recurrent tendency to autonomization, of ideological, political, and military strata.

Obviously, the autonomization we are referring to here can be more or less pronounced. In any event, however, it is far from being total. Taking the example of Napoleon III, the politico-military power wielded and jealously guarded by him, promoted, and developed, the social power of the bourgeoisie, which ended up being connected by multiple ties to the holder of politico-military power.

In a situation characterized by a permanent state of emergency, and a lack of clear ideas about the concrete shape of the new political and social order, communist parties in power and their leaders ended up establishing a relationship with the proletariat and popular masses that recalls the one established with the bourgeoisie by Louis Bonaparte. That is, paraphrasing Marx, 'the dictatorship of the proletariat by the sabre' turned into the 'dictatorship of the sabre over civil society' and over the proletariat itself. However, albeit slender and twisted, a thread continued to connect Louis Napoleon with the bourgeoisie behind the counter-revolution, just as a thread continues to connect communist leaders in power with the proletariat and popular masses who were the protagonists of the revolution. Bonapartism or Caesarism is one of the ways that the process of autonomization of ideological, political, and military castes occurs. Gramsci's distinction between regressive Caesarism and progressive Caesarism remains

valid; and it also remains the case that in different historical situations the progressive or regressive character of Cesarism proves more or less pronounced.

3 DOMINANT CLASS AND DELEGATED CLASS

The process of autonomization of ideological and political (and military) castes can undergo a significant variation. Here is how, in a letter sent from Manchester to Marx on 13 April 1866, Engels described the advent in Germany of ‘Bonapartism’ Bismarck-style:

It would appear that, after some show of reluctance, the German bourgeoisie will go along with it, for Bonapartism really is the true religion of the modern bourgeoisie. It is becoming increasingly clear to me that the bourgeoisie does not possess the qualities required to rule directly itself, and that therefore, unless there is an oligarchy as here in England capable of taking over, for good, the management of state and society in the interest of the bourgeoisie, a Bonapartist semi-dictatorship is the normal form; it promotes the great material interests of the bourgeoisie even against the bourgeoisie, but allows it no share in the government itself. Conversely, this dictatorship itself is in turn compelled unwillingly to adopt these material interests of the bourgeoisie. So, now we have Monsieur Bismarck adopting the programme of the National Association [the quintessential organization of the liberal bourgeoisie].²¹

Germany and Britain are contrasted here. As regards the first, we see the reproduction of the phenomenon already analysed in connection with France: at work is a dictatorship or semi-dictatorship that ‘promotes the great material interests of the bourgeoisie even against the bourgeoisie’, which is excluded from political power. The British scenario is different. Ultimately, it is the aristocracy that retains ‘the management of state and society’, but now ‘in the interest of the bourgeoisie’. Within the framework of a now fully capitalist society, the bourgeoisie, although the ruling class in the strict sense, has delegated the function of government to the aristocracy. In the case of Britain, we may speak of a variant of the process of autonomization of ideological, political, and military castes, in the sense that the latter, although pertaining to the aristocracy, render themselves autonomous vis-à-vis their class of origin and form the governing caste of a bourgeois state.

It is a practice to which, a few years later, the German bourgeoisie resorted. With the foundation of the Second Reich, and the ensuing

powerful economic development, a division of labour was established which Gramsci summarized thus: ‘the bourgeoisie obtained economic-industrial power, but the old feudal classes remained as the governing stratum of the political State, with wide corporative privileges in the army, the administration and on the land’. They thus ‘became the “intellectuals” of the bourgeoisie, with a particular temperament conferred by their caste origin and by tradition’.²² A celebrated contemporary historian has spoken in this connection of the ‘persistence of the old regime’ in Britain, Germany, and Europe as a whole until the First World War.²³ In my view, the explanation given by Engels and Gramsci seems more precise and persuasive: the *ancien régime* was over, but certain strata hailing from it continued to be entrusted with important functions by the dominant bourgeoisie, often with a new significance relative to the past. This is how, in a highly developed country like Britain, we can explain the existence even today of institutions like the House of Lords and the monarchy.

Recourse by a social class to ideological castes that are in a sense foreign to it can also occur in a progressive key. Marx’s analysis of the period preceding the outbreak of the 1848 revolution in Prussia (the Rhineland province specifically) is significant:

The middle class still too weak to venture upon active movements, felt themselves compelled to march in the rear of the theoretical army led by Hegel’s disciples against the religion, the ideas and the politics of the old world. In no former period was philosophical criticism so bold, so powerful and so popular as in the first eight years of the rule of Frederick William IV ... The power of philosophy during that period was entirely owing to the practical weakness of the bourgeoisie; as they could not assault the antiquated institutions in fact, they must yield precedence to the bold idealists who assaulted them in the region of thought.²⁴

In Engels’ words, the bourgeoisie, ‘being short ... of men able to represent them in the press’, wound up in ‘alliance with the extreme philosophical party’.²⁵ Marx himself belonged to the ‘theoretical army’ or ‘philosophical party’ referred to here. He now looked beyond the bourgeoisie, and yet the latter invited him for a time to edit its newspaper, the *Rheinische Zeitung*, retaining ownership and control, thereby enabling it, at an opportune moment, to get rid of the ‘extremist’ danger and pursue a more conciliatory policy towards the aristocracy.

Can the distinction between dominant class and class delegated to perform particular functions in a subaltern position also obtain in a society intent on building socialism? This is the thesis formulated by Lenin. He legitimized it by reference to a passage to be found in late Engels (1894) about the attitude to be adopted towards major landowners and industrialists after the anti-capitalist revolution: '[w]e by no means consider compensation as impermissible in any event. Marx told me (and how many times!) that in his opinion we would get off cheapest if we could buy out the whole lot of them'.²⁶ What is evoked here is a scenario where, in a society of socialist orientation, wealthy bourgeois, individual property-owners with major financial resources, survive to whom 'delegated' functions might be entrusted.

In truth, this scenario already emerges indirectly from an earlier text. While it calls for 'centralis[ing] all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class', the *Communist Manifesto* also advances a more cautious line: an '[e]xtension of factories and instruments of production owned by the state' is tabled. The nationalization invoked here would appear not to be integral, especially since we encounter a qualification: at least 'in the beginning', the measures taken by the revolutionary government would 'appear economically insufficient and untenable'. What immediately stands out is a no less significant watchword: '[c]onfiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels'.²⁷ More than a general measure of an economic kind, the expropriation of the bourgeoisie seems to be a partial action, dictated in part at least by political contingency. We once again find ourselves in the scenario which, even after the anti-capitalist revolution, envisages the partial persistence of major wealth that is bourgeois or bourgeois in origin.

However, it is likely that, referring to the passage by Engels just mentioned, Lenin forced its meaning. But let us take a look at the developments underlying the Soviet leader's stance.

4 'STATE', 'ADMINISTRATION' AND 'RANSOM' IN LENIN

After 1917, the first doubts about the feasibility and rationality of the original programme of rapid, complete expropriation of the property-owning classes soon emerged. Two years later, in an intervention of 7 November 1919, referring to 'exploiters', Lenin observed: '[t]hey still retain certain means of production in part, they still have money ... The "art" of state,

military and economic administration gives them ... a very great superiority'.²⁸ The programme of expropriation seemed set to be comprehensively implemented, but a doubt emerged: was it possible to do without the 'art' on which the classes to be expropriated enjoyed a substantial monopoly? A few months later, on 29 March 1920, Lenin addressed the delegates at the Bolshevik Party's Ninth Congress:

But do you think that when the bourgeoisie superseded the feudals they confused the state with the administration? No, they were no such fools. They declared that the work of administration required people who knew how to administer, and that they would adapt feudal administrators for that purpose. And that is what they did. Was it a mistake? No, comrades, the art of administration does not descend from heaven, it is not inspired by the Holy Ghost. And the fact that a class is the leading class does not make it at once capable of administering. We have an example of this: while the bourgeoisie were establishing their victory they took for the work of administration members of another class, the feudal class; there was nowhere else to get them from.²⁹

It was right for the victorious proletariat to proceed in a similar fashion if it did not wish to lapse into 'sheer utopianism and meaningless phrasemongering'. The need to control political power and the state apparatus remained, but 'for the work of administration, of organising the state, we need people who are versed in the art of administration, who have state and business experience, and ... there is nowhere we can turn to for such people except the old class'.³⁰

Should the Bolsheviks confine themselves to this in drawing on the skills of the bourgeoisie or go further? In May 1921, Lenin went decisively further. Having affirmed that 'the question of power is the fundamental question of every revolution', he called upon the Bolshevik Party to register the 'discrepancy between our economic "forces" and our political strength'. And what then? In building the socialist system, they needed to know how to use members of the capitalist bourgeoisie. The latter would not agree to collaborate out of altruism. Hence, the 'need for a specific type of "buying out" operation which the workers must offer to the most cultured, the most talented, the most capable organisers among the capitalists who are ready to enter into the service of the Soviet power and to help honestly in organising "state" production on the largest possible scale'. It was necessary to 'use the method of compromise, or of buying

out the cultured capitalists who agree to “state capitalism!”, who could be ‘useful to the proletariat as intelligent and experienced organisers of the largest types of enterprises, which actually supply products to tens of millions of people’.³¹ It was for support for this line of argument that Lenin appealed to Marx and, more precisely, to the passage in Engels quoted above.

Here we have gone far beyond a distinction between ‘state’ or political power and ‘administration’. It is no longer a question of hiring, and adequately remunerating, bourgeois specialists entrusted with more or less significant duties. What is involved is a compromise with capitalists who continue to be such—that is, do not surrender their property. ‘Can the Soviet state and the dictatorship of the proletariat be combined with state capitalism? Are they compatible? Of course they are’.³² It should be borne in mind that what is intended by ‘state capitalism’ here is not nationalized means of production in state hands. Instead, ‘state capitalism’ is synonymous with ‘capitalism controlled and regulated by the proletarian state’.³³ That is, we are dealing with normal capitalist private property, which thrived once again under the NEP, albeit to a limited degree. However, it should be remembered that ‘state capitalism in a society where power belongs to capital, and state capitalism in a proletarian state, are two different concepts’.³⁴ Granted this distinction, it was necessary to ‘invite in’ foreign capital, obviously ‘without any power’.³⁵ If this line of renouncing nationalization and full state ownership of the means of production applied to industry, *a fortiori* it could and should apply to agriculture. In October 1921, Lenin summarized the path followed hitherto: ‘[w]e assumed that ... we would build up state production and distribution, and step by step win them away from the hostile system. We said that our task now was not so much to expropriate the expropriators as to introduce accounting and control, increase the productivity of labour and tighten up discipline’.³⁶ Clearly, economic expropriation of the dominant classes only corresponds in part to their political expropriation; and it is necessary and proper for it only to correspond in part for a determinate period.

Four years later, in 1925, in an article entitled ‘Concerning the New Economic Policy and Our Tasks’, Bukharin reached the same conclusions. Recourse to ‘suppression’ was required against ‘insurgent strata and their remnants’. By contrast, ‘there is a different relationship of the proletariat and its state power to the new bourgeoisie. With the existing balance of social forces the new bourgeoisie is a socially necessary

stratum, fulfilling—to a *certain* extent, within *certain* limits, and for a *certain* period of time—a socially useful function’.³⁷ In Britain and Germany, the bourgeoisie in power availed itself of the collaboration of the aristocracy, whose political power proper had been expropriated. Similarly, in Soviet Russia the proletariat in power, or the new political power, availed itself of the bourgeoisie to an even greater extent, given that the ousted class was used not only in state ‘administration’, but also in the organization of economic life and promotion of the growth of the productive forces.

5 ‘POLITICAL EXPROPRIATION’ AND ‘ECONOMIC EXPROPRIATION’ IN MAO

The NEP experiment only lasted a few years. While a role was also played in its demise by persistent ideological reservations about this experiment and political line, what mainly determined it was the deterioration in the international situation and serious threats of war.³⁸ But Soviet Russia of the NEP period is the starting-point for the People’s Republic of China, for much of its history at least.

On the eve of the conquest of power, Mao Zedong clarified his programme for government thus: ‘[o]ur present policy is to regulate capitalism, not to destroy it’. To overcome backwardness, China ‘must utilize all the factors of urban and rural capitalism that are beneficial and not harmful to the national economy and the people’s livelihood’. An important role could be played in this by the ‘national bourgeoisie’, which ‘should not have the chief role in state power’. Instead, it was enjoined to recognize ‘the leadership of the working class (through the Communist Party)’. In their turn, Communists must acknowledge a key point. In taking power, they would be abandoning armed struggle and undertaking ‘economic construction’. Hence, ‘[w]e shall soon put aside some of the things we know well and be compelled to do things we don’t know well. ...We must learn to do economic work from all who know how, no matter who they are. We must esteem them as teachers, learning from them respectfully and conscientiously’.³⁹ The distinction between the political expropriation of the bourgeoisie and its economic expropriation, which had emerged in Marx and Engels and then during the Soviet NEP, came into sharp focus. While they exercised political power, communists must know how to learn economically from the class they had supplanted. Mao further clarified his view in a speech of 18 January 1957:

As for the charge that our urban policy has deviated to the Right, this seems to be the case, as we have undertaken to provide for the capitalists and to pay them a fixed rate of interest for seven years. What is to be done after seven years? That is to be decided according to the circumstances prevailing then. It is better to leave the matter open, that is, to go on giving them a certain amount in fixed interest. At this small cost we are buying over this class. ...By buying over this class, we have deprived them of their political capital and kept their mouths shut. ...We must deprive them of every bit of their political capital and continue to do so until not one jot is left to them. Therefore, neither can our urban policy be said to have deviated to the Right.⁴⁰

What is articulated with especial clarity in this text is the distinction between the economic expropriation of the bourgeoisie and its political expropriation. The latter should be comprehensive, while the former, if not kept within strict limits, risked compromising the country's economic development and the new government's stability. In summer 1958, Mao reiterated his point of view to a rather wary Soviet ambassador: '[t]here are still capitalists in China, but the State is under the leadership of the Communist Party'.⁴¹

Having assumed the leadership of China after numerous vicissitudes, Deng Xiaoping reconnected with this political tradition, which he revived and radicalized. But this did not betoken a break. It needs to be remembered that, prior to winning power on a national scale, from 1928 onwards the Communist Party of China governed more or less extensive areas of the immense country, where 'a curious mixture of private capitalism, state capitalism, and primitive socialism', as well as co-operative property, co-existed.⁴² In the decades since 1928, attempts at total nationalization of the economy have been limited to a fairly short period of time.

We know that the NEP was construed in the West as a camouflaged reversion to capitalism. Three exceptional witnesses argued differently, however. The first is Gramsci, who was in Moscow from May 1922 until December 1923, and who some years later drew up a balance-sheet. The USSR afforded an unprecedented spectacle: 'history has never seen a dominant class, in its entirety, experiencing conditions of living inferior to those of certain elements and strata of the dominated and subjected class'. The popular masses who continued to suffer a life of hardship were disorientated by the sight of 'the Nepman in his furs, with all the goods of the earth at his disposal'. But this should not be a cause for scandal

or rejection, because the proletariat, just as it could not conquer power, could not retain it, if it was incapable of sacrificing particular, immediate interests to ‘the general and permanent interests of the class’.⁴³

The other two witnesses were less sympathetic to the country they were visiting. But on the key issue, they concurred with the Italian Communist leader. I am referring to the Austrian writer Joseph Roth, who visited Moscow between September 1926 and January 1927 and who, in correspondence for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, wrote: ‘[i]f it is true that the proletariat is the dominant class, it is certain that the new bourgeoisie is the affluent class. The proletariat possesses all the institutions of the state. The bourgeoisie possesses all the institutions of an easy life’.⁴⁴ Finally, in 1927 Walter Benjamin summed up his impressions as follows:

Under capitalism power and money have become commensurable qualities. Any given amount of money may be converted into a specific power, and the market value of all power can be calculated. ...The Soviet state has severed this communication between money and power. It reserves power for the Party, and leaves money to the NEP man.⁴⁵

The latter was, in fact, subject to ‘terrible social ostracism’. Economic wealth and political power in no wise coincided.

Hence, in the 1920s at least three very great intellectuals rejected any interpretation of the NEP as the expression of a bourgeois restoration. The People’s Republic of China has not been as fortunate. Starting with Deng Xiaoping’s turn, and despite the conspicuous exception of an eminent historian,⁴⁶ the view that China is a fully-fledged capitalist country goes virtually unchallenged.

6 CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AS ‘SPIRIT OF CLEAVAGE’ AND ‘CATHARSIS’

I have repeatedly spoken of the autonomization of the political and governing caste in connection with political regimes issuing from revolutions led by communist parties. It—let us be clear—is not a supersession of class struggle, but derives from its severity and endeavours to keep it under control. At first sight at least, the category I have employed recalls that of ‘bureaucracy’, of which Trotsky was fond. In fact, the latter, rather than deriving from political and social analysis, was primarily intended to register a negative value judgement and started from the presupposition

that it is the working class at the point of production which expresses revolutionary consciousness in its purity. What thereby gets lost sight of are the ambiguities that characterize the class struggle, especially in the phase following the conquest of power by a party of communist persuasion. Immediately after the October Revolution, who represented the cause of proletarian emancipation? Was it Lenin (the ‘bureaucrat’), who proposed to re-organize and re-start the productive apparatus, putting an end to absenteeism and anarchy in workplaces? Or was it the Belgian worker Lazarevic, determined to oppose the speed-up (and consequent ‘exploitation’) by striking? Was it the Soviet leader, who resorted to ‘bourgeois specialists’ (guaranteeing them high remuneration), and to capitalists disposed to collaborate with Soviet power in developing the productive forces and overcoming the first type of inequality? Or workers indignant at the persistence of the second type of inequality and the ‘restoration of capitalism’? Even if we confine the contrast to workers, who furthers the cause of emancipation? Those who, stimulated by material and moral incentives, engage in the Stakhanovite movement to develop production (and social wealth)? Or those who oppose all this?

At a time when war communism had not yet come to an end—between March and April 1920—Lenin drew attention to the paradox that had been generated in Soviet Russia: the proletariat had ‘become the governing class, and is being called upon to make great sacrifices, to starve and to perish’. It lived in worse economic conditions than the peasants, who had obtained major benefits from the new situation: ‘for the first time [they] had more food than throughout the centuries of tsarist and capitalist Russia’.⁴⁷ The paradox deepened and added insult to injury with the introduction of the NEP. Now it was a class, or a section of a class, which had been ousted as an exploiting class that lived in far better economic circumstances than the politically dominant class.

The tolerance shown the nouveau riche, despite enduring proletarian poverty, prompted a widespread, intense feeling of ‘betrayal’ in Soviet Russia: ‘[i]n 1921–2 literally tens of thousands of Bolshevik workers tore up their party cards in disgust with the NEP: they dubbed it the New Exploitation of the Proletariat’.⁴⁸ Also abandoning the party was the ‘Workers’ Opposition’. This was not only a political crisis but a devastating existential crisis. In 1927, Benjamin observed: ‘the halt the Party one day called to wartime Communism with the NEP had a terrible backlash, which felled many of the movement’s fighters’.⁴⁹

Far from being confined to Soviet Russia, this attitude possibly found its most impassioned or woeful followers among communist militants, even leaders, in the West. Lenin referred to them sarcastically: '[s]eeing that we were retreating, several of them burst into tears in a disgraceful and childish manner, as was the case at the last extended Plenary Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Communist International. Moved by the best communist sentiments, several of the comrades burst into tears'.⁵⁰

But let us concentrate on Soviet Russia. Those who argued, felt, and suffered thus, were convinced that they were giving voice to the consciousness of the working class. How did Lenin react? He condemned the 'Workers' Opposition' as 'an expression of a syndicalist deviation'.⁵¹ This category, which refers to *What is to be Done?*, is eloquent in itself. 'Trade-union' consciousness, or the 'syndicalist' deviation, manifests itself in an inability to subordinate economic demands to the struggle for the conquest and retention of political power. According to the Soviet leader, in a speech to the Third Congress of the Communist International on 5 July 1921, the fact was that 'dire suffering has fallen to the lot of the working class, precisely because it is exercising its dictatorship'. This was a paradox, but its underlying truth could be grasped by the politically most advanced elements of the working class.⁵²

For Lenin, the terms of the situation were clear. Account must be taken of Marx's teaching: '[f]ollowing its seizure of political power, the principal and fundamental interest of the proletariat lies in securing an enormous increase in the productive forces of society'.⁵³ Secondly, it was clear that the Soviet government could not rule if it did not solve the problem of the desperate poverty and hunger afflicting the Russian people. To revive agricultural production, generous concessions had to be made to the peasantry and to cry scandal at this meant 'putting the craft interests of the workers above their class interests, and sacrificing the interests of the whole of the working class, its dictatorship ... for the sake of an immediate short-term and partial advantage for the workers'.⁵⁴ To revive industrial production, even, more generous concessions to bourgeois specialists, and the Russian and international capital prepared to collaborate with the NEP, were required. Opening up to foreign capital, whose advanced technology was an absolute imperative and which was guaranteed exceptional profits, induced disorientation. But it was this policy—not protests against it—which represented 'a form of struggle ... a continuation of the class struggle in another form'.⁵⁵

Let us now glance at the situation in the factories. In the second half of the 1920s, Pierre Pascal, whom we have already encountered, lamented that

‘from a material point of view, we are advancing towards Americanization’ (in the sense of an idolatrous cult of economic and technological development). It was true that some economic progress had been made, but ‘at the cost of tremendous exploitation of the working class’.⁵⁶ Lenin argued the converse between 1920 and 1921. He called upon trade unions to liberate themselves from ‘craft prejudices’; they must ‘act as mediators’ and ‘facilitate the speediest and smoothest settlement’ of the disputes that inevitably arose,⁵⁷ but without ever losing sight of the objective of development of the productive forces—the only thing that could ensure a tangible improvement in the living conditions of the popular masses and, at the same time, strengthen Soviet power. To be clear, ‘conditions primarily demand higher productivity of labour, greater labour discipline. At such a time improvements at home are the major achievements of the revolution: *a neither salient, striking, nor immediately perceptible* improvement in labour, in its organisation and results’.⁵⁸ I have italicized an assertion that further radicalizes the break with the sensualist epistemology to be found in Marx and Engels’ early writings. The formation of revolutionary consciousness has still less to do with ‘contemplation’ of the proletariat’s conditions of existence. While *What is to be Done?* stressed the need to analyse the totality of political and social relations, national and international, now the same result was reached starting from an assertion of the need to transcend the level of empirical perception. On the basis of observation of the high salaries and privileges enjoyed by bourgeois specialists and Nepmen, respectively, the overhasty conclusion might be reached that proletarian class struggle coincided with the struggle against those privileges and salaries. But this would mean losing sight of the wider national and international context and ignoring the complexity of the class struggle against the two forms of inequality.

Overall, the picture afforded by Soviet Russia could be summed up as follows: ‘the proletariat, the revolutionary vanguard, possess[e] sufficient political power’, but permits ‘state capitalism ... alongside it’—that is, the persistence of some zones of capitalism, albeit controlled by the state. This created an unprecedented historical situation, disorientating many. But only those who understood and supported this policy, which was imperative for the maintenance of Soviet power, displayed mature class consciousness.⁵⁹

A situation that ‘history has never seen’: such were the words used by Gramsci, who clearly benefited from his stay in Soviet Russia. In his analysis of the paradox of the NEP and the USSR, he did not go beyond the picture drawn by Lenin. By contrast, the *Prison Notebooks* go much

further, identifying ‘the “cathartic” moment’ as ‘the starting-point for all the philosophy of praxis’ and revolutionary theory.⁶⁰ How are we to interpret this sibylline, astonishing declaration? In European culture, revolution and revolutionary movements were long construed and discredited as expressions of envy, rancour, and resentment. It is enough to think of authors like Constant, Taine and, above all, Nietzsche. Gramsci’s reflection refutes this commonplace. In NEP Russia, proletarians who could not rise above envy of the ‘Nepman in his furs with all the goods of the earth at his disposal’ were not in a position to help build the new society to which they aspired. General in character, Gramsci’s thesis not coincidentally reached maturity while Nazism in Germany was intensifying the resentment and envy of more backward popular strata towards intellectuals, especially revolutionaries, and channelling the frustration of masses impoverished by war and economic crisis against Jews. Contrary to what Constant, Taine, and Nietzsche claimed, the revolutionary movement developed and matured only if it succeeded in expressing a ‘cathartic moment’.

It is interesting to note that, thousands of miles away from Europe, another great communist leader was groping in the direction of the same theoretical result. In 1929, Mao Zedong engaged in a struggle against ‘absolute egalitarianism’. With its pettiness, charge of envy and even *resentiment* (when the Red Army quartered, [e]quality was demanded in the allotment of billets, and Headquarters would be abused for occupying larger rooms’), it was the expression of mean-spirited social relations, ‘the product of a handicraft and small peasant economy’, and thereby frustrated or prevented the creation of the social bloc needed to reverse the *ancient régime*.⁶¹ Successful revolution required the consolidation of unity between the most immediate victims of exploitation and oppression, as well as a policy of alliances to isolate the power to be overthrown. All this was possible only on condition of banishing or containing individual pettiness as well as envy, rancour, and resentment towards the contiguous or immediately higher social strata who were the natural target of such mindsets.

In fact, the ‘cathartic moment’ played a key role in the process of forming class consciousness. In the same year that he developed his thinking on the NEP—1926—Gramsci wrote:

The metal-worker, the joiner, the building-worker, etc., must not only think as proletarians, and no longer as metal-worker, joiner, building-worker, etc., they must also take a further step. They must think as workers who are members of a class which aims to lead the peasants and intellectuals. Of a

class which can win and build socialism only if it is aided and followed by the great majority of these social strata. If this is not achieved, the proletariat does not become the leading class....⁶²

What is described here is a two-stage process. In the first, membership of a specific profession is transcended in membership of the proletariat as such (here we have not gone beyond the view of Marx and Engels). But it is the second stage that contains significant novel features: the proletariat exhibits mature class consciousness only when it rises to a view of the class it belongs to as the leading nucleus of a broader social bloc called upon to carry the revolution to victory. And catharsis proves even more necessary when it is a question of retaining and consolidating power, as demonstrated by the struggles, as well as the disappointments and even personal dramas, of the NEP years. The idea of catharsis was already stirring in Engels' thesis that communist consciousness presupposes transcending the immediate, narrow interests of the proletarian class (see Chap. 3, Sect. 4); and was operative in Lenin's polemic against trade unionism. But it was only now that it met with an organic, consistent formulation.

The acquisition of revolutionary consciousness involves a battle on two fronts. It is necessary to reject co-option into the dominant bloc, on the one hand, and to avoid retreat into corporatism, on the other. On the first front, it involves sharpening the proletariat's class antagonism, while on the second, it means increasing its capacity for mediation vis-à-vis classes or social strata that live in better material conditions than it does. Or, in Gramsci's terms, it might be said that class consciousness is expressed on the one hand as the 'spirit of cleavage', which enables a subaltern class to achieve 'integral autonomy'; and on the other as 'catharsis', thanks to which a class that was formerly subaltern, can make the transition 'from the purely economic (or egoistic-passional) to the ethico-political moment', thereby becoming a ruling class.⁶³

7 BETWEEN RUSSIA AND CHINA: THE BOURGEOISIE AS A CLASS IN ITSELF AND A CLASS FOR ITSELF

'Catharsis' makes it possible to come to terms with the complexity of the class struggle in the society emerging from the Bolshevik October. Therein, especially after the introduction of the NEP, rich bourgeois continued to exist. But, not only were they not the ruling class politically; they were not even a class for itself.

The German Ideology stresses that ‘separate individuals form a class only insofar as they have to carry on a common battle against another class; in other respects they are on hostile terms with each other as competitors’.⁶⁴ This is a discourse that does not refer to one specific class, but proposes to explain the process of formation of the proletariat and bourgeoisie alike and the class consciousness of both. Let us open *The Poverty of Philosophy*. By virtue of a ‘common situation’ and ‘common interests’, created by objective ‘economic conditions’, the proletariat is ‘already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself’. It is in struggle that the mass of proletarians ‘becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself’; and the class struggle becomes a ‘political struggle’. As regards the bourgeoisie, ‘we have two phases to distinguish: that in which it constituted itself as a class under the regime of feudalism and absolute monarchy, and that in which, already constituted as a class, it overthrew feudalism and monarchy to make society into a bourgeois society’.⁶⁵ Hence, the bourgeoisie had long been a class in itself before also becoming a class for itself—that is, before acquiring a developed class consciousness and being capable of defining and practically pursuing its own class interests.

In the proletariat, the process of the formation of class consciousness is impeded, and can even be interrupted or set back, either by the competition that objectively occurs between individual workers, or as a result of the political and ideological initiative of the dominant class. Something similar applies to the bourgeoisie, following a revolution that has more or less radically abolished its political power and discredited it ideologically.

Let us see what occurred in the People’s Republic of China. As emerges from the observation by Mao quoted above—it is important not to consummate the economic expropriation of the bourgeoisie—this class did not disappear following the Communist Party’s arrival in power. In October 1978, initiating the policy of reforms and openness, Deng Xiaoping warned that ‘[w]e shall not allow a new bourgeoisie to come into being’. This objective is not contrary to tolerance of individual capitalists. As was clarified a few months later by the new Chinese leader, ‘the struggle against these individuals is different from the struggle of one class against another, which occurred in the past (these individuals cannot form a cohesive and overt class)’. Naturally, residues of the old class struggle survive, but overall, with the consolidation of the revolution and the power of the Communist Party, a new situation had been created.⁶⁶ ‘Is it possible that a new bourgeoisie will emerge? A handful of bourgeois elements may appear, but they will not form a class’, especially

given the existence of a ‘powerful ... state apparatus’ equipped to control them. The historical precedent invoked by the Chinese leader in August 1985 is significant: ‘[p]erhaps Lenin had a good idea when he adopted the New Economic Policy’.⁶⁷ We are directed back to a situation where the bourgeoisie, or individual bourgeois elements, continued to play—more precisely, resumed playing (after the phase of ‘war communism’)—a more or less pronounced economic role, even though they had been deprived of any possibility of playing a political role.

It is not only political power that counters the bourgeoisie’s transition from class in itself to class for itself. We have seen Marx celebrate the nobility of the Polish aristocrats who allowed themselves be governed by the national interest as opposed to class interest. Particularly at times of more or less acute historical crisis, an individual can find him- or herself located not within a single contradiction, but within multiple contradictions. Marx’s indictment of the French bourgeoisie, which in 1871 targeted the Paris Commune rather than the Prussian invader, is thought-provoking: ‘[i]n this conflict between national duty and class interest, the Government of National Defence did not hesitate one moment to turn into a Government of National Defection’.⁶⁸ As emerges from the indignation evinced by this text, that option was not self-evident. The Polish noble too was concerned by the agitation of the peasantry, which risked threatening his social position and privileges. But he could not ignore the fact that the dismemberment and subjection of his country stripped him of his national identity, thereby condemning him to political, cultural, and even (in some respects) social subalternity to the dominant power. We could summarize things by saying that, in this determinate situation, the Polish noble was compelled to choose between social identity and national identity. As we know, during the Russian Revolution, a general of noble origin—Brusilov—found himself faced with a similar choice. He rallied to the new Soviet government on the basis of his ‘sense of patriotic duty’, because the Bolsheviks were in the process of rescuing Russia from Balkanization and subjugation.

Such processes occurred on a much larger scale during the Chinese Revolution, led by a communist party that had placed itself at the head of the war of resistance against Japanese imperialism, at the head of a struggle to save the Chinese nation as a whole (including the dominant exploiting classes) from the enslavement for which the Empire of the Rising Sun intended it. It is likely that patriotism continues to play a role among the capitalists old and new who have no difficulty in realizing the support

Washington has extended to the most disparate separatist movements that can emerge, or be nurtured and encouraged, in the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, continental country that is China.

Finally, we should not lose sight of the process lucidly described by the *Communist Manifesto*. Let us re-read a very famous passage: as and when the crisis is in full swing, and the existing order is set to collapse (or seems about to collapse), ‘a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands’. We are dealing with a switch of sides that is not motivated by national concerns, but explained mainly by intellectual and emotional adhesion to the party or movement in which the imminent, ineluctable future is embodied (or seemingly embodied). As protagonists of this change of camp, Marx and Engels point to intellectual strata, ideologists, ‘who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole’.⁶⁹ But it can involve very diverse social strata, even representatives and sections of the capitalist bourgeoisie, and historically has done. In the years immediately following the Second World War, out of gratitude and admiration for the role played by the USSR and communist parties in the resistance and the struggle against Nazi and fascist barbarism, Marxism and communism exercised a power of attraction extending far beyond the popular classes. The converse occurred before and after 1989 when the desire to repudiate what the USA and the West tirelessly branded as the wrong side of history—a political current destined to disappear or end up in the dustbin of history—was widespread and insistent. This process is still underway, but exhibits little vigour in a country that escaped a century of colonialist and imperialist humiliation in 1949 and which today, after decades of rapid economic development, seems destined to play a growing role on the international stage. These are circumstances that strengthen the patriotism of individual bourgeois and capitalists, who, for objective reasons, have very great difficulty in constituting themselves as a class for itself.

It is simplistic to make class consciousness and objective social situation correspond mechanically. The polemical exchange that occurred between Khrushchev and Chou En-lai during the Sino-Soviet conflict possesses an emblematic value. The former had proudly exhibited his humble origins, throwing the latter’s aristocratic origins back in his face. Chou En-lai responded: ‘we have both betrayed our class of origin’. Such ‘betrayal’, or switch of sides, is indeed to be taken into account; and during a historical crisis so grave as to represent a mortal danger to a nation, this ‘betrayal’,

or change of sides, tends to be a more or less widespread and enduring phenomenon.

Obviously, a national crisis also influences the process of formation of the proletariat's class consciousness. It can be drawn into chauvinist positions supportive of colonialist and imperialist war. In this instance, it ceases to be a class for itself and becomes a mere appendix of the bourgeoisie. This is what, in the more mature phase of their development, Marx and Engels were compelled to register painfully in connection with Britain. But even in the case of a war of resistance and national liberation, while the proletariat is called on to participate actively, possibly assuming a leadership role, it must avoid losing its autonomy and merging with the bourgeoisie. In November 1938, having proclaimed 'the identity between the national and the class struggle', Mao went on to criticize the slogan 'Everything through the United Front'.⁷⁰ In waging a 'class struggle' that was at the same time a 'national struggle', the proletariat organized in the Communist Party must know how to safeguard class consciousness and identity along with national consciousness and identity. But it could genuinely do this only by eliminating any form of national nihilism.

Prior to the Bolshevik October, then, Lenin felt it necessary to underscore the inanity of setting off in search of class struggle and revolution in the pure state. After the victory of revolutions inspired by Marxism, the communist movement was impelled to clarify for its own purposes that it was no less inane to search for proletarian (or popular) power in the pure state. Important theoretical results ensued. Lenin distinguished between state and administration, between dominant class and delegated class. Gramsci further developed reflection on the historically unprecedented phenomenon whereby a politically ruling class might not be the economically privileged class, analysed Caesarism and the process of autonomization of the political and ideological caste in a post-capitalist society, and highlighted the role of 'catharsis' in a mature revolutionary class consciousness. Mao called for a clear distinction between the political expropriation of the exploiting classes and their economic expropriation. Finally, Deng Xiaoping also applied the distinction between class in itself and class for itself to the bourgeoisie whose political power has been expropriated.

In theory, such distinctions and reflections should have counselled caution in assessing post-revolutionary society. In reality, however, what happened? If we take the first fifteen years after the October Revolution, we find a succession of three social models that are patently different: the

‘collectivism of poverty and suffering’ (Gramsci), or ‘socialized poverty’ (Trotsky), peculiar to so-called ‘war communism’; the NEP and recourse to a restricted zone of capitalism controlled from above, in order to reconstruct and re-start the productive system; and the juxtaposition of a collectivized agriculture and an even more heavily nationalized industry. None of these models really silences the thesis of the advent of a new exploiting class. How are we to explain the constant, widespread use of the category of betrayal? Or, formulating the question differently, how are we to explain the exhausting pursuit of a society undefiled by the slightest bourgeois contamination?

NOTES

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3. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1960–78, Vol. 30, p. 107.
4. *Ibid.*, Vol. 30, p. 108.
5. See Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1890–1924*, London: Pimlico, 1997, pp. 730–1.
6. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 342.
7. *Ibid.*, Vol. 33, pp. 25, 21.
8. *Ibid.*, Vol. 33, p. 286.
9. Quoted in E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917–1923*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978, Vol. 2, pp. 193–4.
10. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, p. 65.
11. Benjamin Constant, ‘The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns’, in *Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Biancamaria Fontana, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 325–6.
12. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975–2004, Vol. 6, p. 326.
13. *Ibid.*, Vol. 48, p. 266.
14. *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 77 n.
15. *Ibid.*, Vol. 48, pp. 267–8.
16. *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 60.
17. *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, p. 123.
18. *Ibid.*, Vol. 10, p. 76.
19. See Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, trans. Gregory Elliott, London and New York: Verso, 2011, Chapter 10, §1.
20. Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, p. 354.

21. *Ibid.*, Vol. 42, p. 266.
22. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971, p. 83.
23. See Arno J. Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War*, London and New York: Verso, 2010.
24. Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 16, p. 159.
25. *Ibid.*, Vol. 11, p. 17.
26. *Ibid.*, Vol. 27, p. 500.
27. *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, pp. 504–5.
28. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 115.
29. *Ibid.*, Vol. 30, p. 457.
30. *Ibid.*, Vol. 30, p. 458.
31. *Ibid.*, Vol. 32, pp. 338–9.
32. *Ibid.*, Vol. 32, p. 345.
33. *Ibid.*, Vol. 32, p. 458.
34. *Ibid.*, Vol. 32, p. 491.
35. *Ibid.*, Vol. 32, p. 182.
36. *Ibid.*, Vol. 33, p. 88.
37. N.I. Bukharin, ‘Concerning the New Economic Policy and Our Tasks’, in *Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism*, ed. and trans. Richard B. Day, Nottingham: Spokesman, 1982, p. 112.
38. See Domenico Losurdo, *Stalin. Storia e critica di una leggenda nera*, Rome: Carocci, 2008, pp. 129–31.
39. Mao Zedong, *Selected Works*, Vol. 4, pp. 421–3.
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41. Mao Zedong, *On Diplomacy*, p. 251.
42. Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China*, New York: Grove Press/Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994, p. 227.
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44. Quoted in Marcello Flores, *L’immagine dell’URSS. L’Occidente e la Russia di Stalin (1927–1956)*, Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1990, p. 52.
45. Walter Benjamin, ‘Moscow’, in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, London: Verso, 1985, p. 193.
46. See Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century*, London and New York: Verso, 2007.
47. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 460.
48. Figes, *A People’s Tragedy*, p. 771.
49. Benjamin, ‘Moscow’, p. 207.
50. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, pp. 280–1.

51. Ibid., Vol. 32, p. 177.
52. Ibid., Vol. 32, pp. 489–90.
53. Ibid., Vol. 33, p. 188.
54. Ibid., Vol. 32, p. 342.
55. Ibid., Vol. 32, p. 346.
56. Quoted in Flores, *L'immagine dell'URSS*, p. 53.
57. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 246; Vol. 33, p. 187.
58. Ibid., Vol. 33, p. 39.
59. Ibid., Vol. 32, p. 279.
60. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971, p. 367.
61. Mao, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, pp. 110–11.
62. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings 1921–1926*, pp. 448–9.
63. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 52, 366.
64. Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p. 77.
65. Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 211.
66. Deng Xiaoping, *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 144, 178.
67. Ibid., Vol. 3, pp. 142–3.
68. Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, p. 311.
69. Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 494.
70. Mao Zedong, *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 215–16.