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## Erik van Ree

# GEORGII PLEKHANOV AND THE *COMMUNIST MANIFESTO*: THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION REVISITED

*This article discusses the question of Georgii Plekhanov's contributions to Marxist revolutionary strategy. It argues that the strategy Plekhanov proposed in Our Differences (1885) was very different from the one he had earlier proposed in Socialism and Political Struggle (1883). Plekhanov pretended to model his Russian policies on the Communist Manifesto's policies for Germany in the mid-nineteenth century. However, in proposing that Russia's democratic revolution was to be followed by a protracted period of capitalist economic development, Plekhanov was in fact taking Marxism in a new direction. Plekhanov was the first Marxist to have rejected Marx's scenario of social revolution by numerically small proletariats and to have predicated the proletarian revolution on the proletarianisation of the majority of the population and integral industrialisation.*

This article discusses Georgii Valentinovich Plekhanov's original contribution to Marxism. I will argue that Plekhanov's originality consisted in his break with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' understanding of the preconditions of the proletarian revolution. Marx and Engels allowed a scenario of social revolution by numerically small proletariats in countries where capitalism was in its infancy. Plekhanov rejected this scenario. He predicated the proletarian revolution on the proletarianisation of the majority of the population and integral industrialisation.

Plekhanov is considered the father of Russian Marxism. His biography is well known. He was born in 1856, and studied at the Voronezh Military Academy and at the St Petersburg Metallurgical Institute. He became a populist revolutionary and in 1880 fled the country to settle in Switzerland, where he was converted to Marxism. Three years later he established the Emancipation of Labour Group, together with Pavel Aksel'rod and others. Apart from leading this first Russian Marxist organisation, Plekhanov became an important figure in the Second International, the organisation of socialist parties established in 1889. The key role he played in the struggle against Eduard Bernstein's so-called revisionism at the end of the century made Plekhanov one of the international leaders of Orthodox Marxism, together with Karl Kautsky.<sup>1</sup>

This article will not undertake an overall reassessment of Plekhanov's Marxism, his works on dialectical materialism, his geographical determinism, or his contributions to the debate with the 'revisionists', and his views about the intelligentsia, the class and the party will not be discussed. The article aims to set the record straight on the way

Plekhanov imagined the coming Russian revolution. I will focus on Plekhanov's conception of the revolution in two stages, and on his insistence that the first, democratic stage would have to culminate in an extended period of capitalist economic development. The article discusses the period ending in 1905, the year of the first Russian Revolution.

Plekhanov's fame as a leader of Russian Marxism was largely due to the policies he proposed for Russia, and which he outlined mainly in his 1883 *Socialism and Political Struggle* (*SPS*) and its 1885 follow-up, *Our Differences* (*OD*).<sup>2</sup> There is a fair degree of consensus in the scholarly literature as to what these policies amounted to. For Plekhanov, the Russian bourgeois-democratic revolution was supposed to end in a protracted period of capitalist economic development. The proletarian-socialist revolution would have to be postponed until capitalist industrialisation reached the level of the highly developed countries and until the industrial working class became the majority segment of the population. The revolutionary strategy proposed by Plekhanov was not one of moderation throughout. He acknowledged that the Russian bourgeoisie was a cowardly class and that the workers would have to play a leading role in the democratic revolution. Plekhanov also hoped that the capitalist era might turn out to be shorter than in the West, though he could see no way for his country to avoid that era. This interpretation of Plekhanov's revolutionary strategy is embedded in the larger debate between populists and Marxists about the Russian road to socialism. The populists pointed to the vitality of the village commune on which, they hoped, a socialist society could be built. In this way capitalism and its concomitant horrors could be avoided. Plekhanov, on the other hand, argued that the *obshchina* was fast disintegrating and that the preconditions of a socialist society, an industrial working class and large-scale production, would be created by capitalism.<sup>3</sup>

The scholarly literature is a bit more divided on the question of Marx's and Engels' understanding of the Russian revolution but, even so, the conclusions drawn by most careful students point in the same direction: Marx was not of one mind on the issue. On one hand, Marx argued that the capitalist mode of production was characterised by certain laws of development and that socialism would be the product of the contradictions of capitalism. Capitalism, Marx suspected, dialectically creates the preconditions of its own demise in the form of an industrial working class and large-scale production. On the other hand, though, Marx denied that these laws were truly universal. It would not be inevitable for countries to enter upon the capitalist path of development. There might be other roads to modernity. In Russia, the *obshchina* might provide a direct route to communism, under avoidance of capitalism. Engels was less confident on this point and tended to tie the communal road to communism in Russia more closely to a proletarian revolution in the West. In the end Marx too may have adopted that view. Most scholars would agree that this fairly represents Marx and Engels on the Russian revolution.<sup>4</sup>

The 'Marxism' of Marx and Engels was no monolith but had its shades and nuances.<sup>5</sup> What Plekhanov essentially did was to flatten 'Marxism'; to denude it of its ambiguity and to come down hard on one side of the Marxist spectrum. In completely rejecting the scenario of the communal road, which Marx to an extent had allowed, Plekhanov picked up the determinist and unilinear strains in Marx and Engels and fundamentally downgraded the voluntarist and multilinear ones. Because of this, Plekhanov's Marxism has often been cast in terms of 'determinism'<sup>6</sup> and

'necessitarianism',<sup>7</sup> and has been decried as 'dogmatic'<sup>8</sup> and 'fatalistic'.<sup>9</sup> On this reading, then, the problem of Plekhanov's Marxism might be considered solved: he followed one 'Marxism' and rejected the other.<sup>10</sup>

This would, however, be too facile a conclusion. It seems to me that we have been so fixated at the dilemma of 'village commune versus capitalism' that it has blinded us. A whole dimension of the problem of the Plekhanovist revolutionary strategy, and of its relation to Marx and Engels, has been completely ignored in the scholarly literature. As seen above, Marx acknowledged that, in the words of one scholar, 'capitalism did not necessarily destroy all in its path'.<sup>11</sup> It might be possible for particular countries not to opt for capitalism at all. Marx suggested that the *obshchina* might help the Russians skip capitalism, a possibility denied by Plekhanov. But Marx was flexible on the question of capitalist universalism in more than one way. He also accepted that once a nation *had* chosen capitalism, it was nonetheless not destined to go *all the way*. Not only could a nation refuse to opt in, it could also opt out early. The capitalist system could be overthrown by the proletariat long before the phase of integral proletarianisation and industrialisation would have been reached. This is what Marx proposed for Germany in the mid-nineteenth century, a capitalist country in the early stage of industrialisation that would nonetheless, in Marx's view, be ripe for the proletarian revolution very soon.

I will argue that in making the socialist revolution dependent on highly developed capitalism, Plekhanov broke with Marx *in two ways*. Not only did he discard Marx's suggestions that capitalism in Russia might be altogether avoided in favour of a direct road to socialism through the *obshchina*. Plekhanov also rejected Marx's other scenario of an early proletarian revolution. Marx had developed this model with an eye to semi-developed Germany, but it obtained an obvious relevance for Russian Marxists once capitalism had become unavoidable in their country too. To my knowledge, Plekhanov was the first Marxist to have rejected Marx's scenario of social revolution by numerically small proletariats and to have predicated the proletarian revolution on the proletarianisation of the majority and integral industrialisation.

Close textual analysis of Plekhanov's work furthermore shows that he realised very well that his Russian strategy represented a sharp break with Marx and Engels's approaches to the proletarian revolution. Nonetheless he suggested that he was just following the established Marxist tradition. In his struggle with the populists, Plekhanov needed Marxist legitimacy so badly that he was prepared to compromise his own intellectual integrity.

### **Plekhanov and the *Communist Manifesto* in the scholarly literature**

The best way to approach the problem at hand is to begin with the *Communist Manifesto*. The programme Marx and Engels wrote for the Communist League was published in 1848, the very year when revolutions broke out across Western and Central Europe. The *Communist Manifesto* was by far the most important text adduced by Plekhanov to underscore the supposed Marxist orthodoxy of his Russian strategy. In particular, Plekhanov repeatedly referred to the policies Marx and Engels had outlined in this celebrated text for Germany.

Historians studying the Russian revolutionary movement commonly frame the question of the Marxist strategy for late-nineteenth-century Russia in terms of a

workers' party that had to operate in a weakly developed country, where the industrial working class was hardly in evidence. This is in stark contrast with the conditions workers' parties met in highly developed capitalist countries such as Great Britain, France and Germany, and for which Marx and Engels's strategies of proletarian revolution supposedly had been intended. Samuel Baron writes that Plekhanov's was 'the first attempt to devise a Marxian socialist program for an underdeveloped country,' and that Plekhanov perfectly realised that Marxism, which 'first arose in a social context very different from contemporary Russia,' had to be adjusted.<sup>12</sup>

This interpretation is misleading. When Marx and Engels were proposing their communist strategies for Germany, it was not a highly industrialised, capitalist nation. In 1850 the German industrial working class comprised less than 3.5 per cent of the economically active population.<sup>13</sup> In 1875 this figure had risen substantially, but only to 10 per cent, not even close to a majority.<sup>14</sup> For another set of figures, in 1890 the Russian industrial working class represented a tiny social formation. It made up not much more than 1 per cent of the total population.<sup>15</sup> But in 1850 Germany, that class counted for little more, less than 2 per cent.<sup>16</sup> And, just like Russia, at this time Germany was still ruled by absolutist rulers. In Baron's terms, then, it was Marx and Engels not Plekhanov who first devised a Marxian strategy for an underdeveloped country, i.e. for Germany.

The view that Marx and Engels tied proletarian revolution to highly developed capitalist conditions is remarkably alive even today. For some important recent examples, in Gary Steenson's reading, Marx laid down a number of political and socio-economic 'criteria' for successful socialist revolutions, one of those being that 'industrial and commercial capitalism was dominant', in contrast to 'nations with large peasant populations'.<sup>17</sup> John Plamenatz allowed that Marx showed some flexibility, but not much. In Plamenatz's view, the 'basic tenet of Marxism' was that socialism required certain conditions created by capitalism. When Marx suggested in 1850 that these conditions might as well be created *after* the proletarian revolution, he was, Plamenatz insists, in fact denying his own fundamental doctrines. Overall, Plamenatz concludes, Marx did 'not envisage the workers getting political power in the infancy of capitalism.'<sup>18</sup> Richard Pipes agrees: Marx's doctrine 'applied to countries with mature capitalist economies,'<sup>19</sup> not to underdeveloped countries 'in which capitalism was still in its infancy.'<sup>20</sup> Only very recently, Terry Eagleton explained that 'Marx himself never imagined that socialism could be achieved in impoverished conditions.'<sup>21</sup>

Yet, this view has been convincingly disproven in the scholarly literature. Reidar Larsson concluded long ago that between 1846 and 1852 Marx and Engels 'devoted themselves almost wholly to drawing up theories precisely for "backward" societies: their native Germany and to some extent France.'<sup>22</sup> These conclusions have been confirmed in the works of Alan Gilbert, Hal Draper, Richard Hunt and Eric Hobsbawm.<sup>23</sup> Plekhanov's insistent references to the German policies of the *Communist Manifesto* were therefore to the point and precisely what we would expect from a Marxist novice who was in the process of orienting himself in this ideology.

In proclaiming the *Communist Manifesto* to be his lodestar, however, Plekhanov landed himself in an unfortunate situation. His proposal for an extended period of capitalist development in Russia was incompatible with *The Manifesto's* German policies, which cast the proletarian revolution as the immediate aftermath of the bourgeois revolution. As we will see later on, Plekhanov's first instinct in *SPS* was indeed loyally to follow the example of *The Manifesto*. He proposed a Russian proletarian revolution

following *immediately* after the democratic revolution, which would rule out a period of further capitalist development. However, by 1885 Plekhanov had changed his mind. He now began to argue that the proletarian revolution would have to be postponed until Russian capitalism reached the stage of integral development and the proletariat turned into the majority of the population. But rather than admitting this, Plekhanov hid the fact of his change of mind and suggested that he was merely elaborating in *OD* on earlier points made in *SPS*. Also, from 1885 onwards Plekhanov continued to assert, falsely, that his Russian strategies remained in full accordance with *The Manifesto's* proposals for Germany.

Plekhanov's literary strategies were so effective that they continue to create confusion in the scholarly literature today. That *SPS* and *OD* contain important mutually incompatible proposals has been missed in the literature. It is falsely assumed that Plekhanov was expounding one and the same line in these two fundamental texts.<sup>24</sup> Also, while it is generally acknowledged in the literature that Plekhanov modelled his Russian strategy on *The Manifesto's* German passages, scholars have missed the fact that Plekhanov's thesis of the extended period of capitalist development was incompatible with *The Manifesto's* German policies. According to Baron and Abraham Ascher, Plekhanov wanted class consciousness to be instilled in the workers to make the period of bourgeois domination as brief as possible. But even though Russian capitalism might develop at a higher tempo than it had developed in the West, there was no avoiding a protracted capitalist period following the democratic revolution. Baron and Ascher fail to note that this policy was incompatible with the German proposals of the *Communist Manifesto* to which Plekhanov himself referred.<sup>25</sup> On the contrary, Reidar Larsson and S. V. Tiutiukin suggest that Plekhanov closely followed *The Manifesto's* German policies in predicting a Russian proletarian revolution *very soon* after the fall of the tsar. But they leave it unexplained how Plekhanov could have reconciled this notion of an early proletarian revolution with his other thesis of the dependence of the proletarian revolution on the creation of a developed capitalist society.<sup>26</sup>

## Marx, Engels and the German revolution

The present article is not specifically devoted to the revolutionary strategy of Marx and Engels. The subject will be treated to the extent that it is relevant for our understanding of Plekhanov's policies, but not as a separate issue. I am especially interested in those passages in Marx and Engels that Plekhanov believed had profound relevance for late-nineteenth-century Russia. It will be clear by now that these were not only passages directly referring to Russia. Paradoxically, some of Marx's and Engels's remarks on German communist strategies were more significant than what they wrote about Russia directly.<sup>27</sup>

Plekhanov was mainly interested in Marx and Engels's views on Germany between 1848 and 1853. At first, Marx and Engels predicted proletarian revolution as the immediate aftermath of a bourgeois insurrection. They formulated the concept of the uninterrupted revolution most classically in the 1848 *Communist Manifesto* and in an address to the Communist League two years later. *The Manifesto* predicted an imminent German 'bourgeois revolution' resulting in the overthrow of feudalism and absolutism, and which would then serve as the 'immediate prologue of a proletarian revolution.'<sup>28</sup>

In the March 1850 address to the Communist League, Marx and Engels expressed the hope that the ‘petty bourgeois democrats’ would seize power. Their democratic revolution would then escalate quickly into a proletarian revolution in order ‘to make the revolution permanent.’<sup>29</sup>

The summer of 1850 represented a turning point. After the defeat of the German and other revolutions, Marx and Engels became pessimistic about an early proletarian revolution in Germany. They expressed their new pessimism on a few famous occasions, which are always referred to in the literature and by Plekhanov. Engels warned against premature proletarian revolutions in his study of the German Peasant War, written in the summer of 1850.<sup>30</sup> On 15 September of that year Marx suggested that the workers might have to experience 15 to 50 years of ‘civil wars and popular struggles,’ before they could be ready to undertake a successful proletarian revolution.<sup>31</sup> In 1853, Marx suggested that the German proletariat entrust the democratic revolution to the bourgeois classes and that the workers prepare to become the ‘*opposition party of the future*’ (original emphasis).<sup>32</sup>

This turn has been interpreted as if Marx and Engels admitted that their whole idea of rapid transition from bourgeois to proletarian revolutions had been a rash mistake.<sup>33</sup> In my reading, this interpretation is untenable. Marx and Engels continued to adhere to the permanent-revolutionary approach to the end of their lives. But in the context of the present article it is impossible to discuss this question with the seriousness that it deserves.<sup>34</sup> Fortunately, my argument about the status of Plekhanov’s Marxism does not depend on whether or not Marx and Engels abandoned the idea of permanent revolution in 1850. Whatever second thoughts they may have had, they never suggested that the German proletarian revolution would have to be postponed until the country reached the stage of integral capitalist industrialisation, a thought that Engels expressed for the first time only in the last months of his life in 1895.<sup>35</sup> The notion that the German democratic revolution must end in a protracted period of capitalist economic development, in order to create the conditions for the proletarian revolution, simply cannot be found in Marx’s and Engels’s works, even when they were at their most pessimistic.<sup>36</sup>

It is of particular importance for our interpretation of Plekhanov to see how Marx and Engels treated the problem of the missing revolutionary majority in a country like Germany, where the workers themselves fell far short of such a majority. Through the years, Marx and Engels consistently suggested that minority proletariats form a coalition with the peasantry. According to Marx’s famous dictum, the peasants provided the ‘*proletarian revolution*’ with ‘*the choir without which its solo performance becomes its death song in all peasant nations*’ (original emphasis).<sup>37</sup> In 1856 Marx wrote that, if supported by another peasant war, the ‘Proletarian revolution’ in Germany would proceed splendidly.<sup>38</sup> In his 1874–1875 comments on Mikhail Bakunin’s *Statehood and Anarchy*, Marx argued that proletarian governments could be established even in countries with a majority of peasants, which was the situation ‘in all states on the West-European continent.’ The ‘workers’ revolution’ had to ingratiate itself with the peasants, on whose support the proletarian government would depend.<sup>39</sup>

Marx and Engels had a famously low opinion of peasants, whom they saw as representatives of the idiocy of village life and as a class doomed to extinction by the process of capitalist competition. They understood that individual peasant proprietors had no intrinsic interest in socialism. The reason why they hoped that the small peasant



producers could nonetheless be won over for the proletariat was precisely because these people lived under the permanent threat of being ruined in the capitalist market. That is why the peasants might be convinced that a socialist workers' government would be in their best interest after all. We find this thought expounded in important, widely known writings by Marx and Engels from 1850 to the end of their lives.<sup>40</sup>

The question arises of how Marx and Engels could have expressed such views, considering that they were at the same time insisting that capitalism dialectically creates the conditions of its own demise through the processes of market competition and class polarisation, resulting in the creation of an industrial working class and large-scale industry. They also understood that socialism could only be constructed in a wealthy society, not amidst abject poverty. Again, the scope of this article does allow full treatment of this complicated question, but one answer seems to be that Marx and Engels indeed recognised all this, and that they saw a majority proletariat and a predominantly industrial and large-scale economy as necessary conditions for the establishment of socialist societies. However, they also allowed for the possibility that these conditions might be created *after* the proletarian revolution.<sup>41</sup> That is how they could hope for the seizure of power by tiny industrial working classes, supported by peasant majorities, while preserving intact their general understanding of capitalist historical development leading to the revolution and socialism.

On close reading, Marx and Engels's most famous and authoritative pronouncements on these issues quite often turn out to be less ironclad than they seem at first glance. For example, in January 1859 Marx famously wrote: 'A social order never perishes before all productive forces that it can accommodate have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the womb of the old society.' Taken literally, this leaves the proletariat no other option but to postpone the revolution until capitalism has completely exhausted its potential for growth and has finally sunk into irreversible stagnation. However, just a few lines further on Marx observes much less severely that the task of creating the new society can only be conceived of when 'the material conditions of its solution are already available *or at least in the process of formation*.'<sup>42</sup> Thus, Marx seems to suggest that, even though a proletarian revolution requires that capitalism is in place, that system need in fact *not* have developed its full potential after all.

The idea that democratic revolutions serve as the immediate prologues of the proletarian revolution also helps us to understand Engels's later thinking on Russia. At first sight there seems to be a strange inconsistency here. In April 1885 Engels famously wrote to Plekhanov's comrade Vera Zasulich that the strategy of a conspiratorial seizure of power advocated by some Russian Blanquist populists might not be so misguided after all. Revolution by a conspiratorial minority, Engels suggested, would do for Russia what 1789 had done for France. It would trigger into action revolutionary forces of a more popular nature to broaden the revolution beyond what the conspirators themselves envisaged. These forces would take over and help the revolution escalate into a Russian 1793.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, though, Engels was clearly of the opinion that capitalism was making headway in Russia, and that there was not much future in the *obshchina*.<sup>44</sup> So why, then, did he express sympathies for precisely that faction of revolutionaries who were aiming for a shortcut to communism through the village commune?

In Engels's revolutionary model, proletarian revolutions tended to be triggered by petty bourgeois democratic revolutions. For Engels, *Narodnaia volia* represented the petty bourgeois catalyst without which the process of revolutionary escalation could not get into motion. This does not mean that Engels necessarily expected a takeover by *Narodnaia volia* to escalate into a proletarian revolution. Most likely, he believed that the escalation could not yet reach that stage. In 1891 Engels still insisted that the Russian proletariat remained too weak for a revolution.<sup>45</sup> But with industrialisation making strong progress in Russia he may have hoped that the time would not be far away when the Russian workers could make their move, of course *after* the road had been cleared by the petty bourgeois revolutionaries.

### Plekhanov's two strategies of proletarian revolution

During the 1880s, Russia was a country with a tiny industrial working class that remained in need of a democratic revolution. What could have been more natural for Plekhanov than to orient himself on the strategies Marx and Engels designed for Germany in 1848 to 1850? The new Marxist convert's first instinct was indeed to adopt the uninterrupted revolution and to model his Russian strategy on the *Communist Manifesto*.

On closer inspection there was something oddly undefined about his first programmatic text, the 1883 *Socialism and Political Struggle*. Plekhanov aligned his thinking to Marx's materialist interpretation of history, as he understood it. The brochure argued that the preconditions of the socialist revolution were missing in Russia and that they would only be created in time by capitalist progress. As matters stood, neither the large-scale production that socialism required nor the politically mature and sufficiently large industrial working class were in evidence.<sup>46</sup> Plekhanov insisted that the revolution could only aim for the establishment of a 'democratic constitution.'<sup>47</sup> To collapse the democratic and socialist stages into one would mean effectively to postpone both.<sup>48</sup>

But how far would capitalist industrialisation have to advance for the workers to be ready for the seizure of power? Plekhanov carefully avoided answering that question. What is more, he insisted that Marx did not expect Russia to follow 'exactly the same phases of historical-economic development as the West had.' Marx and Engels, Plekhanov readily admitted, had even accepted a possible role for the *obshchina*.<sup>49</sup> And, even though the democratic and socialist revolutions must not be collapsed into one, 'It depends on us to *bring* these two moments *closer together*.'<sup>50</sup> This is the point where the *Communist Manifesto* came in. The passage from *The Manifesto* on which Plekhanov's case rested deserves to be quoted in full:

Once the bourgeoisie acts in a revolutionary way in Germany, the Communist Party struggles together with the bourgeoisie against the absolute monarchy, the feudal landowners and the petty bourgeoisie. However, it does not for a moment cease to produce in the workers, as clearly as possible, the awareness of the hostile antagonism of the interests of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. . . The communists direct their main attention to Germany, because Germany is on the eve of a bourgeois revolution and because. . .the German bourgeois revolution can only be the immediate prologue of a proletarian revolution.<sup>51</sup>

Plekhanov explained that the situation of bourgeois societies and the influence of international relations gave reason to hope 'that the social liberation of the Russian working class will follow very quickly upon the fall of absolutism.' He concluded:

We must follow the excellent example of the German communists who, in the words of the *Manifesto*, came out 'together with the bourgeoisie. . . against the absolute monarchy,' and at the same time 'did not for a moment cease to produce in the minds of the workers, as clearly as possible, the awareness of the hostile antagonism of the interests of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.' In acting in that way, the communists wanted 'the German bourgeois revolution to serve only as the immediate prologue of the revolution of the workers.'<sup>52</sup>

In proposing that the Russian social democrats follow the 'excellent example' of the German policies outlined in the *Communist Manifesto*, Plekhanov in effect predicted that the Russian bourgeois revolution would be the immediate prologue of the proletarian revolution, which fundamentally ruled out an extended period of capitalist development after the tsar had been toppled. That the tiny Russian working class would be able to seize power immediately after the democratic revolution would have struck Plekhanov as likely, for he had Marx and Engels on record that many decades earlier such a thing would have been possible in Germany as well.

Of course, Plekhanov understood very well that the tiny working class would not have the strength to establish a socialist state on its own. In handling this problem, he was inspired by Marx's ideas about the potentially revolutionary role of the peasantry. Plekhanov explained that, contrary to popular misconception, Marx had *not* been of the opinion that the peasant would give his support to the 'socialist movement' only after being converted into a 'landless proletarian,' or only after the *obshchina* had disintegrated. The Russian peasants, Plekhanov believed, were sympathetic to the idea of nationalisation of the land. The industrial workers were, of course, *more* susceptible to socialist propaganda than the peasants, but Plekhanov trusted that after the democratic revolution 'systematic propaganda for socialism in the peasant milieu' would yield good results.<sup>53</sup>

*SPS* rather accurately reflected the spirit of the *Communist Manifesto*. The guiding thought of the brochure was the notion that the preconditions of socialism can only be created in the process of capitalist industrialisation, but a sense of balance was restored by the introduction of the permanent-revolutionary idea, i.e. by the acknowledgement of a rapid transition from the democratic to the workers' revolution assisted by the peasantry.

The balance was lost in Plekhanov's second strategic document, *Our Differences* of 1885, in which he argued that the introduction of a democratic constitution could *not* lead to an early proletarian revolution. At first sight Plekhanov seemed in this new book only to elaborate on the thesis he had earlier expounded in *SPS*: socialism depends on the conditions created by capitalism, both in terms of large-scale production and of a class-conscious proletariat.<sup>54</sup> This time, though, Plekhanov made it explicit that Russia needed the *complete* course of capitalism, in his own words, the country must 'graduate from the school in which it *already enrolled*' (original emphasis).<sup>55</sup> The new argument on which Plekhanov's case rested was that, obviously, the democratic revolution would bring the majority to power. In Russia that majority consisted of peasants.

In clear contrast to his more optimistic assessment in *SPS*, Plekhanov now argued that peasants could never be made to see the socialist light. As small commodity producers, they would neither understand nor desire a socialist economy. It was unthinkable that a democratic 'peasant state' would ever turn socialist. This effectively closed the road to socialism in Russia for a long time.<sup>56</sup>

Plekhanov left no doubt about how far he expected capitalism in Russia to advance before it could be overturned: all the way. He argued that in a country in which large-scale industry was not yet dominant, and which remained 'a country of the petty bourgeoisie,' democracy could set itself only:

... the task of guaranteeing the interests of the small individual producers, because precisely this class forms the majority of the people. . . the objective logic of commodity production effects the transformation of the small individual producers into wage-labourers on one hand, and bourgeois entrepreneurs on the other. *When that transformation is completed.* . . the working class will occupy the place of the 'people', and the popular autocracy will turn into a dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>57</sup>

In *SPS*, Plekhanov had denied in so many words that peasants could become socialists only after they had been proletarianised. However, this was exactly what he was saying now. Here we encounter for the first time the classical Plekhanovist argument that a minority working class can never convince a majority of small producers of the advantages of socialism and that the working class must therefore become the majority itself before the era of proletarian revolution can commence.<sup>58</sup>

Plekhanov did suggest that capitalism's reign need not necessarily last long. There could be a '*shortening of the duration of this stage*' (original emphasis). Russian capitalism might reach full maturity in less time than its British predecessor had. What is more, 'Our capitalism will fade without having succeeded in *finally* blooming.' But this did not fundamentally change much, for it was added that capitalism would nevertheless have to 'advance to its more or less complete triumph.'<sup>59</sup> Thus, there was no avoiding that Russian capitalism would have to advance to something approaching full maturity before the workers' revolution could come on the agenda. In just two years' time Plekhanov's strategic outlook had undergone a fundamental change.

## How Plekhanov dealt with Marx and Engels

Once he had decided to disregard the 'excellent example' of the *Communist Manifesto*, Plekhanov found himself in a real predicament. After all, he remained as desperate as ever to prove his orthodoxy in terms of Marx and Engels. *OD* shows the traces of Plekhanov's struggle. He handled the problem of the incompatibility of his new line with the *Communist Manifesto*'s German strategy by hiding the discrepancy from the readers' view: Plekhanov simply did not mention in *OD* the relevant passage from *The Manifesto* that he had displayed so prominently and triumphantly in *SPS* to prove his case.

Omission did not provide Plekhanov with positive Marxist legitimacy, though. To fill the gap, he came up with a number of new references and quotations suggesting that from 1850 onwards Marx and Engels had acknowledged that Germany lacked

the conditions for a proletarian revolution. Plekhanov quoted Engels's warnings against premature revolution during the summer of 1850; Marx's September 1850 admonition to the German workers that it might take them decades to prepare for the revolution; and finally Marx's 1853 urgings to the German workers to prepare themselves to become the 'opposition party of the future,' all found in passages mentioned above.<sup>60</sup> However, this fell far short of proving the orthodoxy of Plekhanov's own position, for there was nothing in the materials adduced by him to show that Marx and Engels had come round to the idea that the German democratic revolution was to be followed by a protracted period of capitalist economic development, or that the German proletarian revolution depended on a working-class majority.<sup>61</sup>

Apparently, Plekhanov realised that his references did not serve their purpose. In later years he therefore returned to quoting the *Manifesto's* German passage in defence of his Russian policies. But now he quoted the passage selectively. Through one article after another, Plekhanov followed the same pattern. Each time he wrote that Marx and Engels had urged the German workers to assist the bourgeoisie in its struggle against the monarchy. Subsequently, he mentioned *The Manifesto* passage concerning the need to arouse the workers' hostility towards the capitalists. However, each time Plekhanov shrewdly omitted the final part about the German bourgeois revolution as the immediate prologue of the proletarian revolution.<sup>62</sup> In other words, he carefully hid the crucial passage that would have made nonsense of his claim that he was following in Marx and Engels's footsteps.

There is more proof that Plekhanov did not operate in completely straightforward ways. In a revealing article in the 5 April 1905 issue of *Iskra*, he finally turned openly against the notion of the 'uninterrupted revolution' to be found in Marx and Engels's March 1850 Address. Plekhanov charged that they had believed in the 'absolute imminence of the socialist revolution, for which the petty bourgeois revolution would serve only as the prologue.' 'Precisely this conviction dictated the slogan of the *uninterrupted revolution*' (original emphasis). But hadn't Marx, Plekhanov continued, come to his senses when he warned in September 1850 that it might take the workers decades to come to power? Strikingly, Plekhanov now asserted that this had *not* been the case. Marx had in fact not changed his mind at all:

... the only thing that Marx in 1850 admitted that he had been wrong about was his expectation of a new [revolutionary] outburst; he continued to feel that the tasks he had set before the German working class had been formulated completely correctly. Had he soon regained his confidence in an early petty bourgeois revolution in Europe, then he would once again have proposed these tasks in the way he had formulated them before.

Plekhanov was saying that Marx had in fact *not* retracted his scenario of permanent revolution for Germany in September 1850. In Plekhanov's reading, Marx had only become more pessimistic about when to expect the democratic, petty bourgeois revolution. But for the rest nothing had changed for Marx, Plekhanov thought, for when the delayed democratic revolution would have finally occurred Marx would have expected it to escalate quickly into a workers' revolution all the same. Thus, without saying it in so many words, Plekhanov now admitted that his suggestion in *OD*, to the effect that Marx had

concluded in 1850 that the preconditions for a proletarian revolution in Germany were lacking, had not been justified.

To prove that his policies were in line with those of Marx and Engels, Plekhanov now argued that at a later moment, *after* 1850, the two men had rejected the permanent revolution after all. According to Plekhanov, 'only much later' Marx and Engels had concluded that capitalism on the European continent had not yet outlived itself.

Later, when the socialist revolution stopped seeming very near, they would no longer say '*our slogan* is the revolution in permanence' even when they were discussing the petty bourgeois revolution...it seems they recognised that the objective...conditions of the 'uninterrupted revolution' were missing. They defined the political tasks of the proletariat on the assumption that the democratic system would remain dominant for a rather protracted period.

The reader would be interested to know when exactly Marx and Engels had changed their minds on this, if not in 1850. We may safely assume that Plekhanov did his very best to find quotations to substantiate his claim that Marx and Engels had finally accepted the need for a long interval between the democratic and socialist revolutions. But he was unable to produce any evidence for the case of Marx, and the only text he came up with for Engels was his 1895 foreword to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France*.<sup>63</sup>

For once Plekhanov was on the mark here, for in this article Engels had indeed concluded that he and Marx had been wrong in assuming back in 1848 that the capitalist mode of production had been ripe to be abolished on the European continent. 'History proved us...wrong,' Engels sadly admitted.<sup>64</sup> However, with no result for Marx and only one work written by Engels a few months before his death, Plekhanov must have realised that he had failed in substantiating his claim that the two men had ever accepted the notion of the protracted capitalist-democratic stage.

## Conclusions

Plekhanov's conclusion that the integral development of capitalism was unavoidable essentially rested on his conviction that Russia's peasant majority would never accept socialism. Once set free by the democratic revolution, the small commodity producers would increasingly engage in capitalism. Obviously, Plekhanov was converted to this capitalist reading of the peasant mentality and practice under the influence of his life experiences. During the 1870s, the Russian populists had attempted to convince the peasants of the advantages of socialism, but their campaign of 'going to the people' had been a failure. Neither had the successful 1881 attempt on the life of Tsar Alexander II, or other terrorist attempts for that matter, stirred the peasants into action.

Still, it remains mysterious why Plekhanov committed himself to the capitalist interpretation of the democratic revolution presented in *OD*. After all, this interpretation saddled him with two significant problems. First, the very possibility of a seizure of power by the Russian social democrats was postponed for decades, a surely unattractive proposition for any revolutionary party. Second, the social democrats landed themselves in an uncomfortable position vis-à-vis the populists, who had an

easy job of accusing them of ignoring the suffering that capitalism would inevitably bring the Russian workers and peasants.

Why, then, did Plekhanov not comfortably stick to the permanent-revolutionary scenario he expounded in *SPS*? Had he preserved this outlook, the populists would have had a much harder time in taking the social democrats to task for their supposed lack of revolutionary vigour. As a bonus, it would have been much easier for Plekhanov to underpin his legitimacy by quotations from Marx and Engels.

Plekhanov's overriding concern seems to have been to define a Marxist position that was completely separate from traditional populist positions. For the populists, the peasants were part of the broad revolutionary working class that was susceptible to socialism. Also, they expected the democratic revolution more or less immediately to assume a socialist character. Ironically, even though populist strategic thinking was surely not identical to what Marx and Engels had proposed for Germany in the mid-nineteenth century, it was not very far removed from it in spirit. This defines Plekhanov's dilemma. Had he continued to model his Russian strategy on the *Communist Manifesto*'s German strategy, his position would have turned out disturbingly close to what the populists had been advocating all along. It would have been difficult for him to hammer out an independent new position. Plekhanov's solution was, then, to exorcise the spirit of Marxist permanent revolution, in the interest of the independence of the Marxist party.

Plekhanov's writings must be set against the background of the wider process of redirecting Marxist thinking that was going on in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth. The new Orthodox Marxism of the Second International tied the proletarian revolution much more closely to conditions of highly developed industrial capitalism than Marx and Engels used to do. Plekhanov was not the only one to reformulate Marxism. Kautsky, for one, also concluded that the small producers were lost for the socialist revolution. This, in his mind, made the revolution dependent on the presence of a majority proletariat. But Kautsky formulated this conclusion only in the course of the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>65</sup> Plekhanov was the pioneer. To my knowledge he was the inventor of the idea that proletarian majorities formed a *conditio sine qua non* of the proletarian revolution. Plekhanov's contribution to the new Orthodox Marxism of the Second International must therefore be recognised as original and exceptionally important.

This raises the question of Plekhanov's legacy. Twentieth-century communists such as Lenin, Stalin, Mao and others of course rejected any reading of Marx that would have condemned the proletariat to postpone its revolution until capitalist industrialisation had run its full course. The October Revolution, which many Marxists read as a working-class seizure of power in a backward country, broke the spell of Plekhanovism. From that moment on, Plekhanov's 'revolutionary attentism'<sup>66</sup> lost the practical significance for the revolutionary movement that it had possessed.

However, theoretically, the influence of Plekhanov's thinking was not lost. Social-democratic Marxists tended to attribute the tyrannical degeneration of the twentieth-century communist regimes to the premature nature of these revolutions. In interpreting communist dictatorship as a product of prematurely attempting socialism in a predominantly peasant country, such Marxists followed the line of argument that was first established by Plekhanov. In a broader sense, all Marx scholars who even today

interpret Marx as if proletarian revolution was, for him, only conceivable under the conditions of highly developed capitalism likewise follow in Plekhanov's footsteps.

Finally and most importantly, history proved Plekhanov right, as much as it proved Marx and Engels wrong. Notwithstanding their mistrust of them, Marx and Engels assumed that the small peasant proprietors could be convinced voluntarily to embrace socialist collective agriculture. Plekhanov was enough of a realist to understand that this was an illusion, and that no workers' government could convince the peasants to give up their lands. Such attempts could only end in repression, an option Plekhanov was not even prepared to consider. The fate of the peasants in twentieth-century communist Russia and China proves Plekhanov's foresight and, in this respect, his humanity.

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## Notes

1. For Plekhanov's biography: Baron, *Plekhanov*; Tiutiukin, *G.V. Plekhanov*.
2. Plekhanov, 'Sotsializm i politicheskaiia bor'ba', *Sochineniia*, vol. 2, 25–88; 'Nashi raz-noglasiiia', *ibid.*, 89–356.
3. See for this interpretation of Plekhanov's strategy, with various nuances: Plamenatz, *German Marxism*, 203, 217–20; Haimson, *The Russian Marxists*, 21–23; Keep, *The Rise of Social Democracy*, 20–3; Baron, *Plekhanov*, chapter 7; Walicki, *Controversy*, 147–50, 155–59; Ascher, *Pavel Axelrod*, 91–4; Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought*, chapter 2; Walicki, *History*, 414–6; Kolakowski, *Main Currents*, vol. 2, 329–36; Löwy, *Politics*, 30–32; Walicki, *Marxism*, 231; White, *Karl Marx*, 309–10, 313–18; Tiutiukin, *G.V. Plekhanov*, 86–95.
4. For Marx's and Engels's positions on Russia, see: Keep, *The Rise of Social Democracy*, 18–19; Baron, *Plekhanov*, 66–8; Hobsbawm, *How to Change*, chapter 7; Walicki, *Controversy*, 147–50, 179–91; Walicki, *History*, 407–8; McLellan, *Marxism after Marx*, 66–7; Kolakowski, *Main Currents*, vol. 2, 323–24; Shanin, *Late Marx*; Löwy, *Politics*, 23–28; Donald, *Marxism*, 66; White, *Karl Marx*, 201–10, 237–44, 258, 273–80, 362–74; Tiutiukin, *G.V. Plekhanov*, 63, 68–70, 99–101; Day and Gaido, *Witnesses*, 26, 28–29; Anderson, *Marx*, chapters 1, 5 and 6. For interpretations essentially denying that Marx and Engels were open to non-capitalist roads to modernisation: Tucker, *Marxian Revolutionary Idea*, 100–04, 109–22; Knei-Paz, *Social and Political Thought*, introduction, chapter 3.
5. For the diversity of Marxism, see: Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms*; Priestland, *Stalinism*.
6. Baron, *Plekhanov*, 116. Baron does recognise a voluntarist element in Plekhanov's Marxism.
7. Walicki, *Controversy*, 158–59. See also: Walicki, *History*, 416; Walicki, *Marxism*, 228–46.
8. Kolakowski, *Main Currents*, vol. 2, 329.



9. Löwy, *Politics*, 30–2. Löwy calls Plekhanov's Marxism stagist, mechanical materialist and objectivistic.
10. According to Plamenatz, Plekhanov drew his inspiration from the 'patient Marxism of Marx's middle and later years': *German Marxism*, 203, 217–20. In Robert Daniels's interpretation, Plekhanov's conclusions reflected 'the ordinary Marxian analysis': *The Conscience of the Revolution*, 36.
11. White, *Karl Marx*, 363.
12. Baron, *Plekhanov*, 112.
13. Out of an economically active German population of 15.8 million people in 1850, 24 per cent worked in the secondary sector, i.e. approximately 3.8 million people. An estimated 1.75 million people were engaged in *Handwerk*, and 1.5 million in *Verlag*, adding up to 3.25 million artisans. This would leave 550,000 industrial workers: Henning, *Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte*, 351, 877, 885.
14. Henning, *Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte*, 351, 678.
15. The Russian population of 1890 has been estimated at 108.5 million people. Maddison, *Monitoring*, 110. The number of industrial workers in that year can be estimated as somewhat over 1.4 million. Lyashchenko, *History*, 477, 487. See also: Crisp, 'Labour and Industrialization', 348.
16. In 1850, Germany had 33.7 million inhabitants: Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, 9. For an estimate of 550,000 industrial workers in 1850 Germany, see note 13.
17. Steenson, *After Marx*, 20–1.
18. Plamenatz, *Man and Society*, 278–93.
19. Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 345–48.
20. Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, 501–2.
21. Egleton, *Why Marx was Right*, 16.
22. Larsson, *Theories of Revolution*, 9–11. See more broadly on the subject pp. 31–49, 58–60, 125–27.
23. Gilbert, *Marx's Politics*, mainly chapters 2, 4, 7–12; Hunt, *Political Ideas*, chapters 6–7; Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory*, 27, 169–288, 317, 358–452; Hobsbawm, *How to Change*, 63–69. See also: Hundt, 'Zur Entwicklung'.
24. See for example: Baron, *Plekhanov*, chapter 7. Baron (p. 100) notes that *SPS* is milder in tone towards the populists than *OD*, and that, as a 'tactical feint', Plekhanov was a bit more open towards the *obshchina* in *SPS* than in *OD*. See also: Larsson, *Theories of Revolution*, 129; Ascher, *Pavel Axelrod*, 91–93; Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought*, 32; Walicki, *History*, 414–15; Kolakowski, *Main Currents*, vol. 2, 329–36; Löwy, *Politics*, 30–32; Walicki, *Marxism*, 231; White, *Karl Marx*, 310, 313–18.
25. Baron, *Plekhanov*, 110, 112–14; Ascher, *Pavel Axelrod*, 91–93.
26. Larsson, *Theories of Revolution*, 129; Tiutiukin, *G.V. Plekhanov*, 86–87. According to Tiutiukin, Plekhanov believed a rapid sequence of bourgeois and proletarian stages might become possible because of the rapid proletarianisation of the peasantry. In Tiutiukin's interpretation, only in 1901 did Plekhanov decide that a considerable period of time would elapse between the two revolutions.
27. The main texts in which Marx and Engels expounded their views on Russia during Marx's lifetime were: Engels's April 1875 'Soziales aus Russland', *MEW*, vol. 18, 556–67; Marx's unsent letter to *Otechestvennye zapiski*, written in November 1877: vol. 19, 107–12; Marx's 8 March 1881 letter to Vera Zasulich: vol. 19, 242–3; the drafts for that letter: vol. 19, 384–406; Marx and Engels's preface to the 1882 Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, vol. 4, 575–6.

28. 'Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei', *MEW*, vol. 4, 493.
29. 'Ansprache der Zentralbehörde an den Bund vom März 1850', *MEW*, vol. 7, 246–48.
30. 'Der deutsche Bauernkrieg', *MEW*, vol. 7, 400–1, 412.
31. See Marx's 1852: 'Enthüllungen über den Kommunisten-Prozess zu Köln', *MEW*, vol. 8, 412.
32. 'Enthüllungen', *MEW*, vol. 8, 461.
33. See for example: Plamenatz, *German Marxism*, 113–15, 217; Lichtheim, *Marxism*, 122–29; Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought*, 196–201; Plamenatz, *Man and Society*, 278–93. See also: Gilbert, *Marx's Politics*, introduction, p. 255. For a dissenting view: Löwy, *Theory of Revolution*, 150.
34. See my 'Marxism as Permanent Revolution', *History of Political Thought*, forthcoming.
35. See Engels's foreword to Marx's 'Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1850', *MEW*, vol. 22, 509–27, especially 513.
36. See also Alan Gilbert, who claimed that Marx 'never argued that the triumph of socialism in any particular country required that the proletariat be a majority (as opposed to a sizable portion) of the population.' *Marx's Politics*, 219. For Marx and Engels's continued hopes for a socialist revolution on the European continent, where workers were not in the majority: Hobsbawm, *How to Change*, 65–66, 76–79.
37. First edition of 'Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte' [1852], *MEW*, vol. 8, 204.
38. Marx to Engels, 16 April 1856, *MEW*, vol. 29, 47.
39. 'Konspekt von Bakunins Buch "Staatlichkeit und Anarchie"', *MEW*, vol. 18, 632–3.
40. See for example: 'Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich' [1850], *MEW*, vol. 7, 21, 84, 87–88; 'Achtzehnte Brumaire', vol. 8, 201–02; Marx to Engels, 16 April 1856, vol. 29, 47; Engels's 1870 foreword to 'Deutsche Bauernkrieg', vol. 7, 537; First draft of 'Der Bürgerkrieg in Frankreich' [Marx, 1871], vol. 17, 549, 551–53; 'Bürgerkrieg in Frankreich' [1871], vol. 17, 341–44; 'Die Bauernfrage in Frankreich und Deutschland' [Engels, 1894–95], vol. 22, 486, 498–500. For Marx and Engels's ambivalence towards the peasantry, in the context of a discussion of the Russian revolution, see Kingston-Mann, *Lenin*, 18.
41. See for example: Engels's 1847 'Grundsätze des Kommunismus', *MEW*, vol. 4, 372–75; 'Manifest', *MEW*, vol. 4, 481. See for this interpretation also: Larsson, *Theories of Revolution*, 30–31; Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory*, 238.
42. Preface of 'Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie', *MEW*, vol. 13, 9. Emphasis added. See for this interpretation also: Larsson, *Theories of Revolution*, 30–31; Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory*, 238.
43. See Engels's 23 April 1885 letter to Vera Zasulich, *MEW*, vol. 36, 303–07. For the question of Marx's and Engels's sympathies for Russian Blanquism, see also: Keep, *The Rise of Social Democracy*, 18–19; Baron, *Plekhanov*, 66–68; Walicki, *Controversy*, 181–82; Löwy, *Politics*, 24.
44. For Engels on the progress of Russian capitalism and the demise of the *obshchina*, see for example: 23 April 1885 letter to Zasulich, *MEW*, vol. 36, 304, 307; 'Über den Brüsseler Kongress und die Lage in Europa' [1891], vol. 22, 242; 'Der Sozialismus in Deutschland' [1891–92], vol. 22, 257–58, 260; 15 March 1892 letter to Nikolai Frantsevich Daniel'son, vol. 38, 305; 18 June 1892 letter to Daniel'son, vol. 38, 366; 24 February 1893 letter to Daniel'son, vol. 39, 37–38; 'Kann Europa abrüsten?' [1893], vol. 22, 390; 1894 afterword to 'Soziales aus Russland', vol. 22, 425ff; April 1892 interview with Engels, vol. 22, 535–36.

45. 29 September 1891 letter to August Bebel, *MEW*, vol. 38, 160.
46. See: Plekhanov, 'Sotsializm', *Sochineniia*, vol. 2, 37, 46–47, 76–81.
47. Plekhanov, 'Sotsializm', *Sochineniia*, vol. 2, 83.
48. Plekhanov, 'Sotsializm', *Sochineniia*, vol. 2, 86.
49. Plekhanov, 'Sotsializm', *Sochineniia*, vol. 2, 46–47.
50. Plekhanov, 'Sotsializm', *Sochineniia*, vol. 2, 86.
51. 'Manifest', *MEW*, vol. 4, 492–3.
52. Plekhanov, 'Sotsializm', *Sochineniia*, vol. 2, 86.
53. Plekhanov, 'Sotsializm', *Sochineniia*, vol. 2, 87–88.
54. Plekhanov, 'Nashi raznoglasiia', *Sochineniia*, vol. 2, 122–23, 232–71, 316–17, 329–30.
55. Plekhanov, 'Nashi raznoglasiia', *Sochineniia*, vol. 2, 270–1.
56. Plekhanov, 'Nashi raznoglasiia', *Sochineniia*, vol. 2, chapter 4, especially 303, 307–08, 310, 312, 323–2.
57. Plekhanov, 'Nashi raznoglasiia', 287. Emphasis added.
58. According to Baron, later on Plekhanov suggested that it would be enough for the working class plus its allies among the peasantry to make up 'a majority at the time of the socialist revolution.' Baron, however, gives no textual references to back up that claim: *Plekhanov*, 102; see also 115–16.
59. Plekhanov, 'Nashi raznoglasiia', 337–38. In the introduction, Plekhanov quoted Marx in support of the view that the capitalist stage might be shortened: *ibid.*, 113. He did not quote Marx quite correctly. See on this matter: Walicki, *Controversy*, 147–50. During the 1890s Plekhanov advocated a coalition of the workers with the poor peasantry, as well as transfer of lands to the village communes. Nonetheless, capitalist democracy headed by the bourgeoisie remained his first strategic goal: Larsson, *Theories of Revolution*, 140–44. In 1901 Plekhanov confirmed that the fall of absolutism and the triumph of socialism would necessarily be separated from each other by 'a considerable stretch of time': Plekhanov, 'O nashei taktike po otnosheniiu k bor'be liberal'noi burzhuzi s tsarizmom (Pis'mo k Tsentral'nomu Komitetu)', in: *Sochineniia*, vol. 13, 179.
60. Plekhanov, 'Nashi raznoglasiia', 196–98, 329–30.
61. It might be asked why Engels did not take issue with Plekhanov. For one reason, Engels admitted that he did not completely read *Our Differences*. See his 23 April 1885 letter to Zasulich, *MEW*, vol. 36, 304, 307. But on a deeper level Engels agreed with Plekhanov, and disagreed with the populists, in two very important respects. First, both men agreed that the *obshchina* was on the way out and was no longer very relevant. Second, although Engels, unlike Plekhanov, did not believe Russian capitalism necessarily had to go all the way, he agreed with Plekhanov that Russia needed more capitalist development to make the proletariat fit to enter the arena as independent revolutionary actor.
62. See for example: G. V. Plekhanov: 'Ferdinand Lassal' [1887], in: *Sochineniia*, vol. 4, 27; 'Politicheskie zadachi russkikh sotsialistov' [1889], vol. 3, 92; 'O zadachakh sotsialistov v bor'be s golodom v Rossii (Pis'ma k molodym tovarishcham)' [1892], vol. 3, 409; 'Novyi pokhod protiv russkoi sotsial-demokratii' [1897], vol. 9, 308; "'Ortodoksal'noe" bukvoedstvo' [1903], in: *Sochineniia*, vol. 12, 391–2; 'Rechi na vtorem ocherednom s"ezde R.S.—D.R.P.' [1903], vol. 12, 423. In 1903 Plekhanov took a distance from Marx, when he rejected the latter's March 1850 proposal for nationalisation of feudal property in Germany as unacceptable under the Russian conditions: "'Ortodoksal'noe" bukvoedstvo', 407–08.

63. G. V. Plekhanov, 'K voprosu o zakhvate vlasti (Nebol'shaia istoricheskaiia spravka)', in: *Sochineniia*, vol. 13, 208–10. Plekhanov also referred to a letter of Engels to the Italian socialist Turati to show that Engels opposed socialist participation in a revolutionary radical-democratic government: *ibid.*: 210–11. In this 26 January 1894 letter Engels observed that Italy was socio-economically insufficiently developed and the Italian proletariat was too weak to seize power. At the same time Engels believed that the old strategy of the *Communist Manifesto*, with a bourgeois revolution creating the opportunity for the proletariat, would be the most suitable one for the Italian situation. See: *MEW*, vol. 22, 439–42.
64. *MEW*, vol. 22, 515.
65. See on this matter my 'German Marxism and the decline of the permanent revolution, 1870–1909', *History of European Ideas*, 2012, No. 4.
66. I have adopted the term from Dieter Groh (*Negative Integration*), who used it to refer to the strategy followed by the German socialist party, and which combined revolutionary rhetoric with a refusal to actively prepare the proletarian revolution.

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