

***Vlast'* from the Past: Stories Told by Bolsheviks**

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Central to the self-representation of the Bolsheviks was the claim that October 1917 gave rise to a proletarian *vlast'*. It is hard for us to grasp today the rich meanings of this term. The difficulty is partly a matter of translation, since the usual rendering of *vlast'* by "power" can be misleading: the Russian word signifies the sovereign authority in the political system and it is therefore closer to German "*Macht*" or French "*pouvoir*" than to English "power." But the difficulty goes deeper than this. For the Bolsheviks, the term *vlast'* was embedded in a narrative which they took over from prewar Social Democracy and applied as best they could to their own unprecedented situation. The best way for us to understand the multiple meanings of *vlast'* is to listen attentively to the narratives in which it was used.

Attention to the narrative context of a basic term can bring out themes missed or misunderstood by those who see political doctrine as primarily propositional. Indeed, the core of a political doctrine is much more likely to be its narratives than its theoretical propositions. In order to demonstrate this, I shall examine a standard thesis about Bolshevik beliefs during the early years of the revolution: the "short cuts to communism" thesis about so-called war communism in 1920. After presenting this thesis in the words of its original and most influential exponent, Isaac Deutscher, I will test it by looking at doctrinal narratives produced by Karl Kautsky, Nikolai Bukharin, Lev Trotsky, Aleksandra Kollontai and Grigorii Zinoviev. I will argue that one of the reasons that this thesis has not been adequately assessed earlier is a deep-seated under-appreciation of the narrative element in doctrine.

THE NATURE OF POLITICAL DOCTRINE

Doctrine is used here to mean an explicit, self-consciously controversial set of beliefs that claims authoritative status. Doctrine can be presented either as a narrative or as a set of propositions. For present purposes, narrative can be defined as a plot-structured relationship among characters; the characters can be large social groups such as classes that for narrative purposes are treated as individual agents. In contrast, a set of propositions is held together by claims to logical entailment and consistency rather than by plot.¹

To illustrate the difference between these two forms, let us consider the Marxist term "petty bourgeois." If we view Marxism as a set of propositions, we will come up with a definition of "petty bourgeois" something like this: "someone who owns the means of production but does not exploit others." But if we instead examine the tales told by Marxists in which the petty bourgeoisie plays a prominent role, we will emphasize characteristics such as vacillation,

the need to accept leadership from others, and gradual polarization. It is these features that allow peasants, intellectuals and shopowners (the disparate social categories that make up the petty bourgeoisie) to be melded into a usable and consistent character in Marxist doctrine.

Recent work in cognitive psychology and allied fields has highlighted just how much easier it is to think in terms of narratives than in terms of propositions. Narrative is an evolved cognitive tool provided by evolution to help us make our way around the social environment. It is a device for focusing attention on the features of a social situation that impinge most directly on our choices and for recalling relevant information from the past.² The primordial importance of narrative for both attention and memory is brought out by suggestions that narrative is not a potentiality opened up by language, but rather that language itself was created as a tool in the evolutionary drive for more and better narratives. As a result, “language in a preliterate society lacking the apparatus of the modern information-state is basically for telling stories.”³

In contrast, propositional thinking is post-evolutionary. It became possible only after the historical invention of a range of devices for which Merlin Donald has provided the useful label “external symbolic storage” (ESS) — devices that range from the notepad I’m now writing on to the computer to which I will later transfer these words. The human brain is not designed for logically disciplined and non-narrative thought: the brain can only produce this kind of thought — or rather, help produce it — as part of a larger complex of cognitive machinery.

Why is the contrasting evolutionary status of narrative vs. propositional thinking important for the study of political doctrine? A successful political doctrine unites a large and heterogeneous group of people: it is hard to imagine all these people truly sharing a set of theoretical propositions and much easier to imagine them sharing a story. Narrative’s relative cognitive ease therefore suggests that the working part of a political doctrine will look less like theology and more like gospel: less like the hard-to-remember logic-chopping of Paul and more like Mark’s attention-grabbing recitation of supremely important events.

Any ongoing political doctrine requires a repair process that assimilates anomalies and ratifies the doctrine’s continuing authoritative status. This is done by constantly telling new stories, or rather, retelling old stories in ways that try to account for unexpected breaches and breakdowns while preserving the spirit of the inherited narrative. By proposing possible stories to fit our past conduct, or to constrain the future conduct of others, we repair breaches in the social fabric and make concerted action possible. As Jerome Bruner puts it, “Our sense of the normative is nourished in narrative, but so is our sense of breach and of exception.”⁴

This repair process occurs on an everyday, face-to-face level; it also

occurs at a highly elaborated and institutionalized level. One such repair process — constitutional interpretation — offers a useful analogy to the function of the Bolshevik narratives presented here. The American constitutional tradition consists in large part of narratives that define, say, what free speech is and why it is important; it is up to judicial interpretation to apply these narratives with on-going realities (is pornography free speech?).⁵ In the case of the Bolsheviks as well, we find the rich ambiguities of constitutive narratives on one side and the unexpected challenges and anomalies of real life on the other. Only through some authoritative repair process could the gap between these two be provisionally closed.

“SHORT CUTS TO COMMUNISM”: A Case Study

The value of a narrative approach to political doctrine can be illustrated by using it to mount a challenge to a long-standing scholarly consensus about Bolshevik doctrine at the height of “war communism” in 1920. During this year, we are told, the Bolsheviks as a whole believed that Russia was on the verge of a leap into socialism or even full communism. They saw the widespread use of coercion and the super-centralization not just as a response to the emergencies of civil war and economic backwardness but as “short cuts to communism.” Scholars have debated the reasons for this Bolshevik belief but not the fact of its existence.

The best way to grasp this consensus about war communism is to look at one of its earliest and most influential presentations: the concluding chapter of Isaac Deutscher’s *The Prophet Armed* (1954).⁶ I shall quote extensively from this chapter, first because variants of Deutscher’s phrases have echoed down the decades in the scholarly literature and second because much of the influence of Deutscher’s interpretation results from the savage eloquence with which a hero-worshipper bashes his hero. Deutscher tells the following story:

The original cause of war communism was the civil war and the resulting social and economic breakdown. “The Bolsheviks strove to exercise the strictest control over scarce resources; and out of this striving grew their War Communism.” (488) The Bolsheviks, however, saw it as something more than an emergency program:

This set of desperate shifts and expedients looked to the party like an unexpectedly rapid realization of its own program The Bolshevik was therefore inclined to see the essential features of fully fledged communism embodied in the war economy of 1919-20. He was confirmed in this inclination by the stern egalitarianism, which his party preached and practiced and which gave to war communism a romantic and heroic aspect. (489)

This set of beliefs was of course a complete delusion: “In truth, war communism was a tragic travesty of the Marxist vision of the society of the

future.” (489) What the Bolsheviks of 1920 failed to realize was that Marx’s vision of socialist society was incompatible with industrial ruin and constant hunger.

They also failed to see that an obvious solution existed for their economic difficulties: using a tax to get grain rather than requisitioning. The Bolshevik reluctance to adopt this obvious solution serves as a confirmation of the blinders that dogma imposed upon them: “It was a sure sign of the Utopian character of war communism that it went on ignoring realities until it drove itself into an impasse and could maintain itself only by ever-increasing doses of violence.” (490-1) Only in 1921, when the Bolsheviks finally replaced requisitioning with a tax, did they unwillingly leave this cycle of violence: “Silently, with a heavy heart, Bolshevism parted with its dream of war communism. It retreated, as Lenin said, in order to be in a better position to advance.” (514)

The story of Trotsky’s individual fate brings home the moral failure inherent in the delusions of war communism. His story has an archetypal shape, as shown by the title Deutscher gives to his climactic chapter — “Defeat in Victory” — and its opening sentence: “At the very pinnacle of power, Trotsky, like the protagonist of a classical tragedy, stumbled.” (486) Early in 1920, Trotsky proposed the obvious solution of a grain tax. When this was turned down by the Politburo, Trotsky became one of the most extreme war communists: “On this occasion Trotsky, rebuked for his wisdom, plunged back into the accepted folly and persisted in it with an ardor which even the fools thought too foolish.” (498) Trotsky’s foolish ardor is exemplified by his defense of Bolshevik labour policies, which Deutscher describes as

perhaps the only frank attempt made in modern times to give a logical justification of forced labor — the actual taskmasters and whippers-in do not bother to produce such justifications. ... It was not the revolution’s fault that, because of inherited poverty and the devastation of several wars and of blockade, it could not honour its promise. But the Bolsheviks need not have expressly repudiated that promise. This was what Trotsky appeared to do when he told the trade unions that coercion, regimentation, and militarization of labor were no mere emergency measures, and that the workers’ state normally had the right to coerce any citizen to perform any work at any place of its choosing. ... He told [people] that the workers’ state had the right to use forced labor; and he was sincerely disappointed that they did not rush to enroll in the labor camps. (500-1, 516)

Of course, in Trotsky’s case, this foolishness was only an aberration. “The policies which Trotsky now framed were incompatible with that *samodeyatelnost*, that political self-determination of the working class, which he had indefatigably preached for twenty years and which he was to preach

again during the seventeen years of his open struggle against Stalin.” (486)⁷ Unfortunately, this aberration had immense consequences: “A decade later Stalin, who in 1920-1 had supported Lenin’s ‘liberal’ policy, was to adopt Trotsky’s ideas in all but name. Neither Stalin nor Trotsky, nor the adherents of either, then admitted the fact.” (515)

Did no one in the party protest against the perversion of both Bolshevik ideals and common sense? Yes, but the main protesters — the Worker Opposition — were in some ways the most deluded of all. It is true that they were “high-minded, Utopian dreamers” who “spoke the language which the whole party had spoken in 1917.” Nevertheless, they “clamored for the immediate satisfaction of the workers’ needs, for equal wages and rewards for all, for the supply, without payment, of food, clothing, and lodging to workers, for free medical attention, free travelling facilities, and free education. They wanted to see fulfilled nothing less than the program of full communism, which was theoretically designed for an economy of great plenty. ... It was a sad omen that the people enveloped in such fumes of fancy were almost the only ones to advocate a full revival or proletarian democracy.” (507-8)

This, then, is the story of war communism as told by a professed admirer of the Bolsheviks: a story of almost suicidal self-delusion. As I shall try to show in this article, there is little to support this thesis and much to refute it. Why, then, has it gained such unquestioned status? One reason is Deutscher’s status as Trotsky’s great partisan. Why would he paint such an unflattering portrait of his hero unless compelled to do so by the facts?⁸ And this leads to another powerful reason for the entrenchment of the Deutscher thesis. Although the short cuts thesis was developed and propagated by scholars on the left (broadly speaking) of Soviet studies, nevertheless it was warmly embraced by more conservative writers and indeed elevated to a central place in the current conservative interpretation of Soviet history. And this is not surprising. The short cuts thesis as presented by Deutscher is a thoroughly devastating portrait of foolish, violence-addicted utopians who betrayed their principles, inflicted great suffering on the Russian population through their delusional policies, and provided a direct precedent for the worst features of Stalinism.

In 1974, Moshe Lewin’s *Political Undercurrents in Soviet Economic Debates* gave an influential endorsement of the short cuts thesis: “the majority of the party was led to believe that the war economy measures applied during this period [war communism] offered the shortcut to socialism that had been dubbed a childish ‘leftist’ dream a short while before.” But Lewin’s version made the Deutscher thesis even more damaging to the left. In his account, the disastrous delusion of war communism was directly motivated by a “conception of a socialist economy” that was “an old socialist doctrine, clearly stated by Marx and Engels and later accepted by the entire Marxist movement.” Of course, Lewin goes on to argue that Bolsheviks such as Bukharin later

understood the necessity of market socialism.⁹ Yet it is small wonder that conservative writers such as Robert Conquest and Martin Malia gratefully accepted the idea that the sufferings of Russia in 1920 were directly due to a mistaken Marxist consensus.¹⁰

The ironic outcome is that a thesis proposed by a Trotskyist writer in the 1950s has become a mainstay of the dominant conservative view of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. A critique of the Deutscher thesis is therefore not just a critique of one writer but also of an interpretation that has dominated postwar scholarship on early Soviet political history.

A final reason for the unchallenged dominance of the Deutscher thesis is a lack of appreciation for the crucial role of narrative in political doctrine. This is partly a matter of gathering relevant evidence. Looking for stories told by Bolsheviks will direct us to long available sources that have been completely overlooked by historians. An awareness of the narrative core of political doctrine also helps us state the issues more precisely, since the Deutscher thesis essentially concerns the story that the Bolsheviks told about themselves and the proletarian *vlast* in 1920.

According to Deutscher's version of this Bolshevik story, the purpose for which the *vlast* was exercised was immediate social transformation; in order to achieve this transformation, coercion was justified as a necessary and permanent way in which the *vlast* was to be wielded. The Deutscher thesis also describes what I earlier called a constitutional repair process: the original doctrinal story was altered to accommodate the unexpected realities of civil war policies. These changes can be summed up as an acceleration of the tempo of transformation and a fundamental revision in the role of coercion. Finally, Deutscher tells us that the only genuine counter-story came from the Worker Opposition and allied groups: they remained true to the 1917 version of the proletarian *vlast* as democratic and non-coercive despite being even more swept up by the desire for immediate "full communism."

In order to test the Deutscher thesis, then, we need to look for authoritative stories told by Bolsheviks about the proletarian *vlast* and its vicissitudes in Russia. We will begin with a review of the canonical narrative inherited from prewar Social Democracy. We will then look at the story as it was told by an authoritative party spokesman — Nikolai Bukharin — in the months after the Bolshevik revolution. With this version as a benchmark, we shall look again at how Trotsky told the story in 1920 in order to see if the story has changed in the predicted ways.

Next we shall look for doctrinal narratives that bring out the basic issues at stake in the challenge symbolized by the Worker Opposition. After looking at stories told by Grigorii Zinoviev and Alexandra Kollontai, we will discover instead that the source of the conflict was rather an unresolved tension in the inherited narrative — a tension that rose to the surface when the *vlast* turned from a dream into a day-to-day reality.

THE INHERITED NARRATIVE

The Bolsheviks' central constitutive narrative was the one they inherited from prewar Social Democracy: they used this narrative not only to justify their claim to power but even to explain what power meant to them. The Social Democratic narrative had three roots: the epic class narrative of the proletariat's "world-freeing deed" provided by Marx and Engels, the image of inspiring leadership provided by Ferdinand Lassalle, and the successful struggle of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) against determined hostility.¹¹ These different elements were molded into a consistent narrative by Karl Kautsky, a professional man of the theater turned socialist theoretician.¹² Kautsky had an immense impact on Russian Marxists; it was said of him that he was a more influential figure in the Russian party than he was in the German party.¹³ This influence did not come from any particular originality or eloquence but rather from a grasp of the narrative core of Social Democracy. All quotations in the following description are taken from Kautsky.

The Social Democratic narrative hinges on the central event of the proletariat's conquest of political power (*Macht*) in order to introduce socialism. Under the surface, much of the emotional drama of this narrative arises from the theme of the leadership that enables the proletariat to realize that its essential nature imposes a world-historical mission upon it. Accordingly, the narrative falls naturally into three acts: the proletariat's realization of its mission, the road to state power, and the construction of socialism.

In Act I, "it is the task of Social Democracy to bring to the proletariat an awareness of its position and its task."¹⁴ Act I portrays an expanding "consciousness" or sense of mission that moves out in concentric circles from a sacred center: Marx, Social Democracy, workers' movement, proletariat, toiling classes, mankind. The story of the expanding circle of consciousness can be told in melodramatic terms as the story of an inspired and inspiring leader: the Social Democratic activist who receives the good news — *ein neues Evangelium* — of the proletariat's identity and passes it on to ever wider circles.¹⁵

In Act II — the road to power — the central task was to preserve the sense of mission. "Revisionism" was more than a theoretical position: it was the expression of the permanent possibility of backsliding and degeneration. If Lenin's Russian translation of the Social Democratic narrative has any distinctive features, it is his passionate fixation on the clash between the good leader who accepts his mission and the bad leader who evades these sacred obligations. This fixation became a titanic hatred of all "opportunists" after the outbreak of war in 1914, when Lenin condemned the newly-revealed bad leaders who supported the war effort and so betrayed everything Social Democracy stood for. It soon became apparent that Lenin took Kautsky's

narrative more seriously than Kautsky did himself, with the ironic result that Kautsky was cast as the archetype of one kind of degenerate leader.

In Act III — the construction of socialism after the conquest of power — we see that the task of leadership continues in full force even after the proletariat becomes the ruling class. The three main class characters in the Social Democratic narrative are the bourgeoisie, the proletariat, and the toilers (exploited labourers such as poor peasants). The narrative imposes different leadership tasks on the proletariat in relation to these three characters, but state power is essential for all of these tasks. The proletariat needs state power in order to deprive the bourgeoisie of a basic prop of their own power: coercion will be used to beat back any attempt of the class enemy to regain control of the state. The proletariat also needs state power as a tool of self-organization, especially since Kautsky emphasized that the whole proletariat would not be “conscious” — aware of its mission — until some time after the conquest of power. Finally, state power is needed to complete the task of class leadership of the toilers. The proletariat must reveal itself as the champion of the immediate interests of the toilers as well as successfully demonstrate that socialism is the only answer to their long-term problems.

A set of images ubiquitous among Social Democratic writers sums up much of the narrative thrust of Social Democracy: the path and the task. The point of revolution is to guarantee the possibility of traveling down the only path that leads to socialism; the mission of the proletariat imposes upon it the task of opening up this path and then leading society toward the promised land. Bourgeois class power is a road-block that obstructs the new road: it can and must be removed in a relatively short space of time. Any violence involved in this process will be entirely the fault of the elites threatened with loss of power: “out of fear of revolution they want to provoke civil war.”¹⁶ But even though “a socialist revolution can at a single stroke transfer a factory from capitalist to social property, it is only step by step, through a course of gradual, progressive development, that one may transform a factory from a place of monotonous, repulsive, forced labor into an attractive spot for the joyful activity of happy human beings.”¹⁷ A revolution defended by coercive means is needed to make peaceful evolution possible.

When we look back now at Marxism and Social Democracy, we tend to locate their source of drama in the struggle between capital and labour. Just as important or more so to Social Democrats of Lenin’s generation was a narrative that portrayed the way in which inspired and inspiring leadership led to the recognition of the class mission. This is the drama invoked in the closing words of Kautsky’s *The Road to Power*, his last important prewar work and one that was enthusiastically endorsed by Lenin. Here Kautsky presents a dramatically charged version of the expanding circle of consciousness, starting with the leadership vanguard and then moving out to proletariat, toilers, and ultimately all humanity:

The elite of the proletariat today forms the strongest, the most far-sighted, most selfless, boldest stratum, and the one united in the largest free organizations, of the nations with European civilization. And the proletariat will, in and through struggle, take up into itself the unselfish and far-sighted elements of all classes; it will organize and educate in its own bosom even its most backward elements and fill them with understanding and the joy of hope. It will place its elite at the head of civilization and make it capable of guiding the immense economic transformation that will finally, over the entire globe, put an end to all the misery arising out of subjection, exploitation, and ignorance.

Fortunate are those destined to take part in this sublime struggle and share in this glorious victory!¹⁸

COERSION AND TRANSFORMATION

The “short cuts to communism” thesis about Bolshevik doctrinal narratives in 1920 cannot be adequately assessed without a clear idea of the stories the Bolsheviks were telling about themselves at the time of the revolution. And yet on a closer look we see that the short cuts thesis rests on a certain fuzziness about Bolshevik beliefs in 1917-18. On the one hand, we are told that the “language of 1917” was the direct precursor of the idealistic but super-utopian Worker Opposition, but on the other hand we are also given to understand that 1917 and early 1918 was a period of relative moderation and realism. This fuzziness only serves to strengthen the short cuts thesis, since both images of 1917-18 serve to picture war communism as a moral and political fall from grace. In one case, the fall is from democratic idealism to repressive coercion; in the other case, from realism to delusion.

This same fuzziness makes it difficult to obtain a focused image of Nikolai Bukharin during this early period. Since in early 1918 he was a leader of the Left Communist faction that was a direct precursor of the Worker Opposition, many scholars assume he had millennial hopes of instant socialism. Neil Harding writes: “Throughout 1917 both Bukharin and Lenin believed that the socialist Revolution signified the leap out of the stultifying and bloody dictatorship of the imperialist bourgeoisie directly into the realm of freedom.” Bukharin therefore did not see the new *vlast'* as a dictatorship of the proletariat, since this was a transitional form that provided no “alternative to the prison and charnel house of the contemporary state.”¹⁹ This and similar descriptions of Bukharin’s views during this period directly conflict with Bukharin’s many pronouncements on the absolute necessity of a proletarian dictatorship and his insistence on the gradual pace of transformation.

This resulting fuzziness comes into focus when we see that Bukharin is telling the story of the new *vlast'* as an instance of the canonical Social Democratic narrative that we have just described. This narrative background allows us to see that Bukharin’s “leftism” consists of his hard-line fierceness on matters of class power. In his aggressive polemics with moderate socialists who

denied that the canonical narrative could be applied to Russia, Bukharin did not argue that Russia was ripe for instant socialism; he claimed it was ripe for a proletarian *vlast*. There is no contradiction between this position and his views on the gradual pace of transformation — indeed, as we shall see, the two go together.

The sources on which the following account is based do not come from factional debates within the party: Bukharin is addressing (or picturing himself as addressing) a non-party audience to whom he expounds party doctrine. There is no reason to assume that these works were not accepted as authoritative statements.²⁰ It is therefore all the more remarkable that they have been almost entirely overlooked by scholars. One reason for this neglect is a lack of appreciation of the narrative core of political doctrine. For example, *From the Collapse of Tsarism to the Fall of the Bourgeoisie* is a narrative history of 1917 written as events unfolded by the party's leading theorist. It should be one of our central sources for understanding the Bolshevik self-image during this period — instead, it has been forgotten.

Bukharin tells the following story: “In all countries except Russia after the October turning-point — and before October in Russia as well — capital has the *vlast*.”²¹ In Russia, there is now a people's *vlast*, in which the revolutionary proletariat (and the party of the revolutionary proletariat) clearly plays the role of leader. If revolutions are the locomotives of history, then the proletariat is now the only qualified driver.²² Since a proletarian state power will open the road to socialism, the violence that will undoubtedly be needed to obtain and defend proletarian power is “sacred.”²³ Still, “the socialist revolution *does not complete, but begins* ‘socialist development,’” and so the path to socialism will be long and difficult, at least in Russia.²⁴ Progress along this path will require all of the proletariat's organizational and leadership resources; severe self-discipline will be required within the ranks of the “army of labor.” Progress down this path will be “gradual but unremitting.”²⁵

In Bukharin's narrative, the identity of the class that holds the *vlast* decides everything else. If, for example, anyone other than a worker-peasant state — even moderate socialists — tried to regulate production, the result would be the same extraordinary exploitation observed in the other belligerent countries. On the other hand, if the new workers' *vlast* resorts to violence and even to terror, one should not equate it morally with tsarism or the imperialists. Such a comparison illegitimately equates the enslaver and the liberator.²⁶ Thus if the wrong class is in power, the best actions are subverted, and if the right class is in power, the worst actions are ennobled.

Since there are only two paths, one leading back to capitalism and the other leading forward to socialism, “a complete and decisive victory of the workers, soldiers and peasants is the first condition of success. This task stands at the center of everything. This task must be solved once and for all.”²⁷ Revolutionary violence that helps solve this fundamental task is not only justified but positively

celebrated: “We communists are for a *workers'* government — one that is needed for the time being, until the working class has complete control over its opponents, [has] thoroughly disciplined the whole of the bourgeoisie, knocked the conceit out of it, and eliminated any hope the bourgeoisie may have of again regaining the *vlast'*.”²⁸

If the task of ensuring class power is an all-or-nothing affair, the “task of organizing economic life” is a more-or-less affair. As we might put it today, the class nature of *vlast'* is digital, while social transformation is analogue. Bukharin, so fiercely radical and uncompromising on questions of class power, uses terms like “gradually,” “step-by-step,” “little-by-little” when discussing social transformation. Indeed, Bukharin is at pains to emphasize the great difficulties facing the task of socialist transformation. He gives three main reasons: the damage caused by the war, the challenges posed by Russian backwardness and “unorganized relations in the village,” and the sabotage of the class enemy. Far from promising a leap into the realm of freedom, Bukharin’s narrative emphasizes the length and hardships of the journey: “Every revolution smashes what is old and rotten: a certain period (a very difficult one) must pass before the new arises, before a beautiful home starts to be built upon the ruins of the old pig-sty.”²⁹

More important than any specific transformational strategy are the leader-follower relations among the principal characters of the class narrative: activist vanguard, proletariat, and toilers. Organizations such as the trade unions educate the proletariat about the importance of labour discipline, while the workers as a whole will contribute their superior organizing ability to help the peasants transform their production relations. Bukharin’s main answer to the charge that Russia is not yet ripe for a socialist revolution is to stress Russian industry’s potential for economic leadership of the countryside — a potential ratified by the proletariat’s political success: “It was not for nothing that the working class was able to lead all the living forces of the revolution.”³⁰

The proletariat’s responsibilities as leader of the journey to socialism also give it the right to discipline individual workers who do not realize their new position as a ruling and leading class. Since proletarian power is still vulnerable and beset by enemies, lack of conscientiousness is a crime and should be dealt with accordingly. In contrast to the central role assigned to coercion in conquering and defending a proletarian *vlast'*, its role in the subsequent journey is indirect and subsidiary: ensuring discipline while under attack. Its presence is a sign of the difficulties of the journey and the immense distance separating the travelers from the final goal.

Bukharin never lost his sense of a perilous and prolonged journey. Indeed, the main point of *Economy of the Transition Period*, his magnum opus of 1920, is that *any* socialist revolution will lead to a temporary but massive breakdown of society.³¹ In order to test Deutscher’s portrait of 1920, however, the best source is Deutscher’s own central proof text: Trotsky’s writings on labour policy in 1920.

In the course of justifying Bolshevik labour policies in 1920, Trotsky defended a number of general propositions: compulsion (*prinuzhdenie*) is a basic socialist principle, as shown by the popular slogan “He who does not work, neither shall he eat”; socialist planning required central distribution of labour; “repression for the attainment of economic goals is a necessary weapon of the socialist dictatorship.”³² These and other similar arguments are the mainstay of the Deutscher thesis: they seem to show by their very nature as general propositions that Trotsky was generalizing the policies of 1920 into the essence of socialism.

The actual narrative framework used by Trotsky to justify policy cannot in fact be deduced from any number of general propositions. For a spotlight on this underlying narrative, let us turn to his pronouncements on a specific aspect of labour policy: individual material incentives. Defenders of the short cuts thesis have avoided any examination of these pronouncements and given exclusive attention to egalitarianism and coercion. Lewin defines war communism as “an ideological construct that mistook the egalitarianism of poverty and wartime brotherhood not only for that of socialism, but also for that of communism.”³³ According to László Szamuely, author of the most detailed defense of the short cuts thesis, war communists such as Trotsky believed that “the main tool of building and controlling socialist economy [sic] is force, coercion by the State.” Szamuely goes on to comment: “This thesis can perhaps not be found *expressis verbis* in contemporary literature, but we can draw well-founded conclusions from the measures and methods that were discussed by the contemporary ideologues and from the methods that were *not* mentioned,” that is, material incentives.³⁴

Did Trotsky’s support of compulsion/coercion in 1920 really mean that he rejected material incentives? The answer to this question is unambiguously “no.” First, Trotsky argues that material incentives always remain the underlying reality: “The effort and efficiency of labor is determined for the most part by personal material interest. For the toiler, what has decisive significance is not the juridical shell with which he obtains the fruits of his labor, but rather, what portion of them he receives.”³⁵

Second, it was not socialist principle that led Trotsky to reject extensive reliance on material incentives but rather the practical unavailability of material to use as an incentive:

In our hungry, exhausted and ruined country, with a disorganized transport and a statistical apparatus that is still extremely weak, Menshevism wants to regulate the distribution of the work force by means of a corresponding distribution of consumer items and goods. This is a complete and utter utopia. If indeed we had such a quantity of goods and the freedom to maneuver with them, then we could create centers of material attraction as we wished. In that case our position would be excellent.³⁶

Third, poverty did not lead to egalitarianism and wartime brotherhood but just the opposite: “As long as we are poor and beggarly, as long as we have insufficient food for supplying even a minimum of our needs, we are not able to distribute it equally to all toilers. We are going to direct consumer items to the central branches of labor and to the most important enterprises. And we are obliged to do this — obliged in the name of saving the toiling masses and the future of the country. We will be able to dress the worker more warmly, give him better nourishment, if he works conscientiously and energetically. That’s why we are applying the bonus system [of differential wages].”³⁷ Trotsky stresses the offense not only to socialist principles but to elementary justice: “We are forced to not grudge three rations for the [bourgeois] specialist, if he raises the productivity of the factory by ten percent. We are forced to go over to this kind of crude and sharp individualization of the elite of the working class. ... Without this injustice within the working class itself — without feeding some and letting others go hungry — we won’t be able to cope.”³⁸

Fourth, Trotsky brought out the implications of these policies for the length of the remaining journey to socialism: “We have preserved the wage system and it will remain with us for a prolonged period. The further we go, the more its significance will consist in assuring all members of society with everything necessary — and just for that reason it will cease to be a *wage* system. But right now we’re not rich enough for that. Our basic task is increasing the amount of what is produced and everything else must be subordinated to this task.”³⁹

Trotsky’s comments on individual material incentive create insuperable difficulties for the short cuts thesis not only because they refute crucial assertions about egalitarianism and coercion but also because they point to the underlying narrative justification for policy. This narrative can be paraphrased as follows: the proletarian *vlast'* has had to endure incredible costs in order to defend itself. These costs have taken us further away from socialism and impose on us the necessity for some very unpleasant policies. We need coercion not as a substitute for material incentives, but as a way of preventing a collapse that would make material incentives completely impossible. Nevertheless these costs and these policies are justified by socialism, because socialism requires a proletarian *vlast'*.

This implied narrative found explicit expression in a speech given on the third anniversary of the October revolution in 1920. Here Trotsky is not conducting polemics in support of controversial policies but trying to affirm his audience’s sense of itself:

We went into this struggle with magnificent ideals, with magnificent enthusiasm, and it seemed to many people that the promised land of communist fraternity, the flowering not only of material but spiritual life, was much closer than it has actually turned out to be ... The promised land — the new kingdom of justice, freedom, contentment and cultural

uplift — was so near it could be touched. ... If back then, three years ago, we were given the opportunity of looking ahead, we would not have believed our eyes. We would not have believed that three years after the proletarian revolution it would be so hard for us, so harsh to be living on this earth...

Three years have gone by — three years, during which the whole world of our enemies tried to hurl us back across that fateful historical threshold we had crossed. We defended ourselves, we did not retreat. We were not far from surrendering Petrograd, we retreated in the east and south with our back to Moscow, but we stood firm, we defended the first worker and peasant state *vlast'* in the world. Our task has not been accomplished — each one of us knows this. The new society and new order for which we fought and are fighting still does not yet exist: the *narod* still does not live as one happy fraternal family, without inequality, without humiliation, without need and mutual offense. Every male worker feels this, every woman worker. Nevertheless — and this is our chief conquest — each male worker, each woman worker, understands that there is no turning back.⁴⁰

This eloquent speech has been entirely overlooked by scholars. Even though the “short cuts to communism” thesis is essentially about the stories the Bolsheviks told about themselves, scholars who are unaware of the narrative core of political doctrine have not been motivated to look for pure expressions of this story-telling. Nevertheless, one can argue on *a fortiori* grounds that this one citation does mortal damage to the Deutscher thesis: it comes from a speech that was delivered at a period (fall 1920) when the illusions of the Bolsheviks were supposed to be at their height, on an occasion when self-congratulation was in order, by a speaker who is supposed to be one of the most outspoken believers in a short cut to communism. If the Deutscher thesis has merit, how is it conceivable that Trotsky said what he did?

To conclude: war communism in 1920 is widely pictured as a fall from the revolutionary grace of 1917. There are no doubt many reasons for this, but we have just seen one of them to be invalid: the alleged contrast between the doctrinal stories told about coercion and transformation. But there is nothing new about the justification of coercion made in 1920: coercion was “sacred” if it overcame the aggressive resistance of the class enemy; it was justifiable if it helped the workers and toilers mobilize resources against a common enemy; it was futile and reprehensible if it became a substitute for demonstrating the economic advantages of socialism. If this justification is a betrayal of the promises of the revolution, then they were already betrayed by early 1918.

We also do not observe the predicted acceleration of the tempo of transformation nor the imagery of leaps and short cuts that scholars have taught us to expect. Bukharin was a leader of Left Communism in 1918; Trotsky was an extreme war communist — nevertheless, both assert the length and difficulty of the remaining journey to socialism. The main effect of the

civil war on the narratives produced by these two leaders was to intensify the pathos of separation from the promised land.

IMAGES OF DEGENERATION: "SOILING" AND "THE WALL"

The narratives produced by Bukharin and Trotsky do not reveal the major narrative repair predicted by the Deutscher thesis. This does not mean that there were not real stresses and strains in applying the inherited narrative to post-revolutionary realities. These stresses and strains are most evident in the critique symbolized by the Worker Opposition of 1920 and early 1921. According to the Deutscher thesis, this critique was essentially over the question: what means shall we use to accomplish the leap into socialism? The Worker Opposition insisted even more fanatically than the rest of the party on the necessity of this leap — so Deutscher tells us — but at least they had faith in the masses and eschewed the use of coercion and super-centralization. In so doing, they acted as the conscience of the revolution and as the only ones who still spoke the language of 1917.

The influence of the Deutscher thesis has prevented us from seeing an elementary fact about the debate between the Worker Opposition and the party majority: it was a given for both sides that the policies of 1920 represented a retreat, not a leap. More precisely, each believed the military and economic emergency had enforced a series of compromises that carried a threat of party degeneration. Once we are aware of the consensus about the possibility of party degeneration, we can get to the real source of the doctrinal clash: opposing definitions of the meaning of "degeneration." It is this underlying clash — rather than the more notorious debate about the role of the trade unions — that best reveals the tensions hidden within the inherited narrative.

In Kautsky's peroration from *The Road to Power*, he gave two glorious tasks to the proletariat: to "organize and educate" backward workers and members of other classes, and to "place its elite at the head of civilization" in order to carry out economic transformation. The Bolsheviks saw their own *vlast'* as committed to these same two tasks but they also discovered that the day-to-day realities of an actual *vlast'* created a tension between the two. According to some Bolsheviks, carrying out the daily tasks of state power, especially in emergency conditions, threatened to create a wall between leader and follower — a wall that disrupted the task of transformative leadership. Others in the party worried more about another consequence of state power: the sustained contact with classes whose outlook had not yet been transformed by the spreading circle of consciousness. This contact meant that the party was soiled by alien elements. If it lost its class purity, it would no longer have the unique qualities needed to construct socialism. In this way, the same canonical narrative gave rise to two different conceptions of the degeneration lurking in the compromises of 1920.

In order to examine more closely the meaning of degeneration, we will

turn to the pronouncements of Grigorii Zinoviev and Aleksandra Kollontai. Of all the spokesman on either side of the party divide, these two were the most inclined to make their points by means of narrative. We shall begin with Zinoviev, who was Lenin's closest companion in the years before the revolution, a member of the Politburo from the time it was formed, the party chief of Petrograd (later Leningrad) until he went into opposition in 1925-26, and chairman of the Communist International. His almost total neglect by historians has led to a serious gap in our understanding of Bolshevik doctrine.⁴¹ One reason (among many) for this neglect is a bias in favor of propositional presentations of political doctrine as opposed to narrative ones. Zinoviev was extremely clumsy in propositional argument, a quality for which he was mocked by party critics at the time and by scholars since. On the other hand, his highly successful oratory was based in large part on his skill as a story-teller; he was also one of the first party historians.

The heart of Zinoviev's narrative was a confidence that sooner rather than later the spreading circle of consciousness would unite leaders and followers. For him, the outlying circles were not so much "unenlightened" as "not-yet-enlightened." Thus, the good leader is one who sticks to his vision even when highly unpopular, secure in his confidence that the tide will soon turn and the message will again be received. The bad leader is one who allows a wall to grow up between him and the expanding circle. In an extensive study of the German SPD published just prior to the 1917 revolution, Zinoviev told how the German socialist leadership had degenerated into a self-perpetuating caste.⁴²

Zinoviev saw the possession of the state *vlast'* as a magnificent opportunity to accelerate the flow of consciousness: "Only after the dictatorship of the proletariat has deprived the bourgeoisie of such mighty tools of influence as the press, the schools, parliament, the church, administrative machinery and so on — only after the decisive defeat of the bourgeois system has become evident to all — will all or almost all workers begin to join the ranks of the Communist party."⁴³ But the mere possession of state power also led unexpectedly to a damming up of the flow of consciousness. Zinoviev was compelled to note that some party collectives "have managed to fence themselves with a wall from the masses," so that "people look at these collectives as if they were bosses [*nachalstvo*], instead of looking at them as people who lead."⁴⁴ And in many cases this hostility toward the party was perfectly justified: "Any person in the *narod* — the most backward little old lady, a toiling peasant — who regards us as in league with the devil [even though] they haven't read the party program and are not going to read it, they're not interested in the Third International and we can't expect them to be — in their hearts they are more of a communist than that communist in a leather jacket who looks down his nose at them."⁴⁵

Zinoviev's response in 1919 and 1920 might be called "talk therapy": the best the leaders could do was to admit the situation, point to objective reasons,

be frank about the sacrifices required, and promise to do better. The party's immediate task was not to accelerate transformation but to remove as much of the wall as they could:

Up here in Petrograd, in connection with the recent disturbances, it was established that at the Nevsky gate cloth supplies were rotting away, while at the same time women workers who needed clothes were driven to thievery, for which we persecuted them and created conflict after conflict. There's no greater shame for us than that these supposedly small — but in reality not small at all — “defects of the mechanism” are still around, that we still can't clothe a worker family or the mother of a worker, who would appreciate even the smallest improvement of their lot or some genuine love and concern for them.⁴⁶

According to Zinoviev's version of events, the party's relations with the workers reached their low point on the eve of NEP in early 1921 — the time of the Kronstadt rebellion and intense labor difficulties in Petrograd. In a speech given at this time, Zinoviev apologized for the guards at the factory gates, but asserted that it was the role of the “conscious” leaders to make sure that waverings at a moment of intense strain did not lead to disaster.⁴⁷ After this crisis, things gradually became better. Of course, NEP still carried a “danger of degeneration,” but this was nothing new: “we talked about this danger in 1919 and in 1921. We are obliged to repeat it, especially under NEP, with an even heavier accent.”⁴⁸ Zinoviev's basic response was again talk therapy:

I mentioned the Putilov factory [in Petrograd] because not so long ago I went through an unpleasant experience there: after the end of one rally a young lad about 17 years old with a gloomy expression said to his neighbor but obviously so that I would hear it: “Ekh, there's not one intelligent person in Soviet Russia” — clearly trying to say “and you aren't so smart yourself.” When I started asking why he had such a gloomy, Schopenhauerian outlook on life already at age 17, it turned out that it wasn't from Schopenhauer at all, but because “I have three unemployed at home, I'm the only worker and I can't provide for them. And what I'm usually receiving in the way of culture is next to nothing.” The figure of this young lad at the Putilov factory is not something exceptional and we have to pay attention to it. If we really have seventeen-year-olds in the factories that are subjected to such thoughts, then this is a serious danger.⁴⁹

As we have seen, Zinoviev's talk therapy was based on an underlying confidence, but in 1925 it began to seem to the rest of the party leadership (particularly Bukharin) that his insistence on talking about difficulties was a manifestation of defeatism. Zinoviev and his comrade-in-arms Lev Kamenev

were removed from leadership posts in 1925-26 and began their slow descent to humiliation and finally execution in 1936 after the first of the great show-trials of the mid-thirties. There is evidence that Zinoviev tried to interpret his political isolation as one more episode in the saga of the lonely leader who would eventually be vindicated. This time the tide never turned.

Kollontai's narratives of the revolution were designed to highlight the threat of a different kind of degeneration: the loss of purity. It is important not to understand this threat through the lens of our own canonical "power corrupts" narrative. For Kollontai, it was not so much the temptations of power as its responsibilities that led to loss of purity. "Tasks of a general state nature" meant dealing with a "heterogeneous" population: in other words, the unpleasant necessity of taking the interests of alien classes into account. "Any party that stands at the head of a soviet state that is mixed in its social makeup is compelled willy-nilly to consider the aspirations of the 'industrious muzhik' with his small-owner style of life and repugnance toward communism, as well as the numerous petty-bourgeois elements of former, capitalist, Russia." Kollontai therefore looked back with nostalgia to the time when "the peasant had received the land but still did not feel himself to be a part of the soviet republic and a citizen with full rights" — at that time there had been no split between leaders and followers within the working class.⁵⁰

Even more threatening than peasants or other "petty bourgeois" elements were the "bourgeois specialists" that the new regime was forced to use — indeed, to put into positions of authority over the workers. For Kollontai, this situation was a mockery of class power that constituted a threat to the very identity of the protagonist of the revolutionary drama: "*Spetsy*, with their origin in the past, closely and unalterably bound by their very essence to the bourgeois system that we are eliminating, began to show up everywhere in our Red Army, introducing their atmosphere of the past (blind subordination, servile obedience, distinction, ranks, and the arbitrary will of superiors in place of class discipline)." Kollontai insisted that "the Worker Opposition has never anywhere objected to 'using' technical and scientific specialists. But using is one thing — giving them *vlast* ' is another."⁵¹

The opposition currents represented by Kollontai did not see the events of 1921 as a great turning point but merely as a New Exploitation of the Proletariat — the climax of a sorry record of "compromise and bargaining."⁵² If NEP presented a special danger, it was that contamination was now more insidious and difficult to resist. Kollontai dramatized this danger in short stories written in the early 1920s. In a typical story, a pure woman of the people marries a party comrade who rises to a responsible post in the new order. After NEP, the husband begins at first by simply working with some plausible nepmen, but then starts taking long business trips, takes up with women from other classes, loses his idealism and generally goes to seed. "However much she loved him, she seemed to understand him less and less. It was as if they

were walking through a forest along two paths which diverged more and more the deeper they went in." Despite her grief, she finally leaves her husband — just as the party's proletarian soul might grieve and leave.⁵³

Deutscher criticizes Kollontai and other opposition groups because of their foolhardy demand for full communism and he compliments them on their devotion to democracy. Neither criticism nor compliment is deserved. There is absolutely no basis for Deutscher's charge that the opposition groups were blind to the economic crisis.⁵⁴ Although she drew a different moral, Kollontai told the same kind of story as Trotsky about the connection between revolutionary hopes of 1917 and the realities of 1920. The revolution had started off on a glorious note. Looking back in 1926, she recalled "the first months of the Workers' Government, months which were so rich in magnificent illusions, plans, ardent initiatives to improve life, to organize the world anew, months of the real romanticism of the Revolution."⁵⁵ But by early 1921, Kollontai openly expressed her anger at being forced to put her dreams on hold: "To our shame, not only far out in the provinces but in the heart of the republic — in Moscow — working people are still living in filthy, overcrowded and anti-hygienic quarters, one visit to which makes one think that there has been no revolution at all."⁵⁶

The compliments to Kollontai's faith in democracy also need to be severely qualified. It is usual to see the essence of Kollontai's outlook in a romantic trust of the masses, in her insistence on worker initiative (*samodeiatel'nost*) and freedom of criticism. Kollontai's doctrinal narratives reveal that her central concern was class purity. The insistence on class purity gave rise to some very practical recommendations: if the minds of party members who worked in the soviet apparatus were soiled (*zasoren*) by alien elements, then the solution was a cleansing process (*ochishchenie*) by means of a purge (*ochistka*) which would remove non-worker elements and give the party back its class purity (*chistota*).⁵⁷ Sympathetic commentators have not observed how the concern for purity undercuts the calls for party democracy. How do you combine bold initiative and criticism from the rank and file with a massive purge coupled within large-scale campaigns to "educate" unreliable members? And not even all proletarians are reliable: some have been "bourgeoisified" because of contact with non-worker elements in the party.⁵⁸

Kollontai's insistence on worker initiative often seems motivated by fearful distrust of everybody else's initiative, particularly the peasant producers. Kollontai pictures the workers fighting on in heroic isolation against insidious influences from the outside world, unaided by all other classes who "hanker after capitalism."⁵⁹ Zinoviev was no more willing than Kollontai to contemplate real political self-determination for non-proletarian classes, yet he shows more real confidence than she does — and more connection with the outlook of 1917 — in his assumption that the walls would soon be breached and the transformative influence of the conscious working class allowed to

work its magic. Zinoviev can be compared to a benevolent colonialist who fully intends to give the natives independence as soon as they are genuinely civilized. Both Zinoviev and Kollontai assumed along with Kautsky that the proletarian elite should be placed “at the head of civilization.” But they stressed different dangers threatening the party missionaries who ventured out into the circles where consciousness had not yet penetrated: Zinoviev worried that they would be seen as elitist and standoffish, while Kollontai worried that they would “go native.”

Thus Deutscher is misleading when he suggests that one side in this clash was loyal to the language of 1917 and the other side was not. Both sides were inspired by the canonical narrative of pre-revolutionary and prewar Social Democracy. Both saw the Bolshevik revolution as the long-awaited proletarian *vlast*. One side emphasized the part of the story that pictured the *vlast* as a magnificent opportunity to exert leadership; this side worried about the paradoxical wall that the very possession of the *vlast* put up between leader and follower. The other side emphasized the part of the story that pictured the *vlast* as an opportunity for the special nature of the proletariat to reveal itself in action; this side worried about the contamination that the very possession of the *vlast* seemed to bring to the world-historical creativity of the proletariat. Since both parts were indeed present in the inherited narrative and since the clash between the two was mainly a matter of emphasis, the tension between the two remained as long as the inherited narrative remained authoritative.

CONCLUSION

The Deutscher thesis about “short cuts to communism” in 1920 deserves to be refuted. It has dominated postwar scholarship on this crucial period and remains without serious challenge to this day. Yet its predictions fail to meet the challenge of the material presented here — material that we would have expected *a priori* to illustrate rather than disconfirm the thesis. To start with, it cannot account for the continuity between Bukharin’s doctrinal narratives in 1917-18 and those of Trotsky in 1920, since the perceived relationship between coercion and transformation underwent no major change. The Deutscher thesis also cannot account for the genuine contrast between these stories: instead of an accelerating leap into socialism we see a lengthening road.

Furthermore, the Deutscher thesis cannot account for the continuity between the doctrinal narratives of Zinoviev and Kollontai, since both are agreed that 1920 was a period of dangerous compromise, not of a leap into socialism. In particular, Deutscher cannot account for the view of NEP in these narratives. “Silently, with a heavy heart, Bolshevism parted with its dream of war communism”: this is how Deutscher describes the transition to NEP in 1921. In fact, Zinoviev and Kollontai saw NEP not as a dramatic reversal of war communism’s uncompromising extremism but rather as a somewhat expanded version of the same type of compromise. Deutscher’s thesis also

cannot account for the contrast between Zinoviev and Kollontai, once we see that Kollontai is interested more in class purity than in democracy and that Zinoviev is in his way loyal to the language of class leadership that was spoken in 1917-18.

The issue of war communism thus needs reopening and rethinking. A narrative approach to political doctrine can help us in this quest. It allows us to formulate the issues brought up by the Deutscher thesis in a more precise way and points us to crucial but overlooked sources. Listening to stories told by Bolsheviks directs our attention back to the central themes of the canonical narrative inherited from prewar Social Democracy: the proletariat's mission to conquer state power (*Macht, vlast'*) in order to construct socialism, and, just as important, the inspired and inspiring leadership required first to accept and then to carry out this mission. This story is the real constitution of the Soviet Union; it is the real definition of what the *proletarskaia vlast'* is all about. The legitimate uses of coercion and its relation to the pace of transformation can only be understood within the matrix of this story. The efforts at narrative repair that led to serious clashes about party degeneration must also be put in the context of the inherited narrative: they arose out of its hidden tensions and ambiguities that inevitably surfaced when the possession of state power became a day-to-day reality rather than a distant goal.

¹ For an argument that "a good story and a well-formed argument are different natural kinds," see Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, Mass. 1986), 11.

² Frederic C. Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (Cambridge, U.K. 1932); Roger C. Schank, *Tell Me A Story: A New Look at Real and Artificial Memory* (New York 1990); Roger Schank and Robert P. Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding: An Inquiry into Human Knowledge Structures* (Hillsdale, N.J. 1977); Donald E. Brown, *Human Universals* (Philadelphia 1991), 134-5; John A. Robinson and Linda Hawpe, "Narrative Thinking as a Heuristic Process," in *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*, ed. Theodore R. Sarbin (New York 1986), 111-125.

³ Merlin Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind: Three Stages in the Evolution of Culture and Cognition* (Cambridge, Mass. 1991), 257. The priority of narrative can also be observed in the language acquisition of the child (Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* [Cambridge, Mass. 1990], 92).

⁴ Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, 97.

⁵ Edward Levi, *An Introduction to Legal Reasoning* (Chicago 1949).

⁶ Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921* (first of three volumes) (New York 1965, first published 1954); page numbers in the text are from this edition. It should be noted that the term "war communism" was not coined until after the introduction of NEP in 1921.

⁷ Deutscher may apologize for Trotsky's views in 1920, but Trotsky himself did not.

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When he republished *Terrorism and Communism* in his collected works in the 1920s, he wrote that he fully endorsed the views therein expressed; see also his prefaces to English and French editions in the 1930s (reprinted in *Terrorism and Communism* [Ann Arbor 1961], xix-xlvi). In the very short section of his autobiography devoted to 1920, Trotsky gives a highly qualified apology for his dispute with Lenin over the trade unions at the end of the year, but for nothing else (*Moia zhizn* [Moscow 1991] [first published 1930], 437-46).

⁸ For a comment on Deutscher's possible motives, see Pierre Broue, *Trotsky*, (Paris 1988), 15-16.

⁹ Moshe Lewin, *Political Undercurrents in Soviet Economic Debates* (Princeton 1974), 77, 82-3. Lewin reaffirmed his thesis when he republished the book in 1991 under the title *Stalinism and the Seeds of Soviet Reform*.

¹⁰ Robert Conquest cites Lewin as his authority for the assertion that "grain procurement by force" was "regarded by the Party, from Lenin down, as not merely socialism, but even communism" (*Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* [New York 1986], 48). Martin Malia bases his entire interpretation of Soviet history on the idea of a continual recurrence of the delusional maximalism of war communism; he takes this idea directly from Lewin, citing Lewin's words to make his point: "the Soviet historical drama [was] a two-act play, replayed several times with different sets and characters" (Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991* [New York 1994], 175). I once heard the distinguished historian Ron Suny admiringly describe "Marxism-Lewinism" as the best alternative to the Malia interpretation, yet we see that on this crucial point Malia is actually following Lewin's lead.

¹¹ The quoted words ("weltbefreiende Tat") are taken from the final paragraph of Friedrich Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* (*Marx-Engels Werke*, 39 vols. [Berlin 1961-1968], 19:228).

¹² Kautsky came from a professional theatrical family for whom he wrote and produced plays; his mother was a well-known socialist novelist; a George Sand novel was instrumental in his conversion to Social Democracy; he himself wrote (unpublished) novels before writing socialist tracts (Gary P. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky 1854-1938: Marxism in the Classical Years* [Pittsburgh 1978]). Detailed plot summaries of his early plays and stories can be found in his *Erinnerungen und Erörterungen*, ed. Benedikt Kautsky (The Hague 1960).

¹³ A German witticism reported with approval by Lenin in *State and Revolution* (*The Lenin Anthology*, ed. Robert C. Tucker [New York 1975], 385). On Kautsky's influence in Russia, see Moira Donald, *Marxism and Revolution: Karl Kautsky and the Russian Marxists, 1900-1924* (London 1993).

¹⁴ Kautsky, *Neue Zeit*, 1901-1902, XX, I, No.3, 79, as cited by Lenin in *What is to be Done* (*Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th ed., 6:38-9).

¹⁵ Kautsky, *Das Erfurter Programm* (Berlin 1965), 230. This striking metaphor was dropped (along with much other important material) from the English translation; compare my earlier remark about gospel vs. theology in political doctrine.

¹⁶ Kautsky, *The Road to Power*, ed. John H. Kautsky, trans. Raymond Meyer (Atlantic Highlands, N. J. 1996), 37. The quoted words are taken from an 1893 article reprinted by Kautsky in this work of 1909.

¹⁷ Kautsky, *Die Soziale Revolution* (Berlin 1902), 12.

¹⁸ Kautsky, *Road to Power*, 91.

¹⁹ Neil Harding, "Bukharin and the State," in A. Kemp-Welch, ed., *The Ideas of Nikolai Bukharin* (Oxford 1992), 85-112 (citation from p. 102).

²⁰ Bukharin, *Programma kommunistov (bol'shevikov)* (Moscow 1918); *Ot krusheniia tsarizma do padeniia burzhuazii* [*From the Collapse of Tsarism to the Fall of the Bourgeoisie*] (n.p., 1925; originally published 1918); *Na podstupakh k Oktiabriu* (Moscow 1926) (a collection of Bukharin's articles and speeches from 1917 and early 1918). The *Programma* was published abroad in many languages until it was superseded in late 1919 by the *ABC of Communism* that Bukharin co-authored with Evgenii Preobrazhensky. Note that the writings in the other two books were republished in the mid-twenties, a time when Bukharin had denounced his Left Communist episode.

²¹ This is the first sentence of the *Programma kommunistov*.

²² *Ot krusheniia tsarizma*, 7-8.

²³ *Programma*, 13.

²⁴ *Kommunist*, No. 3, 174 (Bukharin's emphasis); Bukharin is reviewing a book by Aleksandr Bogdanov, whose words are quoted. *Kommunist* was the organ of the Left Communists, although this article is a polemic against someone outside the party.

²⁵ Bukharin, *Na podstupakh*, 150 (30 October 1917).

²⁶ Bukharin, *Na podstupakh*, 178, 183 (speech to Constituent Assembly in January 1918).

²⁷ Bukharin, *Na podstupakh*, 147 (27 October 1917).

²⁸ Bukharin, *Programma*, 13.

²⁹ Bukharin, *Programma*, 55-6.

³⁰ Bukharin, *Programma*, 28-30.

³¹ On the length of the path to socialism, see Bukharin, *Ekonomika perekhodnogo perioda* (Moscow 1920), 151, 156. The famous chapter on "extra-economic coercion" in this book is often used as proof of a leap mentality, but a comparison with the *Programma* of 1918 shows no essential change: coercion is needed to defend the revolution and to deal with the economic crisis caused by that defense.

³² *Terrorizm i kommunizm*, in Trotsky, *Sochineniia* (Moscow 1925-27), 15:143 (*Terrorism and Communism* [Ann Arbor 1961], 149).

³³ Lewin, *Political Undercurrents*, 8-9.

³⁴ Szamuely, *First Models of the Socialist Economic System: Principles and Theories* (Budapest, 1974), 38-9.

³⁵ Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, 15:333.

³⁶ Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, 15:200; see also 181-2, 102-3.

³⁷ Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, 15:184-5.

³⁸ Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, 15:176-77.

³⁹ Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, 15:142 (*Terrorism and Communism*, 149).

⁴⁰ Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, vol. 17, book 2, 480-5.

⁴¹ The secondary literature devoted to Zinoviev consists of two insightful articles by Myron Hedlin: "Grigorii Zinoviev: Myths of the Defeated," in *Reconsiderations on the Russian Revolution*, ed. Ralph Carter Elwood (Cambridge, Mass. 1976) and "Zinoviev's Revolutionary Tactics in 1917," *Slavic Review* 34 (1975), 19-43.

⁴² "Sotsial'nye korni opportunizma," in Zinoviev, *Voina i krizis sotsializma*, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1920), 292-335; portions of this work can be found in John Riddell, ed., *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International* (New York 1984), 475-496.

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⁴³ This passage is taken from Zinoviev's draft of a resolution of the second congress of the Communist International in 1920; see Zinoviev, *Istoriia Rossiiskoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (bol'shevikov)*, 4th ed. (Leningrad 1924), 9.

⁴⁴ *Vos'moi s'ezd RKP(b)* (Moscow 1959), 294 (1919).

⁴⁵ These words come from a speech of March 1919 first published in *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, 1988, No. 8, 185-197 (cited passage, 197).

⁴⁶ *Vos'moi s'ezd RKP(b)*, 283-4 (1919).

⁴⁷ *Na poroge novoi epokhi* (Petrograd 1921), 40-1 (speech given in April 1921). (I learn from Barbara Allen's forthcoming Indiana University dissertation on Aleksandr Shliapnikov that many Bolsheviks, including Kollontai, felt that Zinoviev's own style of leadership had helped create the wall in Petrograd. I am grateful to Ms. Allen for letting me see her work in progress.)

⁴⁸ Speech at the 11th Party Congress (1922), reprinted in *Odinnadtsatyi s'ezd RKP(b)*, (Moscow 1961), 407-10.

⁴⁹ *Odinnadtsatyi s'ezd RKP(b)*, 405-6.

⁵⁰ Kollontai, *Rabochaia oppositsiia* (Moscow 1921), 11, 16.

⁵¹ Kollontai, *Rabochaia oppositsiia*, 12-3.

⁵² Berkman, *The Bolshevik Myth* (London 1989), 336-8. Berkman was an American anarchist exiled to Russia; these words are from a postscript to his diary of disillusionment originally published in 1925. Verbal echoes show this paragraph to be a close paraphrase of Kollontai's *Rabochaia oppositsiia*.

⁵³ Kollontai, *Love of Worker Bees*, trans. Cathy Porter (Chicago 1978), 140.

⁵⁴ Deutscher's charge rests on a misapprehension of a plank in the Worker Opposition platform that called for payment in kind. The real point of this plank was to ensure that amid general poverty the worker got first dibs on scarce items. The platform also made it clear that scarce items were to be used as individualized material incentives. The Worker Opposition proposed their scheme as a way out of the economic crisis, not as a demand for immediate full satisfaction of the worker's needs.

⁵⁵ Aleksandra Kollontai, *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman*, Iring Fetscher, ed. (New York 1971), 35. According to the editor, Kollontai removed the words "magnificent illusions" from the galleys and substituted "great aims and."

⁵⁶ Kollontai, *Rabochaia oppositsiia*, 18.

⁵⁷ Kollontai, *Rabochaia oppositsiia*, 24, 21, 41ff.

⁵⁸ Kollontai, *Rabochaia oppositsiia*, 42, 44, 46.

⁵⁹ Kollontai, *Rabochaia oppositsiia*, 45-6.