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The Revolution Will Not Have an Itinerary

(On stage there are three chairs arranged around a table with a half-full cigarette tray positioned on it. A man in his mid-50s, Jack, takes to the stage, carrying a bundle of Marxist literature, and arranges it carefully on the table before sitting down on the rightmost chair. Another man, in his mid-30s, Kurt, shuffles in quietly and takes a seat on the middle chair, followed by a man in his early 20s, Dave, who sits down on the leftmost chair. Jack hands out the other two itineraries, before standing to speak.)

Jack: On behalf of the regional organisation, I would like to welcome all to this the September meeting of the International Communist Union and to thank ...

Dave: Brackets Trotskyist

Jack: Yes, of course, brackets Trotskyist

Dave: We don't want people thinking we're Tankies, now do we?

Jack: No, you're absolutely right, we don't want visitors going away thinking we're Internationalist Communists but missing the fact that we're Trotskyists. Anyway, for the record, Scott Tomlinson sends his regards, but sadly cannot be present as he is currently doing voluntary work in Cuba. Moving on, as listed on your itineraries, today's topic is Marx's Theory of Surplus Value. Now, I know that most of you are probably familiar with this particular theory, but it never hurts to re-examine the basics. *(In a droning, monotonous, pompous voice)* Marx argues that Capitalist society consists of two groups, the bourgeoisie who own the means of production, and the proletariat who make up the majority and have to sell their labour to survive. Since the bourgeoisie do not produce any commodities ...

Dave: If I may interject, I think I speak for everyone in the room *(looks around)* when I say we're quite familiar with the Theory of Surplus Value.

Jack: Well, there may be newer comrades here not quite as familiar with the concept as you may be.

(Jack points towards Kurt. Dave flicks his head around to Kurt, then back to Jack.)

Dave: Nah, he's been here since May. If my memory is correct that means he's sat through *(counts on his hands)* seven lectures on the Theory of Surplus Value, six 'discussions' on the Nature of the State and a liberal dollop of 'insight into imperialism'.

Jack: Well, he's never said anything to suggest he understands it, has he?

(Dave looks at Kurt then back at Jack.)

Dave: He never says anything. He won't even tell me how many sugars to put in his tea.

Jack: Well, that's true. *(to Kurt, patronisingly)* Isn't it, young fella? *(Kurt says nothing, feeling somewhat rebuked.)* Still, as I have already said it does no harm to revise the basics occasionally. To continue, the bourgeoisie are unable ...

Dave: I think it may be far more productive to talk about the upcoming elections.

(pause)

Jack: What about the upcoming elections?

Dave: Well I, for one, think it is about time we, as an organisation, considered fielding a candidate.

(pause)

Jack: I'm afraid it is our agreed policy that we do not participate in bourgeois politics. Anyway ...

Dave: Well, what is it, the agreed policy, to do? Throw our support behind some other campaign, so that they get all the glory whilst we sit around discussing the same old theories week after week! Hey, I don't remember attending any meeting where we agreed that, anyway!

Jack: I think you're being a trifle adventuresome. Marxism isn't about blowing your own trumpet; it's about ...

Dave: Not actually making any attempts to convince others of its merits? You may think the best way to bring about the revolution is to sit around, reading the yellowing pages of old pamphlets and smoking cigarette after cigarette until the hardships of Capitalist society contrive to convince the proletariat for you. Personally, I for one would far prefer to actually go out there and make a difference myself. It's got to be better than sitting around talking to our navels all day!

(tense pause)

Jack: Look, I think it would be better if you took a moment to calm down.

(Dave stomps off. Jack also leaves. Kurt pulls a notebook out of his pocket and scribbles down a few notes, secretively, before putting it away again as Dave enters, checking as he does so to see that Jack isn't in the room, before sitting down.)

Dave: Can you believe that guy! *(mocking)* Oh, it's dreadfully important we revise the words of Marx for the umpteenth time to cut that engraving on your skull a little thicker. Yeah, or we could go out there and *do* something! I mean, don't get me wrong, I'm sure not even Marx himself knew his theories as well as that man through there does. But what's the point when he's never going to use them for anything productive! 'Philosophers have only interpreted the world ... the point is to change it.' I bet you he could name the book, page and line of that quote. But for all the difference he makes, it may as well say don't rock the boat too hard or the boss might get wet.

(Pause. Kurt looks at him.)

Dave: Look, I'm thinking of starting a new group, the Union of Trotskyist Internationalists brackets Communist, away from him and his paralysis. And I'll do it too, if you'll join me. I like you, you've got a kinda never-saying-anything aura around you. And that guy does nothing but patronise you, isn't that right? *(Nudges Kurt. Kurt shrugs his shoulders.)* Thing is, if I do this I never want to have to come crawling back to him. Never. So if you say you'll join me, you have to be serious about it.

(Pause. Kurt looks down at his fingers. Dave spots Jack loitering in the doorway and hurriedly gets up.)

Dave: Well, think about it anyway.

(Dave leaves. Again, Kurt takes out the notepad and starts scribbling down notes. He puts it away as Jack enters, carrying a tray with tea and biscuits on it.)

Jack: Mind if I sit here?

(Jack sits down and places the tray on the table.)

Jack: Yeah, I might have been a bit hard on our young comrade there. *(chuckles)* We've all been young and idealistic at one time. It's just *(sighs)*, you know these students, all mean and angry one minute, thinking the revolution's just around the corner. And when they realise it's not, poof!, they're out of here! On to their nice, middle-class lives, leaving us here to carry the torch for them. *(indignant)* 'The Working Class can kiss my ass, I've got the gaffer's job at last'. Yeah, I know his bloody type.

(Kurt has been nodding off over the course of this speech. Jack nudges him, looking for

agreement and Kurt bolts upright, suddenly awake. Jack stares at him for a minute as if expecting him to reply, then continues.)

Jack: *(unperturbed)* Well, I suppose I can't really blame him for being ambitious. I just wish he'd calm down a bit and stop jumping down my neck all the time. Makes me nervous and I can't act rationally. You know what I'm on about, don't you? *(Kurt says nothing. Pause.)* I'd best go check how he is. *(Jack gets up. Mutters indignantly under his breath.)* What am I saying? You just come here for the bloody central heating. Stupid cretin.

(Jack walks offstage. As he is leaving, a posh voice comes out of a walkie-talkie hidden in Kurt's pocket.)

Comma: Comma to Brackets. Comma to Brackets. Come in, Brackets.

(Kurt pulls the walkie-talkie out of his pocket.)

Kurt: Yeah, come in, Comma. Brackets here.

Comma: What are your Commie friends up to now?

Kurt: Well, the young one's talking about splitting. *(chuckles)* Start his own group with two members, or something.

Comma: Yeah, more naïve reds who can't stand each other.

Kurt: Listen, why can't I get a transfer? I feel like I'm wasting my time. The nearest this lot are going to get to threatening is if they forget to pay the gas bill, and ...

Comma: Look, I'd like to, but I've no other vacancies at the mo. And the sergeant's cracking down on people who cut and run from their assignments.

Kurt: But you don't know how mind-wrenchingly dull this is! Listening to those two bicker like an old couple discussing who's going to wash the dishes. Christ, if I hear that old 'un moan about 'the increased cost of distributing the monthly newsletter since the mail increased stamp prices' I'll shove that bloody cigarette in his eye, so help me!

Comma: Yes, I know. Trot-sitting can be an awful hassle when they just squabble all the time. Tell you what, I'll see what I can do back to the station.

Kurt: Yeah, sure, cheers.

(Jack and Dave re-enter. Kurt looks up at both of them, absent-mindedly forgetting he still has the walkie-talkie in his hand. Dave pours himself some tea into a cup, then sits down

in his chair facing away from Jack and crosses his arms.)

Dave: *(sulking)* This tea's cold.

Jack: Well, maybe if you'd been here earlier, rather than sulking in the toilet, it wouldn't be. Anyway, it's your turn to do the washing up.

Dave: Do the washing up! Since when has it been my job to do the washing up?

Jack: Well, it's high time it was, isn't it? You could do something for a change.

Dave: Listen, we agreed at the meeting after Socialism 2002 that you were in charge of providing beverages, both in production and in maintenance.

Jack: Oh yeah? Wasn't that the same Socialism 2002 at which you utterly humiliated me in front of those Revolutionary Communist Party delegates?

Dave: Come on, you were like putty in their hands, swallowing every word. I just told them exactly where they could stick their intellectual revolutionary vanguard!

Jack: *(mouths as if wanting to reply, then chooses not to)* This is all irrelevant. The real question is whether or not you've got over all this election nonsense so we can move on with this itinerary.

Dave: *(snidely)* Well that all depends on whether or not you've got the real world into that thick skull of yours yet!

Jack: Come on. We have neither the funds nor the members to mount an election campaign. It's far more reasonable for us to ...

Dave: To what? Back Respect? Arse to that! Bunch of whiners from the SWP, with George Galloway and some Muslim clerics tacked on. For Christ sake, a man who drives around London in a BMW, bragging about how rich he is and then has the audacity to call himself a Bolshevik! But then again, you probably see nothing wrong with that.

Jack: To be fair, Galloway has done a lot of good work for the Stop the War Coalition ...

Dave: Hell, you'd probably have us backing the Tankies in the Socialist Labour Party! I always thought you were a bit of a Stalinist, never too keen on the Trotsky stuff. Well, if you want to crow the virtues of the 1930s' purges ...

Jack: I'll tell you what happens to parties who embrace bourgeois politics! They get sucked into that House of Commons crap. Suddenly, they're preaching reform instead of revolution. And then what are they? Nothing. It's happening in Brazil, it sure as hell happened to Ramsay McDonald and if you don't get a grip you'll be one of them. A suit with no principles.

Dave: Well, if that's how you feel, maybe I should leave.

Jack: A fabulous idea! Go join the rest of your faker pals in the SWP.

Kurt: *(In an uncontrolled outburst. Stands.)* Oh for Christ sake, can't you see how stupid you both look? Sitting there, moaning about how *(mocking)* you're the only ones who really represent the working class whilst the real world goes by around you! Look, *(turns to Dave)* face facts. Who in their right minds would vote for either of you two, if they had the choice? What, are the Proletarian masses supposed to be sitting in their homes, wishing they could show their support and come along to these meetings, but unfortunately they've all got ballroom dancing classes on a Tuesday? Do you really want to be left standing there with a stupid fake grin plastered on your face as the returning officer announces 'Internationalist Communist whatever, two votes.' *(Turning to Jack)* And as for you, go out once in a while and get a sense of the real world! Have you ever left this room long enough to see it's not the nineteenth bloody century anymore?

(Jack and Dave stare at him, surprised but impressed. Kurt moves to sit back down, but just as he does, a voice crackles out of the walkie-talkie, still in his hand.)

Comma: Brackets, are you feeling okay? You seem to be taking this Trot power nonsense a little seriously.

(Kurt jumps in shock and drops the walkie-talkie. Jack and Dave stare at him. (pause) Jack slowly picks up the walkie-talkie.)

Jack: He'll call you back.

Jack: Well, looks like our friend here's been in cahoots with P C Plod the whole time. *(Jack tosses the walkie-talkie into Kurt's lap.)* And to think, you wanted to trust him.

Dave: Me? Who was it that was constantly feeding pamphlet after pamphlet to him?
Hell, M15 must be experts on Marx, the amount of stuff you handed over ...

Their rowing fades as the end of the Internationale fades in. Kurt gathers the pile of pamphlets on the table in front of him and walks offstage, unnoticed. Lights fall.