

# **The Question of Organization In the Early Marxist Work of Lukács. Technique or Praxis?**

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Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* contains one of the most important discussions of organizational questions to emerge from the tumultuous period immediately following World War I. Unfortunately, Lukács' contribution is little studied or discussed today and widely mis-understood by contemporary Marxists. Typically, he is viewed as a proto-Stalinist by critical theorists in Germany and America and as a romantic irrationalist by many Marxists in France and Italy. Michael Lowy's careful study of Lukács' position in its historical context shows that neither of these interpretations is correct. Lowy argues convincingly that Lukács has some-thing original to offer and that his theory has not yet been entirely exhausted by history<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this paper is to reconstruct Lukács' position as it grows out of his evaluation of the work of Luxemburg and Lenin, and then to consider the adequacy of the Lukácsian theory of organization.

## **1. Lukács, Luxemburg and Lenin**

In *History and Class Consciousness* Lukács writes that "the question of organization is the most profound intellectual question facing the revolution."<sup>2</sup> Lukács' intense interest in what might normally be seen as technical political problems is connected to the intensity of revolutionary expectations in his day. He writes: "Only when the revolution has entered into quotidian reality will the question of revolutionary organization demand imperiously to be admitted to the consciousness of the masses and their theoreticians"<sup>3</sup> It is in this context that Lukács studied the debates of Luxemburg and Lenin not merely as political disagreements but as indices of the changing relation of Marxist theory to historical reality.

The dispute between Luxemburg and Lenin, in the language of the day, concerned the relative importance of "spontaneity" and "consciousness." These terms refer respectively to uncontrolled mass action and Party-directed activities. It is important not to confuse "spontaneity" in this Second International sense with romantic notions of the uncaused or the unmotivated. On the contrary, in this period economic determinism is implicated in the very definition of "spontaneity". Lukács writes, for example, that "The spontaneity of a movement ? is only the subjective, mass-psychological expression of its determination by pure economic laws."<sup>4</sup> "Consciousness", on the other hand, suggests such related concepts as "theory" and "planning", with their obvious instrumental associations but also with all the risks of voluntarism associated with arbitrary actions.

According to Lukács, the debate over the relative importance of spontaneity and consciousness goes very deep, to the heart of the Marxist conception of the revolution,

for "the question of how to organize a revolutionary party can only be developed organically from a theory of revolution itself."<sup>5</sup> Thus, according to Lukács, Luxemburg's emphasis on spontaneity is due to a certain conception of the revolution as primarily social rather than political, as a product of the laws of motion of capitalism's contradictory economic structure. On the other hand, Lenin's emphasis on consciousness results from his view of the economy through the intervention of the historical alternative as a political project.

At the time Lukács was writing, Luxemburg's thought was a locus classicus among Western Marxists. Lukács started with a spontaneous conception of the revolution, derived in part from Luxemburg, and moved gradually toward a position more nearly consistent with Lenin's actual practice in Russia. History and Class Consciousness works out Lukács' changing position on the question of organization in the course of two essays on Rosa Luxemburg, the first written in 1921, the second exactly one year later. The essays differ in tone as well as in content. The earlier essay is a eulogy of Luxemburg, without a single critical note. The second essay expressed the numerous reservations and criticisms that many Marxists came to share with Lukács as Lenin's writings and methods became better known in the West. A remark in the "Foreward" of 1923 seems to describe the evolution of these Marxists. "A detailed analysis of Rosa Luxemburg's thought is necessary because its seminal discoveries no less than its errors have had a decisive influence on the theories of Marxists outside Russia, above all in Germany. To some extent this influence persists to this day. For anyone whose interest was first aroused by these problems a truly revolution, Communist and Marxist position can be acquired only through a critical confrontation with the theoretical life's work of Rosa Luxemburg."<sup>6</sup>

Apparently Lukács himself passed through this critical process from 1921 to 1922.

The comparison of the two essays is thus instructive not only concerning the evolution of Lukács outlook, but that of a whole generation of Marxists. In the first essay, Lukács endorses without reservation Luxemburg's critique of the technical concept of organization prevalent in the Second International. Echoing Luxemburg he rejects an attitude "which allocates to the Party tasks concerned predominantly or even exclusively with organization. Such a view is then reduced to an unrelieved inconsistent fatalism when confronted with the realities of revolution."<sup>7</sup> In contrast, Lukács considers Luxemburg's concept of the Party as the "political direction" of the struggle to be "the fount of true revolutionary activity."<sup>8</sup>

In the later essay, Lukács confirms his continued belief in these views, but now qualifies them by saying that "the Russian Revolution clearly exposed the limitations of the West European organizations."<sup>9</sup> The Russian Revolution not only refutes the old technical concept of organization, but also shows the inadequacy of Luxemburg's own alternative concept of political direction, which, Lukács now argues, failed "to go one step further and to look at the question of political leadership in the context of organization. That is to say, she should have elucidated those organizational factors that render the Party of the proletariat capable of assuming political leadership."<sup>10</sup> Lenin's superiority lies in the fact that he did pose precisely these problems and, according to Lukács, solved them.

However, if Lukács finally prefers Lenin's organizational methods to those of Luxemburg, he continues to believe that it is she who "saw the significance of mass

actions more clearly than anyone."<sup>11</sup> And as late as Lukács' Lenin book, he continues to analyze the phenomenon of the Soviets or councils in pure Luxemburgian terms, as expressing the breakdown of the reified boundary between economics and politics which underlies bourgeois society."<sup>12</sup> His interpretation of Lenin, furthermore, shows an implicit rejection of much of Lenin's own self-interpretation, particularly the theory of "consciousness from without." Thus in his early Marxist works, Lukács seems to have attempted a synthesis of ideas drawn from both Luxemburg and Lenin, which I will try to explain in what follows.

## **II. The Reflexive Concept of Subjectivity**

Underlying Lukács' position on organization, there is a specific interpretation of the relation of theory to practice in the socialist movement. His reflection begins with the question of what ties Marxism as a Theory to the revolutionary process. The problem arises because, given its independent "scientific" origin, Marxism's relationship with the movement that adopted it might be merely contingent and conjunctural. Marxism and the working class movement might have joined together through a happy mutual misunderstanding and not be essentially related at all. As Lukács writes:

"The issue turns on the question of theory and practice. And this not merely in the sense given it by Marx when he says in his first critique of Hegel that "theory becomes a material force when it grips the masses." Even more to the point is the need to discover those features and definitions both of the theory and the ways of gripping the masses which convert the theory, the dialectical method, into a vehicle of revolution ? . If this is not done that "gripping of the masses" would well turn out to be a will o' the wisp. It might turn out that the masses were in the grip of quite different forces, that they were in pursuit of quite different ends. In that event, there would be no necessary connection between the theory and their activity ?"<sup>13</sup>

Lukács' response to this question is formulated in terms of what I will call Marx' "reflexive" concept of subjectivity.

The concept of subjectivity in Marx' early writings is deeply influenced by Hegel's critique of Kantian ethics and, by implication, of the Jacobin experience in the French Revolution. This critique describes a dialectic of "ought" and "is" that overcomes their opposition in Kant' s thought and forms the basis for Hegel's historical standpoint. Hegel argues that the ethical is not a truly independent sphere but only appears to be so to an undialectical consciousness that has not understood the essence of real historical development. Because Jacobin revolution is unaware of the deeper level of social reality from which actual development arises, it attempts to impose a moral truth directly and immediately on society. But, Hegel and Marx both argue morality is a functional element within society and not a standpoint on society. If societies can be ordered in a normative continuum, and both Hegel and Marx believe they can, it must be in terms of standards other than justice and morality.

In the light of Hegel's criticism, Marx is anxious to avoid a purely political moralism that would be based not on the "reality" of proletarian needs but on abstract principles in the Jacobin manner of most contemporary revolutionary sects. Starting from this critique of utopianism, Marx arrives at a general concept of revolutionary subjectivity based on the "reflection" of life in thought.

Marx' original discussion of these problems is found in several early essays, in which he attempted to distinguish his position from utopian communism and Jacobin-Blanquist revolutionism. The proletariat, he argues in his early essay on "The King of Prussia and Social Reform", cannot base its revolution on abstract ethical exigencies, for these will always have to be imposed by the state against the real interests they must by definition contradict insofar as they take on an ethical form. But, Marx claims, the proletarian goal is not merely to change the state by infusing it with correct moral principles, but far more radically to destroy the state. Thus the proletariat should avoid politics, except for the purely negative purpose of destruction, and should instead concentrate on social action toward the end of creating a wholly new type of society in which politics will be unnecessary.<sup>14</sup>

In rejecting political revolution for social revolution, Marx attempted to overcome the split between moral community in the state and immoral society at large. Communism, in his view, could not be a utopia imposed from above against private interests, for the very act of imposing "utopia" would reproduce the basic ill, the split between ethics and reality. A revolution which aims to bring morality down to earth, to realize morality in the Hegelian sense of that term, by making it a feature of daily life rooted in the interests and culture of the people, could never succeed on the basis of legal changes and state action. How right Marx was to fear revolution from above may be judged by the results in the existing Communist societies.

In the 1840s, when Marx elaborated this position, he was writing under the influence not only of Hegel, but also of Feuerbach, whose theory of religious alienation he attempted to generalize to include morality and the state. Just as Feuerbach reduced religious to its "human basis" in the alienated community, so Marx projected the "social" as the hidden unity of the contraries into which life was divided in alienated class society. The return to this basis would require not the reform of the state but its abolition and, correspondingly, not the moralization of civil society through an admixture of improvements, but the abolition of the property-based civil society, dialectically correlated with the state.

These concepts had a major and lasting impact on Marx' self-understanding as a revolutionary theoretician. For, if Marxism is not merely a disguised ethical exigency from which the state would necessarily be reborn in case of successful revolution, it must stand in a new relation to the class it represents. Thus Marx' concept of social revolution was connected to his earliest attempt to formulate a theory of the relation of consciousness to history.

Marx introduced the reflexive concept of subjectivity to describe a type of revolutionary theory and consciousness that grows out of historical "necessity" instead of being imposed "abstractly" on the basis of pure moral principle. Marx wrote, for example, that his theory simply explains to the "world" "its own actions" and thus articulates the historically evolved content of the social movement. He writes: "We simply show it (the world) why it struggles in reality, and the consciousness of this is something which it is compelled to acquire, even if it does not want to."<sup>15</sup>

Reflexive subjectivity corresponds to social revolution just as abstract ethical subjectivity corresponds to political revolution. The one emerges from the "social instinct" of the proletariat and articulates the inner meaning of its actions, while the other reflects the essential opposition of "ought" and "is" as they are experienced by the

isolated individual in bourgeois society. He wrote, in fact, that "the more developed and general the political intelligence of a people is, the more the proletariat ? at least the beginning of the movements ? wastes its energies in the irrational useless uprising which are suppressed in blood."<sup>16</sup> As he argued in his essay 'On the Jewish Question', "It is not enough that thought should seek to realize itself; reality just also strive toward thought."<sup>17</sup>

The reflexive concept of subjectivity is developed further in *The Poverty of Philosophy* with the distinction between a class "in-itself" and a class "for-itself."<sup>18</sup> But later writings are ambiguous, conserving only traces of this original concept of subjectivity, as for example in a passage in the preface to *Capital*, where Marx writes of his critical method that "So far as such criticism represents a class, it can only represent the class whose vocation in history is the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production and the final abolition of all classes ? the proletariat."<sup>19</sup> This passage continues to suggest that Marxism is somehow rooted in the life experiences of the working class, although unfortunately Marx did not explain exactly how and to what extent. Instead, by this later period, Marx tended to offer programmatic references to "determinism" and "historical necessity" in place of the more precise concept of reflexivity. The deterministic language serves the same function as the earlier theory of reflexive consciousness: both motivate the rejection of political moralism, although with different political consequences.

Lukács' pre-Marxist *Theory of the Novel* recapitulated Hegel's critique of abstract ethics. In that work, Lukács depicted the hero of the novel as the bearer of a degraded idealism necessarily correlated with the degraded reality of bourgeois society. From the ironic standpoint of the novelist and critic, reified society and the nostalgia for meaning area located side by side, on the same level as features of the same desolate spiritual landscape.

By the time he wrote *History and Class Consciousness* Lukács was aware that achieving transcendence would require forms of collective opposition that are unavailable to the individual in bourgeois society and open only to the class.

Like the early Marx, Lukács was determined to find a way to renew the theory of revolution that avoids the pitfalls of individualistic moralism. Reflexive subjectivity offers a solution, which can also form the critical link between Lukács' interpretation of Marxism and classical German philosophy. Thus, Lukács said that "the deep affinities between historical materialism and Hegel's philosophy are clearly manifested here, for both conceive of theory as the self-knowledge of reality."<sup>20</sup> For Lukács, as for Hegel and the early Marx, consciousness conceived as self-knowledge is the secret of the transcendence of the opposition of thought and being, subject and objective, "ought" and "is".

### **III. Theory and Consciousness in Luxemburg**

Rosa Luxemburg's theory of mass action recovered the Marxist concept of reflexive subjectivity from the complete oblivious into which it had fallen in the Second International. Her theory was inspired by the 1905 Russian Revolution, the first major mass struggle for socialism since the Commune of Paris.<sup>21</sup> This was an immense spontaneous social movement which quickly passed from basic economic protest to

quite sophisticated social and political demands and the creation of a new kind of revolutionary organization, the "Soviet" or factory council.

Luxemburg wrote in an intellectual and political environment in which any form of direct confrontation with the state was viewed as a voluntaristic violation of the principles of historical determinism and a utopian regression. The orthodox position of the day held that only gradual union and parliamentary struggle expressed the historical necessity of the movement toward socialism. Revolutionary subjectivity and the objective historical movement were never more alien to each other.

The Russian experience in 1905 suggested a different way of connecting revolutionary politics with historical determinism. The struggles of 1905 were violent and yet they clearly emerged from the deepest determining forces of the historical process rather than from the insurrectional fantasies of political leaders. In this case, theory and party organization were joined to historical necessity by their expressive, hermeneutic function, which was to grant conscious and explicit form to the implicit content of the spontaneous struggle. In this new theory of Luxemburg, spontaneity serves to reconcile subject and object in history. In the spontaneous struggle, the proletariat at one and the same time realizes the necessity of the historical laws and imposes its will and consciousness on the world.

Luxemburg argued on this basis for a new conception of the relation of theory to consciousness. Against the pseudo-scientific conception of theory prevalent in the Second International, she proposed a historical approach to theory as a prolongation of action, the articulation of its inner meaning. Theory attains its highest development in the reflection of the individual thinker, whose ideas, once they have been developed, may then be propagandized by the Party among the workers. But the result of this propaganda is not immediately an action. In times of social peace, political education can go no further than to produce ideas in the heads of individual workers. This is what Luxemburg calls a "theoretical and latent" class consciousness.

Ideas are the highest product of theory but, as class consciousness, such ideas represent the lowest level of development. Class consciousness achieves full development not in this contemplative form, appropriate to theory, but in the "practical and active" expression of class aspirations and solidarity in revolutionary struggle. Theory must cease to be a mere representation of the inner meaning of class struggle to become consciousness as a historical force in that struggle.<sup>22</sup> As Lukács was later to explain it, "Proletarian thought is in the first place merely a theory of praxis which only gradually transforms itself into a practical theory that overturns the real world."<sup>23</sup>

For Luxemburg, as for Lukács, the Party plays a decisive role in the passage from theory to practice the latent to the active. "Organization", Lukács writes, "is the form of the mediation between theory and practice."<sup>24</sup> To the temporarily latent character of the socialist goal corresponds the historical reality of the Party. In relation to the masses, "the Party is the objectification of their own will (obscure though this may be to themselves)."<sup>25</sup> For, what is latent and theoretical at any given moment must be made present organizationally if it is later to become practical in struggle. Thus, like theory, the Party derives its historical necessity from spontaneity in such a way as to overcome utopianism and moralism. Both represent the still latent meaning of struggles that need only achieve sufficient breadth and intensity to express themselves in revolutionary consciousness.

From this Luxemburgian standpoint, political direction no longer has any of the voluntaristic traits Marx rejected. It does not change the fundamental orientation of the movement, but rather expresses the significance of on-going actions, thereby aiding the actors to clarify their own goals.

"It (the Party) must immerse its own truth in the spontaneous mass movement and raise it from the depths of economic necessity, where it was conceived, on to the heights of free, conscious action. In so doing it will transform itself in the moment of the outbreak of revolution from a party that makes demands to one that imposes an effective reality. This change from demand to realize becomes the lever of the truly class-oriented and truly revolutionary organization of the proletariat."<sup>26</sup>

Luxemburg's theory of organization had such a great impact on Lukács because it dovetailed neatly with his own Hegelian interpretation of Marx' reflexive concept of consciousness. But did this theory offer an adequate explanation for the revolutionary movements, which followed the First World War? Its intellectual elegance and consistency with Marxism could not, of course, serve as a substitute for this ultimate test, which took the form of a confrontation with Lenin's very different approach and with the reality of the Russian Revolution. Lukács' careful re-examination of the debates between Luxemburg and Lenin left him firmly committed to practical Leninism, although we will see that he did not accept Lenin's own self-interpretation and attempted to substitute something quite different for it.

#### **IV. Luxemburg or Lenin**

Luxemburg's theory of the revolution is more faithful to Marx' deeper intention than any later contribution. However, just for that reason she cannot accurately describe many important features of the revolutionary process that followed World War I. The world had become so very unlike Marx' that his ideas about revolution, even as developed by Luxemburg after 1905, were seriously misleading. In the concluding essays of his book, Lukács attempts to show that Luxemburg's theory is vitiated by a series of errors that result from the projection of characteristics of the early stages of the revolutionary process into a later stage.

Luxemburg, Lukács believes, has "the illusion of an 'organic', purely proletarian revolution".<sup>27</sup> Her image of the revolution is unrealistically simple in three important respects her extension of the concept of the proletariat to cover the widest masses of the population; her "over-estimation of the spontaneous, elemental forces of the Revolution," and her tendency to believe in an "ideological organized growth into socialism".<sup>28</sup> She consistently over-estimates the unity of the proletariat and the proletarian character of the revolution, minimizing the organizational consequences of divisions within the class and the complexity of alliances with non-proletarian strata and classes.

"This false assessment of the true driving forces leads to the decisive point of her misinterpretation: to the underplaying of the role of the Party in the revolution and of its conscious political action, as opposed to the necessity of being driven along by the elemental forces of economic development."<sup>29</sup>

The Party, in Luxemburg's conception, is simply a prolongation of a proletarian spontaneity which, Lukács interprets her to say, points instinctively in the right direction at every stage. Party and class are not two distinct objects for Luxemburg, but

dialectical moments of a single collective subjectivity. "The fact is that the Social Democracy is not joined to the organization of the proletariat. It is itself the proletariat."<sup>30</sup>

This view of the Party flows directly from Luxemburg's emphasis on the immanent character of the revolutionary process. What Lenin called Luxemburg's "not-to-be-taken-seriously nonsense of organization and tactics as a process", while by no means nonsense, turns out to be based on a fundamentally Hegelian concept of historical subjectivity. The Luxemburgian proletariat has the undifferentiated unity and the untranscended subjectivity of a world-historical people inventing the future. At first Lukács was enthusiastic about the Hegelian character of Luxemburg's theory, although he later had serious doubts about it because it stood in such flagrant contradiction to the actual function of the Bolshevik Party in the Russian Revolution.

Lenin's Party maintained a considerable independence from the mass of workers and on occasion took initiatives without much regard for proletarian spontaneity. In Luxemburg's theory, the independence of the Party would be the death of the dialectic in which it raises the level of struggle of the masses through articulating the implicit content of class action. Lenin's conception of a disciplined minority as a leadership of the mass movement appeared to her to be a voluntaristic illusion, already transcended by Marxism long ago in the conception of a social revolution.

Lukács describes the effects of these differences on their positions in a number of important domains, including class alliances, the struggle against opportunism, and tactical planning. In each case, Luxemburg's position appears to flow directly from basic Marxian premises, while Lenin's seems pre-Marxist and sectarian. And yet with time it became clear that Lenin's innovations responded to the decisive practical considerations. The split between theory and practice was never sharper than in this debate, and it is toward overcoming this split that Lukács worked.

Let us begin the discussion of the debate with the question of a mass versus a vanguard conception of the Party. Far from supporting the Leninist idea of a formal separation of Party and mass, Luxemburg wanted to follow in exactly the opposite direction, toward drawing the entire oppressed population into the Party. Thus she proposed as a partial solution to the problem of opportunism the dissolution of the boundary between the Party and the labor unions, which would be merged in one immense mass organization. Similarly, she wished to convert the Party into a place of refuge and an instrument of struggle not only of proletarians, but also of the entire mass of oppressed peasants and petty bourgeois.

Lukács follows Lenin in dismissing this approach because of the confused and chaotic character of non-proletarian movements during great crises. The peasantry and petty bourgeoisie may be revolutionary at one moment and counter-revolutionary the next. Their attitudes are not determined by predictable long-term developmental tendencies of society but by contingent factors. These are, in some sense, classes without strategies, and thus the extension of the crisis of capitalist society to all classes of the population complicates rather than simplifies the revolutionary process. Only sophisticated theoretical leadership of the sort a revolutionary Party can offer, and not mass spontaneity, is adequate to determining the conditions under which class alliances can be made to the benefit of the movement. For Lenin and Lukács, the independence of



the Party from the mass corresponds necessarily to the inadequacy of spontaneity in the forging of class alliances.

The disagreement between Luxemburg and Lenin on the best way to fight opportunism within the working class movement is formally similar to this disagreement on class alliances. Luxemburg believed that opportunism would be overcome by the proletariat in the course of the next revolutionary offensive. Lukács interprets her position to mean that "swings to the Right should be and are dealt with - more or less spontaneously - by the 'organic' development of the workers' movement".<sup>31</sup> She seems to believe, as did the young Marx, that the historical solution arises automatically with the problem which it solves. "Thus...Rosa Luxemburg starts from the premise that the working class will enter the revolution as a unified revolutionary body, which has been neither contaminated nor led astray by the democratic illusions of bourgeois society."<sup>32</sup>

Of course, Luxemburg engaged in a continuous intellectual struggle against opportunism in the interim, but she never believed that this struggle could liquidate its influence in the Party in advance of the revolutionary offensive. Rather, the function of the struggle was merely to maintain majority support for a revolutionary program and leadership during times of social peace or proletarian retreat. Luxemburg's position thus limited her action against opportunism to ideological debate aimed at convincing those wavering between opportunist and orthodox positions. But what more could realistically be attempted in non-revolutionary times?

Lenin, practically alone in the Second International, proposed an outrageous alternative: splitting the movement to create a separate revolutionary organization purged of opportunism from the beginning. Lukács summarizes the difference between their positions of the struggle against opportunism as "whether or not the campaign against opportunism should be conducted as an intellectual struggle within the revolutionary Party of the proletariat or whether it was to be resolved on the level of organization".<sup>33</sup> To Luxemburg, Lenin's attempt to fight opportunism organizationally appeared completely voluntaristic, a mere bureaucratic device that could never arrest the growth of such an important social phenomenon. "Such an attempt to exorcise opportunism by means of a scrap of paper may turn out to be extremely harmful - not to opportunism but to the socialist movement."<sup>34</sup>

Yet, despite the apparently voluntaristic character of Lenin's approach, it had the tremendous advantage of clearly defining the differences within the movement. It clarified the issues involved in the struggle against opportunism and enabled the divisions in the working class to take on organizational form. Ultimately, two coherent strategies emerged, corresponding to the Bolshevik and Menshevik parties, each with significant working class support and a well-defined polemical relationship, of which the entire working class was aware.

By contrast, Luxemburg's methods of struggle could never produce clarity of this sort. She fought opportunism issue by issue within a united Party, through efforts of intellectual persuasion and the formation of tactical alliances with various Party leaders at each congress. But, as Lukács remarks, "A war against opportunism as a tendency cannot crystallize out: the terrain of the 'intellectual conflicts' changes from one issue to the next and with it changes the composition of the rival groups."<sup>35</sup>

Luxemburg was of course anxious to preserve the unity of the movement, and to this end it was essential precisely not to draw the organizational consequences of Party debates. But the price paid for preserving unity turned out to be very high. Opportunism continued to appear to the mass of workers to be a legitimate component of the movement for socialism, and even when the opportunists lost votes of principle, their policies often prevailed by default for lack of organizational teeth in majority decisions. As a result of this situation, the disagreements within the movement "remained differences of opinion within workers' movements that were nevertheless (seen as) revolutionary movements. And so it became impossible to draw a firm distinction between the various groups."<sup>36</sup> German workers thus entered the crisis of the war totally unprepared for the violent conflicts and betrayals that were to wrack their Party periodically until the final bread-up in the aftermath of the war.

With the war, the "intellectual" disagreements of the earlier period were suddenly and without preparation translated into practical decisions of immense moment. The long-awaited spontaneous liquidation of opportunism did not take place, and the proletariat entered the crisis not only divided but also confused on the nature of its divisions as well. In fact, the Left social democrats had been so anxious to preserve the unity of the movement that they had never been able to implement their own ideas or organize around them, and so they were not widely understood by the workers.

It had been a fatal mistake to assume that opportunism would be easily defeated by a united working class in a revolutionary crisis when in reality German workers were permanently and deeply divided. In this context Lukács concluded that "Every 'theoretical' tendency or clash of views must immediately develop an organizational arm if it is to rise above the level of pure theory or abstract opinion, that is to say, if it really intends to point the way to its own fulfillment in practice."<sup>37</sup>

The question of the role of tactical planning in the revolution divided Luxemburg and Lenin as deeply and for the same reasons as these other questions. They were, of course, in complete agreement on such basics as the importance of the Party's role in disseminating revolutionary political propaganda in times of social peace, and in the belief that the workers will revolt the sooner and the more successfully, "the more rapidly and more deeply, more energetically the educational work of social democracy is carried out amongst them".<sup>38</sup> And they could also agree on the need for a Party organization to coordinate socially or geographically separated struggles. But beyond this minimum the disagreement begins, Lenin holding that the Party can at least try - and sometimes succeed - in directing the struggle according to a tactical plan, Luxemburg dismissing this goal as impossible and indeed harmful to the movement.

Luxemburg believed that the spontaneous tactical line that emerges from class struggle is superior to any plan of the Party leadership. Even when wrong, the class movement's spontaneous choices have the pathos of historical necessity about them and form an integral part of the learning process of the class. "Let us speak plainly", she wrote, "historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee."<sup>39</sup> She concluded:

In general, the tactical policy of the Social Democracy is not something that can be "invented". It is the product of a series of great creative acts of the often-spontaneous class struggle seeking its way forward... The unconscious comes before the conscious.

The logic of the historical process comes before the subjective logic of the human beings who participate in the historic process.<sup>40</sup>

These passages show that for Luxemburg the spontaneity of the movement is deeply connected to its historical inevitability. History has the necessity of a real force, an overwhelming power that imposes itself through mass actions often dimly understood by the participants themselves. The hidden forces which produce great events are only revealed in the course of the struggle. The knowledge of the meaning of the events, their objective existence for theory, always follows the act in which historical truth is unveiled bodily. The "owl of Minerva" is necessarily tardy with respect to this mysterious agency.

To the extent that the necessary struggle is the spontaneous struggle and the Party a subordinate product of this spontaneity, the very idea of tactical planning of the revolution is a contradiction in terms. The Party, quite simply, can never take the class as its object, either of knowledge or of action. Rather, the role of the Party is to be the extreme limit of the subjectivity of the class, the prolongation of class action toward self-awareness. If for Lenin the Party should be pictured one step ahead of the class it leads as a vanguard, for Luxemburg the Party is better imagined behind the class, pointing in the direction in which the class is already moving.

The key practical difference implied by this disagreement concerns the role of insurrection in proletarian revolution. Marx' critique of Jacobin methods is prolonged in Luxemburg's theory of the mass strike as the form of movement of the social revolution. Luxemburg argues quite correctly that a revolutionary mass strike cannot be planned and controlled in its technical details by a political party; however, she failed to understand the limitations of the mass strike, which, by itself, is insufficient to assure victory. As Trotsky later explained the problem, "Whatever its power and mass character, the general strike does not settle the problem of power; it only poses it. To seize power, it is necessary, while relying on the general strike, to organize an insurrection."<sup>41</sup> In this task tactical planning is essential, as Lenin was the first to understand clearly.

Lukács argued that Luxemburg's theory of the revolutionary process was at least partially invalidated by the practical lessons of the Russian Revolution. Luxemburg had followed Marx in attempting to restrain the political will of the working class so that it would listen to the deeper voice of its social instinct. But in the context of the revolutionary crisis following World War I, political will was an increasingly important condition of social advance. Victory would come only through the co-ordination of the most sophisticated political leadership and the broadest social movement. Lenin appeared to Lukács to have solve the problem of joining the one to the other. The remaining difficulty was to reconcile Lenin's practical methods with Marxism, and this was the task Lukács set himself. Lukács' attempt to produce an independent theory based on Lenin's practice must have been motivated in part by an implicit critique of Lenin's own self-interpretation. Certainly the Russian defenders of Leninist orthodoxy sensed the incompatibility of Lukács' Leninism with their own. If Lukács himself never openly addressed the problems in Leninist theory, it was no doubt because he felt it would be impolitic to do so, and perhaps also because in the early 1920's strictly philosophical disagreements with Lenin did not seem as important as practical agreement.

Unlike Lukács, Lenin had remained faithful to the "orthodox" epistemology of the Second International "center", as represented by such thinkers as Kautsky and Plekhanov. The reified categories Lenin derived from this epistemology penetrates his own self-interpretation, contradicting the revolutionary tendencies of his thought. The chief theoretical positions of orthodoxy included evolutionary determinism, theory as pure science, and organization and strategy as technical applications of this science. These positions had achieved a sort of classical coherence in the Second International where they rationalized the basically reformist practice of the movement. After World War I, these ideas were thrust into the whirlwind of revolutionary action with theoretically confusing results.

Lukács' reinterpretation of Lenin must be understood in the context of attempts in the West to break with the orthodox Marxism in which Lenin still believed, and to devise a version of Leninism compatible with the emphasis of revolutionary subjectivity that had emerged as one of the chief theoretical characteristics of the post-war offensive. These attempts had in common an implicit rejection of the conservative applications of Lenin's technicism, inherited from his orthodox philosophical teachers.

Certainly Lenin himself was insensitive to these implications. Technicism offered a language in which to articulate his practice in a revolutionary crisis. Lenin's approach was based on the discovery that the revolutionary movement could not spontaneously resolve the crisis it provoked, but merely posed a suspended social potentiality in an explosive contradiction awaiting the action of a conscious minority of its resolution. History would have to become the object of knowledge and control to realize its "necessary" progress. Lenin takes it for granted that the Party could use the laws of history to achieve historically possible ends.

From this point of view the entire society, including the proletariat, appears as an object, relatively predictable and subject to control from above. Historical necessity is not so much discovered in the gigantic power of its unfolding, as it is for Marx and Luxemburg, as grasped technically in the interests of power. So obvious and unobjectionable does this instrumental perspective seem to Lenin that he naively claims that "Marxism...places at their (the Party's) disposal the mighty force of millions and millions of workers."<sup>42</sup>

This approach to history contradicts the original Marxian reflexive theory of subjectivity, designed to transcend precisely such a voluntaristic political orientation toward struggle. It seemed therefore to revive the Jacobin-Blanquist revolutionary methods which Marx had long ago rejected. The old orthodoxy had never encountered these paradoxical consequences of its technicist interpretation of Marxism because it was linked to a practice of everyday trade union and parliamentary struggle that could easily be seen as expressing the long-range historical necessity of capitalist social evolution. But in an insurrectionary context, no such illusions were possible. The theory revealed its anti-Marxist implications with a vengeance, particularly in Lenin's attempt to use Kautskian view on "consciousness from without" to justify a type of political vanguardism Kautsky would never have accepted. This argument, contained in Lenin's *What is to be done?*, deserves further consideration for what it shows about the doctrine Lukács largely passes over in silence in elaborating his own interpretation of Leninism.

Like his orthodox teachers, Lenin believed that Marxism was a pure science, that it came "from without" and was in no way a product of proletarian class struggle, even if it

took that struggle as its privileged object of study. This idea corresponded to a respectable epistemological model of science and assigned revolutionary intellectuals the missionary role of spreading socialist ideas, the source of which was now to be sought in Marxist thought rather than in the spontaneous ideology of the proletariat. However, it does not seem to have occurred to anyone before Lenin to ask seriously what comes "from within" if Marxist thought comes "from without". In justifying his voluntaristic theory of the Party against those who believed socialism was a spontaneous ideology of the proletariat, Lenin posed and responded to this question in a surprising way.

At first Lenin seems to claim that the proletariat's spontaneous ideology is something he calls "trade union consciousness". This is the conscious condition for solidarity in the struggle to defend class interests within capitalist society. It contains no reference beyond capitalism, and is in fact in perfect conformity with the politics of...opportunism. The success of opportunism can now be explained, and all arguments for reliance on the "spontaneity" of the class assimilated to it.

But on closer examination, it appears that Lenin will not even admit that proletarian spontaneity can produce trade union consciousness. "Trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers to the bourgeoisie. Hence our task, the task of Social Democracy, is to combat spontaneity, to divert the labor movement from its spontaneous, trade unionist striving to go under the wing of the bourgeoisie..."<sup>43</sup>

Spontaneity is now reduced to the simple predominance of bourgeois ideology, "because it is more fully developed and because it possesses immeasurably more opportunities of being distributed".<sup>44</sup> Thus, even trade unionism, even revisionism, is not properly proletarian ideology. And "Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of workers in the process of their movement, the only choice is: either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course."<sup>45</sup>

Having denied all ideological creativity to the mass of workers, Lenin proceeds to sharpen the separation between the working class and the theoreticians of socialism. In Lenin's Kautskian view, theory comes from "science" and not from the working class and its struggles. So basic is this distinction for Lenin that to avoid any confusion he calls "the intellectuals", including Marx and Engels, "representatives of the propertied classes".<sup>46</sup> And, at another point, he insists that when workers participate in creating socialist theory, they "take part not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians...; in other words, they take part only to the extent that they are able, more or less, to acquire the knowledge of their age and advance that knowledge".<sup>47</sup>

Now clearly there is a grain of truth in all this, but there is also a very dubious polemical exaggeration. Lenin believes that the only way he can establish the autonomy of the Party as against his spontaneist opponents is to deny any and all connection between Marxist theory and the proletariat. This explains his forgetfulness of the Marxist theory of ideology, which holds that ideas that come to a class "from without", for example from intellectuals drawn from other classes, may nevertheless belong organically to that class if they reflect its own standpoint on its life conditions and its aspirations.<sup>48</sup>

Once Lenin's argument is pursued to its logical conclusion, the orthodox premises from which he began yields an absurd result. Here theory seizes the masses with a vengeance. The proletariat achieves nothing on its own", for its spontaneous trade

unionism has been reduced to bourgeois ideology and its socialist theoreticians are "intellectuals", "scientists", and come from an epistemological beyond or from the bourgeoisie. The rigid opposition of "within and "without" has converted the proletariat into an ideological tabula rasa. It has become the first major class in history with no ideology of its own, but only borrowing from other classes and from science.

Why did Lenin push orthodoxy to these absurd conclusions? No doubt because the alternative, within the framework of the debates in which he was engaged, was to accept a theory of the Party he regarded as wrong. At this point, Lenin could formulate only one fundamental philosophical argument for justifying a break with opportunism and the creation of a vanguard Party. Unfortunately, this argument is incompatible with Marxism, for Marxism is refused on its basis if it cannot find in the proletariat a reality which "strives toward thought" even as revolutionary ideas strive to enter reality as a material force.

Consistency should not be considered a virtue in arguing for a position as overdrawn as Lenin's, and Lenin is not in fact perfectly consistent. Many other passages in his writings show that he did not want to pay the full price of overthrowing Marxism to defend his theory of the Party. Even *What is to be done?* offers an alternative theory, according to which "the 'spontaneous element', in essence represents nothing more nor less than consciousness in an embryonic form."<sup>49</sup> Here the class "strives toward thought", as Marxism requires. But this alternative theory remains undeveloped because within the context of Lenin's orthodox philosophy it constantly risks passing over into opportunist passivity. The conclusion is inescapable that Lenin lacks the theoretical means to develop a properly Marxist explanation for his own practice.

## **VI. The "Actuality" of the Revolution**

Confronted with the success of Lenin's organizational innovations and the incompetence, at least in Marxist terms, of his philosophical explanations for them, Lukács attempted to find an interpretation of Leninism that would reduce the tension between theory and practice. To do so, he reformulated the debate between Luxemburg and Lenin in historical terms, situating their principal ideas with respect to different stages in the revolutionary process.

Lukács' first sketch of such a theory is to be found in an article published in *Die Internationale* in 1921. This paper is a defense of the new insurrectional tactic of the German Communist Party which had been attacked in terms of Rosa Luxemburg's theory of revolutionary spontaneity. Lukács rejected the use of Luxemburg's ideas to preach political passivity, but he could not help recognizing the incompatibility of the new strategy with her views which, as we have seen, had been "theoretically determining" for him from his earliest discovery of Marxism. Confronted with this contradiction, Lukács asks: "Do the relations between Party and mass remain the same in the course of the entire revolutionary process, or is this relation also a process, which actively and passively undergoes the compulsion of the dialectical transformation and overthrow of the total process?"<sup>50</sup>

In reply he suggests the basis of his later theory of the revolutionary process: the idea of a changing relation between spontaneity and consciousness in the course of history. Lukács distinguishes two main stages. Throughout the first and longest stage of the struggle for economic demands and intellectual independence it raises "reactively"

under the immediate compulsion of the economic laws, and all the Party can do in this context is to bring the meaning of such actions to consciousness. During this stage, "the economic and consequently the political and ideological process" has "the necessity of a 'natural law.'"<sup>51</sup>

To this situation there corresponds the "classical" conception of Marxism, as represented by Marx, Engels and Luxemburg, with its emphasis on historical inevitability and the expressive, hermeneutic role of the Party.

But, there is another side to the Marxist theory of revolution which emphasizes the goal of "human control of history", the "realm of freedom". It is true, Lukács admits, that in classical Marxist thought this goal is always discussed in relation to socialist society. But Lukács argues that the realm of freedom is not so much a realm as a process, and one which begins already in the revolutionary movement itself. To draw a sharp line between necessity and freedom, and to call the one capitalist and the other socialist, would be to deny their dialectical relation. Freedom would then appear not as an immanent, historically developing moment of struggle but as a transcendent ideal. On the contrary, Lukács claims, the "leap" into the realm of freedom discussed by Marx and Engels cannot be conceived as a sudden break in the continuity of history but only as a gradual development in which, with the approach of the revolution, consciousness plays an increasingly important role.

Thus Lukács distinguishes a second main stage in the revolutionary process, the stage of the final crisis of capitalism, during which the growing role of consciousness and freedom is reflected in a much more active role for the Party. During this stage the Party may have to follow the sort of strategy chosen by the German Communists, energizing the working class by providing an example of a revolutionary initiative to help it overcome its "lethargy".<sup>52</sup> Lukács did not retain the exact terms of this discussion in *History and Class Consciousness* and his book on Lenin, but those works continue to develop the idea of a gradual change in the relation of spontaneity and consciousness in the course of the revolutionary process. Indeed, Lenin is based on the theory of the second stage: "Lenin's concept of party organization", he writes there, "presupposes the fact ? the actuality ? of the revolution."<sup>53</sup> This idea is brought in constantly to explain the differences between Lenin's approach and traditional Marxist strategy and organization.

In *History and Class Consciousness* Lukács elaborates the theory of the two stages in terms of the development of the proletariat. As the theoretician of reflexive subjectivity, Luxemburg is for him the chief interpreter of the organizational implications of the first stage, which implies a theory of the Party he summarizes as follows: "Its organisation corresponds to a stage in the class consciousness of The proletariat which does not aspire to anything more than making Conscious what was hitherto unconscious and making explicitly what hitherto had been latent. More accurately: it corresponds to a stage in which the process of acquiring consciousness does not entail a terrible internal ideological crisis for the proletariat."<sup>54</sup>

From this "classical" point of view, one would be tempted to consider the dissolution of the Party with the approach of the revolution, as the entire latent content of the struggle, formerly conserved by the Party, is translated into spontaneous class action.

But the revolutionary period which followed World War I dramatized the crisis and division of the proletariat. The smoothly rising curve of proletarian spontaneity did not

carry the class through the revolutionary crisis to power, for the very conditions under which its victory was possible disorganized and confused it. "The crisis involves not only the economic undermining of capitalism but, equally, the ideological transformation of a proletariat that has been reared in bourgeoisie."<sup>55</sup> And precisely to the extent that large sectors of the proletariat enter the revolutionary period still "caught up in the old capitalist forms of thought and feeling", the crisis of capitalism is also a crisis of the proletariat itself.<sup>56</sup>

This crisis of the proletariat can only be met by an increasing reliance on theory and class consciousness. As the revolution approaches, the next step on the path to socialism becomes less and less obvious; the spontaneous reaction of the class to the operation of the economic laws is no longer an adequate guide and actions must be based increasingly on the objective potentialities of the society. Instrumental considerations take their place alongside expressive ones in the life of the Party.

"The closer this process comes to its goal the more urgent it becomes for the proletariat to understand its own historical mission and the more vigorously and directly proletarian class consciousness will determine each of its actions. For the blind power of the forces at work will only advance "automatically" to their goal of self-annihilation as long as that goal is not within reach. When the moment of transition to the "realm of freedom" arrives this will become apparent just because the blind forces really will hurtle blindly towards the abyss, and only the conscious will of the proletariat will be able to save mankind from the impending catastrophe."<sup>57</sup>

Here is to be found the justification for Lenin's voluntarism. As the theoretician of the final crisis of capitalism, Lenin understood the increasing role of consciousness better than the representatives of the "classical" Left. His break with the organizational and strategic theory of the Marxist tradition looked to many like a return to Jacobin-Blanquist methods out of the distant past, but in fact, Lukács argues, this was no nostalgic, backward glance, but a much needed adjustment of the working class movement to the demands of the new revolutionary era.

## **VII. Party, Class, and Class Consciousness**

This historical justification of Lenin's practice raises a deep theoretical problem; for, even if the sort of Party Lenin created is the most effective in a revolutionary crisis, it remains to be seen if anything more than opportunity links this Party to the proletariat. Lukács' theory of class consciousness is designed to solve this problem by explaining the dependence of the Party on the class even in the second stage, characterized by Party autonomy and conscious initiative. The theoretical issue involved in this discussion has to do with the relation of individual thought to the objectively based class standpoint from which it proceeds. Since this relation is formally similar to that of Party to class, Lukács' theory of class consciousness clarifies much of the earlier discussion.

The Marxism of the Second International situated class standpoint and individual thought on the same ontological level and related them as effect and cause. The result is crude reductionism, the denial of the specificity and relative autonomy of intellectual and ideological processes. Lenin sensed the organizational and strategic risks of such reductionism and therefore employed the idea of "consciousness from without" to



distinguish Marxist thought from the class standpoint of the proletariat. But we have already seen the paradoxes to which this view leads.

There is a way of avoiding these paradoxes and preserving the truth of both the concept of reflexive subjectivity and Lenin's objections to a reduction of theory to everyday consciousness. This way requires, however, a difficult distinction between the concept of class consciousness, based on the objective determinants of the everyday activity of the class as these are understood by social theory, and the actual thoughts and feelings of members of the class which, experience shows, may deviate significantly from theoretical expectations. In principle, class consciousness would be the significance of class action represented as "objectively possible" contents of consciousness members of the class might employ to articulate the meaning of their lives. In practice, the objectively possible beliefs described in the theoretical model of class consciousness must compete, and not always very successfully, with ideas borrowed from other classes or developed idiosyncratically from a mixture of sources.<sup>58</sup>

The relation of the Party and class can be analyzed on this basis in a way which does justice both to Luxemburg's insistence on the reflective nature of class consciousness, and to Lenin's insistence on the independent role of theory. The Party can be seen as attempting to interpret the situation of the class in accordance with the concept of class consciousness,, understood essentially as the unarticulated meaning of class action. This meaning can be "imputed" to the class in the expectation that, if it is correctly interpreted, the class will recognize itself in the Party's language and acts. The translation of these imputed contents back into action by the class completes the cycle in which class development of class consciousness advances to higher levels. In this model of the development of class consciousness the ideas the Party brings to the class are both "from without", in the sense that they arise from theory, and "from within", in the sense that they reflect the truth of class action.

There is a short passage in Marx' work which comes quite close to suggesting this model of the relation between theory and practice in history. This passage resolves the contradiction of the "within" and the "without" in very much the same spirit as Lukács' theory. Marx writes:

"Just as little must one imagine that the democratic representatives are indeed all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shop-keepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven from earth. What makes them representatives of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drives the latter practically. This is, in general, the relationship between the political and literary representatives of a class and the class they represent."<sup>59</sup>

Lukács' theoretically elaborated version of this suggestion works well in explaining the classical reflexive concept of theory and the Party. But the relation between Party and class in the period of the actuality of the revolution is complicated by the fact that theory can identify instrumentally decisive tasks which are not taken up spontaneously by the class action.

It is, of course, normal that theory contain contents with no immediate relation to class action, for example, abstract ideas about the circulation of money or the schemata

of reproduction of capital. These ideas can be called "proletarian" only in the very limited sense that they, like Marxist thought in general, lie under the horizon of the class standpoint of the proletariat. This horizon, Lukács argues, is defined by the possibility of a dialectical transcendence of the reified bourgeois standpoint, both in practice and theory. But such ideas do not bring the meaning of any specific action to consciousness. They thus "represent the proletariat", in Marx' phrase, only scientifically, not as moments in its self-consciousness. What happens once the success of the movement depends on translating ideas of this type into action? What happens when the mere addition of self-consciousness to action is insufficient, when "what must be done" no longer follows in a smooth continuum along the path of the actualization of the latent meaning of spontaneous action?

For Lenin this situation requires a Party initiative, based on "consciousness from without" and supported by a working class that lets itself be maneuvered like troops on the battlefield. On these terms the Party appears as a historical subject and the masses as just another objective condition it must take into account in pursuing its goals. What is lost in this description is the complex communicative and social dimension of the interaction of Party and class in a revolutionary crisis. Lenin's' military metaphor obviously doesn't explain the authority of the Party, which depends on investments of a wholly different order. It is this aspect of the relation Lukács now tries to reconstruct.

The risk of sectarianism is obvious when theoretically inspired Party initiatives leave the masses far behind in order to respond "correctly" to objective instrumental requirements. Here one can see clearly the dialectical correlation of technicism and ethical idealism: the Party may consciously fall back into a moral stance in relation to society, posing ethical exigencies disguised as scientific certainties. Sectarianism can only be avoided where the Party continues to advance proletarian consciousness, because that is the only really fundamental condition of victory it can hope to influence deeply.

With this in mind, it is possible to distinguish "classical" expressive acts of the Party, which follow and render explicit the content of class action, from a new type of exemplary Party intervention which precedes class actions, the necessity of which it makes clear and which it inspires. In both cases the Party's acts are double meant, once in function of the particular objective they aim at, and then a second time in function of their expected impact on class consciousness. But in the era of the actuality of the revolution, the passages from latent theoretical concepts to practical and active class consciousness must be immensely accelerated to coincide with the rhythms of instrumental effectiveness in a political crisis. This coincidence can be achieved where, by their exemplary form, instrumental actions also serve to advance consciousness. Lukács writes:

"The struggle of the Community Party is focused upon the Class consciousness of the proletariat. Its organisational separation. From the class does not mean in this case that it wishes to do battle for its interests on its behalf and in its place? Should it do this, as occasionally happens in the course of evolution, then it is not in the first instance an attempt to fight for the objective goals of the struggle in question (for in the long run these can only be won or retained by the class itself), but only an attempt to advance or accelerate the development of class consciousness."<sup>60</sup>

Here Lenin's scientific-technical self-understanding is completely inverted. The Party does not become the subject of history through its independent actions. Rather, these actions pose the Party as an object before the class. Thus Lukács describes the Party, even at its most active, in the passive mode. He calls it the "visible and organised incarnation of (the proletariat) class consciousness".<sup>61</sup> And, he writes:

"The Community Party must exist as an independent organisation so that the proletariat may be able to see its own class consciousness given historical shape. And likewise, so that in every event of daily life the point of view demanded by the interests of the class as a whole may receive a clear formulation that every worker can understand. And, finally, so that the whole class may become fully aware of its own existence as a class".<sup>62</sup>

The Party does not have "at its disposal" millions of proletarians, but on the contrary, it is those million who have the Party at their disposal, to believe or disbelieve, to accept or reject, to follow or oppose on the basis of its success in discovering and communicating the next "objectively possible" step in the evolution of class consciousness. The apparently contingent technical relation of Party to class in Lenin's theory is subordinated here to a deeper "internal cause" which makes this technical relation possible in the first place. The Party, even in its acts, becomes the objectification of class consciousness. It is not a mechanism of social control in the service of the revolution; it is there to be "seen", and the sight of it inspires the overthrow of the society.

### **VIII. Breakdown of the Synthesis VIII.**

Lukács' synthesis of Luxemburg and Lenin draws both expressive and instrumental forms of action together under the reflexive concept of subjectivity. Although he lacks the term, Lukács has clearly grasped the concept of exemplary action which supplies the mediating link between the apparent contraries. The synthesis breaks down, however, when Lukács turns from explaining the relation of Party to class in the revolution to a consideration of their relation in the socialist state. Once the Party's acts becomes acts of state, the informal popular controls under which it developed no longer suffice to insure its subordination to the class and yet Lukács proposes no new controls capable of preventing a regression to Jacobin volunteerism.

Lukács' discussion of socialism is nevertheless interesting as an attempt to sketch the outlines of a public sphere based on a social movement rather than on "politics" in the usual sense of the term. The bourgeois parliamentary public sphere is transcended through the creation of forms of collective action that go beyond mere verbal propaganda addressed to the individual consciousness of the isolated voter. The social basis of this new public sphere is the Soviet or works' council which overcomes the isolation of the individual and the split between economic and political life on which this isolation is based.

Lukács' description of the Soviets has a distinctly Luxemburgian cast, and reflects her own analysis of similar phenomena in the 1905 Revolution. For both Luxemburg and Lukács, the Soviets represent the point of transition from a reactive spontaneity under the impulse of the economic laws toward a creative social movement capable of restructuring society. To explain this transition, Lukács frames Luxemburg's analysis in

terms of his theory of the transcendence of reification in a proletarian consciousness oriented toward the "totality" of society.

"The Soviet system, for example, always establishes the indivisible unity of economics and politics by relating the concrete existence of men ? their immediate daily interests, etc. ? to the essential questions of society as a whole. It also establishes the unity in objective reality where bourgeois class interests created the "division of labor" above all, the unity of the power 'apparatus' (army, police, government, the law, etc.) and 'the people' ? Everywhere, the Soviet system does its utmost to relate human activity to general questions concerning the state, the economy, culture, etc., while fighting to ensure that the regulation of all such questions does not become the privilege of an exclusive bureaucratic group remote from social life as a whole. Because the Soviet system, the proletarian state, makes society aware of the real connection between all moments of social life (and later objectively units those which are as yet objectively separate ? town and country, for example, intellectual and manual labor, etc., ), it is a decisive factor in the organization of the proletariat as a class."<sup>63</sup>

This description of the Soviets begins to suggest a theory of the new context of citizenship in socialist society, and as such it marks a definite advance over most earlier Marxist discussions of socialist politics, which tend to vary between utopian speculation and unimaginative appeals to the example of existing bourgeois democratic forms. And yet it is puzzling that neither here nor elsewhere does Lukács discuss the institutional aspects of the socialist state, such as voting, the organization of public debate, competition between parties, rights of individuals and groups, and so on.

How important is the missing institutional theory from the standpoint of Marxism? Given Marx' frequent criticism of the limitations of capitalist democracy, one might imagine that Lukács' omission is consistent with Marxism and represents a lack characteristic of Marxism itself. Yet the one text in which Marx examines a workers' power, *The Civil War in France*, contains extensive discussion of the institutional structure of the socialist state. This discussion is governed by the original impulse of Marx' critique of political revolution in his early work, which is the search for a way of subordinating the new socialist state to the social movement. Marx judges some means inherited from capitalist democracy effective for this purpose (e.g., voting), and others counterproductive (e.g., separation of powers).

Rather than developing an institutional theory of this sort, Lukács juxtaposes his theory of the Soviets with a theory of the vanguard Party derived from the first few years of the Russian example. He writes that "the Party's role in a revolution ? the masterly idea of the early Lenin ? is even more important and more decisive in the period of transition to socialism than in the preparatory period."<sup>64</sup> And he assures us that the apparent contradiction between the authority of the Party and the democratic tasks of the revolution is in fact "the dialectically correct solution to the objective contradictions" of the situation.<sup>65</sup> He seems to claim that the very same mechanisms which insured the subordination of the Party to the class before the revolution will work afterwards to prevent the autonomization of the state.

But the reference to Lenin's idea of the leading role of the Party is deceptive. In the discussion reviewed above, Lukács has shown quite convincingly that before the revolution the Party can lead successfully through exemplary actions that lie at the intersection of instrumental and communicative exigencies. Only in this way can the

Party advance the movement politically while retaining and enlarging its base of popular support. But after the revolution the situation has changed and the Party is not forced to find compromises between the instrumental requirements of effective strategic action and the communicative conditions of maintaining a leading relationship to class consciousness.

Instead, the Party focuses on gaining control of a new base of power, the coercive institution of the state. In relation to this state, the Soviets cannot play the role played earlier by proletarian spontaneity as a corrective and verification of the Party's line. The Party's existence is no longer rooted in the class consciousness of the proletariat, for now it finds itself at the summit if the technical bureaucracies in charge of running an industrial society in which workers appear as simple subordinates. The back and forth movement from Party to class, consciousness to spontaneity, through which both advanced in synergy, is replaced by the command structure of an industrial state. By no stretch of the imagination can the acts of the Party at this point be described as moments in the self-reflection of the class.

One might argue that Lenin had few choices as a leader of a historical movement while still expressing concern about the direction he was compelled by circumstance to take. Certainly the single-party state established in Russia ought to have been a subject for concern among Marxists, if for no other reason, on the basis of a reading of *The Civil War in France*. It seemed obvious to Marx in 1871 that new institutional structures of socialist democracy would be required to maintain the social and emancipatory character of the movement. It is difficult to understand how the passage of fifty years could change the status of that insight. Yet it is not at all obvious to Lukács, nor to many others in his position in the 1920s. Instead, he arrives theoretically at the same contradiction at which Lenin arrived on the basis of practical experience: the assertion of the simultaneous and increased role of both the masses and the Communist Party in a single-party Soviet state. In practice, this contradiction was resolved by the collapse of the social movement and the creation of a new kind of society without precedent in Marxist theory.

The inability of most revolutionary Communists in the 1920s to foresee and forestall the Stalinist catastrophe was due to a deep failure of theory and imagination. The cause of this failure was twofold. On the one hand, thinkers and activists like Lukács and Lenin confused emergency measures taken in the shadow of the revolution with fundamental changes in the nature of the public sphere under socialism. On the other hand, and as a result of this first error, they underestimated the validity of the classic teachings concerning the political and legal preconditions of democracy developed in the course of several centuries of bourgeois and Marxist reflection and experience. The consequences of this failure are still very much with us and represent the inner theoretical limit of the dominant forms of revolutionary Communism down to the present day.

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## Notes

1 For examples, see James Miller, 'Marxism and Subjectivity', in *Telos*, no. 6, Fall 1970: Louis Althusser et al., *Lire le Capital*, Paris, Maspèro, 1967, tome II, p. 104. Cf. M. Löwy, *Pour une sociologie des intellectuels révolutionnaires*, Paris. PUF, 1976, pp. 203-225. Another book which helps to correct the image of the early Lukács is Laura Boella, *Il Giovane Lukács*, Bari, De Donate, 1977.

2 G. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, translated by R. Livingstone, Boston, MIT, 1968, p. 338. This text will be referred to hereafter as HCC.

3 HCC, p. 297.

4 HCC, p. 307.

5 HCC, p. 297.

6 HCC, p. xiii

7 HCC, p. 41,

8 HCC, p. 41,

9 HCC, p. 297.

10 HCC, p. 298.

11 HCC, p. 298.

12 G. Lukács, *Lenin*, trans. By N. Jacobs, London, New Left Books, 1970, pp. 67-68.

13 HCC. p. 2.

14 K. Marx, *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, New York, Doubleday, 1967, p. 350.

15 Letter from Marx to Ruge (Sept. 1843), quoted in HCC, p. 77.

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17 K. Marx, *Early Writings*, London, C.A. Watts, 1963, pp. 53-54.

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20 HCC, p. 16.

21 R. Luxemburg, 'The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions', in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, New York, Pathfinder, 1970.

22 Ibid., p. 199.

23 HCC, p. 205.

24 HCC, p. 299.

25 HCC, p. 42.

26 HCC, pp. 41-42.

27 HCC, p. 303.

28 HCC, pp. 278-279.

29 HCCH, p. 275.

30 R. Luxemburg, op. cit., p. 119.

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- 57 HCC, pp. 69-70.
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- 61 HCC, p. 42.
- 62 HCC, p. 326.
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- 65 Ibid. p. 87.