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The importance of conspiracy theory in extremist ideology and propaganda

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Chapter 10: Lenin and the Grand Conspiracy Theory

When the financial oligarchy think it advisable to get parliamentary cover for their acts of violence, the bourgeois State has at its disposal for this purpose all the manifold instruments inherited from centuries of class rule and multiplied by all the miracles of capitalist technology—lies, demagoguery, baiting, calumny, bribery, and terror.

To demand of the proletariat that like meek lambs they comply with the requirements of bourgeois democracy in the final life-and-death struggle with capitalism is like asking a man fighting for his life against cut-throats to observe the artificial and restrictive rules of French wrestling, drawn up but not observed by his enemy.”¹
- Leon Trotsky

“...the truly scientific (though in my opinion too deterministic) approach of Marx has been forgotten by his latter-day followers, the Vulgar Marxists, who have put forward a popular conspiracy theory of society which is no better than the myth of the Learned Elders of Zion.”² - Karl Popper

Introduction

In the previous century Soviet propaganda was responsible for spreading some of the most influential conspiracy theories. This is somewhat incongruous as Marx's determinist - or as Karl Popper describes it “historicist” - ideology should be immunized against the idea of small groups of conspirators having a significant effect on the course of history. This chapter will attempt to explain how Lenin, while following Marx, still managed to incorporate a major conspiracy theory into communist ideology in the form of his theory of imperialism.

After a brief discussion of non-Marxist socialist conspiracy theories, this chapter will focus on Soviet communism and describe the two main kinds of arguments about why the Communist party of the USSR became such a remarkable producer of conspiracy theories in spite of their determinist Marxist intellectual background. The remainder of the chapter will be dedicated to the narrative of how and why Lenin adopted a variant of the anti-Jewish Grand Conspiracy Theory (though shorn of its Jewish elements) and to examining the use of this variant of the Grand Conspiracy Theory in Bolshevik ideology and propaganda in the lead up to

¹ *The Communist International: 1919-1943- Documents, Vol. 1: 1919-1922*, Jane Degras ed., (Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 44.

² Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, (Routledge Classics, 2002), p. 167.

the October 1917 coup, and then briefly examine its subsequent use in early Soviet propaganda. This chapter mainly covers the period between 1914 and 1924, between the beginning of WWI and the death of Lenin - the “first phase” of the USSR’s history.

Because of their ideological rigidity and easy use of repression against populations under their control or violence against anyone standing in their way, Lenin’s Bolshevik faction were classic left-wing extremists. Unlike with some other examples of violent extremists examined in this thesis, this thesis will not argue that the Grand Conspiracy Theory made a contribution to the emergence of the Bolshevik strain of extremism. Time and space constraints prevent us from examining the emergence of Lenin’s faction and his vision for them, but suffice it to say that by 1914, when he incorporated a modified version of John Hobson’s anti-Jewish conspiracy theory into Leninist ideology, Lenin was already a violent subversive at the head of a conspiratorial group dedicated to revolution. This chapter does not focus on how this new Leninist conspiracy theory may or may not have affected the evolution of Soviet policy. This thesis is more interested in how this conspiracy theory was integrated into Leninist ideology, subsequently allowing the theory to spread globally because of the propaganda apparatus of the USSR.

Discussing Soviet conspiracy theories is more difficult than discussing the other more “reactionary” conspiracy theories described earlier in this thesis because of the Soviet tendency to load texts with Marxist vocabulary which can muddle the narrative. This chapter will be full of very long quotes and sometimes repeated examples of the same kind of rhetoric, often chosen because they contain somewhat less ponderous prose, but which still demand careful attention. Most of the example conspiracy theories discussed in this thesis so far include direct-enough explanations from their believers, relatively short statements that distill their conspiracist beliefs. Unfortunately, when examining the topic of Lenin’s variant of the Grand Conspiracy Theory, a great deal of patience is demanded from both the researcher and the reader.

Socialism, Marxism, and conspiracy theories

Socialists could be just as susceptible to believing or being tempted to use conspiracy theories as supporters of the Throne and Altar. Recall the discussion of the work of the socialist Toussenel and the magazine *L’Anti-Semitique* in chapter 7. Also recall from that chapter that the socialist Bakunin privately toyed with the anti-Rothschild conspiracy theory by speculating that the family of Jewish bankers were funding his ideological foe within socialism, Karl Marx.

Socialist conspiracy theorists did not need to take up anti-Jewish ideas to believe that there is a nearly-all-powerful network of the privileged who deceive and manipulate the masses for their own ends. Bakunin, for example, was not usually given to anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, but did preach the idea that the entire structure of Western civilization, church, state, and civil society, was the self-consciously deceptive project of a group of oppressors. Take this passage he wrote around 1870 attacking the church` as agents of the state for perpetuating the oppression of the people by the few through deliberate deception:

“...robber and robbed, oppressor and oppressed live side by side, ruled by a handful of people, in whom one recognizes the real oppressors. It is always the same type of men, who, free of all political and religion prejudice, consciously torture and oppress the rest of the people. In the 17th and 18th centuries, until the advent of the great revolution, they ruled Europe and did as they liked.

They do the same to-day... History teaches us that the chief priests of Church and State are also the sworn servants and creatures of these damnable institutions. Whilst consciously deceiving the people and leading them into disaster, these persons are concerned to uphold zealously the sanctity and unapproachability of both establishments. The Church, on the authority of all priests and most politicians, is essential to the proper care of the people's sons; and the State is indispensable, in their opinion, for the proper maintenance of peace, order, and justice. And the doctrinaires of all schools exclaim in chorus: 'Without Church or Government, progress and civilization is impossible.'"³

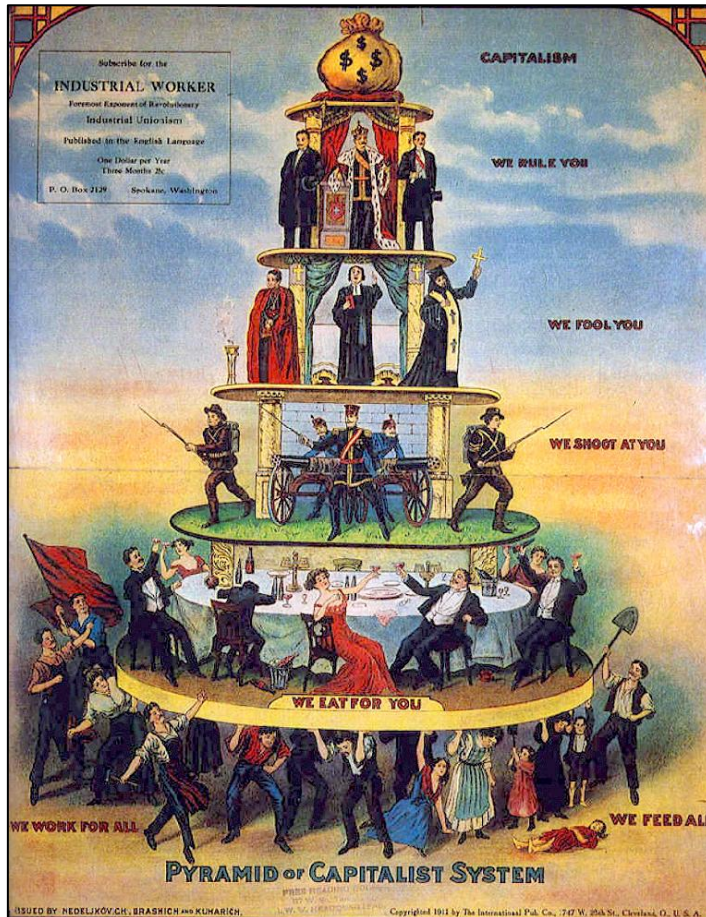


Figure 6

Another more demotic example of Socialist propaganda that emphasized deception, and suggesting some kind of conspiracy theory, is the famous image the “Pyramid of Capitalist System” published in the United States in 1911 (Figure 1). This image attacks the capitalist system by depicting it as a pyramid whose base is supported by miserable workers (“We Work for All / We Feed All.”) Above them are the rich (“We eat for you”), above them are soldiers (“We shoot at you”), above them are the clergy (“We fool you”) above them kings, presidents, politicians, etc. (“We rule you”) and at the very top of the pyramid sits a bag of money - “Capitalism.”⁴ The layer with the clergy is the one that concerns us here - it shows a Roman Catholic cardinal, a protestant preacher, and an orthodox priest. This makes a point similar to Bakunin’s, that the clergy are nothing more than “servants” of the rulers whose purpose is to “fool” the oppressed people, to keep them in line and keep them from rebelling.

³ Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin, *The Selected Works of Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin*, (Library of Alexandria, 2009). Also available at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/writings/ch11.htm>.

⁴ Eric Triantifillou, “The Pyramid’s Reign”, *Signal: 05: A Journal of International Political Graphics & Culture*, Alec Dunn and Josh MacPhee eds., (2016).

This image is in turn based on a 1901 image the “Pyramid of Autocracy” produced in Geneva by Nikolai Lokhov, an artist working for the Russian Union of Social Democrats Abroad, an organization of Russian exiles.^{5 6} The “Pyramid of Autocracy” attacked Russian autocracy by depicting Russian society as a similar pyramid, with the Imperial Eagle at the top instead of “Capitalism.” In this image there is also a tier for clergy with “We fool⁷ you” which also implies a message like that of Bakhunin’s, that the Russian clergy were agents of the tyrannical rulers of Russia, used to befuddle the people and keep them enslaved to the Tsar. Unlike in the United States in 1911 where there were a multitude of denominations and religious dissenters, the idea of a monolithic and controlled clergy was not a fantasy in the Russian Empire. In Russia there was an official church - the Russian Orthodox Church. It was subordinated to the state and clergy were basically part of the state bureaucracy.⁸ In this situation it was at least conceivable that the state could order the clergy around, perhaps even to “fool” the people. The import of this image from the Russian Empire to describe the situation in the United States is an example of the larger phenomena of conspiracy theories. Just as was discussed in chapter 3, the use of ideas of influence and conspiracy that might actually work in a monarchy - manipulating and deceiving the sovereign, when applied to a democracy necessitate the existence of a conspiracy large and powerful enough to deceive the whole mass of the “sovereign” people. Analogously, while it might have been possible for the Russian government to “fool” the people via its state-controlled church, the idea that “capitalism” in the United States could do something similar suggests the existence of a vast network of secret levers of control stretching into the major religious denominations - a conspiracy theory. The 1911 image “Pyramid of Capitalist System” was probably the work of Serbian immigrant artists. In 1912 this image made it onto the pages of the newspaper of a major union Industrial Workers of the World, which partially accounts for its fame.⁹ However, while this image may have become famous, it does not represent any kind of organized propaganda campaign.

Socialists conspiracy theorists did not have access to state-level propaganda apparatuses until after the Russian Revolution of 1917. The remainder of this chapter will examine how Lenin, the first leader of the Soviet Union, became enamored of a conspiracy theory derived from the grand anti-Jewish conspiracy theory, and how this theory became a core part of Bolshevik ideology and therefore of Soviet propaganda.¹⁰

Claiming that a variant of communism has a conspiracy theory at its core is incongruous on the surface, because communists broadcast their adherence to Marxism, which should be resistant to conspiracy theories. The root of Karl Marx’s thought was his belief in economic determinism. The economic structure, which is in turn based on concrete “relations of

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ As Triantifillou mentions, this image is based on a Belgian caricature from 1885 that depicts King Leopold of Belgium at the top. However, the 2nd rung, the clerics has “Je prie pour vous” I pray for you - instead of an accusation of deception. See John Grand-Carteret, *Popold II, Roi des Belges et des Belles*, Louis-Michaud ed., (Paris, 1908) p. 64.

⁷ “морочимъ.”

⁸ Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, (Penguin, 1993), p. 243.

⁹ Triantifillou.

¹⁰ The core of this analysis is dependent on the unfortunately short commentary on this topic from Daniel Pipes, see Daniel Pipes, *Conspiracy*, p. 82.

production,” is what the rest of society is based on. All other aspects of society, political, intellectual etc., are based on economic conditions:

“In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.”¹¹

The idea that a group of conspirators could derail the determined, economically rooted, process of history and “usurp” political power is ridiculous in such a system. As Karl Popper wrote, Marx:

“...saw in such phenomena as war, depression, unemployment, and hunger in the midst of plenty, not the result of a cunning conspiracy on the part of ‘big business’ or of ‘imperialist war-mongers’, but the unwanted social consequences of actions, directed towards different results, by agents who are caught in the network of the social system. He looked upon the human actors on the stage of history, including the ‘big’ ones, as mere puppets, irresistibly pulled by economic wires— by historical forces over which they have no control. The stage of history, he taught, is set in a social system which binds us all; it is set in the ‘kingdom of necessity’. (But one day the puppets will destroy this system and attain the ‘kingdom of freedom’.)”¹²

In other words, the “strings” controlling society and creating so much misery were not the work of men, but of history. It was not a conscious conspiracy but an unconscious process that would be overcome. However, by the mid-20th century it was obvious that many avowed followers of Marx had become believers in a kind of anti-capitalist conspiracy theory. Karl Popper, who greatly admired Marx even as he criticized his thought, lamented this change. Popper compared Marx’s thought with what he called the “vulgar Marxism” which:

“...believes that Marxism lays bare the sinister secrets of social life by revealing the hidden motives of greed and lust for material gain which actuate the powers behind the scenes of history; powers that cunningly and consciously create war, depression, unemployment, hunger in the midst of plenty...”¹³

Popper bemoaned the fact that Marx’s doctrine of determinism which should be immune to conspiracy theorizing had been “abandoned by most of his followers” by the 1940s, calling it a sad intellectual come-down “from the level of *Capital* to that of *The Myth of the 20th Century*.”¹⁴ (Popper is referring here to the book *The Myth of the 20th Century* written by the Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg, who received much attention in the previous chapter.) Popper

¹¹ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, N. I. Stone trans., (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1904), p. 11.

¹² Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, p. 312.

¹³ Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, p. 311.

¹⁴ Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, p. 312.

speculated that this change might have been done for “propagandist reasons” or because many of Marx’s followers did not really understand him.¹⁵

Soviet Communism: leftist extremist ideology, a perfect marriage with conspiracy theories?

The obvious agent responsible for the spread of “Marxist” conspiracy theories was the Communist party of the USSR. Popper’s speculation about “propagandist” motivations for the use of Marxist¹⁶ conspiracy theories is a reference to the massive use of conspiracy theories in Soviet propaganda. During the period before Popper wrote about “vulgar Marxism” Stalin’s propaganda organs had pumped out tales of a massive conspiracy of his former colleagues that threatened the USSR, culminating in show trials where captured “members” of this made-up conspiracy of “Trotskyites” confessed their crimes and told of the reach of the conspiracy into every level of Soviet society. Soviet iconography often portrayed malign figures, capitalists, fascists, etc. “fooling” the masses (and of course, eventually being destroyed by the revolution.) The release of some classified material since the collapse of the Soviet Union has revealed that the Soviet Union was responsible for spreading some of the more popular conspiracy theories in circulation today as propaganda, especially against the United States, such as the idea that the CIA had assassinated president Kennedy, or that the AIDS virus was secretly concocted by the US government.¹⁷

Why did this party founded on determinist Marxist ideology turn to conspiracy theories? Two persuasive arguments have been advanced to explain how this happened, one based on the utility of conspiracy theories in propaganda and the other based on the realities of power after the Bolsheviks seized it - i.e. that there was something inherent in the structure of the Soviet Communist party or in Bolshevik ideology that transformed them into conspiracy theorists after they seized power and started to govern.

Turning first to the utility argument: the use of even the most outrageous conspiracy theories in support of Soviet goals would not have been out of character for the USSR. A group or an individual which decides on deliberately spreading fabricated conspiracy-theory propaganda makes a moral choice that this lie is serving a greater good, such as fighting the radicalism of the Jacobins, or defending Holy Russia from losing its western provinces to the Poles, or even (if one believes a massive evil conspiracy actually exists) as part of the effort to fight off a powerful a-moral Illuminati, or Jesuit, or Jewish conspiracy which itself has no morals and continuously makes use of lies. Lenin however made clear that there is no moral line to cross. The only thing that mattered was the good of the revolution and the party that served that revolution.¹⁸ As he put it in a speech to the Russian Young Communist League in 1920:

“We reject any morality based on extra-human and extra-class concepts. We say that this is deception, duplicity, stultification of the workers and peasants in the interests of the landowners and

¹⁵ Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, p. 312.

¹⁶ Or as Popper would have probably categorized them: pseudo-Marxist.

¹⁷ Robert W Pringle “Active Measures,” in *Historical Dictionary of Russian and Soviet Intelligence*, (Scarecrow press, 2006) p. 15.

¹⁸ Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: The Founders - The Golden Age - The Breakdown*, (W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), p. 769.

capitalists... We say: morality is what serves to destroy the old exploiting society and to unite all the working people around the proletariat, which is building up a new, communist society.... To us morality is subordinated to the interests of the proletariat's class struggle....When people tell us about morality, we say: to a Communist all morality lies in this united discipline and conscious mass struggle against the exploiters. We do not believe in an eternal morality, and we expose the falseness of all the fables about morality. Morality serves the purpose of helping human society rise to a higher level and rid itself of the exploitation of labour."¹⁹

The scholar of Marxism Leszek Kołakowski pointed out that this passage and others like it are difficult to interpret in a matter different from "everything which serves or injures the party's aims is morally good or bad respectively, and nothing else is morally good or bad."²⁰ This sanctions aggression and conquest,²¹ and also torture, robbery, and even spreading the most vile lies, as long as they helped the revolution along. This line of thinking leads inevitably to justifying lies told in the service of the programs or even just the tactics of the leaders of the revolution - and not only concerning lies. If one believes the only moral "good" comes from the good of the party then even the "truth" must be made to conform to the needs of the party. Conspiracy theories could perform this function of making the "truth" correspond to the reality required by the party by alleging an enormous deception has taken place to distort the supposed observed "truth."

A splendid example of how this brand of purposeful amorality can lead to conspiracy theories cropping up in Soviet propaganda was pointed out by Hannah Arendt. She examined how propaganda under the conditions of Stalin's totalitarian police state had to bend to the demands of: "...Stalin's method of accusing a fictitious enemy of the crime he himself was about to commit."²² So, according to Arendt, when Stalin was about to kill off large sections of the senior ranks of the Communist party of the USSR he invented the idea of a clandestine network of Jewish doctors who had been secretly killing off large sections of the Communist party of the USSR.²³ Unlike any act by Stalin, who had at his disposal a party apparatus, a secret police, an army, etc., any group of conspirators capable of doing such consequential acts under the noses of the Soviet authorities would require a vast clandestine network with amazing powers of concealment and deception and nearly limitless resources – which requires a conspiracy theory to explain their continued influence and ability to evade detection. This concocted conspiracy theory was then used to justify the purge that Stalin was intending to carry out.

By the time Stalin achieved absolute power it was evident that the post-history paradise was not arriving promptly after the 1917 Revolution. A conspiracy theory was a route that Soviet propaganda could take to explain this "failure" as well as justify future failures, shortages, and the state's use of repression. Karl Popper referred to this kind of post-utopian conspiracy theorizing in a short passage in *The Open Society*:

¹⁹ Vladimir Lenin "The Tasks of the Youth Leagues," From October 2, 1920, first published in Pravda, re published in Vol. 31 of Lenin's Collected Works, available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/oct/02.htm>. Accessed May 20 2018.

²⁰ Kołakowski, p. 769.

²¹ Kołakowski, p. 769.

²² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Location 611.

²³ Ibid.

“...people who sincerely believe that they know how to make heaven on earth are most likely to adopt the conspiracy theory, and to get involved in a counter-conspiracy against non-existing conspirators. For the only explanation of their failure to produce their heaven is the evil intention of the Devil, who has a vested interest in hell.”²⁴

Here Popper speaks of a “counter-conspiracy” that conspiracist revolutionaries can organize in order to fight for a utopia and defend it against the conspiratorial forces preventing its rise. This points to the second kind of argument about the Soviet use of conspiracy theories, that there was something inherent in the nature of the Bolshevik faction of the Communist party that caused it to embrace conspiracy theories, especially after it seized power. Before the Soviet Revolution, Lenin’s Bolshevik faction of communists was a kind of secret society itself - a hierarchical clandestine network of amoral, anti-religious revolutionaries who used propaganda and subversion in a quest to seize power - quite similar in some respects to the secret societies that existed in the imaginations of Barruel, Metternich, and others. This conspiratorial structure was not built in a vacuum nor was it directly inspired by the myths of secret societies from the 19th century. The materialism and accompanying amorality were from Marx, but the top-down conspiratorial methods grew from Lenin’s belief that the revolution needed a revolutionary vanguard, a group of professional revolutionaries commanded from a single center who would conduct the revolution.

After seizing power, such a deeply un-democratic and secretive system would be the perfect incubator for a re-manifestation of the old practices of the most repressive absolute monarchies, including a secret police and rampant rumors of networks ready to seize power or attempting to influence and deceive the “king” (or, in this case, the leaders of the party). This tendency, the argument often goes, would have been compounded by the necessarily clandestine nature of revolutionary parties before the Revolution. Because it was trying to operate in what was, by the standards of its day, a repressive police state (Tsarist Russia), the Bolshevik faction had to adopt clandestine, conspiratorial tactics.²⁵ The kind of veteran Bolsheviks who excelled in secretive political work before the revolution would have carried their old experience into the new government. As Arendt put it:

‘...conspirators have an understandable tendency to think that the most efficient methods in politics in general are those of conspiratory societies and that if one can apply them in broad daylight and support them with a whole nation’s instruments of violence, the possibilities for power accumulation become absolutely limitless.’²⁶

A party/government that operates in this manner is liable, like any group of humans, to “mirror imaging” a term used by contemporary intelligence analysts to describe the mind’s tendency to assume that the motives and actions of others are similar to one’s own.²⁷ So, a top-down conspiratorial organization that uses deception and subterfuge could see its opponents as similar top-down conspiratorial organizations using subterfuge and deception, and denounce them as such.

²⁴ Popper, *The Open Society*, p. 307.

²⁵ Daniel Pipes, *Conspiracy*, p. 175.

²⁶ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 379.

²⁷ Richards J. Heuer Jr., *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, (US Government Printing Office, 1999), p. 70.

The former US intelligence officer and scholar of the history of Soviet intelligence Dr. Jack Dziak combined this structural argument with the previous utility argument in his concept of “conspiracy come to power” which he used to describe the government of the Soviet Union. The Bolsheviks were a conspiracy to seize power, and after they seized power they naturally used conspiracy theories to justify their power: “Conspiracies presuppose enemies, and a conspiracy come to power must perpetually justify itself by exposing threats to its own exclusive claims.”²⁸ As he explained elsewhere, the nature of this kind of organization, once it got into power, made its leaders and their servants churn with “counterintelligence” paranoia and fears of conspiracies to overthrow the state and seize power:

“The Soviet Union was a ‘counterintelligence state,’ that is, an enterprise in which the premier function of the “organs” was to preserve the exclusive claims to power of the Communist Party and its ruling cadres. This “counterintelligence state” fixated on enemies, real and imagined, domestic and foreign. From the very first days of the USSR the intelligence services, as they were mistakenly labeled in the west, were imbued with a counterintelligence character, as was the whole of state and society. Soviet foreign intelligence had the demeanor and feel of external counterintelligence, a characteristic inherited in part from its Okhrana predecessor of Tsarist days.”²⁹

There is much merit to both of these kinds of arguments, as will be demonstrated later, but many commentators on Soviet history commit the error of focusing on Soviet ideology and propaganda after Lenin seized power. Lenin’s Bolshevik faction embraced a variant of the Grand Conspiracy Theory before their 1917 coup, and it was an important element of Bolshevik propaganda during their quest to seize power. The Soviet Communist party was tied to a variant of the Grand Conspiracy Theory because Lenin used this idea in two of his major works written immediately before the Bolshevik seizure of power. Therefore, it became an important part of Soviet ideology after 1917. This points to a third ideological factor in the Soviet embrace of conspiracy theories that must also be examined. The remainder of this chapter, while taking elements from both the “post-revolutionary” explanations for communist conspiracy theories mentioned above, will examine the circumstances of Lenin’s pre-Revolution concoction of his own version of the Grand Conspiracy Theory, describe Lenin’s major source for this conspiracy theory, and chart its use in early Bolshevik/Soviet propaganda and some of the ideological consequences of this idea.

Communist ideology and deception

In most of the variants of the Grand Conspiracy Theory that we have examined thus far the ideas of illegitimacy and usurpation have been of chief importance. Usually, there is the idea that the legitimate government (a “rightful” king, for example) was (or is about to be) replaced or superseded by a very powerful conspiracy with superpowers of deception (the Jews, Freemasons, etc.) who have duped the people with propaganda. Using ideas similar to this would not work in Soviet ideology, because Soviet communism had no use for the idea of legitimacy. Lenin and other Bolsheviks were strong believers in the maxim of Marx’s friend and

²⁸ John J. Dziak, *Chekisty: A History of the KGB*, (Lexington Books, 1988), p. 51.

²⁹ John J. Dziak, “Islamism and Stratagem,” in *Cultural Intelligence for Winning the Peace*, Juliana Geran Pilon ed., (Institute of World Politics Press, 2009), p. 288.

collaborator Friedrich Engels: “the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy.”³⁰ States were just organized violence supporting a class, law was just a weapon of class struggle.³¹ There is no room for the idea of usurpation when there is no legitimacy.

However, notice Engels’ emphasis that the democratic republics were similar to monarchies, in that both are “nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another.”³² Elsewhere Engels stated that in a democratic republic, wealth “employs its power indirectly, but all the more surely” working through corruption and “an alliance between the government and the stock exchange.”³³ Engels wrote that under universal suffrage “the possessing class rules directly through the medium of universal suffrage. As long as the oppressed class... is not yet ripe to emancipate itself, it will in its majority regard the existing order of society as the only one possible...”³⁴

How does the ruling class rule directly through the medium of universal suffrage? Here deception can play a role. In an 1880 essay Marx wrote about the importance of a distinct political party of the working class which can then transform universal suffrage “...from the instrument of deception that it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation”.³⁵ These two ideas, that the people are ruled by the upper classes despite universal suffrage (using an element of deception) and that this rule can only be overcome by a disciplined party contributed to Lenin’s crucial idea of “combating spontaneity” - that absent a revolutionary party every working class movement would inevitably- spontaneously- come under the spell of the upper classes, for example via trade unionism - which diverts the proletariat towards seeking better conditions instead of revolution. This cycle will persist until a revolutionary vanguard emerges which could effectively resist this cycle:³⁶

“There is much talk of spontaneity. But the *spontaneous* development of the working-class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology... for the spontaneous working-class movement is trade-unionism... and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie. Hence, our task, the task of Social-Democracy, is *to combat spontaneity, to divert* the working-class movement from this spontaneous, trade-unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social Democracy.”³⁷

³⁰ Frederick Engels, *The Civil war in France*, Postscript, (published in 1871, English edition 1871, Translated and edited by Zodiac & Brian Baggins). Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/postscript.htm> . Accessed May 30 2018.

³¹ Kolakowski, p. 663.

³² Engels, *The Civil war in France*. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/postscript.htm> . Accessed May 30 2018.

³³ Frederick Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Alan West trans. in 1942, p. 93. Available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/origin_family.pdf. Accessed June 4, 2019.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Karl Marx and Jules Guesde, *The Programme of the Parti Ouvrier*, 1880. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm>. Accessed June 4, 2019.

³⁶ Kolakowski, pp. 665-666.

³⁷ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*, Section II, Joe Fineberg and George Hanna trans., (edition published in Lenin’s Collected Works, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961, Moscow, Volume 5,

In his earlier work Lenin still saw the parliamentary governments in the West as “better” than the absolutism that still existed in his home country, that is, they were developmentally closer to the coming proletarian revolution. After writing about the tribulations experienced by German socialists under anti-socialist laws in the late 19th century, Lenin wrote: “The Russian proletariat will have to undergo trials immeasurably graver; it will have to fight a monster compared with which an anti-socialist law in a constitutional country seems but a dwarf.”³⁸ Lenin evidently believed that exposing the deceptions of the ruling class was easier in republics than under Tsarism. In 1901 Lenin gave praise to the ability of liberal western societies to uncover deceptions foisted on the people by the rulers:

“In our times, guns, bayonets, and whips are not a sufficiently reliable guardian; it is necessary to convince the exploited that the government stands above classes, that it does not serve the interests of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, but those of justice, that it is concerned with protecting the weak and the poor against the rich and the powerful, etc. Napoleon III in France and Bismarck and Wilhelm II in Germany exerted no little effort to play up to the workers in this way. ***But in Europe, where there is a more or less free press, a representative government, electoral campaigns, and well-established political parties, all these hypocritical tricks were quickly exposed.*** In Asia, however, which includes Russia, where the masses of the people are so wretched and ignorant, and where there are such strong prejudices fostering faith in Our Father the Tsar, tricks of this kind are quite successful...”³⁹ [Emphasis not in original]

Note that here Lenin wrote that it was easier to expose “hypocritical tricks” in the more democratic West, not that these tricks weren’t also used there and therefore didn’t have to be actively exposed. In 1908, after Russia had gotten a Parliament and had its own liberal (Kadet) party that enjoyed serious electoral success, Lenin wrote that “Bourgeois politicians, one and all, in all parliamentary countries, have always paid lip-service to democracy while betraying it.”⁴⁰ Lenin decried the other Russian socialists who, at a London conference in the previous year, had insisted that “it was not Marxist to speak in the resolution about the liberals’ ‘deception’ of the people...”⁴¹ In Lenin’s view denouncing bourgeois deception was an important part of Marxism.

If merely a concern about “deception” was enough to make one a conspiracy theorist, then nearly everyone who has ever thought about politics would have to be labeled a conspiracy theorist. To be classified as a conspiracy theorist one must believe that there is an enormous and successful, or almost-successful, conspiracy that deceives most people, and Lenin’s ideas of “combating spontaneity” does not approach this. However, a crisis arose that shocked Lenin so deeply and made him so apprehensive of “bourgeois” deception that he appropriated an anti-

pp. 347-530). Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/ii.htm>. Accessed June 4, 2019. See also Kołakowski, p. 667.

³⁸ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*, Section I. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/i.htm>. Accessed June 4, 2019.

³⁹ V. I. Lenin, *A Valuable Admission*, First published in *Iskra*, No. 6, July 1901. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/may/11.htm>. Accessed June 4, 2019.

⁴⁰ V. I. Lenin, *Deception of the People by the Liberals*, Bernard Isaacs trans., (First published in *Proletary*, No. 25, March (25) 12, 1908. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/mar/12b.htm>. Accessed May 20, 2018.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Jewish version of the Grand Conspiracy Theory to explain it. The trigger for this crisis was the beginning of WWI.

Lenin and socialist “traitors” - the outbreak of WWI

For years Lenin had been waiting for a great crisis of capitalism to initiate the hoped-for Europe-wide socialist revolution. When war broke out in 1914 he believed the crisis had arrived. Before the war the international socialist movement had agreed that the proletariat must never agree to engage in wars between the capitalists states. The two socialist schools of thought at the time believed either that socialists should use all their political power to push for a quick end of a war or that socialists should try to transform a big war into an international revolutionary civil war. Lenin was an advocate of the second school.⁴² Lenin was shocked at the response of most European socialists towards the great European war after it actually broke out. Instead of opposing the war, many socialist leaders rallied to their flags and voted for measures supporting mobilization. The most surprising defection of all in Lenin's eyes was probably that of Karl Kautsky, the leader of the German Social Democrats, whom Lenin described as the “ biggest authority in the Second International...”^{43 44} Lenin had even written the preface to the Russian edition of Kautsky's 1906 work *The Driving Forces and Prospects of the Russian Revolution*.⁴⁵ In August or September 1914 Lenin wrote: “To the socialist it is not the horrors of war that are the hardest to endure...but the horrors of the treachery shown by the leaders of present day socialism.”⁴⁶

Lenin defined this horrifying betrayal using two terms, “social-chauvinism” and “opportunism.” Social-chauvinism was what non-Leninists might define as patriotism, i.e. the “acceptance of the idea of the defense of the fatherland in the present imperialist war, justification of an alliance between socialists and the bourgeoisie and the governments of their “own” countries in this war, a refusal to propagate and support proletarian revolutionary action against one's “own” bourgeoisie, etc.”⁴⁷ Lenin saw this “social-chauvinism” as linked to a trend he had identified earlier - opportunism. Lenin defined “opportunism” like this:

⁴² Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Locations 9390-9397.

⁴³ James Ryan, *Lenin's Terror, The ideological origins of early Soviet state violence*, (Routledge, 2012), p. 49.

⁴⁴ V. I. Lenin and G. Y. Zinoviev, “Socialism and War”, (From *Lenin Collected Works*, Foreign Languages Press, 1970, Peking, Volume 21, pages 295-338). Available at <https://marxists.architecturez.net/archive/lenin/works/1915/s+w/ch01.htm#s15> . Accessed May 21, 2018.

⁴⁵ V. I. Lenin, “Preface to the Russian Translation of K. Kautsky's Pamphlet: The Driving Forces and Prospects of the Russian Revolution,” (from [Lenin Collected Works](#), Progress Publishers, 1965, Moscow, Volume 11, pages 408-413). Available at <https://marxists.architecturez.net/archive/lenin/works/1906/dec/00b.htm>. Accessed May 21, 2018.

⁴⁶ V. I. Lenin, “The European War and International Socialism,” (From *Lenin Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, 1974, Moscow, Volume 21, pages 20-24.) Available At <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/aug/x02.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

⁴⁷ V. I. Lenin, *The Collapse of the Second International*, Chapter 7, (From *Lenin Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, [1974], Moscow, Volume 21, pp. 205-259.) Available at <https://marxists.architecturez.net/archive/lenin/works/1915/csi/vii.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

“Opportunism means sacrificing the fundamental interests of the masses to the temporary interests of an insignificant minority of the workers or, in other words, an alliance between a section of the workers and the bourgeoisie, directed against the mass of the proletariat”⁴⁸

Lenin took the term “opportunism” from Marx, but made it his own through repeated use as an insult. According to the communist philosopher György Lukács: “For Lenin, opportunism is a phrase which characterizes anyone who surrenders the hope of abolishing the capitalist class and the capitalist system and therefore ceases to be Marxist.”⁴⁹ In 1915 Lenin wrote that this “opportunism” was made possible by the emergence of a privileged strata of workers whose interests aligned with the bourgeois:

“...the comparatively peaceful and cultured life of a stratum of privileged workingmen ‘bourgeoisified’ them, gave them crumbs from the table of their national capitalists, and isolated them from the suffering, misery and revolutionary temper of the impoverished and ruined masses”⁵⁰

This a version of the Marxist idea of the “labor aristocracy.” Lenin believed that the defection of socialists from the cause of international revolution to support their own countries during WWI demonstrated that opportunism and social-chauvinism were “*one and the same tendency*”:⁵¹

“In the conditions of the war of 1914-15, opportunism leads to social-chauvinism. The idea of class collaboration is opportunism’s main feature. The war has brought this idea to its logical conclusion, and has augmented its usual factors and stimuli with a number of extraordinary ones; through the operation of special threats and coercion it has compelled the philistine and disunited masses to collaborate with the bourgeoisie. This circumstance has naturally multiplied adherents of opportunism and fully explains why many radicals of yesterday have deserted to that camp.”⁵²

Lenin’s polemics against the “social-chauvinists” and against Kautsky in particular used the language of deception. In 1915 Lenin, using some standard Marxist vocabulary, described “Kautskyism” as a “social product of the contradictions within the Second International, a combination of loyalty to Marxism in words and subordination to opportunism in deeds.”⁵³ By late 1914 Lenin was already writing about how the German, French, and English bourgeoisie had “hoodwinked” or fooled, (“*одурачивает*” / “*одурачить*”) the working class in each of their countries to support the war, including in advanced parliamentary democracies like in France and the UK, by using “false phrases about patriotism” and distracting them from “the only

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Georg Lukacs, *The Process of Democratization*, Susanne Bernhardt and Norman Levine trans., (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 16.

⁵⁰ V. I. Lenin, *The Collapse of the Second International*, Chapter 7.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ V. I. Lenin, *Socialism and War*, Chapter I, (From *Lenin Collected Works*, Foreign Languages Press, 1970, Peking, Volume 21, pages 295-338). Available at <https://marxists.architecture.net/archive/lenin/works/1915/s+w/ch01.htm#s15>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

genuine war of liberation, namely, a civil war against the bourgeoisie both of its 'own' and of 'foreign' countries..."⁵⁴

As was mentioned earlier, the idea of deception was not alien from Lenin's thought before 1914, but here he was implying that a massive deception (or a series of massive deceptions) had taken place all across the "developed" and most democratic European countries. Recall Lenin's earlier statements that it was easier to uncover lies aimed at the workers in the advanced countries than in autocratic Russia. 17 years after writing this Lenin wrote that his socialist opponents in the freer West had been "bribed" in order to corrupt the labor movement as part of a massive bourgeois plot:

"the *opportunists* (social-chauvinists) are working hand in glove with the imperialist bourgeoisie *precisely* towards creating an imperialist Europe on the backs of Asia and Africa, and that objectively the *opportunists* are a section of the petty bourgeoisie and of a certain strata of the working class who *have been bribed* out of imperialist superprofits and converted to *watchdogs* of capitalism and *corruptors* of the labour movement."⁵⁵

Hobson's anti-imperialism: The Grand Conspiracy Theory's path into Leninism

Soon after the outbreak of war, Lenin's new bitter enemy Kautsky published an essay titled "Ultra-Imperialism." While some other socialists held that capitalism inevitably led to wars of imperial expansion, in this essay Kautsky argued that warlike imperialism was not necessary for the continued growth of capitalism. In fact, he believed that ill-conceived competition for colonies and the growing grievances of the colonized might lead capitalism to an early death. He suggested that after the war, realizing this danger, the states of Europe might cry "capitalists of all countries, unite!" and renounce the arms race and band together to form a kind of international imperialist cartel to continue developing and exploiting the "agricultural zones" (i.e. colonies) for the benefit of industrialized Europe.⁵⁶

Kautsky wrote that socialists "must struggle against [ultra-imperialism] as energetically as we do against imperialism..."⁵⁷ but Lenin was not persuaded that Kautsky was speaking honestly. In his polemical manner Lenin derided Kautsky's ideas of an ultra-imperialist future as a "a petit-bourgeois exhortation to the financiers that they should refrain from doing evil"⁵⁸ and also that it was part of a plot to console the enslaved proletariat. The workers of Europe are told that their troubles would be ameliorated once the future ultra-imperialist cartel ends war and proceeds to manage the world in an ultra-imperialist manner, with the workers of Europe serving as a kind of global middle class. Using this idea, workers could be persuaded that European

⁵⁴ V. I. Lenin, "The War and Russian Social-Democracy," D. Walters and R. Cymbala trans., (from Lenin Collected Works, Progress Publishers, [197[4]], Moscow, Volume 21, pages 25-34). Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/sep/28.htm>. Accessed on May 31 2018.

⁵⁵ V. I. Lenin, "Imperialism and the Split in Socialism," M. S. Levin, The Late Joe Fineberg and and Others trans., (From Lenin Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1964, Moscow, Volume 23, pages 105-120). Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/oct/x01.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

⁵⁶ Karl Kautsky, "Ultra Imperialism," First published in Die Neue Zeit, September 1914. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1914/09/ultra-imp.htm>. Accessed May 3, 2018.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ V. I. Lenin, *The Collapse of the Second International*, Chapter 5, (From Lenin Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1974, Moscow, Volume 21, pages 205-259.) Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/csi/v.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

revolution was unnecessary, and if they behaved they would become an important, privileged, and wealthy part of a global ultra-imperialist system. Lenin compared this consolation to that of a priest who consoles slaves with religion, reducing the likelihood of revolt and benefiting the slave owner.⁵⁹ In a 1915 pamphlet *The Collapse of the Second International* Lenin called ultra-imperialism “The most subtle theory of social-chauvinism, one that has been most skillfully touched up to look scientific and international...”⁶⁰

Lenin decided to address what he believed was an attempt to harm the prospects of revolution head-on. Lenin had all the tools and plenty of ideas to spin his own propaganda narrative and conspiracy theory to denounce Kautsky and his other ideological enemies, but Lenin instead adopted (with some significant modifications) the conspiracy theory elaborated by John A. Hobson, an English liberal who wrote one of the most influential books of the early 20th century: *Imperialism: A Study* (1902).⁶¹ ⁶² In his writing on the topic, Lenin acknowledged his debt to Hobson. Before Lenin’s writing on imperialism is discussed, it is wise to examine Hobson’s thought on the subject, as this helps to situate Lenin’s thought in the chain of anti-Jewish conspiracy theories.

Years before Lenin read Hobson’s *Imperialism: A Study*, the liberal newspaper the *Manchester Guardian* dispatched Hobson to South Africa in 1899 as a correspondent during the run-up to the Second Boer War. The articles he wrote were later published in a book *The War in South Africa. Its Causes and Effects* (1900). Hobson was very much against the Second Boer War and believed it was the work of a conspiracy of bankers, miners, and businessmen. Hobson had a particular kind of banker, miner, and businessman in mind: Jewish ones.⁶³ In a chapter titled “For Whom Are We Fighting?” Hobson lays out a conspiracy theory clearly in debt to the kind of anti-finance, anti-Rothschild conspiracy theory popularized in the 19th century by people like Toussanel and organs like *L’Anti-Semitique*.

“The gold-mines of the Rand, are almost entirely in their [Jewish] hands... First comes Wernher, Beit & co., more commonly known by the name of the managing director as the ‘Eckstein Group’... Next in size comes Neumann.. Two other important groups of mines, largely repositories of German capital, Goetz & Co. and Albu & Co. The financial connection, according to my information, consists in the fact that Brassey, representing Rothschild, has a controlling interest in Goetz & Co. ...These statements are made to me on evidence which I am naturally unable to check, but I believe them to be correct, and even if only approximately true, they indicate a close consolidation of the great part of the Rand mining industry.... But while the power of this capitalism is based on gold, it is by no means confined to it. Whatever large or profitable interest we approach, we find the same control. The interests are often entirely severed from, and even hostile to, the mining industry, but they are in the hands of the same class. This is the case with the dynamite monopoly. Every name connected with the present and past of this scandalous economic episode is significant: Lippert, Lewish and Marks, Vorstmann, Phillip, Nobel. The rich and powerful liquor trade, licit and illicit, is entirely in the hands of Jews... That greatest of gambling instruments, the

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Lars Magnusson, “Hobson and Imperialism: An Appraisal,” in *J.A. Hobson after Fifty Years: Freethinker of the Social Sciences*, John Pheby ed., (St. Martin’s Press, 1994,) p. 143.

⁶² Paul Johnson, “Marxism vs. the Jews”, *Commentary*, April 1984. Available at <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/marxism-vs-the-jews/>. Accessed June 14, 2019.

⁶³ Harvey Mitchell, “Hobson Revisited,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1965), University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 397-416.

Stock Exchange, is, needless to say, mostly Jewish... The press of Johannesburg is chiefly their property... Nor has the Jew been backward in developing those forms of loan and mortgage business which have made his fame the world over. A rich and ably organized syndicate exists which operates through branches in all the little towns, lending sums of money or furnishing credit through retail shops which they control, to the neighbouring Boers, and thus obtaining mortgages upon their farms. I am informed that a very large portion of the Transvaal farmers are as entirely in the hands of Jewish money-lenders as is the Russian moujik or the Austrian peasant."⁶⁴

Hobson's believed that this Jewish oligarchy was clandestinely manipulating Britain into war in Southern Africa to assist their own parasitic business interests. His ultimate evidence was a *cui bono*: "...since half of the land and nine-tenths of the wealth of the Transvaal claimed for the Outlander are chiefly theirs [the Jewish businessmen], they will be chief gainers by any settlement advantageous to the Outlander."⁶⁵ Their chief instrument for propelling British public opinion towards favoring war was the press:

"What I am describing is nothing else than an elaborate factory of misrepresentations for the purpose of stimulating British action... when it is understood that the great London press receives its information almost exclusively from the offices of the kept press of South Africa the mystery is solved... this great confederation of press interests is financially cemented by the fact that Rand mining magnates are chief owners of at least two important London daily papers and of several considerable weekly papers, while the wider and ever-growing Jewish control of other organs of the press warrants a suspicion that the direct economic nexus between the English press and Rand finance is far stronger than is actually known, we shall have a clear comprehension of the press conspiracy which has successfully exploited the stupid Jingoism of the British public for its clearly conceived economic ends."⁶⁶

Nor did Hobson believe that this conspiracy to start the Second Boer War would be a one-off event. The methods the Jewish financiers had used to manipulate politics and public opinion to engineer a war, combined with the nature of their business interests in South Africa and the need for constant government intervention and protection, would lead to a permanent usurpation of political power in South Africa:

"...while this class of financiers has commonly abstained in other countries from active participation in politics, they will use politics in the Transvaal. They have found the need for controlling politics and legislation by bribery and other persuasive arts hitherto: the same need and use will exist in the future. Politics to them will not merely mean free trade and good administration of just laws. Transvaal industry, particularly the mining industry, requires the constant and important aid of the State. The control of a large, cheap, regular submissive supply of labour, the chief corner-stone of profitable business, will be a constant incentive to acquire political control: railway rates, customs' laws, and the all-important issues relating to mineral rights will force them into politics, and they will apply to these the same qualities which have made them so successful in speculative industry. In a word, they will simply and inevitably add to their other businesses the business of politics... the judicious control of the press and the assistance of financial friends in high places will enable them to establish and maintain a tolerably complete form of boss-rule in South Africa."

⁶⁴ J. A. Hobson, *The War in South Africa, Its Causes and Effects*, (London: James Nisbet & co., 1900) pp. 191-194.

⁶⁵ Hobson, *The War in South Africa*, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁶ Hobson, *The War in South Africa*, pp. 216-217.

Before traveling to South Africa Hobson did not obviously evince anti-Jewish beliefs. Hobson had earlier written some articles that warned of the negative effects of large number of poor Jewish refugees from the Russian Empire flooding into Britain and bringing down the price of labor. However, these articles were not anti-Jewish per-se, as he was warning of an influx of cheap labor in general (at the time of his writing the poor immigrants happened to be Jewish, driven from their homes by persecution in the Russian Empire and the spate of pogroms there in the late 1880s.) Notably, while he warned of the possible effects of a sharp decrease in the price of labor, he was unsure how to proceed, and he did not recommend that the government take steps to restrict immigration, Jewish or otherwise.⁶⁷

It is not known from where Hobson picked up the anti-Jewish conspiracy theory he wrote about. Perhaps he gathered it from reading or hearing anti-Semitic ideas from Europe, or perhaps he picked it up from anti-Jewish agitation among contemporary British socialists,⁶⁸ or from unsophisticated, sectarian interpretations of politics that may have been circulating in Afrikaner circles.⁶⁹ Regardless, it is certainly a modified form of the anti-banker anti-Jewish conspiracy theory of the Toussenel type (though perhaps, anti-rich-Jew is a more apt description)⁷⁰ adapted for the specific situation of the run-up to the Second Boer War. Like Toussenel and some other adherents of an anti-banker/anti-Jewish conspiracy theory Hobson emphasized that he held nothing against Jews as Jews, but rather insisted that the “stress which my analysis lays upon the Jew has reference to the class of financial capitalists of which the foreign Jew must be taken as the leading type.”⁷¹

Hobson was not a socialist or a Marxist, as he is sometimes mistakenly identified (though he attempted to synthesize socialist ideas with liberalism.)⁷² As we have seen, a conspiracy theory can easily cross ideological divides as long as the identified target and/or agent is right. Hobson’s idea that the British public had been hoodwinked into an unnecessary war needed a villain, and the Jewish businessmen, with the Rothschilds among their chiefs, fit the role.

In his later, much more influential 1902 book *Imperialism: A Study* which Lenin read, Hobson toned down the idea of a Jewish conspiracy orchestrating the war in South Africa but applied the idea of a conspiracy of business interests tricking and manipulating his native country into imperialist expansion much more broadly. In contrast to his earlier opinion about the war in South Africa, in *Imperialism: A Study* Hobson did not assert that this was a new phenomenon for Britain and warn of a future of usurpation by manipulative Jewish South African business interests. Instead Hobson wrote that such a conspiracy operated in every imperialist country and that the various conspiracies had succeeded in tricking their countries into aggressive imperial ventures. For Hobson in 1902, conspiracies of financial interests manipulating politics and public opinion was the main explanation for the phenomenon of

⁶⁷ John Allett, “New Liberalism, Old Prejudices: J. A. Hobson and the ‘Jewish Question,’” *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Spring, 1987), pp. 99-114, Available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4467370>. pp. 102-104.

⁶⁸ Wistrich, p. 203.

⁶⁹ Mitchell, pp. 403-404.

⁷⁰ Allett, p. 104.

⁷¹ Hobson, *The War in South Africa*, p. 189.

⁷² Jules Townshend, *J.A. Hobson*, (Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 138.

imperialism at the turn of the century. Finding the imperialist practices of Britain self-evidently wasteful and dangerous, Hobson again resorted to a *cui bono* to explain it:

“Seeing that the imperialism of the last three decades is clearly condemned as a business policy, in that at enormous expense it has procured a small, bad, unsafe increase of markets, and has jeopardised the entire wealth of the nation in rousing the strong resentment of other nations, we may ask, “How is the British nation induced to embark upon such unsound business?” The only possible answer is that the business interests of the nation as a whole are subordinated to those of certain sectional interests that usurp control of the national resources and use them for their private gain.”⁷³

According to Hobson, the core of this imperial system was a response to the demands financial interests, who are able to override the needs of the rest of the country in the pursuit of immense profits overseas:

“Aggressive Imperialism, which costs the tax-payer so dear, which is of so little value to the manufacturer and trader, which is fraught with such grave incalculable peril to the citizen, is a source of great gain to the investor who cannot find at home the profitable use he seeks for his capital, and insists that his Government should help him to profitable and secure investments abroad.”⁷⁴

By his reckoning, advanced nations were putting more and more capital to work in areas outside the home countries, where it could reap enormous profits and interest from loans.⁷⁵ Hobson noted that the Imperialist ventures allowed financial interests to reap £90,000,000 or £100,000,000 every year in “pure profit” while the income the British state received from taxing the foreign and colonial trade was estimated at only £18,000,000 per year in 1899.⁷⁶ Hobson estimated £60,000,000 was the “minimum expenditure on armaments in time of peace.”⁷⁷ So, just taking into account the expenditure on weapons alone, to say nothing of expenditures on diplomats, colonial officers, secret agents, etc. - Hobson calculated that imperialism was an enormous loss-making venture. He believed that modern imperialism would be impossible in any democracy “if every citizen was made to realise their cost by payments of hard cash.”⁷⁸

Hobson made the point that financial interests were not the only beneficiaries of this “parasitic” imperial policy. There were adventurers and bureaucrats who had careers in their empires, shipbuilders, builders, manufacturers of weapons, all of whom would also be in favor of imperialism.⁷⁹ But who exactly manipulated public opinion to satisfy these financial interests and how did they do it? Hobson believed that the “central guiding and directing force” of these interests was “in the power of the general financier.”⁸⁰ “The wealth of these houses, the scale of their operations, and their cosmopolitan organization make them the prime determinants of

⁷³ J. A Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, (Endeavour Press, 2015), Kindle Edition, Location 1051.

⁷⁴ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Locations 1248-1251.

⁷⁵ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Location 1130.

⁷⁶ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Location 1256.

⁷⁷ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Location 1088.

⁷⁸ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Location 1808.

⁷⁹ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Location 1545.

⁸⁰ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Location 1328.

imperial policy.”⁸¹ Imperialism might satisfy a large group of investors, dock workers, administrators, etc., but “the enthusiasm for expansion which issues from these sources, though strong and genuine, is irregular and blind; the financial interest has those qualities of concentration and clear-sighted calculation which are needed to set Imperialism to work.”⁸²

As mentioned earlier, Hobson was not as verbose and explicit in his identification of the ethnic background of these “cosmopolitan” financiers in *Imperialism: A Study* as he was in his earlier *The War in South Africa*, but in one revealing passage early in the book he let his readers know what group he was mainly concerned with, without spelling out the word “Jew”:

“United by the strongest bonds of organisation, always in closest and quickest touch with one another, situated in the very heart of the business capital of every State, controlled, so far as Europe is concerned, chiefly by men of a single and peculiar race,⁸³ who have behind them many centuries of financial experience, they are in a unique position to control the policy of nations. No great quick direction of capital is possible save by their consent and through their agency. Does any one seriously suppose that a great war could be undertaken by any European State, or a great State loan subscribed, if the house of Rothschild and its connections set their face against it?

Every great political act involving a new flow of capital, or a large fluctuation in the values of existing investments, must receive the sanction and the practical aid of this little group of financial kings. These men, holding their realised wealth and their business capital, as they must, chiefly in stocks and bonds, have a double stake, first as investors, but secondly and chiefly as financial dealers. As investors, their political influence does not differ essentially from that of the smaller investors, except that they usually possess a practical control of the businesses in which they invest. As speculators or financial dealers they constitute, however, the gravest single factor in the economics of Imperialism.”⁸⁴

The main tools Hobson said this cosmopolitan cabal of (primarily Jewish) high-finance used to manipulate the government and public opinion would have been familiar to Toussenel, Butmi, or almost any other 19th or 20th century propagandist of the Grand Conspiracy Theory. First and foremost was the supposedly-free press: “the entire dependence of the Press for its business profits upon its advertising columns involves a peculiar reluctance to oppose the organised financial classes with whom rests the control of so much advertising business.”⁸⁵ Hobson went beyond just pointing out common business interests, but made the accusation that direct and effective manipulation of public opinion by financial houses was commonplace:

“the final determination rests with the financial power. The direct influence exercised by great financial houses in “high politics” is supported by the control which they exercise over the body of public opinion through the Press, which, in every “civilised” country, is becoming more and more their obedient instrument. While the specifically financial newspaper imposes “facts” and “opinions” on the business classes, the general body of the Press comes more and more under the conscious or unconscious domination of financiers... this policy of owning newspapers for the sake of manufacturing public opinion is common in the great European cities. In Berlin, Vienna, and Paris

⁸¹ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Locations 1300-1301.

⁸² Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Locations 1307-1308.

⁸³ The 1927 Soviet edition of this work uses the word породы - breed, as opposed to пача - race. See Джон Гобсон (John Hobson), *Имперуализм* (Imperialism), V. B. Belenko trans., Leningrad: Priboi, 1927, p. 64.

⁸⁴ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Locations 1270-1280.

⁸⁵ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Locations 1321-1322.

many of the influential newspapers are held by financial houses, which use them, not primarily to make direct profits out of them, but in order to put into the public mind beliefs and sentiments which will influence public policy and thus affect the money market."⁸⁶

Hobson held that this financial power also influenced teaching at universities: "The millionaire who endows Oxford does not buy its men of learning outright, need not even stipulate what should be taught... No formal tests are necessary; the instinct of financial self-preservation will suffice."⁸⁷

The reach of this financial cabal into international politics enabled their profiteering by encouraging and taking advantage of aggressive imperialist ventures and ensuing crises by loading down states with debts and profiting off of war production:

"To create new public debts, to float new companies, and to cause constant considerable fluctuations of values are three conditions of their profitable business... A policy which focuses fears of aggression in Asiatic states, and which fans the rivalry of commercial nations in Europe, evokes vast expenditure on armaments, and ever accumulating public debts, while the doubts and risks accruing from this policy promote that constant oscillation of values of securities which is so profitable to the skilled financier. There is not a war, a revolution, an anarchist assassination, or any other public shock, which is not gainful to these men..."⁸⁸

Hobson saved his angriest denunciation for the liberals who may not have been "conscious traitors or hypocrites" but who nevertheless "sold the cause of popular reform, which was their rightful heritage, for an Imperialism which appealed to their business interests and their social prepossessions."⁸⁹ Hobson was furious against liberals who still supported imperialist ventures, as he saw the patriotism and jingoism ginned up by imperial ventures and wars as a tool used by the government (i.e. the tool of the [mostly Jewish, remember] financial cabal) to distract the masses and blunt demands of the people for social reform at home. The cause of social reform had been derailed by appeals to patriotism, ginned up by imperialist ventures: "Every social reform involves some attack on vested interests, and these can best defend themselves when active Imperialism absorbs public attention."⁹⁰ Hobson saw imperialism as a two-pronged tool "by which the ruling State has used its provinces, colonies, and dependencies in order to enrich its ruling class and to bribe its lower classes into acquiescence."⁹¹

"Governments use national animosities, foreign wars and the glamour of empire-making, in order to bemuse the popular mind and divert rising resentment against domestic abuses. The vested interests, which, on our analysis, are shown to be chief prompters of an imperialist policy, play for a double stake, seeking their private commercial and financial gains at the expense and peril of the commonwealth. They at the same time protect their economic and political supremacy at home against movements of popular reform."⁹²

⁸⁶ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Locations 1310-1318.

⁸⁷ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Locations 3457-3461.

⁸⁸ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Locations 1282-1290.

⁸⁹ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Locations 2395-2396.

⁹⁰ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Locations 2364-2365.

⁹¹ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Location 3100.

⁹² Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Locations 2370-2374.

Therefore according to Hobson, the so-called liberals who supported imperialist ventures and who accepted being distracted and “bribed” by the financial cabal were the worst of the worst, “they were ‘hirelings,’ destitute of firm political principle, gladly abandoning themselves to whatever shallow and ignoble defences a blear-eyed, raucous ‘patriotism’ was ready to devise for their excuse.”⁹³ Hobson did not elaborate here on how exactly the pro-imperialist “liberals” became “hirelings” other than via appeals to patriotism, or perhaps by their self-interest in cabal-funded universities or writers in cabal-owned newspapers. However, in another section he explains how some of the bribes of the financial cabal trickled down to other groups. Landowners were bought off by “grants in aid of local taxation,” churchmen by the “relief of rates on tithes and increased grants for Church schools,” the liquor industry by “a policy of masterly inaction in the matter of temperance reforms and special consideration in regard to taxation.”⁹⁴ There were also “special classes of the workers” who worked in industries dependent on government expenditures supporting imperialism, such as at “metal and shipbuilding centers.”⁹⁵ These bought-off interest groups, combined with the manipulation of public opinion through the bought-off press, was enough to guarantee imperialist policies favorable to the Rothschilds and their ilk.

Hobson also warned that imperialism sowed the seeds of its own destruction. Following that single line on bribery, Hobson wrote that the “bleeding of dependencies, while it enfeebles and atrophies the energy of the imperial people, irritates and eventually rouses to rebellion the more vigorous and less tractable of the subject races;”⁹⁶ Hobson believed that the imperialist conspiracy was storing up wrath among the colonial peoples that would one day explode, perhaps leading to a collapse of the whole system.

In later years Hobson would back away from the analysis he gave in *Imperialism*, stating: “When I wrote my volume on Imperialism I had not yet gathered into clear perspective the nature of the interaction between economics, politics, and ethics, needed for anyone who might wish to claim the title of Sociologist.”⁹⁷ He hedged, but he never recanted.

Lenin modifies and applies Hobson

The belief that financial cabals were decisive in determining the imperialist policy of Western powers was not new to Lenin or to the Russian Communist party in 1915-1917. For an example from earlier times, see this article from a 1912 edition of their propaganda organ *Pravda* about a conspiracy of bankers to financially enslave the newly-minted Chinese Republic:

“International capital immediately sensed the possibility of a large profit. In order not to quarrel... the bankers of five countries (Britain, France, Germany, Japan and Russia)... enlisted the support of the government and worked out the terms of the Chinese loan. These conditions amounted to the fact that China had to recognize foreign control over their own finances, that is, to abandon independence; it goes without saying that, in addition to a good interest, international capital meant all sorts of beneficial concessions, that is, the right to organize various enterprises, which, in

⁹³ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Locations 2397-2399.

⁹⁴ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Location 1777.

⁹⁵ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Location 1782.

⁹⁶ Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, Locations 3099-3101.

⁹⁷ J. A. Hobson, *Confessions of an Economic Heretic*, (Routledge, 2012), pp. 83-84.

general, would lead to economic enslavement of China. It is self-evident that the international union of bankers is not acting without the support of governments.”⁹⁸

This item possibly reflect the influence of Hobson, who had published *Imperialism: A Study* a decade earlier, or the works of other socialists, perhaps also influenced by Hobson, who were critical of predatory foreign lending to China and the influence of European and Japanese banks there. Lenin had first read Hobson’s *Imperialism: A Study* in 1904, and an unpublished article he wrote after this time about imperialism already shows a debt to Hobson, writing about the corruption of parts of the proletariat using the wealth stolen from the colonies.⁹⁹

What Lenin seized on in Hobson’s *Imperialism: A Study* when he returned to it after the outbreak of WWI were the passages that could be used to attack Kautsky and the other “defecting” socialists. The notebook Lenin kept while reading Hobson’s *Imperialism: A Study* has the notation “cf. K Kautsky” next to quotes from Hobson against the economic inevitability of imperial expansion and quotes about Imperialism developing into a feudal system supported by “uncivilized dependencies”¹⁰⁰ Hobson’s warning that imperialism sowed the seeds of its own destruction was music to Lenin’s ears while he was searching for reasons to attack Kautsky’s idea of ultra-imperialism. Lenin’s later writing shows that he became particularly attached not only to these arguments about inevitable imperialist warfare but also to Hobson’s arguments that allowed Lenin to attack the integrity of Kautsky and the “opportunists” and all the socialists who had shown their loyalty to their home countries at the outbreak of war. In *Imperialism: A Study* Hobson had elaborated the supposed mechanisms of the (mostly Jewish) financial cabal’s control over Western democracies, their “bribery” of lower-class supporters using the proceeds of empire. Lenin appropriated these conspiracy-theory-based mechanisms of control derived from anti-Jewish/anti-Rothschild conspiracy theories. Ignoring Hobson’s anti-Jewish elements, Lenin fashioned these ideas into what became one of the central pillars of Soviet ideology and therefore of Soviet propaganda - Lenin’s theory of imperialism.

Lenin codified his Hobson-derived theory of imperialism in the book *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917). He acknowledged his debt to Hobson in this book in the preface: “...I made use of the principal English work on imperialism, the book by J. A. Hobson, with all the care that, in my opinion, that work deserves.”¹⁰¹ Lenin also cites many other writers on imperialism, most notably the German socialist Rudolf Hilferding. *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (hereafter, just *Imperialism*) is generally considered one of his most important works - in the top three along with *What is to be Done* (1902) and *State and Revolution* (1917).¹⁰² Lenin added Marxist language and his brand of Marxist analysis to Hobson’s conspiracy theory. Most conspicuously, Lenin took Hobson’s idea that a financial

⁹⁸ Ал. Дмитрие (Al. Dmitrie), “В Китае” (In China), *Pravda*, No. 43, June 19, 1912, p. 5.

⁹⁹ James W. Roberts, “Lenin’s Theory of Imperialism in Soviet Usage,” *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Jul., 1977), pp. 353-372. p. 354.

¹⁰⁰ V. I. Lenin, *Notebook K*, (From Lenin Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1976, Moscow, Volume 39, pages 405-436). Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/ni-kappa/hobson.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

¹⁰¹ V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Preface. Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/pref01.htm>. Accessed September 1, 2018.

¹⁰² Adam B. Ulam, *The Bolsheviks*, (Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 310.

cabal was actively manipulating sections of democratic society and used it as an attack against his “opportunist” opponents, and against Kautsky in particular, maintaining that a capitalist cabal had used the “super-profits” from imperialism to bribe them into abandoning the cause of the revolution:

“...*within* the working-class movement, the opportunists, who are for the moment victorious in most countries, are ‘working’ systematically and undeviatingly in this very direction. Imperialism, which means the partitioning of the world, and the exploitation of other countries besides China, which means high monopoly profits for a handful of very rich countries, makes it economically possible to bribe the upper strata of the proletariat, and thereby fosters, gives shape to, and strengthens opportunism.”¹⁰³

In the preface to the French and German editions of his *Imperialism* Lenin was even more direct in his accusation of bribery:

“As has been shown in this pamphlet, capitalism has now brought to the front a *handful*... of very rich and powerful states which plunder the whole world simply by ‘clipping coupons.’... Obviously, out of such enormous *superprofits* (since they are obtained over and above the profits which capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their “own” country) it is *possible to bribe* the labour leaders and the upper stratum of the labour aristocracy. And that is just what the capitalists of the “advanced” countries are doing: they are bribing them in a thousand different ways, direct and indirect, overt and covert.”¹⁰⁴

In his push to emphasize that the ills of socialism, indeed of the entirety of Western society, were the result of calculated conspiracy, Lenin abandoned Hobson’s idea that universities might support imperialism out of a nearly-unconscious sense of self interest, to preserve the flow of grants from pro-imperialist capitalists. Lenin insisted that scholars and publicists consciously and intentionally conceal facts about imperialism:

“Bourgeois scholars and publicists usually come out in defence of imperialism in a somewhat veiled form; they obscure its complete domination and its deep-going roots, strive to push specific and secondary details into the forefront and do their very best to distract attention from essentials by means of absolutely ridiculous schemes for “reform”, such as police supervision of the trusts or banks, etc.”¹⁰⁵

Lenin gave a name to the financial cabal to replace Hobson’s general intimations of a “particular race” or of certain capitalists like the Rothschilds. The term that Lenin used is one he got from the socialist economist Hilferding: “Finance Capital” or “Monopoly Capitalism.” Borrowing from Hilferding, Lenin posited that this financial elite arose at the top of a new stage of capitalism caused by the increasing involvement of banks in industry and their increasing consolidation, which according to Lenin causes them to “grow from modest middlemen into

¹⁰³ V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Chapter 8, (from Lenin’s Selected Works, Progress Publishers, 1963, Moscow, Volume 1, pp. 667-766). Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/ch08.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

¹⁰⁴ Lenin, *Imperialism*, PREFACE TO THE FRENCH AND GERMAN EDITIONS. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/pref02.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ Lenin, *Imperialism* Chapter 9. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/ch09.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

powerful monopolies having at their command almost the whole of the money capital of all the capitalists and small businessmen and also the larger part of the means of production and sources of raw materials in any one country and in a number of countries.”¹⁰⁶ Lenin wrote that this evolution of a group of financial middle men into commanders of the economy is “one of the fundamental processes in the growth of capitalism into capitalist imperialism...”¹⁰⁷

According to Lenin these bankers eventually become a “financial oligarchy” in every advanced country, and he cites various writers complaining against “financial oligarchy” in the West.¹⁰⁸ Lenin stated that this financial oligarchy “...throws a close network of dependence relationships over all the economic and political institutions of present-day bourgeois society without exception...”¹⁰⁹ Lenin described this financial oligarchy as the group that actually orchestrates the bribery of sections of the proletariat and influences erstwhile “democratic” governments to engage in imperialist ventures and then to export surplus capital to the colonies in order to extract super-profits and secure resources. Lenin gave several examples of how “finance capital” had managed to manipulate their home-governments to subjugate supposedly independent countries, forcing them to give up control over their economies and become part of an imperialist system, for example Portugal and Argentina were under the thumb of the UK’s imperialist system, according to Lenin.¹¹⁰

Lenin devoted large parts of his *Imperialism* to direct attacks on Kautsky, attacking his integrity often via his ideas about ultra-imperialism. “Whichever way one turns Kautsky’s argument, one will find nothing in it except reaction and bourgeois reformism.”¹¹¹ An important point that Lenin insisted on was that imperialism was an entirely new stage of capitalism, and that any other way of talking about the development of capitalism, especially Kautsky’s, was just part of propaganda in favor of imperialism:

“Kautsky’s theoretical critique of imperialism has nothing in common with Marxism and serves only as a preamble to propaganda for peace and unity with the opportunists and the social-chauvinists, precisely for the reason that it evades and obscures the very profound and fundamental contradictions of imperialism: the contradictions between monopoly and free competition which exists side by side with it, between the gigantic “operations” (and gigantic profits) of finance capital and “honest” trade in the free market, the contradiction between cartels and trusts, on the one hand, and non-cartelised industry, on the other, etc.”¹¹²

Another idea of Hobson that Lenin took up with relish was the idea that imperialism was sowing the seeds of its own destruction. As all of these empires, each commanded by a

¹⁰⁶ Lenin, *Imperialism*, Chapter 2. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/ch02.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Lenin, *Imperialism*, Chapter 2. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/ch02.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

¹⁰⁸ Lenin, *Imperialism*, Chapter 2. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/ch03.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

¹⁰⁹ Lenin, *Imperialism* Chapter 10. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/ch10.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

¹¹⁰ Lenin, *Imperialism* Chapter 6. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/ch06.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

¹¹¹ Lenin, *Imperialism* Chapter 9. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/ch09.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

¹¹² Ibid.

financial oligarchy, compete for markets and resources, there would be increased friction between them and consequently increased chances of conflict (WWI being the obvious contemporary example for Lenin.) Also, the different imperialist powers would face increasing resistance from the colonized peoples. In a separate essay Lenin reiterated the idea of financial cabals, fighting amongst each other, but (for now) benefiting from the misery of the colonized and thieving from them to prop up their rule at home through bribery. Note how he accused Kautsky of “glossing over” the “profound contradictions” of imperialism:¹¹³

“Imperialism is monopoly capitalism. Every cartel, trust, syndicate, every giant bank is a monopoly. Superprofits have not disappeared; they still remain. The exploitation of all other countries by one privileged, financially wealthy country remains and has become more intense. A handful of wealthy countries—there are only four of them, if we mean independent, really gigantic, “modern” wealth: England, France, the United States and Germany—have developed monopoly to vast proportions, they obtain superprofits running into hundreds, if not thousands, of millions, they “ride on the backs” of hundreds and hundreds of millions of people in other countries and fight among themselves for the division of the particularly rich, particularly fat and particularly easy spoils.

This, in fact, is the economic and political essence of imperialism, the profound contradictions of which Kautsky glosses over instead of exposing.

The bourgeoisie of an imperialist “Great” Power can economically bribe the upper strata of ‘its’ workers by spending on this a hundred million or so francs a year, for its superprofits most likely amount to about a thousand million. And how this little sop is divided among the labour ministers, ‘labour representatives’ (remember Engels’s splendid analysis of the term), labour members of war industries committees, labour officials, workers belonging to the narrow craft unions, office employees, etc., etc., is a secondary question.”¹¹⁴

Lenin’s collusion with “imperialists” and the Revolution of 1917

Using the idea of conscious, financial cabals in every “imperialist” state orchestrating the deception of the public to support imperialist ventures, Lenin accused Kautsky and other socialists who supported their countries during the war of treachery, of being bribed to betray the revolution. Lenin did not accuse Kautsky of being weak and pliable, of having given up “true” revolutionary Marxism because he had turned soft or wanted to please rich potential patrons (like the motivation of pro-imperialist University professors described by Hobson). Lenin was adamant: Kautsky and the other “social-imperialists” were bribed agents of imperialist bankers, an “upper section of petty-bourgeois scoundrels who have been bribed by the capitalists”¹¹⁵ Here is an excerpt from an article Lenin wrote in 1916, after he had written but before he had published *Imperialism*:

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Lenin, “Imperialism and the Split in Socialism,” from *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol 23 (Marx to Mao digital reprints, 2011) p. 115. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/cw/pdf/lenin-cw-vol-23.pdf>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

¹¹⁵ V. I. Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, “How Kautsky Turned Marx Into A Common Liberal,” Jim Riordan trans., (From Lenin’s Collected Works, Progress Publishers, Moscow, Volume 28, 1974, pages 227-325). Available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/prrk/common_liberal.htm. Accessed May 31, 2018.

“...all that is now being glossed over by the *hypocritical Kautskyites* of various countries, namely, that the *opportunists* (social-chauvinists) are working hand in glove with the imperialist bourgeoisie *precisely* towards creating an imperialist Europe on the backs of Asia and Africa, and that objectively the *opportunists* are a section of the petty bourgeoisie and of a certain strata of the working class who *have been bribed* out of imperialist superprofits and converted to *watchdogs* of capitalism and *corruptors* of the labour movement.”¹¹⁶

Lenin wrote about this “unity” between the different “social-chauvinist” camps all over Europe, while each was supporting their own countries on opposite sides of the war, they were united in their strategy of deceiving the proletariat at the behest of their “national bourgeois” masters. Here Lenin attacks the German socialist (and later finance minister) Albert Südekum along with Kautsky:

“Everybody knows that Südekum’s friends and adherents met in Vienna and acted entirely in his spirit, championing the cause of German imperialism under the cloak of “defence of the fatherland.” The French, English and Russian Südekums met in London and championed the cause of “their” national imperialism under the same cloak. The real policy of the London and Vienna heroes of social-chauvinism is to justify participation in the imperialist war, to justify the killing of German workers by French workers, and *vice versa*, for the sake of determining which national bourgeoisie shall have preference in robbing other countries. And to conceal their real policy, to deceive the workers, both the London and the Vienna heroes resort to the *phrase*: We “recognise” the “independence of nations,” or in other words, recognise the self-determination of nations, repudiate annexations, etc., etc.

It is as clear as daylight that this “recognition” is a flagrant lie, despicable hypocrisy, for it justifies participation in a war which *both* sides are waging, not to make nations independent, but to enslave them. Instead of exposing, unmasking and condemning this hypocrisy, Kautsky, the great authority, *sanctifies* it.”¹¹⁷

Lenin may have been especially interested in describing Kautsky and other socialists as paid agents for their governments because Lenin himself had begun a relationship with a government, the German government. Lenin had been arrested by the Austrians right after the outbreak of war, but he had been released after he was identified as “an enemy of tsarism.”¹¹⁸ The Germans reached out to Lenin not long after this and eventually established cooperation with him and his Bolshevik faction. Lenin was in contact with the Estonian nationalist and German agent Alexander Kesküla starting in October 1914. Kesküla provided him with funding to publish Bolshevik propaganda in Russia, and Lenin used his revolutionary network to collect information on internal conditions in Russia for Kesküla, information which was forwarded to the German General Staff. An official in the German General Staff described this relationship as an “extremely useful contact with Lenin” and recommended a subsidy of 20,000 marks a month for the operation.¹¹⁹

In addition to the use of the Bolsheviks as an intelligence network, the Germans funded Lenin because, despite his continuing calls for revolution in Germany, he was openly defeatist with regards to Russia. In 1914 Lenin had drawn a moral equivalence between both belligerent

¹¹⁶V. I. Lenin, “Imperialism and the Split in Socialism,” Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/oct/x01.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

¹¹⁷ V. I. Lenin, “The Peace Programme,” (From Lenin Collected Works, Volume 22, Moscow, pages 161-168), Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/mar/25.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

¹¹⁸ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Locations 9383-9384.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., Location 9480.

camps but then opined that the defeat of Russia would be a “lesser evil” -at least from the standpoint of Russian workers:

“In the present situation, it is impossible to determine, from the standpoint of the international proletariat, the defeat of which of the two groups of belligerent nations would be the lesser evil for socialism. But to us Russian Social-Democrats there cannot be the slightest doubt that, from the standpoint of the working class and of the toiling masses of all the nations of Russia, the defeat of the tsarist monarchy, the most reactionary and barbarous of governments, which is oppressing the largest number of nations and the greatest mass of the population of Europe and Asia, would be the lesser evil.”¹²⁰

The Bolsheviks did not stop calling for revolution in Germany. They could hardly have paused given the importance of a revolution in Germany in Marxist ideas about the future, but their propaganda did push for Russia to break its alliance with France, Italy, and Britain and try to end the war on its own, and so the Germans could continue to take an interest in supporting their propaganda.

German involvement with the Bolsheviks was most obvious after the Russian February Revolution of 1917. After a series of military failures and bread riots and mass protests put down by violence that were reminiscent of those during the Revolution of 1905, the garrison of the Russian capital city mutinied. Lacking any means to suppress unrest in the capital and also believing that the incompetent rule of the Tsar was an obstacle to victory against the Germans, some Russian generals pressured Tsar Nicholas to abdicate. Nicholas designated his younger brother Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich as his successor. The leaders of a Provisional Government hastily put together by members of the Duma and socialist leaders in the capital met with Grand Duke Michael and convinced him to also abdicate. Power was now nominally in the hands of the Provisional Government until a constituent assembly could be convened to construct a new government.¹²¹

This was an enormous opportunity for the Germans. The original German war plan had been to quickly take France out of the war and then turn all efforts against Russia, but this plan failed. Instead the Germans found themselves fighting a two-front war of attrition. The political chaos in Russia raised the tantalizing possibility of reversing their initial strategy - taking Russia out of the war and enabling the Germans to turn their full force against their enemies to the west. Unfortunately for the Germans, the new Provisional Government of Russia was committed to continuing the war. As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons Russian generals had forced the Tsar to abdicate was because they thought he was botching the fight that they still intended to win. The new government was so pro-war that some Germans speculated that the British had engineered the February Revolution.¹²² The Germans chose a strategy of sowing chaos in order to destroy the Russian war effort and force it to make a separate peace. As a contemporaneous German official cabled to Berlin:

¹²⁰ V.I. Lenin, “The War and Russian Social-Democracy,” (From Lenin Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1974, Moscow, Volume 21, pages 25-34). Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/sep/28.htm>. Accessed May 31, 2018.

¹²¹ *The Cambridge History of Russia: Volume 2, Imperial Russia, 1689-1917*, (Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 655- 658.

¹²² Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Location 9765.

"We must now unconditionally seek to create in Russia the greatest possible chaos.... We should do all we can ... to exacerbate the differences between the moderate and extremist parties, because we have the greatest interest in the latter gaining the upper hand, since the Revolution will then become unavoidable and assume forms that must shatter the stability of the Russian state."¹²³

As an obstreperous and divisive leftist who supported the immediate termination of the "imperialist" war, Lenin was a perfect candidate to receive increased German support; but he was still in exile in Switzerland. The German envoy in Switzerland called Lenin's cause to the attention of his government, and the German Chancellor issued instructions to arrange for the transport of Lenin and other Russian exiles across German territory to neutral Sweden, where they could then cross into Russia. Lenin and 32 other exiles, including 19 Bolsheviks, made the journey back to Russia with German assistance.¹²⁴

As part of this chaos strategy, the German government funded the Bolsheviks in order to spread Bolshevik anti-war propaganda. A German Social-Democrat estimated that the Germans spent 50 million deutsche marks in total to support the Bolsheviks, which at the time was the equivalent of about nine tons of gold.¹²⁵ According to the German military archives, the German government spent 40 million deutsche marks for propaganda in Russia before January 31 1918, and an additional 10 million after that. (Not all of this was destined for the Bolsheviks.)¹²⁶ A report from the German State Secretary in December 1917 described what he claimed had been the strategy:

"Russia appeared to be the weakest link in the enemy chain. The task therefore was gradually to loosen it, and, when possible, to remove it. This was the purpose of the subversive activity we caused to be carried out in Russia behind the front - in the first place promotion of separatist tendencies and support of the Bolsheviks. It was not until the Bolsheviks had received from us a steady flow of funds through various channels and under different labels that they were in a position to be able to build up their main organ, Pravda, to conduct energetic propaganda and appreciably to extend the originally narrow basis of their party..."¹²⁷

Of course, this German official was bragging after the Bolsheviks had seized power in October 1917. He could have been exaggerating the success of his work with Lenin. The scholar Dr. Peter Kenez has argued that while German funding for propaganda certainly existed, it was not critical and that the "political fortune of the revolutionaries" would not have been fundamentally different without them.¹²⁸ This may be true but it is at this point undeniable that the German subsidies existed and that they were substantial enough that Lenin risked it all in order to accept them. How would Lenin's ideas about Kautsky and other socialists being paid agents of imperialism have looked if convincing proof had emerged that Lenin was himself being paid by the same government he was accusing Kautsky of being in cahoots with? More importantly, the reaction of the Russian public, and especially of soldiers and sailors, to

¹²³ Ibid. Locations 9781-9784.

¹²⁴ Ibid. Locations 9803-9804.

¹²⁵ Ibid. Locations 10296-10297.

¹²⁶ Ibid. Locations 10939-10945.

¹²⁷ *The Russian Revolution and the Soviet State 1917-1921: Documents*, Martin McCauley ed., (Palgrave Macmillan 1980), p. 138.

¹²⁸ Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929*, (Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 32.

revelations of Lenin's collaboration with Russia's enemy would have been (indeed, was) very negative.

Lenin tried to carefully avoid any paper trail that would implicate him or his followers in this clandestine collaboration,¹²⁹ and doubtless he and his successors tried to destroy any evidence of it after they had seized power. However, one of Lenin's documents slipped through the cracks. The historian Richard Pipes has identified a short letter Lenin sent to his representative in Switzerland in August 1918 where, after admonishing him to spend more money on Bolshevik propaganda in several languages, Lenin writes: "The Berliners will send some more money: if the scum delay, complain to me **formally**."¹³⁰

Using the funds they had available the Bolsheviks re-started their flagship paper *Pravda* which, except for a brief interlude before Lenin returned to Russia, took a hard line against the Provisional Government and against continuing the war. The Bolshevik propaganda the Germans subsidized had a consistent anti-war theme. Take this example from *Pravda* March 31, 1917, which carried what claimed to be a resolution from a company of the famous Semenovskiy Guards Regiment saying: "The war was not begun by the people, but only through the will of the people can it be stopped and will it be stopped" and included a resolution supposedly from another regiment that declared "The root of evil lies in war. This war has upset our economic life... Each additional day of war brings the country to ruin. There is one way out of this turmoil - the immediate cessation of the war. That is why we appeal to the Provisional Government..."¹³¹

Lenin arrived in Russia in early April 1917. One of the first things he did upon his arrival was publish *The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution* aka *The April Theses*. In this document, published in *Pravda*, he included familiar Bolshevik demands and ideas, such as the nationalization of all land and the banks, the notion that the Revolution was passing from the first, bourgeois, phase to the second proletarian phase, etc. Lenin also demanded that all power be given to the soviets (workers councils) and taken away from the Provisional Government, which Lenin denounced as "impermissible, illusion-breeding... a government of capitalists... an imperialist government." Lenin denounced the war as imperialist "owing to the capitalist nature of that government..." He also demanded the "Abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy" which would of course have been rather helpful to German war aims.¹³²

Lenin's idea of "imperialist" cabals of bankers driving countries to war was a useful idea for Bolshevik propaganda that attacked the idea of continuing to fight and attacked the Provisional Government which had pledged to continue the war. This idea was used to argue that there was moral equivalence between Germany and its allies and the supposedly more "democratic" allies of Russia: France and Britain. According to this narrative, Allied slogans about fighting the war to "make the world safe for democracy" or to "defend Belgian neutrality" were all just imperialist deceptions. Lenin's *Imperialism* was published in Russia in late April

¹²⁹ *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive*, Richard Pipes ed., (Yale University Press, 1999), p. 12.

¹³⁰ Ibid., letter from Lenin to Ya. A. Berzin, 14 August 1918, p. 53.

¹³¹ *Pravda*, No.22, March 31, 1917, p. 5 (p. 247).

¹³² V. I. Lenin, *The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution* [a.k.a. *The April Theses*], From Lenin's Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1964, Moscow, Vol. 24, pp. 19-26. Available At <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/04.htm>. Accessed June 1, 2018.

1917¹³³ (though many ideas codified in *Imperialism* had been spread by other Bolshevik publications earlier.)

For an extended example of this line of argument used in propaganda, take this two-part article published in *Pravda* in March 1917 by the Bolshevik leader Grigory Zinoviev. He wrote that Russia should break its agreements and try to exit the war, arguing that any agreements made by the despot Nicholas II were illegitimate as they were made in secret with the imperialist British, French, and Italians. He argued that there was moral equivalence between the Allied governments and the Central Powers (both of whom were just dancing to the tune of their capitalist overlords), and that peace was necessary for the future of the revolution, which faced threats from the faux-democratic imperialist Allies in addition to the imperialist Germans:

"Comrades, but who concluded these agreements? Is it not the same bloody Nicholas with his gang?!

Do the people know, does the working class know the content of these treaties, which are 9/10ths secret treaties? Does Milyukov [the Russian foreign Minister] and his ilk know these contracts in all their details? And if they know, why do not they publish them in general information, so that the people themselves can judge and say: I approve or reject?... Of course, we did not read these secret treaties and do not know their details. But the real aims of the war of modern governments are well known. Germany (that is, the German imperialists) wants to plunder Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, the Belgian and French Congo, the Netherlands India, the Portuguese colonies, Morocco.... Austria needs the eastern coast of the Adriatic...But the goals of the imperialists of the other side are not any better.

England (that is, the British government, the British imperialists) wants to turn Africa all over into the English part of the world, or at least to pillage in Africa everything except that which belongs to the French imperialists... France (that is, the sharks of French imperialism) wants to plunder Syria, part of Asia Minor, German possessions in Africa.... Italy (the Italian capitalists) wants to plunder in Africa... And Russia?

Russia (ie, the Russian capitalists, the Russian imperialists) wants to pillage Constantinople, make their way to the straits, capture Asia Minor, Persia, Mongolia, strangle Galicia, grab a bigger piece in East Prussia, and so on... This is also suggested by Mr. Milyukov, for whom the treaties concluded by Nicholas II are sacred... The actual goals of the current war, these are predatory purposes. And the words about 'culture', 'law', struggle for freedom, the 'salvation of noble Belgium' - are only a seasoning, only loud words for gullible people... the Guchkovs and Miliukovs will in every possible way disrupt the questioning of the soldiers on this issue, although they were compelled (under the pressure of the revolution) to promise soldiers freedom to participate in the political struggle ...

The new government proposes this to us: in the field of domestic policy, let everything be done in a new way, and in the sphere of foreign policy let it remain in the old way. This is a counter-revolutionary plan... The foreign policy of the tsarist government was a continuous policy of blood and mud. This policy made from the old Russia an 'international gendarme'. This policy led us to a shameful war with Japan in 1904-1905. This policy has led to... Russia being in the imperialist war of 1914-1917. And this new foreign policy of tsarism, the new government invites us to continue!...

¹³³ Lenin, *Imperialism*, Preface, Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/pref01.htm>. Accessed June 1, 2018.

We are well aware that German imperialism is a danger to the final victory of the Russian revolution. But it is in danger also from the side of British and French imperialism.”¹³⁴

This anti-war agitation that threatened the stability of a major ally could hardly have avoided the attention of the other powers fighting Germany. In June French intelligence handed over to Russian authorities a number of intercepted communications between Bolshevik leaders and their German handlers in Stockholm.¹³⁵ The Russian government acted on July 1, ordering the arrest of 28 Bolshevik leaders, but it was too late to prevent a putsch. On July 3 soldiers near the capital mutinied, intent on beating up the *burzhui* (bourgeois). After a short period of hesitation, the remaining Bolsheviks in the capital decided this was the moment to seize power. They called an extraordinary session of the executive committee of the Petrograd Workers' Council (the Petrograd Soviet) and “passed” a resolution (after the other Menshevik and Social Revolutionary [SR] factions had walked out) indicating their intent to overthrow the Provisional Government. On July 4 the Bolsheviks attempted a coup, marching mutinous troops into the city accompanied by pro-Bolshevik workers. For reasons that are unclear, the coup failed. One reason may be that anti-Bolshevik members of the Provisional Government released some information on Lenin's connection to the Germans. Angry troops scattered the Bolsheviks in the capital. The Provisional Government ordered the arrest of all the Bolshevik leaders and the printing press for Pravda was destroyed.¹³⁶ Lenin went into hiding.

The State and Revolution

During this period in hiding Lenin wrote what is arguably his most important work *The State and Revolution*.¹³⁷ This book is a collection of quotations from the works of Marx and Engels selected by Lenin along with Lenin's extended commentary urging violent revolution. It was an attack against the idea of about any kind of accommodation with any of the then-existing states. If the workers have a vote in a “bourgeois” democracy, Lenin wrote, it is not a sign of progress but a tool for the ruling class to mollify its slaves and maintain power.¹³⁸ Lenin reiterated the ideas expounded in *Imperialism: the Highest State of Capitalism* about “Imperialism - --the era of bank capital, the era of gigantic capitalist monopolies, of the development of monopoly capitalism into state- monopoly capitalism...”¹³⁹

Lenin wrote *The State and Revolution* after the Tsar was deposed, and in this book the focus of his attack was republican government, and the Russian Provisional Government in particular. Lenin held that modern republics are merely tools of imperialist cabals of bankers: “At present, imperialism and the domination of the banks have ‘developed’ into an exceptional art both these methods of upholding and giving effect to the omnipotence of wealth in democratic

¹³⁴ Г. Зиновьев (G. Zinoviev), “Война и революция” (War and Revolution), *Pravda*, No.17, March 25, 1917, 187-189.

¹³⁵ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Location 10516.

¹³⁶ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Location 10521 to 10806.

¹³⁷ Tamás Krausz, *Reconstructing Lenin: An Intellectual Biography*, Balint Bethlenfalvy trans., Monthly Review Press, 2015, p. 177.

¹³⁸ Kołakowski, p. 755.

¹³⁹ V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution The Marxist Theory of the State & the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution*, (From Collected Works, Volume 25, p. 381--492), p. 21. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/ebooks/lenin/state-and-revolution.pdf>. Accessed June 1 2018.

republics of all descriptions.”¹⁴⁰ This power was exercised by secret cabals out of sight of the voting public. Without a violent proletarian revolution all so-called democracies were really just “democracies for the money-bags...”¹⁴¹ And the nascent Russian republic was no exception:

“...from America to Switzerland, from France to Britain, Norway and so forth-- in these countries the real business of ‘state’ is performed behind the scenes and is carried on by the departments, chancelleries, and General Staffs. parliament is given up to talk for the special purpose of fooling the ‘common people’. This is so true that even in the Russian republic, a bourgeois - democratic republic, all these sins of parliamentarism came out at once, even before it managed to set up a real parliament. The heroes of rotten philistinism... have even succeeded in polluting the Soviets after the fashion of the most disgusting bourgeois parliamentarism, in converting them into mere talking shops. In the Soviets, the ‘socialist’ Ministers are fooling the credulous rustics with phrase - mongering and resolutions. In the government itself a sort of permanent shuffle is going on in order that, on the one hand, as many Socialist - Revolutionaries and Mensheviks as possible may in turn get near the ‘pie’, the lucrative and honorable posts, and that, on the other hand, the ‘attention’ of the people may be ‘engaged’. meanwhile the chancelleries and army staffs ‘do’ the business of ‘state’.”¹⁴²

Lenin was not just criticizing the nascent Russian republic as corrupt, or attacking this or that republic as shams, he was claiming that every single parliamentary country, from America to Switzerland, were deceptive screens for the real “secret” governors. Elections just gave the people an opportunity to participate in a delusion: “To decide once every few years which members of the ruling class is to repress and crush the people through parliament -- this is the real essence of bourgeois parliamentarism, not only in parliamentary constitutional monarchies, but also in the most democratic republics.”¹⁴³

Lenin wrote that “Imperialism-- ... has clearly shown an unprecedented growth in its bureaucratic and military apparatus in connection with the intensification of repressive measures against the proletariat both in the monarchical and in the freest, republican countries.” These repressive measures included the deception of Kautsky and the other “social-chauvinists” were “covering up the defense of the predatory interests of ‘their own’ bourgeoisie with phrases about ‘defence of the fatherland’, ‘defence of the republic and the revolution’, etc.”¹⁴⁴

Lenin never finished *The State and Revolution* because he was interrupted by the crisis that the Bolsheviks then used to catapult themselves to power.

The October coup

After the attempted Bolshevik coup in the summer of 1917, the Minister-Chairman of the Provisional Government ordered Kornilov, a well-respected general, to ready his men to march on the capital in the case of another attempted Bolshevik coup. Kornilov got the impression that he was destined to become military dictator and tried to march on the capital uninvited. When the Provisional Government ordered him to stop, Kornilov refused. This attempted coup/misfiring counter-coup fizzled, but it marked a turn in the fortunes of the Bolsheviks, who

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

were allowed to re-arm their paramilitaries and were treated by other socialists as potential allies against the threat of military coup.¹⁴⁵

During this time Lenin and his followers did not cease denouncing the Provisional Government and calling for its ouster. Once again, the theme of “imperialism” was an element of this anti-government anti-war propaganda. On September 1st the Provisional Government officially declared that Russia was a republic, and by September 8th Lenin was complaining that the Bolsheviks were “persecuted by the agents of Russian republican-democratic imperialism...”¹⁴⁶ Here is Zinoviev again, in an article titled “The Imperialist Republic” from the Bolshevik newspaper *Proletarii* in September 1917, commenting on a report that the Provisional Government was considering dispatching some leading businessmen and politicians as ambassadors to Britain and France:

“This short message... gives us the most perceptive idea of what the real character of the modern Russian republic is. Paris and especially London are the most important centers of world politics. The questions of war and peace are now most dependent on London. London bankers and industrial kings hold half the world in their hands, they turn the “allied” governments like puppets. In particular, the fate of not only the external, but to a very large extent, the domestic policy of the new-born Russian republic depends on them. The main knots of world imperialist policy converge in Paris and London. The significance of the Russian ambassador in London and Paris is sometimes much greater than the significance of the Russian foreign minister.... Konovalov is a millionaire, a big industrialist and banking tycoon, a representative of big capital, a former member of the Progressive Party, now a member of the Kadet Party, which are both thoroughly imbued with imperialism, ...Nabokov is a rich landowner, a member of the Central Committee of the Kadet Party, of this General Staff of the counter-revolution, a protege of Milyukov, who does not even make a secret of the fact that he ponders the service of English imperialism...”

“...But after all, Russia is still not monarchy, but a republic! Yes, reader, Russia is now a republic. But there are republics and republics. Today's Russia is an imperialist republic. And that's the whole point. The imperialist republic means the absolute power of the bankers and kings of industry, it means - a war without end, it means - servility to London and Paris (that is, to the billionaires of London and Paris), it means - a crackdown on the workers and soldiers, it means - high prices and hunger for the masses, It means - reaction as the entire domestic policy of the country, it means - the death penalty for soldiers, prison for the revolutionary proletariat, it means - leaving the land in the hands of the landowners - it means, in one word, a noose around the neck of ten million workers, soldiers, and peasants... yes long live the Imperialist Republic! - this is in fact the slogan of the Mensheviks and SRs.”¹⁴⁷

The war continued, and Russian losses mounted on the battlefield. The Provisional Government was losing confidence of the people and the Bolshevik Central Committee decided on a strategy of deception and provocation. They would goad the government into retaliating against them and then conduct a coup while pretending they were defending the Congress of

¹⁴⁵ Ulam, pp. 357-358.

¹⁴⁶ V. I. Lenin, “The Stockholm Conference”, (from *Lenin Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, 1977, Moscow, Volume 25, pages 269-277.) Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/sep/08b.htm>. Accessed June 1 2018.

¹⁴⁷ Г. Зиновьев (G. Zinoviev), “Империалистская республика” (Imperialist Republic), *Proletarii*, no. 9, , September 05, 1917, (Petrograd) p. 5.

the Soviets and the Constituent Assembly from Kornilov, the Provisional Government, and the Germans.¹⁴⁸

In October 1917, fearing a repetition of the June experience when the Provisional Government had called out troops to crush the Bolshevik coup, the Bolsheviks focused their attention on disabling the Provisional Government's ability to issue orders. They circulated a false statement that the garrison had chosen the Bolshevik Military-Revolutionary Committee as their representative, and that the Russian Military Staff had refused to recognize this and had instead become a "weapon of counterrevolutionary forces."¹⁴⁹ After some desultory attempts at negotiation, on October 24 The Provisional Government and the Russian Military Staff ordered some troops into the center of the city and that the bridges across the Neva be raised to prevent the Bolsheviks from getting into the city center. They also ordered the disconnection of phone lines leading to Bolshevik HQ at the Smolny institute and the closure of the two major Bolshevik newspapers. The Bolsheviks responded by sending their troops to seize the telegraph offices, while claiming that they were just defending against the counterrevolution. That night Bolshevik troops seized the railroad stations, the banks, telephone exchanges, etc., and the next morning Lenin wrote a declaration that the Provisional Government had been deposed by the Military-Revolutionary Committee.¹⁵⁰

That morning, October 25th 1917, the Bolshevik propaganda paper *Rabochii Put* (the temporary cover-name of the illegal *Pravda*)¹⁵¹ lead with the slogan "Peace, Bread, Land!" and carried an announcement from the Military-Revolutionary Committee that the "counter-revolution had raised its criminal head. Kornilovites are mobilizing forces to cross the All-Russian Congress of Soviets and disrupt the Constituent assembly." The second article warned of a "noble-banking counter-revolution" and justified the actions of the Military-Revolutionary Committee. At this critical juncture, perhaps the most crucial hour of the 1917 Russian Revolution, Bolshevik propaganda conjured up twin threats, a classical "reactionary" threat of the nobility seizing power and that of the "bankers" i.e. the "imperialist" governments of the Western Allies which were themselves under the control of "finance capital." It was they who wanted counter-revolution in order to continue the war, and who were lying when they claim the war was not fought for imperialist aims:

"The Provisional Government is falling apart. It fraudulently assured the army that it had agreed to obtain and would obtain from the 'allies' -a full 'renunciation of seizures.' But the 'allied' bosses of bandit capital (in complete agreement with the Russian bourgeoisie) resolutely refuse to take into account, to any extent, the requirements of the Russian revolution (nothing else could be expected from them!). American, British and French bankers decide: 'The war continues!'

Let millions of peasants and workers perish, let the Russian revolution perish, - the "allied" bourgeois applaud its death in advance ... behind the ministry [of war] is hidden the real power... The collapse of the Provisional Government leads directly to the power of the henchmen of the noble-bank counter-revolution..."¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Locations 12056-12065.

¹⁴⁹ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Locations 12096-12131.

¹⁵⁰ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Locations 12168 to 12250.

¹⁵¹ Roger Pethybridge, *The Spread of the Russian Revolution: Essays on 1917*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 1972), p. 121-122.

¹⁵² "Перед решением" (Before decision), *Rabochii Put*, No.179, November 07 (25 October), 1917, p. 1.

The last bastion of the Provisional Government, a few ministers barricaded in the Winter Palace, surrendered early the next morning.¹⁵³ Bolshevik fighters seized Moscow by November 2nd.¹⁵⁴

While the October 1917 coup is the traditional date that marks the start of Bolshevik rule in Russia, the Bolsheviks actually engaged in several months of activities to consolidate their power. The biggest political threat to their power was the Constituent Assembly, which everyone still expected to convene and establish a new government, and which would surely remove the Bolsheviks from their new position of extra-legal power.¹⁵⁵ This probability was increased after the elections for candidates to the Constituent Assembly in November 1917, when the Bolsheviks received only 24% of the vote despite interfering with the election process.¹⁵⁶ The Bolsheviks had no intention of letting go of power. Lenin now denounced the Constituent Assembly as a tool of the counter-revolution and troops loyal to the Bolsheviks fired on protesters who tried to prevent the Bolsheviks from dispersing the Constituent Assembly.¹⁵⁷ On the day when the Bolsheviks finally dissolved the Constituent Assembly, they again conjured the idea of bankers and reactionaries in alliance against the revolution, this time with the specific addition of the influence of the “American Dollar,” a clear reference to American “finance capital.”¹⁵⁸ Their attack was focused on a faction of the SRs - the socialist party that had received the most votes in the elections for the Constituent Assembly:

“THE HIRELINGS OF BANKERS, CAPITALISTS, AND LANDLORDS, THE ALLIES OF KALEDIN, DUTOV, THE SLAVES OF THE AMERICAN DOLLAR, THE BACKSTABBERS—THE RIGHT SR’S—DEMAND IN THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ALL POWER FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR MASTERS—ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE.”¹⁵⁹

Among the first orders of business for Bolsheviks after finally consolidating power was to do what their German benefactors had been hoping for: end the war. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk negotiated between December 1917 and March 1918 gave the Germans not only peace but a new eastern European empire. In addition to ceding an enormous amount of territory to the Germans and agreeing to demobilize, the new “Soviet” state agreed to allow Germans to maintain private enterprises in newly-communist Russia.¹⁶⁰ In other words, the government of Germany had managed to secretly support a socialist faction within Russia that had come to power and proceeded to make the old Russian Empire into Germany’s colony.¹⁶¹ The mirroring of the interaction between the Germans and the Bolsheviks with Lenin’s depiction of the interaction between the “imperialist” governments of Europe and Kautsky and other socialists is remarkable.

¹⁵³ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Location 12326.

¹⁵⁴ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Location 12467.

¹⁵⁵ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Location 12891.

¹⁵⁶ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Location 13414.

¹⁵⁷ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Locations 13521 and 13656.

¹⁵⁸ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Location 13727.

¹⁵⁹ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Locations 13722-13725.

¹⁶⁰ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Locations 14722 - 14739.

¹⁶¹ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Locations 14739.

After the war: Soviet ideology and propaganda and “imperialism”

Despite this massive success on the Eastern front, Germany was unable to prevail over the Western Allies. This obviated the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Especially after Germany and Austria had been defeated, Lenin could describe the victorious Allies as a unified grand conspiracy, which was consciously organizing and conspiring against the Soviet Revolution. Kautsky and the other German “social-chauvinists,” who had previously been accused of working for the German government, were instantly accused in Soviet propaganda of being hirelings of Western imperialism in the emerging “civil war” between the imperialist countries and the Soviet revolution:

“...the world bourgeoisie has organised and is waging a civil war against the revolutionary proletariat and, accordingly, is supporting Kolchak and Denikin in Russia, Mannerheim in Finland, the Georgian Mensheviks, those lackeys of the bourgeoisie, in the Caucasus, the Polish imperialists and Polish Kerenskiis in Poland, the Scheidemanns in Germany, the counter-revolutionaries (Mensheviks and capitalists) in Hungary, etc., etc.

But Kautsky, like the inveterate reactionary philistine he is, continues snivelling about the fears and horrors of civil war! All semblance of revolutionary understanding, and all semblance of historical realism (for it is high time the inevitability of imperialist war being turned into civil war were realised) have disappeared. This is, furthermore, directly abetting the bourgeoisie, it is *helping* them, and Kautsky is *actually on the side of the bourgeoisie* in the civil war that is being waged, or is obviously being prepared, throughout the world.”¹⁶²

As Kautsky did not cease his criticism of the Bolsheviks, especially against their repression and their international aggression, Lenin attacked him for advocating democracy instead of Lenin’s top-down revolution. After all, “bourgeois” democracy is just a tool of the financial oligarchy:

“The Scheidemanns and Kautsky’s speak about “pure democracy” and “democracy” in general for the purpose of deceiving the people and concealing from them the *bourgeois* character of *present-day* democracy. Let the bourgeoisie continue to keep the entire apparatus of state power in their hands, let a handful of exploiters continue to use the former, bourgeois, state machine!”¹⁶³

Like in other conspiracy theories examined in this thesis, the depicted tools or tactical goals of the “imperialists” could change, but the ultimate enemy of the Revolution - the oligarchy of finance capital - would remain the same. “Anti-imperialist” propaganda was also useful for the Soviet Union during the desultory interventions of Western powers in the Russian Civil War and their attempts to support non-Bolshevik alternatives in the ruins of the Russian Empire. Soviet propaganda presented the various efforts by non-Bolshevik forces to fight the expanding Bolshevik realm as the attempts of a clique of Western capitalists to protect their imperialist system. For a visual example see Figure 2, a 1920 poster issued by the Red Army in Kyiv. It depicts a gleeful Red Army soldier vaulting forward with his bayonet and about to skewer the enemy - a fat banker labeled “Imperialism” and “Entente and Co.” (the Western Allies in WWI.)

¹⁶² V. I. Lenin, “How the Bourgeoisie Utilises Renegades,” George Hanna trans., (from Lenin’s Collected Works, 4th English Edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Volume 30, pages 27-37). Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1919/sep/20.htm>. Accessed June 1 2018.

¹⁶³ V. I. Lenin, “‘Democracy’ and Dictatorship,” (from Lenin Collected Works, Volume 28, p. 368-72). Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/dec/23.htm>. Accessed June 1 2018



Figure 7

In front of the banker stretches a long line of his failed attempts to destroy the Revolution, starting with the crown of the Tsar, several attempts to start alternative governments that were crushed by the Bolsheviks, and ending with a panicked-looking “white Poland” (referencing the Polish-Soviet war of 1919-1920.)¹⁶⁴

To be clear, there were British, French, and American intelligence officers, diplomats, etc. in the Soviet Union during the Russian Revolution and the Civil War. Given the open claims of Lenin and other Bolsheviks

that they were going to destroy Western society and turn the world communist, and also their links to Germany and constant demands that Russia exit the war, it is unsurprising that the Western powers conducted intelligence operations against the nascent USSR. However, keep in mind that according to Lenin’s theory of imperialism these were not intelligence officers, soldiers, and diplomats who were ultimately working for their country. According to Lenin’s theory they were ultimately just servants of imperialism, meaning servants of the finance-capitalist cabals that controlled their supposedly free countries.

The activities of the Bolsheviks were not confined to Russia. In anticipation of more revolutions they formed the Communist International in early 1919 to coordinate the global revolution.¹⁶⁵ This venture abroad was both offensive and, in the Bolshevik interpretation, defensive. Defensively, the Bolsheviks expected that the “imperialist” powers would combine forces to crush the revolution in Russia, and therefore they had to spread the revolution to Europe and destroy the imperialist powers and annihilate the source of the threat. Offensively, they believed that the era of the world revolution was nigh, and that it was their duty to spread this socialist revolution,¹⁶⁶ - to “combat spontaneity” all across the world.

Lenin’s “imperialist” conspiracy theory also had an important role to play in post-revolutionary propaganda, especially since the “chief task” of the Communist International according to a July 1920 resolution was “to fight bourgeois democracy and expose its falseness and hypocrisy...” According to this resolution the Communist International (usually just abbreviated as “Comintern”) had to strive to fight against the massive deception which “imperialist” actors had successfully foisted on the world, which included the creation of independent states that were in fact secretly in total submission to some financial clique that

¹⁶⁴ “25 Октября 1917 года - 7 ноября 1920 года. Третья годовщина коммунистической революции в России - крах мирового империализма” *October 25, 1917 - November 7, 1920. The third anniversary of the Communist Revolution in Russia - the collapse of world imperialism) Kyiv, 1920. Available at <http://redavantgarde.com/collection/show-collection/1328/print/>. Accessed June 1, 2018.

¹⁶⁵ Jon Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics*, (University of California Press, 1994), p. 32.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

controls some imperialist country. The resolution included the idea of Zionism as an example of this kind of deception:

“...bourgeois-democratic lies which conceal the colonial and financial enslavement of the vast majority of the world's population by a small minority of the wealthiest and most advanced capitalist countries that is characteristic of the epoch of finance capital and imperialism...It is essential constantly to expose and to explain to the widest masses of the working people everywhere, and particularly in the backward countries, the deception practised by the imperialist Powers with the help of the privileged classes in the oppressed countries in creating ostensibly politically independent States which are in reality completely dependent on them economically, financially, and militarily. A glaring example of the deception practised on the working classes of an oppressed nation by the combined efforts of Entente imperialism and the bourgeoisie of that same nation is offered by the Zionists' Palestine venture (and by Zionism as a whole, which, under the pretence of creating a Jewish State in Palestine in fact surrenders the Arab working people of Palestine, where the Jewish workers form only a small minority, to exploitation by England). In present international conditions there is no salvation for dependent and weak nations except as an alliance of Soviet republics.”¹⁶⁷

These amazing powers of deception that the imperialists had at their disposal could also be used to explain propaganda attacks against the USSR, such as criticizing the mass repression taking place in Soviet-controlled lands, or accusing leading Bolsheviks of having colluded with the Germans during the war, or decrying the USSR's attempt to conquer other countries as “imperialistic” (in the older, pre-Lenin, sense of the term.) For example, take an excerpt from this article that appeared on the front page of *Pravda* on January 29, 1919:

“Three days ago the Tsarskoye Selo radio station received a new... text of the declaration of the Allies on the Russian question... it contains one highly significant phrase.. The phrase “fighting Bolshevik imperialism”...this is a new slogan... The Allies obviously hope that by this new word and this new slogan they will be able to deceive and intimidate the masses, and draw the masses into a new bloody adventure... This is one of the many... forgeries, on which the allied “statesmen” have long been gaining experience. It used to be said that the ‘Bolsheviks - are the allies of German imperialism’ the ‘secret documents’ proving the connection between Lenin and Trotsky with [Kaiser] Wilhelm... were fabricated. Now there is no German imperialism.... Everyone now knows that this was a forgery - insolent and vile - and also, very tone-deaf and unsophisticated. What is there left to do? Declare that the Bolsheviks themselves are imperialists. Lenin and Trotsky are no longer accomplices of the imperialists, they are the imperialists themselves! Isn't this absurd? ... Everybody knows that the Bolsheviks are the ultimate arch-enemies of all imperialism...”¹⁶⁸

Lenin's idea of imperialism remained important after it had become obvious that the hoped-for world revolution would not take place anytime soon. Marx had predicted that the proletarian revolution would break out in the most advanced nations, but Lenin's theory of imperialism could explain that this had not occurred because the masterminds of finance capital, using their profits gained through imperialism, had been able to bribe enough of their proletariat:

“...despite the objectively revolutionary situation, political and economic . . . the majority of the workers are not yet under communist influence; this is particularly true of those countries where

¹⁶⁷ *The Communist International: 1919-1943 - Documents, Vol. 1: 1919-1922*, p. 144.

¹⁶⁸ A. Меньшой (A. Menshoi), “Большевистический империализм” (Bolshevik imperialism), *Pravda*, No. 17, January 29, 1919, p. 1

finance capital is very powerful and where consequently large strata of workers are corrupted by imperialism (e.g. England and America), while real revolutionary mass propaganda has only just begun.”¹⁶⁹

According to this idea, the financial oligarchy had successfully used a strategy of conquest and decadence in the most advanced countries. This idea that the loot from the empires enables the oligarchs who rule Western nations to bribe their people and forestall the revolution points to one of the important implications of Lenin’s theory of imperialism, which did not really come to the fore until decades later: a possible strategy of supporting revolts against European imperialism as a means of preparing the way for revolution in Europe.¹⁷⁰ If the financial oligarchy in the West is dependent on super-profits from colonial exploitation to bribe their working class, then a strategy to choke off these super-profits by ending imperialist domination could help finally bring about the predicted proletarian revolution in Europe. This in turn suggests a policy of making the possession of colonies so painful to the populations of imperialist states that they will compel their oligarch rulers to abandon them, which would consequently rob the rulers of their ability to bribe their workers - and therefore lead to socialist revolution.

Another central implication of Lenin’s theory for Soviet ideology was the identification of these rulers - the “ultimate” kind of enemy, especially after the Revolution - as the lords of finance capital. This kind of enemy shared many of the aspects of the Jewish enemy identified in Black Hundred propaganda: international, incredibly manipulative and deceptive and powerful, using its control of international finance, the press, and the manipulation of supposedly democratic politics to exert clandestine control of the “free” societies of the West. So at least for a short time in the early 20th century there lived in Russia two influential conspiracy theorists: Lenin and Butmi. They were diametrically opposed politically but they believed in uncannily similar conspiracy theories. Lenin posited that a *few small groups* of unscrupulous bankers bent on world domination had gained control of Western countries which they were manipulating for their own ends. Butmi posited that *one* group of unscrupulous *Jewish* bankers bent on world domination had gained control of Western countries which they were manipulating for their own ends. As has been demonstrated in the section on Hobson, this similarity between Lenin’s imperialist and Butmi’s anti-Jewish conspiracy theory of the “Black Hundred” type was not a coincidence or convergent evolution. In fact, these conspiracy theories came from some of the same roots: Western finance-focused anti-Jewish conspiracy theories.

As stated in the introduction, this chapter does not argue that Lenin’s extremist violence may have been precipitated by a belief in a conspiracy theory. Lenin was already quite clear about his desire for violent revolution long before he wrote *Imperialism*. The version of the Grand Conspiracy Theory that he adopted via Hobson was initially used by Lenin to explain why so many of his fellow socialists suddenly seemed to turn against global revolution after the beginning of WWI and instead defended their homelands. It then became a convenient idea for propaganda, accusing the Bolsheviks’ opponents of being paid agents of foreign powers (while the Bolsheviks were accepting money from the Germans), promoting moral equivalence

¹⁶⁹ *The Communist International: 1919-1943 - Documents, Vol. 1: 1919-1922*, p. 243.

¹⁷⁰ Ulam, pp. 311-312.

between the Allies and the Germans during WWI and generally giving the Bolsheviks the ability to label any opponent as a tool of the imperialist conspiracy against the Revolution.

This propaganda tool was not only used tactically. Because it was enshrined in two of Lenin's three major works his idea of imperialism could not be ignored in Soviet ideology (though it could be de-emphasized in Soviet propaganda from time to time - for example, when the USSR was allied with the Western democracies during WWII.) The demands of this Leninist ideology and the fact that among the greatest ideological threats to Soviet communism were the democracies in Western Europe and America meant that denunciations of "imperialism" became a standard Soviet line. It is important to emphasize that this denunciation was not primarily a denunciation of European expansionist policies - capturing foreign lands, enslaving peoples, stealing things, etc. - but was instead a denunciation of advanced capitalist democracies themselves. As one analyst put it: "Imperialism is not something the Western countries do: it is a state of being, it is what they are. They have reached the stage of monopoly-capitalism; this, by definition, is imperialism. It has nothing to do with pursuit of this or that line of action in their foreign transactions; no matter what they do, it will be by definition 'imperialist.'"¹⁷¹ Any anti-revolutionary movement could be tied to the "imperialists" - even, for example, the nascent Polish Republic.¹⁷²

Mirroring the anti-Jewish conspiracy theories of the Tsarist era, Lenin's theory of imperialism was used against the idea of republican government. Just as reactionaries and supporters of tsarism argued that republics were just a tool of the Freemason or Jewish conspiracy and that a free press was the tool of the conspiracy before the Russian Revolution, Bolsheviks used the chimera of an imperialist conspiracy to attack the idea of republics and a free press after the 1917 Revolution. "Real" republics, like the Roman Republic or perhaps some from early-modern Europe, didn't exist anymore, modern republics were just the camouflage that ruthless, clandestine, oligarchic dictators used to cover their actions. To ask the Soviet Union to be more "democratic" was, using this analysis, demanding that the Revolution play by rules written by the enemy - rules the enemy did not deign to follow. Here is an excerpt from the Comintern manifesto that included this idea, written by Trotsky and adopted 1919:

"When the financial oligarchy think it advisable to get parliamentary cover for their acts of violence, the bourgeois State has at its disposal for this purpose all the manifold instruments inherited from centuries of class rule and multiplied by all the miracles of capitalist technology—lies, demagoguery, baiting, calumny, bribery, and terror.

To demand of the proletariat that like meek lambs they comply with the requirements of bourgeois democracy in the final life-and-death struggle with capitalism is like asking a man fighting for his life against cut-throats to observe the artificial and restrictive rules of French wrestling, drawn up but not observed by his enemy."¹⁷³

In 1919 Lenin attacked the idea of freedom of assembly in his 1919 "Theses on Bourgeois Democracy and Proletarian Dictatorship Adopted By the First Comintern Congress" :

¹⁷¹ Roberts, p. 371.

¹⁷² See the headline from *Pravda*, No. 99, 9 May 1920.

¹⁷³ *The Communist International: 1919-1943- Documents, Vol. 1: 1919-1922*, p. 44.

“...even in the most democratic bourgeois republic 'freedom of assembly' is an empty phrase, for the rich have the best public and private buildings at their disposal, have also enough leisure for meetings, and enjoy the protection of the bourgeois apparatus of power. The proletariat of town and country, as well as the small peasants, that is the overwhelming majority of the population, have neither the first nor the second nor the third. So long as this is true, 'equality', that is, 'pure democracy', is a deception.”¹⁷⁴

Immediately following this section on how “pure democracy” is “deception” Lenin attacked the idea of a free press as a form of ideological unilateral disarmament in the face of capitalism:

“Freedom of the press' is another leading watchword of 'pure democracy'. But the workers know, and the socialists of all countries have admitted it a million times, that this freedom is deceptive so long as the best printing works and the biggest paper supplies are in capitalist hands, and so long as capital retains its power over the press, a power which throughout the world is expressed more clearly, sharply, and cynically, the more developed the democracy and the republican regime, as for example in America. To win real equality and real democracy for the working masses, for the workers and peasants, the capitalists must first be deprived of the possibility of getting writers in their service, of buying up publishing houses and bribing newspapers. And for that it is necessary to throw off the yoke of capital, to overthrow the exploiters and to crush their resistance. The capitalists have always given the name of freedom to the freedom of the rich to make profits and the freedom of the poor to die of hunger. The capitalists give the name of freedom of the press to the freedom of the rich to bribe the press, the freedom to use wealth to create and distort so-called public opinion. The defenders of 'pure democracy' reveal themselves once more as defenders of the dirty and corrupt system of the rule of the rich over the means of mass education, as deceivers of the people who with fine-sounding but thoroughly false phrases divert them from the concrete historical task of liberating the press from capital. Real freedom and equality will be found in the system the communists establish, in which there will be no opportunity to get rich at the expense of others, no objective possibility of subjecting the press, directly or indirectly, to the power of money,...”¹⁷⁵

For one final example of an attack on liberal democracy by invoking the specter of an aggressive enemy who would take advantage of this freedom, take this scathing letter Lenin wrote to a left-wing communist who had written a few articles in which he called for press freedom:

“All over the world, wherever there are capitalists, freedom of the press means freedom to buy up newspapers, to buy writers, to bribe, buy and fake “public opinion” for the benefit of the bourgeoisie.

This is a fact.

No one will ever be able to refute it....

The bourgeoisie (all over the world) is still very much stronger than we are. To place in its hands yet another weapon like freedom of political organisation (= freedom of the press, for the press is the core and foundation of political organisation) means facilitating the enemy's task, means helping the class enemy.

We have no wish to commit suicide, and therefore, we will not do this.

¹⁷⁴ *The Communist International: 1919-1943 - Documents, Vol. 1: 1919-1922*, p. 10.

¹⁷⁵ *The Communist International: 1919-1943 - Documents, Vol. 1: 1919-1922*, p. 10.

We clearly see this fact: "freedom of the press" means in practice that the international bourgeoisie will immediately buy up hundreds and thousands of Cadet, Socialist Revolutionary and Menshevik writers, and will organise their propaganda and fight against us.

That is a fact. 'They' are richer than we are and will buy a 'force' ten times larger than we have, to fight us.

No, we will not do it; we will not help the international bourgeoisie...

Freedom of the press will help the force of the world bourgeoisie. That is a fact, 'Freedom of the press' will not help to purge the Communist Party in Russia of a number of its weaknesses, mistakes, misfortunes and maladies (it cannot be denied that there is a spate of these maladies), because this is not what the world bourgeoisie wants. But freedom of the press will be a weapon in the hands of this world bourgeoisie. It is not dead; it is alive. It is lurking nearby and watching. It has already hired Milyukov, to whom Chernov and Martov (partly because of their stupidity, and partly because of factional spleen against us; but mainly because of the objective logic of their petty bourgeois-democratic position) are giving 'faithful and loyal' service."¹⁷⁶

Conclusion

The Soviet embrace of conspiracy theories may have been incongruous with its Marxist roots, as Popper argued, but Soviet ideology was influenced by the charismatic leader of the Russian Revolution, Vladimir Lenin. By 1917 Lenin was a full-blown conspiracy theorist, and a proponent of his own brand of the Grand Conspiracy Theory. Lenin's emphasis on the importance of deception opened the way for his adoption of Hobson's anti-Jewish conspiracy theory to explain imperialism and the "defection" of Lenin's former socialist allies during WWI. Lenin removed the anti-Jewish elements when he adopted it, but he adopted the basic narrative of a small group of bankers (finance-capital) who exert control over Western society through amazing powers of deception and manipulation. The proximate cause of Lenin's embrace of Hobson's conspiracy theory may have been his conflict with Lenin's nemesis Kautsky. But Lenin did not adopt this idea as a just a debating tactic. He integrated it into two of his three major works, thereby assuring that this conspiracy theory would be exported all over the world in Soviet ideology and Soviet propaganda. Lenin's "imperialism" conspiracy theory was also useful in Bolshevik/USSR propaganda against the Western allies in WWI (and to mask his own collusion with the Germans) and eventually against the idea of republican government. Just like in Austrian propaganda after the French Revolution, in the propaganda of the Portuguese counter-revolutionaries in 1823, and in Black Hundred propaganda, in Bolshevik propaganda a variant of the Grand Conspiracy Theory was used against the idea of republican government and freedom of the press.

Part of the similarities between Soviet and Nazi propaganda and ideology may be explained by their common roots in anti-Jewish Grand Conspiracy Theories, though Lenin's lack of anti-Jewish bile and perhaps his ignorance of Hobson's anti-Jewish beliefs have obscured their close heritage.

¹⁷⁶ V. I. Lenin, "A Letter To G. Myasnikov," Yuri Sdobnikov trans., (from Lenin's Collected Works, 1st English Edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Volume 32, pages 504-509). Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/aug/05.htm>. Accessed June 1 2018.