


EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVES

RETHINKING AND REDEPLOYING THE MOMENT OF OCTOBER 1917

It is a sign of our troubled times that we even find it necessary to defend the notion that the monumental uprising of October 1917, and the social transformations that followed it, are the defining events of our time — notwithstanding the devolution of 1989–91 and the associated adverse shift in the economic and social climate of recent decades. We use round-number anniversaries — and the 2017 centenary is surely a major one — as a means of gathering together all perspectives that share the critical and illuminating lens of Marxist theory, to draw out the lasting impacts of the Russian Revolution, on the crises and possibilities of the present. The Revolution placed into historical reality a society of *early socialism*, on one-sixth of the planet's territory, and that enormous fact trumps the defeats and confusions that surround us. This in fact makes it possible for us to transcend the old divisions on the left in interpretations of the Soviet Union — its internal realities, its world effects. Our task, at this centennial moment, is to bring it all together: the unique and irreversible achievements, the repressions and insufficiencies, the positive and the negative. It is all a vital part of the legacy, the platform, for whatever progressive working humanity will be able to achieve in the current century and beyond.

As always, I leave the details to the Guest Editors' Introduction, and to the treasure-trove of contributions themselves. And again as always, I extend our collective thanks and appreciations to the Guest Editors for their tireless work in collecting, vetting and organizing these materials.



\$81 FOR 81 YEARS

With this issue we round out our 81st year, and Vol. 82 is already in the planning stages. A long-time reader, Kevin Lindemann, recently sent us a

contribution of \$81 — “For 81 years of Marxist scholarship.” We love to record and acknowledge this kind of support, especially since in this electronic age it can sometimes seem a bit lonely in the print journal business! (Not to speak of the challenges to our work posed by the dangerous right-wing turn in both U. S. and world politics.) Lindemann writes: “A new generation is coming to socialism . . . and I am convinced that many will be interested in reading serious Marxist scholarship, just as I was 40 years ago. We just have to reach them.” Well, S&S will be trying to do just that, with the print edition as the base but also branching into new online ventures as well. Nothing keeps us going like contributions, suggestions and criticisms from readers, along with financial support, from newer and older readers alike. Keep them coming!

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MARVIN E. GETTLEMAN, 1933–2017

We lost Marv on January 7 this year.

Marv was one of the (then!) younger people brought on board, around 1973, by the existing editorial group at *Science & Society*. For 36 years he was a tireless presence at the journal, a colleague whose energy, enthusiasm and wide knowledge were a defining element in our “mix.” Marv resigned from the Editorial Board and Manuscript Collective in 2009, owing to what we subsequently realized was the onset of dementia, the illness that eventually ended his life.

Marv was a singularly active presence at *Science & Society*. His enthusiasm, tireless work, deep knowledge and commitment to Marxism and to working-class and progressive struggles will not be forgotten. During his time with us, he wrote three articles and several reviews, and co-edited a Special Issue on the Spanish Civil War (Fall, 2004). If he were still with us, he would undoubtedly have been a major contributor to the project of the current Special Issue.

We present below excerpts from a few remembrances of Marv, from a Memorial Service held in New York last January 12.

D. L.

It was in History 100 or 101 in 1953 that I met Marvin, at City College (City University of New York). We were respectful of the teacher’s authority;

he, however, was, well, not easily hoodwinked. The diet of “Western Civ” that we were fed, which presented the bourgeoisie as rising since ancient Elom, gave him indigestion. Never in my previous schooling had I met anyone who acted as if he knew more than the authority figure with the chalk in his hand at the front of the room.

When I came back from a year abroad to finish my senior year, Marv was editing the college magazine. He invited a piece about my experience. Marv was ready with his scorching blue pencil. His well-known talent at S&S later, of letting authors know what he really thought of them, was fully developed in 1956.

We reconnected later, in the late 60s at the Socialist Scholars Conference. Eventually my husband, John Cammett, worked with Marv at S&S; while Marv could be ferocious as a critic, he was generous and kind, especially when John fell ill.

How does one remember someone who was such an independent spirit, powerful intellect, devoted to the principle that scholarship must serve a progressive political purpose? The Marvin that I remember was all those things and, if I remember the early years correctly, it must have been in his DNA. We all, his wife Ellen, his family, grandchildren and many friends will remember the active, lively, insightful, muscular Marvin of those past decades.

SANDI COOPER

Marv and I first met at City College in the mid-1950s. He was in the class of 1957, one year ahead of me, but we met and became friends when we served on CCNY's Student Council. In those days, besieged by McCarthy and conservative congressional Committees, and a college administration that did their bidding, Marv spearheaded a movement in response to an attempt by the College to force students to sign membership lists if they joined extra-curricular clubs. Each club had to have 12 members sign up in order to be allowed to function. In those days of guilt by association signing such lists could be used against members of left-oriented clubs and discourage students from joining radical groups. Marv had the brilliant concept of organizing 12 student leaders to sign every membership list on campus, thereby obviating the necessity for other members to sign and put themselves in harm's way. It worked. The administration was outwitted and furious, but could do nothing to counteract Marv's great idea.

He was young and exuberant at CCNY. We packed the classrooms of any professor under attack by congressional committees. Hundreds of students enrolled in their classes, making it impossible for the administration to think

of firing or persecuting them. Marv, when he wasn't busy competing on the swimming team, led this movement and was terribly effective.

Marv's book on Vietnam, a low-cost paperback, became the bible for the anti-war movement in the 60s and 70s. It presented in a very readable format, with pithy introductions which Marv wrote, the most important documents of Vietnamese history and politics. Most of us in the anti-Vietnam War movement were ignorant of Indochinese realities, but Marv's book allowed us to become instant experts. It was a godsend.

My critical collaboration with Marv began after September 11, 2001. The attacks of that day led us to write our co-edited book of documents on the Middle East and the Islamic world from the 7th century to the (then) present. It is now in its third edition and was produced by Marv's publisher, Grove Press. We worked almost every day for a couple of years writing and rewriting the text. Marv knew how to simplify our message without talking down to our audience of students and educated citizens. In the process I learned how to write for a mass audience and how to develop the discipline to become a professional writer. For that I owe him a great deal.

Periodically, we would drive up to Ellen and Marv's house in the Catskills where we would continue writing, between berry picking, barbecues, shopping at the local farmer's market, and entertaining friends. I became part of Ellen and Marv's large family and loved every moment of it.

I've lost a dear friend who showed me the way to become a professional writer. On the way, I solidified my friendship with him and Ellen. I will be forever grateful for the chance of knowing and becoming friends with both of them.

STUART SCHAAR

Like Stuart, I share fond memories of Marv's and Ellen's hospitality in their Catskills home. Marvin, unlike many intellectuals, was also a skillful carpenter. He rebuilt much of that house, was constantly puttering with improvements, was a sucker for new tools, and made a unique headboard out of branches for their bed. And yet, lover of life that he was, he also exulted when they finally let the house go, saying: "The less property one has, the freer one feels!"

Marvin was also an artist: his portraits capture the subject's character and his landscapes capture the mood of a place. And he loved music. In his last years, he listened to classical music all day. Once I asked him who his favorite composer was and he struggled to speak, coming out with "Beethoven."

But of course we all know Marv as a committed public intellectual and activist. One of my first memories of him was when in 1970 our *ad hoc* New York Faculty Against the War occupied Pupin Hall, one of Columbia University's science buildings doing military research. We held it for nearly a week until security was breached and the mobilized athletes threw us out. In that time we bonded in a tiny civil society of our own, complete with political discussion and a Women's Caucus.

I got to know Marvin better a few years later when he joined the board of *Science & Society*. Like many journal boards, we had our lively discussions which Marv participated in with passion. Needless to say, his expertise in American history made him a very valuable member of the group. But I must remind you, this is a memorial, not a canonization. Marv, being only human, had a fault or two. In this case, his high standards sometimes leaked into letters to contributors of manuscripts in a rather challenging way. I remember saying to him once: "Marv, this is a letter of *acceptance, not rejection!*"

As long as he was able, Marv continued his scholarship. It is our loss that he could not finish his book on the Jefferson School of Social Science, but an anticipatory article appeared in the *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, and another in S&S ("No Varsity Teams': New York's Jefferson School of Social Science, 1943–1956," Fall 2002).

Finally, Marvin doted on Ellen. I'll never forget his announcement at an S&S meeting, beaming and starry-eyed: "I've met the most wonderful woman!"

RENATE BRIDENTHAL

I first met Marv Gettleman at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore in 1962. JHU was then a white Christian male bastion; a racist sexist place with almost no diversity. As one of the first Jewish graduate students in the History program, Marv was subjected to outrageous bigotry by our mentors. As the second woman in the department after Willie Lee Rose, an example of our faculty's limitations occurred when I returned from my first teaching post at Hampton Institute in Virginia, to be asked by one of our professors: "Now, Blanche tell us, as a New York Jew: What was it like to teach them Nigras?" But even JHU was in flux by 1963.

Marv, who despised racism, was one of the students who led sit-ins at segregated Baltimore eateries, and around the time of the March on Washington the History Department created a bail fund for arrested students. Moreover, Charles Barker — Marv's mentor and mine — was a peace activist,

and when in 1965 Marv's brilliant book on Vietnam was published, the many efforts to derail his dissertation and block his PhD ended.

My subsequent memories of Marv were at John Jay College (CUNY) during *Science & Society* meetings. Above all, I remember a conversation highlighted by Annette Rubinstein's affirmation that "*life is about the struggle!*" and "*revolution is a process, not an event!*", to which Marv replied: "*And joy is the engine!*"

BLANCHE COOK

INTRODUCTION

The Russian Revolution One Century Later

JOHN P. PITTMAN

This special issue of *Science & Society* on the centenary of the October Revolution of 1917 might seem both expected on one hand, and somewhat incongruous, on the other. This journal has traditionally featured among its articles discussions of issues related to the historical achievements and political liabilities of the movement of which “Great October” was a first milestone. And yet, today, in 2017, the “rosy dawn” that 1917 seemed to be has not just faded: the world seems a very different one from that which came to an end in 1991, and which came to be called the “short 20th century.” A century after 1917, it sometimes seems, the “ten days that shook the world” are only obscurely associated with contemporary global problems.

But no one alive today could, even if they wished, dismiss the impact of that first actual Marxist revolution on the history of the century in which it occurred, for our 21st-century world has been constituted by the impress of that achievement. The defeat of Hitler fascism was a victory in the first place of the Soviet people and its Red Army, and the achievements of the anti-colonial struggles waged by people in Asia and Africa were immeasurably facilitated by the “socialist camp” of Eastern European countries, to cite only two of the most important instances. And recall that the overturn of South African apartheid came about as a result of liberation movements whose material conditions of existence were underpinned as well, in part, by socialist solidarity.

Unquestionably, the demise of Soviet power was a dramatic setback for progressive prospects in our young century. Even those with

severe doubts about one aspect or another of the former Soviet societies are unlikely to view what has taken their place favorably. And the growing strength of right-wing extremism — both as fringe obsession and legitimate political movement contesting, and even capturing, power — in many “advanced” countries today indicates the fragility of those bourgeois political virtues often pointedly contrasted with characteristics of the former socialist lands. This special issue’s retrospective look at the signal political achievement of the past century comes amid the uncertainty and insecurity of a world shadowed by brazen corporate power.

All the contributors to this issue are sympathetic to the impulses driving the foundation of the “first workers’ state”; even so, there is a variety of approaches to the legacy of “actually existing socialism.” We all write from the cusp of a difficult project, one embracing two disparate goals. The first is the attempt to acknowledge, and, as Marxists, “own” the entire spectrum of events and consequences brought about, both inside and beyond the borders of Russia, by “Red October” and the social system to which it gave birth. Yet we do so while maintaining our partisanship with communists, socialists, and “small-d democrats” whose historic efforts are at the heart of the “Soviet century.”

Issues of revolutionary strategy that are timely today were in the middle of debates a century ago as well. August Nimtz, Jr. addresses the strategy of the Bolsheviks in the run-up to the October 1917 overthrow of the short-lived bourgeois constitutional regime, focusing on the electoral and parliamentary work of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. Nimtz shows that, despite his frequently-cited criticisms of “parliamentary cretinism,” Lenin consistently argued for — and was instrumental in organizing — the Party’s participation in elections at all levels of government and its engagement in parliamentary struggle as preparatory for the armed seizure of state power. According to Nimtz, this strategy was not an innovation of Lenin’s but stemmed from his careful study of the Marxist founders, and in particular of a key text written by Marx and Engels after the European revolutionary upsurge — the “European Spring” — of 1848–9.

Focusing on the works of revolutionary leaders, however influential, cannot alone capture the dynamism of a revolutionary storm. Alexander Buzgalin, writing of the social processes that conditioned 1917 and its aftermath, addresses two key questions: Was October a

revolution? And: Was it socialist? His answers, while both primarily in the affirmative, are not so straightforward. He writes of a “mutant socialism,” and makes an argument for that term by drawing on more general claims about revolutions. Acknowledging the “great achievements and cruel errors” of the Bolshevik instance of socialist construction, he takes the unleashing of active social creativity of the vast mass of working people as a key criterion of revolutionary transformation. Emphasizing an essential truth of revolutionary successes — that they come into being through the activity of the oppressed population, and not from the intentions and decisions of revolutionary leaders — Buzgalin presents the Russian experience as involving a number of interrelated lines of development taking place simultaneously (*e.g.*, communist construction, alongside bureaucratic dictatorship, among others).

Part of the fascination of the October Revolution derives undoubtedly from the range of moods encompassed by it, spanning the excitement of the days of revolutionary upsurge and the calm, sober analysis of the political situation that accompanied it. David Laibman captures that range. A shorter opening segment of his article is given over to analysis of an eyewitness account of an episode in the ferment, early in 1918, at the beginning of the civil war. This analysis then provides support for a characterization of Soviet society as socialist, albeit “early socialist,” despite what he describes as “terrible consequences of limited democratic procedures” leading to an “authoritarian deformation.” Calling for a “systematic model of the Soviet social formation,” Laibman argues that the Russian Revolution is not reversible, and that the socialist elements to which it gave rise persist today, although in a state of “defensive hibernation.”

A significant milestone in the development of Soviet society came with the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, which publicly confronted the legacy of Stalin. John P. Pittman picks up from the official CPSU critique of the Stalin period to consider the role of the “cult of personality” more broadly in the 20th-century history of Communism. Noting the prevalence of such cults in the history of the Communist parties after 1917, he presents a number of considerations suggesting that it is the difficulties inherent in the Marxist revolutionary project that such cults can be seen as responding to. He discusses as well the difficulties for the realization of the broadly egalitarian program of

communism — or even socialism — that such cults themselves create. Putting the question of the significance of personality cults for the Communist legacy, Pittman points toward the role of patriarchy, and its absence in classical Marxist and Leninist theory, for understanding the prevalence of the cult phenomenon in Communist history.

In a review essay based on several recent revisionist books on the life of Joseph Stalin, Gerald Meyer argues for a reassessment that is grounded on the assumption that Stalin was a rational human being who viewed the world through the prism of Marxism. While acknowledging that Stalin was not the creative theoretician that Marx, Engels, and Lenin were — he notes at one point Stalin's "crude version" of historical materialism — Meyer argues that Stalin should be regarded as "the near-equal of" those three, a "world-historic figure," since he was the "architect of the first workable socialist system." The essay, reviewing the achievements, excesses, and tragic contradictions attendant to socialist construction in the Soviet Union, grapples with the "political paranoia" of the Soviet leader while arguing for Stalin's centrality in the history of the Soviet Union and the World Communist Movement.

Contributors of shorter pieces to this issue consider cultural and intellectual responses to the worldwide impetus of October. Alan Wald sketches some problems confronting a "critical engagement with the *longue durée* of Communist politics and culture," briefly tracing the impact of 1917 on (particularly American) left cultural workers for a quarter century or so in its wake. Wald stresses the need for an appreciation of the paradoxes of Communist politics and the difficulties, both personal and professional, which they created for pro-Communist writers particularly. Intellectuals concerned with organizing specially exploited, low-wage workers also looked to the Soviet example for succor in their difficult struggles.

Shana Russell looks at the work of Esther Cooper to show how she drew inspiration for the organization of domestic workers in the United States from studying at close hand the transformation in the conditions of Russian domestic workers as a result of the 1917 Revolution. Ronald Suny, surveying the arc of Soviet history — and noting that the essentialist attempts to explain the authoritarian turn in Russia after October on the basis of an alleged authoritarian streak in Russian national character are wrongheaded — concludes that the lesson of the Soviet system is: "There is no real socialism without democracy."

He does, however, testify to the advances made by the non-Russian Soviet republics under the sway of Soviet ethno-national policies.

Finally, Luis Fernando Medina revisits Hegel's complex response to the revolutionary tradition of 1789 to suggest that an analogous complexity is required of our assessments of the legacy of the October revolutionaries — candidly acknowledging their excesses without dismissing their achievements, while nonetheless accepting an obligation to “dare to try” as they did. “Could it be,” he concludes his piece, that “we owe it to their memory?”

This volume concludes with reviews of books about two of the most consequential leaders of the CPSU, Lenin and Stalin. These are *Reconstructing Lenin: An Intellectual Biography*, by Tamas Krausz, reviewed by Tom Mayer; and the first volume of Stephen Kotkin's multi-volume study, *Stalin*, bringing the story up to 1928, reviewed by Renate Bridenthal.

Nothing like a comprehensive survey of the issues and problems arising from the October heritage is attempted here — if such a thing were even possible! In planning and preparing this issue of *Science & Society* we realized that other left journals were also in process of assembling Russian Revolution issues as well — a kind of “socialist competition,” perhaps?

In this new century of the crisis of capitalism, young people are again searching for an alternative. Marx has again become a focus of study and forms of a possible socialist organization of society are being hotly debated. The 20th century attempts, heralded by the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the Bolshevik experiment itself, while not models for a new century, nevertheless offer important examples of successes and failures, of opportunities and pitfalls. We offer this issue of *Science & Society* in the hope and expectation that it will make a unique contribution to the discussion.

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