

Rethinking Transition as Struggle, Experimentation and Cultural Revolution: Value-Form Theory and Questions of Revolutionary Strategy

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On all accounts, before the revolution the Bolsheviks had a very vague idea of what an economy of the transition period would be like. Preoccupied with the major task which was preparing for the seizure of power, a task whose urgency was accelerated in 1917 in ways that had not been seen before, it seems that they did not have an 'economic' plan. There were some general directing lines, many of them coming from the traditions of German Social democracy, pointing towards increased nationalization and state planning.¹ This is exemplified in

¹ Although one might say that the tradition of Social-Democracy which was based on a conception of the contradiction between private property and increased socialization of production tended more to the direction of socialism as organized capitalism (Gronow 2016).

Lenin's famous idea of the postal service as a blueprint for socialism.² There were some ideas circulating, especially in the most advanced segments of the industrial proletariat, the main social base of the Bolsheviks, around workers' control, and also the long tradition, beginning with the Narodniks of dealing with the peasant problem (a tradition mainly inherited by the Social Revolutionary Party)³, but not a complete economic programme.

Even the initial steps of the revolution had more to do with *establishing political control* than with actually changing the social relations of production. This does not mean that the Bolsheviks and Lenin did not have a general approach to the question of transition. In texts such as 'The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government' or "'Left-wing Childishness" and Petty-Bourgeois Mentality' Lenin describes the soviet economy as an articulation of different modes forms of production

But what does the word "transition" mean? Does it not mean, as applied to an economy, that the present system contains elements, particles, fragments of both capitalism and socialism? Everyone will admit that it does. But not all who admit this take the trouble to consider what elements actually constitute the various socio-economic structures that exist in Russia at the present time. And this is the crux of the question. Let us enumerate these elements:

- 1) patriarchal, i.e., to a considerable extent natural, peasant farming⁴;
- 2) small commodity production (this includes the majority of those peasants who sell their grain);

² LCW, vol. 25, p. 431.

³ On how the SRs and the Bolsheviks dealt with the demands of the peasantry in 1917 see Carr 1966, vol. 2, pp. 151-176.

⁴ Lenin refers here to self-consumption and maintenance oriented farming.

- 3) private capitalism;
- 4) state capitalism;
- 5) socialism.⁵

For Lenin transition presupposes an alliance of state capitalism – *conceived as the imposition of state monopoly and regulation* – and socialism –*conceived as socialized production* – both struggling against petty bourgeois elements and private capitalism.

It is not state capitalism that is at war with socialism, but the petty bourgeoisie plus private capitalism fighting together against both state capitalism and socialism. The petty bourgeoisie oppose every kind of state interference, accounting and control, whether it be state capitalist or state socialist.⁶

One of the main forms of this struggle would be the imposition of forms of state accounting and control of both production and distribution.

At present, petty-bourgeois capitalism prevails in Russia, and it is one and the same road that leads from it to both large-scale state capitalism and to socialism, through one and the same intermediary station called “national accounting and control of production and distribution”.⁷

⁵ LCW, vol. 27, P. 335-336.

⁶ LCW, vol 27. p. 336.

⁷ LCW, vol 27, p. 340.

At the same time Lenin insisted on the importance of maintaining some form of increased productivity and combining technical and scientific expertise with state planning.

Socialism is inconceivable without large-scale capitalist engineering based on the latest discoveries of modern science. It is inconceivable without planned state organization, which keeps tens of millions of people to the strictest observance of a unified standard in production and distribution.⁸

Although the question of experts and the role in the decision process within industry was one of the points of conflict with Left Communists, at the same time Lenin insisted on the importance of the collective ingenuity of the proletariat and its enthusiasm in the revolutionary process.

There is an enormous amount of organizing talent among the “people”, i.e., among the workers and the peasants who do not exploit the labour of others. Capital crushed these talented people in thousands; it killed their talent and threw them on to the scrap-heap. We are not yet able to find them, encourage them, put them on their feet, promote them. But we shall learn to do so if we set about it with all-out revolutionary enthusiasm, without which there can be no victorious revolutions.⁹

⁸ LCW, vol. 27, p. 339.

⁹ LCW, vol 27, p. 262.

However, this was always combined with the emphasis on the need for discipline and productivity that went up to the acceptance of the supposedly progressive elements in the Taylor system.

The more class-conscious vanguard of the Russian proletariat has already set itself the task of raising labour discipline. For example, both the Central Committee of the Metalworkers' Union and the Central Council of Trade Unions have begun to draft the necessary measures and decrees. ¹⁰⁵ This work must be supported and pushed ahead with all speed. We must raise the question of piece-work and apply and test it in practice; we must raise the question of applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system; we must make wages correspond to the total amount of goods turned out, or to the amount of work done by the railways, the water transport system, etc., etc.¹⁰

At the same Lenin insisted from the beginning that this return to discipline, productivity and Taylorism could maintain and expand a socialist character in terms of the mass mobilization and politicization of the proletariat and its mass participation in the running of state affairs.

We must work unremittingly to develop the organization of the Soviets and of the Soviet government. There is a petty-bourgeois tendency to transform the members of the Soviets into "parliamentarians", or else into bureaucrats. We must combat this by drawing all the members of the Soviets into the practical work of administration. In many places the departments of the Soviets are gradually merging with the Commissariats. Our aim is to draw the whole of the

¹⁰ LCW, vol 27, 258.

poor into the practical work of administration, and all steps that are taken in this direction—the more varied they are, the better—should be carefully recorded, studied, systematized, tested by wider experience and embodied in law. Our aim is to ensure that every toiler, having finished his eight hours’ “task” in productive labour, shall perform state duties without pay; the transition to this is particularly difficult, but this transition alone can guarantee the final consolidation of socialism.¹¹

All accounts of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period suggest that Lenin set two seemingly different priorities for the revolutionary transition. On the one hand, he insisted that revolution could take advantage of the role of bourgeois experts who could help delivering higher productivity and applying discipline in factory. This was combined with a call to abandon all battle cries about workers’ control and towards the full-scale introduction of Taylorism and methods for the organization of the production process coming for capitalist industries.. On the other hand, Lenin does not disregard other aspects of the revolutionary process such as mobilization and politicization of the masses, recourse to collective ingenuity and creativity of the working class, and voluntary activities such as the Communist subbotniks.¹²

One might conclude that this is merely an ambiguity of Lenin’s approach on socialist construction. But that’s not quite the case. There is a common element in these two approaches, namely *Taylorism*, which seems to be taken for granted and in a seemingly uncritical way by Lenin.

¹¹ LCW, vol 27, pp. 272-273.

¹² LCW, vol 29, pp. 409-434.

Robert Linhart¹³ in his very careful reading of Lenin's references to Taylorism in the 1918 texts has shown that Lenin thought that if Taylorism was freed from its class elements incorporated in it in Western Capitalism, integrally adopted in soviet industry and combined with forms of democracy and initiative (from workers' control to the workers themselves learning the Taylor system), this could promote revolution by increasing productivity, enabling the reduction of work time and liberating time to be used for the mass participation of workers in politics and state affairs.

On the contrary, the Taylor system, properly controlled and intelligently applied by the working people themselves, will serve as a reliable means of further greatly reducing the obligatory working day for the entire working population, will serve as an effective means of dealing, in a fairly short space of time, with a task that could roughly be expressed as follows: six hours of physical work daily for every adult citizen and four hours of work in running the state.¹⁴

This in a certain manner will be one of the limits of Lenin's thinking on the question of transition, namely a tendency to treat *the terrain of production and labour process* as something that had mainly to do with productivity and work time, with the question of socialist transformation been considered mainly in terms of mass *political* participation and soviet democracy.

A more complex approach can be found in some of the texts of 'Lenin's last battle'.¹⁵ In the text 'On Co-operatives', the notion of Cultural Revolution pointed towards the contradictions of the transition period and the need for

¹³ Linhart 1976.

¹⁴ LCW, vol. 42, p. 80.

¹⁵ Lewin 1968.

mass politicization of the working class and the peasants. Cultural Revolution was conceived as an attempt towards new forms of mass *political* intellectuality and a different proletarian ethos of participation and responsibility, elements that were also conceived as an attempt towards the transformation of relations of production (in this case moving towards a different social organization of agricultural production).

Our second task is educational work among the peasants. And the economic object of this educational work among the peasants is to organize the latter in co-operative societies. If the whole of the peasantry had been organized in co-operatives, we would by now have been standing with both feet on the soil of socialism. But the organization of the entire peasantry in co-operative societies presupposes a standard of culture among the peasants (precisely among the peasants as the overwhelming mass) that cannot, in fact, be achieved without a cultural revolution.

This cultural revolution would now suffice to make our country a completely socialist country; but it presents immense difficulties of a purely cultural (for we are illiterate) and material character (for to be cultured we must achieve a certain development of the material means of production, must have a certain material base).¹⁶

The extreme conditions of the Civil War and War Communism were treated by many as necessary yet exceptional measures and by few indeed as a way to think of socialism. However, at the end of the Civil War the prevailing idea was that a simple version of a socialist command economy based upon the administrative

¹⁶ LCW, vol 33, pp. 474-475.

abolition of commodity relations could not function and at the same time it would lead to severe problems regarding the class alliances inside the emerging soviet society, especially the relations with the peasantry. This was not simply a political question, but also a very practical one since it had to do with the actual possibility of survival. This led to the turn towards the NEP. Part of it was the reconstitution of some forms of capitalist social relations and some capability of the peasantry to sell their produce. The idea was that some form of accumulation was imperative before deeper social changes would occur, in contrast to more radical approaches. This period coincided with the continuation of a relatively open discussion inside the party although the end of the Civil War did not lead to the lifting of the interdiction of other parties and the one-party system was kept in place.

However, both in the exceptional 'ultra-left' measures of war communism and in the 'right' turn towards the NEP, many Bolsheviks appear to have a consistent approach on what they perceive as dynamics of the soviet economy. It is interesting how Lenin reintroduces in the text on 'The Tax in Kind'¹⁷, one of his main texts on the NEP, the argument of the 1918 texts that state capitalist and socialist elements are in alliance, struggling against bourgeois elements (small commodity production, private capitalism). Any economic program at this moment is conceived in terms of expansion of the state capitalist/socialist sectors and the restriction of the 'petty bourgeois' sectors. The main stake at the beginning of NEP was the expansion of large scale production and industrialization:

¹⁷ In LCW, vol. 32.

By “implanting” state capitalism in the form of concessions, the Soviet government strengthens large-scale production as against petty production, advanced production as against backward production, and machine production as against hand production.¹⁸

In that particular period, for Lenin and the majority of the Bolsheviks, the main challenge was large scale industry which in a certain manner was perceived as the basis of socialism in contrast to small production and petty bourgeois mentality which were considered the most important obstacles to socialist construction. Lenin stressed that in his speech at the 10th Congress of RCP (B).

Large-scale industry is the one and only real basis upon which we can multiply our resources and build a socialist society. Without large factories, such as capitalism has created, without highly developed large-scale industry, socialism is impossible anywhere; still less is it possible in a peasant country, and we in Russia have a far more concrete knowledge of this than before; so that instead of speaking about restoring large-scale industry in some indefinite and abstract way, we now speak of the definite, precisely calculated and concrete plan of electrification. We have a precise plan projected by the best Russian specialists and scientists, a plan which gives us a definite picture of the resources, considering Russia’s natural features, with which we can, must and will lay the basis of large-scale industry for our economy. Without it, no real socialist foundation for our economic life is possible.¹⁹

¹⁸ LCW, vol 32, p. 346.

¹⁹ LCW, vol 32, p. 408.

At that particular period and despite the compromises incorporated in the New Economic Policy, large scale industrialization and centralization of production was seen as an end itself, even at the cost of 'concessions' to capitalists in the 'state capitalist' sector. In the long run, this would mean that state capitalist / socialist 'large-scale industry' sector will gradually absorb and in the end obliterate all other economic sectors. In this sense, one can find here, albeit in latent form, elements of the economic program that the Stalinist fraction will try to implement violently at the end of the 1920s: collectivization, accelerated industrialization, relentless liquidation of all non-state capitalist/socialist forms of production. This was more evident in left wing proponents of NEP such as Preobrazhensky and his conception of primitive socialist accumulation, in reality a violent transfer of income from the peasantry to the socialist sector of the economy.²⁰

In the 1920s, before the arrival of Stalinism, there were important theoretical debates referring directly to questions of socialist transition, such as the debates on money, industrialization and planning.²¹ On the other hand, other debates such as the debates on workers' control that marked the phase of 'War Communism' did not continue in the same manner, especially after the defeat of Left Communists and the Workers' Opposition.²²

However, even in those debates one could witness the absence of a more profound thinking of the process of social transformation and in particular of the transformation of social relations and forms of production. Debates seem to

²⁰ Preobrazhensky 1965.

²¹ Boettke 1990; Barnett 2004.

²² Kollontai 1974.

centre upon mainly the extent of private property, the relation of the plan to the market and the rhythm of the transition to a fully socialized economy.

Now, were there any theoretical interventions during that period that elaborated transition problems in the manner described above? Not explicitly. However we could mention the contribution of Isaac Illich Rubin. Rubin introduced a novel reading of Karl Marx's theory of capitalism, by insisting on the centrality of the value-form. This form-theoretical approach marked a rupture with the Ricardian reading of Marx's value theory, linking the value-form to the reproduction of capitalist relations of production. Of course this intervention was highly abstract and theoretical in nature, not linked directly to any concrete debates of that period regarding socialist transition.

Although Rubin's intervention accepted the role of money as representation of the value-form during the period of transition, this was the outcome of neither a practical/realist consideration or of some a-historical conception of the value form. Instead the value-form was about the reproduction of social relations and productive forms.

Two useful, even though latent, arguments can be borrowed from Rubin:

A) Rubin's argument that political economy is mainly about relations of production, can lead us to the conclusion that economic policy aiming at the transition to a communist mode of production is mainly about changes in the relations of production.

Political economy deals with the production relations among people, i.e., with the social forms of the process of production, as opposed to its material-technical aspects.²³

On this question, the debate around Rubin's position in 1927-1930 is more than illuminating. Although the discussion is very abstract, with no references to socialist transition, and complex (since although Rubin is the main target of criticism, as the debate proceeds some of his opponents also become targets of criticism as part of the polemic against the *mechanicists*) at the same time it is obvious that the emphasis on the supposed underestimation of the production of forces by Rubin is an echo of the debates socialist construction.²⁴

B) Rubin's insistence that every historical mode of production based on a broad division of labour acquires a specific form of social homogenization of labour. This means that a communist economic system will develop *its own form of social homogenization and equation, essentially different from the market*. The dualism of capitalism production (use value/value, concrete labour/abstract labour) must thus be replaced with a *new form of dualism of communist production*. The transition to communism must involve the introduction of new social economic forms.

We all know that the main thrust of the debates that followed were debates about planning. The Plan became synonymous with socialism and the transition to communism came to be considered as the transition to a fully state owned and planned economy. However, such an approach left the question of social relations of production out of the scope, reduced the social division of

²³ Rubin 1973, p. 40.

²⁴ Rubin *et al.* 1975; Rubin *et al.* 2005.

labour to questions of ownership and treated power relations and hierarchies in production as purely neutral.

Charles Bettelheim's work, especially his work of the late 1960s and 1970s, was one of the first attempts to think thoroughly this question.²⁵ By this we do not wish to underestimate the great debates and divides of the 1930s and 1940s, especially within the heterodox left on the question of the class character of the Soviet Union and whether it was deformed socialism or state capitalism. However, in Bettelheim we find a more systematic attempt to deal with the theoretical questions.

In particular Bettelheim leaves aside the question of the plan or the question of legal ownership and shifts the attention to actual relations of production. Consequently, his conclusion is that on the one hand *state ownership* and *abolition of private property* can be combined with the reproduction of capitalist relations of production, in the sense of power relations and hierarchies in production. On the other hand, the combination of the plan with isolated productive process in the end *reproduces their private character* and leads to the reproduction of the value-form. As a result, in the USSR, as the Stalinist fraction consolidated its power, we moved towards an exploitative condition, a novel form of state capitalism, which politically was combined with a resort to oppressive and repressive practices.

We think that Bettelheim continues an argument that is very close to the one posed by Rubin regarding the question of the specific form of social equation of labour in the transition period. He claims that a radical break is needed between monetary accounting calculations and the *new form of economic*

²⁵ Bettelheim 1975; Bettelheim 1976; Bettelheim 1977.

calculation which is appropriate for a potentially communist economic structure. This new form of economic calculation require the construction of a *new theoretical space* that can define new economic forms: a *new exchangeability and substitutability* of labour processes and products and a *new form of social necessary labour*, all based on a new form of association of productive units, subjects, activities, that will not be validated via the market through the validation of hours of labour but in terms of the *useful social effect* of every labour (a social effect that, exactly like value, will be different from what we call 'use value' of a product).

When the CMP gives way to the socialist mode of production (SMP), or even when socialist relations of production *dominate* capitalist relations of production in a transitional social formation, the object of production is no longer the appropriation of surplus-value but the satisfaction of social needs. From this moment, *theoretical space* is no longer that of value and prices but of the "useful effects" of labour, and thus of *social utility*. The concept of "socially necessary labour" takes on a radically different meaning here from the one it has in the CMP. Its measurement is now not the surplus-value produced (or the relation of surplus to necessary labour), but the "social utility" produced by the various types of labour.²⁶

This conception draws heavily from Engel's first elaborations on the subject in *Anti-Dühring*. Engels stresses the fact that there have been modes of production where values were not necessary for the organization of production, modes of

²⁶ Bettelheim 1975, p. 12.

production which were based upon direct social production and direct distribution.

Commodity production, however, is by no means the only form of social production. In the ancient Indian communities and in the family communities of the southern Slavs, products are not transformed into commodities. The members of the community are directly associated for production; the work is distributed according to tradition and requirements, and likewise the products to the extent that they are destined for consumption. Direct social production and direct distribution preclude all exchange of commodities, therefore also the transformation of the products into commodities (at any rate within the community) and consequently also their transformation into *values*.²⁷

There are indeed some simplifications in Engels' approach and in particular the way he insisted that in a non capitalist mode production calculations would be 'simple enough', directly and spontaneously made by society itself, in time without any reference to values.

From the moment when society enters into possession of the means of production and uses them in direct association for production, the labour of each individual, however varied its specifically useful character may be, becomes at the start and directly social labour. The quantity of social labour contained in a product need not then be established in a roundabout way; daily experience shows in a direct way how much of it is required on the average. Society can simply calculate how many hours of labour are contained in a steam-engine, a

²⁷ MECW, vol. 25, p. 294.

bushel of wheat of the last harvest, or a hundred square yards of cloth of a certain quality. It could therefore never occur to it still to express the quantities of labour put into the products, quantities which it will then know directly and in their absolute amounts, in a third product, in a measure which, besides, is only relative, fluctuating, inadequate, though formerly unavoidable for lack of a better one, rather than express them in their natural, adequate and absolute measure, *time*.²⁸

However, Bettelheim sees in this original idea not a direct simple and transparent mode of production, producing only use values, but a new form of socialization of production, with new patterns of equalization, exchangeability and substitutability of products. Furthermore, such new patterns, Bettelheim argues, cannot arise from the expansion of a given Taylor-based organizational form of industry. They require a new perception of production as a whole.

Bettelheim adds another important argument which is very close to Rubin's argument and in a certain way expands it. It is a value-form theoretical approach according to which the value-form and abstract labour are expressions of capitalist social relations of production. For Bettelheim the value-form in its full expression and its particular dissimulating effects (commodity fetishism) requires both commodity relations and capitalist relations of production (separation of producer from the means of production, wage relation, separation of different economic units etc). However, for Bettelheim even if we have a nominal abolition of typical commodity forms in the transition period, this does not mean that capitalist social relations of production are abolished. Moreover,

²⁸ Ibid.

the fact that economic units remain isolated means that the 'plan' is not exactly the opposite of the 'market'.

This conclusion shows us the ideological character that the opposition "plan/market" can assume. When the plan is "thought" in the form of immediate representation, it effectively appears to be simultaneously both the *opposite* and the *same thing* as the market. This character of identity of opposites signals an *ideological coupling* and thus an opposition, which is at the same time both illusory and real.²⁹

Bettelheim suggests that in this sense we can see the persistence of the value form in social formations that are in the process of transition as the expression of capitalist social relations and forms that persist, either in the form of capitalist relations of production or in the form of the separation of economic units.

1) If the value-form continues to exist in actual transitional social formations, *this is due to the persistence of determinate social relations that continue to assume the "phantasmagorical form of a relation between things."*

(2) Not only does the existence of this "phantasmagorical form" continue to "represent" relations between human beings as relations between things, but it also produces the form of inversion. As long as this form remains unanalyzed, it prevents the *real movement* of the relations between things from being understood. Furthermore, when this understanding is absent, the action of the political on the economic level is carried out in a very approximate manner, due

²⁹ Bettelheim 1975, p. 38.

as much to inadequate *knowledge* (of measurement and calculation) as to the instruments of action (adequate forms of organization, significant prices, etc.).³⁰

A value form perspective, can account for the persistence of the market or market-like practices and forms of commodity fetishism and at the same time for the need to start experimenting with different relations of production, both at the terrain of the workplace, in the sense of a challenge against the capitalist division of labour and also at the terrain of 'distribution' in the sense of alternative non-market networks based upon participatory planning and other forms of coordination of diverse productive activities. It suggests that the overcoming of the value-form will not be the outcome of administrative measures but of profound changes and transformations in the relations of production and a broad socialization of the production and distribution process. It would the result not of technical solutions but of profound political struggles and an extensive politicization of the production process, part of a broader process of increased political participation and 'socialization of politics'.

We are well aware of the potential accusation than Rubin does not hold open political positions, that he was more like a scholar without political interventions, especially since he run the constant danger of arrest and incarceration because of his Bundist and Menshevik past. Yet at the same time we believe that from his reconstruction of value-form theory this alternative can come forward. We also think important that in a strange coincidence someone like Bettelheim, who started off within the dominant paradigm that the expansion of the plan and full nationalisation and socialisation was the way

³⁰ Bettelheim 1975, p. 42.

forward, not only did he move towards a conception of the primacy of social relations of production, but also his turning point was the question of economic calculus and his own version of something close to value-form theory.

Such an approach will lead to some necessary conclusions:

(a) The transition period is a period of uneven articulation of two modes of production, the capitalist and the potential communist.

(b) As long as capitalist relations of production are reproduced we would also have the reproduction of the value-form, expressed in the monetized character of the economy, in forms of fetishism, in the continuation of the market as a form of socialization of private labours. Administrative measures (plan) cannot alter this fundamental tendency but only reproduce it in a different form.

(c) The crucial aspect is not to attempt simply to change the ownership or to substitute the market by the plan, but to attempt to revolutionize relations of production. This means a process of experimentation with alternative forms of social organization of production, self management, and socialization of knowledge. It also means a process of attempting to revolutionize forms of socialization of private labours by means of non-commercial networks, new forms of distribution and new forms of participatory democratic planning.

(d) Such an attempt also requires a cultural revolution, namely new forms of mass social and political intellectuality, a new ethos of mass participation, a revolutionizing of social norms, gender roles, family practices, in order to have people with different forms of communist “common sense” (in Gramsci’s use of the term).

(e) Politically this requires the full liberation of political debate and participation, including the existence of many parties, independent trade unions

and above all autonomous forms of popular power from below. Moreover, it would require an extensive and expansive experimentation with new practices of politics, a mass socialization of politics and a mass repoliticization of the workplace and anything related to the economy.

(f) The aim would be to have the emergence of new social forms of production and new ideological constructions that would be equally 'natural' as commodity and value fetishism. Following Louis Althusser's insistence that the idea of a full transparency of social relations in communism is an ideological (and idealist) illusion,³¹ we can say that a potential communist mode of production will not be exploitative but will be fetishized albeit in an emancipatory way.

(g) This process would combine the short and the long-durée and instead of 'construction' can be better described as establishment of proletarian hegemony and a new historical bloc a new identity between structure and superstructure. This would also be a way to counter the pervasive and recurring influence of the dominant ideology and fetishism of commodity and value.

(h) It is the extent of the actual transformation of the relations of production that would determine the actual degree and rhythm of socialist transition. It would require intensification of class struggles and implementation of a dual power strategy even after the seizure of power. It would also need some

³¹ 'Yes, we find in Marx a latent idea of the perfect transparency of social relations under communism, the idea that these social relations are 'human relations', that is, crystal-clear relations between nothing but individuals (ultimately, all individuals) in the conquest and realization of the 'free development of their personality'. Yes, from *The German Ideology*, which expiates on this theme at length, down to *Capital*, the first volume of which describes states of social transparency, from Robinson and the family based on patriarchal production to the free association of communism, Marx never manages to relinquish this mythical idea of communism as a mode of production without relations of production; in communism, the free development of individuals takes the place of social relations in the mode of production.' (Althusser 2006, pp. 36-37).

form of Cultural Revolution, increased politicization, and constant experimentation with new social forms and productive processes and distribution networks, in constant conflict with recurring capitalist/market practice. Only in this sense can we talk about a transition period.

(i) Only by such a complex and uneven process we would be able to elaborate collectively new forms of economic calculation and new practices of coordination of production, and new ways of distribution and allocation of resources, goods and services. In ways that would be more transparent (although perhaps a degree of opacity would persist) and much more subject to forms of collective self-determination.

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What would be the ground on which such a 'road' could be taken? With regard to the Russian revolutionary experience, Bettelheim argued that NEP was the ground for such an experiment. That is why he insisted (in the second volume of *Class struggles in USSR*) that NEP was not a retreat. Bettelheim insists that at least in Lenin's conception, NEP was a way to better forge the social alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry but also as a way to enable all social forms to reveal themselves as part of process of their revolutionary transformation under the political condition of the dictatorship of the proletariat as revolutionary political power that can facilitate intensified class struggle.

Lenin recognized this reality when he called upon the Bolshevik Party to adopt the NEP. What the Bolshevik Party did, in fact, between 1921 and 1923, was to

recognize the existence of commodity, money, and capitalist relations, and to create the conditions for these relations to reproduce themselves and, thereby, to reveal themselves clearly; for the transformation and destruction of these relations necessarily has to pass through that phase. [...] [T]he Bolshevik Party was concerned to help birth the political, ideological, and economic conditions for the transformation and then the eventual disappearance of these same commodity, money, and capitalist relations. A preliminary stage in this direction was the establishment of a planning apparatus which should function so as to subject the reproduction of commodity and money relations to conditions and political relations imposed by the organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat.³²

However, this intensification of class struggle should reach the point of experimentation with new forms of production and organization. Experimentation, mass mobilization and democratization must gradually penetrate the core of the economic structure.

We believe that this road could, at a theoretical level, be considered to be the only efficient 'third road' against the dichotomies of the 1920s with which we are all familiar, namely:

- 'Left-wing' tendencies that insisted on aggressive industrialization and a more radical transformation of the countryside towards a collectivised system, exemplified in Preobrazensky's theory of the 'primary socialist accumulation but also in a certain way in Trotsky's early positions on the militarization of the trade-unions and later Stalin's statification of trade unions and soviets

- the defence of the NEP, exemplified by Bukharin's right-wing position of a realistic approach based on a compromise with peasantry and small and

³² Bettelheim 1977, pp. 49-50.

medium private capital, a strategy that lacked any mid-term or long-term transition as transformation perspective.

We know the limitations of this dichotomy: since there was not an attempt towards a more profound change of social relations of production, in both industry and the agricultural sector, NEP alone would only leave to increased inequalities and a greater divergence between city and countryside (increases in productivity alone in order to offer the peasantry cheaper industrial goods in exchange for increased agricultural produce seemed not to function) and a move towards nationalization and increased collectivisation would only take a violent and coercive way, a revolution 'from above' in the best case, or just the unleashing of violence without precedent in its actual terms. Later debates on planning theory didn't touch upon this question.

However, was there a real historical potential for such a third road at the NEP era? This is a big question. Robert Linhart once made the comment that 'in 1929 Stalin was not debating Mao Zedong, the "gang of four", the ecologists etc. He was debating Bukharin, Trotsky and Zinoviev'.³³ We can expand this comment and say that today we can compare the approaches of Lenin, Stalin, Bukharin, the Shanghai People's Commune, May 1968, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the ecological movement etc. However, Lenin debated Bukharin and Trotsky, then Bukharin debated Stalin and finally Stalin debated Ordzhonikidze and Kirov.

Could the level of class struggle, the 'collective ingenuity' and social practice that were then liberated formulate such a third road? The answer could be negative in terms of real historical potential of the Russian revolution in the

³³ Bettelheim - Linhart 1980, p. 55.

1920s. However, the historical limits of previous revolutions can be the starting points of future ones.

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