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Political Testament of Lenin and Bukharin and the Meaning of NEP

Lenin's last writings have given rise to a surprising range of interpretations.¹ Despite this diversity, consensus holds that in these articles Lenin was striking new ground, extending his critique of war communism, and deepening his conception of the New Economic Policy. Another widely held view is that Nikolai Bukharin, inspired by the last articles, went further down the path opened by Lenin. Few agree about the content of Lenin's new direction, although one may note the following coincidence: Lenin is always seen as rejecting whatever the author in question does not like about original Bolshevism.

In the first half of this paper, I will argue that, on the contrary, despite some new details, the themes and concerns of the final writings faithfully reflect Lenin's long-term outlook. No critique of war communism or deepening of NEP can be extracted from these writings. This lack of originality does not detract from their importance but, rather, strengthens their position as Lenin's political testament. In the second half of the paper, I will argue, that, although Bukharin constantly referred to Lenin's final writings, they did not change his outlook at any fundamental level.

Lenin was a sick man when he dictated the final writings, a fact that is reflected in their unfocused, repetitive, and rambling organization. It is therefore useless to take up the articles one by one; we must adopt Bukharin's method and discuss each of Lenin's themes in light of all the references to it scattered throughout the writings.² For reasons of space, I will not discuss Lenin's view of nationality problems or the theme of Russia's international position between the tardy revolution in the west and the incipient revolution in the east. I shall also leave to one side the drama surrounding Lenin's personal conflict with Stalin and the Politburo's reaction to Lenin's suggestions.³ The three themes I will discuss are improving the apparatus, strengthening party authority, and the need for cultural revolution.

Lenin inveighed against "bureaucratism" because he wanted an effective, centralized apparatus that would be an efficient tool in the hands of the worker's state. The "withering away of

This essay is dedicated to my teachers Robert Tucker and Stephen Cohen, who, long before perestroika, emphasized the importance of Lenin's testament and Nikolai Bukharin to the Soviet reform tradition.

1. I include the five final articles, the letter to the congress, and the draft for "How to Reorganize Rabkrin"; all can be found in volume 45 of *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Institut Marksizma-Leninizma, n.d.), 5th ed. Standard western discussions of the circumstances surrounding the final articles are found in Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary: A Study in History and Personality* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973); Moshe Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968); Robert H. McNeal, *Stalin: Man and Ruler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). On Bukharin, besides the standard works of Robert Daniels (*The Conscience of the Revolution: Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia* [Cambridge: Harvard, 1960]) and Stephen Cohen (*Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography* [New York: Vintage Books, 1971]), I have benefited from the Marxist analyses of Michael Haynes (*Nikolai Bukharin and the Transition from Capitalism to Socialism* [New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985]) and Christian Salmon (*Le rêve mathématique de Nicolai Boukharine, 1905–1923* [Paris: Sycomore, 1980]).

For a useful collection of recent Soviet articles, see *Bukharin: Chelovek, politik, uchenyi* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1990). The student of Bukharin will benefit from three new Soviet editions of his writings: *Izbrannye Proizvedeniia* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1988); *Problemy teorii i prctiki Sotsializma* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1989); *Put' K sotsializmu* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1990). The last has a useful and comprehensive bibliography of Bukharin's writing.

2. "Politicheskoe zaveshchanie Lenina," in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 419–436.

3. Recent Soviet discussions include V. P. Naumov, "Leninskoe zaveshchanie," *Pravda*, 26 February and 25 March 1988; V. I. Startsev, "Politicheskoe rukovoditeli sovet'skogo gosudarstva v 1922–nachale 1923 g." *Istoriia SSSR*, 1988, no. 5, 101–122; and Aleksandr Bek's interview with Lenin's secretaries, published in *Moscow News*, 1989, no. 17 (Bek's novel on this subject is being published).

the state” did not mean doing away with an administrative apparatus, but rather doing away with the separation between state and society—what Robert Tucker has called “dual Russia.” The overcoming of this dualism would be achieved by full democracy, which would thus cleanse the apparatus of its “bureaucratic” defects.⁴

Lenin’s concern in the final writings is therefore not to do away with or even to limit the scope of the state apparatus but simply to improve it. According to Lenin, the defects of the apparatus stem entirely from the prerevolutionary past: tsarist bureaucrats, bourgeois capitalists, petit bourgeois speculators. Bureaucratism is a *perezhitok starogo*, a holdover from the past.⁵ Even though Lenin cautioned the Bolsheviks that in five years they could not expect to do very much to eliminate bureaucratism, he never suggests that war communism or the civil war has strengthened bureaucratism. Indeed, in one passage, intensified bureaucratism is associated with NEP.⁶

Lenin does mention in passing that the party is also infected with bureaucratism, but the entire focus of his program is to use the party to cleanse (or purge) the state apparatus.⁷ The apparatus least infected by bureaucratism, the Foreign Affairs Commissariat, demonstrates this desired goal.

This apparatus is an exceptional component of our state apparatus. We have not allowed a single influential person from the old tsarist apparatus into it. All sections with any authority are composed of Communists. That is why it has already won for itself . . . the name of a reliable communist apparatus purged to an incomparably greater extent of the old tsarist, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois elements than those which we have had to make do with in other People’s Commissariats.⁸

Lenin’s proposal for improving the apparatus is to enlist the best and the brightest of young workers and peasants. (Peasants who are directly or indirectly associated with exploitation need not apply.) The evolution of Lenin’s scheme can be traced from the letter to the congress to the first draft of “How to Reorganize Rabkrin” to the final published article. During this evolution a number of substantive changes occur. When the proposal is first mentioned, it is assigned two aims of equal importance: preventing a split among the leadership and improving the apparatus. As Lenin works out the scheme, the first aim almost fades away and the second one becomes decisive.

At first Lenin wanted to put the enlisted workers on the Central Committee, but between the first draft and the published article he simply substituted the Central Control Commission for the Central Committee. Lenin did not explain why he dropped his plan for enlarging the Central Committee, but I assume it is because he saw the anomaly of having people on the Central Committee who would have “full rights” and yet who would be confined to a specific task. The switch to the Central Control Commission is also consonant with a move away from elections and toward examinations as a way of selecting the enlisted workers.⁹ In any event, the sudden switch shows that Lenin’s focus is not on the reform of any particular party institution but on enlisting fresh forces.

The point of Lenin’s scheme rests on the human—one might even say superhuman—qualities of the enlisted workers. Since they are to be thoroughly versed in up-to-date administrative

4. In 1922, Lenin wrote: “The state = the working class, its vanguard, its crystallized organization and cultural power,” *PSS* 45:412. The attempt to combine high centralization with democratic enlistment is characteristic of a wider trend in Russian political culture I have termed “the enlistment solution.” For discussion, see Lih, *Bread and Authority in Russia, 1914–1921* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

5. *PSS* 45:383. See also 347, 376, 385, 387, 405, 447. Lenin comments on the limitations of Lenin’s analysis in *Lenin’s Last Struggle*, 124; and in *Political Undercurrents in Soviet Economic Debates: From Bukharin to the Modern Reformers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 64.

6. *PSS* 45:397.

7. *Ibid.* 45:397. See also 308 (November 1922).

8. *Ibid.* 45:361. See also 45:447, 405. For a similar strategy with Gosplan, see 45:351–352.

9. Bukharin put the emphasis on examinations (*Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 434). See also Lenin, *PSS* 45:445–446.

science the source of the enlisted workers had to change. In the first mention, the main characteristic of these workers is the negative one of not having acquired the prejudices of the new Soviet civil service. In the final version, Lenin is looking for candidates among experienced officials and students.¹⁰ The enlisted workers will also be irreproachable Communists, conscientious, loyal, united among themselves. They will be fearless—unafraid of authority and never speaking against their consciences. They will accept nothing on faith. They will inspire the confidence of the working class, the party, and indeed the whole population.

At times the enlisted workers will have to resort to craftiness. Since a major cause of the ineffectiveness of the apparatus was the semiconscious sabotage of the bureaucrats, the methods of intelligence work will be appropriate. These methods will “sometimes be directed to rather remote sources or in a roundabout way,” and therefore Lenin advised the antibureaucratic crusaders to work out “special ruses to screen their movements.” Lenin’s call for unorthodox methods against class-inspired sabotage is perhaps the part of the testament closest to the Stalinist outlook.¹¹

Lenin’s aim is to “concentrate in Rabkrin human material of a truly contemporary kind, that is, fully comparable to the best western European models.”¹² After training by “highly qualified specialists” and party leaders, the enlisted workers will improve Rabkrin and, through Rabkrin, the entire state apparatus.¹³ Bukharin called them a lever for reforming the apparatus, and this appropriate metaphor reminds us of Lenin’s famous paraphrase of Archimedes’s lever in *What Is to Be Done?* (“Give us an organization of revolutionaries, and we shall overturn Russia!”) In his last articles, Lenin retreats to his dream of an elite of “professional revolutionaries” whose total dedication and heroic leadership abilities will bring about miracles.¹⁴

“Our Central Committee has become a strictly centralized and highly authoritative group, but the work of this group has not been placed in conditions that correspond to this authority.”¹⁵ While many of Lenin’s remarks on this score bear on improvement of administrative routine, we shall focus on his remarks with broader political import. The most important consideration is the prevention of a schism. The fear of a schism and the insistence on unity is probably the aspect of Bolshevik mentality that is hardest for Americans to understand. The Bolsheviks felt deeply that in a hostile world the survival of the revolution depended on their own unity and the disunity of their opponents.¹⁶

Lenin discusses the possibility of a schism at two levels: among the individuals of the top leadership and at the more fundamental level of the workers and the peasants. Lenin did not believe there was much chance of a peasant-worker split in and of itself. After noting the possibility of a lack of basic understanding between the classes, Lenin comments that “this is too much [a matter of a] remote future and too unbelievable an occurrence for me [even] to talk about.”¹⁷ Nor does the danger of a split in the top leadership result from any underestimation of the worker-peasant alliance or any other serious policy difference. The danger is rather that a strictly accidental and personal split among the top leaders will lead to a loss of party authority and thus to failure in the battle for the loyalty of the peasant. Preventing a schism in the top leadership is also important because no one person can combine all the different qualities needed in a leader.

10. PSS 45:347–348, 394–396.

11. Ibid. 45:397–400.

12. Ibid. 45:389.

13. PSS 45:354. See also the early mention of the scheme in May 1922, 45:181.

14. Bukharin, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 434. My understanding of *What Is to Be Done?* is based on Robert C. Tucker, *Political Culture and Leadership in Soviet Russia* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988).

15. PSS 45:387.

16. Ibid. 45:344; see also 360, 362.

17. Ibid. 45:344. It is easy to understand why, after years of polemicizing with the opposition and then with Stalin, Bukharin would argue that Lenin was warning against the adoption of actively antipeasant policies. See *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 430–431.

Despite his concern about a split in the leadership, Lenin does not mention factionalism, perhaps because he no longer saw factionalism as a threat, as he had in 1921. Another possibility is that Lenin saw factionalism arising from disputes among the elite rather than from rank and file pressures.¹⁸ In any event, Lenin's scheme for enlisting the best and brightest workers was also designed to strengthen party unity. Those enlisted would reduce the chance of a personal schism by improving the work routines of the top leadership. They will also provide the leadership with a "tie to the masses," since they will gain authority from their closeness to "the highest party institution [the Central Committee] and from their equal standing with those who direct the party and through it the entire state apparatus."¹⁹ None of this seems to be a call for democratic pressure to limit top party leaders' freedom of action—on the contrary, the aim is to increase the effectiveness of what Lenin called in his last published sentence the "highly authoritative party elite."

In his early polemics with the Narodniki, Lenin had argued that capitalism was necessary to shake Russia out of its "Asiatic" sleepiness. At the end of his life, he still felt that, although capitalism itself was no longer necessary, this task remained on the agenda. "Proletarian culture" was impossible without the cultural revolution capitalism had wrought elsewhere.²⁰

Lenin's concern was prompted by his Marxist conscience that told him (in the person of Nikolai Sukhanov and other socialist critics) that a socialist revolution was not possible without the material base created by capitalism and its accompanying cultural attitudes. Another source of concern was the practical problem of dealing with the peasantry. Both concerns presented the same challenges: how to get Russia to the position of a western country the day after the revolution and how to find an enlistment mechanism that would transform the peasants' outlook so that they could participate in the building of socialism. Lenin's main answer is of course the cooperatives, although *shefstvo* and the village school teachers can be seen as political equivalents.²¹

Lenin was not particularly interested in the economic advantages of the cooperatives; for him they were an answer to socialist criticism based on Russia's lack of culture.²² The cooperatives would act as the functional equivalent of capitalism and transform the peasant who at present was not even at the level of a "cultured huckster." Lenin did not see the cooperatives as an extension of NEP, but rather as a tool for overcoming NEP:

Under NEP we made a concession to the peasant as a merchant and to the principle of private trade; precisely from this (contrary to what is thought) flows the gigantic significance of the cooperatives. . . . We went too far, going over to NEP, not because we attached too much importance to the principle of free production and trade—we went too far because we forgot to think about the cooperatives.²³

In other words, even though allowing private trade was a necessary concession, the Bolsheviks must remember that they have to transform the peasants so that they no longer require such a concession.²⁴

18. Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, 128; Igor Kliamkin, *Novyi mir*, 1989, no. 2:211.

19. *PSS* 45:447; see also 45:384.

20. *Ibid.* 45:364, 389–392. Lenin's remarks on this issue should be seen in the context of his long-standing dispute with Aleksandr Bogdanov. For details see Zenovia A. Sochor, *Revolution and Culture: The Bogdanov-Lenin Controversy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988).

21. *PSS* 45:366–368. For an earlier confrontation of Lenin with this question, see Lih, *Bolshevik Sowing Committees of 1920: Apotheosis of War Communism?* (Pittsburgh: Carl Beck Papers, 1990), 29–32.

22. *PSS* 45:376–377. On subsidies for the cooperatives, see *PSS* 45:371, 373, 405.

23. *Ibid.* 45:370–371.

24. This view was expressed at the time by a western scholar: "It is upon the cooperatives, therefore, that the chief responsibility has had to be placed for bringing the wide masses of the population in touch with socialized production. . . . Upon the basis of these declarations of Lenin in regard to cooperation, the Party has counted upon it to aid in the maximum curtailment of the life of the New Economic Policy." Calvin B. Hoover, *The Economic Life of Soviet Russia* (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 225–227. Viktor Danilov describes Bukharin's outlook as a "cooperative-market conception of economic development," but this expression is misleading, since the cooperatives were meant to overcome the market. Danilov, "Bukharinskaia

To understand the nature of Lenin's testament, we must start with some of the things that are not in the final writings. No new definition of socialism can be found there. Today one of the most popular phrases from the testament is "we are compelled to admit a radical change of our whole point of view on socialism." Lenin immediately makes it clear, however, that he is referring to the shift from taking power to peacefully constructing socialism. Lenin would have been seriously offended by recent claims that he had moved beyond Marx's definition of socialism.²⁵

The testament contains no critique of war communism. The very concept is missing: Lenin continually refers to the five years since the revolution as a unit, with an occasional mention of the fact that intervention and hunger slowed down the pace of socialist construction. The source of all evils is the prerevolutionary past and the petit-bourgeois environment. The civil war is not a corrupter of Bolshevism but a source of inspiring examples.²⁶

The testament contains no deeper, wider vision of NEP. Lenin defends NEP on the basis of the need for economic recovery and as a justifiable concession to the peasants' backward outlook, but otherwise his attitude seems negative. NEP is associated with bureaucratism, a low level of economic productivity, NEPmen, and the Brest retreat.²⁷

The political testament is not a critique of Stalinism *avant la lettre*. Despite Lenin's anger at Stalin, the testament contains no warning against coercive assaults on the peasantry or murderous purges of the party, simply because it never occurred to Lenin that such things were possible.

He never hints at a rethinking of the party's role. Lenin saw the top party institutions as effective and authoritative, and he wanted to ensure that they became more so.²⁸

While these remarks may seem to remove much of the drama of Lenin's final testament, they increase its significance as an expression of Lenin's basic outlook. One reason for this significance is the lack of tight editorial control that allows the tensions inherent in Lenin's outlook to surface directly. These tensions sometimes look like contradictions, but they reflect the real conflicts of a revolutionary statesman entering unknown territory. One such tension is the relation between "west" and "east." Sometimes the west is a symbol of civilization, up-to-date science, and progress as opposed to the sleepy, backward, "uncultured" east; in other places the west is oppressive, stodgy, and malevolent and the east is a revolutionary giant just beginning to feel its strength.²⁹

The attitude toward bourgeois culture and bourgeois specialists reveals a similar ambivalence. Lenin wants his readers both to look up to the specialists as sources of knowledge and as teachers and to look down on them as potential saboteurs. Related to this attitude is reliance on the virtue of the workers combined with suspicions about their lack of culture.³⁰

Another tension is that between patience and impatience—careful self-discipline and revolutionary daring. Lenin expressed this tension directly in his formula about combining revolu-

al'ternativa," in *Bukharin: Chelovek, politik, uchenyi*, 82–130. Danilov's important article greatly aided the revision of my conference paper before publication.

25. Vladlen Sirotkin, "Uroki NEPa, " *Izvestiia*, 9 and 10 March 1989; Mikhail Antonov in *Nash sovrehennik*, 1989, no. 2: 125–130. The descriptions of Lenin's new definitions offered by these two authors show almost no similarity—a fact that is not surprising since Lenin said nothing on the subject. For an indication of the emotional nature of the debate on Lenin's phrase, see A. Tikhonov, *Ogonek*, 1989, no. 51: 19.

26. References to five years of revolution are in *PSS* 45: 376, 385, 390, 397, 443, 449; references to the civil war 45: 347, 357, 401–402, 410; the inspiring examples of the civil war can be found in *PSS* 45: 383, 372–373, and 302–305 (November 1922).

27. *PSS* 45: 372, 397, 401, 387, 381.

28. Despite Lenin's discontent with Stalin, he seemed to envision an expanded role for the secretariat. See *PSS* 45: 443, 449, 385–386.

29. *PSS* 45: 397, 401–406. For other antiwest references, see 45: 378, 379, 399–400; for other pro-west references, see 45: 364, 389.

30. Sometimes the tension in his attitude toward specialists results in virtual incoherence, as in Lenin's remarks on a suitable textbook in *PSS* 45: 395. On workers, see *ibid.* 45: 390–391.

tionary enthusiasm with the ability to be an efficient trader.³¹ It can also be seen in the split between the attention given to improvement of administrative routine and the denunciation of “bureaucratism”—between the calls for patience and the sneers at timidity before established routine.³² As with the bourgeois specialists, Lenin calls for a psychologically difficult attitude of contempt toward a source of necessary discipline.

A tension between the desire for centralization and the desire for mass participation leads to the instability of the scheme to enlist workers: Sometimes election is stressed, sometimes appointment—sometimes an unspoiled nature is emphasized, other times professional expertise is paramount.

A final, and perhaps basic, tension is between shame and pride in Russia—shame over its backwardness and tsarist past, pride in its people and revolutionary future:

We are speaking of the half-asiatic lack of culture, from which we have not yet extricated ourselves, and from which we cannot extricate ourselves without strenuous effort—although we have every opportunity to do so, because nowhere are the masses of the people so interested in real culture as they are in our country; nowhere are the problems of this culture tackled so thoroughly and consistently as they are in our country; in no other country is state power in the hands of the working class which, in its mass, is fully aware of the deficiencies, I shall not say of its culture, but of its literacy; nowhere is the working class so ready to make, and nowhere is it actually making, such sacrifices to improve its position in this respect as in our country.³³

* * *

Lenin’s final articles seem to have had an extraordinary effect on Bukharin. He refers to them continually throughout his many writings of the 1920s; indeed, they are almost the exclusive source of his Lenin citations. Before examining what Bukharin saw in these articles, we need to look first at the overall evolution of his thinking and then to the threats he saw to the proper Leninist course.

Bukharin’s outlook is informed by his understanding of the evolution of capitalism. The general line of this analysis remained consistent from 1915 onwards.³⁴ The immanent law of capitalist development was “the law of centralization and concentration” that was replacing the capitalism of the competitive market. This trend was a progressive one, even though the various social contradictions of capitalism did not allow the complete rationalization of the economy. “Under the shell of monopolistic capitalism has grown a system of concentrated means of production . . . and an organization of social labor of vast power and scope, preparing the foundations of the rationalization of the whole industrial process.”³⁵

Monopolistic “finance capitalism” provided the empirical grounding for Bukharin’s understanding of the dynamics of the transition to socialism in Russia. Bukharin’s typical mode of argument is to say, “look at what has happened under capitalism; the process with us is—in a formal sense—the same.” The similarity was only formal because of the proletarian dictatorship, which transforms the class content of the process. The pressure of the masses, as expressed by the ruling Communist party, will prevent capitalist irrationality and parasitism.

31. Stalin picked up this formula in *Foundations of Leninism* with his phrase about Russian revolutionary sweep and American *delovitost’*.

32. PSS 45:389ff, 399–401. Compare also the assessments of the five years since the revolution on 390, 392, 395.

33. PSS 45:364–365.

34. For Bukharin’s analysis of capitalism, see “Mirovoe khoziaistvo i imperializm,” *Problemy*, 21–93; “Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State,” in *Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism*, ed. Richard B. Day (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1982), 6–37 (both these works were written in 1915); *Azbuka kommunizma* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1920), 88–91; *Ekonomika perekhodnogo perioda* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1920), 7–26; “The Theory of ‘Organized Economic Disorder,’” in *Selected Writings*, 331–351; “Tekhnika i ekonomika sovremennogo kapitalizma,” in *Etiudy* (Moscow: Gos. tekhniko-teoreticheskoe izdat., 1932), 64–107.

35. Bukharin, *Etiudy*, 106–107.

A typical example of Bukharin's reasoning is the crucial chapter on town and country relations in *Economics of the Transition Period* (written in 1920). Bukharin first observes the danger of a growing disproportion between agriculture and industry. He then asks how capitalism deals with this life and death challenge (since "agriculture—especially in a time of shocks—is the decisive branch of production"). Because agriculture is not concentrated production, the "organizational process" of state capitalism regulates circulation—that is, exchange between town and country. Regulation takes place by means of the cooperatives and can include even the small peasant enterprise.

Later in the chapter Bukharin considers the central challenge to the Bolshevik revolutionary project: "In what forms can we establish the organizing influence of the proletarian town? And how can we achieve a new equilibrium *between* town and village?" His answer: "For the main mass of *small producers*, their involvement in the organizational apparatus is possible, for the most part, through *the sphere of circulation*, and therefore formally in the same way as under state capitalism."³⁶ Under normal circumstances, the cooperatives will be the basic instrument in this process. Although *Economics of the Transition Period* is often regarded as the most vivid expression of war communist ideology, Bukharin reproduced the substance of this argument more than once during the 1920s.³⁷

When we understand the underlying structure of Bukharin's argument, we see that it is incorrect to assert that he was moving towards a conception of a "socialist market" or "socialist pluralism." On the contrary, in 1925 as in 1920, Bukharin looked forward to an economy that would be a "single organized whole" under the direction of a centralized state.³⁸ Bukharin vividly describes the many irrationalities of state-organized capitalism, attributes these irrationalities to the absence of "the spur of competition," and mentions the danger of a similar degeneration under socialism.³⁹ Thus for a modern reader his analysis seems to show the necessity of pluralism and the market, but Bukharin's outlook prevented him from moving toward that conclusion. The trend toward organization and concentration was the rational kernel of economic evolution; no remedy for bureaucratic degeneration that backtracked toward anarchic competition was acceptable to him. The only kind of competition that Bukharin accepted was between economic forms, between socialism and capitalism: Socialism had to prove its superiority in deeds, not just in words. Even this type of competition was not desirable in itself; Bukharin wished to see it concluded triumphantly as soon as possible.

Bukharin's use of the analogy with finance capitalism also shows why his emphasis on the cooperatives had nothing to do with pluralism, if by that term we mean autonomy from a directing center. In his famous "Enrich yourselves!" speech of spring 1925, Bukharin began his discussion of the cooperatives by noting their dependent status under capitalism. He then went on to argue that a workers' state should be able to do even better:

How will we be able to draw [the peasant] into our socialist organization? . . . We will provide him with material incentives as a small property-owner. This isn't frightening at all, because in the final analysis, on the basis of this very same economic growth, the peasant will be moved along the path of our transformation of both himself and his enterprise into a

36. *Ekonomika*, 73–87. Karl Kautsky is cited as an authority for the last statement.

37. *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 140–143, 171–175. The continuity in Bukharin's aims on this particular point is noted by Lewin (*Political Undercurrents*, 43) and Danilov ("Bukharinskaia al'ternativa," 89). In 1933, Bukharin directly equated the withering away of the state with the withering away of society: "Enlisting *everybody* into its immediate organization, the state stops being itself; by absorbing society into itself, it dissolves itself into society without trace." *Problemy*, 409.

38. Bukharin used the quoted phrase both in 1920 (*Ekonomika*, 110) and in 1925 (*Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 175).

39. *Mezhdunarodnoe i vnutrennee polozhenie SSSR* (Moscow: Pravda-Bednota, 1927), 35–37; "Theory of 'Organized Economic Disorder.'" "

40. *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 142–143. See also his objection to independent peasant organizations: *XIV s'ezd vsesoiuznoi kommunisticheskoi partii (b)* (Moscow, 1926), 131.

particle of our general state socialist system—just as he grows into capitalist relations under a capitalist regime.⁴⁰

Within the socialist sector political pressure, not competition, would ward off the degeneration that threatened any monopoly. Bukharin's vision of peaceful evolution was premised on the economic power and political unity of the state.⁴¹ For this reason, he wrote in 1925 that "the general line of the proletariat during its dictatorship is a line toward *strengthening* the social whole, a line *against* schisms in society, a line for the consolidation of the state (until that phase when its 'dying away' commences)." In 1926 he wrote, further, that factionalism within the party would aid the NEPmen and the kulaks. In his 1929 article on Lenin's testament, he sets forth his view without ambiguity:

In the last analysis, the state apparatus is the very lever, the very machine, through which our party, the victorious leader of the proletariat, will direct all of our politics; if we look from the point of view of the future, then our state apparatus is the very organization through which we must draw in millions, all the toilers without exception, and so attain a definite stage in the transition to the state-commune—from which, unfortunately, we are still very distant.⁴²

When I began investigating Bukharin's conception of war communism and NEP, I assumed that he had tied his critique of war communism closely to his critique of the party opposition. To my surprise, I found that for the most part Bukharin separated the two critiques. Overcoming the remaining influence of war communism was a relatively minor problem for Bukharin; the serious threat to the proper Leninist course came from the party opposition.

To place these critiques in context, we must first chart Bukharin's conception of NEP. We can do this by means of the four *-stups* (an appropriate root-word for so dynamic a phenomenon as NEP): *otstuplenie* and *nastuplenie*, *ustupka* and *dostupno*. Some claim that to see NEP as a retreat was (and is) a sign of hostility to NEP and that defenders of NEP, such as Lenin and Bukharin, were moving away from this negative view. I believe that clarity on this matter is possible if we pay close attention to the content of the retreat and subsequent advance. The retreat was to free trade from a state trade monopoly, not from the *prodravverstka*, which was a heavy wartime tax. The decriminalization of free trade was a concession to the small individual owner-peasant and cleared the way for forms of advance understandable and accessible to peasants. As soon as economic recovery made it possible, the advance would start again—private trade would be "crowded out" by the combined forces of state trade and the cooperative apparatus, using peaceful economic measures. This policy in itself was not new but was an old policy adapted to the new circumstance of a decriminalized market. While including an undeniable element of retreat, NEP also included subsequent advance toward a planned economy. The overcoming of NEP would be NEP's own doing.

Bukharin set forth this conception of NEP in 1921–1922. In the course of an extended comparison to the Brest peace—another retreat that made possible a later advance—Bukharin writes that once the Bolsheviks had built up the economy,

41. *Mezhdunarodnoe*, 37–38; *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 105–108. Bukharin did oppose over-centralization; see *Fourth Congress of the Communist International* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1923?), 170, and *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 417. The need to find a replacement for market competition was a commonplace of the period (see Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution: Politics and Workers, 1928–1932* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988]). On the power and unity of the state, see *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 78, 138–139.

42. *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 433–434. For the other quoted statements in the paragraph, see Bukharin *Kritika ekonomicheskoi platformy oppozitsii* (Leningrad: Priboi, 1926), 47; *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 264. Other references to the state include 71–74, 78–79, 139, 348–350, 358; *The Path to Socialism in Russia*, ed. Sidney Heitman (New York: Omicron, 1967), 178. See especially the refutation of anarchism in *Teoriia istoricheskogo materializma*, 9th ed. (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1929), 345.

we will “turn the rudder.” But this new reversal in the direction of the rudder will not, by any means, imply a return to the past, to *prodrazverstka* and the like. . . . The “turn of the rudder” will involve gradual economic liquidation of the large-scale private economy and [its replacement by] economic subordination of the small producer to large-scale industrial leadership. The small producer will be drawn into the socialized economy not by measures of extra-economic compulsion, but, for the most part, by the economic benefits he will gain from tractors, electric lights, agricultural machines, etc. He will find himself enmeshed (to his own advantage) in *electric wires*, which bring life-giving energy to fertilize the economy.⁴³

It is sometimes argued that as the 1920s wore on, Bukharin changed this conception and began to see the desirability of moving further in the direction of the original retreat. He could not be fully explicit about this for political reasons and so he continued to talk about overcoming the market, but in reality this event was put off to the remote end of the transition period and even beyond. More and more, Bukharin realized that market relations had permanent positive value as a barrier to monopolistic degradation and the tyranny of a centralized state.⁴⁴

I believe, on the contrary, that after the initial “zig” of the decriminalization of the market, Bukharin looked forward to a steady, straight-line “zag” toward the replacement of the market by a planned economy. It is true that in his polemics with Stalin in 1928–1929 Bukharin insisted on the necessity of preserving market relations. According to Bukharin, collective farms would not be able to replace individual peasant enterprises any time in the near future, and under these circumstances the market was the only available mechanism for managing economic relations with the peasantry. But in a comparative context, the market’s association with the scattered and primitive individual peasantry meant that it was a badge of backwardness:

The specific feature of the USSR is not NEP as such, but the *dimensions* of NEP and the *scope* of market relations. . . . The greater the industrial development of a country and the more it is industrialized, the smaller role will market relations play after the proletariat’s seizure of power. From a dynamic point of view, [the more developed the country,] the faster we will be able to overcome NEP, that is, overcome market relations on the basis of those same market relations. Development in the context of market relations will be accompanied by the growth of the whole economic mechanism: The scope of market relations will be less, the tempo of its disappearance will be quicker, and there will be a quicker tempo of socialist development, from embryonic forms to a fully valid socialist economy, consisting of a single homogeneous organism.⁴⁵

Bukharin’s conditional acceptance of the market did not imply any tolerance for the private middleman or for competition within the state sector. In 1927, for example, he pointed with pride to the re-establishment of the grain monopoly that had been removed at the beginning of NEP. In 1928, one of his major remedies for inadequate grain procurement was to eliminate competition between state purchasing organs in order to create a “single procurement front.”⁴⁶

The analogy with capitalist evolution that was so integral to Bukharin’s outlook also supports the sincerity of his hopes that NEP would “negate itself.” Why not allow market forms, if they were politically or economically expedient? Just like capitalism everywhere else, the com-

43. *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 28–30 (translation in *Selected Writings*, 105–106). See also “The New Economic Policy of Soviet Russia” in *The New Policies of Soviet Russia* (Chicago: C. H. Kerr, [1921]); Lenin, *PSS* 45:302 (November 1922).

44. Lewin, *Political Undercurrents*, 46–47.

45. Speech to Comintern Congress in August 1928, *Problemy*, 213. The most explicit statement of Bukharin’s differences with Stalin is his speech to the Central Committee in April 1929, published for the first time in *Problemy*, 253–308. For Bukharin’s views on the use of market forms after collectivization, see G. A. Bordiugov and V. A. Kozlov, “Pozdnii Bukharin: Predstavleniia o sotsializme,” Bukharin, ed., *Zhuravlev*, 149–161.

46. *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 326; see also 79, 192–198, 237, 325, 397, 405; *Put’ k sotsializmu*, 270.

petitive market under NEP would evolve in the direction of a “single organized whole.”⁴⁷ It would be strange indeed if Bukharin included in his final goal elements that he felt had already been left behind by the west.

Bukharin saw at least two threats to this vision of NEP: the illusions created by war communism and the party opposition’s lack of faith in the possibility of constructing socialism without outside help. The influence of war communism was definitely the lesser threat. While war communism had been a necessary set of measures, many in the party had erroneously absolutized the necessary methods of civil war. The end of the civil war and the introduction of NEP dissipated this error on the theoretical level, but moods and habits remained from earlier times, especially among students and “our comrades in the villages.” These habits had to be combated, for example by the measures introduced in early 1925 to allow greater opportunity for individual accumulation in the villages. By 1927 Bukharin seemed to think that this task had been more or less accomplished.⁴⁸

Whatever the problems associated with war communism, it had never caused any doubt of the worker-peasant alliance. Indeed, this alliance had been the basis of victory in the civil war. The bearers of war communist illusions had to learn some new answers to the same old question: how to vanquish the class enemy and build socialism by means of the worker-peasant alliance. As Bukharin wrote in an early philippic against Evgenii Preobrazhenskii, “up till now, *no one* has spoken against the worker-peasant bloc. [It is] an axiom in our ranks.”⁴⁹

The party oppositionists, however, rejected this axiom theoretically and practically. Bukharin put the oppositionists into a polemical framework he had constructed during the revolution and civil war, particularly in *Economics of the Transition Period*. This polemic was based on the issue of Russia’s ripeness (*zrelost’*) for revolution. The oppositionists were the most recent link in a long chain of capitalist and socialist critics who claimed that, as a “petit-bourgeois peasant country,” Russia was barren soil for a socialist revolution. The oppositionists were “neo-Mensheviks” whom the peasants had panicked into an exaggerated fear of degeneration of the revolution. Their only solution was to build socialism on the ruination (*razorenii*) of the individual peasant or to wait for help from the victorious western proletariat. The symbol of the party opposition was not the overconfident war communist, but the defeatism and *dezertirstvo* of Zinov’ev and Lev Kamenev in October 1917.⁵⁰

Bukharin mainly used Lenin’s final writings in his polemic with the oppositionists and not in that with the war communists. The war communists had always accepted the need for a worker-peasant alliance and they had been brought to see the necessity for a retreat followed by a more complicated advance. Lenin’s final writings addressed neither of these issues directly. The final articles were important in the discussion of war communism only for the argument that the co-operatives could be an effective means of socialist advance.⁵¹

Lenin’s testament was more important in the battle with the party oppositionists because they denied the axiom of the worker-peasant alliance as a path to socialism. Given this deeper challenge, Lenin’s testament was needed not merely to show where the path could be found, but also to prove that such a path existed at all. The main purpose of the testament was not to restrain revolutionary enthusiasm but to instill confidence and to refute the nay-sayers who magnified the

47. *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 196–197, 447–448.

48. For discussions of war communism, see “O likvidatorstve nashikh dnei,” in *Path to Socialism*, ed. Heitman, 117–182; *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 122–145 (1925), 316–323 (1927). Emergency measures applied in a real emergency could be based on optimism about an underlying unity of interests. Emergency measures as a permanent system could only be based on a more pessimistic outlook. For this reason Bukharin accused Stalin in 1929 of an “ideological capitulation” to the party opposition. *Problemy*, 266.

49. *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 153; quotation on 97; see also 75–77.

50. *Ibid.*, 356–359. The most extended treatment is “O karaktere nashei revoliutsii . . .,” in *ibid.*, 277–315. At the fourteenth party congress, Bukharin accused Zinov’ev of wanting to return to civil war methods; Zinov’ev indignantly rejected the charge and Bukharin dropped the point (*XIV s’ezd.*) 151, 427–429; *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 244).

51. *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 122–134.

difficulties of constructing socialism in one country. Even in 1929, on the eve of full-scale collectivization, Bukharin claimed that Lenin wrote these articles because he had foreseen attacks from the ranks of skeptics and pessimists.⁵²

Any demonstration that Lenin's testament led to real change in Bukharin's strategic plan is difficult. Even before NEP, much less the appearance of the final articles, we see Bukharin answering his basic question "in what forms can we establish the organizing influence of the proletarian town?" with the following elements: the primacy of circulation over production, the need to appeal only to the peasants' material interests, the cooperative's usefulness as a link in the chain of organization, the fear of bureaucratic degeneration, the eventual crowding-out of private trade, and the long-term goal of an all-embracing, but democratic, central authority.

If the final articles had any real effect on Bukharin, they gave him permission to use his analysis of capitalist evolution as a framework for building socialism. The capitalists wanted civil peace and a painless, crisis-free transition to organized production. The Bolsheviks had always denied and continued to deny that this transition was possible—under capitalism. Lenin's testament gave Bukharin the authority he needed to argue that the transition was possible *after* the revolution and that, therefore, the formal analogy with capitalist evolution was legitimate. The Bolsheviks would succeed in doing with the peasants what the capitalists had failed to do with the workers.⁵³

In 1920 Bukharin argued that the cooperative network created by capitalism faced three possibilities: It would atrophy if town and country remained in economic isolation from each other; it would be destroyed if the kulaks used it as an instrument in a class offensive against the proletariat; "it can be drawn in to the overall socialist organization of distribution and gradually rebuilt (given the resurrection of the real process of product exchange and the decisive *economic* influence of the towns)."⁵⁴ Bukharin obviously preferred the third alternative; Lenin's testament gave him the basis for believing it was possible.

NEP is often defined primarily in terms of its contrast with war communism. This contrast has also served as an interpretive framework for Soviet political history as a whole. Left and majority in the 1920s, "general line" and "right deviationists" during the Stalin period, dogmatists and reformists during the post-Stalin period—all these have been seen in terms of the original contrast between war communism and NEP.

The plausibility of this framework has been strengthened by the adoption of NEP as a legitimating symbol for the reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev. Lenin's testament in particular has been treated almost as a charter for perestroika.⁵⁵ Bukharin's own reliance on Lenin's testament, with his opposition to Stalin in the late 1920s, has provided further support for the idea that Lenin and Bukharin were united in seeing the chief danger to the party as a resurgence of war communism (read "proto-Stalinism").

A close reading of the texts in question does not support this interpretation. Neither Lenin nor Bukharin saw the civil war period as a source of possible degeneration for the party. The illusions created by the necessary policies of war communism had been for the most part overcome.⁵⁶ Lenin saw no need to discuss these illusions in his final articles, and Bukharin did not use Lenin's testament to prove the necessity of the original retreat. The main threats to the party lay elsewhere: the infection of the petit-bourgeois environment, the danger of a party schism, and the defeatism of pseudo-Marxists frightened by Russian backwardness.

52. *Ibid.*, 420 (there is no mention of war communism in this article devoted to Lenin's political testament). See also *ibid.*, 104, 305, 348–50.

53. For a schematic representation of Bukharin's perspective, see the charts added to *Ekonomika*. These can also be found in Heitman, ed., *Path to Socialism*, 138–144.

54. *Ekonomika*, 86–87.

55. Gorbachev has called the testament "a revolution within the revolution, no less profound, perhaps, than October" (*Pravda*, 21 April 1990).

56. Lenin, *PSS* 45:302 (November 1922); Bukharin, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 128.

My reading also points to the possibility that NEP had a less fundamental effect on the strategic outlook of Lenin and Bukharin than is often suggested. These leaders did not emphasize any "deepening of NEP" but rather NEP's possible self-overcoming. If true, this reading weakens the claim that Lenin or Bukharin directly expressed major reform ideas of today but strengthens the central contention of those who see a discontinuity between Bolshevism and Stalinism: Lenin's testament and Bukharin's interpretation of it remain an eloquent expression of the basic Bolshevik outlook betrayed by Stalin.