From the October Revolution to the first five-year plan
Some questions of Soviet history

The following speech points to some of the areas of Soviet history being investigated and questions being considered. Although it cannot do this without presenting the author's preliminary judgments, it should be borne in mind that it seeks to provide a sweeping overview of the ongoing study, rather than present the MLP's conclusions on Soviet history. Final conclusions are still to be reached. In the meantime, more specific studies concerning the history of industrialization, collectivization, NEP, etc. will be published later in the Supplement, as will be the speech on theoretical issues.

Interjections from the floor are bracketed and in italics, and the speech has been edited for publication.

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Three years ago our party set forward the study of the theory and practice of socialism as a foremost task on the theoretical front. Since that time the entire party has taken part in a study of the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin on the theory of socialism, and at our last congress we discussed some of the questions arising from that study. The Central Committee has also launched a comprehensive study of the history of the October Revolution and its aftermath. At the time of our last congress this study was just getting underway, and at that time we reported some of the issues which arose from a cursory examination of the history.

In this conference we would like to report on the state of this work and on a number of issues which arise in conjunction with it. In this speech I will be addressing some issues in the study of the history, and a second speech will be devoted to theoretical questions which have arisen in conjunction with this study. To the extent possible, we tried to divide up these questions between the two speeches; actually, there's going to be a reasonable amount of overlap.

A caveat

Comrades should note that, while considerable effort has gone into distilling and compiling factual materials on the history, this work is not complete. The digestion of these materials is still in its early days. Discussion about the history and about related theoretical issues has begun in the Central Committee. But this discussion is ongoing and necessarily preliminary in nature. We do not have the answers; we are better learning what the questions are. As a consequence, the ideas which will be presented in these speeches are still in the process of taking shape. What is presented here should be taken as an attempt to reflect the range of concerns coming up in that discussion, rather than as an expression of developed views of the Central Committee.

Our approach to history

Before going on to the history itself, I would like to touch for one minute on our approach to the study of history.

Since the last congress we have put considerable effort into factual investigation of the history. Yet the present stage of compiling and distilling factual materials is still not complete. And this does not take account of further work which may still be required to make sense of those materials.

We do not undertake such detailed work for love of dusty and ill-lit library nooks. Rather, it is our insistence that we must proceed from facts; not from random facts, nor from a selection of facts which fit our prejudices and predispositions, but from a systematic examination of all available factual materials. And if many such so-called "factual" sources are necessarily suspect — and in few arenas does invention pass for fact so readily as in the study of Soviet history — then we are that much more obliged to exhaustively examine all available materials. We must sort out fact from invention and systematically place the facts in their historical context. Only in this way can we be dealing in analysis and not in prejudice.

We are dealing here with extraordinarily complex events. And they are moreover pathbreaking events, covering territory where no revolution before trod. There were no road maps for the Bolsheviks once they entered this territory, and there are no road maps for us in studying and evaluating this experience. And this is why we must insist upon a rigorous approach which guards against any rush to embrace simplistic, pre-digested answers.

All simplistic answers have in common that they reduce vital questions of the revolution to dead and lifeless truisms, and pass off pat formulae in place of serious analysis. This is true whether we are speaking of simplistic defenses of the Stalin era (an invisible coup d'etat one night in March 1953), or one-dimensional critiques of the period (the October Revolution rose and fell with the factory committee movement of 1917), or those "historical" critiques which place one outside the need for analysis (the October Revolution rose and fell as it did because that was the nature of the era in which it took place, so what else do you need to know?).

While we give great weight to the question of the facts and their historical context, this does not mean that we postpone all discussion until the "final" fact falls into place. Discussion is now underway, and it is part of the process whereby we go from more general views to more

particular and concrete views, and in the course of which many specifics of our earlier views are going to be negated while certain features are going to be strengthened and developed. But all this is based upon systematic attention to the facts and their historical context. And at no point do we lose sight of the necessarily limited character of the views which we formed in the earlier stages of this process. We regard these as working hypotheses which serve, not as quick and easy answers, but rather as roadmarks, to help us to focus the investigation which lies ahead.

Our earlier presentation of the history

At our last congress we had a presentation of some issues arising from an initial examination of the history. I would like to begin by reviewing what was presented at that time.

That presentation focused on three essential points: first, that it appeared that there was a decisive turn in Soviet society in the mid-1930s; second, that there was a question of studying both the achievements of the socialist revolution and the antecedents of that turn in the early history; third, that the turn in the mid-1930s did not mark the end of the history, but rather the inception of a process of degeneration which passes through a number of stages until arriving at a complete capitalist society, albeit one with a bureaucratic form of state-capitalism rather than Western-style capitalism.

I will go on to some further detail.

The October 1917 revolution was a socialist revolution which established the dictatorship of the proletariat. In carrying this out, the Russian workers also completed the unfinished tasks of the democratic revolution.

The task the Russian workers faced after October was not the overnight establishment of socialism but rather beginning a transition toward socialism; the more so, given the extreme backwardness of Russia, the preponderance of petty production, and so forth. The immediate aims of the Bolsheviks — expropriating the propertied classes, liberating the oppressed nations, establishing a new state power based on the toiling masses — were nonetheless of breathtaking scope.

Harsh reality obliged zigzags in policy and even concessions away from socialist principle. The biggest zigzag of all was the New Economic Policy (NEP). Power remained in the hands of the proletariat, but under intense pressure not only from abroad, but also from the partial revival of capitalist elements at home.

With the complicated situation created by NEP, further steps were needed. The Soviet workers had to go on an offensive of industrialization and push forward the collectivization of the countryside. This took place in the period of the First Five Year Plan. In this period great advances were made but there were also weaknesses and problems in how things were carried out, especially a tendency to lean too heavily on the use of administrative measures and measures "from above". Nonetheless one can still see in this period an attempt to remain revolutionary and to be guided by a class line. This was as well a period of extensive mass activity. These suggest that the revolution continued to be alive at this point.

But after the first big steps were taken the "final and irrevocable victory of socialism" was declared in the mid-30s, and this became the banner for fundamental changes. The campaign against egalitarianism, which had begun already in 1931, resulted in privileged status for a stratum of engineers, state and economic officials, and military officers, drawn in large part from the ranks of the workers but subsequently transformed into a worker aristocracy. A bureaucracy, the groundwork for which had been laid earlier, now takes form based on this worker aristocracy and standing above the toiling masses. These changes are codified in a new constitution in 1936 which formally abandons the Soviet form and relinquishes the hegemony of the working class.

After this turn the Soviet Union was no longer pursuing a forward march toward socialism, albeit with problems, but was now in a trajectory of degeneration. The society did not completely change character overnight. There was a process of degeneration, going through its stages, leading up to outright state capitalism. Traditional private capitalism had largely been defeated. As a result, the degeneration led to the bureaucratic state capitalism we are familiar with from the last few decades. Only in the present day has it fallen upon Gorbachev to make a really big push for private capitalism.

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The history revisited

This is about where our thinking stood two years ago.

Since the congress, our investigation has focused on the history prior to the mid-1930s. And from it arise some important questions about the earlier history.

Some of these questions revolve around the period of the First Five Year Plan.

It seems unlikely that we can characterize this period as we have in the past. Mass mobilization of the workers, for example, was a central feature in the launching of the industrialization drive in 1928/29. But calling a halt to the mass mobilization, and emphasizing reliance on the creation of a stratum of managers and engineers loyal to the party and state, were just as central to how industrialization was carried through from 1930 onward. So this process began very early and was actually an integral part of this period of the First Five Year Plan.

We are still studying how and why this came about. Was this a fundamental turn in policy? Was this turn inherent in the logic of the all-out drive for industrialization? We cannot yet answer this with confidence. But in any case, it is clear that we cannot characterize the latter half of the period — from 1930 onward — as one guided by a class line, at least not one that we would approve of. Nor can we readily put the problems of this period in second place to the achievements of the industrialization and collectivization battles. How these things are carried out — industrialization and collectivization — is central to the outcome of the relation of class forces, especially the relationship of the working class to the state and the role of the working class in the economy. The problems in this regard appear to be greater than we have stated in the past.

The period of 1928/29 still has many very interesting features, but we also have to be reluctant to give any characterization at this point of the earlier period, because of issues regarding what came before it, and what came after it. So this too requires further study.

I should mention that another central event of this period, as well as the industrialization drive, was the collectivization of agriculture, and here too there were problems. The collectivization of agriculture was rushed through at a whirlwind pace. There was a burning need for collectivization. But the rapid pace at which it was pursued does not seem to reflect the pace of development of the class struggle in the countryside. In fact, in its haste the party seems to have bypassed the complex questions of dealing with the social issues in the village and violated the principle of the voluntary character of collectivization. This seems to have had a wrenching effect on the entire society and to have set a pattern of relying on repressive measures in dealing with social issues.

So these are some issues regarding the period of the First Five Year Plan. There are issues earlier on as well. These issues arise especially on the front of the relationship of the party and state to the toiling masses. This question is posed in a striking way in the period of 1920/21, but is not confined to it.

One thread of this question is bound up with the crisis conditions brought on by civil war. After October, the fight between revolution and counterrevolution took the form of a bitter civil war which all but consumed Russia. Revolution triumphed, due above all to the heroism of the workers and soldiers and the inability of the counterrevolution to win over any significant section of the peasantry. But by the end of the war the working class was exhausted, the peasantry was alienated, and the entire country was starving.

A second thread has to do with the ebb of the revolutionary tide after the high water mark which followed October. The participation of a large section of the workers in public affairs was an important feature of the immediate post-October period. But by the end of the civil war this participation was in retreat and the mass-democratic forms associated with the revolution had waned. Now it seems that, to a certain extent, this would have happened regardless of any particular history of the civil war. It would be a mistake to assume that the high tide of the revolution is going to carry on forever. But under the particular conditions — the legacy of destruction and dislocation brought about by the civil war — the mass participation waned with a vengeance.

Yet a third thread has to do with Bolshevik party policy. The crisis of war communism was not just brought on by the civil war, and by the objective conditions attendant upon the civil war; it was also a crisis in party policy.

It was against this background that the party launched the NEP to restore the country from the depths of ruin. But the question of the relationship of the mass of toilers to the party and state, and their role in public affairs, remained vexing problems. And it appears that the party did not address these problems in the subsequent period, but rather tended to turn its face away from them.

This then becomes the backdrop to the unfolding of the inner-party debates of the 1920s and the launching of the industrialization drive at the end of the decade.

How does this change our view of the history overall?

Our investigation has not gone to the point where we can put forward a comprehensive overview of the history, even on a most tentative basis. But what we have uncovered most recently suggests that the events of the mid-1930s may represent the culmination of processes which began earlier and developed further than we had previously suspected.

As for the October Revolution itself: studying the history in close detail, warts and all, can only further impress one with the remarkable energy, achievements and impact of the Revolution. The study we have undertaken will make it possible to remove the big words and slogans such as Soviet power, smashing the bourgeois state, and so forth from the realm of abstraction into something living and concrete, the better that the experience of the October Revolution may inform the next round of proletarian revolution.

These are the essential points which I have to make in this presentation, and I'm going to give some detail on them. I'll begin with the period of the First Five Year Plan.

The period of the First Five Year Plan

This period, if we include not only the four years of the Five Year Plan, actually falls from one Party Congress to another one. It's a bit complicated: the Five Year Plan was adopted a year after it was to have started, and was declared achieved a year before its finish date; so it was actually in effect for three years. But when we're talking about the general period, we should deal with the years from '28 to '33. So we actually should consider the period from the 15th Party Congress of Dec. 27 to the 17th Party Congress of January 1934, with the 16th Party Congress being held in the midst of it in June 1930.

[Question: "I didn't understand; from what you said, it was in effect before they declared it?"]

There was not an orderly process of carefully adopting a plan and then organizing the economy on the basis of the plan. They began working on the idea of a plan; and then they decided they were going to go for all-out industrialization, and started taking steps in the direction of all-out industrialization; and only sometime later got around to actually calling it the plan.

["When did they write it up and call it a plan?"]

The plan was formally adopted by a congress of Soviets in the spring of 1929. And a year, actually nine months, before its finish date, they declared that the plan had been achieved; they had achieved the Five Year Plan in four years. And they went on to the Second Five Year Plan, which also got written up a year or two late.

So this was a period of tremendous tumult. These little jokes about getting the plan written a year or two after it's gone into effect are just the merest hint of what things were like in those days. The entire society was turned inside out. They called it the Third Revolution; the first was February, the second was October, and this was the Third Revolution. In part this had to do with ideas about what they were doing. In part it actually felt like it. It felt like the period after the October Revolution or the period of the civil war. There was that much dislocation going on.

It seemed for a time that Soviet society was being turned completely inside out. This was a period in which events marched at a very rapid pace. Developments would emerge, would flare, and then die, all in a few months. Others would emerge and evolve, going from embryo through several stages in the space of a few months.

At the heart of this period lie two closely-related drives around which all else unfolds: the industrialization drive and the collectivization campaign.

The imperative of industrialization

Several years of the NEP had brought about some semblance of normalcy in the wake of the chaos and destruction of the civil war. Exchange between the city and the countryside had been re-established. Industrial production approached its pre-war level. The standard of living of the workers had gained significantly from its post-war low. The restoration of the national economy had made possible some limited reforms, such as unemployment relief.

But chronic problems persisted. Unemployment not only persisted, but grew, as mass migration from the countryside to the cities — which had been interrupted by the civil war — resumed. The housing shortage in the cities was chronic and was becoming severe. There was an endemic scarcity of consumer goods.

No immediate relief from these problems was foreseeable. Exchange between town and village grew slowly, and was thought to be retarded by the relatively high price of manufactured goods. This in turn was linked to the low productivity of labor, and this in turn was linked to the archaic organization of production and a fixed capital base which was largely pre-1905 technology. And the terms of exchange between town and country largely precluded the accumulation of funds for investment in industry.

To explain the problem of accumulation for investment: an underlying aspect of the NEP, part of the deal so to speak, was that the peasantry would receive a bigger share of their production than they had before the revolution. The consequence of this was that taxes on the peasantry had to be kept to a reasonable level; the peasantry was quite poor. And the consequence of this was that the state had little revenue for investment in new industry. The economic achievements of the 1920s were based largely on bringing existing industrial capacity back on line. This was fairly easy, because by the end of the civil war they had gone down to about 25% utilization of capacity. So they were able in some industries to increase production fourfold without any new investment. But once they hit full capacity utilization, where do you go from there?

It was under these conditions that rapid industrialization came to the fore in the inner-party discussion. Industrialization, it seemed, could resolve the economic dilemma; increase the productivity of labor; make possible the reduction of prices and increase of exchange with the countryside; generate surplus funds for new industrial investment; put an end to the continual tug-of-war with the countryside — at every harvest there was a tug-of-war over what the price of grain would be; increase the weight of the working class in the society, and strengthen its ties with the party and state; and advance the march toward socialism.

These were the points being argued in the inner-party debate, and there's a certain basis to all these points. Industrialization was a burning necessity for marching forward toward socialism. In point of fact, industrialization was a burning necessity if you wanted to have any type of modern society. But it seems that a key to what kind of modern society you are building must be how industrialization is to be achieved and what role the workers are to play in this process. And this aspect of things did not

feature prominently in the inner-party discussion. As well, in the inner-party discussion there was a certain tendency to pose industrialization, not simply as a cornerstone of socialism, but as socialism itself. This tendency to equate industrialization with socialism became marked after 1930.

The industrialization drive

A blow-by-blow description of the course of the industrialization drive is far beyond the scope of this presentation. Here I will confine myself to a few basic observations.

First, Soviet mythology gives great weight to central planning as the key feature of industrialization and of the Five Year Plans. The suggestion is that production takes place on a planned basis and anarchy of production becomes a thing of the past. In any literal sense this was not true. Production targets in the Five Year Plan were goals set to be exceeded, not just achieved but exceeded. So actually it was not aiming for a particular level of production, but the sky's the limit. Moreover, the plans were subject to repeated changes. Not only were they revised annually, but in each factory the workers and management were put in competition with each other to offer counterplans. Upping the ante. Management would set forward what the production target would be for this year of the Five Year Plan; workers would respond with a counterplan, upping the ante 20%.

["This was to quicken productivity?"]

Yes. Moreover, the Soviet planning apparatus had only a limited ability to plan: the extent of their knowledge of the economy as a whole was limited. Their understanding of the relationships between the different branches of industry, how they affected one another, was limited. The planning apparatus had only a limited ability to take account of such basic issues as transportation. No account was taken, and it would be difficult to put it on a quantitative scale, of many questions of consciousness and mass initiative; for instance, when large numbers of new workers are entering the work force, there is their training and what this would entail.

Given the very rapid tempo of industrialization, what resulted could not really be characterized as the abolition of planlessness. It was not infrequently closer to giving new insight into the term "anarchy of production."

One of the basic economic themes in Soviet life was scarcity, the scarcity of all resources. And this became critical when they started going about things at a rapid tempo. You couldn't get the supplies you needed. Some enterprising factory managers actually took to hijacking trains in order to get the raw materials to keep their factories running. And this was tolerated, as long as they made their quota. This was a show of initiative.

What had changed was the ground rules. Under NEP, preserving market relations with the peasantry required that the economy as a whole follow the basic ABCs of the market. The ruble had to be kept reasonably stable; hyperinflation of the type of the civil war era had to be avoided. The state could not arbitrarily invest large amounts of money in industry and pay for it by printing more money; this was out under NEP. The state was bound by what its revenues were. Industry under NEP was strictly bound by what its revenues were. You could not run an industry in the red. You didn't necessarily have to turn a profit, but it could not be run in the red, for that would mean that the central bank runs in the red, as it has to keep paying your bills. In fact, early on in the NEP period, those factories which could not be put on at least a break-even footing were consolidated or closed down. How the state interacted with the economy was through the spheres of finance and price-setting.

With the launching of the First Five Year Plan, these ground rules went out the window. Factory output was now under the discipline, not of the ruble, but of the production quota. At the same time accounting, for all practical purposes, vanished for a few years. The central bank began running an unlimited line of credit for industry. For a period of about two years a factory manager could call on as large an amount of credit as he needed; there were no questions asked.

So it was not true that everything proceeded according to a plan, in an organized and careful way. What is true is they got away from the ground rules of the market, which they had followed under NEP. As long as they were under the discipline of the market in the classical way, they could not find the revenues for substantial industrial investment. They found some other way. And this permitted them a way out.

And they did succeed in carrying through industrialization at a rapid pace. What they achieved was fairly remarkable.

But being awash in a sea of red ink was not by itself enough to produce industrialization. More was needed. And one of the most essential things required for the launching of all-out industrialization was the mobilization of the workers.

Rise and decline of mass mobilization

The first years of the Five Year Plan were marked by a great mobilization. Hundreds of thousands of workers — mainly young, semi-skilled workers — were brought into the shock brigade movement.

Earlier, in 1926, the party leadership had attempted to launch a productivity drive in the usual way — it gave a directive to management. This lasted perhaps four months, and they had to take it back; it ended in a fiasco. They had thought, among other things, that if they could increase productivity in the already existing industry, they could reduce the prices of manufactured goods, have more exchange with the countryside, make more money from this turnover, and use it to finance the development of new industry. But in 1926 when they simply gave a call for improved productivity in industry, it fell on its face.

Now, the industrialization drive of the Five Year Plan

was much more far-reaching, much more ambitious. So launching it was possible only through the mass mobilization of the workers. Soviet workers were well aware of the implications of the backward state of industry, and a significant section responded boldly to the call to take up the struggle for production. They formed shock brigades; they experimented with the re-organization of production on the shop level. They'd hold a shop level conference and they would say, "Why are the machines set up this way? We should set up the machines this other way and have this other division of labor, and we'll be able to etc., etc., etc." And they would go ahead and experiment. Some of the shock brigaders, maybe 10 or 15% of them, formed communes and pooled their wages. Mass production conferences — shop conferences, and sometimes factory-wide conferences — took up organizing the process of production, and this was the form in which the counter-plans were developed and achieved. They would actually hold mass meetings to discuss the quotas and to propose alternative goals.

This process involved hundreds of thousands of workers. It was a mass movement. And it actually did have effect in industry. It also had some effect on the relationship between the party and the workers, in the sense that this section of workers was now drawing close to the party. By 1930, workers at the bench formed the highest proportion of party membership that they ever had. The highest percentage of factory workers in the party was in 1930, and it was because of the impact of the shock brigade movement.

But in 1930-31, with this mass mobilization well under way, policy turned in another direction. The engineers and managers, who had been under heavy pressure since 1927, were rehabilitated; particularly the engineers. Speeches were made saying the engineers used to be all out for sabotage, but had now decided to take up the cause of the revolution.

Hand in hand with this, a campaign against egalitarianism was launched. One aspect of this was denouncing the communes, which some sections of shock brigaders had formed, the pooling of wages, and so forth.

Another aspect of this was not only expanded wage gradations, but particularly the question of bonuses, which were chiefly for the managers and engineers.

At this same time increasing weight was given to labor discipline and work rules as the basic means of raising productivity. The chairmen of the production conferences had been appointed deputy managers of the plants. And that remained. But they remained as individuals; the production conference were gone.

["That (the production conference) is one of the things you referred to in the beginning?"]

Yes. And it was dissolved. Too many hours away from the bench was the idea.

On any one of these points, their reasoning could cite certain problems. But if you take these things as a whole, all coming within a few months of each other, a systematic turn was taking place.

For the former shock brigaders however, or at least for a section of them, this did not necessarily mean disillusionment, because the rapid growth of industry demanded a new generation of managers and engineers. The size of industry was doubling, and moreover a new generation of technology was being introduced. The demand for all levels of supervision and for engineers is very great. And tens of thousands of former shock brigaders were promoted to management positions. It was a rapid process. One week you would be a machinist doing production work at the Putilov works, the next week you would be the manager at the biggest tractor factory in the Soviet Union. Only the tractor factory wasn't built yet, so your first job as manager was to build it. You had to head up a construction site of ten thousand workers, a thousand supervisors and a hundred engineers. This was taking place on a massive scale. That's an actual example; but most of it is promotion to lower level, shop floor supervisory positions. The former shock brigaders became the new foremen.

At the same time, thousands more were recruited to go to the polytechnic schools to qualify as engineers. In the course of time better than a hundred thousand workers, basically all shock brigaders, went to the university and come out as engineers.

Growth of the state apparatus

During this time there was also the rise and decline of a movement against bureaucracy.

Around 1928 a campaign against bureaucracy was spearheaded by the Young Communist League. It was targeted against public officials accused of obstructing party and Soviet policy and of neglecting the needs of the masses. At times, groups of youths would invade local Soviet offices and denounce the officials there and point out who the obstructionists were, demand they be thrown out on the spot, and so forth. It bore some resemblance to certain episodes of the Cultural Revolution in China.

This was accompanied by cutting back the size of the government apparatus. And, at this time, in connection with this campaign, a minor reduction was actually made in the total size of the apparatus.

But this change did not last. Within a few years the size of Soviet officialdom had swelled. What had changed was its distribution, what departments they were in. Many older departments didn't grow at all, or got smaller, while the ministry for heavy industry doubled every year, and by the end of the decade it had been divided into fourteen separate ministries: a ministry for textiles, a ministry for metals, a ministry for chemicals, etc. Similar developments took place with respect to the ministries concerned with agriculture, and a few years later with ministries concerned with domestic, internal trade. This reflected the development of a huge bureaucracy.

["I'm sorry, I didn't follow this. You say in 1928 they started a movement against bureaucracy?']

Right.

["The size of the government starts getting smaller?"]

Yes. They cut back the total payroll a few percent. It's hard to say, because their figures are incomplete.

["But anyway, in 1928-30, it gets smaller with the movement against bureaucracy, and then that's stopped."]

Right. Now even at this time, 1928, the key economic ministries are hiring hand over fist. But they were so small at first, that it didn't make a dent in the total figures until a few years later.

Betting on the socialist intelligentsia

Officials were hired for the Soviet ministries. Together with the industrial managers and engineers they constituted the most important sections of what came to be called the "socialist intelligentsia".

What they called the "socialist intelligentsia" did not refer to poets and artists. Technically it did; anyone who was not in production work was part of the "socialist intelligentsia." But the statements about the socialist intelligentsia weren't that concerned at this point in history with professors and poets. Mostly they're interested in engineers and managers and state officials, and this is who they orient themselves towards.

In fact the term gets used at two levels. At certain times all office workers are categorized as socialist intelligentsia, because they're not working in industrial production. But what's actually the core of the matter? When they talk about the "two friendly classes and a stratum," they're not saying "now we've trained hundreds of thousands of poets from the ranks of the workers"; they're talking engineers and managers and state officials.

From the ranks of the shock brigaders hundreds of thousands of workers were recruited and formed as this stratum called the "socialist intelligentsia." I want to be a little bit careful about the characterization, because it's complicated. It's not that there weren't any engineers and managers before. But in some regard they're training this stratum anew, a stratum the state can rely upon.

At the time the Five Year Plan was launched, virtually all the engineers were from the old society. There were perhaps two engineers in the party. A million party members, and two engineers. The engineers were hostile to Soviet power. From that standpoint it made a tremendous difference to send 150,000 loyal workers to engineering school.

But what happens is they get formed as a stratum with the same — actually with greater — privileges than the previous engineers. Not only did they receive the privileges and perks of a higher standard of living, but they're party members. And as the decade goes on, they are entrusted with more and more authority and have more and more to say about what takes place in the economy.

So the "socialist intelligentsia" becomes a new stratum, or at least a stratum in a certain way different from the technical, managerial, and official strata which they had before. And by the latter 1930s the "socialist intelligentsia" was placed formally on a par with the working class. In practice it was another matter. Being part of the "socialist intelligentsia" meant having certain special privileges and perks and so forth. Nominally workers and engineers were on a par in terms of recruitment to party membership; actually engineers had better access. Nominally they were at par in terms of their kids' chance to go into higher education; but in practice there was better access for the "socialist intelligentsia."

This formation of this stratum did not take place all at once. The first wave of shock-brigaders sent to engineering school, for example, did not matriculate until about 1934. The great purges of 1936/37 took a heavy toll among older economic managers, and brought promotions for many individuals coming from this new wave; and this undoubtedly played some role in the formation of this stratum. These purges also reflect the fact that certain very palpable tensions continued to exist between the state and the economic managers. When they're being fired by the thousands upon thousands, there has to be some tension.

The formation of this stratum and its rise in status passes through a number of stages over quite a few years. By the time we reach modern history we find, prominent among the leaders of party and state, names from the first wave of recruits to the polytechnic, such as Khrushchev, Kosygin and Brezhnev. But while this process unfolded over time, it appears that from about 1930 onward the party leadership was betting on the cultivation of a loyal stratum of economic managers.

Assessing the phases of the First Five Year Plan

Now to all appearances, there is an early phase in the First Five Year Plan, roughly 1927-29, in which the policies are markedly different both from what went before and what followed. This is a point which marks a break with the NEP policies in the past, and where there hasn't yet been the turn of 1930 — mass mobilization of workers is taking place. This phase of the First Five Year Plan has a number of features which might indicate revolutionary efforts, but it's hard to draw a conclusion or give a characterization at this time, given the close connection between this phase and what followed, as they're not entirely separable.

Two years ago we said the First Five Year Plan had its problems, but you can see there was an attempt to be revolutionary, an effort to follow a class line, and so forth. Now we've looked at it more closely. Right in this period, from 1930 onwards, there is a turn, where they're doing nothing of the sort. One can't just say, well, in 1928-29 they were trying to follow a class line and get mobilized, because there's a question of what happened to this policy. How come they were not doing this in 1926, and they were not doing this in 1930, but they were doing it in between? We don't know yet.

Collectivization

Now I'd like to turn to the question of collectivization.

The proletariat in Russia succeeded in seizing and retaining power by forming an alliance with the peasantry based upon conceding to the agrarian program of the latter. The agrarian program of the October Revolution was — whatever the peasants wanted it to be; that was the deal. This was at the cost of a setback in agriculture. Many of the big capitalist estates were broken up and returned to petty production, and it was a setback from the standpoint of production.

But at this price was won a torrential peasant movement which broke the back of feudalism. And this movement swiftly gave rise to an intensification of class struggle in the villages. By 1918 the countryside was swept by a poor peasant movement which gained the upper hand, largely leveled the rich peasants, and took command of the village Soviets. This gave the proletariat an organized ally in the countryside.

The Bolsheviks essentially had not been in the countryside at the time of the revolution. All they could do was give a call to the peasants: seize the land. But seizing the land not only broke the back of feudalism but then gave rise to the class struggle in the village over who gets it — between poor peasant and rich. It gave rise to an organized poor peasant movement, which swept through the countryside, and among other things won the rural Soviet elections and took over the village Soviets.

So at the time it seemed that the revolution was in a strong position in the countryside.

But the impact of the civil war, devastation, the emergency appropriations, and famine halted this process. And in the NEP period the village Soviets receded, while the traditional peasant commune, called in some of our speeches the "mir" [the traditional village community with its periodic redistribution of the land and collective responsibilities—ed.] and in others the "skhod" [the peasant assembly of the mir—ed.], became the center of gravity in the village. Meanwhile, the victories of the poor peasants' movement had made everyone more or less a middle peasant. They had taken away land and implements from the rich peasants, giving them to the poor peasants; obviously the process was not even, and it was not thorough, but to a certain extent everybody at this point was a middle peasant. So for the country to function, for the Soviet government to retain power, an accord with the middle peasant was required.

That accord was, of course, the NEP. The state would permit the resurgence of the market, which had disappeared under war communism; it would give leeway to petty proprietorship. The peasant, for his side of the deal, would sell his grain to the state. Implicit in this compromise was that the peasant would claim a larger share of the grain than he did before October; a bigger share of the grain would stay in the countryside, less would go to the cities.

In practice, the NEP accord proved fragile. This stemmed from the nature of NEP, i.e., that it was a truce between two different systems of production. It seems that once the big owners of land and industry had been expropriated, bit by bit what came to the fore was a contradiction with petty proprietorship. This meant that NEP was inherently unstable; it meant that sooner or later it was going to give way, but not necessarily at the time nor in the way in which it did.

Now the development of the contradiction with petty proprietorship does not necessarily, when the proletariat is holding power, take on the form of bloody clashes or a confrontation with the peasantry as a whole. In fact, the extent that it does, is probably a sign of the weakness of the proletariat. The actual battleground for this war is the village itself; it is to be found in the bitter struggle between the poor and the rich in the village. Petty proprietorship cannot stand; it disintegrates; the ranks of the middle peasants begin to disintegrate and differentiate between rich and poor. The class struggle ensues. The alternative to having a fight between the proletariat and the peasant over petty production is a development inside the village, the class struggle between the poor peasant and the rich peasant, which opens up the possibility of winning over the rural majority and using this momentum to transform the countryside.

The collectivization of agriculture, based upon the voluntary participation of a section of the peasantry, can provide a path to such a rural transformation. Collective relations are not socialist relations and ought not be confused with them. But under the dictatorship of the proletariat they can be an alternative to petty proprietorship, an alternative which can provide a framework for the introduction of modern, large-scale cultivation and for breaking down rural isolation and idiocy, and which can provide a support within agriculture for the development of industry.

In the late 1920s the CPSU did undertake the collectivization of agriculture, and this did lay the foundation for rural social transformation. But questions must be raised about the way in which this was achieved and the type of transformation that resulted.

At the onset of the industrialization drive the Soviet government made sweeping changes in the relationship of prices and wages, reducing the prices of both agricultural and manufactured goods, thereby in effect raising real wages. A scarcity of consumer goods resulted — the workers bought everything up. The NEP relations with the peasantry would have been under pressure at this point in any event because of the increased state revenues going into industrial investment. But the monkeying around with the price structure tipped the scales decisively, and in the next harvest the peasantry did not bring its grain to market. There was wholesale hoarding of the grain. And this became known as the "second scissors crisis."

["What year was this?"]

October-November of '27 is when they decide that it's a crisis.

What had actually been developing for several years is that slowly, under the covers, class differentiation had been developing in the countryside. A richer section of the peasantry emerged, who had more possibility to hoard their grain; they didn't have to bring it to market the minute they harvested it. They could hang onto it. And what they had discovered about the pricing policy of the Soviet government showed them that what to do was: hold back the grain at the fall harvest and wait for spring. Every summer grain prices would be reduced. Every fall the state grain monopoly would purchase what it could at the reduced prices. By spring they would have to up the offer because they were short.

This had been developing over several years. This time the shortfall in grain was severe.

Now, hoarding is inherent in rural petty proprietorship. Any peasant who can hoard will hoard. It's part of the process, and Lenin discusses this. On one side the peasant is a toiler, and on the other side he's a petty proprietor. Hoarding comes with the territory. But the extent of the hoarding which took place at this point marked the reemergence of a rich peasant stratum. Adding insult to injury was the fact that this new rich peasant stratum — the emerging kulaks — were able to hoard the grain efficiently, in part because they now had use of the apparatus of the cooperative movement. These were not production coops, but purchasing and marketing coops. Nevertheless here the cooperative movement, which had been envisioned as a key means toward rural transformation, was at least to some extent used for hoarding.

Essentially the turn to all-out industrialization led right away to a initial breakdown in market relations with the peasantry. This had happened before, and when it happened before the state retreated; it rolled back prices and wages, it cut back their plans for investment, etc.

This time it did not. This time, rather than retreat from the industrialization drive, the party and state leadership turned instead to emergency measures of grain appropriation similar to the days of war communism. Essentially they sent hundreds of thousands of grain workers to the countryside to collect the grain and set quotas for each village.

Now this in turn, by the time of the next harvest, led to a complete breakdown in exchange with the countryside. The whole thing unraveled.

It's possible that, at this point, the idea was, well, we'll get through one or two harvests with emergency appropriations, and then we'll be in a position where we can return to market relations. It's not clear what the thinking was. But what happened was, once they turned to emergency measures, the market vanished, and the emergency measures of appropriation were the only means they had of collecting grain.

It's difficult to sustain emergency measures indefinitely. Under these conditions the idea of collectivization, which has already been posed in the party, gained a new urgency.

The emergency measures for grain appropriation had been combined with a campaign against the kulak. It was called the "Siberian Urals method." They would go into a village, call a village-wide meeting, give a speech denouncing the kulaks, about the importance of giving the grain to the cities, and then call upon the poorer peasants to join them in a house-to-house search of the kulaks' properties looking for grain stores. The deal was that the poor peasants, the first time around, actually got a percentage of what was confiscated. And the first time the confiscations were enormously successful. Thereafter they dropped quite a bit.

These types of measures became closely connected with collectivization. For a few weeks in the fall and for a few weeks in the spring, there was large-scale party presence in the countryside, with armed detachments going around carrying out the grain collection. This seemed like a perfect opportunity to carry out collectivization, as long as one was in the village anyway.

Moreover, the campaign against the kulaks was carried to the point of confiscation: their land, their animals, and their implements were confiscated and, as collective farms were formed, were placed at the disposal of the collective farms. This had a practical side, in that it meant the collective farms had a head-start on life. It means they had a little more land, a few more implements, a few more animals at their disposal. Moreover, not only were kulak properties confiscated, all their property — they weren't just leveled, in the case of a large section of the kulaks everything was simply taken — but they were expelled from the village. Some were expelled to outlying areas, still more were transported to virgin lands east of the Urals which they would then colonize, but hundreds of thousands ended up in labor camps under the supervision of the political police. And in fact at this point the political police became the second largest employer of labor, the largest being the ministry of industry, but after this comes the labor camps.

["How nasty were these camps?"]

It was not summer camp, but the conditions actually varied, and many people were actually in there for a limited period of time. There are many cases which can be cited where someone is denounced as a kulak, is sent to a labor camp for reeducation, while working at a labor camp building roads receives a citation and a 50-ruble prize for the quality of his work, and upon his discharge from the camp two years later gets a job reference and lands a job. For a section it was like that. But the conditions were difficult. And a good deal of the work being done was construction work, roads and canals including massive canal projects, in which the conditions had to have been fairly harsh. When digging by hand what's going to become a sea canal, the conditions are going to be pretty tough.

By the time the first Five Year Plan was adopted, it made a provision for collectivization. It called for the collectivization of 20-25% of the countryside, depending on whether you're counting the amount of land or the amount of production or the amount of households, by the end of the Five Year Plan. In fact that goal, the 20-25% level, was achieved by late 1929.

At the same time it became evident that industrialization was running into difficulty. One of the methods of encouraging collectivization is the state gives certain leeway to the collective farms to ensure that they're more successful than petty proprietorship, such as tax breaks, and certain other preferential treatment. By late '29 they were discovering that they did not have the resources available to do this. And at this point they gave a call for all-out collectivization. Within a matter of weeks, the number of collectivized households doubled; it went up from one-fourth to one-half the rural population.

Severe crisis ensued. By March, 1930 the Central Committee called a retreat. This was Stalin's "Dizzy With Success" letter which blamed the excesses on the party rank and file.

["The time frame for going from 25% collectivization to 50%?"]

Between November of 1929 and February of 1930.

["They decide they don't have the resources to give incentives to collective farms, and then ..."]

Right. Voluntary collectivization works, because it appeals not only to the peasants' gravitation toward the working class, but also appealing to their self-interest. On a collective farm they can produce more grain for the cities and at the same time live better themselves. But it's hard getting it going. These are peasants with an average of two years of schooling, and organizing a modern farm is not going to be so easy. So how were they going to ensure, if 25% of the peasants are collectivized and 75% are petty proprietors, which was going to be the trend of the future? Interest-free loans can be given to the collective farms. Taxes can be abolished on the collective farms, or reduced or waived for a few years. And so on.

["I understand that, but if they couldn't maintain those incentives with 25%, why did they go ahead?"]

Because they couldn't guarantee that a collective farm system organized on a voluntary basis could compete with petty proprietorship.

["In other words, they didn't offer those same incentives. But if they didn't have the resources to offer these incentives at 25%, how can they possibly offer the same incentives at 50%?"]

Because they couldn't maintain them at 25%, they said, well, there is one alternative, which is if there's no petty proprietorship and nobody has a choice, it's not a problem.

["So they withdrew the incentives that they had previously offered?"]

Things were so confusing that nobody knew exactly what was being offered or not. The way this was carried out was remarkable. The spring planting in 1930 took place without the peasants in the collective farms knowing how they were going to receive remuneration. There was no debate. The traditional peasant method in the village commune was that the land was distributed according to the number of eaters in each household. So some thought shares in the crop should be distributed on that basis. The more orthodox view coming from the cities was that it should be distributed according to how many days labor each individual did. But that wasn't the only view. The secretary responsible for collectivization, the minister for agriculture, who was himself a former steel worker, thought everyone should go over to a wage system. Now, where the collective farms were supposed to get the money to pay wages he did not explain. But that was his view. And every month they would do another draft of model statutes for the collective farms, which would say things like, the collective farms should pay no more than 50% of renumeration in the form of wages prior to the harvest, at least half the payments should be held back —they had no money!

What actually happened in the first year is that part of the dropout from the collective farms — once they said anybody out who wants to can get out, and half got out — were not people who wanted to drop out. They were the agricultural laborers, people with no land who were attracted to the collective farms, and they joined them in November and discovered they weren't going to get fed until next November. Large numbers of them had to leave. It was messy. It was not well organized. But it also has to be taken into account, that when major social movements are launched, all kinds of strange things do happen. There's no part of history worth examining that doesn't look awfully strange once you look at it closely.

They had no document saying this is how they were going to do it. But it's the same plenum of the Central Committee which discusses the crisis of industrialization which also gives a call for all-out collectivization. It seems that there is a connection, and that this is the underlying thing.

In any event, collectivization went far beyond what the peasantry could sustain. They had to retreat. They retreated for a year, had good weather and an exceptional harvest, and once they had this, a more orderly attempt was made to go forward from 25% to 50% collectivization, and they reached it by the end of 1931.

On paper this was a great success, but the fact of the matter is that the collective farm system had grown up rapidly and remained highly disorganized and disoriented.

At the same time, the state was becoming more and more rigid about the grain quotas for the collective farms. This was for two interrelated reasons.

The first was that they had hired on far more workers in the course of industrialization than they had expected. The original plan in the Five Year Plan was not to increase the payroll that much, but to increase the productivity of the workers. Yet by 1931 they had run out of unemployed to hire on. They had hired on everybody. They were routinely hiring two workers for every job, because of high labor turnover, because they were hiring ex-peasants who had no experience in industrial work, etc. This increased the demand for grain.

The other thing that happened during this period was that Japan invaded Manchuria, and there was a serious question whether they were going to move south deeper into China or whether they were going to move into

Siberia. Had the Japanese moved into Siberia, the Siberian harvest would have been lost.

So they went on an emergency appropriation campaign, taking every bit of grain from the countryside except for the seed grain, and sometimes taking the seed grain too. The state went in for massive hoarding.

At the same time, they were transferring some 500,000 troops to Siberia in preparation for a Japanese invasion.

All these things came to a head. In some areas there was not enough seed grain for the next planting. A crop failure resulted. In other areas the peasants just wouldn't plant and wouldn't harvest. In effect they were on strike. At this point the peasants turned very heavily toward working their private plots. And a big fight was taking place between the state and the peasants as to whether there would be private plots and how large they would be.

Violation of the voluntary principle

A major social experiment like this is not going to have a smooth course, even at best. There are going to be setbacks. But many of the problems here seem to be linked to the violation of the principle of the voluntary character of collectivization and to the wide use of repressive measures. This is not simply a matter of not stepping on anyone's toes; it's the issue that collectivization has to be based upon the concrete situation in village life.

There's no doubt that a social base did exist for collectivization. In the Ukraine, throughout the 1920s, a collective farm movement had persisted. And it was composed principally of poor peasants. At that time the Ukraine had the most capitalist development in agriculture in the country. It had the bitterest class struggle in the countryside. And this shows that when the development reaches a certain point, the poor peasants and a section of the middle peasants are interested in collectivization as a way out.

The situation in the Ukrainian countryside may have been somewhat more advanced than elsewhere. But class differentiation was taking place; it seems reasonable to assume that there was some social base for collectivization. Moreover, when they called a retreat in collectivization, half of those in the collective farms chose to remain; there may be various factors involved, but certainly some peasants wanted collectivization.

The collective farm system eventually stabilized on the basis of a compromise between the collective farm and petty production. Grain production would be collectivized, but the peasant would have his private plot as well. And the collective farm did become the foundation of other changes in the countryside. Universal education was introduced in the countryside. A system of medical clinics was introduced in the countryside. And so forth.

But the price that was paid was very dear. The distorted way in which collectivization was achieved seems to have had a wrenching effect on the entire society. The wide-scale use of police methods to deal with social issues was set as a standard for the future. And a large part of the peasantry, while it may have adjusted to collectivization, definitely was not won to the side of the party and state.

Aftermath of the Civil War

I want to turn now to some points regarding earlier history.

The role of the working class in the October revolution was not just an abstraction. It was realized through the role of the Red Militia, the factory committee movement, the workers' Soviets, and the Bolshevik Party itself. Through these means the class conscious workers, with the direct backing of the overwhelming majority of the class, seized and exercised power in the months and years following the revolution. The participation of masses of workers in political affairs blossomed, and a large section of urban toilers were drawn close to the Party. As I've mentioned, the unfolding of the poor peasants' movement in the villages gave the proletariat an organized rural ally as well. And, I should mention as well the soldiers' soviets, which provided a forum for political participation for what, essentially, was at that time the most conscious section of the peasantry.

These achievements were dealt a grave blow in the Civil War. Fourteen reactionary armies were fielded by Russian reaction and the major imperialist powers in a bitter war against the revolution. They marched across Russia leaving death and destruction in their wake. At the height of the war they occupied the major grain-producing regions and cut off the flow of foodstuffs to the cities.

The working class responded heroically. Entire factory committees and trade unions enlisted en masse. The great majority of class conscious workers ended up in the ranks of the army, or in the Cheka, or in administrative work.

A consequence of this was the decline of many of the forms associated with the October revolution. It's hard to maintain the factory committee when the entire factory committee is enlisted in the army to go fight. So to a certain extent you now have the class conscious proletariat organized as an army.

Reaction proved unable to crush the October Revolution militarily. But it dealt it a severe blow. Together with death and destruction, it also brought about economic collapse. In fact, economic collapse had been threatening from 1917, that's one of the reasons the revolution took place. But the possibility of forestalling it disappeared with the onset of the civil war.

With the White armies occupying the grain-producing areas and with the collapse of internal trade, the Soviet government resorted to the emergency appropriation of grain from the peasantry in the areas it could reach. The peasants were left with only enough grain to survive, and sometimes not even that. Even at that, the urban population remained only a step away from starvation.

The devastation of the Civil War, the emergency appropriation of grain, the collapse of internal trade, and conscription brought the peasantry to hunger, exhaustion

and the brink of rebellion. The poor peasants' movement and the village Soviets had all but collapsed. And the alliance of the working class with the peasantry was seriously weakened.

The cities were deeply affected too. The Russian proletariat was numerically a small part of the Russian population, but it was obliged to shoulder the main weight of the defense. The majority of party members, the factory committee movement, and other class conscious workers had gone to the front. Industry ground to a near standstill. At the time of the October Revolution, the economic crisis was such that industrial output had fallen to about 50% of its prewar level. During the civil war, it fell to 20 or 25%.

Complicating matters further, the workers remaining in the factories were no longer the veterans of the factory committee movement and the October Revolution; these had gone to the front, and their places had been taken by elements drawn from a variety of social backgrounds, including peasants who had been displaced by the war. The masses in the cities were hungry and exhausted, and a part of them had lost confidence in the Party and in the Soviet government.

By the time of the Kronstadt rebellion in March 1921, many local peasant revolts were brewing. The books say things like that there were over 200 local peasant revolts, but what a local peasant revolt is and how much it means varied a lot from case to case. But it was a sign that there was certain discontent brewing in a fairly large section of the peasantry. Then, in the weeks before Kronstadt, mass anti-Bolshevik demonstrations had taken place in Petrograd. In fact that's how the plotters in Kronstadt got the idea and why they thought they could pull something off. They thought that the situation would be ripe. Actually this was a mis-estimate. Nonetheless the fact of mass demonstrations taking place in Kronstadt under a series of slogans including "for Soviets without Bolsheviks" indicated the crisis confronting the party.

The crisis in policy

Defeating the counterrevolution in the civil war required an all-out mobilization. And not only the party, but to a considerable extent, the entire society had been placed under military or near-military discipline. Harsh measures were frequently required, and they were carried out swiftly, without regard for the niceties of preparing public opinion which might be expected in more peaceful times. Many of these harsh methods were necessitated by the conditions of the time; if you're at war, you don't have time to dot the i's and cross the t's, you take whatever measures are necessary. You go ahead and you don't take the time to prepare the public opinion, etc., you go ahead and do it. It also means you don't have a lot of time for sitting around thinking, well here we must act swiftly and decisively, but here we have leeway. So the measures which had to be taken during this period were fairly harsh, and this is just a fact of life.

Along with these conditions there are probably going to be some excesses, and there is also a tendency to romanticize the emergency measures and the military way of doing things, and to portray this as a rapid advance toward socialism. This was the more so, given that many of the measures that were taken were popular among the class conscious workers. Historically, to the working class, money signifies slavery. The idea of somehow abolishing money goes way back. It didn't begin with Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program*; that just put the idea on a scientific footing. So, when the workers saw hyper-inflation and the disappearance of the ruble, at least a section of the class conscious workers said, "Fine. Let's abolish money." Speculation was outlawed. Speculators could be taken out and shot, in theory at least.

But what is speculation? Someone goes to the countryside, buys a bag of grain, brings it back to the city to sell it at a higher price. This was speculation, but there's a certain problem here. The problem is, the market is speculation. The market brings middlemen, and what's a middleman but a speculator? Outlaw all speculation, and right there you're abolishing the market, which is great, but what do you have to replace it with? Certain problems may indeed have resulted from this. But from the standpoint of many class conscious workers, "Yea, shoot the speculators. Yea!" As far as many class conscious workers were concerned, this was exactly what to do, and this was marching toward socialism.

This not withstanding, all these measures taken as a whole — the militarization, the emergency grain appropriation, the other emergency political and economic measures — weighed heavily upon the mass of toilers. The class conscious workers may have liked them, but for the toilers as a whole, they proved to be more of a burden than they could sustain. Yet the tendency to romanticize this approach may have encouraged a certain blindspot toward the problems and dangers which accompanied these methods.

And it's notable that numbers of the emergency measures which were taken, were not eased when the end of the civil war was in sight. They were not eased when it was a foregone conclusion that the revolution was going to defeat the counterrevolution. It was only when the crisis became severe, when rebellions were breaking out and so forth, that attempts were made to get away from this emergency way of doing things. So in fact it seems to have had a certain grip on the party.

Ebb of the revolutionary tide

Now a prominent feature of the high tide of the revolution after October was the awakening of a large section of the toiling masses to public affairs. It may have been easy at this time to imagine that this would become a permanent feature of the revolution, that there would always be thousands and thousands of workers every week turning out for mass assemblies to debate, and this is the

way it would be from now on, only maybe it would get bigger.

But revolutionary high tides tend to be followed by revolutionary ebbs. It doesn't seem that history works this way, that once you finally get state power, the rules change and there'll never be an ebb. It doesn't really seem reasonable, and you are going to see ebbs in which the revolutionary fervor dampens somewhat and in which at least some sections of the masses withdraw into everyday life.

This does not necessarily mean a complete end to mass participation in public affairs. But the phenomenon will diminish. And the party will then be faced with the question of how to cope with a more normal situation, at the same time preserving the essence of the revolution and working for the day when the next tide comes and there is a new surge of even wider mass participation in public affairs.

In Soviet Russia this ebb did take place, and it took place against the background of war communism. And the extreme exhaustion of the masses made for a particularly steep ebb. This was all the more so because of the fate during the civil war of the forms which had been opened up during the revolution. A lot of them were gone or had weakened. The factory committee movement had, basically, been wiped out by the historical circumstances. The village soviets had been decimated. And such circumstances too became a contributing factor to the steep ebb of the revolutionary tide.

The class conscious proletariat had not ceased to exist — just the form in which it was organized was a little different, basically it was the party and the army to a large extent. But this meant that mass mobilization for the war effort had necessarily taken most party members and a whole section of the class conscious workers out of their spheres. A guy who used to be at the Putilov works, working among thousands and thousands of other workers there, may now be off in Siberia someplace, where he doesn't know anybody. This was part of the conditions of the aftermath of such a war.

Relations between the party and the masses

Under these conditions, with the aftermath of the civil war, with a certain crisis in party policy, and with the ebb of the revolutionary tide, the relationship of the party with the masses emerged as an important problem which did not readily disappear. The party appears at times to have had some recognition of this problem and to have made some efforts in this direction. But this was not consistent, and in practice was honored more in the breach than in the observance.

At one time, a series of conferences of non-party toilers was launched. At another, a campaign to revitalize the Soviets. But the main place was given to rebuilding the trade unions as the main link between the party and the masses. In fact, however, there is little evidence the trade unions succeeded in playing such a role during the 1920s. And as the 1920s progressed, questions of mass mobilization and mass participation appear to have received diminishing attention until the launching of the shock brigade movement toward the end of the decade.

These problems had practical implications. So long as the party was in power it was obliged to govern society. At the end of war communism this meant hammering out compromises with other class forces, notably the peasantry and the remains of the old bureaucracy. To the extent that the party's ties with the masses suffered weaknesses, the party was then entering into these arrangements on something less than a secure footing. And as the decade moves on into the 20s, these problems then become a backdrop to further developments such as the unfolding of the inner-party debate, and the eventual launching of the industrialization drive.

These are the points I wanted to make regarding the early history.

The October Revolution and its place in history

What attitude do we take toward this?

The attitude of Marx and Engels toward the Paris Commune is instructive.

Marx and Engels praised the Commune in the highest possible terms, and drew from its brief experience — only ten weeks — valuable lessons about the socialist revolution. Yet, when we look at the Commune in detail, it is evident that had it lived beyond its 70-some-odd days, it would have soon been in crisis.

The Paris Commune was something of an historical anomaly. It wasn't a time of European-wide upsurge; there was simply a situation in France which gave the proletariat a taste of what the future would be. Paris at that time was largely cut off from the countryside and from the other French cities. The Parisian toilers in that day were concentrated in light industry and were much less organized than, say, the proletariat of Russia a few decades later. By any standards, the objective conditions under which the Commune arose were less than favorable to the proletariat being able to retain power.

Now the leaders of the communards were majority Blanquist, minority Proudhonist. They were not Marxists, except for a few individuals. They subscribed to other trends, and not infrequently the policies of the Commune reflected the weaknesses of these trends. The Central Committee brought to power by the insurrection surrendered power to the Commune too soon; serious steps were not taken to crush the counterrevolution; the Communards were paralyzed by awe in the face of the power of the banks; and their appeal to the peasantry was acutely weak.

Now, for all of this, the memory of the Commune will nonetheless long be honored.

By these standards the October Revolution went very far indeed. The October Revolution was the product of an entire historical era. It was not Paris, which at that time

was a town of a few hundred thousand. It took place in a country of 100-150 million.

It was the doing of a millions-strong industrial working class; it held power not for weeks, but for years. And we can do this study because the October Revolution went far enough to get into trouble. There's much more than this. They actually held power for years, and for years spent time grappling with the practical problem of organizing working class rule. And dealt as well with the question of winning the peasantry, or a section of the peasantry, as an ally.

It was led by revolutionary Marxists organized into a political party. And above all, the October Revolution left an indelible impression on world history. Most of the twentieth century has centered around the fact of the October Revolution.

The place of the October Revolution in history, as a great revolution of the working class, is secure.

The need to de-mythicize the process of revolution

However, the October Revolution, and the revolutionary process in general, have been shrouded in mythology. And if we are going to draw the lessons of this history, we need to give concrete meaning to the big, awe-inspiring phrases that you can't get a handle on. What does it mean to smash up the old state machine? What is the slogan of "Soviet Power"? What do these things signify?

We take up this task because we believe the lessons of this experience are still relevant. Today's world is a different place from that of 1917, and it would be foolish for anyone to imagine that they are going to be able to make revolution by imitating or doing a rerun of the tactics of the October Revolution. But the laws of history, and the fundamental questions which face us, have not changed.

We are putting a lot of effort into our study of this history. And we are paying a lot of attention to our methods of study. But the correctness of our methods of study, of the quality of the conclusions we come to — the documents we write in summing it up etc. — none of this is going to be the test of the validity of the conclusions which we arrive at. They are going to be put to the test by the next generation of the proletarian revolution. And after the professors and the politicians and the press have a hundred times proclaimed that the revolution is dead, and that Marxism is dead, the revolution is going to burst forth with a magnitude of strength not before seen. It's going to reach greater heights than before, and part of the reason it's going to reach greater heights than before, is it's going to be able to stand on the shoulders of the October Revolution, just as the October Revolution stood on the shoulders of the revolutions of the 19th century. □