

NIKOLAI BUKHARIN: ALTERNATIVE OR INTERREGNUM?

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This dissertation examines the claims that Nikolai Bukharin was an inconsistent Marxist theoretician, at times “un-Marxist” in his thinking who radically altered his political philosophy to justify his support for such different policies as War Communism and the New Economic Policy. It also investigates the validity of the accepted wisdom that Bukharin represented a “liberal” alternative to Stalin and Stalinism within Bolshevism and that, by 1925, he had moved to the Right of the Party.

This study begins by examining the conflicting visions of the state and the evolutionary and revolutionary strains within Marxism. It then studies the works of those Marxist thinkers, of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whose work on the state, revolution and the transition to socialism significantly influenced Bukharin’s work. Finally, it subjects Bukharin’s major theoretical works on imperialism, revolution and the role of the state in the transition to socialism, between 1915-1925, to an in-depth analysis to determine the validity of the claims made about Bukharin and his works.

While one can still argue that Bukharin may have acted differently from Stalin once in power, this dissertation demonstrates that Bukharin was consistent in his theoretical work on the revolution and the transition to socialism. This study also conclusively demonstrates that

Bukharin was located within the heart of both Marxism and Bolshevism and did not move to the Right during the NEP. It clearly shows that Bukharin's support for War Communism and the NEP flowed directly from his original synthesis of the revolutionary and evolutionary strains within Marxism, and the need for a powerful, proletarian state, "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat," that would manage the socialization of antagonistic petit-bourgeois elements into socialism, build socialism economically, and do whatever was necessary to protect the Revolution from its internal and external enemies. Thus, in reality, Bukharin, the "liberal alternative," provided the philosophical foundation and justification for the use of unlimited state power, which in the hands of Stalin led to the "Revolution from Above" and from this perspective one can locate Bukharin as the philosophical interregnum between Lenin and Stalin.

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PREFACE

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INTRODUCTION

Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin began his rise to prominence in revolutionary circles at the age of 16, when he became involved in the revolutionary student movement at Moscow University during the 1905 Revolution. This began his development into a revolutionary Marxist-Bolshevik and, within a year, he had joined the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDRP).¹ From the start, he took an active political role in the Party as an organizer and as a propagandist among workers in Moscow, a role he performed until his third arrest by Tsarist authorities for revolutionary activity. Bukharin then fled to Europe in 1912, where he met Lenin, continued to study economics, and worked with various socialist groups. Eventually Bukharin made his way to the United States in 1916, where he became, along with Leon Trotsky, an editor of a Russian language newspaper and organized various socialist groups.²

It was in 1915, during this period of exile, that Bukharin firmly established his reputation within the Bolshevik Party as a leading theoretician with the publication, in 1915, of Imperialism and the World Economy.³ Following its publication, Bukharin's theories began to play a significant role in the development of Bolshevik party theory and policy. His early works, Imperialism and the World Economy and "Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State,"⁴ written in

¹ Stephen F. Cohen, Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution (NY: Oxford University Press, 1974), 9-10.

² Sidney Heitman, "Between Lenin and Stalin: Nikolai Bukharin," in Revisionism: Essays on the History of Marxist Ideas, ed. Leopold Labedz (New York: Praeger, 1962), 77-90.

³ Nikolai Bukharin, Imperialism and World Economy (NY: M. Lawrence, 1930)

⁴ Nikolai Bukharin, "Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State" in N.I. Bukharin: Selected Writings on the

1916, preceded Lenin's own work on imperialism and significantly influenced Bolshevik thinking on how imperialism reflected the changes in capitalism, particularly the development of state capitalism. Bukharin's analysis would play a significant role in the early revolutionary period (1917-1918) as the Bolsheviks sought to understand the development of imperialism, the outbreak of the Great War, the development of state capitalism, and how these developments could and would lead to revolution.

Bukharin's theoretical work during the Civil War period was no less important. In 1919, he and Evgenii Preobrazhenskii co-authored The ABC of Communism,⁵ a popular explanation of the Party Programme adopted at the Eighth Party Congress that contained both revolutionary and evolutionary policies. Then, in 1920, he wrote what Stephen Cohen considers his most radical work, The Politics and Economics of Transition Period.⁶ That this work was so radical is no surprise when one considers that Bukharin wrote it in the midst of the Civil War and, as Cohen points out, "just as war communism was approaching its apogee."⁷ Although Bukharin wrote this for a particular period of Revolutionary Russia's history Cohen writes that "in 1928, Pokrovski, the doyen of Soviet historians cited it as one of the . . . great Bolshevik achievements in "social science" since the revolution."⁸ A year later he published Historical Materialism,⁹ a work that expounded "a proletarian sociology, known as *historical materialism*," that enabled the working class to find "its bearings in the most complicated questions in social life and in the class

State and the Transition to Socialism. ed., trans. Richard B. Day (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1982), 6-33.

⁵ Nikolai Bukharin and Evgenii Preobrazhenskii, The ABC of Communism (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966)

⁶ Nikolai Bukharin, The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period, trans. Oliver Field, ed. Kenneth J. Tarbuck (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1979)

⁷ Cohen, Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution, 87.

⁸ Ibid, 88. Cohen points out that Pokrovski also cited Lenin's State and Revolution, 408.

⁹ Nikolai Bukharin, Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology, Edited by Alfred G. Meyer, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969)

struggle.”¹⁰ (Emphasis in original) Bukharin wrote that he intended that this book expound and develop this theory to predict correctly “the conduct of the various parties, groups, and classes in the great transformation through which humanity is now passing.”¹¹

Bukharin’s works published after Historical Materialism, “The New Course in Economic Policy”¹² (1921) and The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance¹³ (1925), played a significant role in the evolution and theoretical justification of the New Economic Policy (NEP). His theoretical work here placed Bukharin at the very center of the debate within the Party over the “proper road to socialism,” and, for a time, made him the leading theoretician within the Party.

However, after Bukharin’s political defeat in 1929, his works lay virtually ignored in the West, the communist world, and the Soviet Communist Party for more than three decades. This changed in the sixties when Soviet reformers looking to revitalize their moribund economy, and Western and Soviet historians looking for alternative “paths to socialism” in the aftermath of de-Stalinization, rediscovered and began to study Bukharin and his theories. This led to the growth of a modest, but influential, literature dealing with Bukharin and his philosophical system.

With this “rediscovery,” the discussion regarding Bukharin's philosophical contributions and the proper interpretation of his political philosophy began anew, and a critical consensus of Bukharin and his theoretical work gradually, yet steadily, emerged.¹⁴ Roy Medvedev led the

¹⁰ Nikolai Bukharin, “Nikolai Bukharin: Historical Materialism- A system of sociology – Introduction: The Practical Importance of the Social Sciences,” Nikolai Bukharin-Writers Archive, n.d., <http://www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1921/histmat/intro.htm#a> (7 March 2005).

¹¹ Ibid, (7 March 2005).

¹² Nikolai Bukharin, “The New Course in Economic Policy” in N.I. Bukharin: Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism, trans., ed. Richard B. Day (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1982), 209-294.

¹³ Nikolai Bukharin, “The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance” in Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism, 109-151.

¹⁴ See, in particular, Leon Deutscher, The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky 1921-1929 (NY: Oxford University Press, 1980); Richard B. Day, N.I. Bukharin: Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism (NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1982); E. H. Carr, Socialism in One Country: 1924-1926 (NY: Macmillan Books, 1960); George

way in the Soviet Union in 1980 with his Bukharin: The Last Years.¹⁵ Medvedev did not have access to a great deal of information on Bukharin and relied heavily on Western scholarship to write this book.¹⁶ However, he embarked on this work with an eye to addressing the need, as he saw it, to encourage further research on Bukharin and his legacy.¹⁷ In the West, although historians had briefly examined Bukharin's legacy in the sixties, Stephen F. Cohen led the way in reevaluating the "Bukharin Alternative" in 1974 with his landmark work, Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution.¹⁸

Although Medvedev recognizes Bukharin's conflicting legacy, he believes that when one talks about Bukharin, "we are speaking of one of the most eminent leaders and theoreticians of the Bolsheviks, a man who had become deservedly famous long before the Revolution."¹⁹ Medvedev places Bukharin as the leading theorist within the Party and the one who drafted the "general party line" after Lenin's death. Yet eight years earlier, in his opus Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism, Medvedev took issue with Bukharin's understanding of the NEP. He writes that "Bukharin's understanding of NEP was debatable," that Bukharin had "no clear, precise answer to the question how to move the peasant village toward socialism," and that his discussions regarding the growth of the kulak into socialism were

Katkov, The Trial of Bukharin (NY: Stein and Day, 1969); Moshe Lewin, Political Undercurrents in the Soviet Economic Debate (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974). Although not of all these works deal with Bukharin, specifically they do allow us to see how historians view Bukharin historically.

¹⁵ Roy Medvedev, Nikolai Bukharin: The Last Years, trans. A. D. P. Briggs (NY: W.W. Norton, 1980) Medvedev's biography was the only Soviet study on Bukharin until 1988. Even at that, it appeared only in the West and circulated in the USSR as "Samizdat." Soviet reformers often referred to Bukharin's theories and policies but could not cite him as their source until his rehabilitation in 1988. This was particularly true during the time of the Kosygin reforms. Bukharin's work also clearly influenced Tatyana Zaslavskaya and Abel Aganbegyan, the two leading reformist theoreticians under Gorbachev. See Abel Aganbegyan, Inside Perestroika, trans. Helen Szamuely. (NY: Harper and Row, 1989) and Tatyana Zaslavskaya, The Second Socialist Revolution, trans. Susan M. Davies with Jenny Warren (London: Tauris, 1990)

¹⁶ Ibid, Bukharin, 9-10.

¹⁷ Ibid, 9-11.

¹⁸ Stephen F. Cohen, Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974)

¹⁹ Medvedev, Bukharin, 7.

mistaken.”²⁰ In his conclusion, Medvedev writes, “some of his [Bukharin’s] works are clearly obsolete . . . a part of his work may now appear inchoate or superficial.”²¹ Still, for Medvedev, Bukharin represented an alternative to Stalin and Stalinism. He writes that Bukharin attempted to find an alternative to the “left” tendency in the party and quotes Sidney Heitman, who argues that, “It may be noted that had Bukharin’s views rather than Stalin’s prevailed after 1928, they would have yielded radically different results than those that followed from Stalin’s course.”²²

Lenin himself had characterized Bukharin as a scholastic thinker, a weak dialectician, and as someone who was un-Marxist in his approach to politics and economics.²³ Antonio Gramsci, in his work The Modern Prince,²⁴ agreed with Lenin’s assessment. He wrote:

he [Bukharin] no longer understands the importance and significance of the dialectic, which is degraded from being a doctrine of consciousness and the inner substance of history and the science of politics, into being a subspecies of formal logic and elementary scholasticism.²⁵

Gramsci also argued that Bukharin lacked “any clear and precise idea of what Marxism itself is,”²⁶ and harshly criticized Bukharin for turning Marxism into a sociology that “represents the crystallisation of the deteriorating tendencies . . . which consist of reducing a conception of the world into a mechanical formula.”²⁷ Because of this, Gramsci characterized Bukharin as a second-rank Marxist theoretician writing of Bukharin, “It [this reductionism] has been the greatest incentive for the facile journalistic improvisations of superficially “brilliant” men.”²⁸

²⁰ Roy Medvedev, Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism, trans. Colleen Taylor; ed. David Joravsky and Georges Haupt (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 65-66.

²¹ Medvedev, Bukharin, 166.

²² Ibid, 166-167. Although here Heitman argues that Bukharin would have acted very differently than Stalin once in power, he also concludes that Bukharin’s philosophical work was crucial to Stalin and Stalinism.

²³ Cohen, 104-105. Here Cohen quotes Lenin, who said of Bukharin that he “has never studied and, I think, never fully understood dialectics.” Lenin also used the term “soft wax” when describing Bukharin, and many historians have accepted his characterization of Bukharin.

²⁴ Antonio Gramsci, The Modern Prince: And Other Writings (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1957)

²⁵ Ibid, 99.

²⁶ Ibid, 97.

²⁷ Ibid, 94.

²⁸ Ibid, 94.

In the Western historiography of Bukharin, some historians accepted these descriptions and also characterize Bukharin as “soft wax” and question his credentials as a Marxist and also a Leninist.²⁹ Still others, such as E. H. Carr, Moshe Lewin, Richard Day, and Isaac Deutscher, accuse Bukharin of being, in Day’s words, a “theoretical extremist,” “a liberal rather than a Marxist theorist,”³⁰ of splitting the Bolshevik party and even of unwittingly paving the way for Stalin by contributing to Trotsky’s political defeat.³¹

These scholars agree that Bukharin’s credentials as a Marxist thinker are open to question and that he was guilty of many political errors, and some even labeled him a “liberal” or a “theoretical extremist.”³² Yet, none of these writers has sought to understand the philosophical foundation that underpinned Bukharin’s support for the radical, revolutionary policies of War Communism (1918-1921) and then the gradualist and evolutionary policies of the New Economic Policy (NEP) (1921-1928). Instead, they have received the accepted wisdom, reinforced by Stephen F. Cohen’s claims that, as Soviet policies changed from War Communism to the NEP, Bukharin rethought and radically altered his political philosophy to suit the policies of the day.

This alleged volte-face is the central theme of Stephen Cohen’s book, Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution. Cohen presents Bukharin as a “Western Style Liberal” and a “humanist,” as someone who, because of ethical and humanitarian concerns, shifted his support from War

²⁹ Deutscher, 82-83, 290. Cohen’s book, in particular, gives the reader the sense that Bukharin was some sort of Western style liberal. Katkov, in The Trial of Bukharin, 26-27, argues that there is some merit to Trotsky’s evaluation. With only minor reservations, he quotes Trotsky’s view of Bukharin. “The character of the man [Bukharin] is such that he always needs to lean on somebody . . . Bukharin is simply a medium through whom somebody else speaks and acts.”

³⁰ Richard B. Day, “The New Leviathan: Bukharin’s Contribution to the Theory of the State and the Transition to Socialism,” introduction to N.I. Bukharin: Selected Writings on the State and the Transition To Socialism (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1982), xxxii, lv.

³¹ Ibid, xxxii; See also Deutscher, 242-246, 27-394.; Lewin, 10, 68; Carr, 134-166.

³² Whether he was right or wrong in his support of these policies is not the point of this study. The focus here is to understand his conception of the state, so that we can understand his support of the different policies in the different periods.

Communism and became the leading proponent of the NEP.³³ Jonathan J. Bean argues that Cohen advocated the Bukharin alternative in Soviet history, which Cohen defined as

market socialism, balanced growth, evolutionary development, civil peace, a mixed agricultural sector, and tolerance of social and political pluralism with the framework of the one-party state.³⁴

In other words, Cohen posits that Bukharin, because of this about face and this move away from extremism during the NEP, represented an alternative to the Stalinist path in Soviet History.

After analyzing and comparing Bukharin's writings, on War Communism, and the NEP, Cohen concludes that during War Communism, Bukharin, like many others in the party, fell victim to the "general euphoria" of War Communism and shared the unrealistic belief that this policy could serve as the vehicle for the transition to socialism. He also contends that Bukharin's 1920 treatise, The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period, in which Bukharin wholeheartedly supported the policies of War Communism, stands as an example of Bukharin's subjugation of political theory to the politics of the moment. It was, Cohen argues, "a literary monument to the collective folly [War Communism] . . . a tract grounded in the worst error of the period, the belief that Civil War lays bare the true physiognomy of society."³⁵

According to Cohen, Bukharin could only embrace the principles of the New Economic Policy once he had acknowledged his "errors" and made a major break with his past political philosophy.³⁶ He points out that for a year following the introduction of the NEP (1921), Bukharin published very little and only began to write and publish again in 1922. It was during this period that Cohen believes that Bukharin "rethought" and revised his political philosophy

³³ Here Cohen attempts to show that Bukharin was different from Stalin and other Bolsheviks and that he represented the "human face" of socialism. He also portrays Bukharin as someone who could reject his philosophical past because of his own humanitarian concerns.

³⁴ Jonathan J. Bean, "Nikolai Bukharin and the New Economic Policy: A Middle Way?" The Independent Review v. 11, n. 1 Summer 1997, 87.

³⁵ Cohen, 87.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 123-159.

when confronted with the reality of post-Civil War Russia, the reality of a society shattered and unprepared for socialism, a reality that reportedly shattered Bukharin's own illusions about how Russia would achieve socialism.³⁷ Cohen cites Bukharin's 1924 statement that "the *illusions* [War Communism] of the childhood period are consumed and disappear *without a trace* . . . the transition to the new economic policy represented the collapse of our *illusions*,"³⁸ (Emphasis in original) as proof that Bukharin abandoned the principles that he had espoused in The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period. Cohen writes that Bukharin's:

Emphasis on civil peace, legality, official constraint and toleration, and persuasion . . . represented a dramatic turnabout from his 1920 eulogy of "proletarian coercion in all its forms."³⁹

Cohen also claims that an "ethical consideration influenced Bukharin's economic thinking" in the disputes over the exploitation of the peasantry and the pace of industrialization.⁴⁰ In effect, Cohen argues that, by 1924, Bukharin had not only reached a philosophical reconciliation with the NEP, but began to develop the political and philosophical basis for that policy, a policy infused with, in Cohen's opinion, ethical considerations.⁴¹ This led Cohen to the conclusion that Bukharin and his policies, during the NEP, represented a liberal and a viable alternative within Bolshevism to Stalin and Stalinism.⁴²

Other western historians argue that Bukharin supported conflicting policies because he was not consistent in his theoretical work. Moshe Lewin, writing at the same time (1974) as Cohen, argues that Bukharin's wild swings in policy were the result of the "anarchistic and humanistic tendency of Bukharin and . . . streak of hostility to state power common to many socialists, in

³⁷ Ibid, 123-159

³⁸ Ibid, 138.

³⁹ Ibid, 206.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 172-173.

⁴¹ Ibid, 138-139.

⁴² Stephen F. Cohen, "The Afterlife of Nikolai Bukharin" introduction to This I Cannot Forget by Anna Larina, trans. Gary Kearn (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1994), 23.

many of the Bolshevik 'old guard.'"⁴³ He argues that: "The volte-face was unmistakable, not only did Bukharin become 'Stalin's willing henchman,' but he also moved to the right of the political spectrum."⁴⁴ Isaac Deutscher, writing much earlier (1959), claims that Bukharin's

rigidly deductive logic and his striving for abstraction and symmetry induced him to take up extreme positions: for years he had been the radical leader of the 'left Communists'- and by a process of radical reversal he was to become the leader of the party's right wing.⁴⁵

Only recently have historians considered the possibility that continuity existed in Bukharin's political thought and that he remained consistent in his application of theory to policy. This is the position taken both by Nicholas Kozlov, in a collection of essays entitled, Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin: A Centenary Appraisal,⁴⁶ and Michael Haynes, in his Nikolai Bukharin and the Transition from Capitalism to Socialism. Neither Haynes nor Kozlov believe that Bukharin traded in one set of philosophical principles for another, but rather that his philosophical principles remained consistent throughout his life. Both agree that Bukharin's alleged radical shifts did not reflect a "rethinking" or a radical rupture in his philosophical system. Instead, they attribute Bukharin's support for such dissimilar policies as War Communism and the NEP to the consistent application of his political philosophy to the changing circumstances of Revolutionary Russia. What actually took place, according to both Kozlov and Haynes, was that as political and economic realities changed, Bukharin utilized his philosophical principles to explain the necessity of and to provide support for the different policies in the different periods.

⁴³ Lewin, Political Undercurrents in Soviet Economic Debates, 11.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, XIV.

⁴⁵ Deutscher, 82.

⁴⁶ Michael Haynes, Nikolai Bukharin and the Transition From Capitalism to Socialism (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1985); Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin: A Centenary Appraisal, ed. by Nicholas N. Kozlov and Eric D. Weitz (New York: Praeger Press, 1990)

Although Kozlov and Haynes agree that Bukharin adhered to a consistent political philosophy throughout this period, they differ over what constituted the central tenets of his philosophy. Kozlov argues that Bukharin's guiding principle was the centrality of the peasantry to the victory and consolidation of the revolution, while Haynes asserts that Bukharin's analysis of state capitalism and the world imperialist system constituted the central tenet of Bukharin's philosophy. In his analysis, Kozlov criticizes both Cohen and Lewin for

concluding . . . that a new theory of the transition emerged, and that Bukharin (or Lenin) had somehow either "rethought" the nature of socialism or had in fact never advanced a coherent conception in the first place.⁴⁷

He argues that Cohen's and Lewin's mistake is to "construe socialism as a *policy* (hence when the policy changed, the underlying theory of socialism must necessarily have changed)."⁴⁸

(Emphasis in original) Kozlov claims that this mistake led both Lewin and Cohen to miss

the essence of what Bukharin (and Lenin) had been consistently arguing since 1918: socialism is not a policy, but a class process. It is a transitional period between capitalism and communism, and consequently combines elements of both systems in a contradictory manner.⁴⁹

Instead, Kozlov maintains that Bukharin's support for War Communism and then the NEP "is an indication of [Bukharin] confronting greatly altered circumstances, not a fundamental revision of basic principles regarding the peasantry's role in the transition to socialism."⁵⁰ In a detailed explanation of the centrality of the peasantry to the victory and consolidation of the revolution for Bukharin, Kozlov writes that:

a careful investigation reveals that Bukharin rather consistently maintained that the building of socialism entailed an active if problematic role for the peasantry (whether his analysis was realistic is another matter). As such, Bukharin's advocacy of one set of policies during War Communism, another in the early

⁴⁷ Kozlov, 121. Kozlov cites Cohen biography on Bukharin, 138-139, and Lewin's work, 13, 15-16, where they both argue that the "volte-face" took place in both Lenin and Bukharin.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 121.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 121.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 108.

phase of NEP, and yet a third in the late NEP is an indication of confronting greatly altered circumstances, not a fundamental revision of basic principles regarding the peasantry's role in the transition to socialism.⁵¹

Underlying Kozlov's analysis is his contention that War Communism evolved as a set of policies designed to meet the specific crisis of the Civil War. In no way was this policy an "*a priori* product of theory."⁵² (Emphasis in original) This, for Kozlov, explains how Bukharin, without revising his philosophical system, could support War Communism and the exploitation of the peasantry during the Civil War and then espouse the NEP and conciliation with the peasantry in the aftermath of the Civil War.⁵³ Kozlov claims "Bukharin's conceptualization of this transition period [NEP] to socialism predates the NEP, and is therefore not an ad hoc hypothesis designed for apologetic reason."⁵⁴ Therefore, any shift in Bukharin's support for different agrarian policies represented a policy shift, not a theoretical shift.⁵⁵

Haynes agrees that Bukharin did not experience the "volte-face" attributed to him by Cohen and Lewin. Echoing Kozlov, Haynes maintains that "Bukharin's own policies were not derived out of the air but arose directly from his previous analysis of capitalism" and that the transition from War Communism to NEP "involved a working-out of his [Bukharin's] earlier position in the new circumstances of the time."⁵⁶ In effect, Haynes contends that, "the tasks of a working class that had conquered power . . . were very different from those of a working class still struggling for power."⁵⁷ He argues that,

⁵¹ Ibid, 108.

⁵² Maurice Dobb, Soviet Economic Development Since 1917 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 120, quoted in Nicholas Kozlov, Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin: A Centenary Appraisal, ed. by Nicholas N. Kozlov and Eric D. Weitz (New York: Praeger Press, 1990), 110.

⁵³ Kozlov, 109-111.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 117.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 110-112.

⁵⁶ Haynes, 49.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 72.

Bukharin's position in the 1920s developed out of his earlier analysis [of capitalism] and in political terms, he came to define the center ground of the NEP politics, not the Right.⁵⁸

Therefore, Haynes maintains that Bukharin's policy shifts and his alleged philosophical "about-face" resulted from his theory of state capitalism within the imperialist system, a theory, he contends that is poorly understood by most Western historians. Haynes' asserts that Bukharin believed that in the period of state capitalism and imperialism, the state capitalist structure served as a bulwark to protect the domestic and monopolized state capitalist system against the other competing states in the imperialist world system. This state capitalist structure, through its dominance of the coercive institutions of the state, had the ability to organize and control the socialization process of the entire society while it eliminated the anarchic tendencies of capitalism. The result was the socialization of all groups in society into the dominant state capitalist system.⁵⁹

Haynes points out that Bukharin's work on state capitalism illustrates how that system would serve as the example for the proletarian state in the period between capitalism and socialism. He argues that Bukharin viewed the superstructure as dominant over its base in the state capitalist period and from this, Bukharin extrapolated that in the transition period the proletarian state could dominate its base in the same manner. Thus, once the revolution from below took place and the working class created its own state, this proletarian state could control and dominate society while, at the same time, bringing its antagonistic base into the socialist system. As Haynes puts it, for Bukharin, "The real centre of the transition was therefore the attempt consciously to control society."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ibid, 72.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 60, 80-82, 86, 91.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 88.

As important as Haynes' insight is, he does not explore this any further. What Haynes does not do is a detailed analysis of Bukharin's philosophical work from 1915-1925 in order to understand the philosophical continuity in Bukharin's work regarding the role of the state in the transition to socialism. Instead, his work focuses mainly on the economic and political debates within the Party during the NEP, examining Lenin's, Trotsky's and Preobrazhenskii's work and analyzing how each of these men either succeeded or failed in this period based on their individual analysis of the nature of the revolution and the necessary pace of industrialization. Haynes' ultimate goal in this work, as laid out in his "Introduction,"⁶¹ is to show:

that Bukharin was the one twentieth-century Marxist to provide the basis for a coherent analysis of capitalism and the transition to socialism which still stands the test of time. Secondly, we shall argue that in important respects Bukharin's analysis is still in advance of much contemporary discussion, and to the extent that it can be reappropriated it can advance that discussion.⁶²

Consequently, on one level, Haynes sets out to show that Bukharin created "a coherent analysis of the transition to socialism," which he does in his brief examination of Bukharin's philosophical work. However, he focuses mainly on Bukharin's work as a guide for the transition to socialism and the practicality of his work in understanding present day capitalism.

What then is the "true" legacy of Bukharin? Most importantly, what was Bukharin's philosophical foundation, beyond the issue of the state, which allowed him to support the seemingly contradictory policies of War Communism and the NEP while remaining consistent in his application of theory to politics?

This dissertation seeks to answer these questions by building on the insights of Kozlov and, in particular, Haynes' work, work that began the reexamination of Bukharin's place in the Revolution, within Bolshevism, and as the "liberal alternative" to Stalin. Though their work

⁶¹ Ibid, 1-7.

⁶² Ibid, 4.

broke new ground in the study of Bukharin and his legacy, Cohen's thesis that Bukharin represented the "liberal" alternative within Bolshevism to Stalin and Stalinism is still widely accepted both within the West and within the former Soviet Union. From the beginnings of de-Stalinization under Khrushchev, through perestroika, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Bukharin became the iconic figure of the alternative road to socialism.⁶³ Thomas Sherlock, in "Politics and History under Gorbachev," (1988) argues

Bukharin's rehabilitation has placed his conciliatory rural program, as well as his advocacy of moderate cultural and political lines, in direct opposition not only to the Stalinist "revolution from above," which dramatically expanded the bureaucratic reach of the state, but also to the terror of the 1930s, which destroyed the party as an autonomous political institution. The resurrected image of Bukharin is seen as a powerful antidote to the prevailing "Stalinist" relationship between the Soviet party-state and society and to "bureaucratic centralism" in the party.⁶⁴

Martin Malia agrees and, in his article, "A Fatal Logic," (1993) writes:

This is why the retrospective cult of Bukharin and the NEP figured so prominently in revisionist writing and why the field, almost unanimously, went so wild over "Gorby," who was supposed to return the system, over the head of the Stalinist "aberration," to the "Bukharin alternative" and thus make the whole experiment at last turn out right.⁶⁵

Sidney Heitman calls this image into question in his essay "Between Lenin and Stalin: Nikolai Bukharin."⁶⁶ Heitman argues that even though "Stalin turned against Bukharin and repudiated some of his specific policies applicable to the late nineteen-twenties; he retained the

⁶³ For a sampling of Bukharin's importance during the period of "Perestroika" see: "Taking a Closer Look at Bukharin," The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, XL, No 5 (1988), 4-8, 23; "Bukharin Hailed for 'Humanistic' Views," The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, XL, No. 41 (1988), 16-17, 24. See also Oscar J. Bandelin, Return of the NEP: The False Promise of Leninism and the Failure of Perestroika (Westport, CT.: Praeger, 2002), 105. Bandelin argues that Cohen's work on Bukharin became central to Soviet Intellectuals in the period of Perestroika.

⁶⁴ Thomas Sherlock, "Politics and History under Gorbachev," Problems of Communism (May-August 1988), 24.

⁶⁵ Martin Malia, "A Fatal Logic," The National Interest, Spring 1993, [cited 15 July 2005] [database online]; available from Questia, <http://www.questia.com/>, 80+.

⁶⁶ Sidney Heitman, "Between Lenin and Stalin: Nikolai Bukharin," 77-90.

essential core of Bukharin's thought."⁶⁷ Heitman comes to this conclusion by studying, among Bukharin's numerous works, those he believes "merit special mention as outstanding landmarks in the development of Bolshevik thought."⁶⁸ Among these works a number are crucial for the present study. These are Imperialism and the World Economy (1915), "Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State" (1916), The ABC of Communism (1919, with Preobrazhenskii), and Historical Materialism (1921). Without a thorough understanding of these particular works, Heitman argues, and this work agrees, it is impossible to understand the development of Bukharin's theoretical work, especially regarding the role of the state in the transition to socialism.

However, while providing a foundation for this study, these works alone do not provide a complete analysis of Bukharin's philosophical thought concerning the state and the transition to socialism. Therefore, this study will examine these works, along with Bukharin's major work of his revolutionary period, The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period (1920), and the two most important works of his evolutionary period during the NEP, "The New Course in Economic Policy" (1921), and The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance (1925). By doing this analysis, this dissertation will make clear that although Bukharin may well have differed from Stalin in the exercise of violent coercion; it was Bukharin, not Stalin, who formulated the theory that justified the use of unbridled state power to transform society, which Stalin utilized in his "Revolution from Above."⁶⁹

Therefore, this study begins its analysis of Bukharin's major works of the pre-revolutionary period with Imperialism and the World Economy and "Towards a Theory of the Imperialist State." These two works are crucial to this study, as they illuminate Bukharin's early

⁶⁷ Ibid, 89.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 80-81.

⁶⁹ Marc Herold, "The Contribution of Bukharin" in Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin: A Centenary Appraisal, 16. Here Herold argues that Bukharin, not Lenin, or Luxemburg, pointed out the importance of the state during the imperialist epoch, in economic organization and highlighted the authoritarian nature of the modern state.

thinking on the changed nature of the state in the era of imperialism. They also provide a philosophical basis to judge Bukharin's post-revolutionary writings, for it was in these early writings Bukharin first sought to understand how the historical role of the state had changed so dramatically and what this change meant for the realization of socialism. These works also provide insight into how the different interpretations of Marx, in particular Rudolf Hilferding's analysis of finance capitalism and the monopolization that took place under it, influenced Bukharin's thinking on the role the proletarian state would play in the transition period and his eventual development of a coherent theory for that transition.

This study then analyzes Bukharin's three major works of the revolutionary period--The ABC of Communism (1919, with Preobrazhenskii), The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period (1920), and Historical Materialism (1921). The study of these works provides us with an insight into Bukharin's intellectual and political evolution and the philosophical tenets that explain his support for War Communism, which, in this period, puts him on the "left" of Bolshevism. What also becomes clear in the analysis of these works is Bukharin's development of an original synthesis of revolutionary and revisionist Marxism that explains the peculiarities of the transition period from capitalism to socialism in Russia.

In the final phase, this study analyzes "The New Course in Economic Policy" (1921) and The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance (1925). These two works reflect Bukharin's most important theoretical writings of the NEP years, the period where Cohen claims Bukharin broke with his "radical" past and cast aside the "illusions" about the transition to socialism. However, when viewed in the context of his previous writings, these works will make clear that it was Bukharin's understanding of the changed nature of the state in the period of finance capitalism and imperialism that underlay his philosophical thought on the transition to

socialism. This appreciation of the changed nature of the state allowed him to throw his support behind War Communism in one era and then the NEP in another.

As important as Bukharin's thinking on the state was, Bukharin actually accomplished something greater in these works and throughout this period. Heitman writes, "In these and other works, Bukharin achieved a remarkable synthesis between classical Marxian social theory and Bolshevik revolutionary experience"⁷⁰ by placing "far greater emphasis than Marx and Engels had upon the role of conscious leadership . . . substituting the actions of the Communist Parties as primary determinants of revolution."⁷¹ Without appreciating Bukharin's synthesis of the competing visions of Marxism, and his analysis of the state and the role of the Party in the transition to socialism, our understanding of Bukharin's political philosophy remains incomplete.

Therefore, rather than presenting a political history of Bukharin, which others have already done, this work seeks to fill this void by analyzing how Bukharin's philosophical conception of the state affected his political support for different policies in Revolutionary Russia. Specifically, this dissertation examines how Bukharin developed, and adhered to, a consistent political philosophy, which had at its heart his conception of the role of the "Leviathan" state, which Bukharin argued, came to the fore in the period before the Great War. This study will make it clear that once the Bolsheviks took power, Bukharin based his actions and his support for policies on his understanding of the nature and the role of the state and state power in the transition to socialism. For Bukharin, the state, as the superstructure, had the capacity to determine not only the base, but also class relations. This, at its simplest, is what links the Bukharin who supported War Communism with the Bukharin who supported the NEP.

⁷⁰ Sidney Heitman, "Between Lenin and Stalin: Nikolai Bukharin," 82.

⁷¹ Ibid, 89.

However, this is but one part of the explanation. This study also argues that it was Bukharin's innovative synthesis of the revolutionary and evolutionary strains of Marxism, which when combined with Bukharin's original work on the state, enabled him to support both War Communism and the NEP. Rather than existing as separate and contradictory policies, War Communism and the NEP were integral and complimentary parts of the revolutionary transition to socialism, a complementarity that united the conflicting Marxist visions while positing the role of a strong, centralized, and all-powerful state in the transition period.

Therefore, this study will argue that it was Bukharin's analysis of the state, particularly in the period of "state capitalism," that provides the understanding of how Bukharin could support very different policies in the early period of Revolutionary Russia without compromising the underlying consistency of his political philosophy. This study will also argue that this analysis flows from Bukharin's original synthesis of the competing visions within Marxism that allows Bukharin to develop a coherent philosophical system for the transition from capitalism to socialism.

This synthesis of Marxism and Bukharin's views on the nature and role of the state played an important part in the formation of the Bolsheviks' view of the state and state power. However, it is beyond the focus of this study to explore fully that influence, although some forays into this are essential. Nevertheless, in the hope that future historians will rise to the challenge, this work explores in part that influence and makes particular note of the ways in which Bukharin's views of the state helped to create the philosophical foundation upon which the Bolsheviks and eventually Stalin built their policies.

1. THE STATE IN MARXIST THEORY

1.1. Introduction

One significant problem facing students of Bukharin is how to explain his seemingly anarchistic desire to smash the state during the Revolution and the Civil War, and then his desire to use the state to facilitate an evolutionary transition to socialism after the Revolution and the Civil War. Almost as troubling and puzzling to many historians is his open, even enthusiastic support for the violent, coercive policies of War Communism and then his equally enthusiastic championing of the NEP and its peaceful and gradualist policies.

This study asserts that Bukharin's views on the role of the state and state power in the transition period mirrored the tension within Marxism regarding the nature of the post-revolutionary state in the transition period and his support for the differing policies reflected that tension. What it is also contends and will demonstrate in this chapter is that Bukharin was really the first theoretician who not only, as Heitman argues, "achieved a remarkable synthesis between classical Marxian social theory and Bolshevik revolutionary experience,"¹ but also achieved a synthesis between the conflict in Marxism regarding the revolutionary and evolutionary path to socialism. In accomplishing this synthesis, Bukharin developed a political philosophy that enabled him to support the seemingly contradictory policies of War Communism and the NEP, a

¹ Heitman, "Between Lenin and Stalin: Nikolai Bukharin," 82.

philosophy that had at its core a powerful, centralized state that incorporated the contradictory features of capitalism and socialism in the transition to socialism.

1.2. Which Marx? Which Marxism?

Richard Hunt, in his landmark two-volume work, The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels: Marxism and Totalitarian Democracy, 1818-1850,² and The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels: Classical Marxism, 1850-1895³ clearly perceived that, in essence, two different visions of the road to socialism and, consequently, two different conceptions of the state manifest themselves in Marxist theory. Hunt argues that Marx and Engels, in their separate analyses, came to two very different conclusions regarding the nature of the state. He writes that

Marx originated the conception we may call the “parasite state,” whose essence lies in its estrangement from the host society that it governs as a self-serving hierarchy of professional administrators.⁴

In this conception, the state existed to serve its own interests and did “not involve any notion of class rule;”⁵ the state actually stood above the class conflict. According to Hunt, Marx and Engels would use this conception of the state when analyzing the absolutism of Louis Bonaparte and for the transition period “between bourgeois and proletarian rule.”⁶

² Richard N. Hunt, The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels: Marxism and Totalitarian Democracy, 1818-1850 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974)

³ Richard N. Hunt, The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels: Classical Marxism, 1850-1895 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984)

⁴ Hunt, The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels: Marxism and Totalitarian Democracy, 1818-1850, 125. Here Hunt cites a number of other writers who discerned Marx’ conception of the state. Hunt also argues that he takes the label of “parasitic state” from Marx’s writings on the state of Louis Napoleon in France. For more on Marx’s conception of the parasite state in this work see 37-38, 39, 44, 45, 59-74. Also for further explication on Marx and the “parasite state” see Hunt: The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels: Classical Marxism, 1850-1895, 7-8, 11, 26-63.

⁵ Ibid, 126.

⁶ Ibid, 129.

Hunt points out that Engels, reflecting on his experiences in England, believed that because “power rested in the hands of the parliament controlled by the propertied classes,”⁷ the state represented class rule. It was “Engels’ theory of the class state [that] would be used for the principal periods in the Marxist historical schema—feudal, bourgeois, and anticipated proletarian”⁸ that found its way into The Communist Manifesto and would later underpin both Bukharin’s and Lenin’s understanding of the capitalist state.

However, these theories of the capitalist state do not stand alone, nor are they mutually exclusive. Hunt points out “the critical necessity of using both theories simultaneously in an effort to comprehend Marx and Engels’ vision of the future polity after the proletarian revolution.”⁹ The main difference between the two, he argues, was the length of the transition period and the policies needed in that period. Hunt writes that

Marx’s parasite state would be more or less immediately transcended as professionalism gave way to popular self-administration. But Engels class state would linger for a while in the form of organized coercive power—the nonprofessional workers’ militia—required to constrain the restorative efforts of the expropriated bourgeoisie.¹⁰

What is clear from Hunt’s analysis is that each theory of the state could explain different periods in the life of a society in the transition to socialism. This created both flexibility and confusion in understanding the role of the state in the transition period; flexibility in adapting theory to practice, but confusion over what constituted the proper road to socialism.¹¹

⁷ Ibid, 125.

⁸ Ibid, 129.

⁹ Ibid, 130.

¹⁰ Ibid, 130.

¹¹ For a more extensive reading of Hunt on the issue of the “parasite” and “class” state, see his The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels: Classical Marxism, 1850-1895. In particular, for more work on the “parasite” state read 27-63. For more on the “class” state see 64-98.

Hunt also discerned another “tension” in Marxism. He viewed the writings of Marx and Engels as extremely radical in the 1848 period of “blood-and-thunder revolutionism.”¹² In this period and during the Paris Commune, Marx and Engels supported violent revolution to overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie and establish the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat.”¹³ The Dictatorship, according to Engels, existed to secure the achievements of the revolution (in this case, the 1848 March Revolution in the German states) and was “a necessary consequence of the interregnum situation created by any revolution.”¹⁴ In essence, Marx and Engels, by 1850, argued that all power would rest in the “dictatorship”¹⁵ as it took any action necessary, including violent repression, to ensure the public welfare and to protect the proletarian revolution.¹⁶ Thus, the Engels and Marx of these periods postulated that, after the revolution, proletarian rule would rest on the armed might of the workers and the use of terror against the bourgeoisie and all reactionaries.¹⁷

However, Hunt argues that Marx and Engels, outside of 1848-1850 and 1871 and the Paris Commune, developed a very different conception of how the working class would achieve power and realize socialism. He points out that

With the emergence of stable democratic institutions in parts of Western Europe, the two men began to speak for the first time of a possible peaceful and legal assumption of power by the workers in the most advanced countries.¹⁸

¹² Hunt, The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels: Marxism and Totalitarian Democracy, 1818-1850, 133.

¹³ Ibid, 212-336. In these pages, Hunt makes the case that Marx and Engels conception of the Revolution, the Dictatorship and the transition were conditioned by the period within which they operated.

¹⁴ Ibid, 292.

¹⁵ Ibid, 290-293. Hunt points out that the term “dictatorship applied to the rule of the proletariat was used for the first time in March 1850.”

¹⁶ Ibid, 314-315. On these pages Hunt shows how Marx laid out the tasks of the proletarian dictatorship and how the Americans and English “reformists” were wrong in not accepting the need for repression after the revolution.

¹⁷ Ibid, 316. See also Hunt, The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels: Classical Marxism, 1850-1895, 201. For a further explication of the use of violence read pages 200-211 in this volume.

¹⁸ Hunt, The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels: Classical Marxism, 1850-1895, 299.

They then theorized that backward countries, such as Russia, would “ride the coattails” of the socialist revolutions in the West.¹⁹ During this long period of transition, Marx and Engels argued that the proletariat should wring all the concessions it could from the ruling classes on its way to the conquering of state power. In the developed capitalist nations, the workers would accomplish this through participation in the political process. Hunt argues that what Marx made clear in this period was that,

No socialist . . . need predict that there will be a bloody revolution in Russia, Germany, Austria, and possibly Italy if the Italians keep on in the policy they are now pursuing. The deeds of the French Revolution may be enacted again in those countries. That is apparent to any political student. But those revolutions will be made by the majority. No revolution can be made by a party, *but By a Nation*.²⁰ (Emphasis in original)

In other words, the socialist revolution could occur, but it need not be violent and the nation would lead it, not a “vanguard.” After Marx’s death, the Revisionists, such as Bernstein, took this to mean that a violent revolution was no longer necessary and formulated their theories on the transition to socialism accordingly. However, Hunt notes that the Revisionists came to this conclusion because they “muddled” the elements of Marxism together and did not understand that Marx still believed in revolution.²¹ Still, based on this analysis, it is clear that there exists an element in Marxism that theorized a “possible” peaceful transition to socialism and an element that theorizes a transition period where the workers, whether they come to power, peacefully, or violently would use the Dictatorship of the Proletariat to realize socialism.

Adam Ulam accepts that this ambiguity exists in Marxism and writes that with the death of Engels in 1895,

¹⁹ Ibid, 308.

²⁰ H., Marx: Chicago Tribune (05/01/79) “Interview with Karl Marx, 1999, http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/bio/media/marx/79_01_05.htm (8 March 2005).

²¹ Hunt, The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels: Classical Marxism, 1850-1895, 360-361.

the canon of Marxism was frozen, and the vital questions of the socialist role in parliamentarianism, of the nature of transition from capitalism, and of socialism itself, remained to be fought over by the Revisionists and the orthodox Marxists. The fight, although accompanied by continuous invocation of the scriptures, points up the really enigmatic and ambiguous nature of the Marxist argument as it touches the actual problem of socialism.²²

What Ulam discerns is that the “ambiguity” and “confusion” in Marxist thought split the revolutionary movement and led to conflicting visions of the proper road to socialism. However, this

apparent enigma disappears if one refuses to be distracted by the revolutionary phraseology of Marxism into believing that *from the economic point of view* the stage of socialism represents a drastic break with capitalism. Quite the contrary: socialism, once it assumes power, has as its mission the fullest development of the productive resources of society.²³ (Emphasis in original)

In essence, Ulam argues that within Marxism a tendency exists that is “productivist” in nature and accepts that the liberation of humanity exists in the distant future after a long, evolutionary transition period. To illustrate his point, Ulam cites a passage in The Communist Manifesto where Marx and Engels write that

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organized as a ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible.²⁴

A close reading of this section of The Communist Manifesto supports Ulam’s contention. Marx and Engels explicitly laid out a “10 Point” program for the transition period. These points include the “establishment of industrial armies,” the “extension of factories and instruments of production,” “centralizations of communication and transport in the hands of the state,” and

²² Adam Ulam, The Unfinished Revolution (New York: Random House, 1960), 44-45.

²³ Ibid, 45.

²⁴ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The Communist Manifesto (New York: International Publishers, Inc., 1998), 30.

“combination of education with industrial production.”²⁵ Only when “all production has been concentrated in the hands of . . . the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character,” and the proletariat will actually have “abolished its own supremacy as a class.”²⁶ Therefore, even though the goal of socialism was to create the environment “in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all,”²⁷ i.e. the emancipation of labor and humanity, a transition period would exist where socialism would become “*capitalism without the capitalists*.”²⁸ (Emphasis in original)

Ulam writes that

there are two consistent lines in Marx: one, of a revolutionary always against the status quo, feudal, capitalist, or whatever; the other, of a believer in the immutable laws of material development, which no *political* revolutionary could affect. At first, in Western Europe of the 1840's, it was easy to be both; later on it became increasingly difficult. It fell to his successors to try to reconcile the logic of the theory with its revolutionary emotion, in a world quite different from the one in which Marx and Engels had spent their formative years.²⁹ (Emphasis in original)

Thus, Ulam, like Hunt, locates Marx and his theoretical system in two different eras. The revolutionary Marx represents the anarchist reaction to early industrial capitalism where “the ideal society for revolutionary Marxism is the one that is “arrested” in its response to industrialization,”³⁰ that is, one that has not yet fully developed into a mature industrialized society, along with the socialization process that goes with industrialization and urbanization. However, the conundrum, as Ulam points out, is that once that maturation process occurs as it did in Germany, England, and the United States,

the same forces that had made the worker abandon the mere spirit of opposition to the state and industry, the mere principle of the workers' association as a

²⁵ Ibid, 30-31.

²⁶ Ibid, 31.

²⁷ Ibid, 31.

²⁸ Ulam, 45.

²⁹ Ibid, 55-56.

³⁰ Ibid, 153.

substitute for any more comprehensive philosophy of politics and society, make him chafe under doctrinaire Marxism and push him toward a more pragmatic and evolutionary type of socialism.³¹

What is of significance here is that, like Hunt, Ulam posits that there exists a body of Marxist thought that is rooted in the early industrial and very revolutionary period and another body of Marxist thought that is rooted in more democratic and more mature industrial states where reform becomes possible. One strain would allow “orthodox Marxists” to justify violent revolution, and the other would enable the Revisionists to justify their peaceful and evolutionary theories and policies. Ulam argues that, by 1898, no middle ground or theory existed, to reconcile the violent, revolutionary wing with the gradualist, reformist wing. Therefore, Marxists faced a choice:

Either, like Bernstein, you accept the logic of the doctrine as leading toward an industrialized state and democracy, or you seize the spirit of revolution and forget about the “stages of material development.”³²

This study will show that the genius of Bukharin was to synthesize these two conflicting interpretations of Marxism, the revolutionary and evolutionary, into his own unique theory of revolution from below that would destroy the capitalist state, while adding the role of an all-powerful, proletarian state that would facilitate the evolutionary transition to socialism.

John Willoughby agrees with Hunt and Ulam arguing, in his essay “Confronting the New Leviathan,” that Marx and Engels left an “ambiguous legacy” regarding the state, which served Bukharin and the Bolsheviks poorly.³³ Willoughby claims that the conflicting visions of the state in Marxism lead one to the conclusion that:

On the one hand, the state is a reflection of antagonistic class interests; on the other hand, the new Leviathan—the monopoly capitalist, imperialist state—is a

³¹ Ibid, 153.

³² Ibid, 155.

³³ John Willoughby, “Confronting the New Leviathan: The Contradictory Legacy of Bukharin’s Theory of the State,” in Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin: A Centenary Appraisal, 96-98.

powerful organizer of class exploitation . . . the latter perspective suggest that state agents can participate in the creation as well as in the maintenance of the capitalist mode of exploitation.³⁴

Willoughby also cites the tension between Marx's early conception (1850) of the base-superstructure, and Engels questioning of that conception in Anti-Dühring.³⁵ He claims that in, Anti-Dühring, Engels had turned Marx on his head, by pointing out that "the state organizes class relations, rather than the reverse."³⁶ Willoughby concludes, "We could not find a clearer inversion of the base-superstructure metaphor."³⁷

These insights regarding the new "Leviathan" and the reversed nature of the base-superstructure played a role in Bukharin's analysis of development of the finance capitalist state and imperialism, especially after he read Rudolf Hilferding. As this study will show, Bukharin would eventually accept the concept of the "Leviathan" capitalist state that could organize society and had the ability to reverse the base-superstructure metaphor in the period of "organized state capitalism." For Bukharin, this new type of state, when transformed into the "Leviathan" proletarian state, as the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat," would facilitate the transition to socialism.

Neil Harding, in his essay "Socialism, Society and the Organic Labour State,"³⁸ also argues that Marx had two very different and conflicting conceptions of the post-revolutionary state. He claims that the "commune state" reflected Marx's desire for human liberation and assumed that capitalism had created the necessary preconditions for socialism prior to the revolution.³⁹ Therefore, according to Harding, since capitalism had already created the material

³⁴ Ibid, 98.

³⁵ Ibid, 96-97.

³⁶ Ibid, 97.

³⁷ Ibid, 97.

³⁸ Neil Harding, "Socialism, Society and the Organic Labour State," in The State and Socialist Society, ed. Neil Harding (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 1-45.

³⁹ Ibid, 8.

conditions for socialism, the goal of the commune state was “*the transformation of the patterns of authority within society*”⁴⁰ (emphasis in original) and the emancipation of labor.⁴¹ Marx pointed to the Paris Commune as an example of what this type of state might look like,⁴² and argued that “The Communal Constitution would have restored to the social body all the forces hitherto absorbed by the State parasite feeding upon, and clogging the free movement of, society.”⁴³ Thus, according to Marx, society would amputate the repressive powers of the parasite state and society would then take on the legitimate functions of the state and begin the transformation of all relations in society.⁴⁴ In this way, the revolutionary state would then transform the social and political patterns of authority within the post-revolutionary society, thus paving the way for the future communist society.

Harding, like Ulam, argues that Marx’s competing conception of the state was “productivist” in nature and assumed a powerful central state controlled by the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat.” This model reflected Marx’s absorption “with the relationship of men to *things* - to their forces of production.”⁴⁵ (Emphasis in original) That is, in the period of reconstruction after the revolution, the state would perform the tasks that capitalism left unfinished, while at the same time smashing the old relationships of domination and subordination. Therefore, instead of the primary Marxist goal of human liberation, the productivist Marx realized that “the object of society was productive activity not freedom.”⁴⁶ This does not mean that total human freedom was no longer Marx’s final goal. What it means, according to Harding, is that, in this period, Marx believed that a loss of relative autonomy and liberty was necessary and inevitable as the

⁴⁰ Ibid, 13.

⁴¹ Karl Marx, The Civil War in France: The Paris Commune (NY, NY, International Publishers, 1968), 59-61.

⁴² Ibid, 57-69.

⁴³ Ibid, 59.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 58-59.

⁴⁵ Harding, 12-13.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 12-13.

commune state was incompatible with the maintenance of the modern industrial system. The productivist state had to create the material wealth necessary for socialism and to absorb the former bourgeois elements into the new socialist society.⁴⁷ The ten-point program in The Communist Manifesto, cited earlier, clearly illustrates Marx and Engels belief in the role of a powerful state in the transition period. In this period, the state would organize and direct the society until the state makes itself superfluous and then withers away.⁴⁸

Stephen Hanson, in Time and Revolution,⁴⁹ concurs with these assessments and argues that Marx presented “two wholly irreconcilable visions of political action.”⁵⁰ He correctly points out that: “There are two distinct economic alternatives that might be derived from Marx’s critique of capitalist exploitation: one based on the rational conception of time, and one based on a charismatic conception of socialism as beyond ordinary time constraints.”⁵¹ In other words, he argues that there was the Marx who “counsels patience in order to make gradual progress within existing bourgeois institutions” and the Marx who “calls for an immediate break with human “prehistory” through a revolutionary overthrow, not only of bourgeois society, but of rational time constraints on human action.”⁵²

Lewis Siegelbaum believes that there were three different visions of the transition to socialism that arose from Marx’s writings. Like Harding, Siegelbaum claims that Marx believed that, regardless of the class origins of the state, the centralization process that took place under capitalism would make it relatively easy for the working class to facilitate the transition to

⁴⁷ Ibid, 12-13.

⁴⁸ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1948), 30-31.

⁴⁹ Stephen E. Hanson, Time and Revolution: Marxism and the Design of Soviet Institutions (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997)

⁵⁰ Ibid, 47.

⁵¹ Ibid, 50.

⁵² Ibid, 47.

socialism once it seized state power.⁵³ In the second vision, and utilizing Marx's analysis of the Paris Commune, Siegelbaum argues that the goal of the working class was to destroy the state and then utilize the commune state to remake society and all societal relations.⁵⁴

Unlike Harding, who viewed the Dictatorship of the Proletariat as exclusive to the "productivist" Marx, Siegelbaum argues that, in Marxism, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat would combine the tasks of the commune state and the productivist state.⁵⁵ That is, the proletariat, through the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, would carry out of the reorganization of society and the remaking of the societal relations, according to the vision of the commune state, while using the proletarian state power to create the economic foundations for socialism during the transition period.⁵⁶

One question for this study then is "How did Bukharin think about Marxism, the state, and the role of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in the transition period?" To answer this, we need go forward to Bukharin's 1924 speech, "Lenin as a Marxist."⁵⁷ This was Bukharin's ingenious defense of the NEP, in which he ostensibly pulls together the various strands of Lenin's thought to lay out his own coherent philosophy of "Revolutionary Marxism," the state, and the transition to socialism. In this essay, as will become evident later in this work, Bukharin acknowledged the tension within Marxist thought as regards the revolution, the state, and the transition to socialism. He also argued that there were "different epochs in Marxism," each with roots in different periods of historical development and different phenomenon in both Europe

⁵³ Lewis H. Siegelbaum, Soviet State and Society Between Revolutions, 1918-1929 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 9.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 8-9.

⁵⁶ Willoughby sees something similar and argues that "the Marxian socialist tradition had fused with it two distinct vision of the socialist future: radical democracy and decentralization, on the one hand, and centralizing coordination on the other." Willoughby, "Bukharin's Theory of the State," 99.

⁵⁷ Nikolai Bukharin, "Lenin as a Marxist" in In Defence of the Russian Revolution, ed. Al Ricahardson (London: Porcupine Press, 1995), 249-277.

and Russia. In this speech and his works, Bukharin explicated his own synthesis of Reformist and Revolutionary Marxist thought from these different epochs, uniting them into a coherent theory of revolution and the transition to socialism. He also incorporated Rudolf Hilferding's original contribution on finance capitalism, the nature of the state, and state capitalism into this synthesis.

His synthesis of these different strains of Marxism meant that, in one period, Bukharin could argue, like Marx, that the Bolsheviks could compress long-term historical processes into a very short time and leap over stages of historical development to realize socialism (the Revolution and War Communism), and in another period (the NEP), again like Marx, counsel patience. In essence, because of this synthesis, Bukharin could argue, in one period, for the rapid realization of the commune state and then in a later period accept that the road to socialism had to follow a long road of evolutionary socialism.⁵⁸

Before this study can delve fully into Bukharin's analysis of revolution and the transition to socialism, it is crucial to address and analyze two Marxist thinkers of the late 19th Century, Eduard Bernstein and Rudolf Hilferding, who began "Rethinking of the Road to Socialism."

⁵⁸ Heitman argues that Bukharin created a "highly flexible, adaptable ideology that could be invoked under a wide variety of conditions unforeseen by Marx and Engels." This echoes what Bukharin himself wrote in "Lenin as a Marxist." See Sidney Heitman, "Between Lenin and Stalin: Nikolai Bukharin," 81.

2. RETHINKING THE ROAD TO SOCIALISM

2.1. Introduction

Prior to the Great War, the long anticipated communist revolution seemed no closer than in 1848 when Marx and Engels wrote The Communist Manifesto. Their anticipated stratification of capitalist societies into two antagonistic blocs, one the ever-growing and destitute proletariat and the other the ever-shrinking, monopolistic capitalists, had not occurred. It was true that some elements of the European working class found themselves in conditions no better than their counterparts of the mid-19th Century, but in England and Germany, two of the most advanced industrialized nations, the working class had made great strides. The state had legalized trade unions, the standard of living rose for many workers and, by the early 20th century, the Labour Party in Britain and SPD (Socialist Party of Germany) became active participants in the political and economic life of their respective nations. Most importantly, these gains came through the extension of suffrage and the parliamentary system. This new development in capitalism had far-reaching implications for socialist theoreticians of this era as they began the reevaluation of Marxism in the face of this new reality.

Two of the most influential theorists of this period, especially for Bukharin, Eduard Bernstein and Rudolf Hilferding, embarked on this reevaluation and began to reexamine capitalist development and the changes that had taken place in advanced capitalist countries such as England and Germany. Their observations led them, independently, to conclude that the

working class could achieve socialism peacefully by taking over the capitalist state and by putting the capitalist economic system at the service of the working class. “*For a revisionist like Eduard Bernstein, the working class could roll back the ruling class and bend the state to its will*”¹ (emphasis in original) because he “*pictured the state as having autonomy from capitalism as a mode of production (since it could transcend it) but totally subordinate to classes whose instrument it was.*”² (Emphasis in original) For Hilferding the development of the monopoly capitalism and the merging of the state and capital during the period of finance capitalism led him to argue that the working class would need only to take over the state and then begin the march to socialism, as finance capitalism had already monopolized and rationalized the economic system.

Their analyses also differed on how the working class would achieve socialism in these changed circumstances. Bernstein argued that the extension of democracy and universal suffrage would enable the working class to take over the capitalist state via the ballot box. Hilferding contended that the struggle against imperialism would lead to the victory of the working class and once the proletariat controlled state power, it would put society on the road to socialism.

Eduard Bernstein began his revision of Marx in the late nineteenth century and based his major work, Evolutionary Socialism,³ (1899) on his analysis of the changed nature of capitalism. In this work, Bernstein examined the changes in capitalism since 1848, i.e. the period of the Revolutionary Marx, to discover how and why these processes had not resulted in revolution.

In his analysis, Bernstein argued that, contrary to revolutionary Marxist doctrine, conditions had actually improved for the working class in the advanced capitalist countries, as

¹ Haynes, 27.

² Haynes, 27.

³ Eduard Bernstein, Evolutionary Socialism: a Criticism and Affirmation (New York: Schocken Books, 1961)

the working class had gained political rights and expanded those rights. This led Bernstein to what many Marxists viewed as heresy, the belief that instead of experiencing violent revolution, capitalist countries would gradually evolve into socialism as the proletariat, through universal suffrage and the parliamentary system, gradually took control of the capitalist state. Then once in control of that state the working class would bend the state and its economic and political system to its own ends, i.e. the realization of socialism. Thus, the violent revolution that Marx had predicted need not occur because universal suffrage and democracy would enable the working class to achieve socialism. Significantly and presciently, Bernstein also provided stark warnings against a premature and violent socialist revolution. The efficacy of these warnings only became clear to the Bolsheviks, and in particular, to Bukharin, once the Bolsheviks conquered state power and faced the task of “building socialism” in Russia.

In 1910, Rudolf Hilferding, in his seminal work, Finance Capitalism,⁴ also sought to explain how and why capitalism had succeeded in preventing or holding back the revolution. The explanation for Hilferding lay in the development of what he called “finance capitalism.” He argued that, in the era of finance capitalism, the anarchic tendencies of market capitalism disappeared as industrial and finance capital became intertwined with the banks taking on the role of supreme organizers of the economy through their control of credit. This analysis meant that the individual capitalist state had become a giant cartel in which the power of the finance capitalist state dominated and even acquired the ability to socialize its antagonistic base, the working class, into the values of the finance capitalist state.

⁴ Rudolf Hilferding, Finance Capital: A Study of the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development; trans. Morris Watnick and Sam Gordon, ed. Tom Bottomore (England: Routledge & Kegan Paul, plc, 1981)

Taking these developments as his starting point, Hilferding believed that finance capitalism had created the pre-conditions for a socialist society and economy by eliminating the chaos of the market and because of the interaction of

those processes of concentration which, on the one hand eliminate free competition through the formation of cartels and trust, and on the other bring bank and industrial capital into an ever more intimate relationship.⁵

Therefore, Hilferding argued, the proletariat could simply take over the state and then convert the economic system to socialist production and distribution. In 1918, Hilferding changed his view of the state, and argued that the state structure was “neutral” and existed as a mediator between the competing blocs within capitalist society. As William Smaldone, in, “Rudolf Hilferding and the Total State,” writes,

Thus, in Hilferding's view, the parliamentary republic provided a political framework in which the state had become a neutral institution subject to the popular will. Violent revolution was not necessary to achieve socialism. Instead, the working class could now use governmental institutions and trade unions to expand its power and bring about gradual political and economic reforms. A socialist society would be built by evolutionary rather than revolutionary means.⁶

Therefore, although by 1918 he came to view the state somewhat differently, Hilferding consistently argued that the proletariat would not need to destroy the state. Rather it could simply take over the state and all its organs and transform the rationalized, monopolized capitalist economic system into a socialist system.

Although Bukharin rejected Bernstein’s argument that socialism would evolve peacefully from capitalism and Hilferding’s contention that the working class could achieve socialism by simply taking control of the capitalist state structure in its struggle against imperialism, both men’s ideas had a significant impact on his thinking. Eventually he would incorporate elements of their analysis into his own work on the transition period. Although he was no Revisionist,

⁵ William Smaldone, “Rudolf Hilferding and the Total State.” *The Historian* 57.1 (1994): 97-107.

⁶ *Ibid*, 98.

Bukharin, during the NEP, found himself adopting revisionist style policies by incorporating Bernstein's analysis of the long-term processes necessary to achieve socialism. Hilferding's work provided Bukharin with a guide on how the proletariat would use state power to facilitate the transition to socialism. In order to appreciate the impact of both men's theoretical writings on Bukharin let us now consider their work in depth.

2.1.1. Eduard Bernstein and Evolutionary Socialism

Unable to believe in finalities at all, I cannot believe in a final aim of socialism. But I strongly believe in the socialist movement, in the march forward of the working classes, who step by step must work out their emancipation by changing society from the domain of a commercial landholding oligarchy to a real democracy which in all its departments is guided by the interests of those who work and create.

Eduard Bernstein⁷

Appreciating Eduard Bernstein's rethinking of the road to socialism is crucial to understanding Bukharin's political and philosophical struggles during the transition to socialism. Richard Day believes that "Bernstein contributed to the inventory of ideas upon which Bukharin drew."⁸ Alfred Meyer argues that Bukharin developed a "coherent and impressive, and also rather modern, sociological system," that owed a great debt to Bernstein's Evolutionary Socialism.⁹ Consequently, understanding the analysis that led Bernstein to accept evolutionary socialism helps one appreciate Bukharin's own ideas about the long and gradual transition to

⁷ Bernstein, viii.

⁸ Richard B. Day, introduction to N. I. Bukharin, Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism, trans., ed. Richard B. Day (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1982), xxxiv.

⁹ Alfred Meyer, introduction to Historical Materialism, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 6a.

socialism under the NEP. This appreciation also provides a clearer understanding of why, in 1929, the Party charged Bukharin with the same heresy as Bernstein.¹⁰

Peter Gay believes that Bernstein's exile and his experiences in England during the 1890s significantly influenced his shift towards Revisionism. He writes that of "significance for Bernstein's intellectual development was the atmosphere in England which was, one might say, almost professionally reformist. Bernstein found almost daily evidence of the 'free air of England.'"¹¹ He cites one particular event that had a profound impact on and conditioned Bernstein's theories of evolutionary socialism.

London factory workers had gone out and the employers were importing scabs from Germany. The trade unions asked Bernstein to address the strikebreakers, and he agreed to undertake the assignment. One afternoon, at closing time, he placed himself on a large rock outside the factory gates and began to harangue the German workers who were just leaving work for the day. He explained the issues to them and urged them not to scab, but to join their English brothers in the strike. All this while several policemen stood around calmly, eyeing the milling crowd and guarding against possible disorders. But the policemen did not interfere with Bernstein's speech, nor did they attack his listeners. Occurrences like these made a profound impression upon German visitors, who were hardly used to such behavior from their Crown and their police. These events seemed to suggest that peaceful social change was, after all, a possibility.¹²

This experience and the economic and political developments in England and Germany forced Bernstein to reexamine the economic development of modern society.¹³ What he saw in modern Germany and England, in particular, did not conform to the early analysis of capitalism and to the radical theory of revolution as formulated by Marx and Engels in the 1848 and after the Paris Commune. He wrote,

¹⁰ Richard B. Day, introduction to N. I. Bukharin, Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism, xxxiv.

¹¹ Peter Gay, The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 56.

¹² *Ibid*, 57.

¹³ Bernstein, XII.

If society were constituted or had developed in the manner that the socialist theory has hitherto assumed, then certainly the economic collapse would be only a question of a short span of time. Far from society being simplified as to its divisions compared with earlier times, it has been graduated and differentiated both in respect of incomes and of business activities.¹⁴

Citing statistics from the “British Review,” Bernstein pointed out that the early and revolutionary Marxist analysis, which stated that as the conditions for the socialist revolution developed society would split between the wealthy few and the impoverished many, no longer fit.¹⁵

Bernstein argued,

It is thus quite wrong to assume that the present development of society shows a relative or indeed absolute diminution of the number of the members of the possessing classes. Their number increases both relatively and absolutely. If the activity and the prospects of social democracy were dependent on the decrease of the “wealthy,” then it might indeed lie down to sleep. But, the contrary is the case. The prospects of socialism depend not on the decrease but on the increase of social wealth.¹⁶

Bernstein also believed that the available evidence showed that capitalist development was more dynamic and adaptable than it appeared to Marx in 1848. Capitalism had put more wealth into more hands, including that of the working class. Instead of monopolization and concentration of wealth into fewer and fewer hands and the disappearance of the middle strata that the revolutionary Marx had anticipated, Bernstein pointed out that in fact the middle strata was actually increasing and prospering.¹⁷ Therefore, Bernstein concluded,

If the collapse of modern society depends on the disappearance of the middle ranks between the apex and the base of the social pyramid, if it is dependent upon the absorption of these middle classes by the extremes above and below them, then its realisation is no nearer in England, France, and Germany to-day than at any earlier time in the nineteenth century.¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid, 49.

¹⁵ Ibid, 47.

¹⁶ Ibid, 48.

¹⁷ Ibid, 72.

¹⁸ Ibid, 72.

Believing that two key pieces of Marxist theory of revolution, emiseration of the working class and the stratification of society into two antagonistic and irreconcilable classes, no longer held in this changed environment, Bernstein sought to understand how the working class would achieve socialism.

In the chapter, “The Tasks and Possibilities of Social Democracy,”¹⁹ Bernstein argued that, “Democracy is in principle the suppression of class government.”²⁰ He reasoned that “democracy and the extension of democracy”²¹ through universal suffrage to all segments of society, would enable the working class to take control of the state and achieve socialism peacefully. The evolution of capitalism and the positive changes that had taken place since 1848 had made violent revolution superfluous.²² Citing Germany and England as his examples of these changes, Bernstein argued against adhering to the dogma of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” in the changed environment. In fact, Bernstein called the “dictatorship of the proletariat” an “antiquated phrase,” a concept that belonged to a “lower civilization,”²³ i.e. the period of early industrial capitalism. He asked:

Is there any sense, for example, in maintaining the phrase of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” at a time when in all possible places representatives of social democracy have placed themselves practically in the arena of Parliamentary work, have declared for the proportional representation of the people, and for direct legislation--all of which is inconsistent with a dictatorship?²⁴

The revolutionary Marxist vision and the “dictatorship of the proletariat” no longer held for Bernstein, because events and processes had not borne out that theory. In fact, on the

¹⁹ Ibid, 135.

²⁰ Ibid, 144.

²¹ Ibid, 144.

²² Ibid, 145.

²³ Ibid, 146.

²⁴ Ibid, 146.

contrary, the working class had actually gained from and become part of the system. Therefore, he argued:

And so the conclusion of this exposition is the very banal statement that the conquest of the democracy, is the indispensable preliminary condition to the realisation of socialism. Feudalism, with its unbending organisations and corporations, had to be destroyed nearly everywhere by violence. The liberal organisation of modern society are distinguished from those exactly because they are flexible, and capable of change and development. They do not need to be destroyed, but only to be further developed.²⁵

Bukharin would strongly disagree with Bernstein on this point. He argued strenuously and violently against the notion that democracy was enough to realize socialism and that the working class could grow into and realize socialism utilizing the liberal, capitalist state structure. Yet, as will become evident, Bernstein's insights on the changed nature of capitalism became important for Bukharin during the period of the NEP, when he and the Bolsheviks realized that Russia had not evolved sufficiently to realize socialism immediately after the revolution and actually belonged to that "lower civilization." They came face-to-face with the reality of a "backwards" Russia after the Civil War and in the transition period, in the way that Bernstein came face-to-face with the reality of German and English conditions prior to the Great War.

It is beyond the scope of this study to do a detailed analysis of Bernstein's theory of Revisionism and it would take us far afield. The point of the analysis above is to illustrate the dilemma Bernstein faced when he observed the economic and political developments in Germany and England and discovered that those developments did not fit the Revolutionary Marx's analysis of the Revolution and the transition to socialism. Bukharin and the Bolsheviks faced a similar dilemma in post-revolutionary Russia as they struggled to make the necessary adjustments to that reality and find the proper road to socialism. The necessity of the NEP under

²⁵ Ibid, 163.

the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and a long and “evolutionary” road to socialism flowed from this realization.

Another crucial insight in Bernstein’s work relates to the tasks and the problems facing the working class if it took power prematurely. Bernstein warned against a seizure of power by the working class before the long-term maturation and socialization process of the working class was completed. In a foreshadowing of the Bolshevik experience he wrote, “the more suddenly they [the working class] come in possession of their freedom, the more experiments they will make in number and in violence and therefore be liable to greater mistakes.”²⁶ One of those “experiments” was “nationalization.” Bernstein saw nationalization as a particularly vexing issue and believed that it would cause difficulties even in a society where the working class came to power peacefully.²⁷

Based on his analysis of the economic diversity in large-scale and small-scale industry as capitalism developed in the nineteenth century, Bernstein argued that the state would find the task of any type of nationalization daunting, if not impossible. He argued that, if nationalization came too quickly or too broadly during or after the conquest of state power, then these nationalized industries would essentially serve to drag down the economic level of the post-revolutionary society.²⁸ Conditions would then force the revolutionary state to “lease the mass of the businesses to associations, whether individual or trade union, for associated management.”²⁹ That is, the state would then turn to an alternative form of association, to co-operatives, in order to move towards socialism. He wrote:

The expropriation on a larger scale which is mostly thought of in the criticism of such proposals cannot in any case produce organic creations in a night by magic,

²⁶ Ibid, 161.

²⁷ Ibid, 108.

²⁸ Ibid, 162.

²⁹ Ibid, 162.

and therefore the most powerful revolutionary government would be compelled to face the task of looking for a practical theory of co-operative work in agriculture.³⁰

This crucial insight proved to be a portent of what the Bolsheviks faced after the Civil War.³¹ Faced with the great difficulties of socialist construction after the Civil War, they would turn to co-operatives simply because they realized that the proletarian state could not achieve socialism by itself. Yet, unlike Bernstein, Bukharin believed that these co-operatives would inevitably grow into or evolve into socialism and that the development of co-operatives under the workers' state would guarantee the triumph of socialism.

Bernstein also warned about the dangers of building socialism in isolation. He cited the experiences of the “communistic colonies”³² and claimed that,

These . . . succeed in actual or practical isolation for a long time under circumstances one would consider most unfavourable. But as soon as they attained a greater degree of prosperity and entered into more intimate intercourse with the outer world they decayed quickly. Only a strong religious or other bond, a sectarian wall raised between them and the surrounding world, apparently, will keep these colonies together when they have attained wealth. But the fact that it is necessary for men to be limited in their development in some way, in order that such colonies should flourish, proves that they can never be the general type of associated labour.³³

After the Civil War, the Bolsheviks faced such a dilemma. The only way for them to realize socialism, once they were isolated, was to withdraw behind the wall of “Socialism in One Country,” as they sought, through the NEP, to achieve the “maturity” Bernstein argued was necessary for socialism. As we know, this development had serious ramifications once Stalin came to power.

³⁰ Ibid, 133.

³¹ Bukharin, The ABC of Communism, 308-330. This section illustrated that even during War Communism the Bolsheviks realized that co-operation was essential in achieving socialism.

³² These “utopian” experiments took place in the 19th Century. The “Owenites,” and many other groups, were an example of this.

³³ Bernstein, 131.

In summary, Bernstein argued strongly against the revolution before the working class had “matured” and before society was prepared for socialism. A careful reading of Bernstein makes clear that for him the conditions for socialism and achieving socialism in 1900 in England and Germany were very different from what the revolutionary Marx had theorized in 1848. Therefore, violent revolution was no longer necessary because the long process of maturation, the raising of the cultural level of the working class and the increasing democratization of society made the revolution, especially violent revolution superfluous.

Much of what Bernstein warned about and discerned relating to the necessary level of class maturity and culture and the dangers inherent in a “premature” revolution eventually influenced Bukharin’s thinking about the NEP. This does not mean that Bukharin was a “Revisionist” or that he believed the NEP would not lead to socialism. Rather what Bukharin took from Bernstein were the lessons learned when analyzing evidence and confronting changed circumstances and phenomena.

However, “a more immediate influence [on Bukharin] originated with Rudolf Hilferding's *Finance Capital*.”³⁴ Bukharin owed a great debt to Rudolf Hilferding, whose insights on the changed nature of capitalist state and its transformation into the directing “subject” (the interventionist state) of historical development had a profound impact on Bukharin and the evolution of his political philosophy.

³⁴ Richard B. Day, introduction to N. I. Bukharin, Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism, xxxiv.

2.1.2. Rudolf Hilferding and Finance Capital

Hilferding, an Austro-Marxist, represented “a current of thought attempting to distance itself from the typical orthodox Marxist believers by trying to creatively develop the Marxist heritage.”³⁵ In the early years of the 20th century, they confronted the Austrian school of economics whose theory of value began with the individual. In contrast, Hilferding and the Austro-Marxists placed society and social relations at the core of their theory of value.³⁶ In 1904, Hilferding published a criticism of their work in his book Böhm-Bawerk's Criticism of Marx.³⁷ Although this work was a rebuttal to the Austrian school, Hilferding, like Bernstein and the Revisionists, sought to understand the changes taking place in modern capitalism and what those changes meant for the future of socialism.

Hilferding laid out his rethinking of Marxism and modern capitalism in his classic work, Finance Capital³⁸ (1910), a volume that had a profound impact on contemporary Marxist thinkers, including Bukharin. Tom Bottomore, in his introduction to Hilferding’s Finance Capital,” dubs it “one of the classical works of Marxist theory,”³⁹ pointing out that it was Hilferding who first formulated the ideas

about the role of cartels and trusts, both nationally and internationally, the influence of the banks, organized capitalism as a stage in the movement toward a socialized economy, the growth of the interventionist state with its inherent

³⁵ Jonas Zoninsein, Monopoly Capital Theory: Hilferding and Twentieth-Century Capitalism (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 7.

³⁶ Thomas Bottomore, introduction to Finance Capital: A Study of the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development, 4.

³⁷ Rudolf Hilferding, Böhm-Bawerk's Criticism of Marx, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (Glasgow: Socialist Labour Press, 1920)

³⁸ Rudolf Hilferding, Finance Capital: a study of the latest phase of capitalist development, ed. Tom Bottomore, trans. Morris Watnick and Sam Gordon (London ; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981)

³⁹ Bottomore, introduction to Finance Capital: a study of the latest phase of capitalist development, 16-17. There is no contradiction between Hilferding’s attempt to “creatively develop” Marxism and seeing Hilferding work as a “classical” work. Hilferding worked on expanding and updating Marxist analysis of capitalist development in the changed circumstances of this period.

potentiality for becoming a system of total power, and the politics of imperialism.⁴⁰

Jonas Zoninsein concurs with this assessment writing that, “Finance Capital was even greeted by Otto Bauer and Karl Kautsky as . . . something like a fourth volume of Marx’s Capital.”⁴¹

Richard Day writes that Finance Capital was “widely acclaimed as the missing fourth volume of Capital, Hilferding’s book reintegrated Marxism in a new synthesis that included both the classical business cycle and the latest organizational changes.”⁴² Bukharin would eventually adopt and adapt many of Hilferding’s insights into his own work on the development of monopoly capitalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the development of imperialism and the “interventionist” state and what these meant for the revolution and the transition to socialism.⁴³

In Finance Capital, Hilferding argued that a new and higher form of capitalism had emerged from the chaotic conditions of competitive, laissez-faire capitalism. This was, as he believed at the time, the final stage of capitalism,⁴⁴ a stage he called “finance capitalism.”⁴⁵ “Finance capitalism,” through cartelization and monopolization of the national, capitalist economy, eliminated the anarchic competition innate to the commercial and industrial capitalist phases of history.

Once cartelization and monopolization had completely organized the economy in each capitalist nation, imperialism inevitably developed.⁴⁶ This happened because once finance capitalism had eliminated the internal competition and the chaos of the internal, national market,

⁴⁰ Ibid, 16-17.

⁴¹ Zoninsein, 5.

⁴² Richard B. Day, introduction to Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism, xxxiv.

⁴³ P. M. Sweezy, “Four Lectures on Marxism” Monthly Review Press, (1981); 60.

⁴⁴ Zoninsein, 101-122. Zoninsein, as well as Bottomore believed that Hilferding, with his article in 1918 “Organized Capitalism,” “qualified” his earlier thesis on the role of the state.

⁴⁵ Hilferding, Finance Capital: a study of the latest phase of capitalist development, 368-370.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 365-370.

the battle once fought within borders of capitalist states would necessarily expand outwards into a battle between state capitalist trusts in the world market.⁴⁷ The battle could take the form of tariff wars and/or military conflicts between or among the national capitalist states. This would occur for two reasons. In the first instance, imperialism became necessary because the national state trusts would have to move out into the world economy to find and dominate new markets and acquire the raw materials needed for production. In the second instance, Hilferding noted, that the expansion into the world economy was necessary because the finance capitalist state, even though it was now a rationalized and a non-competitive capitalist system, still had to overcome the contradictions between its capitalist superstructure and proletarian base.

As the state capitalist trusts (nations) competed with each other in the world market, the choice for the national trusts was conflict in the forms of tariffs or imperialist war or even further cartelization, this time on the international level. (Karl Kautsky argued this could occur in the phase of “ultra-Imperialism” when the imperialist states could conceivably organize a worldwide cartel.⁴⁸) Hilferding, in contrast, contended that the proletariat would conquer state power and realize socialism through the struggle against imperialism. Hilferding wrote, “victory can come only from an unremitting struggle against that policy [imperialism], for only then will the proletariat be the beneficiary of the collapse to which it must lead.”⁴⁹ This followed from Hilferding’s contention that finance capital had already created “the final organizational prerequisites for socialism, finance capitalism also makes the transition easier in a political sense.”⁵⁰ As finance capital brought the most important branches of industry, such as mining, iron and steel, electricity and so on, and production under its control and as the banks extended

⁴⁷ Ibid, Chapters 21-25 for Hilferding’s analysis of imperialism and its nature.

⁴⁸ Karl Kautsky, “Ultra-Imperialism (1914),” 2004, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1914/09/ultra-imp.htm> (30 June 2004).

⁴⁹ Hilferding, Finance Capital: a study of the latest phase of capitalist development, 366.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 368.

their power over industry, the transition period to socialism would be much smoother and much easier.⁵¹

According to Hilferding, realizing socialism by taking over the state became possible because the banks had already brought together industrial capitalists and merged with them to eliminate the anarchy of the market and to act as the manager of monopoly capitalism and the cartels.⁵² Consequently, the proletariat would not need to destroy the capitalist state and its economic system. It would come to power and realize socialism simply by taking political control of the state system through the “political revolution.” This “political” revolution and the seizure of power would replace the “dictatorship of the magnates” with the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” The proletariat would thus not need the violent social or economic revolution as the working class could use all the powers of that state over the monopolized economic system to facilitate the transition to socialism.⁵³ Hilferding’s insight into the evolution of finance capitalism and the role of the banks in this process became central to Bukharin’s analysis of the transition period to socialism. In fact, Bottomore writes, “Bukharin’s starting point and essential inspiration was Finance Capital.”⁵⁴

An important point made by Hilferding, which significantly influenced Bukharin, was the process of cartelization and monopolization of the capitalist economic system and the impact that had on the smaller industries in the system. He argued that, “Alongside this process of concentration, there is also a trend in retail trade to eliminate the independent trader”⁵⁵ and that “Monopolistic combinations, on the other hand, tend to eliminate independent trading

⁵¹ Ibid, 268.

⁵² Ibid, 233-236.

⁵³ Ibid, 368-370.

⁵⁴ Bottomore, introduction to Finance Capital: a study of the latest phase of capitalist development, 1.

⁵⁵ Hilferding, Finance Capital: a study of the latest phase of capitalist development, 209.

altogether.”⁵⁶ What Hilferding discerned was the process by which the larger enterprises came to dominate, absorb, or destroy the smaller enterprise into the larger units. They became part of a newer and more advanced capitalist system, all the while taking on the values of this new system. In this way, the finance capitalist state eliminated competition and the individual capitalist. Hilferding put it this way:

Industrial profit incorporates commercial profit, is itself capitalized as promoter’s profit, and becomes the booty of the trinity which has attained the highest form of capital as finance capital. For industrial capital as God the Father, who sent forth commercial and bank capital as God the Son, and money capital is the Holy Ghost. They are three person united in one, in finance capital.⁵⁷

Hilferding believed that there were no limits to this cartelization and that the ultimate outcome “would be the formation of a general cartel.”⁵⁸ The capitalist system would then “be consciously regulated by a single body,”⁵⁹ competition within the national economy would end and finance capitalism would exercise power over “the life process of society.”⁶⁰ Finance capital would also increasingly control the socialization process through its control of the individual state structure and economic cartel. This insight underlay Bukharin’s later work on the transition to socialism, beginning with the ABC of Communism, in which he argued that the proletarian state structure could use its own monopolized political and economic system to absorb its antagonistic base into socialism.

Hilferding also argued that, in the period of finance capitalism, “the capitalist class seizes possession of the state apparatus in a direct, undisguised, and palpable way, and makes it the instrument of its exploitative interests.”⁶¹ Therefore, Hilferding believed that once

⁵⁶ Ibid, 211.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 220.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 234.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 234.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 235.

⁶¹ Ibid, 368.

monopolization of the economy was complete and the capitalist class had seized complete control of the state that state now existed solely to serve the monopolized and non-competitive capitalist system and the wishes of the capitalist class.⁶² This new state also had become so powerful that it could socialize even its antagonistic base into the capitalist system. He wrote:

Economic power also means political power. Domination of the economy gives control of the instruments of state power. The greater the degree of concentration in the economic sphere, the more unbounded is the control of the state. The rigorous concentration of all the instruments of state power takes the form of an extreme deployment of the power of the state, which becomes the invincible instrument for maintaining economic domination⁶³

This proved to be the most important insight for Bukharin and his later work on the role of the state in the transition period.

Hilferding's analysis and work on the development of this "interventionist state" became the foundation of Bukharin's analysis to explain how the proletariat could use its own "interventionist," proletarian state structure to facilitate the transition to socialism, after it had destroyed the state capitalist structure. During the NEP in particular, Bukharin utilized Hilferding's analysis and argued that the proletarian state would act in the same manner as the capitalist state had acted in the period of finance capital when it dominated the economy and all facets of life. For Bukharin and the Bolsheviks, this meant that during the transition to socialism, the Bolsheviks would use their control of the coercive powers of the proletarian state and their domination of the "commanding heights" of the economy to socialize their own antagonistic base into socialism. In essence, Bukharin argued that, in the transition period, the proletarian state would act as the "dialectical opposite" of finance capital, and use its domination

⁶² By 1918, Hilferding argued, in "Organized Capitalism," that the state is actually an independent agency that could act to represent whichever group controlled it at any particular time.

⁶³ Hilferding, Finance Capital: a study of the latest phase of capitalist development, 370.

of the levers of state power and the economy to build socialism and socialize its antagonistic base into socialism.

Both Bernstein and Hilferding provided Bukharin with telling insights into the changes in capitalism since the publication of the Communist Manifesto in 1848. Although Bukharin did not agree with all their conclusions, their insights played a crucial role in his thinking on the transition to socialism. What will become clear later in this study is that Bukharin during the NEP, like Bernstein, adapted to the “objective” reality of the level of development and maturity of the working class and society when making policy decisions. Bukharin would also use Hilferding’s insight into the development of the “interventionist” state, the changed nature of state power and the reversal of the relationship between the base and the superstructure to understand his support for both War Communism and then the NEP. In essence, by 1925, Bukharin, would synthesize the revolutionary analysis of his Left Communist period and, the evolutionary path to socialism as exemplified by Bernstein and add Hilferding’s insight on the changed nature of state during the period of imperialism into a coherent theory of revolution and the transition to socialism.

3. BUKHARIN AND THE IMPERIALIST STATE: 1914-1917

The modern state, no matter what its form, is essentially a capitalist machine . . . the ideal personification of the total national capital. The more it proceeds to the taking over of the productive force, the more does it actually become the national capitalist.

All the social functions of the capitalist are now performed by salaried employees. The capitalist has no further social function than that of pocketing dividends, tearing off coupons and gambling on the Stock Exchange.

Frederick Engels¹

3.1. Introduction

Chapter 1 examined the conflict in Marxism regarding the proper role of the state and the use of state power in the transition period from capitalism to socialism. It also examined the conflict in Marxist thought over the proper road to socialism and argued that depending on the particular period, Marxist thinkers could interpret Marx's work to justify an immediate, radical, and revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system, or argue that socialism would develop through a long-term, evolutionary process. Again, depending on the particular period of history, one could take from Marx's work that the state, i.e. the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, would

¹ Frederick Engels, Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 381-32.

oversee a relatively rapid transition to socialism because the economic, social, and political preconditions for socialism were in place. Alternatively, one could conclude that, after the revolution, the state would have to accomplish what capitalism had left undone by creating the economic, social, and political conditions necessary to realize socialism. Thus, the transition period would not be a short one, but a long-term process taking many years. These conflicting interpretations of Marxist thinking on the Revolution and the state left a great deal of freedom for thinkers to adapt Marxism to the changed circumstances within capitalism of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries.

Chapter 2 analyzed the works of two socialist thinkers who began to discern and study the changed nature of capitalism and what that these changes meant for socialism. Both concluded that it was possible to realize socialism peacefully. Hilferding's analysis of the changed role of the state in the period of finance capitalism was of particular importance in this chapter. Like Engels, he discerned the reversed relationship between the base and the superstructure in capitalist nations, and sought to understand what that meant for the revolution and socialism. In particular, Hilferding made it clear that, by the early twentieth century, Marxist thinkers understood the role of the state, both in the period of capitalism and in the transition to socialism, very differently from the revolutionary Marx who perceived the "parasite" state as described by Hunt.

Marxist thinkers such as Bukharin found themselves wrestling with implications of these analyses and, consequently, the problem of which was the "correct" Marx to follow in the revolution and the transition period. Would they follow the revolutionary Marx of the commune state? Alternatively, would they follow the evolutionary Marx of the productivist state that foresaw a gradual, evolutionary path to socialism? These tensions within Marxism and the

arguments of Hilferding and the Revisionists all deeply influenced and shaped Bukharin's evolving conception of the state, the nature of the base-superstructure metaphor, and the state's role in the transition to socialism.

3.2. Early Writings

Bukharin's significant theoretical work began with The Economic Theory of the Leisure Class (1914),² which was a critique of Eugen Böhm-Bawerk's Karl Marx and the Close of His System.³ In this book, Bukharin, like Hilferding before him, attacked the Austrian School of Marginal Utility for its criticism of Marx and put forth a spirited defense of Marx and Marxism. Still, most historians consider Bukharin's Imperialism and the World Economy (1915) to be his first important work, one generally acknowledged to have influenced Lenin's own work on imperialism. In July 1916, he finished "Towards a Theory of the Imperialist State" (1916),⁴ a follow-up essay to Imperialism and the World Economy. These latter two works represent Bukharin's earliest attempts to understand the implications of the changed nature of the state in the imperialist period and what that change meant for war, revolution and the triumph of socialism.

² Nikolai I. Bukharin, The Economic Theory of the Leisure Class (NY: International Publishers, 1927)

³ Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, Karl Marx and the Close of His System (Philadelphia: Orion Editions, 1984)

⁴ NI Bukharin: "Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State," in Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism, 6-33.

3.2.1. Economic Theory of the Leisure Class

In the autumn of 1914, Bukharin wrote The Economic Theory of the Leisure Class in response, like Hilferding, to Eugen Böhm-Bawerk's Karl Marx and the Close of His System, a work in which Böhm-Bawerk had attacked Marx's Capital for the supposed contradiction between "labor value" in Volume I and "production value" in Volume III.⁵ Although Bukharin did not deal with the issue of the state in this work, it is of interest for what it tells us about Bukharin and his development as a theoretician.

Cohen writes that, in contrast to his later writings, "Bukharin did little more than restate fundamental Marxist propositions about the study of political economy and society,"⁶ locating himself "squarely in the mainstream of orthodox European Marxism."⁷ He attacked and criticized the Austrian School for its subjectivism, its individualism, and for its misguided analysis of the Law of Value. In particular, he criticized the Austrian school for its development and promotion of the Theory of Marginal Utility. This theory contradicted the linchpin of all Marx's work, the "labor theory of value," because it considered individual and irrational responses to be the deciding factors in commodity exchange.⁸

Like Hilferding before him, Bukharin criticized Böhm-Bawerk's analysis as flawed from the outset because Böhm-Bawerk gave the individual precedence over society. Bukharin believed that this mistake was at the root of Böhm-Bawerk's and the Marginalist school's errors.⁹ He argued that the difference between Marxism and the Austrian school was that

⁵ Donald J. Harris, introduction to Economic Theory of the Leisure Class, by Nikolai Bukharin, xiii-xiv.

⁶ Cohen, 19.

⁷ Ibid, 20.

⁸ Bukharin, Economic Theory of the Leisure Class, 32-33. Bukharin expressly criticized him for "a theory of subjectivism (psychologism) on the basis of an analysis of consumption."

⁹ See Rudolf Hilferding, Böhm-Bawerk's Criticism of Marx, 121-196, for how Hilferding analyzed and criticized the Austrian School of Economics.

Marxism recognized the priority of society over the individual, the temporary nature of any social structure, and the dominant role played by production. He criticized the Austrian School for its emphasis on extreme individualism in its methodology, its ahistorical point of view, and its stress on consumption.¹⁰ Bukharin also attacked the Austrian School for its “ethical trimmings,”¹¹ as ethics had no place in a “scientific” analysis of historical and economical developments. In short, this work marked Bukharin as an orthodox Marxist as understood in this period.

What is of interest for this study is that Bukharin recognized that the Austrian School of Marginal Utility had discerned the development of “finance capitalism.” He explicitly labeled the Austrians as apologists for the new class of “rentiers,” representing those among the bourgeoisie who had now broken from the production process.¹² Bukharin claimed that the Austrian School represented the “fin-de-siècle bourgeoisie,”¹³ and that their “new theory is a child of the bourgeoisie on its *last legs*.”¹⁴ (Emphasis in the original) Moreover, he argued that because of the tendencies of finance capitalism,

We consider the Austrian theory [Marginal Utility] as the ideology of the bourgeois who has already been eliminated from the process of production, the psychology of the declining bourgeoisie.¹⁵

He asserted that their theories failed to deal with, what was to him, the most important fundamental question facing the world. This was the “enormous and speedy accumulation of capital,” that brought with it “concentration and centralization,” and an uncommonly rapid progress in technology. Finally, according to Bukharin, these thinkers failed to deal with “the

¹⁰ Bukharin, The Economic Theory of the Leisure Class, 36.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 54.

¹² *Ibid*, 34.

¹³ *Ibid*, 58.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 23.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 31.

regular recurrence of industrial crises - this specifically capitalistic phenomenon which shakes the social-economic system to its foundations.”¹⁶

Besides providing a glimpse into Bukharin’s “orthodox Marxism,” The Economics of the Leisure Class provides the reader with intriguing insights into a problem with which Bukharin and other Marxist and bourgeois theoreticians of this era grappled. They struggled with and attempted to understand the emergence and consolidation of finance capital and imperialism, and what that meant in historical terms for the long-term stability of capitalism and, for Bukharin, the prospects of socialist revolution. Although Bukharin primarily relied upon the revolutionary, and what had become by this time, classical Marxism, this work demonstrates the influence of Hilferding and Bernstein on his analysis of the role of the state in the transition period.

Bukharin, like Hilferding and eventually Lenin, believed that the emergence of finance capitalism and imperialism represented the final phase of capitalism because the material and political preconditions for socialism now existed. Bukharin’s belief that capitalism had reached its final stage prior to the Great War, along with the subsequent transformation of state power during the Great War, laid the foundation for and informed his work on the state and its role in the radical and evolutionary periods of the Revolution. Bukharin took this insight, incorporated Hilferding’s work on the changed role of the state, and his and Bernstein’s analysis of how the proletariat could use the state in the transition period to socialism, to understand this new stage of capitalism and the role the proletarian state would play in the transition to socialism.

¹⁶ Ibid, 57.

3.3. Bukharin and State Capitalism

As Marxist and bourgeois theoreticians searched for an explanation for the emergence of finance capitalism and imperialism and the implications of these developments, the Great War and the disruption and destruction it wrought made this search even more urgent. The Great War dramatically transformed the social and economic life of all the nations involved, as the military demands of the war dictated that the European states centralize and bring the productive forces of their respective countries under increasing state control. Marc Ferro, in The Great War, points out that the government in Germany “proceeded gradually with industrial reorganization on lines leading to a kind of state capitalism,”¹⁷ as the demands of the war led to increasing state control over the economy and society. Even in United States, where the state historically abstained from the economy, the central government became more of an active agent, taking on and performing many functions that, in Marxist terms, were in the realm of “civil society.”¹⁸ Thus, for Marxist thinkers, the challenges became even more formidable in this era. Not only did these thinkers have to wrestle with defining and ascertaining the historical importance of finance capitalism, imperialism, and the emergence of state capitalism as historical categories, they had to explain how these phenomena, in particular state capitalism, would lead to socialism. Ferro provides a glimpse into that future when he cites the German industrialist, Walter Rathenau, who said “It

¹⁷ Marc Ferro, The Great War (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 129-135. Ferro, in these few pages demonstrated how the nations centralized their economic systems and totally mobilized their societies to prosecute the war.

¹⁸ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The German Ideology (NY: International Publishers, 1995), 7-12. According to Marx’s earlier work, “civil society” was the sphere in which human beings acted in their own self-interest separate from others and without interference of the state. The State was only to serve as a police force in guaranteeing people safety. All economic activity took place in this sphere, with the state simply acting to protect this activity.

[state capitalism] meant a step towards state socialism, because trade was no longer free, being subject to regulation. . . All this constituted an innovation that the future may take to.”¹⁹

As we know, Bukharin disagreed with Hilferding and Bernstein, who argued that the working class could achieve socialism without revolution. He even came into conflict with Lenin who, echoing Rathenau, considered state capitalism as a means to achieve socialism. Bukharin, instead, replied with his famous dictum “For socialism is regulated production, regulated by *society*, not by the *state* (state socialism is about as useful as leaky boots).”²⁰ (Emphasis in original) He argued that the capitalist state had to be smashed and a proletarian state structure created before the working class could attain socialism. Yet, Bukharin, like Rathenau, also wrote somewhat contradictorily that, “the future belongs to economic forms that are close to state capitalism,”²¹ and postulated that the features of this transition period would be “economic forms . . . close to state capitalism.” This meant that this new state would be “state capitalism *in reverse, its own dialectical transformation into its own antithesis.*” (Emphasis in original)²²

On one level, this appears contradictory. However, examining Bukharin’s work more closely reveals an underlying theoretical consistency to his evolving conception of the state that had its roots in his emerging synthesis of the various, conflicting strains of Marxism regarding revolution and the state. To understand how Bukharin accomplished this synthesis and the nature of this synthesis, this study begins its analysis in 1915 with Imperialism and the World Economy) and concludes in 1925 with The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance.

¹⁹ Ferro, 131.

²⁰ Nikolai Bukharin, “Toward A Theory of the Imperialist State,” in Selected Writing on the State and the Transition to Socialism, 26. Here Bukharin stays very close to Marx (See German Ideology, 7-12.) in his view that socialism will result by ending the alienation of the individual in civil society, once the state is gone, as it is nothing more than an expression of class interests. This will be important later in this study, because in actuality the civil society in Soviet Russia and in Bukharin’s theories is subsumed by the State instead of vice-versa.

²¹ Nikolai Bukharin, Imperialism and the World Economy, 158.

²² Nikolai Bukharin, The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period, 101.

In doing this, this dissertation will illustrate how Bukharin believed the proletarian state would accomplish the transition to socialism after the revolution in a form similar to state capitalism. However, because of the proletarian state's social origins, the new proletarian state structure, in the form of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat would accomplish the transition to socialism as the dialectical antithesis to state capitalism.²³

3.4. The Great War, State Capitalism and Imperialism

There was a general awareness among the elites of the great powers that the continuance of the war beyond 1916 might break the political and social structure of pre-war Europe.

John Bourne²⁴

In 1917 European history, in the old sense, came to an end. It was the moment of birth for our contemporary world; the dramatic moment of modern man's existence.

A.J.P Taylor²⁵

The Great War was a watershed in European and world history. It was a war that many believed would last only six months. Yet, it dragged on for four long years, with each year of the war bringing new horrors and disasters. The war that many nations, in particular the German, Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires, saw as a way to resolve their internal conflicts and establish their global positions had instead strained their political systems, their economies and

²³ See above in the discussion on Böhm-Bawerk. Under state capitalism, the capitalist system proceeds from subjective (irrational, spontaneous) wants and its smallest unit is the individual, where in Marxism, the new society must proceed from the objective (planned and organized) and the social (with the individual finding his species being within the collective. The base of each system thus determines the nature of its respective state. This is why state capitalism cannot lead to socialism; it proceeds from a capitalist base.

²⁴ John Bourne, "The World War Context" in Passchandaele in Perspective: The Third Battle of Ypres, ed. Peter H. Liddell (Pen and Sword Paperbacks, Leo Cooper, London, 1997), 4.

²⁵ A .J .P. Taylor, The First World War: An Illustrated History (Perigee Books, G. P. Putnam's Sons, NY, NY 1972), 165.

their peoples to the breaking point. Instead of relief from their domestic miseries, all the major powers suffered great shocks and losses. The worst year, 1916, gave the world the tragedies of Verdun, the Somme, and the Brusilov Offensive. These events “tore away what remained of the last vestiges of the ‘short-war illusion.’”²⁶ The official policy of mass slaughter initiated by The Ottoman Empire in 1915 against the Armenians had now become the official policy of the Germans at Verdun and eventually, unofficially, of all the major powers by the end of 1916.

At Verdun, the German general staff committed itself to a policy of attrition to make, in von Falkenhayn’s words, “the forces of France . . . bleed to death.”²⁷ In the process, both sides lost a combined 600,000 men, all for a piece of ground, which had no strategic value. On 1 July 1916, on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the British Army suffered approximately 60,000 casualties out of the 120,000 men who took part in the offensive.²⁸ By November 1916, the combined casualties among the German, French, and British armies amounted to approximately 1.2 million men.²⁹ On the Eastern Front, the Brusilov offensive in July 1916 destroyed the will of the Austrians to fight and contributed to the collapse of that Empire. By this time the Russian army itself suffered 1,412,000 casualties, this in an army that had already endured horrific losses in the two years of war.³⁰ This battle and subsequent defeats marked the final gasp of the Russian Empire.³¹ On the Italian Front, “Half of the entire Italian war casualty

²⁶ Bourne, 4.

²⁷ Alistair Horne, The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916 (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 1964), 44.

²⁸ David Stevenson, Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 137.

²⁹ Taylor, 135, 140.

³⁰ John Keegan: The First World War (New York, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 303-308.

³¹ Taylor, 127-130. Edmund Taylor, The Fall of the Dynasties: The Collapse of the Old Order 1905-1922 (New York, New York: Dorset Press, 1963), 244-246. Russia’s total casualties for the war were 9,000,000 men, approximately 76% of the total mobilized.

total - some 300,000 of 600,000 - were suffered along the Isonzo,” most of those in 1916 in a series of battles that took place between March and November of 1916.³²

This carnage and the shocks they inflicted on those on the home front rent the very fabric of pre-war European society and created a revolutionary situation throughout Europe. Karl Radek believed that the experiences suffered by the working class at the front made the Revolution possible. Writing in September 1918, as the Great War neared its end, Radek argued that:

They [the working class] had to wade through the horrors of war, be torn in pieces by grenades; they had to bleed to death for the interests of the capitalists; they had to heap up mountains of corpses, in order that the lesson that capitalism leads to the bloodiest anarchy, to the destruction of the few cultural achievements which have been created, to the deepest misery of the masses, to their literal enslavement, so that this lesson might be converted out of a theoretical thesis into a crying and burning certainty.³³

These experiences had indeed radicalized many in the working class, particularly in Russia. However, it had another consequence. This war forced all the states involved to place their national economies and civil societies under their direction in order to meet the material and human demands of the war, and hold their nations together. Women went into the factories, rationing became commonplace, and even the most liberal states, including the United States, introduced anti-subversive laws. The era of “Total War” and the “Leviathan” state had arrived.³⁴

Against this backdrop, Bukharin, building on Hilferding’s work, began to develop his analysis of the imperialist state, and in particular, what the development of this state meant for

³² Michael Duffy, “First World.com – The Battles of Isonzo, 1915-1917” (2005), www.firstworldwar.com/battles/isonzo.htm (7 May 2005).

³³ Karl Radek, “The Development of Socialism from Science to Action,” in In Defence of the Russian Revolution, ed. Al Richardson (London: Porcupine Press, 1995), 9.

³⁴ Wesley Allan Riddle, “War and Individual Liberty in American History” in Leviathan at War, ed. Edmund A. Opitz (New York: The Foundation for Economic Education, 1995), 139-143. This section deals with the United States involvement in the Great War and how the state expanded to fight the war, through conscription, propaganda and the crushing of dissent. Bukharin, Imperialism and the World Economy, 65-66, 145-146. Bukharin cites the United States as an example of how a “large state capitalist trust grows and becomes consolidated.”

the revolution and the transition to socialism. The result was Imperialism and the World Economy,³⁵ and no less than an authority than Lenin, in 1915, recognized the need for this analysis and the importance of Bukharin's work in the period of the great, imperialist war. In his "Introduction" to Imperialism and the World Economy Lenin wrote,

there can be no concrete historical analysis of the present war, if that analysis does not have for its basis a full understanding of the nature of imperialism, both from its economic and political aspects. Without this, it is impossible to approach an understanding of the economic and diplomatic situation of the last decades, and without such an understanding, it is ridiculous even to speak of forming a correct view on the war.³⁶

Thus, began the philosophical journey that led Bukharin from War Communism to the New Economic Policy, using as a roadmap his consistent theoretical analysis of the state, and the role of the new Leviathan, proletarian state after the Revolution.

3.4.1. Imperialism and the World Economy

Bukharin and his comrades sought to understand how the bourgeois state had so successfully pitted the working class of one nation against another and how that led to the carnage and destruction of the Great War. At the same time, they sought to analyze and explain how imperialism arose from finance capitalism, how this led to the imperialist war and the formation of the state capitalist trust, and then how this entire process could and would lead to the worldwide proletarian revolution and then socialism.

The Great War gave the lie to both Bernstein's and Hilferding's contention that processes of consolidation and centralization and the struggle against imperialism could and would lead to

³⁵ Haynes, 8. Haynes concurs with this analysis and begins his chapter "Capitalism As A World Economy" with a discussion of the war and how it forced Marxist thinkers to build on Marx's work to understand Imperialism, the war and how the proletariat would realize socialism..

³⁶ V. I. Lenin, introduction to Imperialism and the World Economy, 9.

a peaceful transition to socialism.³⁷ Lenin correctly pointed out what had actually occurred in the capitalist world.

There is no doubt that the development is going *in the direction* of a single world trust that will swallow up all enterprises and all states without exception. But the development in this direction is proceeding under such stress, with such tempo, with such contradictions, conflicts, and convulsions-not only economical, but also political, national, etc., etc.-that before a single world trust will be reached, before the respective national finance capitals will have formed a world union of “ultra-imperialism,” imperialism will inevitably explode, capitalism will turn into its opposite.³⁸ (Emphasis in original)

Still, before Bukharin and the Bolsheviks could map their road to socialism, they needed to understand how Europe had arrived at the Great War and the new revolutionary conditions that arose from it. Imperialism and the World Economy was Bukharin’s early attempt to do just that.

In Imperialism and the World Economy, Bukharin discerned the same monopolistic tendencies at work as had Hilferding and claimed that, by 1914, capitalism’s fundamental nature had radically changed. Like Hilferding, he argued that industrial capitalism had evolved into a powerful and all-encompassing new form of capitalism known as “finance capitalism.”³⁹ This “neo-capitalism” permeated and organized all sectors of the national economy and thus eliminated the competition and the economic anarchy of the domestic market economy of commercial and industrial capitalism.⁴⁰ The banks stood firmly behind this development and financed this capitalist expansion and the consolidation that took place. Of this development, Bukharin wrote:

An increasingly large section of industrial capital does not belong to the industrialists who apply it. The right to manipulate the capital is obtained by them

³⁷ Bernstein believed that working class could take power peacefully and direct the transition to socialism when he argued that: “In modern society we have . . . an increasing insight into the laws of evolution and notably of economic evolution. With this knowledge goes hand in hand . . . an increasing capacity for directing the economic evolution.” See Bernstein, Evolutionary Socialism, 14-15.

³⁸ VI Lenin, introduction to Imperialism and the World Economy, 14.

³⁹ Cohen, 21, 25-27. Cohen details Hilferding’s analysis and shows how Bukharin adapted it to his own analysis of finance capital.

⁴⁰ Cohen, 26.

only through the bank, which in relation to them, appears as the owner of that capital. On the other hand, the bank is compelled to place an ever-growing part of its capital in industry.⁴¹

This process inextricably linked the banks and the industrialists. Capital had “been in reality transformed into industrial capital.”⁴² The economy itself became more tightly organized as finance capitalism destroyed the anarchic tendencies of capitalism within the national borders. Bukharin cited the example of the German Empire Bank, which became so closely connected with the private sector that a dispute ensued over whether this bank was just a stock company or a state institution, and consequently whether it should be subject to the laws governing private or public holdings.⁴³

Bukharin argued that, as finance capitalism evolved, it acquired new forms, established new organizational structures, and resolved the contradictions of industrial capitalism by destroying the “old, conservative, economic forms” that existed in earlier stages of capitalism,⁴⁴ replacing them with the “capitalist monopoly organizations: cartels, syndicates, trusts, bank syndicates.”⁴⁵ These trusts organized not only within the individual industries, but cut across the “branches of production . . . transforming them [the various trusts] into one single organization.”⁴⁶ In essence, this process tended “to turn the entire ‘national’ economy into a single combined enterprise with an organizational connection between all the branches of production.”⁴⁷

⁴¹ Bukharin, Imperialism and the World Economy, 71.

⁴² *Ibid*, 71.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 73.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 64.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 64.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 70.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 70.

These processes transformed the national economy into something new. Bukharin claimed that, in reality, capitalism had now evolved into what he called “organized capitalism,”⁴⁸ in which

*the state power absorbs virtually every branch of production . . . in addition the state increasingly becomes a direct exploiter, organizing and directing production as a collective, joint capitalist.*⁴⁹ (Emphasis in original)

The economy and state had now evolved

*into one gigantic combined enterprise under the tutelage of the financial kings and the capitalist state, an enterprise which monopolizes the national market and forms the prerequisite for organized production on a higher non-capitalist level.*⁵⁰ (Emphasis in original)

With this development, organized capitalism eliminated the economic chaos inherent in the domestic, industrial capitalist system. States that once had dynamic, yet chaotic, internal economic systems became monopolistic, national capitalist states that now stood in the same relation to each other as individual enterprises within nations had in the period of commercial and industrial capitalism.

In his analysis, Bukharin took Marx’s work on the development of capitalism within the national borders and extrapolated this to the development of what he termed the “world economy,” which he defined “as a system of production relations and, correspondingly, of exchange relations on a world scale.”⁵¹ He argued that the intertwining of capital and industry on a worldwide basis brought this new political and economic system into being.⁵² This development meant that “entire countries appear today as ‘towns,’” namely, industrial countries whereas entire agrarian nations or territories appear to be the ‘country’ of commercial

⁴⁸ Cohen, 26. Hilferding would later use this term in 1918 to describe capitalism at the end of the war.

⁴⁹ Bukharin, “Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State,” 22.

⁵⁰ Bukharin, *Imperialism and the World Economy*, 73-74.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 25-26.

⁵² *Ibid*, 17-52 In this section Bukharin explained how the “World Economy” came into existence through the intertwining of Finance Capital and industry within nations and how this went out into the World Economy.

capitalism.”⁵³ The most technologically advanced nations now stood in relation to the rest of the world as the city had stood to the countryside in the industrial period of capitalism.⁵⁴ With this development, conflict would logically result among the national trusts because,

The policy of finance capital pursues a three-fold aim: first, the creation of the largest possible economic territory which, secondly, must be protected against foreign competition by tariff walls, and thus, thirdly must become an area of exploitation for the national monopoly companies.”⁵⁵ The national “trusts would “grow at the expense of third persons, outsiders, only after having destroyed intermediary groupings.”⁵⁶

Hilferding had argued that the goal of finance capitalism was a “self-sufficient national state, and economic unit limitlessly expanding its great power until it becomes a world kingdom--a world-wide empire.”⁵⁷ According to Bukharin, this tendency towards expansion, destruction, and acquisition, known as “imperialism,” became the official policy of finance capitalism.⁵⁸

Beyond the purpose of expanding the power of the finance capitalist state into the world economy, imperialism was a means for the finance capitalist state to solve its social and economic conflicts. It accomplished this by absorbing or destroying the smaller and weaker units (other states) in a conscious policy of expansion and conquest.⁵⁹ This then allowed it to acquire the new markets and the raw materials necessary to compete and survive in the world economy, while, at the same time, alleviating the social and political tension at home.⁶⁰

Bukharin did not believe that war would immediately result from this expansion and intra-capitalist competition. He argued that competition among these states would take on new

⁵³ Ibid, 21.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 21-22. This mirrors Marx and Engels. See The Communist Manifesto, 13 where they wrote, “Just as it [the bourgeoisie] has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones.”

⁵⁵ Ibid, 107.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 121.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 109.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 107.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 139-140.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 109.

and more antagonistic forms such as tariffs, which were set up to protect the individual domestic markets. However, what the imposition of tariffs did, as the competition over raw materials, the new markets, and the export of capital did, was to contribute to the anarchy and instability of the world market as each national state trust sought to increase its power and extend its influence in the world economy at the expense of the other state trusts.⁶¹ Even though Bukharin did not see war breaking out immediately because of this new form of international, anarchic competition, he did believe that imperialist war was inevitable. He wrote:

What was said about crises is true also about wars. War in capitalist society is only one of the methods of capitalist competition, when the latter extends to the sphere of world economy. This is why war is an immanent law of a society producing goods under the pressure of the blind laws of a spontaneously developing world market.⁶²

To escape this fate Bukharin argued that it was logical, in fact urgent, for the “various national capitalist groups”⁶³ to negotiate international agreements, which would form international trusts comparable to the national trusts to escape the conflicts inherent in this development, something he did not believe they could do.

Karl Kautsky held that agreement among the various capitalist groups was possible.

Writing on the eve of the Great War in 1914, he argued

that capitalism may still live through another phase, the translation of cartelization into foreign policy: a phase of ultra-Imperialism, which of course we must struggle against as energetically as we do against imperialism.⁶⁴

Kautsky theorized this new “ultra-Imperialism” could prove very stable and thus prevent or hold back the revolution.⁶⁵ Both Lenin and Bukharin rejected this and instead argued that a life and

⁶¹ Ibid, 78, 87, 107.

⁶² Ibid, 54.

⁶³ Ibid, 52.

⁶⁴ Marxist Internet Archive, “Kautsky Ultra-Imperialism (1914),” n.d., <http://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1914/09/ultra-imp.htm> (8 January 2005). This was originally published in September 1914.

⁶⁵ Hanson, 86.

death struggle would take place in the world economy because it was impossible for the different groups of national capitalists to come to an accommodation or achieve the solidarity among the national capitalist trusts.⁶⁶ Bukharin, writing at the time of, what he viewed as the penultimate, imperialist war argued that:

It follows . . . that the actual process of economic development will proceed in the midst of a sharpened struggle between the state capitalist trusts and the backward economic formations. A series of wars is unavoidable. In the historic process, which we are to witness in the near future, world capitalism will move in the direction of a universal state capitalist trust by absorbing the weaker formations.⁶⁷

Thus, Kautsky's "ultra-Imperialism," and Bernstein and Hilferding's dreams of a peaceful transition to socialism in the era of state capitalism became just that, dreams.

Bukharin also argued that another significant factor militating against a peaceful evolution to socialism was the growth of state power and the state's ability to coerce and co-opt the working class through "social imperialism." Social imperialism enabled the capitalist state to absorb its antagonistic, proletarian base into the dominant system of capitalism and led the working class to identify its interests with those of the dominant capitalist class. Contemporary observers recognized the development of this variant of imperialism and pointed out how it was used by the finance capitalist state.

John Hobson argued that imperialism was "a depraved choice of national life, imposed by self-seeking interests which appeal to the lusts of quantitative acquisitiveness and of forceful domination,"⁶⁸ and resulted because of the economic interests of a small band of extremely rich and influential financiers in Europe.⁶⁹ Analyzing the English experience, Hobson believed that imperialism had not really benefited the citizens of the colonial power. What it had done though

⁶⁶ Bukharin, Imperialism and the World Economy, 61-62.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 139-140.

⁶⁸ J. A. Hobson, Imperialism: A Study (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1905), 368.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 46-63. In this chapter, Hobson analyzes who these people were and how they used imperialism to benefit themselves.

was to make and keep the working class reformist instead of revolutionary by exploiting the economies of the colonies to provide the working class of the mother country with a slightly higher standard of living than ordinarily possible under industrial capitalism.⁷⁰

Lord Lugard, in particular, wrote that,

I hold that our right [to imperialism] is the necessity that is upon us to provide for our ever-growing population -- either by opening new fields for emigration, or by providing work and employment . . . since we know what misery trade depression brings at home.⁷¹

In his own work on imperialism, Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism, Lenin even quoted Cecil Rhodes' famous justification of imperialism: "The Empire, as I have always said, is a bread and butter question. If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists."⁷²

Lenin later illustrated how imperialism split the working class, creating a "labor aristocracy" and, in essence, making the working class more and more bourgeois. Thus, in Lenin's opinion, the imperialist state, through "social imperialism," could absorb its antagonistic base into the values of the bourgeois, imperialist state.⁷³

The German ruling class embarked on imperial adventures in the 1890s and used imperialism, and the threat of war as integrative tools that stressed the greatness of Germany and focused the attention of all classes on external acquisitions and international crises to avoid reforming their political system. Heinrich Claß, the leader of the Pan-German League viewed imperialism as a means of strengthening the Reich.⁷⁴ Claß believed and argued that war was the

⁷⁰ Lenin cited Hobson's work as crucial to his own study of Imperialism. See V. I. Lenin, Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism (New York: International Publishers, 1977), 7.

⁷¹ F.D. Lugard, The Rise of Our East African Empire, vol. I (London: Blackwood, 1893), 379-473.

⁷² Lenin, Imperialism, 79.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 106-107.

⁷⁴ Volker Berghahn, Germany and the Approach of War in 1914 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993),

“only remedy for our people,” and that “A generous passage at arms should be quite beneficial also for our domestic situation even if it means tears and grief to individual families.”⁷⁵

As this new form of capitalism evolved during the Great War, consolidated its power and dominated the capitalist states, it turned the relationship between the base and the superstructure upside down. Through control of the levers of coercion and the institutions of the state, capitalism sought to “gain power not only over the legs of the soldiers, but also over their minds and hearts.”⁷⁶ Bukharin asserted that as this occurred, class conflicts in each nation would disappear because the state would annihilate classes and absorb them into the service of the nation.⁷⁷ This ability to co-opt and dominate the working class in the capitalist states only strengthened Bukharin’s belief that finance capitalism and imperialism could not lead to a peaceful and evolutionary path to socialism. This new “Leviathan” capitalist state had become so powerful that it now controlled the socialization process within society, destroying and co-opting even the most left-wing trade unions, and leading to further subjugation and degradation of the working class. Once the finance capitalist states controlled the hearts and minds of the workers and soldiers and consolidated the economy, in the form of the national trusts, and society within their own borders, they could “thrust themselves against one another with particular ferocity.”⁷⁸ In August 1914, events bore out his analysis when the imperialist war broke out and the socialist parties abandoned their principles and supported the national interests of the imperialist states over their own class interests. Faced with this reality Bukharin concluded that only a socialist revolution that completely destroyed the capitalist state could lead to socialism.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 109.

⁷⁶ Ein Ausland-Deutscher, Staatsreich oder Reformen, (Zurich, 1907), 203; quoted in Bukharin Imperialism and the World Economy, 109.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 109.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 121.

Another factor that led Bukharin to argue against the possibility of the working class coming to power peacefully in this era was the nature of the contradictions within capitalism. He maintained that the class conflict suppressed by finance capitalism within its national borders would now move into the world economy. Thrusting those contradictions and the class conflict into the world economy, where the ruling class of international capitalism was now split into “national” groups opposed to each other and their respective working classes, had created an “iron ring of state organization” that would “let loose all the devils of a world scuffle.”⁷⁹ What would occur was a “world industrial crisis on the one hand, wars on the other.”⁸⁰

Here he applied the classic Marxist analysis of capitalist development and the ensuing revolution to the world economy, rather than to the national economy.⁸¹ The international division of labor united the world into one large, all-encompassing labor process where production now was of a social nature on a worldwide basis. However, the acquisition of goods, markets, and raw materials assumed, in Bukharin’s words “the character of ‘national’ (state) acquisition.”⁸² The class of national capitalists, not those workers in the world who performed the social labor, benefited from this development.

Bukharin argued that in this new period of imperialism and imperialist war the workers’ position had worsened absolutely, leading to the sharpening of class antagonism. However, because of imperialism’s nature, the power of the new state, and its ability to oppress and socialize the working class on an unimaginable scale, this antagonism reached heights that were inconceivable in the previous capitalist epoch.⁸³ In essence, the social base of the world economy was in conflict with its superstructure. This could only lead to war, which would then

⁷⁹ Ibid, 169.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 53.

⁸¹ Ibid, 106.

⁸² Ibid, 106.

⁸³ Ibid, 159-160.

lead to revolution. Once this happened, Bukharin claimed that the Great War, i.e. the great imperialist war, would sever the last chain that bound “the workers to the masters.”⁸⁴ Violent revolution, not peaceful evolution and democratic seizure of state power or seizure of the state in the struggle against imperialism, would be the inevitable result.

As noted above, a significant new insight appeared in Bukharin’s Imperialism and the World Economy regarding the role of the state. The monstrous state powers that he saw develop and grow during this period led Bukharin to turn Marx on his head. He, like Engels in Anti-Dühring and Hilferding in Finance Capital, now viewed the state, along with all its resources, as an “active agent,” as the “subject” of history. In this epoch, Bukharin argued that the superstructure now conditioned the base instead of the reverse.

Bukharin argued that, even before the war, given the increased complexity of life in modern capitalism, the state had already taken on an ever-increasing number of functions normally reserved for civil society.⁸⁵ In particular, he cited the example of how the state monopolies began to work with the syndicates and the trusts in organizing everything from production to distribution to state credit and communal meals.⁸⁶ In the period of imperialist war, he argued “the use of state power and the possibilities connected with it” now became paramount.⁸⁷

Because of the changed nature of the state, both before and during the Great War, Bukharin discerned that the state no longer simply represented the values and wishes of the capitalist class, but now had become the “enforcer” and protector of the “capitalist system.”⁸⁸ In his analysis of England, France, and Germany in the prewar and early years of the war, Bukharin

⁸⁴ Ibid, 160.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 41.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 149-150.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 123-124.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 123-124.

argued that the power of the state, even during industrial capitalism, could now subjugate the economy and the society to the needs of the state without hurting the native capitalists.⁸⁹ Faced with the exigencies of the war, the state created monopolies and took on more of the functions of the private capitalists. Even in areas where the state did not establish a monopoly, it affected other areas of the economy, which came into direct competition with it. He cited the example in Germany when the state had nationalized the electrical industry. This action affected the private gas industry because it competed with electricity in the market. Bukharin believed that it was thus possible that eventually a gas monopoly would come into existence under the auspices of the state because the electric monopoly could not compete with the state monopoly. Thus, in this case the larger, monopolized state structures would subsume the smaller enterprises.⁹⁰

Accelerated by the war, this political and economic evolution led to a convergence of state power and finance capital. The state and private monopoly enterprises, under the impact of the Great War, began to merge into one large trust within the framework of the state capitalist trust.⁹¹ The bourgeoisie accepted this monopolistic interference of state power because it was in their own interests, and because they lost nothing in the process. Bukharin stressed that this development was nothing more than the “shifting [of] production from one of its hands into another.”⁹² The state and the capitalist structure merged, becoming, as Bukharin put it, “an entrepreneurs’ company of tremendous power, headed even by the same persons that occupy the leading positions in the banking and syndicate offices.”⁹³ The result of this accelerated centralization was the development of a new very powerful capitalist form called “state

⁸⁹ Ibid, 150-151.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 154.

⁹¹ Ibid, 155.

⁹² Ibid, 155.

⁹³ Ibid, 155.

capitalism,” not the state socialism the Revisionists and Hilferding had believed and hoped would occur.⁹⁴

In Imperialism and the World Economy, Bukharin not only touched on the significance of this development of state power but also began to explore how the post-revolutionary proletarian state could use this state power in the transition to socialism when he argued, “the future belongs to economic forms that are close to state capitalism.”⁹⁵ Bukharin did not specifically address how the proletarian state structure would or should act once it became dominant over its non-socialist base. However, it is clear that Bukharin had discerned a fundamental shift in the nature of the capitalist state and concluded that the proletarian state, in the transition period, could act to control the socialization process within society in the same manner as the state capitalist structure had done during the final stages of capitalism. More importantly for this study, the changed nature of this state and Bukharin’s understanding of the reversal of the base-superstructure metaphor would have significant implications for his philosophical thought in both the revolution and in the transition period.

At this point, Bukharin thoughts on the state’s role were somewhat general. He had not really dealt with the issue of how the state could facilitate the transition to socialism. His primary concern was how this new state had come into being, how it could lead only to war, and how this war then set the stage for socialist revolution. He recognized that the state had fundamentally changed since Marx’s time, and that it no longer simply served as a tool of the bourgeois class. In the period of finance capitalism and imperialism, the state had become an active agent, the “subject” of history, capable of acting upon and dominating all aspect and segments of society.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 157.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 158.

In his later works, this awareness would play a significant role in his analysis of how Russia would realize socialism.

3.4.2. “Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State”

Thus emerges the finished type of the contemporary imperialist robber state, the iron organization, which with its tenacious, raking claws embraces the living body of society. This is the New Leviathan, beside which the fantasy of Thomas Hobbes looks like a child's toy.

Nikolai Bukharin⁹⁶

In Imperialism and the World Economy, Bukharin had analyzed the change from commercial capitalism and its policies of free markets and competition to industrial capitalism and then finance capitalism and its policy of imperialism. He believed that finance capitalism had established new organizational structures that resolved the contradictions of commercial and industrial capitalism while it created new contradictions (disequilibrium in the world economy) as capitalist competition moved into the world economy. The development of finance capitalism and then imperialism led to competition among the national trusts, which naturally led to tension, conflict, and the imperialist war. The imperialist war, i.e. the Great War, furthered the development of the “Leviathan” state as the finance capitalist state dealt with the demands of the war.

Bukharin had also dealt with the consolidation of the state and state power, in particular focusing on how the state had taken on more of the functions normally reserved for civil society

⁹⁶ N.I. Bukharin, “Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State,” in Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism, 31.

as it became dominant over its antagonistic base. It had consolidated the productive forces of society under its own power and its own organizations, eventually swallowing these organizations to become “*the sole universal organization of the ruling class.*”⁹⁷ (Emphasis in original) In reality, it became what he termed “organized capitalism,”⁹⁸ in which “*the state power absorbs virtually every branch of production . . . in addition the state increasingly becomes a direct exploiter, organizing and directing production as a collective, joint capitalist.*”⁹⁹ (Emphasis in the original)

Still, he had not specifically dealt with the development of state capitalism and what the development of this form of capitalism meant for the working class and for the revolution. Although Bukharin had foreseen the growth in state power and the imperialist state before the war, he had not really contemplated the power of that state until the war accelerated and made this development explicit. His first attempt to understand and analyze this fundamental change in capitalism and the role of the state, and what this meant for the revolution and socialism appeared in 1916 in his essay “Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State.”

“Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State” came at a time when Marxists, including Lenin, were debating the changed role of the capitalist state in the imperialist period and the war. Bukharin contributed to this debate by his efforts to analyze and understand the development of the new “Leviathan” state and its implications for revolution and socialism. Initially Bukharin had intended “Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State” for publication in “Sbornik Sotsial-Demokrata.” However, Lenin had just published his own analysis of imperialism and Bukharin found himself in disagreement with Lenin over the issue of the “explosion of the [capitalist]

⁹⁷ Bukharin, “Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State,” 31.

⁹⁸ Cohen, 26.

⁹⁹ Bukharin, “Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State,” 22.

state,” i.e. its destruction in the revolution, and its use as a vehicle to socialism.¹⁰⁰ In a footnote to this piece, Bukharin wrote about the problem he faced in publishing this work, “The editors of the *Sbornik* did not consider it possible to include the article, suggesting that it developed incorrect views concerning the state.”¹⁰¹ Bukharin argued that he had committed no errors regarding the “explosion of the state,” and that Lenin was the one who was wrong on this issue. Eventually, Lenin, through his wife, told Bukharin that “he no longer has any disagreements with you on the question of the state.”¹⁰²

On one level, in “Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State,” Bukharin attacked those Revisionists and other socialists, and even Lenin, who saw the emergence of state capitalism as a positive development. On another level, he attempted to understand how state capitalism had developed from the war and what that meant for socialism. In this work, Bukharin expanded his analysis of state capitalism and its origins as first developed in Imperialism and the World Economy. Here he began to focus on what state capitalism had actually accomplished and, more importantly, what this meant for the socialist revolution. When viewed in retrospect, this work contained the analysis and philosophy on the role of the state in the transition to socialism that became the foundation of Bukharin’s philosophical thought.

In this essay, Bukharin attacked those “social patriots,” who had forgotten their Marx and who talked in the language of “the nation” instead of class.¹⁰³ Bukharin argued that they had forgotten that to support the capitalist state was to support their own oppressors and reminded them that:

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 32-33.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 33.

¹⁰² Ibid, 33.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 7-8.

From the Marxist point of view, the state is nothing but the *most general organization of the ruling classes, its basic function being to preserve and expand the exploitation of the oppressed classes.*¹⁰⁴ (Emphasis in original)

The modern imperialist state was no different. It had arisen as a social phenomenon peculiar to its time, i.e. the period of finance capitalism and imperialist war. Therefore, no matter how this state monopolized the internal economy and politics of individual capitalist nations, for Bukharin the reality was that this new state was still fundamentally bourgeois in nature. This meant that the state would always serve the interests of the bourgeoisie and so even if the working class would take over this state, they could not use it to act in the interests of the working class.¹⁰⁵

Using the German system of state organization as his model, Bukharin argued that the superstructure's role had changed and its influence over the base became all-important. The superstructure's ability to socialize and control its antagonistic base became greater even than in the early imperialist phase. This had occurred because the demands of the war accelerated the interventionist and consolidating tendencies of the state, which took on even greater economic and social responsibilities, and established more state monopolies, particularly in the defense-related industries.¹⁰⁶ The state now acted not merely as a mediating body reflecting the will of the bourgeoisie, but rather as an all-encompassing, organizing structure for the entire society. Indeed, the state now became the active agent of history, the omnipotent bourgeois class structure, which blatantly represented the class interests of the bourgeoisie and absorbed any person, organization, business, cooperative and even trade union that interacted with it or encountered it. The state's tentacles now extended over and dominated the political, economic, and social life of the nation and the world. In essence, it now acted as the "Leviathan" state that

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 7-8.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 7-15.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 20.

controlled production, distribution, banking, and the organs of coercion, organs that Bukharin later came to believe the proletariat would preserve and use after the revolution.¹⁰⁷

One way it did this, Bukharin argued, was through the cooperation of the state and private capitalist enterprises, where the state eventually subsumed and turned these private enterprises into pure state enterprises.¹⁰⁸ In other instances, he claimed the state could regulate industries and control the entire production process by dictating every step in that process. Bukharin believed that the state could even join enterprises together and create endless rules under which enterprises had to live and produce.¹⁰⁹ This process led to the complete monopolization of the economy whereby the state absorbed virtually all branches of production. Thus, the new capitalist state became the dominant capitalist, instead of simply representing the capitalist class. What Bukharin believed had occurred in this historical phase was that, in essence, the state capitalist system had become “a collective, joint capitalist” that had completely monopolized, organized and directed both production and society.¹¹⁰

The state’s reach did not end at the production process. Even before the war, the state had taken an active and interventionist role in the distribution of goods and materials. Because of its overwhelming cost and importance to state power, the state in Germany and Russia built the railway system, either alone or in cooperation with private enterprise. It also actively intervened in basic industries, such as coal and electricity, and was involved in the construction of the telegraph system. As the state needed greater control over the movement of goods for the war effort, it eventually took over or dominated enterprises and thus became the dominant force in

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 15-33. In particular, see, 22-23, 31 for more extensive discussion on this.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 21.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 21.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 22.

the economy.¹¹¹ Trade monopolies had also developed under state capitalism. These came about for two very simple reasons: the growing collectivist nature of capitalism, which had been in evidence since the rise of finance capitalism, and the “financial and strategic” considerations of imperialism and the war.

The last two means of tying the economy together under state capitalism, according to Bukharin, were the joint-stock enterprise and the simple confiscation of goods by the state. The joint-stock enterprise created companies that were mixtures of state agencies and private businesses. Citing the example of Germany’s *Kriegsrohstoffgesellschaften* (war material societies), and *Reichsverteilungsstellen* (Imperial allocation offices), Bukharin showed how these controlled the distribution and allocation of commodities and raw materials for the war effort and argued that food seizures were the main form of confiscation used to ensure the survival of the state and the maintenance of civil peace during the war.¹¹² (These policies would eventually find their counterpart in War Communism and NEP.) Through these policies, Bukharin saw that the “*anarchic commodity market is largely replaced by organized distribution of the product, the ultimate authority being state power,*”¹¹³ (Emphasis in original) as the state replaced the last remnants of the anarchic commodity market by asserting control over all facets of economic life.¹¹⁴

Bukharin analyzed this process in this way:

The general pattern of the state’s development is therefore as follows: in the beginning the state is the sole organization of the ruling class. Then other organizations begin to spring up, their numbers multiplying especially in the epoch of finance capitalism. The state is transformed from the sole organization of the ruling class into one of its organizations. . . Finally, the third stage arrives, *in which the state swallows up these organizations and once more becomes the*

¹¹¹ Ibid, 22.

¹¹² Ibid, 23.

¹¹³ Ibid, 23.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 23.

*sole universal organization of the ruling class, with an internal, technical division of labor. The once-independent organizational groupings becomes the divisions of a gigantic state mechanism, which pounces upon the visible internal enemy with crushing force.*¹¹⁵ (Emphasis in original)

Thus, imperialism and state capitalism had turned Marx's thesis of the relationship between the base and the superstructure on its head. The state had evolved into the new "Leviathan . . . beside which the fantasy of Thomas Hobbes looks like a child's toy."¹¹⁶ This insight is crucial to this study as Bukharin's analysis of the changed nature of the state eventually informed his work and underpinned his support for both War Communism and the NEP.

In Imperialism and the World Economy, Bukharin had argued that the Great War was a symptom, indeed a violent expression, of the inherent contradictions within the capitalist world. As this war dragged on, neither finance capitalism nor the all-encompassing power of state capitalism could contain the revolution. Even with the radical change in the nature of the state and the development of massive new state power, the contradictions inherent in state capitalist system would become so great that the revolution would become inevitable.¹¹⁷ At this point, the working class faced a clear choice: It could allow the state capitalist trust to absorb it in the same way that it had all the bourgeois organizations, or it could destroy the capitalist state.¹¹⁸

Criticizing those such as Bernstein and Hilferding who believed that the working class could realize socialism by taking over the capitalist state, Bukharin argued that the working class and its allies literally had to "explode" the bourgeois state and create its own proletarian state. While Bukharin believed that state capitalism could be the forerunner of or an example for socialist distribution, he argued strongly that socialism could not evolve directly out of the state capitalist system. Building on his earlier work, Bukharin argued that the destruction of the entire

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 31.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 31.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 31-32.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 31.

state capitalist system was essential because it had arisen on a specific class basis, and had become the universal organization and instrument of the capitalist ruling class.¹¹⁹ Thus, like the Revolutionary Marx, Bukharin argued that the working class had to destroy that state before it could realize socialism.

Even though Bukharin believed that the revolution and the destruction of the capitalist state had to take place, he exhibited a certain respect for what state capitalism had accomplished. He eventually came to believe that state capitalism could be a model, but not the vehicle, for the transition to socialism. He viewed the replacement of “*the anarchic commodity market*” with the organized distribution of goods as a positive development.¹²⁰ (Emphasis in the original) Unquestionably, Bukharin believed that the rational distribution network created under state capitalism could serve as a precursor to socialist distribution.¹²¹ He later fleshed this idea out in The ABC of Communism when he wrote, almost admiringly:

That which the syndicates, the banks, the trusts, and the combined undertakings, had not yet fully achieved, was speedily finished by State capitalism. It created a network out of all the organs regulating production and distribution. Thus, it prepared the ground even more fully than before for the time when the proletariat would be able to take the now centralized large-scale production into its own hands.¹²²

In other words, because of “organized capitalism,” the apparatus for socialist production and distribution was now in place.

If it hoped to establish socialism, the new proletarian state would need to completely take over the economic material framework and establish its own transitional form of state power, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. This proletarian state power would defeat its class enemies,

¹¹⁹ Bukharin, “Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State,” 30-32. See also Haynes, Nikolai Bukharin & the Transition from Capitalism to Socialism, 43-46 for more on this discussion.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 23.

¹²¹ For Bukharin the key was which class controlled the state.

¹²² Bukharin and Preobrazhenskii, The ABC of Communism, 120.

inculcate proletarian values into the former bourgeoisie, the peasants and non-proletarian elements and the remnants of the old order and only then would it relax its dictatorship. That is, as a mirror image of the state capitalist state, the proletariat would use its state power to socialize even its antagonistic base into its values. This idea, that once the proletariat gained control of what Lenin termed “the commanding heights” it could then use its state to facilitate the transition to socialism, linked the Bukharin of the pre-revolutionary period with the Bukharin of the NEP.

Bukharin’s insights regarding the powers of the state as they clearly developed during the pre-war and the period of the Great War would have a significant impact on how he viewed the transition to socialism. Analyzing Bukharin’s work between 1918-1925 clearly shows that his support for the radically different policies of War communism and the NEP were consistent with not only his understanding of the revolutionary and evolutionary tendencies within Marxism, but more importantly, his view of the changed nature of the state and the constantly changing political situation in Revolutionary Russia.

4. THE REVOLUTIONARY ROAD TO SOCIALISM

4.1. Introduction

The accepted historical wisdom regarding Bukharin is that he altered his underlying philosophy in order to support such radically opposed policies as War Communism and the NEP. In this and the following chapter what will become evident is that Bukharin's support for War Communism and then the NEP was neither contradictory nor irreconcilable with his underlying political philosophy. Throughout this period, Bukharin's ideas regarding the nature of the state and the use of state power in the transition to socialism remained consistent. What changed was his thinking on how the new revolutionary state had to adapt to meet the crises confronting the Bolsheviks after the Revolution and the Civil War. In essence, these chapters will clearly illustrate that his radical anti-statism of the revolutionary and the Civil War period, and then his support for an evolutionary and peaceful state-driven solution after the Civil War and the collapse of War Communism, followed directly from his understanding of the changed role of the state in the era of state capitalism. They also directly derived from his understanding and synthesis of the revolutionary and evolutionary Marxist ideals that he fit to the circumstances of the day.

To understand the consistency that underlay Bukharin's support for such disparate policies, this chapter will examine his three major works of this period, The ABC of Communism, The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period and Historical Materialism.

A careful analysis of these works is crucial for this study, as it will demonstrate how Bukharin's conception of the state and what the state had accomplished in the pre-Revolutionary period informed his support for the radical policies of War Communism. What this chapter will also show is that, even within these works, the root of Bukharin's support for the evolutionary policies of the NEP was already evident, and that this support developed out of his previous analysis of state capitalism and what it had accomplished once it became dominant over society.

4.2. Bukharin and Revolutionary Road to Socialism

Prior to the Revolution, Bukharin believed that capitalism had completed its historical task in Russia and so socialism and the commune state would quickly appear after the revolution. Bukharin accepted that in its laissez-faire stage, capitalism had created the wealth and the organization necessary for socialism and

That which the syndicates, the banks, the trusts, and the combined undertakings, had not yet fully achieved, was speedily finished by state capitalism. It created a network out of all the organs regulating production and distribution. Thus it prepared the ground even more fully than before for the time when the proletariat would be able to take the now centralized large-scale production into its own hands.¹

In other words, the development of state capitalism made socialism possible by converting capitalism from an irrational into a rational system,² eliminating the anarchy of the commodity market, converting money into a unit of account, organizing production on a nationwide scale, and subordinating the entire, national economic system to its will.³ Consequently, Bukharin believed that the Bolsheviks, once they seized power and smashed the state, could realize the

¹ Bukharin & Preobrazhenskii, *The ABC of Communism*, 120.

² Richard B. Day, introduction to *Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism*, xxxvi.

³ N. I. Bukharin, *The Economics of the Transition Period [Excerpts]*, in *Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism*, 51.

Revolutionary Marxist vision of the commune state by focusing their attention more on the power relationships in society, and less on the economic organization and economic relationships. In this vision, the state would actually begin to wither away as it merged all facets of the state and state power into society.⁴

Bukharin's assumptions on the nature and accomplishments of state capitalism, assumptions that his pre-revolutionary writings on imperialism helped to popularize within the Party and his optimistic assessment of proletarian class-consciousness led him to believe that the Bolsheviks could quickly realize the commune state. Kowalski points out that in 1917, Lenin, Bukharin, and the Left Communists, all shared a "rather optimistic evaluation of the proletariat's class consciousness."⁵ By the time he wrote State and Revolution⁶ (1917), Lenin

emphatically shared Bukharin's conviction that . . . Capitalism in its contemporary imperialist form had developed sufficiently to create the *preconditions* that *enable* really "all" to take part in the administration of the state.⁷ (Emphasis in original)

Kowalski argues that this led Lenin and Bukharin to conclude that "the central 'guiding and unifying institutions required in socialist society would emerge spontaneously from below as the workers themselves came to perceive the necessity of them.'"⁸ Thus, even Lenin was convinced that capitalism had created the foundation for socialism and that the administration of

large-scale production, factories, railways, the postal service, telephones and so forth, and *on this basis* the great majority of the functions of the old 'state power' have become so simplified and can be reduced to such very simple operations of registering, filing and checking that these functions will become entirely accessible to all literate people.⁹ (Emphasis in original)

⁴ John Ehrenberg, The Dictatorship of the Proletariat: Marxism's Theory of Social Democracy (NY: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc, 1992), 100.

⁵ Ronald I. Kowalski, The Bolshevik Party in Conflict: The Left Communist Opposition of 1918 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 128-129.

⁶ V. I. Lenin, The State and Revolution (London: Penguin Books, 1992)

⁷ Neil Harding, Lenin's Political Thought (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 115.

⁸ Kowalski, 128-129.

⁹ Lenin, The State and Revolution, 40.

In 1918, these shared assumptions led Bukharin to support the position of the Left Communists, who “demanded the immediate nationalization of basic industry and the radical transformation of old Russia into a new socialistic society.”¹⁰

By the spring of 1918, however, reality had proved both Bukharin and Lenin wrong about what capitalism had accomplished in Russia. The impact of the Revolution, and later the Civil War and foreign intervention, led to what Bukharin termed “expanded negative reproduction.”¹¹ That is, the destruction of the productive forces necessary for socialism. Therefore, what the Bolsheviks really found was not a society ready for socialism, but a society heading towards total collapse.

Confronted with this reality, Lenin, and eventually Bukharin, realized that to complete the revolutionary march to socialism a centralized “transitional state,” backed by the sword of the revolution, “The Dictatorship of the Proletariat,” was necessary. Bukharin, in particular, became convinced of the need for this strong and productivist, transitional state, a state unafraid to use whatever means necessary to save the Revolution and achieve socialism.¹² In fact, Bukharin used words associated more with Trotsky and Stalin, when he argued that, “In the proletarian dictatorship compulsion is one of the methods used to construct a communist society.”¹³

The tasks of this transitional state, like the commune state, would be to rid society of the remnants of the old order and re-make relationships within society, while at the same time redistributing political power. However, unlike the commune state, it would complete two

¹⁰ Gerhard Rempel “War Communism,” Western New England College, nd, mars.acnet.wnec.edu/~grempe/courses/stalin/lectures/WarCom.html (10 January 2005)

¹¹ Bukharin, The Economics of the Transition Period [Excerpts], in Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism, 53. Bukharin uses this term to explain the destruction and collapse of the economy in the Civil War period.

¹² Ibid, 68.

¹³ Ibid, 68.

additional tasks. One was immediate--to defeat those who sought to crush the Revolution. The other was long-term task--to accomplish the historical tasks left undone by capitalism. That is, it had to create the economic, technical and cultural prerequisites for socialism in Russia. Sidney Heitman points out that

Bukharin concluded, socialism in underdeveloped countries is established only slowly and gradually, governed in its pace of development and methods by the material legacy inherited from the previous regime, by the relative strength of the proletariat and other class forces, and by the extent and tenacity of small-scale, private enterprise.¹⁴

Consequently, in the period of the revolutionary transition when the revolution faced enemies on all sides, an economy and a citizenry clearly unprepared for socialism, Bukharin supported War Communism and the need for a strong, proletarian state, i.e. “The Dictatorship of the Proletariat,” that would use any means necessary, including violent coercion, to win the Civil War. Once the Dictatorship of the Proletariat achieved victory in the Civil War and faced the task of rebuilding the economy and society, Bukharin then supported the dismantling of War Communism and the introduction of the New Economic Policy, a policy based on the new circumstances of “Civil Peace” and a long and evolutionary road to socialism. Bukharin explicitly stated that:

Within the context of the capitalist system, the party of the working class is a party of *civil war*. The position is completely reversed when the working class takes power into its own hands...As the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie is destroyed and replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat...the party...becomes *a party of civil peace*.¹⁵ (Emphasis in original)

¹⁴ Sidney Heitman, “Between Lenin and Stalin: Nikolai Bukharin,” 86.

¹⁵ Bukharin, The Economics of the Transition Period [Excerpts], 48. As he did in The ABC of Communism, Bukharin claimed that the party demanded submission and “civil peace” from the former ruling strata and warned them that they were inviting punishment if they interfered “*with the cause of peacefully building a new society*.” (Emphasis in original)

In other words, once Bukharin abandoned the hopes for the commune state, the role of the state in the transition to socialism remained constant, but the imperatives of state policy changed and the tasks of the state had changed.

Under War Communism, the state needed to defeat class enemies and avert an economic catastrophe; under the NEP, the state faced the task of reconstructing the economy and creating and expanding the social wealth that Bernstein had argued was necessary for socialism. For Bukharin, both policies assumed a role for a strong centralized state and both policies derived from a single assumption: a strong proletarian state was essential to protect the Revolution and facilitate the transition to socialism in Soviet Russia. It is clear how his analysis of the monopolized capitalist state structure in Imperialism and the World Economy influenced his thinking on the role of the proletarian state in the transition period. It is also clear that Bukharin's views on the nature of the state in the transition to socialism shared Marx's own ambiguous, i.e. the revolutionary-v-evolutionary Marx, thinking on the nature of the post-revolutionary state.

The question remains as to how Bukharin could, without changing his underlying philosophy, so enthusiastically endorse the violent and coercive methods of War Communism and then later become the leading theoretician for the policy of the NEP. In the subsequent sections of this chapter, and in the following chapter, this examination will clearly demonstrate how Bukharin's support for a violent and then a peaceful transition to socialism stemmed from his synthesis of revolutionary and evolutionary Marxism and his understanding of the changed role of the state.

4.2.1. The ABC of Communism

After the October Revolution, as Sidney Heitman points out, the “dreams of utopia” that the Bolsheviks harbored turned into a “nightmare of chaos” under the impact of counter-revolution, political instability, a paralyzed economy, and foreign intervention.¹⁶ In the countryside, barter had returned, as had the “bagmen,” those “entrepreneurs” who transported and sold food on the “black market.” Industry had broken down and production plummeted. The Whites controlled large swathes of Russian territory, and in March of 1919, Admiral Kolchak led his White Army in a new offensive against the fledgling Soviet Republic. Instead of the communist millennium, the Bolsheviks faced the reality of a country in turmoil and one far removed from the promised land of communism. This reality clearly signaled that the commune state would not appear immediately after the revolution and forced the Party, and Bukharin, to reexamine their analysis of what state capitalism had accomplished and to look towards the “productivist” and evolutionary Marx to find a guide on how the Bolsheviks could achieve socialism in Russia.

It was against the backdrop of this new reality, that in March 1919, the Eighth Party Congress met to revise the 1903 Party Program and to determine the future of the Revolution.¹⁷ Once the illusions and hopes of October 1917 collapsed under the chaos of the Civil War, the delegates had to find a new path to socialism. By the end of the Congress, the Party had adopted its new program; a program that Cohen views as a “statement of Bolshevik aspirations and utopian hopes in 1919, of party innocence, not Soviet Reality.”¹⁸ Heitman points out that the

¹⁶ Sidney Heitman, introduction to The ABC of Communism, 6.

¹⁷ At the time of the Congress, Bukharin still aligned himself with the Left Communist faction and believed in the worldwide revolution and the quick realization of socialism and the commune state.

¹⁸ Cohen, 84.

program “was a compromise among the contending positions [within the Party],”¹⁹ from those who wanted to export the Revolution, to those who wanted to continue the revolutionary program of October, to the careerists who recently entered the party. Reflecting the different factions in the party, and more importantly reflecting the conflicting visions of Marx, The ABC of Communism was, at times, a radical and very revolutionary document, while at times it exhibited some of the conciliatory, moderate, and evolutionary policies that became central to the NEP in the 1920s.²⁰

The Party charged Bukharin and Preobrazhenskii, both of whom served on the program commission created by the Eighth Party Congress, to edit and write an explanation of the revised Bolshevik Party program.²¹ The result of this collaboration was The ABC of Communism, an explanation of the Bolshevik program and the tasks they faced in building socialism, as well as a primer “written for mass consumption in simple and lively language, making it comprehensible to even the most unsophisticated reader.”²² This made The ABC of Communism a valuable tool that would make Marxism understandable to the common peasant and worker who the party sought to reach and whose support it needed.

Aleksandar M. Vacić argues that Bukharin and Preobrazhenskii’s “earlier views--as reflected in The ABC of Communism . . . were not only popular and close to the official doctrine, but were identical.”²³ Yet, as Vacić points out, they each eventually learned different lessons from the collapse of War Communism. He contends that for Preobrazhenskii and others

¹⁹ Sidney Heitman, introduction to The ABC of Communism, 7.

²⁰ Ibid, 6-7.

²¹ M.M. Gorinov and S.V. Tsakunov, trans., Konstantin Gurevic “Life and works of Evgenii Alekseevich Preobrazhenskii,” OZLEFT, n.d., <http://members.optushome.com.au/spainter/Preobrazhenski.html> (9 January 2005) This essay originally appeared in Slavic Review in the Summer of 1991.

²² Sidney Heitman, introduction to The ABC of Communism, 9.

²³ Alexander M. Vacić, “Alternative Views on Socialist Economics in the Bukharin-Preobrazhenskii Polemic and their Contemporary Significance,” in Bukharin in Retrospect, ed. Theodor Bergmann, Gert Schaefer, and Mark Selden (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 66.

within the Party, particularly the Left Communist tendency, the failure of War Communism meant that socialism in Russia would need outside help to triumph, i.e. the revolution would have to spread. (Something Bukharin also believed before the collapse of War Communism.) Until that happened though, Preobrazhenskii concluded that both economic and political coercion were necessary for rapid industrialization and survival of the Revolution.

Vacić then points out that Bukharin eventually learned the opposite lesson and believed that the failure of War Communism meant that the new proletarian state had to build socialism through non-coercive economic means and by creating a “smychka,” an alliance between the working class and the peasantry.²⁴ This meant that once the Revolution triumphed then Bukharin looked to the productivist Marx who envisioned the long and evolutionary road to socialism.

Cohen writes that The ABC of Communism, “Apart from its treatment of imperialism and state capitalism . . . was not a specifically Bukharinist document.”²⁵ This is not surprising considering Bukharin and Preobrazhenskii co-authored this pamphlet, and the views laid out in The ABC of Communism reflect the views of the Party Programme of 1919. However, Cohen correctly points out that Bukharin’s association with The ABC of Communism, and its publication “thrust him willy-nilly into the role of high priest of ‘orthodox Bolshevism.’”²⁶ Therefore, a close reading and analysis of The ABC of Communism provides the reader with an insight into Bukharin’s thinking on the state its role in the long term road to socialism and his synthesis of the various strains of Marxist thought.

The insights of both Vacić and Cohen dealing with Bukharin’s relationship to The ABC of Communism are extremely important and help clarify what Bukharin believed in The ABC of

²⁴ Vacić, 67.

²⁵ Cohen, 84.

²⁶ Ibid, 84.

Communism. Upon close examination, parts of The ABC of Communism reflect an orthodox reading of the radical and revolutionary Marx and others reflect a reading of the Marx who sees the transition as a long-term process and that only begins after the revolution.

In The ABC of Communism, Bukharin and Preobrazhenskii restated Marx's earlier analysis of the capitalist state and capitalist development, examining these in relation to the socialist revolution and the transition period.²⁷ It is also a restatement of Bukharin's earlier work on how "it [capitalism] brings into being the economic basis for the realization of the communist social order."²⁸ Following from this, Bukharin argued that, in the post-revolutionary society the state would plan and "consciously" organize society,²⁹ allowing people, once they were sufficiently trained and educated, to work at many and varied functions.³⁰ Bukharin also claimed that, in this new society, the workers' state would initially distribute goods based on the amount of work done and then later by need.³¹ Reflecting his own anti-statism of the period, and like Lenin in State and Revolution, Bukharin argued that this communist society would operate like a "well-oiled machine," needing only a statistical bureau to allocate tasks and the workers for those tasks as society needed them.³²

However, in the changed circumstances of the Civil War and War Communism, Bukharin and the Party, in The ABC of Communism, wrestled with what the proletariat had to do now that it had conquered state power, instituted "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat," and faced a situation where the prerequisites for socialism did not exist. Bukharin came to a number of conclusions. For one, he concluded that the dictatorship represented "strict methods of

²⁷ Bukharin and Preobrazhenskii, The ABC of Communism, 39-68, 93-137.

²⁸ Ibid, 68.

²⁹ Ibid, 69-70.

³⁰ Ibid, 72.

³¹ Ibid, 73.

³² Ibid, 74.

government and a resolute crushing of [its] enemies.”³³ This stemmed from his awareness that the bourgeoisie would use all means to resist the workers’ state during the revolution. Consequently, Bukharin argued that the dictatorship too would have to use all means necessary, including terror, to crush its enemies.³⁴ He argued that:

The more vigorous the resistance of the bourgeoisie, the more desperate the mobilization of its forces, the more threatening its attitude, the sterner and harsher must be the proletarian dictatorship. In extreme cases the workers' government must not hesitate to use the method of the terror.³⁵

Therefore, the “Dictatorship” had to destroy the old capitalist state structure, suppress the old classes, and transform class relations, so that it could effect the socialist transformation of society and the economy. It would have to act in a harsh and uncompromising manner when faced with an enemy determined to destroy it. Only after the working class had defeated the bourgeoisie could the proletariat ease its dictatorship and “grow progressively milder.”³⁶ This argument places Bukharin firmly in the mainstream of Bolshevism and Revolutionary Marxism, both in the Revolutionary and Civil War periods, while at the same time providing us with a glimpse into his thinking about the responsibilities of the revolutionary proletarian state. His thinking here is also consistent with the role that Marx ascribed to the commune state in the post-revolutionary period in that the Dictatorship of the Proletariat would affect the transformation of society, economically, socially and politically.

However, this is where the similarity with the Marx of the commune state ended. Though Bukharin viewed the dictatorship as a short-term and expedient measure, he argued in The ABC of Communism and in his later works, that the proletarian state had to become “productivist” in order to reorganize and reconstruct the economic base of society after the

³³ Ibid, 80.

³⁴ Ibid, 80.

³⁵ Ibid, 80.

³⁶ Ibid, 80.

revolution. This became necessary because the Great War, the Revolution and the Civil War had damaged or destroyed the productive forces created by capitalism in its historical epoch. In other words, the proletarian state, in a long-term evolutionary process, had to take on the role of rebuilding and revitalizing the productive forces in society through its control of the levers of coercion and state power.³⁷ The proletarian state would now determine the productive, social, and political relationships within society while creating the social wealth necessary to realize socialism.³⁸ It was this idea that once the proletariat gained control of what Lenin termed “the commanding heights,” i.e. the state, and that the proletariat would use this state to facilitate the transition to socialism, which linked the Bukharin of the pre-revolutionary period, the War Communism period and the NEP. Thus, in The ABC of Communism, the Bolsheviks, and Bukharin, when faced with the difficulties of this period, moved away from the Marx of the commune state and embraced the “productivist” and eventually the evolutionary Marx.

The proletariat, secure in its control of its state, would act in the same manner as the state capitalist structure had done in its epoch. It would socialize its antagonistic base into the socialist system in the way the state capitalist system had done in its era. By creating a relationship in which the proletarian state dominated the petit-bourgeois elements, the state hastened the integration of the petit-bourgeois producer into the socialist economy and then later into the socialist state system.³⁹ Through its control of the placement of orders with small enterprises, the proletarian state could dictate the production levels of the small-scale capitalist enterprises and the prices paid for goods to these petit-bourgeois producers. Its control of the allocation of fuel and raw materials to small enterprises and the artisans, and its control of the financial levers, such as taxes, rents, loans and credits given to the small producer, would enable

³⁷ Ibid, 81.

³⁸ Ibid, 192-248.

³⁹ Ibid, 205-207.

the workers' state to reap the economic benefits while, at the same time, drawing these petit-bourgeois elements into the socialist system.⁴⁰

Two other very important insights from The ABC of Communism deserve attention because they contain the seeds of the policies that became central to the NEP and Bukharin's views on the evolutionary versus the revolutionary path to socialism. The first dealt with the utilization and conciliation of the "bourgeois experts,"⁴¹ and the other with the peasant question.⁴²

According to The ABC of Communism, bourgeois experts and technicians were among those who resisted the Bolsheviks most fiercely during the Civil War. Therefore, when the revolution was in danger, Bukharin believed that the state had every right to use whatever force necessary to defeat these enemies.⁴³ However, once the proletariat triumphed, Bukharin believed that a different policy was necessary. Following the Bolshevik victory in the Civil War, Bukharin believed that a split would occur in the ranks of the "specialists," between those who saw their future within the Soviet state and those who remained hostile to Soviet power. He argued that it was the duty of the proletarian state to exploit and to widen this split by encouraging more of these specialists to work for the socialist system. To accomplish this, the proletarian state needed to embark on a new course and to create an environment enticing enough to encourage the specialists to work for it. Therefore, instead of repression and compulsion, the workers' state would relax its violent and repressive policies, offering instead bourgeois inducements, such as good salaries and benefits, in the hope that these specialists

⁴⁰ Ibid, 273-277. This refers to small industries such as textiles, small, artisanal workers and home workers.

⁴¹ Ibid, 288-292.

⁴² Ibid, 216-219, 294-320.

⁴³ Ibid, 289-290.

would realize that they had much to gain by working for it and helping build socialism.⁴⁴ Still Bukharin argued that the Soviet power had to remain vigilant. If the time came when these specialists resisted or sought to sabotage the power of the workers' state, then that state had the right and the duty to use the harsh measures that proved so effective in winning the Civil War.⁴⁵

Bowing to the necessities of the economic situation that the Bolsheviks faced in this period, Bukharin explicitly admitted that the workers' state needed the bourgeois experts. What was more important is the philosophical implication of this policy. Bukharin's position acknowledged that the working class could afford to show mercy and act in a conciliatory manner towards its class enemies once it was secure in its position and in total control of the proletarian state's coercive forces. Thus, the violence and coercion necessary to win the Revolution and the Civil War would no longer suffice in these new economic and political conditions of reconstruction. In other words changing circumstances, not any underlying change in Bukharin's philosophy, dictated these policies.

Critics within the Party, such as the Worker's Opposition, opposed these conciliatory policies as a reversion to and a restoration of capitalist relations. However, Bukharin argued in The ABC of Communism and in his later writings that he did not believe that the return of market relations at the base of society, i.e. trade with the peasantry and the utilization of co-operatives, would mean the return of capitalism to Russia. Bukharin maintained that the proletarian state, grown from a proletarian base and in control of the "commanding heights," was

⁴⁴ Ibid, 290.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 288-293. Ironically, the Shakhty Trial in 1928 of "bourgeois experts" in Ukraine marked the first real use of this doctrine by Stalin and marked the opening of the assault on Bukharin and the "Right Deviation" within the party. See Sheila Fitzpatrick, The Russian Revolution: 1917-1932 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 111-118, 129-132. Also see Alex F. Dowlah and John E. Elliott, The Life and Times of Soviet Socialism (Connecticut: Praeger, 1997), 72-74.

powerful enough to draw its antagonistic base into socialism in the way that state capitalism had drawn the working class in during its epoch.

The policies espoused in The ABC of Communism regarding agriculture more clearly exemplified this. Bukharin believed that the proletariat, secure in its control of the state, could also afford to act in a more conciliatory manner towards the peasantry without the fear of a capitalist restoration. Therefore, instead of forcibly requisitioning grain, as it did under War Communism, the state could use economic levers to entice the peasants to produce and sell to the state. The state would accomplish this through the control of prices, taxes, and rents. It would educate the peasantry about the advantages of large-scale farming and provide the peasants with scientific help to improve its production. Finally, the proletarian state would create cultural links between the city and the country.⁴⁶ By such activities, the Bolsheviks would reduce the disparity between the town and the country, and show the peasants how profitable their relationship with the proletarian state could be. This in turn would induce the peasants to join the collectives, which would accelerate their assimilation into the socialist state.⁴⁷

Bukharin meant for these state policies to revitalize the economy, reorganize the society on a new socialist basis, all the while bringing all non-proletarian elements into the socialist system. Initially, he saw this as a short-term and expedient measure necessary to achieve socialism quickly. However, this task was much greater than even the most pessimistic of Bolsheviks could have imagined in 1919. The new reality the Bolsheviks faced during and after 1919 meant that the proletarian state would not wither away as easily as Bukharin and others had believed once it defeated its class enemies. The proletarian state would have to finish the work

⁴⁶ Ibid, 225-241.

⁴⁷ Engels argued the same point in 1894. See Frederick Engels, "The Peasant Question in France and Germany," 08/2000, www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Engles_The_Peasant_Question_in_France_and_Germany.pdf (18 August, 2005), 14.

of capitalism and create the economic and political prerequisites necessary for communism. Such an immense historical task delayed the withering of the state for quite awhile. Therefore, faced with a “changed reality,” Bukharin, like Bernstein, began to adapt his policies, all the while staying within the mainstream of Marxist thought on the role of the productivist state and the long-term nature of the transition.

The Bukharin who co-authored The ABC of Communism was, as will become evident below, very similar to the Bukharin of the NEP period. In both periods, his understanding of the role of the state in the transition period and his adaptation of Marx are the keys to understanding how he could support such divergent policies as War Communism and the NEP. There are elements of policies in The ABC of Communism that he would later use during the NEP. To cite but one example, there is no doubt that he argued for violent coercion, but he also argued that the proletariat, once it was in control of its own state, could relax its coercive policies and institute policies that would ensure an evolutionary and largely peaceful transition to socialism. The following analysis will clearly illustrate that the consistent application of his analysis of Marx and the changed nature of the state during state capitalism and the dialectical reversal of this state in the transition period underlay his support for these two, very different, policies.

4.2.2. The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period

The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period, published in 1920, after the Great War and while the Civil War raged, represented Bukharin at his most radical and revolutionary. Given the apocalyptic nature of the struggle, this is hardly surprising. However, for those historians looking to Bukharin as an alternative to Stalinism, it is an embarrassment. Stephen

Cohen, in particular, describes this work as “a tract grounded in the worst error of the period,” the belief that “Civil War lays bare the true physiognomy of society.”⁴⁸ What these historians do not fully appreciate is that, in this period, like the Marx of 1848 and 1870, Bukharin was wrestling with no less than what he believed was the survival of the “Revolution” and even more importantly “Humanity.”

Surveying the wreckage left by imperialism, the Great War, the Revolution, and the ongoing Civil War, Bukharin argued that the restoration of capitalist relations would be a disaster not just for Russia, but also for the human race. Bukharin believed that “*mankind is confronted with a dilemma: ‘the death of civilization or communism’*, and there is no other alternative.”⁴⁹ It is no wonder that his prescription for “salvation” was so “radical” in this period. Still, there is nothing in The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period that is inconsistent with anything he had written earlier and was to write later. In fact, this work fits in with his earlier and later analyses of the change in state power, the changed role of the state in state capitalism, and the state’s role in the transition to socialism.

During this period, Bukharin remained aligned with the “left communist” tendency in the Party. However, the underlying philosophy and theory of the state in The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period is not different from his writings on the state found in Imperialism and the World Economy, “Toward a Theory of The Imperialist State,” The ABC of Communism, and, later Historical Materialism. It is not, as Cohen suggests, an anomaly because The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period is neither a departure from his past nor

⁴⁸ Cohen, 87. Kozlov points out that this quote does not even come from The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period and actually refers to the period of civil war in a society split into classes and. See Kozlov, “War Communism, the New Economic Policy and Bukharin’s Theory of the Transition to Socialism,” 111.

⁴⁹ Bukharin, The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period, 91.

inconsistent with his future works. Rather it is rooted in Bukharin's original synthesis of Marx and his philosophical thought on the reversed role of the base and the superstructure.

In The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period, Bukharin analyzed state capitalism and its development in almost the same terms that he used in "Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State."⁵⁰ As in The ABC of Communism, Bukharin argued that the dictatorship of the proletariat, organized as state power and through its control of the coercive powers of the state, would remake or destroy the bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia, and the peasantry. In The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period, he restates his belief, initially found in The ABC of Communism, that the proletarian state would use its powers ruthlessly against all class enemies and would relax them only after it had defeated these enemies and had firmly established the proletarian state. As he had in his earlier writings, Bukharin declared that once the proletarian state had defeated its enemies, it would then use its coercive powers to transform these defeated elements into supporters and workers for the socialist system.⁵¹ As a result, according to Bukharin, the dictatorship of the proletariat, when in control of its own state,

will bear a *formal* resemblance to the epoch of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, i.e. it will be state capitalism in *reverse, its own dialectical transformation and its own antithesis*.⁵² (Emphasis in original)

For Bukharin, the character of the state could now

be clearly seen as a 'super-structure', upon an economic basis. As with every 'super-structure', it is not simply a bell-glass, covering economic life, but an active force, a working organization which consolidates in every way possible the production base on which it arose.⁵³

Therefore, Bukharin believed that the Bolsheviks, once they had destroyed the capitalist state, could create an all-encompassing proletarian state that would control all the levers of economic

⁵⁰ Ibid, 57-92.

⁵¹ Ibid, 157-175.

⁵² Ibid, 101.

⁵³ Ibid, 70.

and political coercion to destroy its enemies and bring its antagonistic base into the socialist system.

This argument flows directly from his earlier work on the imperialist state and the state power that developed out of finance capitalism, the demands of the war and into state capitalism.

He wrote:

*the reorganization of the relations of finance capitalism was a move towards a universal state-capitalist organization, with the abolition of the commodity market, the transformation of money into an accounting unit, production organized on a nationwide scale and the subordination of the entire “national-economic” mechanism to the aim of world competition, i.e., primarily of war.*⁵⁴
(Emphasis in original)

Thus, in the period of total war, the pre-war path of capitalist development had led to “organized capitalism,” with the corresponding growth of state power and the development of an interventionist state that controlled the socialization process and the production process in society.⁵⁵ In each bourgeois nation, the entire economy and all bourgeois and bourgeois economic organizations found themselves turned into branches and departments of a “united, *universal* organization . . . the *imperialist* state, resting on the *state-capitalist* relations.”⁵⁶ (Emphasis in original) This evolution was necessary, Bukharin argued, as the state was the only organization left to hold the nations together while meeting the demands of the war.⁵⁷

Amidst the destruction and economic chaos of the Civil War, Bukharin also became alarmed about what he called “expanded negative reproduction.” He defined this as the destruction of the productive forces that took place in capitalism in times of economic crisis and war. In this context, he argued that “expanded negative reproduction” was the natural result and

⁵⁴ Ibid, 78.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 70-71.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 76.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 74-79.

outgrowth of state capitalism's militaristic state.⁵⁸ This "negative reproduction" would eventually break the link with the masses and cause the social imperialism that had held the working class in thrall to collapse.⁵⁹ As the expected industrial, economic and social collapse unfolded, according to Bukharin,

it follows that any rebirth of industry (based upon disintegrating, capitalist relations), which is the dream of the utopists of capitalism, is impossible. The *only* way out lies in the fact that lowest links of the system, the basic productive forces of capitalist society, the working class, will occupy the ruling position in the organization of social labour.⁶⁰ (Emphasis in original)

Once the collapse of the capitalist system had taken place, the working class would have to organize itself in order to save humanity. In essence, Bukharin argued that, "the construction of communism is the precondition for social rebirth."⁶¹ What he saw, and he was quite explicit, is that:

The development and collapse of capitalism led society up a blind alley, and brought to a halt the production process which is the very basis of society's existence. The resumption of the production process was possible only under the rule of the proletariat and that is why its dictatorship is an objective necessity.⁶²

Faced with the collapse of society and humanity, and an economy, which by 1921, produced less than 20% of pre-war levels,⁶³ he argued the proletarian state had to use all its power, including violence if necessary, to reconstruct a society and an economy destroyed by the Great War and the Revolution. Laurence Lafore, who examined the collapse of the "old order"

⁵⁸ Ibid, 81-82.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 88-92.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 90.

⁶¹ Ibid, 90.

⁶² Ibid, 107.

⁶³ Professor R.W. Davies, "The New Economic Policy," 1998, www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~semp/nep.htm (21 January 2005). Davies argues "But the economy was devastated. The output of large-scale industry had fallen to a mere 13 per cent of the 1913 level, iron and steel to a mere four per cent. And from the summer of 1920 peasant disturbances were widespread, and unrest spread to the industrial workers. Against this tense background, in March 1921 a Communist Party congress decided that compulsory food requisitioning was no longer possible, and resolved to replace it by a food tax. The peasants would retain any surplus. Their incentive to grow more food would thus be restored."

throughout Europe after the Great War, argued that the reason the state, in all countries, became so powerful and took on an active role in dealing with social, political, and economic problems, was because “there was no agency capable of effective action except the national state.”⁶⁴ Bukharin firmly believed this and argued that an all-powerful proletarian state was necessary because it now had to arrest the “negative reproduction,” begin the reconstruction of society and save humanity. Thus, the “commune state” would have to wait until the “proletarian state” created the necessary pre-conditions for socialism.

Though the proletarian state structure and its actions bore a formal appearance to the state capitalist structure and its actions, they were dialectical opposites, because the class basis of the two systems and the reasons for their actions were completely different. Therefore, exploitation became inconceivable because the proletarian state had converted “collective-capitalist property and its private-capitalist form into collective *proletarian* “property.”⁶⁵ (Emphasis in original) In Bukharin’s words:

This method of organization consists in the subordination of all the workers’ organizations to the most comprehensive organization, i.e. to the state organization of the working class, to the *soviet state of the proletariat*. “Statification” of the trade unions and the virtual statification of the mass organizations of the proletariat springs from the inherent logic of the transition process. The smallest units of the workers’ apparatus must be changed into the vehicles of a general organizational process, systematically directed and led by the collective intelligence of the working class, which is physically embodied in its highest and all-embracing organization, the state apparatus. Thus, the system of state capitalism is dialectically transformed into its own opposite, into the state structure of worker’s socialism.⁶⁶ (Emphasis in original)

⁶⁴ Laurence Lafore, *The End of Glory* (Illinois: Waveland Press, 2001), 85.

⁶⁵ Bukharin, *The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period*, 134.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 106.

Bukharin argued that there had to be a system of universal labor service, incorporation of the mass of peasants into this system and the creation of a “collectively acting, living, mass, productive force.”⁶⁷ He believed that

for the great mass of *small producers*, inclusion within the organizational apparatus is possible *mainly* through the *sphere of circulation*, or formally by the same route as under the system of state capitalism. *State and communal organs for procurement and distribution*: these constitute the main apparatus of the new system of equilibrium.⁶⁸ (Emphasis in original)

Richard Day argues that this assertion provides the link between Bukharin of the periods of War Communism and the NEP. Day writes:

By the mid-1920s Bukharin would defend the NEP and Lenin’s so-called “co-operative plan” with exactly the same reasoning. Cooperatives for the organization of sales and purchase would become the logical counterpart of capitalist industrial syndicate and would *indirectly* regulate peasant production by manipulating market forces rather than eliminating them. In this respect, The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period anticipated Bukharin’s program for “cooperative agrarian socialism.”⁶⁹ (Emphasis in original)

In The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period, Bukharin also used the term “primitive socialist accumulation” to describe the wealth needed to build socialism. However, he defined it very differently than did Preobrazhenskii in the early 1920s. Preobrazhenskii argued that socialist accumulation relied

on alienating part of the surplus product of presocialist forms of economy and the smaller will be the relative weight of accumulation on its own production basis, that is, the less it will be nourished by the surplus product of the workers in socialist industry.⁷⁰

In essence, as Chad Raymond points out, in his unpublished dissertation, Preobrazhenskii believed that

⁶⁷ Ibid, 130.

⁶⁸ Richard Day, introduction to Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism, 4.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 4.

⁷⁰ Vacić, 72.

industrialization could be achieved by forced sales from the agricultural sector to the state at below market prices. Industrial and consumer goods produced by the urban sector would be sold to the peasantry at artificially high prices, creating a scissors effect, and the capital bled from the rural sector would be acquired by the state, leading to industrialization.⁷¹

In contrast, Bukharin argued that

socialism . . . must inevitably begin with the mobilization of the living productive forces. This mobilization of labour is fundamental aspect of a socialist primary accumulation, which is the dialectical negation of capitalist accumulation. Its class nature lies not in creating the preconditions for a process of exploitation, but in economic rebirth with the *abolition* of exploitation, not coercions by a handful of capitalists, but the self-organization of the working masses.⁷² (Emphasis in the original)

In this work, Bukharin sounds very much like Trotsky in the Civil War and later Stalin during “The Great Leap Forward.” Like them, in their respective periods, Bukharin argued that for the Revolution to survive what was “required here by the very terms of the organization's existence is an unquestioning execution, and speed of decision, and unity of will.”⁷³ In this instance, the coercive power of the state became all-important, and compulsion and coercion represented “for the first time . . . an instrument of the majority in the interest of that majority.”⁷⁴ Compulsion was thus, not an outside force, but rather the working class’ self-organization. Bukharin argued that the “militarization of the population – above all in the army – is a method of *self-organization of the working class and organization of the peasantry.*”⁷⁵ (Emphasis in the original)

Given that Cohen has presented Bukharin as a “humanist alternative,” who avoided coercion, Bukharin’s defense of and justification of compulsion and coercion may seem odd. It

⁷¹ Chad Raymond, “Rational Resistance to a Weak Authoritarian State: The Political Economy of Vietnamese Farmers from Collectivization to Doi Moi,” 2000, <http://www.socialscience.gardner-webb.edu/Faculty/craymond/Diss/Intro.htm> (21 January 2005), Chapter 1.

⁷² Bukharin, *The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period*, 129.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 142.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 164.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 142.

is not. Bukharin did not view this mobilization of labor as exploitation because “Under the proletarian dictatorship, the question of an ‘owner’ no longer arises, since ‘the expropriators are expropriated.’”⁷⁶ Thus, the proletarian state, as the self-organization of the working class, could not exploit the working class,⁷⁷ but instead through the “self-organization of the working masses”⁷⁸ would accomplish the economic revival and the revitalization of society.

Militarization of labor by the proletarian state was not the only way in which Bukharin thought to “encourage” people to work and to build socialism. In The ABC of Communism, Bukharin had argued for “comradely labour discipline” that “must be accompanied by the *complete spontaneity of the working class*. The working class must not wait for orders from above.”⁷⁹ (Emphasis in the original) Bukharin believed that, in the transition period, where the workers no longer worked for the capitalist, but instead for themselves, “every worker is responsible to his class.”⁸⁰ The “communist subbotnik,” where workers volunteered their labor on Saturdays was an example of this.⁸¹ This phenomenon originated during the Civil War, when a group of revolutionary workers worked on their steam engines on their day off.⁸² Bukharin, and the proletarian state, touted this as an example of the new “communist man” coming into existence as capitalism died out and the communist millennium dawned.

The ideas propounded in The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period do not radically depart from Bukharin’s theories on the state and the use of state power in his earlier works. In this work, one finds the “productivist” Bukharin who sees state power as the salvation

⁷⁶ Ibid, 164.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 164.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 129.

⁷⁹ Bukharin and Preobrazhenskii, The ABC of Communism, 284-285.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 285.

⁸¹ For more detailed analysis and examination of the “Subbotnik” movement see: William J. Chase, “Voluntarism, Mobilisation and Coercion: Subbotniks, 1919-1921.” Soviet Studies, vol XLI, no 1, January 1989: 111-128.

⁸² B. Kagarlitsky, “Differing Opinions over Lenin’s Memory,” St. Petersburg Times, 29 April 2003, #864.

of the Revolution, Russia and the world through the all-powerful proletarian state that would begin the long and evolutionary process of building socialism. What is intriguing about Bukharin's work in The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period, although beyond the scope of this paper, are the implications of his thinking on the role of the state in the transition to socialism. By heralding the proletarian state as the "subject," the "agent," of history, Bukharin provided those in the Bolshevik Party, who viewed the policy imperatives differently to justify the use of state power in various, even nefarious, means.

4.2.3. Historical Materialism

In his biography of Bukharin, Stephen Cohen writes that, "the dissimilar tempers of The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period and Historical Materialism⁸³ . . . derived in part from the fact that they focused on different periods in society's life."⁸⁴ He acknowledges that, although Bukharin wrote these studies within a year of each other, he wrote them under very different circumstances: The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period during the worst of the Civil War, and Historical Materialism after the Bolsheviks had won the Civil War, jettisoned War Communism and instituted the NEP. For Cohen the differences between The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period and Historical Materialism resulted from Bukharin breaking with his philosophical past, a break that enabled him to reject War Communism, and to embrace the NEP and the "gradualist" and peaceful path to socialism.

This work argues that there was no such break, that Historical Materialism flows directly from The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period, and that Historical Materialism is

⁸³ Nikolai Bukharin, Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology, ed. trans. Alfred G. Meyer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969)

⁸⁴ Cohen, 119.

consistent with Bukharin's previous philosophical work on Marxism and the state. The differences between these two books are not the result of some fundamental break by Bukharin with his philosophical past. Bukharin's support for very different policies derived from his consistent application of his theories on the role of the state and his adaptation of the different visions of Marxism to the circumstances faced by the Bolsheviks at the end of the Civil War.

In Historical Materialism, Bukharin dealt very little with the state and its structure. Instead, he focused on and continued to refine his analysis of the reversed role of the base and the superstructure, as well as "equilibrium," a concept that first appeared in The ABC of Communism and which Bukharin elaborated in The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period. Bukharin did not do this by simply restating Marxist orthodoxy, but rather by using the new pre-war sociological theories current in the West and merging them with his understanding of Marxism. The result was the creation of, in the words of Alfred Meyer, a "coherent and impressive, and also rather modern, sociological system."⁸⁵

As he had done earlier, and true to his Marxist roots, Bukharin stated that the superstructure was determined either "directly or indirectly by the stage that has been reached by the social productive forces."⁸⁶ However, strongly influenced by the new Western sociological theories, Bukharin argued that the relationship between the superstructure and its component parts was a very complex one. Instead of a simple cause and effect interaction between the base and the superstructure, Bukharin argued that there existed a dynamic reciprocal relationship between the base and the superstructure and that each component of the base and the superstructure exercised influence on the other components.⁸⁷ As a traditional Marxist, he saw that the relationship and the level of development of the productive forces at the base, as well as

⁸⁵ Alfred G. Meyer, introduction to Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology, 6a.

⁸⁶ Bukharin, Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology, 155.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 155.

the production relations within society, determined and shaped the development of the superstructure. That superstructure, in turn, shaped the productive forces and productive relations through its institutions while, at the same time, reflecting the interests and values of the class that controlled it.

He defined the social and political superstructure as consisting, “for all society, of a combination of things, persons;” it “is a complicated thing, consisting of different elements which are interrelated.”⁸⁸ He argued that

this structure is determined by the class outline of society, a structure which in turn depends on the level of development of the productive forces.” All the elements of the superstructure are therefore directly or indirectly based on the stage that has been reached by the social productive forces.⁸⁹

In other words, the superstructure consists of the state, all its agencies, the officer class, the state bureaucrats, the political leaders, social psychology, ideology, and so on. In a capitalist society, those who staffed these positions would all come from the capitalist class because of the economic base from which this system arose and the class alignment in that society. Thus, the entire superstructure reflected the values of the capitalist class, served the needs of that class, and worked to socialize the society into the values of the capitalist system.

This echoes Bukharin’s earlier work, where he made it clear that he did not believe that the capitalist state, no matter how rationalized, could be used by the working class to realize socialism. He continued to argue that the working class had to destroy the capitalist state and its superstructure before it could achieve socialism because the state and its superstructure grew from the system of capitalist relations. In Historical Materialism, Bukharin explained why it was necessary to this and how the new proletarian state would facilitate the transition to socialism

⁸⁸ Ibid, 154-155.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 155.

once it had destroyed the capitalist state and all its elements.⁹⁰ Referencing the revolutionary Marx, Bukharin argued that the proletariat had to destroy the capitalist state because, with its destruction, “capitalist production [would become] impossible.”⁹¹ Once the proletariat accomplished this task and gained control of the commanding heights of political and economic power, it would then act in the same manner as the capitalist state had in the period of imperialism and state capitalism. It would use violent coercion to deal with enemies and non-violent coercion to socialize its antagonistic base into the socialist values of the proletarian state.

In Historical Materialism, Bukharin argued that the socialist revolution was a historical process that only began with the conflict between the productive forces and the productive relations. This process consisted of four stages - the Ideological Revolution, the Political Revolution, the Economic Revolution, and then the Technical Revolution.⁹² In the first phase, the Ideological Revolution, the changed production relations that came about because of the changes in the productive forces would lead to “a revolutionizing of the consciousness . . . an ideological revolution in the [working] class that is to serve as the grave-digger of the old society.”⁹³ That is, the development of the class-consciousness necessary to make the revolution would take place within the working class. The second phase is the Political Revolution in which the working class seizes power. However, this is not merely a seizure of political power in the way that Hilferding and Bernstein argued for, “but more or less . . . a destruction of its [the state’s] machinery [i.e. superstructure], followed by the erection of a new organization, i.e., a new combination of things and persons, a new coordination of the corresponding ideas.”⁹⁴ For Bukharin, the Political Revolution meant the establishment of a proletarian state that would

⁹⁰ Ibid, 261-262.

⁹¹ Ibid, 226.

⁹² Ibid, 255-262.

⁹³ Ibid, 255.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 259.

remake the political and economic superstructure and bend it to the will of the working class. Then during the Economic Revolution, it would break up the production relations from the capitalist era and begin to erect new relations, which had already been maturing in the womb of the old order, and “*in contradiction* with that order.”⁹⁵ (Emphasis in original) Finally, in the Technical Revolution, the new workers’ state would create a new social equilibrium and new production relations that could facilitate the regeneration of the productive forces and then the regeneration of all of society.

As is clear, prior to Historical Materialism, Bukharin envisioned this entire process as a relatively short one. He based this on his belief that the Bolsheviks could realize the commune state once the revolution took place, simply because capitalism had already created the prerequisites for socialism.⁹⁶ However, after the Bolsheviks emerged victorious from the Civil War, Bukharin realized that the preconditions for socialism no longer existed, if they ever did, in Russia. The Russian economic and social base was predominately peasant. The proletarian base that did survive the Civil War existed only in the cities and the meager productive forces in Russia prior to 1914, suffered massive destruction in the Great War and the Civil War. The output of large-scale industry fell to a mere 13 per cent, and the production of iron and steel to a mere four per cent of the of the 1913 level.⁹⁷ Production of grain in 1920 and 1921 was about 50 percent of the prewar average.⁹⁸ In other words, the social productive forces necessary for the socialist transformation in Russia, already meager at best before the Revolution, did not exist after the Bolsheviks consolidated power. This meant that the Bolsheviks, following Bukharin’s

⁹⁵ Ibid, 259.

⁹⁶ Lenin emphatically shared this belief with Bukharin in this period. See Lenin’s State and Revolution

⁹⁷ Professor R.W. Davies, “The New Economic Policy,” 1998,
<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~semp/nep.htm> (21 January 2005)

⁹⁸ George Fyson, “The Militant -4/31/95- -Lenin’s Final Fight,” 1995,
http://www.themilitant.com/1995/5917/5917_27.html (22 January 2005).

analysis of the phases of the “transition period,” had to carry out the Economic and Technical Revolutions to create the productive forces, but only after they had carried out the Political Revolution and created the proletarian state structure and superstructure to accomplish this task. Hence, the reality of Russia after the Revolution meant that the transition to socialism would be a long-term process, not a one-time event. The all-powerful proletarian state, i.e. the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, would merge the contradictory features of this period, that is, a socialist superstructure sitting on top of a petit-bourgeois base, to facilitate this transition.

Bukharin also refined his concept of “equilibrium” in this work. Cohen correctly points out that, for Bukharin, “dialectics and social change are explained by equilibrium theory.”⁹⁹ For Bukharin, equilibrium became the dialectic, where conflict determined the motion of the system and the subsequent change in society. Instead of the Hegelian and Marxist dialectic, Bukharin argued in his analysis of economic and social change that equilibrium was the basis for all societal change.¹⁰⁰ Bukharin theorized that change took place when external pressure disrupted the internal equilibrium or a change in the productive forces took place within society. The disruption would lead to “expanded negative reproduction” until society found equilibrium on a new basis.¹⁰¹

Analyzing the mutual influences of the base and superstructure on each other, Bukharin argued that it was impossible for the superstructure and its base to be in contradiction, or out of equilibrium, with each other for any length of time. If this conflict or contradiction came into existence, then an adjustment had to occur or revolution would result.¹⁰² However, Bukharin appreciated that not “*every conflict between the productive forces and the production relations*

⁹⁹ Cohen, 117.

¹⁰⁰ Bukharin, Historical Materialism, 74.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 74.

¹⁰² Ibid, 158.

results in revolution.”¹⁰³ (Emphasis in original) Instead, he contended that the superstructure, even a capitalist one, was capable of adjusting and resolving, at least temporarily, its inherent contradictions. In essence, the superstructure had the ability to find at least a temporary “equilibrium” achieving conciliation between the productive forces and the production relations, as well as the class relations within society.

Bukharin had made this point in Imperialism and the World Economy when he analyzed and explained how capitalism had delayed the Revolution by constantly adjusting itself to the changed circumstances of the world economy. That ability aside, Bukharin argued that, in a capitalist state, the basic character of the superstructure would remain capitalist and continue to create disequilibrium, regardless of how well it adjusted to the changed equilibrium in each crisis. Consequently, equilibrium would last only for a short period before another crisis occurred. A further problem for capitalism was that the equilibrium that it created was what Bukharin termed “unstable and negative indication.”¹⁰⁴ That is, when the capitalist state adjusted the equilibrium, it simultaneously damaged or destroyed the productive forces in the process of restoring equilibrium. This occurred simply because the necessary societal transformation, essential for the creation of a permanent equilibrium, was impossible to achieve under state-capitalism. The inherent contradictions were simply too great and the effort to restore equilibrium too destructive to the productive forces.

This problem, along with the inherent contradictions of state capitalism in the age of imperialism, meant that the superstructure of the capitalist state could only evolve into what Bukharin called a “militaristic state capitalism.”¹⁰⁵ At this point, the superstructure would not be able to find equilibrium between itself and its proletarian base, and its external environment (the

¹⁰³ Ibid, 245.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 77.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 32.

world economy). Once this disequilibrium reached a critical point, imperialist war would take place and then the revolution would become not only possible but also inevitable.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, when the revolution took place, the proletariat would not only need to “expropriate the expropriators” and smash the old state machinery, but also to build a new, socialist superstructure, capable of restoring equilibrium and restoring and reorganizing the economy and the society.¹⁰⁷ Following from this analysis of Bukharin’s work, we know that he now accepted that an all-powerful centralized and productivist state would create the prerequisites for socialism in Russia.

This study has already illustrated Bukharin’s analysis of the changed relationship between the base and the superstructure in the period of imperialism and state capitalism. In Historical Materialism Bukharin also looked at the base and superstructure, at the way in which they interacted and, more importantly, the superstructure's role in placing politics over the economy. This is obvious from Bukharin's analysis of what he terms the “*economic revolution*.”¹⁰⁸ (Emphasis in original)

Utilizing the example of the state capitalist system, and as he had done earlier, Bukharin wrote that, during the post-revolutionary transitional period, the proletarian state, in a dialectical reversal of state capitalism, would determine the economic and political relationships at the base of society through its control of the superstructure. In other words,

a revolution begins when the property relations have become a hindrance to the evolution of the productive forces; revolution has done its work, as soon as *new* production relations have been established, to serve as forms favoring the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 252-253.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 259-263. The concept discussed here presupposes, if we follow Bukharin's ideas through, that after the revolution the proletarian state would establish “an equilibrium” between its new superstructure and its base.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 255-262.

evolution of the productive forces. Between this beginning and this ending lies the reverse order in *the influence of the superstructure*.¹⁰⁹ (Emphasis in original)

Obviously, the theory of equilibrium held great importance for Bukharin. He believed that the state's inability to find equilibrium had precipitated revolution in Russia and would lead to revolutions elsewhere. In Bukharin's view, disequilibrium is the primary or fundamental cause of revolution. Bukharin's theory of the base and superstructure and equilibrium suggested that the victorious proletarian state, once it took power, would have to use its superstructure to bring its own base into equilibrium with it. Otherwise, it could not resolve the inherent contradictions or disequilibrium, if you will, of the transition period.¹¹⁰ Implicit here also is the idea that, if proletarian dictatorship failed to achieve equilibrium, it too ran the risk of collapse.

To avoid this, once the working class established its dictatorship, it had to create a new proletarian state, which controlled the "commanding heights" of political power and the economy through its control of the political, economic, power and social relationships. After accomplishing this, the working class would then create the productive forces necessary for socialism. Implicit in this analysis again is what later became central to Bukharin's "road to socialism." Bukharin now recognized that socialism was not something the Bolsheviks would achieve quickly. Rather the transition would be a long-term process taking an entire historical period, particularly because of the "*peculiarity of the transition period*."¹¹¹ (Emphasis in original) The peculiarity to which Bukharin referred was the outright destruction of the economic base during the war, the Revolution, and the Civil War and the peasant nature of the country. This insight was important because it indicated, as early as the autumn of 1921, that

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 263-264.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 261. Here Bukharin writes that the dictatorship must stay "until the conditions of the new social equilibrium had been established in their main outlines."

¹¹¹ Ibid, 264. See also Bukharin and Preobrazhenskii, The ABC of Communism, in particular the three chapters dealing with organizing agriculture, production and distribution.

Bukharin was working out the concepts that served as the foundation for his policies during the high water mark of NEP in 1925.

In his analysis, Bukharin again utilizes the “Productivist” and Evolutionary” Marx. He argued that, during the transition period, *“the transition from one form of society to another is accompanied by a temporary lowering of the productive force, which cannot in any other way find an opportunity for further evolution.”*¹¹² (Emphasis in the original) This meant that the proletarian state and its superstructure would have to not only destroy the old social relationships of a capitalist society, but also embark on the creation of new productive forces that befit a socialist society. For the Revolution to succeed in the context of revolutionary Russia, the new proletarian state had to become the “productivist state,” focusing on a long and gradual evolutionary process, while, like the commune state, reordering all societal relationships.

The analysis found in Historical Materialism is a continuation of Bukharin’s work on the influence of the superstructure on the base and an analysis of how the new proletarian state would restore equilibrium through that relationship. Utilizing this work, and faced with the reality of post-revolutionary Russia, he tried to determine, practically and theoretically, the way to move to the next step, the step that would take the proletariat from the Revolution itself to socialism. Thus, this is not some dramatic change in Bukharin’s philosophical thought, but the fleshing out and the evolution of his thinking on the revolutionary and evolutionary transformation of society.

Bukharin’s support for the violence and the coercion of the Civil War and War Communism periods is also of great importance to this study. Scholars still question how Bukharin could shift from active support for the policies of violence and civil war in 1919, to the position, only a few years later, as an outspoken advocate of civil peace and the NEP. By now, it

¹¹² Ibid, 265.

is obvious that the answer lies in Bukharin's theories on the changing role of the state in the imperialist stage of history, through the period of revolution, and into the transition period to socialism.

Beginning with "Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State" in 1916, Bukharin maintained that while the enemy (the bourgeoisie) controlled the state and waged war against the proletariat, there could be no compromise. Until the proletariat completely destroyed the capitalist state and replaced it with its own state structure, class conflict and class war were essential.¹¹³ However, once the proletarian state won the class war and succeeded in subduing the old order then, and only then, could it relax its dictatorship and institute a new policy of civil peace.¹¹⁴ This relaxation would not occur soon after the seizure of power, but rather only when the proletarian state had crushed its class enemies, consolidated its power, and devised policies to socialize its antagonistic base, i.e. peasants, specialists, et. al, into the values of the new socialist order. He put forth this position in each of the works examined here, but it was not until 1921 and his article "The New Course in Economic Policy"¹¹⁵ that he began to fully develop this idea, an idea that was more completely explicated in his works on the NEP and especially in The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance (1925).

¹¹³ Bukharin and Preobrazhenski, The ABC of Communism, 226.

¹¹⁴ Nikolai Bukharin, The Road to Socialism and Worker-Peasant Alliance in Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism, 249-250.

¹¹⁵ Nikolai Bukharin, "The New Course in Economic Policy," in Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism, 98.

5. NEP: THE EVOLUTIONARY ROAD TO SOCIALISM

The adoption of NEP was a collapse of our illusions . . . we thought then that our peacetime policy would be a continuation of the centralized planning system of that period. In other words war communism was seen by us not as a military, i.e., as needed at a given stage of civil war, but as a universal, general, so to speak 'normal' form of economic policy of a victorious proletariat.

Nikolai Bukharin¹

5.1. Introduction

Richard Day, in his very perceptive essay “The New Leviathan”² argues that:

In the closing pages of The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period a glimmer of reality began to penetrate Bukharin's otherwise fanciful design for near-instantaneous social transformation. After three years of Bolshevik rule, it finally became clear that the comparative ease of seizing political power in Russia would be more than offset by the enormous practical difficulty of building socialism in a backward country.³

Day also echoes the opinion of others regarding Bukharin, claiming that, “in reality, the “liberal” Bukharin of the NEP continued to be a theoretical extremist in the sense of reasoning by way of non-dialectical concepts.”⁴

¹ Nikolai Bukharin quoted in Alec Nove, “Some observations on Bukharin and His Ideas,” in Political Economy and Soviet Socialism (Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1979), 86.

² Richard Day, “The New Leviathan,” xxxi-lvi.

³ Bukharin, “The New Course in Economic Policy,” 95.

⁴ Richard Day, “The New Leviathan,” xlviii.

In the first instance, Day agrees that Bukharin, beginning with The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period, exhibited continuity in his philosophical thought. He believes that Bukharin did not have to rethink his philosophy to move from support of the harshest military measures of War Communism to the peaceful, co-operative policies of the New Economic Policy. In the second instance, the “non-dialectical concept” that Day refers to is “equilibrium,” a concept central to Bukharin’s Historical Materialism.

From the analysis of Historical Materialism, it is clear that Bukharin’s concept of equilibrium stressed that external forces exert influence on the internal equilibrium of a state. When this occurs, the external force disrupts the internal equilibrium of that society and that society necessarily restructures itself or collapses. This is a crucial point and insight for Bukharin. Day argues, “The failure of world capitalism to collapse on schedule had altered the external environment of Soviet society, requiring an adaptive, internal restructuring.”⁵ This internal restructuring, this restoration of equilibrium in Russia, became the “New Economic Policy.”

Another important point made by Day refers the reader back to Bukharin’s earlier work on the nature of the state and who controls that state. Day writes that in The Road to Socialism, Bukharin, for the first time, explicitly stated that:

Within the context of the capitalist system, the party of the working class is a party of *civil war*. The position is completely reversed when the working class takes power into its own hands...As the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie is destroyed and replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat...the party...becomes *a party of civil peace*.⁶ (Emphasis in the original)

Day points out that Bukharin, as he had in The ABC of Communism, argued that the Party demanded submission and “civil peace” from the former ruling strata, and warned them that they

⁵ Ibid, xlvi.

⁶ Bukharin, The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance, 250.

were inviting punishment if they interfered “*with the cause of peacefully building a new society.*”⁷ (Emphasis in original) Accordingly, with its enemies, especially in time of crisis such as the Civil War, the proletariat had to act mercilessly and act with a swift vengeance. Once victorious in the Revolution and securely in control of its own state, the proletariat’s goal then became the “*reform [of] the broad popular strata, the peasantry,*”⁸ (Emphasis in original) cooperating with and co-opting this historically antagonistic strata into socialism.⁹ Thus, the amount of coercion and violence used by the proletarian state would depend on the behavior of its enemies, and on the circumstances of the day.

5.2. “The New Course in Economic Policy”

We [the Bolsheviks] believed that it was possible to destroy the market in one stroke and immediately. It turned out that we shall reach socialism *precisely through* market relations. (Emphasis in original)
Nikolai Bukharin¹⁰

After victory in the Civil War and after the Western European revolutions failed, the Bolsheviks found themselves in control of a state in which the pre-conditions for socialism no longer, if they ever had, existed and surrounded by a hostile capitalist world. Sheila Fitzpatrick points out that, by 1921, the economy had almost completely collapsed.¹¹ The output of large-scale industry fell to 13 per cent of its 1913 level, while iron and steel output dropped even

⁷ Ibid, 250.

⁸ Ibid, 266.

⁹ Ibid, 266-269.

¹⁰ Nikolai Bukharin, *Izbrannye proizvedniia* (Moscow, 1988), 196, quoted in Lewis Siegelbaum, *Soviet State and Society: Between Revolutions, 1918-1929*, 140.

¹¹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution: 1917-1932*, 85-86.

further, tumbling about 96%.¹² Paul Avrich, citing an article in Pravda from February 1921, tells of over sixty, large factories in Petrograd that had shut down because they lacked fuel.¹³ In both the cities and the countryside, famine returned, while peasant resistance to the continuation of War Communism and requisitioning led to revolts in the Ukraine¹⁴ and in the Tambov¹⁵ regions. Demobilization of the Red Army threw more men into the labor pool and consequently increased unemployment, forcing many within the working class to flee the cities in search for food.¹⁶ Then on the eve of the Tenth Party Congress, the Kronstadt Revolt broke out.¹⁷ When these crises converged in 1921, Bukharin and the Bolsheviks faced the full implication of the premature revolution, about which Bernstein had warned.¹⁸ They now had to turn inwards for economic regeneration and find an alternative path to socialism in revolutionary Russia.

Even before Russia had reached this crisis point, the Party, as early as 1920, found itself in turmoil when the Workers Opposition questioned the policies and the path the Bolsheviks were taking to socialism. In response to War Communism and its collapse, the Workers Opposition demanded a greater economic plan that would increase production, provide for the rule of Soviet Russia by the trade unions, the equalization of wages, the free distribution of food, and the gradual replacement of monetary payment with payment in kind. They also argued

¹² Professor R.W. Davies, "The New Economic Policy" 1998, <http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~semp/nep.htm> (21 January 2005). See also From Tsarism to the NEP, ed. R.W. Davies (GB: Billing and Sons Ltd., 1990), 5-7.

¹³ Paul Avrich, Kronstadt: 1921 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1970), 37.

¹⁴ Paul Avrich, "Russian Anarchists and the Civil War," Russian Review, Volume 27, Issue 3 (July, 1968), 296-306. This is a brief, but clear discussion of Makhno's anarchist rebellion in Ukraine.

¹⁵ "Tambov Rebellion-free definition," academe-de, n.d., <http://www.free-definition.com/Tambov-rebellion.html> (12 Feb. 2005). This provides brief background on the Antonov Revolt and links to more information on the Tambov Revolt. For more in depth examination of this rebellion see Oliver Radkey, The Unknown Civil War in Soviet Russia (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1976)

¹⁶ Fitzpatrick, 86. Fitzpatrick points out that 3.6 million industrial workers existed in 1917, but by 1921, only 1.5 million still worked in industrial enterprises.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 85-87. See also Avrich, Kronstadt: 1921.

¹⁸ Siegelbaum, Soviet State and Society, 75.

against the use of bourgeois specialists in industry.¹⁹ The Democratic Centralists concurred with this program, as they also fought against the increasing centralization of administrative power in the Party and the State.²⁰

By 1921, Preobrazhenskii had split from Bukharin over the pace of industrialization and the conciliation of the peasantry, and called for the exploitation of the peasantry in order to achieve the “primitive socialist accumulation” necessary for rapid industrialization. Trotsky continued to argue for exploitation of the peasantry, rapid industrialization, and the militarization of labor.²¹ He also argued for exporting the revolution reasoning that, “Only the victory of the proletariat in the West could protect Russia from bourgeois restoration and assure it the possibility of rounding out the establishment of socialism.”²²

It was against this backdrop that the Bolsheviks gathered for the Tenth Party Congress and led by Lenin, adopted the New Economic Policy, a policy based on the “smychka,” the alliance between the working class and the peasantry that reintroduced market relationships into Russia after the “command” economy of War Communism ended. Bukharin, who ardently supported War Communism, now supported Lenin and the NEP and embarked on a spirited defense of the NEP when he wrote “The New Course in Economic Policy.”²³

In this essay, Bukharin attempted “to clarify the *general meaning* of our new economic policy, its causes, and its objectives, along with its importance in the *general perspective* of our

¹⁹ Alexandra Kollontai, “The Workers Opposition,” Alexandra Kollontai Archive, 2002, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/kollontai/works/1921/workers-opposition/index.htm> (22, January 2005). See also The Workers Opposition in Russia (Chicago: Industrial Workers of the World, 1921)

²⁰ Siegelbaum, Soviet State and Society, 6, 24, 81-82.

²¹ Deutscher; The Prophet Armed, 499-501, 516-517.

²² Sally Ryan, “Leon Trotsky: Permanent Revolution: Permanent Revolution Index Page,” introduction to Permanent Revolution and Results & Prospects, nd, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1931-tpv/index.htm> (22 January 2005).

²³ Nikolai Bukharin, “The New Course in Economic Policy” in Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism, 99.

national economy's development toward communism."²⁴ (Emphasis in original) He did this because he feared that "many of our party comrades are lacking . . . a sense of perspective,"²⁵ that could lead them to oppose the NEP and thus sabotage socialist construction.

Bukharin restated points he had made in his earlier writings. He dealt specifically with the concept of "equilibrium," which he had developed in Historical Materialism, and repeated the points he first raised in The ABC of Communism regarding the proper policies in dealing with the countryside in a period of "civil peace." Most importantly, he referenced his analysis on the changed role of the state in the transition to socialism, an analysis based on his earlier work on finance and state capitalism, to explain how the proletariat would use its own state to create socialism in Russia.

In words similar to his earlier work on the state, Bukharin argued that, "The proletariat is obliged to smash state capitalism of the European-American variety by way of revolution."²⁶

This was necessary because

state capitalism means the most extreme possible form of *bourgeois omnipotence*, in which production is concentrated in the hands of the *bourgeois* state. In this instance the owner and supreme administrator of all the means of production is the *bourgeoisie*, acting through its *state*.²⁷ (Emphasis in original)

Consequently, during the Revolution the Bolsheviks had to smash the capitalist state regardless of the economic dislocation caused. Then during the Civil War and the period of War Communism, the Bolsheviks had to subordinate economics to politics. Bukharin stated clearly, "Our economic policy during the epoch of so-called 'War Communism' could not be concerned essentially with the development of the productive forces. The most 'urgent' and pervasive task

²⁴ Ibid, 99.

²⁵ Ibid, 99.

²⁶ Ibid, 108-109.

²⁷ Ibid, 107.

was that of providing the country with a Red defense.”²⁸ All other issues became secondary to the survival of the Revolution and any measures necessary for the survival of the Revolution, regardless of their impact on the equilibrium and production, including the forcible requisitioning of grain, became justified. Bukharin wrote that

In these circumstances the basic slogan, as far as the national economy was concerned, was . . . on the speedy acquisition of products *even at the price of undermining the forces of production*. The objective was not “to produce,” but “to take”; and we had to take in order to provide supplies as quickly as possible to the Red Army, to workers in the defense industries, etc. This was the *single* objective upon which all our attention centered.²⁹ (Emphasis in original)

Therefore, during War Communism, Bukharin and the Bolsheviks tolerated “expanded negative reproduction,” i.e. the destruction of the productive forces; otherwise, they would have lost the Civil War. The peasants also grudgingly accepted this and supported the Revolution because a return to the rule of the landlords was an intolerable alternative. This led to a form of “class equilibrium” where the political interests of the peasantry and the working class coincided. However, as Bukharin pointed out, this was not a normal economic process, and it had to change after victory in the Civil War.³⁰

Once the political equilibrium of War Communism ended, the need to establish a satisfactory economic relationship between the proletariat and the peasantry “that would provide for *expansion* of the productive forces, became a matter for immediate concern.”³¹ (Emphasis in original) Bukharin believed that the NEP would begin this expansion by replacing the politics that governed relations between the proletarian state and the peasantry in War Communism with economic relations in the NEP period. The NEP then, according to Bukharin, was crucial for the development of socialism, because it would stabilize the relationship between the town and

²⁸ Ibid, 99.

²⁹ Ibid, 99-100.

³⁰ Ibid, 100.

³¹ Ibid, 101.

country and reverse the “negative reproduction” brought on by the Revolution and the Civil War. Bukharin also believed that the Leviathan proletarian state would play a central role in the regeneration of the economy and the final victory of socialism.

Taking his lead from Hilferding, and as in his earlier works, Bukharin argued that the future belonged to the large-scale industries and state structures, and that these would create the wealth necessary for socialism as they had created the wealth for the capitalists in the era of state capitalism. Bukharin argued that:

In any and all circumstances, whatever the course adopted in economic policy for the construction of communism, the basic concern must be the interests of large-scale industry. Large-scale industry is the starting point for all technological development; it is the base of the economic relations that prevail in a communist society; it is the support of the industrial proletariat, as the social force that brings about the communist revolution. The basic objective of any economic policy concerned with developing productive forces must, accordingly, be to strengthen large-scale industry.³²

These large-scale industries, controlled by the proletarian state would create the wealth necessary for socialism while also absorbing its petit bourgeois base into socialism. As he pointed out in The ABC of Communism, this would take place through the system of leasing, foreign trade and concessions to larger, private industries. He wrote that

the surplus value [from concessions, leases and trading] is immediately divided into two parts: one part, as profit, finds its way into the capitalist's pocket; the other part takes the form of a percentage deduction or rent payment and goes to our state, which means into the hands of the proletariat.³³

Thus, the proletarian state through its control of the commanding heights would restore equilibrium, create the wealth necessary for socialism, and absorb the small-scale producers and industries into the socialist system. Based on this analysis, it is clear then that Bukharin did not jettison his entire life's work to support the NEP. On the contrary, Bukharin's conception of the

³² Ibid, 102.

³³ Ibid, 107.

state's role in the NEP remained consistent with his previous philosophical work. What had changed was what the state had to accomplish when faced with the reality of Russia in 1921.

One argument made by Bukharin, which has led many historians to believe that he changed his political philosophy to suit his support of the NEP, was his explicit comparison of the NEP with Brest-Litovsk in that it was a “*strategic operation by the proletariat on the economic front.*”³⁴ (Emphasis in original) Yet, a political retreat need not be a philosophical retreat. Just as Brest-Litovsk allowed the Bolsheviks to build up the Red Army to protect the Revolution, the economic “retreat” would enable the Bolsheviks to overcome the economic and social chaos in Russia to save the Revolution and facilitate the evolutionary march to socialism.

Bukharin, in response to those who viewed the NEP as a “surrender” to capitalism, argued that the Revolution was secure because once the new proletarian state controlled the “commanding heights,” and “once the revolution is carried out politically and the means of production are nationalized . . . the socialist economic system cannot be endangered.”³⁵

Bukharin argued:

The greater our own economic growth, the more profitable the agreements we shall be able to conclude, and the greater will the proletarian share become, until through its steady increase it ultimately devours the share going to the capitalist. Then we shall have the final victory of communism.³⁶

Thus, the Bolshevik's version of “state capitalism” would, as Bukharin put it, “live out its days peacefully.”³⁷

Apart from Bukharin's analysis of the NEP and its purposes, this work also provides insight into Bukharin's thinking regarding the relative roles of the commune and the productivist states in the period of the NEP. The function of the commune state was to transform the

³⁴ Ibid, 104.

³⁵ Vacić, 70.

³⁶ Bukharin, “The New Course in Economic Policy,” 107.

³⁷ Ibid, 108.

relationships within society after the Revolution and lead quickly to socialism. However, in the Russian case, once the Civil War had ended, the state had to become “productivist” in nature as it not only had to change the relationships within society but also had to create the wealth necessary for socialism.

Here is where the “illusions” disappear, the illusions that the road to socialism would be very short and that the commune state could quickly transform Russia in a relatively short time. The Bolsheviks and Bukharin now faced a greater task than that of the Revolution and the Civil War. They had to accept an evolutionary process that utilized the “productivist state” to create the material conditions for socialism, while transforming the political and social relationships in society. Once the military demands of the Revolution and the Civil War no longer took primacy, the New Economic Policy became the way that the new Soviet Republic would create the material conditions and wealth necessary to realize socialism, while, at the same time, transforming the relationships within society. In effect, the Bolsheviks would realize socialism by a combination of the two visions of the state in Marxism, overseen by the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat.”

5.3. The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance

Bukharin did not idealize the peasantry or concede anything to it politically. His attitude was that of an enlightened missionary who had come to transform the benighted into citizens worthy of being partners of the proletariat, or more accurately ceasing to be peasants.

Lewis Siegelbaum³⁸

After Lenin's death, Bukharin became the leading supporter and theoretician of the NEP. He did this not out of any shift towards a humanitarian or liberal position but from the realization that, as Fitzpatrick, put it, "the Bolsheviks had taken power 'prematurely' – that is, they had undertaken to do the capitalists' work. . . in Russia."³⁹ In effect, the Bolsheviks had to become the "capitalists without capitalism." Fitzpatrick points out:

Russia needed more factories, railways, machinery and technology. It needed urbanization, a shift in population from the countryside to towns, and a much larger, permanent working class. It needed popular literacy, more schools, more skilled workers and engineers. Building socialism meant transforming Russia into a modern industrial society.⁴⁰

This meant, as Bernstein had warned, that the Bolsheviks faced a situation where, if they wanted to realize socialism, they had to modernize the economy and create the cultural level to make socialism possible, an evolutionary process that would span epochs, not take place overnight.

However, differences surfaced within the Party on which policies the Bolsheviks should follow to achieve socialism and many Bolsheviks did not accept the need for an "evolutionary process" nor the NEP as the proper road to socialism. Consequently, between the publication of "The New Course in Economic Policy" in 1921 and The Road to Socialism and the Worker-

³⁸ Siegelbaum, 141.

³⁹ Fitzpatrick, 102.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 102.

Peasant Alliance in 1925, as the NEP took hold and began the restoration and reconstruction of Russia, or, as the Left Opposition argued, the degeneration of Russia, these differences led to an intensification of the battles within the Party.⁴¹

It is beyond the scope of this study to delve into the minutiae of the Party debates, the power struggles and the analysis of the economic situation in Soviet Russia in this period, but it is necessary to understand the political situation in the Party prior to the publication of The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance.

Even after the defeat of Trotsky in 1923, Preobrazhenskii and the Left Opposition continued to argue for centralized state planning, priority for heavy industry and moving quickly to heavy, large-scale, capital-intensive methods of development. This meant “primitive socialist accumulation” through exploitation of the peasantry.⁴² The “United Opposition” of Kamenev and Zinoviev also argued for a rapid pace of industrialization.⁴³ Preobrazhenskii argued for the quick transfer of capital to the state at the expense of the peasantry. What these “oppositions” all had in common with each other and even with those who supported the NEP, was that Soviet Russia had to industrialize. The reality, as Stephen Cohen points out was not disagreement over the need for industrialization but that over the methods to achieve that industrialization.⁴⁴

This debate over methods took on further relevance with the “Scissors Crisis” of 1923, when the gap in the price of finished goods and what the state paid to the peasants for grain led to serious grain shortfalls and a crisis in reconstruction efforts.⁴⁵ For Bukharin this crisis only strengthened his belief in the “smychka” and the NEP as the way to overcome these types of

⁴¹ Fitzpatrick, 86.

⁴² Siegelbaum, 169.

⁴³ This was the alliance among Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin, which collapsed in 1925 over the doctrine of “Socialism in One Country” and the autarchic vision implicit in the NEP. See, in particular, “Socialism in One Country” in E.H.Carr, Socialism in One Country, vol. 2 of “A History of Soviet Russia” (New York: The McMillan Company, 1960), 36-52.

⁴⁴ Cohen, 174.

⁴⁵ Siegelbaum, 102-106.

crisis and strengthen the link between the peasant and the workers' state. Once this link was secure, the NEP, with its market relationships, not a centralized plan, would become the "bridge" to transport Russia to socialism.⁴⁶ Trotsky and "The Group of 46," which included Preobrazhenskii and some Worker Oppositionists, Democratic Centralists and other leading Bolsheviks, learned a very different lesson from the scissors crisis: they condemned the NEP as a "pro-Kulak" policy and questioned why there was no central plan and why the peasants should hold the Revolution hostage.⁴⁷

In 1925, after four years of the NEP, resistance to it continued to mount from these various opposition groups and many Party members disillusioned with the NEP and its compromises with petit-bourgeois elements in Russia. In spite of and in response to this opposition, Bukharin continued to defend the NEP with a philosophical argument that derived from his carefully worked out analysis of the state and its role in the transition and synthesis of the productivist and commune state ideals found in Marxism.

Echoing his earlier work, Bukharin argued that: "Under capitalism the proletariat's general line is toward *disruption* of the social whole, toward *splitting* society and *demolishing* the state."⁴⁸ (Emphasis in original) However, he also argued, "Under its own dictatorship the proletariat's general line is toward *fortifying* the social whole, against splitting society, and toward *stabilizing* the state (until the phase when its "withering away" begins)."⁴⁹ (Emphasis in original) The NEP with its market relationships and social peace thus would act as that policy to stabilize and fortify the proletarian state.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 140.

⁴⁷ Deutscher, The Prophet Unarmed, 109-118. The "Group of 46" also demanded inner-Party democracy and an end to the ban on factions.

⁴⁸ Bukharin, "The New Course in Economic Policy," 109.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 109.

Accepting that under the NEP market relationships would, to a certain extent, return to Russia, Bukharin once again argued that these relationships would not and could not restore capitalism but only lead to the triumph of socialism. As he had written earlier, “socialism is guaranteed by the fact that the working class holds power and that we have a revolutionary dictatorship, or undivided rule.”⁵⁰ He could make this argument, even with the admitted return of market relations, because he believed that, in a dialectical reversal of state capitalism, the proletarian state, built on its own class basis, would achieve socialism by its control of the “commanding heights” of the economy and the coercive political power of the state.⁵¹ That is, the “Leviathan” socialist state, through its control of all of the coercive levers of state political and economic power, would absorb the cooperatives and even its antagonistic, petit bourgeois base into socialism. Bukharin argued that this was possible because:

*Completely different conditions prevail under our system, i.e., under the system of proletarian dictatorship. The general bounds of cooperative development in our country are not determined by the fact that the factories, plants, mines, railroads, and banks are in bourgeois hands, but by the fact that the whole of large-scale industry, transport, and the credit system are under the control of the proletarian state.*⁵² (Emphasis in original)

From Imperialism and the World Economy to The ABC of Communism, The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period, and Historical Materialism, to “The New Course in Economic Policy,” and The Road to Socialism, Bukharin consistently argued that because the proletarian state exercised control over the commanding heights and utilized the levers of power for the good of the cooperative and the peasant, the peasant and the small producer would

⁵⁰ Bukharin, The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance, 263.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 263.

⁵² *Ibid*, 238.

“inevitably *grow into* the system.”⁵³ (Emphasis in original) Bukharin summed up this new set of relationships and their goals best when he wrote that:

*The commanding heights in relation to the rural bourgeoisie is the proletarian city. . . And the heart of the city, its proletarian industry, its banking system, its legislation, etc., have all turned their “face to the village,” i.e., they all serve as a powerful support for the middle and poor peasant elements in the countryside against the kulak strata.*⁵⁴ (Emphasis in original)

What is also of great interest here is how Bukharin understood the state would eventually wither away. He clearly believed that the proletarian state had a specific and finite role. He wrote:

The real task of the working class is to *reform the broad popular strata, the peasantry* in particular. Unwaveringly approaching this objective, and drawing the rest of society in its wake, the proletariat must reeducate the peasantry in a socialist manner, constantly elevating it and pulling it upward to the same material, economic, and cultural-political level as that of the leading strata of the proletarian population. As broad strata of the peasantry are reformed and reeducated, *they will increasingly become comparable with the proletariat, merge with it, and be transformed into equal members of socialist society.* The difference between the two classes will steadily disappear. In this way the broad masses of the peasantry, “changing their own nature,” will blend with the workers of the city; and the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the dictatorship of a particular class, will increasingly wither away.⁵⁵ (Emphasis in original)

The overlap and merger of the commune state and the productivist state ideal in Bukharin’s work is unambiguous. He clearly believed that in one period, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, a strong, centralized state, would combine the tasks of the commune state and the productivist state by reestablishing equilibrium in society, changing social relationships, while creating the material conditions for socialism. Once the proletarian state accomplished all these tasks, then and only then, would the state “wither away” and bring on the communist millennium.

⁵³ Ibid, 238.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 254-255.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 266.

Much of the criticism directed towards Bukharin centers on how he could justify this system of “growing into socialism” and compromising with “class-enemies,” after he had supported War Communism and was a “left-communist” during the Civil War. His earlier work, in particular “The New Course,” illustrates how the changed circumstances of the day conditioned which policies he supported or positions he took in the different periods. He restated this in The Road to Socialism when he wrote:

Within the context of the capitalist system, the party of the working class is a party of civil war. The position is completely reversed when the working class takes power into its own hands, supported by the broad strata of the peasantry. As the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie is destroyed and replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat, the task of the working class becomes one of strengthening this dictatorship and protecting it against all encroachments. The party of the working class, under these conditions, becomes a party of civil peace, i.e., it demands submission from the former ruling classes, strata, and groups. It demands civil peace from them; and the working class punishes and prosecutes all those who disrupt this civil peace, all conspirators and saboteurs -- in a word, all who interfere with the cause of peacefully building a new society.⁵⁶

Bukharin further argued:

After the working class has beaten off all the attacks of its enemies and guaranteed peaceful, constructive work within its own state, it no longer advocates civil war within the country. Instead, it calls for domestic pacification based on recognition of the new power’s plenitude, its laws, and its institutions -- a pacification based on submission to these laws and institutions from all strata, including the former opponents of the new power. The very forms of the class struggle undergo a corresponding change.⁵⁷

This reflects and repeats the language used in The ABC of Communism and Historical Materialism in explaining what the Bolsheviks needed to do in the different phases of the transition process.

The goal was still socialism and the commune state, of which Bukharin and others dreamed, but it would now result from a long-term and evolutionary process of “building

⁵⁶ Ibid, 250.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 250.

socialism.” The Bolsheviks would realize socialism by combining the ideals of the commune state, i.e. breaking up of capitalist relations, and the ideals of the productivist state, i.e. the building up of the material wealth and the infrastructure necessary for socialism overseen by an all-powerful Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

For Bukharin, who controlled that state and the class base of that state was the all important question.⁵⁸ His support for War Communism and then the NEP developed directly from his analysis of the role of the state in the state capitalist epoch and in the transition to socialism. From his earliest writings on the state in 1915 with Imperialism and the World Economy, he remained consistent in his analysis of the role of the state and its influence on the base in both the capitalist and socialist epochs.

Equally important in this analysis is Bukharin’s concept of equilibrium. Equilibrium was necessary for an urban-based state with an agrarian base to survive.⁵⁹ He fully and conclusively dealt with this concept of equilibrium between the town and country in the section entitled “Industry and Agriculture Must Help Each Other.”⁶⁰ In particular, Bukharin asserted that for any policy to work it must “*guarantee first and foremost a development of the productive forces of state industry and of the peasant economy.*”⁶¹ (Emphasis in original) Here, he did not specifically use the term “equilibrium,” however, the discussion in this section centered on the creation of and the attempt to find equilibrium between the state industries and the peasant economy. The Bolsheviks had to accomplish this to insure the maximization of profits and

⁵⁸ Ibid, 240-241, 247-249. See also Bukharin and Preobrazhenskii, The ABC of Communism, 167-191, 258-330. This thesis is laid out there in nearly identical terms. In The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance Bukharin clearly states that the task of the new workers state is to reform and remold the peasantry and the old classes into the socialist system.

⁵⁹ Bukharin, The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance, 229-232. Here he writes of the competition between the socialist superstructure and the petty bourgeois peasant and trader as a struggle that “will decide everything.”

⁶⁰ Ibid, 240.

⁶¹ Ibid, 243.

growth for both sectors while guaranteeing that one would not be in a position to exploit the other. Here is the link to [Historical Materialism](#), where Bukharin first argued that there had to be an equalization of and no conflict between the “productive forces and the production relations” lest the resulting disequilibrium lead to revolution.⁶²

It is evident from the analysis in this study that as late as 1925 Bukharin did not rethink or change his core philosophical values. Rather the policies he supported were consistent with his philosophy and within the corpus of Marxist thought regarding the role of the state in the transition to socialism. What accounted for his alleged conversion from War Communism to NEP was the realization that the commune state was an illusion, a conversion necessitated by the dire realities that confronted the Bolsheviks after 1917. Viewed in this way, his statement, “the *illusions* [War Communism] of the childhood period are consumed and disappear *without a trace* . . . the transition to the new economic policy represented the collapse of our *illusions*,”⁶³ (Emphasis in original) is not the philosophical break that Cohen argues it was. The “illusion” Bukharin refers to here is not his philosophical past, but to his hopes that the road to socialism was a short one and that War Communism was the correct policy to put them on that road.⁶⁴

⁶² Bukharin, [Historical Materialism](#), 243-246.

⁶³ Nikolai Bukharin, ([Bo'l'shevik](#), No. 2, 1924), 3, quoted in Stephen Cohen, [Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution](#), 139.

⁶⁴ Bukharin, [The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance](#), 259-261. Bukharin wrote: “Thus, our conception of the development toward socialism has changed significantly. But these changes do not in the least imply retreat from a proletarian policy. On the contrary, they represent the summation of a great revolutionary experience.”

6. BUKHARINISM: REVOLUTIONARY AND EVOLUTIONARY MARXISM

6.1. Introduction

In Chapter 1, this dissertation argued that Bukharin synthesized the conflicting visions of revolutionary and evolutionary Marxism, and the productivist and commune state, while incorporating his own conception of the “Leviathan state” into that synthesis. This explains how Bukharin could support the violent revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state and the violence and coercion of War Communism and then later the peaceful, evolutionary policies of the NEP. The question we must answer here is this, “Is this an accurate portrayal of what Bukharin believed and did?”

Bukharin explicated this synthesis and propounded his own theory of the transition to socialism in a little known speech entitled “Lenin as a Marxist”¹ given to the Communist Academy on February 17, 1924, less than a month after Lenin’s death. Cohen devotes little attention to this speech, yet argues that this speech actually represents “the beginning of Bukharinism.”² He contends that this speech did not so much represent an exposition of Bukharin’s theoretical work, but instead represents the beginning of Bukharin’s own and unique theoretical justification of the NEP.³ While agreeing with Cohen that Bukharin developed “Bukharinism,” and that he continued to work out his theories regarding the NEP, this study

¹ This speech appeared as a pamphlet published by the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1925.

² Cohen, Bukharin the Bolshevik Revolution, 159.

³ *Ibid*, 160-212. In this section, Cohen analyzes what he calls Bukharin’s “about face” in relation to the road to socialism.

argues that this speech illustrates how Bukharin had already reconciled revolutionary and evolutionary Marxism, the productivist and commune state, while also incorporating his own analysis of the use of state power in the transition to socialism.

6.2. “Lenin as a Marxist”

Cohen points out that Bukharin’s speech “was part of the political ritual” after Lenin’s death, in which Bukharin, like others in the Party, sought to “establish his own fidelity and credentials.”⁴ This may be true, but this speech is also an ingenious defense of the NEP and an explanation of “Bukharinism,” that also dealt with the opposition to the NEP within the Party. Bukharin ostensibly pulls together various strands of Lenin’s political thought to develop, what is clearly “Bukharinism,” his own coherent philosophy of Marxism, the state, and the transition period. Even though Cohen argues that Bukharin’s “reformist gradualism was still only a skeletal theory,”⁵ this speech makes clear that Bukharin had actually pulled together a comprehensive theory of revolution and the transition to socialism. This theory is evident in all of his early works and finalized, as we saw, in The Road to Socialism and Worker-Peasant Alliance.

Bukharin acknowledged the tension within Marxism regarding the revolution, the state, and the transition to socialism. In a manner reminiscent of the various writers cited in Chapter 1, Bukharin argued that different “Marxisms” existed, each with roots in different periods of historical development. In what he termed “The Marxism of the Epoch of Marx and Engels,” that is, the 1848 period of “Revolutionary Marxism,” Bukharin contended that Marxism found its

⁴ Ibid, 158.

⁵ Ibid, 159.

social basis, not in a “peaceful epoch,” but in the period of the revolutions of 1848 and “in the catastrophic nature of European development” of this period.⁶ Therefore the revolutionary formulations of Marx and Engels made perfect sense and “the whole content of this Marxism was thoroughly revolutionary.”⁷ Bukharin saw that the “social development led to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*,” and that “the Marxism of the epoch of Marx and Engels . . . served as a most excellent weapon for the overthrow of the capitalist regime.”⁸ (Emphasis in original) In other words, Bukharin saw Marx’s revolutionary program as peculiar to its specific historical period, not something transferable “*to another historical setting, another correlation and to other situations.*”⁹ (Emphasis in the original)

In the next phase, Bukharin recognized what he termed, “The Marxism of the Epigones,” those second-rate imitators of Marx, who accepted the evolutionary path to socialism and collaborated in the expansion of bourgeois power and control that led to the “*degeneration of Marxism.*”¹⁰ (Emphasis in the original) Here he grouped together Kautsky, Plekhanov, and the Revisionists, interestingly, without using Bernstein’s name. These thinkers, operating in a period when capitalism had stabilized, when the striking contradictions of capitalism moved into the colonial sphere, and where the state had now developed the ability to incorporate “the working class organizations into the general system of . . . capitalism. . . in an evolutionary manner,”¹¹ came to very different conclusions regarding the road to socialism. As Bernstein had done in his analysis, Bukharin determined that something fundamental had changed in this period that led the working class away from the radical and revolutionary Marxism of 1848. He wrote:

⁶ Bukharin, “Lenin as a Marxist,” 250-251.

⁷ Ibid, 251.

⁸ Ibid, 251.

⁹ Ibid, 261.

¹⁰ Ibid, 251-252.

¹¹ Ibid, 251-255.

The physiognomy of that Marxism was something quite different from the Marxism of Marx and Engels . . . we are dealing with quite a different foundation for this ideology, because we have to a large degree a different foundation for this ideology. This foundation is the working class of the most predatory imperialist states.¹²

Thus, in these changed circumstances, the revisionists and opportunists had led the working class away from the revolutionary theory of Marx and into the arms of the bourgeoisie by failing to understand and properly analyze the tendencies of capitalism in the period before the Great War. This failure led the working class to march off to war in 1914 in defense of the “nation,” instead of drawing the proper conclusions about capitalism and the need for revolution.

The third phase that Bukharin discerned was what he called “The Marxism of Lenin.” This phase represented a new epoch, an “unusually stormy and unusually revolutionary epoch,”¹³ similar to the “Marxism of Marx.” For Bukharin, this phase represented “the logical and historical completion and development of the other.” However, he argued this period “*cannot be simply a repetition of Marxism and Marx*, because the epoch . . . is not a simple repetition of the epoch in which Marx lived.”¹⁴ (Emphasis in the original) Therefore, Bukharin did not call for a simple return to mid-19th Century Revolutionary Marxism. A new Marxism, or at the least a new synthesis of Marxism, was needed because many of the phenomena, finance capitalism, the Great War, the workers’ risings, and finally the commencement of working class rule, were “unknown to both Marx and Engels.”¹⁵ What Bukharin argued then was that “these phenomena must be theoretically grasped,”¹⁶ analyzed and understood to determine the proper road to revolution and to socialism. In essence, Bukharin’s analysis of the development of finance capitalism, imperialism, the impact of the Great War, the Revolution, and the nature of the

¹² Ibid, 255.

¹³ Ibid, 255.

¹⁴ Ibid, 255.

¹⁵ Ibid, 256-257.

¹⁶ Ibid, 256.

transition period to socialism, followed the same sequence as his theoretical work dating to Imperialism and the World Economy.

In his analysis of this third phase of historical development, Bukharin argued, “Leninist Marxism is a much wider field than the Marxism of Marx”¹⁷ because

an immense quantity of new ideas connected with the analysis and the practice based on this analysis, of entirely new phenomena, and of quite historical phases has been added to all ideas that then existed. Thus the frontiers of Marxism have been crossed.¹⁸

What he argued, like Bernstein, was that the entirety of ideas of Marx in 1848 simply was not the way forward for socialism. Marx’s ideas existed as “instruments,” as “methodology,” and that the adding of new experience and analysis to Marxism was not contradictory.¹⁹ Consequently, Bukharin contended that “Leninist Marxism” is a “*synthesis of a threefold nature*. . . . a return to the Marxism of Marx,”²⁰ (Emphasis in original) i.e. the revolutionary Marx, with the accumulated knowledge and experience of the new phenomena adapted to the circumstances of the day. Furthermore, Bukharin maintained that it is a

synthesis of the theory and practice of the struggling and working class . . . it is a synthesis of the *destructive and constructive* work of the working class . . . this latter circumstance is the most important of all.²¹ (Emphasis in original)

Although Bukharin uses the term “Leninist Marxism” here, when examined closely, it is clear that what Bukharin did in this speech was to lay out his own theory of revolution and the transition to socialism. In his theory, Bukharin utilized the original vision of the “Marxism of Marx and Engels,” and added the experiences gained during the period of “Marxism of the Epigones.” He then took his own analysis of finance capitalism, its policy of imperialism, and

¹⁷ Ibid, 257.

¹⁸ Ibid, 257-258.

¹⁹ Ibid, 258.

²⁰ Ibid, 258.

²¹ Ibid, 258.

the role of the Leviathan state, synthesizing all these to explain how the Bolsheviks had to win the Revolution and then embark on the transition to socialism, in the period of what he termed “The Marxism of Lenin.” Bukharin explicitly laid out his synthesis of the “Marxism of Marx and Engels” and the “Marxism of the Epigones,” or put another way, a synthesis of the Revolutionary Marx and the Evolutionary Marx that links the Bukharin of War Communism and the Bukharin of the NEP.

Bukharin, as in his earlier works, argued that in one period, the working class had two tasks, one that is destructive, and one that is constructive.²² He stated that, “We are the most decisive, courageous and consistent destroyers of one system, but now we are the most consistent constructors of another system.”²³ That is, the working class had to destroy the capitalist state in the overthrow of capitalism, and then once that was accomplished the task facing the working class was to construct and bind “together various sections of the common whole under the definite hegemony of the working class.”²⁴

Bukharin pointed out that only after the working class established its hegemony over society through the Dictatorship of the Proletariat could it end the revolutionary, destructive epoch to begin the evolutionary, constructive phase.²⁵ Here Bukharin saw the Bolsheviks entering new territory as they crossed the outer limits of Marxist teaching.²⁶ Once they crossed this line and established the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, then the real “period of organic development *commences*.”²⁷ (Emphasis in original) He stated,

what should happen after the conquest of power by the working class (naturally insofar as we are referring to one isolated country), it is then a question of the

²² Ibid, 258.

²³ Ibid, 271.

²⁴ Ibid, 258.

²⁵ Ibid, 257.

²⁶ Ibid, 257.

²⁷ Ibid, 270.

further development towards socialism in this country proceeding along an evolutionary path, and it cannot be otherwise; in other words, after the conquest of power by the working class, the real transition to socialism begins.²⁸

The struggle would now take on a new form. It would not be a political or military struggle, but an “evolutionary struggle of economic forms.”²⁹ Thus, in the transition period the Bolsheviks would not overcome the remnants of capitalism simply by destroying shops throughout Russia, but by the growth and competition of state industries and organizations.³⁰

Although Cohen saw this as part of Bukharin’s “about face,” and other historians viewed it as “un-Marxist,” Bukharin had already laid out this argument in both The ABC of Communism and in his work on the NEP. It is clear from the analysis in this study and Bukharin’s own words, that Bukharin’s’ synthesis of the revolutionary and evolutionary Marx, each adapted to different circumstances, lay at the heart of his support for both War Communism and the NEP. He stated this explicitly, in answer to or in anticipation of attacks on the NEP from within the party:

It is quite clear that there is no break whatsoever with traditional Marxism, since it is a matter of continuing and adapting methods of Marxism under completely new conditions that were quite unknown to both Marx and Engels in their concrete forms.³¹

Consequently, for Bukharin, his synthesis of the two main strains of Marxism, the revolutionary and the evolutionary, was not a revision of Marxism, or of the transition period in Marxism. It was a continuation of Marxism. Therefore, Kozlov is correct when he argues that what Cohen and Lewin did not understand was that for Bukharin “socialism is not a policy, but a class process. It is

²⁸ Ibid, 270.

²⁹ Ibid, 270.

³⁰ Ibid, 271.

³¹ Ibid, 271.

a transitional period between capitalism and communism, and consequently combines elements of both systems in a contradictory manner.”³²

In this work, Bukharin also dealt with the issue of state power in the transition period, i.e. “The Dictatorship of the Proletariat.” Even though he accepted that the struggle in the transition period would be economic and that the process would be evolutionary not revolutionary, he also accepted that in the transition period, the state would actually increase its power, becoming all-powerful and all encompassing.³³ This Leviathan state would only wither away as the contradictions of the transitional system of proletarian dictatorship withered away. Bukharin accepted that this would only occur after many years and after a long, historical epoch.³⁴ This meant that, until that took place, the proletarian state would retain hegemony over society and would lead society to socialism by taking whatever actions necessary to ensure the success and survival of the Revolution.

This state power was necessary, as noted above, to ensure that no “third revolution” took place, either to restore capitalism or to turn the Revolution away from its evolutionary path.³⁵ This state also would take on the role of absorbing those non-proletarian elements, mainly the peasantry, into the socialist superstructure. In this speech, Bukharin argued that the Revisionists mistakenly “made their task that of peaceful, cultural construction . . . and for a . . . evolutionary renewal of this capitalist system.”³⁶ This mistake allowed the bourgeois state to absorb the non-bourgeois elements into its system. Now, in the transition period, when Bukharin argued for peaceful socialist construction and an evolutionary path to socialism, the proletarian state would act as, in words from The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period, “state capitalism *in*

³² Kozlov, 121.

³³ Bukharin, “Lenin as a Marxist,” 270.

³⁴ Ibid, 270-271, 273-274.

³⁵ Ibid, 270.

³⁶ Ibid, 259.

*reverse, its own dialectical transformation into its own antithesis*³⁷ (Emphasis in original) and absorb all the non-proletarian elements into it.

“Bukharinism” then was a coherent and consistent philosophy that had as its foundation the synthesis, or unification, if you will, of the two conflicting strains of Marxist thought.

“Bukharinism” at once explained and justified the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the destruction of the bourgeois state, and then laid out an evolutionary transition to socialism. Bukharin’s work on the theory of the state and its active role in the socialization of non-proletarian elements into socialism, i.e. the reversal of the base-superstructure metaphor, is a crucial component of this analysis. As Bukharin accepted the need for a long and oftentimes very difficult road to socialism, the all-powerful state, as he conceived it, became the means to ensure that Russia would not deviate from that road.³⁸

³⁷ Bukharin, The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period, 101.

³⁸ Bukharin, “Lenin as a Marxist,” 273-274.

CONCLUSION

I destroy my enemy when I make him my friend.
Abraham Lincoln

If the purpose of this work had been only to analyze the policies that Bukharin espoused in the twenties, then Lincoln's quote would sum up The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance, the goal of the NEP and the whole purpose of the "face to countryside." For that is what these policies were--efforts to win over the class enemy through co-optation and socialization, not destroy the enemy through civil war and the violent coercion of War Communism. Were these policies then a major philosophical shift for Bukharin and did they represent a break from his days as a left communist and a committed advocate of War Communism and revolutionary war? Alternatively, did they represent a unique and original synthesis of Marxism and thus place him as the philosophical "interregnum" between Lenin and Stalin?

Stephen Cohen maintains that, as Bukharin changed his support from War Communism to the NEP, he also transformed his political philosophy. How else can one explain Bukharin's support for War Communism and then only a few years later his support the NEP, two policies that seemingly have nothing in common with each other? Michael Haynes points out that

The redirection of Bukharin's thought in these years has often been pictured as 'a violent about turn', both politically and theoretically as a shift from the far Left of the Bolsheviks to the extreme right wing.¹

It is also now clear that Bukharin never shifted "rightward," as Lewin and Deutscher argue, in terms of his political philosophy. The reality was, as Haynes put it, "he came to define the centre ground of NEP politics, not the Right."² In essence, he was a principled communist theoretician who believed in the revolutionary struggle. The difference between his support for War Communism and then the NEP was his recognition that "the tasks of a working class that had conquered power . . . were very different from those of a working class still struggling for power."³

This study has also argued that Bukharin developed an original synthesis, or unification, of the revolutionary and evolutionary strains in Marxism that guided his thinking in the different stages of the revolution and the transition to socialism. Tied to his synthesis, and a key component of the present analysis, is Bukharin's thinking on "the nature of the originality of the base and superstructure relationship under the dictatorship of the proletariat where the workers' state became 'the collective directing subject.'"⁴ The Leviathan proletarian state, according to Bukharin, determined all political, economic, and social relationships after the Revolution. Therefore, during the transition period, the proletarian state would act as state capitalism had acted by dominating society and socializing its antagonistic, petit bourgeois base into the dominant proletarian state structure, while defending itself from attacks by the imperialist world. This synthesis of Marxism and the insight regarding the reversed role of the base and the

¹ Haynes, 72.

² Ibid, 72.

³ Ibid, 71.

⁴ Ibid, 86.

superstructure enable us to understand how Bukharin could support both War Communism and the NEP without fundamentally changing or adapting his underlying philosophy.

This dissertation also enables us to locate Bukharin inside the Marxist philosophical system and rebut the claim that he was “un-Marxist” in his works and, more importantly, that he was a liberal alternative to Stalin and Stalinism. He did expand Marxism and, like Bernstein, used sociological analysis to understand how Soviet Russia would reach socialism. However, as noted in the previous chapter and in Bukharin’s own words, “it is quite clear that there is here no break whatsoever with traditional Marxism.”⁵ In reality, his works reflect the tension that exists within Marxism and how he synthesized Marxism to resolve those tensions. Therefore, what explains his shift in policies was the new reality of the epochs, the new evidence, and the new phenomena that emerged, which forced him to adopt policies relevant to each new situation while staying true to Marxism and his political philosophy.

Bukharin consistently adhered to his pre-1917 analysis of capitalist development when he argued that the destruction of the state capitalist structure and the remnants of the bourgeois world were all that was necessary to reach socialism. Therefore, in this period, the revolutionary Marxist ideals of 1848, i.e. the “Marxism of Marx and Engels,”⁶ and the ideal of the commune state took precedence. Following the Revolution, when faced with enemies on all sides and an economy and citizenry clearly unprepared for socialism, he supported War Communism and the need for a strong proletarian state, i.e. the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, to “overthrow . . . the capitalist regime in all its theoretical branches and . . . in all its branches of practical and political conclusions.”⁷ Thus, the revolutionary Marxism of the “Marxism of Marx and Engels” was necessary and justified the revolutionary and destructive actions of this period. Once the

⁵ Bukharin, “Lenin as a Marxist,” 271.

⁶ Ibid, 250-251.

⁷ Ibid, 250.

proletariat achieved victory over its class enemies, was secure in control its own state, and faced the task of rebuilding the economy and society, Bukharin then joined and supported Lenin when he jettisoned War Communism and introduced the New Economic Policy, a policy based on the new circumstances of “Civil Peace.” Then the true transition to socialism began when the Dictatorship of the Proletariat now brought together the functions of the commune and the productivist state to achieve socialism by an evolutionary, constructive path.

Therefore, War Communism and the NEP were not mutually exclusive policies based on conflicting philosophies and Bukharin’s support of War Communism and then the NEP was thus no radical break in his philosophical system. In reality, both War Communism and the NEP pursued the same final goal, socialism, and originated from a single philosophical source, Bukharin’s original synthesis of the revolutionary and evolutionary visions of Marxism and his belief in the centrality of a powerful proletarian state in the transition to socialism.

These findings lead one to the conclusion that there were not “two Bukharins” – “the authoritarian extremist of War Communism (1918-21) and the humanitarian liberal of the New Economic Policy (1921-1929).”⁸ There was only Bukharin, the theoretician, located in the heart of Marxism and Bolshevism, who was the philosophical “interregnum” between Leninism and Stalinism.

This conclusion then calls into question and necessarily leads historians to reject Cohen’s contention that Bukharin was a “liberal alternative” to Stalin. Contrary to accepted wisdom, philosophically, Bukharin’s work was not outside Marxism or for that matter Bolshevism. In some respects, he may have been a “humanitarian,” or even “liberal,” but he most certainly was at the heart of Bolshevism and Marxism. This then leads historians to rethink the role that

⁸ Richard Day, “The New Leviathan,” xxxii.

Bukharin's theoretical synthesis and his writings on the state in the transition to socialism played in Stalin's "Revolution from Above."

Historians have rightly criticized Bukharin for his political role in the defeat of the Left Opposition in 1923 and the United Opposition in 1925, when he and Stalin were allies and both supported the NEP. These actions arguably facilitated Stalin's rise and eventual consolidation of power, with all its attendant consequences. In fact, Michael Haynes argues, "Ultimately he [Bukharin] was led so far astray in his politics that he unwittingly contributed to one of the central horrors of this century."⁹ However, what this study suggests and leaves open for future analysis is that Bukharin's political role in Stalin's rise to power was less important than the role his philosophical work played in Stalin's "Revolution from Above."

Although a complete analysis of Bukharin's philosophical role in Stalinism is beyond the scope of this study, it is clear that Bukharin was the philosophical interregnum between Lenin and Stalin and the theoretician who developed an original body of Marxist thought on the Revolution and the role of the state in transition period, that we can rightly call "Bukharinism." Although unintentional, "Bukharinism" laid the philosophical foundations for "The Revolution from Above" and "The Great Leap Forward" in 1928. In actual fact, it was not Stalin, but Bukharin who first argued that the proletarian state, through its control of the economic and political levers of state power, could coerce, violently or peacefully, its antagonistic base into socialism. It was Bukharin's, not Stalin's, analysis of the changed nature of the state and state power between 1915 and 1925, which led to the belief that, as Michael Haynes puts it, "The real centre of the transition was therefore the attempt consciously to control society."¹⁰ In essence, Bukharin argued that the state, i. e., the proletarian dictatorship

⁹ Haynes, 130.

¹⁰ Ibid, 88.

is a weapon for suppressing the exploiters and any attempt they might make to regain power and, second, that it serves as a basic lever for the economic transformation of society. The working class uses its control over the machinery of state power in order *continuously to reform the economic relations of society in a socialist manner*.¹¹ (Emphasis in original)

Heitman rightly points out,

although Stalin added new doctrines after 1928 to the official body of Communist theory, in some instances these were merely reaffirmations or reformulations of ideas advanced earlier by Bukharin. An example of this is Stalin's theory of 'revolution from above' by which he justified his programmes of enforced industrialization and collectivization in the nineteen-thirties. The precedent for this theory, however, had been laid down as early as 1920 by Bukharin, when he characterized the dynamics of the transition period as an extraordinary process of 'reverse influence of the superstructure on the base', arising from the revolutionary, 'cataclysmic nature of the transitional process'.¹²

Karl Kühne agrees and argues, in his essay "Bukharin as Theoretician and Skeptic of Economic Growth," that:

In his ABC of Communism and The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period, he [Bukharin] had portrayed the abolition of the market under perfect communism as an ideal aim. . . . Stalin appropriated a large part of the Bukharin model.¹³

Consequently, by the time Stalin and the Bolsheviki embarked on the "Revolution from Above" in 1928, "one can find few theoretical justifications in his [Bukharin] own work for his . . . struggle against Stalinist authoritarianism."¹⁴ Because, in reality and ironically, the philosophical foundation and justification for the use of unlimited state power, in any form necessary to achieve socialism, came from the theoretical work of Nikolai Bukharin, the leader of the "Right" deviation that Stalin and his allies had defeated.

¹¹ Bukharin, The Road to Socialism and the Worker-Peasant Alliance, 263.

¹² Heitman, "Between Lenin and Stalin: Nikolai Bukharin," 89.

¹³ Karl Kühne, "Bukharin as Theoretician and Skeptic of Economic Growth," in Bukharin in Retrospect, 127.

¹⁴ Willoughby, 102.

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