

# **The Labour Aristocracy**

The Material Basis  
for Opportunism  
in the  
Labour Movement

**Max Elbaum And Robert Seltzer**

**Resistance Books**

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# THE LABOUR ARISTOCRACY

THE MATERIAL BASIS FOR OPPORTUNISM IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

By Max Elbaum and Robert Seltzer

## 1. THE THEORY OF THE LABOUR ARISTOCRACY

### INTRODUCTION

A significant alteration is taking place in the relation of class forces within US society as a consequence of the wide ranging economic and political assault mounted over the past few years by monopoly capital against the US working class. This assault, in which the actions of the Reagan administration are more a symptomatic than causal factor, promises a continued all-sided erosion and reversal of many of the gains scored by the US working class over the past four decades. All indications are that things will become “worse before they get better”.

Setting aside such “left” infantile nonsense as “the ’80s will make the ’30s look like a picnic”,<sup>§</sup> what is certainly true is that US imperialism is at bay and the contradictions of the world capitalist system have qualitatively deepened and compounded in the course of the 1970s. The US population can no longer be buffered to the same extent and in the same manner as in past decades and is facing the inexorable consequences of the international crisis facing the US bourgeoisie. The fundamental class antagonisms

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[At the time of writing, Max Elbaum was a member of the *Line of March* editorial board. Robert Seltzer was a member of the *Line of March* Labour Commission. A nationwide grouping of Labour Commission members and associates contributed to the research and preparation of the article.]

<sup>§</sup> This slogan, accompanied by the call to “prepare for workers’ power!” is currently being popularised by the Communist Workers’ Party (CWP). Taken together, these slogans reveal

internal to US society are unmistakably sharpening and coming into bolder relief, threatening to undermine the bourgeoisie's carefully cultivated image of an "America the beautiful" — home of a superior, hard-working stock blessed to live in a land of advancement for those willing to work for it. Inevitably there will be a spontaneous class polarisation stemming from these changed conditions, from which flow the prospects for advancing the unity and revolutionary consciousness of the US working class. But the exact political forms through which this polarisation will be expressed will undoubtedly be complex and not at all easy to predict.

Every ideologically motivated force on the left that targets the proletariat, from social-democracy to Trotskyism, is gearing up in one way or another to position itself for the "events to come". The Marxist-Leninists are no exception. But as soon as we begin to take stock of the contradictions and possibilities of the coming period a number of sobering questions impose themselves, in particular the state of the communist movement: its fragmentation, its political and ideological immaturity and backwardness, its relative lack of influence within the working class. Besides these questions which are, in essence, the central question of party building, other important questions of both the theory and practice of proletarian revolution come to the fore when we face such major alterations in the objective conditions of the spontaneous class struggle. Unfortunately, and much to the chagrin of those infected with a mechanical materialist world outlook, such questions never appear on our agenda neatly formulated and in an "orderly fashion". Rather, they "announce themselves" through the motion of class struggle, and then the task of correctly identifying these questions, joining and pursuing them, itself often requires a theoretical and ideological struggle — among communists — of the first order.

Of course, from the long view of the last hundred years, the laws of history are clearly unfolding with a steady force approximating the laws of nature. The fundamental contradiction of capitalist production, between socialised production

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the total incapacity of infantile leftism to understand the real world, let alone change it. Whatever the contours of the current decade, it is clear that the intensifying crisis of the world imperialist system is proceeding under conditions qualitatively distinct from those that characterised the '30s. Just to mention one: the political dynamic of the '30s led to a situation in which the forging of a world anti fascist front embracing both the socialist Soviet Union and the imperialist US represented the fundamental interests of the world proletariat. In the current period, the dynamic impacting the US working class as the result of US preparations for war is exactly the opposite. The CWP's empty slogan to "prepare for workers' power," is sheer juvenile fantasy in light of the prevailing political and ideological outlook of the US working class in which the hegemony of opportunism has hardly been challenged, let alone overcome.

and private property, continues to deepen on a broader and broader scale, inexorably locked into its inherent inefficiency, irrationality and anarchy. More importantly, the contradiction expresses itself in human terms — in the brutality, oppression, and exploitation suffered by the international proletariat and masses yoked to capital. This is the social fuel, the political energy propelling human history forward in the 20th century at a pace and scale unequalled by any previous epoch and resolving the contradiction of the capitalist mode of production through one revolutionary upheaval after another.

Although such a historical materialist standpoint is absolutely crucial in maintaining the ideological bearings of the revolutionary proletariat, it is of little help in the actual practice of revolution! The underlying laws of history can only reveal and translate themselves concretely in the realm of politics, in the realm of the class struggle, which moves in zig-zags — filled with contradictory phenomena, trends, etc. Politics (historically specific) is the substance of the “class struggle”, through which the rich myriad of conscious and contending interests — class, national, sectoral, and in a limited sense, even the clash of individual wills — gets played out. The challenge (and verification) of the science of Marxism-Leninism rests precisely in the capacity of communists to analyse the actual political motion of the class struggle in all its complexity and anomaly and not in the all too common retreat into the philistine complacency that “history is on our side”.

At this juncture, the real challenge facing US communists is not to repeat obvious truisms which any half-baked “socialist” can proclaim *ad nauseum*. There is little profundity and less science in solemnly declaring that “the intensified attacks will result in increased struggle and consciousness on the part of workers!” or that “conflict between their interests and those of the capitalists is clear!” or to note that the impulse for militance and unity within the working class will rise in the coming period.

The advanced workers do not require communists to intone such obvious truths. And no matter how much the communists hail the expected spontaneous rise of working-class militance, they will not thereby address the real knotty political and ideological problems of the present moment.

To begin acting as the conscious element in the spontaneous movement, the communists must address the problem of the conspicuous *reactionary* countervailing forces within the US working class. How do we account for the political shift to the right of large sections of workers as reflected in the substantial working class support given to Reagan? What is the *precise character* of the assault upon the working class, where are the main blows of the austerity program being directed and why? How can this working class, with its particular history and features, be expected to respond?

Vague, “general”, and shifting answers to these questions will not suffice. A precise analysis of the actual political character and motion of the different strata, layers and sections of the US working class is required. The class must be seen not merely in its essential underlying unity, but more to the point, politically, in its immediate internal tensions, contradictions and struggles. Since the working class in the United States has long become the absolute majority class, “national politics” is shaped not only by the ever shifting relation and struggle between the working class and the bourgeoisie but also by the political trends and contradiction *within the proletariat itself*. Consequently, any “class analysis” which insists on depicting the US working class as some homogenous, “naturally revolutionary” class is as useless to the politically advanced worker as the prattling of “pie in the sky” Sunday school teachers. Such platitudes constitute a gross parody of Marxist analysis in which “faith in god” is merely replaced by faith in the qualities of some mythical, homogenous working class, the like of which has never existed anywhere.

Unfortunately, such platitudes do more frequently than not get passed off as analysis, providing a vivid example of how the obtuseness of the US communists’ political analysis is closely linked to problems of theory. In particular the communist movement is characterised by stagnation (to say nothing of outright distortions) in the theoretical legacy concerning the *material basis* for the stubborn existence of opportunism within the working class (especially in imperialist countries), and the *stratifications* within the working class which provide the *social base* for the politics and ideology of opportunism. And yet, this is precisely the question — opportunism within the working class movement — which the motion of the class struggle thrusts upon our agenda, not simply as a theoretical undertaking but also as a matter of practical politics, as soon as we attempt to intervene. Unfortunately the significance of Lenin’s theory of opportunism and its particularisation in the analysis of the labour aristocracy has been, by and large, lost to the US left — often distorted beyond recognition and for all practical purposes dropped as a central component of class analysis.

It is ironic that on this particular question a theoretical vacuum would exist in the US. Probably nowhere else in the world is the influence of opportunism such an immensely powerful force within the working class. Especially in the period since the end of World War II, it would be hard to argue that anything remotely approaching a “class struggle trend” (much less a communist trend) has existed within the organised movement of US workers, unless the notion of a “political trend” is reduced to such Lilliputian scale that it renders it historically meaningless (a trick tried more than once within the US left circles). Yet the bitter fact remains that the AFL-CIO fits

the classic definition of “social-imperialist” to a degree unequalled in the history of the international workers’ movement. Taking up the “stars and stripes” as its sacred banner, the AFL-CIO proudly announces to the world that the rightful place for the American worker is firmly beside the US bourgeoisie in defence of “truth, justice, and the American way of life” — a shameless defence of imperialism in the name of “labour.” No amount of “qualification” or denial on the part of US leftists can alter the fact that when the official spokesmen of US labour express a bourgeois world view and set of politics, they are generally representative of the sentiments of the majority of the organised sections of the US working class, and even sections of the less stable, unorganised workers.

What a seeming paradox! One of the most developed proletariats in the world — in an objective, economic sense — is far from being revolutionary and shows few prospects for some miraculous transformation, even in increased “hard times.” This contradiction has overwhelmed and disoriented the left in imperialist countries time and again (England’s proletariat is a case in point) and continues to do so today. The actual resolution of this paradox — the forging of a truly revolutionary proletariat in advanced capitalist countries — while profoundly framed by the maturation of historical conditions and practical politics, is thoroughly dependent on the capacity of the communists to provide the necessary political leadership and ideological training. But the inability of the conscious left forces to take on this task is due to the theoretical vacuum which continues to exist on the questions of opportunism and the labour aristocracy.

Of course, the different currents on the left resolve the problem in various ways, the main opportunist impulse still being social-democracy (and its most recent variant, Eurocommunism). Social-democracy merely adjusts the type of “socialism” and the path (“democratic”) required to achieve it to coincide with the conditions and consciousness of the working class in advanced “civilised” countries. Typically, the “left wing” of US social-democracy today, weak-kneed in the face of the rightward, conservative shift among sections of the working class, is scurrying to “recapture” the positive potential of American patriotism, the “American family” and the Democratic Party. With a “socialist” program custom-fit for the sensibilities of the radicalised petit bourgeoisie and the upper, stable strata (also read “white”) of the working class, it is no surprise that the question of the labour aristocracy and the polarisation within the working class would not surface as a serious debate among social-democrats.<sup>8</sup>

Among communists in imperialist countries the impulse toward opportunism is also strong, but it takes other forms principally because the category of socialism can not be so easily “adjusted” and tampered with among those who at least nominally

hold themselves accountable to Marxist-Leninist criteria.

The crux of this distinction is the understanding that the essential character and substance of socialist revolution is the *revolutionary rupture* with capitalist society, the forceful *seizure of power* by the *revolutionary* (as distinct from merely “democratic”) proletariat and the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship. This outlook is the objective check that continues to reassert itself in real life as the demarcation between social-democracy and communism. This demarcation has been reaffirmed and deepened by the subsequent experience (rich in its diversity) of Marxist-Leninist-led social revolutions and by the actual practice of socialist construction which step by step is pulling larger portions of the world population out of the imperialist orbit.

As a result, communists in imperialist countries cannot avoid the task of determining how and under what conditions the proletariat can in fact be transformed into a self-conscious, truly revolutionary force. Since this task is arduous, it is hardly surprising that many would lose their bearings. Their confusion gets concentrated on questions concerning the extent and character of opportunism within the working class, its material basis, and the strategy and tactics needed to isolate and defeat it, and thereby unite the class on a revolutionary basis. Wherever they have lost their direction and opportunism has gained the upper hand within communist movements, Lenin’s theory of the labour aristocracy has fallen into disuse, been qualified out of existence, or rejected outright.

Yet the founders of scientific socialism, writing in the era of competitive capitalism, already glimpsed this phenomenon, especially noted in Engels’ writings on the “bourgeoisification” of the English working class. However, at that early stage of capitalism’s development, the question of opportunism in the labour movement, its extent and political significance, was not yet mature. It remained for Lenin, writing in the era of imperialism “when the proletarian revolution had become an immediate practical question”, to explain in more depth why such revolutions were not widespread, indeed, to explain why significant sections of the proletariat and the major portion of the socialist movement itself had deserted to the side of the bourgeoisie.

But today, communists for the most part one-sidedly attribute the sluggishness of the proletariat in imperialist countries to the unforeseen economic, political, military, and ideological resilience of monopoly capitalism, especially in its post-World War II

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<sup>8</sup> Recent political developments among the social-democratic “lefts” who claim allegiance to Marxism are a sober reminder that Leninism still remains the great divide separating revolutionary Marxism from the opportunist currents in the socialist and workers’ movement.

recovery. Undoubtedly the thrust of such an analysis is not only true but is essential in analysing the objective conditions which frame the actual character and political motion of the working class movements in imperialist countries. However, the negative tendency is to neglect to analyse thoroughly the other aspect: that the expansion of the relatively protected strata of the proletariat brings with it the consolidation of a reformist and opportunist trend within the working class, which in turn becomes a powerful material force shaping and distorting the political and ideological character of the working class movement. This is the real basis of the “divisions within the working class” which some in the communist movement have become so adept at excoriating while having absolutely nothing to say — other than platitudes about the need for working class unity — as to how the class will advance ideologically.

Refusal to face squarely the consequences and implications of this split results in a philistine “optimism”, taking both right and “left” forms, in which mechanical materialism attempts to pass itself off as historical, dialectical materialism. In the United States we have the complacency and “patience” of the revisionist CPUSA’s confidence that the antimonopoly sentiments of the masses are bound to gradually mature (somehow, some way) into socialist consciousness, so long as the war hawks can be prevented from “blowing us all up” beforehand. On the other extreme, there is the infantile “left” rhetoric associated with the Maoist New Communist Movement which championed every instance of spontaneous militance on the part of the workers as the harbinger of the imminent “revolutionary upheaval”. Ironically both right and “left” views share similar assumptions and the same philosophical distortion of positing a direct, one-to-one mechanical relationship between alterations in “objective conditions” and the transformation of the consciousness of the working class. The confidence which rightfully flows from a grasp of historical materialism is vulgarised to the simplistic vision that as the crisis of capitalism deepens the proletariat is bound to arouse from its slumber as a homogenous, revolutionary force.

Such wishful thinking Lenin ridiculed as “official optimism” — a view which rests content with the fact that “history is on our side” while refusing to face squarely the concrete difficulties and contradictions encountered in actually preparing the proletariat for its revolutionary mission. The net result of such opportunism in the US in particular is the all too familiar production of shallow and opaque “communist analyses” of objective conditions along with equally unconvincing and unsatisfactory strategies and tactics — leaving Marxism-Leninism with relatively little credibility or influence on the left, much less within the broader working class.

It is in the spirit of altering this sad state of affairs that we attempt to reopen discussion and debate in the communist movement on the theory of the labour

aristocracy. In our opinion a correct notion of the labour aristocracy and a coherent theory accounting for opportunism within the working-class movement are crucial elements in developing a comprehensive class analysis of US society. Closely connected to the distortion of Lenin's theory of the labour aristocracy is the widespread misconception within communist ranks of the very concept of class analysis. For the most part this critical task has been taken up as an exercise in bourgeois sociology utilising pseudo-objective categorisations of the population by occupation, income, etc., thereby losing the essential political purpose of the question in a sea of lifeless statistics. This is a mechanical distortion of the Marxist notion of class analysis whose purpose is profoundly political and historical: to determine the objective factors (principally but not exclusively economic) that frame how the various classes and strata of the population are likely to interact concretely with the class struggle. Developing a precise theory of the labour aristocracy is absolutely key to such an analysis; without it, it is impossible to illuminate the actual political motion and trends within the US working class.

However, even joining the debate on this question poses serious difficulties in itself. Although the US communist movement lacks a coherent, unified theory of the labour aristocracy, the theoretical distortion is hidden behind a veil of eclecticism.

Consequently our own discussion of the theory of opportunism and the labour aristocracy must begin with a thoroughgoing theoretical recapitulation. Although the existence of opportunism is widely acknowledged "in general", virtually all of the relevant categories — superprofits, the bribe, bourgeoisification, the labour aristocracy — as well as the theory as an integral whole and the historical dynamics of its development have been thoroughly distorted. Consequently we must return to the original works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin to reconstruct the general theoretical framework. This will require a number of lengthy quotations so that readers may grasp the development of the theory and form an opinion of the classical views as a whole. This is important because contemporary writings on the labour aristocracy are especially prone to selective quotation-mongering.

Our starting point will be Lenin's analysis of imperialism and the dissolution of the Second International. We will then re-examine, as Lenin did, the works of Marx and Engels on the subject of opportunism in the labour movement. Third, we will reconstruct the line of reasoning that Lenin pursued in analysing opportunism in the epoch of imperialism, including an examination in some detail of a number of the specific "building blocks" of the overall theory. Finally, we will examine Lenin's view of the strategic and tactical implications of this theory for the struggle of the proletariat.

## I. GENERAL CONTOURS OF LENIN'S THEORY

### A. LENIN'S APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM

Lenin in 1915 defined opportunism as “sacrificing the fundamental interests of the masses to the temporary interests of an insignificant minority of the workers or, in other words, an alliance between a section of the workers and the bourgeoisie, directed against the mass of the proletariat”.<sup>1</sup> This general definition had a particular target: the consolidation of a *system of class-collaborationist politics* in the Second (“socialist”) International. The spectacle of “patriotic” mass workers’ parties collaborating with their “own” bourgeoisies in the slaughter of World War I represented a qualitative political degeneration. For Lenin this historic fact demanded a political regroupment of the revolutionary forces outside the Second International. Equally important, it required a *theoretical* explanation of both the content and origins of opportunism and how it had matured into social-chauvinism, a consolidated and relatively permanent (not fleeting) feature of the workers’ movement in the most advanced capitalist countries. Such an analysis was essential if the revolutionary movement was to be politically rebuilt on a solid basis.

This theoretical task preoccupied Lenin from the outbreak of World War I to the dawn of the Russian Revolution in 1917. In life, the theoretical work emerged as a polemic directed principally against Kautsky and other “centrists” who theoretically conciliated the opportunist trend and attempted to unite with it politically. Lenin undertook to define the precise character of opportunism, its connection with imperialism and its social roots in the labour aristocracy. Only on such a basis, could an effective revolutionary policy for the working class movement be formulated.

Replying to Kautsky’s demagogic complaints that the “lefts” (internationalists) opposed the unity of the labour movement, Lenin argued that the movement was *already split*, ideologically, politically, and *economically*. In the era of imperialism, Lenin argued, the working-class movement in the imperialist countries would inevitably contain “two main trends”, “two international camps”, one opportunist and one revolutionary. Their size and relative influence might vary from country to country and from period to period, but both had a material basis in the actual stratified character of the proletariat in the era of imperialism. The revolutionary trend had its material base in the exploitation of the working class and oppressed peoples under imperialism. The opportunist trend had its material base in the creation of the labour aristocracy, which embodied, in Lenin’s words, “this most profound connection, the economic connection between the imperialist bourgeoisie and the opportunism which

has triumphed (for long?) in the labour movement. And from this”, Lenin wrote, “we concluded that a split with the social chauvinists was inevitable.”<sup>2</sup>

The centrists, ever the “loyal opposition” to opportunism, refused to recognise the existence of these two distinct, antagonistic political trends in the labour movement. Politically, the centrists sought to preserve unity with the social chauvinists at all costs — under the banner of preserving the unity of the working class. In the political crisis caused by the war, the practical effect of the centrist line was to provide the opportunist trend with additional legitimacy, especially for many workers who had come to have serious misgivings about “socialist” support for imperialist butchery. The centrists’ failure to forthrightly draw a line of demarcation with social-chauvinism required crude and fantastic rationalisations. Theoretically, the centrists had to obscure the real nature of opportunism and the historical development of capitalism into imperialism. As Lenin pointed out, for all their talk about the unity of the working class, the centrists *evaded* the stubborn fact “that *certain* groups of workers *have already drifted away* to opportunism and to the imperialist bourgeoisie!”<sup>3</sup>

Lenin’s incisive polemics against centrism rested on a profound theoretical understanding of this phenomenon, not merely an identification (obvious to all) of a political divergence in the labour movement. The split with opportunism was principled, a strategic necessity, because it corresponded to the objective development of a new quality in class relations. As Lenin wrote: “The important thing is that, economically, the desertion of a stratum of the labour aristocracy to the bourgeoisie has matured and become an accomplished fact; and this economic fact, this shift in class relations, will find political form, in one shape or another, without any particular ‘difficulty’.”<sup>4</sup> The inexorable logic of this analysis forced Lenin to conclude:

There is not the slightest reason for thinking that these parties [the opportunist labour parties] will disappear *before* the social revolution. On the contrary, the nearer the revolution approaches, the more strongly it flares up and the more sudden and violent the transitions and leaps in its progress, the greater will be the part the struggle of the revolutionary mass stream against the opportunist petit-bourgeois stream will play in the labour movement.<sup>5</sup>

Lenin’s formulation about a section of workers deserting economically to the bourgeoisie was a relatively new and provocative one. Prior explanations of opportunism, including Lenin’s own earlier writings, tended to target two negative tendencies in the workers’ movement. (1) the overall dominance of the ruling bourgeois ideology as a factor that spontaneously limited the workers struggle to reformist, trade-unionist politics;<sup>6</sup> and (2) the unstabilising influence of alien class elements continually drawn into the expanding proletariat from either the large petit bourgeoisie

or intellectuals attracted to the revolutionary movement. According to this view, these alien class elements served as the social base for the persistence of corruption, backward ideas and reformism in the proletarian movements.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Marxists generally held that the working class *as a whole* remained fertile ground for revolutionary ideas, so long as socialists consciously approached their work and attempted to raise the spontaneous movement to the level of revolutionary social-democracy/scientific socialism.

However, the steady degeneration from the late 1890s to the ultimate collapse of the Second International revealed starkly that the old explanations were grossly inadequate. In Germany, for example, social-democracy had harnessed the spontaneous workers' struggles and had constructed an impressive political and organisational edifice. Yet it was from within the German Social-Democratic Party itself that the opportunism and social chauvinism took root. In England the opportunist trend grew from the centre of the most expansive and developed proletariat whose core was already third and fourth-generation proletarians. How could the most developed sections of the proletariat, the stronghold of trade unionism, so completely unite with their own bourgeoisie in fratricidal war and colonial conquest? Obviously this phenomenon could not be principally attributed to the entry of unstable petit-bourgeois elements into the proletariat or to bourgeois propaganda, although both played a role.

This was the knotty problem which Lenin confronted. As was his established practice, he returned to the writings of Marx and Engels with characteristic meticulousness, in particular to a re-examination of the most conspicuous case thus far of the growth of reformism and degeneration in the labour movement — the English workers' movement of the late 19th century. For Lenin, a scientific understanding of opportunism required tracing the origins of the split in the workers' movement back through 60 years of history. It was necessary to discover the objective dynamics that caused opportunism to grow from a "mood" to a consolidated political "trend" that had come to objectively reflect the interest of a distinct stratum of the working class.

## **B. MARX AND ENGELS ON THE 'BOURGEOISIFIED' ENGLISH WORKING CLASS**

Marx and Engels frequently derided the English proletariat for becoming "more and more bourgeois" during the period of England's industrial and colonial monopoly in the second half of the 19th century.<sup>8</sup> On the surface, this criticism appears contradictory, even somewhat irreverent on the part of these two preeminent theoreticians of the proletarian cause. England's working class at that time was the largest and by far the most organised in the world. Marx and Engels had observed, from close quarters, the effects of opportunism in the English working-class

movement and how it sabotaged time and again the revolutionary impulses of the English socialist movement. For example, the First International was valued by the pragmatic English labour leaders only so long as it restricted itself to providing support for economic clashes with the employers and didn't interfere with their efforts to win "respectability". This narrow attitude provoked Marx in 1872 to say that "the English labour leaders had sold themselves",<sup>9</sup> a sober assessment that, of course, didn't endear him to the English trade union movement. With the rise and expansion of English colonialism, reformism matured into open political collaboration, and Engels expressed an equally frank opinion:

You ask me what the English workers think about colonial policy. Well, exactly the same as they think about politics in general. There is no workers' party here, there are only Conservatives and Liberal-Radicals, and the workers gaily share the feast of England's monopoly of the world market and colonies.<sup>10</sup>

Engels returns to this theme again in the preface to the second edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, published in 1892,<sup>11</sup> where he addresses the problem of the proletariat aligning itself with its own exploiters in the country where industrial capitalism was first thoroughly established. He begins by noting that England had developed into an exceptional capitalist country between 1848 and the 1870s. It held vast colonial possessions, enjoyed hegemony over the world market, and led the world in industrial production. England was virtually unchallenged as the world's manufacturing centre and looked to all other countries as either markets for its manufacturing goods or as suppliers of raw materials and food. The English bourgeoisie reaped immense profits that were historically unprecedented. This preeminent position provided England with a high degree of industrial "prosperity" (relative to previous periods in England as well as to the conditions then prevailing in other capitalist countries). Despite regular interruption by the periodic capitalist crises of overproduction, there was a general upward trend in production over the course of decades that permitted important economic and political concessions to the English working class in exchange, of course, for its expected loyalty to the policies of the English manufacturing bourgeoisie, a loyalty which was mediated and obscured through the fostering of "national pride" and English chauvinism.

Economically, Engels concluded that the condition of the English working class generally improved during this period, but that the concessions were unevenly distributed and primarily accrued to a "small, privileged, 'protected' minority [who] permanently benefited".<sup>12</sup> Even for the great bulk of workers: "There was temporary improvement ... But this improvement always was reduced to the old level by the influx of the great body of the unemployed reserve, by the constant superseding of

hands by new machinery, by the immigration of the agricultural population ...”<sup>13</sup>

Who, then, constituted the “privileged” and “protected” minority that was able, by and large, to stay out of the reserve army and to avoid the full brunt of the “normal” mechanisms of capitalist production which undermined gains by workers? Engels identified two sections of the working class, the factory hands (primarily located in the textile mills and iron foundries of the north), and the members of the craft unions (headquartered in London):

Firstly, the factory hands. The fixing by Act of Parliament of their working day within relatively rational limits has restored their physical constitution and endowed them with a moral superiority, enhanced by their local concentration. They are undoubtedly better off than before 1848. The best proof is that, out of 10 strikes they make, nine are provoked by the manufacturers in their own interests, as the only means of securing a reduced production.<sup>14</sup>

As for “the great trades’ unions”:

They are the organisations of those trades in which the labour of *grown-up men* predominates, or is alone applicable. Here the competition neither of women and children nor of machinery has so far weakened their organised strength. The engineers, the carpenters and joiners, the bricklayers, are each of them a power, to the extent that, as in the case of the bricklayers and bricklayers’ labourers, they can even successfully resist the introduction of machinery. That their condition has remarkably improved since 1848 there can be no doubt, and the best proof of this is in the fact that for more than 15 years not only have their employers been with them, but they with their employers, upon exceedingly good terms. They form an aristocracy among the working class; they have succeeded in enforcing for themselves a relatively comfortable position, and they accept it as final. They are the model working men of Messrs. Leone Levi & Giffen, and they are very nice people indeed nowadays to deal with, for any sensible capitalist in particular and for the whole capitalist class in general.<sup>15</sup>

Politically, it was an eminently prudent policy for the English manufacturing capitalists to form alliances with key strata of the rapidly growing proletariat. Engels observed that they “had learnt, and were learning more and more, that the middle class [the industrial bourgeoisie]<sup>8</sup> can never obtain full social and political power over the nation except by the help of the working class”.<sup>16</sup> Once the bourgeoisie had succeeded in smashing the radical working class Chartist movement in 1848, it turned toward a policy of pacification by means of reforms (in fact, adopting much of the Chartist program). The manufacturers, Engels pointed out, came to see the value to *themselves* of enacting protective labour legislation and extending suffrage.

Perhaps the most striking change was in their attitude toward labour organisations. “Trades’ unions”, Engels wrote, “hitherto considered inventions of the devil himself, were now petted and patronised as perfectly legitimate institutions, as useful means of spreading sound economical doctrines amongst the workers. Even strikes, than which nothing had been more notorious up to 1848, were now gradually found out to be occasionally very useful, especially when provoked by the masters themselves, at their own time.”<sup>17</sup>

The defeat of the left in 1848, followed by a long period of concessions, had the “natural” corrupting result that the politically active sectors of the working class, located almost entirely in the unions, began supporting England’s colonial policy and adopting the bourgeoisie’s political parties as their own. Further, within the working-class movement, the more protected workers upheld exclusionary policies, particularly aggravating the split between Irish and English sections of the proletariat.

Despite the historic setback represented by the rise of opportunism, Engels recognised that it was likely to be a temporary phenomenon. As a materialist, Engels understood that the dialectics of capitalist evolution would create new conditions within which the English workers would finally “budge”. He predicted that as England’s monopoly position eroded the English manufacturers, in order to compete with the rising industrial powers of Germany and the United States, would be compelled to increase their exploitation; English workers would begin to lose their relative privilege as reformism was exchanged for more brutal forms of rule. Engels took specific note of the decline of England’s international position — signalled by the economic stagnation that began in 1876 — and the worsening condition of the English working class, asserting that favourable times were developing for the resurrection of the socialist movement on the basis of the “hitherto stagnant lowest strata”.

The truth is this: during the period of England’s industrial monopoly the English working class have, to a certain extent, shared in the benefits of the monopoly. These benefits were very unequally parcelled out amongst them; the privileged minority pocketed most, but even the great mass had, at least, a temporary share now and then. And that is the reason why, since the dying out of Owenism, there has been no socialism in England. With the breakdown of that monopoly, the English working class will lose that privileged position; it will find itself generally — the privileged and leading minority not excepted — on a level with its fellow workers abroad. And that is the reason why there will be socialism again in England.<sup>18</sup>

In fact, Engels’ prediction was partially realised in his own lifetime by the turn to the left of the working-class movement in the 1890s. Besides a general re-emergence of various forms of socialism, there was a rise of a “New Unionism” among the unskilled,

irregularly employed masses of workers, previously unorganised and inactive. This period saw the formation of the trade union political groups that would later come to form the Labour Party.

However, Engels did not have sufficient basis to firmly grasp the new economic features of fully mature monopoly capitalism nor the political contours of the class struggle in the era of imperialism. Consequently he underestimated the stamina of English capital in its monopoly finance stage, the recementing and transformation of the colonial empire through the export of capital — in short the material basis to continue to provide relative economic protection and political privilege to the English working class. In addition the tradition of bourgeois reformism had taken firm root in sections of the English proletariat. This itself became a powerful material force in the ideological deformation of the working class. Some of this could be glimpsed even before Engels' death, for "Old Unionism", the labour aristocracy, already rarely supported and often stubbornly opposed the new radical trends. In large part, this tendency can be accounted for by the labour aristocracy's ability to maintain *relative* full employment and economic security even in the period of stagnation between 1876 and the mid 1890s — precisely the period of "hard times" that was thrusting the less protected strata of the working class into struggle and toward the left politically.<sup>19</sup>

### C. LENIN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE QUESTION

From Marx and Engels' descriptions and analysis of the rise of opportunism in England, Lenin abstracted out the central theoretical point: the stubborn phenomenon of opportunism among English workers had a *material basis* in the fact that the dominant world position of English capitalism produced *superprofits* which allowed the English bourgeoisie to make significant economic and political concessions to certain strata of the proletariat. These concessions, a complex set of phenomena including expansion of the social wage, and access to educational and cultural institutions, served as the material basis for the creation of a thoroughly opportunist trend rooted in a large *labour aristocracy* as well as the conspicuous rise of bourgeois

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<sup>19</sup> Engels' use of the term "middle class" to characterise the "industrial bourgeoisie" in this context undoubtedly is a reflection of the particular way in which classes were consciously identified in England at that time. It should be recalled that the nobility, represented in the royal family and the House of Lords, was a political anachronism which had survived, shorn of most of its power, into the capitalist epoch. Secondary political contradictions still existed during this period between the already dominant bourgeoisie and the survivors of the feudal nobility. These contradictions survived even into the 20th century, but largely in the realm of ideology whose principal expression was in classical British upper-class snobbery.

illusions and national chauvinism among English workers more generally. Lenin summed this point up as follows:

... why does England's monopoly [industrial and colonial] explain the (temporary) victory of opportunism in England? Because monopoly yields *superprofits*, i.e., a surplus of profits over and above the capitalist profits that are normal and customary all over the world. The capitalists *can* devote a part (and not a small one, at that!) of these superprofits to bribe *their own* workers, to create something like an alliance (recall the celebrated 'alliances' described by the Webbs of English trade unions and employers) between the workers of the given nation and their capitalists *against* the other countries.<sup>20</sup>

Lenin did not rest with extracting the essence of Marx and Engels' contributions to the theory of opportunism within the working-class movement; rather he qualitatively developed their contributions by extending the analysis to the era of imperialism. The rise of monopoly capitalism at the turn of the century required Lenin to go beyond the summation of the English experience, and hence laid the foundation for his groundbreaking contributions.

Lenin's argument is contained in a number of articles and polemics written between 1915 and 1917, notably *The Collapse of the Second International*,<sup>21</sup> *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*,<sup>22</sup> and *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*.<sup>23</sup> Essentially, Lenin argued that the emergence of monopoly capital was a qualitative development of capitalism, producing in the handful of imperialist countries the extended (not fleeting or temporary) basis for the extraction of superprofits. On the other hand, to assure continued political stability bourgeois rule increasingly required that a section of the ever-expanding proletariat be ideologically tamed into a "loyal opposition". This would be accomplished by extending the bribe to the more organised and stable strata of the working class in the form of economic and political concessions and reforms, thereby creating the stratum of the labour aristocracy. This basic development, Lenin contended, would be a feature of the class structure (and impact accordingly the dynamics of the class struggle) in *every imperialist country*. As Lenin put it,

The last third of the 19th century saw the transition to the new, imperialist era. Finance capital *not* of one, but of several, though very few, great powers enjoys a monopoly ... This difference explains why England's monopoly position *could* remain *unchallenged* for decades. The monopoly of modern finance capital is being frantically challenged; the era of imperialist wars has begun. It was possible in those days to bribe and corrupt the working class of *one* country for decades. This is now improbable, if not impossible. But on the other hand, *every* imperialist "great" power can and does

bribe *smaller* strata (than in England in 1848-68) of the “labour aristocracy”. Formerly a “*bourgeois labour party*”, to use Engels’ remarkably profound expression, could arise only in one country, because it alone enjoyed a monopoly, but, on the other hand, it could exist for a long time. Now a “*bourgeois labour party*” is *inevitable* and typical in an imperialist countries, but in view of the desperate struggle they are waging for the divisions of spoils, it is improbable that such a party can prevail for long in a number of countries.<sup>24, §</sup>

The leaders that emerge at the head of this “bourgeois labour party” trend are thoroughly conscious in their attempts to keep the class struggle “within bounds” and restrict the class consciousness of the working class to the level of trade union consciousness. This form of “mature” opportunism is distinct from the spontaneous forms of false consciousness which are expected in the initial stages of any worker’s political development. It is an opportunism which has emerged on the very foundations of a developed trade union consciousness and movement in imperialist countries (oftentimes replete with socialist rhetoric!). Unlike the opportunist trend among English workers in the latter third of the 19th century, this mature form of the opportunist trend within the workers’ movement, as well as its social base in the labour aristocracy, is a *permanent feature of imperialism*.

Consequently, the split between opportunist and revolutionary trends within the working class of imperialist countries (and between the social-chauvinists in imperialist countries and the revolutionary workers and peasants of the oppressed countries) had a material basis in imperialism and could not be expected to evaporate, leaving behind some mythical, homogenous, revolutionary proletariat. Consequently both class analysis and the development of revolutionary strategy and tactics would have to take this split into account from the beginning. Lenin put it quite bluntly:

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§ Lenin’s prediction on this particular point was a miscalculation. The life span of the reformist labour parties has been extended in this century by a unique set of historical factors that could not have been anticipated by Lenin. He certainly could not foresee the post-World War II world in which the US achieved a degree of hegemony over the imperialist system comparable to that of England in the late 19th century, and on that basis succeeded in bribing and corrupting the US working class “for decades”.

However, Lenin’s miscalculation (like Engels’ underestimation of the ability of capitalism to develop new mechanisms to bribe the working class) does not at all negate the essence of his theory. On the contrary, it only highlights Lenin’s essential point — the degree to which imperialist superprofits provide a material basis for a stubborn opportunist trend within the working class.

... in the epoch of imperialism, owing to objective causes, the proletariat has been split into *two international camps*, one of which has been corrupted by the crumbs that fall from the table of the dominant nation bourgeoisie ...<sup>25</sup>

Finally, Lenin went even beyond the assertion that the labour aristocracy had become a permanent feature of the imperialist era to note the factors which shaped the expansion and contraction of the opportunist trend in any given historical period. Lenin pointed out that periods of sharp interimperialist rivalry or determined struggles of oppressed nations and peoples tended to lessen the degree to which the imperialist bourgeoisie could bribe “its” proletariat, while periods of economic and political stability allowed an increase in bribery and, consequently, an expansion of the opportunist trend. While noting this constant ebb and flow in the size and stubbornness of the labour aristocracy in any particular country, Lenin always reasserted the central point: the basic phenomenon of an opportunist trend in the workers’ movement would *never qualitatively disappear so long as imperialism exists*. Furthermore, Lenin argued, the split could be expected to persist even after the socialist revolution, in the initial stages of consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat.

## II. KEY BUILDING BLOCKS OF LENIN'S THEORY

Lenin's essential contribution to the theory of opportunism was in showing how the dialectics of imperialism, especially the law of uneven development, inevitably produce a strong social basis for class-collaborationist politics within the working class itself. The most coherent expression of this tendency is found among the ranks of the upper strata of the working class, or more precisely the labour aristocracy. The concrete analysis of the labour aristocracy in any particular country must be historically specific and take into account a multiplicity of factors determining its size, economic position, political significance, etc. Although this complexity is an obstacle to any universally applicable sociological blueprint, it is possible — and politically necessary — to define the general features of the stratum, its main political expressions, and the broad contours of its historical development and prospects.

The problem of the labour aristocracy, both as a theoretical abstraction and as a concrete social force in various imperialist countries, continually recurs in Lenin's writings; nevertheless, there is no attempt to systematically define the subject in detail. For Lenin, the political demands of the struggle against opportunism took precedence over a detailed sociological analysis of the aristocratic stratum.

At that time the political controversy raging in the socialist movement was not over the existence of a labour aristocracy in the imperialist countries, but rather over its role in the class struggle. The development of a privileged upper stratum was conspicuous in all the developed capitalist countries. Indeed, it didn't even require a Marxist to detect the phenomenon. For example, one of Lenin's chief sources of information on the subject was a certain Schulze-Gaevernitz, whom Lenin described as "a scoundrel of the first order and vulgar to boot", but who nonetheless provided "very valuable admissions" about "workers' exclusiveness and aristocratic attitude ..."<sup>26</sup> Lenin relied heavily on this pro-imperialist author's observations in *Imperialism*:

... the bourgeois student of "British imperialism at the beginning of the 20th century" is obliged to distinguish systematically between the "*upper stratum*" of the workers and the "*lower stratum of the proletariat proper*". The upper stratum furnishes the bulk of the membership of cooperatives, of trade unions, of sporting clubs and of numerous religious sects. To this level is adapted the electoral system, which in Great Britain is still "*sufficiently restricted to exclude the lower stratum of the proletariat proper*"! In order to present the condition of the British working class in a rosy

light, only this upper stratum — which constitutes a *minority* of the proletariat — is usually spoken of. For instance, “the problem of unemployment is mainly a London problem and that of the lower proletarian stratum, *to which the politicians attach little importance ...*” (Schulze-Gaevernitz). He should have said: to which the bourgeois politicians and the “socialist” opportunists attach little importance.<sup>27</sup>

Clearly, Lenin’s contribution to theory was not in showing the existence of the well-known phenomenon of this emerging division in the working class, but rather in laying bare its objective economic and political connections to the monopoly capitalist system itself. In establishing that the labour aristocracy represented a bloc with the bourgeoisie, that it was the concrete expression of the objective relationship between imperialism and opportunism, Lenin solved the major theoretical problem of the principal source and material base for opportunism in the working-class movement. Other related questions such as the exact size and forms of the “bribe”, the shifting composition of the labour aristocracy, the precise relationship between the upper stratum, its opportunist party and trade union leadership, etc., were definitely of political significance (and Lenin spoke to them), but theoretically they resided at the level of concrete historical analysis. In this sense, Lenin considered them to be “secondary questions” that could only be correctly analysed from the perspective of the general theoretical framework.<sup>8</sup>

However it has been precisely upon these “secondary questions” that the controversy over Lenin’s analysis has centred in the communist movement. The popular notion that the labour aristocracy is today insignificant, a mere historical curiosity, has come from obscuring the fundamental logic of Lenin’s theoretical framework and hopelessly confusing higher and lower levels of theoretical abstraction. Both mechanical materialists and dogmatists alike have succeeded in reducing the theory of opportunism and the labour aristocracy to a muddled checklist of simple formulas and criteria; as a result, disproving any one element or showing that others “no longer apply” then leaves one free to discard the whole theory as “outmoded”.

Possibly nowhere has Lenin’s entire theory of the labour aristocracy been called into question, explicitly rejected, or qualified out of existence more than in the US communist movement. As a result, there is little agreement not only over the specific character of the labour aristocracy in the US, but even whether it exists! The term itself has fallen into disuse and many see it as a nasty insult (or at worst as an attempt to “create” and foster artificial division within the US working class!) rather than as a scientific category indispensable for any concrete class analysis of an imperialist country. Indeed, the theoretical poverty and ideological and political backwardness of the US communist movement is nowhere more clearly expressed

than on this issue. Ironically — tragically — the widespread mechanical distortion of Lenin’s theory has become an effective smokescreen behind which the largest and most privileged labour aristocracy in history remains hidden from the communists. It forms an insuperable ideological block to the development of a cogent, materialist analysis of the working-class movement that is the precondition for the forging of an advanced political line.

However, this opportunist distortion is not always easily discernible because it usually comes shrouded in eclecticism. This takes the form of upholding Lenin “in general” while taking issue with “certain elements” of his analysis, and *prestol!*, the theory as a practical influence on the Marxist-Leninist analysis of US society disappears.

Who in the communist movement is not familiar with these common distortions of the theory:

- The labour aristocracy is made up entirely of the paid officials of the trade union movement, thus “explaining” the supposed ideological and political gap between the inherently corrupt union hierarchy and the honest rank and file. This is a distortion on two counts. First, while most of the union officialdom undoubtedly is part of the labour aristocracy, it is by no means its exclusive component. Second, while the majority of trade union officials in the US labour movement are today part of the labour aristocracy, there is nothing inherent or automatic about such categorisation and advancing it is an anarcho-sindicalist prejudice.

- The labour aristocracy is composed exclusively of the skilled workers and their sectarian craft unions, a view which, in light of the increasing proletarianisation of the work process, leads to the conclusion that the labour aristocracy is dying out naturally and is, at most, a declining force.

- The concept of monopoly bribery is vulgarised to mean some type of “under-the-table” payoff, rather than a wide range of economic, political, and legal reforms, many of which were fought hard for but nonetheless allow sections of US labour the *privilege* of struggling with capital “on better terms” than their counterparts in the lower strata of the US working class and — even more to the point — the proletarian detachments in countries oppressed by US imperialism.

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§ For example, Lenin wrote: “The bourgeoisie of an imperialist “great” power *can economically* bribe the upper strata of ‘its’ workers by spending on this a hundred million or so francs a year, for its *superprofits* most likely amount to about a thousand million. And how this little sop is divided among the labour ministers, ‘labour representatives’ ... labour members of war industries committees, labour officials, workers belonging to the narrow craft unions, office employees, etc., etc., is a secondary question.”<sup>28</sup>

● The category of superprofits is reduced to excessive profits gained from “overseas investments”, rather than from monopoly capital itself with its tremendous control over labour, sources of raw material, credit and market mechanisms, the *state*, etc.

Given these and other vulgarisations of Lenin’s theory, a serious appraisal of the dominant opportunist trend among US workers and its concrete relationship to the labour aristocracy has become a nearly hopeless undertaking for US communists.

In an attempt to begin clearing up this confusion we intend to examine more closely the key component parts of Lenin’s theory. Our aim is to re-establish the essential theoretical content of the main concepts or “building blocks” that make up the theory, as well as the logical connections between them. Although we will make reference to various comments from Lenin concerning specific features of the theory, concrete phenomena, etc., we do not intend to rest our case on quotations. It must be frankly acknowledged that Lenin’s formulations, written in the heat of polemics, were sometimes scattered and imprecise. Therefore, our main concern is to advance an in-depth exposition which captures the basic logical consistency of Lenin’s framework and its theoretical validity in analysing the essential material basis and substance of opportunism and the split within the proletariat in the era of imperialism.

#### A. MONOPOLY SUPERPROFITS AND BRIBERY

Lenin’s theoretical framework poses two main aspects of the labour aristocracy’s connection with imperialism. First, there is the category of *monopoly superprofits*, which provides the material basis for the existence of the labour aristocracy by creating the economic possibility of forging a relatively stable class-collaborationist alliance. Second, there is the relationship of *bribery*, which defines how this alliance between the monopoly bourgeoisie and the labour aristocracy is actually consummated. Both the theoretical category of superprofits and the more practical problem of bribery have often been understood simplistically.

Superprofits, for example, are often defined in an extremely narrow fashion which obscures the economic essence of the category. Based on a superficial reading of Lenin, it is argued that superprofits refer solely to the net proceeds from foreign investment and unequal trade relations, or even more narrowly to the profits generated from the exploitation of colonies and dependent nations. Although these sources of superprofits are extremely important for imperialism, the category cannot be limited solely to the realm of the export of capital. It can only be understood in relation to monopoly capital as a whole.

True, in polemics against reformist and national chauvinist attempts to distort the nature of imperialism, Lenin gave special emphasis to the enormous superprofits

generated from colonial exploitation and capital export, which were “obtained over and above the profits which capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their ‘own’ country ...”<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, it is quite clear that Lenin considered the *general* basis for appropriation of superprofits to be monopoly capital, whether it functioned in the branches of the imperialist state’s home economy or in foreign countries through export of capital. In *Imperialism*, for example, Lenin stated: “*The receipt of high monopoly profits by the capitalists in one of the numerous branches of industry, in one of the numerous countries, etc., makes it economically possible for them to bribe certain sections of the workers, for a time a fairly considerable minority of them, and win them to the side of the bourgeoisie of a given industry or given nation against all others.*”<sup>30</sup> (Emphasis added.)

Lenin also emphasised that *monopoly domination was the general source of superprofits* in his polemics against Kautsky’s illusionary position that the ending of England’s exclusive position in the world market would permit a return to conditions of competitive capitalism within England and a peaceful equilibrium to be achieved among the stronger capitalist powers. One implication of Kautsky’s position was that the privileges described by Engels were no longer possible for the upper strata of the English working class (or for similar strata in other capitalist countries). Against Kautsky’s tortuous attempts to evade the reality of monopoly capitalism, Lenin argued, first, that Kautsky blissfully ignored the intensification of England’s colonial monopoly, as well as the rise of smaller colonial empires controlled by several other “great” powers, all of which provided expanded superprofits. Second, Lenin demolished Kautsky’s assumption that once England’s world monopoly over industrial production had been undermined the significance of monopoly would be drastically reduced and superprofits would disappear. “England’s industrial monopoly was already destroyed by the end of the 19th century. That is beyond dispute”, Lenin wrote.

But *how* did this destruction take place? Did *all* monopoly disappear? If that were so, Kautsky’s “theory” of conciliation (with the opportunists) would to a certain extent be justified. But it is *not* so, and that is just the point. Imperialism *is* monopoly capitalism. Every cartel, trust, syndicate, every giant bank *is* a monopoly. Superprofits have not disappeared; they still remain.<sup>31</sup>

A key theoretical point underlying Lenin’s argument is that monopoly power can operate at different levels of capitalist economy: superprofits can be garnered by the monopoly firms within a branch of industry, by the strategic industries within a national economy, and by the strongest countries within the international capitalist system. “Just as among individual capitalists superprofits go to the one whose machinery is

superior to the average or who owns certain monopolies”, Lenin wrote, “so among nations the one that is economically better off than the others gets superprofits.”<sup>32</sup>

§ Hence, late 19th-century English capitalists secured superprofits by their joint monopoly of world industrial production and trade, even though there was sharp competition among manufacturers within England itself. The rise of mature industrial rivals in the US and Germany reduced, but did not totally foreclose, this source of superprofits. Moreover, it intensified competition at all levels of the capitalist system, which resulted in accelerated concentrations of capital and production, the formation of giant monopoly firms, the feverish drive for control of colonies and increased trade protectionism. The giant firms that were created at the turn of the century in all the major branches of industry in the advanced capitalist countries were protected (but not immune) from competitive pressure in their home markets and colonies due to their large scale of operations and financial strength.

Lenin recognised that these trends constituted a qualitative development of capitalism — the stage of monopoly capitalism — and that the basis for the appropriation of monopoly superprofits had qualitatively expanded.

The history of the last 80 years has shown that giant monopoly corporations have been able to extract superprofits on a steady basis over long periods. This has been accomplished by means of strict regulation of production, market apportionment, monopoly pricing, favoured access to credit, control of scientific research, export of capital and privileged connections with the state. As the scope of operation of these monopolies has been international, superprofits have been derived from all spheres of the world capitalist economy, on the basis of the exploitation of all strata of the working population.

The largest source of monopoly superprofits has been within the imperialist countries. Here, in the largest capitalist markets, monopoly power has drastically skewed the distribution of the total surplus value to the advantage of the largest corporations. The strongest firms cream off a large share of the profits of nonmonopoly enterprises and a portion of the value of the labour power of the working class, as well as appropriate the surplus value created by the labour of workers in the monopoly firms themselves.

Monopoly superprofits have also included a significant share of the value created by working people in the neocolonies and dependent nations. Significant superprofits are appropriated by purchasing labour power at a price below its value and by imposing unequal terms of trade. The latter mechanism permits monopoly capital to appropriate a share of the value produced by independent small commodity producers, as well as a share of the surplus value of national capitalists.

Since the enormous profits of monopolies determine the extent of the labour aristocracy, any theoretical formulation that arbitrarily restricts the general category of superprofits to only one of its sources will tend to underestimate the capacity of the bourgeoisie for bribery and will likewise underestimate the extent of the social basis for opportunism. In addition, the failure to distinguish between different sources of superprofits will prevent an understanding of the spontaneous political motion and contradictions within the labour aristocracy, whose various sections have particular relationships with different sections of monopoly capital, which at different times have varying capacities to engage in bribery. In fact, certain political differences among opportunist leaders, especially in the trade unions, can be directly attributed

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<sup>§</sup> Lenin's use of the category of superprofits is theoretically consistent with Marx's discussion of surplus profits and monopolies in *Capital*.<sup>33</sup> Marx demonstrated that competition between firms in the same branch of industry forms the social value of commodities, and that competition between branches of industry for more profitable use of capital *tends* to equalise rates of profit in different branches, forming an *average rate of profit* in the economy. In the era of competitive capitalism, profits above the average rate, i.e., surplus profits, were generally spasmodic and temporary. They were usually derived as a result of technological advances that enabled a capitalist to reduce costs below the industry average, or entrepreneurial skills that opened new markets. However, an abnormally high rate of profit by an individual firm, or in a particular branch of industry, was soon undermined by an inflow of capital seeking the higher rate of profit or by the relatively rapid adoption of cost cutting innovations by competitors.

However, Marx pointed out that if monopolies developed that created obstacles to the movement of capital, they would secure a surplus profit for a longer period by means of monopoly pricing (i.e., pricing above the price of production and social value of commodities). The monopoly price would transfer a part of the profit of other capitalists to the capitalist with the monopoly; and, in certain cases, would also transfer a part of the value of labour power of workers if the monopoly-priced commodity entered their necessary consumption. As a result, the owner of the monopoly would receive a *monopoly profit*, which is a category that includes the average profit, which goes to all capitalists on the principle of equal profit on equal capital, plus a monopoly surplus (or, in Lenin's terminology, "super") profit.

In the monopoly stage of capitalism, the tendency to form an average rate of profit still exists, since monopoly doesn't obliterate competition in the system as a whole. But it is modified by monopoly power. Therefore, the surplus value of society is distributed both according to size of capital through interindustry competition (which yields equal profit on equal capital as in competitive capitalism); and according to the level of monopolisation (which yields monopoly superprofits). Monopolies receive both the average profit and monopoly superprofit. Consequently, there arises the phenomenon of a relatively permanent hierarchy of profit rates ranging from the highest in the strategic industries with large-scale production and the strongest monopolies, to the lowest in weaker industries with small-scale production, intense competition and market instability. The actual composition of the firms in this hierarchy is not static, even at the upper monopoly end, since competition between monopoly firms and industries continues always, especially in the international arena.

to this unevenness. Finally, correctly linking superprofits to monopoly capital *as a whole* underscores the point that the labour aristocracy will be a permanent feature of the imperialist epoch. As Lenin's polemic with Kautsky implies, inter-imperialist competition (or, for that matter, the revolutionary withdrawal of markets from the imperialist system) may reduce monopoly superprofits quantitatively; however, they will qualitatively remain as the material basis for opportunism so long as monopoly capital exists.<sup>8</sup>

If the category of superprofits has been interpreted one-sidedly, the question of the "bribe" has been even more completely distorted. At the most vulgar level, bribery is understood in the everyday sense of the word, as if a relationship involving millions can be simply equated with some individual payoffs and betrayals. Certainly many labour leaders (the labour lieutenants of capital) have on more than one occasion been guilty of this kind of betrayal, but the turning point in the history of the labour movement can not be simply explained by the bad faith and weak character of individuals. The coherence of a social chauvinist trend in all the imperialist countries was not an accident; it was a historical development that proceeded regardless of the will of particular individuals. It reflected the bribery not merely of a handful of leaders, but of whole sections of the working class.

This conception of bribery as a mass social phenomenon runs throughout Lenin's writing. For example:

Marx also fought the working-class leaders who went astray. In the Federal Council, in 1872, a vote of censure was passed on Marx for saying that the British leaders had been bribed by the bourgeoisie. Of course, Marx did not mean this in the sense that certain people were traitors. That is nonsense. *He spoke about a bloc of a certain section of the workers with the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie supports this section of the workers directly and indirectly. That is the way in which it bribes them.*<sup>34</sup> (Emphasis added.)

Consequently, it is necessary to use the notion of bribery in a comprehensive manner, as indicated by Lenin's remarks to the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920:

Before the war, it was calculated that the three richest countries — Britain, France and Germany — got between eight and 10,000 million francs a year from the export of capital alone, apart from other sources.

It goes without saying that, out of this tidy sum, at least 500 million can be spent as a sop to the labour leaders and the labour aristocracy, i.e. on all sorts of bribes. The whole thing boils down to nothing but bribery. It is done in a thousand different ways: by increasing cultural facilities in the largest centres, by creating educational

institutions, and by providing cooperative, trade union, and parliamentary leaders with thousands of cushy jobs. This is done wherever present day civilised capitalist relations exist. It is these thousands of millions in superprofits that form the economic basis of opportunism in the working class movement.<sup>35</sup>

Obviously, Lenin had something more in mind here than simply higher wages or conspiratorial payoffs to top leaders. On the contrary, he describes nothing less than a whole system of economic, political and cultural concessions to the labour aristocracy and its representatives. Only this broad perspective on imperialist bribery allows any historically meaningful assessment of the protections afforded the upper strata of the working class.

Lenin himself had no illusions about the labour aristocracy's privileges. In economic terms, as Lenin observed time and again, sections of the working class comprising the labour aristocracy benefited from "tolerably good wages",<sup>36</sup> "better terms of employment",<sup>37</sup> exemption from "the burden of the worst paid and hardest work"<sup>38</sup> and relative immunity from "the problem of unemployment".<sup>39</sup> Politically, these sections enjoyed significant privileges, such as legal party and trade union institutions and access to the reformist levers of bourgeois-democratic government. Ideologically, the labour aristocracy was "most imbued with the narrow-minded craft spirit and with petty-bourgeois and imperialist prejudices".<sup>40</sup> Lenin emphasised the stark contrast between the relatively secure and stable condition of the bourgeoisified workers with the brutal poverty, harsh lives and political underdevelopment of the majority of the working class, i.e., the irregularly employed, the unorganised, immigrant labour, and those workers in agriculture and the backward branches of industry.

Although monopoly bribery is not the sole or original source of inequality and stratification within the working class, monopoly definitely provides the bourgeoisie with the capacity to qualitatively reinforce these other divisions, create new differentials, and divert spontaneous struggles into reformist channels that

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<sup>8</sup> Since monopoly capital, with all its monopoly mechanisms and accompanying monopoly distortions, has become so thoroughly dominant and generalised, its workings no longer appear extraordinary but rather "normal"; accordingly superprofits no longer seem "super". In addition, the superprofits generated from "overseas" have become associated with the all-sided oppression of the colonies and semicolonies and the brutalising extraction of absolute surplus value. These associations at the phenomenal level have contributed to the common narrow conception of superprofits and to the inevitable "common sense" conclusion that they are declining drastically as imperialism's colonial empire shrinks. In fact the great majority of overseas US investments are made in Europe, not the neocolonies.

disproportionately benefit certain sections of the working class over others.

At a certain point, the more astute members of the bourgeoisie recognised that the proletariat “can neither be brushed aside nor suppressed by brute force. It must be demoralised from within, by *buying* its top section”.<sup>41</sup> In 19th-century capitalism, this was an exceptional tactic. With the advent of imperialism, however, bribery became a more general policy of the monopoly bourgeoisie, indeed, a political necessity! Just as the bourgeoisie contends for the support of the peasantry in countries where capitalism is primitive, so in advanced capitalist countries, in which the size of the petit bourgeoisie has sharply declined, the bourgeoisie consciously struggles for influence over sections of the proletariat itself. Ideological influence stemming from spontaneous bourgeois prejudices among the workers — even when reinforced by bourgeois propaganda — is insufficient to guarantee the bourgeoisie’s political hegemony within the workers’ movement; therefore the necessity of a material system of bribery and reinforcement.

To sum up: In the imperialist era, superprofits provide the monopoly bourgeoisie with the capacity to purchase a degree of social peace in the imperialist countries, though this is naturally dependent on the ebbs and flows of the accumulation process. The leading sections of the bourgeoisie are class conscious and have learned the necessity of pursuing a strategy of bribery in order to disorganise and neutralise the working-class movement. In carrying out this strategy of bribery, the bourgeoisie has utmost flexibility in determining which contradictions within the working class it will play upon. Lastly, it should go without saying that the bourgeoisie only concedes what the level of class struggle, the political maturity and organised strength of the working-class movement require it to. This inevitably affects the forms and extent of bribery.

## **B. COMPOSITION OF THE LABOUR ARISTOCRACY**

Although Lenin did not attempt to identify, with any great precision, which sections of the working class constituted the labour aristocracy, it is possible to find different comments in which this or that aspect of the stratum is emphasised. In the main, he tended to use the term “labor aristocracy” almost interchangeably with the concept “upper strata of the working class” (though in some cases a subtle distinction can be detected), both of which he described variously as the “thin upper crust” or “top of the labour movement.”<sup>§</sup>

Following Engels, Lenin generally included the skilled industrial workers and their unions in the labour aristocracy, but he also included additional groupings at different points in his writings: members of the trade union and social-democratic party

apparatuses (the “labour bureaucracy”), office employees, workers in “privileged” branches of industry, producers of luxury commodities, etc. In one example, Lenin appeared to say that the corrupted minority could be numerically quite large, including the bulk of organised workers in England during its most prosperous period in the 19th century and in Germany immediately before World War I (which would amount to approximately one-fifth of the proletariat in each of these countries).<sup>42</sup>

In order to bring some theoretical coherence to these assorted characterisations, we will first advance the general criteria for including various sectors of the working class in the labour aristocracy, and then examine several particular aspects of the problem: skilled job monopolies, unionisation, etc.

### **Some general considerations**

The particular composition of the labour aristocracy can only be analysed from the standpoint of Lenin’s theoretical framework. The key point is that the labour aristocracy is an *objective* social grouping. In the most general sense, the labour aristocracy includes those sections of the working class that are the main beneficiaries of monopoly bribery. However, the labour aristocracy’s relatively advantaged position doesn’t negate its essential class status; members of the labour aristocracy are still exploited by capital. Thus, in a fundamental sense, the labour aristocracy’s *class interest* is identical to that of the proletariat as a whole.

But the key point is that the labour aristocracy also has a distinct *sectoral interest* stemming from *reformist concessions on the basis of monopoly superprofits*; consequently it has an immediate interest in maintaining its privileged position and its “special relationship” with monopoly capital.

Thus, this stratum’s specially protected status — within the framework of its exploitation — is tied to the fortunes of the monopoly bourgeoisie, to the expanded accumulation of capital, and to imperialist domination of the oppressed nations. (This situation is obviously an anomaly in the essential and general relationship of the proletariat to capital.) The labour aristocracy’s privileges provide fertile soil for bourgeois notions of reality to take root, thereby “spontaneously” obscuring the class interest of these privileged workers. (This contradiction between class interest and sectoral interest accounts for the particular form of “false consciousness” characteristic of the labour aristocracy — that the partial and selfish interests of this stratum are viewed as representing the interests of the working class as a whole.)

There exists absolutely no predetermined guarantee that the underlying class interest of the labour aristocracy will win out over its narrow, privileged (opportunist) interest. The actual resolution of this contradictory tension within the labour

aristocracy can only be determined in the course of the actual class struggle. On the level of individual workers from the upper strata, the decisive factor, of course, is the degree of class consciousness. Undoubtedly, some workers will not be won away from a proletarian outlook by the concessions won from the hands of the bourgeoisie; others, however, will surely surrender their class interest “for a mess of pottage”. As Lenin wrote,

Neither we nor anyone else can calculate precisely what portion of the proletariat is following and will follow the social chauvinists and opportunists. This will be revealed only by the struggle, it will be definitely decided only by the socialist revolution.<sup>43</sup>

However, as a thorough materialist, Lenin wasn't so naive as to restrict his analysis and politics to the theoretical logic of the matter. The whole thrust of Lenin's writings on the labour aristocracy is that *historically* a large portion of this stratum, whatever the efforts of the communists to forge class consciousness, has in fact moved politically, time and again, on the basis of its narrow opportunist interest against the class interest of the proletariat as a whole and can be expected to continue to do so; that it has allowed bourgeois concessions to function as “*an instrument of deception and corruption*”.<sup>44</sup> From the standpoint of Marxist social science, the essential point is the generalised *mass* phenomenon; thus, it is the actual historical role of the labour aristocracy that must be the decisive guide in determining its role and function in the political strategy for proletarian revolution.

Of course, it is not accidental which sections of the proletariat have historically played this aristocratic role: it has been the upper strata of workers, i.e., those with the greatest economic and political leverage resulting from their strategic role in capitalist production and often their advanced level of organisation. These are the workers the bourgeoisie has been most anxious to coopt through bribery; and among whom it has most often succeeded.

The stratification between the labour aristocracy and the rest of the class is *distinct* from the numerous other stratifications which fragment the proletariat;

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<sup>43</sup> Lenin's concern in using the concept of labour aristocracy was to emphasise the link between imperialism and opportunism within the working class, not in establishing a general “blueprint” for determining the composition of the aristocracy at any particular time. Thus his use of the term is sometimes imprecise as to who is included. As well, Lenin sometimes uses “labour aristocracy” as if it describes the opportunist political trend in the workers' movement rather than its objective social base in the upper strata of the class. The main thrust of his writings, however, is to use labour aristocracy to mean the objectively privileged upper strata of the working class (not all of whose members, of course, support opportunist politics) and we follow that usage in this article.

therefore, grasping its *particularity* is crucial. The distinguishing characteristic of this stratification is that it matures in, and is directly linked to, the monopoly stage of capitalism — the capacity of imperialism consistently and systematically to produce monopoly superprofits and, as a consequence, bribe sections of the working class. The bribe takes the form of all-sided concessions (not exclusively economic, i.e. higher wages) whose effect is to allow a section of the proletariat to struggle with capital for its own sectoral interests *on more favourable grounds*, with a degree of leverage not enjoyed by other strata of the class (who usually constitute the majority). This sets the basis for the growth of a *mature form of opportunism* among the labour aristocracy where their essentially privileged situation vis-a-vis capital is thoroughly obscured by surface phenomena.

This opportunism takes many forms. We witness the phenomenon of workers from the labour aristocracy attributing their gains solely to their own superior organisation, “toughness”, even intelligence! — losing sight of the fact that the *major part* of their favourable situation stems from the fact that the imperialist bourgeoisie has the capacity and inclination “to grant them” more favorable terms upon which “to bargain”. Their false consciousness becomes even more insidious when they develop the notion that they have a “birthright” (although the proletariat is a revolutionary class precisely because it has no birthright whatsoever!) to their stable conditions of life from “tradition”, from the fact they are from “civilised nations”, that they are “upstanding, god fearing men” (as opposed to the “coloureds”, “foreigners” and “womenfolk” who clutter up the under-layers of the class). Such mythology obscures the fact that their capacity to wrench concessions from “their capitalists” is inextricably linked to the fact that the international proletariat and large sections of their own proletariat are brutally exploited by imperialism (oftentimes by the very same capitalists!).

The other noteworthy particularity of this stratification is that its size and location are directly affected by the twists and turns of imperialism’s development and crisis. The decisive factor in this process is the bourgeoisie’s ability to engage in monopoly bribery. Sections of the working class will gain or lose aristocratic privileges depending on the *overall course* of imperialist development and the class struggle. In periods of relative prosperity the labour aristocracy will expand, incorporating new sections of the working class; in periods of crisis the labour aristocracy will narrow and its component parts will alter. In theoretical terms, this is the essential particularity of the labour aristocracy as the central stratification within the proletariat in the era of imperialism.

However, Lenin did not leave the theoretical matter at hand at this level of abstraction. Nor can we. The bourgeoisie does not, and cannot, simply announce

its plans to *arbitrarily* promote sections of the proletariat to a position of relative aristocratic privilege, to expand and contract this stratum at will, etc. The social category of the “labour aristocracy” can only express itself concretely in real life by seizing upon previously existing stratifications within the proletariat, enveloping them, incorporating them, transforming them in the process. Furthermore the phenomena are not static. As capitalism develops, various changes in the social and technical division of labour occur; also various social relations within and between classes alter and transform. As a result the concrete *component parts* of the labour aristocracy can change from one period to another.

The dialectical enigma which continues to stump mechanical materialists is as follows: the category of the “labour aristocracy” can not be grasped concretely simply in its abstract economic and political connections with imperialism; it must be understood in its *component parts* from one country and period to another — yet the labour aristocracy is *not the sum total of its component parts* ascertained by an established checklist; its *essence* remains the general reality — that section of the proletariat bribed by monopoly superprofits in the era of imperialism.

Specifically therefore the labour aristocracy intersects and overlaps with a number of diverse stratifications (each with its own distinct nature and laws of motion) within a particular proletariat — divisions based upon the labour process (skilled and unskilled), the competition for work (employed and unemployed), the degree of bargaining power with the capitalists (organised and unorganised), geographical differences, as well as national, racial, religious, and sexual forms of oppression. Imperialism qualitatively transforms the various advantages and protections of the already existing upper strata, creating a labour aristocracy, which is reflected politically in the cohering of various opportunist tendencies into a mature, all-sided, “social-chauvinist”, “social-imperialist” trend.

With this theoretical framework and perspective we are better equipped to interact with Lenin’s extensive writings on this matter and understand the logic of why he included certain groupings as the component parts of the labour aristocracy. In the early decades of the century, the categories of skilled workers, trade unions, office employees, etc., all had two features in common: First their specific production role and relationship to monopoly capital objectively placed many workers in the upper strata of the working class; second, these “aristocratically-weighted categories” combined made up the bulk of the constituency of the bourgeois labour parties of the Second International. Workers falling into several of these categories (which obviously are not mutually exclusive) were much more likely to support the opportunist alliance with the imperialist bourgeoisie, for example, union officials representing the craft

workers in the cartelised industries.

In analysing the labour aristocracy today, it is evident that all the social categories mentioned by Lenin have undergone important changes in the advanced capitalist countries. These changes have resulted from developments in the forces of production, changes in the social and technical divisions of labour, and the expanded organisation of the working class movements. Some obvious examples include: the steady differentiation over the past 50 years among office employees into those entering skilled professions and the masses of low-skilled clericals; the more restricted role of skilled labour in manufacturing and the expansion of “semiskilled” categories; and the expansion of the trade union movement beyond the crafts to include broad based industrial unions. Despite the numerous changes in the features and profile of the working class, it cannot be denied that the proletariat has not become a single, homogenous mass and shows no signs of becoming such. More importantly, in every imperialist country there still exists an aristocratic stratum that bargains with capital in comparatively privileged and protected terms and provides the social base for opportunism within the workers’ movement. This is the reality, and the centrepiece of Lenin’s theory, which gets lost and obscured amid the eclecticism and debates over the “outmoded” elements of Lenin’s “definition” of the labour aristocracy.

### **Skilled workers and trade unions**

One of the most common mechanical distortions of Lenin’s theory has been a dogmatic sociology that equates the labour aristocracy at all times with the skilled craft workers. From this premise, it has been a short step to conclude that the concept has lost all meaning and current-day relevance in advanced capitalist countries, since skilled manual workers are a small and declining section of the industrial proletariat, and their economic status is now closer to that of the mass of “semiskilled” industrial workers. This view has gained particularly widespread currency in the communist movement and has been the single most important theoretical obstacle to a scientific application of Lenin’s essential theory to the new phenomena of monopoly capitalism after World War II.

The essential error of this view is that it totally collapses two different categories of analysis, each of which has its own particular features and laws of motion. The labour aristocracy, as we have noted earlier, is a category mainly determined by monopoly bribery — the economic and political concessions made by the bourgeoisie to create a privileged upper stratum of the working class. The expansion and contradiction of this labour aristocracy is determined by the motion of imperialism — the interplay of interimperialist rivalry, national liberation struggles, periodic economic crises, etc.

On the other hand, the category of skilled workers is determined mainly by a specific role in the production process itself, and its membership is determined mainly by those laws of motion which affect the development of the forces of production and the division of function within the production process itself.<sup>§</sup>

Theoretically, then, these two categories do not inevitably coincide; monopoly bribery can hardly be limited to skilled industrial workers (as Engels, in fact, observed in the case of the 19th century English factory hands), while in periods of economic crisis or war, bribery may not even be extended to significant numbers of the skilled workers. In short, theoretical rigour demands that these categories not be collapsed into one. Having made this crucial theoretical clarification, however, the concrete historical relationship between skilled workers and the labour aristocracy must be examined, for it is undoubtedly accurate that historically, the upper strata of skilled workers, especially those who have developed trade union organisations, have formed the most stable core of the labour aristocracy, as compared with other sections of the work force who may enter the labour aristocracy in relatively exceptional periods of prosperity. At root, this phenomenon is a classic example of how monopoly capitalism seizes upon a stratification that exists in the working class due to the nature of the productive process and transforms it into a division of profound political significance for the working-class movement.

In its historically concrete development, the specific stratification of the working class into skilled and unskilled workers has lent itself particularly well to such a transformation. Due to the additional costs of training skilled labour, the value of skilled labour power is higher than the value of unskilled labour power, yielding from the outset to differentiation in wages in favour of skilled workers. Of crucial importance, skilled labour taken collectively also has definite advantage over unskilled labour in its constant battle with capital over the price of labour power. This advantage stems from the fact that at any given time, only a small portion of the reserve army of labour has the qualifications to engage in specific crafts and thus to provide that lever of competition among workers that drives wages down. For this reason, the spontaneous combinations of skilled workers — *craft unions* — had the most favorable conditions to win economic and political concessions from capital. Such unions also had an immediate interest in further restricting competition by limiting access to training or other measures, thus creating extremely favorable conditions for a narrow, sectoral consciousness to develop among the skilled workers. Clearly, such factors made the grouping of skilled workers extremely attractive for capital to transform it into and maintain it as a labour aristocracy in the era of imperialism.

In short, by its very nature, the spontaneous organisation of skilled workers acted

to protect the security of the skilled workmen at the expense of other strata of the working class. Further, the exclusionary process intersected with racial, national, religious and sexual forms of oppression to produce skilled workforces with chauvinist interests in common with the bourgeoisie.<sup>§</sup>

However, the rise of monopoly capitalism provided a qualitatively stronger material basis for the bourgeoisie to *consolidate* its alliance with the skilled workers and their unions. Monopoly provided the capacity to make increased concessions; the general advance of the workers' movement provided the incentive to the bourgeoisie to split off a section of the proletariat. From the bourgeoisie's viewpoint, the skilled workers represented the decisive section of the proletariat to win as allies; they were a relatively small stratum with strategic significance in production; they were often suspicious and even hostile to the mass of their fellow workers, but still influential over them. Thus, monopoly capital in the imperialist countries was willing to concede certain prerogatives to the skilled workers that seemed historically unavoidable, such as unionisation "rights", control over entry to the trades, and substantially higher wages. In exchange, the skilled stratum saw its future in collaboration with monopoly capital.

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<sup>§</sup> The laws of motion shaping the differentiation of labour into skilled and unskilled were comprehensively addressed by Marx in *Capital*. Marx demonstrated that the development of the forces of production inevitably gives rise to the need for skilled labour, while the intersection of this development with the production relations of capitalism tends to steadily replace skilled labour with unskilled labour while continually bringing new types of skilled labour into existence. This process produces the phenomenon of *occupational stratification*, which is continually transformed by the progress of capitalist production. Marx identified the stages of development of this stratification quite clearly in *Capital*. In the stage of manufacture, the combined workforce under capitalist control, i.e., the "collective labourer", carries out the production functions that once belonged to each individual artisan in the more primitive stage of handicraft production. These functions are subdivided among a mass of detail labourers in the capitalist factory, and there "develops a hierarchy of labour powers, to which there corresponds a scale of wages".<sup>45</sup> Marx continues:

Manufacture begets, in every handicraft that it seizes upon, a class of so-called unskilled labourers, a class which handicraft strictly excluded. If it develops a one-sided specialty into a perfection, at the expense of the whole of a man's working capacity, it also begins to make a specialty of the absence of all development. *Alongside of the hierarchic gradation there steps the simple separation of the labourers into skilled and unskilled*. For the latter, the cost of apprenticeship vanishes; for the former, it diminishes, compared with that of artificers, in consequence of the functions being simplified.<sup>46</sup> (Emphasis added.)

In the following stage of machinery and modern industry, this process is extended and intensified:

The transformation of the skilled upper stratum into the core section of the labour aristocracy is the expression of the historical dialectic of a newly arisen stratification (social category) appropriating and altering the quality of a previously developed stratification. In concrete political terms it was the transformation of narrow craft trade unionism into all-sided collaboration with the imperialist bourgeoisie. In *What Is To Be Done?* Lenin had pointed out that trade unionism, though historically progressive, was essentially reformist because it limited the working class to bargaining for better terms

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Hence, in the place of the hierarchy of specialised workmen that characterises manufacture, there steps, in the automatic factory, a tendency to equalise and reduce to one and the same level every kind of work that has to be done by the minders of machines; in the place of the artificially produced differentiation of the detail workmen, step the natural differences of age and sex.<sup>47</sup>

As the mass of workers become machine operatives and attendants, the category of skilled workers, “whose occupation it is to look after the whole of the machinery and repair it from time to time,” becomes “numerically unimportant”. Further, these mechanics and kindred workers are “a superior class of workmen, some of them scientifically educated, others brought up to a trade; it is distinct from the factory operative class and merely aggregated to it”.<sup>48</sup>

It has also become evident in the 20th century that these historical tendencies affect not just the industrial proletariat, but also the masses of workers exploited by commercial and bank capital as well those in the “service” sectors of the economy. Marx was not unaware of this phenomenon, even in its embryonic stage. Thus, in Marx’s discussion of commercial capital, he writes:

The commercial workers, in the strict sense of the term, belong to the better-paid class of wage-workers — to those whose labour is classed as skilled and stands above average labour. Yet the wage tends to fall, even in relation to average labour, with the advances of the capitalist mode of production. This is due partly to the division of labour in the office ... Secondly, because the necessary training, knowledge of commercial practices, languages, etc., is more and more rapidly, easily universally and cheaply reproduced with the progress of science and public education the more the capitalist mode of production directs teaching methods, etc., towards practical purposes ... With few exceptions, the labour power of these people is therefore devaluated with the progress of capitalist production.<sup>49</sup>

The particular tendencies that predominated in earlier periods of capitalist development do not disappear, but rather emerge in more backward sections of industry that are being transformed, or appear — often in new forms — in new branches of the economy or old industries that are being reconstituted on a new technological basis. The general trend is to displace labour by machines, or automatic machine or flow processes. However, the specific natures of different production processes mean that this trend will unfold unevenly and with effects that temporarily counteract it. This is the phenomenon of technological advance bringing new categories of skilled labour into existence, which then eventually undergo a process of devaluation similar to the older skilled categories.

in the sale of its labour power and tended to eschew the political struggle for socialism (for state power).<sup>51</sup> Lenin's later criticisms of trade unionism in the imperialist countries were even sharper: the trade unions were guilty of engaging in reformism on a thoroughly *opportunist* basis, i.e., they allied politically with the imperialist bourgeoisie in order to secure concessions for a minority of the working class. Thus, in *'Left-Wing' Communism*, Lenin contrasted the weakness of the labour opportunists in the Russian unions, who had "only" the backward qualities characteristic of narrow craft unionism, with the strength of opportunism in the imperialist countries. There opportunism had "acquired a much firmer footing in the trade unions; there the *craft union, narrow minded, selfish, case-hardened, covetous, and petty-bourgeois 'labour aristocracy', imperialist-minded, and imperialist-corrupted*, has developed into a much stronger section than in our country".<sup>52, §</sup>

This phenomenon reflected the objective historical *intersection* of craft unionism with monopoly bribery, which transformed the skilled industrial stratum in the imperialist countries into an aristocratic stratum in the Leninist sense of the term. At the same time, it must be reemphasised that while skilled workers (and their craft unions) have certain features which allow them to become and be sustained as a core component of the labour aristocracy, theoretically the labour aristocracy cannot be equated with skilled workers and craft unions. In periods of prosperity, benefits can be extended far beyond skilled craft workers, especially to workers who have some form of trade union organisation.

While monopoly over skill and the organisation of craft unions is the most classic method of exacting concessions from capital, other methods have historically been effective as well, particularly in periods of imperialist stability when the bourgeoisie has important reserves available for bribery. Thus, in certain periods key benefits of monopoly bribery are extended to the organised workers in general, or even to sectors of unorganised workers. (For example, at times, formally nonunionised public workers were a key component of the labour aristocracy, protected through extensive patronage systems; other times, like today, formally unorganised "proletarianised professionals" have become important parts of the labour aristocracy.)

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<sup>§</sup> In the US, craft unionism used the historically developed forms of oppression as weapons to further restrict competition. In the most general sense, this was accomplished by refusing to organise on an industrial basis, since the vast majority of minority, foreign-born and women workers were concentrated in unskilled and "semiskilled" jobs. Particular barriers were imposed by Jim Crow constitutional clauses and other entry restrictions. An important difference must be noted, in the type of exclusion practiced against Black workers compared with other social groupings. *Not only were Black workers excluded from the craft unions, they*

### C. THE LEADERSHIP OF THE LABOUR ARISTOCRACY

Probably the most common method of narrowing the labour aristocracy as a social stratum to the point where it barely casts a shadow over the rest of the proletariat is to reduce it to a few high-paid labour leaders, or at the most the “labor bureaucracy”. This approach neatly solves the problem of opportunism in the labour movement by theoretical sleight of hand: it portrays the rank and file as spontaneously revolutionary, or at least spontaneously antimonopoly; while it tends to dismiss the opportunist leaders as misleaders without a base. Unfortunately, this viewpoint has little in common with reality, and through oversimplifications serves to trivialise the scope and extent of the problem.

Of course, Lenin clearly distinguished between the rank and file of the labour aristocracy and its opportunist leadership, but he also identified the relationship between these two categories. In *‘Left-Wing’ Communism*, he precisely defined the connection, the unity:

[England’s] exclusive position [between 1852 and 1892] led to the emergence, from the “masses”, of a semi-petty-bourgeois, opportunist “labour aristocracy”. The *leaders of this labour aristocracy* were constantly going over to the bourgeoisie, and were directly or indirectly on its payroll ... Present-day (20th-century) imperialism has given a few advanced countries an exceptionally privileged position, which, everywhere in the Second International, has produced a certain type of traitor, opportunist, and social-chauvinist leaders, *who champion the interests of their own craft, their own section of the labour aristocracy*.<sup>53</sup>

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were deliberately driven out of the skilled positions they occupied. As described by labour historian Philip Foner:

During the 1880s and early 1890s, Negro labour in Southern cities was important in railroading, shipping, and building. Beginning in the late 1890s, the Negro workers in Southern cities were steadily eliminated from skilled jobs as a result of a deliberate conspiracy between employers and the craft unions. By refusing to admit Negro members and by preventing union members from working with men who were not in the union, these organisations gradually pushed Negro workers out of skilled positions they had held formerly. Where Negro craftsmen were organised in separate, Jim Crow locals, they received little or no assistance from the city central labour bodies, composed of white men ... The skilled place held by the members of the Negro local were eyed jealously by the white craft unions ... The national unions to which the Jim Crow locals were affiliated, refused to protect their jobs or wage scales.

The substitution of formal apprenticeship training, controlled by the craft unions, for “picking up” the trade was an important factor in limiting the opportunities for Negroes in the skilled trades. Employers and unions conspired to confine apprenticeships to whites ...<sup>50</sup>

The differences were both economic and political: Economically, the opportunist leaders controlled and benefited from membership in a bureaucratic apparatus that provided “lucrative and soft jobs in the government ... or on the management councils of no less respectable and ‘bourgeois law-abiding’ trade unions ...”<sup>54</sup> These occupations, usually divorced from direct production, provided a style of life similar to that of the *petit bourgeoisie* or the professions of the “middle strata.” Politically, the opportunist leaders represented the conscious headquarters of the opportunist trend; they deliberately bargained with the bourgeoisie for favours that insured not merely their own personal positions (in the careerist sense), but strengthened the position of the labour aristocracy as a whole. (Of course, this latter role was more the province of the top party and trade union functionaries than leaders of particular unions who were primarily concerned with the privileges of “their” section of the labour aristocracy.)

These differences between the official leadership and the rank and file provide more than sufficient basis for the development of numerous contradictions between the two, sometimes quite sharp. For example, in explaining the German party’s support for the war, Lenin wrote:

As is the case with any organisation, the united will of this mass organisation was expressed *only* through its united political centre, the “handful”, who betrayed socialism. It was this handful who were asked to express their opinion; it was this handful who were called upon to vote ... the masses were not consulted ... The masses could not act in an organised fashion because their previously created organisation ... had betrayed them.<sup>55</sup>

Control of the centralised bureaucratic apparatus can be a powerful factor in any political struggle. This has been proven in a number of arenas and trade unions are no exception. Certainly the capacity of corrupted “labour lieutenants of capital” to maintain themselves in power is closely linked to their control of the bureaucracy. Yet

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<sup>54</sup> This process took place in the United States between the early 1880s and 1900. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) was founded in 1881 as a militant organisation of narrow craft unions. Within a decade the AFL had moved to conservative economic positions and open hostility toward socialism. The period from 1895 to 1901 saw the rise of monopoly capitalism, the purge of Black workers from the skilled trades, and the complete degeneration of the AFL, into conscious and systematic class collaboration under the leadership of Gompers. This new aristocratic role was most vividly shown by the AFL’s support for the US government’s turn of the century imperialist ventures in the Philippines and the Caribbean, as well as the top trade union leaders’ membership in the National Civic Federation (an organisation founded to promote class partnership and dominated by the monopoly bourgeoisie).

the contradiction does not reside principally in the nature of the bureaucracy itself. This is a crucial theoretical point commonly misunderstood.

The labour bureaucracy is a distinct social category, developed and framed historically. In the most general sense, it is a product of two historical trends: (1) the necessity at a certain point to centralise administration and leadership of complex, nationwide mass working class organisations, a phenomenon that is historically progressive; (2) the objective limitations that capitalism places upon democracy in general, which produces a tendency to separate the leading functionaries from accountability to their base; a phenomenon that will be overcome only in the course of building communism.<sup>§</sup> As Lenin wrote”

Under capitalism, democracy is restricted, cramped, curtailed, mutilated by all the conditions of wage slavery, and the poverty and misery of the people. This and this alone is the reason why the functionaries of our political organisations and trade unions are corrupted — or rather tend to be corrupted — by the conditions of capitalism and betray a tendency to become bureaucrats, i.e., privileged persons divorced from the people and standing *above* the people.

That is the *essence of* bureaucracy; and until the capitalists have been expropriated and the bourgeoisie overthrown, *even* proletarian functionaries will inevitably be “bureaucratised” to a certain extent.<sup>56</sup>

Clearly then there is a form of opportunism which spontaneously flows from the nature of the bureaucracy itself, the impulse toward individual corruption and class collaboration. This form of opportunism has reached somewhat spectacular proportions in the US labour movement where union leaders with six-figure incomes, association of certain union leaders with organised crime, aggrandisement of pension funds, etc. are commonplace. Nevertheless, the scale and prospects of this form of opportunism are circumscribed by a number of factors: the level one occupies in the union bureaucracy; the relative poverty or wealth of the work force being “serviced”; the degree of power, familiarity and interpenetration the union enjoys with the capitalists, and government, etc.

In addition, this type of corruption which the bourgeoisie has become quite expert at exposing, has also served to obscure the “mature” opportunism of the labour lieutenants of capital which is an opportunism of an altogether different quality. This “mature” opportunism certainly rests upon control of the union bureaucratic apparatus and intersects with the petty opportunism of an army of corrupt and lazy functionaries. And imperialism itself transforms the union bureaucracy into the leading section of the labour aristocracy. However, mature opportunism does not, in fact, inherently require personal corruption. Similar to “mature” industrial capital, it

can be “respectable” (in the narrow sense of the term). The opportunism associated with the labour aristocracy, personified in its leaders, is essentially a political and ideological alliance with monopoly capital (on all the basic questions) in return for a degree of relative privilege vis-a-vis the rest of the proletariat (domestically and internationally). In short, it consists of basic loyalty to capitalism spiced with struggle for the sectoral interests of the labour aristocracy.

Therefore it is a theoretical error, as serious as it is commonplace, to reduce the essence of a mature, opportunist *political trend* in the era of imperialism to simply a large-scale expression of “bureaucratic interests”. The massive trade union bureaucracy, like all bureaucracies, can not exist (in any extended sense) on its own; it is directly connected to the economic and political requirements of the workforce it is set up to serve. Consequently, try as some may, the labour lieutenants of capital can not be so neatly separated from the mass of workers who constitute the labour aristocracy. The power and persistence of the opportunist leadership can not be attributed principally to their scheming and conniving manipulation of the bureaucracy (although they are certainly skilled at this), but rather to the *unity* they maintain with their rank and file in being able to return from the negotiating table “with the goods” — a unity forged on the basis of opportunism, on the basis of placing the narrow sectoral interests of the relatively privileged strata over the interests of the whole proletariat.

As a political trend, then, opportunism includes leadership and rank and file organised around a specific political line and ideological outlook. The conscious leadership, centred in the labour bureaucracy, represents the sectoral interests of the labour aristocracy and its specific sections, not merely the interests of the bureaucracy. The labour aristocracy includes significant sections of the rank and file. The objective position of these workers is expressed, subjectively, in political support for opportunist leaders and their policies. Naturally, the extent of this support ebbs and flows and is determined by the extent of privileges conceded by monopoly capital, as well as the ability of the left to build and strengthen a class-struggle trend in the class.

We want to stress again that it in no way follows from this that all individual members of the upper strata — including the trade union officialdom itself — necessarily do or will support opportunist politics. Their fundamental class interests provide the countervailing material basis to reject the “mess of pottage”. However, the key point is that this stand does *not flow spontaneously* from their position in the more protected strata of the class; it is thoroughly bound up with their broader

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<sup>8</sup> One thing the Polish crisis illustrates is that this problem does not even get solved “automatically” under socialism and could result in sharp struggle and upheaval.

political exposure and class consciousness; and is settled in the final analysis in the actual politics of the class struggle beyond its narrow, trade union boundaries.

This point of theory is of particular importance to the immediate political practice of communists who work in sections of the labour aristocracy. When this aristocratic stratum expresses opposition to its own leadership, this phenomenon must be examined closely and not simply hailed as an expression of “militance” in the abstract. Discord between the base of the labour aristocracy and its leadership need not automatically signal a break by the rank and file with the politics of opportunism, but can (and more often does) reflect disenchantment with the ability of a particular leadership to effectively “champion” its aristocratic privileges. Tactically this phenomenon may provide important opportunities for the communists to penetrate the ranks of the labour aristocracy (itself no small accomplishment!) and strengthen the class-struggle pole (also often an enterprise wrought with danger and violence). Yet the real situation can not be romanticised. Even substantial progress on the narrow terrain of militant trade unionism will not complete the political and ideological work of the left. In fact, at times it may only position the communists to begin such work! Confronting the narrow self-interests; the bourgeois illusions; the pro-imperialist sentiments; the national, racial, and sexual chauvinism, etc. — this is the work and *struggle*, not merely with the “leaders” but among the rank and file as well. In short, the task of bringing sections of the labour aristocracy to real class consciousness (not merely trade union militance) will be an extremely difficult and protracted undertaking and will inevitably require a split, not only between the workers and opportunist leaders but right within the ranks itself. Communists who refuse to face this reality have not yet either taken off their rose-coloured glasses or had them ripped off by events in the class struggle itself.

#### D. THE LABOUR ARISTOCRACY AND THE LOWER STRATA: ANTAGONISM AND INFLUENCE

The complex and shifting relationship of the labour aristocracy to the lower strata of the working class is an axis around which much of the “politics” within the workers’ movement oscillates. In the main the relationship is one of antagonism. The labour aristocracy as a distinct stratum of the working class has, in Lenin’s words, “deserted” to the bourgeoisie. This is not simply the case of certain workers “overlooking” the demands of other strata, or one-sidedly giving the bulk of their attention to the most immediate struggles between themselves and their employers; such shortcomings are inevitably found, to one or another degree, in all strata of the working class. Rather, the problem with the labour aristocracy is that it actually *allies*, in the economic,

political, and the ideological struggle, *with* the bourgeoisie and “*against* the mass of the proletariat”, domestically and internationally.

This alliance takes a variety of forms, country to country, but leads directly in all imperialist countries to a distinct antagonism between the labour aristocracy and the lower strata of the proletariat. Economically, the labour aristocracy fights bitterly to maintain its exclusive access to certain jobs and to restrict the main burden of unemployment as much as possible to the lower strata of the class. Ideologically, the aristocracy supplies a choir that sings hosannas to the harmony of interest between labour and capital, the importance of patriotism above all else, and the eternal superiority of the capitalist system. Politically, this stratum supports in the concrete the foreign policy of imperialism as well as its political institutions of class rule; and it fights tooth and nail to defend and perpetuate the unequal stratifications among workers (from which it benefits handsomely) along the lines of race, nationality, or sex. In charting this selfish course, the labour aristocracy inevitably comes into direct conflict with the basic interests, if not the active political movement, of the lower strata of the working class in its own country as well as of workers and oppressed peoples worldwide. In many situations, such conflict erupts into open, even violent, struggle.

However, such clear-cut and open struggle is obviously not the “constant” feature of the relation between the labour aristocracy and the lower strata; in fact in certain periods it may be difficult to detect at all. Since the labour aristocracy coincides with the most organised sections of the class with the longest tradition of unionism, it emerges as the “natural” spokesman for labour — and is viewed that way not only by itself and the bourgeoisie but by large sections of the working class, including the most oppressed strata who often have neither sufficient economic clout nor political franchise “to be heard”. In fact for extended periods, the labour aristocracy has been able to exercise political leadership over the entire working class, leading to the hegemony of opportunism in the workers’ movement. During such periods it is the “influence” and not the “antagonism” between the labour aristocracy and the rest of the class which comes to the fore.

What is the material basis for this odd phenomenon?

The main basis is that the entire working class, not just the labour aristocracy, is affected by the general conditions of monopoly capitalism and bourgeois-democratic political life in the imperialist countries. Because of this, the benefits and privileges from monopoly capitalism are not and cannot be totally confined to the labour aristocracy. This is especially the case in periods of general prosperity, as Engels noted about late 19th-century England when the lower strata of the class shared with

the labour aristocracy, granted to a limited extent, the benefits from rapid capital accumulation and world capitalist hegemony. In this situation, the ideological element of the “promise” of bettering one’s life, of advancing to the status, if not the position, of the labour aristocracy creates a certain bond between the lower strata and the more privileged workers.

Certainly relative to the masses in the colonies and semicolonies, the *entire* working class in the advanced capitalist countries possesses political, economic, and cultural advantages. Just as monopoly capital consolidated the split between the labour aristocracy and the lower strata of the proletariat, it accentuated the division between workers in imperialist countries and the masses in the oppressed nations. Indeed, this latter division has often served to moderate (and obscure) the tensions between the labour aristocracy and the lower strata in imperialist countries, as both have benefited somewhat from imperialist exploitation of workers in the colonies and neocolonies. Lenin observed this phenomenon and didn’t mince words about its meaning: “To a *certain degree* the workers of the oppressor nations are partners of *their own* bourgeoisie in plundering the workers (and the mass of the population) of the oppressed nations.”<sup>57</sup>

Of course, the benefits from this “plunder” have not altered the fundamental class relations of capitalist exploitation within the imperialist countries; nor are they distributed to the workers in the imperialist countries in the same manner that dividends are paid to bourgeois stockholders in imperialist enterprises. Rather, the superprofits, low-cost raw materials and commodities obtained in the oppressed nations have contributed to raising profit rates in the imperialist countries (especially for the monopoly firms). This has at times temporarily forestalled competitive pressures that lower the general rate of profit, thereby permitting workers in the imperialist countries to win increased real wages (or, in more difficult periods, “sparing” such workers from the full brunt of wage cuts and layoffs). The fact that the labour aristocracy receives, proportionate to its size, the greatest share of imperialist concessions does not negate the gains also registered by the lower strata. Hence, all sections of the working class have developed bourgeois illusions to varying degrees, especially the notion of “national superiority”.

In the more “enlightened” capitalist democracies where the state plays a direct role as an agent of concessions, this form of bribery has also reached the lower strata of the working class. Both state employment and especially high-paid jobs sustained by military production have been important conduits of privileges to large sections of the working class, aristocratic and others. It is not surprising, then, that the opportunist call for “patriotism” doesn’t fall on deaf ears — even among the lower strata. Further,

most social reforms are not confined to the labour aristocracy alone and, in fact, the bourgeoisie sees little political point in doing so. Lenin described the phenomena of bribery by means of bourgeois democracy and state reforms in England, where it had reached its most sophisticated level of development:

The mechanics of political democracy works in the same direction [as more direct forms of bribery]. Nothing in our times can be done without elections; nothing can be done without the masses. And in this era of printing and parliamentarism it is *impossible* to gain the following of the masses without a widely ramified, systematically managed, well-equipped system of flattery, lies, fraud, juggling with fashionable and popular catchwords, and promising all manner of reforms and blessings to the workers right and left — as long as they renounce the revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. I would call this system Lloyd-Georgeism, after the English minister Lloyd-George, one of the foremost and most dexterous representatives of this system in the classic land of the “bourgeois labour party”. A first-class bourgeois manipulator, an astute politician, a popular orator who will deliver any speeches you like, even r-r-revolutionary ones, to a labour audience, and a man who is capable of obtaining sizable sops for docile workers in the shape of social reforms (insurance, etc.), Lloyd-George serves the bourgeoisie splendidly, and serves it precisely *among* the workers, brings its influence *precisely* to the proletariat, to where the bourgeoisie needs it most and where it finds it most difficult to subject the masses morally.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, there is substantial economic, political, and ideological basis in imperialist countries for the lower strata to develop illusions about bourgeois democracy and look often to the “more experienced” and “more respectable” labour aristocracy to provide leadership in (supposedly) representing their interests.

Another element linking the labour aristocracy to the lower strata exists in countries where the aristocracy intersects with stratification by race or nationality. In such cases, the labour aristocracy is usually composed predominantly of members of only one racial or national grouping, while the lower strata includes members of this grouping as well as specially oppressed racial or national groups. In this context, the members of the lower strata who are of the same racial or national grouping as the aristocracy (whites in the US, English in England) often serve as a vehicle for the aristocracy to influence significant portions of the lower strata of the class. In the contemporary US, for example, the narrow sectoral interest of the labour aristocracy and the “white racial interest” of white workers (as whites) often coincide politically to produce one of the most pernicious strains of national chauvinist and racist opportunism in world history.

Overall, the main point is that although the core and social base for the opportunist

trend within the working class reside in the labour aristocracy this trend cannot be limited solely to the labour aristocracy and, at times, can extend into the lower strata of the class.

The relationship between the labour aristocracy and the lower strata of the working class is hardly a static or simple one. On the one hand, the aristocracy is a sector of the class that has deserted to the bourgeoisie and sides *against* the interests of the lower strata. On the other, many benefits of imperialism are also extended even to these lower strata, and the labour aristocracy is connected to the lower strata by numerous political, economic, ideological, and, in many cases, national or racial threads that allow it to exert substantial influence over the entire working class. There can be no exact formula to determine how this complex contradiction will manifest itself at any given moment of the class struggle. However, we can say in general that, in the long run, the less protected, lower strata will provide the social base for the revolutionary trend within the proletariat; and the polarisation and challenge to the opportunist politics of the labour aristocracy will intensify as the class struggle sharpens and the revolutionary consciousness within the proletariat develops.

This brings us to Lenin's ideas concerning the strategy and tactics of proletarian revolution and the struggle against opportunism.

### III. STRATEGY AND TACTICS IN THE ERA OF IMPERIALISM

#### A. FACING THE PROBLEM SQUARELY

For Lenin the struggle against opportunism and the influence of the labour aristocracy was not an end in itself. A correct approach to this struggle can only be elaborated in light of the central political task of the communist movement: the *preparation* of the proletariat — politically, ideologically and organisationally — for the struggle to seize state power in a *revolutionary situation*. Lenin posed the essential aspect of this problem in broad outline in his article, *Karl Marx*, summing up what was most important in the Marxist theory of the tactics of the proletarian class struggle:

At each stage of development, at each moment, proletarian tactics must take account of this objectively inevitable dialectics of human history, on the one hand, utilising the periods of political stagnation or of sluggish, so-called “peaceful” development in order to develop the class consciousness, strength and militancy of the advanced class, and, on the other hand, directing all the work of this utilisation towards the “ultimate aim” of that class’ advance, towards creating in it the ability to find practical solutions for great tasks in the great days, in which “20 years are embodied”.<sup>59</sup>

The opportunism of the Second International matured precisely during the decades of “sluggish”, “peaceful” development, in which legal mass organisations of the working class grew in size and strength and were able to obtain significant political and economic concessions. The crisis of World War I, however, revealed the “quiet” degeneration that had accompanied those years of steady advances. Rather than oppose the imperialist war which, under the circumstances, would have required revolutionary measures, the majority of leaders of the working class movements openly allied with their “own” imperialist bourgeoisie.

In *The Collapse of the Second International*, Lenin exposed the immediate form of bribery that accounted for this betrayal:

The initiation of revolutionary activities would obviously have led to the dissolution of these legal organisations by the police, and the old party — from Legien [leader of the German Social-Democratic trade unions] to Kautsky inclusively — sacrificed the revolutionary aims of the proletariat for the sake of preserving the legal organisations. No matter how much this may be denied, it is a fact. The proletariat’s right to revolution was sold for a mess of pottage — organisations permitted by the present police law. And again:

An edifying picture. People are so degraded and stultified by bourgeois legality that they cannot even *conceive* of the need for organisations of another kind, *illegal* organisations, for the purpose of guiding the revolutionary struggle. So low have people fallen that they imagine that legal unions existing with the permission of the police are a kind of *ultima Thule* — as though the *preservation* of such unions as *leading bodies* is at all conceivable at a time of crisis!<sup>60</sup>

The main point of Lenin's polemics at this time was that the blatant opportunist betrayal of the working class "in the great days" was directly connected to its more subtle, but no less treacherous betrayals, in the preceding years of "stagnation". "It is generally agreed", he wrote, "that opportunism is no chance occurrence, sin, slip or treachery on the part of individuals, but a social product of an entire period of history."<sup>61</sup> It was precisely Lenin's theoretical analysis of the specific content of the period preceding World War I — the rise of monopoly capitalism and the expansion of the labour aristocracy into an international phenomenon — that explained the strength, durability and influence of the opportunist trend, as well as its incongruous policies in time of crisis.

The legal mass organisations of the Second International, which Lenin called "perhaps the most important feature of the socialist parties",<sup>62</sup> embraced only a minority of the working classes of the developed capitalist countries; and they were essentially the preserves of the labour aristocracy. Clearly there was a direct link between the relatively privileged workers who benefited over the years from the growth of monopoly and bourgeois tolerance for their mass organisations and the opportunist political line that eventually triumphed in the Second International.

For Lenin, only the understanding of these phenomena *as a whole*, their material basis and laws of development, would provide a firm basis for the struggle against opportunism in the working-class movement. Lenin's decisive and provocative political point was that in the epoch of imperialism, a section of the proletariat, the labour aristocracy, constitutes "the social mainstay of the bourgeoisie".<sup>63</sup> This stratum of bourgeoisified workers will tend to align itself with its class enemy due to the relative privileges it has obtained, privileges that historically are a product of the enormous expansion of monopoly and monopoly superprofits.

The practical implications of this theoretical conclusion are profound for the course of the revolutionary movement. The working class in the imperialist countries is objectively split economically, which accounts for the existence of consolidated opportunist politics in the workers' ranks. Conscious revolutionaries can have no illusions: the *entire* working class will *not* be won to the struggle for socialism; and a fraction will actively resist, even after the seizure of power. "There never has

been and never can be”, Lenin wrote in 1919, after the experience of the Russian revolution, “a class struggle in which *part* of the advanced class does not remain on the side of the reactionary forces ... Part of the backward workers are bound to help the bourgeoisie — for a longer or shorter period.”<sup>64</sup>

## **B. THE NECESSARY STRUGGLE AGAINST OPPORTUNISM**

Facing this reality squarely, Lenin’s inevitable conclusion was that the task of developing the “class consciousness, strength and militancy” of the proletariat was completely bound up with the struggle against opportunism, in *both* sluggish periods and revolutionary “great days”. It is notable that Lenin’s resolutions and presentations to the first congresses of the Communist International all stressed this as perhaps the central problem in the developed capitalist countries that had “relatively larger and more stable labour aristocracies”:

No preparation of the proletariat for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie is possible, even in the preliminary sense, unless an immediate, systematic, extensive and open struggle is waged against this stratum, which, as experience has already shown, will no doubt provide the bourgeois White guards with many a recruit after the victory of the proletariat.<sup>65</sup>

The goal of this struggle was to destroy the political influence of the labor aristocracy; to expose the fallacy of the upper stratum’s claim that its sectoral interests coincided with the class interest of the proletariat as a whole; and to erase “every trace of its prestige among the workers”.<sup>66</sup>

Revolutionary propaganda had to expose the “living” connection between opportunism and the material corruption of the privileged workers by monopoly capital:

By exposing the fact that the opportunists and social chauvinists are in reality betraying and selling the interests of the masses, that they are defending the temporary privileges of a minority of the workers, that they are the vehicles of bourgeois ideas and influences, that they are really allies and agents of the bourgeoisie, we teach the masses to appreciate their true political interests, to fight for socialism and for the revolution through all the long and painful vicissitudes of imperialist wars and imperialist armistices.<sup>67</sup>

Lenin goes on to make his famous, and often misconstrued, argument: Those who pose the struggle against monopoly capital as opposed or separate from the struggle against opportunism are thoroughly confused and naive about the actual conditions of the class struggle. Given the existence of the labour aristocracy and the consolidation of opportunism into a mature trend — usually with coherent organisational expression

— Lenin wrote “that unless a determined and relentless struggle is waged all along the line against these parties — or groups, trends, etc., it is all the same — there can be no question of a struggle against imperialism, or of Marxism, or of a socialist labour movement”.<sup>68</sup> For Lenin, this line was simply an application of materialism and a sober approach to politics as it actually unfolded in the class struggle.

### C. THE ‘PIVOT OF TACTICS’ IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Lenin did not confine himself, however, merely to general statements concerning the need to struggle against the opportunist trend. He attempted to draw out the concrete historical trends that shape the contours of such struggle and serve as the basis for the elaboration of revolutionary strategy and tactics.

In *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism* and, most clearly, in *Karl Marx*, Lenin noted (and contrasted) two opposing, but connected, historical tendencies at play in the development of the spontaneous class struggle. On the one hand, workers strain to organise in economic combinations (trade unions) to fight their employers for better wages and conditions. On the other hand, the very success of such struggles compels the bourgeoisie to seek new forms of maintaining its control over the workers. Meanwhile, the existence of monopoly superprofits and the fact that the workers’ combinations can inevitably represent only particular sections of the working class lay the basis for the bourgeoisie to manipulate this contradiction and use concessions (the bribe) to tame the better-situated workers and win them to their side. In this manner, the gains of sections of the working class can be turned into their opposite, serving not to strengthen the working class movement as a whole but to provide a basis to split and weaken the movement through the victory of opportunism. Lenin attached central importance to this dialectic, targeting in particular those who one-sidedly argue that workers combinations into unions would inevitably lead to ever higher forms of struggle, while downplaying the ability of the bourgeoisie to utilise such combinations (among other factors) to forge a labour aristocracy on a profoundly opportunist basis.

In general, Lenin argued that in periods in which the labour aristocracy is firmly entrenched in leadership of the mass organisations of the working class, particularly the trade unions, a correct tactical line must emphasise political work in the lower strata of the working class, among the unorganised and those whose conditions of life provide less basis to foster bourgeois illusions. In periods in which new forces from the lower strata are entering the established mass organisations, or in which objective conditions are constricting the labour aristocracy’s role and influence within them, correct tactics must focus on isolating the labour aristocracy and sharpening the

struggle against opportunism within the reactionary-led bodies. In all periods, political work must continue wherever the masses are concentrated, including painstaking, patient, and at times dangerous work in those organisations dominated by the labour aristocracy and opportunism (in order to be positioned to take advantage of the rank and file's discontent when conditions change).

These general tactical guidelines were elaborated by Lenin in a series of polemics with the "centrists" and "left" opportunists in the period 1914 to 1920. The struggle with the centrists established the importance of the tactic of going "lower and deeper, to the real masses", the real majority, when the mass organisations of the working class are mainstays of opportunism. The centrists argued that it was necessary to reach a reconciliation with the social-chauvinists because they represented the organised working class. The centrists, in essence, refused to acknowledge the objective nature of the connection between imperialism and opportunism, and theoretically refused to deal with the unpleasant facts of the matter. As Lenin wrote:

Some writers, L. Martov, for example, are prone to wave aside the connection between imperialism and opportunism in the working-class movement — a particularly glaring fact at the present time — by resorting to "official optimism" (*à la* Kautsky and Huysmans) like the following: the cause of the opponents of capitalism would be hopeless if it were progressive capitalism that led to the increase of opportunism, or, if it were the best-paid workers who were inclined towards opportunism, etc. We must have no illusions about "optimism" of this kind. It is optimism in respect of opportunism; it is optimism which serves to conceal opportunism.<sup>69</sup>

In sharp contrast to the "official optimism" of the centrists, Lenin asserted that Marxist tactics required a sober view of the labour aristocracy, its hegemony in the mass organisations, and the necessity of reaching the workers in the lower strata. Further, this viewpoint required vigorous struggle against the opportunist politics of the privileged stratum. Lenin's presentation of the problem, against Kautsky's demagoguery, is an important corrective for those who would "bow to the spontaneity" of an essentially opportunist movement:

One of the most common sophistries of Kautskyism is its references to the "masses". We do not want, they say, to break away from the masses and mass organisations! But just think how Engels put the question. In the 19th century the "mass organisations" of the English trade unions were on the side of the bourgeois labour party. Marx and Engels did not reconcile themselves to it on this ground; they exposed it. They did not forget, firstly, that the trade union organisations directly embraced a minority of the proletariat. In England then, as in Germany now, not more than one-fifth of the proletariat was organised. No one can seriously think it possible to organise the majority

of the proletariat under capitalism. Secondly — and this is the main point — it is not so much a question of the size of an organisation, as of the real, objective significance of its policy; does its policy represent the masses, does it serve them, i.e., does it aim at their liberation from capitalism, or does it represent the interests of the minority, the minority's reconciliation with capitalism? The latter was true of England in the 19th century, and it is true of Germany, etc., now.

Engels draws a distinction between the “bourgeois labour party” of the old trade unions — the privileged minority — and the “lowest mass”, the real majority, and appeals to the latter, who are not infected by “bourgeois respectability”.<sup>70</sup>

Lenin concluded: “This is the essence of Marxist tactics!”

This understanding of focusing politically on the nonaristocratic sections of the working class was incorporated into the guiding line of the Comintern. All parties were urged to acquire closer links with the masses, “particularly those who are least organised and educated, who are most oppressed and least amenable to organisation”.<sup>71</sup>

Naturally, this tactical focus (like any tactic), if interpreted mechanically or taken out of context, could lead to serious political errors. Certain forces in the Comintern — the “left” communists in the countries where opportunism reigned supreme — turned Lenin's reasoning into a call for revolutionaries to abandon political work in the trade unions. Lenin's famous polemic against this line, contained in *‘Left-Wing’ Communism — An Infantile Disorder*, is, of course, well known.

Unfortunately, opportunism in the communist movement itself has *reduced* *‘Left-Wing’ Communism* to the simple injunction that the communists must work in reactionary-led trade unions. But Lenin's main thesis is that communists “must absolutely *work wherever the masses are to be found*”.<sup>72</sup>

Embodied in this seeming nuance of difference are two points for which the US communist movement has shown little appreciation. First, the tendency to fetishise work in the trade unions as the only or principal form of revolutionary activity in the working class — on the strength of Lenin's polemic against ultraleftism — runs counter to the content and spirit of that work. There were then and there remain today important reasons for communists to work within the reactionary-led trade unions.<sup>§</sup> But a communist movement whose orientation to the revolutionary training of the proletariat is concentrated exclusively or even principally on the organised trade union movement at the expense of its work among the nonorganised, lower strata is already embarking on an opportunist course.

Second, Lenin's call to work where the masses are to be found is not simply a plea for the communists to obtain some personal or organisational proximity to the

workers. It is a call to do political work among the masses. In particular, it is a call to the communists to *struggle*, in the trade unions, against the labour aristocracy and its opportunist line. The political objective is to strengthen the class consciousness and fighting capacity of the workers in the process of defeating the influence of the opportunist trend. The struggle proceeds on two fronts: against the reactionary “top leadership”, the “labour lieutenants of the capitalist class” whom it is absolutely necessary to expose, discredit and expel from the workers’ movement; and against the labour aristocrats in the rank whose political influence must be destroyed and who may perhaps be won away from opportunism in the course of the struggle. “We are waging a struggle against the ‘labour aristocracy’ in the name of the masses of the workers and in order to win them over to our side,” Lenin wrote, “we are waging the struggle against the opportunist and social chauvinist leaders in order to win the working class to our side.”<sup>73, †</sup>

#### D. THE STRUGGLE AGAINST OPPORTUNISM IN PERIODS OF ECONOMIC CRISIS

Just as Lenin avoided any rigid approach to determining the strata of the proletariat in which communists must conduct their political work, he avoided mechanicalism in grappling with both the opportunities and dangers presented by periods of imperialist economic decline. Economic crises are inevitable under imperialism, and inevitably these periods reduce imperialist superprofits, eroding the ability of the bourgeoisie to offer bribes to substantial sections of the working class. This has a negative affect on the labour aristocracy’s standard of living and serves to remove some sections of the working class from its ranks. Lenin recognised, however, that this economic motion would not *automatically* eliminate the persistence of opportunist politics in the working-class movement.

Lenin emphasised that periods of economic decline provide more *favourable conditions* for workers to reject their sectoral interests (now materially diminished) and embrace their class interests. This is particularly true of the sections of workers in the lower strata who have previously been under the influence of the labour aristocracy. But, at the same time, a tendency also develops for the labour aristocracy, seeing its privileges eroding, to fight that much harder to retain its favoured position and shift the burden of hardship on to the lower strata and the proletariat internationally. And since in such periods of economic crunch the bourgeoisie invariably intensifies its *ideological* efforts to maintain support among the workers (economic concessions being too costly), every such sentiment of support in the labour aristocracy is widely encouraged and promoted by the bourgeois-controlled institutions that shape public opinion.

Overall, the point is that changes in objective conditions by themselves will not break the hold of opportunism; dialectically it requires polarisation and struggle, which in fact can be expected to sharpen in periods of crisis or decline. This tension will occur spontaneously without the communists. However the task of the conscious element in grasping this dialectic is to *increase and sharpen* the polemic with opportunism in periods of sharpening economic conflict. To do less is to conciliate opportunism. As Lenin wrote of the centrists:

... the *fact is evaded* that *certain groups of workers have already drifted away* to opportunism and to the imperialist bourgeoisie! And that is the very fact the sophists of the OC want to *evade!* They confine themselves to the “official optimism” the Kautskyite Hilferding and many others now flaunt: objective conditions guarantee the unity of the proletariat and the victory of the revolutionary trend! We [Kautsky and Co.], forsooth are “optimists” with regard to the proletariat! But in reality all these Kautskyites, Hilferding, the OC supporters, Martov and Co. are *optimists* ... with regard to *opportunism*. That is the whole point!”<sup>74</sup>,<sup>§</sup>

#### E. LENIN’S APPROACH TO STRATEGY AND TACTICS SUMMED UP

Lenin’s understanding of the material basis for consolidated opportunism in the working-class movement provides a basic orientation to communist intervention in the class struggle in the imperialist countries. In a strategic sense, it is evident from Lenin’s

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<sup>§</sup> Apart from Lenin’s emphasis on the importance of work in the trade unions because they constitute basic organisations of the working class that will exist well into socialism (actually a strategic consideration), there were particular historical circumstances that caused Lenin so strongly to urge attention to communist tactics in the trade unions in 1920. First, as Lenin notes in the polemic with the “lefts”, the years 1918 and 1919 saw a massive influx of workers into the trade unions of the developed capitalist countries; this meant new contingents of workers were acquiring elementary class understanding and had not yet fallen under the hegemony of the opportunists. Second, the war had worsened the condition of the working class, by creating an enormous disparity between price rises and wages, massive economic dislocation, and shortages of basic commodities. This impoverishment narrowed the labour aristocracy and reduced its influence over the masses. In these immediate circumstances, favorable conditions existed for communist work in the trade unions and for intensifying the struggle against opportunism.

<sup>†</sup> This argument and Lenin’s general call to struggle against opportunism has, of course, been interpreted by various ultra-“left” tendencies as a rejection of the concept of united front. But this is a thorough misreading of Lenin who on many occasions clearly indicates the need for unity of action even with opportunists when conditions are right. The view that the United Front Against Fascism of the 1930s was a revisionist line because it called for unity with the social-democrats, for instance, appears to have some currency among such forces. The point

reasoning, that preparing the proletariat for socialist revolution is inconceivable without qualitatively weakening the political influence of the opportunist trend. However, thoroughly consistent with materialism, Lenin's analysis reveals that this is not possible at all times, since the strength of opportunism is directly related to the strength of monopoly capitalism internationally and within any particular imperialist country.

Periods of relative prosperity call for very sober tactical calculations on the part of communists and for a firm ideological stand to avoid pessimism or opportunist tendencies to adjust program and strategy to the prevailing political stagnation within the proletariat. Tactically, such periods require difficult and sometimes evasive work in the strongholds of the labour aristocracy. While not making a fetish of this or that form of struggle, emphasis should be on those sections of the class not privy to the temporary historical advantages. Political work in these "slow" periods lays the political basis for the *quality* of advances in the "great days", when objective conditions create the possibilities to seriously contend with the opportunist trend.

Periods of economic and political crisis, which are inevitable, call for open and sharp struggle against opportunism, which becomes even more dangerous and virulent to the working class movement when its base is narrowed. The weakening of the material bribe in such periods increases the importance to the bourgeoisie of the ideological and political services rendered by the opportunist "labor leaders". The loss of privileges or the threat of it will not necessarily provoke a spontaneous, across-the-board struggle against monopoly capital, but on the contrary it can fuel a powerful reaction within sections of the proletariat to "blame" the workers in the lower strata or in other countries. It must be emphasised that in such periods the opportunist leaders do not simply "represent" the threatened interests of the labour aristocracy, but function under the most direct instructions from the bourgeoisie. Nonetheless, the loss of the relative prosperity created by the privileges of imperialism will steadily erode the social base for opportunism, thereby creating more favorable circumstances for workers to grasp the nature of the betrayal of the opportunists in contrast to their real class interest. Whether the full potential of the objective conditions will be realised or

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is that the united front is a *political* category; that is, it is unity on the basis of a common set of politics concerning the most pressing question before the working class at a given time. The challenge to social-democracy to unite on such a basis is, in effect, a challenge to social-democrats to break with opportunism. At the same time, as Lenin's comments on the labour aristocracy underscore, there can be no liquidation of the struggle against opportunism within the context of the united front.

not is dependent on the correctness of the political line, tactics, and organisation of communists. (This is precisely the significance of Leninism which social-democrats and opportunists of all hues never tire of dismissing as voluntarism, completely inappropriate in the “civilised” countries!) Communists must strive to be prepared and positioned to polarise the struggle with the opportunist trend and show concretely how such collaboration with the bourgeoisie actually reflects the interest of a small minority of the working class and a tiny section of the international proletariat.

Finally, communists should have no illusion about “quick results”, even in a period of crisis. Lenin, though always optimistic about the revolutionary potential of the working class, was quite realistic about the prospects in the advanced capitalist countries:

In America, Britain and France we see a far greater persistence of the opportunist leaders, of the upper crust of the working class, the labour aristocracy; they offer stronger resistance to the communist movement. That is why we must be prepared to find it harder for the European and American workers’ parties to get rid of this disease than was the case in our country ...

... The disease is a protracted one; the cure takes longer than the optimists hoped it would.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>§</sup> The Organising Committee (OC) functioned as the leading political centre of the Mensheviks in Russia from 1912 to August, 1917. In World War I it followed a social chauvinist policy, justifying Russia’s role in the war. The OC’s Secretariat Abroad, including notables such as Axelrod and Martov, followed a procentrist line and used internationalist rhetoric to cover up support of the Russian social chauvinists.

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## IV. CONCLUSION

This reconstruction and *reassertion* of Lenin's theory of the labour aristocracy will undoubtedly strike a discordant note in most of the US communist movement today. Ignored, obscured and distorted for decades, Lenin's theory runs directly counter to a vast body of "workerist" prejudice in all sectors of the communist movement. To the extent that the theory is discussed at all, the prevailing sentiment seems to be one of embarrassment at a legacy which contradicts the principal expression of our movement's immaturity — its unflagging worship of the spontaneous motion of the class struggle.

Lenin's theory is a cogent reminder of the capacity of Marxism-Leninism to illuminate the complexities of the class struggle and find their universal components. The proof of its relevance is the undeniable fact that opportunism in the working class movement of the imperialist countries — especially the US — is today a more powerful and widespread trend than ever before. If anything, the period since the end of World War II in the US has been characterised by the consolidation of an opportunist political trend in the US working class based on a qualitative expansion of the labour aristocracy.

Nevertheless, most of the US communist movement is content to look at this reality through rose-coloured glasses, so that it is unable to grasp those historical trends and developments which are to be encountered before our very eyes. In an effort to "explain" the politics of the class struggle, mechanical materialism and unbridled optimism vie for influence, leading to confusion at best and shameless conciliation of opportunism at worst.

Nowhere does this "official optimism" which has blind faith in the power of the day-to-day economic struggle to spontaneously generate class consciousness express itself in a more concentrated and consistent form than in the operative line of the Communist Party (CPUSA). Nor has any tendency in the communist movement more consciously rejected Lenin's theory of the labour aristocracy than the CPUSA.

We will return to these points in the second part of this article (in the next issue of *Line of March*), when we will apply Lenin's theory of the labour aristocracy to a concrete analysis of the politics of the working class movement in the US from the end of World War II until today. The concluding article will advance a framework and some initial ideas on the formulations of communist strategy in the struggle against opportunism in the US working-class movement.

# NOTES

[LCW = V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (Progress Publishers: Moscow, 19XX-XX).]

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- 2 LCW, Vol. 23, p. 110.
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- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- 6 LCW, Vol. 5, pp. 378-387.
- 7 LCW, Vol. 15, pp. 38-39.
- 8 LCW, Vol. 23, pp. 112-113.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 3 (Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1970), pp. 440-451.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 450.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 447.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 448.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 446-447.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 450.
- 19 Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (International Publishers: New York, 1963), p. 300.
- 20 LCW, Vol. 23, p. 114.
- 21 LCW, Vol. 21, pp. 205-259.
- 22 LCW, Vol. 23, pp. 105-120.
- 23 LCW, Vol. 22, pp. 185-304.
- 24 LCW, Vol. 23, pp. 115-116.
- 25 LCW, Vol. 22, p. 343.
- 26 LCW, Vol. 39, pp. 446, 457.
- 27 LCW, Vol. 22, p. 282.
- 28 LCW, Vol. 23, p. 115.
- 29 LCW, Vol. 22, p. 193.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 301.
- 31 LCW, Vol. 23, p. 114.
- 32 Karl Marx, *Capital* (International Publishers: New York, 1967), Vol.3, pp. 641-648, 761, 861.
- 33 LCW, Vol. 21, p. 359.
- 34 LCW, Vol. 30, p. 512.
- 35 LCW, Vol. 31, p. 230.
- 36 LCW, Vol. 19, p. 370.
- 37 LCW, Vol. 31, p. 193.
- 38 LCW, Vol. 30, p. 34.
- 39 LCW, Vol. 22, p. 282.
- 40 LCW, Vol. 31, p. 193.
- 41 LCW, Vol. 21, p. 445.
- 42 LCW, Vol. 23, p. 119.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 117.
- 44 LCW, Vol. 12, p. 217.
- 45 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 349.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 350.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 420.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3, p. 300.
- 50 Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labour Movement in the United States*, Vol. 2 (International Publishers: New York, 1975), pp. 353-354.
- 51 LCW, Vol. 5, pp. 397-440.
- 52 LCW, Vol. 31, pp. 51-52.
- 53 *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.
- 54 LCW, Vol. 23, p. 117.
- 55 LCW, Vol. 21, p. 240.
- 56 LCW, Vol. 25, pp. 491-492.
- 57 LCW, Vol. 23, p. 56.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 117.
- 59 LCW, Vol. 21, p. 75.
- 60 *Ibid.*, pp. 251-252.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 247.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p. 251.
- 63 LCW, Vol. 31, p. 193.
- 64 LCW, Vol. 30, p. 33.
- 65 LCW, Vol. 31, pp. 193-194.
- 66 LCW, Vol. 29, p. 563.
- 67 LCW, Vol. 23, p. 120.
- 68 *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- 69 LCW, Vol. 22, p. 301.
- 70 LCW, Vol. 23, p. 119.
- 71 LCW, Vol. 31, p. 194.
- 72 *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- 73 *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- 74 LCW, Vol. 23, pp. 110-111.
- 75 LCW, Vol. 31, p. 231.