

Leadership, Democracy and Transitions

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Stockholm, November, 2010

Outline

- 1 Ideas of Leadership and Democracy
 - Ideas in Manifesto of the Communist Party.
 - Social Democracy
 - The impact of the first world war and Russian revolution
 - Formation of a revolutionary aristocracy
- 2 Ideas of Transition
 - Where do we go now?
 - Political change
 - Economic measures

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Manifesto

- *The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working-class parties.*
- *They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.*
- *They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.*

Also avant-guard concept

The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement¹

¹Communist Manifesto

Immediate Aim Democracy

- *The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.*
- *We have seen above, that the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy.*

The proletariat was not yet a class. It was to be formed as a distinct class in society by the process of political struggle. It was political struggle that would make a mass of individuals act in a collective way for their common interest. The proletariat must conquer political power, it must become the ruling class. The raising of the proletariat to the position of ruling class is identified with *the winning of democracy.*

What was meant by democracy

The language of the Communist Manifesto was based on ancient political philosophy, words like Proletariat, and Democracy came from Rome and Greece.

- Today's we see democracy as being very different from proletarian rule.
- 160 years ago words had a rather different meaning.
- To the upper classes, democracy and mob rule were synonymous. What educated people then thought of democracy was still heavily influenced by the ancient Greek authors. Aristotle had said that democracy did not mean majority rule.
- Instead it meant *rule by the poor*

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Erfurt Programme

- 1 Direct legislation through the people, by means of the rights of proposal and rejection. Selfdetermination and selfgovernment of the people in realm, state, province and parish. Election of magistrates by the people, with responsibility to the people. Annual voting of taxes.
- 2 Education of all to bear arms. Militia in the place of the standing army. Decision by the popular representatives on questions of war and peace. Settlement of all international disputes by arbitration.

Note this is still very radical and involves direct participatory democracy - something that later Social Democracy forgot. Also note that there is no provision for the election of officers

Russian Social Democracy

In their 1903 programme the RSDLP led by Lenin followed the model of the Erfurt Programme, without the radical commitment to direct legislation by the people and to annual direct voting of taxes by the people. Their objectives were the establishment of what they called a 'democratic republic':

- 1 *The sovereignty of the people, i.e., the concentration of supreme state power entirely in the hands of a legislative assembly, consisting of the representatives of the people and constituting a single chamber.*
- 2 *Universal, equal, and direct suffrage for all citizens, men and women, who have reached the age of twenty, in the elections to the legislative assembly and to the various bodies of local self-government; secret ballot; the right of every voter to be elected to any representative institution; biennial parliaments; salaries to be paid to the people's representatives*

It is very questionable whether a constitution of this sort is really democratic in the sense used by Aristotle and Marx.

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1917 Russian Social Democrats new aims

The party fights for a more democratic workers' and peasants' republic, in which the police and the standing army will be abolished and replaced by the universally armed people, by a people's militia; all officials will be not only elective, but also subject to recall at any time upon the demand of a majority of the electors; all officials, without exception, will be paid at a rate not exceeding the average wage of a competent worker; parliamentary representative institutions will be gradually replaced by Soviets of people's representatives (from various classes and professions, or from various localities), functioning as both legislative and executive bodies.

There are three key ideas being put forward here:

- 1 That parliamentary representative institutions will be replaced by Soviet representative institutions.
- 2 That all representatives must be subject to recall.
- 3 That representatives will be paid no more than an average worker.

Recall

- This principle, derived from the Commune, was incorporated in the constitution of the USSR (see further discussion later), and in the constitution of Arizona.
- In the 2010 election in the UK all the main parties were in favour of introducing the right of recall to the UK constitution.
- It is mainly of use in dealing with manifest corruption, and perhaps for dealing with manifestly broken election promises.
- It is a mechanism with a great deal of inertia since it requires a significant fraction of the constituents to sign a demand for recall, and then requires a ballot.

Soviets or Peoples Councils

- Bodies with mass participation
- These occur spontaneously when a military crisis occurs in an autocracy : Paris 1871, Petrograd 1917, Munich 1919, Lisbon 1975.
- They can lead to the overthrow of the existing state if the army and navy mutiny and come under the command of the new councils.
- Only effective if determined insurrectionists lead them: Blanquists in Paris, Leninists in Petrograd.

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- Take a polystyrene coffee cup of cold water and place it in a microwave oven. Turn the oven on for about 60 seconds. Carefully tip into this a teaspoon of instant coffee, the whole cup will violently boil over.
- The microwave has super-heated the water to just above 100 degrees. The entry of the coffee granules *nucleates* the formation of bubbles of steam, and the whole mass boils over: a phase change.
- Revolutions involve similar phase changes
 - External events, for example the privations of war, raise the emotional energy of the population until it is superheated.
 - Then some apparently minor event will cause a sudden and turbulent outburst. The stored emotional energy is then put to work breaking down old bounds on behaviour.
 - This means that the whole process is at once deterministic and chaotic. The deterministic component is the slow buildup of energy but the point of nucleation, is unpredictable.

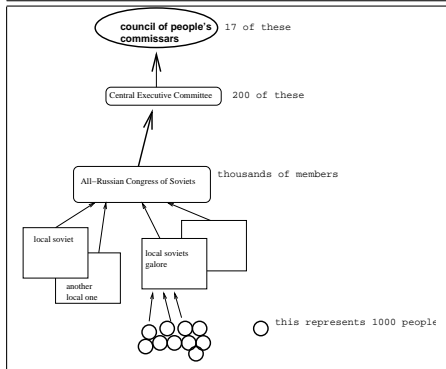
The workers' General Staff

- A social group or class can only act coherently in a chaotic situation if it has a coordinating mechanism.
- No battle plan survives contact with the enemy.
- No political party following a single fixed programme can succeed in such chaos.
- Bolsheviki succeeded because they had concrete economic answers to the problems the people faced.
- They also understood what the Imperial General Staffs of Europe took 4 years to learn: the need for initiative and flexibility in a changing situation.

Soviet aristocracy

- Bolshevik leadership necessary for the success of soviets
- Soviets uniquely suited to leadership by a revolutionary aristocracy

Hierarchical soviet structure



Indirect elections favour 1 party state

- Suppose that an RSDLP member was 50 times more likely to be nominated and 4 times more likely to be elected if nominated than a random non party citizen.
 - ⇒ This gives 200 fold over representation of RSDLP members in the local soviets. If the RSDLP made up one in a thousand of the Russian population, they would already make up 20% of the local soviets.
 - ⇒ Indirect elections amplify any inequalities in votes at lower level.
 - ⇒ Total domination of the council of commissars by the RSDLP

The trajectory of Russia

Czarist Monarchy

⇒ Soviet Democracy (Oct 1917)

⇒ Bolshevik Aristocracy (from 1918) due to concentration of power

⇒ Revolutionary Monarchy (Stalin, Khrushchev)

⇒ Bureaucratic oligarchy (1965 - 1990)

⇒ Plutocratic oligarchy (1991 till now)

Why do revolutionary republics become Monarchies?

Cromwell, Napoleon, Stalin, Mao, Kim il Sung

- 1 For the plebian viewpoint, only a strong man, with dictatorial power can hope to advance their interests against a powerfully entrenched upper class.
- 2 External enemies, mobilisation for defence favours the development of a supreme national commander: Napoleon I, Fidel Castro or Kim Il Sung.
- 3 States with cabinet of ministers (or commissars) require a Prime Minister (First Secretary ?), to break deadlocks when powerful ministers argue.

Russian case

All of these factors played their roles as the USSR went into the Stalin monarchy

- Given the revolutionary aristocratic character of the soviet state, with a cabinet government populated by very able, determined and intelligent men, disputes and alliances arose, which could only be stabilised by the rise of a single leader.
- Next, external threat from imperialism demanded mobilisation of the economy for defence, which again favoured a single leader. This, and the need to broaden the proletarian basis of support for the Communist Party, impelled the policy of extraordinarily rapid industrialisation.
- In the widespread plebian nostalgia for Stalin in modern Russia, we see a longing by impoverished masses for a strong leader who can tame the oligarchs.

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Need for the Long View of History

- The bourgeois revolutions in England and France were false starts that failed to develop a stable constitution. In the end the bourgeoisie found a formula that worked.
- In the future we may look back on the Russian and Chinese revolutions in the same way.
- The key, is to develop a form of participatory democracy that provides the sort of stable platform for socialism that parliamentary government provides for capitalism.
- To find these forms we have to look beyond the immediate historical experience of the last two centuries.

Rome or Athens

- The American revolutionaries too looked to the past - to the Roman Republic as their model.
- The Roman republic appealed to them as the form best suited to the collective rule of a slaveholding aristocracy.
- But there is another ancient model Athens, not republicanism but direct democracy.

The Greeks, after long experience, developed mechanisms to prevent aristocratic domination :

- All major political decisions had to be taken by the people as a whole in a plebiscite.
 - Note : this is just what the Erfurt programme had demanded.
- The executive functions of the state were implemented in a randomly selected council. This randomly selected council had among its duties the selection of issues that were to be put to plebiscite.
 - Note : random selection is, as every polling organisation knows, the only scientific way of getting a representative sample of the population.

Different role for political parties

In this sort of political structure the role of political parties would change radically.

- They would no longer be mobilising to win support for politicians
- They would have to be working to mobilise public opinion
- They would become much more ideological – much more overt struggle between different ideologies
- The people in them would be there because of conviction not career calculations.

Need for strategy

It is not possible for the socialist movement to have a impact in a changing world unless it has a concrete strategy on how to change the economic system and a constitutional strategy on how to change the political system.

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International rather than national

Classical social democracy was organised around the nation state.
But we need to look beyond that:

- 1 The EU means the nation state is no longer economically self governing.
- 2 The scale of modern production means it can not be planned on anything less than a continental level.

EU crisis

- 1 Monetary union deprives nation states of economic control.
- 2 But the EU lacks the democratic control and tax raising power to be a focus for progressive politics.
- 3 Inequalities between net exporters like Germany and net importers like Greece and Portugal lead to unsustainable financial tensions.
- 4 The social provisions and welfare state of the whole continent are held ransom to the rentier classes of the creditor states.

A European Democratic Revolution

Any people anywhere, being inclined and having the power, have the right to rise up, and shake off the existing government, and form a new one that suits them better. This is a most valuable - a most sacred right - a right, which we hope and believe, is to liberate the world. (Abraham Lincoln)

- Sovereign EU peoples assembly selected by lot from the EU population.
- The assembly to have full tax raising powers provided that any tax approved by EU wide plebiscite.
- Right of initiative and legislation by the people at EU level.

Probably only a Constituent assembly of the peoples of Europe, selected by Lot could set up the new structure

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Economic measures

- Democratic control over ECB
 - Value Policy Committee: economists nominated by Parliament, plus European citizens' jury
- Steps to abolish the tyranny of finance
 - Debt Jubilee
 - Outlaw the payment of interest under revived usury acts
 - ECB placed under legal obligation to stabilise Euro in terms of labour
 - Print time value on Euro notes
 - Move to non transferable system of labour credits with work the only legitimate source of income

Abolish wage slavery

- Instead of overtly attacking property rights this goal asserts human rights which are currently being violated by those who live of the proceeds of wage slavery
- Historical precedent the abolition of slavery in the USA by Lincoln

Labor is prior to, and independent of, capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration.
(Abraham Lincoln)

Steps towards ending wage slavery

- EU law must recognize that labour is sole source of value
 - European right of employees to receive full value-added,
 - rights to be enforced by EU labour courts with juries made up of employees and with judges elected by employees
 - Right of employees to elect majority of board of firms
 - Effect is to substantially abolish exploitation

Cancellation of all debts

- Excessive extension of debt was unsustainable, cause of crisis
- Bail out banks, or let them fail?
- Trillion-Euro bailout, mostly of advantage to millionaires
- Devaluation of debt burden is an objective necessity
 - Quantitative easing - creation of money one way of doing this
- We should call for cancellation of all debts public and private other than:
 - Back wages owed by firms
 - up to 30,000 per person in personal deposit accounts
 - back taxes owed

Benefits of debt cancellation

- Heavily debt-burdened firms able to resume activity
- Restore solvency to state finances
- Consumers able to resume spending
- Banking system becomes greatly more liquid
- Power of rentiers broken

Summary

- The struggle for direct democracy is the lost memory of the European socialist movement
- The old forms of Parliament and Soviet Republic were never enough
- We must win the battle for democracy in its original sense.

For Further Reading I



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Clarte. 2010-07-31



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FOR A NEW ATHENS Lessons for communists from the 'Old' (Classical) Athens ,

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