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## *The CCNY Crisis*



*Berkeley · Madison · Japan*  
*The Revolutionary Party*  
*Art and Revolution*

# and in the morning you awake

Richard Lyons

The soldier walked slowly along the sidewalk, his muddy reflection following in the clean store windows. His whole movement was an expression of fatigue. His eyes were glassy, too open. His face was pale and stiff. His hands did not move from his sides, and his feet barely left the pavement as he took his sliding, heavy steps. He was alone. The crowd swarmed past him, unseeing. Newsboys on the corner cried out the latest headlines of a fumbling world. Now and then he stopped to listen, shaking his head slowly and with infinite sadness.

Somewhere in the back of his mind was a reason he was sure. He could remember saying it over and over in the darkness, in the noise. There had been a reason, if only he could remember. Maybe then things would be explained. Maybe then he would understand what he saw now, and himself. There HAD been a reason.

"...and not only the price is doubled, but it's cheaper material. Why they don't last six..." a voice passing.

As he looked around he saw the intense expression of the many faces in the crowd. They were in such a hurry and had so little time to do... What? He did not actually listen, but he could not escape snatches of conversation as they passed... hurried voices in rapid, impatient sentences. A fat woman jostled against him. He hardly felt her. She said nothing.

A voice... "an' he say real mean like, 'You black bitch' he say, 'where I come from niggers know their place an' listen when a white man tell 'em.' But I don't say nothin'. I just set there an'..." passing.

This was the city he had thought of so often. Here was the center of all his hopes and longings. There had been a reason. This was the area his mind always concentrated on to justify his action when there seemed nothing and he needed hope. This was the symbol of the reason, but there was something... what?... basic that applied to all cities. As he crouched behind old buildings, watching walls crumble and an occasional child lying brokenly, quiet in the broken rocks and plaster, this was what he thought. Somehow back home they will have an answer for this.

And afterwards when the thin diminished population crawled out of the broken buildings, ready to sell anything to fill a fundamental hunger, he had said I represent a city that has a remedy for this as soon as it can be brought about. No, girl, I do not want your body. I am tired and I have a sister.

There must have been a reason. If only I could remember it. No one seems to know it here, he thought. No one acts in a manner equal to what must have been my reason. There is not even time for themselves.

He stopped before a store. A long restless line reached out through the doors and down the block. A woman, clutching a small paper sack, came out of the doors triumphant. She looked at the soldier, but she did not see him. He remembered the ragged peasant lines in the early morning and the reward of coarse bread and the MPs

keeping order and the hungry smiles and the waiting. He shook his head. It was everywhere the same. Yesterday it was the line at the candy store.

"...but listen, Frank, I know. We have to stop those Russians now, while we've got the..."

The first day in town, a week ago, he passed a factory where a small group of men circled slowly before an entrance. A large drum stood in the gutter, a little pile of coal dumped beside it. The smoke was lost in the sharp wind. Under a dark canvas draped over a rough wooden frame, men sat staring at the holes in the bottom of the drum. Through the holes the fire was dull red against the black iron. The air was silent. In the factory windows a blue light shone where the offices were. He had passed it on his way home. I guess the war is over, he said. No more huddling in the dirt, listening in the silence. The war's over. The first day home.

A newsboy cried out about a broken conference. There must have been a reason. The war is over... I guess. The peace is not yet agreed upon. Was that the reason--peace? If that was it, what had we to do with it after all? No, that was not it. The war is over, but there is no official peace. That was not the reason; peace was not our business.

"Certainly. Farming's the same. It's dog eat dog. Anyone too lazy can just go..." passing. He had walked in the door that first day. He heard his mother talking on the phone. "Meat..." she was saying, "I don't know what we're going to do if we can't get meat. And bread you know. They've got you there; you can't lay in a supply of bread..." He stood in the hall, listening. Slowly he turned his head. He saw himself in the hall mirror and his body shivered slightly. His face was dirty and his beard was caked. His hair hung matted and uncombed and the gash in his cheek was dried brown. After all he had been walking a long time. He'd forgotten just how far. There was a small round hole in his shirt just below his good conduct ribbon. In his shirt in back there was a similar hole with ragged edges. He had forgotten it. "...and Hazel writes that they can't find a room and Fred just out of the army..."

He walked soundlessly up the stairs to his old room. It was not changed, except that his picture had been added, smiling in his clean new uniform. His clothes still hung in the closet. Now that his sister had married there were two empty rooms upstairs. Two rooms, eight walls confining wasted space.

He remembered a girl in a cellar to whom he had given a can of C-rations. He remembered thinking as she ate that there was not much difference between her and the dogs that followed the portable kitchens. There must have been a reason. It seemed in a way that the girl had something to do with it. No human being ought to be compared with dogs in the act of eating, or of loving, or to be placed in that position. There must have been a reason if only he could remember it.

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Independent Socialist Club banner in the People's Park march in Berkeley on May 30.

**independent socialist**

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# Harlem on Their Minds

## The CCNY Crisis

Walter Daum,  
David Friedman & Ron Tabor.

CCNY, the College of the City of New York, stands on a high ridge in northern Manhattan, on a spot where sentries of George Washington's revolutionary army might well have kept lookout for British troops approaching along the Harlem Plain.

There was a different lookout kept for two weeks in April and May, after several hundred black and Puerto Rican students seized and occupied City College's South Campus. The college administration chose to shut down the entire campus rather than call for the police, for fear of what might erupt out of the Harlem ghetto below.

The insurgent students had called a strike and taken over the South Campus in support of their five demands, which include a School of Black & Puerto Rican Studies and a college admissions policy reflecting the racial composition of New York City's high schools. The city's public high schools have an enrollment which is more than half black and Puerto Rican, and almost always in ferment these days.

During the period of the South Campus occupation, hardly a day went by when two or three high schools were not closed down somewhere in the city because of actual or feared student disruptions. At the same time, other colleges of the City University system were closing and opening and closing again in response to student actions. There appeared to be a movement on the offensive, with City College the most vulnerable target.

### "PEACE AND QUIET"

By the middle of May the situation was quieter, after the courts and politicians had stepped in. Seventeen student leaders were arrested at Brooklyn College on conspiracy, arson and vandalism charges. Twenty-nine students and faculty members at Queensborough Community College were arrested at a professor's house off campus. At City College, five hundred helmeted policemen replaced the black and P-Puerto Rican students guarding the campus, after the college had been reopened and the students ousted by court injunctions.

At none of the city campuses have the students' demands been won, although at CCNY, as this article is being written, negotiations have resumed and some settlement on the admissions question may result. The problem is that the strategy adopted by the movement has left it isolated from its potential allies, black and white, and the authorities are now free to deal with it according to the "hard line."

The movement begun by black and Puerto Rican students focusing on their own demands and supported by white radicals has had a choice of two alternative strategies. The activists could have treated the majority of white students (90% at CCNY) as potential allies, and tried to demonstrate that the demands would have a liberating effect on all students.

### OPEN ADMISSIONS

Steps in this direction were taken by some members of SDS and ISCers at CCNY, who generalized the proportional admissions demand by calling for a policy of Open Admissions for All -- a demand addressed to the state -- to be paid for out of corporate wealth. This long range demand, denounced as "inflammatory" by the New York Times, made it clear that increased minority enrollment need not be won at the expense of white students. During a three week period before the strike, nearly a thousand student signatures were collected on Open Admissions petitions.

Even after the shut-down had kept most students away from the campus for two weeks, many white students were not entirely hostile to the black and Puerto Rican demands. Even some engineering students, considered the most conservative section of the campus, and subjected to a regimented and dehumanizing competitive curriculum, were friendly, although they saw themselves as pawns in the struggle and feared the loss of grades and course credits.

When the college was forced to cancel final examinations, when some classes turned to discussions of the strike and the real political questions on students' minds, when unnecessary make-work was expunged from syllabi for lack of time, the nature of higher education became a little clearer to everyone. Even the immediate by-products of a militant struggle can be exhilarating.

But this strategy of relating to students at large was not generally followed. The Committee of Ten, the leadership of the black and Puerto Rican students, accepted the broadened admissions demand but did not discuss it with their own followers. Little attempt was made at any time to proselytize among whites. A week before the seizure of South Campus, a few leaflets appeared saying "strike!" and not much else. None of the white radicals and few of the black students knew of the takeover before it happened. At one point the leadership decided not to attempt any leafletting among white students, on the grounds that everybody knew what the demands were and the whites weren't likely to support them anyway.

This pessimistic view of the white students was shared by the white radicals, most of whom looked to the blacks for leadership on all questions. They

recognized that racism is institutionalized in American society and were eager to fight against it, but were confused about how to deal with white students' acceptance of these institutions. Failures held by the white radicals often turned into racist-baiting attacks on the audience, which included many honestly confused students. The slogan "fight racism" often in practice turned into a policy of fighting students.

If masses of whites are to be won over, the struggle must be seen as a joint one for common needs, as well as support for the demands of the most oppressed.

On the campus today it is too often assumed that black students are the only ones with legitimate grievances. This attitude among radicals conveniently plays into the hands of the power structure. The campus tends to polarize along racial lines.

The "white skin-privilege" theorists go so far as to argue that white students and workers should fight only for the demands of the most oppressed. On the contrary: Our strategy should be to fight to make higher education a right for all, and thus a privilege for none.

Radical faculty, and those liberal faculty members who supported the student demands, also left all initiative to the black and Puerto Rican leadership. During one of the interminable faculty meetings called to lament the campus crisis, nonseated staff members were deprived of the right to vote, and over a hundred walked out in anger. At their own meeting there was some talk of organizing a fight, but the predominant feeling was that nothing should be done to disturb the



negotiations then in progress between students and the Administration. The faculty militants acted not to build a movement of faculty and students, but only to pressure the authorities on behalf of the black and Puerto Rican negotiators.

The prevailing pessimism about the potential of white students led to a strategy of treating those students as pawns. The goal was to shut the college down by any means possible. The seizure of South Campus "worked," for two weeks anyway, but for most students it constituted a lock-out rather than a strike.

Forced to remain at home where they could not be won over to the strike, they and their parents, friends and communities were open to reactionary politicians. The Committee of Ten did succeed in getting to negotiate with college President Gallagher, but their lack of mass support allowed the reactionary forces to act. The college was reopened, and Gallagher was shunted aside by the Board of Higher Education and repudiated for his too-easy acquiescence.

The Committee of Ten failed to understand that a student strike is primarily a political strike, whose strength derives from the mobilization, organization and education of masses of people, rather than the shutting down of production and profit. By closing City College in a manner hostile to the vast majority of students, the seizure of South Campus fed into the political strength of the reaction, and cast aside any possibility of a coalition based on mass student discontent.

## GUERRILLAISM

The strategic mistakes of the City College struggle were not corrected after the seizure of the South Campus was ended. The reopened campus was the scene of hit-and-run demonstrations, false fire alarms and small fires, one large fire that destroyed an auditorium, and fights among students. There were instances of blacks attacking whites and whites attacking blacks, with provocations on both sides. The terrorism had unfortunate consequences: The strike campaign was depoliticized, as debate turned from the program to the tactics.

White students were forced into a posture of self-defense, those friendly to the demands were unable to find vehicles for supporting the struggle. Most black and Puerto Rican students either stayed home or were reduced to a passive spectator status. Students who had been kept away from the scene for two weeks, many of whom had no idea what the crisis was all about, found themselves thrust into the midst of the battle.

The Board of Higher Education, by reopening CCNY, thus used white students as its unwilling shock troops for the "hard line". Masses of police were stationed on the campus, guarding buildings and demanding student I.D. cards for entry. One rally organized by white radicals and attended by over a thousand students was broken up by fighting and police intervention after a half-dozen blacks threw eggs at the audience from behind the speaker's platform. Another rally was interrupted by firecrackers thrown into the crowd.

The terror tactics lent themselves to acts of provocation and provided an excuse for political and police repression of the movement. Radicals who attempted to uncritically defend these methods were discredited among their potential base, and reduced to such confusion that they wouldn't even condemn arson as a police provocation, lest it turn out to have been a "revolutionary act."

Meanwhile a strike of sorts was still in progress. Many black and some white students stayed away from classes, and a few faculty members refused to teach. Picket lines were rare and small. -- at no point was there organized picketing by black and Puerto Rican students. The absence of a mass, visible presence of blacks and Puerto Ricans made the strike virtually invisible, and left many sympathetic white students in doubt of the existence of a movement in which they

could become involved. All attention instead was focused on the negotiations, the Committee of Ten and the Administration.

Organization was nil and demoralization high: Striking students were provided with no information, faculty strikers assumed their colleagues had resumed teaching, and nothing was done to forestall penalties against the strikers. Some "striking" teachers held classes off campus and continued to assign papers; black and Puerto Rican students, many of whom were in the remedial SEEK program, set up classes in a Harlem school building with the SEEK faculty. Since the main enemy seemed to be the campus buildings and white students, the nature of the strike was left unclear to all involved.

## DIVIDE AND RULE

The power structure played upon the divisions between black and white students. Administration and Establishment figures gave the proportional admissions demand token support. Faculty Councils at several of the city colleges and the Board of Higher Education came out in favor of some kind of "open admissions" (together with tracking systems, requirements for academic high school diplomas that few black or Puerto Rican students get, and tuition charges for anyone above the "poverty line").

The general Establishment position was that the black demands were reasonable, non-revolutionary, and designed only to win entry into the mainstream of American life. White radicals on the other hand, were seen as "mad dogs and criminals" (J. Copeland, Gallagher's replacement as President of CCNY) and "left fascists" seeking only to exploit the blacks' legitimate demands (New York Times). Adam Clayton Powell and other black politicians were quick to accept this interpretation of the situation.

The thrust of this Establishment line is two-fold: it suppresses that fact that the rebellious students want not only a foot in the American mainstream but also a hand in directing its flow; and it suggests, not subtly, that entry into the mainstream could be arranged if the rebels would only divest themselves of their militant and intransigent white cohorts.

In addition, it reminds white students that they already have their share of the American pie -- and implies they had better (1) move over and give just a bit to the blacks, and (2) stay away from those nasty radicals. At the same time, it reinforces the self-defeating assertions of the "white skin-privilege" theorists on the left.

The black and Puerto Rican activists, refusing to take seriously the possibility of building mass support for the strike among white students, implicitly looked instead to the Harlem ghetto to come to the aid of their struggle. But the ghetto did not respond when police power was finally used to open and pacify CCNY.

In the first place, City College is not an institution that normally connects with the daily life of the people of Harlem, even in the immediate neighborhood. The black and Puerto Rican students at CCNY were unable to involve any significant portion of the Harlem community in their activities on campus.

Secondly, Harlem has few organizations that can be expected to join in radical activity: church groups, Coated War on Poverty organizations, Democratic Party clubs, and all-talk-no-action black nationalist groups are about all there is. Moreover, black people have learned from the ghetto uprisings of the past few years that spontaneous, unorganized clashes with the police produce broken heads, burned out neighborhoods, and very few material concessions.

A peculiarly elitist conception about the ghetto masses was voiced by all sides during the occupation of South campus. Black and Puerto Rican leaders, white radicals, faculty conservatives and liberals, and the Administration alike shared the view that the people of Harlem would react like Pavlovian dogs in response to the stimulus of police, at CCNY. Of course, it is

understandable that administrators, conservatives, and Establishment liberals would look upon ghetto residents as a "mindless mass".

But black militants and white radicals have a responsibility to understand better the specific consciousness and degree of organization of the people to whom they would appeal for support. In this case, they simply assumed, mistakenly as it turned out, that the ferment in the high schools and the struggle for community control of the public schools could easily be redirected toward City College.

To a certain extent, the black and Puerto Rican leadership counted on intimidating the Administration of a predominantly white college in the midst of a black ghetto. They failed to realize that the Powers which control the college are sufficiently far removed from the campus, and sufficiently callous toward the fate of the white students at City College, to be immune to such a threat.

The members of the Independent Socialist Club on the CCNY campus were concerned almost from the beginning about the weaknesses of the strike movement. Recognizing that little political work had been done among the white student body, that the image of the Administration as "all honorable men" remained intact, and that many of the black and Puerto Rican students were far from happy about the tactics being employed, we were convinced that only by stressing the demand for open admissions for all would the strike be able to win support from more than the committed radicals and those swayed by liberal guilt.

The locking down of the South Campus -- a tactic with which not many white students could identify -- and the closing of the whole school -- leaving the campus empty -- were reflections of the fact that at no time did the Committee of Ten choose tactics designed to win mass support from the white students. One of the results was confusion and splits among the white radicals, caught between the desire to support the tactics of the Committee of Ten and the requirements of relating to non-radical whites.

The possibility that a viable strategy might be articulated was foreclosed fairly early when the white radicals decided against voicing public criticism of terrorism and other tactics supported by the Committee of Ten; internally, among the radicals, criticism of the tactics was met with anger and not permitted expression at the rallies. For this reason, they were unable to counter hostility to the five demands. For many students, legitimate criticisms of tactics apparently directed against white students unfortunately became the basis for opposition to the demands.

## COALITIONS

The fact that black-white campus struggles across the country have mostly been defeated, or in some cases coopted, can in part be traced to the unhealthy relationship between black campus militants and their white radical allies. The dominant tendency is for blacks to insist on -- and whites to accept -- an uncritical, rather servile, support relationship. In practice, this makes it difficult or impossible for white radicals to win over significant numbers of students and build a movement. Furthermore, there is always the temptation for blacks to accept immediate concessions at the price of repudiating the white radicals and radicalism in general.

ISCRs at City College, almost alone among the radicals, refused to accept such a relationship. We strongly supported the black and Puerto Rican demands; at the same time, we expressed our doubts within the movement about the character and conduct of the strike, and we publicly opposed the terrorism and anti-student tactics which followed the withdrawal from South Campus. Unless the white movement generally adopts such an approach, we will be unable to win the support of our potential base among white students, or to establish a meaningful coalition, involving mutual respect, with the black militants.

# Racism and Library Science

Sanford Berman

HT1500-HT1600

see also

Z665-Z997

After three weeks of using the LC subject heading list at the University of Zambia Library, what I long suspected has now been distinguishably confirmed: western chauvinism permeates the scheme (and Sears, too). Presuming that American libraries, democratic and equalitarian in spirit, do not wish their card catalogues to enshrine and perpetuate a racist/colonial bias, I propose that:

- 1) The new Round Table on the Social Responsibilities of Libraries undertakes a comprehensive study of the extent to which our major cataloging and classification schemes are white, imperialist, and Christian-oriented, with concrete suggestions for improvement.
- 2) Some immediate corrections be made by libraries sensitive to the history and achievements--indeed, the integrity--of both the "Third World" and our own ethnic minorities, e.g.,
  - a) "Native Races" as a subdivision could be replaced simply by "Peoples." "Races" is clearly an anach-

ronism, no longer sound anthropologically, while "Native" is the sort of word employed by an outsider, a European or American, not an African or Asian. Much the same objection may be lodged against "Native Clergy," "Native Labor," and "Native Races"--all primary headings. Possible substitutes: "Local Clergy," "Colonies--Labor and Laboring Classes," "Colonized Peoples."

b) "Race Question," as a subdivision (e.g., under "United States" and "Africa, South") smacks of white supremacy (it is surely no mere "question," no leisurely abstraction, to American and South African blacks). "Race Relations" would be more neutral and objective.

c) The heading "Negroes in Africa" (together with its permutations, e.g., "Negroes in Africa, West") is utterly absurd (just as "Orientals in Asia" or "Caucasian Race in Europe" would be). It should be stricken from subject lists. And the same might be done with "Negroes in South Africa," which wrongfully suggests they are a minority in their own country.

Also, the accuracy and worth of that long-standing subdivision, "Discovery and Exploration," need to be reexamined. "Africa--Discovery and Exploration" and "North America--Discovery and Exploration," for example, are colossal pieces of ethnocentrism.

Cortez no more discovered Mexico for the Aztecs than Livingstone did

Victoria Falls for the Leya tribe, who much earlier had named it "Nsyungu Namutitima." If not scrapped altogether, the sub-head should, at the very least, be employed only with a further qualification indicating who did the discovering and exploring (e.g., French, European, American, English). Unqualified, "Discovery and Exploration" represents an insult to the many peoples and lands which, so it appears in our library catalogues, didn't really exist until white men happened to notice them.

And a corollary matter: how quaint and self-righteous that the United States does not now (and never did) have "colonies" (not a nice word), but only "territories and possessions"! In other words, Cubans, Guamanians, Filipinos, Okinawans, Puerto Ricans, Midway and Virgin Islanders, Hawaiians, Samoans, and Indians, unlike their less fortunate brothers and sisters in Africa, Asia, and South America, were spared a "colonial" experience.

What then, was (or is) it? Can't we bear to call a thing by its right name? Certainly, no disinterested scheme for the arrangement of books and knowledge ought to employ such a transparent double standard and self-serving euphemisms.

Sanford Berman, Assistant Librarian, University of Zambia, Lusaka.

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# May Days in Madison

-Al Greene-

On Saturday, May 2, residents of the Mifflin Street-Bassett Street area of Madison, Wisconsin (predominantly students and "hippies") attempted to hold a block party in the 500 block of Mifflin Street.

Block parties are a fairly common occurrence here, and one had been held only a short time before on another street, Gilman, where police blocked off the area after it became clear that too many people were present to prevent them from spilling into the streets. The Mifflin Street residents had publicized their party well in advance, and tried unsuccessfully to obtain a permit for May 2. Despite its denial, they went ahead with the party.

Early in the afternoon's festivities, it became clear that the police were NOT going to block off the street. Within a short time after the party started, police came into the area, telling people to disperse, and indiscriminately arresting those who didn't move fast enough. One of those arrested was an alderman, Paul Soglin, elected from the ward on an independent left-wing platform.

Despite orders to disperse, growing crowds of angry people continued to mill about in the area until the police started hurling tear gas bombs. People anywhere near the police were in danger of being clubbed and arrested or pushed around. Residents in the area later testified that police illegally entered houses, sometimes beating residents or arresting them, sometimes ransacking the place for no apparent reason. Tear gas and "pepper" gas bombs were tossed onto porches, leaving the houses generally unlivable for days afterward.

## STREET FIGHTING

In response to the police attack, street-fighting broke out; rocks were hurled at the cops, and some cops returned them. Police cars passing through the area were bombarded with a hail of rocks, bottles, bricks and anything else people could lay their hands on.

After awhile, things seemed to quiet down and the police left. At that point, several people hastily constructed barricades at either end of Bassett Street, and directed traffic away from the area. Police returned in short order, charged through the barricades at 40 mph in their cars and met a new barrage of missiles.

People arrested on Saturday were usually charged with "disorderly conduct" (30 days or \$100). When people returned to the area the next afternoon (Sunday), it was clear that the situation had grown "out of hand". Charges were upped for those arrested on Sunday and after to "unlawful assembly" (1 year or \$5,000 or both).

On Sunday, people once again gathered to try to hold a block party on Mifflin Street. The police came in, told them they had one minute to disperse, and then charged, again indiscriminately gassing, beating and arresting everyone in reach. The city had by now called in the Dane County riot squad, the vicious cops who had mercilessly smashed an unarmed anti-Dow sit-in in October of 1967 (cf. I.S. #3, p.12). Police went up to residences and tore down signs reading "Support Your Local Pigs" or red flags hung there by students.

That night, a picket line of almost 1,000 people in front of the City Jail (declared an unlawful assembly by the Mayor) broke up and headed back to Mifflin Street.

## WAR ON STATE STREET

From then on, sporadic hit-and-run warfare continued into the early hours of Monday morning. Students carried the war into the main part of town, State Street, stoning plate-glass windows of stores well-known for charging high prices, burning bonfires in the street and when possible continuing their attacks on cop cars.

By the night's end, all of State Street was blanketed by tear gas, including many apartments and small businesses in the area. Students walking home were often stopped, kicked or beaten by County police, and told to "get out of here," even when it was clear that the students were attempting to do just that.

Alderman Soglin was arrested for a second time on Sunday, along with a black alderman, Eugene Parks, who was taken to jail after he protested the police beating of a black student. The bail for those arrested on Sunday was upped from the usual \$107 each to \$507.

A rally called on Monday afternoon by SDS on the campus library mall ended when about half of the 1,000 people there went up to visit the courthouse where people arrested over the weekend were being arraigned. A highlight of that rally was the announcement that Madison firemen had bailed out Alderman Soglin.

Earlier in the year, the firemen had gone on strike against the city administration over the issue of parity with the police. The City Council had repeatedly refused to provide firemen with wages equal to those of the police. At that time, the police, led by the reactionary Roth Watson, campaigned against the

firemen. But Soglin, and a number of students in an ad hoc group organized by the Student Labor Committee, gave public support to the firefighters' strike.

Now, not only did the firemen bail out Soglin, but later on Monday evening when street-fighting resumed, firemen denied the police use of firetrucks to meet in preparation for escalated police aggression on the Mifflin-Bassett Street area residents; they also refused to allow police to use firemen's riot equipment against students.

Firemen have generally blamed police, not students, for their having to put out brushfires and bonfires started by students during the melee. Daily local "fire department reports" appearing in the newspapers have included entries like the following: "Girl brought to hospital at 1:30 a.m. Hit over head by police nightstick."

On Monday night, Madison's Mayor William Dyke came into the local neighborhood to "answer questions," but left after it became clear that residents of the area would not settle for a white-wash. Many residents asked for an investigation by a body other than the pro-cop Police and Fire Commission -- known since for its attacks on the firemen for bailing out Soglin. Other residents called for rent control, enforcement of present housing regulations to make student housing in the area livable, and immediate amnesty for all those arrested in the melee.

When the mayor left, after warning people they had



"30 minutes of grace" before the pigs would be called, barricades went up again, the police came back, and the war resumed.

On Tuesday evening, the struggle reached a critical juncture. Alderman Soglin -- unable to sustain his earlier militant stance -- told people to get out of the streets since social change, from his point of view, doesn't just come from people in the streets, but from "other areas" and "other directions." Mayor Dyke called off the police attacks and brought 30 "concerned citizens" wearing white armbands into the neighborhood.

The fact that the police did not come back and that the people held the streets for an evening was in itself a small concession from the city. But the essential purpose of the "concerned citizens" was to dampen and divide up the struggle, and they succeeded in fractionalizing the demonstrators into small groups that stood around into the early hours of Wednesday morning discussing the issues.

On Wednesday night, a community meeting of Mifflin Street residents was held. It was decided there to continue the struggle by organizing around the following demands: (1) complete amnesty for arrestees; (2) that a ROTC march planned for the coming Saturday not be permitted to pass through the area; (3) no city harassment of firemen for bailing out aldermen and for telling the truth in the newspaper about what happened; (4) a street dance on Saturday, (5) the setting up of permanent block committees in the neighborhood; and (6) reparations from the city for hospital expenses and property damage.

Unfortunately, the dynamic of the struggle had already substantially waned by the Wednesday night community meeting.

The next Saturday, May 9, no real action was taken to hold a dance. The local fire captain urged students to attend a big party at his house, to be held that afternoon and evening. The students did so and the proposed block party was abandoned. Since then, little or nothing has happened. People who were arrested have not received amnesty, and must fight their arrests in the courts.

## PRECEDENT

Despite the inconclusive resolution of the conflict, an important precedent was set. The May Days in Madison introduced, in a preliminary way, an element that will be decisive for future struggles: the working class.

The support given the students by the firemen -- in exchange for the earlier student support of the firemen's strike, and in open defiance of the police -- constituted another real if tentative and groping example of the kind of coalition between students and workers that must be built if some way out of the present impasse in American politics is to be found.

The week's developments demonstrated that street fighting by itself, although an important tactic in radical struggles, is not enough to build and sustain a base that can effectively challenge state power. Reliance upon guerrilla warfare (street fighting by individuals instead of groups) would only precipitate an incipient rupture between townspersons and students (already, some middle-class "townies", local high school kids, have beaten up long-haired students).

But if demands are posed which link up the student struggles with the problems of townspersons -- demands revolving around "regressive taxation," "depletion" allowances for insurance companies and businesses, unfair assessment of lower-income properties versus that of corporations, the "exclusiveness" of the university regarding black and white working-class people and the poor, the escalating governmental attacks on the trade union movement -- the possibility is opened up of students breaking out of their present isolation toward a mass movement for social change which can pose a real challenge to the institutions of capitalist society.

The neighborhood struggle in Madison, for example, might have raised a demand for rent control, under democratically-controlled block organizations and a city-wide organization of delegates from the blocks -- with the right of tenants to form tenant organizations and to strike over high rents. Or it might have proposed the immediate funding of low-income housing on the East (lower-middle and working-class side, on the South (black) side, and in student areas of the West side, to be financed by taxing unassessed properties of insurance companies, profits from university Regents' investments, etc.

## COALITIONS

The open, pitched battles between demonstrators and police in places like Madison and Berkeley testify to the thorough-going alienation of large numbers of students and "non-students" from the status quo. At the same time, the embryonic coalitions between students and workers in Madison, Richmond, Buffalo, Sterling Heights, Mahwah and elsewhere point toward the direction of development which the movement must follow in the future.

The new revolutionary movement beginning to take shape among American students must take on the job of making itself relevant to the mass of the American people.

# Party and Class

- Chris Harman -

Few questions have produced more bitterness in Marxist circles than that of the relation between the party and the class. More heat has probably been generated in acrimonious disputes over this subject than any other.

In generation after generation the same epithets are thrown about - "bureaucrat", "substitutionist", "elitist", "autocrat". Yet the principles underlying such debate have usually been confused. This despite the importance of the issues involved.

For instance, the split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks that occurred over the nature of the organisation of the party in 1903 found many of those who were to be on the opposite side of the barricades to Lenin in 1917 in his faction (for instance, Plekhanov), while against him were revolutionaries of the stature of Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg.

Nor was this confusion an isolated incident. It has been a continuous feature of revolutionary discussion.

## THREE CONCEPTS

It is worth recalling Trotsky's remarks, at the second Congress of the Comintern, in reply to Paul Levi's contention that the mass of workers of Europe need a party. Trotsky points out that the situation is much more complex:

"If the question is posed in the abstract then I see Scheidemann on the one side and, on the other, American or French or Spanish syndicates who not only wish to fight against the bourgeoisie, but who, unlike Scheidemann, really want to tear its head off - for this reason I say that I prefer to discuss with these Spanish, American or French comrades in order to prove to them that the party is indispensable for the fulfilment of the historical mission which is placed upon them.

"I will try to prove this to them in a comradely way, on the basis of my own experience, and not by counterposing to them Scheidemann's long years of experience saying that for the majority the question has already been settled...

"What is there in common between me and a Renaudel who excellently understands the need of the party, or an Albert Thomas and other gentlemen whom I do not even want to call 'comrades' so as not to violate the rules of decency?"

The difficulty to which Trotsky refers - that both Social Democrats and Bolsheviks refer to the 'need for a party', although what they mean by this are quite distinct things - has been aggravated in the years since by the rise of Stalinism. The vocabulary of Bolshevism was taken over and used for purposes quite opposed to those who formulated it.

Yet too often those who have continued in the revolutionary tradition opposed to both Stalinism and Social Democracy have not taken Trotsky's points in 1920 seriously. They have often relied on 'experience' to prove the need for a party, although the experience is that of Stalinism and Social Democracy.

Most of the discussion even in revolutionary circles is, as a consequence, discussion for or against basically Stalinist or Social Democratic conceptions of organisation.

The sort of organisational views developed implicitly in the writings and actions of Lenin are radically different from both these conceptions. This has been obscured by the Stalinist debasement of the theory and practice of the October revolution and by the fact that the development of the Bolshevik Party took place under conditions of illegality and was often argued for in the language of orthodox Social Democracy.

## SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The classical theories of Social Democracy - which were not fundamentally challenged by any of the Marxists before 1914 - of necessity gave the party a central role in the development towards socialism. For this development was seen essentially as being through a continuous and smooth growth of working-class organisation and consciousness under capitalism.

Even those Marxists, such as Kautsky, who rejected the idea that there could be a gradual transition to socialism accepted that what was needed for the present was continually to extend organisational strength and electoral following. The growth of the party was essential to ensure that when the transition to socialism inevitably came, whether through elections or through defensive violence by the working class, the party capable of taking over and forming the basis of the new state (or the old one refurbished) would exist.

The development of a mass working-class party was seen as being an inevitable corollary of the tendencies of capitalist development. "Forever greater grows the number of proletarians", wrote Kautsky, "more gigantic the army of superfluous labourers, and sharper the opposition between exploiters and exploited", crises "naturally occur on an increasing scale", "the majority of people sink ever deeper into want and misery", "the intervals of prosperity become ever shorter; the length of the crises ever longer". This drives greater numbers of workers "into instinctive opposition to the existing order."

Social Democracy, basing itself upon "independent scientific investigation by bourgeois thinkers" exists to raise the workers to the level where they have a "clear insight into social laws." Such a movement "springing out of class antagonisms...cannot meet with anything more than temporary defeats, and must ultimately win". "Revolutions are not made at will... They come with inevitable necessity."

The central mechanism involved in this development is that of parliamentary elections (although even Kautsky played with the idea of the General Strike in the period immediately after 1905-6). "We have no reason to believe that armed insurrection...will play a central role nowadays." Rather, "it (parliament) is the most powerful lever that can be used to raise the proletariat out of its economic, social and moral degradation."

The uses of this by the working class makes "parliamentarianism begin to change its character. It ceases to be a mere tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie." In the long run such activities must lead to the organisation of the working class and to a situation where the socialist party has the majority and will form the government. "... (The Labour Party) must have for its purpose the conquest of the government in the interests of the class it represents. Economic development will lead naturally to the accomplishment of this purpose."

Not only did this perspective lay the basis for most socialist action throughout western Europe in the forty years prior to the First World War, it also went virtually unchallenged theoretically, at least from the Left.

Lenin's astonishment at the SPD's support for the war is well known. Not so often understood, however, is the fact that even Left critics of Kautsky, such as Rosa Luxemburg, had not rejected the foundations of the theory of the relation of the party to the class and of the development of class consciousness implied. Their criticisms of Kautskism tended to remain within the overall theoretical ground provided by Kautskism.

What is central for the Social Democrat is that the party represents the class. Outside of the party the worker has no consciousness. Indeed, Kautsky himself seemed to have an almost pathological fear of what the workers would do without the party and of the associated dangers of a "premature" revolution.

Thus, it had to be the party that takes power. Other forms of working-class organisation and activity can

help, but must be subordinated to the bearer of political consciousness: "This 'direct action' of the unions can operate effectively only as an auxiliary and reinforcement to and not as a substitute for parliamentary action."

No sense can be made of any of the discussions that took place in relation to questions of organisation of the party prior to 1917 without understanding that this Social-Democratic view of the relation of party and class was nowhere explicitly challenged (except among the anarchists who rejected any notion of a party). Its assumptions were shared even by those, such as Rosa Luxemburg, who opposed orthodox Social Democracy from the point of view of mass working-class self-activity.

Thus Trotsky, who had been President of the Petrograd Soviet in 1905, does not mention them in his analysis of the lessons of 1905, RESULTS AND PROSPECTS. Virtually alone in foreseeing the socialist content of the Russian revolution, Trotsky did not begin to see the form this would take.

"Revolution", he wrote, "is first and foremost a question of power - not of the state form (constituent assembly, republic, united states) but of the social content of the government."

There was a similar omission in Rosa Luxemburg's response to 1905, THE MASS STRIKE, and not until the February revolution did the Soviet become central in Lenin's writings and thoughts.

The revolutionary Left never fully accepted Kautsky's position of seeing the party as the direct forerunner of the workers' state. Luxemburg's writings, for instance, recognise the conservatism of the party and the need for the masses to go beyond and outside it from a very early stage. But there is never an explicit rejection of the official Social-Democratic position.

Yet without the theoretical clarification of the relationship between the party and the class there could be no possibility of clarity over the question of the necessary internal organisation of the party. Without a rejection of the Social-Democratic model, there could not be the beginnings of a real discussion about revolutionary organisation.

This is most clearly the case with Rosa Luxemburg. It would be wrong to fall into the trap (carefully laid by both Stalinist critics and would-be followers of Luxemburg) of ascribing to her a theory of 'spontaneity' that ignores the need for a party. Throughout her writings there is stress upon the need for a party and the positive role it must play:

"In Russia, however, the Social-Democratic Party must make up by its own efforts an entire historical period. It must lead the Russian proletarians from their present 'atomised' condition, which prolongs the autocratic regime, to a class organisation that would help them to become aware of their histori-



cal objectives and prepare them to struggle to achieve those objectives."

"...The task of Social Democracy does not consist in the technical preparation and direction of mass strikes, but first and foremost in the political leadership of the whole movement."

"The Social Democrats are the most enlightened, the most class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat. They cannot and do not wait, in a fatalistic fashion with folded arms for the advent of the 'revolutionary situation'."

Yet there is a continual equivocation in Luxemburg's writings on the role of the party. She was concerned that the leading role of the party should not be too great - for she identified this as "the prudent position of Social Democracy". She identified "centralism", which she saw as anyway necessary ("the Social Democracy is, as a rule, hostile to any manifestation of localism or federalism") with the "conservatism inherent in such an organ (i.e. the Central Committee)."

Such equivocation cannot be understood without taking account of the concrete situation Luxemburg was really concerned about. She was a leading member of the SPD, but always uneasy about its mode of operation. When she really wanted to illustrate the dangers of centralism it was to this that she referred:

"The present tactical policy of the German Social Democracy has won universal esteem because it is simple as well as firm. This is a sign of the fine adaptation of our party to the conditions of a parliamentary regime. However, the very perfection of this adaptation is already closing vaster horizons to our party."

Brilliantly prophetic as this is of what was to happen in 1914, she does not begin to explain the origins of the increasing sclerosis and ritualism of SPD, let alone indicate ways of fighting this. Conscious individual and groups cannot resist this trend. For "such inertia is due, to a large degree, to the fact that it is inconceivable to define, within the vacuum of abstract hypotheses, the lines of non-existent political situations." Bureaucratisation of the party is seen as an inevitable phenomenon that only a limitation on the degree of cohesion and efficiency of the party can overcome.

For Luxemburg, it is not a particular form of organisation and conscious direction as such that limit the possibilities for the "self-conscious movement of the majority in the interests of the majority."

"The unconscious comes before the conscious. The logic of history cannot be defined in the subjective logic of the human beings who participate in the historic process. The tendency is for the directing organs of the socialist party to play a conservative role."

There is a correct and important element in this argument: the tendency for certain sorts of organisations to be unable (or unwilling) to respond to a rapidly changing situation.

One only has to think of the Maximalist wing of the Italian Socialist Party in 1919, the whole of the "centre" of the Second International in 1914, the Menshevik-Internationalists in 1917, or the KPD in 1923. Even the Bolshevik Party contained a very strong tendency to exhibit such conservatism.

But Luxemburg, having made the diagnosis, makes no attempt to locate its source, except in epistemological generalities, or to look for organisational remedies. There is a strong fatalism in her hope that the "unconscious" will be able to correct the "conscious".

Despite her superb sensitivity to the peculiar tempo of development of the mass movement—particularly in the Mass Strike—she shies away from trying to work out a clear conception of the sort of political organisation that can harness such spontaneous developments.

Paradoxically, this most trenchant critic of bureaucratic ritualism and parliamentary cretinism argued in the 1903 debate for precisely that faction of the Russian party that was to be the most perfected historical embodiment of these failings: the Mensheviks. In Germany political opposition to Kautskysm, which already was developing at the turn of the century and was fully formed by 1910, did not take on concrete organisational forms for another five years.

## TROTSKY ON BUREAUCRATISM

Considerable parallels exist between Luxemburg's position and that which Trotsky adheres to up to 1917. He too is very aware of the danger of bureaucratic ritualism:

"The work of agitation and organisation among the ranks of the proletariat has an internal inertia. The European Socialist Parties, particularly the largest of them, the German Social-Democratic Party, have developed an inertia in proportion as the great masses have become organised and disciplined. As a consequence of this, Social Democracy as an organisation embodying the political experience of the proletariat may at a certain moment become a direct obstacle to open conflict between the workers and bourgeois reaction."

Again, his revolutionary spirit leads him to distrust all centralised organisation. Lenin's conception of the party can, according to Trotsky in 1904, only lead to the situation in which:

"...The organization of the Party substitutes itself for the party as a whole; then the Central Committee substitutes itself for the organization, and finally the 'dictator' substitutes himself for the Central Committee."

For Trotsky the real problems of working-class power can only be solved, "by way of systematic trends which will inevitably emerge as soon as the proletarian dictatorship poses tens and hundreds of new... problems. No strong "domineering" organisation will be able to suppress these trends and controversies."

Yet Trotsky's fear of organisational rigidity leads him also to support that tendency in the inner-party struggle in Russia which was historically to prove itself most frightened by the spontaneity of mass action. Although he was to become increasingly alienated from the Mensheviks politically, he did not begin to build up an organisation in opposition to them until very late. Whether he was correct or not in his criticisms of Lenin in 1904 (and we believe he was wrong), he was only able to become an effective historical actor in 1917 by joining Lenin's party. If organisation does produce bureaucracy and in-

ertia, Luxemburg and the young Trotsky were undoubtedly right about the need to limit the aspirations towards centralism and cohesion among revolutionaries. But it is important to understand all the consequences of this position.

The most important is a historical fatalism. Individuals can struggle among the working class for their ideas, and these ideas can be important in giving workers the necessary consciousness and confidence to fight for their own liberation. But revolutionaries can never build the organisation capable of giving them effectiveness and cohesion in action comparable to that of those who implicitly accept present ideologies. For to do so is inevitably to limit the self-activity of the masses, the "unconscious" that precedes the "conscious".

The result must be to wait for "spontaneous" developments among the masses. In the meantime, one might as well put up with the organisations that exist at present, even if one disagrees with them politically, as being the best possible, as being the maximum present expression of the spontaneous development of the masses.

In the writings of Lenin there is an ever-present implicit recognition of the problems that worry Luxemburg and Trotsky so much. But there is not the same fatalistic succumbing to them. There is an increasing recognition that it is not organisation as such, but particular forms and aspects of organisation that give rise to bureaucratization.

Not until the First World War and then the events in 1917 gave an acute expression to the faults of old forms of organisation did Lenin begin to pay explicit attention to the radically new conceptions he himself was developing. Even these were not fully developed.

The destruction of the Russian working class, the collapse of any meaningful Soviet system (i.e. one based upon real workers' councils), and the rise of Stalinism, smothered the renovation of socialist theory. The bureaucracy that arose with the declination and demoralisation of the working class took over

workers for socialism; a union of them with the Socialist Party bursts forth with a spontaneous force in the very early stages of the movement."

Even in the worst months after the outbreak of war in 1914 he could write: "The objective war-created situation... is inevitably engendering revolutionary sentiments; it is tempering and enlightening all the finest and most class-conscious proletarians. A sudden change in the mood of the masses is not only possible, but is becoming more and more probable..."

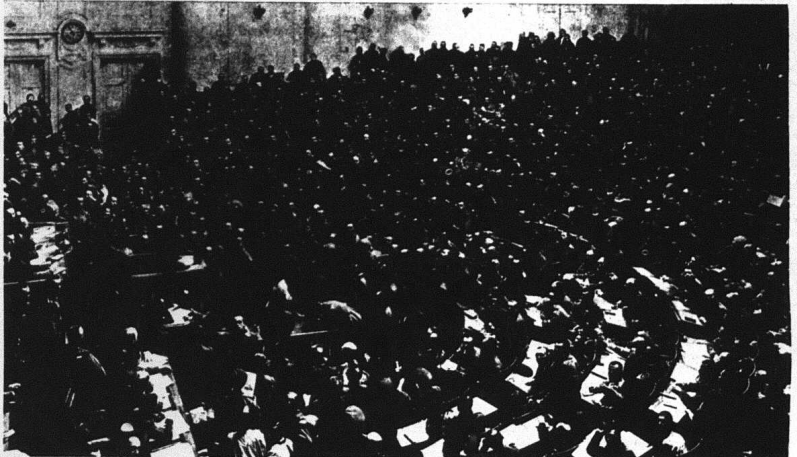
In 1917 this faith in the masses leads him in April and in August-September into conflict with his "own party": "Lenin said more than once that the masses are to the left of the party. He knew the party was to the left of its own upper layer of 'old Bolsheviks'."

In relation to the 'Democratic Conference' he can write: "We must draw the masses into the discussion of this question. Class-conscious workers must take the matter into their own hands, organise the discussion and exert pressure on 'those at the top'."

There is, however, a second fundamental element in Lenin's thought and practice: the stress on the role of theory and of the party as the bearer of theory. The most well known recognition of this occurs in "What is to be done, when Lenin writes that 'Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice.' But it is the theme that recurs at every stage in his activities, not only in 1903, but also in 1905 and 1917, at exactly the same time that he was cursing the failure of the party to respond to the radicalisation of the masses.

For him the party is something very different from the mass organisations of the whole class. It is always a vanguard organisation, membership in which requires a dedication not to be found in most workers. (Although this does not mean that Lenin ever wanted an organisation only of professional revolutionaries.)

This might seem a clear contradiction. As in 1903, Lenin uses arguments drawn from Kautsky which imply that only the party can imbue the class with a socialist consciousness, and later refers to the class



The Petrograd Soviet meeting in 1917.

the theoretical foundations of the revolution, to distort them into an ideology justifying its own interests and crimes.

Lenin's view of what the party is, and how it should function in relation to the class and its institutions, was no sooner defined as against older Social-Democratic conceptions with any clarity than it was again obscured by a new Stalinist ideology...

What is usually ignored by commentators on Lenin is the fact that throughout his writings there are two intertwined and complementary conceptions, which to the superficial observer seem contradictory.

Firstly, there is continual stress on the possibilities of sudden transformations of working-class consciousness, on the unexpected upsurge that characterises working-class self-activity, on deep-rooted instincts in the working class that lead it to begin to reject habits of deference and subservience.

He writes: "In the history of revolutions there come to light contradictions that have ripened for decades and centuries. Life becomes unusually eventful. The masses, which have always stood in the shade and therefore have often been despised by superficial observers, enter the political arena as active combatants..."

"These masses are making heroic efforts to rise to the occasion and cope with the gigantic tasks of world significance imposed upon them by history; and however great individual defeats may be, however shattering to us the rivers of blood... and thousands of victims, nothing will ever compare in importance with this direct training that the masses and the classes receive in the course of the revolutionary struggle itself."

"... We are able to appreciate the importance of the slow, steady and often imperceptible work of political education which Social Democrats have always conducted and always will conduct. But we must not allow what in the present circumstances would be still more dangerous—a lack of faith in the powers of the people. We must remember what a tremendous educational and organisational power the revolution has when mighty historical events force the man in the street out of his remote garret or basement corner, and make a citizen of him. Months of revolution sometimes educate citizens more quickly and fully than decades of political stagnation."

"The working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social Democratic. The special condition of the proletariat in capitalist society leads to a striving of

being more 'to the left' than the party. In fact, however, to see a contradiction here is to fail to understand the fundamentals of Lenin's thinking on these issues.

For the real theoretical basis for his argument on the party is not that the working class is incapable on its own of coming to theoretical socialist consciousness. This he admits at the second congress of the RSDLP when he denies that 'Lenin takes no account whatever of the fact that the workers too have a share in the formation of an ideology, and adds that... The 'economists' have gone to the extreme. To straighten matters out somebody had to pull in the other direction—and that is what I have done.'

The real basis for his argument is that the level of consciousness in the working class is never uniform. However rapidly the mass of workers learn in a revolutionary situation, some sections will still be more advanced than others. To merely take delight in the spontaneous transformation is to accept uncritically whatever transitory products it throws up. But these reflect the backwardness of the class as well as its movement forward, its situation in bourgeois society as well as its potentiality of further development so as to make a revolution.

Workers are not automatons without ideas. If they are not won over to a socialist world-view by the intervention of conscious revolutionaries, they will continue to accept the bourgeois ideology of existing society. This is all the more likely because it is an ideology that flavours all aspects of life at present and is perpetuated by all media. Even were some workers 'spontaneously' to come to a fully fledged scientific standpoint they would still have to argue with others who had not.

"To forget the distinction between the vanguard and the whole of the masses gravitating towards it", Lenin says, "to forget the vanguard's constant duty of raising ever wider sections to its own advanced level, means simply to deceive oneself, to shut one's eyes to the immensity of our tasks, and to narrow down these tasks."

This argument is not one that can be restricted to a particular historical period. It is not one, as some people would like to argue, that applies to the backward Russian working class of 1902 but not to those in the advanced nations today. The absolute possibilities for the growth of working-class consciousness may be higher in the latter, but the very nature

of capitalist society continues to ensure a vast unevenness within the working class. To deny this is to confuse the revolutionary potential of the working class with its present situation.

As he writes against the Mensheviks (and Rosa Luxemburg) in 1905: Use fewer platitudes about the development of the independent activity of the workers—the workers display no end of independent revolutionary activity which you do not notice!—but see to it rather that you do not demoralise undeveloped workers by your own tallism.

There are two sorts of independent activity. There is the independent activity of a proletariat that possesses revolutionary initiative, and there is the independent activity of a proletariat that is undeveloped and held in leading strings... There are Social Democrats to this day who contemplate with reverence the second kind of activity, who believe they can evade a direct reply to pressing questions of the day by repeating the word "class" over and over again.

Within Lenin's conception those elements that he himself is careful to regard as historically limited and those of general application must be distinguished. The former concern the stress on closed conspiratorial organisations and the need for careful direction from the top down of party officials, etc.

Under conditions of political freedom our party will be built entirely on the elective principle. Under the autocracy this is impracticable for the collective thousands of workers that make up the party.

Of much more general application is the stress on the need to limit the party to those who are going to accept its discipline. It is important to note that for Lenin (as opposed to many of his would-be followers) this is not a blind acceptance of authoritarianism.

The revolutionary party exists so as to make it possible for the most conscious and militant workers and intellectuals to engage in scientific discussion as a prelude to concerted and cohesive action. This is not possible without general participation in party activities. This requires clarity and precision in argument combined with organisational decisiveness.

The alternative is the 'marsh'—where elements motivated by scientific precision are so mixed up with those who are irremediably confused as to prevent any decisive action, effectively allowing the most backward to lead. The discipline of those who have combined by a freely adopted decision. Unless the party has clear boundaries and unless it is coherent enough to implement decisions, discussion over its decisions, far from being 'free', is pointless.

Centralism for Lenin is far from being the opposite of development the initiative and independence of party members; it is the precondition of this.

It is worth noting how Lenin summed up the reasons for his battle for centralism over the previous two years in 1905. Talking of the role of the central organisation and of the central paper, he says that the result was to be the 'creation of a network of agents... that... would not have to sit round waiting for the call to insurrection, but would carry out such regular activity that would guarantee the highest probability of success in the event of an insurrection. Such activity would strengthen our connections with the broadest masses of the workers and with all strata that are disoriented with the aristocracy... Precisely such activity would train all local organisations to respond simultaneously to the same political questions, incidents, and events that agitate the whole of Russia and to react to these 'incidents' in the most rigorous, uniform and expeditious manner possible...'  
By being part of such an organisation worker and

intellectual alike are trained to assess their own concrete situation in accordance with the scientific socialist activity of thousands of others. 'Discipline' means acceptance of the need to relate individual experience to the total theory and practice of the party. As such it is not opposed to, but a necessary prerequisite of the ability to make independent evaluations of concrete situations.

That is also why 'discipline' for Lenin does not mean hiding differences that exist within the party, but rather exposing them to the full light of day so as to argue them out. Only in this way can the mass of members make scientific evaluations. The party organ must be open to the opinions of those it considers inconsistent.

It is necessary in our view to do the utmost—even if it involves certain departures from tidy patterns of centralism and from absolute obedience to discipline—to enable these grouplets to speak out and give the whole Party the opportunity to weigh the importance or unimportance of those differences and to determine where, how and on whose part inconsistency is shown.

In short, what matters is that there is political clarity and hardness in the party so as to ensure that all its members are brought into its debate and understand the relevance of their own activity. That is why it is absurd, as the Mensheviks tried to do, and as some people still do, to confuse the party with the class. The class as a whole is constantly engaged in unconscious opposition to capitalism; the party is that section of it that is already conscious and unites to try to give conscious direction to the struggle of the rest. Its discipline is not something imposed from the top downwards, but rather something that is voluntarily accepted by all those who participate in its decisions.

We can now see the difference between the party as Lenin conceived it and the Social-Democratic party simultaneously envisaged and feared by Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky. The latter was thought of as a party of the whole class. The coming to power of the class was to be the party taking power. All the tendencies within the class had to be represented within it. Any split within it was to be conceived of as a split within the class.

Centralisation, although recognised as necessary, was feared as a centralisation over and against the spontaneous activity of the class. Yet it was precisely in this sort of party that the 'autocratic' tendencies warned against by Luxemburg were to develop most. For within it the confusion of member and sympathiser, the massive apparatus needed to hold together a mass of only half politicised members in a series of social activities, led to a toning down of political debate, a lack of political seriousness, which in turn reduced the ability of the members to make independent political evaluations, increased the need for apparatus-induced involvement.

Without an organisational centralisation aimed at giving clarity and decisiveness to political differences, the independence of the rank-and-file members was bound to be permanently undermined. Ties of personal affection or of deference to established leaders become more important than scientific, political evaluation. In the marsh, where no-one takes a clear road, even if the wrong one, then there is no argument as to which is the right one.

Refusal to relate organisational ties to political evaluations, even if done under the noble intention of maintaining a 'mass party', necessarily led to organisational loyalties replacing political ones. This in turn entailed a failure to act independently given opposition from old colleagues (the clearest example of this tendency was undoubtedly Martov in 1917).

It is essential to understand that the Stalinist party

is not a variant of the Bolshevik party. Like the Social Democratic party, the Stalinist party was dominated by organisational structures. Adherence, which organisation rather than to the politics of the organisation mattered. Theory existed to justify an externally determined practice, not vice-versa. Organisational loyalties of the apparatus are responsible for political decisions (the former relate in turn to the needs of the Russian state apparatus).

It is worth noting that in Russia a real victory of the apparatus over the party required precisely the bringing into the party of hundreds of thousands of 'sympathisers', a dilution of the 'party' by the 'class'. At best politically unsure of themselves, the 'Lenin levy' could be relied upon to defer to the apparatus.

The Leninist party does not suffer from this tendency to bureaucratic control precisely because it restricts its membership to those willing to be serious and disciplined enough to take political and theoretical issues as their starting point, and to subordinate all their activities to these.

But does this not imply a very elitist conception of the party? In a sense, it does, although this is not the fault of the party, but of life itself, which gives rise to an uneven development of working-class consciousness. The party to be effective has to aim at recruiting all those it conceives of as being most 'advanced'. It cannot reduce its own level of science and consciousness merely in order not to be an 'elite.'

It cannot, for instance, accept that chauvinist workers are 'as good as' internationalist party members, so as to take account of the 'self-activity' of the class. But to be a 'vanguard' is not the same as to substitute one's own desires, or policies or interests, for those of the class.

Here it is important to remember that for Lenin the party is not the embryo of the workers' state—the Workers' Council is. The working class as a whole will be involved in the organisations that constitute its state, the most backward as well as the most progressive elements. 'Every cook will govern.' In Lenin's major work on the state, the party is hardly mentioned.

The function of the party is not to be the state, but rather to carry out continual agitation and propaganda among more backward elements of the class so as to raise their self-consciousness and self-reliance so to the point that they will both set up workers' councils and fight to overthrow the forms of organisation of the bourgeois state.

As Lenin saw it, the Soviet state is the highest concrete embodiment of the self-activity of the whole working class; the party is that section of the class that is most conscious of the world historical implications of this self-activity.

The functions of the workers' state and of the party should be quite different (which is why there can be more than one party in a workers' state). The former has to represent all the diverse interests of all the sections—geographical, industrial, etc.—of the workers. It has to recognise in its mode of organisation all the heterogeneity of the class.

The party, on the other hand, is built around those things that unite the class nationally and internationally. It constantly aims, by ideological persuasion, to overcome the heterogeneity of the class. It is concerned with national and international political principles, not parochial concerns of individual groups of workers. It can only persuade, not coerce them into accepting its lead.

An organisation that is concerned with participating in the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism by the working class cannot conceive of substituting itself for the organs of direct rule of that class. Such a perspective is only available to the Social-Democratic or Stalinist Party (and both have been too afraid of mass self-activity to attempt this substitution through revolutionary practice in advanced capitalist countries).

Existing under capitalism, the revolutionary organisation will of necessity have a quite different structure from that of the workers' state that will arise in the process of overthrowing capitalism. The revolutionary party will have to struggle within the institution of the workers' state for its principles as against those with opposed ones; this is only possible because it itself is not the workers' state.

Lenin's theory of the party and his theory of the state are not two separate entities, capable of being dealt with in isolation from one another. Until he developed the theory of the state, he tended to regard the Bolshevik Party as a peculiar adaptation to Russian circumstances. Given the Social-Democratic (and later the Stalinist) conception of the party becoming the state, it is only natural for genuinely revolutionary and therefore democratic socialists not to want to restrict the Party to the most advanced sections of the class, even if the need for such an organisation of the most conscious sections is recognised.

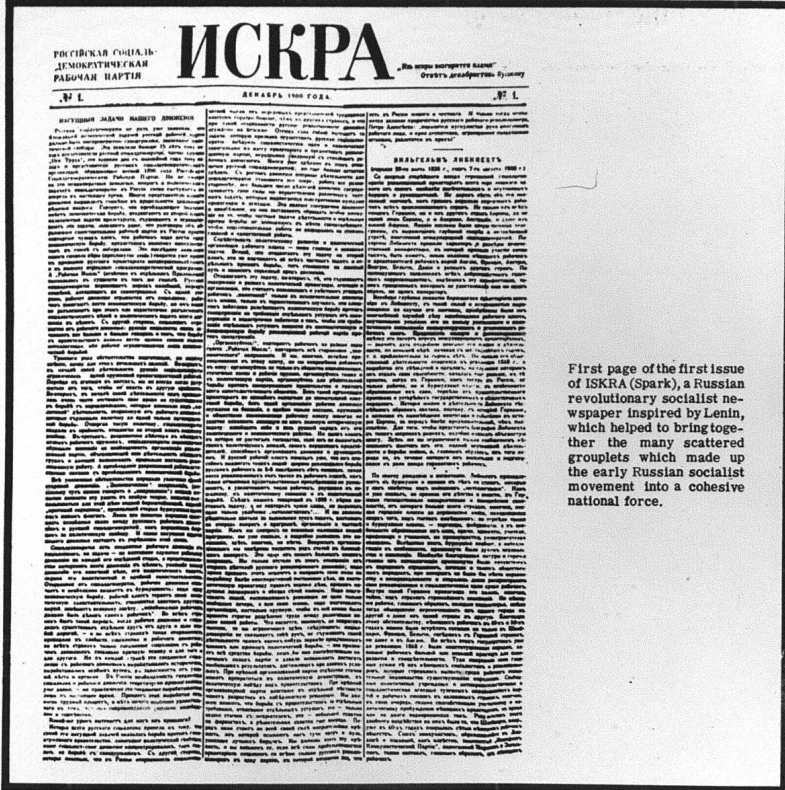
This explains Rosa Luxemburg's ambiguity over the question of political organisation and theoretical clarity. It enables her to counterpose the 'errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement' to the 'infallibility of the cleverest central committee'. But if the party and the institutions of class power are distinct (although one attempts to influence the other) the 'infallibility' of the one is a central component in the process by which the other learns from its errors.

It is Lenin who sees this. It is Lenin who draws the lessons, not (at least until the very end of her life) Luxemburg. It is not true that 'For Marxists in the advanced industrial countries, Lenin's original position can much less serve as a guide than Rosa Luxemburg's...'

The need is still to build an organisation of revolutionary Marxists that will subject their situation and that of the class as a whole to scientific scrutiny, will ruthlessly criticise their own mistakes, and will, while engaging in the everyday struggles of the mass of workers, attempt to increase their independent self-activity by unrelentingly opposing the ideological and practical subservience to the old society.

A reaction against the identification of class and party elite made by both Social Democracy and Stalinism is very healthy. It should not, however, prevent a clear-sighted perspective of what we have to do to overcome their legacy.

Excerpted from International Socialism, no. 35.



First page of the first issue of ISKRA (Spark), a Russian revolutionary socialist newspaper inspired by Lenin, which helped to bring together the many scattered grouplets which made up the early Russian socialist movement into a cohesive national force.