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Aleksandr Bogdanov's Concept of Revolution and the Organisation of State

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the controversy of Alexander Alexandrovich Bogdanov, the so-called “another Bolshevik”, with Lenin and his associates on the question of the revolution and the ways of building a socialist society and state. It is shown that Bogdanov expressed a critical attitude towards the revolution and its socialist nature, the ability of the proletariat to play a decisive role in it, and wrote about Russia’s unpreparedness for an anti-capitalist coup, thereby expressing a distinctly marked anti-Leninist position. Based on the analysis of a large corpus of Bogdanov’s works, the authors focused their attention on the following aspects of his work relating to the theme of revolution: the contradictions between Bogdanov and Lenin in its interpretation even before October 1917; Bogdanov’s views on the revolution and real socialism after its completion; his interpretation and evaluation of “war communism”; the program for building socialism in the USSR and the search for ways to form fundamentally new social structures developed in the context of the science of tectology, created by him; Bogdanov’s project “Proletkult” and his utopian novels, in which he foresaw how “socialism in one country” would be built and how the transition from the old exploitative to new forms of human coexistence would be carried out, as well as the danger of the degeneration of democracy into a dictatorship.

Keywords: revolution, socialism, “war communism”, proletariat, tectology, Proletcult project, utopia, dictatorship

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A critical attitude towards the revolution, its socialist nature, the possibility that the proletariat could have a prominent role in it, and the meaning of the “war communism,” was present in Russia right after the revolution among Marxist intellectuals and political leaders, whose different points of view made for a varied panorama that only the political circumstances forced into a scheme of pro- or anti-Lenin positions. The so-called “other Bolsheviks,” to use Robert Williams’ expression [1], defined a space of high theoretical originality, which became over the years the subject of deeper and deeper inquiries, first in the West, then also in Russia. Among them, particular attention was paid to Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Bogdanov, Lenin’s greatest rival since the beginning of the century, whom the official Party statements had condemned as “heretical” since soon after the revolution. When the second edition of Lenin’s *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* was published in 1920, a harsh postface by V.I. Nevsky (*Dialectical Materialism and the Philosophy of Dead Reaction*) established a direct relationship between the ideas criticized by Lenin in 1909 and Bogdanov’s more recent statements [2. P. 371—384]. It is only at the end of the 1950s, that Bogdanov’s name resurfaced in the USSR in a non-polemical context, as the author of *Tectology*, which was retrieved as a forerunner of cybernetics and systems thinking within Soviet space programs [3. P. 161—169; 4. P. 172]. During the Cold War and starting from the mid-Sixties, Western historians, oriented towards ideological and political questions, got interested in Bogdanov, when the first monograph entirely devoted to *Lenin’s Rival* by Dietrich Grille [5] came out in Germany. A new generation of scholars, partly involved in the spirit of ‘68, and seeking a “socialism with a human face,” started working on the alternatives to Leninism, and published a very important series of works [6. P. 37—41]¹. More recently, Bogdanov has been studied in the context of Russian positivism within a comparative frame with contemporary Western philosophy [21, 22].

During the *Perestroika* period, Bogdanov’s works circulated again in Russia: in 1989, *Tectology*, which had disappeared since the 1920s, was republished; in 1990, an important selection of Bogdanov’s writings ranging from 1904 to the 1920s was edited by N.K. Figurovskaja and G.D. Gloveli under the title *Problems of Socialism*; in 2003, the three volumes of *Empiriomonism* appeared in a common edition [23—25]. In 1991, the journal *Voprosy filosofii* devoted a whole number to Lenin’s *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and included Bogdanov’s critical booklet, published in 1910 under the title *Faith and Science* [26]. In 1995,

¹Among the most meaningful Western publications: [7—20].

a significant event was the publication of three volumes of unpublished materials with the common title *Unknown Bogdanov*. Not only N.S. Antonova and N.V. Drozdova, under the supervision of G.A. Bordjugov, published documents from the former Party Archive, which had been until then practically inaccessible, but the Prefaces to the three volumes were entrusted to Western scholars (respectively to John Biggart, Gabriela Gorzka, and Daniela Steila), with a rather unusual attempt, especially for that time, to put in contact the Western and the Russian scholarly worlds [27]. In that same year, N.I. Moiseev emphasized some possible further developments of tectology and considered it a “natural constitutive part of the theory of self-organization” [28. P. 9—11].

If we consider the general theme of revolution within Bogdanov’s thought, it seems interesting to focus on three main moments:

1. the controversies between Bogdanov and Lenin before October 1917 as far as they concerned their conceptions of revolution;
2. Bogdanov’s views on the revolutions of 1917 and his conception of “war communism”;
3. Bogdanov’s ideas about building a socialist system after the Bolshevik revolution.

1

Bogdanov and Lenin ascertained their deep theoretical disagreements as soon as the summer of 1904 when they had just met in Switzerland. But, for some of the following years, they set them aside to fight together on the Bolshevik side. During the revolution of 1905, Bogdanov was on the front line. According to Bonch-Bruевич’s memories, “there were times in Russia — for instance, in 1905, after January 9th — when the immediate leadership of the Party belonged completely to A.A. Bogdanov, and his authority was truly immense among our most active lines and among the underground activists” [29. P. 9]. After the failure of the 1905 revolution, the situation became tenser. On one side, Bogdanov’s followers, or “left-wing Bolsheviks” were convinced that the revolutionary movement was soon going to regain strength, after a period of fatigue to which it seemed condemned. For this reason, they defended the importance of the clandestine apparatus, thus neglecting the possibilities for legal action. On the other side, the “Leninists” aimed more or less honestly at the reconstruction of a unitarian party that would be capable of both maintaining the activities of clandestine agitation and of profiting from the legal opportunities that would arise from the participation in the Duma. The tactical divergences sparked again the theoretical conflict between two different worldviews: Lenin’s, close to Plekhanov’s orthodox materialism, and Bogdanov’s, open to the constructivist suggestions of contemporary epistemology.

In this context, the opposition between the two different conceptions of the revolution was neatly outlined: for Lenin, revolution meant consciously leading the proletariat by every means to insurrection and socialist order, depending on the circumstances, which would have ultimately resulted in a new culture. For Bogdanov, the development of an authentic proletarian culture was not to be

postponed until the post-revolutionary period. The new culture had to develop in line with the activity of the revolutionary movement following the direction of a collectivist vision of the world and the perspective of its general transformation. In the volume *The Fall of the Great Fetish*, published in 1910, Bogdanov remarked that the victory of the proletariat in the revolution could have been acquired “not so much by the seizure of political power and the removal of the capitalistic mode of production in favor of the socialist one, as by the creation of a new quality of culture” [30. P. 20].

In this perspective, the “Party School” for activists and propagandist workers, organized by Bogdanov, Lunacharsky, Gorky, Aleksinsky, and other eminent Bolsheviks on Capri island during the Summer and the Fall of 1909, responded not only to the aim of preparing new revolutionary and proletarian executives but also and mostly it was supposed to produce self-conscious socialists, who would have gone back to Russia to dedicate themselves to the revolutionary work in all its width. The school’s program, which went from the assessment of the present condition to the general conception of the world, had to allow the proletarians to build their own culture, thus freeing themselves from their subjugation to the bourgeoisie. For this reason, when Trocky, after having been invited to participate in this experience, criticized the excessive ambition of the school, which, according to him, was risking to create only “*self-satisfied half-learned people*” [31. P. 459] Bogdanov commented with Gorky that Trocky was evidently “looking at the school just as a propaganda circle of a slightly superior type; for him, the *creative* side of the deal does not exist” [32. P. 66]. For Bogdanov, Gorky, and their companions, the activities of the schools for workers had to provide the stimula and the context for the elaboration of an authentic and innovative, if still embryonal, collectivist worldview.

In the programmatic article *Socialism in the Present Time*, published in February 1911, Bogdanov gave voice exactly to the idea that socialism did not consist only in the economic overtaking of private property, but also in the construction of a new society in all of its aspects, which should have developed from the comradely relationships between workers. The brotherly relationships created by collaboration within the collective had to become the basis for the new organization of the entire society and the elaboration of the new overall worldview. According to Bogdanov, “the struggle for socialism does not in any way come down to the mere war against capitalism or the simple gathering of forces to this aim. Such a struggle is at the same time a positive and creative work... it is *the elaboration of the socialist proletarian culture*” [24. P. 101].

Of course, a mature socialist culture could not have fully developed in capitalist conditions and during the struggle to overcome them, but it is clear that, for Bogdanov, the goal to be attained in the revolutionary activity was not only an economic and political conquest but the actual transformation of the proletariat itself during the process of the struggle. The article closed with a clear-cut declaration: “in every sphere of life — usual work, social activity, family, scientific and philosophical knowledge, art — by creating new forms in its implacable

struggle with the old society, the proletariat will live more and more in its way, reorganizing itself in a socialist way, to reorganize in its turn the whole of humankind” [24. P. 103]. The contrast with the Leninist idea of revolutionary tactics could not have been sharper. Craig Brandist has even considered this aspect as the real core of the differences between the two main Bolshevik leaders before the revolution: “while Lenin focused on the direct political dimensions of hegemony, Bogdanov foregrounded the need to develop an elaborated proletarian culture in advance of the seizure of state power” [33. P. 19; 25—40]. In a book published in 1918, Bogdanov openly declared a thoroughly new conception of the chronology of the revolution: “According to the old conceptions, socialism has to win first, and only then can be implemented; before its victory, it is not real, it does not exist, it is just a ‘final aim.’ For us, it is not like that. Socialism is the worldwide comradely cooperation of people... who dominate nature and consciously create their reciprocal relations, their realm of ideas, and their organization of life and experience, according to a plan” [24. P. 349].

2

Bogdanov was touched by the war. After he came back to Russia because of the amnesty of 1913, he was drafted as a doctor at the beginning of the World War. To tell the truth, he had briefly practiced as a doctor in a psychiatric hospital more than ten years before, but had since then been involved in completely different things. Nevertheless, he served for approximately six months in an infantry regiment at the front. In February 1915, he was hospitalized for three months following a nervous breakdown, after which he was proclaimed unfit to serve and was reassigned first to a military hospital, then to another one, and finally, from the summer of 1916, he served as a medical inspector in the camps for war prisoners in the Moscow region [34. P. 53].

The war appeared to Bogdanov, as the good Marxist that he was, as the expression of the crisis of the capitalist world. He remarked it was exactly in the war's catastrophe that capitalism demonstrated “in fact its own enormous resilience and strength” [35]. While analyzing the war, Bogdanov distinguished the aspects that would have helped the development of the revolution and the aspects that would have hindered it. According to Bogdanov, the war damaged the socialist cause because of “1) the decimation of people and the destruction of the work products; 2) the destruction of many international links and their long-term weakening in the future; 3) the dimming of ideas and feelings of the working masses and the socialist intelligentsia” [36. P. 25]. Other aspects and consequences of the war solicited in their turn the revolution: “1) [the war] provided the greatest *revelation of capitalism* in the whole of history; 2) in capitalism itself, it caused changes that facilitate the transition to the socialist system, and gave rise to the so-called ‘*state capitalism*’; 3) it broadened the workers’ preparation for socialism by providing a *new and rich economic experience*” [36. P. 27].

But when the war in Russia gave a decisive push to the revolution, Bogdanov was certain that its goal should have been a democratic republic, although the

revolutionary movement in Russia was first of all the doing of workers and soldiers, and only subordinately of the bourgeoisie [37. P. 17]. According to his analyzes, just after the February revolution, the dedication of the revolutionary class should have been directed at the rapid convocation of a Constituent Assembly that would complete the transition to a democratic republic. The claims of the working-class movement should have been limited to universal suffrage (direct and secret in every election), immediate peace, the realization of a minimal economic program and its working day of 8 hours at least in those sectors that were not directly linked to the needs of the military, the support to the agricultural reform demanded by the peasants (while paying attention not to damage “the interests of production”), and the organization of a popular militia “for the further defense of freedom and democracy” [37. P. 20—21]. In June 1917, Bogdanov published in the paper of the Soviet of Moscow a decisively polemic article against Lenin’s *Letters on Tactics* and in particular against the idea of the “State-Commune” as a form of transition between the bourgeois regime and socialism [24. P. 344—348; 38. P. 590—592]. If, as soon as April 1917, Lenin declared finished the “bourgeois phase” of the revolution, for Bogdanov the process had just begun and its abrupt acceleration would have resulted in such a violent reaction that it would have inevitably become “a civil war, with a huge waste of the best forces of the people” [24. P. 347; 39. P. 102].

Before the seizure of power by his companions of a lifetime, in October 1917, Bogdanov took the position of a socialist who did not feel at home in any party, but who continued to analyze the events with all the scientific instruments at his disposal [38. P. 585—587]. Since he stayed faithful to historical materialism, he could not admit the voluntarism that was implicit in the idea of “premature revolution”: that which had happened had to be perfectly justified by the historical conditions, otherwise it could not have happened at all. In the article *The Fates of the Workers Party in the Current Revolution*, which he published at the beginning of 1918 in the journal *The New Life*, Bogdanov remarked that “the moment of the explosion was determined by the spontaneous forces of this [working] mass, and not by someone’s bad will; plots could just frame the explosion, not generate it, and not even speed it up. One cannot blame the explosion for having occurred at a certain time, and not having waited for anybody” [40. P. 2]. It is not by accident that Bogdanov put in exergue to the article Spinoza’s motto: “not to cry, not to laugh... but to understand.” ([41] Cap. 1, IV).

Bogdanov too was hoping for a quick ending to the war, but he specified that “peace is just the first condition to save Russia and the revolution if their salvation is still possible. The other equally necessary condition is a wide economic and cultural construction. Such a task presented itself to the Bolsheviks after they seized power” [42. P. 2]. But, for this purpose, it was first necessary to reconsider the evolution of the party itself during the previous revolutionary months. According to Bogdanov, because of the conditions of the country at war, the working class, which was still very mixed with the peasant element, had been radicalized, thus transforming the Bolshevik faction “into the one and only actual workers’ party” [40. P. 2], the only one to support coherently the peace cause. In this way,

Bolshevism “expanded far beyond the working class. Military masses were pulled in,” and, as a result, “Bolshevism did not become a worker, but a worker-military party” [40. P. 2].

A few months before, Bogdanov had already anticipated an analysis of these consequences to his close friend and brother-in-law A.V. Lunacharsky, who, unlike Bogdanov, had actively taken part in the revolution and was involved in the new Bolshevik government of the country as Commissar of Enlightenment. During the months immediately following the revolution, on many occasions, his former companions in the struggle offered Bogdanov numerous collaborations and prominent positions [43. P. 23]. Lunacharsky did the same, but Bogdanov answered with a sharp and bitter refusal². Here, too, he insisted on the inevitability of the actions of the Bolsheviks while underlining their ambiguities and risks. First, he stated he would not stand up for sabotage or boycott and that he saw nothing funny in what they were doing, often in an absurd but almost always *compelled* way. He not only saw the tragedy of their position but thought that they did not see it fully; and that he should try to figure it out in his way. According to Bogdanov, the war gave rise to an economic and cultural collapse and a giant development of war communism.

Whether or not he was the inventor of the term [44. P. 40; 45. P. 147], Bogdanov certainly elaborated a very precise conception of it long before Lenin used the expression “war communism,” starting in 1921, to indicate the brutal condition that would have been imposed by the war soon after the revolution and that should have been overcome with the assistance of the new economic policy [38. P. 606—609; 46. P. 219—220]. For Bogdanov, the war conditions had forced on the whole of society a centralized organization of consumption that might have been called “communism” because its model was the “commune” of the army, thus applying to the whole of society the principle of the centralized organization of consumption typical of the barracks, but which was in truth opposed to the socialist ideal. Bogdanov believed that socialism was *first of all* a new type of cooperation and organization of production; war communism was the authoritarian-controlled organization of mass parasitism and destruction and they should not be confused [24. P. 342]. In his letter to Lunacharskij, he explained: “War communism, developing from the front to the rear, temporarily rearranged society: a multi-million commune of the army, rations for the soldiers’ families, regulation of consumption; in relation to that, normalization of sales and production. The whole system of state capitalism is nothing else than a hybrid between capitalism and consumer war communism — which nowadays economists don’t understand since they have no idea of organizational analysis” [24. P. 352].

Bogdanov was elaborating his “general science of organization” or “tectology,” as a universal science capable of “scientifically and integrally arranging the organizational experience of mankind” [47. P. 60], thus providing an ensemble of basic principles on which it would have been possible to rapidly master

² This letter, dated November 19th (December 2nd), 1917, was first published in 1991 in [24. P. 352—355] and then in [27. P. 189—192].

the knowledge and develop it according to innovative perspectives. One of the basic principles of the science of organization could have been applied to the situation of post-revolutionary Russia: “if a system consists of parts with lower and higher degrees of organization, its relation with the environment is determined by the lower degree of organization” [24. P. 353]. According to this principle, by becoming a worker-military party, Bolshevism would inevitably become a soldier party, and consequently “it assimilated the logic of soldiers’ barracks, all their methods, all their specific culture and their ideals” [24. P. 353]. The logic of the barracks seemed to Bogdanov as antithetic to the logic of the factory: the barracks are a super-individual organization, but they are organized according to criteria of authority and strength that have very little in common with the cooperation and solidarity of workers with a view to the common result. According to the logic of the barracks, every task was to be conducted by force and the revolution is reduced to the seizure of power. To confuse war communism with the ideal at which the revolutionary process should have aimed, constituted for Bogdanov a dangerous deception: “War communism is still a communism; and its harsh contradiction with the usual forms of individual appropriation creates such an atmosphere of mirage that vague prototypes of socialism are taken as its realization.” For this reason, Bogdanov asserted his role as “scientific analyst:” “the task of scientific thinking is to uncover and explain mirages, which distract from the right path towards the ideal” [24. P. 344].

First, socialism had to be collective production, while war communism was a centralized organization of consumption, which extended the logic of the barracks to society. In his analysis of the situation following the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, Bogdanov identified many practical cases where crucial questions had been resolved hastily, without considering the complex organization of society and the cares in the handling of the transition to socialist collectivism. Bogdanov, e.g., examined the rapid liquidation of the technical boards of factories, but also the control of banks and tribunals, commenting that “it is an undeniable waste of forces, which cannot be justified from the organizational standpoint, but is due to the psychology of the soldiers’ mass, reckoning with the old lords” [42. P. 2]. The same constant resort to decrees resulted from the habit of “the order, which actually determined and allowed everything in the military life” [42. P. 2], but which accounted for very little in the economic, social, and cultural life.

In his article published in *The New Life*, Bogdanov did not spare a cutting remark to Lunacharsky, whose exhortations to the intelligentsia not to abandon their posts and to pass to the service of the new power seemed to him useless and naïve, because “the general politics of the government is such that it inevitably leads the intellectuals to depart, as far as their existing capabilities make it possible for them” [42. P. 2]. After all, it was Lunacharsky’s dedication to the Bolshevik government that mostly embittered Bogdanov on a personal level. He sharply wrote to his brother-in-law: “I have nothing against the fact that the rough chess player Lenin and the narcissistic actor Trocky accomplish the surrender of socialism to the soldiery. It makes me sad that you are mixed up in it, 1) because for you the

disillusion will be much worse than for them; 2) because you could do something else, no less necessary, but more durable, although at this moment less remarkable, and you could do that without changing yourself” [24. P. 354]. The reference here is to the analytical work to which Bogdanov entrusted his residual hopes to avoid the failure of the revolution.

His analysis in his long article on the *Fates of the Workers Party* closed with a series of concerns: “We come to the sad but undeniable conclusion that in Russia nowadays there is no workers’ socialist party. There is a war-communist party, leading the working class, and there are some groups of the socialist intelligentsia. The war actually made the army the task, and the working class the means; our revolution reflected that fact in the proportions of each force within politics as well. It could not be otherwise. But war is not eternal, and this situation is going to end. What will happen then” [42. P. 2]? Bogdanov thought that, once peace would be obtained, the two souls of Bolshevism would separate and the elements of the socialist intelligentsia would reunite with the workers to realize their ideal. But there was no certainty that this process could be carried out quickly and, most of all, peacefully. If the published article closed with the exhortation to make this happen, the letter to Lunacharsky was quite pessimistic: socialism “handed its faith to the soldiers’ bayonets, and the day is not very far when those same bayonets will slaughter its faith, if not its body. Here is the real tragedy. [...] A demagogical-soldiery dictatorship is fragile in principle: one cannot ‘sit on the bayonets’” [24. P. 354].

For this reason, the revolutionary process was very far from its conclusion. Its objective could not simply be “the revolution of property, the owner’s replacement in society, a matter of class interest and mass material strength.” On the contrary, it was “the creative revolution of the world culture, the replacement of the spontaneous formation of social forms and their struggle by their conscious creation, a matter of a new class logic, new methods for combining forces, new ways of thinking” [24. P. 354]. Socialism should have involved the whole planet, while, just after the war, Bogdanov did not see any possibility for a revolution even in Europe, which constituted by itself a meaningful impediment to the realization of a full revolutionary design. In his utopian novel *The Red Star*, as soon as 1907, one of the protagonists made a comparison between socialism as realized on Mars with the result of a hypothetical triumph of socialism in a few isolated countries, “like islands in a hostile capitalist and even to some extent precapitalist sea.” Here, “even in those instances where socialism prevails and triumphs, its character will be perverted deeply and for a long time to come by years of encirclement, unavoidable terror and militarism, and the barbarian patriotism that is their inevitable consequence. This socialism will be a far cry from our own” [48. P. 114].

For these reasons, “projects that suddenly impose on the proletariat the most radical, complex and difficult deal, unprecedented in history, that is the reorganization on a world basis” resulted in being “cruel irony, or a childish folly” [24. P. 331]. To realize such an imposing task, the proletariat would have had to have already possessed solid cultural foundations, in the form of that science of

organization that Bogdanov was elaborating and that would have allowed the workers to understand the dynamics of the whole of reality and to transform the entire world based on their own collective experience in the factory. Without this preliminary acquisition, to attempt the realization of socialism “would have been a gamble without the slightest chance of success, an attempt to build a worldwide palace without knowing the laws of architecture” [24. P. 332].

3

Aside from the risks of failure that Bogdanov saw in the specific condition of revolutionary Russia, we already said that the seizure of power and the consequent measures did not mean for him an automatic approach to socialism. A characteristic of the socialist system had to be “the highest conceivable stage of *power on nature, organization, sociality, freedom, and progress*” [24. P. 98]. For this reason, Bogdanov had been insisting for his entire life that “the hidden premise of Bolshevism” was “the idea of creating now, within the present society, a great proletarian culture, stronger and more graceful, incomparably freer and more creative, than the culture of the declining bourgeois classes” [49. P. 4]. His dedication to the cultural preparation of workers, from the first circles in Tula to the schools in Capri and Bologna, from the idea of an encyclopedia for workers to the projects for a proletarian university [38. P. 601—602; 50. P. 238—262; 51], was aimed at elaborating, with the “universal class,” the methods and means to organize the collective life of humanity.

While he remained faithful to his decision to stay outside of the party, Bogdanov was immediately interested in the activities of the proletarian educational and cultural organizations, which were so lively that their first conference was inaugurated in Petrograd one week before the seizure of the Winter Palace. From the very beginning, Bogdanov was an inspiring figure for the whole movement, and he entered the executive Board of the Prolekult and the editorial office of the periodical *Proletarian Culture*. At the first congress of the Prolekult in Moscow in February 1918, he held one of the central interventions by the title *Science and the Working Class*, where he indicated the necessity for the proletariat to become the organizing class through the tools offered by Bogdanov’s tectology, which was an accessible science for workers, as they were prepared by the experience of labor to think from the point of view of the collective. The proletariat, as Bogdanov had already written in 1911, “should [...] strive for the simplification and the unification of science, for retrieving its general ways of researching, which would give a key for the most different specializations and would allow the proletarian to quickly take control of them” [24. P. 102].

After all, Bogdanov’s remaining hopes for a non-tragic result of the Bolshevik revolution were entrusted to the fast cultural development of the proletariat. For this reason, a strict scientific organization was necessary.

In this perspective, universal social planning would not have represented for Bogdanov a risk of violence or coercion. Instead, it would have guaranteed a harmonious development, where individuals would have soundly cooperated in

“*the struggle for happiness*, the struggle for everything that life and nature can give to humankind” [24. P. 63]. The collaboration of all given the common ideals would have been asserted instead of individualism and competition, and the new science of organization would have allowed the overtaking of the opposition between manual and intellectual, creative and executive work. Bogdanov had already faced this problem in his utopian novel of 1907. On Mars, production was regulated by a capillary system of statistical data gathering on the quantity of the available workforce and of the workforce demanded by each productive sector to respond to the needs of society. The “Central Institute of Statistics has agencies everywhere that keep track of the flow of goods into and out of the stockpiles and monitor the productivity of all enterprises and the changes in their workforces.” Thus, production is subdued to very precise planning, as explains the Martian guide: “what and how much must be produced for any given period and the number of man-hours required for the task can be calculated. The Institute then computed the difference between the existing and the desired situation for each vocational area and communicated the result to all places of employment. Equilibrium is soon established by a stream of volunteers” [48. P. 66]. The statistical tables of production have to be made public and accessible to all for this to be achieved. Statistics succeed in harmonizing freedom and necessity and obtaining the labor for the survival and the development of society forcing nobody to do a job that she does not choose voluntarily and spontaneously. “The statistics continually affect *mass* transfers of labor, but each individual is free to do as he chooses” [48. P. 68].

In the ideal socialist society that Bogdanov describes, harmony is guaranteed by the organization of production, while there is no restriction on consumption: “everyone takes whatever he needs in whatever quantity he wants” [48. P. 66]. The ideal society imagined by Bogdanov in 1907 was constructed on a planning model that was completely opposed to the war communism of the first years of Bolshevik power. It has often been said that Bogdanov, disappointed with the results of the revolution, had abandoned politics to commit completely to science. But developing tectology and supporting the proletarian cultural organizations was to Bogdanov a truly political activity, because it was science that the revolution needed. It was with this spirit that, in July 1918, Bogdanov became one of the members of the first Presidium of the socialist Academy (then renamed Communist), and that he held lectures of political economics and philosophy in different universities, first of all, in the newly established “proletarian University,” but also the University of Moscow.

In the fall of 1920, the autonomy of the Prolekult was under discussion: the organization’s number of members represented a potential threat [52. P. 193—194]. The attack on Bogdanov that was orchestrated in that period can be read in this light. In 1920, as has already been mentioned, the second edition of Lenin’s *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* was published with a long postface by Nevsky, which was addressed by the critique of Bogdanov’s most recent works, in particular *Tectology* and *Philosophy of Living Experience*, which was supposedly in continuity with the positions that Lenin had harshly criticized over ten years before.

Some pieces by Lenin and Plekhanov were collected in a few small volumes under a telling title: *Against Bogdanov, Against Bogdanovism* [53; 54]. When, towards the end of 1921, Lenin took a stand against the Prolekult by proposing to the Politburo the adoption of a very critical resolution, Bogdanov resigned from the executive council in order “not to taint the organization with his name” [34. P. 56]. He did not stop to advocate for his original positions in his interventions at the Academy and in his writings. On September 8, 1923, Bogdanov was arrested, because he was suspected of having connections with the group the *Workers’ Truth*, which was inspired by his theories in its critique of Bolshevism, without — so it would seem — Bogdanov’s direct involvement. He was only released on October 13, after many declarations of extraneousness from active politics, an indignant letter to Felix Dzerzhinsky, and requests for help from numerous friends. He suffered physically and psychologically because of this “incident.” As Kremontsov has remarked, “it possibly played a role in Bogdanov’s decision to move from theorizing on the questions of physiological collectivism to attempting its practical implementation. Or perhaps, the death of his old rival, on January 21, 1924, prompted Bogdanov to begin experimenting with blood exchanges” [34. P. 58].

In this case, too, we cannot say that it was a complete withdrawal from the revolutionary draw. He had imagined the work on transfusions, which lead him to found the Institute of Hematology in 1926, as soon as 1907, in the *Red Star*, as the realization of an actual physiological “collectivism.” On Mars, the inhabitants of the socialist society “perform *mutual blood transfusions* between human beings, whereby each individual receives from the other a number of elements which can raise his life expectancy” [48. P. 85]. As is known, Bogdanov died two years after the foundation of the Institute, during a transfusion experiment.

His opinions on the period following Lenin’s death are largely left to the secret of the notes that are kept in the former Party archive in Moscow. These are scattered comments, whose context is sometimes difficult and, up to a certain extent, arbitrary in its reconstruction. Sometimes, the statements are very clear. Even in the notes, as far as the decisive role of the proletariat is concerned, we can read: “One of the two: either it takes the old culture, the methods of other classes, and at the same time subordination, or it creates its own culture, its methods, and subjects its organizational forces to them, wherever they come from, and then, as master of the course of events, fulfills its historical mission”³. Nevertheless, instead of the universal organizing class, Bogdanov seemed to see a flock in search of a guide. “A class, which needs absolute leaders, is still of course in its own nature a subordinate class”⁴. It will easily give in to some great leader “without understanding that the point of dealing with historical challenges is not in leaders, but in methods”⁵.

The temptation of subordination within the revolutionary movement itself was, for Bogdanov, a long-term process. He had repeatedly criticized Lenin, starting

³ RGASPI, f. 259, op. 1, d. 48, l. 42.

⁴ Ibid., l. 43.

⁵ Ibid., l. 32ob.

from 1908, because he had commenced establishing an authoritarian leadership in the Bolshevik faction. He writes it down in his notes as well, pinpointing that the period 1908-1910 had been that of the “*struggle for unique personal leadership*”⁶, and that, between 1910 and 1924, he had witnessed “a gradual transition from democratic-revolutionary to bureaucratic thinking”⁷. From this, “the fate of the new vision. A half-spontaneous collective prefers an ‘ennobling fraud’ rather than a gloomy truth, it prefers considering its heroes-leaders as made from its same flesh, as its loyal servants [...], and it does not like at all to know that the chain of dedicated fights objectively came down to a struggle for replacing the master”⁸.

Bogdanov’s disappointment was certainly profound, and it shows particularly strongly in some notes written under the recurring title “for the novel,” as if they had been remarks and cues to be used in a novel, maybe a third unwritten utopian novel. In this hypothetical novel, one of the characters was supposed to be some kind of tyrant, whose dictatorship was nevertheless justified by history. We can read of him: “In the struggle for a sole dictatorship he was objectively right: such was the level of his herd that it was a necessity; but single, randomly developed strong individuals of the European type could not add as much, as they took away since they evoked the fundamental authoritarian type of link within the organization by their existence itself. — With his limited education, entire fields of the ‘spirit’ of his herd would have stayed out of his control, under the influence of these same individuals. Hence, the attempt to take over these fields too, a childish attempt, but successful after 10-15 years, which testifies to the striking intellectual slavery of the herd.” And of this slavery, he gave an example in an aside: “professors, who quote a children’s book with highest blessing”⁹.

Bogdanov was wondering: “What did *I* want to make of Marxism and what did *they* do with it”¹⁰? The reality of the 1920s must have seemed to him the brutal result of the substitution of the ideology of troops to the liberating vision of socialism, which he had sensed during the confused months of 1917: “sometimes it happens like this, that the ideology of creation becomes the ideology of stagnation and complacency, the ideology of social fighters becomes the ideology of oppressive soldiery”¹¹.

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⁶ RGASPI, f. 259, op. 1, d. 48, l. 44ob.

⁷ Ibid., l. 42ob.

⁸ Ibid., l. 46.

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Концепция революции и организации государства Александра Богданова

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Перевод с итальянского Л. Пазини 

Аннотация. Статья посвящена полемике Александра Александровича Богданова, т.н. «другого большевика», с Лениным и его сподвижниками по вопросу о революции и путях построения социалистического общества и государства. Показано, что Богданов высказывал критическое отношение к революции и ее социалистической природе, возможности пролетариата играть в ней решающую роль, писал о неготовности России к антикапиталистическому перевороту, выражая тем самым ярко обозначенную анти-ленинскую позицию. На основе анализа большого корпуса работ самого Богданова авторы сосредоточили свое внимание на следующих аспектах его творчества, касающегося темы революции: противоречиях между Богдановым и Лениным в ее трактовке еще до Октября 1917 г., взглядах Богданова на революцию и реальный социализм уже после ее свершения, его трактовке и оценках «военного коммунизма»; разработанной Богдановым в контексте созданной им науки тектологии программе построения социализма в СССР и поискам путей формирования фундаментально новых социальных структур;

богдановском проекте «Пролеткульта» и его романах-утопиях, в которых он предвидел то, как будет строиться «социализм в одной стране» и осуществляться переход от прежних эксплуататорских к новым формам общежития людей, а также опасности перерождения демократии в диктатуру.

Ключевые слова: революция, социализм, «военный коммунизм», пролетариат, тектология, проект «Пролеткульта», утопия, диктатура

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