

Legality and Illegality

The materialist doctrine that men are the product of circumstances and education, that changed men are therefore the products of other circumstances and of a different education, forgets that circumstances are in fact changed by men and that the educator must himself be educated.

Marx: *Theses on Feuerbach.*

To gain an understanding of legality and illegality in the class struggle of the proletariat, as with any question touching on modes of action, it is more important and more illuminating to consider the motives and the tendencies they generate than merely to remain at the level of the bare facts. For the mere fact of the legality or illegality of one part of the workers' movement is so dependent on 'accidents' of history that to analyse it is not always to guarantee a clarification of theory. A party may be opportunistic even to the point of total betrayal and yet find itself on occasion forced into illegality. On the other hand, it is possible to imagine a situation in which the most revolutionary and most uncompromising Communist Party may be able to function for a time under conditions of almost complete legality.

As this criterion cannot provide an adequate basis for analysis we must go beyond it and examine the motives for choosing between legal and illegal tactics. But here it does not suffice to establish—abstractly—motives and convictions. For if it is significant that the opportunists always hold fast to legality *at any price*, it would be a mistake to define the revolutionary parties in terms of the reverse of this, namely illegality. There are, it is true, periods in every revolution when a *romanticism of illegality* is predominant or at least powerful. But for reasons which we shall discuss in what follows, this romanticism is quite definitely an infantile disorder of the communist movement. It is a reaction against legality at any price and for this reason it is vital that every mature movement should grow out of it and this is undoubtedly what actually happens.

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What, then, is the meaning of the concepts of legality and illegality for Marxist thought? This question leads us inevitably to the general problem of organised power, to the problem of law and the state and ultimately to the problem of ideology. In his polemic against Dühring, Engels brilliantly disposes of the abstract theory of force. However, the proof that force (law and the state) "was originally grounded in an economic, social function"¹ must be interpreted to mean—in strict accordance with the theories of Marx and Engels—that in consequence of this connection a corresponding ideological picture is found projected into the thoughts and feelings of men who are drawn into the ambit of authority. That is to say, the organs of authority harmonise to such an extent with the (economic) laws governing men's lives, or seem so overwhelmingly superior that men experience them as natural forces, as the necessary environment for their existence. As a result they submit to them *freely*. (Which is not to say that they *approve* of them.)

For if it is true that an organisation based on force can only survive as long as it is able to overcome the resistance of individuals or groups by force, it is equally true that it could not survive if it were compelled to use force every time it is challenged. If this becomes necessary, then the situation will be revolutionary; the organs of authority will be in contradiction with the economic bases of society and this contradiction will be projected into the minds of people. People will then cease to regard the existing order as given in nature and they will oppose force with force. Without denying that this situation has an economic basis it is still necessary to add that a change can be brought about in an organisation based on force only when the belief of both the rulers and the ruled that the existing order is the only possible one has been shaken. Revolution in the system of production is the *essential precondition* of this. But the revolution itself can only be accomplished by people; by people who have become intellectually and emotionally emancipated from the existing system.

This emancipation does not take place mechanically parallel to and simultaneously with economic developments. It both anticipates these and is anticipated by them. It can be present and mostly is present at times when the economic base of a social system shows nothing more than a *tendency* to become problem-

atical. In such cases the theory will think out what is merely a tendency and take it to its logical conclusion, converting it into what reality ought to be and then opposing this 'true' reality to the 'false' reality of what actually exists. (A case in point is the role played by natural law as a prelude to the bourgeois revolutions.) On the other hand, it is certainly true that even those groups and masses whose class situation gives them a direct interest, only free themselves inwardly from the old order *during* (and very often only *after*) a revolution. They need the evidence of their own eyes to tell them which society really conforms to their interests before they can free themselves inwardly from the old order.

If these remarks hold good for every revolutionary change from one social order to another they are much more valid for a social revolution than for one which is predominantly political. A political revolution does no more than sanction a socio-economic situation that has been able to impose itself at least in part upon the economic reality. Such a revolution forcibly replaces the old legal order, now felt to be 'unjust' by the new 'right', 'just' law. There is no radical reorganisation of the social environment. (Thus conservative historians of the Great French Revolution emphasise that 'social' conditions remained relatively unchanged during the period.)

Social revolutions, however, are concerned precisely to change this environment. Any such change violates the instincts of the average man so deeply that he regards it as a catastrophic threat to *life as such*, it appears to him to be a blind force of nature like a flood or an earthquake. Unable to grasp the essence of the process, his blind despair tries to defend itself by attacking the *immediate manifestations* of change that menace his accustomed existence. Thus in the early stages of capitalism, proletarians with a petty-bourgeois education rose up against machines and factories. Proudhon's doctrines, too, can be seen as one of the last echoes of this desperate defence of the old, accustomed social order.

It is here that the revolutionary nature of Marxism can be most easily grasped. Marxism is the doctrine of the revolution precisely because it understands the essence of the process (as opposed to its manifestations, its symptoms); and because it can demonstrate the decisive line of future development (as opposed to the events of the moment). This makes it at the same time the ideological expression of the proletariat in its efforts to liberate

itself. This liberation takes the form at first of actual rebellions against the most oppressive manifestations of the capitalist economy and the capitalist state. These isolated battles which never bring final victory even when they are successful can only become truly revolutionary when the proletariat becomes *conscious* of what connects these battles to each other and to the process that leads ineluctably to the demise of capitalism. When the young Marx proposed the "reform of consciousness" he anticipated the essence of his later activity. His doctrine is not utopian, because it builds on a process which is actually taking place. It does not contemplate realising 'ideals' but merely wishes to uncover the inherent meaning of the process. At the same time it must go beyond what is merely given and must focus the consciousness of the proletariat on what is essential and not merely ephemerally the case. "The reform of consciousness", says Marx, "consists in no more than causing the world to become aware of its own consciousness, in awakening it from its dream about itself, in *explaining its own actions to it*. . . . It will then be seen that the world has long possessed a dream of things *which it only has to possess in consciousness in order to possess them in reality*."²

This reform of consciousness is the revolutionary process itself. For the proletariat can become conscious only gradually and after long, difficult crises. It is true that in Marx's doctrine all the theoretical and practical consequences of the class situation of the proletariat were deduced (long before they became historical 'fact'). However, even though these theories were not unhistorical utopias but insights into the historical process itself, it by no means follows that the proletariat has incorporated in its own consciousness the emancipation achieved by the Marxian theory—even if in its *individual actions* it *acts* in accordance with that theory. We have drawn attention to this process in a different context³ and emphasised that the proletariat can become conscious of the need to combat capitalism on the economic plane at a time when politically it remains wholly within the ambience of the capitalist state. How very true this was can be seen from the fact that it was possible for Marx and Engels' whole critique of the state to fall into oblivion and that the most important theoreticians of the Second International could accept the capitalist state as *the* state without more ado and so could regard their own activity and their conflict with that state as 'opposition'. (This can be seen at its clearest in the polemic between Pannekoek and Kautsky

in 1912.) For to adopt the stance of 'opposition' means that the existing order is *accepted in all essentials as an immutable* foundation and all the efforts of the 'opposition' are restricted to making as many gains as possible for the workers *within* the existing system.

Admittedly, only fools and innocents would have remained blind to the real power of the bourgeois state. The great distinction between revolutionary Marxists and pseudo-Marxist opportunists consists in the fact that for the former the capitalist state counts *merely as a power factor against which* the power of the organised proletariat is to be mobilised. Whilst the latter regard the state as an institution *standing above the classes* and the proletariat and the bourgeoisie conduct their war *in order to* gain control of it. But by viewing the state as the object of the struggle rather than as the enemy they have mentally gone over to bourgeois territory and thereby lost half the battle even before taking up arms. For every system of state and law, and the capitalist system above all, exists in the last analysis because its survival, and the validity of its statutes, are simply accepted as unproblematic. The *isolated* violation of those statutes does not represent any particular danger to the state as long as such infringements figure in the general consciousness merely as isolated cases. Dostoyevsky has noted in his Siberian reminiscences how every criminal feels himself to be guilty (without necessarily feeling any remorse); he understands with perfect clarity that he has broken laws that are no less valid for him than for everyone else. And these laws retain their validity even when personal motives or the force of circumstances have induced him to violate them.

The state will never have difficulty in keeping such isolated infringements under control just because it is not threatened in its foundations for a single moment. To adopt the stance of being in 'opposition' implies a similar attitude to the state: it concedes that the essence of the state is to stand outside the class struggle and that the validity of its laws is not *directly* challenged by the class struggle. This leaves the 'opposition' with two alternatives: either it will attempt to revise the laws by legal means and then, of course, the old laws remain in force until the new laws take their place. Or else it will promote the isolated infringement of the laws. Hence, when the opportunists attempt to conflate the Marxist critique of the state with that of the Anarchists, they are merely indulging their low taste for demagoguery. For Marxism is concerned neither with anarchistic illusions nor with utopias.

What is essential is to realise that the capitalist state *should be seen and evaluated as a historical phenomenon even while it exists*. It should be treated, therefore, purely as a power structure which has to be taken into account only to the extent to which its actual power stretches. On the other hand, it should be subjected to the most painstaking and fearless examination in order to discover the points where this power can be weakened and undermined. *This strong point, or rather weak point in the state is the way in which it is reflected in the consciousness of people*. Ideology is in this case not merely a consequence of the economic structure of society but also the precondition of its smooth functioning.

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The clearer it becomes that the crisis of capitalism is ceasing to be a piece of knowledge gleaned by Marxist analysis and is in the process of becoming palpable reality, the more decisive will be the role played by ideology in determining the fate of the proletarian revolution. In an age when capitalism was still quite secure, inwardly it was understandable that large sections of the working class should have taken up an *ideological* position wholly within capitalism. For a thorough-going Marxism required a posture they could not possibly sustain. Marx says: "In order to understand a particular historical age we must go beyond its outer limits."

When this dictum is applied to an understanding of the *present* this entails a quite extraordinary effort. It means that the whole economic, social and cultural environment must be subjected to critical scrutiny. And the decisive aspect of this scrutiny, its Archimedean point from which alone all these phenomena can be understood, can be no more than an aspiration with which to confront the reality of the present; that is to say it remains after all something 'unreal', a 'mere theory'. Whereas when we attempt to understand the past, the present is itself the starting-point. Of course, this aspiration is not merely petty bourgeois and utopian in character, yearning for a 'better' or 'more beautiful' world. It is a proletarian aspiration and does no more than discern and describe the direction, the tendency and the meaning of the social process in whose name it actively impinges on the present. Even so this just increases the difficulty of the task. For just as the

very best astronomer disregards his knowledge of Copernicus and continues to accept the testimony of his senses which tells him that the sun 'rises', so too the most irrefutable Marxist analysis of the capitalist state can never abolish its empirical reality.

Nor is it designed to do so. Marxist theory is designed to put the proletariat into a very particular frame of mind. The capitalist state must appear to it as a link in a chain of historical development. Hence it by no means constitutes 'man's natural environment' but merely a real fact whose actual power must be reckoned with but which has no inherent right to determine our actions. The state and the laws shall be seen as having no more than an empirical validity. In the same way a yachtsman must take exact note of the direction of the wind without letting the wind determine his course; on the contrary, he defies and exploits it in order to hold fast to his original course. The *independence* which man in the course of a long historical development has gradually wrested from the hostile forces of nature, is still very largely lacking in the proletariat when it confronts the manifestations of society. And this is easily understood. For the coercive measures taken by society in individual cases are often hard and brutally materialistic, but *the strength of every society is in the last resort a spiritual strength*. And from this we can only be liberated by knowledge. This knowledge cannot be of the abstract kind that remains in one's head—many 'socialists' have possessed that sort of knowledge. It must be knowledge that has become flesh of one's flesh and blood of one's blood; to use Marx's phrase, it must be "practical critical activity".

The present acute crisis in capitalism makes such knowledge both possible and necessary. Possible because as a result of the crisis even the ordinary social environment can be seen and felt to be problematical. It becomes decisive for the revolution and hence necessary because the actual strength of capitalism has been so greatly weakened that it would no longer be able to maintain its position by force if the proletariat were to oppose it consciously and resolutely. Only ideology stands in the way of such opposition. Even in the very midst of the death throes of capitalism broad sections of the proletarian masses still feel that the state, the laws and the economy of the bourgeoisie are the only possible environment for them to exist in. In their eyes many improvements would be desirable ('organisation of production'), but nevertheless it remains the 'natural' basis of society.

This is the ideological foundation of legality. It does not always entail a conscious betrayal or even a conscious compromise. It is rather the natural and instinctive attitude towards the state, which appears to the man of action as the only fixed point in a chaotic world. It is a view of the world that has to be overcome if the Communist Party wishes to create a healthy foundation for both its legal and illegal tactics. For all revolutionary movements begin with the romanticism of illegality, but hardly any succeed in seeing their way beyond the stage of opportunist legality. That this romanticism, like every kind of Putschism, should underestimate the actual strength possessed by capitalism even at a moment of crisis is, of course, often very dangerous. But even this is no more than a symptom of the disease from which this whole tendency suffers.

The disease itself is the inability to see the state as nothing more than a power factor. And in the last resort this indicates a failure to see the connections we have just mapped out. For by surrounding illegal means and methods of struggle with a certain aura, by conferring upon them a special, revolutionary 'authenticity', one endows the existing state with a certain legal validity, with a more than just empirical existence. For to rebel against the law *qua law*, to prefer certain actions *because* they are illegal, implies for anyone who so acts that the law has retained its binding validity. Where the total, communist, fearlessness with regard to the state and the law is present, the law and its calculable consequences are of no greater (if also of no smaller) importance than any other external fact of life with which it is necessary to reckon when deciding upon any definite course of action. The risk of breaking the law should not be regarded any differently than the risk of missing a train connection when on an important journey.

Where this is not the case, where it is resolved to break the law with a grand gesture, this suggests that the law has preserved its authority—admittedly in an inverted form—that it is still in a position *inwardly* to influence one's actions and that a genuine, inner emancipation has not yet occurred. At first sight this distinction may perhaps seem pedantic. But to realise that it is no empty and abstract invention but, on the contrary, a description of the true situation one need only recall how easy it was for typical illegal parties like the Socialist Revolutionaries in Russia to find their way back in to the bourgeois camp. One need only recall the first truly revolutionary illegal acts which had ceased

to be the romantically heroic infringements of isolated laws and had become the rejection and destruction of the whole bourgeois legal system. One need only recall the way in which these acts exposed the ideological attachment of the 'heroes of illegality' to bourgeois concepts of law. (Today Boris Savinkov is fighting in the White Polish camp against proletarian Russia. In the past he was not only the celebrated organiser of almost all the great assassinations under Czarism but also one of the first theoreticians of romantic illegality.)

The question of legality or illegality reduces itself then for the Communist Party to *a mere question of tactics*, even to a question to be resolved on the spur of the moment, one for which it is scarcely possible to lay down general rules as decisions have to be taken on the basis of *immediate expediencies*. In this wholly unprincipled solution lies the only possible practical and principled rejection of the bourgeois legal system. Such tactics are essential for Communists and not just on grounds of expediency. They are needed not just because it is only in this way that their tactics will acquire a genuine flexibility and adaptability to the exigencies of the particular moment; nor because the alternate or even the simultaneous use of legal and illegal methods is necessary if the bourgeoisie is to be fought effectively.

Such tactics are necessary in order to complete the revolutionary self-education of the proletariat. For the proletariat can only be liberated from its dependence upon the life-forms created by capitalism when it has learnt to act without these life-forms inwardly influencing its actions. As motive forces they must sink to the status of matters of complete indifference. Needless to say, this will not reduce by one iota the hatred of the proletariat for these forms, nor the burning wish to destroy them. On the contrary, only by virtue of this inner conviction will the proletariat be able to regard the capitalist social order as an abomination, dead but still a lethal obstacle to the healthy evolution of humanity; and this is an indispensable insight if the proletariat is to be able to take a conscious and enduring revolutionary stand. The self-education of the proletariat is a lengthy and difficult process by which it becomes 'ripe' for revolution, and the more highly developed capitalism and bourgeois culture are in a country, the more arduous this process becomes because the proletariat becomes infected by the life-forms of capitalism.

The need to establish just what is appropriate to revolutionary action coincides fortunately—though by no means adventi-

tiously—with the exigencies of this educational task. To take but one example, the Second Congress of the Third International laid down in its Supplementary Theses on the question of parliamentarism that the Parliamentary Party should be completely dependent on the Central Committee of the C.P. even where this latter should be proscribed by law. Now this decision is not only absolutely indispensable for ensuring unified action. It also has the effect of visibly lowering the prestige of parliament in the eyes of broad sections of the proletariat (and it is upon this prestige that the freedom of action of that bastion of opportunism, the Parliamentary Party, is based). How necessary this is, is shown by the fact that, e.g. the English proletariat has constantly been diverted into the paths of opportunism because of its *inner subservience* to such authorities. And the sterility of the exclusive emphasis upon the 'direct action' of anti-parliamentarism no less than the barrenness of the debates about the superiority of either method constitutes proof that both are still enmeshed in bourgeois prejudices, albeit in ways that are diametrically opposed.

There is yet another reason for insisting upon the simultaneous and alternating use of both legal and illegal methods. Only this will bring into being the precondition for an untrammelled revolutionary attitude towards law and the state, namely the exposure of the system of law as the brutal power instrument of capitalist oppression. Where one or other of the two methods is used exclusively, or predominantly, even though within certain restricted areas, the bourgeoisie will be able to maintain the fiction in the minds of the masses that its system of law is the only system. One of the cardinal aims of every Communist Party must be to force the government of the country to violate its own system of law and to compel the legal party of social traitors to connive openly at this 'violation'. In certain cases, especially where nationalist prejudices obscure the vision of the proletariat, a capitalist government may be able to turn this to its own advantage. But at times, when the proletariat is gathering its forces for the decisive battle, such violations will prove all the more risky. It is here, in this caution of the oppressors which springs from considerations such as these, that we find the origin of those fatal illusions about democracy and about the peaceful transition to socialism. Such illusions are encouraged above all by the fact that the opportunists persist in acting legally at any price and thereby render possible the policy of prudence adopted by the ruling class.

This work of educating the proletariat will only be directed into fruitful channels when sober, objective tactics are adopted that are prepared for every legal and every illegal method and that decide which is to be used solely on grounds of its utility.

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However, the struggle for power will only begin this education; it will certainly be unable to complete it. Many years ago Rosa Luxemburg drew attention to the fact that a seizure of power is essentially 'premature' and this is especially true in the context of ideology. Many of the phenomena that make their appearance in the first stage of every dictatorship of the proletariat can be ascribed to the fact that *the proletariat is forced to take power at a time and in a state of mind in which it inwardly still acknowledges the bourgeois social order as the only authentic and legal one*. The basis of a soviet government is the same as that of any lawful system: it must be acknowledged by such large sections of the population that it has to resort only in exceptional cases to acts of violence.

Now it is self-evident from the very outset that under no circumstances will such recognition be forthcoming from the bourgeoisie at the beginning. A class accustomed by a tradition going back for many generations to the enjoyment of privileges and the exercise of power will never resign itself merely because of a *single* defeat. It will not simply endure the emergence of a new order without more ado. It must first be *broken ideologically* before it will voluntarily enter the service of the new society and before it will begin to regard the statutes of that society as legal and as existing of right instead of as the brutal facts of a temporary shift in the balance of power which can be reversed tomorrow. Whether or not the resistance of the bourgeoisie takes the form of open counter-revolution or of covert acts of sabotage, it is a naïve illusion to imagine that it can be disarmed by making some sort of concession to it. On the contrary, the example of the soviet dictatorship in Hungary demonstrates that all such concessions which in this case were without exception also concessions to the Social Democrats, served only to strengthen the power consciousness of the former ruling class and to postpone and even put an end to their inner willingness to accept the rule of the proletariat.

This retreat of the power of the soviets before the bourgeoisie had even more disastrous implications for the ideology of the broad masses of the petty bourgeoisie. It is characteristic of them

that they regard the state as something general and universal, as an absolute supreme institution. Apart from an adroit economic policy which is often enough to neutralise the individual groups of the petty bourgeoisie it is evident, then, that much depends on the proletariat itself. Will it succeed in giving its state such authority as to meet half-way the faith in authority of such strata of the population and to facilitate their inclinations to subordinate themselves voluntarily to 'the' state? If the proletariat hesitates, if it lacks a sustaining faith in its own mission to rule, it can drive these groups back into the arms of the bourgeoisie and even to open counter-revolution.

Under the dictatorship of the proletariat the relationship between legality and illegality undergoes a change in function, for now what was formerly legal becomes illegal and vice versa. However, this change can at most accelerate somewhat the process of emancipation begun under capitalism; it cannot complete it at one stroke. The bourgeoisie did not lose the sense of its own legality after *a single* defeat, and similarly the proletariat cannot possibly gain a consciousness of its own legality through the fact of *a single* victory. This consciousness only matured very slowly under capitalism and even now, under the dictatorship of the proletariat, it will only ripen by degrees. In the first period it will even suffer a number of setbacks. For only now will the proletariat, having once gained control, be able to appreciate the mental achievements which created and sustained capitalism. Not only will it acquire a far greater insight into bourgeois culture than ever before; but also the mental achievements essential to the conduct of the economy and the state will only become apparent to large sections of the proletariat after it has come to power.

Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that to a great extent the proletariat has been deprived of the practice and the tradition of acting independently and responsibly. Hence it may often experience the need to act thus as a burden rather than as a liberation. And finally there is the fact that petty bourgeois and even bourgeois attitudes have come to permeate the habits of life of those sections of the proletariat that will occupy leading positions. This has the effect of making precisely what is new about the new society appear alien and even hostile to them.

All these obstacles would be fairly harmless and might easily be overcome were it not for one fact. This is that the bourgeoisie for whom the problem of legality and illegality has undergone a

comparable change of function, is even here much more mature and much further advanced than the proletariat. (This remains true as long as it is fighting against a proletarian state that has not yet properly established itself.) With the same naïve complacency with which it formerly contemplated the legality of its own system of law it now dismisses as illegal the order imposed by the proletariat. We have made it a requirement for the proletariat struggling for power that it should view the bourgeois state merely as a fact, a power factor; this requirement is now instinctively fulfilled by the bourgeoisie.

Thus, despite the victory gained by the proletariat, its struggle with the bourgeoisie is still unequal and it will remain so until the proletariat acquires the same naïve confidence in the exclusive legality of its own system of law. Such a development is, however, greatly impeded by the attitude of mind imposed on the proletariat by the opportunists. Having accustomed itself to surrounding the institutions of capitalism with an aura of legality it finds it difficult to view with detachment the surviving remains which may endure for a very long time. Once the proletariat has gained power it still remains enmeshed intellectually in the trammels woven by the course of capitalist development. This finds expression, on the one hand, in its failure to lay hands on much that ought to be utterly destroyed. On the other hand, it proceeds to the labour of demolition and construction not with the sense of assurance that springs from legitimate rule, but with the mixture of vacillation and haste characteristic of the usurper. A usurper, moreover, who inwardly, in thought, feeling and resolve, anticipates the inevitable restoration of capitalism.

I have in mind here not only the more or less overt counter-revolutionary sabotage of the process of socialisation perpetrated throughout the Hungarian soviet dictatorship by the trade-union bureaucrats with the aim of restoring capitalism as painlessly as possible. I am thinking here also of the widely noted phenomenon of corruption in the soviets which has one of its chief sources here. Partly in the mentality of many soviet officials who were inwardly prepared for the return of a 'legitimate' capitalism and who were therefore intent on being able to justify their own actions when it became necessary. Partly also because many who had been involved in necessarily 'illegal' work (smuggling propaganda abroad) were intellectually and above all morally unable to grasp that from the only legitimate standpoint, the standpoint of the

proletarian state, their activities were just as 'legal' as any other. In the case of people of unstable moral character this confusion was translated into open corruption. Many an honest revolutionary lapsed into a romantic hypostatisation of 'illegality', into the unprofitable search for 'illegal' openings, and these tendencies exhibit *a deficient sense of the legitimacy of the Revolution* and of the right of the Revolution to establish its own lawful order.

In the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat this feeling and this sense of legitimacy should replace the requirement of the previous stage of the revolution, namely the stage of unfettered independence *vis-à-vis* bourgeois law. But notwithstanding this change *the evolution of the class consciousness of the proletariat advances homogeneously and in a straight line*. This can be seen most clearly in the foreign policies of proletarian states which, when confronted by the power structures of capitalist states, have to do battle with the bourgeois state just as they did when they seized power in their own state, though now the methods have partly changed.

The peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk have already testified to the high level and the maturity of the class consciousness attained by the Russian proletariat. Although they were dealing with the German imperialists they recognised their oppressed brothers all over the world as their truly legitimate partners at the negotiating table. Even though Lenin's judgement of the actual power relationships was notable for its supreme intelligence and realistic toughness, his negotiators were instructed to address themselves to the proletariat of the world and primarily to the proletariat of the Central Powers. His foreign policy was less a negotiation between Germany and Russia than the attempt to promote proletarian revolution and revolutionary consciousness in the nations of Central Europe. Since then the home and foreign policies of the Soviet Government have undergone many changes and it has been necessary to adapt them to the exigencies of the real power situation. But notwithstanding this the fundamental principle, the principle of the legitimacy of its own power which at the same time entails the principle of the need to advance the revolutionary class consciousness of the proletariat of the world, has remained a fixed point throughout the whole period.

The whole problem of the recognition of Soviet Russia by the bourgeois states must not be regarded in isolation as involving no more than the question of the advantages accruing to Russia. It must be seen also as the question of whether the bourgeoisie will

recognise the legitimacy of the proletarian revolution. The significance of this recognition changes according to the concrete circumstances in which it takes place. Its effect on the vacillating sections of the petty bourgeoisie in Russia as well as on those of the proletariat of the world remains the same in all essentials: it sanctions the legitimacy of the revolution, something of which they stand in great need if they are to accept as legal its official exponents, the Soviet Republic. All the various methods of Russian politics serve this purpose: the relentless onslaught on the counter-revolution within Russia, the bold confrontation of the powers victorious in the war to whom Russia has never spoken in tones of submission (unlike the bourgeoisie of Germany), and the open support granted to revolutionary movements, etc. These policies cause sections of the counter-revolutionary front in Russia to crumble away and to bow before the legitimacy of the Revolution. They help to fortify the revolutionary self-consciousness of the proletariat, its awareness of its own strength and dignity.

The ideological maturity of the Russian proletariat becomes clearly visible when we consider those very factors which have been taken as evidence of its backwardness by the opportunists of the West and their Central European admirers. To wit, the clear and definitive crushing of the internal counter-revolution and the uninhibited illegal and 'diplomatic' battle for world revolution. The Russian proletariat did not emerge victoriously from its revolution because a fortunate constellation of circumstances played into its hands. (This constellation existed equally for the German proletariat in November 1918 and for the Hungarian proletariat at the same time and also in March 1919.) It was victorious because it had been steeled by the long illegal struggle and hence had gained a clear understanding of the nature of the capitalist state. In consequence its actions were based on a genuine reality and not on ideological delusions. The proletariat of Central and Western Europe still has an arduous road before it. If it is to become conscious of its historical mission and of the legitimacy of its rule it must first grasp the fact that the problem of legality and illegality is purely tactical in nature. It must be able to slough off both the cretinism of legality and the romanticism of illegality.

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NOTES

- 1 *Anti-Dühring*, p. 205.
- 2 Nachlass I, pp. 382-3. [Correspondence between Marx and Ruge, 1843.] The italics are mine.
- 3 Cf. the essay "Class Consciousness".