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in memory of
Rosa Luxemburg
1870 - 1919

her Life of Korolenko:
a study of Russian literature
before the Revolution

**can american workers make
a socialist revolution?
by george novack**

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editorial

IN MEMORY OF ROSA LUXEMBURG

In the closing month of the first world war the soldiers and workers of Germany rose up in a revolution which came close to toppling capitalist rule in that country. Their victory would have brought desperately needed aid to the newly formed workers' government of Russia and would have changed the whole course of twentieth-century history. Soldiers got revolutionary propaganda from the Bolsheviks in the opposing trenches and from the Spartacus League in their own ranks. The sailors at the Kiel naval base mutinied to establish a sailors' council to rule that city; soldiers' councils sprang up on the fronts and workers' councils in the major cities.

Although it overthrew the monarchy, this mighty upsurge had been driven back into the channels of capitalist politics within months. Its two foremost leaders, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, lay murdered in Berlin. The Weimar Republic had been founded—that shaky coalition between the social democracy, bourgeois and even royalist parties—which was destined to collapse into the hands of Hitler's Nazis sixteen years later.

Lenin had predicted in 1916 that the revolution in Germany would be slow in starting, but once it got under way would move with the speed of a locomotive. The dizzying pace of events in the winter of 1918-19 completely corroborated this prediction. The last months of Rosa Luxemburg's life were intimately bound up with these events.

An implacable opponent of the imperialist war, she had spent three and a half of its four years in prison. The people of Breslau stormed the prison and liberated Rosa Luxemburg from confinement November 9, 1918, the same day the revolution surged into Berlin. Hundreds of thousands demonstrated in the streets. After the Hohenzollern Kaiser abdicated, appointing right-wing social-democratic leader Fritz

Ebert "Reich Chancellor," Karl Liebknecht addressed workers from the balcony of the Imperial Palace, proclaiming the establishment of a Socialist Republic to be ruled by the Soldiers' and Workers' Councils. Hours later, Ebert, reluctantly conceding that the power temporarily rested with the workers' committees, set about to wrest it back to the safe confines of a bourgeois parliament. That same evening he secretly reached agreement with the Hohenzollern generals to cooperate in the restoration of "law and order"—the crushing of the revolution.

Luxemburg arrived in Berlin November 10. Paul Froelich, her biographer and comrade in the Spartacus League, writes that her friends greeted Rosa "with concealed sadness, for they suddenly realized what the years in prison had done to her: She had aged terribly, and her black hair had gone quite white. She was a sick woman, but her eyes shone with the old fire and energy. Although she urgently needed rest and recuperation, there was no rest for her. Two months were left of her life, and they were filled to the utmost with almost superhuman efforts."

Rosa immediately set out to do what ultimately proved impossible, although she spared no energy in the task: This was to mold a revolutionary party which could take the leadership of the masses in revolt and direct their struggle toward the seizure of state power. She resisted the rush to deflect this struggle into the electoral path, knowing that this could only result in losing the power of the workers' councils to a new form of the old bourgeois rule. She urged that the revolutionized masses drive forward along the course they had spontaneously taken November 9. As she explained to the founding congress of the Communist vanguard:

"The ninth of November was an attempt, a weak, half-hearted, half-conscious, and chaotic attempt, to overthrow the existing public authority and to put an end to ownership rule. What is now incumbent upon us is that we should deliberately concentrate all the forces of the proletariat for an attack upon the very foundations of capitalist society.

"There, at the root, where the individual employer confronts his wage slaves; at the root, where all the executive organs of ownership rule confront the objects of this rule, confront the masses; there, step by step, we must seize the means of power from the rulers, must take them into our own hands." ("Program for Revolution," *International Socialist Review*, May-June 1967)

However, two major political factors prevented the forces under the leadership of Luxemburg and Liebknecht from mobilizing the masses to carry out this program at that critical juncture. One was the fact that the social democracy did not simply present an undivided counter-revolutionary face under the right-wing leadership of Ebert, Philipp Scheidemann and Gustav Noske. A large section of the social democracy, which had split from the right-wing faction on the war question in 1916, was not clearly identified with its policies and acts.

This Independent Social Democratic Party, under the centrist leader-

ship of Karl Kautsky, Eduard Bernstein, and Georg Ledebour, finally voted against war credits for the imperial army—two years after the outbreak of war—thereby rehabilitating its image in the eyes of the war-sick masses. But this did not deter the "Independents" from following the same electoral path as the right wing in 1918 and abandoning the revolution to enter the coalition government.

In the second place, the Spartacists themselves, who opposed the war from the outset, remained as a faction in the Independent Socialist Party long after they should have separated from it to promote the construction of a truly revolutionary party. That split was delayed until December 1918, when the revolution was already nearing its peak. It proved impossible at that late date to win over quickly enough the majority of workers to the revolutionary program of the Communist Party, as the new party modeled after Lenin's Bolsheviks was called.

The Spartacist leaders realized that time was needed to reorganize the revolutionary vanguard and communicate their line of strategy to the rebelling workers and soldiers. But the impatience of the insurgents on one hand, and the provocations of the counterrevolutionary authorities on the other, doomed their efforts.

In the first week of January an abortive uprising took place in Berlin. Although the Spartacist leaders had opposed it as adventuristic, they assumed the leadership after failing to hold it back. When the uprising was defeated, January 8, the bourgeois and right-wing social-democratic press fomented a hysterical witch-hunt atmosphere to cover their deliberate tracking down and murder of the famed Spartacist leaders. Disguised and in hiding, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were seized in a working-class suburb January 15, 1919, and murdered by cavalry officers the same night under Noske's direct instructions.

* * *

We are commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of this assassination by publishing two of Rosa Luxemburg's lesser-known writings which illustrate different sides of the talents of this remarkable woman. What both the work of literary criticism and the manifesto against capital punishment express, is the profound and deeply moving socialist humanism of their author—one of the few totally principled and uncompromising revolutionary political leaders of our century.

Rosa Luxemburg

AGAINST CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

The manifesto against capital punishment was one of Rosa Luxemburg's first articles in Rote Fahne, the newspaper of the Spartacus League, following her release from prison in November 1918. She sets forth democratic and humane ideals for the socialist revolution on this highly controversial question. Of course it is not possible under conditions of severe class conflict and civil war to guarantee that such ideals will be practiced. The violence of imperialist counter-revolution can preclude this for a time.

But certainly when the revolution has been successful and has had a chance to stabilize its regime, it must begin to abolish these relics of the barbarous past. It is one measure of the retrogressiveness of Stalinism that even today, fifty years after the October revolution, the Soviet bureaucracy imposes capital punishment, and not only for murder and treason, but for such lesser crimes as individual theft or embezzlement of state property. Rosa Luxemburg's few lines, not the miserable record of the Soviet bureaucracy, reflect the authentic spirit of Marxist humanism.

We did not wish for amnesty, nor for pardon, in the case of the political prisoners, who had been the prey of the old order. We demanded the right to liberty, to agitation, to revolution for the hundreds of brave and loyal men who groaned in the jails and in the fortresses because, under the former dictatorship of Imperialist criminals, they had fought for the people, for peace, and for socialism.

They are all free now.

We find ourselves again in the ranks, ready for the battle.

It was not the clique of Scheidemann and his bourgeois allies, with Prince Max of Baden at their head, that liberated us. It was the Prole-

tarian Revolution that made the doors of our cells spring open.

But another class of unfortunate dwellers in those gloomy mansions has been completely forgotten. No one, at present, thinks of the pale and morbid figures which sigh behind prison walls because of offenses against ordinary law.

Nevertheless these are also the unfortunate victims of the infamous social order against which the Revolution is directed—victims of the Imperialistic war which pushed distress and misery to the very limit of intolerable torture, victims of that frightful butchery of men which let loose all the vilest instincts.

The justice of the bourgeois classes had again been like a net, which allowed the voracious sharks to escape, while the little sardines were caught. The profiteers who have realized millions during the war have been acquitted or let off with ridiculous penalties. The little thieves, men and women, have been punished with sentences of Draconian severity.

Worn out by hunger and cold, in cells which are hardly heated, these derelicts of society await mercy and pity.

They have waited in vain, for in his preoccupation with making the nations cut one another's throats and of distributing crowns, the last of the Hohenzollerns forgot these miserable people, and since the Conquest of Liege there has been no amnesty, not even on the official holiday of German slaves, the Kaiser's birthday.

The Proletarian Revolution ought now, by a little ray of kindness, to illuminate the gloomy life of the prisons, shorten Draconian sentences, abolish barbarous punishments—the use of manacles and whippings—improve, as far as possible, the medical attention, the food allowance, and the conditions of labor. That is a duty of honor!

The existing disciplinary system, which is impregnated with brutal class spirit and with capitalist barbarism, should be radically altered.

But a complete reform, in harmony with the spirit of socialism, can be based only on a new economic and social order; for both crime and punishment have, in the last analysis, their roots deep in the organization of society. One radical measure, however, can be taken without any elaborate legal process. Capital punishment, the greatest shame of the ultra-reactionary German code, ought to be done away with at once. Why are there any hesitations on the part of this Government of workers and soldiers? The noble Beccaria, two hundred years ago, denounced the ignominy of the death penalty. Doesn't its ignominy exist for you, Ledebour, Barth, Daeumig?

You have no time, you have a thousand cares, a thousand difficulties, a thousand tasks before you? That is true. But mark, watch in hand, how much time would be needed to say: "Capital punishment is abolished!" Would you argue that, on this question also, long discussions followed by votes are necessary? Would you thus lose yourselves in the complications of formalism, in considerations of jurisdiction, in questions of departmental red tape?

Ah! How German this German Revolution is! How argumentative and pedantic it is! How rigid, inflexible, lacking in grandeur!

The forgotten death penalty is only one little isolated detail. But how precisely the inner spirit, which governs the Revolution, betrays itself in these little details!

Let one take up any ordinary history of the great French Revolution. Let one take up the dry Mignet, for instance.

Can one read this book except with a beating heart and a burning brow? Can one, after having opened it, at no matter what page, put it aside before one has heard, with bated breath, the last chord of that formidable tragedy? It is like a symphony of Beethoven carried to the gigantic and the grotesque, a tempest thundering on the organ of time, great and superb in its errors as well as in its achievement, in victory as well as in defeat, in the first cry of naive joyfulness as well as in the final breath.

And now how is it with us in Germany?

Everywhere, in the small as in the great, one feels that these are still and always the old and sober citizens of the defunct Social-Democracy, those for whom the badge of membership is everything and the man and the spirit are nothing.

Let us not forget this, however. The history of the world is not made without grandeur of spirit, without lofty morale, without noble gestures.

Liebknacht and I, on leaving the hospitable halls which we recently inhabited — he, among his pale companions in the penitentiary, I with my dear, poor thieves and women of the streets, with whom I have passed, under the same roof, three years and a half of my life — we took this oath as they followed us with their sad eyes: "We shall not forget you!"

We demand of the executive committee of the Council of Workers and Soldiers an immediate amelioration of the lot of all the prisoners in the German jails!

We demand the excision of capital punishment from the German penal code!

During the four years of this slaughter of the peoples, blood has flowed in torrents. Today, each drop of that precious fluid ought to be preserved devotedly in crystal urns.

Revolutionary activity and profound humanitarianism — they alone are the true breath of socialism.

A world must be turned upside down. But each tear that flows, when it could have been spared, is an accusation, and he commits a crime who with brutal inadvertency crushes a poor earthworm.

Rosa Luxemburg

LIFE OF KOROLENKO

Introduction

Here is a half-forgotten article on a secondary figure in turn-of-the-century Russian literature. To be sure, its author is the eminent personality Rosa Luxemburg. But why should it merit republication and reading today?

There are at least four reasons why this work by the martyred European Marxist has much to teach us in these times when bourgeois scholars are largely content with unhistorical and one-dimensional literary criticism and when Soviet criticism continues to be disfigured by the discredited and stultifying demands of "socialist realism."

1) This is a classic of Marxist cultural criticism.

2) It offers an informative review of the history and social role of Russian literature in the nineteenth century, and of its contrasts with the rest of European literature.

3) By way of example, it stands as a condemnation of the dogmatic precepts and practices of the Stalinist school of literary criticism.

4) It provides a vital model of how the Marxist method can be skillfully and flexibly applied so that justice is done both to the sociological and the artistic qualities of literary productions.

Rosa Luxemburg wrote the article as a preface to her translation, from Russian into German, of Vladimir Korolenko's autobiographical novel *Istoriia Moego Sovremennika* (A History of My Contemporary). She undertook this work during her imprisonment for socialist opposition to the imperialist war from 1915 to 1918. The preface was written July 1918 in Breslau Prison, from which she was released the following November after the German Revolution. It is one of the last products of her pen (she was assassinated in January 1919) and the ripest expression of her talents in the field of cultural criticism.

The present version is reprinted from the winter 1943 issue of the now defunct *New Essays: A Quarterly Devoted to the Study of Modern Society*, with minor editorial corrections.

Rosa Luxemburg rarely wrote on literary subjects. When she had the opportunity, why did she choose to deal with a lesser light of Russian literature rather than one of its towering geniuses? She sought to get at what was essential rather than exceptional in that great national body of literature.

In a letter to her publisher written from prison she explained: "Your idea that I should write a book about Tolstoy doesn't appeal to me at all. For whom? Why? Everyone can read Tolstoy's books, and if they don't get a strong breath of life from them, then they won't get it from any commentary." It was only at her publisher's insistence, in fact, that she wrote the present article.

Much of her commentary touches on nonliterary questions. She has many a cutting remark aimed at the conservative officialdom of the German Social Democracy. Her remarks on modern "civilization's" penchant for making scapegoats of minority peoples, too, has international relevance today. Passages of interest on other topics are written in her characteristic tone of uncompromising revolutionary morality that caused Lenin to speak of her as "an eagle," despite certain minor political disagreements he had with her.

Luxemburg's basic proposition concerning Russian literature under czarism—that its unique quality flowed from its spirit of opposition to the regime—is a point worth considering in evaluating any literature today, and first of all, Soviet literature, even though regimes of an opposite class nature are involved.

What does Luxemburg mean by "opposition to the regime"? She refers to the attitude of nonacceptance of the status quo, of constant questioning and challenging of fundamental assumptions. This organic spirit of opposition flowed from the extreme tensions of social life in old Russia. The title of a famous and popular poem by N. A. Nekrasov expressed this literature's nearly universal dissatisfaction with the regime: "Who Can Be Happy and Free in Russia?"

The rebellious mood of the best literature under czarism, which refused to accept "things as they are," became a force in Russian life undermining the ideological and moral foundations of absolutism. "It created in that huge prison, the material poverty of czarism, its own realm of spiritual freedom" and "by educating generation after generation" became a "real fatherland for the best of men, such as Korolenko." With very much the same words, one could describe the role of the best in Soviet literature today as it challenges the basic assumptions of the bureaucratic regime.

Luxemburg's view of the political function of art also sheds light on the contemporary Soviet literary scene.

Authentic Marxism, as opposed to its Stalinist caricature, never called upon art to serve narrow political ends. The harm that a nar-

row utilitarian approach can do was illustrated by a recent significant event in Soviet life.

A congress of Soviet writers was held in May 1967 to celebrate the accomplishments of half a century since the October Revolution of 1917. It was only the fourth such congress in over 30 years and its timing underlined the importance current officialdom attaches to literature's function in Soviet society.

Ironically, the most significant development at that "jubilee" congress was the demand raised for an end to censorship in a courageous open letter by novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. This occurrence dramatized the crisis at the heart of Soviet literature. Much of Soviet economic, social, and cultural life is fettered by the requirements of a privileged bureaucracy that has taken over arbitrary direction of the proletarian state. While preserving the nationalized property and, in its own inefficient way, developing and defending the planned economy, this heavy-handed bureaucracy restricts the creative forces of the revolution.

Just as Soviet workers are denied an independent voice in major economic and political decisions, the creative artists are utilized to "fulfill plans" handed down from above. Their orders are, in general, to glorify the ruling layer and popularize its policies of the moment. In short, literature and the arts are called upon to perform narrowly utilitarian political functions, and censorship tends to exclude any work not conforming to that role.

Luxemburg's view is a far cry from this bureaucratic approach, which is masked under the title "socialist realism." Likewise, in the early nineteen-twenties Lenin and Trotsky argued against the infantile and dogmatic advocates of the essentially utilitarian and undialectical notion of "proletarian culture."

While Luxemburg singles out "opposition to the regime" as the "chief characteristic" of the old Russian literature, she does not mean by that that its sole concern was to take sides in the political struggles of the day. She refers to something much deeper and broader.

"Nothing of course could be more erroneous than to picture Russian literature as a tendentious art in a crude sense, nor to think of all Russian poets as revolutionists, or at least as progressives. Patterns such as 'revolutionary' or 'progressive' in themselves mean very little in art."

If we bring this up to date for Soviet literature, we might say, "Nothing is more erroneous than to *require* that literature be tendentious in a crude sense or that all writers be revolutionists or progressives; such patterns produce little in the way of art."

Luxemburg's discussion of Dostoyevsky clarifies the point: "With the true artist, the social formula that he recommends is a matter of secondary importance: the source of his art, its animating spirit, is decisive." Although Dostoyevsky promoted outspokenly reactionary ideas, his novels about the distressing dilemmas of human existence have a liberating effect. "His thoughts and emotions are not governed

by a desire to hold on to the status quo." He is agonized by and revolts against the existing social labyrinth; he has an implicit vision that something better is possible. The animating spirit of Dostoyevsky's art, which enabled it to reach his contemporaries, continues to affect us as powerfully, while the wrong solutions for social problems he recommended remain incidental and do not destroy the worth of his work as a novelist.

Under Stalin, both Dostoyevsky's works and any friendly commentary on them such as Luxemburg's were virtually banned. They violated the needs of bureaucratic utilitarianism.

Today, Luxemburg's comments on Dostoyevsky could be applied very aptly to the case of the imprisoned Soviet author Sinyavsky. Many have noticed certain reactionary, especially religious and anti-Marxist, tendencies in his writings. But his animating spirit is one of rebellion, of critical thought, of nonacceptance of dogma, of searching for something new and better. The suppressed and semi-suppressed works of an entire layer of present-day Soviet writers like Sinyavsky and Solzhenitsyn have created a new "realm of spiritual freedom" in defiance of the censorship and all-pervading conformism. This body of unorthodox literature is again helping to form a new generation of revolutionists who face the task of bringing about full socialist democracy within the workers' state.

— George Saunders

I

"My soul, of a threefold nationality, has at last found a home— and this above all in the literature of Russia," Korolenko says in his memoirs. This literature, which to Korolenko was fatherland, home, and nationality, and which he himself adorns, was historically unique.

For centuries, throughout the Middle Ages and down to the last third of the eighteenth century, Russia was enveloped in a cryptlike silence, in darkness and barbarism. She had no cultivated literary language, no scientific literature, no publishing houses, no libraries, no journals, no centers of cultural life. The gulf stream of the Renaissance, which had washed the shores of all other European countries and was responsible for a flowering garden of world literature, the rousing storms of the Reformation, the fiery breath of eighteenth-century philosophy— all this had left Russia untouched. The land of the czars possessed as yet no means for apprehending the light rays of Western culture, no mental soil in which its seeds could take root. The sparse literary monuments of those times, in their outlandish ugliness, appear today like native products of the Solomon Islands or the New Hebrides. Between them and the art of the Western world, there apparently exists no essential relation, no inner connection.

But then something like a miracle took place. After several faltering

attempts toward the end of the eighteenth century to create a national consciousness, the Napoleonic wars flashed up like lightning. Russia's profound humiliation, arousing for the first time in czarism a national consciousness, just as the triumph of the Coalition did later, resulted in drawing the Russian intellectuals toward the West, toward Paris, into the heart of European culture, and bringing them into contact with a new world. Overnight a Russian literature blossomed forth, springing up complete in glistening armor like Minerva from the head of Jupiter; and this literature, combining Italian melody, English virility, and German nobility and profundity, soon overflowed with a treasure of talents, radiant beauty, thought and emotion.

The long dark night, the deathlike silence, had been an illusion. The light rays from the West had remained obscure only as a latent power; the seeds of culture had been waiting to sprout at the appropriate moment. Suddenly, Russian literature stood there, an unmistakable member of the literature of Europe, in whose veins circulated the blood of Dante, Rabelais, Shakespeare, Byron, Lessing, and Goethe. With the leap of a lion it atoned for the neglect of centuries; it stepped into the family circle of world literature as an equal.

The chief characteristic of this sudden emergence of Russian literature is that it was born out of opposition to the Russian regime, out of the spirit of struggle. This feature was obvious throughout the entire nineteenth century. It explains the richness and depth of its spiritual quality, the fullness and originality of its artistic form, above all, its creative and driving social force. Russian literature became, under czarism, a power in public life as in no other country and in no other time. It remained at its post for a century until it was relieved by the material power of the masses, when the word became flesh.

It was this literature which won for that half-Asiatic, despotic state a place in world culture. It broke through the Chinese Wall erected by absolutism and built a bridge to the West. Not only does it appear as a literature that borrows, but also as one that creates; not only is it a pupil, but also a teacher. One has only to mention three names to illustrate this: Tolstoy, Gogol, and Dostoyevsky.

In his memoirs, Korolenko characterizes his father, a government official at the time of serfdom in Russia, as a typical representative of the honest people in that generation. Korolenko's father felt responsible only for his own activities. The gnawing feeling of responsibility for social injustice was strange to him. "God, Czar, and the Law" were beyond all criticism. As a district judge he felt called upon only to apply the law with the utmost scrupulousness. "That the law itself may be inefficient is the responsibility of the czar before God. He, the judge, is as little responsible for the law as for the lightning of the high heavens, which sometimes strikes an innocent child. . . ." To the generation of the eighteen-forties and fifties, social conditions as a whole were fundamental and unshakable. Under the scourge of officialdom, those who served loyally, without opposition, knew they could only bend as under the onslaught of a tornado, hoping and waiting that

the evil might pass. "Yes," said Korolenko, "that was a view of the world out of a single mold, a kind of imperturbable equilibrium of conscience. Their inner foundations were not undermined by self-analysis; the honest people of that time did not know that deep inner conflict which comes with the feeling of being personally responsible for the whole social order." It is this kind of view that is supposed to be the true basis of czar and God, and as long as this view remains undisturbed, the power of absolutism is great indeed.

It would be wrong, however, to regard as specifically Russian or as pertaining only to the period of serfdom the state of mind that Korolenko describes. That attitude toward society which enables one to be free of gnawing self-analysis and inner discord and considers "God-willed conditions" as something elemental, accepting the acts of history as a sort of divine fate, is compatible with the most varied political and social systems. In fact it is found even under modern conditions and was especially characteristic of German society throughout the world war.

In Russia, this "imperturbable equilibrium of conscience" had already begun to crumble in the eighteen-sixties among wide circles of the intelligentsia. Korolenko describes in an intuitive manner this spiritual change in Russian society, and shows just how this generation overcame the slave psychology and was seized by the trend of a new time, the predominant characteristic of which was the "gnawing and painful, but creative spirit of social responsibility."

To have aroused this high sense of citizenship, and to have undermined the deepest psychological roots of absolutism in Russian society, is the great merit of Russian literature. From its first days, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it never denied its social responsibility—never forgot to be socially critical. Ever since its unfolding with Pushkin and Lermontov, its life principle was a struggle against darkness, ignorance, and oppression. With desperate strength it shook the social and political chains, bruised itself sore against them, and paid for the struggle in blood.

In no other country did there exist such a conspicuously early mortality among prominent representatives of literature as in Russia. They died by the dozens in the bloom of their manhood, at the youthful age of twenty-five or twenty-seven, or at the oldest around forty, either on the gallows or as suicides—directly or disguised as duels—some through insanity, others by premature exhaustion. So died the noble poet of liberty, Ryleyev, who in the year 1826 was executed as the leader of the Decembrist uprising. Thus, too, Pushkin and Lermontov, those brilliant creators of Russian poetry—both victims of duels—and their whole prolific circle. So died Belinsky, the founder of literary criticism and proponent of Hegelian philosophy in Russia, as well as Dobrolyubov; and so the excellent and tender poet Kozlov, whose songs grew into Russian folk poetry like wild garden flowers; and the creator of Russian comedy, Griboyedov, as well as his greater successor, Gogol; and in recent times, those sparkling short-story writers,

Garshin and Chekhov. Others pined away for decades in penitentiaries, jails, or in exile, like the founder of Russian journalism, Novikov; like the leader of the Decembrists, Bestuzhev; like Prince Odoyevsky, Alexander von Herzen, Dostoyevsky, Chernyshevsky, Shevchenko, and Korolenko.

Turgenev relates, incidentally, that the first time he fully enjoyed the song of the lark he was somewhere near Berlin. This casual remark seems very characteristic. Larks warble in Russia no less beautifully than in Germany. The huge Russian empire contains such great and manifold beauties of nature that an impressionable poetic soul finds deep enjoyment at every step. What hindered Turgenev from enjoying the beauty of nature in his own country was just that painful disharmony of social relations, that ever present awareness of responsibility for those outrageous social and political conditions from which he could not rid himself, and which, piercing deeply, did not permit for a moment any indulgence in complete self-oblivion. Only away from Russia, when the thousands of depressing pictures of his homeland were left behind, only in a foreign environment, the orderly exterior and material culture of which had always naively impressed his countrymen, could a Russian poet give himself up to the enjoyment of nature, untroubled and wholeheartedly.

Nothing, of course, could be more erroneous than to picture Russian literature as a tendentious art in a crude sense, nor to think of all Russian poets as revolutionists, or at least as progressives. Patterns such as "revolutionary" or "progressive" in themselves mean very little in art.

Dostoyevsky, especially in his later writings, is an outspoken reactionary, a religious mystic and hater of socialists. His depictions of Russian revolutionaries are malicious caricatures. Tolstoy's mystic doctrines reflect reactionary tendencies, if not more. But the writings of both have, nevertheless, an inspiring, arousing, and liberating effect upon us. And this is because their starting points are not reactionary, their thoughts and emotions are not governed by the desire to hold on to the *status quo*, nor are they motivated by social hatred, narrow-mindedness, or caste egotism. On the contrary, theirs is the warmest love for mankind and the deepest response to social injustice. And thus the reactionary Dostoyevsky becomes the artistic agent of the "insulted and injured," as one of his works is called. Only the conclusions drawn by him and Tolstoy, each in his own way, only the way out of the social labyrinth which they believe they have found, leads them into the bypaths of mysticism and asceticism. But with the true artist, the social formula that he recommends is a matter of secondary importance; the source of his art, its animating spirit, is decisive.

Within Russian literature one also finds a tendency which, though on a considerably smaller scale and unlike the deep and world-embracing ideas of a Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky, propagates more modest ideals, that is, material culture, modern progress, and bourgeois pro-

fiency. Of the older generation the most talented representative of this school is Goncharov, and of the younger one, Chekhov. The latter, in opposition to Tolstoy's ascetic and moralizing tendency, made the characteristic remark that "steam and electricity hold more love for humanity than sexual chastity and vegetarianism." In its youthful, rousing drive for culture, personal dignity, and initiative, this somewhat sober, "culture-carrying" Russian movement differs from the smug philistinism and banality of the French and German delimiters of the *juste milieu*. Goncharov particularly, in his book *Oblo-mov*, reached such heights in picturing human indolence that the figure he drew earned a place of universal validity in the gallery of great human types.

Finally, there are also representatives of decadence in Russia's literature. One of the most brilliant talents of the Gorky generation is to be found among them, Leonid Andreyev, whose art emanates a sepulchral air of decay in which all will to live has wilted away. And yet the root and substance of this Russian decadence is diametrically opposed to that of a Baudelaire or a D'Annunzio, where the basis is merely oversaturation with modern culture, where egotism, highly cunning in expression, quite robust in its essence, no longer finds satisfaction in a normal existence and reaches out for poisonous stimuli. With Andreyev hopelessness pours forth from a temperament which, under the onslaught of oppressive social conditions, is overpowered by pain. Like the best of the Russian writers, he has looked deeply into the sufferings of mankind. He lived through the Russo-Japanese war, through the first revolutionary period and the horrors of the counter-revolution from 1907 to 1911. He describes them in such stirring pictures as *The Red Laugh*, *The Seven Who Were Hanged*, and many others. And like his Lazarus, having returned from the shores of shadowland, he cannot overcome the dank odor of the grave; he walks among the living like "something half-devoured by death." The origin of this kind of decadence is typically Russian: it is that full measure of social sympathy under which the energy and resistance of the individual break down.

It is just this social sympathy which is responsible for the singularity and artistic splendor of Russian literature. Only one who is himself affected and stirred can affect and stir others. Talent and genius, of course, are in each case a "gift of God." Great talent alone, however, is not sufficient to make a lasting impression. Who would deny a Monti talent or even genius, though he hailed, in Dantean *terza rima*, first the assassination by a Roman mob of the ambassador of the French Revolution and then the victories of this same revolution; at one time the Austrians, and later the Directory; now the extravagant Suvarov, then again Napoleon and the Emperor Franz; each time pouring out to the victor the sweetest tones of a nightingale? Who would doubt the great talent of a Saint-Beuve, the creator of the literary essay who, in the course of time, put his brilliant pen to the service of almost every

political group of France, demolishing today what he worshiped yesterday and vice versa?

For a lasting effect, for the reeducation of society, more than talent is needed. What is required is poetic personality, character, individuality, attributes which are anchored deeply in a great and well-rounded view of the world. It is just this view of the world, just this sensitive social consciousness which sharpened so greatly the insight of Russian literature into the social conditions of people and into the psychology of the various characters and types. It is this almost aching sympathy that inspires its descriptions with colors of glowing splendor; it is the restless search, the brooding over the problems of society which enables it to observe artistically the enormity and inner complexity of the social structure and to lay it down in great works of art.

Murder and crimes are committed everywhere and every day. "Barber X murdered and robbed wealthy Mrs. Y. Criminal Court Z condemned him to die." Everyone has read such announcements of three lines in the morning paper, has gone over them with an indifferent glance in order to look for the latest news from the racetracks or the new theater schedule. Who else is interested in murders besides the police, the public prosecutor, and the statisticians? Mostly writers of detective stories and movies.

The fact that one human being can murder another, that this can happen near us every day, in the midst of our "civilization," next door to our home, sweet home, moves Dostoyevsky to the very bottom of his soul. As with Hamlet, who through his mother's crime finds all the bonds of humanity untied and the world out of joint, so it is for Dostoyevsky when he faces the fact that one human being can murder another. He finds no rest, he feels the responsibility for this dreadfulness weighing upon him, as it does on every one of us. He must elucidate the soul of the murderer, must trace his misery, his afflictions, down to the most hidden folds of his heart. He suffers all his tortures and is blinded by the terrible understanding that the murderer himself is the most unhappy victim of society. With a mighty voice, Dostoyevsky sounds an alarm. He awakens us from the stupid indifference of civilized egotism that delivers the murderer to the police inspector, to the public prosecutor and his henchmen, or to the penitentiary with the hope that thereby we shall all be rid of him. Dostoyevsky forces us to go through all the tortures the murderer goes through and in the end leaves us all crushed. Whoever has experienced his Raskolnikov, or the cross-examination of Dmitri Karamazov the night after the murder of his father, or the *Memoirs from a Deathhouse*, will never again find his way back to the supporting shell of philistine and self-satisfying egotism. Dostoyevsky's novels are furious attacks on bourgeois society, in whose face he shouts: The real murderer, the murderer of the human soul, is you!

No one has taken such merciless revenge on society for the crimes committed on the individual, nobody has put society on the rack so cunningly as Dostoyevsky. This is his specific talent. But the other

leading spirits of Russian literature also perceive the act of murder as an accusation against existing conditions, as a crime committed upon the murderer as a human being, for which we are all responsible—each one of us. That is why the greatest talents again and again return to the subject of crime as if fascinated by it, putting it before our eyes in the highest works of art in order to arouse us from our thoughtless indifference. Tolstoy did it in *The Power of Darkness* and in *Resurrection*, Gorky in *The Lower Depths* and in *Three of Them*, Korolenko in his story *The Rustling of the Woods* and in his wonderful *Siberian Murderer*.

Prostitution is as little specifically Russian as tuberculosis; it is rather the most international institution of social life. But although it plays an almost controlling part in our modern life, officially, in the sense of the conventional lie, it is not approved of as a normal constituent of present-day society. Rather it is treated as the scum of humanity, as something allegedly beyond the pale. Russian literature deals with the prostitute not in the pungent style of the boudoir novel, nor the whining sentimentality of tendentious literature, nor as the mysterious, rapacious vampire as in Wedekind's *Erdgeist*. No literature in the world contains descriptions of fiercer realism than the magnificent scene of the orgy in the *Brothers Karamazov* or in Tolstoy's *Resurrection*. In spite of this, the Russian artist, however, does not look at the prostitute as a "lost soul," but as a human being whose suffering and inner struggles need all his sympathy. He dignifies the prostitute and rehabilitates her for the crime that society has committed on her by letting her compete with the purest and loveliest types of womanhood for the heart of the man. He crowns her head with roses and elevates her, as does Mahado his Bajadere from the purgatory of corruption and her own agony to the heights of moral purity and womanly heroism.

Not only the exceptional person and situation that stands out crassly from the gray background of everyday life, but life itself, the average man and his misery, awakens a deep concern in the Russian writer whose senses are strongly aware of social injustice. "Human happiness," says Korolenko in one of his stories, "honest human happiness is salubrious and elevating to the soul. And I always believe, you know, that man is rather obliged to be happy." In another story, called *Paradox*, a cripple, born without arms, says, "Man is created for happiness, as a bird for flight." From the mouth of the miserable cripple such a maxim is an obvious "paradox." But for thousands and millions of people it is not accidental physical defects which make their "vocation of happiness" seem so paradoxical but the social conditions under which they must exist.

That remark of Korolenko actually contains an important element of social hygiene: happiness makes people spiritually healthy and pure, as sunlight over the open sea effectively disinfects the water. Furthermore, under abnormal social conditions—and all conditions based on social inequality are fundamentally abnormal—most heterogeneous

deformations of the soul are apt to be a mass phenomenon. Permanent oppression, insecurity, injustice, poverty, and dependence, as well as that division of labor which leads to one-sided specialization, mold people in a certain manner. And this goes for both the oppressor and the oppressed, the tyrant and the slave, the boaster and the parasite, the ruthless opportunist and the indolent idler, the pedant and the jester — all alike are products and victims of their circumstances.

It is just the peculiar psychological abnormality, the warped development of the human soul under the influence of everyday social conditions, which aroused writers like Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Goncharov, Saltykov, Uspensky, Chekhov, and others to descriptions of Balzacian fervor. The tragedy of the triviality of the average man, as described by Tolstoy in his *Death of Ivan Ilyich*, is unsurpassed in world literature.

There are, for example, those rogues who, without a vocation and unfit to make a normal living, are torn between a parasitic existence and occasional conflicts with the law, forming the scum of bourgeois society for whom the Western world puts up signs, "No beggars, peddlers, or musicians allowed." For this category — the type of Korolenko's ex-official Popkov — Russian literature always had a lively and artistic interest and good-natured smile of understanding. With the warm heart of a Dickens, but without his bourgeois sentimentality, Turgenev, Uspensky, Korolenko, and Gorky look upon these "stranded" folk, the criminal as well as the prostitute, with a broad-minded realism, as equals in human society, and achieve, just because of this genial approach, works of a high artistic effect.

Russian literature treats the world of the child with exceptional tenderness and affection, as is shown in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, in Dostoyevsky's *Karamazov*, Goncharov's *Oblomov*, Korolenko's *In Bad Company* and *At Night*, and in Gorky's *Three of Them*. Zola, in his novel *Page d'amour*, from the Rougon-Macquart cycle, describes the sufferings of a neglected child. But here the sickly and hypersensitive child, morosely affected by the love affair of an egotistic mother, is only a "means of evidence" in an experimental novel, a subject to illustrate the theory of inheritance.

To the Russian, however, the child and its soul is an independent entity, the object of artistic interest to the same extent as the adult, only more natural, less spoiled and certainly more helplessly exposed to the evils of society. "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones . . . it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck," and so on. Present society offends millions of those little ones by robbing them of what is most precious and irretrievable, a happy, sorrowless, harmonious childhood.

As a victim of social conditions, a child's world with its misery and happiness is especially near to the Russian artist's heart. He does not stoop to the child in the false and playful manner which most adults believe necessary, but treats it with honest and sincere comradeship,

yes, even with an inner shyness and respect for the untouched little being.

The manner in which literary satire is expressed is an important indicator of the cultural level of a nation. Here England and Germany represent the two opposing poles in European literature. In tracing the history of satire from Von Hutten to Heinrich Heine, one may also include Grimmelshausen. But in the course of the last three centuries, the connecting links in this chain display a frightful picture of decline. Beginning with the ingenious and rather fantastic Fischart, whose exuberant nature distinctly reveals the influence of the Renaissance, to Mosherosh, and from the latter, who at least dares to pull the bigwig's whiskers, to that small philistine Rabener—what a decline! Rabener, who gets excited about the people who dare to ridicule princelings, the clergy, and the "upper classes" because a well-behaved satirist should first of all learn to be "a loyal subject," exposes the mortal spot of German satire. In England, however, satire has taken an unparalleled upswing since the beginning of the eighteenth century, that is, after the great revolution. Not only has British literature produced a string of such masters as Mandeville, Swift, Sterne, Sir Philip Francis, Byron, and Dickens, among whom Shakespeare, naturally, deserves first place for his Falstaff, but satire has turned from the privilege of the intellectuals into a universally owned property. It has become, so to speak, nationalized. It sparkles in political pamphlets, leaflets, parliamentary speeches, and newspaper articles, as well as in poetry. Satire has become the very life and breath for the Englishman, so much so that even the stories of a Croker, written for the adolescent girl of the upper middle classes, contain the same acid descriptions of English aristocracy as those of Wilde, Shaw, or Galsworthy.

This tendency towards satire has been derived from, and can be explained by, England's political freedom of long standing. As Russian literature is similar to the English in this respect, it shows that not the constitution of a country, nor its institutions, but the spirit of its literature and the attitude of the leading social circles of society are the determining factors. Since the beginning of modern literature in Russia, satire has been mastered in all its phases and has achieved excellent results in every one of them. Pushkin's poem *Eugene Onegin*, Lermontov's short stories and epigrams, Krylov's fables, Nekrasov's poems, and Gogol's comedies are just so many masterpieces, each in its own way. Nekrasov's satiric epic *Who Can Be Happy and Free in Russia?* reveals the delightful vigor and richness of his creations.

In Saltykov-Shchedrin Russian satire has finally produced its own genius who, for a grimmer scourging of despotism and bureaucracy, invented a very peculiar literary style and a unique and untranslatable language of his own and, by so doing, profoundly influenced intellectual development. Thus, with a highly moral pathos, Russian literature combined within itself an artistic comprehension that covers the entire scale of human emotions. It created in the midst of that huge prison, the material poverty of czarism, its own realm of spiritual

freedom and an exuberant culture wherein one may breathe and partake of the intellectual and cultural life. It was thus able to become a social power and, by educating generation after generation, to become a real fatherland for the best of men, such as Korolenko.

II

Korolenko's nature is truly poetic. Around his cradle gathered the dense fog of superstition. Not the corrupt superstition of modern cosmopolitan decadence as practiced in spiritualism, fortune-telling, and Christian Science, but the naive superstition found in folklore—as pure and spice-scented as the free winds of the Ukrainian plains, and the millions of wild iris, yarrows, and sage that grow luxuriantly among the tall grass. The spooky atmosphere in the servants' quarters and the nursery of Korolenko's father's house reveals distinctly that his cradle stood not far from Gogol's fairyland, with its elves and witches and its heathen Christmas spook.

Descended at once from Poland, Russia, and the Ukraine, Korolenko has to bear, even as a child, the brunt of the three "nationalisms," each one expecting him "to hate or persecute someone or other." He failed these expectations, however, thanks to his healthy common sense. The Polish traditions, with their dying breath of a historically vanquished past, touched him but vaguely. His straightforwardness was repelled by that mixture of clownish tomfoolery and reactionary romanticism of Ukrainian nationalism. The brutal methods used in Russifying the Ukraine served as an effective warning against Russian chauvinism, because the tender boy instinctively felt himself drawn toward the weak and oppressed, not toward the strong and triumphant. And thus, from the conflict of three nationalities that fought in his native land of Volhynia, he made his escape into humanitarianism.

Fatherless at the age of seventeen, depending on nobody but himself, he went to Petersburg where he threw himself into the whirlpool of university life and political activity. After studying for three years at a school of technology, he moved on to the Academy of Agriculture in Moscow. Two years later his plans were crossed by the "supreme power," as happened to many others of his generation. Arrested as a spokesman of a student demonstration, Korolenko was expelled from the Academy and exiled to the district of Vologda in the far north of European Russia. When released, he was obliged to reside in Kronstadt, under police parole. Years later he returned to Petersburg and, planning a new life again, learned the cobbler's trade in order to be closer to the working people and to develop his personality in other directions. In 1879 he was arrested again and was sent even further northeastward, to a hamlet in the district of Vyatka, at the end of the world.

Korolenko took it gracefully. He tried to make the best of it by practicing his newly acquired cobbler's trade, which helped him to

make a living. But not for long. Suddenly, and apparently without reason, he was sent to western Siberia, from there back to Perm, and finally to the remotest spot of far-eastern Siberia.

But even this did not mark the end of his wanderings. After the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, the new czar, Alexander III, ascended the throne. Korolenko, who in the meantime had advanced to the position of railway official, took the obligatory oath to the new government, together with the other employees. But this was declared insufficient. He was requested to pledge the oath again as a private individual and political exile. Like all the other exiles, Korolenko refused to do so and as a result was sent to the ice-wastes of Yakutsk.

There can be no doubt that the whole procedure was only an "empty gesture," though Korolenko did not try to be demonstrative. Social conditions are not altered directly or materially regardless of whether or not an isolated exile, somewhere in the Siberian taiga near the polar region, swears allegiance to the czar's government. However, it was the custom in czarist Russia to insist on such empty gestures. And not only in Russia alone. The stubborn *Eppur si muove!* of a Galileo reminds us of a similar empty gesture, having no other effect than the vengeance of the Holy Inquisition wreaked on a tortured and incarcerated man. And yet for thousands of people who have only the vaguest idea of Copernicus' theory, the name Galileo is forever identical with this beautiful gesture, and it is absolutely immaterial that it did not happen at all. The very existence of such legends with which men adorn their heroes is proof enough that such "empty gestures" are indispensable in our spiritual realm.

For his refusal to take the oath, Korolenko suffered exile for four years among half-savage nomads at a miserable settlement on the banks of the Aldan, a branch of the river Lena, in the heart of the Siberian wasteland, and under the hardships of subzero weather. But privations, loneliness, all the sinister scenery of the taiga, and isolation from the world of civilization did not change the mental elasticity of Korolenko nor his sunny disposition. He eagerly took part in the interests of the Yakuts and shared their destitute life. He worked in the field, cut hay, and milked cows. In winter he made shoes for the natives—and even icons. The exile's life in Yakutsk, which George Kennan called a period of "being buried alive," was described by Korolenko without lament or bitterness, but with humor and in pictures of the most tender and poetic beauty. This was the time when his literary talent ripened, and he gathered a rich booty in studying men and nature.

In 1885, after his return from exile, which lasted (with short interruptions) almost ten years, he published a short story, *Makar's Dream*, which at once established him among the masters of Russian literature. This first, yet fully matured product of a young talent burst upon the leaden atmosphere of the eighties like the first song of a lark on a gray day in February. In quick succession other sketches and stories followed—*Notes of a Siberian Traveler*, *The Rustling of the Woods*,

In Pursuit of the Icon, At Night, Yom Kippur, The River Roars, and many others. All of them show the identical characteristics of Korolenko's creations: enchanting descriptions of nature, lovable simplicity, and a warmhearted interest in the "humiliated and disinherited."

Although of a highly critical nature, Korolenko's writings are by no means polemical, educational, or dogmatic, as is the case with Tolstoy. They reveal simply his love for life and his kind disposition. Aside from being tolerant and good-natured in his conceptions, and apart from his dislike of chauvinism, Korolenko is through and through a Russian poet, and perhaps the most "nationalistic" among the great Russian prose writers. Not only does he love his country, he is in love with it like a young man; he is in love with its nature, with all the intimate charms of this gigantic country, with every sleepy stream and every quiet wood-fringed valley; he is in love with its simple people and their naive piety, their rugged humor and brooding melancholy. He does not feel at home in the city nor in a comfortable train compartment. He hates the haste and rumble of modern civilization; his place is on the open road. To walk briskly with knapsack and hand-cut hiking staff, to give himself entirely to the accidental—following a group of pious pilgrims to a thaumaturgical image of a saint, chatting with fishermen at night by a fire, or mixing with a colorful crowd of peasants, lumbermen, soldiers, and beggars on a little battered steamboat and listening to their conversation—such is the life that suits him best. But unlike Turgenev, the elegant and perfectly groomed aristocrat, he is no silent observer. He finds no difficulty in mingling with people, knowing just what to say to make friends and how to strike the right note.

In this manner he wandered all over Russia. With every step he experienced the wonders of nature, the naive poetry of simplicity, which had also brought smiles to Gogol's face. Enraptured, he observed the elementary, fatalistic indolence characteristic of the Russian people, which in times of peace seems unceasing and profound, but in stormy times turns into heroism, grandeur, and steel-like power. It was here that Korolenko filled his diary with vivid and colorful impressions which, growing into sketches and novels, were still covered with dew-drops and heavy with the scent of the soil.

One peculiar product of Korolenko's writings is his *Blind Musician*. Apparently a purely psychological experiment, it deals with no artistic problem. Being born a cripple may be the cause of many conflicts, but is, in itself, beyond all human interference and beyond guilt or vengeance. In literature as well as in art, physical defects are only casually mentioned, either in a sarcastic manner to make an ugly character more loathsome, as Homer's Thersites and the stammering judges in the comedies of Moliere and Beaumarchais, or with good-natured ridicule as in genre paintings of the Dutch Renaissance, for instance, the sketch of a cripple by Cornelius Dussart.

Not so with Korolenko. The anguish of a man born blind and tormented with an irresistible longing for light is the center of interest.

Korolenko finds a solution, which unexpectedly shows the keynote of his art and which is, incidentally, characteristic of all Russian literature. The blind musician experiences a spiritual rebirth. While detaching himself from the egotism of his own hopeless suffering by making himself the spokesman for the blind and for their physical and mental agonies, he attains his own enlightenment. The climax is the first public concert of the blind man, who surprises his listeners by choosing the well-known songs of the blind minstrels for his improvisations, thus arousing a stirring compassion. Sociality and solidarity with the misery of men mean salvation and enlightenment for the individual as well as for the masses.

III

The sharply defined line of demarcation between belletristic and journalistic writers, observed nowadays in Western Europe, is not so strictly adhered to in Russia because of the polemical nature of its literature. Both forms of expression are often combined in making pathways for new ideas, as they were in Germany at the time when Lessing guided the people through the medium of theater reviews, drama, philosophical-theological treatises, or essays on esthetics. But whereas it was Lessing's tragic fate to remain alone and misunderstood all his life, in Russia a great number of outstanding talents in various fields of literature worked successfully as advocates of a liberal view of the world.

Alexander von Herzen, famous as a novelist, was also a gifted journalist. He was able, during the eighteen-fifties and sixties, to arouse the entire intelligentsia of Russia with his *Bell*, a magazine he published abroad. Possessed with the same fighting spirit and alertness, the old Hegelian Chernyshevsky was equally at home in journalistic polemics, treatises on philosophy and national economy, and political novels. Both Belinsky and Dobrolyubov used literary criticism as an excellent weapon to fight backwardness and to propagate systematically a progressive ideology. They were succeeded by the brilliant Mikhaylovsky, who for several decades governed public opinion and was also influential in Korolenko's development. Besides his novels, short stories, and dramas, Tolstoy, too, availed himself of polemical pamphlets and moralizing fairy tales. Korolenko, on his part, constantly exchanged the palette and brush of the artist for the sword of the journalist in order to work directly on social problems of the day.

Some of the features of old czarist Russia were chronic famine, drunkenness, illiteracy, and a deficit in the budget. As a result of the ill-conceived peasant reform introduced after the abolition of serfdom, stifling taxes combined with the utmost backwardness in agricultural practices afflicted the peasants with crop failure regularly during the entire eighth decade. The year 1891 saw the climax: in twenty prov-

inces an exceptionally severe drought was followed by a crop failure resulting in a famine of truly biblical dimensions.

An official inquiry to determine the extent of the losses yielded more than seven hundred answers from all parts of the country, among which was the following description from the pen of a simple parson:

"For the last three years, bad harvests have been sneaking up on us and one misfortune after another plagues the peasants. There is the insect pest. Grasshoppers eat up the grain, worms nibble on it, and bugs do away with the rest. The harvest has been destroyed in the fields and the seeds have been parched in the ground; the barns are empty and there is no bread. The animals groan and collapse, cattle move meekly, and the sheep perish from thirst and want of fodder. . . . Millions of trees and thousands of farmhouses have become a prey to flames. A wall of fire and smoke surrounded us. . . . It is written by the prophet Zephania: 'I will destroy everything from the face of the earth, saith the Lord, man, cattle, and wild beasts, the birds and the fish.'

"How many of the feathered ones have perished in the forest fires, how many fish in the shallow waters! . . . The elk has fled from our woods, the raccoon and the squirrel have died. Heaven has become barren and hard as ore; no dew falls, only drought and fire. The fruit trees have withered away and so also the grass and the flowers. No raspberries ripen any more, there are no blackberries, blueberries, or whortleberries far and wide; bogs and swamps have burned out. . . . Where are you, green of the forests, oh delicious air, balsam scent of the firs that gave relief to the ailing? All is gone!"

The writer, as an experienced Russian subject, devoutly asked at the end of his letter that he not be held "responsible for the above description." His apprehension was not unfounded, because a powerful nobility declared the famine, unbelievable as it may seem, to be a malevolent invention of "provocateurs," and that any sort of help would be superfluous.

In consequence a war flared up between the reactionary groups and the progressive intelligentsia. Russian society was gripped with excitement; writers sounded the alarm. Relief committees were established on a grand scale; doctors, writers, students, teachers, and women of intellectual pursuits rushed by the hundreds into the country to nurse the sick, to set up feeding stations, to distribute seeds, and to organize the purchase of grain at low prices.

All this, however, was not easy. All the disorder, all the time-honored mismanagement of a country ruled by bureaucrats and the army came to the fore. There was rivalry and antagonism between state and county administrations, between government and rural offices, between the village scribes and the peasants. Added to this, the chaos of ideas, demands, and expectations of the peasants themselves, their distrust of city people, the differences existing between the rich kulaks and the impoverished peasants—everything conspired to erect thousands of barriers and obstacles in the way of those who had come to help.

No wonder they were driven to despair. All the numerous local abuses and suppressions with which the daily life of the peasants had been normally confronted, all the absurdities and contradictions of the bureaucracy came to light. The fight against hunger, in itself merely a simple charitable act, changed at once into a struggle against the social and political conditions of the absolutist regime.

Korolenko, like Tolstoy, headed the progressive groups and devoted to this cause not only his writings but his whole personality. In the spring of 1892, he went to a district of the province Nizhni-Novgorod, the wasp's nest of the reactionary nobility, in order to organize soup kitchens in the stricken villages. Although completely unacquainted with local circumstances, he soon learned every detail and began a tenacious struggle against the thousands of obstacles that barred his way. He spent four months in this area, wandering from one village to another, from one government office to another. After the day's work, he wrote in his notebooks in old farmhouses far into the night by the dim light of a smoky lamp, and at the same time conducted, in the newspapers of the capital, a vigorous campaign against backwardness. His diary, which became an immortal monument of the czarist regime, presents a gruesome picture of the entire Golgotha of the Russian village with its begging children, silent mothers steeped in misery, wailing old men, sickness and hopelessness.

Famine was followed immediately by the second of the apocalyptic horsemen, the plague. It came from Persia in 1893, covered the lowlands of the Volga and crept up the river, spreading its deadly vapors over starved and paralyzed villages. The new enemy created a peculiar reaction among the representatives of the government which, bordering on the ridiculous, is nevertheless the bitter truth. The governor of Baku fled into the mountains when the plague broke out, the governor of Saratov kept in hiding on a riverboat during the ensuing uprisings. The governor of Astrakhan, however, took the prize: Fearing that ships on their way from Persia and the Caucasus might bring the plague with them, he ordered patrol boats to the Caspian Sea to bar the entrance of the Volga to all water traffic. But he forgot to supply bread and drinking water for those thus quarantined. More than four hundred steamboats and barges were intercepted, and ten thousand people, healthy and sick, were destined to die of hunger, thirst, and the plague. Finally, a boat came down the Volga toward Astrakhan, a messenger of governmental thoughtfulness. The eyes of the dying looked with new hope to the rescue ship. Its cargo was coffins.

The people's wrath burst forth like a thunderstorm. News about the blockade and the sufferings of the quarantined prisoners swept like fire up the Volga river, followed by the cry of despair that the government was intentionally helping to spread the plague in order to diminish its population. The first victims of the "plague uprising" were the Samaritans, those self-sacrificing men and women who had heroically rushed to the stricken areas to nurse the sick and administer precautions to safeguard the healthy. Hospital barracks went up in flames;

doctors and nurses were slain. Afterwards, there was the usual procedure—penalty expeditions, bloodshed, martial law, and executions. In Saratov alone twenty death sentences were pronounced. The beautiful country of the Volga once more was changed into a Dantean Inferno.

To bring sense and enlightenment into this bloody chaos required a personality of the highest integrity and a profound understanding of the peasants and their distress. Next to Tolstoy, nobody in Russia was better suited to accomplish the task than Korolenko. One of the first on the spot, he exposed those who were in truth responsible for the uprisings — the government officials. Recording his observations, he once again presented to the public a stirring document, equally great in its historic as well as artistic value— *The Cholera Quarantine*.

In old Russia, the death penalty for ordinary crimes had long been abolished. Normally, an execution was an honor reserved for political offenses. In the late seventies, however, death penalties were in favor again, especially at the beginning of the terrorist movement. After the assassination of Czar Alexander II, the government did not hesitate to sentence even women to the gallows, as in the case of the famous Sophie Perovskaya, and later Hessa Helfman. These executions were exceptional, but they left a deep impression upon the people. Again, horror swept over the country when four soldiers of the "Penalty Battalion" were executed for murdering their sergeant who had tortured them. Even in the subjugated and depressed atmosphere of these years, public opinion could be shocked by such measures.

This situation changed with the Revolution of 1905. In 1907, after the absolutist powers had regained the upper hand, a bloody revenge set in. Military tribunals convened day and night; the gallows found no rest. The "assassins," men who had taken part in armed revolts, but especially so-called expropriators—half-grown boys— were executed by the hundreds. It was done in a most haphazard way and with very little observance of the formalities. The hangmen were inexperienced, the ropes defective, the gallows improvised in a most fantastic manner. The counterrevolution indulged in orgies.

It was at this time that Korolenko raised his voice in a strong protest against the triumphant reaction. A series of articles, published in 1909 in pamphlet form with the title *An Ordinary Occurrence*, is characteristic of him. Like his articles on the famine and the plague, it contains no set phrases, no hollow pathos. Simplicity and a matter-of-factness prevail throughout. Actual reports, letters of the executed, and impressions of prisoners make up this booklet. And yet it is outstanding in its compassion for human suffering and its understanding of the tortured heart. Exposing the crimes of society, which are contained in every death sentence, this little work, full of warmth and highest ethics, became a most stirring accusation.

Tolstoy, then eighty-two years old, wrote to Korolenko, when still strongly impressed by the pamphlet: "Your work on the death penalty has just been read to me and, though I tried, I could not hold back my tears. I find no words to express my gratitude and love for a work

which is equally excellent in expression, thought, and feeling. It must be printed and distributed in millions of copies. No Duma speeches, no dissertations, dramas, or novels could produce such good results as this work.

"It is so very effective because it arouses such intense compassion for the victims of human insanity that one is ready to forgive those victims no matter what they might have done. However, even if one would try, it is not possible to forgive those responsible for such horrors. With amazement we learn of their conceit and self-delusion, of the senselessness of their actions, because you are making it quite clear that all these pitiful cruelties effected only the opposite of what had been intended. Aside from all this, there is one more thought your work had made me strongly aware of—a feeling of pity not only for the murdered but also for those poor, misguided and deceived people, the prison wardens, hangmen, and soldiers, who committed the atrocities without knowing what they were doing.

"There is only one satisfaction to note: that a book like yours will unite a great number of still unaffected and eager people into a group that strives for the highest ideals of virtue and truth, an inspired group which, in spite of its enemies, will shed an ever growing light."

About fifteen years ago, in 1903, a German daily paper sent out a questionnaire regarding the death penalty to many eminent representatives of the arts and sciences. They were the most brilliant names in literature and jurisprudence, the flower of intelligence in the land of thinkers and poets, and all of them spoke fervently in favor of the death penalty. To any thinking observer this was one of the many symptoms of the things to come in Germany during the world war.

It is one of the features of modern civilization that the mass of people, whenever the shoe pinches for one reason or another, make a scapegoat of members of another race, religion, or color in order to release its pent-up ill temper. It is then able to return refreshed to the regular daily life. It is understood that those best suited to serve as scapegoats are national minorities that have previously been socially neglected and mistreated. And just because of their weakness and the precedent of mistreatment, further cruelties are easily administered without fear of reproach. In the United States it is the Negro who is discriminated against and persecuted. In Western Europe this role has often been forced on the Italian.

It was around the turn of the century, in the proletarian section of Zurich, in Aussersihl, that a pogrom flared up against the Italians in the wake of the murder of a child. In France, the name of the town Aiguesmortes recalls a memorable riot of workers who, embittered by the frugal habits of the Italian migratory workers which led to general wage-cutting, tried to teach them the need for a better standard of living in the style of their ancestor, the *Homo hauseri* of Dordogne. With the outbreak of the world war, traditions of the Neanderthal man unexpectedly became very popular. In the land of thinkers and poets, the "great time" was accompanied by a sudden return to the instincts

of the contemporaries of the mammoth, the cave bear, and the wooly rhinoceros.

To be sure, the Russia of the czars was not as yet so highly civilized a state, and the mistreatment of foreigners and other public activities were not expressions of the psyche of the people. It was, rather, the monopoly of the government, fostered and organized at the proper moment by state institutions and encouraged with the help of government vodka.

There was, for example, the famous trial of the "Multan Votiaks" that took place in the nineties. Seven Votiak peasants from the village of Great Multan in the province of Vyatka, half heathens and savages, had been accused of a ritual murder and thrown into jail. This so-called ritual murder trial was, of course, only a small and casual incident of the government policy, which tried to change the depressed mood of the hungry and enslaved masses by offering them a little diversion. But here again, the Russian intelligentsia, with Korolenko in the lead once more, took up the cause of the half-savage Votiaks. Korolenko eagerly threw himself into the fight, unraveling the maze of misunderstandings and deceit. He worked patiently and with an infallible instinct for finding the truth, which reminds one of Jaures in the Dreyfus case. He mobilized the press and public opinion, obtained a resumption of the trial, and by personally taking over the defense, finally won an acquittal.

In Eastern Europe the subject most preferred for diverting the people's bad disposition has always been the Jews, and it is questionable whether they have yet played their role to the end. The circumstances under which the last public scandal—the famous Beyliss trial—took place was definitely still in style. This Jewish ritual murder case in 1913 was, so to speak, the last performance of a despotic government on its way out. One could call it the "necklace affair" of the Russian *ancien regime*. As a belated follow-up to the dark days of the 1907-1911 counterrevolution, and at the same time as a symbolic forerunner of the world war, this ritual murder case of Kishinev immediately became the center of public interest. The progressive intelligentsia in Russia identified itself with the cause of the Jewish butcher from Kishinev. The trial turned into a battlefield between the progressive and the reactionary camps of Russia. The shrewdest lawyers and best journalists gave their services to this cause. Needless to say, Korolenko, too, was one of the leaders of the fight. Thus shortly before the bloody curtain of world war was to be raised, Russian reaction suffered one more crushing moral defeat. Under the onslaught of the oppositional intelligentsia, the murder indictment collapsed. There was revealed also at the same time the whole hypocrisy of the czarist regime, which, already dead and rotten internally, was only waiting for the *coup de grace* to be administered by the movement for freedom.

During the eighties, after the assassination of Alexander II, a period of paralyzing hopelessness enveloped Russia. The liberal reforms of the sixties with regard to the judiciary and to rural self-administration

were everywhere repealed. A deathlike silence prevailed during the reign of Alexander III. Discouraged by both the failure to realize peaceful reforms and the apparent ineffectiveness of the revolutionary movement, the Russian people were completely overcome with depression and resignation.

In this atmosphere of apathy and despondency, the Russian intelligentsia began to develop such metaphysical-mystical tendencies as were represented by Soloviev's philosophy. Nietzsche's influence was clearly noticeable. In literature the pessimistic undertones of Garshin's novels and Nadson's poetry predominated. Fully in accord with the prevailing spirit was Dostoyevsky's mysticism, as expressed in *The Brothers Karamazov*, and also in Tolstoy's ascetic doctrines. The idea of "nonresistance to evil," the repudiation of violence in the struggle against powerful reaction, which was now to be opposed by the "purified soul" of the individual, such theories of social passivity became a serious danger for the Russian intelligentsia of the eighties—the more so since it was presented by such captivating means as Tolstoy's literary genius and moral authority.

Mikhaylovsky, the spiritual leader of the People's Will organization, directed an extremely angry polemic against Tolstoy. Korolenko, too, came to the fore. He, the tender poet who never could forget an incident of his childhood, be it a rustling forest, a walk in the evening through the quiet fields, or the memory of a landscape in its manifold lights and moods, Korolenko, who fundamentally despised all politics, now raised his voice with determination, preaching aggressive, saber-sharp hatred and belligerent opposition. He replied to Tolstoy's legends, parables, and stories in the style of the gospel with the *Legend of Florus*.

The Romans governed Judea with fire and sword, exploiting land and people. The people moaned and bent under the hated yoke. Stirred by the sight of his suffering people, Menachem the Wise, son of Yehuda, appealed to the heroic traditions of their forebears and preached rebellion against the Romans, a "holy war." But then up spoke the sect of the gentle Sossaians (who, like Tolstoy, repudiated all violence and saw a solution only in the purification of the soul, in isolation and self-denial). "You are sowing great misery when you call men to battle," they said to Menachem. "If a city is besieged and shows resistance, the enemy will spare the lives of the humble, but will put to death all those who are defiant. We teach the people to be submissive, so that they may be saved from destruction. . . . One cannot dry water with water nor quench fire with fire. Therefore, violence will not be overcome with violence, it is evil itself."

To which Menachem answered unswervingly: "Violence is neither good nor evil, it is violence. Good or evil is only its application. The violence of the arm is evil when it is lifted to rob or suppress the weak; but if it is lifted for work or in defense of thy neighbor, then violence is welfare. It is true, one does not quench fire with fire nor dry water with water, but stone is shattered with stone and steel must

be parried with steel, and violence with violence. Knoweth this: The power of the Romans is the fire but your humbleness is . . . wood. And the fire will not stop until it has eaten all the wood."

The *Legend* closes with Menachem's prayer: "O Adonai, Adonai! Let us never as long as we live fail the holy command: to fight against injustice. . . . Let us never speak these words: Save yourself and leave the weak to their destiny. . . . I too believe, O Adonai, that your kingdom will be on earth. Violence and suppression will disappear and the people will gather to celebrate the feast of brotherhood. And never again shall man's blood be shed by man's hand."

Like a refreshing breeze, this defiant creed stormed through the deep fog of indolence and mysticism. Korolenko was ready for the new historic "violence" in Russia which soon was to lift its beneficent arm, the arm to work and fight for liberty.

IV

Maxim Gorky's *My Childhood* is in many respects an interesting counterpart to Korolenko's *History of a Contemporary*. Artistically, they are poles apart. Korolenko, like his adored Turgenev, has an utterly lyrical nature, is a tender soul, a man of many moods. Gorky, in the Dostoyevsky tradition, has a profoundly dramatic view of life; he is a man of concentrated energy and action. Although Korolenko is strongly aware of all the dreadfulness of social life, he has Turgenev's capacity to present even the cruelest incidents in the mood of an ameliorating perspective, enveloped in the vapors of poetic vision and all charm of natural scenery. For Gorky as well as for Dostoyevsky, even sober everyday events are full of gruesome ghosts and torturing visions, presented in thoughts of merciless pungency, relentless, without perspective, and almost devoid of all natural scenery.

If, according to Ulrici, drama is the poetry of action, the dramatic element is positively evident in Dostoyevsky's novels. They are bursting with action, experience, and tension to such an extent that their complex and irritating compilations seem at times to crush the epic element of the novel, to break through its boundaries at any moment. After reading with breathless anxiety one or two of his voluminous books, it seems incredible that one has lived through the events of only two or three days. It is equally characteristic of Dostoyevsky's dramatic aptitude to present both the main problem of the plot and the great conflicts which lead to the climax at the beginning of the novel. The preliminaries of the story, its slow development, the reader does not experience directly. It is left to him to deduce them from the action in retrospect. Gorky, too, even in portraying complete inertia, the bankruptcy of human energy, as he did in *The Lower Depths*, chooses the drama as his medium and actually succeeds in putting life into the pale countenance of his types.

Korolenko and Gorky not only represent two literary personalities

but also two generations of Russian literature and freedom-loving ideology. Korolenko's interest still centers around the peasant; Gorky, enthusiastic pupil of German scientific socialism, is interested in city proletarians and in their shadows, the lumpenproletariat. Whereas nature is the normal setting for Korolenko's stories, for Gorky it is the workshop, the garret, and the flophouse.

The key to both artists' personalities is the fundamental difference in their backgrounds. Korolenko grew up in comfortable, middle-class surroundings. His childhood provided him with the normal feeling that the world and all that is in it is solid and steady, which is so characteristic of all happy children. Gorky, partly rooted in the petty bourgeoisie and partly in the lumpenproletariat, grew up in a truly Dostoyevskian atmosphere of horror, crime, and sudden outbreaks of human passion. As a child, he already behaved like a little hunted wolf baring his sharp teeth to fate. His youth, full of deprivations, insults, and oppression, of uncertainty and abuse, was spent close to the scum of society and embraced all the typical features of the life of the modern proletariat. Only those who have read Gorky's autobiography are able to conceive fully his amazing rise from the depths of society to the sunny heights of modern education, ingenious artistry, and an outlook on life based on science. The vicissitudes of his life are symbolic of the Russian proletariat as a class, which in the remarkably short time of two decades has also worked its way up from the uncultured, uncouth, and difficult life under the czar through the harsh school of struggles to historical actions. This is surely quite inconceivable to all the culture-philistines who think that proper street illumination, trains that run on time, clean collars, and the industrious clatter of the parliamentary mills stand for political freedom.

The great charm of Korolenko's poetic writing also constitutes its limitations. He lives wholly in the present, in the happenings, of the moment, in sensual impressions. His stories are like a bouquet of freshly gathered field flowers. But time is hard on their gay colors, their delicate fragrance. The Russia Korolenko describes no longer exists; it is the Russia of yesterday. The tender and poetic mood which envelops his land and his people is gone. A decade and a half ago it made room for the tragic and thunder-laden atmosphere of the Gorkys and their like, the screeching storm birds of the revolution. It was replaced in Korolenko himself by a new belligerency. In him, as in Tolstoy, the social fighter triumphed in the end; the great fellow citizen succeeded the poet and dreamer. When in the eighties Tolstoy began to preach his moral gospel in a new literary form as folklore, Turgenev wrote letters imploring the wise man of Yasnaya Polyana in the name of the fatherland to turn back to the realm of pure art. The friends of Korolenko, too, grieved when he abandoned his fragrant poetry and threw himself eagerly into journalism. But the spirit of Russian literature, the feeling of social responsibility, proved to be stronger in this richly endowed poet than his love for nature, his longing for an unhampered life of wandering, and his poetic desires.

Carried along by the rising revolutionary flood at the turn of the century, the poet in him was slowly silenced while he unsheathed his sword as a fighter for liberty, as the spiritual center of the opposition movement of the Russian intellectuals. The *History of a Contemporary*, published in his review, *The Russian Treasury*, is the last product of his genius, only half poetry but wholly the truth, like everything else in Korolenko's life.

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George Saunders

FIFTY YEARS OF SOVIET LITERATURE

What is the status and role of Russian literature fifty years after the establishment of Soviet power, in the light of Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of its prerevolutionary development?

Luxemburg traced the oppositional spirit of literature under czarism back to the extreme social contradictions which pervaded Russian life in the nineteenth century. These contradictions were generated by the semi-Asiatic backwardness of a nation which had been thrust into the midst of the modern imperialist era, saddled with the curse of an enormous and highly developed ("Westernized") autocratic state apparatus.

Today the Russian revolution and its consequences have completely overturned the fundamental property relations and institutions of the czarist era. The state rests upon nationalized property and planned economy, and the power of the old landlords and capitalists has been smashed, never to return.

Yet certain features of the territory's age-old heritage remain to plague the Soviet people. Despite its eminence as the second military-industrial power in the world, the Soviet Union still suffers from serious economic difficulties and shortages, especially in the domains of agricultural and consumers' goods, where it falls considerably short of the productive capacities of the most advanced capitalist countries.

The persistent scarcities in means of personal consumption resulted in a scramble for the available necessities and amenities of life by different sectors of the population. The need for an all-powerful regulator of the unequally distributed goods gave rise, on the new socio-economic foundation, to the unwelcome return of one of the detestable forces of the old Russia: a swollen, haughty, uncontrolled bureaucracy — with more power at its disposal than its predecessor of czarist times.

However, Soviet Russia is a land of startling contrasts. Thus, alongside this regenerated bureaucracy, there have survived into the new era some of the best literary and cultural traditions of the nineteenth-century enlightenment. These are coming into the open nowadays with increasing vigor and giving battle to the all-too-familiar evils of the past: official and unofficial brutality, backwardness, indifference, cruelty,

conformism. This heritage has been reanimated after the black night of Stalin's totalitarianism — an era in which the nation's culture seemed to retreat into the "cryptlike silence" of "darkness and barbarism," to use Luxemburg's description of pre-nineteenth-century Russian culture. The recent revitalization of cultural life under the impetus of the de-Stalinization process has likewise revived the original liberating ideas of the Bolshevik October and the vital innovations of the first and freest period of Soviet power.

During the half century of the Soviet Republic its literature has passed through five roughly distinguishable phases: 1918-1927; 1927-1941; 1941-1945; 1945-1953; and 1953 to the present. Let me briefly delineate the chief characteristics of these successive periods.

The October revolution and the civil war leveled the archaic social structure and thoroughly ploughed up the Russian soil. The ground, saturated with the blood and sweat of workers and peasants, was prepared to receive the seedlings of the new order and its cultural life. However, in its first appearance postrevolutionary literature largely remained the product of diverse elements among the intelligentsia, the artistic expressions of their efforts to come to terms or come to grips with the new social and political reality.

As Trotsky, the foremost literary critic as well as military leader of the time, observed in *Literature and Revolution* (1925), the attempts to grasp the immense transformation in the lives of the masses across the vast reaches of the country and to find adequate and felicitous expressions of these changes in artistic images had largely begun in the twenties. "We have hardly now passed through the stage of preparing the preparation [for the art of the socialist future.]," Trotsky warned those overzealous souls who spoke of attaining a new plateau of cultural creation overnight ("Proletarian Culture," or *Proletkult* for short).

The cultural lag in the postrevolutionary period reversed the role that literature had played in the time of czarism's decline. Literature had then foreshadowed the turn of social events and run ahead of them. Now literature fell far behind the pace of historical developments primarily because of the nature of the intelligentsia.

Before the outbreak of the first world war the bulk of the intelligentsia had become hobbled by a thousand unconscious ties to the leisure classes, especially the newly risen and half-baked bourgeoisie, whose control of wealth made of it the actual subsoil of artistic and cultural developments. The revolution cut away this social base of the old art, leaving the intelligentsia in midair. Many who felt that "culture" as such had been totally destroyed turned against the revolution. Those who rallied to the revolution, and even more, those who decided to travel along with it, had great difficulties in reorienting themselves and gaining a new equilibrium.

For a new art to develop it was first necessary for a new generation of intellectuals, of educated people, writers, artists, of different social origins to grow up, for whom the revolution, workers' power, and the perspectives of world socialism would be an integral part of their

upbringing and experience, accepted facts of everyday life. Those who understood the mainsprings of the revolution and wholeheartedly participated in its national and international development would, if they had the talent, be best equipped to blaze new trails for art to follow and to introduce new techniques and modes of expression.

All this required time, among other things. Meanwhile other, more pressing, tasks had to have priority, such as the defense of the revolution, the stabilization of its regime, the reconstruction of the economy, and the creation of new institutions and habits of social existence. These would provide the preconditions for the practice of any art, let alone the creation of a new one.

"Culture feeds on the sap of economics, and a material surplus is necessary, so that culture may grow, develop and become subtle . . . The proletariat will be able to prepare the formation of a new, that is, a Socialist culture and literature, not by the laboratory method on the basis of our present-day poverty, want and illiteracy, but by large social, economic and cultural means. Art needs comfort, even abundance. Furnaces have to be hotter, wheels have to turn faster, looms have to turn more quickly, schools have to work better." (*Literature and Revolution.*)

The notion that a socialist art must evolve through the organic growth of a new society and that forced feeding and hothouse breeding can produce nothing viable has not been confined to Trotsky among Marxist writers on this subject. In *Socialism and Man* Che Guevara expressed the same line of thought: "New generations will come who will be free of the original sin. The probabilities that great artists will appear will be greater to the degree that the field of culture and the possibilities for expression are broadened . . . This is a process which takes time."

Flexibility and permissiveness still marked the 1925 Soviet Communist Party central committee resolution on art and literature. Let the various schools explore and contend, it held. The party might encourage certain currents and oppose others through ideas and arguments, but administrative interference, either through preferential subsidies or repression, was excluded—so long as the artist did not oppose the revolution in action.

Thus, in the early years of the Soviet Union, albeit with many deformations and deficiencies, a new literary intelligentsia began slowly but surely to form itself. The "preparation of a preparation" was visible in the experimentation and originality of many productions of that period.

This hopeful trend was negated by the recession of the revolution and the Thermidorian reaction that grew out of it. This was evidenced politically by the defeat and suppression of the Leninist Left Opposition accomplished by the Stalin faction by 1927 and by the consolidation of a privileged bureaucracy in both the party and government.

In the ensuing 1927-1941 period the development, or rather the degeneration, of literature was wholly determined by the prevailing political counterrevolution. The centralization of power in the Stalinized

bureaucracy was accompanied by increasing interference in literary affairs, the establishment of officially patronized and protected groups, and the growth of the Stalin cult with its obligatory glorification of the omnipotent head of state. This led to the abolition of all contending literary circles and their forced merger into a single Union of Soviet Writers which dispensed all emoluments.

The founding conference of the Writers Union in 1934, the year of the fateful Kirov assassination, was marked by the proclamation of "socialist realism." This regimental uniform designed by Stalin and recommended to the writers by his court minstrel, Maxim Gorky, was to become the obligatory "method" for all Soviet art as long as Stalin lived—and even beyond. The professional artist or writer had to adhere to this dogma for personal safety, for the necessities of life and the pursuit of his craft, and—not least—for the privileges that would come his way if the job was done to the satisfaction of the masters. High rewards for "correct" art became institutionalized in the form of Stalin prizes.

Under Stalin's reign the primitive Russian curse of an overdeveloped state apparatus, with its complementary attitudes of arrogance and submissiveness, reasserted itself with a vengeance. Before the new literature was given a chance to take root and put forth its first shoots, this backward shift cut off its room for growth. Under the slogan of an undefined and undefinable "socialist realism," literature was again seized by the throat, as under the autocracy, and commanded to do service and make obeisance to the state power.

The strong sense of civic concern in the older Russian literature arose *voluntarily* out of the artist's "spirit of opposition" and fidelity to his highest ideals. In the Stalin era, *ideynost* and *narodnost* (concern with ideology and loyalty to "the people") were imposed by external authority upon the writer. If he cared to survive, let alone prosper, he had to comply with the regime's arbitrary standards in a spirit of "realism" that was more self-preservative than socialist.

As bureaucratic backwardness cast its pall over the nation, the time when czars and boyars were glamorized by court poets, painters, and other flatterers reappeared in a new guise. An art with a quasi-feudal odor emerged. More than one critic has noted (though none so pointedly as Sinyavsky, who now sits in jail for his astuteness) the aesthetic link between the art of the Stalin era and that of absolutist classicism. Even the greatest of movie directors, Sergey Eisenstein, had to inject medieval master-worship into that preeminently twentieth-century art form, the film, first in *Alexander Nevsky* and then in *Ivan the Terrible*, Part II, where he conjured up the feudal past with mixed tones of glorification and satire aimed directly at Stalin.

The straitjacket on literature imposed by "Stalinist realism" resulted in a tremendous impoverishment of the output. This held true even in comparison with the literature of the nineteen-twenties, which had been no more than the inkling of a potential. After Stalin was en-

throned, those pioneer years came to look like a golden age of vigor, freedom, and experimentation. And that is how they seem to those Soviet youth today who look back with curiosity and questioning to that pristine period. It is significant that a figure like Sinyavsky devoted an entire volume to the poetry of 1919-1923.

The theoretical constrictions of Stalin-Gorky were soon backed up by the jail cell and the bullet. Many of the finest literary talents perished in the great purges of the nineteen-thirties. These were artists who had gone through the sacrificial years of revolution and economic reconstruction and were seeking to give the sentiments and aspirations of socialism a voice.

The war years from 1941 to 1945 saw a significant change. If the purges decimated the creators of Soviet literature, World War II destroyed a vast amount of the material and human sources of Soviet culture. However, ironically, the war played another and more positive role. It broke the hypnotic trance of the psychology of the "besieged fortress" which had led many to condone the crimes of the regime and even gave a semblance of credibility to the falsifications of the government. When war actually came, the active struggle in which the Soviet masses proved themselves dissolved the dread, broke the paralysis, and imbued them with a new self-confidence.

The prestige and authority of the Stalinist leadership suffered a sharp blow as a result of the early successes of the Nazi war machine. The suddenly revealed lack of Soviet preparation and Stalin's responsibility for the initial debacle remain touchy, half-taboo issues to this very day in Soviet circles. The masses won through to victory over Hitlerism at the cost of colossal sacrifices, despite the calamitous errors of the supposedly infallible and unquestionable leader. Doubts began to crop up. The thought surely occurred to many that even a rank-and-filer might have led the country as well as or better than the "beloved leader."

Those doubts have not gone away. They began to affect the spirit of Soviet literature even while the war was going on and have grown strong with passing years.

Such thoughts are implicit in Viktor Nekrasov's novel *In the Trenches of Stalingrad* (1946), where leaders are absent, Stalin is hardly mentioned, and the ranks are seen as struggling stubbornly and mainly at their own initiative. Such thoughts are explicit in the semi-autobiographic novels of Konstantin Simonov, *The Living and the Dead* and *Soldiers Are Made Not Born* (published 1960-1964), where combat troops and officers are disgruntled and full of doubts about the leadership in the very heat of the war's enormous battles. Both writers were frontline participants in the war, as was the young writer Grigori Baklanov, whose *June 1941* is a bitter polemic against the policies that brought disaster in the early months. Baklanov traces these policies back to Stalin's purges and gives interesting flashbacks to the political life of the prepurge period, with references to the meetings of the Left Opposition.

Vasil Bykov is another of the generation of prose writers who fought in the war. His story "The Dead Feel No Pain" (*Novy Mir*, 1966) was criticized by the Soviet military caste because it showed Soviet officers brutally ordering Soviet soldiers shot rather than letting them be taken prisoners by the Germans (which automatically made one "suspect" under Stalin's rule). Here is how Bykov described the impact of the war on the thinking of the Soviet masses:

"In the war we not only defeated fascism and defended the future of humanity. We also came to know our own strength and came to understand what we ourselves are capable of. We gave history and ourselves a great lesson in human worth. From the fronts of the world war we brought back not only the consciousness of duty fulfilled, but a spirit of revolutionary love of freedom, of international brotherhood, a spirit strengthened in bitter combat—and a spirit which in one way or another has made itself felt in our subsequent peacetime life and which continues to grow stronger with the years." (*Novy Mir*, 1967)

The most famous of the writers who were also soldiers or officers is Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, whose career—he was sent to a forced labor camp for criticizing Stalin's war policies in a letter—is a symbol of the contradictory upsurge of democratization pressures in the midst of the war.

The bureaucracy partly relaxed its literary censorship as one of several concessions made to gain popular support and encourage the masses to fight. But when the mortal danger had passed and the need for economic reconstruction again became imperative, coupled with the rise of the cold-war threat from U.S. imperialism, harsher controls than ever were reinstated. The terrible period known as Zhdanovism, named after Stalin's commissar for cultural affairs, followed. From 1945 to 1953 the antidemocratic features of Stalin's tyranny reached the zenith of absurdity. An orgy of anti-Semitism, called "anti-cosmopolitanism," glorification of everything Russian in the most obscene tones of national chauvinism, the cult of the genius of Stalin elevated to sickening heights—these were the hallmarks of a period that culminated in the fabricated "Jewish doctors' plot."

In this period, which ended only with Stalin's death, literature turned pale and lifeless. Its main content was limited to praise of the iconized ruler and his miracles at home and abroad. Its style was perfunctory and mechanical. The supreme achievement of these lackluster years was the "conflictless" novel, the awestricken recital of how all obstacles in agriculture or industry were effortlessly overcome. Within the workers' states, only the aesthetics inspired by the "thought of Chairman Mao" has matched the deformations of the Zhdanov period in Soviet culture.

* * *

The so-called thaw of the post-Stalin period from 1953 to the present has brought about a partial change. The most trenchant Soviet writers are starting to probe and portray the deep conflicts and ulcerous grievances of their society.

To be sure, the unrest reflected in Soviet literature today does not arise from a society divided between property owners and propertyless. But the practices of bureaucratic absolutism in a state that has presumably attained "socialism" and is in the process of "building communism" create crying contradictions in the very heart of the system that cannot but find expression in the work of any sensitive artist if he be given the slightest free rein.

If Russian literature today deliberately takes up serious social issues, it is no longer in obedience to the propagandistic demands of the regime. The social commentary which inspires so much of the contemporary literature has a voluntary character arising from the inner necessities of searching for the truth. It is exploring the roots of personality, the motives of passion, the causes of crime, depravity and, most daring of all, the evils and sources of bureaucratism.

One current in modern Soviet literature seems to have abandoned political themes altogether. On the surface it fixes on the purely individual, as though in revulsion against the "civic concerns" prescribed by the authorities. But deeper inspection discloses the relevance of Rosa Luxemburg's observation that the attention paid by the creative artist to the victims of society and their derelictions is basically a social and, in its innermost essence, a political concern.

This is the hallmark of the poetess Bella Akhmadullina, the poets Bulat Okudzhava and Yevgeny Vinokurov, and to a large extent, of Yevtushenko and Voznesensky—although the explicitly political or protest poetry of the latter two is better known. It is the forte of such prose writers as Yuri Kazakov, Vasily Aksyonov and Anatoly Gladilin, to name only a few of the younger generation. Representatives of older generations also belong to this current.

Fewer are the writers who make directly critical statements; these jut out like the peaks of a mostly submerged iceberg. To this category belong such works as the late Ilya Ehrenburg's *The Thaw*, a critique, even a slick self-critique, of the time-servers who thrived in the Stalin era; and Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone*, a devastating portrait of the factory bureaucrat Drozdov. (In an unguarded moment, Khrushchev acknowledged there was a great likeness to himself in Drozdov.) Zorin's *Guests* brings out the conflict between the young generation, which feels an affinity with the generation of 1917, and that of the middle (Stalinist) years, which abandoned the revolutionary ideals and grew fat. Solzhenitsyn's works and some by Yevtushenko may also be classified in this genre. Much of the so-called underground material, which circulates widely in manuscript but is not published through official channels, belongs to this category.

The spokesmen for these new currents are quite conscious of the prerevolutionary heritage and its spiritual kinship with their own direction. When Solzhenitsyn issued his open letter at the Writers Union congress in May 1967, it was reportedly endorsed by hundreds of other Soviet writers. (In fact, Czechoslovak literary rebels had it read aloud at their historic June 1967 congress, one of the sparks

of their own democratization drive.) In his letter, Solzhenitsyn connected the need for literature to voice the "pains and fears" of society with the historical tradition of great Russian literature which he evaluated in terms close to those of Rosa Luxemburg:

"Literature cannot develop between the categories of 'permitted' and 'not permitted,' 'this you can and that you can't.' Literature that is not the air of its contemporary society, that dares not pass on to society its pains and fears, that does not warn in time against threatening moral and social dangers, such literature does not deserve the name of literature; it is only a facade. Such literature loses the confidence of its own people, and its published works are used as waste-paper instead of being read.

"Our literature has lost the leading role it played at the end of the last century and the beginning of the present one, and the brilliance of experimentation that distinguished it in the nineteen-twenties. To the entire world the literary life of our country now appears as something infinitely poorer, flatter and lower than it actually is, than it would appear if it were not restricted, hemmed in.

"The losers are both our country, in world public opinion, and world literature itself. If the world had access to all the uninhibited fruits of our literature, if it were enriched by our own spiritual experience, the whole artistic evolution of the world would move along in a different way, acquiring a new stability and attaining even a new artistic threshold."

The de-Stalinization processes have unfolded by zigs and zags as countervailing pressures have shoved them ahead—or pushed them back. Antibureaucratic literature reached a high point in 1956 following Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin; it was squelched for a year or two after the crushing of the Hungarian revolt—a revolt heralded by dissident writers.

A new upturn came around 1959 with the third Writers Congress and the appointment of Aleksandr Tvardovsky, the "liberalizing" editor of *Novy Mir*, to the central committee of the party. Two "legal" wings of Soviet literature have polarized since that time. The anti-Stalinist, antibureaucratic tendency centers around the journals *Novy Mir* and *Yunist*. The other, "neo-Stalinist" and conservative in upholding the status quo, revolves around various organs but mainly around the journal *Oktyabr*, edited by the sinister V. Kochetov.

The rising new writers, led by Yevtushenko and Voznesensky, came into prominence in the early nineteen-sixties. "Underground" literature began to circulate ever more widely in intellectual circles and among the students. Several such productions were published outside the country, such as those by Sinyavsky and Daniel. Stalin's removal from the Red Square mausoleum after the twenty-second party congress in late 1961 strengthened the antibureaucratic forces to the point where efforts were made to isolate and purge some of the hacks who had risen under Stalin over the bodies of fellow writers they had denounced.

The publication of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and *Stalin's Heirs* in late 1962 was the greatest "legal" recognition accorded the liberal current to date. Then began the heavy counteroffensive launched by the diehards in the party hierarchy and their literary camp-followers. This first took the form of a campaign, in 1963, allegedly against abstract art, which was broadened in the following years into a drive against all "bourgeois ideological influences."

The series of trials of dissident "underground" writers began with the Sinyavsky-Daniel trial in 1965. The conflict between the "neo-Stalinists," whose position is reinforced by the witch-hunt trials staged by the secret police and judicial authorities, and the "anti-Stalinists," who have turned protest petitions and open letters into an effective technique of opposition, has grown more intense on either side. Each literary current reflects viewpoints in Soviet society at large, including divergent trends within the party and government bureaucracy itself. Thus, when a so-called poet in the journal *Oktyabr* praises Stalin (without naming him), he is, regardless of individual motivation, registering and reinforcing the official reaction.

Conversely, when a young writer in the monthly *Yunost* publishes a story about a Soviet fishing trawler in which the crewmen, talking among themselves, assent to a young worker's furious criticisms of bureaucratism, while a party notable (named Berezhnoy—a play on Brezhnev?) is painted in the most repulsive terms, much more is involved than individual differences of artistic style or taste.

The antibureaucratic sentiments being articulated by Soviet writers could have the same historic importance as the role of the Hungarian intellectuals who constituted the Petofi circle in the Hungarian revolt of 1956 and the Czechoslovak writers who touched off the democratization movement in that country this past year. Their revival of the anti-absolutist cutting edge of Russian literature and the experimental initiatives of the nineteen-twenties are political symptoms of immense importance.

Rosa Luxemburg pointed out that Russian literature remained at its post as a critic of czarism for a century "until it was relieved by the material power of the masses, when the word became flesh." This is only one of the many parallels between the function of vanguard literature in nineteenth-century Russia and the role it is playing in the Soviet Union and elsewhere in Eastern Europe today.

The progressive, critical-minded Soviet writers of the post-Stalin period are fulfilling a similar function. As the voice of the most articulate elements in Soviet society, they are harbingers of the political awakening of its working people after the long night of Stalinist despotism. They are doing preparatory work for the antibureaucratic movement and will have to remain at their posts until they, too, will be replaced by the material power of the resurgent Soviet masses. It is the action of that power that will eventually depose the bureaucratic overlords whose pretensions and crimes are being exposed, satirized, and denounced by the literary precursors.

George Novack

CAN AMERICAN WORKERS MAKE A SOCIALIST REVOLUTION?

The capitalist rulers of the United States have choirs of troubadours, voluntary and hired, to chant their praises nowadays. Intellectuals of all categories exalt their own functions in the fields of culture and communications. Countless books, movies, and TV series depict the joys and cares of suburban middle-class families. The press features the doings of youth, from the antics of hippies and yippies to the demonstrations of the campus rebels.

For a long time the Afro-American was, in the phrase of novelist Ralph Ellison, "the invisible man." But first the civil-rights movement and now the deeply felt black nationalist demands, exploding in ghetto uprisings, have pushed the black masses into view. Their grievances may be unsatisfied and their tactics deplored, but their forceful presence can no longer be ignored.

The least attention is being paid to the largest part of the American people. The white workers have almost fallen from public sight. Their social prestige is at the lowest point in this century. The waged worker has the fewest friends, admirers, and defenders among the intellectuals and in politically articulate circles. Who cares if the wealth-producers of the world's richest country have no Homer or even Walt Whitman to celebrate them?

The current devaluation of the social significance of the workers as a class, and the white workers in particular, stands in contrast with the latter half of the nineteen-thirties, when the mass production workers were invading the open-shop strongholds of big business and installing powerful unions in them. At that time they were widely believed to possess the potential energy, not only to change relations within industry, which they did, but to overthrow American capitalism. This esteem for labor's progressive capacities persisted in radi-

This talk was delivered on November 28, 1968, to the eighth national convention of the Young Socialist Alliance at the University of Illinois (Chicago Circle Campus).

cal and even liberal quarters until after the postwar strike wave of 1945-46. (See *The New Men of Power*, written around that time by C. Wright Mills.)

In the two decades since, as a result of the prolonged prosperity, political reaction, union bureaucratism, and labor conservatism, the wageworking class has dropped to the bottom of the rating scale. Today there is "none so poor as to do them reverence." How pointless it seems to ask: Do the American workers have any revolutionary potential? Can they break loose from established institutions, develop an anticapitalist consciousness, engage in a struggle for power, and go on to build a socialist society?

Run through the hierarchy of American society and every level of it will come up with negative answers to these questions. The corporate chiefs, their political agents, and the comfortable middle classes would agree that, except for a few disgruntled "subversives," the workers in the United States are content with their lot and station, have few deep grudges against the existing system, and will never look forward to changing it. Most professors and intellectuals look askance at the notion that ordinary workers have what it takes to organize themselves and lead a mass movement that can challenge and displace the monopolist and militarist masters of their fate.

Skepticism about such qualifications among the workers extends beyond the well-to-do. The union bureaucrats, who do not permit the ranks to lead their own unions, hardly expect them to run the whole of American society. Afro-Americans view privileged and prejudiced white workers as indifferent and hostile to black emancipation, and they are to a certain extent correct.

In their quest for forces that can bring about revolutionary change in the contemporary world, some young radicals look toward the "poor," the unemployed, the lumpenproletariat, student rebels, and the peoples of the Third World. They turn in every direction but one: the millions of industrial workers in their own land. Although the Socialist and Communist parties preserve some ritual rhetoric, inherited from their Marxist pretensions, that links the prospects of socialism with the working class, in practical politics they display a lack of faith in its independent power by supporting capitalist parties and liberal politicians and refusing to propagandize for a labor party based on the unions.

This attitude has been formulated in philosophical terms by Prof. Herbert Marcuse in his popular book, *One-Dimensional Man*. In a symposium at the University of Notre Dame in April 1966, he argued that Marxism has broken down in its central contention that the working class is the predestined gravedigger of capitalism. "In the advanced industrial countries where the transition to socialism was to take place, and precisely in those countries, the laboring classes are in no sense a revolutionary potential," he asserted. More recently, in an interview published in the October 28, 1968, *New York Times*, Marcuse flatly ruled out any possibility of revolution in the United States. Revolution is inconceivable without the working class and that

class is integrated in the affluent society and "shares in large measure the needs and aspirations of the dominant classes," he stated.

In a reassessment of Marx's theory of the revolutionary role of the industrial proletariat at the 1967 Socialist Scholars Conference in New York, *Monthly Review* editor Paul Sweezy propounded the proposition that, in sharp contrast with the peasant masses in the Third World, the advances of modern technology and its prodigious productivity in a developed democratic capitalist framework tend to shape a proletariat which is less and less revolutionary.

These write-offs of the workers by the Left have been matched by liberals who proceed on non-Marxist premises. Thus, after announcing that Marx erred in expecting the working class to be the prime agency of revolutionary change, David Bazelon in *Power in America: The Problem of the New Class* assigns that function to the managers and technocratic intellectuals who he thinks are about to supplant the capitalists as the future ruling class.

To round out this record of disparagement, most American workers would hardly give positive answers to a pollster who asked whether they had the need, right, or prospect of taking control of the economic and political system from the present possessors of power and property.

Hardly anyone but revolutionary Marxists nowadays retain faith in the anticapitalist strivings and sentiments of the working people or believe that they can in time participate in a mighty movement oriented toward socialist objectives. For adhering to these convictions and being guided by them, we are looked upon as ideological freaks and political fossils, ridiculous relics of a bygone era, dogmatists who cling to outworn views and cannot understand what is going on in front of our own eyes.

Indeed, it may seem quixotic to put up countervailing arguments against such an overwhelming preponderance of public opinion and dulled class consciousness among the workers themselves. Why not go along with the crowd?

Unfashionable as it may be, Marxists have substantial reasons for their adamant resistance on this point. Their convictions are not an affirmation of religious-like faith. They are derived from a scientific conception of the course and motor forces of world history, a reasoned analysis of the decisive trends of our time, and an understanding of the mainsprings and the necessities of capitalist development. Marxism has clarified many perplexing problems in philosophy, sociology, history, economics, and politics. Its supreme achievement is the explanation it offers of the key role of the working class in history.

This is far too serious an issue to be treated in an offhand way. Nothing less is at stake than the destiny of American civilization and with it the future of mankind.

So grave a question cannot be definitively disposed of by reference to the present mood, mentality, and lack of political organization of the workers themselves. Nor can it be permanently suppressed. It keeps reasserting itself at each new turn of events. No sooner has the

revolutionism of the working class been dismissed for the hundredth time than it returns from exile to haunt its banishers.

The year 1967, for example, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the October revolution, when the workers did conquer power for the first time in history, opening a breach in the structure of world capitalism which has been widened and deepened by a series of subsequent socialist revolutions. Will this process never be extended to the United States when it has already come within ninety miles of its shores?

The general strike of ten million French workers in May-June 1968 disclosed an unsuspected readiness for anticapitalist action in the advanced industrial West. Cannot the American workers become imbued at some point with a similar militancy?

There is another side to this problem. Those who deny any latent radicalism in the industrial workers seldom appreciate what consequences logically flow from this negative position in the areas of most concern to them.

If the working masses cannot be counted on to dislodge the capitalists, who else within the country can do that job? It would be exceedingly difficult to point out another social force or find a combination of components that could effectively act as a surrogate for the industrial workers. The struggle against capitalist domination then looms as a lost cause and socialist America becomes a Utopia.

Recognition of this difficulty gives rise to pessimistic forecasts of America's future. Some see the iron heel of fascism already poised above the nation; others emphasize the powerlessness of the Left. People who seriously envisage such a perspective must logically reconcile themselves to the eventual unloosing of a nuclear holocaust by the American imperialists at bay.

A typical instance of such prostration was provided by the historian Gabriel Kolko of the University of Pennsylvania in an article on "The Decline of American Radicalism in the Twentieth Century," published in the September-October 1966 issue of the now defunct *Studies on the Left*. After pronouncing Marxism obsolescent, he concluded: "Given the consensual basis of American politics and society in the 20th century, and the will of the beneficiaries of consensus to apply sufficient force and power at home and abroad when resistance to consensus and its hegemony arises, the new left must confront the prospect of failure as an option for radical, democratic politics in America. Rational hopes for the 20th century now rest outside America and in spite of it. . . ."

In view of the omnipotence of the ruling class and the weakness of its internal opposition, all that radicals can do is "to define a new intellectual creed at home which permits honest men to save their consciences and integrity even when they cannot save or transform politics." As though to verify these arguments, *Studies on the Left* shut up shop shortly thereafter, and its editors have scattered in search of a new critique of "post-industrial society" to save (or should we say "salve") their scholarly consciences.

Before succumbing to such sentiments of hopelessness, it would seem

advisable at least to reexamine the problem in a more rounded way. It might then be seen that the Marxist analysis and inferences on the prospects of the American working class are not so unfounded as the critics make out.

The present situation of American labor

The potential of any class is derived from the place it occupies in the dynamics of economic development. Is it advancing or receding, rising or declining in the system of production? From all statistical indices it is plain that the small family farmer falls into the second category. Is the industrial worker shriveling as well?

All over the world—regardless of the social form of production—industrialization and urbanization is causing the proletariat to grow in size and gain in economic, social, and political importance. The wage-working class, defined as those who sell their own labor power to the owners of capital, is no exception to that rule in the most advanced of all the industrial countries. Between 1880 and 1957 the ratio of wage earners of all sorts in the gainfully employed population of the United States rose steadily from 62 percent to 84 percent, with a corresponding decline for entrepreneurs of all kinds (from 37 percent to 14 percent).

The number of jobs in American industry has more than doubled since 1940, rising from 33 to well over 70 million. This army of wage earners operates the most complex and up-to-date productive facilities and produces the most abundant and diversified output of goods. The product of their energies and skills provides the riches of the owners of industry and supports their gigantic armed forces.

Thanks to the prodigious capacities of the productive apparatus, this working class has the highest wage rates and living standards, even though it receives a diminishing share of the annual wealth it creates. Eighteen millions or so have organized strong unions and engaged in many of the biggest and bitterest strikes in labor's history.

At the same time most members of this class are extremely retarded in political and social outlook, the least aware of their class status and responsibilities, racist-minded, privileged, and conservatized. They remain the only working class of the highly industrialized countries which has not cut loose from subservience to the capitalist parties and established a mass political organization of their own, whether of a Laborite, Socialist, or Communist type. Although they may be steady union-dues payers, they are by and large uneducated in Marxist ideas and the socialist program.

Many of today's young radicals are far more impressed by the undeniable shortcomings of the labor movement than by any of its positive accomplishments. Sometimes they appear to deny it any progressive features. They slight the significance of the sheer existence of powerful union organizations which act as a shield against lowering wages and working conditions and check the aggressions of capitalist reac-

tion. They leave out of consideration the working conditions of a century ago, before unionization, the fourteen- to sixteen-hour day, the exploitation of child labor, the early mortality rate for all workers; and they neglect to study what happens when unions are exceptionally weak and fragmented—or destroyed—in the epoch of imperialism, for instance in Mussolini's Italy or Hitler's Germany.

According to the anti-Marxist ideologues, whatever else happens, the workers will never become a force ready, willing, and able to transform the United States. Their ranks are so smugly and snugly integrated into the mass "consumer society" that they can have no compelling reasons to turn against it. It is out of the question for them to attain the political or ideological level of their European counterparts and certainly not the revolutionary temper of the Cuban workers.

Such a long-term prognosis rests upon two suppositions. One, that American capitalism has been immunized against severe crises and will maintain its domestic stability indefinitely. Two, that the present characteristics, attitudes, and relations of the working force are essentially unalterable by any foreseeable change in circumstances. Much hinges then on the prospects of U. S. monopoly capitalism in the last third of the twentieth century. What are these likely to be?

The outlook for American capitalism

Despite the elimination of private property elsewhere, the capitalist rulers of America today have an arrogant faith in the longevity of their system. They firmly believe that the empire of the almighty dollar is assured of perpetual dominion at home and abroad.

From an offhand glance at developments since the Civil War, the case for their continued supremacy would appear unassailable. Over the past century the magnates of capital have succeeded in concentrating economic, political, military, and cultural power in their hands. They have emerged from two world wars stronger and richer than before. They hold the commanding heights within the country and over two-thirds of the globe.

While peoples on other continents have become more and more cognizant of the revolutionary nature of our epoch, Americans consider themselves completely detached from it because of the contradictory effects the international upheavals since 1917 have had on the fortunes of American capitalism.

While the system that it is committed to defend to the death has been losing ground step by step to the socialist forces on a world scale, U. S. capitalism has been gaining enormously at the expense of its rivals. Today it towers above them all.

This country has been the prime capitalist beneficiary of the cataclysmic changes that have marked the first period of the transition from capitalism to socialism. The main beneficiary of the capitalist past, it has flourished more than ever during the first phase of capitalism's decline. As it holds the fort for the rest of the capitalist camp,

the United States has drawn into itself most of the residual vitality of the disintegrating capitalist order.

This temporarily favorable aspect of the world situation for America's ruling class accounts for the unexampled strength of monopolist domination, the stability of its social alignments, the complacency of its political outlook. The eminence that so pleases the rich and the very rich and deludes the rest of the American people is viewed as a fitting culmination and reward of the entire career of American civilization.

The basic reasons for the political backwardness which appears so insuperable and everlasting are not to be found in any irremovable psychology of the American people and its working class but rather in the exceptionally auspicious circumstances of the development of American bourgeois society. It was the offspring of a lusty young capitalism which swept everything before it from the time the New World was opened up for settlement and exploitation half a millennium ago.

The population of the United States has been the most favored, pampered, and even spoiled child in the family of capitalist nations. Capitalism has attained the most luxuriant growth here in almost every respect. This consummate development of capitalism, which is the outstanding peculiarity of our history, has set its stamp upon the thinking, values, and outlook of almost every American. That is why the worship of the golden calf, the frantic chase after the fast and not so elusive buck, and confidence in the eternity of this system are so deep-rooted and widespread. Any suggestion that world capitalism in general, and its American segment in particular, has reached its zenith seems incredible to the ordinary citizen who expects that the system as he knows it will, like old man river, just keep rolling along.

These devout believers in the perpetuity of U.S. capitalism fail to take into consideration the impact of five mighty tendencies upon its further development.

First is the fact that America's wealth and preponderance have been gained, and are being sustained, at the expense of the poverty and weakness of less fortunate countries in other parts of the world. Their blood and flesh fatten the vulture of imperialism. The gap between rich and poor keeps widening on a global scale. American citizens make up one-fifteenth of the world's population and consume one-half of its total output.

Second, this unequal and oppressive relationship has its consequences. Those underdeveloped — or, more accurately, overexploited — countries which have been shut off from almost all the benefits of capitalist expansion, while suffering from imperialist depredation and domination, are increasingly resorting to anticapitalist actions to achieve their liberation. They are determined to get access to a rightful share of the conquests of modern civilization. This is the motivation and meaning of the irrepressible revolutionary movements in Asia, the Near East, Africa, and Latin America.

Third, the predominant trend of history since 1917 has not been the building up but the breaking down of world capitalism. This process of socialist expansion has already established workers' states all the

way from the Adriatic in Europe to the Pacific Ocean; in Cuba it has come within hailing distance of the United States. This international anticapitalist struggle, which is the ascending social and political trend of the twentieth century, celebrated the first half-century of its conquests in October 1967. The next half-century does not promise fewer advances toward socialism than the first.

Fourth, the spread of world revolution has already administered stiff jolts to American imperialism and continually confronts its strategists with grave problems on the foreign field. Their disastrous setback in Vietnam is only a down payment on the enormous costs they must incur in undertaking the overambitious design of policing the world for the preservation of the profiteering way of life.

Finally, the cumulative effects of all the problems growing out of the convulsions of a chronically sick capitalism are sooner or later bound to have sizable and serious repercussions within the United States itself. They will tend to undermine its stability, upset its conservatism, and give rise to new forms of mass radicalism. These have already announced themselves in the strivings of black America for national self-determination, the disaffection among the youth, and the antiwar movement that changed the face of American politics in 1968.

It should be noted that these expressions of discontent emerged amidst the longest boom of the twentieth century and virtually full employment. A slump in economic activity would intensify the growing dissidence in the unions and add a sizable amount of labor unrest to the array of opposition to the monopolist regime.

Is it reasonable to expect that the United States alone will remain indefinitely separated from the world historical movement toward socialism when it is already up to its ears in every other international development? It is more likely that its reckless and far-ranging activities in attempting to safeguard its system from decline and destruction, combined with the fluctuations in its economy, will bring about an eventual radicalization of its own working class.

Japanese seismologists monitor micro-earthquakes every day to detect signs of impending tremors that portend major upheavals. So the recurrent strikes at the lowest ebb of the class struggle in the United States serve as reminders that its workers cannot be completely counted out as a factor in the calculations of American radicalism.

Possible precipitants of labor radicalism

The skeptics who repose unlimited confidence in the longevity of capitalism rule out the possibility that the workers will be any more insurgent in the next twenty years than the last. What will incite them to change from being a prop to a peril to capitalism, they ask. Won't they become more and more like the housebroken "cheerful idiots" depicted by C. Wright Mills?

Surprisingly, it may turn out that the past two decades of inertia were not a totally dead loss. They may have enabled the working

class to rejuvenate its ranks and accumulate energies which await a suitable occasion for discharge. Thus the French workers, who appeared to be disarmed under de Gaulle, seized the tenth anniversary of his assumption of authoritarian power to launch the greatest of all general strikes and make an aborted bid for power.

The United States has hardly been a model of social peace since Johnson started bombing North Vietnam in 1965 — and the rising tide of radicalism is far from its crest. The workers will not join it solely as a result of verbal exhortations. But they can get moving again in reaction to some whiplash of the capitalist regime. Here the subsequent course of international economic development will be the decisive factor.

Throughout the postwar expansion the exceptionally high productivity of the American economy has enabled its capitalists to dominate the world market despite the higher wage scale of our industrial workers. Now the unbeatable international advantages enjoyed by U. S. corporations for two decades are fast diminishing as other industrialized countries have reequipped, rationalized, and modernized their productive systems. Although West European and Japanese industries continue to trail behind the American giants in the computer and aircraft fields, they are today fully capable of challenging them in auto, steel, chemicals, shipbuilding, and many lines of consumer goods.

Under intensified foreign competition, U. S. corporations will be increasingly pressed to shave their costs, beginning with the cost of labor. The average wage of the American worker has been two and a half times that of the West European and five times greater than the Japanese. Big business will have to try to reduce this immense wage differential through direct or indirect moves against the earnings and living standards of the industrial work force. As the unions engage in defensive actions against such attacks, sharp tension can quickly replace the prevailing toleration between the bosses and the workers.

The resurgence of labor radicalism may come from the flagging of the long-term postwar capitalist expansion and an extended downturn in the industrial cycle — or it may be precipitated by intensified inflation. It could be provoked by anger against antilabor legislation or by resistance to another military venture and debacle of U. S. imperialism. It could be hastened by the impact of a black insurrection, student clashes with the authorities, as in France, or by the penetration of these forces into the unions through black caucuses and radicalized young workers. The possibilities are so diverse that it is impossible to foretell where or how the break in the dike will come.

The irregular development of American radicalism from 1928 to 1968

The widespread underrating of the working class comes from reliance on short-range criteria. Marxism has other standards of judgment. Its general strategy in the struggle for socialism is based upon a long-term, many-sided and dialectical approach to the development of the proletariat.

It is important to note that from 1928 to 1968 the struggles of the three main anticapitalist elements have unfolded in a disparate manner and at an uneven tempo. The industrial workers, the black masses, and the students have manifested fluctuating degrees of radicalism over those forty years which have brought them into differing relations with one another as well as with the ruling class.

The American workers of the nineteen-twenties were far more passive, helpless, and poorly organized than today. Many experts at that time could not figure out how these weaknesses might be overcome, and it was not easy to do so. The touchstone of labor's impotence in their eyes was its inability to introduce unionism into basic industry where most low-paid workers were located.

They marshaled imposing reasons why the workers were unlikely to emerge from disorganization. The workers were divided against themselves: native against foreign-born, white against black, craft workers against mass production workers. The anti-union forces were rich, crafty, and powerful. The magnates of capital had the workers at their mercy. They controlled the courts, legislatures, Congress, and the press. They used the blacklist, their private police, labor spies, and reserves of strikebreakers to crush and victimize organizers in the shops.

Moreover, the AFL officialdom was uninterested in bringing unionism to the unorganized. How, then, were the mass production workers to organize themselves? They were considered too unintelligent and unaware of their own interest and bereft of the necessary resources, national connections, and experience.

The most telling argument advanced by the empiricists was the failure of every effort that militants and radicals had made for forty years to organize basic industry. The campaigns undertaken by Eugene Debs in the early eighteen-nineties; by the De Leonists, Wobblies, and left Socialists before the first world war; and, finally, by the Communists in the nineteen-twenties had all come to nothing.

The gloomy prognosis drawn from these empirical facts had one flaw: it assumed that previous conditions would prevail with undiminished effect from one decade to the next. However, the 1929 crash intervened and upset many things. Once the workers recovered from the paralyzing onset of the depression, and industry picked up in 1933, their morale and fighting spirit revived with it. Before the end of the decade, they broke down the open shop and unionized basic industry.

Such swings tell a great deal about the mutability in the disposition of social forces. Consider the contrasting positions of the white workers and the black people in the nineteen-thirties and the nineteen-sixties. This is as instructive as the reversals that took place in the state of the working class from the nineteen-twenties to the nineteen-thirties and from the thirties to the sixties.

Labor was on the offensive against corporate capital in the nineteen-thirties, with the white workers in the lead. Once the black workers became convinced that they were really welcome in the new industrial

unions, they joined wholeheartedly with the white workers in the organizing struggles of the CIO. In fact, pro-union sentiment was stronger in the black community as a whole than in the white community in the late thirties and early forties.

Black militancy and black radicalism were expressed mainly through general labor struggles in the thirties, rather than as a specifically black movement. There were scattered pockets of black nationalist organization, and black nationalist sentiment was undoubtedly more widespread than most whites realized, but the strength and potential of Afro-Americans as an autonomous force had not yet been expressed in any significant organizational form. It was not until 1941, with the emergence of the short-lived March on Washington movement, that there appeared the first signs of a nationwide nationalist awakening, or reawakening, since the heyday of Garveyism in the nineteen-twenties. Its development was slow and erratic during the forties and early fifties, but by the sixties it had become one of the central features of the present epoch.

So the relative roles of the white workers and the black people became reversed. While the white workers were by and large quiescent, millions of black Americans were now pounding against the status quo. The initiative in struggle, held by the working class in the nineteen-thirties, had now passed into the hands of blacks as a people.

Suppose that learned sociologists, projecting from the state of affairs in the thirties, had concluded that the black people never would or could rise up on their own and take the lead in social protest. Would such an extrapolation be better grounded than the current presumption that apathetic white workers, now in the rearguard, must be disqualified as a fighting force for the rest of the century, or even the coming decade?

What about students? Throughout the nineteen-thirties they played a small part in the surge of radicalism dominated by labor. During the great strike wave from 1945 to 1947 they were not heard from. At that point could they not have been written off for all time as a ferment for revolution? Indeed, they remained "the silent generation" through the nineteen-fifties and did not pass over to radicalism until they were animated by the civil-rights movement, the Cuban Revolution, and the anti-H bomb demonstrations in the early sixties.

Such pronounced irregularities in the radical activities of diverse sectors of society speak against making hasty categorical judgments about their respective capacities for combat from their postures over a limited time. The prophets of gloom may easily mistake the recharging of the energies of the American working class for their exhaustion.

Proposed alternatives to the working class

Once the workers have been canceled out as the chief bearer of social progress, the question is insistently posed, Who will take their place? Obviously, the peasantry, which has been the most massive revolu-

tionary battering ram in the colonial countries, cannot serve as a substitute in the United States.

One answer is that the twenty-two million Afro-Americans will fill the vacancy because they occupy a comparable status as an oppressed colonial people inside the imperialist monster. At the present stage the battlers for black liberation unquestionably stand in the front line against the capitalist power structure. They have not waited for anyone else to launch a vigorous attack upon the caste system that victimizes them in so many ways. And they have begun to form their own leadership and create their own organizations in pursuing that struggle.

However, these facts do not exhaust the problem of their place in the overall development of the American revolution. Black Americans have need of powerful allies at home as well as abroad in order to overcome "the man" and win liberation from the oppression of Uncle "Sham." They can count on sympathetic support from radical students and intellectuals. But that is hardly enough. Remote and improbable as it seems in the prevailing situation, the principal source of internal reinforcement for their liberation movement can come only from the white end of the labor force.

The long-term strategical formula for throwing off the rule of the rich is an anticapitalist alliance in action between insurgent Afro-Americans and militant white industrial workers. No other coalition of forces can carry through that task. Like the workers and peasants in colonial lands, the two will triumph together or not at all.

Some non-Marxists rebut this strategical orientation by counterposing the aggressiveness of black America to the docility of the white workers. They thereby lose sight of significant similarities in the socio-economic positions of the two parts of the proletariat which can acquire great importance at a later time.

The black liberation movement itself has a dual character. It combines the democratic struggle for self-determination of a national minority with a drive for proletarian demands and objectives. This is because the black masses are not peasants in the countryside who aspire to change agrarian relations. They are largely waged workers penned in city slums who are up in arms against intolerable conditions of life and labor.

In 1957-58, for example, almost 90 percent of the half-million blacks in Detroit were blue-collar workers. Most were in the auto, steel, and chemical plants and belonged to the industrial unions. Many participated in the 1967 uprising. According to John C. Leggett's study, *Class, Race and Labor* (1968), they are not only highly race conscious but "more class conscious than whites." That is, they are more outraged by the privations imposed on them by "the big-money class" and readier to resist it. The same holds true for Chicago and other centers of industry, as the black caucuses springing up in unions from the East to the West Coast indicate.

The composite character of the superexploited wage slaves in the

cities makes their struggles doubly explosive. The democratic demands of the black people for an end to discriminatory treatment and racism are fused with their proletarian demands for jobs, rank-and-file control of the unions, more welfare, and other essentials. Although many nationalist black militants do not yet see the matter in this light, they act as the anticapitalist vanguard of the entire American working class.

However much the black masses are now estranged from the white workers, both are objectively yoked together through their joint subordination to the profiteers. They constitute two distinct segments of a single labor force. They are, to be sure, diametrically different in certain respects, since black and white are unequally subjected to the pressures of capitalist exploitation. Nevertheless, their common economic positions vis-a-vis the ruling economic and political power tend to draw them closer together, despite the width of their divergences.

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Apart from the national minorities or along with them, anarchistically inclined thinkers imagine that such elements as the chronically unemployed, the lumpenproletariat, the hippies or other temporary dropouts from bourgeois society can be alternative gravediggers of capitalism. But they cannot explain how these outcast groupings can organize themselves or others for sustained economic or political activity of any kind, whatever spasmodic and despairing outbursts they may indulge in.

C. Wright Mills looked to the dissidents among the "intellectual apparatus" as "a possible immediate, radical agency of change." The wageworkers, he theorized, acted as a decisive political force only in the early stages of industrialization. Now these workers had become coopted into the bureaucratized "mass consumption" United States and the "cultural workers" would have to lead the struggle against "the power elite."

The general experience of the past decade has not confirmed this conclusion of the empirical sociologist, or rather, it has certified its limitations. Dissident intellectuals can play significant roles in starting and stimulating oppositional currents against authoritarian regimes and unpopular policies, as Czechoslovakia in the East and the anti-Vietnam-war teach-ins in the West have indicated. But however great their political impact, nowhere have their initiatives or activities in and of themselves overturned an established social or political regime and put a new one in its place.

Students have likewise demonstrated the world over that they can play a vanguard role in opposing official and unofficial reaction and detonating struggles of broader scope by setting an example of resistance for other forces to imitate. But in the dynamics of the revolutionary process as a whole, their intervention is auxiliary to the decisive power of the working masses. Once the ten million French strikers returned to work in June 1968, the student rebels, who had touched off the workers' offensive, could not sustain their confrontation with the de Gaulle government.

The perspectives of a triumphant fight to the finish against capitalist domination and imperialism are inseparably connected with the entry of the workers onto the arena. Who else can organize and mobilize a counterpower strong enough to challenge and crush the powers-that-be? Who else is in a position to take control of the means of production, socialize them, and plan their operation? Who else can become the directors of the new social order? To understand this and act upon it distinguishes the vanguard students who become Bolsheviks from all others.

* * *

There is a further consideration. The non-Marxist rebels want greater democracy. Yet, paradoxically, the repudiation of the workers as the central agency of social reconstruction leads to extremely undemocratic options.

The white and black workers and their families compose the vast majority of the American people. Suppose some other agency is delegated or destined to lead the way to the abolition of capitalism. What relation is the savior-force to have to the working masses during this process? If the workers are not self-active, it could at best be paternalistic. In that event, the revolutionary movement would fall under the auspices of a benevolent elite or a maleficent bureaucracy.

How does such a mode of development square with the insistence of these young rebels that they are more devoted to democratic methods than the Marxists and opposed to all forms of elitism or bureaucratism? How are they, or anyone else, going to promote a revolution along democratic lines without the conscious consent and active participation of the wageworking majority? And what happens if that majority remains antipathetic and resistant to the ongoing revolution — as they should, according to certain preconceptions? If the workers cannot be revolutionized under any conceivable circumstances, then the prospects for expanding American democracy are no brighter than those for achieving socialism.

Depreciating the working class

It is ironical that young rebels who reject conformism to big business mimic its low opinion of the working class. One reason for this attitude is a limited historical vision. Contemporary Americans are divided, according to University of Michigan sociologists, into the "depression" and the "prosperity" generations.

The new radicals belong to the latter group. Cradled in the prosperity and domestic stability of the postwar Western world, they are acquainted only with a nonmobilized union movement. They have never witnessed combative legions of labor at first hand nor seen what they can accomplish. They regard the union structure as an unbreakable solid block and make no distinction between the membership and the officialdom that sits upon it. Consequently, they feel as alienated from the ranks of labor as the ranks do from them.

Many unwittingly share the disdain of middle-class intellectuals for less formally educated people. They visualize the mass of workers as contented cattle who cannot look beyond their bellies or ever be inspired by a call to struggle for broad social causes and political aims.

Although they may have taken courses in economics or sociology, they fail to perceive how the psychology of the better-paid workers has been debased by middle-class values. The worst aspect is not, as some think, an artificially stimulated craving for meretricious goods and the latest gadgets.

Far more vicious and pernicious are the feelings of inferiority induced in the popular masses through systematic indoctrination in the standards of the master class which underrate their real worth to society. The self-reliance of the workers is so weakened that they do not realize they can say "no" to capitalist domination or escape from the status quo.

By echoing the pervasive disparagement of the workers, supercilious students involuntarily help to reinforce such class mistrust. The revolt of the Afro-Americans shows that the techniques of submissiveness practiced by bourgeois miseducators have limited effectiveness. The new radicals accept the fact that the black masses, so long depicted as menials, can reject their degradation, heighten their racial pride, resist their oppressors. Yet it has still to dawn on these new radicals that, at some later date, white workers too can pass through similar processes of remoralization. If black can become beautiful, so can labor in its most energetic and creative periods.

Not a few young radicals come from working-class families. Although they have come to comprehend how and why Afro-Americans have been taught to hold themselves in contempt and bend the knee to the master race and class, they fail to recognize that they can fall victim to similar pressures. Cut off from their own roots, they have been tricked into accepting the disdain for the capacities of working people inculcated by the bourgeois system.

They acquire so one-sided a view of the wageworkers by conceiving of them, not as the chief agents of production, but primarily as consumers motivated by suburbanite standards. However, the functions of the workers as purchasers of commodities are not equal in social importance to their role as the creators of wealth in the productive process. Nor do these different sides of their activities have the same weight in shaping their conduct. The reactions of the workers are primarily and ultimately determined by what happens to them in the labor market and at the point of production. That is where they encounter speedups, short time, layoffs, discrimination, insecurity, wage reductions, and other evils of exploitation. That is why any drastic fluctuation in their economic welfare can quickly alter their tolerance of the existing state of affairs.

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The more sociologically inclined among the new radicals have elaborated some theoretical justifications for their disqualification of the in-

dustrial workers. They base their arguments, not on the narcotizing effects of capitalist consumption and culture, but upon changes in the productive process. They point out that white-collar workers are growing faster than blue-collar workers and conclude that this relative reduction has qualitatively diminished the economic, social, and political power of the latter. Is this the case?

It is true that the labor force is undergoing marked changes in all industrial countries. Two such shifts have special significance. Because of its high capital intensity, the number of workers engaged in modern industry tends to decrease relative to the personnel employed in transport and communications, the educational system, research, government jobs, and the service trades. Further, as a result of mechanization, the percentage of technical and highly skilled workers tends to grow at the expense of the unskilled.

The implications of these structural changes in the work force do not signify that the working class as such has less importance since, in fact, the sellers of labor power grow relative to the farm population, independent small proprietors, and other sectors of society.

The declining role of such social strata in production and distribution enhances the weight of others. Thus the decrease of the small farmer with the growth of large-scale mechanized enterprises in agriculture is accompanied by increases in the numbers of agricultural workers; the obsolescence of the small retailer with the expansion of chain stores creates scores of thousands of commercial employees; mechanization and automation industrialize many departments of economic activity previously unaffected by wage labor. These interrelated developments extend the scope of wage-labor relations on a scale unknown in the nineteenth century.

The main meaning of these changes is that education and skill become ever more vital in the competition for jobs and the scramble for social survival and economic advancement. On the one hand, the low-paid, unskilled segments of the laboring population become more miserable, insecure, ground down. On the other hand, the growing numbers of white-collar, professional, and technical personnel become more subjected to capitalist exploitation and alienation, more and more proletarianized, more responsive to unionization and its methods of action, more and more detached from loyalty to their corporate employers. These trends pile up combustible materials which can flare into massive anticapitalist movements.

The relative reduction in the directly producing force does not nullify the key role of the proletarians within industry. In the relations of production, quality is more decisive than quantity. Ten thousand transport workers are far more crucial in social struggle than ten thousand office workers. When 35,000 transport workers shut down the New York City subways and buses several years ago, everything ground to a halt in the hub of U. S. capitalism.

The strategic position that the mass production, transport, and communications workers occupy in the operations of capitalism invests their actions with a power exceeding their actual numbers. As direct

producers, they alone can start or stop the most vital sectors of the economy. The capitalist regime is well aware of the latent power of the strike weapon wielded by blue-collar workers and constantly seeks to hamper its use. In practice, the rulers have little doubt about its revolutionary potential.

Thus one million industrial workers command incomparably more revolutionary power than seven million college students. Although the three million teachers constitute the largest single occupational group in the country, their collective economic power is less than that of the half-million blue-collar workers in the steel mills.

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Some envisage the imminent ejection of almost all workers from industry through the swift spread and consummation of automation. Under capitalism, mechanization and cybernation do threaten the jobs of skilled and unskilled alike, in one industry after another. The dislocations and job instability caused by these processes have to be guarded against by both the economic action and political organization of the working class.

Capitalist production cannot do without an ample laboring force, no matter how many are unemployed, because profit-making and the accumulation of capital depend upon the consumption of large quantities of labor power which creates value in the form of commodities. Although this or that segment or individual may be squeezed out of jobs temporarily or permanently, the industrial work force as such is not expendable, no matter how fast or how far automation proceeds under capitalist auspices.

Indeed, the inherent limitations upon its introduction and extension under capitalism, the inability of the profiteers fully to utilize the immense potential of the new science and technology for reducing the working day and rationalizing production, provide further reasons for breaking their hold upon industry. Socialism envisages the elimination from industry of the capitalist proprietors and coupon-clippers, rather than the workers.

In any event, the industrial workers are far from obsolescent and cannot be conjured away by abstract extrapolations. They will be on hand from now until the socialist revolution — and quite a while thereafter, because they provide the minds and the muscles for the production of all material wealth.

Marxism and the "labor metaphysic"

Two authoritative periodicals of the plutocracy, the *London Times Literary Supplement* and the *New York Times*, paid high tributes to the genius of Karl Marx on the centennial of the publication of *Capital* in 1967. It is "the most influential single work of economics ever written," said the *New York Times* editors. In the same breath they hastened to expose what in their eyes were the basic errors of Marx's

teachings. Prominent among them, they insisted, was his false prediction about "the role of the working class as the gravedigger of capitalism."

"New Left" theorists play on this same theme from a different standpoint. Orthodox Marxists glorify the working class, they claim. Instead of facing up to the realities of contemporary capitalism and appraising its assimilation of the industrial workers in a dispassionate scientific manner, the disciples of Marx fall prey to what C. Wright Mills has called "the labor metaphysic." To be effective reformers of society, they ought to give up doctrinaire fascination with the leading role of the working class and look elsewhere for more suitable candidates.

They dismiss the fact that, despite the vicissitudes of the class struggle, every so often since 1917 the revolt of the workers and their allies has been victorious. Over the long run, the sum total of their successes has outweighed the reverses; the overall movement of the world working class keeps advancing toward its social goals.

The surest index to the validity of Marxism is the balance sheet of world history in this age of permanent revolution. International experience demonstrates that Marx's ideas have been vindicated over the past half-century, though only in a partial way. Like shipwrecked sailors hanging onto an overturned lifeboat in a stormy sea, all sorts of anti-Marxists cling to the fact that not all of Marx's prognoses have yet been verified, above all, in the United States. The impregnability of American capitalism constitutes their rock of salvation.

Yet they are not wholly secure even here. A not unimportant part of Marx's theory on the evolution of capitalism has already been confirmed in the United States. His forecast of the inherent tendencies of a matured capitalism to pass from competition to monopoly through the concentration and centralization of capital is epitomized by contemporary America.

What remains to be verified are the logical *political and ideological* consequences of these economic trends, namely, the transition of the workers from union to class consciousness, from bourgeois and petty bourgeois to socialist ideology, from subservience to capitalist parties to independent and militant political organization and action. The fact that these developments have been considerably retarded does not bar them from ever being realized. This very delay sets the tasks that will have to be tackled and solved in the next stage of radicalism.

The dispute between the "New Lefts" and Marxists over the role of the working class is less concerned with divergent appraisals of the facts in the present situation than with their methods of reasoning. The two proceed along different lines in analyzing the dynamics of contemporary social development. The anti-Marxists of the New Left are provincial-minded empiricists. They reject the ideas and perspectives of Marxism, not so much because these have been rendered invalid by irrefutable argument or overwhelming evidence, but because these are not yet accomplished facts.

Although they fancy themselves ahead of their contemporaries, they

remain captive to the ideological and political backwardness of American life. They are swayed by the prevailing prejudices against dialectical materialism which can go unchallenged because of the absence of solid Marxist traditions and a strong socialist movement in the United States. They are hardly aware of the extent to which they have been swept along by the pragmatic habits of thought so deeply embedded in our national culture.

The hidden capacities of the oppressed

In determining whether the American working class is a dead volcano or whether explosive energies still simmer in its depths, it should be kept in mind that neither revolutionary situations nor revolutionized classes are normal occurrences. They mature at rare intervals when the slow growth of the preconditions for a showdown between contending social forces comes to a head. During the intervening lulls in mass activity, people come to believe that the social contradictions of capitalism will never generate insurrectionary moods and movements in their time.

Such a conviction became fixed in the minds of the reformists when no direct confrontation between capitalists and workers took place for fifty years from the Paris Commune of 1871 to the Russian Revolution of 1917. A like conclusion has come to the fore whenever the working class has suffered grave setbacks or passed through a protracted quiescence over the past half-century. It has taken a new upsurge or victory of the workers to dispel that defeatism.

Over the past half-century the close association of oscillations of confidence in the capacities of the working class with alternations in the intensity of the class struggle can be charted in three major waves. The pessimism produced by the collapse of the European Social Democracy in 1914 was counteracted by the triumph of the Russian workers in 1917; the catastrophic defeats of the nineteen-thirties leading to the second world war were succeeded by the revolutionary upsurge after 1943, which culminated in the Yugoslav, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cuban victories; and the torpor of the Western working class from 1948 on was unexpectedly upset by the French general strike of May-June 1968.

Cuba shows how the urge to power can break out in the most unscheduled ways and places. Nobody in 1958 expected that a few years later the workers of that island would become uplifted by the ideals of socialist internationalism which the organizers of the July 26th Movement themselves did not then consciously hold.

Time and again funeral ceremonies performed over the revolutionism of a particular national section of the working class, or the class in general, have turned out to be premature. Such shortsightedness has resulted from an overestimation of the "reasonableness" of capitalism on the one hand and an underestimation of the latent capacities

of the toilers on the other. Sudden shocks can cause the rebelliousness of the oppressed to spring to life with a celerity that confounds the skeptics and amazes the participants themselves.

Beaten down in so many ways, workers seldom suspect what they are capable of achieving under the extraordinary stimulus of a revolutionary crisis. That genius of propaganda, Tom Paine, once testified how his plunge into the First American Revolution brought forth talents hidden in him. "I happened to come to America a few months before the breaking out of hostilities . . ." he wrote some years after the Battle of Lexington. "I had no thoughts of Independence or of arms. The world could not then have persuaded me that I should be either a soldier or an author. If I had any talents for either, they were buried in me, and might ever have continued so, had not the necessity of the times dragged and driven them into action." (*Political Writings*, vol. I, 169-170)

The "necessity of the times" forces groupings, classes, and whole peoples, as well as individuals, to perform prodigious feats. The colonial rebels displayed a tenacity of purpose, unity, and skill at warfare that astonished their foe and their contemporaries, much as the Vietnamese liberation fighters have in our own day.

In a speech he made in 1968 on the fifteenth anniversary of the attack on the Moncada army garrison, Fidel Castro emphasized the immense untapped resources, lodged in the masses, that a revolution can draw upon. "The history of this Revolution has furnished us with many examples, repeated examples, of the fact that those who were in error were those who did not believe in man, that those who made the mistake and failed were those who had no confidence in the peoples, who had no confidence in man's ability to attain and develop a revolutionary awareness.

"In the past, those of us who proclaimed the revolutionary struggle, who proclaimed the need for a revolution, were told the same thing: that we were mistaken, that we were a bunch of dreamers and that we would fail.

"This was what the politicians, the 'savants' of politics, the 'professors of politics,' the 'brains' of politics, the leaders of the traditional, bourgeois parties, had to say. They did not believe in the people; they underestimated the people. They thought the people incapable of accomplishing anything. They thought of the people as an ignorant herd to be manipulated at their will. Those of you who are here today—especially those who are here as guests—and can take a good look at this enormous congregation of people which is the living expression of our Revolution's power, should not forget that only fifteen years ago we were a small group of youngsters whom many considered dreamers, who had been told they would fail because it was impossible to make a revolution in a country of illiterate, ignorant people. And yet, what is it that we see today? What has been the result of the effort begun fifteen years ago by a small group of youngsters

at that stage of our revolutionary history? How much has been accomplished by this people? How much has this unarmed people accomplished? How much has this people that they called ignorant, that they underestimated, that they considered lacking in every virtue, accomplished?"

Such historical precedents suggest that the American workers ought to be sized up, not simply for what they are at a given moment, but for what they may be compelled to become under changed circumstances.

The historical judgment of the skeptics is at fault. With all its appurtenances of power, it is the corporate plutocracy rather than the proletariat that is a decaying class heading toward its demise. The American working class is fresh, vigorous, undefeated, undemoralized. It has displayed considerable fighting spirit, initiative, and stamina in the past—and its career as a creative social force has barely begun.

When republican and democratic movements first emerged in the bourgeois era, spokesmen for royalism, aristocracy, and clerical domination argued that common people were unfit to be entrusted with affairs of state. The same sort of elitist prejudice motivates some of those who today permanently preclude the workers from sovereignty in society.

On what grounds are they justified in setting arbitrary and insurmountable limits to the creative capacities of American labor? If the workers can produce airplanes and precision instruments for the industrialists and militarists and all kinds of commodities for the market, if they can build and maintain powerful industrial unions for themselves, why can't they go beyond all that?

What prevents them from organizing a mass political party of their own, being won over to socialist ideas, and eventually manning a revolutionary movement which can challenge the existing order and lead the way to a new society? Why can't these workers, who make such a plenitude of other things, also make history and remake society and, in the process, remake themselves? If they perform all kinds of jobs for the profiteers, why can't they do their own jobs? If they wage and win wars for the imperialist rulers, why can't they conduct a civil war in defense of their own interests, as their predecessors did in the nineteenth century?

The wageworkers are no more fated to remain servants in their own house than the American colonists were condemned to remain subjects of the British Crown, or the slaves to remain the property of the Southern planters. If a few million workers and a mass of illiterate peasants in less developed lands have succeeded in revolutionizing themselves along socialist lines, what inherent qualifications did they possess that the better-equipped American workers cannot acquire? The class struggle within the United States should give an answer to these questions before this century is over.

The problem of leadership

The capacities and conduct of a class at any given time depend in no slight degree on the character of its leadership. If the American workers have such a poor record over the recent past, the responsibility rests more with the men at their head than with their own inadequacies. The potentially most dynamic body of workers in the world has the most corrupt, servile, and obtuse official union leadership.

These leaders kowtow to the corporations and the government while lushly living on munificent salaries and expense accounts. They think more like big businessmen than representatives of a progressive social force. They cannot inspire the members of their organizations to higher levels of achievement in industry or politics or teach them anything new. They are rightly despised by young rebels on the campuses and distrusted and held in contempt by young workers in the plants.

Many mistakenly believe that this breed of leaders faithfully and fully represents the caliber of their ranks, that it is the only kind they can produce or follow. Actually, these officials are the product and the promoter of a prolonged period of stagnation. A resurgent labor movement would thrust forward a new type of leadership from below, and even prod some susceptible bureaucrats, as it proved capable of doing during the industrial union drive of the nineteen-thirties. Under a comparable radicalization, labor can both reenergize itself and renew its leadership.

And one thing may be anticipated. Once their militancy revives on a large scale, the American workers will travel at jet-plane speed. They will take off from the point where their march was halted and thrown back several decades ago. The mass production workers did not go ahead to form an independent political organization after they created the industrial unions in the nineteen-thirties. They were prevented from taking this next step by the John L. Lewis-Communist Party coalition in the CIO. They have suffered heavily ever since from this failure to disengage from the two big capitalist political machines.

When they again rise up, the fighting vanguard of the union movement will have to seek the road of independent political action to promote their objectives, as workers elsewhere have already done. However, they will not duplicate the precise course of political development taken by their predecessors. They will follow an exceptional line of march because their thrust toward independence comes so late on the scene, is directed against the most formidable and ruthless adversary, will be objectively intertwined with the revolutionary struggle for Afro-American liberation, and will have been preceded by a new, radicalized generation of college and high school students and young workers. The most advanced workers will be inclined to adopt the best methods of militant action and revolutionary organization available to them.

The sharpness of their break with the old ties can impel this vanguard to make a big leap in their ideas and activity in relatively

short order. Whereas the workers who were radicalized at earlier dates in other countries were attracted to Social Democratic, Fabian, or Stalinist programs and parties, these movements have today become largely discredited and decrepit. They cannot provide a new generation of rebellious workers with the leadership, organization, and program they need in the harsh struggle against the monopolists, militarists, and union bureaucracy. These militants will be open to the acceptance of the ideas of authentic Marxism, which the Trotskyist movement alone presents in the United States.

The American working class has colossal tasks ahead of it. It confronts the most formidable and ferocious of adversaries in the monopolist-militarist combine that controls American capitalism. Yet it possesses the potential of a giant. Like Gulliver, it has been pinned down by lilliputians while it has fallen into a drugged sleep.

This class will be roused from its slumber by events beyond anyone's control. Marxists do not believe that the popular masses can be summoned into battle on anyone's command. The class struggle unfolds with a rhythm of its own, according to internal laws determined by weighty objective historical conditions.

On the other hand, Marxists are neither fatalists nor anarchists. They recognize that the working masses can launch mighty offensives on their own initiative once capitalism goads them into action. It occurred to no one that February 23, 1917, would be the first day of the Russian Revolution or that May 13, 1968, in France would see the start of the greatest general strike in working-class history.

The revolutionary program and perspectives of Marxism are predicated upon fusing such autonomous actions of the masses with the conscious intervention of its socialist vanguard. The correct combination of these factors is the only guarantee of success in the combat against capitalism.

If it is not correctly oriented in time, the most powerful spontaneous upsurge can fall short of its mark, dribble away, be turned back and crushed. This misfortune has befallen the workers' movement many times over the past century.

The revolutionary party helps workers take full advantage of their opportunities in good times or bad. That is its reason for existence. Just as every army has its training camps, officer corps, and a high command, so every serious revolutionary movement needs experienced cadres of militants and a dependable general staff. Such a leadership cannot be created overnight. It should be assembled, tested, and tempered in the preparatory period of a revolutionary process. Otherwise, it may be too late. Default on this score has ruined many promising openings for the conquest of power.

The American workers will have to be morally and ideologically rearmed in order to conduct an effective struggle to the end against their exploiters. As every teacher and student knows, self-confidence is necessary to learn new skills and perform greater tasks. Any vanguard that aspires to prepare a revolutionary change in the United States

will have to impart assurance to the working people that they have what it takes to meet and beat the ruling rich and liberate themselves.

This is a reciprocal process. The revolutionary socialist party enhances its own confidence to the extent that the masses it proposes to assist elevate their reliance on themselves.

The will to win is an indispensable factor in the way to win. The decisive sections of the working class, black and white, can go forward to victory only as they become convinced that the profiteers are not born to command, that they are misruling the nation and leading the world to catastrophe, that they are not omnipotent and unbeatable, that their system of exploitation is not everlasting but has to go and can be abolished. This is the essential message of Marxism. It teaches that the workers are qualified and mandated by historical progress to supplant the plutocrats as the directors and organizers of economic and political life and become the pioneers of the first truly human society.

It is obvious from these considerations that the continuing controversy over the capacities of the American working class does not involve minor issues. Nothing less than the course and outcome of the struggle for socialism and self-determination in the United States, if not the very survival of society, depend upon whether an affirmative or negative answer is given to it, first in principle, then in practice.

* * *

The Young Socialist Alliance has given the most affirmative answer to this question by its program, activities, and its very existence. You are meeting this Thanksgiving weekend to implement that faith in the potential of the American working class, black and white. Remember what Fidel Castro said last year: "Only fifteen years ago we were a small group of youngsters whom many called dreamers." You are a small group of the same sort in this country today.

But what you are and what you do here and now—and, even more, what you may become—has great political importance because you represent the vanguard of the young students and workers who are called upon to bring the liberating ideas of socialism to the American people and wipe imperialism off the face of this planet.

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