

# THE LENINIST BARRIER TO SOCIALIST RECONSTRUCTION

Ben Debney



Public domain



CLASSAUTONOMY.INFO 2023

If the past can be reduced to the failings of an individual, the complicity of an entire culture and its participation in that individual's misdeeds need never come under scrutiny.

- Sardar, Nandy and Davies, *Barbaric Others*

<https://linktr.ee/bendebney>

- Palmer, Robert Roswell (2013). *Twelve who ruled: The year of terror in the French Revolution*. Princeton University Press.
- Perelman, Michael (2000). *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical political economy and the secret history of primitive accumulation*. Duke University Press.
- Peirats, José (1990). *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution*, London; Freedom Press.
- Peirats, José (2011). *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*. Vol. 1. PM Press.
- Pirani, Simon (2008). *The Russian revolution in retreat, 1920–24: Soviet workers and the new communist elite*. Routledge.
- Reed, John (1980). *Ten Days that Shook the World*. London; Penguin Books.
- Reich, Wilhelm (1970). *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Rocker, Rudolf (1937). 'The Insufficiency of Economic Materialism' (Chapter 1), in *Nationalism and Culture*. Los Angeles, CA: Rocker Publications Committee.
- Rosenberg, William (1978). 'Workers and workers' control in the Russian revolution,' *History Workshop*, pp. 89-97. Ruskin College.
- Said, Edward (1978). *Orientalism*. Penguin.
- Serge, Victor (2015). *Year one of the Russian Revolution*. Haymarket Books, 2015.
- Shafir, Gershon, Everard Meade, and William J. Aceves, eds (2013). *Lessons and Legacies of the War on Terror: From Moral Panic to Permanent War*, London; Routledge.
- Sheehan, Helena (2017). *Syriza Wave: Surging and Crashing with the Greek Left*. NYU Press.
- Sirianni, Carmen (1982). *Workers' Control and Socialist Democracy: The Soviet Experience*. London; Verso.
- Smith, Stephen Anthony (1985). *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories, 1917-1918*, Cambridge University Press.
- Stalin, Josef (1933). The Results of the First Five-Year Plan, via <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1933/01/07.htm>, accessed 21 September 2019.
- Sotirakopoulos, Nikos and George Sotiropoulos (2013). "Direct democracy now!: The Greek indignados and the present cycle of struggles." *Current Sociology* 61, no. 4: 443-456.
- Sukhanov, Nikolai Nikolaevich (2014). *The Russian Revolution 1917: A Personal Record by NN Sukhanov*. Princeton University Press.
- Trotsky, Leon (2008). *History of the Russian Revolution*, Haymarket Books.
- Trotsky, Leon (1979). "Hue and Cry Over Kronstadt" in V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, *Kronstadt*, Monad Press.
- Trotsky, Leon (2010). *The Permanent Revolution & Results and Prospects*. Red Letter Press.
- Twiss, Thomas (2015). *Trotsky and the Problem of Soviet Bureaucracy*, London; Taylor & Francis.
- Volin (1975). *The Unknown Revolution, 1917-1921*, Montreal; Black Rose Books Ltd.
- Williams, Albert Rhys. (1921). *Through the Russian Revolution*. Boni and Liveright.
- Wolin, Sheldon (2008). *Democracy Inc: Managed Democracy and the Spectre of Inverted Totalitarianism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Womack, John (2011). *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*. Vintage.

- Jackson, Peter dir (2001). *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, Burbank: New Line Cinema.
- Jones, Rod (n.d.). *Factory Committees in the Russian Revolution*, Prole.info, n.d., via <http://prole.info/pamphlets/factorycommitteesinrussia.pdf>, accessed 21 September 2017.
- Knight, Amy W. (1999). *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery*, Hill and Wang.
- Kropotkin, Peter (1970). 'Letter to Lenin,' *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Lazzarato, Maurizio (2015). *Governing by debt*. South Pasadena; Semiotexte.
- Leach, D. K. (2013). Prefigurative politics. *The Wiley-Blackwell encyclopedia of social and political movements*.
- Lenoe, Matthew (2010). *The Kirov Murder and Soviet History*, Yale University Press.
- Leval, Gaston (1975). *Collectives in the Spanish revolution*. London: Freedom Press.
- Lieven, Dominic (2015). *Towards the flame: Empire, war and the end of Tsarist Russia*. Penguin.
- Lenin, V. I. (1917). All Power to the Soviets! *Pravda* No. 99, July 18.
- Lenin, V. I., & Chretien, T. (2015) [1917]. *State and revolution*. Haymarket Books.
- Lenin, V.I. (1918). *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, Moscow.
- Lenin, V.I. (1917). *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It*, Moscow.
- Lenin, V.I. (1922). *To the Russian Colony in North America*, Moscow.
- Lenin, V.I. (1920). "Left-Wing" Communism: an Infantile Disorder.
- Lenin, V.I. (2015). *State and Revolution*. Haymarket Books.
- Lenin, V.I. (1921). The Tax in Kind, 21 April, in Lenin's *Collected Works*, 1st English Edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Volume 32, pages 329-365.
- Libcom.org (2016). 'The Petropavlovsk Resolution (1921),' via <https://libcom.org/history/petropavlovsk-resolution>, accessed 17 September 2017.
- Lofgren, Mike (2016). *The Deep State: The Fall of the Constitution and the Rise of a Shadow Government*. Penguin.
- Lorimer, Doug (1998). *Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution: A Leninist Critique*, Melbourne, Resistance Books.
- Mandel, Ernest (1995). *Trotsky as Alternative*, London; Verso.
- Marx, K (1990). *Capital*, London, Penguin Classics.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (2002). *The Communist Manifesto*. Penguin.
- Marx, K. (2008) [1852]. *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Wildside Press.
- Meyer, Stephen (1980). "Adapting the immigrant to the line: Americanization in the Ford factory, 1914-1921." *Journal of Social History* 14, no. 1: 67-82.
- Mett, Ida (1973). *The Kronstadt Uprising*. Montreal: Black Rose Books.
- Moore, Jason W. (2015). *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, London; Verso.
- Miéville, C. (2017). *October: the story of the Russian Revolution*. London & New York: Verso.
- Mintz, Frank (2013). *Anarchism and Workers' Self-Management in Revolutionary Spain*, Oakland; AK Press.
- Mustin, Graham (2015). 'Religion and revolution in the Middle Ages,' *International Socialism* 147, 6 July, via <http://isj.org.uk/religion-and-revolution-in-the-middle-ages>, accessed 7 October 2017.
- Ness, Immanuel, and Dario Azzellini (2011). *Ours to Master and to Own: Workers' Control from the Commune to the Present*. Haymarket Books.

THE CENTENARY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION OF October 1917 presented an opportunity to recall a momentous period of working-class struggle and a beacon of hope for anyone who has ever dared to dream of a basically sane and just world. At the same moment, it was also an occasion for forgetting, insofar as historians partial to the Leninist ideology of the Bolshevik Revolution sought to salvage the century-old foundations of Leninism from its historical consequences through politicisation and militant forgetting. A representative example of such appears can be found in the press release for a biography of Lenin timed to coincide with the 2017 centenary, alleging that

V. I. Lenin's originality and importance as a revolutionary leader is most often associated with the seizure of power in 1917. But, in this new study and collection of Lenin's original texts, Slavoj Žižek argues that his true greatness can be better grasped in the last two years of his political life. Russia had survived foreign invasion, embargo and a terrifying civil war, as well as internal revolts such as the one at Kronstadt in 1921. But the new state was exhausted, isolated and disorientated. As the anticipated world revolution receded into the distance, new paths had to be charted if the Soviet state was to survive (Verso 2017).

The emphasis in this formulation on the difficulties of ruling the Soviet state is at the outset indicative of this politicisation and sanitation; Russia had survived foreign invasion, embargo and a civil war, but it was the Soviet state (the Bolsheviks, in other words), used interchangeably with the Russian people, that had suffered; it was only their suffering that was worthy of visibility, much less to say compassion. The Russian sailors who instigated the revolt at Kronstadt in 1921, as well as many of the other revolts taking place against the Bolshevik state at the time, were apparently not Russians, or Russians worthy of consideration. These assumptions are unmistakable the implicit claim that the popular workers' revolution and the Bolshevik political revolution were identical; to do harm to the state was to do harm to the people (Deutscher 2003; Trotsky 2008; Serge 2015; Miéville 2017)

The paper that follows proceeds from the contention that the habit of conflating the Russian people and the state, in particular by refusing to acknowledge the fundamental distinction between the popular revolution in the factories and the political revolution carried out by the Bolsheviks, is the first of two major errors in Leninist historiography of the Russian Revolution. This,

coupled with the assumption that the nature of a state depends on the real or alleged beliefs of those in control of it, and not what they do—that, labels, in other words, speak louder than history, and that they permit a double standard based on who any action serves (or is alleged to), not by its nature or consequences (particularly in terms of the harms it causes)—is indicative of the ongoing politicisation of the history of the Russian Revolution for ideological purposes, for the sake apparently of sparing those who embrace it the work of reconstructing their politics on the basis of new information.

This process, this paper argues, results, in the end, in a concerted forgetting and ahistoricism, presenting serious issues not only for empirical rigour, but for efforts at socialist reconstruction and prefigurative socialist politics relevant to the conditions of the world a century on from the events of 1917 (Leach 2013). Energy that can be much better spent dealing with the problems of the world in 2017 and beyond is instead devoted to salvaging the theories of 1917 from the century that followed; innovations in the present are devalued and reduced to a sacrifice zone, along with much of the world and the people socialist theory should, in theory, be looking to empower, in the name of upholding received dogma through recourse to confirmation bias. What follows then can only be scapegoating logics and virtue signalling to the ideologically faithful from within closed ghettos, based on ad hominem serving to avoid the debate entirely (Debney 2020, 231-240). Nevertheless, the historical record defies this militant, collective forgetting (Brinton 1970; Smith 1985; Sirianni 1982; Avrich 1963a; Avrich 1963b; Rosenberg 1978; Aufheben 2015; Jones 2017). Against the historical record, we find double standards served by a scapegoating logic of ‘if you think for yourself, the enemies of the revolution win.’

To this logic, sincere expressions of doubt based on evidence or principled critiques of Leninism are impossible; they can only be the product of a reactionary agenda, conscious or otherwise, brought into existence with what Cohen calls ‘deviance production’—ideological deviance in this case being a subjective concept based on who has the power to control the interpretation of the term, not of anyone thus labelled (Cohen 2002, 2-8). Leninism can only be innocent of any derivation from the founding principle of the First International that ‘the emancipation of the working class will be carried out by the workers themselves,’ apparently because that is what historians looking to salvage Leninism from the lessons of Soviet history prefer to believe.

On this basis then, the honest work of historical remembrance is reduced to a work of deviance production, politicised on the one hand by conflating the state with the people, and by associating doubt with counter-revolution, via the ‘False Dilemma’ fallacy, on the other (Cohen 2002; Debney 2020). Deviance production wielded against defenders of the historical record functions not least to suppress the distinction of the difference between the

- Chattopadhyay, P. (1996). *Capitalism as Socialism in the Early Soviet Doctrine: Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Preobrazhensky*. Review of Radical Political Economics, 28(3), 74-82.
- Cichocka, A., de Zavala, A. G., Marchlewska, M., & Olechowski, M. (2015). Grandiose delusions: Collective narcissism, secure in-group identification, and belief in conspiracies. In *The psychology of conspiracy* (pp. 60-79). Routledge.
- Cohen, Stanley (2002). *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, London; Routledge.
- Cohn, Norman (1993). *Europe's inner demons: the demonization of Christians in medieval Christendom*. Random House.
- Cohn, Norman (2011). *The pursuit of the millennium: Revolutionary millenarians and mystical anarchists of the middle ages*. Random House.
- Conquest, Robert (1989). *Stalin and the Kirov Murder*, Oxford University Press, USA, 1989.
- Conquest, Robert (2008). *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, London; Oxford University Press.
- Darsey, J. (1988). The legend of Eugene Debs: Prophetic ethos as radical argument. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 74(4), 434-452.
- Dauvé, Gilles (2016). *When Insurrections Die*, via <https://libcom.org/library/when-insurrections-die>. Accessed 21 September 2019.
- Davis, David (1971). *The Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion from the Revolution to the Present*, Ithaca, NY; Cornell University Press.
- Debney, B (2020). *The Oldest Trick in the Book: Panic-Driven Scapegoating in History and Recurring Patterns of Persecution*. Singapore; Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- Deutscher, I. (2003). *The prophet armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921*. Verso.
- Dolgoff, Sam (1974). ed. *The Anarchist Collectives: Workers' Self-Management in the Spanish Revolution, 1936-1939*. Black Rose Books Ltd.
- Eckhardt, W. (2016). *The first socialist schism: Bakunin vs. Marx in the International Working Men's Association*. PM Press.
- Eco, Umberto (1995). ‘Ur-Fascism,’ *The New York Review of Books*, 22 June, via <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism>, accessed 18 May 2017.
- Engels, Friedrich (1877). *Anti-Dühring*.
- Federici, Silvia (2005). *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Private Accumulation*, New York; Autonomedia.
- Feldman, Jay (2011). *Manufacturing Hysteria: A History of Scapegoating, Surveillance, and Secrecy in Modern America*, Pantheon.
- Fromm, Erich (1942). *The Fear of Freedom*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Fromm, Erich (2012). *The Sane Society*. Routledge.
- Getzler, Israel (2002). *Kronstadt 1917-1921: the fate of a Soviet democracy*, Cambridge University Press.
- Haney, Craig (2003). ‘The psychological impact of incarceration: Implications for post-prison adjustment,’ *National Criminal Justice Reference Service*, via <https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/Publications/abstract.aspx?ID=205852>, accessed 21 February 2016.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri (2000). *Empire*. Harvard University Press.
- Hilton, Rodney (1990). *Class conflict and the crisis of feudalism: essays in medieval social history*. London; Verso.
- Hofstadter, Richard (1966). *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, London; Cape.

the conclusions about the nature of Leninist vanguardism as such indicates that the reassertion of self-serving ideological orthodoxies continues to take precedent over critical appraisal of the revolution's legacy, encumbering efforts at socialist reconstruction with the dead weight of century-old ideological dogma, and empowering the class enemy by reinforcing the mentality that the state is not per se an instrument of class domination, but more or less oppressive depending on the beliefs of those who wield state power.

The ultimate tragedy and irony of this militant ignorance and obstinate refusal to change and evolve is that the mentality that state terrorism is good because it benefits the right people is a characteristic feature of everything this tradition claims to oppose—much less to say the militant ignorance and obstinate refusal to change and evolve. For socialism as a whole to change and evolve, the evidence from the history of socialism tells us all we need to know in terms of the plain fact that we must, much less to say something of the consequences that lay ahead if we refuse. Socialist reconstruction can only take place if we act like history matters, even—or especially—when we don't like the lesson it has to tell.

## Bibliography

- Abramovitch, Raphael R (2017). *The Soviet Revolution: 1917-1938*, Routledge.
- Adorno, T. W., E. Frenkel-Brunswik, and D. J. Levinson (1950). *The Authoritarian Personality*, Harper.
- Aufheben (2015). *What was the USSR? Towards a Theory of the Deformation of Value Under State Capitalism*, Edmonton, Alberta; Thoughtcrime Ink.
- Avrich, Paul (2014). *Kronstadt 1921*. Princeton University Press.
- Avrich, Paul (1963). *Bolshevik revolution and workers' control in Russian industry*, Slavic Review; March. Vol. 22, p47-63.
- Avrich, Paul (1963). "Russian factory committees in 1917." *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* H. 2: 161-182.
- Bauer, Augustin Souchy (1982). *With The Peasants Of Aragon*. Soil of Liberty.
- Beer, Max (2010). *Social Struggles in the Middle Ages*. Routledge.
- Brinton, Maurice (1970). *The Bolsheviks & Workers' Control*, London; Solidarity, 1970.
- Brinton, Maurice (2004). 'The Irrational in Politics,' in Goodway, David, ed., *For Workers Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton*, Oakland, CA; AK Press, 257-292.
- Broué, Pierre & Emil Témime (2008). *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*, Haymarket.
- Carey, Alex (1995). *Taking the Risk Out of Democracy*, Sydney; UNSW Press.

popular, Russian Revolution and the political, Bolshevik Revolution—and with it, the fate of the factory committees and soviets—understood here as the expression of revolutionary power—under Bolshevik rule, or of those who dared to fight for the ideals of socialism when they came into conflict with the political ambitions of the Bolsheviks.

This paper contends that the tendency to identify critical perspectives on the Russian Revolution with attacking socialism (again, the 'False Dilemma'), accounts in no small part for the inability of the left to learn from the history of the Russian Revolution, and so to reconstruct Socialism out of the wreckage of the Bolshevik Revolution; it makes it harder to identify the same dynamics at work on the political right, and to identify broader historical patterns recurring on that basis (Debney 2019, 236). If, ultimately, the issues related to the historical conditions that produced Stalinism pertain to issues of means and ends, politicised histories of the Russian Revolution must dodge this issue by privileging beliefs over facts and casuality. In empiricist historical perspective, however, actions speak louder than words—a fact that must ultimately be respected for the sake of socialist reconstruction.

**Basic orthodoxies.** The founding principle of the First International was that 'the work of emancipation will be carried out by the workers themselves.' Eugene Debs well-articulated the rationale for this principle in pointing out that 'those who lead you into a revolution can lead you back out again'—one of the more significant lessons of the Thermidorian reaction (Darsey 1988). If the working class was not permitted to organise and express itself autonomously, and if it was forced to carry a new set of masters who had learned to speak the language of workers' rights and justified class oppression in the name of the rights of labour, then politics of class justice would degenerate into a rhetorical mechanism for the social reproduction of class privilege. Labels did not speak louder than history (Eckhardt 2016).

While rhetorically the Bolsheviks were committed to revolutionary change, in practise they did not believe that a classless society was possible in Russia. Marx had theorised that economic development proceeded in distinct historical stages reflecting the underlying mode of production, leading Lenin and Trotsky to assume that communism was impossible in Russia without the development of an urban proletariat. Such was only achievable through a transition period that could bring Russia out of feudalism and into capitalism, creating the basis for the urban proletariat who could then struggle for socialism (Lenin 2015). To this, Trotsky added that the Russian bourgeoisie were too weak and ineffectual to carry out a political revolution to overthrow the Tsar in a comparable manner, and since this was the case, the urban proletariat such as it was would have to enter into an alliance with the peasantry to do so, enabling resolution of the land issue and facilitating the development of an industrial pro-

letariat that could carry out a second revolution and establish the basis for the cooperative, classless economy associated with full communism (Trotsky 2010).

Precluded from immediate change (in their own minds, at least), the Bolsheviks sought to take and maintain state power, suppress the capitalist reaction and develop the semi-feudal and predominantly agrarian Russian economy such that it would in turn produce a proletariat that could act as a social base for industrialisation, and eventually socialism. Upon the development of a proletariat that could struggle for full communism in the form of workers' control of production and the abolition of classes, Lenin theorised, the state would simply wither away (Lenin 1917). The fact that it did not in practise is typically account for by pointing to the failure of European communists to extend the revolution over to in the west, precipitating a strategic crisis that Stalin was then able to exploit to assume leadership of the Russian Communist Party and turn it into a vehicle for his own designs on absolute power (Trotsky 2008).

As the leader of the Left Opposition, Trotsky provides the main source of criticism of Stalin, not least of which being that Stalin left the New Economic Policy (NEP) in place, abandoning the project of working through the alleged stages of economic development from socialism to full communism by prioritising 'the law of value' over 'the law of planning,' while leaving the Soviet state to degenerate into bureaucratism (Twiss 2015). Trotsky was particularly vocal in his criticism of Stalin's policy of 'Socialism in One Country.' Such an abandonment of worker internationalism, he pointed out, subordinated communist movements around the world to the needs of Soviet foreign policy, having a markedly destructive effect on radical opposition to the world capitalist status quo—Western anti-communist paranoia notwithstanding. The conduct of the Stalinists during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution (1936-9) in breaking up peasant collectives was a particularly egregious example (Broué & Témime 2008).

**The Great Purges.** Prior to the Purges of the 1930s, Stalin was already prone to the fallacy-ridden style of the False Dilemma ('those who are not for me are against me,' or 'there is no difference between being criticized and being attacked') that criticism of his personal dictatorship over the Party could only come from those who were imbued with petit-bourgeois bias, not because the Soviet Union was a terror-ridden inferno (Oplinger 1990; Debney 2020). In The Results of the First Five-Year Plan (1933), Stalin declared that

We must bear in mind that the growth of the power of the Soviet state will increase the resistance of the last remnants of the dying classes. It is precisely because they are dying, and living their last days that they will pass from one form of attack to another, to sharper forms of attack,

and Zapata demonstrate the efficacy of non-state military organisation, but such options are off the table, cries of existential threats then only exist as an ideological pretext for taking state power. Unless of course, defenders of the Leninist orthodoxy recuse themselves from leadership of the revolution.

**Conclusion.** While conventional histories of the Russian Revolution follow orthodox Leninist ideology in blaming Stalin's personality, the expediences of the White Invasion and the failure of the working classes in Western Europe to follow up with revolutions of their own for the failure of the revolution, ascribing decisive faults on factors external to Bolshevik ideology as such is convenient and easy. On the same logic, we might blame the pathology of Wall Street on the personalities of Wall Street bankers, not on the pathologies interwoven into finance capital as an institution, and capitalism as an autocratic (some might say totalitarian) social relation.

In looking at institutional power dynamics, by contrast, the evidence suggests that Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin were not as different as conventional histories of the Russian Revolution tend to reflect. The penchant of all three for the logic of the False Dilemma, for the deep defensiveness that made Stalin, Trotsky and Lenin prone to demonising and labelling any source of criticism and associating it with either passive ('petit-bourgeois, utopian diletantism') or active (thinking differently) support for the capitalist reaction, draws an unbroken line from the Bolshevik Revolution of 25 October 1917 to the Stalinist purges and beyond.

Thus, in the absolute logic of, 'if you cast doubt on the Bolshevik party the enemies of socialism win,' born of the False Dilemma, there was only room to tell the revolutionary leaders what they wanted to hear, or to be classed in the same category as Tsarist militarists and capitalist oligarchs. The logic of "if you cast doubt on the Bolshevik party the enemies of socialism win" was as evident in Trotsky's denunciation of the Kronstadt rebels as 'White guardists' as it was in Stalin's denunciation of his opponents as 'petit-bourgeois counter-revolutionary Trotskyist terrorists.' It accounts for Lenin's tendency to demonise his enemies as 'infantile leftism' and conflate thinking differently with being a weekend dabbler in radical politics—though demonizing and labelling anyone with the audacity to cast doubt on the majesty of your judgment was perfectly rational.

Patent unwillingness to address these issues, if nothing else, is reflected in the conspicuous lack of social histories of worker self-activity to accompany the new biographies of Lenin published to mark the Centenary of the Russian Revolution. That they do remain unexplored and unexplained within the political tradition that wrought them, even after a century, suggests that historians who subscribe to that political tradition find it easier to envision the end of the world than the end of Leninism, and politicise the histories they write accordingly. This process of politicising the history of the Russian Revolution to avoid

The fantasy changed, became more complex, down through the centuries. It played an important part in some major persecutions; and the way in which it did also varied. Sometimes it was used merely to legitimate persecutions that would have occurred anyway; sometimes it served to widen persecutions that would otherwise have remained far more limited. In the case of the great [European] Witch Hunt, it generated a massive persecution, which would have been inconceivable without it. In pursuing its history one is led far beyond the confines of the history of ideas and deep into the sociology and social psychology of persecution (Cohn 1993, ix).

During the suppression of the Kronstadt Uprising, the Bolsheviks used the same trope Cohn identifies as the 'Ancient Fantasy' to play the victims of Tsarist reaction, even though there was nary a reactionary in sight (outside of the ruling class of bureaucrats in the process of successfully colonising the hammer and sickle, which they then used to colonise the rest of the Soviet Empire—effecting workers' primitive accumulation). Plans by White Guardists to provoke the Kronstadt sailors into revolt are generally referred to as the 'smoking gun' of proof of a conspiracy, though Trotskyist conspiracists can neither point to proof of any influence over the sailors, or explain why a conspiracy would be necessary for the revolutionary sailors to need outside influence to reach the point of insurgency where the Bolsheviks were concerned.

The plain fact is that far more bourgeois elements could be found amongst the rapidly expanding bureaucracy in Moscow, a fact that suggests the Bolsheviks had other motivations for claiming that a party dictatorship was necessary to meet the military threat. Nestor Makhno's anarchist partisans held off Ukrainian Nationalists, Austro-German imperialists, Hetmanates, the Whites, and the Red Army for good measure. Non-statist modes of military organisation similar to Makhno had similar triumphs against regular forces, the Zapata-lead insurgents during the Mexican Revolution only a few years beforehand being not the least of which (Womack 2011).

Stalin's use of the False Dilemma cast himself out to be a victim of a vast international Trotskyist conspiracy, rationalising his persecution of Trotskyists with what we can today identify as conspiracism (Cichočka et al, 2015). Trotsky, as we have seen, did the same, casting himself as a victim of a vast international conspiracy come to malevolent, destructive fruition in the Kronstadt Rebellion. We might draw a similar parallel between the False Dilemma as applied in the abovementioned examples of Cohn's 'Ancient Fantasy,' in the existential threat of witches, the Brides of Satan, and the attempts by Leninists to justify the establishment of a political monopoly on the grounds of situational expediency—in this case, the alleged existential threat of Tsarist reaction. If Makhno

appealing to the backward strata of the population, and mobilizing them against the Soviet power. There is no foul lie or slander that these 'have-beens' would not use against the Soviet power and around which they would not try to mobilize the backward elements (Stalin 1933).

Of note in this passage is the absolutist binary invoked between 'the power of the Soviet state,' and 'the last remnants of the dying classes.' Being the sole recipient of that power (much more so in the wake of the purges shortly to follow), Stalin self-servingly conflates 'the power of the Soviet state,' and his own personal power as dictator. His willing confusion of the two set the scene for the association of dissent with 'counter-revolutionary opposition elements from among the Trotskyists,' who, in being the only dissident group left, would be the main targets of the coming purges, associated with Right deviationists in the abovementioned formulation through a free conflation of criticising someone and attacking them.

In this 'You are either with us or you are with the counter-revolution'-type logic, the False Dilemma is overt; so too is Cohen's deviance production. As Cohen noted, since prevailing interpretations of deviance depended on the power to impose their definition on public discourse, deviance production requires control over the channels of mass communication and could thus be generally understood as elite-driven phenomena (Cohen 2002; Debney 2020). The Stalinist state media reflected control of a class elite over Bolshevik discourses around deviance patently when, on 1 December 1934, head of the Leningrad Soviet and Politburo member Sergei Kirov, was assassinated in Moscow. It immediately cast Kirov's assassination as the handiwork of the renegade Trotsky and his petit bourgeois, counter-revolutionary terrorist supporters, who were immediately targeted for liquidation during the ensuing Great Purge and Moscow Show Trials (Abramovitch 2017; Knight 1999; Lenoe 2010; Conquest 1988; Conquest 2008).

Enabling the purges from this point on, and as a result of this process, was a conspiracy theory centred around the myth of a Trotskyist cabal operating in cahoots with Western capital to undermine and destroy the revolutionary state. By means of this conspiracy theory, reflecting deviance production and the False Dilemma, the machinery of Stalinist repression cemented the absolute power of the Red Tsar and sealed the last nails in the coffin of the workers' revolution in the name of defending it from its enemies. Anyone who failed to worship Stalin with the requisite level of awe, were demonized and associated with the conspiracy theory on the logic that, 'if you think for yourself, the bourgeois reaction wins' (Debney 2020, 48; 235).

Unmistakable in this logic was the cognitive dissonance between the rhetorical ideals Stalin invoked to rationalise the Purges, and the actually-existing values that motivated him to root out the last fires of dissent in the name of

their defence against an existentialist threat—values which, suffice it to say, were far less selfless and benign. Such cognitive dissonance is hardly unique (Mencken 1921; Hofstadter 2012; Feldman 2011; Reich 1970; Fromm 1942; Adorno 1950; Eco 1995; Brinton 2004; Saïd 2003; Klein 2007; Oplinger 1990; Shafir, Meade & Aceves 2013; Debney 2019). The really burning question is the extent to which such parallels, and so the attendant conclusions consistent with more general warnings of history against hubris and overreach, can be drawn within.

**Stalinism and Trotskyism.** A paradox is evident within Leninist historiography insofar as the pretext of ‘extenuating circumstances’ Stalin cited as justification for the policies Trotsky found so abhorrent were mirrored in those the latter cited to justify suppression of strikes and other expressions of working-class discontent after 1917 (Debney 2020, 235-8). Primary amongst such cases was the massacre of the revolutionary sailors, ‘the cream of the revolution,’ at the Kronstadt naval base outside Petrograd in 1921 (Avrich 2014; Getzler 2002; Mett 1973). The same dynamics of deviance production, along with victim playing, victim blaming, and conflating criticism with support for the enemy per the False Dilemma evident in the Stalinist purges are also evident in the suppression of the Kronstadt Uprising, treated by Trotsky at the time as a regrettable necessity to defend the revolution. The extenuating circumstances of the Russian Civil War demanded the Bolsheviks massacre the revolutionary sailors of Kronstadt, whom Trotsky had earlier hailed ‘the cream of the revolution,’ once their creamlike qualities became a hindrance, rather than an aid, to their own ambitions.

The reason Trotsky had celebrated the revolutionary sailors of Kronstadt as ‘the cream of the revolution’ was for their mutiny which weakened the repressive powers of the Tsar and provided decisive support to the revolutionary cause immediately prior to October 1917. ‘The Battleship Potemkin,’ which portrays the revolutionary sailors’ involvement in the 1905 revolution, including the classic massacre scene on the waterfront steps at Odessa, highlighting the violence and brutality of the Tsar and the importance of the revolutionary sailors to the growth of the movement.

Having helped the Bolsheviks into power, however, the Kronstadt sailors watched with growing unease as the new revolutionary government began to mimic the lately overthrown autocrat, usurping the power of local Soviets, suppressing opposition newspapers, forcing the revolutionary factory committees to submit to the control of vertical, party-controlled unions, and forbidding strikes, in the name of the claim that state power and the economic power of the revolutionary workers and peasants were one and the same thing—as long as the former had the right label. The values professed in party newspapers, and broadcast over state-controlled public radios were more

was in ancient Greek republics: freedom for slave owners’ (Lenin 1917) At the same time, however, ‘freedom is a bourgeois prejudice,’ as Lenin declared in response to appeals from anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman to respect the freedom of the Russian working class.

We repudiate all morality which proceeds from supernatural ideas or ideas which are outside the class conception. In our opinion, morality is entirely subordinate to the interests of the class war. Everything is moral which is necessary for the annihilation of the old exploiting order and for the uniting the proletariat. Our morality consists solely in close discipline and conscious warfare against the exploiters (Lenin 1920).

These comments are in keeping with the conflation of the First International principle of ‘the workers’ themselves’ with autocratic state power acting in the name of the workers, though not populated by them. If everything necessary for the annihilation of the old order was moral, then anything was moral as long as the target could be associated with it—the Kronstadt sailors, the Trotskyist Left Opposition, and finally anyone who failed to fall in line with the Stalinist cult of personality with the requisite level of awe. If the worker’s state failed to wither away because it never was one, the fact is lost on the ‘substitutionalist’ historiography that fails to recognise a distinction between the Bolsheviks and the working class, much less to say the state and society.

**The matter of wartime expediencies.** Just as Leninist ideology used the concepts of the institutional power structure of the Soviet state and the mass of the Russian people interchangeably, freely conflating the vested interests of those in charge of the state and common interest, so too did they use the defence of Soviet Russia from its external enemies and the grip on power of the Bolshevik Party interchangeably in the same way. As we have seen, scare-mongering about existential threats, politicised for the sake of justifying one or another expediency born of crisis that in calmer and more dispassionate times are considered beyond the pale, is the classic propaganda device for imposing authoritarian controls in the name of situational expediencies that sustain the power of ruling classes at the expense of popular rights and freedoms (Debney 2020). It turns up in no end of historical contexts and serves no other ultimate purpose.

In his exploration of the scare-mongering dynamics associated with witch panic, historian Norman Cohn formulates what he describes as an ‘ancient fantasy’—what we might describe these days as a propaganda trope for elite crisis management. The essence of this ‘ancient fantasy’ was, Cohn argued, that ‘there existed, somewhere in the midst of the great society, another society, small and clandestine, which not only threatened the existence of the great society but was also addicted to practices which were felt to be wholly abominable, in the literal sense of anti-human.’



Labels and who benefitted remain more important than what happened and what was done.

We have already examined how this propaganda line was adopted under Stalin to demonise dissent as an attack on the revolution; much of the additional evidence discussed since has been provided in the name of demonstrating this attitude as a characteristic feature of the Bolsheviks more generally. Similarly, in 1921,

State capitalism would be a step forward as compared with the present state of affairs in our Soviet Republic. If in approximately six months' time state capitalism became established in our Republic, this would be a great success and a sure guarantee that within a year socialism will have gained a permanently firm hold and will have become invincible in this country (Lenin 1921, 329-365).

By this logic, state capitalist monopoly was not exploitative or oppressive because the people controlling the state capitalist monopoly called themselves socialists; the extraction of surplus value was no longer indefensible as a matter of principle, but a matter of the greater good, as long as those extracting that surplus value claimed to be anti-capitalists. Such problems beg the question as to why, if the Bolsheviks were in control of the state capitalist monopoly, why not just hand over power to the factory committees that had been set up in 1917. If the factory committees had already seized the means of production, it was hardly necessary to relinquish control unless the Bolshevik revolution had come at the expense of the workers' revolution. The vertical integration into the state effected under Bolshevik state capitalism was in this sense reminiscent of vertical integration of unions under Italian fascism (Mussolini had, after all, described fascism as the 'corporate state'). But nevertheless,

The state capitalism, which is one of the principal aspects of the New Economic Policy, is, under Soviet power, a form of capitalism that is deliberately permitted and restricted by the working class. Our state capitalism differs essentially from the state capitalism in countries that have bourgeois governments in that the state with us is represented not by the bourgeoisie, but by the proletariat, who has succeeded in winning the full confidence of the peasantry (Lenin 1922).

The numerous armed revolts that had to be put down and the forced requisitioning of grain that came later would appear to suggest that the Bolsheviks had somewhat less than the full confidence of the peasantry. In *The State and Revolution*, possibly his most libertarian work, Lenin had pointed out truthfully enough that 'freedom in capitalist society always remains about the same as it

meaningful and relevant than the values manifest in actions, if not, where usurpers sought to reinvent themselves as solutions to problems of their own making, their oft-unforseen consequences.

Bolshevik repression of a series of strikes in Petrograd early in 1921 was enough to break the camel's back. On 28 February, meetings aboard the Petropavlovsk and Sevastopol battleships approved the 15-point 'Petropavlovsk Resolution,' demanding new elections to the Soviets, freedom of speech and of the press, and free right of assembly (Libcom.org, 2017). It is worth noting at the outset of the Petropavlovsk Resolution that nowhere does it demand the restoration of the Tsar or of capitalism, or anything that could even be interpreted as such—except by later historians applying the False Dilemma in service to the politicisation of history.

Indeed, resolutions 11 and 15 demand greater economic freedom with the specific stipulation that such freedom does not utilise wage labour (by contrast, such concerns did not appear to be a feature of Lenin's New Economic Policy). Hardly demonstrating concerns with the freedom of small-scale traders as in the NEP, the Petropavlovsk Resolution expresses discontent with the functioning of the Soviets under the Bolsheviks, with specific reference to their responsiveness to the needs of civil society and the increasing domination by the central government over all areas of social and economic life. The demand for 'all power to the soviets' merely repeated Lenin's much-vaunted slogan of 1917—one that the Bolsheviks had apparently now traded for 'all power to the party' by executive fiat now that they controlled a monopoly over the means of violence (Lenin 1917).

With the adoption of the Petropavlovsk Resolution, the Kronstadt Uprising was underway. In response, Trotsky cabled the Kronstadt Rebels via the Committee for the Defence of Petrograd on 4 March 1921 to inform them, 'If you persist, we will shoot you down like partridges' (Volin 1921). The choice of game hunting as a metaphor is itself a telling statement on the growing expanse between the living conditions of inner party members in Moscow and the greater mass of the Russian people (it is traditionally associated with the landed aristocracy, who had both the spare time to hunt for leisure and lands on which to do so). Proposing to release the hounds of revolutionary justice, Trotsky invoked an unfounded conspiracy theory predicated on the same logic of False Dilemma that would later form the basis for his own persecution:

Do you see where the rascals have led you? Here is your position. The greedy fangs of former Tsarist generals are already showing themselves behind the Social-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks. All these Petrichenkos and Toukins are manipulated like puppets by the Tsarist general Kozlovsky, Captain Borkser, Kostromitinoff, Chirmanovsky and other proved White guards. They are duping you! They tell you that you

are struggling for democracy, but two days have hardly passed and you see that you are not really fighting for democracy but for Tsarist generals. You have permitted a new Wrengel to put a rope around your necks (Volin 1921).

In sending the Red Army across the Baltic ice to butcher the Cream of the Revolution a week or so hence, now that their creamlike militancy was a hindrance rather than a help to his own political ambitions, Trotsky denounced the Kronstadt rebels as 'White Guardist' supporters of the Tsar, a claim he repeated over a decade later in a series of tawdry apologetics the Prophet Outcast penned from unforeseen exile in Mexico (Trotsky 1979; Deutscher 2003). Such issues appear to escape the history published to commemorate the Centenary from the perspective of the Prophet (Miéville 2017).

Making a series of unsupported allegations revolving around a theory of changing class composition within the Kronstadt garrison, Hue and Cry Over Kronstadt is notable for the lengths to which Trotsky goes to demonstrate that the Kronstadt garrison were against him because they weren't for him; in this sense, Trotsky's apologetics appear to be unique in the annals of blame-shifting in that, rather than simply invoking the False Dilemma, he tries to prove it empirically (Trotsky 1979). For all his sophistry, however, Trotsky is unable to explain what is counter-revolutionary about the Petropavlovsk Resolution, other than not liking it. He doesn't even bother to mention it. Nor does he explain how the de facto leader of the uprising, Stephen Petrichenko, fits into his theory of shifting class composition in the Kronstadt garrison, given his eight-year history in the navy.

The lack of answers in this respect begs the question as to the shifting class composition of the Bolshevik party as it became more and more inured to power, bureaucratic and out of touch with the same working class whose interests it claimed up uphold. By 1920, Lenin was insisting that, contra his famous cry of 'all power to the soviets,' he had stood for one-man management 'from the beginning' (Brinton 1970, 65). Furthermore, other details were coming to light, such as the 'White' professor who 'reached Omsk in the autumn of 1919 from Moscow,' reporting that

at the head of many of the centres and glavki sit former employers and responsible managers of business. The unprepared visitor to the centres who is personally acquainted with the former commercial and industrial world would be surprised to see the former owners of the big leather factories sitting in Glavkozh, big manufacturers in the Central textile organisations, etc (Brinton 1970, *ibid*).

In lieu of addressing such issues, Trotsky takes approach that excused him

slogans, to pass from them as quickly and as easily as possible to socialist slogans (Lenin 1918).

As soon as 'socialist' is understood to mean 'the political power of the Bolsheviks' and not 'the class power of the Russian workers and peasants, exercised directly and without intermediaries,' the potential for abuse is not hard to miss. It becomes readily apparent in the willingness to confuse popular demands for land redistribution in aid of the agrarian cooperative economy of the Obschina or Mir with 'petit-bourgeois slogans' and reactionaries attempting to defend the old order.

If the existence of Russian peasant cooperatives potentially signalling an agrarian path out of economic crisis cast doubt at the very least on reductionist or deterministic theories of historical stages, then it made sense for Lenin to adopt the logic of the False Dilemma: 'if you question my judgement, the counter-revolutionary Trotskyists win.' To do otherwise was to acknowledge no place for politicians and the self-proclaimed vanguard of the proletariat in the Revolution—or even that sophistries recasting a new ruling class as a revolutionary workers dictatorship had been the basis for a new ruling class using the revolutionary aspirations of Russian workers and peasants as a stepping stone into power. Since there was there was no bad way of serving the cause, no objective measure of success or failure outside of self-serving ideology which defined anything as a good as long as it was invoked with the right pretext, Lenin could claim in 1917 that

Socialism is merely the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly . . . socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly (Lenin 1917).

Lenin neglected to elaborate on what the interests of the whole people were and how state capitalist monopoly served them. He neglected to elaborate on how this kind of phrasing might not be abused in such a way as to identify the personal vested interests of the tyrant or demagogue with the interests of the people, thereby making any assertion of the popular interests, needs or goals of the popular mass a counter-revolutionary prospect. It appears to have been at this stage of the Bolshevik Revolution—the Bolshevik usurpation of the class power of Russian workers and peasants in their name—that the problematic nature of prioritising values as expressed in speech or values as demonstrated in actions and policies, and their consequences, reaches a crisis point for the conventional historiography. A capitalist workers state is, after all, one in which the 'workers' commodity form' prevails; the need to remain militantly ignorant of this fact would appear to go some way towards explaining its tawdriness.

speech was simply inconsistent with reality. The conventional history of the Russian Revolution appears in part an attempt to maintain a performative, make-believe monopoly over causality because Leninists don't feel like being wrong about their claims regarding alleged iron laws of historical development, and this being the root justification for the vanguard party model—for a party of trained cadres who can rule the masses in the name of emancipating them from their own ignorance of history, and then also inevitably from themselves. The history that celebrates this a priori logic inevitably also perpetuates it—along with the increasingly unconvincing claim that this is the only form of prefigurative politics that can see beyond class and other social hierarchies.

**The Question of the State.** In lieu of recognising the problems associated with trying to fix history with a label, the practical application of vanguardism produced party dictatorship over the working class, while acting in its name, which degenerated into a dictatorship of one person over the working class, while acting in its name. Stalin was able to substitute his own power for that of the Party, after all, because the habit of substituting something else for the self-activity of the working class was already in place, making up the rules as they went along in the name of the fulfilling the stages of history preceding communism as had been standard practise since the Bolsheviks reinstated market social relations through the New Economic Policy (NEP) in the name of saving the revolution. As ever, this torturous logic was enabled by a free conflation of a state self-labelled 'working class' and the cooperative self-activity of the mass of Russian workers.

On the basis of this logic, the reintroduction of state capitalism through the NEP, implementing market mechanisms in the name of the long-term viability of socialism, was held to be a revolutionary course of action because it maintained the power of the incumbent political class—nothing more. Lenin freely admitted the Bolsheviks detested the idea of agrarian socialisation as an affront to the ideological justifications for their hold on power, but that he was obliged to take it up as their own, seeking at the same moment however to educate the peasants in the error of their ways.

...when enforcing the land socialisation law — the “spirit” of which is equal land tenure — the Bolsheviks most explicitly and definitely declared: this is not our idea, we do not agree with this slogan, but we think it our duty to enforce it because this is the demand of the overwhelming majority of the peasants. And the idea and demands of the majority of the working people are things that the working people must discard of their own accord: such demands cannot be either ‘abolished’ or “skipped over.” We Bolsheviks shall help the peasants to discard petty-bourgeois

from any need to reflect on his own basic operating assumptions. Hue and Cry Over Kronstadt drips with bitter incredulity that people dare to doubt his judgment, or to take note of facts that he prefers to avoid. ‘The present disputes around Kronstadt revolve around the same class axis as the Kronstadt uprising itself, in which the reactionary sections of the sailors tried to overthrow the proletarian dictatorship,’ Trotsky concluded.

Conscious of their impotence on the arena of present-day revolutionary politics, the petty-bourgeois blunderers and eclectics try to use the old Kronstadt episode for the struggle against the Fourth International, that is, against the party of the proletarian revolution. These latter-day ‘Kronstadters’ will also be crushed—true, without the use of arms since, fortunately, they do not have a fortress (Trotsky 1979).

The Prophet did not get the chance, as it turns out, in being a ‘Kronstadter’ himself to Stalin. Of additional interest is Trotsky’s failure to make any mention of his conspiracy theory at the time, not least at the Tenth Party Congress (8-16 March 1921) in Moscow, which was running throughout the period of the Kronstadt Uprising. There would have been no better opportunity to expose a counterrevolutionary plot within the navy; it would have gotten a deal of attention considering the status of the revolutionary sailors as key players in both the 1905 and 1917 revolutions.

As it happens, however, Trotsky did not make a single mention of the ‘shifting class composition’ conspiracy theory at the Party Congress, alleging instead of the Cream of the Revolution shortly after massacring them, and of related tendencies within the revolutionary movement, that

The Workers Opposition have come out with dangerous slogans. They have made a fetish of democratic principles. They have placed the workers’ right to elect representatives above the Party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers’ democracy (Mandel 1995, 83; Brinton op. cit., 371).

It was not Trotsky who had been corrupted by the exercise of absolute power; it was the fault of the Russian working class for asserting workers’ democracy in the midst of a workers’ revolution, long decades in the making. As well as demonstrating a practical understanding of the difference between a Party dictatorship, the workers’ power it was supposed to be, and the workers’ movement in whose name the Bolsheviks had seized power, Trotsky had also demonstrated the practical application of terror as a function of state power, whether the state identified as communist or otherwise.

Fascinatingly from the point of view of the conventional historiography, Ernest Mandel reaches much the same conclusions. While noting the logistical difficulties created by the civil war, the decline of the urban working class to 35% of its former size and the collapse of much urban industry, Mandel nevertheless rallies against the ‘dark years’ of Trotsky’s ‘substitutionalism’, in which he abandoned the need for the workers’ party to be ‘an accompaniment to the self-activity of the masses,’ and argues that this ‘hindered rather than promoted’ it during these vital first years. In support of these claims Mandel quotes Trotsky’s comments to the Tenth Party Congress in 1921 referred to above, also making note of comments to the Second Comintern Congress in 1920, in which he stated

Today we have received a proposal from the Polish government to conclude peace. Who decides such questions? We have the Council of People’s Commissars but it too must be subject to certain control. Whose control? The control of the working class as a formless, chaotic mass? No. The Central Committee of the party is convened in order to discuss the proposal and to decide whether it ought to be answered. And when we have to conduct war, organise new divisions and find the best elements for them – where do we turn? We turn to the party. To the Central Committee. (Mandel 1995, 83).

As Mandel himself concedes, such commentary reflects Trotsky’s assumption that, outside hierarchies of political control exists only chaos and formlessness—a conspicuously bizarre assumption for a paragon of class solidarity and the purported withering away of the state.

In being a unique departure from the orthodoxy, Mandel’s commentary on this topic also at the same moment demonstrates the rule: if Stalin demonised Trotskyists as ‘petit-bourgeois counter-revolutionaries,’ and this was the same basis on which Trotsky demonised the Kronstadt rebels fifteen years prior, this would suggest that the Othering discourses against threats to power are the same because the underlying victim-playing and victim-blaming defences against acknowledging one’s true motivations—or indeed, acknowledging the consequences of those actual motivations—were the same (Debney 2020).

**Root historiographical politicisation.** As noted above, Engels used the Marxist mythology of historical stages was used to justify a binary between ‘scientific’ socialism and ‘utopian’ socialism. The difference allegedly was that ‘Utopian’ socialism indulged in utopian daydreams about a perfect society, or constructing isolated cooperative communities long removed from the class struggle, or worrying about what was actually possible given prevailing conditions.

hirelings who, in allowing the emerging capitalist class to free up capital costs associated with owning and maintaining the labour supply, were no longer owned, but rented.

As Marx himself later observed in the first volume of *Capital*, the history of the extirpation of the working class from the bonds of feudalism ‘is written in the annals of mankind with letters of blood and fire,’ a far more prescient observation (Marx 1990, 875). Nevertheless, *The Communist Manifesto* alleged that the glorious bourgeoisie were not only doing all the work, but they were civilising the barbarians as well:

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation. The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians’ intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate (Marx & Engels 2002).

Approvingly invoking Orientalist binaries against subject colonial populations does not seem particularly indicative of those with superior insight into the dialectics of historical development, but rather the product of people who were products of their age. Perhaps it was this blindness to their own authoritarian overreach that made the founders of communism incapable of perceiving the cognitive dissonance associated with the implication that the inherently superior dynamics of private accumulation were behind the subjugation of colonial possessions, not to mention the subjugation of women or the expropriation of the commons, other parts of the same process of primitive capital accumulation (Federici 2005; Perelman 2000; Moore 2015).

At the same time, the reductionism and determinism inherent to the theory of iron laws of historical development created a need for political leadership by a cadre of ‘advanced workers,’ which in practise meant a cadre of professional party activists trying to introduce Socialism to Russian society through social engineering of industrial capitalism to produce proletarians ready for class struggle. While expressing surprise that the reversal of cause and effect resulted in a party dictatorship exercising power in the name of the working class and a ruling class freed of ‘the passing moods of the workers democracy’ (to borrow Trotsky’s terminology), defenders of this vulgarised materialism sought to explain away the logical cul-de-sacs and double standards as utopianism and revisionism on the part of anyone who acknowledged them.

The a priori assumption here was that any notion that revolutionaries might maintain a basic harmony between means and outcomes, such that lived values as manifest in actions be consistent with professed values in

smash alternative movements at odds to the process of ‘primitive accumulation’ building momentum behind the development of the capitalist economy, and to force the European peasantry into roles consistent with capitalist modalities – not least of which being the forcing of peasant women into the home under patriarchal rule to perform the role of brood mares for capital. ‘It is no exaggeration to say that women were treated with the same hostility and sense of estrangement accorded ‘Indian savages’ in the literature that developed on the subject after the Conquest,’ Federici writes.

The parallel is not casual. In both cases literary and cultural denigration was at the service of a project of expropriation . . . the demonization of the American indigenous people served to justify their enslavement and the plunder of their resources . . . Always, the price of resistance was extermination (Federici 2005).

If the three centuries of theocratic terror associated with the European Witch Hunts can be understood as the midwife of capitalism as it emerged out of the crisis of feudalism, accompanied as it was by colonial adventures that created a related set of problems all of their own, this would seem to indicate that the path from feudalism to capitalism was anything but historically inevitable (Said 1978). Rather, it necessitated centuries of institutional terror to shut down the robust peasant rebellions taking place at the time and the alternative economic experiments to which they were giving rise (Cohn 2011; Hilton 2003; Mustin 2015; Beer 2010). In light of what we know now about the actual means by which the continuance of class privilege and a master class in the face of a rebellious European peasantry was ensured, the waxing lyrical of Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* about the glorious doings of incipient capitalism appear somewhat disastrous.

The means of production and of exchange, on whose foundation the bourgeoisie built itself up, were generated in feudal society. At a certain stage in the development of these means of production and of exchange ... the feudal relations of property became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had to be burst asunder; they were burst asunder (Marx & Engels 2002).

They were burst asunder with the aid of three centuries of state terror, as were the alternative paths of cooperative development springing up around parts of Europe where feudal bonds had ceased to have influence, mirroring the Russian *Obschina* or *Mir* which predated serfdom. Many of the other famous comments within the *Communist Manifesto* regarding ‘all that is solid melts into air’ and similar commentary suffer from similar shortcomings, not least given the fact that the bourgeoisie never lifted a finger to do anything Marx and Engels describes; it was all done either by slave labour, or by the

In contrast, ‘scientific’ socialism took into account material conditions and alleged iron laws of history to place revolutionary praxis in historical context (Aufheben 2011, 6-46). The binary dualism was rationalised more or less on these grounds and incorporated into a version of dialectical materialism that ultimately asserted the moral superiority of the thesis-antithesis-synthesis analytical model on the logic if, ‘if you question the veracity of binary dualisms and Othering of political opponents real or imagined, the utopians win.’

According to this reading of dialectical method, then, placing revolutionary theory and practise in historical context meant coming to terms with a ‘historical-economic succession of events,’ political superstructures historically reflecting their underlying modes of production—monarchist autocracy alongside feudalism, which in reaching crisis point opened a window for bourgeois-democratic revolutions that enabled capitalist industrialisation, economic liberalisation and the development of an urban working class, thereby establishing suitable conditions for revolutionary struggle. Permanent revolution was predicated on the idea of adopting a consistent revolutionary strategy and avoiding political alliances with the bourgeoisie against the aristocracy, lest revolutionaries inadvertently help to strengthen the social basis for reaction by helping to strengthen their class enemy politically, in favour of a worker-peasant alliance (Trotsky 2010).

This belief fed the conviction amongst the Bolsheviks in the impossibility of a revolution in an underdeveloped country like Russia—hence the understood need to export the revolution to the more industrially advanced countries of Western Europe, to give Russia the room to develop an urban proletariat as a social base for proletarian revolution. Since the proletarian revolution was off the cards, the best that could be hoped for, the Bolsheviks felt, was a ‘bourgeois-democratic’ revolution that could abolish remaining traces of feudalism, secure political rights and ‘expand the floor of the cage’ as it were for revolutionary struggle (Lorimer 1998). All of this hinged on the orthodox Leninist belief that ‘iron laws’ of history could be applied to revolutionary activism, while evidence to demonstrate why conditions not of men’s choosing were a greater determinant of historical outcomes than their free will, remained elusive (Rocker 1937). The impossibility of communism without respecting alleged iron laws of capitalist development justified not fighting for the socialisation of the means of productions and the abolition of classes and the commodity form at all—much less to say implementing state capitalism in its stead (Chattopadhyay 1996; Brinton 1970; Aufheben 2015).

That such continues to be the case in conventional histories of the Revolution casts significant doubt on the claim that the laws of history demanded a series of transition stages culminating in a state capitalist revolution as a prelude to the development of an urban industrial proletariat. If for no other reason than it recognised the existence of an individual subjectivity rooted

in self-awareness that could act in history as well as being acted upon, even if they did not decide the circumstances (cf. Marx: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please . . . the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living”) (Marx 1852). While industrialisation in England and France had given both countries large proletarian bases for socialist revolution, it had also subjected them to the autocratic hierarchies inherent to capitalist relations of production. If liberal capitalist democracy involved formal political rights, such ended at the threshold of work, which remained as internally autocratic as the political sphere had ever been under feudalism. Engels noted as much waxing lyrical about this fact in the process of explaining that overcoming the autocracy of capitalist social relations required embrace them:

Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, grows the mass of misery . . . grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in number, and disciplined, united, and organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself . . . The expropriators are expropriated (Engels 1877).

Engels’ comments are belied by scholarly research into the pernicious and toxic influence of authoritarian psychology and its corrupting effects on individual subjectivity, which in this case point to the fact that, subject to the autocratic hierarchies inherent to capitalist relations of production workers of the west were—and remain subject to—capture-bonding, or Stockholm Syndrome. This precipitated and appeared to go some way to accounting for the willingness of the mass individual to cooperate in their own exploitation (Reich 1970; Fromm 1942; Fromm 2012).

To the extent that the capitalist economy became a class-based prison, trapping workers within wage- and debt-bondage, this also applies to questions of political economy. In both cases the result was repressed, dogmatic and inflexible personalities, paralysed by terror in the face of freedom—tantamount from their co-dependent perspective to abandonment, and no less painful a prospect. The fact that ‘destructiveness is the outcome of un-lived life’ was a potential source of all sorts of irrational energy for someone who knew how to channel it, whether they were an Engels looking to harness the ‘mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself’ for purportedly revolutionary purposes, or a business owner looking to inspire greater productivity out of his or her rentals by applying benevolent paternalism of the kind associated with Henry Ford (Meyer 1980: 67-82). To the extent that capitalism involved the rise of a hereditary class of hirelings conditioned to capture-bonding by the prevailing mode of production, introducing capitalism as a strategy for overcoming it made about as much sense as inducing cancer as a cure for cancer, and was about as irresponsible (Lazzarato 2015).

The failure within the orthodox historiography of the Revolution to account for the authoritarian dynamics of capitalist relations of production also appears to have failed to account for the monopolistic and otherwise totalitarian tendencies within capitalism, tendencies that are playing themselves out before us as late capitalism mutates into global neoliberal casino corporatism as we speak. On the one hand, a historically unprecedented transnational corporate empire renders national governments mere puppets and masks, eviscerating whatever token rights remain in pursuit of total corporate supremacy. On the other hand, the political representatives of the international corporatocracy claim to represent the popular will, scare monger about existential threats in the face of unfolding economic, social and environmental crises in the name of leveraging them for the sake of defending class privilege from the existential threat of political demands for change—and otherwise doing everything in their power to forestall any potential for political institutions to respond to the needs of the mass of humanity (Lofgren 2016; Wolin 2008; Hardt & Negri 2001; Carey 1995). According to the conventional historical view, this constitutes preferential conditions for the development of revolutionary class struggle.

This also raises the question as to why these conditions were not present at the decline of feudalism, which was likewise a class-based society though one based around manorial production and the master-slave relation between the manor lord and the feudal serf (Hilton 1990). As well as failing to account for the monopolistic tendencies within capitalism, vulgarised historical materialism, which within Leninism became the ideological pretext for conflating the class power of Russian workers and peasants with the party dictatorship of the Bolsheviks, also sits increasingly at odds with contemporary scholarship on the historical origins of capitalism.

In this respect, Federici (2005) traces the breakdown of feudal social relations and the rise both of peasant rebellions and agrarian forms of self-management in the aftermath of the Black Plague, as the mass dying that targeted believers and sinners alike revealed the lie of a higher plan to the cosmos and gave fuel to heterodoxy, apostasy and rebellion. Federici raises the question of whether the forms of collectivism that were springing up around the commons, especially in places like Italy, didn’t demonstrate the viability of alternate forms of economic organisation based on sharing and cooperation, established within an agrarian rather than industrial context (Federici 2005). As Federici demonstrates, the Catholic hierarchy certainly seemed to think so, which appears to account for the fact that an alliance of it and other privileged interests launched a campaign of theocratic terror in the form of the European Witch Hunts, which ran for 300 years.

The mythology of the existentialist threat of the witch established an ideological pretext for class warfare, enabling the European ruling classes to