

Party and Programme: Lenin and Luxemburg against Opportunism and Centrism - Part 3

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Dave Hughes concludes the series by looking at Lenin and Luxemburg's fights for the revolutionary programme within the Second International

In the last [article](#) ^[1] we examined the struggle waged by Lenin and the Bolsheviks within the shattered framework of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party between 1903 and 1912. We showed that this was a struggle against opportunism that passed through several stages beginning with the question of organisation, passing during the 1905 revolution onto the terrain of major tactical questions. On all these issues the Mensheviks appeared as systematic if vacillating revisionists of the positions worked out by *Iskra* between 1900 and 1903. In the terminology of the post 1914 period, they represented a centrist current. We showed that Lenin in no way operated with a mechanical notion of unity being obligatory until a party decisively crossed class lines in a major event such as voting war credits or forming a bloc with a bourgeois party. Instead what was central for Lenin was the preservation of the programme; organisation and major tactics of a revolutionary party. Tactically this end could be served by both a split from and a unification with unstable centrist elements depending on the tasks a given historical situation placed before the proletarian vanguard, the kind of pressure the masses exerted on these elements and the size and firmness of the revolutionary nucleus.

Lenin was quite aware that the right wing in International Social Democracy Bernstein in Germany, Axelrod in Russia represented a bourgeois tendency that would be excluded from the ranks of the proletariat. In no way restricting his attacks to this right wing he was equally merciless with the vacillating equivocating centre, in whose ranks stood Leon Trotsky. Trotsky was later to realise the profound correctness of the blows Lenin dealt him in this period and himself to fight lone and hard against those who wished to pursue a similar policy. He summed this up in words which are very relevant today: "A simple conciliation of factions is possible only along some sort of 'middle' line. But where is the guarantee that this artificially drawn diagonal line will coincide with the needs of objective development? The task of scientific politics is to decide a programme and a tactic from an analysis of the struggle of classes, not from the parallelogram of such secondary and transitory forces as political factions". (Stalin, L. Trotsky Vol.1 p172)

Events have shown the practical fruit born from the IMG's revision of Bolshevik history. The IMG theoreticians excised Lenin's struggle against conciliation and centrism, consigned tactics to a realm unconnected to programme in order to clear the decks for Socialist Unity and Socialist Challenge. As one of the largest groups on the Left they are seriously and systematically miseducating and misleading a whole stratum of subjectively revolutionary militants. First they falsified history. Now they are liquidating the conception of a disciplined democratic centralist party and the historic programme of Trotskyism. In the second article in our series 'Party and Programme' - 'From Communism to Social Democracy' we looked at Marx and Engels struggle for a scientific programme in the first mass workers party. Here also we

discovered that the question of unity was predicated in achieving a programme which outlined an operative strategy. Here also it was obvious that degeneration set in when tactics were sundered from principles- the former becoming increasingly opportunist, following the line of least resistance; the latter becoming an ossified shibboleth. We showed that the 'great events', the decisive crossing for the class line of 1914 had its roots in the early days of Social Democracy.

That Marx and Engels fought unsparingly to eradicate them - a fight that included in 1875 a fight against unity on a rotten programme. In this third article of the series we look at the formation of a revolutionary current within German Social Democracy - the Left Radicals, consisting of Rosa Luxemburg, Clara Zetkin, Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mehring and other figures such as Karl Radek and Anton Pannekoek. The contribution these figures made to the re-elaboration of the revolutionary programme has been obscured by a welter of lies and misrepresentation emanating from the 'friends', centrist and ultra-left anti-Bolsheviks as well as the professional hacks of Stalinism who abuse in these figures all those revolutionary qualities that they seek to obscure in Lenin.

However, any reassessment of the Left Radicals cannot be conducted in a spirit of uncritical piety. The war and the subsequent revolutionary upheavals of 1918/19 found the German proletariat with only the feeblest nucleus of a revolutionary party. This was of no small significance on a world scale, since Germany was to be the key to the prospects for the international spread of the Russian revolution up to 1933. It is in this context that we examine the key questions of the nature of the epoch and the strategy and tactics necessary for it, and of how to build a party capable of winning the working class to this programme for the seizure of power. From this we shall see that the question of splits and unification must be related to this goal as a tactic, not as some sort of absolute imperative, breakable only in the case of a higher absolute 'not crossing class lines'. Lastly we return to the Bolsheviks again, or rather to the conjunction of the Bolsheviks with the Left Radicals and other proto-communist groups during the First world war. Here again we shall see not a jumbling together of all those who had not crossed class lines but a merciless struggle against centrist positions, centrist slogans and the eventual winning of the best, subjectively revolutionary elements away from these positions to a consistent, communist, programme and tactic.

The formation of the left wing in the SPD

We have examined the rupturing of the revolutionary communist tradition within the largest and most influential of the mass Social Democratic Parties. The fact that this was masked by regular declarations of Marxist orthodoxy does not alter the nature of the process of degeneration into reformism and opportunism. However the very orthodoxy of German Social Democracy, the immense political authority of its chief ideologue, Karl Kautsky served to blind many revolutionary Marxists to the scale of degeneration in German Social Democracy in the first decade of the twentieth century. If we are to understand the struggle to revive the revolutionary programme against the reformists and opportunists, we have to examine the development of the Left wing in German Social Democracy, and of Bolshevism in Russia. Both of these tendencies had their origin in national organisational and tactical differences with their respective reformists and opportunists.

The full programmatic implications of the differences, of the splits, were developed on the basis of experience of mass struggle in the period before the Imperialist war, and on a serious political economy in the imperialist phase. A study of the widening gulf between sterile Kautskyan orthodoxy and the Left in the second international is vital for all those who want to understand the relationship between tactical differences and 'general principles', who want to understand the method of re-elaborating and redefining the revolutionary programme. Lenin's split with the Russian opportunists in 1903, the split between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, was understood by him to be over organisational matters. The mass struggles in Russia from 1905 to 1907, the response of the two factions within the split party to those

struggles, made it abundantly clear that the Bolsheviks did not simply represent a different method of 'organising' the party. (1)

From 1905 onwards, Lenin understood the Bolsheviks to be the defenders of the revolutionary programme against the conciliationism and legalism of the Mensheviks. He did not, however, generalise from the Russian struggle to the state of the International until a later period. On an international scale the front line troops in the battle against Kautsky's orthodoxy were the German Left, organised around Luxemburg and Liebknecht. Although wrong on many issues, it was Rosa Luxemburg who opened up the conflict between revolutionaries in Social Democracy and the Kautskyite leadership. She did this at a time when Lenin was still uncritically invoking the political authority of Kautsky and Bebel against the Russian opportunists. This legacy of Rosa Luxemburg is one openly acknowledged by Lenin after the collapse of German Social Democracy in 1914. Writing to Schliapnikov on October 27 1914, Lenin had this to say: 'I hate and despise Kautsky now more than all the rest, the filthy, vile and self satisfied brood of hypocrisy...Rosa Luxemburg was right, she long ago understood that Kautsky had the highly developed, 'servility of a theoretician', to put it more plainly, he was ever a flunky to the majority of the party, a flunky to opportunism.' (2)

Against Bernstein's revision of Marxism, Kautsky reaffirmed the crisis ridden nature of the capitalist system, the necessity to ever force up the rate of exploitation of surplus value from the working class. However, for Kautsky these remained inoperative items in an orthodox catechism. The period of the late 1890's and early 1900's was still seen by Kautsky as a non revolutionary period. The tactics of Social Democracy - peaceful building of the trade union organisations and the strengthening of the Social Democratic parliamentary position, were not challenged.

While Luxemburg and the Left defended the tenets of Marxist political economy alongside Kautsky, their differences with the Party was a whole, with the revisionists and the orthodox, crystallised around the question of tactics. Luxemburg's first critique of Bernstein, articles gathered together into Reform and Revolution, not only defends Marxist political economy: 'Bernstein began his revision of Social Democracy by abandoning the theory of capitalist collapse. The latter, however, is the cornerstone of scientific socialism'. But implicitly come out against the pacifist tactics embraced by the majority of the party. It is this document that contains her critique of pure trade unionism, of building up trade union power as a programme for socialism: '..the objective conditions of capitalist society transform the two economic functions of the trade unions into a sort of labour of Sisyphus, which is, nevertheless, indispensable'. She challenged the reformist idea that the development of political democracy makes the proletarian revolution either impossible or superfluous. She does so in order to reorientate the programme and practice of the party. For the first time, Luxemburg openly calls for a programme that outlines the road to power for the proletariat:

"Our programme would be a miserable scrap of paper if it could not serve us in all eventualities, at all moments of the struggle, and if it did not serve us by its application, not by its non- application. If our programme contains the formula of the historic development of society from capitalism to socialism, it must formulate, in all its characteristic fundamentals, all the transitory phases of this development, and it should, consequently, be able to indicate to the proletariat what ought to be its corresponding action at every moment on the road to socialism. There can be no time for the proletariat when it will be obliged to abandon its programme or be abandoned by it." (4)

This challenged not only Bernstein's revisionism but also the Erfurt synthesis of the reformist tactics with formal acknowledgement of the ultimate objective of socialism. For Luxemburg and the German Left the only effective rebuff to opportunism lay in the development of new tactics that placed working class power on the agenda. Luxemburg expressed this in a letter to Roland Holst on the 17th December 1904: 'The

only means to combat opportunism radically is to move forward ourselves, to develop the tactic, to intensify the revolutionary aspect of the movement'.(5) The developing tactical differences, central to the process of re-elaborating the revolutionary programme, were concretised in the mass struggles of the European working class from 1902 to 1906. The Belgian General Strike of 1902, the Dutch General Strike of 1903, a massive strike wave in Russia culminating in the revolution of 1905, miners' strikes in the Ruhr, opened up the debate on tactics in the German Social Democracy. The 'orthodox' saw the mass strike as a valuable addition to their armoury, but they saw it as a subordinate to, a back up for the parliamentary reformist tactic.

The position was clearly formulated by Bebel, for example, at the SPD's Jena Congress in 1905. He argued that the mass strike weapon was necessarily a defensive and subsidiary tactic. It should be resorted to, Bebel argued, when the two principle prerequisites for implementing the tactics of the party, universal suffrage and the right to organise in trade unions, came under attack. The massive energy and strength exhibited in the mass strike wave was seen only as an appendage, a reserve off stage army, to the central task of increasing trade union strength and parliamentary representation. Luxemburg and the Left's reply, her codification of the experience of the mass strike wave, is found in her pamphlet, 'The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions', written in 1906. At a time when the Bolsheviks were learning from the mass struggles in Russia and developing a sharpened perspective for the coming revolution accordingly, the German Left saw in the mass struggles the basis of alternative tactics to those of the revisionist and orthodox in Social Democracy. Polemicising against the German trade union bureaucracy that vetoed a discussion of the general strike at the 1905 Conference and the short-sightedness of the Jena congress resolution's attempt to: 'seek to narrow and to artificially smother the social importance, and to limit the historical scope of the mass strike as a phenomenon, as a problem for the class struggle...'(16)

Luxemburg called on German Social Democracy and the German working class to learn from the experience of the Russian revolution: 'the most backward country of all, just because it has been unpardonably late with its bourgeois revolution, shows ways and methods of further class struggles to the proletariat of Germany and the most advanced capitalist countries.' (7) Not only does the Russian revolution signal: 'a new lengthy period of violent struggles' but the ripeness of the international labour movement for decisive revolutionary struggle: 'and while the bureaucrats of the German labour movement rummage in their office drawers for information as to their strength and maturity, they do not see that that which they seek is lying before their eyes, in a great historical revolution, because, historically considered, the Russian revolution is a reflex of the power and maturity of the International and therefore, in the first place of the German labour movement' (8)

What is vital to Luxemburg's pamphlet is not simply the discovery of a new tactic. For Luxemburg the revolution in Russia signified the end of the parliamentary period, a period where the economic and political struggles of the working class were necessarily but artificially separated. The conservative bureaucracy in the trade unions, the short sighted Party officials, owed the authority, and hence their deep hostility to mass action, to this separation. To Luxemburg, the mass strike breaks down the artificial walls between economic and political struggle: 'the economic struggle is the transmitter from one political centre to another, the political struggles is the periodic fertilisation of the soil for economic struggle'.(9) The mass strike opens up immediately the question of which class rules in society, hence the impossibility of limiting its use to the defence of the parliamentary or trade union tactic. Hence also its centrality in any programme for the seizure of power by the working class.

Luxemburg's pamphlet has its notable weaknesses, it fails to emphasise the central role for the party in leading and directing the general strike and the struggle for power. Nonetheless, in locating and

polemicising against the innate conservatism of the labour bureaucracy, in arguing for orientation to a new period of revolutionary struggles and for tactics relevant to those struggles that would be capable of leading the mass of workers in action, it marks a significant break with the perspectives and programme of German Social Democracy. The Left saw the mass strike as a necessary and integral part of the proletarian revolution. As such it was central to the working class' own preparation for power. The orthodox responded to the strike wave by trying to co-opt its massive energy into their own reformist schema as a useful but subsidiary tactic.

In the 'Road to Power' (1909) Kautsky argued that the mass strike was one, but only one, form that the revolutionary struggle could take. While recognising its role, particularly in Russia, he saw no need for German Social Democracy to alter its programme or tactics. He said this while recognising on the level of 'general principle' that the intensification of the class struggle signalled the opening of a new and revolutionary period: 'the only certain thing is universal uncertainty. It is certain that we are entering upon a period of universal unrest, of shifting of power, and that whatever form this may take, or how long it may continue, a condition of permanent stability will not be reached until the proletariat shall have gained the power to expropriate politically and economically the capitalist class and thereby inaugurate a new era in world history.'⁽¹⁰⁾ In the 'Road to Power' Kautsky attempted to undermine both the Left's call for revolutionary tactics and the revisionists programme for class collaboration and class peace. His 'centrist' recipe was a peculiar combination of optimism 'Happy he who is called to share in this sublime battle and this glorious victory' ⁽¹¹⁾ and passive subservience to the inexorable logic of socialist victory.

Kautsky at this time was prepared to recognise the tendency of capitalism towards militarism and war, it is a central premise in the 'Road to Power'. He was prepared to morally indict capitalism for this while unprepared to alter and focus the Party's strategy accordingly. Tactical differences within the German Social Democracy Party did not rest exclusively on the question of the mass strike. In 1905 and 1906 the Left, particularly Karl Liebknecht, urged the party to undertake a vigorous anti-militarist campaign. They proposed anti-militarist and anti-enlistment Party agitation among youth and soldiers. While the party leadership still stood by the 'principles' of refusing to vote for any capitalist budget, refusing to bloc or take office with any bourgeois party, they violently resisted the proposal for anti-militarist agitation. Such work, they consistently argued, was illegal and would force the Party into confrontation with the State Courts. As such it challenged the accepted tactics of Social Democracy - the legal strengthening of the Party and Trade Union organisation and base. But the differences between the orthodoxy of Kautsky and Bebel and the future founders of the German Communist Party had an implicit content that went far beyond simple disagreement as to the role and applicability of particular tactics. In the aftermath of the 1905 revolution the differences hinged increasingly on the nature of the period ahead and the consequent tactics and strategy to be employed by Social Democracy. These differences came to a head in the debate on Imperialism. The tactical differences within the German Party lie at the heart of the debate on Political Economy. By this we do not mean that a tactical debate was conducted in the language of economics. Only by a thorough examination of the particular period of capitalist development only by reasserting the method of Marxist political economy could the revolutionary communist within Social Democracy enter on the path of re-laborating a programme for working class revolution.

The debate on Imperialism

The concept of 'Imperialism' was crucial to the development of the Left's programme and their critique of the orthodox centre. Written in 1913 Luxemburg's 'The Accumulation of Capital' attempts a systematic explanation of Imperialism and deduces a perspective of capitalist crisis from it. Luxemburg starts from the premise that Capital can only expand by continuously subordinating non-capitalist elements within the capitalist country and in parts of the globe where capitalist relations were not yet established. Capital Accumulation in the nineteenth century depended on wealth accrued from outside the capitalist system

itself: 'Thus the immediate and vital conditions for capital and its accumulation is the existence of non-capitalist buyers of the surplus value which is decisive to this extent for the problem of capital accumulation.' Whatever the theoretical aspects, the accumulation of capital, as an historical process, depends in every respect upon non-capitalist social strata and forms of social organisation'.(12)

The massive expansion of capital in the nineteenth century was possible because of the size and scale of non-capitalist relations in the world. Those resources, Luxemburg argued in 1913, were becoming ever scarcer the subject of increasingly sharp competition between the rival national capitals for their own survival. Imperialism and consequently militarism were to be understood only in this context: 'Militarism... is a pre-eminent means for the realisation of surplus value, it is itself a province of accumulation' (13)

Militarism was an inevitable consequence of the last desperate struggles of imperialism. Imperialism is the political expression of the accumulation of capital in its competitive struggle for what remains still open in the non-capitalist environment.(14) Now Luxemburg was wrong in her theory of Capital Accumulation in her insistence that there could be no extended reproduction of Capital without non-capitalist consumption of the surplus value. Pannekoek of the German Left, Bukharin of the Russian Party argued this forcefully in polemics with her. Bukharin's 'Imperialism and the World Economy' published in 1915, Lenin's 'Imperialism - the Highest Stage of Capitalism' (1916) start from the concept of a fusion, 'a condescence' of finance and industrial capital of Imperialism as the export of capital. Militarism for them is an integral part of this process: 'The internationalisation of economic life, here too makes it necessary to settle questions by fire and sword' (15) but basing themselves on Hilferding's 'Finance Capital' published in 1910 Bukharin and Lenin develop a scientific and concrete understanding of the specific nature of imperialism.

The question then is not whether Luxemburg's position on Imperialism was correct. We would argue that Bukharin and Lenin were right against her. Lenin in 1913 considered Luxemburg's book to be dangerous enough to applaud critics of it from all parts of the political spectrum within German Social Democracy, writing to Kamenev he said: 'I have read Rosa's book Die Akkumulation des Kapitals. She is an impudent liar, who has mutilated Marx. I am delighted that Pannekoek, Eckstein and Bauer have unanimously accused her of the same things of which I accused the Populists in 1899.'(16) But Luxemburg's work is the first major attempt of the Social Democratic left to come to terms with the new period of capitalism, to attempt to develop a theory of the new period to lay the basis for a programme for Socialist revolution.

The break with Kautsky and the 'Marxist Centre'

The theory of imperialism as the last, most contradictory, crisis torn and destructive stage of capital was to become the basic plank of the communist left. The implications for the left were stark. Such a period posed immediately the choice of 'Socialism or Barbarism' to the working class movement, it cut the ground from beneath the majority of Social Democracy who still looked to peacefully utilising those existing democratic institutions of capitalism to build the movement. The logic of imperialism and militarism would force capitalism to undermine any authority resting in Parliaments, made impossible a perspective of gradual and democratic development. Radek described this as Imperialism 'hollowing out parliamentarism as a weapon of the working class'. The ever greater dependence of the competing capitalist economies on militarism rendered historically redundant, rendered utopian, pacifist disarmament, and diplomatic peace campaigns. As Luxemburg wrote in 1911: 'The Question of militarism and Imperialism for the central axis of political life; in them and not in questions of ministerial responsibility and other pure parliamentary demands, lies the key to the political situation.' (7) Mass action by the proletariat, not parliamentary manoeuvre and strength held the key to the working class reply to capitalism's crisis.

It was the Left in International Social Democracy - including both Lenin and Luxemburg who fought and nominally committed the Second International to an international general strike in the event of declared

hostilities between the European ruling classes. Kautsky's reply to the Left's theory of Imperialism - published after the start of the War! - was delivered most systematically in *Der Imperialismus*,. ?*Neue Zeit*? Sept 11 1914 (18).

Faced with the political, programmatic logic of the theory of imperialism Kautsky pulls back from the positions he had espoused in the 'Road to Power'. Imperialism he argues is but one policy adopted by capitalism to overcome the economic problem of agricultural production lagging behind industrial production. As such capitalism would be offered an opportunity to change course after the war: 'There is no economic necessity for continuing the arms race after the world War, even from the stand point of the capitalist class itself, with the exception of at most certain armaments interests' (19) Imperialism as a policy will be, Kautsky argues, a positive hindrance to capitalist growth: 'Imperialism is thus digging its won grave. From a means to develop capitalism it is becoming a hindrance to it. Nevertheless, capitalism need not yet be at the end of the line, from the purely economic standpoint, it can continue to develop so long as the growing industries of the capitalist countries can induce a corresponding expansion of agricultural production'. (20)

There is a political alternative to imperialism and militarism, an alternative which the growth of cartels and monopolies in the economic sphere will stimulate capitalism to adopt. This alternative is the envisaged stage of self-interested world capitalist cooperation: Ultra- Imperialism: 'The translation of cartelisation into foreign policy; a phase of ultra-imperialism which of course we must struggle against as energetically, as we do against imperialism, but whose perils lie in another direction, not in that of the arms race and the treat to world peace' (sic) And what policies what programme flows from this new theory? Clearly it offers only a pacifist opposition to the first imperialist war. The war itself will educate the capitalists into new ways: 'The longer the war lasts, the more it exhausts all the participants and makes them recoil from an early repetition of armed conflict, the nearer we come to this last solution, however, unlikely it may seem at the moment.' (21) The proletarian revolution is not on the agenda, capitalism is capable of adopting policies to ensure a period of global stability and security. The tasks for socialists rest in persuading capitalist society to take the path, to see its potential interest and then social democracy can return to the tactics adopted and operating before the imperialist war, tactic temporarily suspended because of that war.

Under the hammer blows of the outbreak of war, against the programmatic thrust of the revolutionary Lefts Kautsky's 'theoretical' degeneration is complete. We do not say so imply because of the events of the 1920s and 1930s proved Kautsky so wrong but because his 'theory' offered to the working class only submission disarmament and international cooperation afterwards! The German Left, fighting nose to nose with Kautskyism orthodoxy, by their fight for revolutionary tactics, by their attempts to establish a political economy of Imperialism rekindled important and fundamental elements of the communist tradition. Their position, however, remained incomplete and inadequate by the time of sharpest test for Social Democracy. On August 4th 1914 German Social Democracy voted war credits to the Imperial regime. Luxemburg was stunned. Lenin in Switzerland, refused to believe the newspaper reports believing them to be forgeries produced by German High command. Luxemburg could declare 'since August 4th 1914, German Social Democracy has been a stinking corpse' but the grouping around her, as we shall see were not capable of establishing a clear and programmatic basis for a new and revolutionary Communist International Party. It was Lenin and his co-thinkers within the Bolshevik Party who had played a less significant role in the fight against opportunism internationally than the German revolutionaries who was to understand the key questions of principle and strategy that were to lay the basis for a programmatic split with opportunism. The problems facing communists were essentially those of explanation of the opportunist politics of the Social Democratic Parties, of developing the programmatic basis for the struggle for power in the imperialist epoch, the programmatic basis for the split with all opportunist elements.

Lenin, Imperialism and The roots of Social Democratic degeneration

Luxemburg and the German Left had characterised and criticised the opportunism of the SPD leadership. Their theories of imperialism, their polemics and their tactical proposals however, contained no explanation of the opportunist trend in the Labour movements. Lenin's work on imperialism sought not only to understand the economic mechanisms of capitalism at its highest stage of development, it sought to locate the opportunism of the labour movement in that stage. Lenin in 'Imperialism and the Split in Socialism' argues that the Bolsheviks have always seen:

'The economic connection between the imperialist bourgeoisie and the opportunism which has triumphed (for long?) in the labour movement and from this incidentally, we concluded that a split with the social chauvinists was inevitable.'(22)

The two trends so obviously evident in the 1914 split had been ever present in the labour movements in the Imperialist States:

'These two trends, one might even say two parties, in the present day labour movement, which in 1914-1916 were traced by Engels and Marx in England through the course of decades roughly from 1858-1892'(23) The split was not a matter of one trend crossing the lines to the enemy in August 1914 - although this is how the IMG try to portray it - but based on the fact that the Second International Parties contained not only revolutionary Marxists but, on the whole, a predominance of the culture and politics of the labour aristocracy weaned by Imperialism: 'Now a 'bourgeois labour party' is inevitable and typical in all imperialist countries; but in view of the desperate struggle they are waging for the division of the spoils, it is improbable that such a party can prevail for long in a number of countries.' (24) Imperialism nurtured bourgeois labour parties based on the labour aristocracy, but the Imperialist War cuts away 'in a number of countries' the base for the labour opportunists and for those in Social Democracy who have refused to break with them.

Here Lenin's venom is directed at Kautsky, a figure that Lenin had viewed sympathetically long after Luxemburg had opened her attack on his hollow orthodoxy: 'Kautskyism is not an independent trend because it had no roots either in the masses or in the privileged stratum which has deserted to the bourgeoisie.' (25) Lenin was aware of the existence of 'two tendencies' in the International and in the German labour movement in particular, in advance of the August 1914 betrayal. Writing in Prosveshcheniye in April 1914 he addressed an article to the Russian comrades 'What should not be copied from the German Movement': 'We must not try to play down the disease which the German party is undoubtedly suffering from. Nor must we play it down with 'officially optimistic' phrases. We must lay it bare to the Russian workers, so that we may learn from the experience of the older movement, learn what should not be copied from it.' (26)

The article is primarily aimed at the leading Social Democratic Trade Union bureaucrat Karl Legien, but Lenin makes it plain that the 'official optimism' pervading the upper reaches of the party is blinding it to its own disease. This 'official optimism' was a German version of the conciliationism found within the Russian movement. It is sometimes stated that Lenin had boundless illusions in the revolutionary nature of the German Party. This is simply untrue. The depth of Lenin's concern over opportunism within the SPD is indicated in a letter to Inessa Armand he wrote shortly before the publication of the article against Legien: 'The Germans virtually have two parties, and this has to be born in mind without trying to shield the opportunists (the way Neue Zeit and Kautsky are now doing.)'(27) Lenin's conclusion is that he and Zinoviev are determined to 'hound them with all our might'. Lenin was thus already identifying the trends he had fought and split with in Russia inside the German movement. Conversely he strove to counter the attempts being made by the conciliators to use the prestige of the German party to preach unity and tolerance of opportunism. Lenin was obdurate that: 'The more often the liberals and the Liquidators in

Russia (including Trotsky of course) attempt to transplant this amiable characteristic to our soil, the more determinedly they must be resisted.'(28)

The 'official optimists' - the Centre - subordinated the fight against the reformists to the maintenance of unity. Under the banner of 'unity' the majority of Social Democracy refrained from breaking with Bernstein. Under the same slogan the Russian 'centre' campaigned against the open break in Russian Social Democracy. Against this international and national tendency Lenin waged a war for unity of Marxists alone - before the August 1914 betrayal. Writing in Put Pravdy in April 1914 'On Unity' he declared: 'Unity is a great thing and a great slogan. But what the workers case needs is the unity of Marxists, not unity between Marxists, and opponents and distorters of Marxism.' (29) Generalising from the national struggle against opportunism in Russia, understand the roots of the split in socialism as a result of his work on Imperialism Lenin was more sharp and clear than Luxemburg and the German Left in the first years of the war.

The War, the German Left Radicals and Centrism

The differences between Luxemburg and Lenin during the war had their roots in the differences between their struggle against opportunism in the years preceding it. Luxemburg and the Left- Radicals situation was in some respects more difficult than that of Lenin. They existed in mass party that had not formally renounced its revolutionary heritage. The party leadership had formally rejected Bernsteinism, had held to the Erfurt Programme. But in substance, in practice they had conducted an opportunist tactic for over a decade. The Left Radicals had spearheaded the attack on the Right in alliance with the centre. Influenced by this alliance, they had not pressed for the expulsion of the right from the party. Had they done so this would have revealed firstly the scope of opportunism within the party and secondly the compromised purely verbal radicalism of the Centre.

The tactical struggle over the mass strike from 1905 to 1910 had partially revealed this. Anton Pannekoek writing in Neue Zeit in 1912 characterised 'Kautskyan Radicalism' as viewing the revolution as 'an event in the future, a political apocalypse' which had little impact on contemporary practice other than justifying a continued 'marshalling of the troops' by trade union and parliamentary head counting. He noted that this split between a radical goal and revisionist practice would lead Kautsky to a rapprochement with Bernstein against the Lefts: '..it is apparent that the revisionists rejection of any revolutionary action and Kautsky's postponement of it to the indefinite future are bound to unite them on many of the current issues on which they both oppose us.'(30)

It was the strength of figures like Luxemburg and Pannekoek that they vigorously tested the lofty principles of the SPD in the balance of tactics, and found the Party and its ideologues woefully inadequate. But they themselves had an accompanying weakness that proved very serious in the long run. Appalled by the bureaucratic inertia of the party machine, developing against it a withering critique of its deadening effects on the masses they came to underestimate the necessity to pose against this a different form of organisation. Rosa never put forward as the stupid slanderers of Stalinism or the false friends of 'libertarian socialism' claim a theory which denied the role of the party or relied on the 'spontaneity' of the masses. Unlike Lenin however, she had little experience of developing the type of party which could carry out the tactics she was forced to advocate as an oppositionist within a mass party. Therefore, in Trotsky's words: '...in her historical - philosophical evaluation of the labour movement, the preparatory selection of the vanguard, in comparison with the mass actions that were to be expected fell too short with Luxemburg; whereas Lenin - without consoling himself with the miracles of future actions - took the advanced workers and constantly and tirelessly welded them together into firm nuclei, illegally or legally, in mass organisation or underground by means of a sharply defined programme.'(31)

In Germany Rosa had no clear field for these tasks. The ground was encumbered by the mass, legalist, bureaucratized party and trade unions. The only way to have selected a firm cadre and welded them together would have been a sharp factional struggle around a definite alternative strategy - a new programme in embryo. Lenin was later to sense this lack in the pre 1914 German Lefts. In his review of the Junius brochure he notes: 'Junius's pamphlet conjures up in our mind the picture of a lone man who has no comrades in an illegal organisation accustomed to thinking our revolutionary slogans to their conclusion and systematically education the masses in their spirit. But his shortcoming - it would be a grave error to forget this is not Junius's personal failing, but the result of the weakness of all the German Leftists, who have become entangled in the vile net of Kautskyite hypocrisy, pedantry, and 'friendliness' for the opportunists.'(32)

The Question of a split

In a newly translated article on Rosa Luxemburg (33) Ernest Mandel argues correctly that Rosa Luxemburg should have built an organised left faction within German Social Democracy. He does this however, with the condition that a split, a new party, could not have taken place before the historic betrayal of August 1914: 'The formation of a new party was of course impossible until the treachery of the SPD leadership had been irremediably demonstrated to the masses by manifest betrayals of an historic scope.'(34) By this he means that until the SPD leaders openly supported their own ruling class's Imperialist war, 'crossed class lines', there was no grounds for a split in Social Democracy, only grounds for organising a tendency.

Mandel ignores the fact that a vigorous organised factional struggle within the SPD, would have brought a decisive clash within the party bureaucracy. If the Lefts had refused to compromise it would most certainly have led to a split, to expulsions and the necessary formation of a new party. Mandel's view that this would have been 'impossible' would be a recipe for capitulation. Lenin was in retrospect to see that the pre-war splits with opportunism in Russia, in Bulgaria, in Italy and Holland strengthened the proletarian vanguard and rescued important sections of workers from the debacle of 1914. Thus in 1914 he could write: 'In Italy the party was the exception for the period of the Second International; the opportunists, headed by Bissolati, were expelled from the party. In the present crisis, the results have proved excellent: people of various trends of opinion have not deceived the workers or blinded them with pearls of eloquence regarding 'unity.'" He draws the conclusion: 'What was a happy exception for the Second International should and shall become the rule for the Third International.'(35)

After the great betrayal of August 1914 the political terrain was not as simple as portrayed by the IMG and USFI theoreticians. The camp of outright Social Chauvinism was fairly obvious. In Germany it consisted of SPD leaders like Ebert, Cunow, David, Scheideman, Sudekum, Noske and TU leaders like Karl Legien. Architects of the "civil peace", they made recruiting speeches, toured the front, sat on the munitions committees. The party and trade union journals carried nauseating chauvinist articles. In Britain they consisted of figures like Arthur Henderson, Sidney Webb and the ex-Marxist Hyndman. In the Russian party Plekhanov became an outright chauvinist. In France the veteran Marxist Jules Guesde and Marcel Sembat entered the war cabinet and the syndicalist Leon Jouhaux took the office of National commissar. In Belgium Emile Vandervelde joined the government of national defence. Amongst the opponents of the war there was little clarity. The most determined and immediate opposition came from the Social Democratic deputies in the Serbian Parliament. On 31st July, faced with the war credits vote Lapcevic and Katzlerowitch voted against them. On the 8th August in the Russian Duma Bolshevik and Menshevik deputies read out a joint declaration against the war and left the chamber before the vote was taken. In Germany whilst Karl Liebknecht and fourteen other SPD deputies had voted within the party fraction against voting war credits, when it came to the vote in the Reichstag chamber they all obeyed party discipline and did so.

On that very evening a small group met in Rosa Luxemburg's flat to plan resistance to the war. It was a slow and difficult task. No disciplined faction existed within German Social Democracy only a broad left radical current. The wave of chauvinism carried away many erstwhile supporters. It took many months to assemble even a nucleus. Liebknecht, rallying to the group was able to use his Reichstag deputyship to good effect when in December 1914 he broke discipline and voted against the second war credits bill. It was Spring 1915 before the group was able to bring out a single issue of a legal magazine Die Internationale. Whilst its articles ferociously attacked the 'civil peace', recognised the breakdown of the international, bitterly attacked Kautsky's sophisms and advocated Liebknecht's slogan 'the main enemy is at home' it still posed the key goal as 'peace', although stressing that this could be achieved 'not by pious wishes, cleverly concocted solutions and Utopian demands addressed to the ruling classes' but by relentless class struggle against the perpetrators of the war. Another grouping emerged around the journal Lichtstrahlen calling themselves the 'German International Socialists'.

Severe repression the arrest and imprisonment of first Luxemburg and then Liebknecht rendered the task of developing a coherent programme more difficult than that facing the émigré Bolshevik leadership who furthermore had an already prepared illegal apparatus at their command. Liebknecht although conscripted was released to attend the rare sittings of the Reichstag. From its tribune he poured out a ceaseless stream of denunciations of the war. He also managed to issue a series of leaflets driving home his slogan 'the worst enemy is at home'. In prison Luxemburg wrote the 'Crisis in Social Democracy', the famous Junius Brochure but it was not possible to publish it until April 1916, after Rosa had been released from prison. Indeed 1916 was a crucial turning point for the opposition to the war. At first totally stunned by the eruption of the war, totally demoralised by the momentary chauvinist hysteria whipped up amongst the masses - the old 'Marxist Centre' of the Party Hugo Haase, Georg Ledebour, Rudolf Hilferding and Karl Kautsky had either remained silent or manufactured excuses for the treason of August 4th. By 1915 the pressure of the Internationalists and the reawakening class consciousness of the workers of Berlin, Leipzig, Bremen, Essen and most of the industrial centres forced them to move into opposing the war around pacifist slogans. From the right, the unbridled chauvinists drove them from the party apparatus.

Kautsky in a letter to Victor Adler wrote: '... those around David and the trade unionists believe the moment is ripe to purge the party of all traces of Marxism. They are going about this with a ruthless terrorism which is hard to tolerate...The dispute is growing more embittered every day, and one day we may be faced with an ultimatum which makes open war inevitable.' The split was indeed precipitated by the right in March 1916. The SPD Parliamentary Faction expelled thirty three of its members. By the end of the year despite gaining two fifths of the votes at the SPD congress the expulsions were mounting and in April 1917 at a conference held ironically in Gotha the Independent Social Democracy Party of Germany (USPD) was founded.

Within this classically centrist party there existed three trends. A right wing led by Kautsky and Bernstein - who had opposed the split and saw it as a temporary phenomenon, and were opposed to participation in efforts to re-establish international links during the war. Close to them stood Hugo Haase, a close disciple of August Bebel who differed from them on the question of international action for peace and therefore favoured participation in the conference at Zimmerwald. In the centre stood a group around Georg Ledebour and Adolf Hoffmann and on the left stood a larger group around Luxemburg and Liebknecht and smaller groups around Julian Borchardt's journal Lichtstrahlen and the supporters of Anton Pannekoek and Karl Radek. The Luxemburg-Liebknecht group, centred in Berlin formed the Spartakusbund in March 1916, espousing the positions and slogans of the Junius Brochure and emphasising the need for a reconstructed, disciplined International. As against this process of development and these positions we will now examine the development of the Bolsheviks in the first year of the war.

The Bolsheviks hammer out a war programme

On September 5th 1914 Lenin arrived in Berne and immediately drafted his 'Theses on the War'. These defined the war as "bourgeois, imperialist and dynastic." Condemned the German Social Democrats behaviour as a "betrayal of socialism" and that of the Allied socialists as being "just as reprehensible." From these acts Lenin's theses went on to proclaim the "ideological and political bankruptcy of the International" pointing out that this had long been prepared for by the pre war opportunists. The 'Centre' of the German and other parties had now capitulated to these opportunists and Lenin concluded: "It must be the task of the future International resolutely and irrevocably to rid itself of the bourgeois trend in socialism." The central task facing the working class during the war was to work for: "the socialist revolution and the need to use weapons not against their brothers, the wage slaves in other countries but against the reactionary and bourgeois governments and parties of all countries." (36) In November Lenin clarified this position further. In the party central committee statement 'The War and Russian Social Democracy' it stated 'the conversion of the present imperialist war into a civil war is the only correct proletarian slogan.'

In an article published simultaneously Lenin put forward the need for a definitive break, not only with the Second International, not only with the outright traitors but with the opportunism which had marked its life before the great betrayal: The Second International is dead, overcome by opportunism. Down with opportunism, and long live the Third International. Purged not only of 'turncoats' (as 'Golos' wishes), but of opportunism was well.'(37) Kautsky adopted from the outset a position of providing 'Left' or 'Marxist' covering for the social chauvinists. He accorded to all Social Democrats the right to defend their own fatherlands. He held that 'The International is not an effective weapon in war time; it is essentially a weapon of peace.' He denied that Imperialist war was intrinsic to capitalism. The proletariat should limit itself to working for peace. He was joined in this position by right centrists in various countries - including Ramsey Macdonald in Britain. Lenin condemned this covering up of social chauvinism as the basest renegacy. By the end of 1914 three tendencies had emerged. The outright chauvinists, the outright opponents of war and what Lenin called 'confused and vacillating people, who at present are following in the wake of the opportunists and are causing the proletariat most harm by their hypocritical attempts to justify opportunism...' Some within this centrist tendency could be won back but only by the resolute pursuit of a total break with and denunciation of the chauvinists and the espousal of the perspective of turning the Imperialist War into a Civil War.

Given the Imperialist nature of the war Lenin further insisted that revolts of oppressed nations against their oppressors should be supported - a position he emphatically adopted over the Irish Rising of 1916. On the basis of such a programme the Bolsheviks found themselves in a minority amongst anti war socialist. The German Left made their first major statement on the war in the Junius Brochure, penned by Luxemburg in April 1915. Lenin compared the pamphlet unfavourably with the position of the Bolsheviks. Compared with their Manifesto 'it only becomes clear that Junius's arguments are very incomplete'. While noting that the pamphlet does not issue a clear call for a civil war against the European bourgeoisies, a class war for socialism. The Junius formulation was 'both victory and defeat in the present war are equally fatal for the German people.' Lenin's criticism concentrated on two major points. Firstly the pamphlet talked of the treachery of Social Democracy without either explaining it or specifically condemning opportunism in its pre war Kautskyist form: 'Neither the Junius pamphlet nor the theses say anything about opportunism or about Kautskyism! This is wrong from the standpoint of theory, for it is impossible to account for the 'betrayal' without linking it up with opportunism as a trend with a long history behind it, the history of the whole Second International' (38) Secondly the pamphlet stated that 'national wars are no longer possible,' that imperialism had rendered all national wars reactionary. Lenin took particular exception to this formulation because he considered it opened the way to two particularly dangerous and potentially reactionary positions: 'It gives rise to the absurd propaganda of 'disarmament' since it is alleged that there can be no

wars except reactionary wars.' (39) The Bolsheviks saw that a new International could only be built in total opposition to disarmament schemes and pacifist utopias.

Imperialism and the National Question

The second and more important implication of the Junius formulation was its implied attitude to national struggles against Imperialism: 'It also gives rise to the even more ludicrous and downright reactionary attitude of indifference to national movements. And such an attitude becomes chauvinism when members of the 'great' European nations, that is, nations which oppress the mass of small and colonial peoples, declare with a pseudo scientific air: 'national wars are no longer possible'.(40) National wars were not only possible, Lenin argued, but should be supported when they were fought against imperialist oppression: 'National wars against the Imperialist powers are not only possible and probable; they are inevitable, progressive and revolutionary though of course, to be successful, they required either the concerted effort of huge numbers of people in the oppressed countries...or a particularly favourable conjuncture of international conditions...or the simultaneous uprising of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie in one of the big powers.' (41)

Lenin's support of the national struggle against Imperialism was not an abstract nature of principle. Lenin saw the national struggle as progressive against the world system of imperialism - a necessary component of the struggle against that system. This position flowed from his analysis of the Imperialist world economy. His critique of Junius focuses on the implications of Luxemburg's formulations. Other sections of 'Internationalists' were to take up the campaign against the 'right of nations to self determination' more actively. In struggling against them Lenin was struggling for a programme to fight capitalist in its Imperialist stage. Bukharin and Pyatakov in the Russian party, the Polish and Dutch socialists drew different conclusions to Lenin from the analysis of Imperialism. Imperialism was now triumphant as a militarist world system. It had extinguished all national and democratic rights. In so doing Imperialism had rendered redundant the old minimum programmes of social democracy the demands for democracy and reform. In fighting for socialism it was now utopian and backward looking to raise these democratic demands argued Pyatakov and Bukharin. they called for the dropping of the demands of the minimum programme as 'contradictory to the socialist programme'. As a triumphant international system Imperialism had also rendered all national struggles, struggles for national independence historically reactionary.

Hence Bukharin and Pyatakov's opposition to supporting the right of nations to self determination. In undialectical fashion Bukharin had reduced political struggle and demands to an economic analysis. In recognising with Lenin the necessity for programme for socialist revolution. Bukharin could not understand the role that organisation around democratic demands, or national struggles against imperialism, could play as links in that programme. In this way he repeated on an international scale the methodology of the Economists in Russian Social Democracy - arguing that political struggle for economic demands was no concern of the proletariat because of the nature of the Imperialist world economy. Lenin characterised Bukharin and Pyatakov as Imperialist Economists: 'He cannot solve the problem of how to link the advent of imperialism with the struggle for reforms and democracy - just as the Economism of blessed memory could not link the advent of capitalism with the struggle for democracy.' (42)

Bukharin on the State

For Bukharin this analysis flowed from an undialectical method. He confused a clear tendency in Imperialist world economy towards statification with the actual triumph of State Capitalism: 'the state becomes more and more a direct exploiter, which organises and directs production as a collective, composite capitalist.' 'Thus arises the final type of contemporary imperialist bandit state, the iron organisation which in its grasping, prehensile paws seizes the living body of society.' (N.Bukharin: On the

theory of the Imperialist State 1916. R.V.Daniels: A Documentary History of Communist Vol 1 p.83-86) Bukharin argued that either the new totalitarian state would proceed to devour the workers organisations, and all democratic rights or the working class would 'outgrow the framework of the state and burst it from within, as they organise their own state power.' There were no other possibilities. It therefore followed that the minimum and democratic demands of Social Democracy were rendered historically redundant, a barren utopia, by this new Leviathan, 'in the face of which the fantasy of Thomas Hobbes seems like child's play.'

Lenin detected in Bukharin an undialectical projection of what was a definite historical tendency into an already accomplished fact. He realised that if the tendency of the imperialist state was to suppress democratic freedoms then this would inevitably engender struggles to defend them on the part of the working class and other oppressed and exploited strata. However, democratic rights could no longer be seen as a stable norm, intrinsic to fully developed capitalism, the struggle over them would have to be integrally linked to the struggle for socialism - the division into two programmes maximum and minimum overcome. However Bukharin's desire to suppress the minimum programme altogether seemed to Lenin to abandon the utilisation of a central contradiction of imperialism against itself. Before the war Pannekoek had argued against Kautsky for example: 'the struggle of the proletariat is not merely a struggle against the bourgeoisie, for state power, but a struggle against state power.' (quoted in Lenin in 'State and Revolution' CW vol 25 p.283 Lenin had feared here a rebirth of anarchism in the international left.

His marginal notes to Bukharin's 'wrong incomplete' distinction between anarchists and socialist on the question of the state. Lenin's views however, changed. Whilst rejecting Bukharin's undialectical method, and Pannekoek's loose formulations, whilst remaining deeply suspicious of any tendency to anarchism Lenin himself came to rediscover the profound anti-statism of the revolutionary Marxist tradition. Whilst opposing all concessions to the anarchist programme of abolishing the state as such. Lenin by the April Theses of 1917 was to recognise as essential to the programme of revolutionary Marxism the smashing of the bourgeois state machine, its replacement with a new form of state power 'the commune state' of the proletarian dictatorship. 'State and Revolution' researched and written in August September 1917 represents the mature formulation of Lenin's position on the state, a work which is a sustained attack on the Kautskyan position of taking over the state machine. The plan for the work included a final chapter, never completed, on the 'necessity of changing the programme of the Social Democrats'. This fundamental change of programme, the reaffirmation of the revolutionary position of Marx and Engels with regard to the Paris commune was re-asserted by Lenin against the orthodox social democracy of the Second International. Lenin was forced to realise that Bukharin and Pannekoek in their earlier disputes with Kautsky had been on 'the right track' that their work had raised the necessity, even if in an undialectical fashion, of placing the smashing of the bourgeois state machine at the centre of the Marxist programme.

Lenin against Trotsky

In his comradely criticism of the Junius pamphlet, in his polemic with Bukharin Lenin was fighting for the programmatic basis for unity of the communist left. He did this 'against the stream' of anti war socialist who believed that a new unity could be forged between all socialist who opposed the war. This current was particularly strong in Russian Social Democracy. The Menshevik paper Golos, based in Paris, came out against the war and those Russian socialist such as Plekhanov who had succumbed to social chauvinism. Around the successor to Golos, Nashe Slovo (founded in January 1915) there was a significant regroupment of Russian anti-war socialists. The paper grouped together, in 1915 Trotsky, Martov, Lunacharsky as well as Ryazanov, Lozovsky and Balabanova. This regroupment of ex-Bolshevik and non-Bolshevik anti-war socialist argued that the old divisions within Russian social democracy were now redundant, that the Bolsheviks were sectarian for maintaining their organisational independence and separation. Nashe Slovo had no unifying line either against the war or against the 'socialist' war mongers.

Martov, for example, while opposing the war, considered it wrong to charge the social patriots with treason to the workers movement.

When the head of the Menshevik Duma delegation Chkheidze refused to wholeheartedly support the September 1915 Zimmerwald conference of anti war socialist the editorials of *Nashe Slovo* did not attack him or the other Menshevik Duma deputies. The paper's heterogeneity gave it a vacillating line on the war. While the Bolsheviks called for defeat of the Russian Autocracy against those socialists who maintained a position of 'defending the fatherland' against aggression, *Nashe Slovo* was ambivalent. While the Bolsheviks called for turning the imperialist war into a civil war against those socialists who called for peace without indemnity - *Nashe Slovo* was evasive and internally contradictory. The principle platforms of the paper were opposition to the imperialist war, and the call to re-unify 'internationalist' social democracy - to re- unify all those who had not crossed to the camp of supporting the war. Against this 'unity offensive' the Bolsheviks maintained absolute organisational and programmatic independence:

'We are told that division 'along the line of opportunism' is outmoded, and that only one division is of significance, namely, that between the adherents of internationalism and the adherents of national self sufficiency. the concept of 'adherents of internationalism' is devoid of all content and meaning, if we do not concretely amplify it; any step towards such concrete amplification, however, will be an enumeration of features of hostility to opportunism. In practice, this will prove truer still. An adherent of internationalism who is not at the same time a most consistent and determined adversary of opportunism is a phantom, nothing more. Perhaps certain individuals of this type will honestly consider themselves 'internationalists'. However, people are judged, not by what they think of themselves but by their political behaviour. The political behaviour of 'internationalists' who are consistent and determined adversaries of opportunism will always aid and abet the nationalist trend.'(43)

To the Bolsheviks the appeals for unity from such quarters - nationally and internationally - concealed a failure to finally and irrevocably break with the politics of the opportunists, to wage a revolutionary campaign against the war and its accomplices in the labour movement: 'Nothing can restore the mass influence of the Sudekums, Plekhanov etc. Their authority has been so undermined that everywhere the police have to protect them. But by their propaganda of 'unity' and 'fatherland defence', by their striving to bring about a compromise by their efforts to draw a verbal veil over the deep seated differences, the 'centrists' are causing the greatest damage to the labour movement, because they are impeding the final break down of the social chauvinists moral authority, and in that way are bolstering their influence on the masses and galvanising the corpse of the opportunist Second International.' The *Nashe Slovo* bloc proved an unstable grouping. Squeezed between the opportunists like Axelrod and the leftists like Trotsky and the Bolsheviks Martov and the actual or future Leninists was not because Martov was a perpetrator of the 'historic betrayal' in IMG terms he did not 'cross class lines' and support the war. The split was on the basis of Martov's failure to take up the fight against those who refused to irrevocably break with the 'betrayers'. Martov broke with *Nashe Slovo* treading his way back to the left flank of the opportunists. As is well known the most significant sections of the grouping around *Nashe Slovo* were won to the politics of Bolshevism as a result of the vigorous campaign waged against their positions by the Leninists, as a result of the revolutionary events of 1917. The majority of *Nashe Slovo* supporters proved to be 'subjective revolutionaries'. But their 'unity bloc' fell apart and they were obliged to rally to the clear 'defeatism' and the 'civil war' positions of the Bolshevik party.

From Zimmerwald to the Russian Revolution

As we have seen August 1914 was not an unforeseen or isolated event which changed everything within the Second International. It was a violent and radical revelation of the essence of the trends that had been disputed in the whole preceding period. The opportunists were revealed as social chauvinists, open allies

of 'their own bourgeoisie' against the workers of other countries. The most intransigent opponents of their betrayal were to be found in parties like the Russian, the Bulgarian and the Dutch that had experienced splits before 1914. The Kautskyan Centre was revealed as incurably tied to the opportunists on the right whilst retaining a fondness for 'Marxist' and pacifist phrase mongering. Between these Right Centrists and the clear perspective of the Bolsheviks existed a whole spectrum of individuals and tendencies.

Within the Russian movement was Martov, who was temperamentally a Left Centrist, able to vigorously condemn the war but totally unable to break, from his Menshevik allies where giving the war effort covert support. On the extreme left of this middle ground stood Trotsky and most of the Spartakus group. Personally courageous revolutionaries, they were unwilling to accept that the hardest blows had to be directed against Kautsky and the Centre who tried to divert the workers opposition to the war into pacifist phrases instead of preparing the proletariat to take the road of revolution. Fear of total isolation from the deceived masses held them back from clearly placing the proletarian revolution rather than 'the struggle for peace' at the centre of their war programme. They were therefore unwilling to face the question of defeatism squarely. Luxemburg for instance, in the Junius brochure after stating that 'victory or defeat...would be equally disastrous concludes: 'The overthrow of war, and the speedy forcing of peace, by the international revolutionary action of the proletariat, alone can bring to it the only possible victory.' (44) She then goes on to advance the slogan not of international proletarian revolution as the central strategic objective of the anti war movement but instead: 'the old, truly national programme of the patriots and democrats of 1848, the programme of Marx, Engels Lassalle - the slogan of a united Great German Republic.' (45)

Associated with this slogan was to be the whole gamut of democratic demands - the arming of the whole people in a democratic militia and the dissolution of the standing army, the decision on war or peace to be in the hands of the whole people, a permanent session of parliament, the removal of all political and legal restrictions and inequalities etc. Luxemburg dangerously equates the winning of these objectives with real 'defence of the fatherland' and as the only basis for 'national defence'. Whilst Lenin in no wise rejected the use of the 'minimum programme', of democratic demands, he did reject them as the central objective in mobilising the proletariat against the war. He characterised Luxemburg's use of them as 'looking backwards' to the period when the class struggle coincided with the epoch of bourgeois revolutions in the 1848 period. For him the imperialist war opened the epoch of proletarian revolution. A similar evasiveness characterised Trotsky's positions. The slogans he raised 'Immediate cessation of the war?', No reparations, the Right of Every Nation to Self Determination. the United States of Europe - Without Monarchies, Without Standing Armies, Without Ruling Feudal Castes, Without Secret diplomacy' (46) contained a similar evasion.

Again for Lenin these demands because they restricted themselves within the limits of bourgeois democracy were an inadequate basis for the class struggle to overthrow the bourgeoisie, and ran dangerously close to the pacifist utopias of the centre groupings. Thus when the first International focus for concerted opposition to the war presented itself Lenin found himself and the Bolsheviks in opposition not only to the Centre represented by the Kautsky- Haase -Ledebour group in Germany, but also to the Spartakus Group and the 'Nashe Slovo' group as well. On September 5th 1915, 38 delegates met in the Swiss village of Zimmerwald. Lenin had already contacted a number of the most intransigent oppositionist with a view to creating a Left Wing with the International conference. He drew up a draft Manifesto to put before it.

This draft started by characterising Imperialism as the 'highest stage of capitalism' where the objective conditions for socialism have fully matured. It defines the war as Imperialist i.e. for the repartitioning of colonies and from this, exposes the claim of 'fatherland defence to be bogus' in all the major combatants. It

would be justified however, in the case of an exploited and oppressed nation - i.e. in the colonies. It was the duty of socialists to agitate against the war, not restricting themselves in any way: From considerations of the defeat of their own country'. The objectives of this agitation was: 'To turn the Imperialist war between the peoples into a civil war of the oppressed classes against their oppressors, a war for the expropriation of the class of capitalist, for the conquest of political power by the proletariat and the realisation of socialism.'(47) With regard to the necessary split which revolutionary socialists must effect, the declaration was clear that it must include a break with Centrism as well: 'The working class cannot achieve its historic aims without waging a most resolute struggle against both forthright opportunism and social chauvinism...and the so called Centre, which has surrendered the Marxist stand to the Chauvinists.'(48)

The Bolsheviks remained in a small minority at Zimmerwald but they did draw towards them a few delegates from other countries. Six delegates joined the Bolsheviks' two in constituting the hard core 'Zimmerwald Left.' A further four voted for Lenin's draft of the declaration, whilst the remaining nineteen remained attached to the Centre. The right centrists Haase and Co refused point blank to have any denunciation of the social chauvinists as traitors who must be split with, included in this declaration. Further they even refused to be tied unambiguously to voting against war credits. The position adopted by the Spartakus group and the Nashe Slovo was again ambivalent, siding with the Bolsheviks over denunciation of the Social Chauvinists and the demand to vote against war credits, they rejected Lenin's position of defeatism and the turning of the Imperialist War into a Civil War. Ernst Meyer, representing the Spartakusbund said: '...there is hardly a fractional number of the German proletariat which would be prepared for action as proposed by Lenin's manifesto.'

Trotsky oscillated between support for the Zimmerwald Left (on war credits; he also gave support to taking Lenin's draft of the manifesto as the basis for discussion, dissenting on the 'defeatism' issue) and a willingness to act as conciliator between them and the Centrist majority. In this evasive declaration against the War. Lenin criticised it vigorously as showing 'inconsistency, timidity, and a failure to say everything that ought to be said'. Lenin seriously considered whether or not to vote for the final Manifesto. He was eventually persuaded by the other members of the 'Zimmerwald Left' that a vote for it was necessary - that it was principled precisely because the Left had distinguished themselves from the Centrists at every stage: 'a separate resolution, as separate draft manifesto and a separate declaration on the vote for a compromise manifesto. We did not conceal a jot of our views, slogans or tactics.' This criticism was maintained by the separate organisation of the Left-Zimmerwaldists around separate organs. The 'Internationale Flugblatter' and later a review 'Vorbote' which drew into their ranks the Dutch grouping around Gorter, Roland Holst and Pannekoek, the Swiss leftist Fritz Platten and the Scandinavian Hoglund. Lenin continued his pre-war method of extremely sharp attacks on those lefts who continued the policy of conciliation.

In February 1916, Lenin attacked sharply what he saw as a right turn by the Spartakus group: '...this group is wavering; the majority in it are clearly turning back to the marsh.'(51) Zetkin he accused of a 'sham struggle' against Kautsky. With Trotsky Lenin was even harsher: 'What are our differences with Trotsky? In short he is a Kautskyite, that is he stands for unity with the Kautskyites in the International and with Chkheidze's parliamentary group in Russia. We are absolutely against such unity.' Even with those closely involved with the Zimmerwald Left Lenin could be unsparing. Karl Radek was one of his closest International collaborators. A representative of a section of the Polish Social Democracy, he worked in the early years of the war with Liebkencht and Borchardt in Berlin and with the Bremen and Hamburg Internationalists. Moving to Switzerland he had close contacts with Lenin and Zinoviev and also with Trotsky. He disagreed with Lenin however on the necessity for the proclamation of the need to split with the old Social Democratic parties. As he later put it: 'Being still under the influence of the state of German social democracy, I considered that the path to civil war was still a long one, and that it was premature to

raise the question of a split.'(53)

Lenin summed up his method with regard to figures like Radek thus: 'Radek is the best of them, it has been useful to work with him (especially for the Zimmerwald Left) and so we worked. But Radek too vacillates. Our tactic here is two fold...on the one hand to help Radek move to the left, to unite all possible for the Zimmerwald Left. On the other hand not by one iota to allow vacillating on the basic positions.' (54) Trotsky came under the heaviest blows from Lenin precisely because he stood on the extreme left of the left Centrist bloc, because he supplied it with the best Marxist formulations to cover its vacillations. These attacks had in the long run a profoundly positive effect on Trotsky. Given that he was personally a brilliant and courageous revolutionary these attacks could not help but sting bitterly. Within the 'Nashe Slovo' bloc he came closer to the ex-Bolsheviks Lunarcharsky, Lozovsky and to Radek who contributed to the paper. Conversely became into ever more bitter conflict with Martov. Lunacharsky in his Revolutionary Silhouettes recalls Trotsky's attempts to 'Persuade Martov to break his links with the Defencists' and how Trotsky 'attacked him extremely angrily'.

Eventually in April 1916 the split with Martov came. At the same time (from 24 to 30 April 1916) the Second International conference met at Kienthal in Switzerland. This time 44 delegates assembled. Again the Left came forward with an even sharper posing of the key questions. A stable democratic peace is impossible under Imperialism. An Imperialist peace settlement will be reactionary, pregnant with future wars, carrying with it hunger, unemployment, and national oppression. Therefore the 'Peace with Annexations' slogans are utopian illusions. On the other hand the masses have been roused to fury by the carnage of blood shed of the war. The duty of revolutionaries is to give a lead to the masses, to point the direction to the socialist revolution. The Kautskyan centre is performing the worst deception on the masses by preceding unity with the social chauvinists and directing the workers towards an imperialist Peace settlement (disguised in utopian rhetoric). A revolutionary situation is developing as the war progresses. To take advantage of this, the proletarian vanguard nationally and internationally must split from the old parties and International. The new parties must carry out revolutionary tactics subordinating the struggle for reform to the perspective of revolution and prepared organisationally for this task, capable of illegal work etc.

The Lefts remained in a small minority and though some of the conference resolutions manifested an increase in verbal radicalism, the outcome was that the conference refused to 'decree and create artificially a new international'. Immediately after the conference the bulk of the Centrists began to move rightwards, They undertook, with the representatives of 'neutral' parties like the SP of the USA, to attempt to reconvene the old International Socialist Bureau as a prelude to calling a conference of the Second International. Lenin on the other hand was increasingly certain that a break was necessary with Zimmerwald. That the latter had become the preserve of the Centre and that the centrists were the key opponents of the coming revolutionism. In the notes he drew up on the 'Centre as a Trend in International Social Democracy' he enumerated a number of key features. Firstly their refusal to split with the Social Patriots and their own evasiveness on fatherland defence. The 'passive radicalism' of their criticism of reformism, their opposition to 'reconstruction of the present Social Democratic Parties and trade unions' nothing like Liebknecht's 'regeneration from top to bottom' and their refusal to prepare by propaganda and organisation for revolution. (55) This was written in January 1917

Simultaneously Lenin prepared to make a final decisive intervention in the Zimmerwald milieu. He drew up an appeal to the ISC (the Zimmerwald Executive). Pointing out that the Left only supported Zimmerwald 'insofar as it combats social chauvinism' he concluded: 'It has now been definitely established - of this we are profoundly convinced - that the Zimmerwald majority, or the Zimmerwald Right, has made a roundabout turn not towards complete surrender to it, towards merger with it on a platform of empty pacifist phrases. And we consider it our duty openly to state that to support, in these circumstances, the illusion of

Zimmerwald unity and Zimmerwald struggle for the Third International would cause the greatest damage to the labour movement. We declare not as a 'threat' or as an 'ultimatum', but as an open notification of our decision that unless the situation changes we shall not remain a member of the Zimmerwald group.'⁽⁵⁶⁾ Events however caught up with this manoeuvre.

Revolution broke out in Russia and it was April before Lenin could return to the question of how to break the Zimmerwald bloc and move forward towards the creation of the Third International. At the April conference Lenin through the medium of the famous Theses was attempting to put the party on a firm basis not simply with regard to the specific goals and objectives of the Russian proletariat (the definition of the revolution ahead as a proletarian revolution) was attempting to reforge the party around those fundamental positions that the Bolsheviks had worked out during the war. Thus on the question of 'fatherland defence', Lenin, unlike the Mensheviks who had rested their opposition to the war on the undemocratic nature of Tsarism and who were after February transformed into rabid defencists, did not abate one jot of his former position. Whilst the Mensheviks followed, albeit belatedly, the course of the western social chauvinists into the war cabinet and the 'social truce', the Bolsheviks alone stood prepared to 'turn the Imperialist war into Civil war not in words but in deeds. At the April Conference Lenin immediately raised the question of altering the party programme. Indeed he produced a draft platform 'the tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution' circulated to delegates in typescript copies.

The platform embodied the political and economic analysis Lenin had devoted himself to in Switzerland, the analysis of imperialism, the war and the epoch of revolution it had inaugurated. Further it embodied Lenin's rediscovery of Marx and Engels position on the State. The last three sections sum up the key lessons of the struggle against Social Chauvinism and Centrism. Firstly Lenin enumerates the three trends within the working class. The social Chauvinists who are class enemies' and 'bourgeois with the working class movement' representing the corrupted bureaucracy and the labour aristocracy. Secondly there are the Centrists who Lenin defines as 'routine worshippers' not a separate stratum historically and economically but a transitional formation vacillating between social chauvinist and the true internationalists. This latter trend Lenin defines as those who have effected a 'complete break with both social chauvinism and 'centrism'. He mentions with this trend the Zimmerwald Leftist and the Spartakus Group. A whole section is devoted to the 'Collapse of the Zimmerwald International - The need for Founding a Third International'. Lenin concludes that 'the Zimmerwald bog can no longer be tolerated' and that 'we must break with this International immediately'. Against the argument that the masses are still with the Chauvinists and Centrists, Lenin affirms that what is central is 'giving correct expression to the ideas and policies of the truly revolutionary proletariat' and that therefore the Bolsheviks should not wait for a congress but 'immediately found a Third International'.

Lenin held this position not out of some abstract purity, not because he did not believe that millions of honest proletarians as well as hundreds of thousands of the better cadre could not be won over but because 'Whoever wants to help the waverers must first stop wavering himself'. Lastly Lenin proposed the abandonment by the Bolsheviks of the name 'Social Democrat'. He recalled the original objections of Marx and Engels to the name i.e. that democracy is a form of state whereas proletarian revolutionaries aims at the dictatorship of the proletariat - already only a semi state and beyond that to 'the withering away of the state'. To this reason there had been added the treason of the Second International. Lenin drew the conclusion that 'it is time to cast off the soiled shirt and to put on clean linen' and the resume the name that Marx and Engels had always used of them themselves - Communist. It was to take a further two years before Lenin could achieve this programme. Initially the majority of the Bolsheviks reacted against these proposals. The party refused to withdraw from Zimmerwald, and the process of changing the programme and name of the party took until after the October revolution. The foundation of the party took a further two years. However the process of winning the best elements was well underway. Trotsky the ex members of

the Nashe Slovo group, individuals like Radek, the 'Inter District Organisation', were finally won to Bolshevism. The impact of the successful October revolution gave a powerful impetus to this tendency on a European and World scale. But all this was possible only on the basis of the isolated 'swimming against the stream' of the 1914-1916 period.

Conclusion

We have seen how a left wing developed within two parties of the Second International- the SPD and the RSDLP in the period 1900 to 1914. In both cases this left wing developed from criticism of the opportunist approach to tactics in this period. We have observed that a resolute struggle over tactics revealed three tendencies, reformism, centrism and communism. In Russia this struggle led to a definite split in 1912, a split between Bolshevism and the Liquidators and conciliators. This split immeasurably strengthened the revolutionary forces preparing them for the debacle of 1914, and preparing the Bolsheviks to act as the fixed pole around which all the healthy revolutionary elements were to rally from 1915 to 1919. The failure of this process to occur in Germany weakened the Left Radicals and precluded their playing this role. Indeed it took the pressure of Bolshevik criticism and the powerful attraction of October to pull them onto the firm ground of a consistently revolutionary strategy and tactics. Any analysis such as that of the IMG/USFI which tries to present the pre-1914 battles as mere tendencies within Marxism is in fact an attempt to unlearn and obscure these lessons. Furthermore this approach ignores the importance of the struggle against centrism, crudely equating this with Reformism. The view of the great event - 1914 the "crossing of class lines" as an all transforming event is profoundly undialectical and holds enormous implications for revolutionary practice. Unity predicated on the avoidance of an historic act of betrayal. It is the highest good and to it must be sacrificed the presentation of a correct strategy and effective tactics if those who stand by them are unable to win a majority within the given party and international.

As we have seen, and we will see in our next article on the Comintern, Lenin was never so lightminded as to suggest sending the proletariat into life or death battles armed with dud weapons and under incompetent or treacherous leadership on the pretext that the latter had to prove themselves unworthy in a great test. Before 1914 he foresaw the treachery of the Bernsteins and the Axelrods and was resolutely in favour of expelling them - of splitting with them. They were already a 'bourgeois tend'. Centrism he observed in its embryonic form conciliationism. Within the Russian party he made only those radical compromises which would firstly not obliterate the revolutionary programme or dissolve the organised cadre of the party and secondly which would assist the honest elements amongst the centrists to find their way back to communism. These compromises were only made subject to the clearest and harshest criticism of every weakness and vacillation. Centrism was not as Lenin observed a fixed stratum - it was a transitional formation and was given a powerful impetus by periods of transition.

Thus whilst the principles of reformism and communism bear a certain fixed character. Centrism is more specific to concrete circumstances borrowing (eclectically) from its neighbours to right and left as the working class moves towards or away from revolutionary action. Ominous indeed, for themselves, is the IMG/USFI's writing out of history of Centrism and the struggle against it. Trotsky himself was to point out the source of this blindness: "A centrism readily proclaims his hostility to reformism but he does not mention centrism. Moreover, he considers the very definition of centrism as 'unclear', 'arbitrary' etc.; in other words, centrism does not like to be called by its name." Ominous too is the 'anti-sectarian' zeal of the IMG/USFI which extends to 'rescuing' Lenin from the danger of being in favour of any kind of split before 1914 (except on the grounds of breach of discipline) and of being in favour of a resolute split with those who 'cross class lines' thereafter. This amounts to philistine indifference to the crucial battles over strategy and tactics which Lenin by no means subordinated to a fetish of a united party within which tendencies would harmoniously debate.

The IMG are well aware that the epithet sectarian which jumps so readily to their lips is used so widely that it strikes at the whole record and tradition of Lenin, Trotsky and Bolshevism. So they have to attempt square the circle in defence of their own practice - a practice which involves a persistent tailism, accommodation to left reformist worthies for whom a role as unwitting midwife to a 'class struggle tendency' is 'projected'. That these concessions are made in relatively 'peaceful' conditions does not give great hope as to what such a tendency will do faced with a 'great event'. Meantime we are urged to help create a 'unified revolutionary organisation' and an 'International' with all those who passed the historic tests of the century. We prefer to learn from Lenin's method of relentless struggle against opportunism in organisational and tactical matters, believing with him that persistent error on these questions cannot be divorced from programmatic degeneration and that that unity is desirable which brings together resolute opponents of opportunism on an operative programme. One that delineates on the basis of historic and international experience key tactics within an overall strategy focused on solving the question of proletarian power within a specific period an situation.

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