

# The politics of Alexander Bogdanov in 1917 \*

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## 1. The search for a political platform

*I made a wise decision when I turned my back on politics, for good, I hope.<sup>1</sup>*

*The revolution found me in Moscow where, at first, I wrote political-propaganda articles.<sup>2</sup>*

It is only by the most narrow definition of politics that Alexander Bogdanov can be said to have turned his back that activity, before or during 1917. Expelled by Vladimir Lenin and his supporters from the Bolshevik fraction of the Russian Social Democratic Party in June 1909, he had helped to found the “Left-Bolshevik” *Vpered* group within the RSDRP in December of that year. In December 1911 he had resigned from *Vpered* and in March 1912 he had declined an invitation to rejoin.<sup>3</sup> However, during 1912 and 1913 he had been a remunerated contributor to *Pravda*, a “Workers’ Daily” published in St. Petersburg by a group of Bolshevik “Conciliators”.<sup>4</sup> Bogdanov’s contributions to *Pravda*, ostensibly educational, had carried a

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<sup>1</sup> Bogdanov, letter to V.A. Bazarov, 1 January 1918, in *Neizvestny Bogdanov 1*, 193.

<sup>2</sup> Autobiography (1925), in *Neizvestny Bogdanov 1*, 19.

<sup>3</sup> See ‘V Zhenevskii ideiny kruzhok *Vpered*’, 7 March 1912, in *Neizvestny Bogdanov 2*, 211—214.

<sup>4</sup> The Bolshevik “Conciliators” [*primirentsy*] or “Party Bolsheviks” [they referred to themselves by both terms] had opposed Lenin’s initiative in convening the narrowly based “Central Committee” in June 1911 which went on to convene a conference in Prague in January 1912. They published a manifesto ‘To all party members’ in Paris in August 1911. See Lenin, *Sochineniya XV* (1935), Note 118, 639—641.

political message and it was not fortuitous that when Lenin acquired control of the editorial board towards the end of 1913 Bogdanov's relationship with the paper came to an end.<sup>5</sup> During 1917, notwithstanding his repudiation of party-politics, Bogdanov waged an unrelenting campaign of political propaganda. A recurring theme of his writings was the dysfunctionality of the policies of Lenin and others whom he described as "Maximalists".<sup>6</sup> He advocated implementation of the policies of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party as adopted at its Congresses up to 1907, while anticipating the opportunity of making his own contribution to cultural revolution.

a) *Letopis'*

During 1916 Bogdanov had published a series of articles entitled 'World crises in time of peace and war' in *Letopis'*, a non-party journal of democratic orientation whose editors included his former Bolshevik comrades Boris Avilov, Vladimir Bazarov and Stanislav Vol'sky, and the non-party socialist and Zimmerwaldist, Nikolai Sukhanov.<sup>7</sup> On 2 January 1917, Bogdanov submitted to *Letopis'*, through Bazarov, an overtly political article - 'A Third Programme' (*Tret'ya programma*) in which he outlined the need for cultural revolution and rejected the theory of the "Utopian Marxists" that a particular level of development of the forces of production was a sufficient condition for the transition to socialism. Without mentioning him by name, he ridiculed an

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<sup>5</sup> On the founding of the St. Petersburg *Pravda*, see McKean (1990).

<sup>6</sup> When Lunacharsky accepted a position in Lenin's government, Bogdanov put him into this category. See Bogdanov to Lunacharsky, 19 November 1917, in *Neizvestny Bogdanov 1*, 352. V.A. Bazarov and M. A. Lurie (Yurii Larin) are chastised for Maximalist thinking in *Voprosy sotsializma* (1918), 80, 86—88; After Bukharin's review of *Voprosy sotsializma* in *Kommunist* (1918), No.3, Bogdanov responded by labeling him a Maximalist in 'Povyazka', *Novaya zhizn'*, No.8 for 27 May/9 June 1918.

<sup>7</sup> See 'Mirovye krizisy, mirnye i voennye', in *Letopis'* (1916), Nos. 3, 4, 5 and 7. For an analysis, see White (2018), 346—348. Funded by Maxim Gorky, *Letopis'* was published in Petrograd between December 1915 and December 1917. The print run was 10,000 copies. See Korostelev (2014), Part II.

article of Kamenev that had appeared in *Letopis'* in 1916 in which he had produced statistics in support of this theory.<sup>8</sup>

Bogdanov and Bazarov now exchanged correspondence that dealt not only with theoretical questions but also with what the editors clearly considered to be offensive elements in Bogdanov's presentation of his case, both the analogy he had drawn between the policies of the Maximalists and the military organization of agricultural production by General Alexei Arakcheev during the reign of Alexander I, and the tone of his critique of Kamenev.<sup>9</sup> On 8 February Bogdanov suggested dividing his article into two parts: 'Dangerous dreams' ('*Opasnye mechty*') and 'The Third Aspect of the Programme' ('*Tret'ya storona programmy*'). Was it Nikolai Sukhanov, "a little Il'in, a literary and political careerist of the same type, but on a smaller scale", who was obstructing publication?<sup>10</sup> Five months after submission, Bogdanov's article had still not been published; even so, on 16 May he felt able to write to Pavel Lebedev-Polyansky in Geneva: "I have expressed my views on the Zimmerwald Left in *Letopis'* (the issue should come out shortly)".<sup>11</sup> By 30 May, however, his patience had run out: if the article had been rejected it should be returned.<sup>12</sup> The outcome was that no article by Bogdanov appeared in *Letopis'* during 1917 and it was not until 1918 that both parts of his contentious article appeared in *Problems of Socialism*, an anthology that he had published independently. Conceived as a theoretical indictment of Maximalism in

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<sup>8</sup> See Kamenev (1916). Bogdanov does not mention Kamenev by name but refers specifically to pages 166—167 of his article.

<sup>9</sup> On 15 January Bogdanov expressed surprise at the "solidarity" of the editorial board with Kamenev. See *Neizvestny Bogdanov*, 1, 182.

<sup>10</sup> Bogdanov to Bazarov, 8 February 1917, in, 185—186. "Il'in" was one of Lenin's literary pseudonyms.

<sup>11</sup> See *Neizvestny Bogdanov*, 1, 186. Conferences of anti-war socialists had been held in Zimmerwald from 5—8 September 1915 and Kiental Conferences from 24—30 April 1916 (dates by the Western calendar).

<sup>12</sup> Bogdanov made this request through the editors of *Novaya zhizn'*. See his letter of 30 May 1917 in *Neizvestny Bogdanov* 1, 186—187.

January 1917. Bogdanov's article now formed the basis of a critique of Leninist Bolshevism in practice.<sup>13</sup>

*b) Sotsial-demokrat*

On 9 March 1917 an article by Bogdanov entitled 'War and Peace', appeared in *Sotsial-demokrat*, the official paper of the "Moscow Bureau of the Central Committee and the Moscow Committee of the RSDRP".<sup>14</sup> If *Sotsial-demokrat* had been controlled by the Lenin group, who had published a paper of the same name in Geneva between 1 November 1914 and 31 January 1917, Bogdanov's participation would have been unthinkable.<sup>15</sup> There can be little doubt that he owed the opportunity of contributing to his friend and comrade, Ivan Ivanovich Skvortsov-Stepanov, who had been a founder member of the editorial board.<sup>16</sup>

In 'War and Peace' Bogdanov called upon all "comrades and citizens" by means of manifestos, demonstrations and petitions to bring pressure to bear upon their governments to negotiate a peace without annexations and indemnities. This was tantamount to being an endorsement of the Manifesto of the Zimmerwald majority of 5—8 September 1915.<sup>17</sup>

The text that Bogdanov had submitted to *Sotsial-demokrat* appeared with significant deletions, a circumstance that in all probability explains why the

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<sup>13</sup> The two parts of the article were re-titled 'Socialism tomorrow?' [*Žavtra li?*] and 'A cultural programme' [*Kul'turnaya programma*]. See *Voprosy sotsializma* (1918), 21—48 and 91—99 respectively.

<sup>14</sup> As of the issue of 3 May 1917, the masthead of *Sotsial-demokrat* declared it to be the paper of "the Moscow Oblast' Bureau and Moscow Committee of the RSDRP".

<sup>15</sup> *Sotsial-demokrat* had been the title of the official paper of the RSDRP since 1908. By the end of 1911 only the Lenin faction was represented on the editorial board. After organizing an "All-Russian Conference of the RSDRP" in Prague in January 1912, Lenin published a paper of the same name, edited by Kamenev, as the organ of his new Central Committee. Numerous articles by Lenin appeared in the Moscow-based *Sotsial-demokrat*, but the Lenin group did not have editorial control.

<sup>16</sup> See Viktorov & Kumanev (1986), 136. The first issue of *Sotsial-demokrat* appeared on 7 March 1917.

<sup>17</sup> 'Voina i mir', *Sotsial-demokrat* (Moscow), No.3 (9 March 1917).

article was published unsigned. Later in March he published the full text in a collection entitled *The tasks of the workers in the revolution*.<sup>18</sup> In his original text Bogdanov had made the qualification that “we shall pursue the struggle for peace by legal means, whilst these means are still available to us.” At the same time, nothing should be done to weaken the front or the rear: the people had defended the country because they had been compelled to do so; their commitment to defence would be all the greater now that they were defending the revolution. This section had been deleted. In a second passage that had been deleted he had warned the Provisional Government not to repeat the errors of the old régime: it should immediately approach Russia’s allies and propose a negotiated peace. Terms should be formulated that would be acceptable to Russia’s adversaries in order to secure a rapid end to the war, in view of the casualties and material losses that would be incurred during any delay. Bogdanov had ended his article: “The war must be brought to an end!” (“*Nado konchat’ voinu*”); however, the published article ended with the slogan “Down with the War!” (“*Doloi voinu!*”).<sup>19</sup>

The policy advocated by Bogdanov in *Sotsial-demokrat* was that of “revolutionary defencism”. On 14 March, five days after his article had appeared, the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies published its appeal, drafted by a bloc of Zimmerwald “centrists”, ‘To the peoples of the entire world’— that ended with the slogan ‘Proletarians of all countries, unite!’.<sup>20</sup> From an article of Bogdanov that appeared in the *Izvestiya* of the Moscow Soviet on 2 May we know that he was satisfied with this appeal, with the caveat that it unfairly singled out the

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<sup>18</sup> *Zadachi rabochikh v revolyutsii* (March 1917). Title page carries the date “March 1917”.

<sup>19</sup> ‘*Bor’ba za mir*’, in *Zadachi rabochikh v revolyutsii* (March 1917). The passages that had been omitted in *Sotsial-demokrat* are re-instated on pages 9 and 10 of this edition.

<sup>20</sup> On the drafting of the appeal see Sukhanov I (1991), 276—285; and (2015), 8—33. The appeal ‘*K narodam vsego mira*’, was published in *Izvestiya Soveta Rabochikh i Soldatskikh Deputatov*, No.15, for March 15, 1917 (o.s.). For an English translation see Browder and Kerensky (1961), 1077—1078.

proletariats of Austria and Germany for having succumbed to government propaganda, in other words that it was insufficiently internationalist.<sup>21</sup>

‘War and Peace’ was the only article by Bogdanov to appear in *Sotsial-demokrat*. In 1928, the Soviet historian St. Krivtsov wrote that he had ceased contributing to the paper when the Moscow Bolsheviks “adopted the policies of Lenin”.<sup>22</sup> Certainly, Lenin’s Central Committee as early as November 1914 had called for the “transformation of the present imperialist war into a civil war, in emulation of the Paris Commune”;<sup>23</sup> and on 4 April 1917, soon after his arrival in Petrograd, Lenin had delivered the ‘Theses’ in which he had insisted that “not the slightest concession to revolutionary defencism is permissible”.<sup>24</sup> However, it was not until 19—21 April 1917 that the First Moscow Oblast Conference of the RSDRP formally endorsed Lenin’s Theses.<sup>25</sup> It is therefore more likely that Bogdanov’s relations with *Sotsial-demokrat* ended after 9 March simply because his views were too defensist for

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<sup>21</sup> A. Bogdanov, ‘Na puti k Internatsionalu’, *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.49, 2/15 May 1917. Some time during March had Bogdanov drafted a proclamation for the Moscow Soviet which also ended with the slogan “Proletarians of the World Unite”. However, this proclamation had not been adopted by the Moscow Soviet. See ‘Ot rabochikh revolyutsionnoi Moskvyy k proletariyam voyuyushchikh stran, soyuznykh i nepriyatel’skikh, a takzhe stran neutral’nykh’ (‘From the workers of revolutionary Moscow to the proletariat of the countries at war – allied, enemy and neutral’), in *Neizvestny Bogdanov 1*, 79—81.

<sup>22</sup> Krivtsov (1928), 184.

<sup>23</sup> Lenin had argued that the defeat of the Tsarist government was a “lesser evil” as early as 6 September 1914. See theses 6 and 7 of his ‘Zadachi revolyutsionnoi Sotsial-demokratii v Evropeiskoi voine’ in Lenin, PSS Vol. 26 (1969), 6—7. His views had been incorporated in ‘Voina i Rossiiskaya sotsial-demokratiya’, a manifesto of the Central Committee of the RSDRP published in *Sotsial-demokrat* (Geneva), No.33 for 1 November 1914 in Lenin, PSS Vol. 26 (1969), 13—23) and had been developed in ‘O porazhenii svoego pravitel’sstva v Imperialisticheskoi voine’ in *Sotsial-Demokrat* (Geneva), No.43 for 26 July 1915 in Lenin, PSS Vol. 26 (1969), 286—291. In all of these works Lenin invokes the example of the Paris Commune.

<sup>24</sup> For Lenin’s Theses, see ‘Doklad na sobranii bol’shevikov—uchastnikov Vserossiiskogo soveshchaniya Sovetov rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov 4 (17) aprelya 1917 g.’ in Lenin, PSS. Vol.31 (1969), 103.

<sup>25</sup> See Kowalski (1982), 7, citing ‘Protokoly pervoi (Moskovskoi) oblastnoi konferentsii tsentral’no-promyshlennogo raiona RSDRP (b) proiskhodivshei v g. Moskve 2—4 maia/19—21 aprelya 1917 g.’, *Proletarskaya revolyutsiya* (1929), No.10, 137—142.

the taste of the editorial board. Bogdanov's disparagement of the anti-war propaganda of the Moscow Bolsheviks may also have been a factor.

The slogan "Down with the war!" authorship of which has been credited to M.S. Ol'minsky, had been deployed by the Moscow Bolsheviks as early as 9 January 1917 on the occasion of a demonstration on Theatre Square.<sup>26</sup> They had incorporated this slogan into a proclamation they had drafted at a meeting of 27—28 February that called upon the workers of Moscow to follow the example of Petrograd and form a Soviet.<sup>27</sup> In a signed article, 'On militant slogans', that appeared in the *Izvestiya* of the Moscow Soviet of Workers' Deputies on 23 April, Bogdanov administered a lengthy rebuke to the Moscow party organization and to *Sotsial-demokrat* (he did not mention either) for the imprecision of the slogan, "Down with the war" earlier in the year. It had been so vague that it could have been interpreted by extreme Tolstoyans or anarchists to mean that there should be no support for the army at the front, that peace should be negotiated on any terms, or even that Russia should negotiate a separate peace.<sup>28</sup> It all probability it was this disagreement that convinced the leaders of the Moscow party organization that Bogdanov's views were too divergent from their own, and his adherence to them too intransigent, for there to be any future contribution to *Sotsial-demokrat*.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See V.P. Nogin, 'Sredi Moskovskikh Bol'shevikov', in *God bor'by* (1927), 7; and *Zemlyachka* (1933), 2.

<sup>27</sup> Sofiya Nikolaevna Smidovich recalled a meeting of the "Moscow Oblast' Bureau" (she admits that it had no links with the Oblast') at the flat of the Pavel Petrovich and Elena Konstantinovna Malinovsky, attended by I.I. Skvortsov-Stepanov, V.A. Obukh, M. S. Ol'minsky, A.A. Sol'ts, Petr Germogenovich Smidovich, R.S. Zemlyachka, V.N. Yakovleva (Bureau Secretary and V.I. Soloviev. Skvortsov-Stepanov had drafted the proclamation. See S. Smidovich. 'Chto mne udalos' pripomnit', in *Nakanune revolyutsii* (1922), 143. In a chronicle published by the Institute of History of the Moscow party in 1973 the meeting is said to have taken place at the flat of Obukh. See *Letopis' geroicheskikh dnei* (1973), 12.

<sup>28</sup> A. Bogdanov, 'O boevykh lozungakh', *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.42, 23 April/6 May 1917.

<sup>29</sup> Bogdanov later told Bukharin that *Zadachi rabochikh v revolyutsii* (March, 1917) had been distributed by the Moscow Bolshevik Committee. See 'Otkrytoe pis'mo tov.

c) *Izvestiya of the Moscow Soviet of Workers' Deputies*

From 1 March 1917 Bogdanov was employed as a lecturer (“*lektor*”) in the Cultural-Educational Department of the Moscow Soviet of Workers’ Deputies.<sup>30</sup> The position provided him with convenient access to the columns of the Soviet’s *Izvestiya* where, for the first five issues, Skvortsov-Stepanov was the senior editor and the de facto senior editor even after the Menshevik, Boris Kibrik, had been appointed editor in chief.<sup>31</sup> Bogdanov’s first contribution to *Izvestiya*, ‘The Constituent Assembly’, in issue No.9 for 12 March was published as an unsigned editorial on the occasion of a demonstration organized jointly by the Moscow Soviet of Workers’ and the Soviet of Soldiers’ Deputies. On the front page *Izvestiya* also called for “A Democratic Republic!”, “The 8-hour working day!” and “Peace and the Brotherhood of Nations!”<sup>32</sup>

On 28 May, as a consequence of Kibrik’s decision to bring *Izvestiya* more strictly into line with the policy of the Moscow Soviet, in particular with regard to Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary participation in the Provisional Government, the Bolsheviks’ Moscow Committee announced the withdrawal of their representatives (Skvortsov-Stepanov, Nikolai L. Meshcheryakov and Vladimir N. Makismovsky) from the paper’s editorial

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Bukharinu’, 10 December 1921, in *Neizvestny Bogdanov 1*, 204. He did not add that it was in March that his collaboration with *Sotsial-demokrat* had ended.

<sup>30</sup> In a Curriculum Vitae produced for the Socialist Academy on 30 August 1923 Bogdanov gave the duration of his employment as “*lektor*” as 1 March to October 1917. See *Arkhiv RAN*, f.350, op.3, d.190, par. 11. In a letter to Pavel I. Lebedev-Polyansky of 5 Jun 1917 Bogdanov mentions a 3-hour lecture programme on propaganda to be delivered over a period of four days for the Moscow Soviet of Soldiers’ Deputies. 500 had enrolled. Earlier in the year he had published an article on ‘The rights of the soldier and discipline’ in *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.20, 25 March 1917.

<sup>31</sup> See Viktorov & Kumanev (1986), 119—120.

<sup>32</sup> See *Izvestiya Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov* (Moscow), Vypusk 9, 12 March 1917. The editorial ‘Uchreditel’noe sobranie’, was included by Bogdanov in his collection *Zadachi rabochikh v revolyutsii* (March 1917). He later claimed that this brochure had been distributed by the Moscow Bolshevik Committee. See ‘Otkrytoe pis’mo tov. Bukharinu’, 10 December 1921, in *Neizvestny Bogdanov 1*, 204.

board.<sup>33</sup> Kibrik had by this time resigned as official editor.<sup>34</sup> However, Bogdanov's access to the columns of *Izvestiya* was not diminished: on the contrary, it was under the new editor-in-chief, Vyacheslav Petrovich Volgin<sup>35</sup> that *Izvestiya* on 27 June would publish "The Commune-State", an article that had been rejected by *Novaya zhizn'*.<sup>36</sup> Thereafter, Bogdanov drafted proclamations of the Moscow Soviet on certain bipartisan issues, notably denunciations on 29 August and 1 September of the attempted putsch of General Lavr Kornilov,<sup>37</sup> and, on 6 October, a warning by the Soviet of an impending anti-semitic pogrom.<sup>38</sup> During 1917 two of Bogdanov's early

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<sup>33</sup> Skvortsov-Stepanov's resignation as editor was discussed at meetings of the Executive Committee of the Moscow Soviet of 22 and 27 May. His withdrawal and that of his fellow Bolsheviks was reported in *Sotsial-Demokrat* on 28 and 30 May 1917. He continued to publish regularly in *Izvestiya* and rejoined the editorial board in September, when, following the abortive putsch of General Kornilov, the Bolsheviks obtained a majority in the Moscow Soviet. On 5 October the Executive Committee of the Soviet approved an editorial board comprising Skvortsov-Stepanov and N.L. Meshcheryakov for the Bolsheviks; B.S. Kibrik; V.P. Volgin; and the SR, Gratsianov. See Ignatov (1925), 157—159; and 1917. *Letopis' geroicheskikh dnei* (1973), 165, 175 and 430.

<sup>34</sup> Kibrik, inexperienced in journalism, had tended to neglect his duties. See Ignatov (1925), 157—159; and Koenker (1981), 103.

<sup>35</sup> Volgin had worked with *Letopis'* in 1915 and in 1917 had joined the *Novaya zhizn'* group. He later wrote that together with his "closest assistants" Sholom Moiseevich Dvolaitzky, Konstantin Pavlovich Novitsky and Ruben Pavlovich Katanyan he had "led *Izvestiya* in a consistently internationalist direction, which not infrequently brought me into conflict with the Menshevik-SR Presidium of the Soviet." See *Deyateli SSSR r Revolyutsionnogo Dvizheniya Rossii* (1989), 390—391.

<sup>36</sup> A. Bogdanov, 'Gosudarstvo-kommuna', *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.96, 27 June/10 July 1917. On the rejection of this article, see below,

<sup>37</sup> 'To the population of Moscow. Comrades and Citizens!', *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.149, 29 August/11 September 1917 [issued on behalf of the Moscow Workers' and Peasants' Soviets, the Moscow Committee of the RSDRP (Bolsheviks), the Committee of Moscow Organizations of the RSDRP (Mensheviks), the Moscow Committee of the Socialist Revolutionaries, and the Moscow Unified Organization of the RSDRP]; and 'An appeal to the soldiers from the Moscow Soviets of Workers', Soldiers, and Peasants' Deputies', *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.152, 1/14 September 1917.

<sup>38</sup> 'From the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Citizens of Moscow!', *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.180, 6/19 October 1917.

popularizing works on socialism were re-published under the auspices of the Moscow Soviet.<sup>39</sup>

d) *Novaya zhizn'*

Funded by Maxim Gorky and others, and with the same editorial team as *Letopis'*, *Novaya zhizn'* first appeared in Petrograd on 18 April/1 May 1917 with an issue celebrating 'International Day'.<sup>40</sup> On the grounds that the paper would have "a broad readership", and in the hope (he pointedly remarked) that his material would "reach readers more rapidly", Bogdanov had agreed to contribute and his first article, 'What is it that we have we overthrown?', appeared on 17 May.<sup>41</sup> Here, Bogdanov deplored the persistence of authoritarianism in the RSDRP and cited the cults of Lenin and Plekhanov as examples of this phenomenon. Given that "every collective strives to transform the entire social environment in its own image... if it is structured on authoritarian-submissive lines then, however democratic or communistic its programme, its social policies will inevitably be authoritarian". He concluded that "much remains to be overthrown not only on the right but on the left of the political spectrum ... What is needed is a cultural revolution amongst not only the unenlightened masses but even the most progressive elements of the population." In what was for the most part an indictment of the maturity of Russia's political parties, Bogdanov did not fail to note the

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<sup>39</sup> *O sotsializme* (no date, but 1917), a re-edition of a pamphlet of 1904 and 1905; and *Put' k sotsializmu* (1917). The publishing policy of the Moscow Soviet was fairly inclusive: in *Put' k sotsializmu* we are told that Martov's *Klass protiv klassa* had already been published and that *Meshchanstvo i sotsializm* by Stanislas Vol'skii was being printed.

<sup>40</sup> The masthead of *Novaya zhizn'* identified it as a "Socio-literary, Social-Democratic newspaper". The Petrograd edition appeared, with some interruptions, between 18 April 1917 and 16 July 1918. A Moscow edition was published from 1—22 June 1918 (n.s.) and from 2 July—6 July 1918 it appeared as *Svobodnaya zhizn'*. During 1917 *Novaya zhizn'* had a print run of 62—115,000 copies, on a par with that of such established papers as *Den'* (38—55,000 copies) and *Rech'* (50—100,000 copies). See King (1996), 2; Korostelev (2014), Chapter III; and Volotskoi (2016), 23.

<sup>41</sup> See Bogdanov to the editors of *Novaya zhizn'* of 30 May 1917 in *Neizvestny Bogdanov I*, 187. Bogdanov's name appears in the list of contributors published in *Novaya zhizn'* No.39 for 3/16 June 1917.

arbitrariness of the Leninists' policy of "defeatism" and their conviction that there could be an immediate transition from the struggle for peace to the construction of socialism.<sup>42</sup>

The editors of *Novaya zhizn'* in this article had allowed Bogdanov his overt criticism of Lenin, but they had misgivings with regard to his second submission, 'The Commune-State', in which, referring explicitly to Lenin's *Letters on Tactics*, published in Petrograd on 27 April, Bogdanov criticized the conception of a Soviet state that Lenin had outlined immediately upon his return to Russia.<sup>43</sup> In the same letter to the editors of *Novaya zhizn'* of 30 May in which he had complained about the failure of *Letopis'* to publish 'Dangerous dreams', he asked to be informed of their decision on 'The Commune-State', an article of "immediate relevance".<sup>44</sup> No satisfactory reply can have been given for Bogdanov now offered the article to the *Izvestiya* of the Moscow Soviet of Workers' Deputies where, as we have seen, it was published on 27 June.<sup>45</sup>

Reminding Bazarov of this episode in January 1918, Bogdanov conjectured that 'The Commune-State' had been rejected because it had been "heretical".<sup>46</sup> However, there is no evidence to suggest that this had been the case: it is more likely that *Novaya zhizn'* had judged Bogdanov's polemic to be politically counter-productive at a time when they were trying

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<sup>42</sup> A. Bogdanov, 'Chto zhe my svergli?', *Novaya zhizn'* (St. Petersburg), No.25, 17/30 May, 1917. For a summary of this article, see White (2018), 361—364.

<sup>43</sup> Lenin's brochure had included as an appendix the 'Theses' he had delivered to a meeting of Bolshevik delegates to the All-Russian Conference of Deputies of Workers' and Soldiers' Soviets on 4 April 1917. What later became known as the "April Theses" had already been published in *Pravda* No. 26 on 7 April 1917. See Lenin, PSS, Vol. 31 (1969), 131—144.

<sup>44</sup> Bogdanov presumed that Bazarov had "gone somewhere" since he had had not heard from him for two weeks. See his letter to the editors of *Novaya zhizn'* of 30 May 1917, in *Neizvestny Bogdanov I*, 186—188.

<sup>45</sup> A. Bogdanov, 'Gosudarstvo-kommuna', *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.96, 27 June/10 July 1917.

<sup>46</sup> See Bogdanov to Bazarov, 1 January 1918 in *Neizvestny Bogdanov I*, 193.

to rally support around an internationalist platform within the RSDRP.<sup>47</sup> This, at any rate, can be inferred from a criticism published by Bazarov on 13 June, not of Bogdanov, but of the Menshevik paper *Rabochaya gazeta*, for publishing “inflammatory anti-Bolshevik material.” This, Bazarov wrote, would only serve to “rally support for the Bolsheviks amongst the workers.”<sup>48</sup>

A list of “participants” in *Novaya zhizn'*, published in issue No.39 for 3 June, still included the name of Bogdanov. However, an article ‘On party unity’, published on 13 June, in which he argued that efforts to achieve even a partial unification of the RSDRP were futile, ended his collaboration with the paper until the end of the year.<sup>49</sup> Why so? Between 3 and 24 June 1917 members of the *Novaya zhizn'* group attending the First All Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies had succeeded in persuading other factions of the RSDRP to join in convening a unification congress.<sup>50</sup> Bogdanov’s ‘On party unity’ appeared while the Congress of Soviets was still in session. The negotiators of *Novaya zhizn'* could hardly have welcomed his reflections on the subject. According to Bogdanov, the various factions, by attempting to inculcate ideological principles, were setting workers against each other and dissipating their own energies. Factional leaders had acquired undue importance: they were given to “laying down a line” and had a vested interest in inventing heresy and creating schism. The outcome was that the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies rather than social-democratic workers had become the principal drivers of revolutionary action. The Soviets had become a kind of

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<sup>47</sup> See King (1996), 1—18 and, in particular, 6—9.

<sup>48</sup> Bazarov, ‘Fraktsionnoe neistovstvo’, *Novaya zhizn'*, No.47, 13/26 June 1917. Bazarov objected to “abusive criticism”. Bogdanov’s ‘On party unity’ appeared in the same issue and was presumably considered not to be abusive. See King (1993).

<sup>49</sup> A. Bogdanov, ‘O partiinom edinstve’, *Novaya zhizn'* (St. Petersburg), No.47, 13/26 June 1917.

<sup>50</sup> An Organization Bureau was set up on 18 June and a “Unification Congress” of Social Democrats was held in Petrograd from 19—26 August. Present were “the various Menshevik groupings, the Bund, Latvian groups, ‘non-factional’ social-democratic groups (including the members of the editorial board of *Novaya zhizn'* who had initiated the congress) and others.”. See King (1996), 4; and *Shestoi S'ezd RSDRP (b): Protokoly* (1958), 437.

“broad workers’ party”, but one that was guided by volatile emotions rather than by socialist consciousness.<sup>51</sup> For a general consensus to be achieved within the RSDRP the rank and file would have to acquire the kind of influence over decision-making they had had after 1905.<sup>52</sup> Minority groupings would have to learn to accept the vote of majorities, a characteristic of workers’ parties of the European type. In Russia a low level of cultural development militated against this, hence the risk that the masses would settle for the kind of “unity through practice” that was being forged by the Soviets.<sup>53</sup> Given this pessimistic prognosis, there is little likelihood that Bogdanov would have joined (if, indeed, he had been asked to join) the United Social Democratic Internationalists, the political party initiated by the core of the *Novaya zhizn*’ group in September 1917.<sup>54</sup>

## **2. From defencism to revolutionary internationalism**

If Bogdanov’s position as outlined in *Sotsial-demokrat* of 9 March had been markedly defencist, by mid-April he had become more militant. In a review of the history of the socialist International published in the *Izvestiya* of the Moscow Soviet on 18 April/1 May, he pointed to what would result from the intransigence of governments in the matter of peace negotiations: their

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<sup>51</sup> A. Bogdanov, ‘O partiinom edinstve’, *Novaya zhizn*’ (St. Petersburg), No.47, 13/26 June 1917.

<sup>52</sup> A reference to the Fourth (“Unification”) Congress of the RSDRP held in Stockholm from 10—25 April/23 April—8 May 1906.

<sup>53</sup> A. Bogdanov, ‘O partiinom edinstve’, *Novaya zhizn*’ (Petrograd), No. 47. 13/26 June 1917. For additional information on the content of this article, see (2018), 136—137.

<sup>54</sup> An invitation was issued to “all social-democratic organizations that do not belong either to the Menshevik or to the Bolshevik factions” in *Novaya zhizn*’ of 13/26 September 1917. The new political entity at first adopted the name ‘*Organizatsiya ob’ediennykh sotsial-demokraticheskikh internationalistov*’ and subsequently ‘*RSDRP (Internationalisty)*’. In so far as the new Bolshevik party formed at the so-called “Sixth” Congress of the RSDRP of 26 July—3 August 1917 was also “anti-defencist”, the new group was willing to enter into electoral alliances with the Bolsheviks against the Menshevik defencists. See King (1996), 4—5; *Novaya zhizn*’ 21 October/3 November 1917, 2; and *Shestoi S’ezd RSDRP (b). Protokoly* (1958), 312.

peoples would raise the banner of revolution. The “workers of revolutionary Russia had summoned the proletariat of the other belligerent countries immediately, energetically and by all means, legal and revolutionary, to pursue the struggle for peace.”<sup>55</sup> By July, following the abortive offensive of General Brusilov, Bogdanov had lost hope in the willingness or ability of the coalition Provisional Government to implement the Zimmerwald platform. The offensive had resulted in “disturbances amongst troops in the rear and a senseless anarchistic demonstration in Petersburg”; and in a lurch to the right, involving the re-admission of the Cadets to the cabinet, the introduction of the death penalty at the front, and the arrest on spurious grounds of the leaders of the extreme left.<sup>56</sup>

In a second article, ‘International Revolution’, published in the same issue, he drew attention to signs that the revolution was spreading to Germany, Hungary and Austria. Despite this, governments were still refusing to act. “For this reason, revolution might be necessary in the belligerent countries if the war is to be ended at all... For the sake of peace and the brotherhood of peoples... in the interests of freedom and progress we call upon other peoples to raise the banner of revolution.” Bogdanov ended with the slogan “Long live the international revolution!”<sup>57</sup>

In his article of 18 April/1 May Bogdanov had noted, euphorically, that “an international workers’ congress will soon be convened — the first Congress of the *Third International*. The struggle for peace and the brotherhood of peoples is entering a new phase... The time will have come for a decisive struggle for the liberation of humanity, for the total annihilation of all violence

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<sup>55</sup> N. Maksimov (sic), ‘Internatsional’, *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.38, 18 April/1 May 1917.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Rabochii klass i Vremennoe Pravitel’stvo’, in *Uroki pervykh shagov revolyutsii* (July 1917), 8—9.

<sup>57</sup> A. Bogdanov, ‘Mezhdunarodnaya revolyutsiya’, *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.38, 18 April/1 May 1917.

and oppression – for the *last struggle for socialism*.”<sup>58</sup> It is not clear whether, in referring to a new “international congress” he had in mind the proposal made on 14/27 April by a Dutch-Scandinavian group of Social-Democrats for a general socialist peace conference in Stockholm, or the initiative of the International Socialist Committee under Robert Grimm for a Third Zimmerwald Conference, also to be held in Stockholm.<sup>59</sup> Two weeks later, however, in another article in *Izvestiya* of 2/15 May, ‘On the path to the International’, Bogdanov wrote in a more subdued tone of the difficulties that faced the convening not of a new International but of an “international workers’ peace conference” to which all parties and groups would be invited. Tact was needed in dealing with the contentious issue of whether “majority” factions should be excluded.<sup>60</sup> It was not for the Russian participants to decide whether the German social-patriots under Scheidemann should be allowed to take part; this was a matter for German internationalists themselves to decide.<sup>61</sup> With this more “open” conception of a conference in Stockholm, Bogdanov distanced himself from the Bolsheviks, for whom Bukharin would argue, unsuccessfully, in the Moscow Soviet of Workers’ Deputies on 30 May,

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<sup>58</sup> N. Maksimov (sic), ‘Internatsional’, *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.38, 18 April/1 May 1917.

<sup>59</sup> The Dutch-Scandinavian Committee had acted independently of the executive of the left Zimmerwald factions, who proceeded with their own arrangements for a “Third Zimmerwald Conference”, also to be held in Stockholm. On behalf of the Dutch-Scandinavian Committee, the Danish Social Democrat, Frederik Borgbjerg, had arrived in Petrograd on April 14/27 with an invitation to Russian socialists to attend a general peace conference in Stockholm. It was this proposal that was supported by the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, and endorsed by the First All-Russian Congress of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies of 2–16 June 1917 (o.s.). See Gankin and Fisher (1940), Chapter VII; Browder and Kerensky, Vol. II (1961), 1119–1120; Meynell, 1960), 1–25; Wade (1967), 453–467; and King (2015), 8–33.

<sup>60</sup> The reference is to those socialists who had voted for war credits and were, in the eyes of the internationalists, responsible for the collapse of the Socialist International.

<sup>61</sup> A. Bogdanov, ‘Na puti k Internatsionalu’, *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.49, 2/15 May 1917.

that there should be a break with the “social patriots” and support for the genuinely “revolutionary congress” proposed by the Zimmerwald left.<sup>62</sup>

During the First All-Russian Congress of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies of 2—16 June 1917 a delegation was appointed to mobilize support in Europe for the Stockholm conference.<sup>63</sup> Bogdanov republished his article of 2/15 May, with its warning against the dangers of national self-assertiveness, in a booklet *The Lessons of the First Steps of the Revolution*, in July 1917.<sup>64</sup> However, his publications of later in the year contain no mention of the Stockholm conference. Any hopes he might have retained for the success of the Soviet delegation would have been dashed by the report of one of its members, Henrikh Erlich, to a Congress of Soviets of the Moscow Oblast on 1 October. According to Erlich, the project was being sabotaged by the Provisional Government and its ambassadors. The English and French “majority” parties, initially willing to participate, had been prevailed upon not to do so.<sup>65</sup>

### **3. Critique of the Maximalist utopia**

*Faith is certainty in that which is unseen, as if it were seen, in that which is aspired to and hoped for, as if it really existed.*<sup>66</sup>

During the summer of 1915, in preparation for the Zimmerwald Conference due to be held in September, Lenin had drafted material for a resolution of the left caucus in which it was asserted that in the advanced

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<sup>62</sup> In the Moscow Soviet, Bukharin’s argument was rejected in May by 420 votes to 188 with 16 abstentions. See Ignatov (1925), 174—179. On the evolution of Bolshevik policy towards the idea of a “Third Zimmerwald Conference”, see Lazitch and Drachkovitch, Volume I (1972), Chapter 1.

<sup>63</sup> The delegation comprised the former Bolshevik, Joseph Petrovich Goldenberg-Meshkovsky (now of the *Novaya zhizn’* group); the Menshevik V.N. Rozanov; the Socialist Revolutionary N.S. Rusanov; H.M. Erlich of the Bund; and the Petrograd metal worker A.M. Smirnov. See Gankin and Fisher (1940), 597; Meynell (1960), 21; and Wade (1957), 455.

<sup>64</sup> A. Bogdanov, *Uroki pervykh shagov revolyutsii* (Moscow, July 1917), 15—19.

<sup>65</sup> E. Ignatov, *op.cit.* (Moscow, 1925), 181—182.

<sup>66</sup> Catechism of the Metropolitan Filaret (1782—1867), cited by Bogdanov in ‘Povyazka’ (1918).

countries “The objective conditions are quite ripe for socialism, and the great powers are fighting the current war in an effort artificially to delay the collapse of capitalism...”<sup>67</sup> This claim had also been made in a brochure published by Lenin and Zinoviev in Geneva in August 1915 entitled *Socialism and the War (The attitude of the RSDRP to the War)*; <sup>68</sup> and it found expression in the final version of the resolution of the “Zimmerwald left”, which called for a “socialist reorganization of the leading capitalist countries” and claimed that “objective conditions have already ripened for the realization of this.” <sup>69</sup>

The resolution of the left caucus had not been accepted for debate at the Zimmerwald Conference. However, it was published in *Sotsial-demokrat* (Geneva) in October 1915 together with the manifesto of the Zimmerwald majority.<sup>70</sup> We can assume that Bogdanov was familiar with these materials, for it was on 2 January 1917 that he had submitted to V.A. Bazarov for publication in *Letopis'* his article ‘A Third Programme’ in the first part of

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<sup>67</sup> According to one witness, Lenin, Zinoviev and Radek were all involved in the production of the draft resolution. See Shklovsky (1925), 82. An edition of what purported to be Lenin’s draft, dated “August 1915”, together with a German translation sent to Karl Radek, was published in *Leninskiĭ sbornik XIV* (1930), 165—169 (see also page 177 footnote No.1 and page 196 footnote No.2); and in Lenin, *Sochineniya* Vol. XXX (1935), 230—232. Subsequently, a “variant” of the draft was published as ‘Proekt rezolyutsii ob otnoshenii k voine’ (August, 1915, Sörenberg), in *Leninskiĭ sbornik*, XXX (1937), 95—97. This text was reproduced in the Fifth edition of Lenin’s works (PSS Vol.26 (1969), 383—385, where it is dated “earlier than July 13/26 1915”. No explanation is given in the publications of 1937 or 1969 of the status of the drafts published in 1930 and 1935. According to one source, Lenin subjected two drafts by Radek to criticism before producing his own. See Temkin and Tupolev (1978), 105—106.

<sup>68</sup> See ‘Sotsializm i voina’, PSS Vol. 26 (Moscow, 1969), 307—350 and, in particular, page 321. The brochure appeared (in Russian and German) as a publication of *Sotsial-Demokrat* (Geneva) and was distributed to delegates at Zimmerwald. It contained as appendices the manifesto of Lenin’s Central Committee, ‘The war and Russian Social-Democracy’ (‘Voina i Russkaya Sotsial-Demokratiya’, *Sotsial-Demokrat* No.33, 1 November 1914), and an article by Lenin - ‘A Conference of the Foreign Sections of the RSDRP’ (*Konferentsiya Zagranichnykh Sektsii RSDRP*) together with the resolutions of this conference. See PSS Vol. 26 (1969), 454, note 219.

<sup>69</sup> See ‘Draft resolution of the Zimmerwald Left’, in Gankin and Fisher, *The* (1940), 351—353, and for the citation, 351—352.

<sup>70</sup> ‘Vsemirnaya voina i zadachi sotsial-demokratii’, *Sotsial-Demokrat* (Geneva), No.45—46, 11 October 1915.

which, ‘Dangerous dreams’ he had criticized Kamenev’s article in *Letopis’* of the previous year, noting:

...the prevalence on the left Internationalist wing of our Social Democracy of the so-called ‘Maximalist’ view... the essence of which consists in the idea that the time is ripe for the realization of socialism, and that the crisis currently being experienced by humanity is, in fact, a crisis of transition from capitalism to socialism... the proletariat of Europe and America will first implement socialism in their own countries and then assist the workers of the backward countries, like our Russia, to do the same. In this way, allegedly, the world-wide task of collectivism will be resolved.<sup>71</sup>

We encounter the same theme in Bogdanov’s first article for *Novaya zhizn’*, ‘What is it that we have overthrown?’, published on 17/30 May and in his article ‘The Commune-State’, published in the *Izvestiya* of the Moscow Soviet of Workers’ Deputies on 27 June. In the first he denounced as utopian Lenin’s advocacy in April (“essentially only for himself and his closest followers”) of the transformation of the struggle for peace into a socialist revolution.<sup>72</sup> Some argued that a workers’ revolution in Western Europe would facilitate this transition. However:

One has to be blinded by faith to think that the workers of Europe, the majority of whom have followed the capitalists into war, and who, three years later still remain committed to the slaughter... will embark upon a fundamental reconstruction of society once the war has ended.<sup>73</sup>

Lenin, Bogdanov went on, envisaged an immediate transition to socialism under a “Republic of Soviets”. Even Trotsky, after the revolution of 1905, had made more sense when he had argued that in Russia the transition would be a continuous process.<sup>74</sup> In early 1918 Bogdanov published the prediction

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<sup>71</sup> ‘Zavtra li?’ [formerly ‘*Opasnye mechty*’], in *Voprosy sotsializma* (1918), 21.

<sup>72</sup> A. Bogdanov, ‘Chto zhe my svergli?’, *Novaya zhizn’* (St. Petersburg), No.25, 17/30 May, 1917.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Gosudarstvo-kommuna’, *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.96, 27 June/10 July 1917 and in *Voprosy sotsializma* (1918), 96—97.

<sup>74</sup> Gosudarstvo-kommuna’, *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.96, 27 June/10 July 1917 and in *Voprosy sotsializma* (1918), 96. Trotsky had outlined his theory in ‘Itogi i perspektivy’ in the collection *Nasha revolyutsiya* (1906) and in the

he had made a year earlier of the consequences of a revolutionary leap in the dark:

We could envisage the emergence of a new Arakcheev, only on a grander scale. Having acquired sufficient power, he would appoint an official to every enterprise and subordinate the entire economy to the necessary number of departments. The consequence would be a rapid dissipation of the forces of production and, in due course, a collapse of the entire system.<sup>75</sup>

#### 4. Conception of a democratic revolution

*At that time I adhered to the Old Bolshevik position and looked upon the revolution that had broken out in Russia as a democratic revolution; that was also the understanding of the majority of Russian Bolsheviks.*<sup>76</sup>

In March Bogdanov was cautiously hopeful that a Provisional Government, albeit one dominated by Constitutional Democrats and Octobrists, could persuade the bourgeoisie to accept a programme of democratic reforms of the kind they had rejected in 1905.<sup>77</sup> The *raison d' être* of the Provisional Government was to convene a Constituent Assembly that would create a “people’s régime, a people’s government” (“*narodny stroi, narodnaya vlast*”) based upon universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage. The social estates should be abolished. The constitution should guarantee full civil liberties and equal status for all nationalities.<sup>78</sup> ‘The Constituent Assembly’ was the title of Bogdanov’s first article to be published in the *Izvestiya* of the

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chapter ‘Internatsional’naya taktika’ in L. Trotsky, *Chto zhe dal’she. Itogi i perspektivy* ((1917), 17—30.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Zavtra li?’ [formerly ‘Dangerous dreams’], *Voprosy sotsializma* (1918), 40.

<sup>76</sup> Bogdanov, ‘An open letter to comrade Bukharin’, 10 December 1921, in *Neizvestny Bogdanov, 1*, 204.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Otkuda revolyutsiya i kakovy teper’ zadachi rabochikh’, in *Zadachi rabochikh v revolyutsii* (March 1917), 17; ‘Rabochii klass i Vremennoe Pravitel’stvo’, in *Uroki pervykh shagov revolyutsii* (July 1917), 3.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Uchreditel’noe sobranie’ (unsigned) in *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.9, 12 March 1917 and in *Zadachi rabochikh v revolyutsii* (March 1917), 3—5.

Moscow Soviet of Workers' Deputies on 12 March 1917, and he gave this article pride of place in a brochure published later that month.<sup>79</sup>

In April Bogdanov supported the participation of the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries in a coalition Provisional Government on the grounds that the functions of support, supervision, and, if necessary, direction of the government could be better exercised from within.<sup>80</sup> Following the July crisis he revised his position and accepted that the new government would have to be a socialist government (a government of the “revolutionary democracy”), accountable to the Soviets.<sup>81</sup> However, this was no departure from the position he had taken up in June when, in ‘The Commune-State’, he had rejected Lenin’s conception of a state system based upon the Soviets : the function of the new government was to be a more reliable guarantor of the convening of the Constituent Assembly; it would continue to be provisional.<sup>82</sup> The analogy Lenin had drawn with the Paris Commune of 1870—71 had been incorrect: the Commune had been elected by the population at large, whereas the Soviets provided for separate representation of workers, soldiers and peasants. Elections to the Commune had been direct, whereas in the Soviets elections were multi-tiered and indirect (city Soviets elected to Soviets at Governorship (*Guberniya*) level, Governorship Soviets to Soviets at the

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<sup>79</sup> *Zadachi rabochikh v revolyutsii* [*The tasks of the workers in the revolution*] (March 1917)

<sup>80</sup> ‘Rabochii klass i Vremennoe Pravitel’stvo’ [‘The working class and the Provisional Government’], in *Uroki pervykh shagov revolyutsii* (July 1917), 3—5. From the outset, this had been the position of the *Novaya zhizn’* group in Petrograd. See V. Bazarov, ‘Rekonstruktsiya Vremennogo Pravitel’stva’ [‘The reconstruction of the Provisional Government’], *Novaya zhizn’*, No. 11, 30 April/13 May 1917, cited in King (1994), 54.

<sup>81</sup> ‘Rabochii klass i Vremennoe Pravitel’stvo’ [‘The working class and the Provisional Government’], in *Uroki pervykh shagov revolyutsii* (July 1917), 9—10.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Gosudarstvo-kommuna’, *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.96 for 27 June 1917 and in *Voprosy sotsializma* (1918), 96. In this article Bogdanov refers to Lenin’s ‘Letters on tactics’, written in April 1917 and published as a separate brochure on 27 April 1917. The brochure included Lenin’s ‘Theses’ for a speech he had delivered on 4 April and which had been published in *Pravda* No.26 on 7 April 1917. See ‘Doklad na sobranii bol’shevikov—uchastnikov Vserossiiskogo soveshchaniya Sovetov rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov 4 (17) aprelya 1917 g.’ in Lenin, PSS. Vol.31 (1969), 131—144.

Regional (*Oblast'*) level, and Regional Soviets to the All-Russian level). The electoral base of the Soviets varied from place to place: in one town there might be one deputy per 50 voters; in another one per 100; in yet another one per 200. One village might elect one deputy per 10 households, another one per 20 households, and so on. In all of these respects the Soviets represented an inferior form of democracy.<sup>83</sup>

At the end of this article the editors of *Izvestiya* invited comment from “comrades sharing the point of view of comrade Lenin”. When Bogdanov republished the article in *Problems of Socialism* in 1918 he reported that there had been no response from the “Leninists”.<sup>84</sup>

## 5. Economic reform

*The task is to take the means of production out of private ownership.*<sup>85</sup>

In ‘World Crises in time of Peace and War’ published in *Letopis'* in 1916 Bogdanov had analyzed the origins of the World War and the dynamics of the economies of the belligerent powers.<sup>86</sup> These articles served as the basis for his writings of 1917 and later on the question of War Communism. Towards the end of 1917 and in 1918 he envisaged that the elements of War Communism that contradicted the general line of capitalist development (rationing of consumption, monopolization of some products by the state; state-bureaucratic regulation of production and distribution) would either disappear or be reduced in scale when the war was over; other elements, however, such as syndicates and trusts, might persist.<sup>87</sup> In general, he assumed that after the convening of the Constituent Assembly capitalism would

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<sup>83</sup> ‘Gosudarstvo-kommuna’, *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.96 for 27 June 1917 and in *Voprosy sotsializma* (1918), 92.

<sup>84</sup> *Voprosy sotsializma* 1918), footnote on page 91.

<sup>85</sup> *Put' k sotsializmu* (1917), 6.

<sup>86</sup> *Mirovye krizisy, mirnye i voennye*, *Letopis'* (1916), Nos. 3, 4, 5, 7.

<sup>87</sup> *Put' k sotsializmu* (1917), 28—29; ‘Voenny kommunizm i gosudarstvenny kapitalizm’, in *Voprosy sotsializma* (1918), 86.

continue to exist in Russia, but that it would function within a democratic political framework that guaranteed freedom of expression, of assembly and the activity of trade unions.<sup>88</sup> The specific reforms that he proposed during the months preceding the October revolution enable us to describe him as a “reformist” and as an “evolutionary” socialist. His programme may be summarized as follows:

*a) Reform of the living conditions of the working class*

During the period of the Provisional Government Bogdanov did not put forward any proposals for the structural reform of industry. He did not advocate nationalization or workers’ control. His proposals were aimed primarily at improving the working and living conditions of the working class. He advocated incorporation of the “minimum programme” of social-democracy in a new fundamental law to be adopted by the Constituent Assembly. This would include the 8-hour working day, even if it could not be introduced immediately in the war industries or in the production of essential goods (“*predmety pervoi neobkhodimosti*”). There should be a legal minimum wage. In view of the rising cost of living and the vast profits made by capitalists, workers were entitled to demand wage increases. There should be state-funded unemployment insurance.<sup>89</sup> The burden of taxation should be shifted onto the affluent classes (“*sostoyatel’nye klassy*”).<sup>90</sup> All of these proposals were aimed at the material amelioration of the life of the working class.

*b) Reform of agrarian relations*

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<sup>88</sup> *Put’ k sotsializmu* (1917), 19—20.

<sup>89</sup> Following an agreement between the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ Deputies and the Petersburg Society of Plant and Factory Owners (*Peterburgskoe Obshchestvo zavodchikov i fabrikantov*) that allowed for voluntary overtime arrangements, Bogdanov warned against possible abuses and pointed out that in the experience of other countries, shorter working days made for higher productivity. See ‘On the 8-hour working day’ and ‘Otkuda revolyutsiya i kakovy teper’ zadachi rabochikh’, in *Zadachi rabochikh v revolyutsii* (March 1917), 12—14 and 19—20 respectively; and *Uroki pervykh shagov revolyutsii* (July 1917), 13.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Uchreditel’noe sobranie’, in *Zadachi rabochikh v revolyutsii* (March 1917), 5.

Essentially, Bogdanov's policy derived from the agrarian programme that had been adopted by the RSDRP at its Unification Congress in Stockholm in 1906.<sup>91</sup> With regard to confiscation of the large estates (though not with regard to the utilization of these estates), it did not differ greatly from the policy outlined in the electoral manifesto adopted by Lenin's conference held in Prague in January 1912.<sup>92</sup> In March 1917 Bogdanov advised workers to support confiscation by the peasants of landlords', Court (*udel'*), monastic and State lands, but to do so in collaboration with the Soviets of Peasants' Deputies. Forests, model farms, sugar beet plantations, and rural artisanal enterprises should come under the jurisdiction of either new rural authorities (democratized *zemstva*), or of unions of cooperatives.<sup>93</sup> Bogdanov had no proposals for state ownership or collective landholding, whether by the *obshchina* or other traditional communities.

The Stockholm Congress had acknowledged the need for land redistribution as a first stage in agrarian reform, while insisting that in the longer term only a "complete socialist reconstruction" would be effective in eliminating poverty and exploitation in the countryside.<sup>94</sup> It was in this perspective that Bogdanov envisaged the emergence, in the medium term, of a broad stratum of petty landholders:

Those [peasants] who wish to do so will retain their land and their farms. They will exchange their grain and other produce for the goods produced by the socialist sector of society. We can be confident that, in due course, as they realise the advantages of the general socialist economy, they will themselves choose, household by household, to join it.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> See Chetverty (Ob"edinitel'ny) s"ezd RSDRP: 'Agrarnaya programma', in *KPSS v rezolyutsiyakh i resheniyakh s"ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK*, Vol. 1 (1970), 170—171.

<sup>92</sup> See 'O vyborakh v IV Gosudarstvennuyu Dumu', in *Konferentsii RSDRP 1912 goda* (2008), 504.

<sup>93</sup> *Zadachi rabochikh v revolyutsii* (March 1917), 20—21.

<sup>94</sup> See Chetverty (Ob"edinitel'ny) s"ezd RSDRP: 'Takticheskaya rezolyutsiya po agrarnomu voprosu', in *KPSS v rezolyutsiyakh i resheniyakh s"ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK*, Vol. 1 (1970), 171.

<sup>95</sup> *Put' k sotsializmu* (1917), 7.

Whether the peasants' ownership of land would be protected by title, Bogdanov does not say. His prescription was that forms of "tenure" (*vladeniya*) should be decided provisionally by the Soviets of Peasants' and Workers' Deputies and then confirmed by the Constituent Assembly.<sup>96</sup>

Bogdanov was not unaware of the risks that were inherent in making concessions to peasant aspirations. In June 1917 he pointed out that, being "property-minded" ("*sobstvennik*"), the peasant was opposed to socialism. The price inflation of consumer goods could give rise to conflict. Quantitatively and qualitatively the peasantry and the proletariat were unequal: the peasantry were numerically preponderant; the proletariat culturally more advanced. At present, workers and peasants confronted each other within the Soviets like "great powers" and this antagonism could result in civil war.<sup>97</sup>

Bogdanov's policy with regard to ownership and with regard to large-scale cultivation differed markedly from that of Lenin, who in May 1917 declared that "The ownership of land must be that of the entire people ("*obshchenarodnoe*") and must be established by the general state power".<sup>98</sup> "Everyone would rent land from the state".<sup>99</sup> The "30,000 largest estates" were to be turned into state farms employing wage earners. These would be:

model farms for *common* ("*obshchei*") cultivation... Without this *common* cultivation under the management of the Soviet of Agricultural Workers all land will not become that of the toilers ("*trudyashchikhsya*")... This is the socialist lesson, derived from the study of other peoples, that has led us to the firm conviction that without the common cultivation of the land by agricultural workers ("*rabochimi*") using the best equipment and under the

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<sup>96</sup> *Zadachi rabochikh v revolyutsii* (March 1917), 20—21.

<sup>97</sup> 'Gosudarstvo-kommuna', *Izvestiya Moskovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov*, No.96 for 27 June/10 July 1917 and in *Voprosy sotsializma* 1918), 97.

<sup>98</sup> See V.I. Lenin, 'Vserossiiskii S"ezd Krest'yanskikh Deputatov. Rech' po agrarnomu voprosu, 22 May/4 June 1917', PSS Vol. 32 (1969), 176 and 169—170.

<sup>99</sup> "Arenda dolzhna byt' vyplachena kres'tyanskim sovetam". See 'Vserossiiskii S"ezd Krest'yanskikh Deputatov. Rech' po agrarnomu voprosu', 22 May/4 June 1917, PSS Vol. 32 (1969), 177—178 and 181—182.

management of scientifically educated agronomists there will be no escape from the yoke of capitalism.<sup>100</sup>

In the event, the Fundamental Law of Land Socialization that was adopted by the Soviet Central Executive Committee on 19 February 1918, was closer to Bogdanov's policy than to that of Lenin. While formally outlawing private ownership, the Fundamental Law, in deference to the Socialist Revolutionaries, transferred all land to the peasants, together with rights of use. The Bolsheviks' proposal for state farms was omitted from the Fundamental Law on the insistence of the Left-Socialist Revolutionary Commissar for Agriculture, L.A. Kolegaev, who objected to the introduction of "wage-slavery".<sup>101</sup>

## **6. The social base of the revolution**

### *a) a "workers'-soldiers' revolution*

In an article published in successive issues of *Novaya zhizn'* in January 1918 Bogdanov argued that the most influential role in the events of 1917, and in the October Revolution in particular, had been played by the peasantry and above all by the "soldier-peasantry". Torn from production and living in conditions of consumers' War Communism, the peasantry had formed "a distinct social stratum".<sup>102</sup> The peasantry:

played the most active part in the revolution and [its] intervention has been decisive at every stage. Future historians will maintain that there took place a peasant revolution in the countryside and in the cities a workers'-soldiers' revolution which in time became predominantly a soldiers' revolution.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> 'Vserossiiskii S"ezd Krest'yanskikh Deputatov. Rech' po agrarnomu voprosu', 22 May/4 June 1917, PSS Vol. 32 (1969), 186—187. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>101</sup> See Carr, Vol.2 (1962), 40; and Bunyan and Fisher, (1934), 672.

<sup>102</sup> 'Sud'by rabochei partii v nyneshnei revolyutsii' (Part I), *Novaya zhizn'*, No.19 for 26 January/8 February 1918.

<sup>103</sup> 'Sud'by rabochei partii v nyneshnei revolyutsii' (Part I), *Novaya zhizn'*, No.19 for 26 January/8 February 1918.

In this article Bogdanov identified the Bolsheviks as having served as a political instrument of the peasantry.

b) a “Communist bloc”

In September 1918, in a chapter written for Vol. 2, Book 4 of *A Course in Political Economy* but omitted when the volume was published in 1919, Bogdanov gave a somewhat more prominent role to elements of the proletariat and suggested that power had been seized by a “Communist bloc”, comprising:

the working proletariat whose collectivism includes an essential component of communism that is comprehensible to... the most backward strata of the proletariat who are still imbued with the vestiges of a petty-bourgeois ideology, and who understood socialism as a ‘carve up’ (*‘delezha’*) since it is around this idea that the entire mass of the proletariat can most easily unite... to the lower ranks of the army made up partly of proletarian elements... partly of peasants and petty-bourgeois elements... living in conditions of consumer-communism... and to the poorest and most easily inflammable section of the peasantry and urban artisans, a semi-proletariat... seeking their salvation in the division of spoils.<sup>104</sup>

The idea that is common to both of the above definitions of the social base of the revolution is that one of its driving forces had been the struggle for ownership and control of property. Three years later, Bogdanov would claim that the introduction of the New Economic Policy had vindicated his analysis. In a letter to Bukharin of 10 December 1921 he noted that his prediction of 1918 was no longer considered heretical, namely that the programme of the

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<sup>104</sup> The edition from which this chapter was omitted, was A. Bogdanov and I. Stepanov, *Kurs politicheskoi ekonomii*, Vol.2, Book 4 (Moscow-Petrograd, Gosizdat & “Kommunist”, 1919). The authors’ preface is dated “1 September 1918”. The omitted chapter, originally titled ‘Recent preformations of the collectivist order’ (*‘Noveishie proobrazy kollektivisticheskogo stroya’*), was included in the second edition (Moscow-Petrograd, 1924), in section (d) of Chapter X, under the title ‘Military-economic formations’ (*‘Voenno-ekonomicheskie formatsii’*). For Bogdanov’s draft of 1918, see *Neizvestnyi Bogdanov 1*, 81—92 and in particular the section ‘Worker-soldier communism and worker-peasant communism’ (*‘Kommunizm raboche-soldatskii i raboche-krest’yanskii’*), 89—90.

worker-peasant bloc could not proceed further than what its weaker component, the peasantry, would permit.<sup>105</sup>

*c) the role of the intelligentsia*

In his article of January 1918 Bogdanov had not credited the intelligentsia with any role in determining events, and in September 1918 he repeated this judgment:

Between the two blocs there stands a broad social stratum (“*sloi*”) known as the ‘intelligentsia’ - technically, politically and culturally organized elements, engineers, doctors, teachers, civil servants (*chinovniki*) and so on. This stratum, despite the special position that it occupies in the system of production and its huge contribution to production, has so far had no role as an independent class and no role as the revolution unfolds. To some extent it observes an uncoordinated neutrality, though most are inclined to support the state power: where the imperialist bloc is dominant it remains the agent of capital; where the communist bloc dominates it is assuming, after several vacillations, the guise of a ‘labour intelligentsia’. As long as this remains the case it will not of itself alter the correlation of world forces.<sup>106</sup>

As late as the end of 1919, in a letter to the economist Dmitrii Ivanovich Oparin, Bogdanov continued to deny the intelligentsia a role in the revolution, but envisaged that it could possibly play a part in the transition to collectivism.<sup>107</sup> It was 1920 before he revised his definition of what he now described as the “military democracy” of 1917. The social coalition that had been forged out of military necessity had included “those members of the labouring intelligentsia who had attached themselves to [the military

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<sup>105</sup> See *Neizvestny Bogdanov 1*, 205.

<sup>106</sup> See ‘Sud’by rabochei partii v nyneshnei revolyutsii’ (Part I), *Novaya zhizn*, No.19 for 26 January/8 February 1918; and for the judgment of 1 September 1918: ‘Recent preformations of the collectivist order’ (‘Noveishie proobrazy kollektivisticheskogo stroya’), in *Neizvestny Bogdanov 1*, 92.

<sup>107</sup> ‘Letter to Dmitrii Ivanovich Oparin’, dated 14 September 1919, in *Neizvestny Bogdanov 1*, 196—198.

democracy].”<sup>108</sup> We have here the embryo of what would later become Bogdanov’s theory of a “new class”.<sup>109</sup>

## Conclusions

1. In ‘Fortunes of the workers’ party in the present revolution’ published in *Novaya zhizn’* in January 1918, Bogdanov described himself as a “non-party socialist, and worker in culture and science”.<sup>110</sup> He did not, during 1917, seek to join any political party or to become an elected member of the Moscow Soviet (in 1905, he had been elected to the St. Petersburg Soviet). It is true that he did not abandon the commitment that he had made in 1912 to devote himself to the cause of cultural revolution, but he did to a significant degree campaign politically during 1917. He did not formally repudiate his membership of the RSDRP until after the October Revolution, and during the year he frequently harked back to the policies of the RSDRP adopted during congresses when the party had been formally united, and to the “Old Bolshevik position”.<sup>111</sup>

2. Throughout 1917 much of Bogdanov’s published output had carried a warning of what the consequences would be if policies based on Lenin’s thinking were implemented. In *Problems of Socialism*, published in early 1918,<sup>112</sup> he “provided an general analysis of state capitalism and of the present-day

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<sup>108</sup> ‘Letter of comrade N. to comrade N.N. For members of the RKP only’, in *Neizvestny Bogdanov 1*, 199.

<sup>109</sup> On this subject see Gloveli (2017), especially 96—97.

<sup>110</sup> ‘Fortunes of the workers’ party in the present revolution’ (‘Sud’by rabochei partii v nyneshnei revolyutsii’), (Part I), *Novaya zhizn’* (St. Petersburg), No.19 (233) for 26 January/8 February 1918.

<sup>111</sup> On a Curriculum Vitae produced for the Socialist Academy on 30 August 1923 Bogdanov dated his membership of the RSDRP as “from 1895 to 1917 (Bolshevik from 1903)”. *Arkhiv RAN*, f.350, op.3, d.190, par 25.

<sup>112</sup> In a letter to V.A. Bazarov of 1 January 1918 (see below) Bogdanov stated that *Voprosy sotsializma* would be published “in a day or two”. See *Neizvestny Bogdanov, 1*, 193—194.

chiliastic state of mind”.<sup>113</sup> In ‘Fortunes of the workers’ party in the present revolution’, also published in January 1918, he argued that the millenarianism of the political Maximalists had found its counterpart in the aspirations for land of the peasantry and in the leveling proclivities of the backward strata of the proletariat.<sup>114</sup>

3. For all his deploring the absence of a “Western” culture of compromise within Russian social-democracy, Bogdanov was himself unable to sustain a working relationship with the editorial boards of *Letopis’*, *Novaya zhizn’* or *Sotsial-demokrat*. His last article for *Novaya zhizn’* was detrimental to the efforts of socialists who were seeking to unite the non-Bolshevik groupings of the RSDRP, an objective he must surely have favoured, even if he considered it doomed to failure. Ironically, it was within the multiparty Moscow Soviet of Workers’ Deputies, an institution that he considered to be deficient in socialist consciousness, that Bogdanov found a congenial working environment.

4. Given the lengths to which Lenin had gone before 1917 to discredit the ideas of Bogdanov and, between 1912 and 1914, to exclude him from the columns of the St. Petersburg *Pravda*, it is, on the face of it, surprising that Lenin did not respond to Bogdanov’s publications of 1917, and, in particular, that he did not respond to the invitation issued by the editors of the *Izvestiya* to respond to ‘The Commune-State’. However, there is circumstantial evidence that Lenin may well have considered responding. Following the July Days Lenin asked Kamenev, who, “both scientifically and from a tactical point of view” had in April rejected Lenin’s views on the Soviets,<sup>115</sup> in the event that

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<sup>113</sup> Bogdanov to Bazarov, 1 January 1918 in *Neizvestny Bogdanov I* (1995), 103.

<sup>114</sup> ‘Fortunes of the workers’ party in the present revolution’ (‘Sud’by rabochei partii v nyneshnei revolyutsii’), Part I, *Novaya zhizn’* (St. Petersburg), No.19 (233) for 26 January/8 February 1918.

<sup>115</sup> For Kamenev’s views on the Soviets. see ‘Nashi raznoglasiya’ [‘Our disagreements’, *Pravda* No.27 for 8 April 1917, cited in Ul’rikh (2013), 106. Kamenev considered that the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies could assume responsibilities in transport and food supply, but that any attempt on their part to

he was killed to recover and publish notes that he had begun to compile in Zurich between January and February 1917, for a book on ‘Marxism on the state’.<sup>116</sup> It was to the completion of this work, eventually published in 1918 as *State and Revolution* that Lenin devoted much of his time in Razliv and Helsinki between 9 July and 24 September 1917. A seventh chapter, ‘The experience of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917’ was never completed.<sup>117</sup> The conjecture that in this chapter Lenin would have responded to Bogdanov’s ‘The Commune-State’, may not be too far fetched.

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overthrow capitalism would be inadmissible. See his ‘O tezisakh Lenin’, [‘On Lenin’s Theses’], *Pravda* No.30 for 12 April 1917, in *Revolutsiya 1917 goda glazami sovremennikov v trekh tomakh, T.1* (2017), 120—123.

<sup>116</sup> It was on 7 July that the Provisional Government had issued a warrant for Lenin’s arrest. The letter to Kamenev is dated “not before 5 July, not later than 7 July 1917” (o.s.). See PSS, T.49 (1970, 444

<sup>117</sup> When Lenin travelled to Petrograd in April 1917 the manuscript had remained in Stockholm. It was delivered to him in Razliv. Lenin signed the “Afterword” to *State and Revolution* on 30 November 1917 and was in possession of his author’s copies by 14 February 1918. See PSS T.33 (1969), 33—35, 120, and 560 (footnote 498).

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